



**Sabbath, The Lord's Day, the Christian Worship,  
and Its Application for Online-Church Services**

Chandra Gunawan

Email: [cgunawan@tumpen.nl](mailto:cgunawan@tumpen.nl)

**Abstract**

Sabbath and the Lord's day are important concepts in the Old and New Testament. However, Christian traditions have downgraded their role and significant correlation with the Christian worship. The question is how the meaning of Sabbath and the Lord's day could contribute to understanding the biblical teaching about worship. This article investigates Sabbath dan the Lord's day from the historical redemptive perspective, demonstrates their significances, and considers their application for the current issue of online services. It argues that Sabbath and the Lord's day realize of God's vision regarding the purpose of creation and the new creation and underline God's present seen through the right and harmonious relationships between human and all creations. Christian worship should signify their sacramental roles demonstrating God's present through the right and harmonious relationship of believing community. This may become a substantial issue of online services, which is hardly able to show harmonious fellowship of true believers.

Key words: The seventh day, Sabbath, Worship, Online Services, Genesis, Hebrews, Revelation

**Introduction**

Sabbath and the Lord's day are important concepts in the canonical writings.<sup>1</sup> The two are related to the biblical teaching on worship. While OT underlines the first to reveal God's

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J.C. Laansma, "Rest," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T.D. Alexander et al. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 727–32; A.G. Shead, "Sabbath," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T.D. Alexander et al. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 745–50.



compassion to his people,<sup>2</sup> the NT emphasizes the second to highlight Jesus' resurrection that brings God' lordship over the world.<sup>3</sup>

While the two days may have a different meanings in the biblical texts, some Christians seem to have gone too far, separating them, seeing Sabbath as the OT product and its relevancy only to Jews, considering that the Lord's day has replaced it.<sup>4</sup> This article argue that the two are correlated and significant to evaluating and developing contemporary worship.<sup>5</sup> The research question is how the meanings of Sabbath and the Lord's day can help to understand biblical teaching on worship?

I will use the historical redemptive analysis to answer the question. The hermeneutical approach, which is developed by Reformed theologians, such as Klaas Schilder, Herman Ridderbos, and William VanGemeren,<sup>6</sup> emphasizes that the meaning of a text should not only be limited to its historical context. It underlines the important roles of historical, canonical, and Christological perspectives in comprehending a concept or a text.<sup>7</sup> It will help to investigate the meaning of sabbath and the Lord's day in the canonical writings.

To overview, this article consists of six parts. The first is the introduction. The second is a briefly general survey on the studies of sabbath and the Lord's day. The third is the investigation of sabbath in light of historical redemptive reading. The four will discuss the Sabbath and the Lord's day in historical faith and confession.<sup>8</sup> The fifth is the application of

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<sup>2</sup> See H.H.P. Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D.A. Carson (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1982), 21–41.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R.J. Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D.A. Carson (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1982), 221–50.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. D.A. Carson, "Introduction," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D.A. Carson (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1982), 13–19.

<sup>5</sup> On ancient and contemporary worship, see A.B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), chap. 1.

<sup>6</sup> See E.B. Watkins, *The Drama of Preaching: Participating with God in the History of Redemption* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016), chap. 1. Further discussion on Historical Redemptive readings, see R.B. Gaffin Jr., "The Redemptive-Historical View," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, ed. S.E. Porter and B.M. Stovell, Spectrum Multiview Book (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), 89–110. For discussion of evangelical hermeneutics, see also H.W. House and K.A. Roberts, *Charts on Systematic Theology Volume 1: Prolegomena*, KCBT (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 85–88.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of the descriptive and prescriptive elements of theological studies, see J.D.G. Dunn and J.P. Mackey, *New Testament Theology in Dialogue*, BFT (London: SPCK, 1987), chap. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Assuming that God speaks through the church, the historical redemptive approach considers both biblical teachings and their historical interpretations.



the Sabbath and the Lord's day on current issue regarding online worship. The Last is conclusion.

### **General Survey**

Some scholars have investigated the application of Sabbath in early church. For example, Bacchiocchi investigates the origin of the Sunday observance,<sup>9</sup> analyzing the relations between anti-Judaic feelings and the change of worship day from Sabbath to Sunday, arguing that the application of Sunday as Christian Sabbath happened in the second century to adopt the worship of Sun.<sup>10</sup>

In volume, *From Sabbath to the Lord's Day*, Scholars investigated the concept of Sabbath and Lord's day from the biblical, historical, dan theological perspectives. They demonstrated that no evidence supports Bacchiocchi's propositions.<sup>11</sup>

Laansma investigated the rest motif in the New Testament.<sup>12</sup> He analyzes both the background of the rest motif in OT and the second temple literature,<sup>13</sup> arguing that the theme of the rest in Matthew 11 and Hebrews 3-4 has no common traditions, except that the OT influence the two texts.<sup>14</sup> While the first anticipates the promise of Davidic kingdom, the second refers to the promise rooted in Genesis and psalm traditions.<sup>15</sup> The two texts indicates that Similar to the OT, the NT authors are aware that God's sabbath is different than Israelite's, and his God still awaits the heavenly and eschatological rest.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For pre-Bacchiocchi discussion on Sabbath and its relation to Lord's day, see Carson, "Introduction."

<sup>10</sup> S. Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday: A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> Carson, "Introduction."

<sup>12</sup> J.C. Laansma, *I Will Give You Rest: The Rest Motif in the New Testament with Special Reference to Mt 11 and Heb 3-4*, WUNT 2.98 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of Sabbath in early Jewish traditions, see D. Instone-Brewer, *Passover and Sabbaths: Passover and Atonement*, TRENT 2A (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); N.L. Collins, *Jesus, the Sabbath and the Jewish Debate: Healing on the Sabbath in the 1st and 2nd Centuries CE*, LNTS (London: T&T Clark, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Laansma, *I Will Give You Rest*, chap. 1,6.

<sup>15</sup> See Genesis 2.2 and Psalm 95.11. Laansma, chap. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Laansma, chap. 8; G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 798–801.



Some discussion on the Jesus' interpretation of Sabbath and the sociological implication of the Sabbath in the industrial modern culture draw scholars' attention.<sup>17</sup> However, these issues are beyond the scope of this article.

## **Sabbath in the Canonical Writings**

### **1. Historical reading on Sabbath**

Jewish people celebrate three sabbath, i.e., the day of sabbath, the year of sabbath, and the Jubilee.<sup>18</sup> Barker analyzes the theological significance of Sabbath, arguing that it emphasizes that time and land belong to God and anticipates God's kingship.<sup>19</sup>

The concept of Sabbath initially occurs in creational narrative. The word *שַׁבָּת* in Genesis 2.1-3 has the same lexeme with Sabbath.<sup>20</sup> Waltke maintains the text has significant role in establishing the Sabbath traditions (cf. Ex 20.8-11), underlining the God's lordship over the world and creations' commitment to worship him.<sup>21</sup>

The Sabbath in the prophets highlights two aspects. Firstly, although Israel had entered the land of Canaan but they never feel "the genuine rest."<sup>22</sup> Conversely, they lost the land and went to exile. Secondly, the prophets criticized their Sabbath because they ignored justice and God's law.<sup>23</sup> The celebration of Sabbath cannot be separated from their submission to God but should be a sign of the obedience of his people.

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., A. Carpenter, "Exploitative Labor, Victimized Families, and the Promise of the Sabbath," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 38, no. 1 (2018): 77–94; J.J. Ryan, "Jesus and Synagogue Disputes: Recovering the Institutional Context of Luke 13:10-17" 79 (2017): 41–59.

<sup>18</sup> P.A. Barker, "Sabbath, Sabbatical Year, Jubilee," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, ed. T.D. Alexander and P.A. Barker (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 695. This article deals with the day of Sabbath. The others are beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>19</sup> Barker, 705.

<sup>20</sup> On the meaning of the phrase, see V.P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapter 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 142–43.

<sup>21</sup> B.K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 71–73. On the similarities and differences between the biblical rest tradition and ANE, see John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019).

<sup>22</sup> Shead, "Sabbath," 747–48.

<sup>23</sup> Shead, 748. See, e.g., Is. 1.13.



Barker has shown that the concepts of rest and peace are interconnected.<sup>24</sup> The two emphasize that God's present brings "shalom."<sup>25</sup> This is related not only to one's feeling of satisfaction but also to a harmonious relationship among creations and between God's people.<sup>26</sup> The genuine rest is related to God's kingship that brings peace to the world. This is the sabbath described in Isaiah 66.<sup>27</sup>

The practice of Sabbath in the early church is also related to religious identity. Dunn argues that the term "works of the law" refers to the social laws, i.e., circumcision, food law, and the Sabbath.<sup>28</sup> In this context, the meaning and the orientation of Sabbath has changed. The influence of Hellenization was unavoidable and strict reactions come from several Jewish movement, such as Hassidim.<sup>29</sup>

The early church did not reject the sabbath but no limit her worship only on the day.<sup>30</sup> Paul, for instance, regularly visit a synagogue on the sabbath and used the moment to share the Gospel.<sup>31</sup> The early church, both Jewish and Gentile communities, also have regular meeting on the first day of the week (see, e.g., Jo 20.19; Acts 20.7).

The historical reading on the Sabbath indicates that its practice and role have changed through times. Nonetheless, the principle of Sabbath is clear that it is not only a day for God's people to worship God but also to demonstrate their submission to God.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> P.A. Barker, "Rest, Peace," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Pentateuch*, ed. T.D. Alexander and D.W. Baker (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 687–91.

<sup>25</sup> Barker, 687–88.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 72.

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of the function of Is. 66 in its final form, see B.S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: WJK, 2001), 545–47. Childs sees the highly important message of Is. 66 is that God has prepared the new age when God will rule over the creations.

<sup>28</sup> J.D.G. Dunn, *New Perspective on Paul*, Revised (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 122–25.

<sup>29</sup> On the Hellenization in the second temple Judaism, see S.J.D. Cohen, *From Maccabees to the Mishnah*, LEC 7 (Philadelphia: WJK, 1987).

<sup>30</sup> Similar case happens to the issue of circumcision; while the Jewish Christian communities should circumcise their sons, the Gentile Christian communities are free from the demand (cf. Acts 15).

<sup>31</sup> S. Westerholm and C.A. Evans, "Sabbath," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. C.A. Evans and S.E. Porter (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 1035.

<sup>32</sup> D. Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), chaps. 1–2.



## 2. Canonical Reading on Sabbath<sup>33</sup>

Sabbath is the seventh day of creation.<sup>34</sup> God rests in the seventh day due to his will to stay in his world and to maintain an ordered world.<sup>35</sup> Although the idea of rest in the sabbath is important and becomes the basis for human rest, the main theme of the seventh day is God's present and kingship in the world.

The Gospels show that the Sabbath becomes an issue between Jesus and his opponents (e.g., Mt. 12.9-15a). Westerholm has shown that Jesus' interpretation on Sabbath is different from his opponents.<sup>36</sup> For Jesus, Sabbath is not mainly related to the abstain from work but to the obedience to God's will, and therefore, doing good in the Sabbath is justified.<sup>37</sup>

Revelation underlines similar emphasis with the creation tradition and Jesus' teaching. The new heaven and earth, which is described as a temple coming down from heaven, is related to God's present in the creations. The paradisaal city temple described in Revelation 21 shows biblical perspective in recognizing God's historical redemption, in which he makes the garden of Eden as the prototype of his kingship, and creates the world to be his kingdom, and will unite the heaven and earth in his second coming day.<sup>38</sup>

## 3. Christological Reading on Sabbath

Matthew 11.28-30 sees the rest from the Christological and eschatological views.<sup>39</sup> The rest refers to OT allusions.<sup>40</sup> While scholars think that in 11.28-30 Jesus is recognized as the

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<sup>33</sup> For discussion of canonical interpretation, see B.S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pt. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. K.A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC 1A (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 176. Matthews thinks that the number seven used in Genesis 2.13 has theological meanings.

<sup>35</sup> Walton and Walton, *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context*, 250. The two authors have shown that, based on ANE thought, the world was seen as God's temple, the place that God stays.

<sup>36</sup> Westerholm and Evans, "Sabbath."

<sup>37</sup> H. Weiss, "The Sabbath in the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 110 (1991): 311-21. Weiss argues that the Johannine community breaks with the Sabbath tradition without abashing it.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. G.K. Beale and S.M. McDonough, "Revelation," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 1155-56.

<sup>39</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 450.

<sup>40</sup> D.L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 305; France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 450.



lady wisdom,<sup>41</sup> Laansma argues that the rest motif is rooted in the promise of Davidic kingdom that will bring peace (2Sam. 7.11).<sup>42</sup> Since the Sabbath is related to the rest and the genuine rest comes from Jesus who brings God's kingship to earth, the Sabbath is related to God's sovereignty over creations.

The letter to the Hebrews (3-4) shows that believers should anticipate the spiritual sabbath.<sup>43</sup> The author makes use the Genesis 2.2 and Psalm 95.11 to stress that God's rest is not limited to a place, like the land of Canaan, but a rest that beyond place and time.<sup>44</sup> Guthrie sees that God's rest is related to the new covenant;<sup>45</sup> those believing in Jesus get in the new covenant and experience the "now and not yet God's rest."

To conclude, the historical analysis shows that, compared to its meaning in Genesis, the function of Sabbath in the NT periods has changed; it becomes Jewish identity. The canonical reading recognizes that the close relations between Sabbath and God's kingship in the world. Sabbath celebrates not only his work defeating chaos but also anticipating his final kingship over the world. The Christological perspective has demonstrated that the Christ is the key to the God's rest.

### **Sabbath in the Christian Thought and Confession<sup>46</sup>**

#### **1. Sabbath in Heidelberg Catechisms (HC)<sup>47</sup>**

The question on Sabbath is discussed in Lord's day 38 Question 103.<sup>48</sup> Bierma shows that the teaching of Sabbath in HC should be understood in the context of the important role

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<sup>41</sup> C.L. Blomberg, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 38.

<sup>42</sup> Laansma, *I Will Give You Rest*, chap. 6.

<sup>43</sup> For discussion of the materialism in Hebrews, see O.J. Filtvedt, "Creation and Salvation in Hebrews," *ZNW* 106, no. 2 (2015): 280–303.

<sup>44</sup> G.H. Guthrie, "Hebrews," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 959.

<sup>45</sup> Guthrie, 959–60.

<sup>46</sup> On the teaching of Sabbath in the early church fathers, see D.W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More Than 700 Topics Discussed by Early Church Fathers* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 571–72.

<sup>47</sup> For discussion of differences between HC and WCF, see F.H. Klooster, *Our Only Comfort: A Comprehensive on Heidelberg Catechism Volume 2: Lord's Day 20-52 (Q&A's 53-129) and Appendixes* (Grand Rapids: FACR, 2001), 978–79.

<sup>48</sup> What does God require in the fourth commandment? First, that the ministry of the Gospel and the schools be maintained and that, especially on the day of rest, I diligently attend the church of God to hear God's word, to



of good work in the Christian life, arguing that the work should be done in accord with God's will and his laws.<sup>49</sup> The Sabbath observance should be seen not as a way of salvation but as a fruit of faith.

Williamson argues that, although HC mentions two reasons that believers keep the Sabbath, it basically underlines three important teachings, i.e., the celebrating day about God's redemptive work, recognizing and reflecting the Gospel, a sign of believers' expectation regarding the new creation.<sup>50</sup> Since worship is based on Sabbath traditions, it should represent the Gospel and the promise of the new creation.

The historical redemptive analysis confirms HC emphasis on the Sabbath. The day is not only to worship God but to show his sovereignty and his work in believing community and the world.

## 2. Sabbath in Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF;1643-46)<sup>51</sup>

The topic of Sabbath in WCF is discussed in 21.7-8.<sup>52</sup> The confession underlines that the Sabbath bases its teaching on the creational and God's orders.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, believers should keep the day. Before the resurrection of Jesus, it is the sixth day of the week but it changes to

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use the sacraments, to call publicly upon the Lord, and to give Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that all days of my life I rest from my evil works, let the Lord work in me through His Holy Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

<sup>49</sup> L.D. Bierma, *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism: A Reformation Synthesis*, CTS (Louisville: WJK, 2013), 103–7.

<sup>50</sup> G.I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1993), 181.

<sup>51</sup> On the historical context of the teaching on Sabbath in WC, see R. Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context*, WARF (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009), 310.

<sup>52</sup> 21.7 As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in His Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment, binding all men, in all ages, He hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

21.8 This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up the whole time in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

<sup>53</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess Volume 2: Salvation and Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2007), 337–38.



the first day after the resurrection of Christ.<sup>54</sup> It is designed as a day to worship God, and therefore, Christians should prepare it.<sup>55</sup>

WCF sees the Sabbath from the perspective of Jesus' resurrection, in which the new relationship between God and creation was reconnected.

Although HC and WCF see a discontinuity between the Sabbath and the Lord's day, there is also a good reason to recognize their continuity. For instance, the new creation begins with the Lord's day but its climax is the heavenly Sabbath.

### **Sabbath, The Lord's Day, and Christian Worship**

Worship is a prominent teaching and practice in Christian traditions. Nonetheless, Christians have different understanding on it. Recognizing the differences, Basden stresses "[w]orship has never been practiced in all places by all people in one way."<sup>56</sup> While believing communities worship God in various ways, they have a commonality that their worships are called a Christian worship. Hurtado argues that monotheistic and Christological worship becomes the characteristic of the early Christian services.<sup>57</sup>

The early church used the seventh and the first day of the week to worship God. Laansma's study on Sabbath has shown that no strong evidence supports the view that early Christians changes Sabbath to the Lord's day.<sup>58</sup> The Early church recognized the theological significances of the seventh and the first days.

The notion of Lord's day has a similar basis to the "first fruit" (1Co. 15.23). The first day of the week is the day when Jesus risen from death (Mt 28.1, Mk 16.2, Lk 24.1, Jo 20.1) and signifies the his lordship.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the first fruit underlines the same theological

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<sup>54</sup> Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context*, 309–10. Some scholars think that the WCF maintains that, while the first day refers to Sunday, the seventh day could refer to any day.

<sup>55</sup> Sproul, *Truths We Confess*, 340–41.

<sup>56</sup> P.A. Basden, "Introduction," in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: 6 Views, Counterpoints* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 18. For a history of thought regarding Christian worship, see G.R. Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), chap. 30.

<sup>57</sup> L.W. Hurtado, *At Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Laansma, "Rest." For the history of the practice of the Lord's day, see H.O. Old, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture*, Revised and Expanded (Louisville: WJK, 2002), chap. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," 244–45.



significance that Jesus is a model of creational restoration.<sup>60</sup> Similar to his resurrection, in which the heavenly and earthly realities are united, the heaven begins to come down to earth in the first day of the week and will reach its climax at the day when the new Jerusalem and temple coming down from heaven (Rev. 21-22).<sup>61</sup>

Worship could be seen in a broad and specific senses.<sup>62</sup> In the first context, worship could refer to everything believers do in Christ in their daily life (cf. Rom. 12.1-2). In the second context, worship refers to a day where believers publicly worship God.<sup>63</sup> The early church sees worship not only as a ritual and liturgical but primarily sacramental;<sup>64</sup> it shows and shares Christian devotion and services.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, early Christian worship includes the table fellowship and sharing meal as the main part of believers' worship, in which they demonstrates the God's kingship over believing community.<sup>66</sup>

Having discussed the meanings of worship from the perspectives of Sabbath and the Lord's day, I will evaluate the practice of online worship (OW).<sup>67</sup>

### 1. Dimensions of Worship

The historical redemptive approach used to understand the meanings of Sabbath and the Lord's day leads us to recognize the vertical, sacramental, and eschatological dimensions of worship.

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<sup>60</sup> See H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), chap. 13.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Beale, *A New Testament*, 256–58.

<sup>62</sup> On different understanding of the meaning of worship between the ancient and modern Christianity, see McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, chap. 1. McGowan insists that ancient Christianity saw worship as a whole devotion of life to God.

<sup>63</sup> B. Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), chap. 1. For biblical theology of worship, see Peterson, *Engaging with God*.

<sup>64</sup> For terminologies used to describe the concept of worship in Greek NT, see J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains Vol 1: Introduction and Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: UBS, 1988), 540–41. While the Greek words, e.g., προσκυνέω, used to describe the concept of worship refers to one who bows down but this gesture basically expresses his submission.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, 261. In the Greek NT, one worshipping God describes as one calling His name (ὀνομάζω τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου), which symbolizes his devotion to God. J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains Vol 2: Indexes* (New York: UBS, 1989), 541.

<sup>66</sup> N. Pembroke, *Pastoral Care in Worship: Liturgy and Psychology on Dialogue* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), chap. 8; McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship*, chap. 2.

<sup>67</sup> Examining modern issue based on biblical teaching, one has three alternatives, namely, finding a similar case in the canonical texts, reconstructing how a biblical author will perform if he lives in current time, and applying the biblical teaching on contemporary situation. Since no similar case in the canonical texts matches to the issue of the OW, the last approach will be used to examine it.



## Vertical Dimension of Worship

This dimension has two sides. On one hand, in worship, creation approaches the creator, and therefore, worship is a bottom-up direction. Kuyper rightly shows that God calls believers as the assembly, who separates themselves from the world to come near to God and worship him in Christ.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, worship is a top-down direction, in which God rules creations.<sup>69</sup> He shows his kingship within the world through believers' attitudes and behavior when they meet and show love and respect for each other.

Worship should represent not only human expression in adoring God but also his rule over believing community.<sup>70</sup> The OT prophets criticize the Israelite worship because they lack of obedience (Is 1.2-31). In NT, God's people should demonstrate their submission to God's rule, such as, by showing love to widows and orphans (cf. Jas 1.26-27).<sup>71</sup> Similarly, in James 2.14-26, the author emphasizes the issue of separating faith and deeds, describing it as the empty, underlining the importance of obedience and hospitality.<sup>72</sup> The principle is applied to the worship that without the obedience to God's rule and hospitality to others, worship is empty.

The two sides of vertical dimension of worship should not be separated. A public worship should be a mean of expressing believers' service to God and their submission to his rule.

## Sacramental Dimension

Worship is a sign demonstrating spiritual reality.<sup>73</sup> It shows not only the relationship to God but also his reign in his people. In the OT, worship is related to a gesture of falling down; yet, it is basically an expression of one's surrendering heart to God.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> A. Kuyper, "Meeting with God as Reconciled Congregation," in *Our Worship: Abraham Kuyper*, ed. H. Boonstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 15–16.

<sup>69</sup> D.G. Peterson, "Worship," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture*, ed. T.D. Alexander et al. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 856–57.

<sup>70</sup> Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," 244–45.

<sup>71</sup> Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 162–72. McKnight recognizes the OT allusion (Is 1:17) in James 1.27. James sees the similar situation between Israelite and Christian worships, which lack of moral and behavioural purity.

<sup>72</sup> D.G. McCartney, *James*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 154–75.

<sup>73</sup> Sproul, *Truths We Confess*, 338–39.

<sup>74</sup> Peterson, "Worship," 856.



The worship meeting should represent God's present in the new creation.<sup>75</sup> In this context, the worship is sacramental for it realizes and anticipates the spiritual reality of new creations. Paul describes the reality of new creation in the new relationship between Jews and Gentile (Eph 1.10, 2:15).<sup>76</sup> Since the sign of the new creation is the harmonious relationship (peace) between Jews and Gentiles,<sup>77</sup> the Christian worship should be able to show that relationship. In this case, the role of holy supper is significant to highlight the new covenant and the new relationship of God's people.

### Eschatological Dimension

Christian worship is a basic model of the coming of God's kingdom. It anticipates the dawn of the New Jerusalem and temple. Peterson has shown that the temple motif is prominent in biblical teachings, arguing that the earthly temple is a model of eschatological temple.<sup>78</sup> Bauckham recognizes the church is the "most eschatological worship."<sup>79</sup> Believers' attitude to others and their submission to God's rule is a mean of God's work in bringing his kingdom into the earth.

### 2. Online Worship (OW)

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed Christian worship from public service to OW. This worship could probably fulfill the need for one side of vertical dimension of worship. People could worship God in a church, in a family fellowship, or in an individual meditation, using the online service as a guide. This fits perfectly with Jesus' logia about true worshipers, who worships God not in a particular place (Jn 4.21-24), justifies that one can worship God in Christ without depending on any cultic locations, such as the Jerusalem temple.<sup>80</sup> However, vertical dimension of worship includes his supremacy not only over believing individuals but

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<sup>75</sup> J. Bolt, "All of Life Is Worship? Abraham Kuyper and Neo-Kuyperians," in *Abraham Kuyper: Our Worship*, ed. H. Boonstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 326–29.

<sup>76</sup> See E. Best, *Ephesians: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1998), 259–63.

<sup>77</sup> In the first century, the table fellowship expresses the reality of new covenant, in which Jews and Gentiles are recognized as God's people because of Christ' faith. In Galatians, Paul attacks Peter's attitude when he left the table fellowship with the Gentiles.

<sup>78</sup> Peterson, *Engaging with God*, chap. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," 244.

<sup>80</sup> Kuyper, "Meeting with God as Reconciled Congregation."



the whole believing community. In the communal services God's kingship over believers can be shown through, for instance, their attitude to the poor. The question is how OW could show attention and love to, for instance the poor, in a way that is shown in public services.

OW hardly realizes the sacramental and eschatological dimensions of worship. The worship is not mainly about liturgy but a sign of God's kingship over the new covenant people of God. In a public service, believing community learn to show, for instance, the impartial love among believers by making table fellowship. The question is how OW could take the sacramental role of public worship and how believing community could show, for example, the impartial justice and love in OW.

Moreover, the eschatological dimension of worship makes public worship to be an effective instrument to anticipate the new heaven and earth. The heavenly and earthly realities are united in Jesus' resurrection, and the public worship becomes a foretaste of that new reality. Believers do not have perfection but they learn to forgive and to worship God together. The question is how OW could cover the horizontal reconciliation.

In pandemic covid-19, many churches unavoidably use OW. However, they should be aware that OW is not a replacement for public worship. It is an exit door and used due to emergency situation.

## **Conclusion**

The canonical writings provide no definition of worship. Yet worship is biblical. The concept of worship describes what God's people in the OT and NT regularly did in the day of Sabbath (the seventh day of the week) or the Lord's day (the first day of the week).

Using the historical redemptive reading, this essay has investigated the Sabbath and the Lord's day from the historical, canonical, and Christological perspectives. It has shown that the Sabbath and the Lord's day have different meanings but are interconnected. While the Sabbath refers to both the rest (both earthly and heavenly) and the climax of God's work in the world, the Lord's day is the initial God's work bringing the world to its climax, namely, the promise of the heavenly Sabbath. Thus, while the promise of the rest in the seventh day of creation has been fulfilled in the Lord's day (the first day of the week), the final stage of this day is the eschatological Sabbath, when the heaven and earth are perfectly united.



Based on the meanings of Sabbath and the Lord's day, this essay maintains that the Christian worship has three essential dimensions, i.e., vertical, sacramental, and eschatological. The worship is not only a ritual and liturgical and does not only used to maintain human relationship to God. It functions as a sign that expresses God's kingship over believing community and the world. Moreover, it is also a foretaste for his eschatological kingdom of God, i.e., the new heaven and earth.

Online worship is not a substitution for the public worship. It could be used in a particular situation but not enable covering all dimensions of worship. When churches practice online worship, they need to consider how they are able to fulfill the other church roles, such as taking care the poor and bearing witness.

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**The New Perspective in Theology and Religious Studies**

Vol. 2, No. 1 (2021): 26-43

<http://journalsttcipanas.ac.id/index.php/NPTRS/>

p-ISSN 2722-9726, e-ISSN 2722-9718

Published by Cipanas Theological Seminary

Williamson, G.I. *The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide*. Phillipsburg: P&R, 1993.