

"Remember That You Were a Slave"

Today we're going to look at the fourth commandment, as I just read. Of all the Ten Commandments, I think it is safe to say that this is one of most neglected and most misunderstood commandments among Christianity. On the one hand you have the extreme where some Christians think this commandment no longer applies at all. That's it's been fully fulfilled with the coming of Christ. On the other extreme you have some Christians who attempt to keep this commandment exactly the way the Jews did under the old covenant; which in addition to keeping it on Saturday, it often means that such people take all the numerous Sabbath laws in the Old Testament and apply them in a very legalistic fashion, similar to the ways the Pharisees did. In addition to those two extremes, you have various other positions somewhere in between. For example, some take this commandment and say it's just about a personal principle of work and rest; and so you just have to pick your own personal Sabbath day. For one person it might be Wednesday, for another Friday, and so on.

Well, I'm here today to commend to you what I believe to be the historic Christian practice as well as in agreement with the pattern set forth in the New Testament. You see, what I'm proposing is that the church in the new covenant keeps the principle of the Sabbath on Sunday. This is the "Christian Sabbath," referred to in Scripture and in early church writings as the "Lord's Day," i.e. Revelation 1:10. Now many in the early church wrote to say that observing the Lord's Day is not the same as observing the Jewish Sabbath. I would wholeheartedly agree. You might recall that I mentioned the three types of laws in the old covenant: moral, civil, and ceremonial. We aren't bound to keep those civil and ceremonial laws anymore. Well, the Sabbath under the old covenant had quite a number of civil and ceremonial laws that legislated how the Sabbath was kept. Those ceremonial laws regarding the Sabbath have indeed found fulfillment in the rest that Christ won for us; that's a spiritual rest that we've already begun to taste of in part. The civil laws, like putting someone to death who broke the Sabbath, were unique to Israel as a nation and God has not called us to enforce those anymore, but we can certainly learn from them. But here in the Ten Commandments we see that God has placed this principle of a Sabbath rest in the midst of all these other moral commandments. And to that degree, to the degree that the Sabbath principle is a part of God's moral law, we continue to observe the Lord's Day. What we do on Sundays as Christians is founded upon this fourth commandment. And so what that means is that there is a way that we treat Sunday that's consistent with this fourth commandment, but not in the way that exactly identical with everything the Jews would have done with the Sabbath in the old covenant? Make sense? If that sounds confusing at all, hopefully today's sermon will clear it up a bit.

What causes people sometimes a bit of difficulty here is that the fourth commandment obviously is talking about Saturday in its original context. It was the seventh day, Saturday, that was a holy day unto the Lord originally. But of course in the New Testament, we see that the church begins instead to gather together on Sunday, on the first day of the week. Early church writings tell us why, but it's really pointing out the obvious. Ignatius, a first century bishop, who apparently sat under John the Apostle's teaching, wrote about the Lord's Day saying, "Let every friend of Christ keep the

Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection-day, the queen and chief of all the days" (Epistle to the Magnesians, IX). In other words, instead of keeping a Saturday Sabbath, we have a Sunday celebration. Because that's the day Jesus rose from the dead. The day after the Sabbath. Of course, all four of the gospels go out of their way to let us know it was the first day of the week that Jesus rose from the dead. In the Old Testament scriptures, there were a number of mysterious references to the eighth day. Well, that's of course when Jesus rose, on the eighth day, the day after the old Sabbath.

And so the keeping of the fourth commandment looks a little different under the new covenant than it did in the old. We rest on Sunday, not Saturday. And we don't keep it in light of all the civil and ceremonial laws. No, we keep the fourth commandment in accordance with the pattern set forth in the New Testament. The writings of the early church confirms this pattern as well.

But how we keep the Lord's Day is still certainly modeled on the fourth commandment. Of course, that means we need to keep in mind Jesus' own teachings on the Sabbath; how he said that he was Lord of the Sabbath, and that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. In other words, the Sabbath is not about a legalistic day to wear us out in what we can't do. It's actually a day about what we should be doing! Resting in the Lord and worshipping him.

And that is what we'll be studying today. We'll see how the Christian Sabbath is to be a day holy unto the Lord. That it's a day to remember and rejoice in all that Christ has done for us. That it's a great day to set aside to worship our God and fellowship together. That it's day of holy resting. And so in the rest of our time today I'd like us to look at the fourth commandment as presented here in Deuteronomy. First, we'll look at the holiness of the Sabbath. Second, we'll look at the scope of the Sabbath, in terms of who this commandment is directed to. Third, we'll look at Deuteronomy's reason for the Sabbath. As we look at what Deuteronomy teaches us here about the Sabbath, we'll learn more about how we can benefit from the goodness of the Lord's Day as Christians.

So let's look first at the holiness of the Sabbath. Verse 12. We are commanded to keep the Sabbath holy. It might be helpful here to first make sure what we even understand what the word Sabbath actually means. The word Sabbath in Hebrew comes from a root word that refers to ceasing. And so the idea is that one day you are set aside for ceasing. Ceasing what? Well, ceasing work. That's what verses 13-14 go on to say. You cease your normal every day work that you do all the other six days in order to have a day where you don't do those things. Instead it is to be a holy day.

Well, remember what the word holy means. It's basically to set apart, in a religious sense. As in the day belongs to God. As in the day is about holy things. The opposite of "holy" could be "common," or even "normal." And so we have six days that are common, and one day that is holy. That's the pattern we're given. One holy day per every six normal regular days.

And so when God tells us in the Sabbath to cease from work and to instead rest, we have to understand this rest in the context of the day being a holy day. The holiness of the Sabbath tells us what kind of rest that it's talking about. It's talking about holy rest. About finding your rest in God. It's resting in God and his goodness.

Now obviously this can come in all sorts of different forms, but certainly it comes chiefly in the form of worship. That's why we see the Jews in the Bible going to the synagogues on their Sabbath. And that's why we see the Christians in the Bible assembling together on Sunday, on the Lord's Day. One memorable story of one of these Sunday gatherings in the New Testament is in Acts 20. There Paul gathers with the people during their service, and he starts teaching and ends up teaching until midnight. Yes, midnight. And there was a young man named Eutychus there in attendance who fell asleep during the sermon, and fell off the third story. Paul went and picked him up and he was fine, by a miracle or not, we're not told. But that was one example of the early church taking the Sabbath seriously on the Lord's Day. They were spending the day together as a church receiving quite a long sermon from Paul. I'm sure I'd have more than just people falling asleep if I preached until midnight!

And so I think the holiness of the Sabbath tells us what kind of rest God wants on this day. It's not really a day to be focused on mere physical rest or even personal leisure. It's primarily a day that's about worshipping and enjoying God. About resting in him and his holiness. Now this doesn't mean you can't take a nap on Sunday. But it does mean your "rest" throughout the day should have a God focus. It's something far more than just physical rest. It's resting in God and his goodness.

And this also tells us why it's important that we all honor a Sabbath rest on the same day. We're called to worship God together. And so it's fitting that we all have the Sabbath on the same day. And the only pattern given to us in the New Testament is on Sunday. Sunday is the day the church meets. This is why a pastor's Sabbath is still on Sunday. Pastors certainly work on Sunday. They might take another day off. I personally try to do that on Mondays. But that doesn't make Monday my Sabbath. No, that's a day off, but it's not my Sabbath. Sunday is our Sabbath, the day holy unto the Lord when we gather together as God's family to worship him.

Well, let's consider the scope of the Sabbath now, in terms of who this commandment is directed to. Well obviously, it's directed to each of us. Verse 14. On it you shall not do any work. So the keyword is "you." That's how it starts out. This is a commandment to you! Each of us.

But of course the commandment goes on, doesn't it? This is not just about you resting. It's about all who are under your care resting. Your children. Your servants. Your livestock. With regard to the livestock, Deuteronomy's account actually expands the scope from the Exodus account. Exodus 20:10 just mentions livestock in general, but there's some added commentary here that specifically calls out their oxen and donkeys. The text in Deuteronomy also adds the part in verse 14, where it tells us why we should do this. It says, so "that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you." The Exodus account of the Ten Commandments doesn't have that last part, so that should cause us to think about the significance of why this additional commentary is added here.

You know, this whole idea would have been a very foreign way of thinking for the ancient Near East. First off, scholars have not been able to find any other culture or nation at that time that practiced anything like a weekly Sabbath. It just didn't exist. Scholars generally believe this was something unique to Israel. But furthermore, this goes completely against the way society was typically stratified back then. Back then, the servants did all the work, and the masters did all the resting. For this commandment

to tell everyone to work six days a week, that would have been revolutionary. Then to say that everyone got to rest one day in seven, that was again revolutionary. Again, servants were supposed to work, not rest. And then the same gets applied to livestock? Give the animals a rest? Remember, servants were often treated like property back then, not much different than the livestock. And so for both servants and livestock to get a time of rest, that would have been revolutionary. All of this, would have been very different than the social norm.

Of course today our culture and society is very different. That's probably in large part due to this commandment. Nowadays we don't have slaves, but we do have employees. Often today it's the owners of successful companies that do far more work than the employees. Now that's certainly not always true. We know that some bosses barely show up to work, and that can cause a lot of unhappy employees. But we do know that the executives that are most successful financially are usually the ones that are the workaholics, working round the clock without rest. They do everything they can to maximize their profits. Every hour and every day counts.

But even in this very different culture, the fourth commandments applies. We shouldn't be workaholics. Nor should we be sluggards and lazy. We should find that God-ordained balance of work and rest, and especially that time for spiritual cultivation. You know, as either an employer or an employee, living this out will have financial ramifications for you, I'm sure. That's the challenge of our modern society that's driven by capitalistic profit. If other people or businesses are willing to work round the clock, that sort of competition is going to affect you. I don't have easy answers for you. It will involve some sacrifices and tough prayerful decisions.

And I can't help but think that this commandment calls us to think about how our actions affect others on Sunday. Heads of households, do you set things up on Sunday so that others under your care can maximize this day as a holy day of rest? Or do you find ways to add to their labors on this day? Christian employers need to ask the same question about their employees. Again, there are a number of tough questions to ask ourselves about how to apply this in our modern age.

I like to turn now to look at the reason the book of Deuteronomy gives for this Sabbath command. That's in verse 15. "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." Realize that this is a different reason than what is given in the Exodus account of the Ten Commandments. In the Exodus account it does give a reason, but the reason is that because God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, so we too must pattern our work and rest after that. But here it's a different reason. Here's it's not about creation. It's about redemption.

You see, this is another reason why they should have kept the Sabbath. Because God gave them rest. Remember their previous situation. They were slaves in Egypt. And just like I had said previously, slaves never got any rest. They were just supposed to work, day in and day out. They didn't get weekends and holidays off.

And so this is a different rationale than what's given in the Exodus account. But they are very complementary. God's pattern in creation is a reason for the Sabbath. That's good to know. It's a creation argument that everyone

can relate to, since we've all been created. But God's people can especially appreciate the reason that's given here in Deuteronomy. Israel was redeemed out of slavery. God gave them rest out of their slavery. This is an expression of God's grace to them. God was their new master now. Not the Egyptians. He could have removed them from Egyptian slavery only to put them under a new form of slavery. But that's not what he did. Yes, he'd have them serve him. Yes, he had them work hard for six days each week. But the seventh day was to be a day of holy rest. It was a day for man to take care of what he really needs: his soul. A day to spend in worship of God.

And of course this reason given here in Deuteronomy is especially pertinent to why they should give their slaves rest. Just after verse 14 makes a big point about giving their servants rest, God reminds them in verse 15 how they used to be slaves in Egypt and how God their master was giving them rest. Do you see how great the scope of God's rest is? It was to be extended not just to masters and parents, but to slaves, and to children, and even the foreigners in the land. Israel was to extend God's rest to all who were around them.

I hope the application for us under the new covenant is clear. Israel was given two clear reasons for why the Sabbath was important. The fact that they were following God's pattern in creating the world, and the fact that they were redeemed from slavery and were now given rest. Those were two things Israel could relate to. And both of those reasons we can relate to. We were created, and so God's pattern in creation is pertinent for us. And Israel's heritage has become our heritage as those who've been brought into the family of God. So the Exodus becomes part of our heritage as well.

But of course, we have a new reason to keep the Sabbath, don't we? And that reason becomes clear when you remember that we keep the Lord's Day. What's that reason? That we've been redeemed. That we've been redeemed from sin and death. That was our old state. We were slaves to sin. We were under spiritual bondage and death. We were slaves! But no longer. Remember what Jesus came to do. He quoted this prophecy from Isaiah toward the start of his ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). That's a prophecy all about redemption from slavery. It about giving liberty to the oppressed. And after Jesus read that prophecy, he said that it had been fulfilled that moment as he read it.

In other words, that is what Jesus had come to do. He had come to redeem a people from slavery. To bring true liberty from oppression. But Jesus wasn't talking about social justice here. He was talking about our problem with sin. He had come to bring a solution. And so Jesus would go to the cross to die for our sins. So that whoever trusts in him by faith, would have eternal life. If you have never done that before, I urge you to turn to Jesus even now. Believe in him. If you have, then the Bible says that you are a new creation. And that you are redeemed.

Did you catch that? The two reasons for keeping the Sabbath for the Jews sprung from creation and redemption. Creation of the world and redemption from Egypt. But now we have those same reasons; but better reasons! We are new creations. And we have been redeemed from sin and death! Those original reasons were great reasons to keep the Sabbath originally. But now with these new reasons there's all the more reason to keep the Lord's Day holy.

The Christian Sabbath. A day to set aside for the public and private worship of God. A day of holy resting in the Lord. A day to set aside to really learn and seek what it means to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Saints of God, I hope you've been reminded again today that this commandment still is important to us. We don't have nine commandments, with this one passing away. No, God's given Ten Commandments, each with ongoing significance for us. Let's really set aside Sundays as holy. As the Lord's Day to gather as his people and worship him.

And one of the things that we can do on Sundays that's a very fitting use of the time is found in verse 15. It's that word "remember." Remember. There's quite a lot to remember on the Sabbath isn't there? Before or after your time at church, this is a great thing you can do on Sundays to really help set aside the whole day as holy. You can spend some time remembering on the Sabbath. Remembering the good things of God.

You can remember God's work in creation; how he rested in the goodness of the creation. That means you can find ways to enjoy and appreciate God's creation on Sundays. That's a fitting thing to do on a Sunday.

You can remember how he redeemed Israel from Egypt, and for that matter, you can remember through all the things he's done in the Bible to bring about salvation for his people. Remember that he's saved you. Really thinking through how wonderful that is. That means that Sunday is really a great time to spend reading and reflecting on God's Word and what's he done for us. When we are so busy throughout the week, we might find we don't have much time for real in depth study of the Word. But what better time is there to do that, than on Sunday? Maybe that can be a new Sunday afternoon habit that you start. Maybe you can get your family involved and encourage them all to be involved in holy resting as this commandment calls us to.

One final related application is this. As we go about prioritizing and honoring the Lord's Day, it really can be a witness to others. You know this passage tells us how all who are under our care should have the benefit of the Sabbath rest. The implication is that this rest is to extend to all around us. Well, today we can't force others around us to rest. But by prioritizing Sunday as a holy day for us, that's going to stand out to others. This can be a great witnessing opportunity.

Of course, how we present it can be important. Often when you start skipping certain functions for the sake of being at church, people think you are just too legalistic. We certainly shouldn't act holier than thou when you tell people that you'll be going to church on Sunday instead of something else. We shouldn't act like we're saved by God because we go to church. But we should find ways to tell people *why* we go to church on Sunday. Because it's a day God's asked us to set aside for his worship.

The ultimate fulfillment of the Lord's Day will come when Jesus returns. That's when we enter into our eternal rest. But now on the Lord's Day we get a chance to have a foretaste of that rest, as God's people come together to worship our God. That's a little bit of heaven here on earth. Let's have that perspective each time we gather together to worship. Amen.

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