

(Devotional #26) **Christian Liberty and the Law – The Ten Commandments:**

Honoring the Sabbath

(Exodus 20:8-11; Hebrews 4:10)

*By the seventh day God completed His work which he had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made – **Genesis 2:2-3***

One** person judges one day above another, another esteems every day (alike). Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind – **Romans 14:5

So**, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. Therefore, let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through the same example of disobedience – **Hebrews 4:9-11

Remember** the Sabbath day to keep it holy – **Exodus 20:8

Have you ever wondered why one of the Ten Commandments deals with the setting aside of a special day – the Sabbath? God could have given Israel the twelve commandments and included the Passover and the Day of Atonement – or even seventeen commandments to include ALL the Jewish Feasts described in Leviticus 23? Why just the Sabbath?

Perhaps it is because Exodus 20 is not a section of the Mosaic Law that pertains to special days or feasts or celebrations. The Sabbath is included in the Ten Commandments because of a link Moses makes back to the creation story in Genesis – and any time we see something in the Bible that is linked to the creation, we need to view it as fundamental to the overall theology of both the Old and New Testaments.

We will talk about this link to creation in a minute – but for now, let's look at three important terms used in the Fourth Commandment: **REMEMBER**, **HOLY**, and **SABBATH**, and later we will consider a few other related terms.

The Fourth Commandment begins with the word, '**REMEMBER.**'

(Let me ask the men a few questions):

- Are you are married?
- What holiday occurs on February 14th?
- How about anniversaries? Do you have one of those? (*I bet you do!*)
- Does your wife have birthdays?

*(Okay – Here is the **BIG QUESTION**):*

- How would it go over at your house if on one or more of these days you just '**REMEMBERED**' – (**AS A COGNITIVE PROCESS**) – Valentine's Day, or your anniversary, or your wife's birthday – And let it go at that?
- Then later, when your wife makes known to you ... your failure – and she will ... (*eventually*) – that you forgot her birthday, or worse, your anniversary, what if you said, "**Oh, I didn't forget; I just didn't mention it!**"! How would that go over at your house?

Aren't you expected to do more than '**REMEMBER**'? *If so – if you truly understand the difference in firing off a few neurons that cause your brain to know that it is your anniversary – versus*

buying a card, sending flowers, or taking your wife to dinner – if you can process that difference, then you understand the meaning of the Hebrew word זָכַר (ZAKAR – ‘to remember’).

In Hebrew, ‘**TO REMEMBER**’ denotes an active relationship between ‘*the object of the memory*’ (in our example, your wife) and *the relationship you have with her in the covenant of marriage*. **‘REMEMBERING’ IS MORE THAN ‘RECALLING’ – IT IS A CALL TO ACTION.**

The Bible contains many examples of this, but for the sake of time, I’ll mention two:

In **Genesis 8:1** – “**God REMEMBERED** Noah and all the animals that were with him in the ark — **so HE CAUSED** the wind to pass over the earth so that the water subsided.” God is Omniscient. He had not forgotten about Noah; in fact, Noah had found favor with God years before and God stood beside Noah for the decades during which he built the ark ... and now God is ‘**acting**’ to bring the ark to rest so Noah’s children can begin repopulating the earth.

Consider also **Exodus 2:24** – “God heard their groaning, and **God REMEMBERED** His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” In this verse, **God remembered** His covenant with Abraham – **and then He acted**: He intervened in history to bring about all the events surrounding the Exodus – the most pivotal event in the history of Israel.

What follows ‘**divine remembrance**’ – is ‘**action**’ on the part of God. ‘**Biblical remembering**’ always results in someone doing something. To ‘**remember the Sabbath**’ requires Israel to be involved actively in the observance of that special day – which is kind of ironic since the Sabbath is a day of rest. **How do you ‘actively rest’?** Well, this means the observance of the Sabbath is supposed to involve more than lying on the couch watching a football game.

The next term to consider is the Word ‘**HOLY**’ (קָדוֹשׁ – pronounced ‘QADOSH’). Probably the best translation of this commandment is: “Remember the Sabbath day **BY** keeping it holy” – The way ‘**TO REMEMBER**’ is ‘**BY** making it ‘**HOLY**.’

The essence of ‘**Holiness**’ is ‘**Otherness**.’ This means the Sabbath should not be like any other day. In this case, ‘**holiness**’ is ‘*the setting aside*’ of this one day as a special day for remembering and contemplating **WHO GOD IS** and **WHAT GOD HAS DONE** – then for that contemplation to make a difference in the life of God’s elect nation, Israel.

The Sabbath for Israel was to be spent with a focus on God and the covenant. The cessation of man’s work is an acknowledgement of the priority of God’s agenda over our own. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, He was ‘*doing God’s agenda*’ and ignoring the agenda established in the traditions of the Pharisees.

THE 4TH COMMANDMENT is recorded in verse 8 – What follows in verses 9-11 is an explanation that tells us **why** this commandment was given.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but **the seventh day** is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; (in it) you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant, or your cattle, or your sojourner, who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy
– **Exodus 20:9-11**

This is an explanatory section attached to the commandment, and it links the Sabbath to the creation account in Genesis – To understand why, we must consider the word **SABBATH** (along with some related terms).

The verb שָׁבַת (*pronounced 'SHABBAT' but translated, 'SABBATH'*) – means 'to cease'¹ from the activity in which one is engaged'. There is in this word the subtle suggestion that this cessation is due to the work having been completed; this is how it is used in Genesis 2:2:

*By the seventh day, God had completed His work, which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work – **Genesis 2:2***

So, *shabbat* is not disengagement as we tend to think of resting, but a cessation that results in rest when all obstacles have been removed and all responsibilities having been met. Most significantly, *shabbat* denotes the completion of one's tasks so as to enter into a new and different kind of rest.

For New Testament believers, rest is not found by living in the Promised Land, but by our position in Christ. The Sabbath was observed as '**A STATE OF REST**' – but not '*rest*' as we use the term.

Understanding '**SABBATH REST**' requires us to consider the verse quoted from Hebrews at the beginning of our lesson – "**The one who has entered HIS REST has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His**" – (**Hebrews 4:10**). God did not rest because He was tired. God never grows tired or weary; He never lacks energy or strength, and He never needs rest. God '*rested*' because His work was completed.

This idea of completion is central to a proper understanding of the Gospel. When Jesus said, '**IT IS FINISHED**',² He meant what He said. There is nothing more that must be done. For us this means, **WE CANNOT ADD ANYTHING TO WHAT JESUS ALREADY HAS ACCOMPLISHED – the 'good news' is, ALL WE MUST DO IS BELIEVE THE WORD OF GOD REGARDING JESUS CHRIST.**

SABBATH-REST in Scripture is a picture of **GRACE**. **SABBATH REST IS GRACE REST**. It is the spiritual condition in which the believer has ended the fallacious process of '*working*' for his salvation or '*toiling*' to improve his standing before God. **THERE IS NO PLACE FOR WORKS IN THE GOSPEL**. The Gospel is all about the work Jesus did on the cross; man's role in salvation involves one thing and one thing only: **BELIEVING THE WORD OF GOD REGARDING WHO JESUS IS AND WHAT JESUS DID FOR US ON THE CROSS**. It is about **HIM**, not about **YOU**.

The commandment to observe the Sabbath as Israel observed the Sabbath is not repeated in the New Testament – so our relationship to the Sabbath is different. Christ fulfilled the Sabbath because He fulfilled all the Law – Paul summed up this theology quite succinctly when he wrote:

*No one is to act as your judge regarding food or drink, or
With respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day –
Things which are a mere shadow of what is to come, but
The substance belongs to Christ – **Colossians 2:16-17***

With this in mind, what does the Sabbath mean for us today?

- First, we are not under the Mosaic Law, so there is no requirement to '*keep the Sabbath*' in the same sense that Israel '*kept the Sabbath*.'

¹ Examples can be found in Joshua 5:12 and Job 32:1

² In John 19:30 – the Greek term translated "it is finished" is *Τετέλεσται*. This word is written in the Greek Perfect Tense, which gives it the meaning, "the atonement is now complete ... and will remain complete for eternity."

- Christ Himself is our 'Sabbath' because it is *IN HIM* we experience 'Salvation-Rest.' God gave Israel 'Sabbath-Rest' in the Land of Canaan; we have 'Sabbath-Rest' by our position in Christ, the Son of God.

It is interesting to read God's final words³ before Moses left Mount Sinai to rejoin the sons of Israel, for by them the Lord explained the significance of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is declared to be ***THE SIGN OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT BETWEEN GOD AND ISRAEL***. The observance of the Sabbath set Israel apart from every other nation. Every time Israel observed the Sabbath, they were affirming to the Gentiles and to themselves their relationship to God under an irrevocable covenant. By His words, God explained the purpose of the Sabbath⁴ – '*so the people would be reminded every week that God is the one who sanctifies the nation.*' Without this sign as a reminder of the covenant, the people were sure to forget the uniqueness of their relationship with Yahweh.

What does this mean for Christians today, who are not under the Mosaic Covenant? If the purpose of the Sabbath was to depict Grace-Rest for Israel, how does it relate to us? May we suggest since '*resting in God's grace*' is the underlying meaning of the Sabbath, and since this is a '*rest*' that demonstrates complete dependence upon God alone, ***WE REST WITH FULL CONFIDENCE IN THE COMPLETED WORK OF CHRIST***. God rested on the seventh day, not to regain strength, but to set a pattern for mankind. For our lives to be filled with the peace and power of God, we have to rest – physically and spiritually. Given a choice, it is all too common to choose action over quiet reflection. The need to give attention to the resting of our spirits is lost in today's non-stop world, for there always is more to do. This is why *Sabbath-Rest* is so crucial to the health of our spiritual lives. Our souls are tired – worn out, frustrated, and chronically weak. The solution is – *Sabbath-Rest*.

How do we apply *Sabbath-Rest* to our lives? First, we must make weekly worship a priority. Time in God's presence with God's people, singing God's songs, hearing God's Words, and presenting ourselves to God, refreshes our souls. True worship has its focus on Jesus – who He is and what He has done. Worship is not about us – it is about Him. Then, we must learn to apply the art of *Sabbath-Rest-moments* to our lives throughout each day. This means, we must stop thinking about ourselves in order to meditate on God, for it is God and His Word that refresh the soul. Jesus said, "*If you are weary and heavy laden, come to Me*."⁵ When we come to faith in Jesus, we find rest for our souls. If our soul is at rest, our bodies can rest as well.

The New Testament Church saw a need for a regular day of worship, set aside for fellowship and communion – for the church is admonished not to forsake the regular gathering together for these things⁶. The church chose the first day of the week (***SUNDAY***), not the seventh day, for this purpose, in order to commemorate the resurrection of Christ, the seal marking the completion of God's Salvation Work. (*Remember, the specific day is less important than the manner in which that day is commemorated! But more than that, EVERY DAY IS A DAY OF SABBATH-REST FOR BELIEVERS, for God's Grace is not limited to a particular hour, day, or year on the calendar ... SABBATH-REST is ours for eternity from that moment we believed the Gospel.*)

³ See Exodus 31:12-17

⁴ See especially Exodus 31:13^B

⁵ See Matthew 11:28-30

⁶ See Hebrews 10:25