

Walking with Jesus Through Sinai:
 Seeking Moral Clarity in an Age of Chaos with the 10 Commandments
 CPC Adult Sunday Studies Fall 2024
 14 - Fourth Commandment, part 3

Worship & Rest: On Practices to Help Us Remember the Sabbath

Review - from treating and worshipping God as God - in his person, work, and name - we move now to imitating God in the Sabbath and receiving His rest as a gift. Last week, we looked at the relationship between the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, as well as Heb. 3.7-4.13.

Exodus 20:8-11 - "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

WLC Q. 116. What is required in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment requireth of all men the **sanctifying or keeping holy** to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian sabbath, and in the New Testament called The Lord's Day. (*Deut 5:12-14; Gen 2:2-3; 1 Cor 16:1-2; Acts 20:7; John 20:19,26; Matt 5:17-18; Isa 56:2,4,6-7; Rev 1:10*)

- **Notice the importance of the day.** Sometimes people will say, "I take my Sabbath on Friday," but that's really a misunderstanding of what it is. The Sabbath is the day of resurrection, the day of the Lord, pointing us back to Jesus' resurrection and forward to our final resurrection.
 - There is, of course, a principle in which other parts of our lives can incorporate having a "Sabbath" mindset, just like the Israelites were to remove debts every 7 years, or have a Sabbath of Sabbaths, the Year of Jubilee. Those are simply applying more broadly the specific law of the weekly Sabbath. The weekly Sabbath should lead us to have a more "Sabbath" mindset on other days, but not

to the detriment of actually worshipping and resting on the Lord's Day with God's people.

- **On timing** - biblically, evenings were counted first, so Jews observe the Sabbath from sundown to sundown. You could do that too - Saturday evening to Sunday evening - but you would just want to mark the beginning and ending in an intentional way since you don't have the natural mark of sleep.

Q. 117. How is the sabbath or the Lord's day to be sanctified?

A. The sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such **worldly employments and recreations** as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of **necessity and mercy**) in the public and private exercises of **God's worship**: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day. (*Exod 20:8,10; Exod 16:25-28; Jer 17:21-22; Neh 13:15-22; Matt 12:1-5; Isa 58:13-14; Luke 4:16; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2; Lev 23:3; Isa 66:23; Exod 20:8; Luke 23:54,56; Exod 16:22,25-26,29; Neh 13:19*) - compare WCF 21.7-8

- **Worship and rest** - these are the two main purposes, and everything else we discuss should serve them. Worshipping God informs how / why we rest; and resting allows us to give God the worship He alone is due.
- **"Works of necessity and mercy"** - we are not repeating the superstitious burdens of some orthodox Jews that distracted them away from the purpose of the Sabbath
 - Works of necessity - those actions that cannot be avoided in daily life or in emergencies, such as basic tasks like eating, taking care of family members, getting dressed, etc.
 - Works of mercy - actions done without the intent of receiving something back in return
- **What is a "worldly recreation"?** This is the most common exception taken by ordinands in the PCA, since many see this as meaning they can't take a hike in the woods or throw a baseball with their kids; however, I don't think that's what's meant here.
 - What's probably meant is being so engaged in, say, a sport that you're gambling on it, or re-arranging your own schedule so that you feed your passion of that

sport, all the while forgetting what day it is. It's "lawful" to be passionate about a sport, for example, but there should be different habits and spiritual mindsets on the Sabbath. This will, also, bleed into your habits on the other six days, which is precisely what our spiritual life should be doing - growing in our awareness of the Lord and His call on our life.

- Consider what otherwise "lawful" activities or recreations that you would do the other six days, but not on the Sabbath.
- Freedom of conscience becomes important here. For some, they could watch the NFL in good conscience, others could not; but we should all be aware of what it does to us.

Q. 119. What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are, all omissions of the duties required, all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them; all **profaning the day by idleness**, and doing that which is in itself sinful; and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.

- What is the difference between "**profane idleness**" and "**holy resting**"?
 - Most likely, "vegging out" on Netflix is profanely idle, but I think I could play a card game with my wife in a spirit of holy resting.
- "**Thoughts about worldly employments**" - do you think about, worry about, plan things around what's coming on Monday? What would it look like to pray, think, and act in a way that declared "tomorrow will be anxious for itself, but today is the Lord's"? Sunday is not a day to "get ahead" on what will be coming.
- Notice the severity in which God describes the breaking of the Sabbath - *Ezek. 20.12-3, 22.8, 23.38, Jer. 17.21-27, Isa. 56.2*. To profane the Sabbath is to deny that God is their God and He sanctifies them.
 - "The Sabbath is a sign whereby Israel may recognize that God is their sanctifier. If our sanctification consists in mortifying our own will, then a very close correspondence appears between the outward sign and the inward reality. We must be wholly at rest that God may work in us; we must yield our will; we must resign our heart; we must give up all our fleshly desires. In short, we must rest from all activities of our own contriving so that, having God working in us, we may repose in him." - Calvin, Institutes II.8.29

Some practical advice to help set Sunday apart

Much of this will take prayerful discernment and a conviction of your own personal conscience, as well as discussion with those in your household (if applicable). Some

activities may be sinful on the Sabbath for one person, but not another (cf. 1Cor. 8 & Rom. 14).

- **Intentional scheduling** - Do everything in your power to not have to work on Sundays and plan ahead so you don't need to take care of work duties or travel on Sunday
- Do something **special** that makes it feel like a "treat" or "taste of heaven", like a special dessert or fun activity
- Engage in **extra acts of mercy** that you don't have time for during the rest of the week. Sunday is not simply a "family day" (if you have family close by) though it should feel more like that than the days you must be at work. It's a day for works of mercy and healing, not a day just to relax.
 - This could look like volunteering, spending extra time with neighbors in need, family in need, etc.
- Avoid **entertainment** that is otherwise permitted biblically, but does not promote holiness, so that the day feels different. This will also help you diagnose what you consume and why.
 - This aims at avoiding "worldly recreations" that are "otherwise lawful"
 - I personally feel like I can watch the show "Breaking Bad" in good conscience, but not on the Sabbath.
- Avoid **engagement with the world** in burdensome ways, like reading/scrolling/watching **news** that simply adds to anxiety and a sense of powerlessness. I don't read any news except for a quick check to make sure there's not some catastrophe.
- Spend **extra time with the Lord** in meditation on Scripture, prayer, and singing - both privately and with others.
- If you **fast**, fast until the Lord's Supper (an ancient practice), and then feast! The Sabbath should tend toward celebration of the kingdom come in Christ already, rather than a mourning of the "not yet," which is what fasting most often emphasizes.
- **Consider how you're "forcing" other people to work** - some Christians argue that you shouldn't go out to eat at a restaurant, for example, on a Sunday because you're adding to other's burdens of work on that day. I'm not sure we can say that's a "law" but it's a worthy consideration.

Always remember the purpose of the Sabbath - that the Lord would be set apart in our lives as our Creator and Redeemer! If you're getting caught up in the details, you may be missing the point or need a heart check on your motives.