

The Command Blessing We Love to Hate

Exodus 20:8-11

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 20. We're continuing our study through the ten words which God spoke to Israel and which he gave to Moses, these ten commands. And we've come to the fourth command. It is the commandment we love to hate. Really, it's the blessing we love to hate. We chafe under the fourth commandment. And we rarely relish the fourth commandment, much less delight in it. And it's my desire today to see you come to relish the Lord's Day, to revel in it, to long for it, and to exalt in it.

Now I'm perfectly aware that there is a controversy amongst Bible-believing Christians as to the applicability of the fourth commandment. And I'm going to speak to that before we close the sermon I hope, today. But I want to start our study by reminding you that there is absolutely no controversy about the Old Testament observance of the Sabbath. That is unquestionably the case. It was a day of rest and it was a day of obligation to the people of God under the Old Testament.

And so the question is, "Is there a New Testament weekly fulfillment of the Old Testament Sabbath principle or not?" Some Christians say not. Other Christians say yes. Now, you do need to understand that those Christians that believe that there is a weekly fulfillment of the Old Testament Sabbath principles are the vast majority of Christians that have ever lived. Not sectarian groups of Puritans holed up in a wall in London in 1643, but the vast majority of Christianity has seen a New Covenant application of those Old Testament principles for us today. So with that as a word of introduction let's hear God's word in exodus chapter 20, beginning in verse 8.

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 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 rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Amen. And thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant word. May

He write its eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Father we thank You for this Your word. Teach us from it, humble our hearts before it, turn our thoughts to Christ by it, and grant us a love and delight in Your day. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Lord's Day is one of those subjects where one gets a "But what about..." before you can even start talking about the issue. We aren't naturally warm to the subject of the Lord's Day. We're afraid that the theological, ethical police are going to start going down our list of Sunday activities and crossing off certain elements. And we often put off the very discussion about the Lord's Day by raising hard questions.

We live in an interconnected society, a society more interconnected than any before. Every time you turn on the light switch somebody's down at the power plant. And we raise all sorts of ethical questions about what that means for our observance of the Sabbath. Well, before you argue with me, think with me for a few moments about what this command unquestionably meant when it was originally given, and then let's pause from time to time to ponder its continuing significance for us. And then for the skeptics still left, I'll attempt to speak to the biblical arguments for a continuing weekly Lord's Day for Christians.

But I want you to see first of all the command given in verse 8. Then I want you to see the specifics of the command given in verses 9 and 10. And then I want you to see the rationale of this command given in verse 11. And as we do so you are going to see that the Sabbath was a holy day of rest because of what God did at creation. And when you realize that you will begin to better understand why the Old Testament Sabbath principle still has implications for Christians today. Let's look at these three things together. Let's begin in verse 8.

I. The Sabbath Commanded.

Here we see the command itself. It's a call to remembrance, the call to remembrance of a day of rest. A day to be honored by being kept distinct. If we wanted to give a short summary of what God is saying to Israel in exodus 20, verse 8, it would be "keep the day of rest holy." That's what he's saying in verse 8. Israel must remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy and undefiled. You will have already noticed that this is first command that we have studied so far that is stated positively. It is only one of two commands stated positively. The only other command stated positively is the next command, the fifth commandment.

Now we live in a day and time that doesn't like negative commandments but it strikes me as interesting that one of the commandments that we have the hardest time with is a commandment that is stated positively. You see, if we don't like the content, we don't care whether it's stated negatively or positively, we still

don't like it. But that as an aside, this command begins not with "do not" or "don't" but "remember", "remember." And remember means to observe. How do I know that? Look at the last phrase of verse 8. "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." The very sentence defines it. How do you remember the Sabbath day? You keep it holy. You could even translate it, 'remember the Sabbath day, by keeping it holy.' In fact, let me offer a slightly idiosyncratic, but I think fairly accurate translation of exodus chapter 20, verse 8, for you to ponder. "remember the stop-working day by observing its sacredness." Now I hope John Currid's not checking behind me on my Hebrew translation there but I do think that will stand. "Remember the stop working day by observing its sacredness."

To remember means not a bare mental activity. Oh yes, I remember that there is a seventh day and it's holy. Not a bare activity of remembering that God rested on the seventh day but an embrace, an active embrace, of the realization that God rested on that day for my benefit in His graciousness, and an observing of that day as He has called us to do. There is similar terminology in the New Testament of the Lord's Supper. If you were to turn forward to I Corinthians 11 verses 24 and 25, Paul would tell you that we are to what? We are to "Do this in remembrance of Him." So, to say 'remember the Sabbath Day' is a call to us to enter in, to memorialize, even to re-enact that original divine Sabbath that God took. God took that Sabbath, Jesus says, in Mark 2, because we needed it. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath, he says.

Now that doesn't mean man doesn't need to worry about the Sabbath. That's not Jesus' point, that's not the Old Testament point. That point is that God created that Sabbath Day even before our fall into sin because we needed it. In His mercy, in His goodness, in His compassion He gave us that particular command.

Now, to remember the Sabbath Day then definitely points to the first Sabbath Day, the Sabbath Day that the Lord God took in creation. That Sabbath is the archetype, it's the original. Our Sabbaths or the Old Testament's Sabbaths are the copies of that original Sabbath. When we are called by God to enter in to keeping that Sabbath Day, He is calling on us to participate in His Sabbath.

Notice that God never asks you to do what He Himself is not prepared to do. He kept the Sabbath Day first not because He needed it but because you need it for your benefit, and then He calls on you to join in with Him in the re-enactment, in the memorializing, in the remembering of that divine Sabbath. Moses clearly wants us to understand that the Sabbath which he is talking about in Exodus chapter 20 is not something he has invented. In Genesis 2:1-3, though the noun Sabbath is not used there, the verbal form Sabbath is, and God is its subject. And that is the first Sabbath Day, and that's the Sabbath Day that Moses is pointing back to in Exodus chapter 20:8-11. But Moses also speaks about the original Sabbath Day in Exodus chapter 16 and in Exodus chapter 31, clearly pointing out that he is not instituting or enacting a new command here, he is reviving and renewing an old command here. He couldn't have used the word

'remember' if the Sabbath hadn't been around before the Ten Commandments. So it's vital for you to understand that Moses did not invent the Sabbath Day, and that God did not reveal the Sabbath Day for the first time at Mount Sinai. It was revealed in the days of Adam. It was observed in the days of Abel. It was observed by Israel prior to Mount Sinai and Moses in Exodus 20 and in Exodus 31 says that it's rooted in the creation. So the Sabbath is something that is woven into the very creation.

Sabbath, by the way, doesn't mean 'seventh.' Sabbath means to 'desist from labor.' That's where I got that weird translation, the 'stop working day.' God calls it "Remember the Sabbath Day," remember the day you desist from labor, and hence remember the stop working day. It's a day of rest.

The very concept of a Sabbath was unique to Israel. It's not unique to us, because we in the west are familiar with Muslims who have a sabbath on Friday; we're familiar with Christians who have a Sabbath on Sunday; and with Jews who have a Sabbath on Saturday. But for the pagan cultures around them the Sabbath was absolutely original. Why? Because all of the religious calendars of the pagan cultures around Israel were based upon the sun and the moon, the solar calendar and the lunar calendar. The sun and the moon were worshipped as Gods and the cycles of the sun and the moons determined the religious practice of the cultures around them. Among all those cultures, only Israel was given a seven-day cycle of religious worship to emphasize that the God who gave them this day was sovereign over the sun and the moon and they were to observe this day because of His creational pattern. And so among all the pagan cultures around them, the Jewish calendar is unique in that it is not fixed on a solar or lunar cycle. And we're told in verse 8 that this day is a holy day and it's to be observed as such.

But you're going to immediately say, "How?" But how is the stop working day to be observed as holy? Well, the next two verses explain explicitly how we are to observe it as holy, if you haven't already caught it from the name of the day already. it's the Sabbath Day remember, it's the 'stop working day.' "Hint, hint," Moses is saying. "Hint, hint, this is how you observe the stop working day" and he'll tell you explicitly in verses 9 and 10. But before we get there, whatever else is intended by this sentence, it is clear that Israel is to remember the stop working day by keeping its sacredness.

Now, we need to pause and ask, is there still an application for this, for us, as believers? Do Christians still remember a day? Do Christians have a day in which the cycle of their lives is governed for their worship of the living God? And the answer is 'yes' and 'yes.' And one example comes from Revelation 1:10. John is going to receive the visions upon which are based his apocalypse, the book of Revelation. And in Revelation 1:10, we are told that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. And everyone that John was writing to would know what he was talking about when he said "the Lord's Day." He meant Sunday. He was in

the Spirit on the Lord's Day, on Sunday. And so, in the New Testament itself there is already a day, Sunday, uniquely called the Lord's Day, and John could assume that everyone would understand that. Yes, Christians do remember a day, they have a day called the Lord's Day. That's all I want to make of that right there.

II. How does one keep the Sabbath?

Let's move on to verses 9 and 10. Here we get into the specifics of the command. Now comes the elaboration, the explanation of verse 8. How is it that one keeps the Sabbath Day holy? Well, these verses tell you. And notice three things in this set of verses. The day is the Lord's. The Sabbath Day not only belongs to Him but it is His day because of what He did on that day. Secondly, notice the rhythm of work and rest, six days work, one day rest. And then notice the prohibition of work. Israel, realizing that this day is uniquely the Lord's, must carefully refrain from all unnecessary work on it. That's the nature of the command.

The explanation begins in verse 9 with the flip side of rest. It begins with labor, six days you will work. God is not, in giving the Sabbath Day, calling us to indolence or laziness. He's calling us to activity in serving Him six days a week. There's a rhythm of work and rest, six days to work and last to rest. There are two sides of the Sabbath, labor and rest. There's a time for one and there's a time for the other. And as we'll learn in verse 11, this rhythm itself is based upon God's rhythm in creation. He worked for six days in creating the world and He rested on the seventh. And thus God's order of creation is to have societal consequences in Israel. It's to have consequences for families; it's to have consequences for servants; it's to have consequences even for animals and also for foreigners. In fact, if you look at Exodus 20:10, you will find very appropriately seven categories of beings who benefit from the Lord's Day, you, your sons, your daughters, your male servants, your female servants, your domestic animals and foreigners who dwell in your midst.

I want you to see the egalitarian nature of the Sabbath principle. You see, there might have been a temptation to say, "Well, I'm going to give my son a day of rest but I'm going to dump all the work on my daughters." And before you could even do that, God's made a pre-emptive strike, Sons and daughters will rest." "Well," you might have said, "Well, I'm not going to make my sons and daughters work but boy, am I going to make the servants make up for it." "Nope, you're going to give your servants rest too." "Oh, I'm going to dump it on the male servants or I'm going to give them a rest and dump it on the female servants." "Nope, you're going to give your male and female servants rest." "Well, at least I can keep my domestic animals working." "No, you can't, even your domestic animals are going to rest." "Well, how about those foreigners?" "No, they're going to rest too." You see, the whole social order is to benefit from this day of rest.

Notice as well, that the seventh day is called the rest day of the Lord, your God. It's His day, it's the day He rested. It's to be observed and remembered by us doing the same thing. God leads by example. And this is a gift friends, it's not a burden or a curse. Think of it. God is speaking this command to a generation of slaves. For 400 years they had been in Egypt, for decades their time had not been their own. Other people determined when they worked. Other people determined when they rested. Other people tyrannically drove them into the ground in labor and now God, the sovereign God of heaven and earth, stands up before them and says, "Now, here's the rule in My country, seven and one-half weeks of mandatory vacation every year. Do you understand Me? Seven and one-half weeks plus mandatory vacation every year. That's the rule in My land." Those slaves should have been dancing in the aisles! God is societally enforcing blessing on a people who had been driven into the ground. And in a day and an age like ours, where workaholism is epidemic at the individual level, and in which the corporate structure and the societal structure around us is driving us into incessant labor with never a pause for a breath of air, there could be nothing more glorious than seven and one-half plus weeks of mandatory vacation. It is a day of blessing. And so Israel is to observe the stop working day by stopping working and not making others work either.

Now I want to pause here for just a few moments and meddle. And I want to meddle in three particular areas, your worship, your work and some of the organized recreational activities which now control our culture around us. Let me just meddle a little bit. The blessing of enforced rest like the Sabbath can hardly, can hardly be overestimated in an overscheduled society like ours. I have lived and ministered in different countries and in different parts of this United States. I've not found many subcultures as overscheduled as this one. You folks work hard and you even play hard. And even your playing can become burdensome to you because of the schedule. And a Sabbath Day is a divine provision of a sacred space of time. It is like a sanctuary of time designed to save you from yourself.

The choir just sang a beautiful passage from Romans 14 which says that we're not our own, we live and we die to the Lord. That's true. If we are not our own, we ought not to live like we are our own. If our time is not our own, we ought not to live as if all our time is our own. And the irony is if you live as if all your time is your own it'll end up hurting you. And so God, to make sure that that doesn't happen, says, "Let Me remind you that all your time is not your own. I reserve one seventh of it for Myself for your good." It's a glorious thing! And the cessation of work requires us to trust in God's provision. Because when we stop and rest, and the rest of the people are beavering away in the world, we wonder, "Lord, are You going to provide for us?" And it requires you to exercise faith when you do it.

But what are the challenges to us? Well, I want to suggest three. First, in our

worship. Let me ask some personal questions. Are you keeping the Lord's Day or are you keeping the Lord's morning? Or even the Lord's hour? Is it the Lord's Day for you, and if you are keeping the Lord's Day, what are you doing on it? Is there ever family discussion about the things of the Lord? Is there time together catechizing? Or is there private time reading the Bible along with rest? Are you coming to Sunday evening worship? Are you beginning and ending the day with the Lord's people, longing for their fellowship, nourished by it, delighting in it? The Lord's Day is under assault in our culture from Christians who don't want the day to be His.

How about your work? Are you working on the Lord's Day unnecessarily? Both the Old and the New Testament recognized that there was such a thing as necessary work. When Jesus allowed for His disciples to provide food from themselves on the Sabbath Day as they walked through the grain fields He was not inventing something new. You will misunderstand what Jesus was saying. He was not attacking the mosaic Sabbath when He said that it was appropriate for His disciples to feed themselves and to prepare food for themselves on the Lord's Day. He rooted it Himself in the principle of David taking the showbread from the temple, but He could have gone back right to the law of Moses itself which made it clear that there were certain deeds of necessity, of mercy. If you were called upon to show mercy, mercy had to be shown. It wasn't just that it was allowed to be shown, it had to be shown. Even to domestic animals and that's where we get the famous story of the ox in the ditch. Literally, if the ox has fallen in the ditch, mercy to the animal and to its owner dictates that you must do work on that day in order to express mercy. And so there are legitimate things, there are legitimate activities. I'm thankful that there are health professionals, there are doctors and there are nurses, there are firemen, and there are paramedics and policemen who work on the Lord's Day doing necessary work. But, have you begun to do work on the Lord's Day that is not necessary? Students, is that your catch-up day for work for the work that you could have been doing on Saturday but you were partying with your friends? Yes, there's legitimate work but are we allowing unnecessary work to crowd and ruin our lord's day? I suspect I know the answer to that question.

Thirdly, organized youth sporting events. Are the multiplying youth sporting programs on Sundays ruining your family's Lord's Day? Once your schedule belongs to someone else, you are back in slavery again and you do not experience the freedom of the Lord's Day. And you know, the irony in this culture is that this is us doing this to us. I'm not talking about all the many difficult problems of what you do when pagans do this to you. I'm talking about us doing this to us. First Presbyterian Church, First Baptist Church, Christ United Methodist church, we could shut these Sunday games down. This is us doing this to us. Is this interfering? Is it ruining the Lord's Day? My friends, the Lord's Day is a blessing and when we forfeit it, it is to our loss because you don't break the Sabbath, the Sabbath breaks you. And if you watch the way that God deals with those who do not observe his Sabbath over the course of history, He always

does this, He takes it away from them. That's His punishment. You don't want to observe the Sabbath? Fine, I'll take it away from you. And the loss is always severe.

III. The rationale of the Sabbath.

One more thing, as we look at verse 11 the rationale of the command is given. God Himself worked six days and He rested one. He made it holy and we should too. That's the logic of verse 11. Israel must keep the day because of the creational order established by God because of his rest and consecration of the day. He rested so they should rest too. That's the rationale. It's God's creation work and pattern. We're to observe the holy day of resting from labor because God observed this holy day of rest by resting from labor. We're to act like He acted. After all, we're made in God's image. We're to do like He does, aren't we? So in keeping the Sabbath we are commemorating an act of God that He did for us solely for our benefit. The rest is God's resting and therefore His hallowing. God ceased from His creational labor and thus made the day holy. We keep the day holy by ceasing from labor. Listen to it this way. God rested from work and made a day holy. We keep a day holy by resting from work. We're following God's pattern.

Now three things still remain to be seen. First of all, it's clear from verse 11 that the origin of this Sabbath is not at Mount Sinai, it stretches back to creation. Secondly, the cessation of labor on the Sabbath Day was not an end in itself, it was a means to an end. And there are three categories of things explicitly laid out in the Old Testament that it was an end to, deeds of worship, necessity and mercy. You see this from Moses' writings in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. You also see it in 2 Kings 4:13, and you see it in Jesus' expositions of the Sabbath in the gospels.

But third and finally, the Sabbath was not merely for Israel. We're explicitly told in verse 10 that it was for the foreigner also. It was a way that Israel could bless the nations in her faithful keeping of the Sabbath. Israel is to rest from labor on the stop working day because God made it holy by stopping His work. God has rested for us, we rest for Him. God has redeemed us, we should remember it on His day. And so a Christian observance of the Lord's Day will always involve contemplating what God did in creation, what God did in redemption, what Jesus did in His resurrection and will look forward to the day to come.

Now, I realize that there are Christians that still do not embrace the Lord's Day as something which is taught in the New Testament. But I want to give you five arguments, five arguments for the Lord's Day and then I'll reiterate a couple of them before I close. First of all, we've already seen that the Sabbath day, as taught in the Ten Commandments, was grounded not in redemption but in creation. It came before Moses, it came before the exodus, it came before there

was an Israel. It was established in the creational order. That is precisely Moses' argument in Exodus 20 and that is one reason that the Sabbath still continues, the Lord's Day still continues, because it's rooted in creation.

Secondly, the Sabbath is part of the ten words and to us that ought to say, "Hhmm, must be important. Part of the central summary of the moral law, must be important." That argues against the view that the Sabbath is merely ceremonial and passed away with Israel.

Thirdly, because the Decalogue is binding on believers so also is the fourth commandment.

Fifthly, this view is confirmed by the practice of the New Testament church. Jesus is raised on the first day. When does He meet with His disciples the next week? Saturday? No. Sunday? Yes. When does He meet with His disciples the next week? Saturday? No. Sunday? Yes. In Acts 20, when Paul is talking about the worship of the church in Troas, when do they meet? The first day of the week. In I Corinthians 16:1-2, when he's talking about the giving of alms for the support of brethren in need, when do they give those alms? When do they worship by their giving? On the first day of the week. When is it that John is in the Spirit on the Lord's Day? The first day of the week. This practice is confirmed by the New Testament Church that had a weekly pattern of worship on Sunday, the first day of the week.

And finally, this view is confirmed by the historical practice of the Christian Church which has, from its earliest days, gathered to celebrate the resurrection every week on the day of resurrection, which is the day of rest and gladness, which is Sunday, the Lord's Day.

And so, from the Scriptures we see the Sabbath is part of the creation ordinance and so it continues. And Jesus' teaching and practice of the Sabbath does not abrogate it. He called Himself the Lord of the Sabbath and He showed us how the day ought to be observed, through activities of necessity and mercy.

And then as we look at the apostles and their testimony and witness to the Lord's Day it too confirms its continuation. The Sabbath is a blessing and not a curse. It is a boon and not a burden and when we delight in it we will be refreshed.

Let's pray. Our Lord and our God, we thank You for this day. We ask that You would refresh us in it and cause us to love it and delight in it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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