

The Sabbath

Exodus 20:8-11

NOTES:

The fourth commandment is the longest of the ten, mentioned over a hundred times in the Old Testament, plays an important part of Jesus' ministry in the gospels, and yet most Christians are unaware of its importance and joy. Thomas Watson said this is the market day of the soul, the cream of time. This is when Christ rose, when the Spirit fell on the church, and when we ascend into heaven to be renewed in and by grace.

Made For Man

"Sabbath" means ceasing or resting. Israel must remember the Sabbath, which is not mere mental acknowledgement, but full engagement that results in holiness (v8; cf. Dt. 8:1-2, 11, 18). Israel makes it holy by worshiping and resting (vv9-10). The reason given for the Sabbath is Yahweh's creating everything in six days and resting on the seventh: "Therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (v11). This day is blessed and set aside for the specific purpose of refreshment and renewal—physical, spiritual, covenantal, and communal. Jesus summarizes its nature: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27). God didn't create the week and then make someone to observe it. He went about creating the world with mankind in mind, shaping time itself to bless us. We are built to work for six days and rest one, a pattern established before the fall. It's a gift, but we must keep it intentionally: "the seventh day is the Sabbath to the Yahweh your God" (v10). The command is a positive and specific way we honor Him. Israel did not honor what the Lord calls "My Sabbaths" in the wilderness: "Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them" (Ez. 20:13). A millennium after Moses, He is still insistent on keeping the Sabbath, telling Jeremiah and Nehemiah to shut down commerce on the day (Jer. 17:19-27; Neh. 13:15-17).

From Sabbath to Lord's Day

Since the Sabbath was established by an act of creation, another act of equal import would have to take place in order to change it. Seventh Day Adventists see no change, so they worship and rest on Saturday. The rest of the Christian church at least implicitly recognizes the significance of Christ's resurrection on the first day: "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:5). His victory over death brought life to the middle of this fallen, death-enthralled world (cf. Matt. 28:18). Jesus rose "on the one of the Sabbath" (Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1), and Christians began gathering for worship on Sunday (Jn. 20:19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). John can say He was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and doesn't need to specify which day it is (Rev. 1:10). The Didache, dating from the early 100s, calls the Lord's Day the day of corporate worship, and Ignatius notes believers "no longer observe the Sabbath, but direct their lives toward the Lord's Day, on which our life is refreshed by Him and by His death." Around 200 A.D. Tertullian says Christians regard the day as one of joy where they lay aside their work, and pagans don't celebrate it so people won't mistake them for Christians. The only explicit argument for the Lord's Day as new Sabbath in the New Testament come from Hebrews, a

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passage with challenging pronouns: “There remains therefore a Sabbath-rest (*Sabbatismos*) for the people of God. For He (Jesus) who has entered into His (Jesus’) rest has Himself also ceased from His (Jesus’) works as God did from His” (Heb. 4:9-10). We know all the law is fulfilled in Christ (Matt. 5:18), so the question is how is the Sabbath fulfilled? When you take all these things together, it doesn’t make sense that the Sabbath vanished, or that we keep it in our hearts by repenting of sin and resting in Christ. We still have bodies that need rest, and we still need to gather with God’s people. The Lord’s Day is our day.

Sabbath-Keeping

Sabbatarians are known for being against all sorts of things. But Scripture call us to worship and rest, and defines it for us.

Worship “These are the feasts of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times.... On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it” (Lev. 23:4). God’s people gather together with great joy to worship Him. To not gather or to gather any other way is disobedient. God calls us once a week to renew covenant, worship, and celebrate what He has done. It’s not that we live the rest of the week without Him. It’s more like we meet with Him in such wonderful way that we feed it’s the stores until the next Lord’s Day. The fellowship, confession, forgiveness, prayer, encouragement, correction, teaching, giving, communion, and blessing cascade from Sunday into our week. The entire old covenant looked forward to Jesus, and they worshiped at the end of the week. We worship at the beginning, remembering His triumph on the cross, and then see that victory take effect in the world. We must be committed and prepared to worship: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25).

Rest Most of the fourth commandment is about giving rest. We can’t do business as usual (Amos 8:5). We know worship is the most important thing we do, so it appears that by giving rest to others out of love, God is sure to be worshipped. Jesus has numerous conflicts with Pharisees over their Sabbath-breaking Sabbath traditions (e.g. Jn. 5:1-18). He gives rest to the hurting and broken just like the Lord requires. Only unnecessary vocational work is prohibited because we get to do other things.

The Sabbath is a great gift: “Christ took the Sabbath into the grave with him and brought the Lord’s Day out of the grave with him on the resurrection morn.” –B.B. Warfield