

Sabbath Day

HN 01/05/05 pm

Reading: Exodus 16, Mark 2:18-3:12

Study Text: Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Sing Psalms: 118:24-29, 95:1-6, 95:7-11, 84:8-12

The Jews said – *It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed on the Sabbath*. But Jesus had just healed this man and told him – *Rise, take up your bed and walk* (John 5). The disciples plucked heads of grain as they walked through the fields on the Sabbath. The Jews (Pharisees) said to Jesus – *look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath* (Mark 2).

Clearly Jesus did not agree with the Jews as to what was lawful on the Sabbath. In fact the response of Jesus shows that he had a completely different understanding of the Sabbath. He did not say that the fourth commandment is no longer valid, any more than he did the other commands in the Decalogue. But neither did he enter into discussion with them about what was and what was not lawful on the Sabbath.

The Jews sought salvation by works of the law. So they approached the commands legalistically. The fourth commandment seems to have been a special challenge to them. They added hundreds of regulations in an effort to avoid breaking this law – or to get around it maybe. Still today there are those who approach this command legalistically. Some hold that keeping Saturday as the Sabbath day is essential for valid observance of this commandment.

What Jesus said was *the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of man is also Lord of the Sabbath* (Mark 2:27, 28). Jesus reminded them of the original purpose of the command. It was given by the Lord God to his chosen people under the terms of the covenant he made with them at Horeb. The Sabbath was made or instituted by God for the good of man. Gods' people living in God's land would be blessed if they obeyed his commandments.

This was not the actual origin of the Sabbath day for we read of the Sabbath in Exodus 16 – prior to the giving of the Decalogue in Exodus 20. The Sabbath in fact goes back to time of creation. God rested (*sabbat*) from his work of creation on the seventh day and blessed this day (Genesis 2:2). But it is enshrined in the Mosaic Law as the fourth commandment.

A reason is attached to the giving of this commandment. Originally it was with reference to the creation – for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth...and rested the seventh day (Exodus 20:11). But when Moses explained the law some forty years later a different reason is attached. This is the only major difference between the two accounts. Is this difference significant? Before we answer this question let us take a closer look at the commandment.

Holy

Observe/remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. This is the first commandment given in the positive form – at least this initial phrase. This is what Jesus focused on in his response to the Jews –

the positive aspect. He did not simply look at the second aspect – you shall do no work – as the Jews did. He said it was made for man.

While rebuking the people for *doing your pleasure on my holy day*, the Lord, speaking through Isaiah, told them to *call the Sabbath a delight...you shall delight yourself in the Lord* (Isaiah 58:13,14). God gave the Sabbath day that man would remember him and delight in him as the *Lord your God*. It is *the Sabbath of the Lord your God*. Sanctions were attached to this commandment as with the others (Exodus 31); but it was not given to test men or to make life miserable – it was to be a delight.

We have recently observed a national day of remembrance – a day to remember those who fought in war to defend our country and preserve our freedom. There is concern about the way some young people are observing this day. In remembering those who fought and died some things are not appropriate and not acceptable. Flying a Nazi flag is not acceptable. Rock concerts are not acceptable.

God has given us a day – a day every week when we are to remember him. He has told us how we are to remember him, how we are to observe this day. We are to keep this day holy – it is to be separate, a day that is different from the other six days of the week. Refraining from work is a key requirement to keeping the day holy.

In remembering the Sabbath day we are to remember the Lord our God and what he has done. This is what we find in the attached reasons. *Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt*. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm the Lord brought his people out of bondage in Egypt. They were slaves no longer. They were redeemed by the Lord. They were free, free to serve the Lord their God in the land he was giving them.

Back in Exodus the reason was different. They were to rest on the seventh day because God rested on the seventh day of creation – and man was made in the image of God. They were to keep the Sabbath holy because the Creator blessed this day and hallowed it or declared it holy. The Sabbath day is a creation ordinance, it is a pattern ordained by God for all his creation.

So in observing the Sabbath day we remember God our creator and God our redeemer. Under the New Covenant our redemption is not from slavery in Egypt but from slavery in sin. Jesus Christ by his death and resurrection has redeemed us from sin and set us free – *the truth shall make you free* (John 8:31). We have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

As we remember the Sabbath day, as we remember our creator and our redeemer, we also look forward to the place, to the kingdom that Jesus has prepared for us. We look forward to the ultimate rest, the rest of heaven. The Sabbath day is a day of rest. It is rest that prefigures rest in the kingdom of heaven. Joshua did not give them rest we are told in Hebrews so *there remains a rest for the people of God*. *Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest* (Hebrew 4:9, 11).

On the Lord's Day, the day Jesus rose from the dead and the day Christians adopted as the Sabbath, John was in the Spirit and was given a vision into heaven. He saw every creature worshipping the Lamb upon the throne day and night. Rest and worship on the Sabbath day points to life in the kingdom of heaven. If we do not enjoy the Sabbath and delight in it here on earth, then we are not likely to enjoy this ultimate Sabbath rest and worship in heaven.

Work

The second clause of the command again starts with a positive. *Six days you shall labour and do all your work.* Work is commanded on six days of the week. The pattern of six days work and one day rest was given by God at creation. God made Adam and put him in the garden to tend it. After the fall the pattern remained the same. It was just that the ground was cursed and work became toil.

Work is a duty ordained by God. *If anyone will not work then neither shall he eat* (II Thessalonians 3:10). Those who have experienced unemployment know that work is a blessing to the soul. Work does not necessarily mean paid employment of course. It is idleness and being busybodies that is condemned in Scripture (II Thessalonians 3:11).

Work in quietness and eat your own bread (II Thessalonians 3:12). We work that we might have food to eat, bearing in mind that in the Old Testament this work was predominantly agricultural. But there are some who work to get rich. They are ready to exploit other people in this effort to get rich (James 5). This commandment demands Sabbath rest for the whole household or business. The children and the servants, even the visitor and the animals, are to do no work but to rest on the Sabbath day. There is a humanitarian concern in this command, reflecting the concern God has for the poor and needy and his hatred of oppression.

In our society we may not appreciate how the Sabbath day stands against exploitation – though a closer examination will be revealing. Are not the weaker members of our society suffering from disregard for the Sabbath day?

In India we had a lady to help in our house with cleaning and cooking. She was surprised when we told her not to come to work on Sunday. It was often a busy day for us with fellowship meetings, but unlike other employers we insisted she have a day of rest. By the grace of God she became a believer in Jesus Christ, and so in the providence of God had already learnt the importance of this commandment.

The children of Israel had experienced oppression as slaves in Egypt. They were forced to work, probably seven days a week. Pharaoh did not want them resting and thinking about their God. James I (and Charles I) king of England promoted sport on the Lord's Day, to distract the people from seeking after God. Work or sport – both serve the interest of some men, and certainly the interest of Satan, to keep people from observing the Lord's Day, from worshipping the Creator and the Redeemer of mankind.

Let us remember the Lord of the Sabbath. He is Lord of all. Let us not think that we will gain anything by working on the Sabbath day. The Lord gave them double portion of manna on the sixth day so they would not have to gather it on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:22f). Why then did some go out searching for manna on the Sabbath?

But if I do not study on Sunday I will fail my exam a student once told me. I assured him that by ceasing to study on the Lord's Day he would do no worse than if he studied. Trust in the Lord your Creator and your Redeemer. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy and the Lord will surely bless you and your household all your days.

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