



The Ten Commandments

Part 6 – The Blessing We Love to Hate

Exodus 20:8-11

There are two tables of God's moral law. The first four commandments govern our relationship with God. The final six commandments govern our relationship with our neighbor. So, the Ten Commandments govern the ways in which we fulfill the commands to love God and love our neighbor. The Fourth Commandment is somewhat unique in that it represents a transition. That is, we are to observe the Sabbath because it is holy unto the Lord, but also because it is a blessing to God's human creatures.

Contemporary Christians seem to struggle with understanding and so practicing Sabbath faithfulness. Perhaps it is because most of us have never really heard any instruction on the nature of Sabbath and Sabbath observance. But along with the lack of instruction is our tendency to treasure time and leisure to the point of idolatry.

Main Idea: The first day of the week is the Christian Sabbath set apart for God's glory and the blessing of God's people.

1. The Sabbath Created

Genesis 2:1-3

- The Ten Commandments did not inaugurate Sabbath observance. The practice of Sabbath observance was inaugurated at creation. Therefore Sabbath is what we commonly call a creation ordinance. That is Sabbath, like marriage, procreation, and labor, is a gift to humanity.

2. The Sabbath Commanded

"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..." (Ex. 20:8-10a).

- Whatever our opinion on the present relevance of Sabbath observance for Christians, there is no question as to the essential nature of Sabbath observance to God's old covenant people. While the prophets decried the empty and hypocritical formalism of Israel, at no point does God ever condemn obedience to any of the Ten Commandments. There is a theological and moral core to Sabbath observance that commands our respect. One of the sins for which the prophets routinely rebuke Israel is a habitual rejection of Sabbath observance (Isa. 58:13; Jer. 17:20ff; Ezek. 20:13ff, 22:8, 23:8; Amos 5:8).

3. The Sabbath for Christians

- Sabbath observance cannot be consigned to those ceremonial laws which passed away because of the completion of Christ's work. It cannot be counted along with the other temporary civil laws which governed the nation of Israel. Unlike the temporary civil and ceremonial laws God enshrined the Sabbath in his timeless moral law. This makes sense because the Sabbath was inaugurated not at Sinai but in the days of creation (Genesis 2:1-3).

The Sabbath Day was established by God and set as a pattern in the created order which means it has timeless relevance for Christians.

- Because of the completed work of Christ the sign of the Covenant of Grace changed from circumcision to baptism. Likewise, the covenant meal, Passover, became the Lord's Supper. And, because of Christ, the seventh day Sabbath became the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. Before the dying and rising of Christ the people worked six days and then rested on the seventh. Because of Christ, however, the Sabbath is the first day of the week. The pattern now is to rest and then to work. For the Christian everything proceeds from God's gracious salvation. The weekly pattern which begins with the Sabbath Day is the guarantee that all of our labors begin first by resting in the finished work of Christ.

A. Sabbath is a blessing

1) Worship

- Genesis 2:1-3: On the seventh day God ceased from the work of creation (He was not tired). He then set apart the Sabbath as holy. This begins the expectation that there will be something unique about that day for God's people. The Sabbath became the day of worship for God's people. That same commitment to Sabbath worship was practiced by Jesus and the apostles. Following the resurrection the seventh day Sabbath became the first day Lord's Day in which the church gathered for worship. That has been the practice of the church ever since.

2) Rest

- Rest is a core principle of Sabbath observance. We are a people who need to be commanded to rest. We are likely living at a time when deliberate rest is more elusive than any time in history. We are a 24 hour a day culture. The weekly cycle of a day for rest is a regular testament to our weakness and finitude. The Sabbath pattern requires that we acknowledge our dependence upon God.

3) Mercy

- Luke 14:1-6
- Jesus, who was committed to faithful Sabbath observance, performed necessary acts of mercy on the Sabbath. In this he was not breaking the 4th Commandment or altering it in any way. In doing acts of mercy on the Sabbath Jesus was being faithful. The 4th Commandment does not absolve God's people from the responsibility to act mercifully when presented with the opportunity.
- God's people were to ensure that everyone in their household including servants and sojourners and even beasts of burden rested on the Sabbath. So, the Sabbath is not a blessing only to God's people. It is a blessing to the whole world as God's people continue to practice mercy and extend rest to those around them.

B. Sabbath is Witness

- God called his people to observe the Sabbath in part to sanctify them from the rest of the world. That is, Sabbath observance was a part of what marked God's people as holy from the world. In this sense Sabbath observance was part of their public witness to the nations about the holiness and goodness of God. Their weekly Sabbath rest was a public testimony to their deliverance out of bondage.

C. Sabbath is a Foretaste

Hebrews 4:8-11

Revelation 14:13-14

- A foretaste of the blessed age to come has always been a Sabbath principle. While it is true that Jesus has perfectly secured all of the blessings of redemption through his death and resurrection, it is also true that the creation still waits with eager longing for final redemption and life in the presence of God (Romans 8:22-25).