

## **Exodus 20:8-11** 3-18-18

### ***The Sabbath***

Once again today we take up our look at the book of Exodus and specifically the Ten Commandments as found in Exodus Chapter 20:**8-11** *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 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. 11 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.* There was once an old southern gentleman who had a young grandson come to visit him for two weeks one summer. And during the lad's stay the grandfather wanted to acquaint him with southern pride and tradition so on the first night of the boy's stay the grandpa took the youngun down to the town square for a walk and a talk. There in the town square was a magnificent statue of General Robert E. Lee on his horse named Traveler. And when they came to the end of their walk the grandpa and the boy stood quietly and reverently before the statue for several minutes and then Grandpa said, "Son, say goodnight to General Lee." Well, the young boy was really impressed by all this and he looked up at the statue and said, "Goodnight General Lee." The second night they did the same thing. They walked the town square, stood before the statue and grandpa said, "Son, say goodnight to General Lee." For the boy's entire stay this is how they ended every night. And then on the last evening, when the time came to go home they stood an especially long time before the statue of General Lee and his famous horse. And finally, the grandpa solemnly looked down and said, "Son, say goodbye to General Lee." This time, with a tear in his eye and a quiver in his voice the boy looked up at the statue of General Lee and his horse Traveler and said, "Goodbye General Lee." The old gentleman was rightly proud of the sense of history he had given his grandson - until on the ride home in the car the young boy looked over at his grandpa and asked, "Grandpa, who was that man sitting on top of General Lee?" That goes to show that a little misunderstanding can lead to some serious confusion. And one area of confusion for Christians over the centuries has been the Scriptural teachings on the Sabbath day. I believe the confusion results from some basic misunderstandings which I hope can be cleared up for you as we consider this subject under the headings, "What is a Sabbath? When is the Sabbath? Why is the Sabbath? How do I obey and enjoy the Sabbath?"

First then, what is a Sabbath? The Hebrew word used in the fourth commandment and through the Old Testament is *Shabbat*. The term means "rest." It comes from the verb which means "to cease, to stop, to come to a halt." And any understanding of this day must first and foremost take seriously the meaning of the word. The Sabbath is not primarily and essentially to be a day of worship, although it may be. It is first of all a day of rest. Now, let me explain what is meant by rest. A day of rest does not mean a day of inactivity where you wake up at noon, eat lunch, watch football, eat dinner and go to bed early. The Shabbat kind of rest is not inactivity. There are certain things that any Christian view of the Sabbath will let you do. For example - worship. Deeds of mercy are also allowed. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Also, deeds of necessity are permitted, pulling your ox from the ditch and so on. I have met no one as yet whose view of the Sabbath won't allow the changing of diapers and for that I am grateful. Sabbath means rest, not inactivity. Specifically and especially the commandment means a cessation, a stopping of one's secular labors, that is those labors designed to put food on the table (in other words, financial pursuits).

In the Bible when God identifies Sabbath breaking it always is related to business or money making activities. For example, Nehemiah 13:**15-18**

*In those days I saw in Judah some who were treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads, and they brought them into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. So I admonished them on the day they sold food. 16 Also men of Tyre were living there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise, and sold them to the sons of Judah on the Sabbath, even in Jerusalem. 17 Then I reprimanded the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day? 18 "Did not your fathers do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble? Yet you are adding to the wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath."*

You can see the same thing in Jeremiah 17. The point is that whatever your job, however you make your money, you may do it for six days, but the Sabbath is a day of ceasing. It is to be kept holy. Exodus 20:**8** *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.* This means that the day is different, set apart, sanctified. Now listen carefully, there is to be something about one day of your week that makes it exceptional, that makes it different, that makes it special and on that day, whatever else you do to make it special, you must stop your normal daily, money- making tasks.

Some brethren would argue that this isn't relevant now since, in the New Testament age, we are no longer under the Mosaic rituals given to Moses. We now don't recognize special days as did Israel. And there is some truth to that. But notice this. In Exodus 20 the basis for the commandment

is located in the activity of God way back in Genesis 1 and 2. **11** *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.* The Sabbath principle in its general form of six days work and one special day of rest is not Mosaic law given to the ancient state of Israel only, it is a creation ordinance laid down at the beginning of human history. Christians today are to *remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

Issue #2 - when is the Sabbath? The Bible says it is the seventh day. What day is that? Who knows? Was the first day of creation a **Sunday**? Well it couldn't have been since the sun wasn't created until the third day. What day is the Sabbath? It all depends on when you start the count. Or, if you will, when you start working. My point is, the day of the week is insignificant. God never required a specific day of the week. What he required was obedience to the principle of 6 + 1. Six days work, one day rest. That my friend, is all that can be argued biblically.

In the Jewish system and nation days did not have names. It was 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, Sabbath. And really, if you lined up our calendar with theirs the Sabbath would only once in seven years fall on Saturday. After the New Testament church got underway the day for a worship gathering was set at the first day. This was not called the Sabbath in the New Testament. It was called the Lord's Day. Eventually however the title of Sabbath came to be applied to the first day or Sunday. The Seventh Day Adventist denomination is noted for its vigorous argument against the changing of the Sabbath. It is, they insist, on Saturday and only Saturday. Now, the reason Christian churches gather on Sunday is because the first century apostolic church did this to commemorate the day Christ rose from the dead. But it never says the Sabbath changed. Sunday was just the meeting day. So, when is our Sabbath day to be? In Israel it was Saturday. Not by command but by tradition. That nation had one religion, one law, one tradition. Everyone rested on Saturday. Our situation is much more complex. We live in a pluralistic society. There is no nationally recognized Sabbath in our world. And the truth is that it is impossible for us to have a unified Sabbath as did Israel. The principle though is 6 + 1. For most of you, Sunday is the best day for your Sabbath. If you can I urge you to keep it that way. Sunday is prime time for God's people. If you are out of the loop on Sunday there is much you are going to miss, so try to avoid Sunday work assignments. Let the unbelievers handle those if they must. For a few of you, Sunday may not be the best day. Sunday is not my Sabbath. I have to take another day and so may some of you.

When is your Sabbath? You get to have a day. It may be from 6pm Saturday to 6pm Sunday. But some 24 hour period every seven days is to be holy and special. Which day do you keep holy?

The third question which is very significant is *why the Sabbath?* If we know the purpose for the command it will help us keep it properly. Mark 2:**23-28** *He was passing through the grain fields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. 24 The Pharisees were saying to Him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 25 And He said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; 26 how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?" 27 Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. 28 "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." 27 "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."* Listen now. The Sabbath is for man's good. It isn't meant to shackle you. It's meant to free you. Because of this, one should not make the Sabbath a burden to man by over-legislation. You see Jesus argues here and throughout the gospels against a rigid view of the Sabbath that would say absolutely no this, no that and no the other. Jesus points out that David, in order to feed His hungry men set aside one law, for a higher law - the ceremonial for the sanctity of life. Jesus says it's better to break the Sabbath than to break the man. Man is more important. In fact, the Sabbath is made for man. Don't over-legislate. Matthew 12:**5** *Have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?* They are allowed to do this in order to perform a greater and higher service. The whole flavor of the New Testament is against the Jewish-type rigid view of the Sabbath. Colossians 2:**16** *No one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.* No one should impose all kinds of rules for Sabbath observance. Let's you and I be careful not to burden ourselves or others in this way. The Sabbath is for man.

Now, that is the very general purpose. More specifically it is to be a day of rest. I get that from the meaning of the word *Sabbath*. Also Exodus 23:**12** *Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves.* No matter what kind of work you do, whether it is mentally strenuous or physically strenuous or both, you need a break.

Now rest and refreshment doesn't exclude physical activity - but it does necessitate a change of activity, and a change that to you is refreshing and helps get you revved up for the next week. Do you need a rest? Some of you macho men think you can be a seven day machine but Your Maker doesn't think so. He thinks you need rest. *But if I took a whole day off I won't get enough done and then I'll lose my job and we won't have enough to eat!* This is why faith is a prerequisite for obedience. You have to believe God when he says that if you seek first His kingdom He will provide for you. You have to believe that over the long haul you will be more effective working six days than you will working seven. Have you heard the story about the two lumberjacks? One man cut wood all day long, never taking a break. The other man took a break every hour. When the day was over the second man had chopped more wood than the first. The first guy was incredulous. How could you do that? I worked all day. I worked hard. So the second man explained, "When I stopped to rest, I also sharpened my axe." Hah! You take Sabbath as God commands and I bet you will have a sharper axe that works more efficiently and lasts longer. God knows what He is doing! There is evidence that some of us don't. James Dobson used to say that the #1 enemy of the American family is parental fatigue. You need time to freshen up. You need a day for that purpose. As in the seventh day of creation it is a day to enjoy and delight in the fruit of six days of work. Your failure to rest may not be so noble after all. It may be sin. I recently heard a pastor say he hadn't had a day off in two months. I wonder if he meant that as a confession of sin. I wonder if you see it that way. Some of you are guilty of *resisting a rest*. God does not applaud your effort. You may see yourself as noble and sacrificial but God sees you as disobedient and foolish. To obey is better than what? *To obey is better than sacrifice* (I Samuel **15:22b**).

Now, one of the big problems in our attitude toward the Sabbath is that we don't appreciate it because we don't work six days. The commandment includes **9** *Six days you shall labor and do all your work*. That tells you two things. One, five days of work isn't enough. Now, if your job doesn't expect you to work six days, then find some other work to do. In the yard, around the house, a ministry to engage, a child to parent. This speaks to how you Sunday Sabbath people use your Saturday. Contrary to the American way of life, Saturday is not a holiday. But ever since childhood it is ingrained in us that Saturday is a play day - all day. As a kid maybe you watched cartoons all morning. You men think of Saturday as the day to laze around and watch sports. One way or another Saturday night is time to party. But listen, in our world, how you spend your Saturdays will go a long way toward determining your spiritual state. I mean that. I used to tell

college students that especially. How the students spent Saturday made an enormous difference. Most would play and party and watch the tube. These would usually be pressured, behind and uptight. The ones who worked on Saturday were usually on top of their schedule and the Christians could be there with God's people on Sunday. But most Americans worship the great god of entertainment. We devote our Saturdays to that god and have little left for Jesus on Sunday. Is it possible that your life would be much more enjoyable, useful and glorifying to God if you stop your obsession with entertainment, some of which is exhausting and begin to get proper rest of body and mind for you and your children?

The rest of verse. **9** *Six days you shall labor and do **all** your work.* Now, friend, if you have so much work to do that you cannot do it in six days you have more than God wants you to have. But many of you are in that situation and it is almost always a self-imposed problem. Sometimes it results from a lust for money. You can't be satisfied with the fruit of six days labor, you must have more, more, more. The word says I Timothy 6:**10** *The love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.* Among those griefs are pressure and fatigue. Others of you, in a pursuit of significance or to escape, get wrapped up in this project or that group or this activity. You fill your schedule so full that you have little time for family or church or a God-ordained rest. Consider this -- God says you have six days to do your work and if you need more you're into something God doesn't want you into. The Sabbath is a rest and it is important for bodies, minds, and souls.

Another purpose of the Sabbath ordinance from God is to protect laborers. Some men, in their money lust will demand excessive labor from their workers. Israel had no labor unions but the Sabbath rule protected them from overly-demanding employers. In the Sabbath laws in the Old Testament you may notice the special emphasis and concern given to laborers **9-10** *Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 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.* You can see God's concern.

The fourth reason why God gave the Sabbath command is so that it would be a reminder to us, very much like a sacrament. In the Lord's Supper we look back to God's work on the cross and forward to the return of Jesus. In keeping the Sabbath we look back to God's work of creation and forward to the eternal rest for the elect. Genesis 2:**1-3** *Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. 2 By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done,*

*and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.* When we work six and rest one we follow the pattern God showed us in creation. And we look forward to our eternal and final rest or Sabbath which comes in the eternal kingdom. Hebrews **4:9-10** *So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.* Speaking here of Jesus. **11a** *Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest.* So you see four reasons why God gave the Sabbath law. For man's good, for rest, to protect the laborer and to remind the people of what is past and what is to come.

I hope you see from this that God's law on the Sabbath comes to us out of the heart of a Father who loves us, who wants what is best for us and who knows what that is. That perspective should govern our thoughts about keeping Sabbath. A while back Beth and I spent some time with friends from out of town. This was a committed Christian couple, but in our discussions they complained of fatigue, time pressure, and also lack of Christian fellowship. The main cause they pointed to was their two children and no doubt, children can be a load. But, I was doubtful that that two normal kids would cause those problems if the couple is living by God's wisdom - so I probed and found that these two people were not wasting time watching a lot of TV or pursuing frivolous activities. I was puzzled and concerned but when Beth and I talked about it we both hit on the same thing. This couple did not have a Sabbath. The husband went full-speed ahead all week and then on weekends they often went out of town, and travel with small children is no rest. They would get home Sunday night, worn out and they would start the week weary and in a rut they could not get escape. Folks, I'm not suggesting that taking a Sabbath is a cure-all. But, it may be that many of your constant problems of fatigue and family life and spiritual life would be cleared up by keeping Sabbath. You may have to give up some things. Some trips or some entertainment but it will be worth it. God gave us this to bless us and the bottom line is this: Does your Creator know what you need? Is His law worthy of your obedience? If your answer is *yes* then commit now to obey the fourth commandment to keep holy a Sabbath unto God.

Issue #4 - the big question then is, "With this understanding of the what, when, and why of the Sabbath, how do I keep it set apart as God has commanded?" There is much disagreement on this. Some of you remember seeing the excellent movie, *Chariots of Fire*, in which the Christian athlete, Eric Liddell, refused to run a race on Sunday. Yet the NFL has numerous Christian coaches

and players who go at it for hours twenty Sundays a year. Some say no TV is allowed and no recreation, and no eating at restaurants. And brethren, there is much room for the leading of the conscience. Given the New Testament perspective on the Sabbath we are wise to be careful not to judge. But may I lay down a few general guidelines in keeping with what we have seen so far? And some of this I learned from experience.

There are three common ways to break the Sabbath law. These are things not to do. #1 - don't work seven days a week. For some of you, what constitutes "work" is obvious. For others, such as mothers, it is not. I just want it clearly understood now that changing diapers is not a Sabbath violation okay? But come to your own reasonable definition. Men, I never heard anyone on his death bed say, "I only wish I had put in more overtime at work." Many lament the loss of bodily health and family health and spiritual health which came from too much work. I have a friend who works for a business that really cares about its employees and their family lives. They have a no overtime policy. They refuse to let the business pressures control their priorities. You be careful too. On the Sabbath, cease your work. #2 - If you are a student and many of you are and will be, don't study. For you, that is labor is it not? I was always disappointed by how many students at seminary studied on Sundays. I heard of one fellow who always excused it by saying, "*my ox is in a ditch*" Jesus said if your ox is in a ditch on the Sabbath, get it out. "*My ox is in a ditch*" he said. By that he meant he had a Hebrew assignment due on Monday. The problem is that his ox had been in that ditch since Friday night and he waited until Sunday. No, no, no. Violation #3 is exhausting recreation. This does not mean no recreation. But it should be restful, replenishing recreation. Very often your recreation wears you out and that goes for travel too. Before I was a pastor, I used to play basketball on Sunday afternoon when that was my Sabbath. There is nothing unlawful with shooting some hoop on your Sabbath. But I eventually noticed what it did to me. I would play too long and too late and end up hurrying to get to evening worship if I made it at all. It wasn't restful and it was hurting me, so what should I do? You apply the principle the same way.

Now to the good stuff. Having a Sabbath is exciting; and here are some ways to make it good. I encourage you to develop a routine. Know what you want to do. Consider, first of all that our eternal rest is worship. Israel's Sabbath included worship. Make that a part of your Sabbath. Historically it has functioned as the centerpiece of the Lord's Day for the Lord's people. Protect that time. Value it by getting to bed early, avoiding distractions and competing interests. There are some hobbies that are Sunday intensive; they pull you away from worship and ministry. Choose other

hobbies! A second way to spend your Sabbath is with fellowship. Spend time here with the saints. Spend time with them in your homes. Don't mess up your day by fixing a fancy meal. That's work! Your meals may be great but fellowship over sandwich and chips is just as good. Thirdly, men, this is especially good for you. Do your wife's work on your Sabbath. Your wife gets tired of caring for the kids. She does that six days, you can do it one. Change that diaper. Fix the meals. Wash the dishes and so on. For you that's a rest of sorts, that's special. For her, that's terrific.

Fourthly, the family needs time together. Quality time. Your Sabbath is great for this. Hold family devotions at least weekly. You feel you don't have time I know, but what are you doing on Sundays from noon to bedtime? That's a great time. Don't let that slide, please don't. Positive application #5 - Learn God's word. Sunday School and worship services can help. Utilize the afternoon for reading or Scripture memory and so on. You'll be glad you took the time.

As we wrap up - too often I hear people say this, in so many words they say, *I can't obey the law of God. I don't have time.* Friend, if you are too busy to obey the law of God you are too busy. This is God's law, given for our good. So, I warn you and I admonish you in love and also in truth. Think about it. Talk about it as a family. Adjust your schedule to fit the wisdom of God's good work. And remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.