

Sunday, July 3, 2022 | Ten

Exodus 20:8-11 | "Our God's Rest Remembered"

A couple weeks ago, we kicked off a new 11-week series called "Ten," in which we'll be exploring the first set of commandments given to the Jews in Exodus and how they can still help guide the Christian today. Using parallel passages, we'll discover that the principles God tried to instill in Israel in the Old Testament find fulfillment through Jesus in the New Testament. And how, while the believer is no longer bound to the Law for salvation (i.e., justification), we can still use it to become more like Christ (i.e., sanctification).

In the first week, we studied what Christ had to say about all the commandments rather than dive headlong into the ten commandments. In Matthew 22, we learned that Jesus summed up the duty of man into two sentences: love God with everything and love others as yourself. On these two things, Jesus says, hang all the Law and the prophets. Those two commands give context to everything else in the Bible and life. So much so that **a love for God and neighbor brings certainty in a world of uncertainty.** Even without an explicit command, we can still make good decisions in uncertain situations. The Scriptures can still speak into a 22nd context because its' principles are sufficiently broad enough to encompass all human experience. It is hard to go wrong when you are consumed with love for God and others.

We finally got to the titular Decalogue in the second week by exploring the first commandment. The Ten Commandments were not created by a committee. They were, quite literally, given to us by the voice of God. Therefore, since these ideas come from outside human reasoning, the Decalogue (i.e., the "Ten Words") and all other truths within Scripture embody objective truth. Who better to teach us how we ought to live than a being whose judgment is not clouded by shifting opinions, influenced by fluctuating emotions, or pressured by changing circumstances? And the first word upon which all the other divine words stand is this: Have no other gods but God. **And if there is no god but Yahweh, then we should have no other god but God.** Why would we give anything or anyone who is not a god that sort of devotion that only God deserves? What a waste of worship that would be. And is not Jesus worthy of all of our worship?

In the third week, we unpacked the second prohibition in the Decalogue. And unlike the first command, which prohibits the *having* of other gods, the second prohibits the *making* of anything that's supposed to represent God (i.e., idols, icons, images, etc.). It's a subtle distinction, to be sure, but it's no less important. There are so-called "worship practices" in this world that are wrong. And these practices often make use of things we might call "idols."

Commandment two shows that Yahweh should not be expressed in any manmade thing because he is the one who makes, not the one who is made. However much we may try, the creature cannot create a perfect representation of its Creator. Moreover, that command also reminds us that our Creator has already created images that bear his likeness: *us* (cf. Gen. 1:26; Eph. 2:10). Idolatry, in all forms, not only **downgrades** who God is but also **diminishes** who men and women were made to be.

Last week, we answered the question, “What did God mean when he said, “Do not take my name in vain”? This is the broadest prohibition within the Decalogue and, therefore, one of the hardest to keep. When the Lord commanded this, he expected us to not speak or bear his name in an empty or thoughtless way. Thus, the ways in which this commandment can be broken are numerous. However, just because something is hard does not mean it's not worth doing. After all, **we, as Christians, are to live as our name implies: like Christ**. Jesus lives in us and can enable us to bring glory to his name. And only through the Lord are we able to abide by the third commandment.

Today, we'll unpack the fourth prohibition in the Decalogue: Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Did you know that you owe your Saturdays to Moses? (*Well, technically, we owe our thanks to God; but I think you get the point.*) The idea of having a weekday where you would intentionally stop working is unique to Judaism. True. There were days throughout the year when non-Jews would abstain from activity, but this was based on the lunar cycle and was hardly common practice for everyone. Only the Israelites purposefully made Saturday a non-work day every week.¹ But unlike how we might think of Saturday, the Jews did not set apart a day for relaxation or recreation (though those are part of it) but to remember God.

READ: Exodus 20:8-11 (ESV)

⁸ “**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** to the LORD your God. On it you shall **not do** any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and 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.

¹ Sarna, Nahum M., *Exodus*, The JPS Torah Commentary, (Philadelphia, PA; The Jewish Publications Society, 1991), p. 112, “Whatever the true etymology of the Hebrew term may be, the institution itself has no connection with any known Mesopotamian observance.”

Interestingly, by the time Judaism had fully integrated into Roman culture, the Romans began implementing their own version. Josephus, a first-century historian famous for recounting the fall of Jerusalem, had this to say about the Sabbath in the non-Jewish world:

The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances, and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread.²

Thus, it is obvious that we have the Jews to thank for our Saturdays. But what was it for?

The fourth commandment is comprised of **three** principles:

i. The Sabbath is a day set apart.

READ: Exodus 20:8 (ESV)

⁸ “**Remember** the Sabbath day, to keep it **holy**.”

There are many ways to describe the word holy. But I think the easiest way to understand it is to think of it as describing something that has special meaning and/or worth. This is like how we might treat national monuments over and above other places. For instance, the Lincoln Memorial is just a bunch of rocks carved to look like the 16th president of the United States. To be sure, it's a fair representation of him, albeit a little exaggerated. (Lincoln was 6' 4", not 28 feet tall.) But we made that statue to remind us of the man who helped guide our country through the Civil War. If you were to go to our nation's capital and view this magnificent piece of art, you'd notice that there's no one climbing on Ol' Abe. In fact, you can only get so far until a rope stops you. And while the area is not so quiet with all the bustling tourists, there's a general sense of respect.

In the same way, God set aside one day each week where the Israelites were told to “remember” him. This was to be a day unlike the six that came before it and the six that followed it. They were supposed to hallow one 24-hour period so that it was different than the rest of the week.

ii. The Sabbath is a day set apart to God.

READ: Exodus 20:8-10 (ESV)

⁸ “**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** to the LORD your God.

² Dickson, John, *A Doubter's Guide to the Ten Commandments*, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 2016), p. 91-92.

Typically, Saturdays are thought of as being for fun and relaxation. You might do some housework. But, generally speaking, we're all ready to crash when we hit the last day of the week. This is utterly foreign to how the Israelites viewed the Sabbath. They purposefully made it a day of non-activity. You could only walk a certain distance on the Sabbath. You weren't allowed to gather wood, cook, or do any chores. And there were strict penalties for anyone breaking the Sabbath (cf. Num. 15:32-36).

But the Sabbath was geared towards a focus on God. This is what I mean when I say that the "Sabbath was a day set apart to God." It wasn't set apart "to" the Israelites for them to do with it as they saw fit. No. They were called to stop everything they were doing, bring their attention away from themselves, and center it on God. Why? Because God did want them to forget everything he had done for them. He wanted them to have a weekly remembrance. In fact, when Moses reiterates the Decalogue later in the Pentateuch and gets to the fourth commandment, he reminds the Children of Israel of how they were once slaves in Egypt and were never given a day of rest (cf. Deut. 5:12-15). For generations, the Israelites would have children and grandchildren who'll ask them why they take a day every week to remember God. And the Jews will be given an opportunity to recount how God delivered them from Egyptian enslavement.

iii. The Sabbath is a day set apart to God for mankind.

READ: Exodus 20:10b-11 (ESV)

On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and 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.

Even though the Sabbath was set apart to God, it was set apart for the Israelites' benefit. Just as God rested, they were to rest too. And, in mentioning the creation narrative, the Jews were invited to reclaim Eden every week. They were reminded of how they were not only designed to work but also told that they were made for rest. The Israelites were not created to work day in and day out and week in and day out without ever stopping. They were not to be slaves to God in the same way that they were slaves to Egyptians. Human beings need to rest because just as the body needs food, it also needs rest.

This principle is not only a biblical one. Researchers have known the harmful effects that overworking has on the body. According to one study, being overworked in the US contributes

“to impaired sleep, depression, heavy drinking, diabetes, impaired memory, and heart disease.”³ This has obvious implications on the employer as they find that their employees are more prone to be absent the more overworked they are, there’s increased turnover, and health insurance costs rise as workers become more unhealthy due to being overworked. It seems counterintuitive to say this, but working more doesn’t always mean you’re working better. Often when we push ourselves to our limits to trim our bottom line, we pay the price in other ways. Why? Because we were made to take a break every week. And not just for a night, but for a whole day.

Okay. We’re all glad for our Saturdays and understand the importance of rest. But how does a Christian abide by the fourth commandment? We're not Jews. We don't close everything down Friday evening and open everything back up Saturday evening. Are we exempt from obeying this rule? The answer is, in a way, “yes,” but also, in another way, “no.”

Throughout the centuries, the fourth commandment has been the topic of much controversy in Christian circles. The Pilgrims, for instance, thought they had to observe the Sabbath in the same way that the Jews did. They even created a 39-page instructional booklet on how to obey the fourth commandment. John Owens, a 17th-century administrator for the University of Oxford, once opined about the Pilgrim’s efforts, “A man can scarcely in six days read over all the duties that are proposed to be observed on the seventh.”⁴ So, naturally, we should be thoughtful as we approach how the Christian should apply the fourth commandment.

Much of this controversy centers on the fact that Jesus had an interesting relationship with the Sabbath. He often healed people on the Sabbath just to make a point (cf. Jn. 5:9; 9:15). And No. Despite what the Pharisees and Sadducees said, He never broke the fourth commandment. What he broke was the Jew's interpretation of the Sabbath. Scribes had so laden down the Sabbath that they had defined 39 different ways one might work and thus break the Sabbath, each with its own subcategory.⁵ They had muddled the fourth commandment so that you could do very little, good or bad, on that day. In fact, their strict legalistic interpretation of the Sabbath is still prevalent today. Some might be surprised to learn that elevators run automatically and stop at each floor in Jerusalem beginning Friday evening and will not resume

³ Carmichael, Sarah G., “The Research Is Clear: Long Hours Backfire for People and for Companies,” August 19, 2015, *Harvard Business Review*, <https://hbr.org/2015/08/the-research-is-clear-long-hours-backfire-for-people-and-for-companies>, [accessed, July 2, 2022].

⁴ Young, Kevin, *The 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2018), p. 74.

⁵ Sarna (1991), p. 112.

until Saturday evening because pushing a button could be considered work.⁶ What the Jews today and the Jews in Jesus' day missed is that the Sabbath is not for the Lord but for us.

READ: Mark 2:23-28 (ESV)

²³ One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. ²⁴ And 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 was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" ²⁷ And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸ So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The Sabbath was designed to be a day of rest. But the Jews had so loaded it with rules and regulations that it instead of it being a ***blessing*** it became a ***burden***. A day set aside for a reprieve from physical labor became a day of religious diligence. They turned the fourth commandment into a job rather than a break.

The Jews had forgotten that the Sabbath was made for man, our good, and our delight. It was created so that we might rest in the Lord. Picking through grainfields should not be considered work. They were merely filling their bellies just as David filled his in the Temple. God had provided the grain as much as he had provided the "bread of the Presence." Using the Sabbath to pressure others into not doing something as fundamental as eating was a perversion of the Sabbath. It became a burden rather than a blessing.

This is why we no longer observe the Sabbath as the Jews do (cf. Rom. 14:4-6). Instead, Christians have their own version of the Sabbath. And rather than being on Saturday, we celebrate the Lord on Sunday, the day of the Resurrection. Just as the old Sabbath was a commemoration of the creation in the OT, the new Sabbath is a commemoration of the new creation in the NT. We do not hallow the seventh day. We, as Christians, hallow the eighth day (cf. Jn. 20:19, 26; Ac. 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Heb. 10:25; Rev. 1:10). And rather than calling it the "new Sabbath," we call it the "Lord's Day." **Thus, just as we have Moses to thank for our Saturdays, we have Jesus to thank for our Sundays.**⁷ The two-day weekend is a remarkable

⁶ Dickson (2016), p. 95.

⁷ Ibid., p. 99.

concept of the modern age and we have God to thank for it. Ought we not take time to remember him at least one of those two days?

So, what's the takeaway?

The Lord's Day—i.e., Sunday—is a day of Sabbath-like rest that is set apart to the Lord so that the Christian might be more like Christ.

It is true that Christ-followers no longer observe the fourth commandment as it was originally written. However, we still abide by the Sabbath in principle by setting aside one day each week where we might remember Jesus just as the Israelites remembered God.

The Lord's Day—i.e., Sunday—is a day of Sabbath-like rest set apart to God so that Christians might be more like Christ. But even this is nothing compared to the spiritual relief we experience in Christ every day of the week.

READ: Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

There is no greater peace and reprieve than that found in the Lord.

Video Description

Ten | Week 5 | “Our God’s Rest Remembered”

TEXT: Exodus 20:8-11

Did you know that you owe your Saturdays to Moses? (Well, technically, we owe our thanks to God; but I think you get the point.) The idea of having a 24-hour period where a person would intentionally stop working is unique to Judaism. But unlike how we might think of Saturdays, the Jews did not set apart a day for relaxation or recreation but to remember God. After all, the fourth prohibition in the Decalogue is as follows: Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.

Now, in the spirit of transparency, Christians have viewed the Sabbath differently than the Israelites throughout the centuries. And this has created quite a bit of controversy. Some believers insist that the fourth commandment has been completely abolished. Others say it has been transformed into something else. So which is it?

It is true that Christ-followers no longer observe the fourth commandment as it was initially written (cf. Rom. 14:4-6). However, we still abide by the Sabbath in principle by setting aside one day each week where we might remember Jesus’ resurrection just as the Israelites remembered God’s creation (cf. Jn. 20:19, 26; Ac. 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Heb. 10:27; Rev. 1:10). Thus, just as we have Moses to thank for our Saturdays, we have Jesus to thank for our Sundays. Ought we not take time to remember him at least one of those two days?

The Lord’s Day—i.e., Sunday—is a day of Sabbath-like rest set apart to God so that Christians might be more like Christ. But even this is nothing compared to the spiritual relief we experience in Christ every day of the week. There is no greater peace and reprieve than that found in the Lord (cf. Mat. 11:28-30).

Pastor’s manuscript can be found here: