

## KEEPING THE SABBATH

The following are examples of Odd Laws Still on the Books in the USA. In Wheeler, Mississippi, young girls are never allowed to walk a tightrope, unless it's in a church. In Blackwater, Kentucky, tickling a woman under her chin with a feather duster while she's in church service carries a penalty of \$10.00 and one day in jail. In Idanha, Oregon, no one can eat unshelled, roasted peanuts while attending church. In Honey Creek, Iowa, no one is permitted to carry a slingshot to church except police. No citizen in Leecreek, Arkansas, is allowed to attend church in any red-colored garment. In Studley Virginia, swinging a yo-yo in church or anywhere in public on Sunday is prohibited. In Slaughter Louisiana, turtle races are not permitted within 100 yards of a local church at any time.

Today we are continuing in our series looking at the 10 Commandments and we come to the fourth which is to keep the Sabbath. Sometimes like these old laws we can think that this is one that does not really apply to us today. After all, we are not under the law but under grace. Keeping the Sabbath is not something that is important in this day and age right?

Back in 1981 the movie, Chariots of Fire, won the Academy Award for Best Picture. This Hollywood film told the true story of Eric Liddell. He was chosen to run in the 1924 Paris Olympic games. He decided to forfeit his chance to run in the 200 meter dash because the qualifying meet was held on Sunday. He believed that running on Sunday violated the 4th Commandment. His coach, and many others tried to convince him to change his mind but he held to his convictions. What would you have done if you had been in his place? What does the Sabbath mean to you? How important is it? While I do not agree with Eric Liddell's stance, I believe that this commandment is especially important for each one of us in this day and age.

Exodus 20:8-11 Remember the Sabbath day by keeping 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

What does the word Sabbath mean? Sabbath means "Day of Rest". God says every seventh day you are to take a day of rest. Jesus said the Sabbath, though violated by Jews at the time, was still important. It was given by God to us as a gift;

Mark 2:27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

This means that God gave us the Sabbath for our benefit. It is meant to be a blessing. The purpose is to prevent burnout. Every seven days you need to get physically, emotionally, and spiritually recharged because your batteries run down.

What day of the week is it? It doesn't matter. The answer is once a week. God doesn't care when you do it as long as you do it once a week. Muslims celebrate the Sabbath on Friday. Jews celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday. Most Christians celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday because the first Christians celebrated it then in honor of Jesus' resurrection. In the book of Revelation, John calls it the Lord's Day. So it became the custom. But if you want to be clear about it as a Christian you're no longer tied down by what day you celebrate the Sabbath on.

Colossians 2:16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

Romans 14:5-6 One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord...

It doesn't matter the day, you just need to pick one. As a pastor, Sunday is not my Sabbath!

How do you keep the Sabbath holy? Holy means "set apart for God." How do you keep it different? God says, I want you to set one day a week apart to do something different than you do the other six days of the week. On the seventh day, you're to have a change of pace. God wants you to use the Sabbath to rest, recharge and refocus.

## 1. REST your Body

Your body needs rest. This is so important that God used Himself as an example. When he created the world, it says he took six days to create the world and on the seventh He rested. Was God tired? No, God does not get tired. So why did God rest on the seventh day? He was modeling something that is an important principal of life -- every seven days you take a day off.

Let me go off on a bit of a tangent here. I am often asked what are my views on creation. I know that there are a lot of Christians today who do not believe in a literal 6 day creation. I was like that in University. I believed that Genesis 1 was meant to be taken as poetic. After all, no one was actually there to see creation. As someone taking Biological Science I saw in Genesis 1 as representing directed evolution and that the 6 days of creation represented 6 different time periods and not literal days. This is called the Day Age theory. During the first age God created the planets over millions of years. Then the water, then the land and later plants and animals.

In my first year in Seminary I wrote a paper on creationism talking about the Day Age Theory and many Christian authors who agreed with it. When I got my paper back there was writing on the back of it which read "interesting perspective, but what about the Sabbath?" I did not understand what my professor meant, but it time those words kept coming back "what about the Sabbath?" If you believe that God wants us to take off one day in seven. and that He modelled this for us in creation then you cannot believe in the Day Age theory. If the first day was a billion years and the second day was 100 million years etc. but the seventh was a single day then why did God divinely write on tablets of stone saying that we should work six days and take off the seventh because that is what He did?

The supreme court of the United States has ruled that it's OK for people to have laws that businesses be closed on Sunday, not on religious grounds but on the grounds that human being have built into our very fabric the need for periodic rest. It is a biological fact.

It's interesting to me that there are now more work saving devices than ever before yet people are working harder than ever before and longer hours. There's more stress, pressure and burnout. Inc. Magazine recently had a survey that said 62% of the people in America say "I have burned out or I am on the way." If you're burning the candle at both ends you're not as bright as you think you are. You need to take a day off and rest. Our bodies were not built for non stop work.

Efficiency experts now say that they've discovered that reasonably spaced rest periods increase productivity over the person who works continually and constantly.

The old Indian parable says, "You break the bow if it's always bent."

In the French Revolution they were trying to throw out all the old laws. One of the old laws was the Sunday day off. They said every day will now be a day of work, one of the laws they made in the French Revolution. Within months they had to rescind that law to establish again one day off a week. The health of the French people collapsed. It didn't work.

## 2. RECHARGE your Emotions

There are different kinds of fatigue: physical fatigue when your muscles get tired and emotional fatigue when your emotions get tired. Some of us have jobs that are physically draining. When you get to the end of the day you just want to put your feet up and relax. Others of us have jobs that are emotionally draining. The way you recover from being emotionally drained is not the same way you recover from being physically drained. You can take the whole week end off and sleep the whole week end and still go back to work on Monday and still be emotionally drained even if you slept away the whole week end. Why? Because rest is not enough. Rest will take care of physical fatigue but it will not take care of emotional fatigue.

Physical exercise is actually helpful for emotional fatigue. This is one of the reasons that I like to walk to church as often as possible. It provides me with some exercise that I don't often get sitting at a desk all day. It makes me feel better. For someone with a very physical job, going for a walk is the last thing they would want to do!

Ministry is not a very physical job, but it does wear you out emotionally and spiritually. I have learned from experience the importance of having a sabbath. A church member called his pastor up, very angry on a Tuesday morning. "Pastor," He said "I tried to call you on Monday, but you weren't in." "It was my day off," the pastor replied. "Day off?" the church member stormed. "The Devil doesn't have a day off." "Well, if I didn't have a day off," the pastor said, "I'd be just like him!" There is so much to do in the Church that we are in danger of burning out -- if we try to do it in our own strength.

When Robert Murray McCheyne, only thirty years old, lay dying, he said to a friend at his bedside, "God gave me a message to deliver and a horse to ride. Alas, I killed the horse, and now I cannot deliver the message." The horse was, of course, his body. Christian workers should accept it that their service will be costly if it is to be effective, but they should be careful not to kill the horse. -- J. Oswald Sanders

## 3. REFOCUS your Spirit

Just like emotional and physical fatigue, you can also have spiritual fatigue. If you are involved in spiritual warfare you can expect to become tired from it.

Elijah had a mountaintop experience on Mount Carmel against the prophets of Baal and had then ran for his life. Finally he collapsed under a broom tree. He was physically exhausted. He was also emotionally exhausted, he told God he wanted to die. He was also spiritually exhausted, he felt that he was the only prophet left. While I have been speaking of these three areas as separate, the reality is that they are connected. Severe stress in any of these areas always affects the others.

If you get sick and your body is in pain, it often affects you not just physically but also emotionally and spiritually. If there is a death in the family and you are grieving you are not just emotionally hurting but often are physically and spiritually depressed as well. It is amazing when people decide to get baptized that the week before they get emotionally attacked and physically sick. That is because these areas are connected.

This is why it is so important on the Sabbath to tune in to God. It is the single most important thing we can do. Tuning in to God helps to recenter us. E.g. GPS recalculating... The tragedy is many people take the day off. They use it to take care of their physical needs and they rest and their emotional needs, they have recreation and relationships, and they ignore their most important need -- your spirit is empty and it needs to be refilled with God's presence and power and love and awareness that He's with you all the time. America has turned Sunday into Funday.

Martin Luther, speaking on the Sabbath, said, 'The spiritual rest which God especially intends in this commandment is that we not only cease from our labor and trade but much more - that we let God alone work in us and that in all our powers we do nothing of our own'

Eugene Peterson describes, "Sabbath is that uncluttered time and space in which we can distance ourselves from our own activities long enough to see what God is doing

Mark 8:36 "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?" God wants you to ask that question every seven days, "What am I exchanging my life for? What did I give the last 6 days of my life for?" He wants you to stop and re-examine your priorities, re-evaluate, regroup, relax, tune into God, listen to Him, get your perspective right, get your priorities rebalanced and refocus on God. You need that every seven days.

I'm saying this third thing, Refocus My Spirit -- Worship, is the first thing you ought to do on your day off before you do the others. It is by far the most important.

When you buy a car they give you a book that has a maintenance schedule in it. That maintenance schedule says if you do certain things at certain times then that car will last you a long time. The owner's manual for your life is the Bible. God says the maintenance schedule for living is every seventh day you slow down, stop, regroup, and you spend time in worship, and in things that recharge you emotionally and in physical rest. You do that you will be far more successful and you will last far longer than any other way.

The life style that Jesus offers is not a difficult life style. It's the most logical life style. He knows how you are made. He says, "I came that you might have life." When you do it God's way, you benefit -- physically, emotionally, spiritually, in every way.

When you don't follow God's principles and you didn't have Christ as the center of your life, the manager, calling the shots one of the clearest signs of that, that your priorities are out of order, is that you are chronically fatigued. I'm not talking about a physical ailment but an emotionally, physically fatigue all the time. You're out of balance.

What do I do when I'm that way? You come to Jesus Christ. Ask Him to help you. Say, take all of these parts of my life that are loading me down and help me to sort out what's really important. Become the manager of my life. Jesus said, "I will give you rest."

Matthew 11 "Come to me, all you who are weary and over-burdened, and I will give you rest! For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Jesus said if you're carrying a heavy burden today, you're carrying one that I don't want you carrying. You're trying to be God. Let God be God and you be you. Life will be a whole lot easier.

I want to challenge you to start taking this commandment seriously. It is not an option. If you are saying "I don't have time this week for church and rest." Then you are in trouble. You're going to pay for it eventually. Do this for your own benefit. The Sabbath was made for man.

The Exxon Valdez is an oil tanker that was on its way to Long Beach, California. Instead, it crashed into a reef in Prince William Sound, Alaska. The crash resulted in the second largest oil spill in US History. 30 million gallons of oil spilled into the Ocean. Countless fish and birds and marine mammals died as a result. The primary reason for the tragedy was the fatigue of the crew. In fact, the captain of the ship was asleep when the ship crashed. Because of crew fatigue, its cargo, meant to support life, ended up destroying life. You and I are carrying precious cargo! But to make our delivery we have to avoid soul fatigue. We can support life, not sabotage life, if we don't give way to exhaustion.

A story is told of a wagon train of Christians traveling from St. Louis to Oregon. They observed the Sabbath day by stopping to rest and not traveling. But as winter approached some in the group began to panic that they would not reach Oregon before the snow fell. So they proposed to start traveling on the Sabbath days as well. The group was split over the idea so they split into two traveling groups - one would travel all seven days and one only six days. The group which rested arrived in Oregon first. The people and the horses were so rested that they could travel much more efficiently on the other six days.