

6/26/22 Christ Fellowship

What We Believe about the Lord's Day
Exodus 20:8-11

Anybody going on vacation anytime soon? Somebody tell me where you are going. What are you going to do? A buddy of mine said his wife wanted to go on a vacation but he wanted to have a staycation. So, they compromised and had an altercation.

How often do you usually go on a vacation? I know, not often enough. How often should you go on vacation? Sometimes it's a lot of work to go on vacation. Sometimes you get home from vacation and need a couple of days to recover from it. I've been there. So, why do you do it? Most folks would say they enjoy getting away from work but some of y'all are retired and still go on vacations. Why do you do that? Because you can? I hear ya and I don't have a problem with it. Good for you. Seriously.

If you are able to go on a vacation, you should definitely thank the Lord for providing that ability. And did you know that God wants you to take a break from work? He knows you need it. In fact, God says you need a break from work every single week and so He has provided you with a Sabbath day every week. Did you know God created this day for you? He created it for you so you wouldn't overwork yourself and we should honor His wishes by honoring Him on this day. That's sort of the whole premise behind a Sabbath day.

If you will turn just a little way into your Bible to the book of Exodus, we will see a popular passage of scripture. Exodus is between the first book, Genesis, and the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament. Most people know this passage but it is often a popular one to ignore for some reason. It is pretty plainly worded. It's not hard to understand. But some folks feel like it doesn't really apply to them. Okay, those other nine commandments, I'll try to follow them, but this one, eh, not so much.

Yes, if you will turn to **Exodus chapter 20**, we will see the Ten Commandments but I want to focus on just this one because there seems to be some confusion about it. There seems to be the attitude that God wasn't really serious about this. You know, maybe there ought to be Nine Commandments and one Strong Suggestion. Nine Commandments and a Pretty Good Idea. Or maybe just 9 ½ Commandments, something like that.

We are continuing our look at what we believe and today we are looking at the fourth commandment in **Exodus chapter 20, verses 8-11**. Let's see what God intends for us to do and not do on what we now call the Lord's Day. (And we will see why we call it that, of course.)

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 male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 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.

Some years ago, after reading this commandment, I had a great fear that one day I would die and I would wake up to see God face to face and He would say, with a smile, *“Well done, my good and faithful servant.”* And then the smile would go away and He would say, *“But what part of, Keep the Sabbath holy, didn’t you understand?”* Have you ever had that thought?

The word “Sabbath” means to rest. The original Hebrew word is “Shabath” and it literally means to rest or cease. I have heard people say it means “seventh” but that is incorrect. My big concordance includes the words, “celebrate” and “be still” which I thought was interesting. But it does not include the words “Saturday” or “Sunday” nor is any other day named in its definition.

The first instance of its use is found in **Genesis 2** where it says God rested from creating the world. It wasn’t that He was tired and needed a nap. It just means He stopped, He ceased, He Sabbathed, if you will. He created everything just like He wanted. He made the universe and He made the rules that keep the universe humming like a well-oiled machine just as He planned. And in that plan He included seasons; winter, summer, fall and spring. Aren’t you glad it doesn’t stay this hot year around? Aren’t you glad it doesn’t stay 10 below year around either? We need seasons. **Genesis 8:22** says, *“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”* Add that to the list of reasons I don’t worry about the scam of global warming. We have seasons of heating and cooling and it is all God’s plan.

God knew the earth needed seasons and He created us to have seasons as well. He created us to work. He put Adam and Eve in the garden to work the garden. They had jobs to do. I doubt they punched a clock or had a union but they had work that they needed to do. But God created them – and us – to need a season of rest and He called it Shabath.

Jesus took breaks. He got away from the busy crowds to regroup, relax and refresh. He took time off, and yet at end of his life he could still say to the Father, *“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.”* (John 4:4)

We live in a society that puts a high value on work. Chuck Swindoll once said that *“we have become a generation of people who worship our work . . . who work at our play . . . and who play at our worship.”* As Americans we think we know how to rest. I have read that we spend

more on recreation each year than we do on education, construction of new homes, or national defense! But how many people do you know who are truly rested? How many have found the right balance between worship, work and rest in their lives?

The fourth commandment is all about restoring the proper balance to these three areas – worship, work and rest – and so it is a commandment that we greatly need today. (rayfowler.org) And that commandment says we are to “*remember the Sabbath.*” Remember to rest. But it’s not just have a thought about it. “Remember” means to do something.

Just like God remembered Noah...and then did something. He remembered Abraham...and then did something. The thief on the cross asked Jesus to remember him as Jesus went to His Kingdom. He wasn’t asking for Jesus to have a nice thought about that guy...that one time...back at that place, you know. I remember that guy. No! Remember me and DO something. “Remember” is an action word in this case.

So, we are to remember the Sabbath and what? Keep it holy. But what does “holy” mean? I know we have a lot of words to define here but it’s important. What does it mean to keep something holy? It means to keep it separate and different and set apart for the work of God. That is what the word “holy” means and I’m afraid that’s the part of this commandment that we miss.

We’re pretty good about knowing the difference between weekday and weekend but that whole “*set apart for the work of God*” thing is problematic. I heard somebody say they thought Mondays came around to punish you for all the things you did the weekend before. It doesn’t have to be that way. It shouldn’t be that way. That’s not what Saturdays or Sundays are for at all.

So, that leads us right into why we worship on Sundays and not Saturdays like they did in the Old Testament. It’s a good question. The commandment says, “*the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord.*” And the seventh day is Saturday. So, why did it change? Well, I don’t see Sunday commanded in Scripture as the new Sabbath, but I do believe the New Testament sets a pattern for Sunday public worship for the Christian church. Sunday is called “the Lord’s Day” in the New Testament. Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday. (Mark 16:9) He appeared to his disciples on a Sunday. (John 20:19,26) The Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost on a Sunday. We read in the book of Acts that Sunday was the day of public assembly for early Christians. (Acts 20:7) The disciples were commissioned to preach the Gospel on the first day of the week. (John 20:21) And we read in 1 Corinthians that Sunday was the day of collection for God’s people. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

It's hardly the modern church that changed it. You might say the first church changed it but really, as He did with so many other things, Jesus changed it. One Sabbath day when Jesus and

His disciples were walking through a field, they picked a few heads of grain and munched on it as they walked. And the Pharisees lost their minds. *“He’s not keeping the Sabbath! He’s working on the Sabbath!”* And Jesus just calmly said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”* (Mark 2:27). See, God did not create man because He had a Sabbath and needed someone to keep it. Rather, the Creator knew that man needed time for physical and spiritual rest and so He created a Sabbath for us.

I remember my mother telling me that when she was a young girl, her family would prepare the Sunday meal completely on Saturday evening. They would cook everything that needed to be cooked and served and they put it on the table on Saturday evening and then covered it with a tablecloth until lunch time on Sunday because they felt it was too much like work to do that on Sunday. They wanted to keep the Lord’s Day holy so...fried chicken, mashed potatoes, corn, green beans, rolls and butter; whatever they wanted to eat on Sunday, they cooked and put on the table on Saturday. And she said nobody ever got sick, which is amazing to me. And I think that’s great for them to do if that’s what God told them to do. And I respect that attitude and I believe God did too but I also believe that is what is called legalism.

Legalism is what the Pharisees were famous for. Legalism is depending more on the law than on faith. This was the problem in Jesus’ day. The rabbis had added all sorts of rules and regulations concerning the Sabbath that made the day a burden rather than a blessing.

Over the years the rabbis had defined the terms “work” and “burden,” and even the specific distances you could travel on a Sabbath – it was called “a Sabbath days walk.” (Acts 1:12) They gathered all these rules together in a book called the Mishnah. And when you read the Mishnah, you begin to see all the extra rules that were added to the Bible that were making the Sabbath a burden for the people. For example, an elderly woman wanted to know if she could wear her false teeth on the Sabbath. Was this considered a burden? The rabbis talked it over, decided yes it was, and so no false teeth were allowed on the Sabbath! Well, that was crazy. That wasn’t what God meant when he gave the Sabbath. (rayfowler.org) By the way, I didn’t know until I read that this week that they even had false teeth back in those days but it’s true!

They had good intentions. They didn’t want to break any of the Commandments so they built a fence around them with a bunch more rules that turned what was supposed to be a day of rest into a day of burden. Leave it to man to mess up a blessing of God, right? It was never God’s intention for the Sabbath to be a burden, but rather a delight. The Sabbath was meant as a blessing to man! Jesus didn’t get hung up on all the legalistic rules of his day. He used the Sabbath for worshiping God, for resting from work and for doing good, and he encouraged his disciples to do the same.

So, we don't want to be legalistic about the Sabbath but we also want to obey the 10 Commandments, right? Well, did you know that this fourth commandment is the only command not repeated in the New Testament? All the others – don't steal, don't take the Lord's name in vain, don't murder, don't lie, all of them are repeated in some way in the New Testament but not this one.

And I hear ya. Todd, **Romans 6:14** says we aren't under the Old Testament Law. We are under grace! And that is exactly right and I thank God for it. Again, when Jesus came and died and rose again, it changed everything. But remember what Jesus said about the Law. In **Luke 16:17** Jesus says, *"But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void."* In **Matthew 5:17-18**, as part of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."*

See, the 10 Commandments were never given as a way to get to Heaven. They were given to point the way to the One who is the way to Heaven. They pointed out that we can't please God on our own and we obviously needed a Savior. So, Jesus came from Heaven to show us how to get there and it wasn't through following the Law. BUT, do you remember what Jesus said about certain laws? The ones He did talk about, He always made them...more.

Let me remind you about **Matthew chapter 5** where Jesus is preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Right after He says He has come to fulfill the Law, He says, *"Anyone who breaks the least of these commandments will be called the least in the Kingdom of God"* and then He goes on to revise some of the Laws. You remember?

You have heard it said not to murder but I tell you not to be angry. You have heard not to commit adultery but I tell you not to lust. You have heard not to break your oath but I tell you not to swear at all. Over and over, Jesus makes these commandments just a little more; a little more difficult, a little more impossible, a little more...we need Him. Do you see that?

So, while Jesus never specifically mentioned keeping the Lord's Day holy, He called Himself *"Lord of the Sabbath"* (Matt. 12) and modeled the practice of attending worship as Luke tells us that *"on the Sabbath day he [Jesus] went into the synagogue, as was his custom."* (Luke 4:16) And we see how He felt about the other commands so I think we can easily say that skipping out on church is out of the question. What else it means to keep the day holy is between you and the Lord.

People ask sometimes if it is a sin to work on Sunday. Well, the Bible doesn't specifically say that but it does say to keep what we now call the Lord's Day holy. Is it keeping the day separate and different and *"set apart for the work of God"* if you do on Sunday what you do the rest of the week? How do you think Jesus would answer that? How do you think the Lord

of the Sabbath would feel if you treated Sunday just like any other day? And are you seriously looking for loopholes in this relationship? Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins and your question is, do I really have to go to church every Sunday? If that is a question for you, then I question your relationship with Jesus.

J. Vernon McGee tells this story about a man who wanted to argue about the Sabbath. The man said, *"I'll give you \$100 if you will show me where the Sabbath day has been changed."* McGee answered, *"I don't think it has been changed. Saturday is Saturday, it is the seventh day of the week, and it is the Sabbath day."* The man got a gleam in his eye and said, *"Then why don't you keep the Sabbath day if it hasn't been changed?"* McGee answered, *"the DAY hasn't changed, but I have been changed. I've been given a new nature now, I am joined to Christ; I am a part of the new creation. We celebrate the first day because that is the day He rose from the grave."*

Hallelujah! Thank you, Lord! Let's celebrate that! He created this day for you so you wouldn't overwork yourself and we should honor His wishes by honoring Him on this day. And do you know what would honor God the most right now? Today is the day you get right with God. That would honor Him. And as I have said before, when God gets the honor and the glory then everything works better for everybody. God shows you grace and He shows your family grace and your friends and the crazy guy down the street all get grace when you honor God – and none of us deserve it. That's why it's called grace.

Maybe today you realize you don't really have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus. Maybe you are a church member. You've been baptized. You are a good person. You tithe and just the other day you helped a little old lady across the road. All that is good but none of it gets you to Heaven.

There is going to be some real nice, moral people in a real Hell because they never trusted Jesus to be the Lord of their lives. They never truly asked God to forgive them and to cleanse them nor did they turn away from that lifestyle in repentance. God doesn't send people to Hell. You send yourself by not accepting God's free gift of grace. Are you positive today that if you died tonight that you would go to Heaven? Make sure right now as the music plays.