

God on the Sabbath  
*The Ten Commandments*  
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**Bible Verse:** Exodus 20:8-11  
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Well, it's been a glorious start to our worship on this Lord's Day. We're glad that all of you are with us and we have the privilege this morning of returning to our study on the 10 Commandments. We took a brief break to deal with matters of practical pastoral concern dealing with matters of anxiety and things like that over the past couple of weeks, but now we return to our ongoing series in the 10 Commandments and we come to the fourth commandment today which is the matter of the sabbath and I invite you to turn to Exodus 20 beginning in verse 8 as I read this text which we will study today and also next Sunday in the Lord's will.

Exodus 20:8-11 says,

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 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.

Now this is a most controversial text in religious circles and even in the Reformed circles in which we move. This is one place where you could find disagreement with people that otherwise we would have complete agreement on all matters of important doctrine. This commandment, however, brings forth differences of understanding and differences of opinion so it's a controversial text in religious circles. Stepping outside orthodox Christianity, for example, Seventh Day Adventists require worship on Saturday and they make a big big deal out of Saturday worship based on the fourth commandment. There are others, including our own Confession of Faith that we use here at Truth Community Church, the 1689 Confession, that say that Sunday is the new sabbath that is to be kept and observed according to biblical requirements, and as these men understand things, they would restrict believers' activities in order to honor the sabbath. And still others would say nothing about the fourth commandment, they are of a mind that the moral law expressed in the 10 Commandments has no bearing on Christians whatsoever and

therefore it's not even a matter that needs to be discussed because everything is wrapped up in the New Testament and in Christ. Well, that's already a lot of difference of opinion and here at Truth Community Church, I'm just kind of giving you an overview and then we'll go into things in some depth, here at Truth Community Church we hold to a position which could be called the Lord's Day view of the sabbath. We see enduring moral law in the sabbath and in the fourth commandment, but we distinguish ceremonial features that do not apply today or that were obviously limited to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament.

Now I am not going to try to resolve all of those historical disputes and deal and refute with each different view, that would take us weeks and you would not end up having made much progress on anything at the end of the day. What I want to do instead is simply to give you what I believe is reasonable support for our position and so we're going to walk through some things. Today's message is much different than what we've had over the past couple of weeks, things that were hopefully filled with pastoral help and instruction for you. This is different as we try to teach the full counsel of God. We need to just go through and learn some things and observe some things in Scripture kind of like a construction project where before you can have the beauty of a high-rise building, you have to do a lot of preliminary foundational digging and things like that to lay a foundation in order to build on it later on. This is a foundational kind of message today but it has been very helpful to me to go through this in my study and I'm delighted to be able to share it all with you here this morning.

So let's start with a key principle to interpreting the 10 Commandments that we talked about several weeks ago. The Bible is the context of the 10 Commandments. The Bible is the context of the 10 Commandments. Every one of the 10 Commandments, as you search Scripture you find that Scripture is helping us understand them in different ways and different places and that is the surest way for us to arrive at a proper interpretation. It is important and I would say this gently to my Reformed friends who would differ with the position that we're taking here, it is important for us to let Scripture speak and not to simply try to follow our system to reach our conclusions but to let Scripture speak and inform our understanding so that we are finding a biblical interpretation rather than one that we simply prefer because it fits with our system, and when it comes to the fourth commandment, when it comes to the matter of the sabbath, we need to pay special heed to the way that the rest of Scripture informs our understanding. You know, it's easy, you know, and I have friends who will talk this way, it'll talk about coming together on the sabbath day. Well, we just kind of assume things when we say that. Is that really what Scripture teaches us to do? And I believe that the answer is, no, when we encounter everything that Scripture has to say.

So what we're going to do this morning is we're going to look at what Scripture says about the sabbath and the nation of Israel and then, secondly, we're going to look at the sabbath and the rest of the nations and this is going to lay a foundation for us to next week consider what it means for us in the New Testament. So we just need to walk through a number of different passages of Scripture here today to see what the Bible says

the purpose of the sabbath was. That is where we start. What does the Bible say that the purpose of the sabbath was particularly as it relates to the nation of Israel?

So first point today if you're taking notes: the sabbath and Israel. Now you will recall that after the first six days of creation, God rested the Bible says and go back to Genesis 2 as we come into the text here now. Genesis 2. We see this as we read the first three verses. "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts." So the six days of creation are finished and now we're considering the next day. And on verse 2 it says, "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. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." Now with that little bit of background in mind, jump ahead to Exodus 20 again. Exodus 20, the passage that we already read, Exodus 20, and we'll see in verse 11 that the statement from Genesis 2 is the ground that is given for the sabbath here in the 10 Commandments. Exodus 20:11 says, "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." And so the ground of the sabbath commandment is found in the first week of creation, the seventh day of creation, and just make this very general observation here: in some way, the Lord's rest is the ground of this commandment. This is so very important what I'm about to say. This commandment is pointing us to rest. It is pointing us to rest as the ground of the commandment.

Now just staying in the Old Testament context, staying in the context of the nation Israel, it is clear that God intended the sabbath to be important to the nation of Israel. The text itself, this fourth commandment, verses 8 through 11, is a very long and a very solemn commandment. It takes four verses to express it all and they're kind of long verses compared to some of the later commandments which are only two words in the Hebrew text. And so we see that there is a distinction here and an emphasis being made on the sabbath in the context of the 10 Commandments. So rest is somehow the ground of this commandment.

Now with that said, by the time of Moses, okay, Moses is writing this some 1,460 years before the time of Christ, by the time of Moses, God had already instituted covenants with earlier patriarchs. He introduced this covenant with Noah that came with the sign of the rainbow indicating that God would not destroy the earth by water again. You can read about that in Genesis 9 and the rainbow becomes the mark of the covenant of God not to destroy the earth with water again. Secondly, with Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant, God gave the sign of circumcision to be the sign of the covenant in Genesis 17. It is that sign that physically marked out the people of God in the Old Testament and separated them from unbelieving pagans. And so we were already familiar with this idea of covenants being in mind, God given the covenant with Noah with the sign of the rainbow to mark it, the covenant with Abraham with the sign of circumcision to mark it. Okay, so there's already this issue of signs that are being made.

Now that's very important, in my opinion, because in the same way Scripture says that the sabbath was a covenant sign to Israel. It was a covenant sign to Israel. Look over at

Exodus 31 in the very selfsame context of the 10 Commandments, in the same book you find God talking about and emphasizing the importance of the sabbath to the sons of Israel. Oh, that is so very important. Exodus 31, beginning in verse 12 where it says, "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "I hear some of you still seeking the page. That's okay. Exodus 31:12, "The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel.'" He is directing, he is targeting this to his covenant people at the time. "Speak to the sons of Israel saying, 'You shall surely observe My sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed."

Now, beloved, we're laying a lot of foundation here and I realize that this is not devotional material that we're talking about here today. I understand that and I embrace it and I just want to acknowledge it here to help you stay with me. Next week especially, we'll see some of the great significance of this but what I want you to see is that the sabbath was a sign of the covenant in the national life of Israel. It set them apart from the surrounding nations that did not have a sabbath, and so God emphasizes that he's talking to the sons of Israel here in Exodus 31 as he talks about the sabbath.

Look at verse 13, "Speak to the sons of Israel. This is a sign between Me and you." What's the antecedent of the pronoun "you"? The antecedent is "the sons of Israel." And he goes on in verse 16, "the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath." Verse 17, "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth." Three times there in that brief passage which is a direct biblical commentary on the fourth commandment he's emphasizing that this is for the sons of Israel and it is to them that that is directed.

Now just hold that thought in your mind for a while. As you read on in the law of Moses, it gives them direction, it gives the sons of Israel direction on how they were to keep the sabbath, how they were to obey it. So go on to Exodus 34 just three chapters over, Exodus 34:21 where it says, "You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during plowing time and harvest you shall rest." So in that agrarian economy, they were to rest even during plowing and harvest when it would seem like time was of the essence. God says even during your agricultural key times, you are to rest and honor the sabbath in what you do by resting. Okay?

Move on to the book of Leviticus 23 in the first three verses of Leviticus 23 it says, "The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, "The LORD'S appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations My appointed times are these,"'" he's speaking again to the nation of Israel and he says to them in verse

3, "For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings."

Then one more as we piece together the biblical testimony on this commandment, look over at the book of Numbers which is the next book to your right after Leviticus, Numbers 28 where it says in the first two verses, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Command the sons of Israel and say to them, "You shall be careful to present My offering, My food for My offerings by fire, of a soothing aroma to Me, at their appointed time.'" I pointed that out to just emphasize that again he's speaking to the sons of Israel in what he says here. As you continue on down into the context in verses 9 and 10, he says, "Then on the sabbath day two male lambs one year old without defect, and two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and its drink offering: This is the burnt offering of every sabbath in addition to the continual burnt offering and its drink offering."

So what the Lord has done here is he has established the sabbath in Exodus 20 and then he goes on to regulate how it is to be observed in the subsequent parts of the law of Moses, but all of this very clearly in the context indicating that he's directing this to the nation of Israel, the sons of Israel. And if you'll turn several centuries later to the book of Nehemiah just before the book of Psalms, in Nehemiah 9, before the book of Job, I should say, Esther and then you find the book of Nehemiah 9, we're making observations here, we're observing things. This matters because ultimately the foundation that we are laying here affects the way that we understand the seventh day in our own time, what we understand the purpose of Sunday to be, and it points us to our understanding of who Christ is and how we are to have our faith in Christ. All of these things are pointing us in this direction but we need the foundation to be laid very carefully.

In Nehemiah 9:9, there is a recitation of the history of the nation of Israel and in verse 9 it says this, Nehemiah 9, "You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, And heard their cry by the Red Sea. Then You performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, Against all his servants and all the people of his land; For You knew that they acted arrogantly toward them, And made a name for Yourself as it is this day. You divided the sea before them, So they passed through the midst of the sea on dry ground; And their pursuers You hurled into the depths, Like a stone into raging waters. And with a pillar of cloud You led them by day, And with a pillar of fire by night To light for them the way In which they were to go." Now let's just stop there for a second. He's reviewing the national history of Israel. He's reviewing that history when God gave birth to them as a nation and he led that collection of hundreds of thousands of people out of the nation of Egypt and delivered them from their slavery and from the bondage and from the Egyptian army that was pursuing them. This is a very Jewish context in which this is being given and the history that is recited makes it very very plain and obvious that that is the case.

Now continuing on in verse 13, he recites the giving of the 10 Commandments and he says this, "Then You came down on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven; You gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments." Now

verse 14, "So You made known to them Your holy sabbath, And laid down for them commandments, statutes and law, Through Your servant Moses. You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger, You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst, And You told them to enter in order to possess The land which You swore to give them." Beloved, this is clearly speaking about the nation of Israel. This is not the history of the entire world. This is not the history of all the nations that have ever existed up until that point of time. This is a targeted recitation of history regarding the people that God called out, the sons of Abraham, the sons of Isaac, the sons of Jacob. This is directed to them and to their national history and it's in that context that he is speaking to them about the nature of the sabbath, okay?

Now as you continue on in your Old Testament, you find that the prophets rebuked Israel, rebuked Israel for profaning the sabbath. Look at the book of Isaiah 1. In verse 11, God speaks to his people and actually let's go back and set the context a little more broadly. Look at chapter 1, verse 1, "The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem," you see, concerning Judah and Jerusalem, "which he saw during the reigns of," various kings of Judah, and he says, "Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the LORD speaks, Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me." He's speaking to the Jews and he's saying, "You have revolted against Me." Then he addresses them and in verse 11 he says, "'What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?' Says the LORD. 'I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.'" He says, "You are so full of sin, so full of evil that your practice of worship is an offense to Me. It is an abomination to Me. You have the sabbath and whatever you do on the sabbath is polluted by the nature of your life and the nature of national sin that is surrounding everything in it." So he rebukes them and he says, "The sabbath does you no good," the point being that he is speaking to the nation that is profaning the sabbath.

In Hosea 2, you don't need to turn there but again speaking to the Jews he says, "I will also put an end to all her gaiety, Her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths And all her festal assemblies."

So let's just step back, take a little breath here. I know this is a lot of information all at once but God gave the 10 Commandments to Moses to be given to the sons of Israel. On the sabbath in particular he calls it a sign that is between the sons of Israel and him, and we've seen multiple passages where the sabbath is discussed in the context of the national history of Israel and on and on it goes, and then the rebuke comes to Israel for the way that they are profaning the sabbath, all right? Now as you step into the New Testament, the Pharisees who were the leaders of the Jewish people, they often contested with Jesus over the sabbath.

Look at the gospel of Mark 2, for example. Mark 2, beginning in verse 23 as you turn there. The Pharisees were the religious leaders of the Jews, they saw the importance of

the sabbath as it was given in the Old Testament and they sought to enforce the many rules that they had added to sabbath observance during the intervening 400 years between the end of the Old Testament canon and the coming of Christ. In Mark 2:23 it says this, "And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. The Pharisees were saying to Him, 'Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?' And [Jesus] said to them, 'Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; 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?' Jesus said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'" The Pharisees were contesting this because it was so important to them as the leaders of the Jews.

So all of this simply to say this one simple point: for the nation of Israel, for the Jews, the importance of the sabbath is obvious. It is obviously important in that context but the question that we have to answer here today and next week is this: but what about non-Jews? What about other men in other places, at other times? You see, the whole point, the whole issue and the concern about the moral law and the 10 Commandments is that we are making the statement that this is a universal law that applies to all men, at all times, and in all places, and the question is does the sabbath work like that in the same way that murder and adultery, for example, are obviously a moral law that apply across all cultures, across all times? Is the sabbath treated in Scripture like that or is it treated somehow differently? The answer to that question has great implications for the way that we think about the sabbath and Sunday and the Lord's Day in our time here. If we look at Scripture carefully and we find clear evidence that God himself was not applying the sabbath to all peoples everywhere, then we have to reconsider and have to think more carefully about what the sabbath means for us today. So the question is: what about other men, in other places, at other times? Did the sabbath apply to them? And in the reading I've done of other Reformed writers who differ with our view on this, I don't believe that they have dealt adequately with this concern.

So let's go to point 2: the sabbath and the nations. The sabbath and the nations. You could say the sabbath and non-Jews, and it's here, my friends, it's here that we need to let Scripture interpret Scripture. It is here that we need to let God's word tell us what God's word means rather than drawing conclusions based on a limited consideration of insufficient numbers of texts. What does God's word say about other nations and the sabbath and here, again, we're just making observations as we go along, but as we make those observations, several undeniable principles force a conclusion upon us today. First of all, in Genesis 2 the seventh day is not called the sabbath in Genesis 2. The word "sabbath" does not even occur in Scripture until Exodus 16 and that's covering a lot of years of human history for the sabbath not to be even mentioned. If it was designed to be a law applying to all of the nations everywhere, you would expect to see it mentioned somewhere before Exodus 16 as it's talking about the history of the world before it focuses on the history of Israel. You will not find it there.

Secondly, we note that God did not command Adam to rest. Adam was only one day old at this time. He had no works from which to rest and so God did not command Adam to rest, the Scripture simply tells us that God himself rested from his work. Okay, so just follow along with me here. Now we ask the question, "Well, what about the patriarchs before the time of Moses? What do we see about them?" Beloved, there is no sabbath command given to Noah, given to Abraham or given to Jacob. Scripture does not say that they kept the sabbath. It does not go there in its discussion, and as I said, in the book of Genesis you'll find murder being condemned, you'll find adultery being condemned and punished in the book of Genesis, but one thing you won't find is you will not find anyone being punished for a violation of the sabbath. That is just a matter of fact.

You say, "Okay, well, what about the surrounding nations of Israel?" If the sabbath was intended to be an eternal moral principle for the seventh day of the week and that everyone everywhere was supposed to worship in like manner as is laid forth for the nation of Israel, you would have found that moral principle being enforced on all people at all times but you don't find that anywhere in the book of Genesis or in the book of Exodus. God judges nations for sin, for sure, he judges nations who did not have the law of God, but he did not punish them for breaking the sabbath. That's very odd. That's very odd if the sabbath was intended to apply to all nations everywhere. It's not so odd if it was simply a sign of the covenant between God and Israel.

You can see this same point from a different angle. Look at the book of Leviticus 18. In Leviticus 18, God has laid out something of a morality, sexual morality code, and you can start in verse 19 to see this in a passage that is not popular in our day and age. It says in verse 19, "you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual impurity." Verse 20, "You shall not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife, to be defiled with her," commandment against adultery. "You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD." You see, the early table, the first table being there, protect, honor the name of God, do not commit adultery. Verse 22, "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion." Now watch this. After stating all of those things about, you know, moral purity, verse 24 he says, "Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. 'But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled)." Beloved, they broke other aspects of the 10 Commandments even though they did not have the law themselves. It was sufficient that there was a universal principle of moral law imprinted on their heart where they knew that adultery, they knew that bestiality, they knew that these things were a sin and that they were an abomination and God judged them for doing it. God judged them for loving it, and God brings judgment upon them for violating that aspect of the moral law even though they did not have the written code of Moses before them in order to

increase their guilt. They were guilty because they were violating universally applicable standards of moral law. Let that sink in for a moment. They did not have to have the law of Moses in order to be guilty before God.

Look over at Romans 1 to reinforce this point just a bit here. Romans 1. It says in Romans 1:20, "since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." Then over in chapter 2, verse 12, Romans 2:12, it says, "all who have sinned without the Law will also perish without the Law, and all who have sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law; for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified." Now look at verse 14, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus." The sexual sin which marked the nations back in the book of Leviticus, it was written on their hearts even though they did not have the law of Moses. It was written on their hearts because it was a universal moral principle that these things were obviously wrong. So their consciences testified against them even as they were sinning like this and that became grounds for guilt and grounds for judgment and God says, "Because they have done these things, I am judging them and I am driving them out of the land and giving their land to you." Their guilt in this way was judged by what was on their conscience.

So we see other aspects of the 10 Commandments, other aspects of the moral law written on the human heart as things which are not to be done. That cannot be said of the nature of the sabbath. Those nations had defiled themselves apart from the written law, God judged them based on what they knew in their hearts, but the sabbath was not a part of the judgment. It's not mentioned anywhere. That is really really strange if we are to treat the sabbath as a universally binding rule upon all men everywhere at all times. Now when you set that observation over against the recognition that God speaks to the sons of Israel that the sabbath is a sign of the covenant between him and them, then it starts to fall into place, then it starts to make sense.

Well, let's go back, let's go to the New Testament, then. Remember, we're talking about the sabbath and the nations here. What about Gentile believers in the book of Acts? What about Gentile believers, which is where almost all of us in this room today, we're all Gentile believers here, what about Gentile believers in the book of Acts? Go to Acts 15 and you will remember that in Acts 15 there was a dispute over how the law of Moses was going to apply to Gentile believers. There was a big controversy about it. The elders, the apostles got together and they wrote forth instructions to help Gentile believers understand what the role of the law was in their lives and they limited it, they gave instruction to them that the ceremonial aspects of the law were not things that were to bind their conscience. So in Acts 15 beginning in verse 28 and 29 as he's speaking to these Gentile believers, it says to them, "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials," here's how you should preserve unity

in the church, here's how you should respect Jewish believers that are in the church, here's what we want you to do, verse 29, "that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell." In that time where the law of Moses was particularly at issue in how it would play out in the lives of Gentile believers, the Jerusalem council did not mention observing the sabbath to them at all. There was no mention of it.

So as we step back and look at this, we see all of this directed at the sons of Israel. We see nothing directing this to the nations, nothing directing it to the Gentiles even in the course of the church. So we draw this conclusion, beloved: the regulations of the sabbath were for Israel, to set Israel apart in the Old Testament. Their observance of the sabbath distinguished them from the nations around them. It set them apart. It showed them to be God's people when they were observing the sabbath and the nations were not. It set them apart that way but it is never applied to the nations themselves. To do that would have confused the whole issue of sanctifying Israel unto the purposes of God. Then that leaves us with a question, then, that we're going to explore more next week: what about the sabbath and Christians today? What about the sabbath and Christians today? As we ask this question, this remarkably leads us right into our rest in Christ. It leads us right to the Lord Jesus Christ again as we let Scripture interpret Scripture.

Go to the book of Colossians 2 with me. Colossians 2 and we're going to consider the fuller context here as we go into this. In Colossians 2, Paul is setting forth the superiority of Christ, the greatness of Christ, and he says in chapter 2, verse 9, that in Christ "all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Going on in verse 13, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." Again, we're going to tie all of this together. Paul here is telling Christians what Christ has done for them. He said in Christ you have the fullness of God in bodily form. In Christ you have one who has died for your sins, who has cleansed you, who has thoroughly reconciled you to God, and he did this while you were dead in your transgressions, while you were dead he made you alive together with Christ. Verse 14, look at it there again with me, he canceled your certificate of debt toward God. You owed God a debt that you could not pay because of your sin. You could not pay that debt and what Christ has done for you, Christ has come, Christ in his death on the cross, Christ in the fullness of deity covered your certificate of debt, Christ paid for all of your sins at the cross so that they no longer testify against you in the presence of a holy God. Your sins are fully forgiven. In Christ you have received a full legal righteousness that utterly justifies you before a holy God. You have all of the righteousness of Christ imputed to you, you have all of your sins forgiven because they were laid on Christ at the cross, and

therefore you are perfectly reconciled to him. In Christ you are absolutely complete before a holy God. You have bold and confident access to him, as it says in Ephesians 3;12.

Now what are the consequences of that position in Christ? What is the consequence of being a Christian? Well, one of the consequences of that is that the ceremonial aspects of the law are no longer to trouble you. The things about sacrifices, the things about dietary regulations, the things about other aspects that Israel was to observe in the old economy, those things don't apply to you because the reality has come. The shadows of the ceremonial law were only pointing to Christ and now that Christ has come and you are complete in him, you are no longer to be troubled by the ceremonial aspects of the law because of the greatness of who he is and what he has done. Look at what that means for us there in verse 16 where he says, "Therefore," as a result of who Christ is, as a result of the work of Christ in the atonement, therefore as a result of that here is the conclusion, verse 16, "Therefore 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." The annual festivals, the monthly new moon things or the sabbath day, the weekly things, there's a chronological progression here, no one is to judge you about those things. Those things do not bind you. Those things are not a binding aspect of the law upon you because in verse 17, these "things [were] a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." Remember, the whole purpose of the sabbath, the whole purpose of the sabbath was to point us to rest. It was pointing us to God and how he rested on the seventh day. The purpose of the sabbath was to remind us that there is a rest that we are to look for. They were to be looking for a rest to come. What we have, the benefit that we have now on this side of the cross, what we have now in Christ is that our rest is in Christ, not in the observance of a weekly day. We rest – watch this, this was a long long road to get to be able to say this point – we rest not in a weekly observance of a religious nature, we rest in a greater sabbath, we rest in Christ because he has fulfilled everything that was necessary for us spiritually. He has fulfilled all righteousness for us. He has paid for all of our sins and as a result of that, the rest that we have now is in Christ, not in a weekly observance. And because we rest in Christ, therefore, the ceremonial things of the Old Testament law that were prefiguring Christ are done away. They have been fulfilled. We no longer have to observe those aspects of them because it's been fulfilled in Christ. We are in Christ, not in Abraham. We are in Christ, not in Moses. And therefore the sabbath that applied to the sons of Israel has a different significance for us than it did to them. We are resting in Christ and in Christ alone and he has fulfilled the sabbath for us.

Now there are still, and we'll see this next week, there are still enduring moral principles in the sabbath that we want to take note of and we'll look at next week, but we distinguish the ceremonial and the Jewish aspects of the sabbath and say because we are in Christ, those things do not apply to us and therefore the attempts to regulate our activity on Sunday we believe to be a misguided application of what the fourth commandment means to us today and we'll explore that more next week. But all of this, all of this lengthy exploration of the sabbath in the Old Testament and the New is designed to lead us to this point: what a blessing we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have in Christ a perfect rest, a final rest, so that you can rest in Christ and rest from your works in your

effort to try to please God and to earn merit with him in order to be able to go to heaven. You do not earn merit with God through your works, you rest in Christ. When we come to Christ, we rest from our works of trying to please God and earn his favor by what we do and by our obedience. We rest from that knowing that in Christ the law has been fulfilled on our behalf, that in Christ our sins have been paid, and Christ is our sabbath rest, Christ is the perfection of rest for us so that when you put your faith in Christ, you can rest knowing that everything that God requires from you has been fulfilled, it has been fulfilled in Christ and therefore you are free to rest in him. And that's why Paul says the substance belongs to Christ in Colossians 2:17.

So we'll see these things more clearly even next time. For now, we rejoice in what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, a perfect righteousness, a perfect atonement in which we can fully completely and eternally rest.

Let's pray together.

*Our gracious Lord, we honor You for being the fulfillment of everything that God requires from us. Thank You, our dear Lord Jesus for keeping the law on our behalf and for keeping it even in paying the penalty that the law requires from those who violate it. Lord, we have nothing of our own that we could offer to You to satisfy the demands of a holy God, our obedience even now at best is incomplete and inconsistent, but in Christ we have a perfect rest, perfect work has been done, perfect atonement has been made, and Lord Jesus, we rest in You by faith and we thank You for being the fulfillment of all that God requires from us so that our conscience can be at rest, our hearts can be assured of forgiveness and that we can know for certain that we are on a path that leads to heaven when we die. We pray, Father, for all of those who would lack that kind of assurance, that kind of inner certainty, the confidence that comes from knowing Christ. We pray that Your Spirit would convict them and help them and carry them, as it were, to Christ and as You did with Lydia in Acts 16, that You would open their hearts to believe the things that have been spoken to them of a perfect Savior who made a perfect atoning work at Calvary and in Christ to find their perfect reconciliation with a holy God. We ask these things in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.*

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