

CHAPTER 7  
*Remember the Sabbath*

remembering who gives your time to you

**Introduction**

When it comes to the Ten Commandments, it is difficult to think of a commandment more neglected in today's culture than the fourth commandment: remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Amazingly enough, although this neglect has taken place in the most recent decades of our modern age, the church also has all but given up on this commandment. In the not-too-distant past, the observance of a day of rest in the culture was taken for granted. However today's church has happily joined the world in disregarding the historical and biblical practice of setting the Christian Sabbath, or Lord's Day apart, making it holy. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is two-fold. First, to give a brief summary of the proper, biblical understanding of the fourth commandment. Second, to help parents see that teaching their children to honor the Sabbath, sets before them a wonderful reminder of God's glory in that he gives to man all his time. Worship of God is not a peripheral issue, or simply one of the choices people make in life. Celebrating the Sabbath reminds man that God is central and that all other choices revolve around worshiping him.

## The Sabbath in the Bible

It seems that in today's environment most Christians' view of the Sabbath is one of freedom from obligation. It can be seen by the number of church bumper stickers that grace the cars in the parking lot of the local restaurant every Sunday at lunch. However, rather than accepting a majority opinion at face value, Christians, like their brothers and sisters of the Berean church, are to be guided by God's word (Acts 17:11). Only the Bible is the guide for decisions on how to speak, think and act. So, what does the word of God teach about the Sabbath and is it still significant?

The Sabbath is introduced at the beginning of the Bible in the book of Genesis. In the first two chapters God lays out how he created all things in the space of six days and all very good. After all this work was done, God's next actions are described for us in Genesis 2:1-3:

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation (Gen 2:1-3, ESV).*

At creation, God makes holy, or sets apart, one day in seven. The principle of God-ordained rest finds its root in the very creation of the world. The timetable is significant because this commandment cannot be placed in the ceremonial laws or Israel's civil laws, which are abrogated in their biblical form. The laws given to Moses at Sinai were set before the people of Israel at least 2,700 years later. The fourth commandment itself states as much, pointing back to God's work of creation:

*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 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. 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 (Exodus 20:8-11, ESV).*

The law cites the order established by God in creation as the reason for the fourth commandment. God worked during the six days of creation and rested and set the seventh day apart for a special purpose, making it holy. However, there is more evidence in the Bible that the Sabbath was already understood prior to God giving of the Decalogue to Moses.

Before the Ten Commandments are given at Sinai, the people of Israel are at least aware of the principle of Sabbath. In Exodus 16, four chapters before the law is given, God's provision of manna is recorded. As God gives his instructions for the collection of this bread from heaven, he makes a distinction between collection on the Sabbath, and collection on the other days of the week: "Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." (Exodus

16:26). God refers to the Sabbath without explanation. The principle of rest as found in the fourth commandment was already known. That does not mean the people of Israel were necessarily faithful in keeping this commandment. However, they were held accountable for their response to this law. For example, In Numbers 15:32-36, a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath was executed, stoned with stones, for breaking the Sabbath. Or after the return from the exile, Nehemiah forces strict reforms on the people of Israel because of their failure to set the Sabbath day apart. Nehemiah requires the gates of Jerusalem to be closed on the Sabbath in order to prevent trade on this day (Cf. Nehemiah 13:15-22). So throughout the pages of the Old Testament, the fourth commandment as assumed and enforced. However, there is also New Testament evidence that the fourth commandment should still be held in high regard.

One of these evidences comes from the mouth of our Lord Jesus Christ himself. Jesus addresses this issue in Matthew 5:17-19 where he says he has come to fulfill the law, but not to abolish it. In fact, he tells us that nothing will pass away from the law until everything is accomplished. “Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>1</sup> Christ fulfills all the law and the prophets, but he still speaks of observing and teaching his commandments. The principle of work and rest, established in the fourth commandment, remain in effect. No one is free to discard any of the Ten Commandments. This view of the abiding application of the Law is not a novel invention. It has been the predominant view of the church throughout the centuries.

### **Good and Necessary Consequence**

Dr. A. A. Hodge, a prominent 19th century theologian, has written an excellent summary of the historical acceptance within the church of the Christian Sabbath from the times of the early church until today. In his article “Sabbath, The Day Changed: The Sabbath Preserved” he demonstrates with citations from Christian leaders throughout the centuries that the Christian Sabbath was accepted from the very earliest of times. For example, from Ignatius of Antioch, a contemporary of the apostles, he quotes the following: “Those who have come to the possession of new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath (seventh day), but living in the observance of the Lord’s day, on which also our life has sprung up again, by him and by his death.”<sup>2</sup> Throughout the article Dr. Hodge gives other examples moving from the ancient church through to the Reformation establishing the historical

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 5:19.

<sup>2</sup> A. A. Hodge, Sabbath, “The Day Changed: The Sabbath Preserved”, From *A Puritan’s Mind*, <<<http://www.apuritansmind.com/puritan-worship/the-lords-day/sabbath-the-day-changed-the-sabbath-preserved-by-dr-a-a-hodge/>>>, accessed on February 8, 2012.

precedent of the Lord's Day in the church. As such there is both a biblical and historical foundation for treating the Sabbath as holy, set apart for God's worship.

Since the commandments of God show us his will for how man is to glorify and enjoy God all of life, parents most certainly should be setting all the commandments before their children and to teach them what it means to apply these commandments evangelistically. Christians live out the summary of the law to love the Lord our God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and their neighbor as themselves (Cf. Mark 12:29-30) through the lens of the law. The law shows what form thankfulness to Christ for the work of redemption should take. The fourth commandment teaches that man's orientation should not be focused inwardly, and is of specific use when it comes to considering the use of time. On the first day of the week, the Christian rests in the God who loves and knows his needs and trusting him to provide daily bread. The first day of the week, the Christian gives his time to the Lord in worship, knowing that God has given six other days for labor. The Lord's Day is set apart, made holy, for rest and worship of him. Others who have gone before have taught the same doctrine.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, spends much time considering the fourth commandment. The divines, an old word simply meaning pastors, paint a picture where the entire focus, specifically on the Lord's Day, is to be on God and his worship. Only in cases of works of necessity and acts of mercy is an exception made.<sup>3</sup> Other confessional statements of that same time period, such as the *Heidelberg Catechism* #103 and the *1689 London Baptist Confession* chapter 22 reflect this same understanding. There are six days for work and one day for turning hearts to delight in the Lord and the eternal rest he promises his people in heaven.

Other men have written very helpful and thorough works on this topic<sup>4</sup>, which are commended for further study. The bare-bones summary in this work is that the Bible teaches the Christian especially to honor the Sabbath by setting it apart to the Lord. This doctrine's foundation is laid in the Bible and has been heeded from the very earliest apostolic manifestations of the New Testament Church. But how do Christians in the twenty-first century interact with this commandment? This next sections takes some time to examine how we can implement the Christian Sabbath in our own day.

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<sup>3</sup> *Westminster Shorter Catechism* Q/A 60.

<sup>4</sup> Iain Campbell has written a very thorough overview of the biblical teaching on the Sabbath in his book *On the First Day of the Week: God, the Christian and the Sabbath*. Other men who have done good work on this issue include Bruce Ray in his book *Celebrating the Sabbath* and Walter Gentry in his little book *Call the Sabbath a Delight*. John Calvin's sermon "On the Sabbath", available On-Line at <http://www.reformed.com/publications/johncalvinsabbath1of2.php>. also provides a clear picture of the Lord's Day as a continuing Christian Sabbath.

## What Will This Look Like in My Family?

The Sabbath demands the attention of all believers, whether young, old, married, single, having little children or older children. That is because the issue of Sabbath is central to the life of the Christian. There is no better way, apart perhaps from family worship, to demonstrate to children that the time they have been given is not their own. The worship of the living God is not structured around other activities. In fact, it is quite the opposite. All of life's many possible activities should be structured around the worship of God. That is the central principle taught in this chapter. It is tempting to engage in endless disputes about what may possibly be able to serve as an exception to this commandment. Though some of those conversations may be helpful, to indulge these questions too much reduces the significance of this day. If detailed permissions and prohibitions become the main concern, what should be a celebration will become a painful, and maybe even self-righteous, exercise in drudgery. Instead of asking the question, "What am I allowed to do?" Christians should be asking "How can I use this gift God has given me to teach my children to glorify my Savior on this day?"

### *Teaching Your Children*

Boiling Exodus 20:8-11 down to its essential components, there are three main points. First, there is the command that not to work. Second, there is the command not cause anyone else to work either. Third, rest results because of God's command to do so at creation. We see two commands and one motivation. Those clear instructions form the foundation for our decisions on what we should be doing on the Sabbath: On this day which is set apart for God, do not work and do not make anyone else work. In addition Isaiah 58:13-14 prevents hypocritical externalism by calling for the right heart attitude:

*"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*

Beyond the prohibitions in the text of the law itself, Isaiah calls God's people to a day of forsaking personal pleasures and pursuits and delight in the Lord instead.

Whatever positions are taken on the details of permissible activities on the Sabbath, there must be acknowledgment that these cannot escape the commands of the Bible. The requirements of the fourth commandment mean the Christian cannot work, or make anyone else work, and should delight himself in the Lord. On this day, rest in God is the special blessing from the Lord. Certainly, the Lord is to be trusted on other days too, but this day, God has set apart as holy to himself. It is a special day. For some, this will mean teaching something new in their family because they have never

considered or even heard of this concept. And yet it is a new opportunity to show their children that loyalty to the God who gave up his own Son for the sins of his people is worth some funny looks. If this principle is lived out at home, it is possible that some would begin to think of those who practice it as odd. Unfortunately, this may even be true in the church! But to aid in obedience to this commandments, it is important to consider some of the more common ways the fourth commandment is broken in church cultures.

For example, when I was in seminary, I preached at a church where they had a person designated to welcome guests by taking them out for lunch. When I was approached about going to a restaurant with this brother, I had to respectfully decline and head home. If I would have participated, I would have been the cause of someone else having to work. It was clear when I tried to explain my objection to this man, he was unsure still as to why I would object to such a common practice. The idea of welcoming new visitors is a good one, and I applaud that brother for his effort. However, his application of this idea violated the Scripture. The fourth commandment requires the Christian not to cause anyone else to work. Therefore visiting restaurants, or any kind of commerce really, falls outside of the realm of the permissible. But there are other ways in which the commandment is broken.

In the America of the twenty-first century, it is not uncommon for people to miss Sunday worship because their work requires it of them. Note here that their job is not a labor of necessity or mercy. Instead, it is rather that their work requires a 7 day per week commitment. In that set-up, work trumps worship. And yet, if the commandment prohibits work, are those employments an option for the Christian? Christ calls his people to seek his kingdom first knowing that all other things will be added as well. Life must reflect faith God's promise of provision as we seek to glorify God and enjoy him through obeying the fourth commandment.

I am not trying to engage in list building here, but simply making the point that there are many cultural blind-spots when it comes to obedience to this commandment. Like in all sins, man wants to determine what shape love for God should take. Oddly enough, cultural practice when it comes to meeting with dignitaries in a culture do not face the same scrutiny, or maybe it should be called anarchy. If a citizen has the privilege of meeting his president, prime minister, or monarch proper protocols are followed, often without question. The Lord should be honored in the same way. Man's purpose in life is to glorify God as he has prescribed it. Working through the commandment, it is important to deal with some of the God-given exceptions. One of these is works of necessity.

In Matthew 12:5 Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees about the supposed unlawful behavior of his disciples, namely plucking grain on the Sabbath. In the first place, God never prohibits the plucking of grain on the Sabbath. Their offense was against the tradition of man. However, Jesus'

response also shows this principle of necessity: “Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless?” (Matthew 5:12) The priests are guiltless because they are performing a work of necessity. God commands their work, which is designed to bring glory to God. Therefore, people who labor in leading God’s people in worship, or who serve in law enforcement, fire prevention, power supply perform a necessary function and are not breaking the Sabbath. Jesus shows another exception to work on the Sabbath too: works of mercy.

One of the main sources of offence to the Jews was Jesus’ healings on the Sabbath. On several occasions the gospel writers record that the Jewish leaders were waiting to see whether Jesus would heal on the Sabbath.<sup>5</sup> In their minds, this act was a clear violation of the principle of rest. This understanding is most clearly expressed by the ruler of the synagogue in Luke 13:10-17. He castigates Jesus and the people saying, “There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.” (Luke 13:14b). Jesus responds by showing them that their compassion for their animals is greater than their compassion for the sick. Of course we do not let one of God’s creatures suffer just because it is Sunday. It is right to show mercy on the Sabbath. It is appropriate to perform works of mercy by visiting the sick, the elderly, and caring for the poor, or by performing work in caring for the sick. These works do not violate the Sabbath, but keep it.

This full view of the Sabbath must be taught to Christian children to give a proper view of the Sabbath. It is in rightly understanding and applying that commandment that the opportunity to structure their time around the Lord is given. Sabbath keeping is one of the best ways to remind them that they serve God, not themselves. Begin teaching to your children in word and example today. Make sure they understand the essential truths to make sense of the Sabbath:

- God made the Sabbath as part of his creation, before sin even entered the world. Exodus 20:11 teaches us creation is the foundation for why we obey the Sabbath.
- The commandment teaches three things: don’t work; don’t make anyone else work; and, delight yourself in the Lord, not yourself. Some may need to teach their children the reason for some changes in their homes on the Lord’s Day. If you are in that category, make sure to show them how these changes are being introduced to be faithful to the Lord.
- The Sabbath teaches trust in God and his care of us. The Christian is to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all other things will be given as well.
- Works of necessity and mercy are exceptions to the Sabbath commandment to rest.

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<sup>5</sup> Examples are found in Mark 3:1-6, Matthew 12:9-14 and Luke 6:6-11.



Teaching something as important as the Lord's Day should not be done in a rush. It may be the family will require a return to this lesson in family devotions several times. Depending on the age of the children they may have questions that need to be answered patiently, carefully, and above all, biblically. Be convinced in your own mind before you set it before your children, and be careful to answer all their questions. They may have many, or none at all. However, the biblical teaching on the Lord's Day must be understood. Once these foundational principles are established in the heart and mind, parents have the privilege of applying this commandment in their families. Most likely, when implementing changes in the families, children will ask questions. For example:

- *Is activity "x" ok on Sunday?* Help your children see that the goal is not to build a list, but to be faithful to Christ by obeying the basic Sabbath rules: do not work, do not make anyone else work, and delight yourself in him. Teach them that the better approach is to ask, "Is what I am wanting to do helping or hindering me to keep this day holy?"
- *Why can't I (fill in the activity of your choice here)? All my friends at church are doing that!* Parents must be prepared to guard against self-righteousness when these questions arise. There can be no elevation of your family over another. There can only be an appeal to Scripture, showing your children that you must obey the Bible. This conversation may arise frequently for seasons, especially if this concept is new.

As in all other areas of instruction, when it comes to the Lord's Day parents must take responsibility to lead their families by addressing their children's questions.

#### *Implementing the Commandment*

So much of parenting is taught through example. Unless children see their parents' words reflected in their decisions, they are not likely to follow. Parents must model the first principle learned from the law: to have no other gods before the Lord. The Christian has been bought with a price, and now he is free to live for Christ, according to the commandments of God. This obedience is not legalism, but flows from a heart that loves God because of Christ's work of redemption. As Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do... If you love me, you will keep my commandments."<sup>6</sup> The Christian loves the Lord by living according to his will. When it comes to the Christian Sabbath, that means not working or making anyone else to work.

Remembering the caveat of works of mercy and necessity, step one for the Christian parent must be to make sure that they do not work on the Lord's Day. Some may have structured their careers so that they are regularly working on the Sabbath. In that case, the parent has the opportunity to

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<sup>6</sup> John 14:12, 15, ESV.



acknowledge in his family that this choice is sinful, and work to change the schedule. They are able to lead them in trusting God to take care of all our worldly cares as he says in Matthew 6:25-33.

Living in obedience to the fourth commandment will move outside of employment and flow over into other relationships too. The commitment to honoring God in the Lord's Day may introduce pressure from outside the family. Friends and family may make a habit of visiting restaurants on Sunday. The biblical idea of the Lord's Day may not be understood or appreciated by them at first, but the Christian is not to let anything deter them from following the Scriptures. Parents are guardians of family cultures. They must not let anything but God's word form its foundations.

The Sabbath gives them a tangible way to show their children that the time they have on this planet does not belong to them. It is God's. When they fail to teach their children the significance of Sabbath they open the door for their children to see themselves as the decision makers of their time. They will read, pray, eat, help and then also worship when they want.

### *Celebrating the Sabbath*

It is easy for a desire to keep the Lord's Day holy to have the opposite effect of what is intended. Parents may start out seeking to honor God in resting and worship. However, this day could become one that is dreaded by children if parents are not careful. If they lose sight of the glory of God and the rules become the focus, drudgery is the most likely experience children will have on this day. The rules are never the goal for the Christian, but are simply aids to show love for God. Love for God and praise to him are the proper goals for honoring the Lord's Day. There are several things parents can do to help their family celebrate the Sabbath, and to keep it from being simply about obeying rules.

- *Make yourself available to your family.* In a world where people run from appointment to appointment during the week, Sunday can be a day of commitment to time with family. Family walks, bike-rides, puzzles and other activities are all great venues for the kind of family fellowship that falls in line both with the teaching described in Deuteronomy 6:7 and the habits of the apostolic church in Acts 2:42. Family activities are a great way to strengthen relationships and can lead to many fruitful conversations about God.
- *Take time to make this day special.* With some planning, parents could reserve a special dessert for this day or serve a special breakfast. There could be a special book to read together, or the privilege of friends coming to visit. Whatever choices are made, make sure the Lord's Day is a joyful occasion, not a day of drudgery and restriction.
- *Participate in Works of Mercy.* Sunday is the perfect day to help children see the beauty of serving others. Parents may visit an elderly couple in the church with one or two children, or

minister to people in an old-age home with their children. Children can be taught the blessing of serving others without any expectation of material compensation.

*Is It All About Rest?*

Although the Sabbath is primarily about entering God's rest, that concept is not possible unless you also have work. In a sense, both work and rest are in view in the fourth commandment. The discipline of work is a gift that can be passed on to children, teaching them to enjoy it in a proper framework. Work is not something that children will necessarily embrace without help. Some children are more naturally hard-working than others. However, parents must remember the natural inclinations of children are not an excuse for neglect of God's word. If a child is naturally inclined to lose his temper, parents certainly would not simply allow this child to express his anger any way he wanted. To help their children learn about work, parents can keep a couple of principles in mind:

- *Teach them work is expected in the family through chores.* Too often families do not expect their children to contribute to the maintenance of the household. Not only do family chores provide a great opportunity to help develop the child's work-ethic, but children will also feel that sense of accomplishment as they participate in the family's work. Some think little children could not possibly participate. However, even very small children can learn to clean up their own toys. Perhaps the starting point is holding their little hands and helping them grasp the little dolls and place them in the basket. But through this process they are learning to work. As children get a little older they can help with more substantial chores. Below are some age-appropriate suggestions:

**Ages 3-5.** Wiping the baseboards, clearing the table, making their beds, and tidying toys are all within the range of possible for children this age. To be sure, parents will be very active in supervising these chores, especially for the very little ones, but these activities are very manageable for this age.

**Ages 6-9.** As children get older, sweeping the floors, washing bathrooms, loading the dishwasher, mopping floors, and wiping counters and tables become possible chores. At this age children begin to be more help than they are work. They should be able to manage their own time and tasks. If they are struggling with doing their task well, make sure they understand how they are to complete the task and then expect them to do so excellently. Having children re-do a chore is a sure way to help them learn to do a task well.

**Ages 10 and up.** When children enter the "double digits" years, the question becomes more, "What do I want them to do?" This age is a great training ground for girls and boys as they

prepare for adulthood. Making meals, taking care of the family property, sewing, or building all can be done to help the family and to develop an enjoyment for work.

- *Teach them a balanced perspective of work.* Too often, especially in western culture, work becomes an obsession. It becomes impossible to rest one day in the week out of fear an opportunity will go missing. Children should be taught a proper perspective by having them rest one day in seven. No chores, no homework, nothing that would be associated with the other six days of the week on the Lord's Day. Those things are their work as children. Give them the blessing of a day of rest set apart for the worship of God. That gift will serve them well as they reach adulthood and lead families of their own.

## **Conclusion**

Remember back to chapter one, on foundational principles of the law. Obedience to the law saves no one. However, the Law does act as a guide for thankful, joyful, loving living in worship to God for his completed work on the cross. When parents are diligent to teach their children to honor the Sabbath they will give them a proper structure through which to understand all their future time management. Teach them to honor the Sabbath so they learn to structure their time around worship rather than making worship one of their weekly options. Lead your children into a full life of thankfulness by reviving obedience to the neglected fourth commandment.

## **Study Questions**

1. How are Genesis 2:1-3 and Exodus 16:26-30 important in helping the New Testament believer work through the abiding obligations toward the Lord's Day.
2. From Exodus 20:8-11, what are the two basic principles that can be applied to the Sabbath that would help the Christian make decisions about what should be done. In what way does Isaiah 58:13-14 complement the 4th commandment?
3. Define and explain works of necessity and mercy. How are they related to the Lord's Day?
4. This chapter teaches that one of the ways to celebrate the Sabbath is by making yourself available to your family. How does family time help fulfill both Deuteronomy 6:7 and Acts 2:42?
5. How do you protect your practices on the Lord's Day from becoming a day of drudgery for your children?