

### The Law of God, Part 5: Like a String Around My Finger

**Exodus 20:1 ESV (Pg. 35)** And God spoke all these words, saying, **2** “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. **3** “You shall have no other gods before me. **4** “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. **5** You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, **6** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. **7** “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. **8** “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, **10** but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. **11** For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

- I. One of the movies that is a “must-watch” for the Sharp family during Christmas is the 1947 Frank Capra classic, “It’s a Wonderful Life”. One of the great characters in that film is George Bailey’s Uncle Billy, played by Thomas Mitchell. Uncle Billy had a pet crow and was a forgetful mess, a fact which he tried to counteract by tying pieces of string around his fingers in order to remind him of various appointments and duties that he was required to perform throughout his cluttered day.
  - A. While this may seem to be a completely odd and archaic method of reminder to those of you born less than 30 or 40 years ago; who have grown up with chirping digital devices in your pockets to remind you of every possible thing, I actually remember my mother tying strings around my chubby little fingers to remind me to turn in a paper, or pay a school lunch bill! And it worked!
  - B. Today we are taking a look at the 4th commandment in our current series on the 10 Commandments. It is the last commandment in the list that directly instructs us how we are to worship and relate to Yahweh God. **“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”**
    1. It is an interesting commandment in what it requires. The first three commandments start by establishing some sort of restriction, stating in the negative either “You shall have no...” or “You shall not...”.
    2. But the 4th commandment begins with a word that tells us what **to** do, as opposed to what we are **forbidden** to do. **“Remember”**.
  - C. John Calvin, in speaking of this commandment, commented that “we know how prone (people) are to fall into indifference, unless they have some props to lean on or some stimulants to (remind) them in maintaining their care and zeal for (spiritual things).”<sup>1</sup>
    1. While there are many facets of the Sabbath that we will discuss today, Calvin is saying it’s primary purpose is to be God’s “string around our finger”, reminding us who our source is and on what basis we are redeemed.
    2. And we need such a reminder for the simple reason that we are so prone to forget! Our best intentions to remember that which is vital to our well-being

quickly dissolves into a foggy haze of false urgencies, missed opportunities and loathsome regrets. We need to be reminded.

- D. Because of this, we need constant reminders in order to remember the Lord, to pursue him faithfully, and to love him passionately.
  - 1. Throughout the scriptures, he has provided such reminders. In Genesis, he provides a rainbow as a symbol of his covenant of peace, in the New Testament, even our marriages are held up as a symbol of Christ's covenantal love for us. And there is no reminder of God's love that has been given to us that is as powerful as the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - 2. **Galatians 6:14 ESV** But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
- II. Similarly, the Sabbath stands across the covenants as a perpetual reminder of our need to keep God, and our relationship to him, forever at the forefront of our hearts and minds. There are several things that the Sabbath teaches us about God...
  - A. First, we are reminded by the Sabbath from whom it is that all of our blessings flow. **“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..”**
    - 1. God restricts his people to a maximum 6-day work week. It is on these six days, beginning at sundown on Saturday, and lasting through sundown on Friday that they were to do all of the work that the week required.
      - a) Not only was the seventh day a Sabbath **from** work, so they would have much needed “time off” (we’ll talk more about that momentarily), but it was a Sabbath **to** the Lord their God.
      - b) While work was prohibited, they were not to “veg out”; rather they were to turn their attention to God and find refreshment in him. We find in other places in the Law that it was appropriate to gather at the temple, and even to offer sacrifices, and observe festivals on the Sabbath.
    - 2. So the work that was prohibited was the kind that increases our personal wealth, and builds our private kingdoms, as we neglect our bodies, our families, and our God. But to give one-seventh of their week to resting and remembering God was their divinely appointed way of saying that everything they needed came from God, and they could opt out of the rat race.
      - a) This principle was already illustrated for them in the ordinances given to them concerning the Manna that fell miraculously from the sky to feed them during their 40-year journey in the wilderness.
      - b) On the sixth day before the Sabbath, twice as much Manna was provided for them so that they would not have to gather any on the Sabbath (in fact, they were prohibited from doing so). This taught them that God was their provider, and that their labors added nothing to his ability to provide.
  - B. Secondly, the Sabbath reminded them that they were distinct from other peoples. The people of other nations may have taken time to rest, but they would not think of extending that privilege to their children, their slaves or their livestock; or even to the resident aliens living in their midst! But listen again to God's commandment for his people: **“On (the Sabbath) 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.”

1. The Sabbath was to be a mark of distinction, both for the Israelites and those living in their domain. It was to be a curiosity among the nations, that in honoring their God with one day out of seven, these people would acknowledge and celebrate their divine provision, and would be refreshed.
  2. This privilege would extend to everyone who sought shelter in the God of Israel; native-born or alien, human or livestock. No other nation had anything that could compare to this privilege of God’s covenant people!
- C. And we must not overlook the value of the 24 hours of rest granted by God for his people. This is something that we in America could really learn from. Here, true rest is almost judged and frowned upon. People boast that they are hard working and view anyone who takes frequent, intentional breaks as lazy.
1. Most of us get a day or two off from our jobs each week, but instead of truly resting, we start planning all of the things we either want to, or feel we have to do on the weekend. So we run our kids around to every sport, we run off to the lake, we shop all day, we start another expensive and time-consuming home improvement project. The one thing we rarely do is rest.
  2. Before we get extended time off in the summer, we spend months (sometimes years) planning how we can squeeze every once of fun out of our time off, and after two weeks we return home, exhausted, sunburned and deeply in debt; feeling like we need a vacation to recover from vacation!
    - a) **Psalm 103:13 ESV** As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. **14** For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. **15** As for man, his days are like grass; he flourishes like a flower of the field; **16** for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. **17** But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children, **18** to those who keep his covenant and **remember** to do his commandments.
    - b) God knows how to take care of you better than you do. He designed you! He knows that your physical body, as well as your soul, needs genuine rest. You can only truly function for so long without it. Jesus actually said that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath<sup>2</sup>. God designed it for human flourishing.
- D. The Sabbath was also designed to highlight God’s role as creator of the entire cosmos, and his order in creating it. “**For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**”
1. The Sabbath is made holy in that it is a reflection of God’s order when he created the universe. He spread his labor across 6 days, and then rested on the seventh day.
    - a) This order of creation was obviously in anticipation of the Sabbath as a gift that God would give to his people. Why do I say that? First, God is

limitless in his power, and therefore could have easily created the universe in six nanoseconds (or less) as opposed to six days.

- b) He was demonstrating a human pattern of progressively advancing order and dominion; improvement and refinement. This was seen in both creation, and in the coming of the Kingdom with Jesus.
  - c) But also, we know that that God does not need (as we do) to rest. **Psalm 121:4 ESV Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.** His ceasing from labor and resting was showing us the value of reflecting on our labor and being refreshing from it (though he needed no such refreshment). In remembering the Sabbath, we honor God by reflecting his creative pattern, acknowledging his supremacy.
- E. But there is also another reminder in the Sabbath. In Deuteronomy 5, Moses repeats the entire 10 Commandments to the people before they enter the Promised Land. The two versions are almost identical. But in the fourth Commandment as stated in Deuteronomy, we see a notable difference.
1. Instead of reminding the people of God's Creation, Moses reminds them of his redemption. **Deuteronomy 5:15 ESV You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.**
  2. **"Therefore** the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day". Why would the fact that God had delivered the people of Israel from slavery obligate them to take a day off to rest, and turn their attention toward God?
- III. We actually don't fully understand the answer to that question until after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection and the book of Hebrews is written. The theology of the Sabbath Day is an overarching theme in that book. It is there that God's created order and his redemption of a people for himself collide.
- A. In chapter 4, the writer of that book quotes King David from Psalm 95, yet he attributes the quote, not to David, but directly to the Holy Spirit. The quote is in reference to the Israelites and their rebellion to God as they are traveling through the wilderness on the way to the promised land.
1. In the quote, God says that because of their hardened hearts and their rebellion, the people will not "enter into his rest", meaning that they will not enter the promised land. By their sin and self-reliance, they have forfeited it.
  2. And we know that is exactly what happened! Over the course of 40 years, that entire rebellious generation fell dead in the burning sands of the wilderness. Only their children and grandchildren inherited the land.
- B. But the Holy Spirit, through David, uses a curious term as he is encouraging readers to enter into God's rest. He says, **"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion..."**<sup>3</sup>
1. Why is this curious? Because David was born almost 300 years after the Exodus. He was born more than 200 years after the Promised Land was settled. And yet he speaks of an opportunity that exists to enter God's rest **today**. Because of this, the writer makes a conclusion...

2. **Hebrews 4:9-10 ESV** So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.
- C. This, more than any other thing is the meaning of the Sabbath for us. It reminds us that God has ceased from his labor. This reality is what caused Jesus Christ to cry out as he was dying on the cross, "It is finished!"<sup>4</sup>
    1. Because of this, you and I can also cease from our labor; our striving to live righteously enough to earn God's favor. We are invited to recognize that his finished work is enough for us so that we can begin to rest in him.
    2. From now on, every Sunday is not just a day of rest for our bodies, but a reminder of a great deliverance given to us by Christ's work alone, and not by any of our own labor.
  - D. I can only imagine that there is someone here today that is tightly gripping your penalty flag, ready to toss it at me on the basis of the fact that the Sabbath in scripture always refers to Saturday. Let me briefly comment on that.
    1. Jesus was raised, not on the Sabbath, but on the first day of the week<sup>5</sup> (Sunday) making that day holy for early believers. In the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit was also poured out on the church on the first day of the week<sup>6</sup>, not the Sabbath.
    2. Making note of these two things, the record of the New Testament is clear. The early believers chose to gather on Sunday (the first day of the week), as opposed to Saturday (the last day of the week), because they believed that God had sanctified that day by the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
  - E. Just think for a moment of what a beautiful picture that paints for us. Under the Old Covenant, you would work for six days, your brow sweating, so that you could enter into God's rest on the last day. But under the New Covenant, someone has done the work for us, so we **begin** by entering his rest, and then we proceed to our labor empowered by him, and working for his glory. The Sabbath changes everything!
- IV. Today as we come to the table, I want to invite you to remember what Christ has done so that you could enter into his perfect rest. I want to invite you to repent if you have neglected both the rest that the gospel provides, by striving to be good enough to earn something from God. I also want to invite you to repent if you have neglected the actual physical rest required for both your body and your soul.
    - A. Let the symbols to the broken body and shed blood of Christ, remind you of what has been accomplished for you, and enter into his rest.
    - B. Let these elements, like the Sabbath, be a holy "string around your finger" today. to remind you of what has been accomplished for you if you believe.
    - C. **1 Corinthians 11:32 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/cal/exodus-20.html> (See verse 8. Paraphrased by Marc Sharp)

<sup>2</sup> Mark 2:27

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 3:7-8

<sup>4</sup> John 19:30

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1

<sup>6</sup> [www.bible.ca/7-sunday-pentecost.htm](http://www.bible.ca/7-sunday-pentecost.htm)