

## Honoring the Sabbath

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*by Kenneth Bridge*



*Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength... It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less. - Charles Spurgeon*

***“Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. (Deuteronomy 5:12 N.I.V)***

Exodus 20:8-11

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Matthew 6:1-11

Hebrews 4

We live in an era where more and more businesses remain open 24/7, where the constitutionality of Sunday Blue Laws is challenged, and where the public display of the Ten Commandments comes under increasing attack. And yet as practicing Christians we try to live as we believe God intends for us to live and so it serves us well to revisit the fundamental

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precepts God has revealed to us and come to an understanding of how we can live them out.

The Ten Commandments are found in two locations. First in Exodus they are promulgated at the beginning of the forty year adventure and are intended to govern the behavior of wandering pilgrims still seeking their Promised Land. That they are repeated in Deuteronomy (Greek for second law) is significant. Here on the Plains of Moab Moses is giving parting instructions to the Hebrews. These laws will also govern their behavior once they have settled their new country. They are for all people and all time.

The rationale for observing the Sabbath varies between the two occasions. In Exodus we are told to rest on the Sabbath because God rested on the seventh day; in Deuteronomy we are to rest because God has redeemed His people. The apparent disparity dissolves when we come to an understanding of what is meant by God resting.

Many people, judging from their practice of Sabbath rest, seem to picture God, weary from six days of world making, sleeping in on the seventh day, arising late, putting on His cloud robe and oversized fuzzy Noah's Ark slippers with the giraffe head jutting out over the toes and making His way to the top of heaven's staircase. There Gabriel meets Him with the Sunday Jerusalem Post and a cup of steaming coffee. Physical recovery from over exertion cannot be the intended meaning of God resting.

The Pharisees of Jesus's time went to ridiculous lengths to build a hedge around the Law to protect against accidental transgression. Spitting on the Sabbath was forbidden because it could result in a furrow where it struck the ground and that would be plowing and that would be considered labor. Looking in a mirror was forbidden for a woman on the Sabbath because in her vanity she might be tempted to pluck a grey hair and that too would be work. It was their misunderstanding of rest that brought them into conflict with Jesus. He saw healing and feeding and helping as expressions of rest, not departures from it.

Seven is a number that connotes completion, perfection, harmony. And the rest of God on the seventh day is an expression of complete harmony between creation and God and His purposes. The Hebrew Shalom, like the New Testament concept of salvation is more than a passive lack of conflict, the assurance of a future verdict of not guilty, pie in the sky bye and bye, but an active, vibrant awareness of entering into Eternal and Abundant life in the here and now. The redemption of God's people at the Red Sea and the Rest of God are one and the same.

And so we observe the Sabbath not as a passive and torpid recovery from overwork, or as an arduous and obligatory observation, but as a celebration of New Life, an opportunity to recapture the rhythms of redemption after slogging through a tough week in a fallen world. It is a time of healing and refreshment.

I remember driving to church in a coat and tie on a sizzling, summer Sunday morning in my pickup truck without air conditioning, my mind whirling with the details of what I needed to do that morning and seeing someone stepping out of his house in a pair of shorts to hook up his boat. And later in a small county church I pastored in New York state on a bitter winter Sunday

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morning at 5:30 am as I prayed while shoveling out the front sidewalk to the church, clinging closer to God each time the shovel bit deep into the snow, and throwing off the weight of cares and trials with each shovelful I tossed to the side, I would think about those people who were at that moment turning over and burrowing deeper under their covers for a little more sleep. And on those occasions I would feel sorry for those people who did not know the joy that was mine as I experienced the Sabbath rest of God.

Further Study:

1. Which of my Sunday activities reflect a joyful resting in harmony with God?
2. Which ones are obligations that drain my joy?
3. What do I do about it?

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