

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear friends in Christ,

I don't have to tell you that we live in a society in which the cultural norm is to keep going and going and going at a frenetic pace. We rarely stop to rest. The United States is the only developed nation that does not require employers to give paid vacations or paid holidays. Nearly a quarter of the workers in the U.S. do not get paid vacations. About the same percentage do not get paid holidays. Of those that do get paid holidays, 57% of those workers have unused vacation days or time off at the end of a year. They could have taken more paid vacation, but for whatever reason they did not.

In addition many people don't take a day off during the week. Some work extra hours for extra income. Some are required to work 7 days a week. Some work two jobs or even three to try to make ends meet.

Even when we are off of work we tend to be extremely busy or engaged in our "time off." Maintenance of the house and yard, catching up on paying bills, engagement in your favorite hobby, shopping, screen time – studies estimate that on average 40% of Americans' free time is spent in front of the TV – and that doesn't count time in front of other screens: computer, video games, smartphones, etc. All of this keeps our minds distracted. We are continuously "on" and accessible to the world. And the world is almost always accessing us.

We are people who rarely get real rest. Most of us tend to be tired, stressed, anxious, frazzled, exhausted, bouncing from thing to thing, and barely hanging on.

What if there was a way to get REAL R & R? Real rest and relaxation? Today we will see that our loving Father who wants us to have all good things, gives us a Commandment... the 3rd Commandment ... that helps us get just that: REAL R&R.

So let's listen to the Commandment:

Exodus 20:8-10 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

The 3rd Commandment is unique among the Commandments because we don't in a direct sense follow this commandment. What does the Commandment literally say? How did God want his Old Testament people, Israel, to do? What would keeping this Commandment look like to them? Then we'll take another look at the Commandment and apply it to us today.

What it literally says is that Sunday through Friday would be regular work days, and the Sabbath day, the 7 day of the week, SATURDAY, was to be a day that was kept holy. Notice: not any day, or Sunday... but SATURDAY. What does it mean to keep it holy? To keep something holy means to keep something set apart for the Lord. If you live a holy life, you are living a life set apart for the Lord. When we consecrate the elements for the Lord's Supper we are making them holy in the sense that we are setting them apart for the Lord as we observe the sacrament. Keeping the Sabbath day (that is, Saturday) holy, means keeping it set apart as a special for the Lord. That means that the day could not be used for you and your needs... it was

to be a day of the rest from your labors... a day wholly dedicated to the Lord.

God was so serious about this, he was careful to close all the loopholes. "Okay, I must rest, but I'll put my kids to work. "Nor your son or daughter." Okay, then my servants will work. "Nor your male or female servant." Well, maybe if I just get the oxen started... "Nor your animals." Okay, well, those people living among us aren't Jewish, so we'll put them to work. "Nor the foreigner residing in your towns."

God shows how serious he is by tying it in to the pattern of Creation. God made the heavens and earth in 6 days, and on the 7th he rested (ceased from his labors.) If it's good for God, it's good for you who were created in his image.

It's worth noting that in Deut. 5 where the commandments are listed again, there is additional information given as to why this Commandment is to be observed: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day." (Deut. 5:15).

In other words, it was a day in which they remembered that they worshiped a God who is mighty to save... and already had saved when he rescued them from slavery. So as a day dedicated to the Lord, it would not only be rest, but also a day of remembering God's Word, God's promises, God's great saving deeds.

Now, here's the challenging part. We do not teach nor observe keeping the Sabbath day as I have just described it, do we? Are we breaking God's law? The Jews take issue with us for this. So do 7th Day Adventists, a group that calls themselves Christian, but they do continue to teach and require observance of the Saturday day of worship and rest. Why do we not?

Well, we better have a Scriptural reason.... So let's look at the Scriptural answer. Now I'll admit this is a little heavy, but I'll do my best to explain. The best explanation is really found in Galatians. Chapter and verse? The whole letter! Well, we just can't take the time right now to read and study this letter which is 6 chapters long. But you could read it at home.

But I will summarize. Paul wrote Galatians to believers who were being told that Christ alone was not enough. Christ was a good start, but in addition, a believer also had to learn and follow the Old Testament rules and regulations. So they were teaching that not only did you need to know and believe in Christ, but you also had to know and follow Old Testament laws like circumcision, abstaining from certain types of foods, observing certain holy days...

INCLUDING, resting and worshiping on the Sabbath day... Saturday. Is the way of salvation through Christ PLUS obedience to Old Testament laws? Paul says: "(2:15-16) **We... know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.**" And (2:21) "**If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.**" In other words, Christ's death on the cross is all-sufficient for our salvation. It is complete. If someone teaches that to be saved, you must trust in Christ AND... fill in the blank. ANYTHING added to this equation nullifies grace. Trust in Christ AND keep the Sabbath. Christ is insufficient, and your works must be added. No!

In Galatians 3:25 Paul says, "**Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.**" We have been set free from all of the Old Testament rules and regulations. There is so much more about this in Galatians. Read it!

Colossians 2:13-17

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.

All of the laws of the Old Testament stood as a testimony to the people's sinfulness and their need for salvation. Salvation came in Christ Jesus. The written code with its regulations is cancelled in Christ Jesus. This includes the regulation of Saturday rest and worship.

Ephesians 2:14-15

14 For he [Christ] himself is our peace... by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.

And back to Colossians 2... **16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.**

The Old Testament Sabbath was a shadow. It was a law given before Christ to point to Christ. The Sabbath day was a day of rest and worship that reminded people of God's rescue from slavery. It pointed ahead to the perfect rest that would come through the promised Christ who would rescue all from the slavery to sin. Jesus Christ is the reality. The Sabbath day was a shadow.

If you are standing at the corner of a building and the sun is shining from the right angle, someone may be approaching, but you can't yet see them... only their shadow. You can tell a lot about the person coming... maybe even recognize them as a friend. That shadow is useful. But when they come around the corner and you see them, you would be foolish to keep looking at the shadow, right?

The Old Testament Sabbath was a shadow of the real rest found in Christ. And now that real rest is here. We can do away with the shadow. Jesus is the true Sabbath!

Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Rest = Sabbath. Come to Jesus and you are enjoying Sabbath. Apart from Jesus there cannot be Sabbath / rest.

Oh, so I don't need to feel guilty about not observing Saturday as a day of physical rest and worship? Correct. So we should just cross the 3rd Commandment off the list of Commandments as an Old Testament ceremonial law that applied to Israel before Christ, but not to Christ's people today? Do we just get a free pass on this one? Everyone automatically gets credit for the 3rd Commandment? Well, not so fast. There is a universal application of this Commandment that remains, namely, the principal of regular rest from *our* labors and trusting in God and *his* promises. The principal that true rest for our souls is found only in Jesus.

So... how can we find real rest and relaxation? Only in Jesus. Where do you find Jesus? Only in God's Word. So how do we keep the 3rd Commandment? By receiving the rest God gives in his Word. In other words, regular time in the Word, remembering the Word, meditating on the Word, and putting that Word into practice in our lives.

Please note carefully, that to do so requires times of physical rest. When we go, go go and are always busy, there is simply not time to receive rest for our souls in God's Word.

So, *how have you broken this Commandment?* Here are ways people break it:

- By not taking the rest you need, you break this Commandment. And by rest I mean both physical and spiritual... the two are intertwined.

I started the message today by describing how extremely busy Americans are and how little we actually rest. When we are always busy, always engaged in something... or really, always DISTRACTED, then we cannot find the real rest God wants us to have. I believe Satan's biggest tool in separating people from Christ (or preventing them from coming to him) is busyness, distraction, and our pace of life. It's killing us physically and spiritually. And those two go together more than we realize! Without real physical rest there is no opportunity for spiritual rest.

ILLUST: Can you remember the last time you had true rest? For me, it was four years ago. My wife and I went on a cruise 15th anniversary. I had my cell phone on as we left port, doing some last minute texting and e-mails. When the signal went away, I turned it off and it stayed off for four and a half GLORIOUS days. No e-mail. No phone calls. No text messages. NOTHING. No one could reach me. The time on that cruise ship was truly set apart, and in that sense, was holy and was Sabbath. And I honestly can't remember another time in my life when I was able to relax like that. That's what a Sabbath day is supposed to look like. But that kind of rest is almost impossible to find today.

- However, physical rest like that is not enough if that's all it is. Accompanying the physical rest must also be spiritual rest.
- God doesn't want us to rest and empty ourselves. Rather he wants us to rest and fill ourselves with him, his love, his word, his promises. He wants us to listen to God, and answer him in prayer. Physical rest coupled with spiritual rest is Sabbath.
- Failure to rest results in burn out physically or spiritually, and I've found two very often go together.
- Instead of Sabbath we use stimulants. We push ourselves and keep on going. We start our day with coffee to get us going. By afternoon we're dragging so energy drinks or more coffee... and sugar. Then on the ride home we start crashing, so more stimulants. Then at night we can't wind down so we you have a drink or two or three. Then you sleep, but three hours later your body is wide awake because the alcohol has metabolized and turned to sugars and you can't sleep. The alarm goes off and you start it all over. What if instead, you took a true day of rest?

So what can be done about this?

Confess. Stop. Hiding it. Rationalizing it. (Everyone does it. We need the money.) Confess it for what it is. Idolatry. You can't trust God. You have to take care of yourself. It's selfishness. It's sin. Confess and plead to God for mercy.

God hears your confession. And here is what he did. He sent his Son to rescue you.

- Jesus kept the Sabbath. He observed the Sabbath days. When in Nazareth he went to the Synagogue on the Sabbath "*as was his custom.*" Jesus also took physical rest. He took time off by himself to pray. (See Mark 6.) He was never rushed, or frenetic or pressed for time. He never short-changed time with his Father. In other words, Jesus was our perfect substitute.
- And he didn't stop there. He took our curse of our Sabbath breaking. We haven't made time for God and his Word. We haven't always received the rest Jesus offers. We have sinned against the 3rd Commandment. But Jesus took the curse of our sin upon himself and took it to the cross where he accepted the full penalty for all of our sins.

Now what...

- Your body needs periods of rest. Your body needs a 24 hour period each week to recover, rest, and recharge. And not just physical rest, but spiritual rest too. Make it a

- day to focus on God and his Word and promises. Word and prayer with physical rest makes for a powerful, restorative, refreshing day of rest as God intended. (NOTE: Pastors struggle to do this. I have found that for me, the most regular 24 hour period I can take off is Sunday afternoon until Monday afternoon. But even there other things sneak in.)
- Taking a 24 hour period off is a way to trust yourself and all your affairs to God. You can let go and let God on that day. What would it look like for you to take a 24 hour period where you didn't work to make money for your needs, didn't shop to put buy supplies for you or your family, didn't pour yourself into your hobby, but made it a day turn your attention to God. Tip: Start it with an evening, and end the next evening.
 - But some do take this to the opposite extreme. Too much rest and not enough work. Too much idle time. What can you *do* in service to others. Isn't that what our labor is? One day set apart for rest for God. 6 days in service. Most have a two day weekend. Might you use one of those days in service to the Lord? (Examples.)
 - Regular time in the Word. Church. Bible study (why don't more people come?) Personal devotions. Family devotions.
 - Not a legalistic law. But rest IS needed... both physical and spiritual. The two go together much more than you think. You probably need to be intentional if it's going to happen!

So... remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Or as we might phrase it for today: Remember to take needed rest for body and soul, intentionally setting apart that time for God. Amen.