

¹² *Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.* ¹³ *Six days you shall labor and do all your work,* ¹⁴ *but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.* ¹⁵ *And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.*

Text: Deuteronomy 5:12-15 A 6/3/18 2 Cor. 4:5-12 Mk 2:23-28 Ps. 122 Resp. Ps. 84
Hymns: 1, 44, 755, 53

SABBATH REST FOR OUR SOULS

Open now Thy gates of beauty,
Zion, let me enter there,
Where my soul in joyful duty
Waits for Him who answers prayer.
Oh, how blessed is this place,
Filled with solace, light, and grace!

Speak, O God, and I will hear Thee,
Let Thy will be done indeed;
May I undisturbed draw near Thee
While Thou dost Thy people feed.
Here of life the fountain flows,
Here is balm for all our woes. (TLH #1:1, 5)

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

Three months after God delivered the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, as they were just beginning their journey to the Promised Land, God gave them the Ten Commandments (Ex. 19-20). It was now forty years later, just before God's people were to enter the Promised Land. Our text is from the book of Deuteronomy. "Deuteronomy" means "second giving of the law." God now gave His people the Ten Commandments a second time, impressing upon His people then and upon us now how gravely important the Ten Commandments are for us.

Our text focuses on the Third Commandment: "*Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you.*" God knows that regular, weekly worship is so important for us and our faith relationship with Him that He made it one of His Ten Commandments. As God

expects us to keep the other Commandments (“*You shall not murder,*” “*You shall not steal,*” etc.), so God expects us to keep the Third Commandment: “*Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy.*”

“*Sabbath*” means “*rest.*” In Old Testament times it was a sin to work on the Sabbath day. God commanded His Old Testament people, “*Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work; you nor your son nor your daughter, nor your manservant nor your maidservant, nor your ox nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle*” (If farm animals were working, people were working with them.) “*...nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you.*” God made it absolutely clear: no work on the Sabbath day by anyone. The Sabbath was a day of rest for everyone.

The people had six days each week to work at their job, work at home, and do whatever else they needed and wanted to do. But the Sabbath day was “*holy*” – from the original text: “*consecrated/set apart for a holy purpose.*” God told His people, “*The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.*” The Sabbath day belonged to God.

God had established this during the Creation week. He created everything during the first six days of that week. Genesis says, “*The heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day....*” “*On the seventh day God rested,*” not because He needed rest, but because He was establishing a day of rest for His Old Testament people. Genesis continues, “*Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work*” (2:1-3). The first time God gave His people the Commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy He added, “*For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth*” (and everything else), “*and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it*” (Ex. 20:8-11). As God worked six days and did no work on the seventh day, so His Old Testament people were to work six days and do no work on the seventh day.

God commanded His people, “*Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*” The Sabbath day wasn’t just a day off from work, the Sabbath day was a “*holy*” day. God had said earlier, “*The seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly*” (Lev. 23:3, NIV). “*Observe My Sabbaths and have reverence for My sanctuary*” (Lev. 19:30). The Sabbath was a day for worship, gathering at the tabernacle (the huge worship tent used during the forty years in the wilderness), then the temple and eventually also their synagogues (their churches). God established the Sabbath so that one day each week His people would rest from everything else and gather together to worship Him and hear His Word. God’s main purpose in establishing the Sabbath was not: “*It’s a sin to work on the Sabbath day.*” God’s main purpose in establishing the

Sabbath was so that His people would stay strong spiritually through regularly worshiping and hearing His Word.

When God says, *“Observe the Sabbath day,”* “observe” in the original also means “guard,” “preserve,” “exercise great care over.” We are to “exercise great care” to preserve the Sabbath day, and “exercise great care” to observe the Sabbath day.

God told His people, *“Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”* God’s people had been slaves in Egypt, with no way to free themselves. God brought the ten plagues on the Egyptians. God parted the Red Sea so His people could escape the Egyptian army. When the Egyptian army then tried to follow God’s people through the Red Sea, God made the waters come together again and destroyed the Egyptian army. God’s mercy and grace were His people’s motivation in obeying Him and observing the Sabbath day.

We were spiritually dead, slaves to sin by nature. There was nothing we could do to set ourselves free and save ourselves. *“But God,”* Scripture says, *“who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”* (Eph. 2:4-5). *“For when we were still without strength, ... Christ died for the ungodly”* (Ro. 5:6). Jesus died for all of our sins on the cross. Jesus set us free from sin’s guilt and power, and saved us. God’s grace and mercy to us in Jesus are our motivation to serve Him and obey Him, including obeying the Third Commandment.

God tells us, His New Testament people, in Colossians 2:16-17, *“Do not let anyone judge you ... with regard to ... a Sabbath day. [It is] a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ”* (NIV). Nowhere in the New Testament does God command us to rest physically on the Sabbath. The Old Testament Sabbath’s physical rest was a picture of spiritual rest in Jesus. Jesus says, *“Come to Me, ... and you will find rest for your souls”* (Mt. 11:28a, 29b.) Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament Sabbath by giving us rest for our souls in the forgiveness of our sins.

It’s not a sin anymore to work on the Sabbath day. But God still commands us in the New Testament to gather together regularly to worship Him and hear His Word. The writer to the Hebrews urges us, *“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for [God] who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the [Judgment] Day approaching”* (10:23-25).

The Old Testament Sabbath was on Saturday. The early New Testament Christians changed their worship day to Sunday because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday. In commanding us, “*Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy,*” God isn’t telling us New Testament believers to worship on any particular day of the week. God is commanding us to worship regularly, each week. God deserves our time, effort, and heart’s devotion to gather together each week and worship Him. God knows we need to regularly hear about Jesus who died for our sins on the cross, and hear all the other truths of His Word. As we regularly “*observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy*” God keeps us close to Him, God keeps our faith strong, and God keeps us on the path to eternal life, peace, and rest with Him in heaven. He tells us in His Word, “*There remains ... a Sabbath rest for the people of God. ... Make every effort to enter that rest*” (He. 4:9a, 11a, NIV).

Christian friends, “*Exercise great care*” to observe the Sabbath day. Come to God’s house regularly to worship Him and hear His Word. Receive true Sabbath rest for your souls.

Abide, O dear Redeemer,
Among us with Thy Word
And thus now and hereafter
True peace and joy afford.

Abide with richest blessings
Among us, bounteous Lord;
Let us in grace and wisdom
Grow daily through Thy Word.

Abide, O faithful Savior,
Among us with Thy love;
Grant steadfastness and help us
To reach our home above. Amen. (TLH #53:2, 4, 6)