



THE SABBATH



"And so the whole universe was completed.
By the seventh day God finished what He had been doing
and stopped working.
He blessed the seventh day and set it apart as a special day,
because by that day He had completed His creation and stopped working."
(Genesis 2 v 1f)

God's 4th Commandment is - (Exodus 20 v 8)

"Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. You have six days in which to do your work,
but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work...
...In six days I, the Lord, made the earth, the sky, the sea and everything in them, but on
the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the Lord, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy."

- God commands that on the Sabbath we are to cease work (but not all activity).
- We are to rest and reflect upon God. It is His day, not ours; we are to keep it for Him.
- We rejoice and celebrate freely and obediently. We are to focus on God and the Gospel.
- This is the special day shared by God and His Covenant people... God and His family's day.
- The Sabbath is a breathing space for quality time together.

God's 7th day of Creation was the 1st day of the newly created man and woman. God worked then rested,
while we begin with a rest day then the week's work. Grace and Gospel come first, then work. We do not
earn our rest. The order is important. For Christians Sunday is the first day of the week, not the last.

Every 7th day Christians bear witness to God's sovereign Lordship – He tells us when to work and when
to rest. We show the world God's gracious gift of rest. We show that we obey His command to rest rather
than the world's demand that we work. We show that we do not need to work 24/7 to keep the world spinning
because it is God who does that, not us.

The Sabbath is a clear cut boundary...a marker set down by God. It shows who is obedient and who is not. It
shows ourselves, and others, whether God rules our lives. It shows whether we trust His provision or whether
we only depend upon our own efforts all the time. Do we give God 1/7th of our week, of our life?
(Remember that in truth all 7/7^{ths} belong to God)! The Sabbath is a clear measurement of the rest of our
discipleship.

The Sabbath applies not only to ancient or modern Jews; it applies to God's people today, the Church in all
its branches...and not only to "religious types", but to every single person whom God has created. God
demands that everyone (without exception) keep the Sabbath holy. Otherwise there will be hell to pay!

If that sounds harsh, remember that it is the demand and command of our loving and wise Heavenly
Father who knows better than us what is good for us. We would work 24/7 till we collapse then hear a doctor
advise us to take a day a week off, the same day preferably, and keep it sacrosanct! God Himself did not need
a rest after Creating the universe, His power is unlimited. He was giving us a model example to follow for
our own good. However, remember that gracious though His gift is, it is still a Divine command, so we must
obey what Dad says whether we want to or not, whether we see the sense in it or not!

We must not keep the Sabbath just for our own selfish benefit, beneficial though it is. We keep it for God not
for ourselves selfishly. He graciously provides it for our benefit; we graciously receive the gift and honour
Him by using the opportunity wisely. We use it not simply to rest and recharge our batteries, but even more
so to worship Him and meet together as His family. What kind of a family is it which never sits down
together and never shares a communion meal together and never prays together? So we do not just idly rest;
we positively and actively celebrate. We celebrate God's Creation, God's Grace, God's Salvation, God's

Word, God's Adoption of us, God's Life on Earth, God's Resurrection, God's Pentecost....and so many other things.....basically we celebrate God Himself, the Lord of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is for preaching this Good News, for listening to God's Word to us, for chewing over these things and for re-thinking, re-evaluating, re-orientating and re-organising our response of obedience, devotion and life of service of God and His world. This includes, but is more than, rest and more than Church attendance. This is self-renouncing faith. This is being free for God and His service. This is about being free to be God's creature as God means us to be and not the slave of self or the world's demands.

God decides what we will do or not do on the Sabbath, not us. The Sabbath is not about rules and regulations, nor about legalistic prohibitions. Human laws should not obscure God's gracious Law. God deals with every single one of us personally. Each of us works it out one to one with God. We do so remembering three key points:

(1) The Holy Day belongs to God not us – it is The Lord's Day. (Every day is His day but the Sabbath points to this fact). We therefore should not impose our programme on it but sit free, relaxed and unplanned for God to guide us by His Word given in Church. We go to Church not as an obligation, duty, rigid enslaving programme but as the simple, natural, thankful free response to God's gracious offer.

(2) The Holy Day is about freedom, joy and celebration of God's grace. It is not about laws, moral ideals or busy programmes of events. There is a lot of joylessness and counterfeit, pretend joy in Church circles. It should be belly laugh, heart-felt, genuine and all pervasive joy - the joy which eclipses sorrow and suffering and all kinds of adversity – a foretaste of the joy of Heaven.

(3) The Holy Day is not given to each individual person in isolation but to all of us together in relationship and fellowship with one another as God's family. It is for us as a society, a community and as a congregation. It is not for being alone; it is not just for the immediate family; it is for God and His wider family. We should meet with more people on Sunday than normally. Sunday has the time to deepen relationships which other days don't have. Sunday is not about "going to church", clocking in for a service, as about being the Church, meeting together to hear God's Word and going out together to spread God's Word. The community is built around the Gospel.

The Sabbath has three aspects – past, present and future. It looks back to the 7th day of Creation, Easter Day and the Day of Pentecost. It is a timeless present moment of quality time with God and His family, our family. The Sabbath is also a foretaste of the eternal day in Heaven at the end of our lives, when all our work will be finished, all our battles fought and won. It points to God's judgment day and salvation day.

