

GOD'S TOP TEN – THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TODAY!

#4. REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY

or “THE DAY OF REST”

This is week seven in our series “*God’s Top Ten*”. We’re looking at the Ten Commandments, which are now over 3,500 years old. We’re asking the question. Are they still relevant today? As we’ve been looking at the Ten Commandments in reverse order, this morning we’re going to look at the fourth commandment. It’s much longer than the six we’ve looked at so far. Exodus 20:8-11 (NIV), ***“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.”***

Let’s put this commandment in the framework of modern living for a moment. Here are some phrases we hear a lot of today. “*I’m too busy*”, “*I don’t know where time goes*”, “*I never have any time to myself*”, and “*Technology never lets me slow down*”. Strange how we say all that in an day and age where people work less hours than previous generations, and where we have more time saving devices than ever before.

I think this story, told by J. John in his book about the Ten Commandments is typical of the thinking of this day (Ten. Victor Book, 2000 p.186f). *“There was a business executive who was walking along a beautiful sun drenched beach talking on his cell phone. Over the conversation all he can hear is the sound of the waves, and the gulls crying. Ahead of him, a man in simple clothes is dozing in the shade of a fishing boat that has been pulled on to the beach. As he passes, the fisherman wakes up, and the executive who is waiting for another phone call, decides to make conversation. “The weather is great; there are plenty of fish: why are you lying around instead of going out and catching more?” The fisherman gently replied, “Because I caught enough this morning.” “But just imagine”, said the executive, “if you went out three or four times a day and brought home three or four times as many fish. You know what would happen?” Puzzled the fisherman shook his head. “Why”, said the executive, becoming enthusiastic, “you could buy yourself a motorboat. Then after, say, two years, you could buy a second one. Then perhaps after three years, you could buy bigger boats to catch more fish. And just think, one day you might be able to buy a (fish processing) plant – you might eventually even get your own helicopter for tracing shoals of fish and guiding your fleet of fishing boats. You could even buy your own truck to ship your fish to market, and then . . . ““And then?” asks the fisherman. “And then”, the executive concluded triumphantly, “you could be calmly sitting on the beach, dozing in the sun, and looking at the beautiful ocean!” To which the fisherman replied, “What do you think I’m doing right now”?*

That’s a great story, isn’t it? It reminds us that in pursuit of money and material things, which is after all the obsession of our age, we often lose more than we gain. We say that “*Time is*

money”, but honestly, that’s not true. Time is much more than that. Money and material things can be replaced. Time cannot. Do you remember what Jesus said, Matthew 6:19-20 (NIV),
¹⁹ **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”**

Time is the most precious thing we all have because there is only so much of it. Psalm 90:10,
¹² **Our days may come to seventy years,
 or eighty, if our strength endures;
 yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,
 for they quickly pass, and we fly away. . .**
¹² **Teach us to number our days,
 that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**

The truth is that we’ve all bought into the lie that the busier we are, the better we are, the more important we are, and the more productive we are. So we have become a society of “doers” where we have tied our self-worth to what we DO, rather than who we ARE as children of God. It’s to this lie, which this fourth commandment speaks, **“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.”** This commandment affirms that “being” is more important than “doing”, and we should always remember that. Maybe we need to remember that the word “workaholic” has only been around since 1947, and that it was originally created not as something to be proud of, but to recognize that work can become addictive, controlling and destructive. Work-a-holism affects our relationship with God, with family and friends, and with our ability to relate to others in community.

Here are some important thing to recognize about this commandment. First, it encourages us to “Remember the Sabbath”. The word Sabbath doesn’t actually mean Saturday or even Sunday, although that’s what most of us believe. In Hebrew, the language in which this commandment was first written down, the word “Sabbath” literally means “to cease or to stop activity”. The commandment is about ceasing “doing” so you can concentrate on “being” the person God made you to be. It’s about following God’s example. Genesis 2:2-3 (Msg), **“By the seventh day God had finished his work. On the seventh day he rested from all his work. God blessed the seventh day. He made it a Holy Day. Because on that day he rested from his work, all the creating God had done.”**

Second, observing the Sabbath means to make sure you have a day of rest that you jealously guard. It means that you recognize there are rhythms to life, and that God by his own personal example, and knowing how He made us, has modelled for us that we all need a day of rest when we can step back from our daily labour, change focus, receive physical and emotional rest, and become refreshed spiritually.

The trouble is, of course, that we have become a society that never stops and never rests. We are addicted to motion, and if my Facebook feed is any indication, we are also becoming a nation of insomniacs who even find sleeping difficult. But God never made us for the kind of society we've created. We're not machines. We have limits. We burn out. We hit the wall. We become exhausted physically, and emotionally, and spiritually. And when that happens our work suffers, our family relationships suffer, our friendships suffer, our sense of community suffers, and most of all our relationship with God suffers. That's why we have to understand that this fourth commandment isn't intended to restrict what we do, but to bring proper balance into our lives. It's a commandment of love, compassion and concern for us and for our well-being.

Third, the commandment says that God named the day he rested a *"holy day"*, not a holiday! That word *"holy"* means something that is different, unique and set apart for God. *"Holy"* reminds us that God intends this day of rest to have a spiritual dimension. Now this shouldn't really surprise us. It's at the very core of Scripture that God made us for fellowship with Himself. Now the reality for many of us in today's society is that Sunday may not be our day of rest. So we have to make sure that whatever day is our *"Sabbath"* we treat it as such, and that we add a spiritual dimension to it, such as an extended time of prayer and bible reading, coupled with reading the Sunday sermon from our church website.

Fourth, for us as Christians, Sunday, if at all possible, should be our normal day of worship and rest. Originally, of course, that day was Saturday, which is still the practice of the Jewish people, because God rested from his creating work on the seventh day and Sunday was seen as the first day of creation. But after the resurrection, Christians chose Sunday as the day of worship because it was on that day that Jesus rose from the dead, and God's began his work of re-creation. So every Sunday is for us a *"mini-Easter."* So being at worship should be a priority for us on Sunday. As Hebrews 10: 23-25 (NLT), ***"Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. 24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."***

Fifth, this commandment talks about work. Work is our regular daily duties. It may be in an office, a school, a factory, a retail store, or being a stay at home parent who manages the affairs of your home. If you are retired, your *"work"* may be helping with your grandchildren, or volunteering somewhere. Work is good. It is part of God's design for humanity. It helps to maintain and develop our society. It gives us a sense of self-worth. Through it we provide for our basic needs, and for those of our family. That's why becoming unemployed is such a major stressor in someone's life. It devastates us because our built in, God given desire to work is frustrated. In fact, a work ethic is so deeply ingrained in us that retirement can be difficult for some folk. Colossians 3:23-24 (NLT) clearly links our work and our service to God, ***"Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for***

people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ.

Let me say something to those of you, who like me, grew up with family, cultural or religious roots, where Sabbath, or Sunday observance was a big deal. You will bear witness that Sunday was observed in a very legalistic and narrow way, similar to the ways the Jewish people we read about in the New Testament observed the Sabbath. This is what led many to the idea that Sunday worship, and church life, should always be very serious, that laughter in worship is sinful, and that worship should be somber in tone and not joyful. And along with that sombre tone, came long lists of what you could, and could not do, on a Sunday. I am personally persuaded that a lot of people have rebelled against the Christian faith in our society, due to that way of thinking and acting. But honestly, I don't think that this interpretation of the fourth commandment can be supported in light of what Jesus said. Here's why. In Jesus day, the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, had a list of 1,521 things you were not supposed to do on the Sabbath. Imagine - 1,521 things! Now these are not God given restrictions. These were the interpretations that the Pharisees believed you had to keep so you didn't break this fourth commandment. In fact, do you remember that one of the main criticisms of Jesus, was that Jesus broke these man-made Sabbath laws?

We read about one such incident this morning. The Pharisees challenged Jesus because he let his disciples pick some heads of grain to eat on the Sabbath. The Pharisees designated that as "work", and therefore a breach of the fourth commandment. When they asked Jesus why he had such a lax attitude to making his disciples keep the Sabbath commandment, this was his reply. Mark 2:27 (Msg), ***"The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren't made to serve the Sabbath. The Son of Man is no lackey to the Sabbath. He's in charge!"***

That's the key right there. God gave us the fourth commandment so we can be renewed and refreshed. It was never meant to be an unpleasant, boring or restrictive commandment. The Sabbath wasn't meant to be a day filled with rules and regulations. It was meant to be a day that we could look forward to each week, a day of rest and renewal and spiritual refreshment. A day for us to obey God's command in Psalm 46:10 (NIV), ***"Be still and know that I am God."*** Now let's be clear. If you can be at worship on Sunday, then you should be. Worship should always be given a priority in your Sunday plans. Worshipping God, gathering with his people weekly, has been the practice of Christians for two thousand years. Jesus himself attended synagogue every Sabbath, which was the church of his day. Again, remember that verse from Hebrews 10:25, ***'And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do.'*** Failing to take worship attendance seriously, Scripture, says, is spiritually dangerous! It leads people to wander away from the faith. To worry more about their "doing" than their "being". So listen to the fourth commandment again, ***"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.”

In a day and age where we are literally run off our feet, where stress related illnesses and depression are rampant, where people are spiritually empty, and where our pace of life is killing us, our marriages, our friendships, our communities and our relationship with God, this is a commandment that is very relevant to the twenty first century. At least, that’s what I think. How about you?

Pastoral Prayer

These are the words of a prayer by Wilfred A. Peterson, to which are added the words of our pastoral prayer.

“Slow me down Lord
Ease the pounding of my heart
by the quieting of my mind.

Steady my hurried pace
with a vision of the eternal march of time.
Give me amid the confusion of the day,
the calmness of the eternal hills.

Break the tension of my nerves and muscles
with the soothing music of the singing streams
that live in my memory.

Help me to know the magical restoring power of sleep.

Teach me the art of taking MINUTE vacations,
Of slowing down to look at a flower,
to chat with a friend,
to pat a dog,
to read a few lines of a good book.

Slow me down Lord
and inspire me to send my roots
deep into the soil of life's enduring values
that I may grow toward the stars of my greater destiny.”

Let us pray:

Hear our prayers, Lord. For the weary, the exhausted and the stressed out.

Hear our prayers, Lord For those sinking under the weight of too many demands and responsibilities.

Hear our prayers, Lord, for those burdened by sickness, grief, worry or fear.

And grant to each, your peace and strength. Amen.