

**EXODUS 20:8-11 A DAY OF REST FROM GOD
(3rd COMMANDMENT)**

V. 2 *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

V. 3 *You shall have no other gods before Me.*

V. 7 *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.*

Vv. 8-11 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 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 do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

I imagine that everyone here is familiar with the Old Testament “Sabbath Days.” The word “Sabbath” commonly means “rest.” The “Sabbath Day” was a day of rest. It was commanded by God to be observed on the seventh day of each week—we would say “Saturday.” God commanded the day to be special, that it be kept “holy,” that it be “set aside,” each week for Him. The word “holy” means more than “sinless.” The word carries with it the root meaning of being “separate and set apart.” When God says, “*Be holy,*” (*Leviticus 19:2*), He wants us to be 100% dedicated to Him, to be separate and set apart from every evil of the devil, the sinful world and our sinful flesh. The Sabbath Day was to be a day “set apart” from the other six days of work. This is not to say that work is a bad thing from which God warns us to be separate for at least one day. Labor and work are a blessing and gift of God for our physical and mental welfare. It is physically better for an able-bodied person to be busy with work than to lounge in front of the TV all day. It is better for a person to be mentally active than to be numbed by entertainment all day. Work earns us our daily bread. It also brings us a sense of accomplishment with a job well done. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul says, “If any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Laziness is displeasing to God.

With the command “Remember the Sabbath [Rest] Day] to keep it holy” and “In it you shall do no work,” God was saying to the Old Testament Israel, “STOP!” “On the seventh day of each week DO NOT WORK. Set aside the seventh day for Me.” God stated that He Himself “rested” on the seventh day of Creation. In six days He made the heavens, the earth, the seas, the dry land, and all that is in them—birds, fish, beasts, and man. We are to follow suit. God did not “rest” to be refreshed and recharged, as we often almost automatically think of word “rest” as meaning. The word “rest” in Hebrew has as its root meaning “to cease and desist.” God “ceased”—God “rested”—from His labors. We sometimes use the word “rest” in that way also. When an attorney says, “Your Honor, I rest my case,” he means, “I’m done.” When playing or singing music, there may be special marks on the score which mean “Stop. Don’t Play or Sing.” They are called “rests.” They do not mean, “Surely, you’re worn out. You better take a breather.” They mean cease.

In the Third Commandment the Lord told the Old Testament people who were gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai with its cloud, thunder, and lightning, “STOP at the last day of each week. Cease from your busy-ness at the end of the week, Stop all your scurrying around to provide food and safety for yourselves and your families—which I really provide anyway. Stop! Six days are enough for that; the seventh day is dedicated to Me. I am the LORD. I am the One who has created you. I am the One who has mercifully and miraculously rescued you from bondage and slavery in Egypt, from which you could in no way extricate yourselves. I am the One who promised long ago to send the Seed of the Woman to bruise Satan in the head and break his fatal strangle hold on you, and in the process the Seed would be harmed with a treacherous snake bite in the heel. And I am the One who is leading you to the land of promise, sworn to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The seventh day is to be set aside for Me—for YOUR own growth and encouragement in looking to Me 100%. On that day, hear again My promises, My Word, and My will for you. I want you to be with Me forever. Stop acting as if ‘getting right with Me’ depends on yourselves. Set this day aside for Me. In the process, you will also be blessed with physical refreshment and re-charging from your labor for your labor.”

This was not just to be a matter of outwardly keeping the Sabbath Day. Later, God was not happy when the people kept the Sabbath Day outwardly, but in their hearts the day was not set aside (holy) for the Lord, nor were their hearts set aside (holy) for Him. The prophet Isaiah wrote from God, *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me..., the New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the gathering of assemblies? I am weary of bearing them (Isaiah 1:10-15).* Outward mechanical keeping of the Sabbath did not please God. The day was about spiritual growth in the LORD.

What about you? First, you might ask, what happened to Saturday? How is it that we do not gather for worship on Saturday, but on Sunday? The Third Commandment, as given, was both a matter of God's moral law for all people of all time, and a matter of God's worship law for Old Testament Israel. In the moral law God commands, "You shall have no other gods," "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God," "You shall find Rest in Me," "Honor your father and mother" etc. This commandment is also part of Old Testament worship laws. Just as He commanded them "You shall observe Passover, the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of Booths; you shall not eat pork; you shall not wear blended garments—linen and wool (Leviticus 19:19)"; so also He commanded "on the seventh day of the week, you shall rest." These worship laws given by God, including Seventh Day Sabbath, were all road signs pointing ahead to the Savior to come. In Jesus these signs and messages were all fulfilled and completed. When driving to Bismarck, the signs telling how far, and which way, no longer appear once you are there. They are no longer needed. The seventh day Sabbath observance was not the goal in itself. Jesus, the true Rest Giver, was the goal. He came and with His punishment for sin in your place, you now cease from your own labors of trying to get to heaven by your own flimsy efforts. Jesus is the goal! He Himself said, *The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8)*. Jesus is the point of the Sabbath; Jesus is your Sabbath and your Rest. The signs are not needed. The Apostle Paul writes, *Let no one judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbath, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ (Colossians 2:16-17)*. When someone who is coming around the corner of a building casts a shadow on the ground ahead of while you are on the other side of the corner, you study the shadow. But when the "body" gets around the corner you quit looking at the shadow and look the body! So, Saturday worship and rest no longer apply. The Old Testament worship laws ended with the completed mission of Jesus.

However, hearing the Word of Rest, and growing in Christ, still apply. The early Christians chose Sunday, the first day of the week, as the day of worship—likely because each Sunday is specifically an anniversary of Jesus' rising from the grave!

Ceasing from physical work on the day of worship is no longer demanded from New Testament believers. But to work 7 x 52 readily squeezes out worship, doesn't it. Abstaining from work on the worship day coincides with "setting aside and separating" time to hear again about God's merciful salvation in Jesus, forgiveness in Jesus, and living for Him in Jesus. In Jesus is the true rest which brings peace for your soul and conscience. The key is the message and the Word of God. Do you see why Luther explained the Third Commandment the way he did? "We should fear (respect/honor) and love God that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it." In the Word you have true rest for your souls. Jesus said, *"Come to Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest . . . rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:28-29)*.

Coming to worship is not a deed done to win merit with God. Actually, hearing His Word serves you. The Word points out your sin and total inability to earn His favor. His Word also declares your sins forgiven and wiped away in Jesus! This Sabbath Rest, this worship Rest, is God's gift to you. There is no reason to drag your feet about coming to join others to hear the best and most refreshing news in all the world. God serves you at worship. Forgiveness and life in Christ are His gracious gifts to you, His messages of grace. At worship, the "means of grace," the Gospel in the Word, in Baptism, and Communion are yours. Must one go to worship? No. But why disregard such a gift? Staying away leads one close to despising the "Rest" of God.

Can a person come to worship and still break the Third Commandment? Yes. One despises the Word of forgiveness in Jesus by—eyeballing everybody and everything else and not paying attention, by daydreaming, by dozing. Father forgive us each and all, through Jesus.

There is another aspect of the Day of Rest—its ultimate fulfillment in heaven. The Lord, who "rested" after the sixth day, has also prepared a Rest for us with Him in heaven. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them [works in Christ] (Revelation 14:13)*. *There remains therefore a rest for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9)*. *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Revelation 21:4)*.

The Sabbath Day of worship is God's gift to you. Do not despise the Sabbath/Rest in Jesus that is yours now and in the world to come. Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---