

God Rests, We Rest

Turn to Genesis 1. In the home I grew up in, we did not work on Sunday. Some of you may not have grown up that way, but lots of you did. We did not work on Sunday in our family because Sunday was the Lord's Day, a day of rest.

We went to church in the morning, ate a big dinner, played until supper while Dad slept and Mom rested, had company sometimes, and went to church again in the evening. Not a bad day, actually.

I remember coming back from Bible College one spring, living at home for the summer to earn money, and pointing out to my father that the command to keep the Sabbath holy is the only one of the 10 commandments that is not repeated in the N.T.

I also told him that the Bible never puts the rules of the Jewish Sabbath onto the Lord's Day, Sunday.

My Dad didn't say much one way or the other. I knew I had him in a tough spot, because he went by what the Bible said. One Sunday afternoon later that summer I noticed him doing some small job, cleaning something up, a 10 minute project of some kind.

I said, Dad, you're doing that on a Sunday? He said to me, Well, you said the Bible didn't say we shouldn't work on Sunday. I was quiet.

That was 30 or 35 years ago, and I have thought about this many times since then. I have avoided work on Sunday when I could. Church ministers do their work on Sunday, and I worked at a nursing home for 6 years, including quite a few Sundays.

When I was a student, many years of that, right through doctoral studies, I never did school work on Sunday. I believed what I told my Dad. But I also knew that God himself rested after six days of work, and God also thought it was for people's own good to rest a day in seven.

As much as possible I still take a 24 hour break somewhere, a day of rest. Since the seminary has fewer classes on Monday, I have often taken Sunday noon to Monday noon as my day of rest.

This semester I have a class on Monday morning, one I need to do prepare for about 45 minutes on Sunday evening. I don't like that, but there's no other way. This semester, I try to make Friday supper to Saturday supper my day of rest: no school or church work.

Sabbath Day & Lord's Day In the OT, God told Israel to keep the Sabbath holy. The Sabbath is the 7th day of the week, Saturday. The early church met for worship on the first day of the week, Sunday, because the Lord Jesus rose from the dead on the first day.

In the Roman world there was no day of rest, there was not even a seven-day week. Gentile Christians worked every day.

They met on Sunday either early before work, or after work in the evening, or both. It was not a day of rest.

In the NT times, the Jews kept the Sabbath, the Saturday of rest, and the ones who followed Jesus did both: they rested on Saturday, and on Sunday they worked and they also met together for worship.

But there is no biblical reason to move the OT Sabbath rules to Sunday, the Lord's day. The NT never even hints that the first day of the week, the Lord's day, should be a day of rest. I am going to urge you to have a day of rest, doesn't matter which day.

But it is not a command that either the Lord or the apostles ever gave to Gentile believers. It is not a command. There are biblical reasons to have a day of rest.

But for early Gentile believers it was impossible, and the NT never tells Gentile believers to rest either on the Sabbath or on the Lord's Day, which was the first day of the week (Ac 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10).

Still, there are biblical reasons to have a day of rest, and I believe that in our culture it is a crucial kind of worship, an important act of worship.

So we'll go through five OT Scriptures that talk to us about the Sabbath, and see what we can learn. The first begins at the end of Genesis 1.

*Genesis 1:31 - 2:3 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. <sup>1</sup> Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. <sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.*

I have read these verses quite a few times recently, and in them God sounds satisfied with Himself, and He sounds tired. He sounds just like we would sound after we had completed a difficult project that we were pleased with. God worked, then he rested.

If we go back a few verses, we'll see that during the 6<sup>th</sup> day of Creation this working God made people in his own image and his own likeness. In this context, one basic part of this has to be that God made people to be workers.

In Gen 2:15 Adam gets his first job. God put Adam in Eden to work it and take care of it. Work was a part of life in the perfect Garden of Eden.

God is a worker in Genesis 1; He made us to be his living idols, living images, which means that among other things we are workers as He is. And why would this not include resting? Resting one day a week does not begin with the 10 Commandments.

It is built into Creation itself. God worked for six days, then rested a day, and we are in God's image, and we work. So if we can rest a day in seven, it is an important way of imitating God.

Turn now to Exodus 20. We'll look at four more OT texts that describe 7th day rest, and we'll pay special attention to the *reasons* for keeping the Sabbath. So as I read, look for the answer to the question "why?" Why keep the Sabbath? Look for that.

Exodus 20:8-14 *"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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 core of this commandment, which is to Israel not to the church, is not to rest on the Sabbath but to keep the Sabbath holy. The main way they kept it holy was to rest, but the command was first of all to keep the Sabbath holy.

In v10 it says "the 7th day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God." Israel kept it holy by resting, but the rest was aimed at God. Their rest itself was worship, pointed at God.

And the reason for it goes back to our first text, the Creation story. God rested on the 7th day, and blessed it and made it holy. So Israel was to rest on the 7th day in imitation of God. They were to honour God's rest by resting themselves.

But it was worship: resting kept the day holy; it was *"a Sabbath to the LORD your God."* They honoured God's rest by resting themselves.

Exodus 23:12 *"Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the foreigner among you as well, may be refreshed.*

This is a different reason for rest. There is nothing in this verse about worship, or about keeping the day holy. It is talking about the same Sabbath day, but different logic.

Rest the 7th day because it is good for you, says God himself. You need to rest and be refreshed. Your animals that work for you need to rest and be refreshed.

Your slaves, and the dirty pagans living in your towns, all need to rest and be refreshed. So, no work in your towns on the 7th day.

This is an unusual argument in the Law of Moses. There are lots of food laws and illness laws in Israel's law that we think were just a good idea for the health of Israel. But that is never the logic of the Scripture. The reason is rarely that this is good for you.

But that *is* the reason for the Sabbath rest in Exodus 23:12: everyone needs the rest and the refreshment.

These are the two basic reasons for resting after 6 says of work. One, we do it to imitate God, to be like him. Every single instruction given to God's people in the whole Bible, about what we should do and not do, comes from what God does and does not do.

Resting after work is another way of imitating God.

Two, we rest because we need to rest, God says it is a good idea to rest, people need rest and refreshment. We'll come back to both of these at the end, but these are the basics.

Exodus 31:16-17 <sup>16</sup> *The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.* <sup>17</sup> *It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.' "*

The Sabbath was and is a sign of the covenant between God and the nation of Israel. This is why we who are Gentile followers of that same God are not called to make Saturday a day of rest.

But even that sign of the covenant is based on God's six days of work and his seventh day of rest. The covenant sign was based on imitating God, who worked and then rested.

So we are not under that covenant. But there is still an implied encouragement to rest after six days of work.

In the NT world, rest on the 7th day was impossible for every Gentile believer who was a slave of an unbelieving employer, and impossible for every Gentile believer who was a slave of an unbelieving master.

That is a part of the reason that neither Jesus nor the apostles told Christians to rest one day in seven.

In the Roman world there was no seven day week at all. Even the fact that Gentile believers observed the first day of the week, which we know from 1 Corinthians 16 that the Corinthian church and the Galatian churches did, is unusual.

Gentile churches all adopted from the Jews a seven day worship week, an entirely new thing for them, so they could observe the Lord's day, the first day of the week. But it was not a day of rest, as I've said. They worshipped before work and after work.

Turn to Deuteronomy 5 for our last Scripture today. The 10 commandments are listed twice, in Exodus 20 and in Deuteronomy 5. The reason for keeping the Sabbath is different in Deut 5 than in Exodus 20.

In the 10 commandment list in Exodus 20, the reason for keeping the 7th day holy was because God rested on the 7th day and made that day holy. Let's read Deut 5.

Deut 5:12-15 *"Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> 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 ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do.*

*<sup>15</sup> 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.*

The first reason given in Deut 5 is to give everyone, including working animals, a rest: *On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do.*

Everyone needs a rest, everyone gets a rest, all people and all animals. We saw this reason also in Exodus 23:12, the third Scripture we read. I cannot see why God's people now should not honour this if they are able to do so.

The second reason is to remember redemption, to remember that God freed them from being slaves: *<sup>15</sup> 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.*

I'm interested in the 2nd reason because Gentile believers meet on the first day of the week, the day Christ rose from the dead, for this reason: we meet to remember and celebrate that Christ redeemed us and made us *his* people and *his* servants, true freedom.

Now we'll look at two bad reasons not to rest one day in seven. The reason I am teaching about rest, even though it is not a direct call to Gentile believers, is because I'm distressed about these bad reasons. They steer us, and ought not to. We should not be using our freedom to indulge these motives.

Bad Reason #1 not to rest one day in seven: I don't rest because I want to work, I like to work, and it does not feel good when I'm not working. When I don't work I feel lost, restless, I can't relax anyway when I don't work, so I might as well work.

People were made to work, we're designed that way. Israel did not have to be told to work, but they did have to be commanded sternly to stop. The command to rest assumed bad reason #1, and it was not a valid reason.

Our culture is worse than theirs, it seems to me. Many of us have so much to do that we get addicted to it. We've worked so hard for so long that we cannot stop. Eventually work becomes the only thing that gives meaning to our life. That's a problem. The worse it feels to stop working, the more we need to stop working.

Our purpose is to be children of God, not to work. Our meaning comes from being children of God, and followers of Christ.

Bad Reason #1 not to rest one day in seven: I don't rest because I am afraid I won't get enough done, I have too much to do, I won't survive if I don't work every day. God was finished after six days of work, and I'm not. I've got too much left to do.

This has been a constant pressure in my life, both in my student days, and in my life as a teacher. As a student there were always assignments that I had not done, tests coming up for which I had not prepared enough.

As a teacher, there were classes I was not ready to teach, there were sermons I was not ready to preach. They needed more work. I was not going to do a good job.

The answer for me was always raw trust in God. I won't survive properly if I don't keep working. But then, on what does my survival depend, on God or on my work. It came to this: if I work honestly for six days, can God take care of the rest?

Work is good, always working is not. If I work honestly for six days, and then rest for the seventh when there's much more to do, can God get me where he wants me? Is that enough for God to bless me? Can God take care of me only if I work every day?

Does God actually provide for me and bless me? If I don't believe that, then I need to work every day. If I believe that, then I could rest one day in seven.

This also was assumed in the original Sabbath command. Israelites worked to feed themselves. In Exodus 34:21 God says, *Six days you shall labour, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.*

If we work honestly for six days, and rest one to imitate God, he will provide and bless.

Now I will give two reasons to rest. I need to say again that this is not a command of Scripture. If there is no way for you to rest one day, you are not disobeying God. But there are still two good reasons to rest one day in seven.

Reason #1 to rest one day in seven: God did. God worked six days and rested the seventh. Our rest is not just stopping our work, it is worship. Our rest itself is aimed toward God. It is submitting to God, a choice of being more completely a true child of God. We rest a day in seven because our Father in heaven rested a day in seven.

Reason #2 to rest one day in seven: it is good for us. We need it. We don't just need to rest when we feel too tired to continue. One day of rest in seven was good for working people and working animals, good for owners and good for slaves and good for pagans.

It is one of very few commands in the Law of Moses that explicitly say this is good for you, you need this, based not on fatigue but on a weekly calendar.

If God calls for rest one day in seven, and does so because it is good for us, we can assume that if we rest only when we feel like we should rest, it will *not* be enough. God believes that people need to be commanded to rest one day in seven, for their own good.

So, rest, and aim your rest toward God. Make the rest itself worship, make it a way of resting in his hands, trusting that he's your Provider. Make it a way of acting "like father like child," doing it because your Father did it. Make it a way of showing that you are devoted to him. Rest to the Lord, aim your stillness toward God. Worship by doing nothing.