

Just One Day

Exodus 20:8-11

Cradock Presbyterian Church

October 7, 2012

Here's a simple step, to make your life great. Take just one day a week, and set it aside for your health. Set it aside for your body's health, set it aside for your spirit's health. That means, set it aside to honor God.

God made it simple. "Remember the Sabbath day." That's the first part. The word "Sabbath" literally means "rest." *Remember* means make sure to observe it. Don't forget it, and go and do work! *Remember* it.

Then there's the second part: "*AND* keep it holy." Yep, it's a real "and." It's not enough to acknowledge it's the Sabbath, and rest. You're supposed to keep it holy. Now again, keeping something holy means keeping it separated, sacred, special; it has an elevated status. To an ancient Israelite, it was holy because it belonged to God. Let me say that again, slowly: *it was holy because it belonged to God*. In this commandment, God mixes his holiness with his concern for us.

Do you think God doesn't know our realities? He surely does! God knows that we need to work – a LOT. That's why this commandment goes on to say, "Six days you *shall* labor and do all your work." You're going to work! We all have to work. We have to work every day to make it – those of us still working. Nearly every day we work. The commandment then completes the thought: "But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work." It's a Sabbath TO the Lord. You could just as well say it's *in honor of* the Lord, because that's what it means. The commandment ends with the explanation that God created everything in six days and rested; the implication is that for us to do the same honors God and his creation.

And yet, it's NOT just about honoring God! It's God looking out for the frail creatures he created, too. When the commandment says "you shall not do any work," it goes on to say, "you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns." That covers everybody! Why? *Because God knew that the humans he made needed their rest*. It took Jesus to clarify it, centuries later. In the second chapter of Mark, towards the end, Jesus told the

Pharisees and all gathered with them that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”

But what has happened? Never mind arguments about *Sabbath* is supposed to be *Seventh* day, or Saturday. Since Jesus' resurrection was on a Sunday morning, that became the holy day, the one day of the week set aside for Christians. It is the Christian Sabbath. What has happened to the Sabbath? I remember vividly when Virginia first relaxed the so-called “Blue Laws,” Sabbath closings for stores, because I was personally affected by them. I was working in retail in 1976 when they first started letting stores open on Sunday, “just for Christmas,” so they said. You knew what was coming. You knew this was the foot in the door. My store owner at the time was a practicing Catholic, went to Mass every week. He was opposed, but said, “o.k.” for just Christmas shopping. You can look the history up if you want to; but I'll tell you now, the retail associations yelled and yelled about how good the money had been, over that Christmas season, and how opening on Sunday would mean more money, therefore more jobs, etc, etc. By March 1977, the old Blue Laws, and Sunday closings, were gone forever. And if your store was in a mall, like we were, you had no choice, you were required to be open if the mall said you had to be. Small stores like us were stretched to the limit; I know I worked lots of seven-day weeks from then on. I had to miss church, or leave church early, many times. And I was in school at VCU at the time! My body was worn out. I really doubt God intended anybody to be as tired as I was.

Our lives aren't better when people forget the good things God gives to us. When we don't obey the commandments that God gave us to make our lives better. How many people plan their weeks now so they have everything done by Sunday? So that Sunday they can do – *nothing*? Except go to church? Virginia wasn't the only state back there in the 70s to ease out the Blue Laws – most states did. I bet by 1990 there wasn't a state in the U.S. that had all the stores closed on Sundays. And guess what? You can trace the huge declines in church attendance back to that time. You can also trace all kinds of social ills back to the time when people weren't allowed, or encouraged, to think about one day of the week as special, set aside, belonging to God; or at least being set aside because God said so.

Because what it comes down to is: honoring. Showing appreciation, giving praise, that's how I'd define honoring, as well as giving back, if you can. This commandment and the next one are about honoring. We honor God by keeping the Sabbath. We will honor our father and mother in the next commandment. Let's stick to the current one. When we "remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy," we are honoring God. How so? We show we appreciate God as creator, because we're imitating what God did at creation. Six days did he labor and create the world, and on the seventh rest; as the commandment says, "Six days *you* shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work." We praise God by imitating him; imitation is the sincerest form of praise! When we tell others and encourage them to remember the Sabbath in the same way, we're offering praise by our recommendation. When we come to worship, when we offer ourselves to God on the Sabbath, we're honoring by giving back.

And then there's this: we show that we appreciate God's intentions for us when we take care of the bodies God has given us by taking the rest God has prescribed. We show that we appreciate this gift God has given us in the commandment. Once again, the holy commandment has a side to it that's good for our human natures. Paul said, in First Corinthians chapter 6, that "your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God." This commandment tells us to take care of this temple with which we have been entrusted.

So you see, it's not about strict Sabbatarianism, just obeying the commandment blindly because it's a commandment. God in his wisdom is always looking out for us. So if you'll take the time to plan a little, to make sure you get all your work done in six days, and have one day set aside for rest and time with God, one day where you can give God what he has set aside for you and him – then you'll be just one step closer to the life God has in mind for you.