



The Ten Commandments – Part 8
Exodus 20:8-11
GCSP – 08/29/2009

Can anyone tell me the nicknames for New York City? One is "The city that never sleeps." I assume this refers to the fact that something is always going on 24-7. And although I have never been there, I did spend my first 41 years in the Chicago area. I remember being in the middle of bumper-to-bumper traffic on the Eisenhower Expressway (four lanes each direction) at 2:00 in the morning – and it wasn't because of an accident. And by the way, rush hour in Denver is smooth sailing in Chicago.

I know the breakneck pace we sometimes experience in Denver is enough to make your head spin, but there are two suburbs of Chicago that come close to rivaling Denver in most aspects. Walk down Michigan Avenue on any given day and you will be hard pressed to find anyone truly relaxing. You may see someone sipping a cup of coffee while reading the paper and talking on their cell phone, but this "rest" will typically last a whole 5-10 minutes.

People even walk fast in Chicago. I tend to be pretty leisurely when walking unless my purpose is exercise, so I typically would see dozens, if not hundreds, of people pass me by in the distance of each city block on the occasions I had to spend time downtown; and most of these occasions were on the weekends. By contrast I was walking the 16th Street Mall a few weeks ago and I was the one passing everyone else up.

If you allow it, life will keep you moving at a dizzying pace. Grade school children carry date books and Blackberry's around with them to schedule things in. I read accounts of friends and family on Facebook who are trying to juggle work, school, soccer practice, football, gymnastics, Tae Kwon Do, and a wide variety of other seemingly endless activities.

And we're proud of the fact that we are so busy. It was probably somewhat of a point of pride in my life that I was running an insurance agency and pastoring two churches for a year and a half. My health has suffered for it in the fact that I gained fifteen pounds during that time period, but I was keeping busy. And even though I relinquished my responsibilities at the second church 6-7 weeks ago, I am just now starting to sleep more than 5-6 hours a night and regain some energy.

I don't tell you these things for you to feel sorry for me but to make the point that it is not a gold star on your forehead or a badge for your shirt to be busy all the time. There is no honor in working yourself into the grave – your mind and body were not designed to go without rest. There needs to be time to unwind, to recharge, to refresh, if you expect to reap the benefits of good health and a sound mind.

God knows our tendencies so He didn't leave this aspect of rest up to our discretion.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Exodus**.

Exodus 20:8-11

Let's pray.

God loves you and He loves me. He loves us so much He left us with an important list of ten things we must pay strict attention to. This top ten list is not meant to constrain us or burden us or take away all of our fun, but is meant to protect us and free us and bless us.

Over the last several weeks we have seen God's love expressed to us commanding us to love Him with all of heart, mind, soul, and strength. We have seen God's love in the command to not create any idols or images that we would serve instead of Him, and we have seen God's love for us in the command to honor and reverence Him by never taking His name in vain.

Now we will consider God's love for us in commanding that we keep the Sabbath, or Shabat, as the Jews call it.

There is a lot of discussion and even contention amongst churches and Christians today in regards to how the Sabbath pertains to the New Testament life. Many want to discard it altogether and thus only consider nine commandments, some submit that Saturday was the way God instituted it so Saturday should still be the day of rest, some are adamant that after Christ arose on Sunday that the new Sabbath is now Sunday, and still others believe any day of the week is sufficient as long as you do keep a Sabbath on a weekly basis.

All of these are somewhat valid assertions and all of them seem to have at least some very marginal support in Scripture. So let me say up front, I will not be able to take you to a definitive passage of Scripture that will outline for you step-by-step how you are to observe the Sabbath. But hopefully I will be able to show you that the Sabbath is still important in the lives of New Testament Christians, and hopefully I will be able to give you some principles from God's Word as to how it should be observed.

Let me start with a simple truth: God doesn't need you to accomplish His will. Many of us get too busy with ministry believing somehow that God needs us if His work is going to get done. Beloved God doesn't need more of you, you need more of Him. You need more of His peace manifest in your life, more of His joy, His tenderness, His wisdom, His resurrection power, His love, etc. And the simple fact is that He isn't going to give you these things in the five-minute cracks in your schedule.

God wants time with you, He wants to walk with you, He wants to talk to you, He wants to share His heart with you; in summary God wants an intimate and personal relationship with you.

God did not design you to work seven days a week. And just in case you have forgotten, God Himself didn't work seven days according to **Genesis 2:1-3**.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **Mark**.

Mark 6:30-32

Jesus knows that He has less than a year left on this earth to complete His ministry at this point, and He says let's rest a while. If I knew I only had 6-9 months of ministry time left I would be a basket case. I would try to cram as much as I could into each day and would probably make an attempt at sleeping only a few hours each night. Why? Why would I feel that way? Because in my own mind I believe that nobody else could do what I do. I believe the ministries I am involved in would suffer or that God's truth would somehow not get communicated to the people I have contact with if I wasn't there to communicate it.

Now how silly is that? God has done quite fine in accomplishing ministry and communicating His truth before I ever came on the scene, and He is quite capable of continuing on without my help.

Jesus knew the importance of rest for the human mind and body so He calls for His disciples to come away to a secluded place and rest.

Quote the beginning of **Psalm 23** with me: **"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul..."**

If you don't rest, if you don't seek out quiet pastures and still waters with your Shepherd, it is not beyond Him to make you lie down. Physically speaking it may be some kind of breakdown in your body that makes you slow down and be still. Your job may suddenly disappear as a way to get your attention, or as a way of saying, "Do you have time for Me now?"

And please notice that making you lie down comes before the restoration of your soul. Restoration is not quick and it's not cheap. Drinking a bottle of 5-Hour Energy doesn't accomplish restoration. Sleeping five hours per night instead of four doesn't accomplish restoration. Taking one day off per month doesn't accomplish restoration. Ample time in green pastures and still waters with your Shepherd accomplishes restoration. A day of rest in every seven accomplishes restoration.

Maybe the reason this command comes after loving God, having no idols or images before Him, and honoring His name, is so we can reflect on these things each week. Lord, do I truly love You; are You first in my life? Lord, is there anything in my life that is before You? Lord, have I dishonored Your name in any way this week?

Now I know this next statement could open a can of worms but let's talk about shoes for a moment. Is there anything that highlights the differences between men and women more than shoes?

Although I can dispute the following statement myself, I read that the typical pair of shoes will wear out in about six months if worn every day. The reason I can dispute this is that I have a pair of shoes that I wear just about every day and I've had them for over a year. Now there are some days that I don't leave the house and there are other days that I am not out of the house for very long, but that pair of shoes gets used just about every day. Well, then I discovered that even having a day off every now and then adds life to the shoes.

Most bowling alleys have two complete sets of bowling pins that get rotated every couple of weeks. It has been discovered that the pins lose a certain amount of liveliness if they do not get rest from the constant knocking around. The pins last and last if they are given a week or two of rest in between their week or two of activity.

And if you are shaking your head and doubting the veracity of what I have just told you about shoes and bowling pins, how about dirt? Dirt needs to rest. If you know anything about farming you know that farmers do not plant the same thing in the same fields year after year.

I grew up in Chicago but not too far outside of the city and suburbs you will find the fertile farmland of the Midwest. Most of the farmers rotate corn and soybeans in their fields every few years or so. Those who can afford to will leave a field completely unplanted every now and then; and when they do they discover that the next few year's crops are much more bountiful, to the point of making up for the fallow year.

God is the Author of life and the Creator of all things. Do you think that maybe He knows how His creation operates? Do you think the principle of rest that He designed can be circumvented without consequence?

So if shoes and bowling pins and dirt need rest in order to accomplish their purpose, and to do so for a reasonable length of time, is it possible that we could benefit from rest? Is it possible that your soul will be restored to the point of being able to have a vibrant relationship with God and have the added benefit of being able to accomplish more in the time you devote to these other things in your life?

The beginning of **Psalm 139:3** says, "(Lord) **You scrutinize my path and my lying down.**" God is keeping track of all that we do and He scrutinizes, or analyzes the balance between our work and our rest. That's an amazing thought. God is tracking how much or how little you and I rest.

At the end of **Psalm 139**, David pleads for the Lord to "**lead (him) in the everlasting way**" (**verse 24**). Beloved, the everlasting way is obedience to the Ten Commandments and obedience to all of God's Word. And taking one day off every seven is included in the everlasting way.

A wealthy American business mogul decided to go on a safari in Africa. He hired the best guide and a crew of local natives to carry the supplies for their adventure. Being an aggressive and driven man, he pushed the crew to travel faster and longer and harder than they were accustomed to each day. Finally the natives just stopped and sat down. The business mogul was furious and ordered the guide to get them moving again. The guide simply said, "They must stay here all day. They will not move no matter how much you shout and bully them. We must allow our souls to catch up with our bodies."

Often we have been pushing and pushing ourselves to the point that we have run ahead of God. This is why sometimes you can show up to church and I can see in your eyes that you are physically here, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually nobody's home. You might as well have stayed home.

But don't get me wrong, church isn't what needs to be deleted from your schedule. I have seen too many good Christians people let their schedules rule their lives and drop out of church almost completely. Baseball season for the kids starts having games on Sunday and then soccer and then of course, once the Broncos start their season, well you're already in the habit of church being low on the totem pole of your priorities. And once you get into the habit of missing church, Satan has a stronghold developed in your life that is not easily broken.

But why is it that church gets pushed out more easily than many of the other stuff on your plate? It's like church is the turnip greens and all of the other activities in your life are the steak and potatoes and peach cobbler. If you need room on your plate the turnip greens are history. And believe me, you will have all kinds of valid reasons in your own mind for skipping the turnip greens this time around.

Well, I could spend the rest of the night beating this drum but you get the point.

A key to understanding the principle of keeping the Sabbath is that it is a Sabbath of the Lord your God (**Exodus 20:10a**). And if we took the time to look at **Exodus 31** and **Ezekiel 20** we would also see that Sabbath keeping is a sign of the covenant between God and His people. One of the ways the pagans and Gentiles could identify the Jewish people was by their Sabbath keeping. The practice of setting aside one day each week to worship God and cease from their working was a living testimony to the Lord for all to see.

Observing the Sabbath was also a way of expressing faith. While the rest of the world is still conducting business every day of the week or planting their crops every year (every seven years the Israelites were to let the land rest), Sabbath keeping expressed that God would provide for our needs without us being like the rest of the world. Observing the Sabbath would determine if God's people were holding tightly to the reins of their life or if they were confidently entrusting their lives to God's care.

I am sure you have heard the phrase, "You can't out give God." It's true. But this principle from the Bible covers a lot more than just your money and possessions. It is true that if you cheerfully give a portion of your money and possessions to the Lord that He will provide for you in many ways including money and possessions. But it is just as true that when you give the Lord your time that He will in turn reward you with time. In whatever measure you give He gives back.

Time is the commodity that most people hoard more so than even money. God asks us for a portion of our time to be dedicated to Him. And even though He commands us to rest one day out of seven He is not commanding us to spend that day in a corner with our hands folded and heads bowed. He doesn't even specify how much time we devote to worship and prayer and contemplation on that day. But He had better be a part of the day.

As a matter of fact, when we make the Sabbath to be stricter than it was intended we will be just as guilty as the Pharisees were of holding their own rules and traditions up higher than Scripture. The Rabbis and Pharisees were not content with God's command

to not work on the Sabbath so they decided to add to God's Word and specify what constituted work.

Let me give just a few of their ridiculous examples. Sewing more than one stitch was work. Writing more than one letter of the alphabet was work. Carrying something from one place to another was work. One source says that more than 500 additional rules and regulations were added to God's command to **"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."**

God did expand the meaning of the Sabbath in other parts of the Law, but it was merely expressing certain kinds of work that were forbidden. Construction of the tabernacle was forbidden on the Sabbath, plowing and harvesting were forbidden, and engaging in commerce and trade was forbidden. Starting a fire for the purpose of cooking and gathering firewood was also forbidden, but that was it. If you wanted to write or sew or pick something up and carry it to another room, God did not forbid that. Now if you were writing or sewing for profit then that would violate the spirit of remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy because that would be conducting commerce.

The point is more that we have a day of rest and that we have a God-consciousness throughout that day. We should have a God-consciousness every day but there should be something special or out of the ordinary on the Sabbath – and again, God purposely does not specify what that should be. He doesn't want a bunch of robots following a set blueprint for how to develop an intimate relationship with Him.

Maybe for you it will be spending a greater portion of your time reading and studying the Bible. Maybe it will mean a larger quantity of time in prayer. Maybe the Sabbath will be your primary day for memorizing Scripture. Maybe this will be a day that you go out and visit the sick and minister to those who are in need. God doesn't tell us so I am certainly not going to tell you what you should do to set the Sabbath apart from the other six days of the week. I only use these examples to help spark your thinking.

The combination of developing your relationship with God and having a green pasture, still water day is what God is looking for from us. And this combination should be unique from the other six days in some way. God specifies that much when He says six days you shall work, but on the seventh day...

Some of you may point to the fact that Jesus seemed to always be breaking the Sabbath or that Paul seems to do away with the Sabbath in some of his writings in the epistles, and thus think this command is either not as important as I making it or not even valid for the church today.

Jesus never broke the Sabbath. He broke the additional rules that the Rabbis and Pharisees had added to Sabbath keeping, but He never broke God's definition of the Sabbath. And as for Paul, he was primarily dealing with the other traditions of Judaism that the false teachers were trying to add to salvation.

There is much debate over some of the things Paul said concerning this issue but I do not believe he was eliminating the fourth commandment as some say he did. If anything, I believe Paul was showing us that the Sabbath no longer had to only be on

Saturday, although that is not specifically stated either. And even though I am not going to take the time to deal specifically with this, you may want to jot down **Colossians 2:16-17** for some study on your own time; just make sure you read the whole chapter to get the proper context.

And quickly, regarding the day of the week, it was obviously on what we know as Saturday for Israel, but there is no mention of a specific day after the Cross. We have examples of the church gathering on Sunday and John in the Book of Revelation referring to the Lord's Day, but nothing about Saturday being the only day that the Sabbath can be celebrated on. Taking this lack of information along with Paul's teaching in Romans and Colossians it seems that the specific day of the week is not set in stone, if you will pardon the pun, like it was for Israel.

The bottom line is that God blessed and sanctified the Sabbath. God has placed a special honor on us observing a day of rest and a day of holiness. Should we then lessen or eliminate what God has ordained? Or should we get in on the blessing and the benefit of keeping holy what God made as holy?

Let's pray.