

The Sabbath
Selected Scripture
ABC 4/9/17

Open your Bibles to Ex 20 & stand with me as we read vss 1-17. Just so you know, yes, we're still in Rom 14. **1-17** PRAY

Last week we looked at what Paul wrote in Rom 14:5-9. Vs 5 says, **One person regards (judges) one day above another, another regards every day alike.** This raises the question, what **day** is Paul talking about? It could include the Jewish feast days & celebrations, but most likely is referring to the Jewish Sabbath.¹ We just read the 10 Commandments & #4 said, **Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy** (8). & yet Paul says you can either choose to observe it or not, as long as you're **fully convinced** you're doing it **for the Lord** & giving **thanks to God** for it (Rom 14:5-6). Ever had some confusion in your mind about this issue? Why do we disregard 1 of the 10 commandments? Some of you were raised with Sunday being just like Saturday, a weekend day to do whatever needed to be done or you wanted to do. Others were raised where Sunday was when you went to church, probably both morning & night, & could do as you please between the two. But some of you were raised where not only did you go to church both morning & evening, but in between you weren't allowed to do much of anything but read your Bible or visit the sick. Certainly no secular reading, no games, no swimming, & no playing with friends. Here's the description of one raised under this stricter observance:

The Sabbath began for us when we children were awakened early on Sunday morning for a full day in church. First came Sunday morning church, followed by lunch. & after lunch, we all had to take a nap, whether we wanted to or not...

After we rose from our naps, we were allowed to do some quiet reading or perhaps listen to gospel music. Then, on Sunday evening, we all went to church again. & after we came home, we went straight to bed.

This was the typical Sabbath of my growing up years. & every Sunday, all day long, we had to refrain from doing anything lively, such as playing ball or romping around. We weren't even allowed to use scissors to cut paper for school. Our parents constantly reminded us, "This is the Lord's day, & it's a day of rest." & so we kept it holy.²

¹ Douglas Moo, *Romans*, p 842

² David Wilkerson, *Honoring the Sabbath*, www.tsculpitseries.org/english/1990s/ts971215.html

Depending on what denomination you were raised in, you might have had to learn the Question #116 of the Westminster Catechism is: *What is required in the 4th commandment?*

The answer: *The 4th commandment requires of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as He hath appointed in His word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, & the first day of the week ever since, & so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian Sabbath, & in the NT called "The Lord's Day."*³

Is that correct? What is the Sabbath & are we as Christians required to keep it or is it a matter of conscience that we each must decide & be **fully convinced** for ourselves? This morning I want to follow the Sabbath in Scripture & then draw some conclusions. I do this knowing not everyone will agree & that's OK! If you disagree with what I say this morning I ask that you still **love & accept** me as Paul has been telling us & I promise to do the same for you. Deal?

1. Three Views There are 3 basic views about what day of the week Christians should worship God & how they should keep that day.

A. Saturday or Sabbath Some believe we should worship on Saturday since this is the Sabbath day. This is the position of the 7th-Day Adventists & 7th-Day Baptists.

B. Sunday as the Christian Sabbath This view teaches Sunday is the equivalent of the OT Sabbath, meaning we're to observe it as the Jews observed Saturday. Jonathan Edwards once resolved *never to speak anything that is ridiculous, sportive, or matter of laughter on the Lord's day.*⁴ The Westminster Confession of Faith I just read takes this view, calling the Lord's Day *the Christian Sabbath*. It goes on to say:

*This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, & ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, & thoughts, about their worldly enjoyments & recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the public & private exercises of His worship, & in the duties of necessity & mercy.*⁵

This was the view of the English & American Puritans & was common until relatively recently.

Because of this there were laws such as: *No one shall run on the Sabbath, or walk in his garden*

³ Smith, M. H. *Westminster Larger Catechism* (Logos electronic edition)

⁴ Resolution #38, apuritansmind.com/the-christian-walk/jonathan-edwards-resolutions/

⁵ Chapter XXI, Sections 7, 8

*or elsewhere, except reverently to & from church.*⁶ D.L. Moody once preached a message deploring every form of Sabbath-breaking. He condemned sweethearts who cruised around on bicycles-built-for-two during Sunday afternoons. He also cried out against those who read newspapers & spoke harshly of women who paraded in fine dresses & big, fancy hats on Sundays. He warned them all: *You're breaking the Sabbath. Everything you're doing is a matter of pride & arrogance against God's holy ordinance!*⁷

C. Sunday worship as the *Lord's Day* This view holds the Sabbath has been abolished by the death & resurrection of Jesus & Sunday, the Lord's Day, which has its own characteristics, has replaced it. How are we to understand the place the Sabbath plays, if any, in the life of God's people after the death & resurrection of Jesus? Let's begin by seeing the ...

2. Sabbath in the OT Turn back to the book of beginnings, Gen 2. The chapter begins by telling us creation is done.

A. Gen 2:2-3

The word **sanctified** is essentially the word *holy* & this is the 1st time it's used in the Bible. The root means to separate or elevate. Here, for the 1st time, we come across the idea of something being separated by being elevated. God designates this 7th day as an exalted day, a day lifted above all other days. He makes it holy & declares it to be so for 3 reasons. The 3 reasons are basically connected to the 3 verbs that make up the text.

1) It's a unique day because creation was **completed**. Creation ceased on the 6th day. It didn't go on for billions of years. This is a special day because it signals that God's creation is finished.

2) This is a unique day because God rests. This doesn't imply He was weary & needed to recharge His creative powers. No, the Lord does not grow weary (Is 40:28), He doesn't slumber or sleep (Ps 121:1-5). He rested in the sense that He ceased from work. What it tells us when He rested is really that He was satisfied, which takes us back to **1:31a**.

It was a perfect work & it was the rest of utter satisfaction. Notice there's no Sabbath law given here for Adam & Eve. Nothing is said about this being a day of worship. It seems to be dealing

⁶ D.L. Moody's sermon, *How Shall We Spend the Sabbath*, www.wholesomewords.org/etexts/moody/sabbath.html

⁷ David Wilkerson, *Honoring the Sabbath*

with God alone. He completed His creation & satisfied with it, stopped creating; in other words, He rested.

3) He blessed this day. What's that mean? He designed that the 7th day would be a memorial to His creation & its original perfection. This is a day elevated as a memorial to remember the glory of God's perfection in creation. Every 7th day is a reminder that God created the universe perfectly in 6 days. Saturday is a perpetual witness to God as Creator. Sunday, on the other hand, is a perpetual witness to God as Redeemer which we'll talk about later. But in Gen 2 there's no mention of the Sabbath being a law or a day of worship. The 1st time we find "**Sabbath**" in Scripture is in ...

B. Exodus 16 (11-30) Hundreds of years have passed. Patriarchs have come & gone. None of them worshiped, as far as we know, on the Sabbath. God didn't require it of Adam, Eve, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, & the rest of His people. But in Ex 16 God feeds His people manna as they wander in the wilderness. The manna falls every day except the Sabbath. They were to gather twice as much on Friday so they didn't have to do so on Saturday. This gives them a glimpse of what's coming in chpt 20, & the 10 commandments. But this is the 1st time God gives any law dealing with the Sabbath. Flip over to...

C. Exodus 31 Here we find the Sabbath is a sign. **12-17**

It's a sign in that it points to something else. It's a symbol connected to the Mosaic covenant. When God made a covenant with Noah, He promised He'd never destroy the world again & gave a sign. What was it? A rainbow. When God made a covenant with Abraham He designated the sign of circumcision. Here in the Mosaic Covenant is another sign, the Sabbath. What was the sign for? The Sabbath was a reminder of creation. It reminded them God was the Creator of all things. Every Sabbath was a reminder of a perfect creation, a paradise of God dominated by righteousness, which had been given up because of sin & could only be regained again by righteousness. God decreed the Sabbath as a sign, not for everyone, but for His people, Israel. Vs 17, **A sign between Me & the sons of Israel forever**. Every 7th day was a reminder they were living in a fallen world & had lost paradise. The only way to regain a taste of paradise was obedience to

God, righteousness, as expressed in the 10 commandments. They were to consider the importance of obeying these commands. They were to examine their own lives & look at how they measured up to the law of God. Recognizing their sin was the objective which would bring them to repentance.

D. Deuteronomy 5 Here the basis of the Sabbath observance is different. **15**

God has shown His power not just to create but also to rescue, deliver, redeem, & save. **Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.** The Jews didn't create themselves or deliver themselves from Egypt. It was God alone. Therefore remember Him every Sabbath for what He's done.

The 1st Saturday identified God as Creator, but the institution of the Sabbath in Moses' day identified God as the Law-giver & Deliverer. The 1st was to produce gratitude for the wonder of creation. The 2nd to produce repentance for the forfeiture of all that is right & to know we can never deliver or save ourselves. The Sabbath was a reminder that God created & that the creation of God which was originally perfect is now fallen, & we have fallen, & the whole realm of His creation is stained by sin. & we can do nothing about it. Because of sin was paradise forfeited & the only way to regain it is to be righteous. Obviously, they couldn't keep the law, but they were to be driven to repentance to plead with God to be merciful to them as sinners. Again, this was unique for the people of Israel. When Jesus came, everything changed.

4. Sabbath in the NT As we come to the NT, we know Jesus never sinned, but how did He treat the Sabbath? Quite frankly, any way He wanted! Why? Because He is the Mediator of a new & better covenant. I believe the NT teaches us that not only did Jesus do away with the sacrificial system, He was the final sacrifice, He also does away with the Sabbath system because He is the true rest we all need. Turn to ...

A. Matthew 12 On this Sabbath (1-7), Jesus & His disciples are walking through grain fields & the disciples got hungry & began to pick & eat the grain. According to the OT, there was no law forbidding this (only against harvesting, Ex 34:21). But the Jews had added endless restrictions to the OT. For them the observance of the Sabbath outweighed all other commandments of the

Torah. Rabbi Levi said, *If Israel kept the Sabbath properly even for one day, the Son of David would come. Why? Because it is equivalent to all the commandments.*⁸ The Pharisees see the disciples picking grain & say to Jesus, **Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath** (2). How does Jesus respond? *You think this is bad? Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he & his companions...?* What did they do? They ate of the **consecrated bread**, the showbread, which was for priests only (3-4). He then goes on to talk about the priests who break the Sabbath because they're working but are still innocent (5). *You all make a big issue out of not working on the Sabbath. Guess what? While you're not working, all the priests are working, carrying out all the offerings & sacrifices.* This tells us this law is not moral, it's symbolic. If it were moral, even the priests would have to keep it. Jesus, rather than conceding to their concern over a violation of the Sabbath, points to other violations of the Sabbath that were legal. Then what does He say in vs 8? **The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.** As such, He can do anything He wants with the Sabbath. He can institute it. He can make commands & restrictions. He can require death for violation of those commands, or He can set it aside completely. He can nullify it. & I believe we begin seeing that transition beginning to take place here. As Jesus arrives, everything that's part of the system of Judaism is coming to its end.

B. Mark 2 This is Mark's account of the Mt 12 passage. Mark includes another statement of Jesus.

27

Neither Jesus nor His disciples held to the Pharisees' strict ideas of how the Sabbath should be observed & when Jesus was challenged He replied **the Sabbath was made for man**. In essence, Jesus pointed to the limited value of the Sabbath even as He observed it. At the same time He asserted His right to amend or abolish or replace it if He wished. After all, He was the **Lord of the Sabbath**. God designed the Sabbath to be a blessing, to bring rest, to bring a day in the week when you could thank God for the glory of His creation & be reminded of the paradise that had been lost because of sin. It was a day to show gratitude for creation & to repent & seek forgiveness. God had given the Sabbath to be a blessing to man, to give him rest from his work,

⁸ Harold Weiss, *A Day of Gladness: Sabbath Among Jews & Christians in Antiquity*, p 11

a taste of Eden where all was rest before the fall, to give him an opportunity to thank God for creation, & to examine his life against the law. & seeing his sin, seek forgiveness & mercy which would result in joy & peace & salvation. Again, He is **Lord of the Sabbath**. He is greater than the Sabbath. The Sabbath will be whatever He desires & designs it to be.

C. Luke 14 1-6

The Pharisees thought healing someone was a violation of the Sabbath but it appears Jesus frequently chose the Sabbath for His healings purposely because it struck a blow at their observances of the Sabbath. It's not a stretch to think that Jesus is somehow announcing the end of the Sabbath.

D. John 5 Opposition to Jesus is smoldering under the surface at this time, but this healing brought it out in the open. There's a feast of the Jews (1). We're not sure which one, but it would be a festival or Sabbath feast. **2-3a, 5-9**

OT law didn't forbid walking nor carrying your pallet from one place to another. But rabbinic tradition had added 39 different forbidden activities. You find them in the **Mishnah**. This translation is over 1,000 pages long. It even deals with such things as if a picture falls off the wall on the Sabbath whether or not you're allowed to re-hang it. The answer? It depends!⁹ It's complex & complicated. But one of their prohibitions was carrying your mat on the Sabbath. So Jesus commanded him to violate the Pharisees' Sabbath. He didn't have to heal the man on the Sabbath. He didn't have to command the man to do something that violated their Sabbath sensibilities. But He did & He did it purposely. **15-16**

Jesus would never violate the law of God. He is holy, sinless, unblemished, & separate from sinners. But Jesus did what He wanted on the Sabbath even in the sight of the Pharisees because it was part of bringing down that whole system. In vs 17, He goes even beyond that & defends what He did by saying this, **My Father is working until now, & I Myself am working**. This is a claim to deity. *My Father & I are doing our work before your eyes. We are working.* **18**

⁹ halachafortodaycom.blogspot.com/2013/02/archives-hilchos-shabbos-39-melachos.html

He was calling God His Father & continually doing things that violated their Sabbath laws. The Pharisees charged Jesus with breaking the Sabbath & making Himself equal with God. This led them to eventually kill Him. Jesus never attempted to fit His activities into their Sabbath laws. He established His own authority as one with God & as Lord over the Sabbath. The Pharisees were strict Sabbath keepers. Yet they missed the whole point of the Sabbath. They found no rest from their endless works for salvation. They found no real repentance. The Sabbath laws were mere shadows of hope, a weekly reminder there was a paradise to be regained & it was through a righteousness they could never produce. There could be a rest from the endless struggle & the horrible burden of trying to earn your salvation. When Jesus came He brought that rest, true rest. The child of God is now a new person. Under the new covenant we're declared righteous, healed, washed, forgiven, & accepted. We've entered into rest with none other than the Creator Himself. We have been given Jesus' own righteousness (2 Cor 5:21). We rejoice in that gift & cease all effort to earn our salvation.

E. Hebrews 3:7-11

God's true rest didn't come through Moses or Joshua or the Law. God's true rest comes only through Jesus. **My rest** (11) is the promise of salvation that God gives to those who put their trust in Him. As with other OT symbols, the NT teaches there's a spiritual fulfillment of the Sabbath in Christ. **12-19**

The kind of rest that's important for us is the salvation rest that comes by faith in Jesus. Unbelief forfeits rest. The rest the NT writers are concerned about, even the emphasis in the book of Hebrews, which is a very Jewish book, isn't about a Sabbath rest, but a spiritual salvation rest. Look at **4:1**.

The **rest** the NT concerns itself with isn't a day of the week, it's salvation through Jesus. Hebrews shows why the New Covenant in Christ is far better than the Old Covenant between God & Israel. **2-3a**

There's never a command in the NT to keep the Sabbath. All 10 Commandments are repeated in the NT, some numerous times, except the 4th command. It's never repeated in the NT. It was in

the midst of the law as a sign & a symbol to lead the people to rest & repentance. But when you come to the NT that command is never repeated. The rest the NT is concerned about is the rest that comes to the soul from hearing & believing the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's the rest the NT offers. **4:9-10**

What does that mean? There are only 2 possible ideas about getting to heaven: You work your way in or it's a gift from God. The Jews were working. But when you enter the rest of grace & faith, works cease. The day you came to Jesus you stopped trying to earn your salvation. You entered into permanent rest. A right relationship with God doesn't come through works we do to earn acceptance with Him. We can only be right with God by trusting in the work that Jesus has done in His life, death, & resurrection. Salvation comes by abandoning all trust in ourselves & our works & trusting only in what God has done for us in Jesus. The Sabbath, the symbol & sign, was a dim reflection of the true rest. Look at Rom 14 for a moment. Since it's true that the rest the NT calls for is a spiritual rest, salvation rest from the works approach to righteousness, you can no longer make anything out of the Sabbath.

F. Romans 14:5

There were Jews who had come to faith in Jesus & had a hard time letting go of the Sabbath. It was ingrained in them. They thought they were obeying the Lord by maintaining the Old Covenant Sabbath law. They observed it for the Lord (6). In other words, as vs 5 says, each was **fully convinced in his own mind** & does what he thinks is right. **8**

Don't make an issue out of the Sabbath. Dietary laws & Sabbath observances are part of a passing scheme. & there's instruction elsewhere in the NT to help these people develop their understanding of their freedom from these things. But don't force them against their conscience. If Jewish believers feel compelled to observe the Sabbath law, let them do that until they come to understand the fullness of their freedom. What perhaps is even more remarkable is that there's no command here to observe the Sabbath. This would be a perfect place to say, *Those of you who aren't observing this day, shape up, & get with it!* It doesn't happen. There are no NT commands regarding Christians to observe the Sabbath.

G. Galatians 4:9-11

You have no obligation to go back to the calendar of the feasts & Sabbaths of the Mosaic law. This is perhaps the most definitive because it pulls 2 signs together, the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, circumcision, & the sign of the Mosaic Covenant, the Sabbath. We know that circumcision has been completely abolished in the new covenant. 5:2

Circumcision doesn't matter. 6

H. Colossians 2:11

In other words, you had a far more dramatic surgery, & it was internal. 12-13

Set aside circumcision. If you hang onto circumcision, you make Christ of no effect. The sign of the Abrahamic Covenant is gone. That Covenant passes away because that Covenant cannot save. 16-17

Don't let anybody hold you to a Sabbath. & that's referring to the weekly Sabbath, because the other festival Sabbaths are covered under the terms **festival** which would be yearly celebrations & **new moon** which were monthly ones. Paul says don't let anyone hold you to the Sabbath. It was part of the system that included the temple, the priesthood, & the sacrifices. & it's all gone. It was only a shadow, not the substance. The substance of those yearly, monthly, & weekly Sabbaths is Jesus. Just as Hebs 4 explained, the ultimate substance of the Sabbath is the Person & work of Jesus Christ. The shadow only pointed to the fact that God was the Creator, that paradise had been lost, that you had come under the terrifying judgment of the law & needed to repent & come to God & seek righteousness & mercy & grace at His hand. But it didn't provide that. That's provided only in Jesus. Paul is saying you no longer need the shadow, you have the real thing. You have rest, the true rest found only in Jesus. The purpose of the Sabbath has been fulfilled & we don't need the shadow or picture of the Sabbath when we have Jesus.

Some final thoughts: All the 10 Commandments are repeated in the NT except the Sabbath command. It's never quoted in the NT. There are no Sabbath rules anywhere in the new covenant. There are no instructions about behavior on the Sabbath anywhere in the NT. The apostles never commanded anybody to observe the Sabbath. They never chastise anyone for not

observing the Sabbath. They never warned believers about Sabbath violations. They never encouraged believers to hold to the Sabbath. It's gone, with one exception. According to Gen 2 we can be reminded every 7th day is an opportunity to acknowledge the greatness of our Creator. We can bless that day by acknowledging God as Creator. & then, & this is for next week, the 1st day is where we acknowledge God as Redeemer. We don't ever really celebrate a Sabbath in the Mosaic sense because it's a **ministry of death** (2 Cor 3:7). But we can celebrate a Sabbath in the Genesis sense as we celebrate God as our Creator, & then on the 1st day of the week, as we celebrate Him as our Redeemer.

What's that mean for us? I don't believe you're breaking the Sabbath by eating out, cooking, driving, swimming, playing games, laughing, or going to a movie on Saturday or Sunday. But we do miss out on blessings if we don't take a day for spiritual feeding, worship, & physical refreshment. In general the Sabbath command calls for hard work & it continues a pattern of 6 days of work for 1 day of rest. The command for Israel to work 6 days correlates with creation & with NT commands to work hard & not be lazy. & it includes the principle of rest that Jesus modeled when He called His disciples away to rest (Mk 6:31). There's a principle of balance evident in the Sabbath command that points to the need for regular time off of work. & God's example in creation gave us a pattern of 1 rest day a week. Israel's Sabbath laws don't dictate how we as Christians must spend that day off or when that day off must be. But what it does teach is true rest is to be found only in the Lord. Our pursuit of true rest must be in the living God who is the source of all goodness & pleasure. We should seek & find satisfaction for our souls in Him. The more we know of the God of the Bible, the more we'll seek Him for our continual rest & joy. & the NT pattern for pursuing that renewal in God together is meeting with God's gathered church. The regular pattern of Sunday worship does provide some analogies with Israel's Sabbath. The most obvious is that God's design has always been for His people to regularly meet for worship & service. Heb 10:24-25 reminds us to **consider how to stimulate one another to love & good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; & all the more, as you see the day drawing near.** That principle of

regular fellowship for mutual encouragement & teaching is something inherent in the Sabbath command that we can apply in the NT church. We need that regular refocusing on God because we're prone to wander & forget Him. We need to be brought back to Him to remember who He is & how we relate to Him. Because the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ & the main NT command is to prioritize time with God & His people, then we can give freedom in the details of how that happens. We can guard against judging based on what days are observed or not. But we must give ourselves eagerly to spending time with other Christians & studying His Word & singing & praying & strengthening one another in the body of Christ. We can give ourselves to that priority because we believe God offers the greatest rest & renewal. Then our convictions aren't based on rules about regarding one day over another or because of tradition alone. Instead our convictions will be fueled by faith that wants all that God has for us in the pleasures & passions of being with His people. Then we will seek time alone with Him & time praying & in His Word with others because we know that's where we find the refreshment we need. & as our souls are at rest in all God has done for us in Christ, then we can overflow with gracious love toward others no matter what. Next Sunday, Easter Sunday, I plan to transition to how we view Sunday. Is there something important about it? Is there something unique & special about it? & what does Scripture say? Come next Sunday as we look at that 1st Easter & what it means for us.