

Sharing God's rest

Guard your time

Here's the fourth word given to Israel, and for the benefit of us Christians. 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy...'

- ❑ He tells us there are six days for getting all our jobs done. Then rest, or Sabbath.
- ❑ This has already been illustrated for Israel (Exodus 16:23-29)
- ❑ This includes everyone we are responsible for. I.e. don't enslave others!
- ❑ It's spelt out in detail, which could suggest we will try to find ways to avoid what it says!
- ❑ For some, optional activities become 'work' in the demands they make.

The Lord's talking about time. When we're busy, forgetting is easy! So, 'Remember...!'

- ❑ If we don't guard our time—we may be entertaining other gods unawares.

We are creatures, not slaves

The Sabbath is made holy—for the Lord.

- ❑ It arises from creation where God shows what is important to him. This includes resting on his last day of making everything.
- ❑ God doesn't need a day off! He celebrates work completed. He rests *in* what he has done.
- ❑ He calls us to share this day with him, to rest in what he does.

The Sabbath is also blessed.

- ❑ Everything else God blesses in creation is so something can be 'fruitful and multiply'.
- ❑ By stopping, we can recognise that God is the one who makes everything work—not us.
- ❑ Psalm 46 tells us about how risky this world can be—'mountains fall into the heart of the sea'. But he can be at peace knowing who is in charge of it (Psalm 46). Then he says, 'Be still, and know that I am God'. The word for 'be still' actually means, simply, 'stop!'
- ❑ Another Psalm says, 'In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat—for he grants sleep to those he loves' (Psalm 127:2).

We need to know that the world we live in doesn't just happen, or continue, by our frenetic activity.

- ❑ God makes everything. We are not merely the result of time and chance.
- ❑ He is watching over what he speaks to bring it to its goal (Jeremiah 1:12).
- ❑ He wants us to share in the delight of that being so.
- ❑ If worship doesn't affect our time table, we're missing out on something.
- ❑ The law shows where we have drifted from walking in the Spirit and sends us back to Christ!

When Moses repeats this command, he says the necessity of keeping it arises from redemption.

- ❑ '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' (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).
- ❑ Slaves can't plan their own time table. That's why Israel had to leave Egypt and worship the Lord in the wilderness.
- ❑ Like them, we need to be delivered from this present evil world—it's goals of self-sufficiency, self-sovereignty and self-determination. These things don't set us free. They make us their slaves.
- ❑ The world is finite—we sense there is not enough to go around. God is infinite—he can be prodigal.
- ❑ God is at rest in his love for us (Zephaniah 3:17).

Remembering to stop for long enough to acknowledge and relish God being Creator and Redeemer, is essential to true worship. It is also essential for human health and social well-being.

Sabbath is a sign, not a ceremony

Sabbath proclaims and reminds Israel that they belong to God and can rely on him to be their God.

- ❑ It's 'a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so that you may know that I am the Lord, who makes you holy' (Exodus 31:12; Ezekiel 20:12).
- ❑ We use various reminders or markers to make sure we don't forget important things, and Sabbath is like that for Israel.
- ❑ Sabbath also shows other nations that Israel belongs to the Lord. They are not slaves to the creation but belong to its Maker, and this affects everything.

The Sabbath command remains a sign for Christians—a shaping of time to assist us in keeping the Lord 'front and centre'.

Sabbath, historically, deteriorates until it becomes merely ceremonial and self-justifying.

- ❑ Pharisees hate what Jesus does on the Sabbath. He is living in Sabbath rest—all the time. The Pharisees are 'up tight'—all the time, and their Sabbath is only a ceremony.

Sabbath points to Christ who has come to give Sabbath rest.

- ❑ It takes more than just a day off to know that our life is made useful by God and not by us.
- ❑ Jesus says, 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest' (Matthew 11:28).
- ❑ Only Jesus, making himself an offering for our sins, can give us rest from trying to be something by ourselves (Acts 26:14).
- ❑ Coming to him is the way we enter Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:10).

So how can Christians go about keeping the third commandment?

- ❑ We, like Israel, need a sign that we are the Lord's workmanship—a time to know the Lord is God, and that we are not! It needs to affect our time table!
- ❑ Paul notes that some people keep a special day and some don't (Romans 14:5). Clearly, the sign is what is important, not the ceremony.
- ❑ The first Christians start meeting together on the day Jesus rises from the dead. Gradually, this becomes a pattern (Acts 20:7).
- ❑ Sabbath, for us, is a day, or a time, to be with the Lord, to hear his word and to be with others who trust and love him.
- ❑ As the gospel crosses cultures, each Christian and each church must decide how to regulate their time to remember the Lord.
- ❑ It takes time to know that we are made by, and blessed by, redeemed by and *for* God—his holy people.
- ❑ It requires some stopping of our usual things to realise that God blesses the work of our hands to make it fruitful.
- ❑ It takes time hear and know his word.
- ❑ It takes time to build others up in faith, hope and love.

Those who expect their Christian life to just happen—without heeding the third commandment—may find they drift, or become unfruitful. Or worse.

- ❑ The Lord sometimes gives us obligatory 'sabbath rest'—by sickness etc.

The Lord finishes his creation by resting. He shows Israel he is their Creator and Redeemer by commanding them to rest on their Sabbath. He sends Christ to make this rest actual and permanent.

And then, by resting in the Lord now, we look forward to the day when the whole creation will be fully cleansed, developed and glorious, and ruled over by Christ and all his followers. It is the final Sabbath to which all creation is moving (Revelation 14:13).