

# **The Lord's Rest: The Fourth Commandment Colossians 2:13-23**

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by C.W. Powell**

13. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; 15. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. 16. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: 17. Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. 18. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19. And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. 20. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, 21. (Touch not; taste not; handle not; 22. Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? 23. Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

In all of the law, there are two things to keep in mind. The first is that there were ceremonies that God prescribed. Much of the Jewish life was taken up with the keeping of ceremonies. The ceremonies were for the purpose of emphasizing moral and spiritual realities, very important ones. For instance, there were ceremonies of purification, involving pots, pans, houses, persons, etc. The purpose for the ceremonies of purification was to teach Israel that God is holy and that He must be worshipped by a holy and purified people. Another example is the commandment to rise up before the hoary head, the elderly, to show respect and honor for fathers and mothers. The ceremonies were very elaborate at times. There were ceremonies involving what they were permitted to eat and drink. The people came to think that the ceremonies were the thing itself—and one day they accused Christ of eating with unwashed hands—that is, he had not performed the ceremonies of cleansing that they felt the law required. He pointed them to the reality of the ceremony—that what was important was not what went into a man, but what came out of him—in other words, God is not served by ceremonies, but from the heart, in spirit and in truth.

The second thing is this: all the ceremonies that went along with Moses are done away, because there was a change of the priesthood, from Levi to Christ, and Christ's priesthood is after the order of Melchizedek and not after the order of Aaron. As Hebrews says, because there was a change in the priesthood, there is also a change in the law. Nothing about the Mosaic ceremonies and order remains to us, although certainly the commandment to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength still remains—and to love each other as ourselves

There were trouble makers at Colosse who did not understand these things. There were some, perhaps pre-Gnostics, who taught that the church needs to go beyond Christ to the fullness of knowledge that only they could provide. They involved the church in such controversies, and also controversies over angels and mystic speculations. There was also a settlement of Jews in Colosse, and some of them had become Christians; they were concerned that the Christians were not keeping the ceremonies of the law as they ought to, and involved the church in controversy over such ordinances. Both advocated asceticism and enduring privation and self-sacrifice in what the apostle calls 'will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body,' for even the Jews had been influenced, through Philo, of certain pagan practices.

What was the church to do? Paul is very clear: all these external things, satisfying though they are to pride and the satisfying of the flesh, they will not commend you to God, and can become a snare to you in your faith.

He cuts quickly to the heart of the matter: Christ is the head of the church and our life comes from Him, not from ceremonies. "And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances"

His point is very clear: Ceremonies are very dear to those who do not hold to Christ, even though they are done in the name of Christ, for they are ignorant of the true life of Christ if they think that this life can be im-parted by ceremonies, as if what you do in the body can give life to the soul.

Calvin says on Colossians 2:19

19. Not holding the head. He condemns in the use of one word whatever does not bear a relation to Christ. He also confirms his statement on the ground that all things flow from him, and depend upon him. Hence, should any one call us anywhere else than to Christ, though in other respects he were big with heaven and earth, he is empty and full of wind: let us, therefore, without concern, bid him farewell. Observe, however, of whom he is speaking, namely, of those who did not openly reject or deny Christ, but, not accurately understanding his office and power, by seeking out other helps and means of salvation, (as they commonly speak,) were not firmly rooted in him.. From whom the whole body by joints. He simply means this, that the Church does not stand otherwise than in the event of all things being furnished to her by Christ, the Head, and, accordingly, that her

entire safety consists in him. The body, it is true, has its nerves, its joints, and ligaments, but all these things derive their vigor solely from the Head, so that the whole binding of them together is from that source. What, then, must be done? The constitution of the body will be in a right state, if simply the Head, which furnishes the several members with everything that they have, is allowed, without any hindrance, to have the pre-eminence. This Paul speaks of as the increase of God, by which he means that it is not every increase that is approved by God, but only that which has a relation to the Head. For we see that the kingdom of the Pope is not merely tall and large, but swells out into a monstrous size. As, however, we do not there see what Paul here requires in the Church, what shall we say, but that it is a humpbacked body, and a confused mass that will fall to pieces of itself.

This, then is the rule of the church: Christ is all. Anything that takes away from His glory and honor and power; that magnifies the works and confidence of the flesh is to be rejected by us. As the **Belgic Confession** puts it:

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and that all the shadows are accomplished; so that the use of them must be abolished among Christians; yet the truth and substance of them remain with us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have their completion. In the meantime we still use the testimonies taken out of the law and the prophets to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel, and to regulate our life in all honorableness to the glory of God, according to His will. –Article 25

So let us come to the Fourth Commandment:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

We have one question in the HC which gives God's requirements to the church about the Fourth Commandment, with the scriptural proofs.

Q103: What does God require in the fourth Commandment?

A103: In the first place, God wills that the ministry of the Gospel and schools be maintained, and that I, especially on the day of rest, diligently attend church to learn the Word of God, to use the holy sacraments, to call publicly upon the Lord, and to give Christian alms. In the second place, that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, allow the Lord to work in me by His Spirit, and thus begin in this life the everlasting sabbath.

I. It is God's will that the ministry of the Gospel and schools for teaching be maintained. Therefore time must be allotted by the church to accomplish those things, and people must set aside time for it to be done. Therefore the preaching must be lively and the teaching must be thorough. The purpose is so that people are delivered from the bondage of idolatry and wickedness to worship the one true and living God who has triumphed over everything that is contrary to us: taking it out of the way, so that we may worship God without fear.

13. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quick-ened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;
14. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;
15. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

This is the rest of the Lord. As Hebrews says: 4:10-11: "For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief."

God rested on the seventh day, to show that our peace with Him does not depend upon our works, but upon His works. We are to rest from our own works, abandoning all trust in them, in order to rest completely in Christ. This means that not even our own life here depends upon our grubbing day after day without rest, constantly concerned about our daily bread—not we can take time out and go to church to hear the word of God and rest in the finished work of Christ. If God spared not his own Son to save our souls, surely he will provide for our bodies. So Christ tell us not to fret about our daily bread and our earthly needs.

This is the first meaning of the Sabbath, we are to rest from our own works; we learn this through the preaching of the Gospel and the schools the church provides: this theme is repeated at the end of the question, for it is in trusting the Lord for all things for body and soul that we find the true Sabbath of God.

II. This means that we are to diligently attend church. Diligently attend. Not as an empty ceremony that we offer to God in place of our trust and hope, but as an exercise in learning about the true God, and supporting the ministry of the word. What! is the preaching of the Gospel unimportant! Is the body what matters after all? Has not God provided food for my soul, and where am I to find this? In the ministry of the word. In the preaching of the Gospel—in the study of the word of God.

III. If the ministry of the word is to be maintained so that people can learn the word of God, then this is the way it is to be done:

- a. Learn the Word of God. Learning the scripture is essential. The older must teach the younger—every Christian is to have a part in this, for we are to edify one another. We exhort one another and encourage one another. Everyone is important.
- b. Use the Holy Sacraments. The only ceremonies that remain to us are the sacraments that teach us that Christ is all for us. God has given them to us so that we don't forget how we are redeemed. Once a year, Israel kept the Passover in order to remember they had been delivered from Egypt; we keep the Lord's Supper from time to time to remember that Christ has redeemed us from our sins. There is nothing magical about the ceremony—it is no magic carpet ride to glory—but in it Christ draws near by His word and Spirit to teach us that we live in Him alone, not in bread and wine.

c. Call publicly upon the Lord. Confessing Him before men. Confessing that man is more than a body and a mouth that must be fed, but man is created in the image of God, and His soul must be nourished, using the means that God has provided. Do not teach your children that they do not need the church, that they do not need the Scripture, that they do not need the work of the church.

d. To give Christian alms. This teaching ministry of the church must be supported. We are to lay by in store on the first day of the week, as the apostle commanded us. There is a treasury of the church, that is dedicated to the teaching and the preaching of the Word of God, and to provide temporary aid to those who genuinely have need. These funds are to be under the control of the faithful officers of the church, who in turn give an account to the people. They are not under the control of the minister, although he is to be paid out of them. Not to give regularly and proportionately is to rob God and men suffer in their souls when they withhold the offering from the Lord. Would the church survive if everyone was like you in your attendance and giving? As God has blessed you—not formulary and stingy—for God has blessed you in your souls, and you ought to rejoice in His goodness. The Lord loves cheerful givers.

e. We see the importance of the teaching of the Word and the maintaining of schools and the ministry, for this is the first thing noted by the catechism. First, it says.

f. You see, our rest depends upon the ministry and the teaching of the church. It is no Sabbath to rest the body all day and attend church where the word of God is corrupted and defiled. What rest of the soul is that? God's people are to give priority to the pure teaching and preaching of the Word of God, and provide the means for it to be done.

IV. We begin in this life the everlasting Sabbath. Everything we do is to testify that our rest alone is in Jesus Christ. Our works have nothing to do with our salvation. From beginning to end, our life is hid with Christ in God. As our catechism says,

Question 1: What is your only comfort in life and in death?

Answer 1: That I, with body and soul, both in life and in death, am not my own, but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ, who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins, and redeemed me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that all things must work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by His Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live unto Him.

May God bless you.