

## May 23 Keeping the Sabbath

Back to the creation ordinances, Gods framework. Today we are looking at the ordinance of “keeping the sabbath”. Gen 2:1-3 reads

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 **So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.**

We have another design, or framework, that is put in place prior to the fall. When we see Gods design that is in place since the very inception of creation, meaning prior to even sin, we want to consider this in its “purest” form. We can rightly see that this was how God intended life to be. I think this ordinance is particularly striking in this way. God is God and what makes him God is his Godness. Thus, he didn’t need a day of rest did he? We don’t really think that filling the heavens and the earth made him so tired that he needed a cup of hot tea and a nap do we? No, certainly not. We know the creation ordinances were given to man as man, meaning this is intended for us by God.

Now, I will say up front there is a LOT to consider with this ordinance. Some would say that this is the most controversial ordinance particularly in its application. Meaning how is it to be and not to be applied? We will look at some of this but a full review of this could easily consume a six week class on its own. The part of it that is not controversial, in my opinion, is “six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God”. In Exodus the main reason for keeping the Sabbath is imitation of God’s creative work and rest. In Deuteronomy, it is the celebration of God’s giving Israel rest from bondage of Egypt. Thus, the motive of the Sabbath keeping in Exodus is creation and Deuteronomy is redemption. I think both are instructive. In scripture creation and redemption are not antagonistic. Redemption is the work of the creator. Creation and redemption hold the same ethic and compliment one another.

John Calvin comments on the Sabbath

First, under the repose of the seventh day the heavenly lawgiver meant to represent to the people of Israel spiritual rest, in which believers ought to lay aside their own works to allow God to work in them. Secondly, he meant that there was to be a stated day for them to assemble to hear the law and perform the rites, or at least to devote it particularly to meditation upon his works, and thus through this remembrance to be trained in piety.

I think most of us can wrap our heads around the idea of setting a day aside to allow God to work in us, and assemble to hear the word of god.

The Heidelberg Catechism reflects Calvin’s view:

Question 103. What does God require in the fourth commandment?

- A. In the first place, God will 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.

Celebration of a completed divine work is called “rest”. As an eternal, omnipotent being, God does not need to rest in a literal sense. But he does finish tasks, and the completion of his major task is important to him, a matter for celebration. And at the completion of redemption there will be a final Sabbath rest for the people of God. Hebrews 4:9-10

9 So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,

This verse is meant to draw out attention back to the seventh day of the week, rest. And to set up vs 10 which reads

for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

You see so here is an important work we have called “continuity”. When the bible affirms a position in both the OT and the NT theologians call that “continuity”. When a theologian says that a certain perspective has biblical “continuity”, even from an academic perspective that is like saying “hands off you can’t debate this”. Both Genesis and Hebrews affirm the seventh day of rest and the idea that at the completion of redemptions there will be a final rest. Thus, when the culture withholds this clear sign of common grace, it is a indication of secular and non holy character of the culture.

Q 117 of the Westminster Catechism How is the Sabbath or the Lord’s day to be sanctified?

A. The sabbath or Lords day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments as recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time( except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God’s worship: and to that end we are to prepare our hearts and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of the day.

God gave the Sabbath at creation, and it continues through the OT and NT periods to the consummation. On the Sabbath day we are to rest from “our own works, words, and thoughts about worldly employments and recreations” and focus our attitudes and hearts on God. **We rest in order that we have time to worship.**

Now some practical matters or discussions:

**Work and Rest:** Scripture always defines the Sabbath as a day of rest, rather than a day of worship. God’s sabbath in Gen 2:2-3 is a time of rest from his labors. The fourth commandment calls Israel to work six days and rest for one. The Sabbath rest is physical, not merely stopping one activity for the other. I believe it is therefore legitimate to spend part of the Sabbath day in play physical rest. The work from which we should rest is particularly our daily labors from which we earn our living.

**Recreation:** Scripture permits Sabbath recreation as recreation is apart from the work we earn a living by. It is important to keep in mind that the Sabbath by its very nature is a feast not a fast. It is a time of abundance, not deprivation. It should be a time of delight, play, and joy. (EX 15 and Luke 15) But, there is a difference between merely festing in a secular way and one that points us to God.

We should look for those activities which point our heart towards mediation of our upward call not necessarily things of this world. Sabbath rest should be focused on HIM.

Some forms of recreation promote values opposed to God's word, such as certain kinds of music and videos. We should be self conscious about absorbing such things each day of the week but in particular the Sabbath, as we want to maintain a distinctive character on this day. We need to be VERY careful when coming up with a list of things that should NEVER or ALWAYS be done on the Sabbath.

**Works of necessity and mercy:** Westminster acknowledges exceptions for works of necessity and mercy. Work of necessity given in Matthew 12:1 disciples are essentially farming pick heads of grains of wheat. Matt 12: 5-6 Priest making arrangements for worship.

Deuteronomy 5:15

15 You shall remember that you were a slave[c] in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath

The connection here is the remembrance of God delivering Israel from slavery, so if we have a chance to reduce the toil of others on this day it is an act of mercy.

1. How does this make you consider how you spend your Sundays?
2. In light of this how well attending should bible study hour and the monthly Sunday night feast/study be attended?
3. Why do we struggle with the idea of physical rest? What is the underlying belief issue?
4. What does this say about culture issues such as youth sports practice and competitions on Sundays?