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Sabbath: Ignored, neglected; too busy to observe, too many plans for interruptions.

Sabbath: Good intentions awry. Conscience pricked from weekly reminder of appointment with God.

Sabbath: Old-fashioned, out-moded. Impossible in our modern age.

Sabbath: Despised. Attacked.

Sabbath: Old Testament. Jewish. Nailed to the cross. Done away with; replaced by grace.

Such selective views on inspiration and the authority of the Scriptures belie Protestant claims to base their faith on sola scriptura rather than tradition. No other prominent theological tenet, a divine command no less, is muted by Christians with

as much silence on the subject. Except to demean the day and encourage disregard for the Sabbath, you will not find titles in Christian bookstores on this clear Scriptural teaching. We seem afraid to discuss the issue. What do we fear? For over thirty years I have served as an Army chaplain, yet today is the first time a chaplain not of my ecclesiastical endorsement has publicly addressed the topic; my commendations to Chaplain James King for his openness and honesty. I deeply appreciate him risking dialogue and sharing his pulpit with me this morning.

Divinely instituted, the Sabbath comes to us from creation and is sustained throughout the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. What does shabbath mean? Simply put shabbath means “ceasing” or “resting.” In the textual passage of Hebrews, chapters 3 and 4, the Greek words translated “rest” convey four aspects of resting. Paul recounts Israel’s quest for rest from their slavery and wilderness wanderings to the Promised Land. Like the Children of Israel, we too, seek physical rest, deliverance from

labor. In a world that promises so much relief from work, that has so many conveniences and labor-saving devices, and provides abundant leisure time, the need for rest seems strange. The truth reveals the opposite. Americans work more and enjoy it less. While many Europeans average 34 hours on the job, Americans laborers spend 44 and managers over 50+ hours per week working. We are a people driven by our obsessions and resulting depressions. The need for relief from our endless search for satisfaction and security turns many to chemical dependency and revolving relationships. Our disbelief in God's remedy of shabbath/sabbatismos, resting, prevents the divine cure for our spiritual insomnia.

Second, Paul observed that the Children of Israel, once they had been established in Canaan as a nation, also failed to enter the rest of relationship God intended for His chosen people. God's purpose in choosing the Israelites as His people was not based on their merits anymore than our being chosen for salvation is based on our deserving such

status. Listen to how Moses and Peter say virtually the same thing.

The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers...

Deuteronomy 7:7 - 9:29. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. I Peter 2:9, 10.

Israel turned their status inward. Rather than proclaim the living Creator as the true God to the world, they twisted God's blessings into evidence of their own righteousness and made His provisions for their spiritual development an exclusive system of distorted legalism. Their rejection of the rest God intended for the benefit of the whole world resulted

in idolatry and captivity. Though Christians would never fall into that same trap, we have swayed on the pendulum to the other egocentric extreme and determined for ourselves what part of God's plan and will agrees with convenient tradition and preconceived opinions. Then we dare call our arrogance faithful service to God. Silence is not always consent; sometimes its passive aggression, spiritual rebellion.

Drawing lessons from the past, Paul admonishes Christians to accept Christ's invitation to spiritual rest, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30. The greatest cause of weariness is not physical labor or mental exertion. Emotional distress, conflict and spiritual uncertainty drain and tire our souls most. Jesus understands our human burdens and trials. He experienced them all. Sorely tempted far more than we can ever comprehend,

Jesus persevered and conquered the devil using only the same powers available to you and me - trust in God's Word and obedience to His Father's will. Yet, unlike you and me, Hebrews 4:14-16 tells us our Saviour and Lord never sinned. That is why we can approach the "throne of grace with confidence," not in ourselves, but in His perfect righteousness, and find peace and rest.

Fourth, Paul affirms again the sovereignty of God as Creator and Ruler of the universe. As man's source of life, the Creator knows what is best for the creatures He has made. And even if resting is unnecessary for divinity (after all, God does not get tired from a little creating), the divine declaration that the Sabbath is set aside as holy, sacred time for man is sufficient justification for obedient observance. Whether or not man thinks God's rest is arbitrary or convenient does not abrogate the Sabbath remaining for the people of God. "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His. Let

us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their (Israel's) example of disobedience." Hebrews 4:9-11.

What does the Bible teach about Jesus and the Sabbath? From my study five principles stand out. Briefly stated those principles exemplify the relationship between God and man. They are non-negotiable.

1. The Sabbath defines who we are. We are created beings, made in the image of the Creator for His honor and glory. Creatureliness implies; nay, requires a creator. Hence, man's innate desire to worship. In denying his divine origin, man turned to self-worship and sought some rational basis for existence by developing so-called scientific theories like evolution. Believing in evolution requires more faith than accepting biblical creationism. My son was a research hydrologist . As one of the few creationists at his work-place, he was keenly aware of evolution's unscientific subjectivity and futile attempts to explain life. Evolution proudly asserts humanity's independence from God; no savior

needed. The Sabbath testifies weekly of our origin; it commemorates Creation and the Creator. Genesis 2:1-3 and the Fourth Commandment explicitly establish yom, Hebrew for a literal 24-hour evening and morning day, as the Sabbath to be remembered, observed as sacred time for remembering our Creator and resting in His care.

2. As a measurement of time, the week is unnatural. Its source is creation and it is marked by the Sabbath. All other measurements of time are derived from known astrological events. Attempts to change the seven days weekly cycle have ended in failure. The Sabbath is God's gift of time to man given for the purpose of enhancing relationships with the Creator, the Lord's people and families. Any other use violates holy time and the Lord's purpose for us on that day. Profaning the Sabbath keeps us from receiving the full blessing the Lord wants to bestow on us.

If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day,

if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy (rest) in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. The mouth of the Lord has spoken. Isaiah 58:13 and 14.

3. The Sabbath symbolizes salvation. All religion uses symbols to teach and convey spiritual truths. Christianity is the most temporal of all religions. As a master teacher, Jesus used everyday things of this world to illustrate the kingdom of heaven. Fourteen times He said, "The kingdom of heaven is like..." By refraining from his own works of taking care of himself six days man demonstrates practical faith in dependency on God's saving/sustaining power. Secular worldly pursuits are replaced with worship, devotional study/prayer, fellowship with one's family and church, and learning about the Creator

by studying nature. The Sabbath pause halts the frantic pace of life and provides time for inspired reflection, renewal, reconciliation and redemption. It restores the whole person spiritually, relationally, volitionally, emotionally, mentally and physically.

4. The Sabbath is eternal. Neither Jesus Christ, the Apostles, nor the Scriptures abolish the Sabbath. Just because the Church has neglected teaching the sanctity of the Sabbath does not make it right to ignore or forget to keep the day holy. Jesus often took to task the theologians of His day for their transgressions. He said, “These people honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. They worship Me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.” Mark 7:6, 7. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Matthew 7:21. Speaking of the new earth for the redeemed, the prophet Isaiah describes all mankind worshipping before the Lord “from one Sabbath to another.” Then three words are added showing that this prophecy was

not some human prophet's fanciful dream, "says the Lord." From earth's creation to re-creation of the New Earth, and throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity the Sabbath continues as acknowledgement of God's creative and redemptive power.

5. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Referring to Himself, Christ declared, "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Mark 2:28. As its author, the Sabbath testifies of Christ. All of the above principles have their foundation and focus in Christ. The fundamental teaching under-pinning Christianity declares Jesus Christ to be the Son of the Living God. Though you and I can never fully understand the Incarnation, that mysterious blending of divinity and humanity, we accept on faith Jesus was who the Scriptures declare God to be.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...

Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made.

In Him was life, and that life was the light of men... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came

from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1-4 and 14. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. Colossians 1:16, 17.

Nearly one fifth of the New Testament consists of quotes or references from the Old Testament. The Apostles were keenly familiar with the Scriptures of their day, which was not the King James Version of the Bible, but the Hebraic First Testament and possibly its Greek translation known as the Septuagint. Now follow closely Paul's arguments in proving the divinity of Christ to early believers. He refers to the history of God's dealings with Israel and retraces their familiar historical highlights

as recorded in Psalms 104 and 105, and the ninth chapter of Nehemiah. Listen carefully to verses

9-21 of Nehemiah 9 and then the comparison Paul makes in I Corinthians 10:1-4.

For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers (and sisters), that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.

Who was the God of the Old Testament? None other than Jesus Christ. The Son of God led His people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and into the wilderness. He was the Great Lawgiver who wrote the Ten Commandments and gave His Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. He is the Creator not only of you and me, but also of the Sabbath. Both Isaiah and James declare the Lord as our Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and destroy. How dare

puny man defy our great God by standing Him up every week on the appointment He has made for meeting with us during the time He created for that very purpose of relationship with His children!

Most Christians acknowledge the Sabbath is biblical, but say it is unimportant. So long as God is worshipped one hour a week with time off for good behavior and other interruptions like Superbowl, good-weather golf, overtime pay, shopping for sales, etc., that is sufficient. In essence, we replace God's religious requirement with our own discount devising and bargain basement brand of faith. Even if you buy the popular concept that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding for "remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy," what do you do about fulfilling "the law of Christ." Galatians 6:2. If one claims to follow Christ and walk in His steps, we have the obligation to follow His example on earth. The Apostle Peter puts the "law of Christ" this way: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps, and

grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” I Peter 2:21 and II Peter 3:18. We are to “walk even as He walked.” I John 2:6. That perfect example is recorded in the Gospels. It cannot be improved on. Rejecting it only opens up cans of Christian conjecture and leads to the temptation for substituting human invention. “Lead us not into such folly.” Such violation of the law of Christ is at best, weak inconsistency; and at worse, cheap pretense.

I am always amused at the shallow argument that the Sabbath is Jewish and only intended for them. Tragically, the people using such illogic are usually ardent Christians who forget in the zeal of an argument that Jesus was a Jew. Following their line of thought would lead one to conclude that since Christ was Jewish, only Jews can be Christians. Salvation was only intended for Jews. Us Gentiles were born to be fuel for hell. Or worse, the Jewish Christ has been done away with and replaced by some mythical saint of our own devising. Totally unbiblical. Dr. Luke emphasizes Jesus keeping/

observing the Sabbath. “On the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, as was His custom.” Luke 4:16. As our example in how to live a life of faith, Jesus worshipped on the Sabbath every Sabbath of His life on earth, and even rested in the tomb over the Sabbath from His work of saving man. He would never violate and break the very laws He Himself authored and asked mankind to keep and observe.

The Sabbath is a day for doing good; Jesus said, “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Matthew 12:12. One fifth of the recorded miracles attributed to Jesus were done on the Sabbath. Jesus came to free men from not only the burdens of sin and sickness, but also from the religious traditions and dogma whose sole purpose is to control, dominate and limit man from knowing truth, right, good and the love of God. In Christ’s time the Sabbath was encumbered with over 600 laws recorded in the Mishnah. These man-made rules Jesus rightly brushed aside as burdensome, but He never threw the proverbial baby out with the dirty bath water. And neither should Christians today. Jesus rightly

restored the divine purpose of the Sabbath with this pronouncement; “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” Mark 2:27. The time has come “to restore the breach” in this Christian requirement and practice.

Even if you do not buy the concept of Sabbath for religious reasons, sociologists are advocating it for other anthropological benefits. Some of those benefits are slowing the fast pace of life in which time is out of whack. Nothing stops in America. Around the clock TV, Wal-Mart, and travel. Our highly secular, materialistic world stresses success by over-achieving, over-producing, over-doing without ever being.

Tragically, when Christians desecrate the Sabbath, we dishonor the Creator; and when we dishonor the Creator, we deny Christ as our Lord and Saviour. The powerful witness of living and being at rest, sabbatismos as Paul calls it in Hebrews 4, is lost. Our Lord Jesus put the test of discipleship simply, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Over and over He repeats this requirement in John 14 and 15.

This is not some legalistic mechanism for earning salvation, or obtaining grace through works. Rather loyal service reveals whether or not one's claim to be under grace generates enough joy and gratitude to live obediently in accordance with the expressed will of God and example of Jesus, notwithstanding convenience or popularity.

I realize these thoughts may open new ground for many in their Christian walk. I do not judge those who have never known, but neither can I conscientiously refrain from lighting the Scriptural truth of this fundamental Christian doctrine that leads to rest and peace of a Sabbath relationship with Jesus. In closing look again in Hebrews chapter four, verse 12. The Bible declares the human "heart is deceitful above all things" (Jeremiah 17:9), desperately wicked and beyond knowing one's own motivations. In this delicate matter of responding to God's revealed will, He has promised to "search the heart and examine the mind" (Jeremiah 17:10). He does this through the Holy Spirit's guidance into all truth (John 16:13) of His Word. "The Word

of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight." That need not cause fear. For those who have responded to the invitation of Jesus and found rest in Him, they have peace and the certainty of salvation, which prompts joyful fulfillment of His commands. God reaching out to man, man honoring God, spending Sabbath together; such rest reinforces and perpetuates the relationship. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelation 2:7.

Amen.

NOTE: All texts quoted are from the New International Version of the Holy Bible.

SABBATH

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