

Trinity Presbyterian Church



1, 2, 3, \_\_\_\_\_, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

What about the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment?

Roland S. Barnes, Pastor  
"The Fourth Commandment"  
Exodus 20:8-11

<sup>8</sup>Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but He rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

In some ways I think that this is the most exciting and most blessed commandment of them all. I hesitate in fear and trembling to say this for some very obvious reasons. Who can say that any commandment is more important or more exciting than any other? However, this commandment is unique in one sense. This commandment is the only one that our Lord Jesus addressed by saying that it is directed to the benefit and blessing of mankind. In Mark 2:27 "Then He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

This makes this commandment most peculiar and most interesting. It is intended to be a great source of blessing to you. It is intended to aid you in ordering your life in such a manner as will bring great blessing and harmony into your life. Here, in this commandment the great wisdom of God is displayed. He created us and He knows what is best for the preservation of our spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. So he has given instructions to us that will give us great strength in living. As you receive instructions with a new automobile so that you can insure its longevity and operational performance, so the Lord has given us His law, and the Sabbath Commandment in particular, to bless us.

The Fourth Commandment establishes a cycle of rest and labor to the glory of God. It is the commandment which both lays down good order for the

spiritual life of mankind, and good order for the physical labors and rest of mankind.

Now having said all this it is with great sadness that I must acknowledge that this commandment, unlike the other nine, is probably the most neglected and the most maligned of all of the Ten. Yes, people do neglect the other nine commandments, and perhaps an argument could be made that there are other commandments among the ten that are more dangerous to violate. But this commandment is not neglected by the unbeliever alone. What makes this commandment to some extent unique among the ten is that so many of those who are believers neglect and ignore this commandment. So let us consider the Fourth Commandment: <sup>8</sup>"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Now the first thing that we must do is to establish that the Fourth Commandment is still binding upon us.

Now, at first you might think, "Why is it necessary to make this point? Is that not obvious? After all, this is the Fourth Commandment." One might think this is the case, but it is not. There are many who will assert that we are not under any obligation whatsoever to keep the Fourth Commandment. Therefore, I want to make the case for the binding application of the Fourth Commandment.

First, Sabbath observance was instituted by God Himself at creation before sin entered into the world. Now I offer this as a rebuttal to the argument that is sometimes offered in opposition to the continuing validity of the Fourth Commandment that goes like this: "We don't have to obey the Fourth Commandment today because it was a part of the Old Testament Law. We are now in New Testament times and thus we are no longer obliged to keep the Ten Commandments."

However, the Scripture shows us that God set up the "Sabbath Principle" before the Law was ever given through Moses. Genesis 2:2-3 states, "By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done."

Thus the Sabbath rest was instituted by God even before the Law was given. This is why the Puritans called it "one of the sweet relics of Eden." Like the divine institutions of marriage, family, and labor, the Sabbath Day of Rest was ordained by God from the very outset of creation. It is not therefore limited to the Mosaic economy; passing away with the body politic of Israel. It is not therefore subject to the "cultural conditioning of the ages." It is to be as much a part of the life and health of man as marriage or family or labor.

Now secondly, you and I are under an obligation to obey this commandment because it is established for us by the example of God Himself. Genesis 2:2 states, "By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work."

The Lord Himself rested from His labors on the seventh day and left us an example to follow. It is the cycle of labor followed by rest that is best for man. It is for our benefit that we have a whole twenty-four hour period of rest from our

labors. The whole pattern of life for mankind has been built on this work/rest cycle; patterned after the example of God's six days of creation work followed by a day of rest. This is why we have "seven day weeks" instead of ten day or twelve day weeks.

Thirdly, you and I are under an obligation to obey this commandment because it is set forth in the midst of the Ten Commandments. This Sabbath ordinance did not come into existence at the time of the giving of the Law. It was in existence long before the Law was given, but it was so important to the life and well-being of mankind that God saw fit to "encode" it in His law. In the Ten Commandments God is placing before you a summary statement of the ten most important principles of morality that express the essence of His will for you. When God summarized His moral will in ten principles you can be assured that He was very careful not to include anything but that which is most important, most essential, and most necessary. Right in the middle of these ten most important principles of morality is this commandment concerning the Sabbath Day.

It is encoded in the Ten Commandments because it is an eternal principle of immense importance. And you and I are under a perpetual obligation to obey it as much as we are to obey any of the other Ten Commandments. You are no more at liberty to disobey or discount the Fourth Commandment concerning the Sabbath Day than you are at liberty to disobey or discount the Seventh Commandment concerning adultery. God did not place a principle of limited application into the midst of the Ten Commandments. In the midst of these eternal and universally applicable principles of truth and morality He did not insert a principle that is temporal and limited in application; applicable only to the people of a particular moment in history. If you would like to argue that the Fourth Commandment is no longer applicable, and that we are not under a solemn obligation to obey it, then the burden of proof is upon you to demonstrate that it is so.

It is my solemn conviction that the Sabbath Commandment, the Fourth Commandment, is as binding as any of the other nine. It is binding upon you as a creation ordinance, as a divine example, and as a part of the whole body of the Ten Commandments.

Fourthly, you are obligated to obey this Fourth Commandment because it was affirmed by our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus kept the Sabbath over the entire course of His life. Of course, He was falsely accused of violating the Sabbath Commandment, but He proved that this was never the case. In Mark 2:23-28 we read of an episode in which the Pharisees accused Jesus of Sabbath breaking and he responded to them in verses 27-28 "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

This passage addresses the practice of the disciples and that of Jesus by implication, with respect to the law of the Sabbath. The Pharisees were concerned about what is or is not lawful on the Sabbath Day. In verses 23-24 we read, <sup>23</sup>"And it came about that He was passing through the grainfields on the

Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. <sup>24</sup>And the Pharisees were saying to Him, "See here, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

Of course this objection being raised by the Pharisees raises an even greater question: What is the perspective of Jesus on the Sabbath Law? "See here, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" The implied question is: Why are You letting them do that? In other words, the assumption is that Jesus is responsible for the apparently irresponsible behavior of His disciples. They are, in a sense, saying to Jesus, "You need to stop them. You need to restrict them."

The expectation of the ministry of Jesus was not greater life choking restriction but revolution and liberty. The discussion in Mark 2:18f addresses the practice of fasting, which was not mandated in the Scripture but rather was the tradition of the Pharisees. It was their custom that was at stake. They defined holiness and piety in terms of certain rigorous religious practices, including the practice of fasting twice each week. Jesus, by way of contrast, was concerned about the heart and adherence to God's Word, not man-made traditions. (See: Mark 7:1ff)

However, in Mark 2:23-28 it is not some tradition of the Pharisees that is being addressed. It is the observance of the Fourth Commandment that is being addressed. The Pharisees contend that what the disciples are doing is not lawful to do on the Sabbath day.

What exactly were the disciples doing that so upset the Pharisees? Mark 2:23 states, <sup>23</sup>"And it came about that He was passing through the grain fields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain."

The disciples were walking along on the Sabbath Day; most likely on their way to the synagogue in Capernaum to spend this Sabbath Day morning in worship with God's people. As they walked along they were hungry, and as it happened that they were walking through a grain field they simply plucked the heads of some of the grain and began to eat it. It sounds simple enough, it sounds reasonable enough, doesn't it? What could possibly be wrong with that? However, to the Pharisees, it was not that they were plucking grain, per se, that was the problem. The Law granted the Israelites the privilege of plucking grain from their neighbor's field. Deuteronomy 23:25 states, <sup>25</sup>"When you enter your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not wield a sickle in your neighbor's standing grain." In other words, you were not supposed to start harvesting your neighbor's wheat field. That would be stealing. The disciples were not harvesting wheat. They were doing what was lawful, as far as plucking grain was concerned. The objection of the Pharisees is not that they were doing this, but rather that they were doing it on the Sabbath. Does the Fourth Commandment really forbid this?

Remember that Exodus 20:8-11 states, <sup>8</sup>“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. <sup>11</sup>“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

What is clearly forbidden on the Sabbath Day is labor, i.e. work. This is God's law given to His people, encoded in the Ten Commandments. It is commandment number four. The principle of resting from your labors one day in seven is a well established one.

As we have already seen, the Sabbath was established at Creation: Genesis 2:2 <sup>2</sup>“And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.” It is patterned after the example of God Himself. Genesis 2:3 states, <sup>3</sup>Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” When we remember the Sabbath Day by resting from our labors, we are imitating our God. We are following His example. So we see that this pattern for life was anchored in creation, and patterned after the example of God Himself. And then we noted that it was encoded in the body of the Ten Commandments: (See: Exodus 20:8-11 above) The Sabbath Regulation is number four in the order of the Ten Commandments. It cannot be extracted from this summary statement of the will of God for man. It cannot be isolated from the other nine. Not only is it grounded in creation, patterned after the example of God Himself, and encoded in the Ten Commandments, but we also find that it was practiced by and confirmed by Christ Himself. Everywhere our Lord traveled He observed the Sabbath day. We see this in Mark 1:21 where we read, <sup>21</sup>“And they \*went into Capernaum; and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and began to teach.” We know that Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to His Heavenly Father. The Apostle Paul writes of Jesus that He was “He who knew no sin,” (II Cor. 5:21), and the Apostle John states that <sup>4</sup>“Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.” (1 John 3:4) If Jesus did not keep the Sabbath Law and keep it perfectly, He Himself was a transgressor of the Law, a sinner, and not the Savior. Clearly, the Fourth Commandment forbids us to engage in labor on the Sabbath Day, which labor may be lawful on the other days of the week. Jesus did not abrogate this law. Some have maintained that the Apostle Paul abrogates the Sabbath Commandment in Colossians 2:16, which states, <sup>16</sup>“Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— <sup>17</sup>things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” However, this is not a reference to the Creation Sabbath encoded in the Ten Commandments. It is a reference to the numerous ceremonial sabbaths that were associated with the feasts and festivals of Israel.

The question that we must answer is, "Were Jesus and the disciples actually violating the Sabbath Law?" Were they working on the Sabbath Day in violation of the Fourth Commandment? When they plucked that grain were they sinning? Were they engaged in unlawful labor on the Sabbath Day? The Pharisees said, 'Yes.' Verse 24 states, <sup>24</sup>And the Pharisees were saying to Him, "See here, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" The Pharisees had a whole set of detailed regulations about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath Day. One commentator remarks on this passage, "The underlying reasoning of the Pharisees was as follows: Was not work forbidden on the Sabbath day (Ex. 20:8-11)? Had not the rabbis drawn up a catalogue of thirty-nine principal works, subsequently subdivided into six minor categories under each of these thirty-nine, all of which were forbidden on the Sabbath?" [Hendriksen, Commentary on the Gospel of Mark]

The Pharisees were trying to specify exactly what could and could not be done on the Sabbath. God did not specify in great detail exactly how the Sabbath Day was to be observed. There are broad principles given to guide His people. "Don't labor! Rest! Turn from pursuing your own pleasure, etc." On occasion people have said to me, "Tell me Pastor Barnes, what can I do?" I refuse to tell them. They need to grasp the principle and then wrestle with the manner of its application. A list of rules without any understanding of the principle will lead you into the dangerous waters of legalism. If this is your approach then you have missed the whole essence of the Sabbath Day in particular and of the whole of God's law in general.

When the Pharisees contend that the disciples are doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath, what did Jesus say? Jesus says, 'No.' So then, what is lawful on the Sabbath Day? We read in Mark 2:25-28 <sup>25</sup>And He \*said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and became hungry, he and his companions: <sup>26</sup>how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he gave it also to those who were with him?" <sup>27</sup>And He was saying to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup>"Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Here Jesus establishes that works of necessity are lawful on the Sabbath Day. In verses 25-26 we read, <sup>25</sup>And He \*said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and became hungry, he and his companions: <sup>26</sup>how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he gave it also to those who were with him?" Again a commentator rightly observes, "Obviously, what was happening was that Christ's enemies were burying the real law of God -which did not in any sense forbid what the disciples were now doing -under the mountain of their man-made, foolish traditions." [Hendriksen, Commentary on the Gospel of Mark]

The disciples were not "working," they were merely plucking grain as they walked because they were hungry. This they were free to do; and the Pharisees

were seeking to restrict their freedom by binding them to their legalistic traditions.

Meeting real human needs, like hunger, is lawful on the Sabbath Day. Jesus uses the example of King David of Israel in 1 Samuel 21 to prove His case. Jesus says, "Have you not read..." If they had just read the Scriptures they would know that they had missed the mark. They were so caught up in their man-made regulations that they missed the point of the law. David allowed his servants to eat the show bread (the twelve loaves that were displayed in the temple, which were to be eaten only by the priests who served in the temple) because they were hungry and he was not rebuked for doing so. Now Jesus allows his disciples to pluck grain and eat it on the Sabbath and neither should they be restricted or rebuked for having done so.

Works of necessity are lawful on the Sabbath Day, they are not forbidden. Otherwise, you would be unmercifully bound up with so much restriction that you could hardly move. John Calvin remarks, "The keeping of the Sabbath was, indeed, a holy thing, but not such a manner of keeping it as they imagined, so that one could scarcely move a finger without making the conscience to tremble." "It is invariably the practice of hypocrites to allow themselves liberty in matters of the greatest consequence, and to pay close attention to ceremonial observance."

The extra-biblical traditions of the Pharisees were not the liberating law of God. Rather their traditions were unbearable, life-choking restriction. Not only did Jesus establish that works of necessity are lawful on the Lord's Day, but He also establishes the principle that the Sabbath Day was intended to be a liberating blessing for man, not an enslaving curse. Verse 27 states, <sup>27</sup>And He was saying to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

Jesus also established that works of mercy are lawful on the Sabbath Day. (See: Mark 3:1ff) The Sabbath Law, like every other law of God, is intended to bless us, not to curse us. God has given us His law for our benefit and blessing. The Sabbath law prevents us from becoming slaves to our work on the one hand and slaves to our pleasures on the other. It is a protection for us if we observe it in our lives, families, churches, and nations. Of course, when we transgress God's law, including the Sabbath Commandment, we are then condemned by it as transgressors. In this way, the law acts to direct us to the cross for healing grace and restoration. The law diagnoses our sin problem and sends us to Jesus to be cured. As God's grace cures us it leads us to the pursuit of obedience to God's law as a pattern of holiness. (See: Titus 2:11-14)

In the observance of the Fourth Commandment the focus is not exclusively on that from which you are turning, but also on that to which you are turning; not on what you are not allowed to do, but on what you are called to do on the Lord's Day. The focus is on that in which you are rejoicing on His Day. It is a day of rest from labor, a day in which you don't have to work. In God's economy you buy six and get one free. You work six days and receive enough

to live an extra day without having to work. Not only do you get to rest from your labors, but you also get to rest and rejoice in the salvation given to you as a free gift from the Lord Jesus Christ. We have a day that has been given to us for rest and refreshment for both body and soul. Jesus finished His work of redemption and then was raised from the dead on the first day of the week, resting from His labors. The Church then gathered on the first day of the week for worship, to celebrate the finished work of Jesus and His triumphant resurrection by which He has secured our victory over sin and death. This is a great day; a day of joy and celebration; a day of delight.

So Jesus does not accept the criticism of the Pharisees. Rather He seeks to reestablish the Sabbath to its proper role as a means of great blessing for man, both body and soul. He can put the Sabbath back into perspective because Jesus established that He is Sovereign over the Sabbath Law. In verse 28 we read, <sup>28</sup>“Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” If David was right to allow his servants to eat the sacred show-bread, then Jesus, who is David’s Lord, the true King of the Jews, certainly is justified in allowing His disciples to pluck grain and eat it on the Sabbath Day. After all, Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath!

Jesus asserts that the observance of the Sabbath is for the benefit and blessing of mankind, and therefore it is a flawed understanding of the Sabbath that would prevent a man from helping others on the Sabbath Day, or from plucking a few kernels of grain to eat on the Sabbath Day.

Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. It is His ordinance. It is His plan that is being worked out in counsel with the Father and the Holy Spirit. How dare these Pharisees suggest that He who is the Lord of the Sabbath does not know how to keep the Sabbath. This is Jesus’ point. He is affirming the correct application of the Sabbath Commandment. He is not in the least undermining it.

The Sabbath Ordinance is a binding obligation on all mankind, not just Christians. As all of the other nine commandments, it is binding upon all men in all places at all times. It promotes public order. It is a restraint on evil. When it is ignored it brings God’s displeasure and positive harm to men. It has not passed away with the coming of the New Testament. In fact, it was established as a perpetual ordinance.

We read in Exodus 31:16-17, “The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He abstained from work and rested.”

Yet many Christians have never given any thought as to the observance of the Sabbath Day. Do you conscientiously try to obey the fourth commandment in the same manner that you would make it your purpose to obey the seventh commandment, “Thou shalt not commit adultery?”

If it is true, as I have sought to maintain, that we are under a divine obligation to obey this Fourth Commandment, we must consider another question: "What does it mean to keep it holy?"

It is to be treated as a special day, a sacred day. The word "holy" indicates the setting of something apart. It means that it becomes something very special and unique. It is sanctified, that is, special and unique. It is treated differently than the other days of the week.

Remember Genesis 2:2-3, "By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing; so on the seventh day He rested from all His work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done."

The Lord Himself made the Sabbath Day a distinct and special day in each week. Ezekiel 20:12 speaks of the Sabbath Day as a "covenantal sign." "Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy." It was to be a day that was different from every other day in the week, like a birthday or anniversary. How is the Sabbath Day any different in your household than Monday through Saturday?

In order to keep the Sabbath, one whole day must be set apart each week. Note, that it is the Sabbath "day" that we must keep and not the Sabbath "hour." The Scripture states, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God."

In this way the Sabbath Day is just like the other days of the week; it lasts twenty-four hours. It is good to worship the Lord together on the Lord's Day. This is part of what it means to keep the Sabbath Day holy. But the Sabbath Day lasts longer than one hour or so on Sunday morning. It is twenty-four hours long.

There is a point of discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament with respect to this Fourth Commandment. In the Old Testament the Sabbath was observed on the seventh day of the week, and in the New Testament the Apostles set the pattern of gathering on the first day of the week and called it the "Lord's Day." (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2) The eternal principle of the Sabbath Day as a part of God's Holy Law is retained but the day of the observance is changed. Why was it changed? I think that there are two reasons:

First, it was changed by the practice of the Apostles in order to disassociate it from the ceremonies of the Old Testament. (sacrifices, special sabbaths, etc.) This is the significance of Colossians 2:16 "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a sabbath day." Here the Apostle Paul argues that the ceremonial sabbaths have ceased, not the Creation Sabbath encoded in the Law.

It was also changed to associate it with the triumphant Resurrection Day of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the day when He completed His work of redemption. Jesus completed His work on the first day of the week. It is only right and proper that this day should become the Christian's Sabbath. The

observance of the Sabbath in the Old Testament was directly connected to the concept of redemption. Deuteronomy 5:15 states, "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. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."

So in the New Testament the day of the observance is changed to coincide with the great day of the completion of the work of redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Gerhardos Vos remarks in *Biblical Theology* (page 141) "Inasmuch as the Old Covenant was still looking forward to the performance of the Messianic work, naturally the days of labor to it come first, the day of rest falls at the end of the week. We, under the New Covenant, look back upon the accomplished work of Christ. We, therefore, first celebrate the rest in principle procured by Christ, although the Sabbath also still remains a sign looking forward to the final eschatological rest."

(See also: Jonathan Edwards, "The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath")

This commandment requires you to take one day of each week and set it apart as holy unto the Lord. You must remember it and keep it holy. Remember it, all of it, all twenty-four hours of it. Purpose to remember it, lest you forget it.

This leads me to a second consideration of how you can be careful to observe and keep this commandment: you should be careful to prepare yourself for each Sabbath Day. If you are going to be careful to remember it, then you must make careful preparations for each Lord's Day as it comes. In the Old Testament the people of God observed the Sabbath Day from evening to evening. Leviticus 23:32 states, "It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath." Whether one observes the Sabbath from evening to evening or morning to morning, it is to be one whole day of twenty-four hours.

How do you approach the Sabbath Day each week in your household? Do you approach it with great anticipation of the blessing that awaits you, or with little thought or preparation? Many people do not experience the full blessings and benefits of the Sabbath Day for lack of preparation. Some drag themselves into worship half asleep because they did not do anything to prepare for the Lord's Day. If you prepare for the Lord's Day you will be thinking of what you should do on Saturday evening that will help you to set it apart and keep it holy.

Why do you prepare? What is the motivation? It is the kind of preparation that you make for a celebration. It is the air of excitement that floods your heart when you anticipate some celebration of a great event. This is what you are preparing for as you anticipate the opportunity to gather with brothers and sisters in Christ in order to celebrate the wonder and glory of the resurrection of your Lord from the dead. Ultimately, the great motive for observing the Sabbath Day, the Lord's Day, is the knowledge of and experience of the mercy of God in the great redeeming work of Jesus!

In our home we try to begin our observance of the Sabbath Day on Saturday evening. It is our desire to begin our observance early enough in the evening so we have the time to prepare and arrange our affairs so that nothing will prevent us from being able to keep these twenty-four hours holy. We turn the T.V. off, make sure the cars have plenty of gas, gather the family for prayer, etc. I want to encourage you to give some thought to how you might prepare for the Sabbath Day so that you might properly celebrate the resurrection of our Lord each week.

Of course, fundamental to the observance of the Sabbath is the cessation of labor. The Sabbath Commandment states, "On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates." What a blessing this is for mankind! The Lord is commanding you to quit working for one whole day in seven. This has a two-fold benefit and purpose.

First, it gives you a whole day that you can set aside for the pursuit of spiritual things. Have you ever wished that you had a whole block of time in which you could pursue your relationship with Christ? Guess what? You do! Besides the time that you spend with the Lord daily, He has given you the Sabbath Day.

Second, It gives you a whole day to rest from your labors. What a great blessing! You have God's permission to lay off of work one whole day each week. I want to say more about this later. What a great blessing this is! It makes you dependent upon the Lord for His provision and blessing. Do you own a business? Close it down, lock the doors on the Lord's Day. Go home and rest and depend upon the Lord. But, some will object: "I will not be able to make it if I do that." This is why I have come to the conviction that I will not work myself and that I will not encourage others to work either. Remember what is said in Exodus 20:10, "On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates."

Now I know that this is very difficult in this day in which we live in which there is a total disregard for the Sabbath Day in our culture and businesses. I know that some of you are required to work on the Lord's Day. Pray that if you have to work on the Lord's Day it will be as limited as possible. As we have already stated there are two areas in which labor on the Sabbath Day is legitimate: works of necessity (see: Mark 2:23f eating), and works of mercy (see: Mark 3:1-6 healing).

The principle is that you are free to do what is necessary to provide for your household, and you are free to show mercy to those who are in need. The Sabbath Day is not an excuse to be lazy. There is activity on the Sabbath Day, but it is oriented toward the direct pursuit of spiritual things.

So to observe the Sabbath Day and keep it holy you must observe the whole day (twenty-four hours), you must prepare yourself as it approaches, you must take a break from your labors, and you should spend some of the time in

public and private worship. Ezekiel 46:3 says, "The people of the land shall also worship at the doorway of that gate before the Lord on the sabbaths and on the new moons."

Worship is certainly part of what the Lord intends for us on the day of Sabbath rest. The Apostles gathered on the Lord's Day for worship, prayer, fellowship, and the breaking of bread. It is a day of spiritual refreshment and invigoration. Exodus 31:17 states, "It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased from labor, and was refreshed."

You should gather together with God's people to worship and praise Him, to be instructed in His ways, and to be encouraged and challenged to grow spiritually. It is an opportunity to worship and praise the Lord Jesus Christ on His resurrection day. This is why the writer of Hebrews says that we should "not forsake our own assembling together, as is the habit of some..." (Hebrews 10:25) Thus to observe the Sabbath Day and keep it holy you should involve yourself in worship: both private and public worship, and you should avoid anything that distracts you from the proper observance of the Lord's Day.

Now here is an area in which many become very legalistic. What is entertainment and what is not? What distracts you from keeping the Sabbath Day holy and what does not? I think that this is best left to the individual and family to determine in detail, but having said this I want to establish the principle as legitimate. It is right and proper in the observance of the Lord's Day, the Sabbath Day, to not only cease from labors that would be lawful on the other days of the week, but to also cease from recreations and entertainments that might be lawful on the other days of the week. The prophet Isaiah states, "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 holy 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 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 58:13-14)

John Calvin makes the following observations, "What is necessary then? That we should strive toward a higher end than this rest here; that we should desist from our works which are able to impede us from meditating on the works of God, from calling upon His name, and from our exercising His Word. If we turn Sunday into a day for living it up, for our sport and pleasure, indeed how will God be honored in that? Is it not a mockery and even a profanation of His name? But when shops are closed on Sunday, when people do not travel in the usual way, its purpose is to provide more leisure and liberty for attending to what God commands us that we might be taught by His Word." (Sermons on the Ten Commandments, page 109)

This is why in our home it has been our practice to turn off the T.V., avoid movies, sports, and any other form of entertainment that distracts us from our focus on keeping the Sabbath holy.

*May the Lord renew our hearts by His grace and give us the desire to please Him and obey Him! The great Scottish preacher Alexander Whyte, wrote to a friend, "And, John Fleming, sanctify you the Sabbath. As you love and value your immortal soul, sanctify and do not waste and desecrate the Sabbath. Let no man steal from you a single hour of the Sabbath-day. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God."*