

"Remember the Sabbath to Keep It Holy, Part 10"
(Exodus 20:8-11)

Introduction: Last week we saw how the fourth commandment applies not only to our works and recreations, but also to our thoughts and words concerning them. The idea is that we want to sanctify the day, to make it holy, to cleanse it from anything that is not God-centered, God-oriented, and God-honoring. This is not our day, but Christ's. And He has shown us by calling it "the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10). This is His way of calling the day His own. It is the Christian's true holy day, or holiday. All the holidays are of man's invention, and tend to take away from the special character of this precious day.

Now having said last week that in order to make this day holy, we must abstain from all works, words, and thoughts about our worldly employments and recreations, I want you to see this evening that,

Just as there are some God-honoring exceptions to not working on the Sabbath, there are also some exceptions in the area of our recreations and in our thoughts and words.

- I. *The First Point Was that Abstaining from Works, Words, and Thoughts About Your Worldly Employments and Recreations Was Reasonable and Consistent with the Whole Intent of the Sabbath.*
 - A. *It is consistent with the idea of making the whole day holy to the Lord, by separation ourselves from our common and worldly pursuits. That is what holiness means is separation. If we separate ourselves from the actions, but not from the thoughts and words, we have not fully separated ourselves from it.*
 - B. *It is consistent with the idea of resting on the Sabbath to set aside our work and recreations, but we have not fully rested from them if we do not do them, but are consumed with thoughts and words about them.*
- II. *The Second Point Was that This Is What the Scripture in Fact Requires of Us According to Isaiah 58:13-14, Which Reads, "IF BECAUSE OF THE SABBATH, YOU TURN YOUR FOOT FROM DOING YOUR OWN PLEASURE ON MY HOLY DAY, AND CALL THE SABBATH A DELIGHT, THE HOLY DAY OF THE LORD HONORABLE, AND SHALL HONOR IT, DESISTING FROM YOUR OWN WAYS, FROM SEEKING YOUR OWN PLEASURE, AND SPEAKING YOUR OWN WORD, THEN YOU WILL TAKE DELIGHT IN THE LORD, AND I WILL MAKE YOU RIDE ON THE HEIGHTS OF THE EARTH; AND I WILL FEED YOU WITH THE HERITAGE OF JACOB YOUR FATHER, FOR THE MOUTH OF THE LORD HAS SPOKEN."*
 - A. *To turn your foot from the Sabbath means to not desecrate the day by mixing the common with the holy.*
 - B. *You must turn from your own pleasure and from seeking your own ways and from speaking your own words to doing what it is that the Lord commands you to do on this day, to be holy in conduct and word.*
 - C. *If you delight in the Lord's Day, then you will truly delight in the Lord. But if the idea of setting apart a day wholly for His glory and worship does not delight your heart, then you truly do not delight in the Lord.*
- III. *Thirdly, I Want Tonight to Look At What Might Be Legitimate Exceptions to This Rule.*
 - A. *We Have Already Seen the Exceptions Which the Lord Gives Us in The Area of Work.*
 1. *All work is forbidden in our regular jobs, except that which is necessary to be done on the Sabbath.*

- a. There are those jobs which need to be done every day of the week, such as law-enforcement, emergency, and medical professions.
 - b. But don't forget, the examples we have in Scripture of necessary work were never of such a character as to keep the worshiper occupied all day, every Sabbath. They are more of the character of emergency situations: a man needs help, an ox or donkey needs to be lifted up out of the ditch, those away from home pick grain in the field, etc.
 - c. There is also in Scripture the commandment to attend regularly the worship services of God. The author to the Hebrews writes, "LET US HOLD FAST THE CONFESSION OF OUR HOPE WITHOUT WAVERING, FOR HE WHO PROMISED IS FAITHFUL; AND LET US CONSIDER HOW TO STIMULATE ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS, NOT FORSAKING OUR OWN ASSEMBLING TOGETHER, AS IS THE HABIT OF SOME, BUT ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER; AND ALL THE MORE, AS YOU SEE THE DAY DRAWING NEAR" (Heb. 10:23-25).
 - d. Any kind of employment which continually keeps you from observing the Sabbath, even if it is a work of necessity, should be avoided in order to meet with the assembled people of God in the worship service. Your soul is infinitely more valuable than any job!
2. Works of mercy are also permitted on the Sabbath, but again, they are of the sort that will only take a portion of the day, and do not interfere with your worship of God except in rare cases.
- a. Such things as feeding the poor, or caring for the sick, or clothing the naked, or preaching the gospel to those in darkness in order that they might be released from Satan's bondage are works of mercy.
 - b. These are not only appropriate, but they are commanded. God says through Isaiah the prophet, "IS THIS NOT THE FAST WHICH I CHOOSE, TO LOOSEN THE BONDS OF WICKEDNESS, TO UNDO THE BANDS OF THE YOKE, AND TO LET THE OPPRESSED GO FREE, AND BREAK EVERY YOKE? IS IT NOT TO DIVIDE YOUR BREAD WITH THE HUNGRY, AND BRING THE HOMELESS POOR INTO THE HOUSE; WHEN YOU SEE THE NAKED TO COVER HIM; AND NOT TO HIDE YOURSELF FROM YOUR OWN FLESH?" (58:6-7).
 - c. God commands us to do works of mercy. Works of mercy and necessity are legitimate exceptions to the commandment to not work on the Lord's Day. As a matter of fact, they are especially appropriate on that day.
- B. But I Believe that There Are Also Exceptions in the Area of Recreations.
- 1. There are in this world different kinds of recreation.
 - a. There are those which are worldly and will take your mind off of the Lord and wear you out.
 - (i) These include contact sports, such as football, basketball, boxing, rugby and others like them.
 - (ii) These also include baseball, soccer, volleyball and just about any other organized sport, whether they are team sports or individual competitions.
 - (iii) For many people in this world, sports is their work, their business; it is how they make their living.
 - b. But there are also those kinds of recreations which are restful and meditative and will help fix your mind on the Lord.

- (i) There are not many of this sort in our society today.
- (ii) If there are, they are done mainly by those who do not have the energy to do the others.
- (iii) Such things as walking, especially in the mountains or desert, or horseback riding, or simply sitting or lying down to read a book, or to enjoy a movie.
- (iv) These are restful and really meet what the word recreation means, re-creation. They are re-creative activities.

2. It is these recreative activities that I believe can be legitimately done on the Sabbath.

- a. Now I don't mean that you should be running foot races on Sunday, or walking down on a crowded beach, or reading a secular and worldly book, or watching a secular movie.
- b. But I do think that using these recreations in a God-honoring way can greatly bring rest and refreshment to your soul.
 - (i) If you were to walk in the mountains and to get out into God's creation to behold His glory in the beauty of His works, and to spend time praising Him and praying to Him in the open, wouldn't that be in keeping with the purpose of the Sabbath? We sang of this this morning in the hymn "How Great Thou Art", where the hymn writer says, "When thro' the woods and forest glades I wander and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees, when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur, and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze; then sings my soul my Savior God, to thee: How great Thou art."
 - (ii) The Puritans and those in early New England, used to ride horses in the woods on the Sabbath to refresh their minds and bodies. If we could think of a non-strenuous and relaxing alternative to horseback riding, if we didn't have a horse, that would work too.
 - (iii) Sitting down and reading a good work of Christian literature would also be conducive to this end. I personally find nothing so encouraging and nourishing to my soul as a good piece of Puritan writing, whether it is following the trials and triumphs of Pilgrim as he makes his way to the Celestial City in Bunyon's *Pilgrim's Progress*, or whether it is reading about the necessity of putting on the spiritual armor of God and standing firm in His might against all the wiles of the devil in *The Christian in Complete Armor* by William Gurnall, or whether it is reading a good biography of one of the great saints of old, such as that of George Whitefield by Arnold Dallimore, or that of Jonathan Edwards by Ian Murray. A good movie which portrays these themes is a good alternative as well, such as the movie "Pilgrim's Progress," "The Ten Commandments," "God's Outlaw," "John Wycliffe, Morning Star of the Reformation," "Cromwell," "Martin Luther, Heretic", etc.
 - (iv) The important thing is that they give rest to your body and bring spiritual refreshment to your soul. This should be the true meaning of recreation to the Christian.

- (v) And along these lines, I believe that it is allowed by God to take a nap on the Sabbath if it is necessary to give you the extra strength you need to worship the Lord. Sometimes you may find yourself exhausted after a worship service. I do whether I am preaching or participating in the congregation. A nap is just the thing that is needed to help you regain your strength so that you may put more of yourself into your worship. If your body is tired, it will affect your sense of spiritual vitality and well-being.
 - (vi) On the other hand, this is not to say that it is all right to sleep the whole Sabbath away. There are other things to be done, things for the good of your eternal soul, and you should be busy about them. Sleep only as much as is needed to take the edge off of your tiredness, and then return to the business of worshiping the Lord of Creation by yourself, with your family, or gathered as the people of God.
- C. There Are Also Exceptions in the Area of Thoughts. As There Are Different Kinds of Work and Recreation, There Are also Different Kinds of Thoughts.
1. There are those which are self-centered and pleasure centered.
 - a. Thinking about your work for the purpose of improving your production, or your image in the eyes of others, or just thinking about it because you love your profession so much, these are self-centered thoughts.
 - b. Or thinking about the worldly kind of recreations because you are a sports fanatic, or you just derive so much pleasure from them is also self-centered.
 - c. They are not really thoughts which involve the Lord at all, but things which leave Him out, and promote your own pleasure apart from Him.
 2. But there are also those kinds of thoughts which are God-centered and God-honoring.
 - a. Thinking about how you could better witness to others on the job, or how you might better redeem the time at your employment for the glory of God might be legitimate on the Sabbath.
 - b. I don't know if any of you here have seen the movie Chariots of Fire, but here is an example where thoughts and words might be used from a secular movie about sports to bring edification to the people of God. In the movie, there was a man by the name of Eric Liddell, who was the son of a Scottish Presbyterian missionary in China. The Lord had gifted him with an extraordinary gift of speed and endurance when he ran. He went to the Olympics in the twenties and broke several world records. But at those Olympics, he found that the qualifying heat for his event was to be run on the Sabbath, and he refused to run it. Instead, a team-mate gave him his place in another event, for which he hadn't trained. He ended up winning the event. But here is an example of the non-compromising attitude which we should have toward this command, and all the commandments of God. If we honor God, He will honor us and all that we do for His glory.
 - d. But any way, there are some contexts in which it is God-honoring to think about work and sports. But they are relatively few.

D. And Lastly, There Are Also Some Exceptions in the Areas of Our Words.

1. There are also different kinds of conversations.
 - a. There are those which are spoken purely for the pleasure of the speaker or for the pleasure of the one to whom you are speaking.
 - b. And there are those which are spoken for the glory of God.
2. Most Christians are involved in the first kind of conversation on the Sabbath. Few are in the latter category.
 - a. Most don't even give a thought as to whether what they are saying is God-centered or not.
 - (i) They only know that it is on their mind, and they want to speak it.
 - (ii) They are engaged in conversations purely for their own pleasure, or to give others pleasure, but not for the glory of God.
 - (iii) I believe that the Scriptures warn us against this kind of talk on the Sabbath. Even if there are those who hold to a Sabbath in other respects, it is usually here that they fail to keep the spirit of the Sabbath alive. They frustrate the end of the Sabbath which is to turn our eyes toward heaven, by talking to others about the fruitless things of the world divorced from God , thereby drawing their hearts and minds back down to the things of earth.
 - b. But the Lord wants not only our actions to be sanctified from the things of the world on His day, but also our thoughts and words.
 - (i) I have already given you one example as to how a sporting event might be used for God's glory, but such examples are rare, and would rarely need to be used.
 - (ii) But there are contexts in which our speaking about work may bring glory to the Lord.
 - (iii) We should avoid idle talk, but speaking to someone about their employment for the purpose of ministry is another matter.
 - (iv) If you are talking to someone, and they share a special need, or a special struggle that they are having at work for the purpose of your bringing it on their behalf to God, that honors Him.
 - (v) If you talk about those who work with you, or those for whom you work because you want prayer for their salvation or for their health, that too honors the Lord.
 - (vi) If you talk about your work in order to show someone how the Lord answered your prayer for employment in His Providence, that also brings Him glory.
 - (vii) But when you talk about your work simply to talk without the purpose of honoring God, that is common talk and not sanctified. I believe it is that kind of talking that we should be careful to avoid on the Sabbath.

E. So We Have Seen that to Sanctify the Sabbath, We Must Not Only Abstain from Our Works and Recreations, But We Must, As Our Confession Also Tells Us, Abstain from All Thoughts and Words Concerning Them. To Observe the Sabbath in Any Other Way Is to Frustrate the End for Which It Was Made.

1. Even as you cannot observe the Sabbath when you are engrossed in your worldly employments and recreations, so you cannot observe it when your thoughts and words are all entangled in them.
2. Since the whole purpose of the Sabbath is to separate ourselves from the world to focus on God, to teach us to be heavenly minded and not earthly minded, do we not destroy God's purpose in it if we indulge our thoughts and conversations in the things of the world on that day?
3. May the Lord grant us His mercy then to turn our thoughts toward Him everyday, but especially on His Day, that we might bring honor and glory to Him, and that He might prepare us for heaven.
4. Next week I will finish this series of sermons on the Sabbath by looking at some suggestions on how to sanctify the day, and with some exhortations to motivate us all to keep it holy. Amen.