

Command 4 - Remember To Keep The Sabbath Holy

June 17, 2018

When was the last time you went to Pizza Ranch? Our family doesn't go that often. It is not that we don't like the pizza. The problem is we eat too much because it tastes too good. Trying to avoid pizza overload, I head to the salad bar. I start with a modest plate of lettuce but as I work my way down the line, I inevitably pile my plate high with more vegetables and dressings because they look good. When I get to the end of the line, my plate is so full I can barely walk back to my table without spilling things on the floor. Has anyone else had the same experience?

The salad bar is a good picture of life. It starts out comfortable with a few things on our plates, but we keep adding to them until we can barely keep things under control. Our lives are so overloaded, they start falling apart. Life becomes incredibly stressful. Wouldn't it be nice if there was one day a week we could unplug from our overcrowded schedules and take a break? Wouldn't it be nice if each week we had a day to be refreshed?

Thankfully, there is a day each week where we can do that, and this morning we are going to learn about it.

This summer at CrossWinds we are studying the Ten Commandments. The first commandment told us first to make sure we worship the right God. The second commandment told us to worship the right God the right way. The third commandment told us to always talk about God with the honor and respect he deserves. We are looking at the fourth commandment this morning and it deals with our time, our schedules. The fourth commandment tells us to make time to

take a break and be refreshed, but most importantly to be refreshed in God on that day.

Let's read the commandment and dive into our study.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and 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. Exodus 20:8–11 (ESV)

This is the longest commandment. We will follow the outline of the verses for our study. First, we will see what this command means. Second, we will see how to apply it. Third, we will see why God gave it. Last, we will look at how New Testament Christians apply it.

What does this command mean?

The heart of the command is at the beginning.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy...

Let's look at some of the key words in this command.

Remember — The word remember does not mean to just remember intellectually. It means remember by taking action. This past week, Cindy and I celebrated 25 years of marriage. I could have told her I just remembered our anniversary intellectually, but if I tried that, I wouldn't live to stand here this morning. I needed to remember our anniversary by taking action. It was our silver anniversary so I bought her a silver necklace. I gave her a dozen roses. I should have taken her for a romantic candlelight dinner, but the day was too full so I swapped that for breakfast in bed. By the time I finished making breakfast and

brought it to our bedroom, she was already in the shower getting ready for VBS. At least the thought counted!

The important part to notice is that the word remember means to do something about it. Don't just think about it.

Sabbath — The word Sabbath means stop. If they had stop signs in ancient Israel, they would say Sabbath. Stop. That means take a break. Unplug. Stop regular life as you know it. Don't just think about stopping, actually stop. This is a good antidote for the overstuffed schedule.

Holy — Holy means different. It means distinct, set apart. If you have six people in a room that have black hair then a blonde walks in the room, the blonde is holy. They are completely different from everyone else. They are set apart from other people.

In summary, this command tells us we must take a day to stop usual life and have a change of pace, a different day that doesn't look like the rest of our days. We can't just think about it. We need to actually do it.

Some people do not like this command. They think every day should be the same. They think we should work seven days a week because there is more productivity. We make more money. The problem with that line of thinking is that without a stop day, you end up in slavery. In Egypt, God's people worked every day of the week. Then God commanded them to work six days then take a break. If I was an ancient Israelite, I would have loved this command. God mandates a day. You would think a command to take your day off would be the easiest command to keep, but as we will see, it is one of the hardest.

How do we keep this commandment?

Make sure we work for six days.

...Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath.

The first thing we need to learn about applying this commandment is that God's desires for us to work for six days. We live in a society where people think work is evil. Work is something to avoid. We look forward to retiring so we no longer have to work. We think work is a curse, when it is actually a gift. We may not have to work but we get to work. Work was part of this world before sin entered the world.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. Genesis 2:15 (ESV)

Our God is a working God. He is a creating God. He worked for six days to create the universe. In a similar fashion, we are to pattern the rhythm of our work week after God's work week.

The problem is that after the fall, work became difficult. We have to do things six times before they are done right. Work after the fall is much harder. There are weeds, rust and decay so work is hard.

Remember that work itself is not a bad thing. It is a good thing. In the new heavens and earth, we will work in the new creation. It will be joyful work and productive work because we will work without the curse of sin.

When it comes to applying this, there are two groups of people. For some of us the idea that work is a good thing is a new thing. We try to work as little as possible. Those who try to avoid work have about as much chance of burning

themselves out as I have of getting pregnant. If that is you, God calls tells you to go to work. Focus on working hard for six days.

The other group of people in the room is those with mortgages. We have the opposite problem. Instead of learning to step up the pace so we work six days, we need to step down the pace so we only work six days. We work all the time. We need to learn to slow down and take a rest day.

So applying this command begins with the realization that God wants us to work hard for six days each week before we stop and take a day of rest on the seventh day.

Make sure we Sabbath to the Lord, not to myself.

...but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

Next, I want us to notice that this command says when the people of God take their rest day, it is not their rest day. It is a Sabbath to the Lord. This means the seventh day of rest is not a day to be lived to ourselves but it is a day to be lived to the Lord. Many times we think we primarily need to be personally refreshed but this command tells us that the people of God primarily need to be spiritually refreshed by God through their relationship with him.

To prove this, let me ask simple question. How many of us have adequate time for Bible reading, prayer and Christian friendships during the week? Not many of us. The reason we don't have that time is because we are working all the time. God gifts us with one day to have time to be refreshed in our relationships with God because we desperately need it.

Look with me at a passage in Leviticus that pulls this picture together.

Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work. It is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwelling places. Leviticus 23:3 (ESV)

In Leviticus, we see the Sabbath is a day of rest. We also see it is a day primarily of refreshment in the Lord. This passage adds another piece. It says the Sabbath is a day of holy convocation. What does that mean? A convocation is a gathering. That is Old Testament language for going to church. It is a day for God's people to take a break, to be refreshed in their relationship with God and to go to church where they will find refreshment and needed friendship from other Christians.

Make sure the Sabbath is extended to all people, not just some people.

...On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.

Usually it is the people who have money that can enjoy rest. It is those who are poor that work two jobs and can never get a break. Here we learn this gift of rest from routine and refreshment from the Lord is to be for all people in Israel, not just some people in Israel. It was even to be extended to non-Israelites who are living in the land of Israel. That means in ancient Israel, everything shut down. Everybody worked for Chick-Fil-A. Even if you weren't Jewish, you were given the gift of a break.

I realize today that doesn't work for everyone. Power needs to be on when you flip the light switch. Doctors need to be in the hospital when you go to the emergency room. Somebody needs to answer the phone when you dial 9-1-1. It is not possible for everyone to take a Sabbath rest on the same day. If you can't

take a rest on the Sabbath day, God wants you to take a rest on another day of the week. Remember, this rest is to be for all people.

Why do we keep this command?

A day of rest was built into creation.

Moses continues explaining this commandment. He anchors the reason for this day of rest for all people in the creation story which applies to all people, not just God's people.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and 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. Exodus 20:11 (ESV)

In the Ten Commandments we find the reason for a day of rest in the creation story. God could have made the entire creation in six seconds. He could have made it in six minutes. He could have made it in 6 billion years, like some people claim. Another option is he could have made everything in an instant with the appearance of age. For example, God created bread to feed the 5,000 in an instant with the appearance of the loaf having risen in the past and cooked in the past. Jesus created wine in an instant for the wedding at Canaan, with the appearance of many days of fermentation. Jesus healed in an instant without people spending time to be restored to health. One day our bodies will rise from the grave and in an instant be transformed into our resurrection bodies that will last forever. They also will have the appearance of age.

When God fashioned out creation, he didn't choose to make things in an instant. He chose to work six days then rest on the seventh day. The reason God completed his work in six days then rested from his work on the seventh day was to give us an pattern to follow for our work weeks.

Let me give you a theological sidebar. There's big debate among Christians about the creation story in the book of Genesis. Were these seven, literal, 24-hour days or do these days represent long epics of time? Some claim these days were not literal but merely poetic illustrations. The problem with those alternative explanations to the plain meaning of the creation story is that Exodus 20:11 it strongly indicates these were literal 24-hour days because God set up the work of his creation week to give us a literal pattern for us to follow in our work week. We are to find our rhythm of six days of work followed by one day of rest by echoing God's pattern of six days for work and one day for rest. That is the big idea behind the fourth commandment.

For God's people, the day of rest is also a day of worship to God and refreshment from God.

For God's people, the Sabbath day is to be more than just a day to physically rest. As we said earlier, for God's people, it is a day to be refreshed in what we need most, our relationship with God.

Exodus 20 is not the only place the Ten Commandments are found. They are also found in Deuteronomy 5. The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 were given to the generation that left Egypt that died after forty years of wandering in the wilderness. When the next generation was about to go to the Promised Land, Moses gave a refresher course on God's dealings with his people to the younger generation. In Deuteronomy 5, Moses repeated the Ten Commandments for that new generation. What we should notice is Moses added a small line to this second telling of the commandment.

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave 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 day. Deuteronomy 5:12–15 (ESV)

Moses reminded them that the Sabbath day is also a day for God's people to remember God's salvation. For the Old Testament Israelites, they needed to remember their ancestors began as slaves without hope. They were forced to throw their male children into the Nile River. They were facing genocide. God set them free, and they did nothing to deserve God coming to their rescue. The Sabbath day was a day for them to remember God's mighty salvation.

It is the same for us. Like the new generation of the Israelites, it is easy for us to forget that we all started dead in our sin. We started headed to the lake of fire. We began without hope and without God in this world. God broke into our lives through Jesus. We came to know the truth about God's mighty love. We were born again not by our own strength but by God's grace. It is easy to forget that God saved us. The Sabbath day is the day where we should look back on who we were and remember what God saved us from so we will have a grateful heart.

When God's people forgot to observe the Sabbath, they forgot him.

Even though God's people were given this day of rest and worship, many times they didn't want to unplug. They didn't want to rest. They wanted to work

seven days a week just like the culture around them. When God's people insisted on working every day of the week, they began to drift away.

Through the rest of the Old Testament, the spiritual temperature of God's people could be measured by their willingness follow the Sabbath. The prophet Ezekiel summarizes this.

Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. "Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. Ezekiel 20:12–13 (ESV)

The rest of the world doesn't have a Sabbath day. They work seven days a week. God's people were to stick out from the cultures around them because they took one day a week for rest and worship. God promised to bless them if they did this. He enabled them to accomplish more in six days than other people accomplished in seven days. The problem is God's people rejected the gift of rest and refreshment in him. They acted just like everybody else and worked all the time hoping they would get ahead.

Unfortunately, when God's people insisted on working rather than enjoying time in rest and worship, they were making a value statement about what is really important. They were teaching their children that keeping up with the culture around them was more important than enjoying the rest and worship God provides.

The end result was his people walked away from him, not just with their time but with their hearts. As a result, they ended up in Babylonian captivity.

In the book of Nehemiah, we read of Nehemiah organizing God's people after they returned to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity. Nehemiah helped reestablish the priesthood and reorient people around worship. He organized the building of the walls around the city. He made sure people observed the Sabbath. He made sure they took a day for rest and worship.

There was a time in the book of Nehemiah when Nehemiah had to return to Persia. When he returned from Persia, he found traveling salesmen selling in Jerusalem on the Sabbath.

Tyrrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, in Jerusalem itself! Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city?"... Nehemiah 13:16–18 (ESV)

At this time, the people of Jerusalem were people similar to you and me. They were people who went to synagogue. They loved God. They were trying to walk faithfully. The problem was the traveling merchants, who weren't Jewish. They opened their stores on the Sabbath day, just like they did in every other city. God's people started buying and selling on the Sabbath, treating it like was no different from any other day of the week.

What happened next is shocking to modern ears. Nehemiah flipped out. He barred the city gates on the Sabbath so the traveling salesman wouldn't be able to set up shop in the city. Next, when the salesmen started camping outside of the city, he drove them away. Nehemiah reminded the people that it was treating the Sabbath day just like it was any other day which was pivotal to God's people entering slavery.

While this story is from the Old Testament so it cannot directly apply this to our situation, there is a principle which does apply. The principle is that our culture will pressure us to treat the Sabbath day just like every other day. If we give in to that pressure, we will begin drifting away from God. We need our day of rest and refreshment from God.

Parents, let me talk to you for a moment. There are a lot of sports on Sunday. If we spend Sundays in sports, are we subtly teaching our children that Sunday is no different than any other day? Are we teaching our children they don't need a rest and refreshment from God? Are we teaching our children that refreshment in our relationship with God is something we should skip if we think there is something more exciting in our schedule? Is this not an opportunity to teach our children that maintaining our relationship with God is more important than sharpening sports on this day? Is this not an opportunity to teach our children that they should work hard six days a week, then rest on the seventh day with the trust that God will enable them to accomplish more in six days than the rest of the world can in seven?

Each of us will need to wrestle with these questions. Just remember that God's people in the ancient world stuck out from the other cultures because they chose to rest and worship on the seventh day while the rest of the world chose to work on that day. I hope that encourages you when you need to make a tough choice to turn down a Sunday activity to honor God in this area. You won't be the first.

Is the Sabbath Saturday or Sunday?

This moves us to the New Testament. If you have friends who are Seventh Day Adventists, they will argue with you. They will say, “Why are you worshipping on Sunday, the first day of the week? The Sabbath is the last day of the week. It is Saturday.” They will tell you the reason Christians worship on Sunday is because Constantine changed the day of worship to Sunday for pagan reasons. They will tell you to repent and worship on Saturday, not Sunday. If you have had these discussions, they can be interesting.

When we study this topic, we find there are very good reasons why we worship on the first day of the week, not the last day of the week.

It is all because of a man you may have heard about. His name is Jesus. Everything changed when Jesus came. I mean everything. The last time in the Bible that we read of God’s people gathering Saturday for worship is after Christ’s death when he was laid in the tomb.

Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment. Luke 23:56 (ESV)

What happened the next day? Can anybody tell me? Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday morning. In short, that is why Christians worship on the first day of the week. It is to remember the day Christ rose from the dead. In addition, it is not just the resurrection that happens on Sunday but everything of significance starts happening on Sunday morning from the resurrection of Jesus Christ onwards. A week after the resurrection, Jesus appeared again to his disciples on a Sunday, not a Saturday.

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." John 20:26 (ESV)

Remember the Jews count inclusively, not exclusively. This means their eight days is our seven days.

After Christ's ascension to heaven, the next big event was the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Guess what day Pentecost falls on? You guessed it. It is always on a Sunday.

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Acts 2:1-2 (ESV)

You can see Pentecost always falls on a Sunday in Leviticus 23:15-16.

To remember Christ's resurrection, the church always met on Sunday, the first day of the week.

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. 1 Corinthians 16:2 (ESV)

On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight. Acts 20:7 (ESV)

The early church meeting on Sunday is something we need to notice. They could have met on Saturday. That was already the acceptable day of worship for God's people. They met on Sunday because that was the day the tomb was empty.

Meeting on Sunday was a great inconvenience for the early Christians. It was a work day so the early church either met super early before work or they met super late after work.

Each week the early church broke bread together and passed the communion cups to remember Christ's death for their sin. They met on Sunday to remember Christ's resurrection to new life. The death of Christ was celebrated each week with communion. The resurrection was celebrated each week by meeting on Sunday.

If we move a little further into early church history, we find the first day of the week is no longer called the Sabbath to separate it from the old seventh day of the week. It is called the Lord's Day to answer it as Jesus Christ's resurrection day, the Christian Sabbath day. The apostle John used this name for Sunday in the book of Revelation.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet... Revelation 1:10 (ESV)

For those of you who are struggling to believe that Christ rose from the dead, here is compelling evidence that Jesus literally rose. For thousands of years, God's people observed the Sabbath on Saturday. Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday. What would cause the early Christians to make this hard shift, ditch thousands of years of tradition and begin insisting on worship on a work day at great inconvenience? What could cause this other than Jesus literally rising from the dead?

After the Christian faith spread through the Roman Empire and many many people were taking time on Sunday either before or after work for worship, we have Constantine becoming a Christian and the emperor of Rome.

In AD 321 Constantine declared Sunday as a day off for Christian worship. Fast forward 1,400 years and the United States came on the scene. There was a

big debate. Should we take Saturday off for the Jewish Sabbath or Sunday for the Christian Lord's day? They couldn't make a decision, so they decided to go with both. That, my friends, is the origin of the two-day weekend.

Is the Sabbath binding for Christians?

In one sense yes, in another sense no. The ceremonial traditions of the Sabbath were done away with by Jesus. The Sabbath day was so completely fulfilled by Christ that it is on a different day and it is given a different name, the Lord's day. In that way, the Sabbath is no longer binding on Christians.

In other ways, it is still binding. Remember the Sabbath wasn't just part of Israelite worship. It was part of the creation story, where God gave a day of rest to all people, not just some people. In that sense, the Sabbath still applies.

For God's people in the Old Testament, the day of rest was also to be a day of worship where we are refreshed in our relationship with God because we need spiritual refreshment more than we need physical refreshment. That part still applies.

Let's face it. We live crazy busy lives. If we don't take one day a week to rest and recalibrate our hearts around Jesus, we will fall apart and drift from God, just like the Israelites did when they stopped observing the Sabbath in the Old Testament. So as Christians, we are not bound to keep Old Testament Sabbath laws, but it is still a day of rest for all people and a day of worship for God's people.

How can I observe the Lord's day as a day of rest?

Remember it is not my day. It is the Lord's day.

In the book of Isaiah, there are some fascinating verses that reveal the problem with the heart of God's people when it came to the Sabbath.

If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Isaiah 58:13–14 (ESV)

Whenever we talk about the Sabbath, the discussion always degrades to list making. What can and what can't I do on Sunday? Can I travel on Sunday? Can I play sports on Sunday? Can I eat in a restaurant on Sunday? I don't want you to go home and make lists of what you can and can't do. The best way to answer all these questions is to simply look at your heart. Do I see Sunday as my day for my pleasure to do my own thing or do I see Sunday as God's day, a gift to me to first and foremost enjoy him and be refreshed by him. If I see Sunday as my day off that is first for me, I will make the wrong choices about Sunday every time. If I see Sunday as the Lord's day that is a gift to me to first and foremost be refreshed in my relationship with God, I will make the right choices about what I can and cannot do.

Let mom rest from the kitchen.

Sometimes the Sabbath is the biggest work day for mom. Ladies, I encourage you to prepare the Sunday meal the day before and reheat it so you have a break from the kitchen. I have verses to support this. In Exodus 16 God spoke this way about the manna he provided the Israelites.

...he said to them, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.' " ... See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day. Exodus 16:23, 29 (ESV)

When God gave his people manna in the wilderness, he gave them a double portion on the day before their Sabbath day so they didn't have to spend a bunch of time in the kitchen. Then mom could rest. Now, I realize they didn't have the microwave but the principle remains. Make a double batch on Saturday and take a break on Sunday.

Don't let the Lord's day become like every other day.

Earlier we saw that Nehemiah was angry with God's people because they were doing business with the traveling merchants on the Sabbath. This doesn't mean we can't go to Wal-Mart on Sunday. It just means we need to carefully look at our Lord's day and make sure we are not treating it like every other day.

Use the Lord's day to reconnect with your family.

The Sabbath day should be a day where we have a chance to reconnect with our families. Today, the family heads in many different directions. Our stop day, which is Sunday, should be a time when the family is able to eat together, spent time together and make memories together. If your kids have too many sports on Sunday, it may be time to tell the coach you are a Christian and your family is taking a break.

Use the Lord's day for good works.

One of the things Jesus was always in trouble for was healing people on the Sabbath.

And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. Mark 3:2 (ESV)

The religious leaders considered good works on the Sabbath a form of working. Jesus said the Sabbath was a day for doing good works for other people. The Sabbath is a day where we should do good works for other people that bring them life, health and joy. The Sabbath is the day for you to visit someone in the nursing home. If you are a student, it is the day to call your parents and bring joy to their hearts. Your rest day may even be a good day to get out some tools and build a wheelchair ramp for your elderly neighbor.

Conclusion

The next time you go to Pizza Ranch and you overload your plate and it reminds you about your overstuffed life, remember that God loves you. He doesn't want you working seven days a week as a slave to your schedule. He commands us to stop one day a week to rest and take a break from our work. He commands us to use the day to not just be physically refreshed but to be refreshed in our relationships with God because our lives are so busy we don't have time to do that during the week. This week, make sure you take the time to rest on the Lord's day and be refreshed. Most importantly make sure you take the time to be refreshed in Christ.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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