

**One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain.** <sup>24</sup>

**The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”**

<sup>25</sup> **He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? <sup>26</sup> In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”**

<sup>27</sup> **Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”** (NIV 84)

Theme: The commands of the Lord of the Sabbath are a gracious gift.

1. For our benefit.
2. For our rest.

Gifts are usually something that you enjoy receiving, something that you want and look forward to using. You wouldn't normally consider a law or command a gift. But why do parents make a bunch of rules for their children, or governments for their citizens? Some might say it is simply to control them; but that isn't the only reason. Rules, laws, and regulations are often put into place for protection. There is a reason why parents tell their children to look both ways before crossing the street, not to talk to strangers, or not to throw any parties when they are away for a few days. It's the same reason why governments have laws about speeding, drugs, and driving while impaired—they are there for our protection. We may not like or agree with some of the rules set up for us, but they are often to guard and protect us and those around us.

So the law then isn't really for parents' or the government's benefits (As the argument goes, the government would make a whole lot of tax money if it legalized drugs); but it is for our benefit—you can even say these laws are a gift. The same can be said about the laws and commands of God, especially the third commandment—it is our as a gift because it leads to spiritual and eternal rest.

When God created the world, he did so in six days. And then on the seventh day he rested. This is the picture God used when he established the Sabbath day. The word Sabbath literally means “rest.” Because God rested on the seventh day after making the world, on the seventh day of every week, Saturday, God's children were to rest from their labors in order to worship God.

God clearly told the Israelites when he established the Sabbath day that they were not to do any work, **the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work.** Over time the Jewish people started adding on to God's commands concerning the Sabbath. They made countless laws and regulations concerning what work is or isn't. The Talmud, a Jewish book of instruction and rules written several hundred years before Christ forbid the wiping of a wound on the Sabbath, or taking a little wax to stop up a hole in a cask. These are Man-made rules over and beyond God's command were made to fit their own fancy and to control those underneath them. The Sabbath, then, often was a burden to the Jews.

One Sabbath Jesus and his disciples were walking along in a field of grain. The disciples picked some of the heads of the grain, Luke tells us, and they rubbed it in their hands and ate the grain. This was a sin in the eyes of the Pharisees, not because it was considered stealing—in Deuteronomy 25 there is a specific law that allowed people to do this; No, the Pharisees saw this act of the disciples as work—the picking of the heads would have been considered harvesting and the rubbing in the hands could have been considered any sort of different ways. The Talmud explains: “In case a woman rolls wheat to remove the husks, it is considered as sifting; if she rubs the heads of wheat, it is regarded as threshing; if she cleans off the side-adherences, it is sifting out fruit; if she bruises the ears, it is grinding; if she throws them up in her hand, it is winnowing.”

By focusing on and enforcing these laws the Pharisees changed the whole purpose of the Sabbath law. The purpose of the Sabbath wasn't simply to refrain from work, which is what the Pharisees emphasized more than anything else. No the Jews were to refrain from work on the Sabbath for one specific and more important reason—to worship the Lord! The emphasis, then, is on praising and thanking the Lord

and hearing his Word, not on resting from their labors. The Sabbath, then was for their spiritual benefit before anything else.

As we saw in our second lesson, the Sabbath as God gave Moses isn't in force today; through his suffering and death Christ fulfilled the law and so the civil and ceremonial laws no longer apply. But that doesn't mean we get to ignore the third commandment. There is no command in the New Testament saying, "you must worship on Saturday;" but God does tell us to worship—take Hebrews 10 for example, **Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

How do you look at this commandment? Sadly, at times, we may see this as a burden. How many times do we think to ourselves, "I have to go to church today." Or, "What, there is Church on Wednesdays?" Or perhaps, "I should probably go to Church today, it's been over a month." At times worship becomes not something we want to do, but something that we feel obligated to do. That is because we see worship primarily as something we do—praising and thanking God, or perhaps it's what we do in order to gain more knowledge of God or get some insight on how to live our lives. When the focus is on us and what we do, then worship becomes a work and a burden—not a joy. And there is also a tendency toward legalism when it comes to keeping this commandment—that we have to go to worship in order to please God; that if we don't God is angry with us and so we have to appease him and go to Church every once-in-awhile. Then we do the same thing with worship that the Pharisees did with the Sabbath—they turned it into something we have to do to earn God's favor, part of earning your own salvation.

As the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus showed the Pharisees how their man-made rules and regulations, including with the Talmud were not in harmony with what God had in mind for the Sabbath. To do so he mentioned David, which we read about in our first lesson for today. It was not wrong for David and his men to eat the consecrated bread that was only for the priests to eat because they were in need of it. In the same way, it wasn't wrong for Jesus' disciples to eat the grain because they were hungry and in need of it. The ridiculous and over-bearing man-made laws that the Pharisees were trying burden the disciples with went against the law of love.

The Lord of the Sabbath, gives us the true meaning of the Sabbath when he says, **The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.** In other words, God did not create humans to serve the Sabbath; but the Sabbath was created to serve us, to be a benefit to us. The Pharisees and others made man serve the Sabbath by creating all kinds of laws concerning the Sabbath that made it a burden to the people. The focus became on "you can't do this; you can't do that" rather than on—receive rest for your souls as you worship me. The third commandment, then, is here to serve us—to be a benefit to us; a gift from God, rather than be a burden to us. It is there so that when we obey this commandment we are fed and nourished, forgiven and comforted.

Worship isn't really for God. None of God's commands are for himself, but for us—the third commandment is a perfect example. God doesn't need us to worship him. He remains the Almighty God whether millions of people worship every Sunday or no one worships him every Sunday. Like many laws of the government God gives us this commandment for our benefit, not his.

If God doesn't benefit from worship; what do we benefit from worship? In worship the Lord comes to us with his Holy Word. We are reminded of and convicted in our sin but comforted with the saving message of the gospel: that through Christ's perfect life, suffering, death, and resurrection, our sins have been paid for and a perfect life in heaven with our Savior awaits. In worship we are fed and nourished, strengthened and comforted, sins are washed away in baptism, we receive a tangible forgiveness in the Lord's Supper. Worship is God's gift to us, something he does for us, not us for God.

As we said before Sabbath means rest. Not only did the Sabbath Day give a day of physical rest of the people of God, but more importantly it gave them a day of spiritual rest. There is no New Testament command that we must refrain from work on any day of the week. But that doesn't mean that we don't receive spiritual rest today. That is what the Lord gives us through his Word—true spiritual rest; rest from our sins, rest for our weary souls. The peace of mind knowing that our sins have been removed and paid for and that we won't have to pay the eternal consequences for our sinful actions. Rest from worry knowing that no matter what evils I have done, they have been wiped away by the blood of Christ. This is the type of rest

Jesus had in mind in Matthew 28, **Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.** The Lord does not place burdens upon us for us to follow; but gives us the rest we need through the gospel.

And that isn't the only type of rest we receive. Eventually we will receive an eternal rest in heaven, where we will not only have rest for our souls, but also physical rest. In chapter four the Writer to the Hebrews talks about the true rest that the Lord gives us. He is talking about the Israelites who heard God's word but rejected it: **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 example of disobedience.**

Let us make every effort to enter that eternal rest—says the Writer to the Hebrews. The Holy Spirit does this for us as we are in the Word. Eternal rest, then, is a result of receiving the rest for our souls that the Lord gives to us through the gospel—whether that is through personal devotions, Bible study, worship, or the sacraments.

Many of the man-made rules and regulations set up by parents or governments or whomever are for our benefit—mostly for our protection. The Sabbath is the same—for our protection against the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh—for the gospel is the only weapon that can defeat our spiritual enemies. But this is where God's command is greater—the third commandment doesn't just protect, it also gives. It gives spiritual rest for our souls now, and leads to an eternal rest forever in heaven.

The Apostle John says in his first letter that the Lord's **commands are not burdensome.** There is nothing burdensome about hearing the Word of the Lord and praising and thanking him for all that he has done, rather it is a gracious gift from God. So we do all we can to keep this commandment by worshiping the Lord, not just for one hour a week, but every day of our lives; not because God needs us to, but because of the rest for our weary souls that God gives us through this commandment.