

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. ¹³**Six days you shall labor and do all your work,** ¹⁴**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 ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do.** ¹⁵**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.** (NIV84)

Theme: The Lord's Gracious Command Gives us Rest

1. He removes the burden
2. He gives us motivation

When you were young your parents told you to clean your room, vacuum the living room, or walk and feed the dog. They commanded you to do your chores. And to say the least, you didn't like doing all of these things. You saw them as an unnecessary burden that your parents were inflicting on you.

What about when your parents told you had to go to Church? Were you happy about it, or did you dread going to Sunday School all by yourself and having to sit through another boring sermon and sing a bunch of dull hymns?

Forget when you were younger, what about right now? What do you think of God's law? Are the 10 commandments an unnecessary burden that God is forcing you to obey? What about the 3rd commandment—is it a burden to go to worship?

Today we see that God's gracious law—his 3rd commandment, gives us rest. Through it he removes our burdens and he gives us motivation to obey the rest of his law.

God gave Moses the 10 commandments on the top of Mount Sinai. Just a few months before they had fled Egypt. But then they spent over 40 years in the wilderness. At the end of those 40 years, God wanted his people to remember his law before they entered the Promised Land. So in the book of Deuteronomy Moses reiterated the

law to the people. He wanted to them to realize that they were sinners who could not save themselves and deserved eternal punishment. He wanted to keep their sinful lives in check. He made sure they knew what they were supposed to do.

In the commandment before us today—the third commandment, he told them they weren't allowed to do any work at all on the Sabbath. **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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do.** Sounds like a pretty harsh law, doesn't it? They weren't allowed to do anything on Saturday. No work, whatsoever. And not only the Israelites, but everyone around them. They were to do no work, nor were they to have someone do work for them. It seems like an unnecessary burden. Some people have to get work done on Saturdays. Yard work, laundry, balancing the finances, and so on. But they weren't allowed to. Even if they were sick, or injured, or on vacation during the week and needed to get stuff done, they weren't allowed to. No work was to be done on the Sabbath.

If this law didn't seem like a burden when Moses told it to the Israelites, it certainly became a burden later on. By the time of Jesus the Pharisees and others had taken this law to the extreme. They made up their own regulations to go along with this command and placed a heavy burden on the people. They made it wrong to walk more than a certain distance, to carry something when you walked, to heal people, to make mud, to pick something off of a plant and eat it. They made it so that the people weren't allowed to do anything on the Sabbath. And they missed the whole point of the commandment. They were so focused on making extra laws to make sure they didn't break the third commandment, that they inflicted more burdens on the people instead of removing them.

Like some of those Jews, we too may see God's commandments as a burden. That is the way our sinful nature sees it. We don't want to obey God by nature. Our Old Man fights against us when we try to obey God's commands. Then God's commandments become burdens.

For he commands us to do what we don't want to do by nature, or to do something we don't want to do. And you wish that God wouldn't have made such a command, then you would be free to do whatever you want. Life would be so much easier if you could simply do your own thing without worry about what God commands.

As we learned in today's second lesson, we no longer have to follow the third commandment as it is written. Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus abolished the law. He fulfilled the law so that we no longer have to follow it. It was a law that pointed us to Christ. And now that Christ has come, that law has been done away with. Then why do we study the 10 commandments? Because they are a summary of the moral law—God's will that stands for all people of all time. Every commandment is repeated in the New Testament as something that God still demands all people to do—except one. The third commandment is not repeated in the New Testament in its exact Old Testament form.

But not working on the Sabbath wasn't the main point of the commandment. They were to rest for the purpose of worshiping God. The commandment was to give them time to hear and learn God's Word, to meditate on his grace, and to worship him for all the things they had done for him. We see in the book of Leviticus that the Sabbath was set up as a special day of worship, which included offering more sacrifices to God. And this is the aspect of the third commandment that still applies to us today. Luther beautifully summed the meaning of this commandment to New Testament believers in his Small Catechism. "We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it." God no longer demands that we refrain from work on Saturday. But he does command us to worship him. He wants us to come together on a regular basis to hear and learn his Word, to meditate on his grace, and to praise him for all the things he does for us.

But we may see that as a burden. It requires getting up a little earlier on Sunday morning, from refraining from doing yard work, or watching your sport's pre-game show. It requires turning off the TV and reading God's Word. It means to stop doing whatever, and get into a Bible Class. You don't want to give up doing the things you love, your free time, and so on to worship God and to study his Word.

But is it really a burden? Think back as to why God gave this command in the first place. It was to relieve a burden. To give the people a day of rest. It was rest for their bodies. But more importantly, it was rest for their souls. And that is what he gives to us when we obey this commandment. For this commandment was not given for his benefit, but for ours.

For when we worship God and study his word we receive rest for our souls. In a world full of toil and trouble. When we constantly find ourselves in a state of upheaval from the world around us, sometimes we just need to take a step back. We need a vacation from this sin-filled world. Just to get away for a little bit and get refreshed. That is what his Word does for us. It reminds us of what is truly important in this life. That all the hardships that the world causes in our life do not truly matter. For the world will always cause upheaval, unrest, and unnecessary burdens. But God's Word gives us the rest our souls desperately need.

For God's Word shows us that Christ has removed the burden from us. We no longer have any burdens. We don't have to worry about facing this world all by ourselves. For God is with us every step of the way. And most importantly, we don't have the burden of saving ourselves. We don't have to worry about earning God's favor. We don't have to worry about keeping the 10 commandments perfectly in order to get to heaven.

For God's Word tells us about Jesus Christ, who kept the 10 commandments perfectly for us. He took all our sins upon himself when he died on the cross. They no longer count against us. When he died he gave us his righteousness, his holiness, his perfection. He made us what we were not. So we cannot and do not earn our way to heaven. Christ has done that for us. The burden to obey for eternal life is off of us, for Christ put it on himself. And we know that our sins are forgiven and we will live in heaven forever. Through the Word, God gives our soul, true rest—spiritual rest.

But the Word doesn't just give us spiritual rest, it also gives us motivation to obey his commandments.

In Exodus 20, the first time God gave his people this law, God gave them a very simple motivation. He created the world for us. He took six days to create the world. And on the seventh day, he rested. We

should rest from our work and worship God, because he graciously created the world for us. But here in Deuteronomy 5, he gives his people different motivation **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.** The Israelites were to follow God because he saved them from slavery in Egypt. And he was about to give them the Promised Land.

This motivation that God gave the Israelites is the same motivation he gives us. For just as God saved the people from slavery, so Christ saves us from slavery. He saved us from the slavery of sin. For when we were born we were slaves to sin. We could do nothing but sin. We could not keep any of his commandments. And even now, as Christians, we still sin against God constantly. We not only sin against the third commandment, but all of them. As James points out, **whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.** And each time we sin we deserve eternal damnation, for **the wages of sin is death**—eternal death with the devil.

But through Christ we are no longer guilty of all our sins. And we are no longer slaves to sin. We have the ability now to obey God or not to obey him. And why wouldn't we want to obey God? Why wouldn't we want to do what the one who saved us wants to do? As Christians God's grace is all the motivation we need to obey God and following his Word. Since God showed love to us by giving up his life to save us, we will give up our wants and desires to follow his Word.

And when we follow his Word, we get into his Word. We study it at home and in Bible Class. We worship him on a regular basis. We love hearing his Word and learning about everything Christ has done for us. And then we are refreshed. For it is only in the Word that we hear and learn about our Savior. We are reminded again and again how Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins. Then, our souls, made weary by this world, are no longer focused on the world. They are focused on forgiveness and eternal life. And we know in heaven our souls will find complete rest.

God knows what he is doing, doesn't he? He is like a parent. Parents don't tell their children to do the chores because they are lazy. They make their children do chores to teach them responsibility, the value of

hard work, and simple skills needed to live your life. Although their children may not realize it, the parent's laws actually benefit them. The same thing can be said about all of God's commandments—especially the 3rd commandment. For it is not for God, but for us. When we obey this commandment we get into the Word. We are reminded of God's grace, how he saves us from our sins. We are reminded of what God wants us to do. And he refreshes our soul and motivates us to obey him in all things. Only good can happen when we obey this commandment. For the Holy Spirit will use the Word to strengthen our faith. And he revitalizes our soul.

As Christians we don't see the 10 commandments as a burden, but as an opportunity to show God how much we love him. We see it as God's grace. The third commandment is a perfect example. It's not a burden, for we want to get into God's Word. For when we obey it, the Holy Spirit strengthens us and motivates us through the word. And our souls are given true rest through the forgiveness of sins. This rest we have now and will have forever. Amen.