

I mentioned Sunday that I would give you my thoughts on a couple of the “tougher” passages about Sabbath from the Apostle Paul. By “tougher” I mean they are not as clear and straightforward as we may like, that over the years godly men and women have interpreted them differently. I think that is ok, no reason to panic, let's stay humble and keep seeking God. ***“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12 ESV)*** I am going to give you the passages and then quote Albert Barnes, a pastor from the 1800's, on his interpretation of Colossians 2:16-17. I am quoting him because I agree with his interpretation and he says it better than I would.

“One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.” Romans 14:5-6 ESV

“But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.” Galatians 4:9-11 ESV

“So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.” Colossians 2:16-17 NKJV

Albert Barnes: - “The Greek for sabbaths here is, “of the Sabbaths.” The word Sabbath in the Old Testament is applied not only to the seventh day, but to all the days of holy rest that were observed by the Hebrews, and particularly to the beginning and close of their great festivals. There is, doubtless, reference to those days in this place, since the word is used in the plural number, and the apostle does not refer particularly to the Sabbath properly so called. There is no evidence from this passage that he would teach that there was no obligation to observe any holy time, for there is not the slightest reason to believe that he meant to teach that one of the ten commandments had ceased to be binding on mankind. If he had used the word in the singular number - “the Sabbath,” it would then, of course, have been clear that he meant to teach that that commandment had ceased to be binding, and that a Sabbath was no longer to be observed. But the use of the term in the plural number, and the connection, show that he had his eye on the great number of days which were observed by the Hebrews as festivals, as a part of their ceremonial and typical law, and not to the moral law, or the Ten Commandments.”

Certainly, Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of Sabbath rest, but that ultimate fulfillment is not yet complete in that Jesus has not yet returned to make all things new, until then we and the rest of creation are groaning and looking forward to that complete and perfect rest in Jesus (Romans 8:22-23, Hebrews 4:1-13). Until Jesus returns my opinion is we would be foolish not to receive this gift of a Sabbath day to stop, rest, delight, and contemplate God. Even if the 4th commandment is no longer binding for us, why would we push away this gift, this means of God's grace in our life?

“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 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.”

Exodus 20:8-11 ESV

We see that there is a rhythm of both work and rest. Work 6 rest 1. Both work and rest are good. If your life is all work, then over time, you grind your soul into the ground and you become more machine than human being. On the flip side, rest is good, but if your life is all rest, then it becomes empty of meaning and significance. My point is that both overwork and underwork rob us of the capacity to live as God intended. There're two ditches to avoid: All work and no rest is called slavery. All rest and no work is called laziness. To avoid those two ditches, we need a Sabbath day, we need to tap into this rhythm of work for 6, Sabbath rest for 1. We have looked at the truth that God blessed this day and made it holy. He breathed life into this day and set it apart for a special purpose, a gift to humanity. There's a 24-hour period that in your mind, you're to recognize this one's different, this one's holy and blessed. And then how you behave in that 24-hour period should be different. We stop, we rest, we delight in God and His creation, and we contemplate God.

Deuteronomy 5.

The first five books, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus Numbers, and Deuteronomy, are called the Torah, which is a Hebrew word, normally translated law, or teaching. There are 40 years between the book of Exodus and the book of Deuteronomy, and they are written to two different generations. Exodus was written to mom and dad fresh out of slavery in Egypt. Deuteronomy was written four decades later to mom and dad's children who had no felt experience of slavery, who grew up in freedom. Deuteronomy is from two Greek words, deuterio meaning second and nomos meaning law. Deuteronomy literally means the second law or the second teaching.

Here in Deuteronomy 5, Moses retells the Ten Commandments to this generation of Israelites about to enter the promised land. ***“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)*** The same command, keep the Sabbath, but the way it's worded and why you do it is different.

First, notice that the first word is changed. From “remember” the Sabbath to “observe” the Sabbath. In Hebrew, the word is shamar, and it means to keep, to watch over, to guard, to celebrate. Think of how we observe a holiday such as Christmas or Easter. It's the same idea. You observe, you celebrate the Sabbath. Observe also has this idea of obedience. We observe the law. Of course, if you are going to observe then you have remembered. If you're going to keep it, you need to have remembered it. And if you remember it, the whole point is that you remember it and then you keep it.

The second difference at the end is what I want to us to think about. ***“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.”*** Exodus 20 is 6 days you labor, on the 7th day you stop and rest. Why? Because in 6 days God made everything and then on the 7th day He rested. That's the rationale. Here the rationale for working 6 and resting 1 is because you were slaves in Egypt and God brought you out, so God commands you to keep the Sabbath. Why would God command them to keep the Sabbath because they were slaves in Egypt and God delivered them?

Now, a little bit of background for those of us that did not grow up as slaves in Egypt. I will give you a handful of quotes from Pharaoh found in Exodus 5:1-19: "Why do you take the people away from their work? Get back to your burdens." "No longer give them straw to make bricks, but they must make the same amount of bricks, for they are idle." "Let heavier work be laid on the men." "Your work will not be reduced in the least." They were beaten and asked, "Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today and yesterday?" "Make bricks." "You are idle, you are idle; that is why you say, "Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD. Go now and work." "You shall by no means reduce your number of bricks, your daily task each day." No matter how hard the Hebrews worked, it was never enough. They just lived under this oppressive yoke of the daily quota, more, more, more. And it wasn't just Pharaoh, it was Egypt as a whole, the socioeconomic system. Add to that the reason Israel was making the bricks. The bricks were to build store cities. Entire cities just to store extra stuff. There was never enough, never enough food, never enough drink, never enough grain. There's no rest in that, never satisfied, never enough, can't stop or someone may get ahead of me, they may end up with more than me.

Now, I don't think it takes a lot of brain power to connect slavery in Egypt and that system or culture to ours. The American empire is not very different, the American dream is the task master always screaming more, more, more, don't let them get ahead of you, don't let your neighbor have more than you. Work harder, work longer, play more, get more, have more, need more. We're in this culture that does everything it can to move our heart toward more. Instead of getting beaten with whips we're getting beaten by the dinging and buzzing of the devices in our pocket. We're getting beaten by the commercials and the billboards. More, more, more. Instead of living in the joy and delight of what we have, we end up stuck in the angst and the discontent and the greed and the lust for more that we do not yet have.

In Genesis, the first story about the Sabbath, God worked for 6 days, and then He rested for 1 and establishes a rhythm for all of creation. But the rhythm of Western culture, if there is a rhythm, it's very different. It's a little bit more like this for many of us: Work more, buy more, play more, repeat. Instead of work 6 days, rest 1 day; we live in a culture with a rhythm of more, more, more, more. Even our days off and vacations have become exhausting because it's about more, going more, seeing more, experiencing more.

Why is it important that we remember we were slaves?

I think a big part of why God would command us to observe the Sabbath and remember we were slaves is because humans have the tendency to forget. We have the tendency to forget that we were slaves, and it was God and all God who brought us out of slavery and God who has graciously given us everything we have. We can forget that it was God who saved us and set us free; and that everything we are blessed with in our freedom is from God.

Listen to what Moses teaches warnings the next chapter, ***"And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."* (Deuteronomy 6:10-12 ESV)** In other words, it's easy to forget that we're not God, that the very breath we breathe is from God. Most of us remember this with our minds but do our actions reveal that we remember or have forgotten?

We can also forget that our salvation and freedom has nothing to do with how amazing we were or are; and everything to do with the fact that God loves us. ***"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other***

people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8 ESV) God wants to make it clear that He didn’t choose them or you and I because of how amazing we are but because He loves us. That should be freeing to us. When we forget these truths, we tend to go back to a place of slavery. We start to think and act like I have to produce for God, I have to earn from God, I have to be someone so God can use me or love me. We go back to thinking our identity and worth is based on performance or status or how much we have. And slaves don’t stop and rest.

God is giving this gift of Sabbath and saying observe it, remember it, remember I am God your Creator, and remember I am God your Savior. Remember that the work is finished.

We see in John 19:30 the last words of Jesus from the cross. ***“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” John 19:30 ESV (Hebrews 9:24-28 ESV)*** Jesus finished the eternal purpose of the cross. It stands today as a finished work, the foundation of all Christian peace and faith, paying in full the debt we owed to God and making peace between God and man. God the Father laid upon God the Son all the guilt and wrath our sin deserved, and He bore it in Himself perfectly, totally satisfying the wrath of God for us. And just like God did when He finished creation, when He finished redemption, He invites us into that finished work to enjoy it and work with Him to spread it. ***“Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. (2 Corinthians 5:20-21 - 6:1)***

Sabbath - Remember

Sabbath is a holy and blessed day that God has given to us as a gift, and He has invited and commanded us to remember and observe the Sabbath day. Remember that God has finished the work and has invited us into His finished work. Remember you and I are not God, and we can stop and rest and enjoy God’s finished work of creation and of redemption. Remember that you are not a slave in Egypt anymore, not a slave to sin, or a slave to the fear of death, or a slave to the I need more mentality of the world you live in. Remember that God has invited you into enjoying, caring for, and stewarding His finished work of Creation and Redemption. Our work is now to care for and enjoy God’s finished work. We don’t create, we enjoy and care for and steward God’s creation. We don’t save people, by faith we can enjoy salvation and share and invite others into the finished work of Jesus. The Sabbath day is a gift we can receive, a gift that gives us a taste of the perfect and full rest that is to come when Jesus returns and makes all things new.