

RESTING IN GOD WELL:
Applying Commandment 3 in Deuteronomy 5:12–15
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Physical and spiritual rest are gifts from our gracious God. Rest often includes ceasing from striving or from work or movement to relax, recover, refresh, or renew ourselves. We step away from this life's cares or activities to restore our souls or to regain strength, health, or energy. Rest often involves being placed or supported to stay in a specified position or state. It can also mean to be based on or grounded in something. Thus, rest often comes only in a context of stability and dependence. God often strips us of all secondary supports to remind us that our hope and help are alone in him. We find rest in being still and reminding our souls that he alone *is* God and that he is *our* God.

Returning to our sermon series on Deuteronomy 5–11, we are taking extended time to unpack the lasting significance of the Ten Commandments for Christians. Deuteronomy 5:12–15 supplies Moses's command to Israel to keep the Sabbath holy, and today we seek to consider how Jesus fulfills the Sabbath and what this means for us in relating this law to our daily lives. With so many cares and stresses battling our church and the lives of our members, I sense God's kindness in elevating before us a passage addressing rest and trust. Follow along as I read: Deuteronomy 5:12–15.... Pray with me....

The Sabbath command is often confusing to folks. The New Testament is explicit that we must not engage in idolatry, not bear God's name falsely, honor our parents, not murder, not commit adultery, etc. Indeed, the law of Christ in the new covenant reaffirms all nine other commands. Yet the New Testament is silent about keeping the Sabbath, leaving it for many a mystery as to what its significance is for Christians. Does the Sabbath continue as a new covenant ordinance? If so, does it retain its former shape and significance, not allowing people to work, or has it somehow been transformed? Is Sunday the new Christian Sabbath, and if so, what does this mean?

My desire today is to summarize the purpose of the old covenant Sabbath, consider how Jesus fulfills Israel's Sabbath hopes, and clarify the lasting significance of the Sabbath for the church. My greatest hope is to remind our souls that we can rest now that Jesus has come.

The Purpose of the Old Covenant Sabbath

Sabbath was a sign of the old covenant, and its violation resulted in the death penalty. In an earlier sermon I proposed that the Sabbath supplied Israel a weekly

pattern of anticipation that is now realized in Jesus. Israel would work six days and then trust God to supply on the seventh, making rest their weekly goal and reminding them of their mission to see God's blessing enjoyed and rest realized in relation to God across the world. That to which the old covenant Sabbath pointed Jesus now fulfills, reestablishing and securing sovereign rest for all who are in him.

Deuteronomy 5:14 says that Israel's Sabbath was "to the LORD" (cf. Exod 16:23, 25; 20:10; Lev 23:3; 25:2, 4) in that it displayed him as exalted over all things. The weekly Sabbath emblemized a future reality in which both Israel and the world were to hope. That is, Sabbath keeping served as an eschatological symbol, capturing the goal of the old covenant, for which it was a sign. Within the framework of covenantal thought, the Sabbath pictured the blessing of "life and good" that would come to all who were faithful, and violating the Sabbath equally symbolized the curse of "death and evil" that would come to all unpardoned covenant breakers (Deut 30:15–20). This is why breaking the Sabbath was a criminal offense deserving death (Num 15:32–36).

Jesus Fulfills Israel's Sabbath Hopes

Jesus saw himself as establishing God's kingdom and as the source of mankind's ultimate rest. "All things have been handed over to me by my Father.... Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:27–30). Directly after this assertion, Matthew includes the story of Jesus allowing his disciples to pluck heads of grain on the Sabbath and then declaring himself "lord of the Sabbath" (12:6, 8). Such a testimony was an overflow of the fact that not only was "the kingdom of heaven ... at hand" (10:7) but also "the kingdom of God has come upon you" (12:28; cf. Luke 17:21).

Jesus's redeeming work brought Israel's global Sabbath mission to fulfillment. He is the one through whom the world is blessed (Gen 22:17b–18; Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:8, 14), and by his victorious resurrection he inaugurated the end-times Sabbath rest as a culmination of his new creational work. Jesus stands superior to Moses (Heb 3:1–6), and those of us in him have already entered rest, even though we await its full consummation (4:3–10).

The Sabbath Command's Lasting Significance

How should we think about the Sabbath today? As the sign of the old covenant, the Sabbath pointed toward a goal. It stood at the end of every Israelite's week and symbolized sovereign rest as life's aim. In contrast, for believers, Christ has already inaugurated the fulfillment of God's sovereign rest, as the "shadow"

now finds its “substance” in Christ (Col 2:16–17). Already God has put “everything in subjection to him,” leaving “nothing outside his control”; nevertheless, “we do not yet see everything in subjection to him” (Heb 2:8; cf. Matt 28:18; 1 Cor 15:25–28). The period of the church includes an overlap of the ages, wherein believers are truly but not yet fully enjoying Sabbath rest under Christ’s lordship seven days a week (Matt 11:28–29; Heb 4:8–11; cf. Acts 2:34–36; Rom 15:5–6). Because we already “share in Christ” (Heb 3:14), we have already entered the Sabbath rest he secures (4:9–10), but we also persevere in faith for the day when what Christ has already accomplished will be revealed fully at the future consummation.

In the new covenant there is not one specific day as opposed to others that marks the Sabbath (cf. Rom 14:5–6; Gal 4:9–10; Col 2:16–17). Christ’s resurrection initiates an eschatological shift from old creation to new (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), from Sabbath anticipation to Sabbath realization. Now, all week long, those in Christ enjoy Sabbath rest fully, though not finally.

Like the early church, our corporate worship follows a 1 + 6, gathering on the week’s first day to recall for our souls what is true and to ready us for all that follows (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). We gather on Sunday because this is the day Jesus defeated death (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1), thus initiating on that resurrection Lord’s day the Sabbath for which Israel longed (Rev 1:10). On that first day of the week, light dawned into darkness, God initiated new creation, and God’s kingdom in Christ became visible. Sunday worship reflects that inaugurated nature of rest that we relish the remaining part of the week. It also nurtures within us hope for the day when our faith will become sight (2 Cor 5:7) and when the rest we already taste will be completed through the removal of all evil, pain, and death at the glimpse of our Savior’s face (Rev 21:4; 22:3). As we presently delight in Sabbath rest every day of the week, we magnify Christ’s curse-overcoming work, even as we continue to pray, “Your kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10).

To help us consider the significance of the Sabbath Christians now enjoy, I have observed at least fourteen ways that Scripture calls us to rest in Christ. I pray they will move your soul to become satisfied and hopeful in Jesus.

1. *Rest by trusting God to supply your daily bread.* In the wilderness, God withheld the gift of manna on Saturdays but supplied double on Fridays in anticipation of the Sabbath to remind Israel that he was the one who supplied their needs every day of the week. God could give or take away at will, and he was working for them through their laboring and working for them during their resting. So, even when we have savings in the bank for tomorrow’s

needs and have strength to engage in all necessary tasks, we must continue to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11), ever recognizing, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that” (Jas 4:15). And in this season where Sovereign Joy is praying for a senior pastor and the provision to pay him and praying for a more extended, non-transient, healthy core so we have a stable, mature base from which to send and support those who go, may we be a people who depend on God to meet our every need. We will rest by trusting God to supply our daily bread.

2. *Rest by ceasing from anxious toil.* The psalmist declared, “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for [the LORD] gives to his beloved sleep” (Ps 127:2). Working and guarding the ground was part of humanity’s responsibility before the fall (Gen 2:15), yet after the fall that labor became toilsome and humans’ physical bodies began breaking down (3:17–19). Those in Christ have now regained citizenship in paradise (Phil 3:20) where we already enjoy the presence of God the judge and Jesus the mediator (Eph 2:6; Heb 12:22–24). And having been freed from the curse through Christ’s Sabbath-initiating, blessing-securing work (Gal 3:13), we do not lose heart, even in a care-filled world. Indeed, “though our outer man is wasting away, our inner man is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16). In Christ we can engage our relationships, parenting, schooling, homemaking, or public square job without carrying the strains, worries, or fears associated with the cursed world. “The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:5–7; cf. 1 Pet 5:6–7). Our souls can be at rest even while we are working. Rest by ceasing from anxious toil.
3. *Rest by obeying God in faith.* Through Israel’s journey in the wilderness and through their tenure in the promised land, God motivated obedience by promising that all who followed him would find rest (Exod 33:14; Ps 95:6–11). Yet because they did not believe, they failed to obey and experienced punishment (Num 14:8–11; 2 Kgs 17:13–15). When Christians entrust our future into God’s hand, what we hope for tomorrow impacts who we are today, shaping our decisions, desires, patterns, and pleasures. We find rest in God’s will, ways, and purposes. Our lives are not like the thorny soil of which Jesus said, upon hearing God’s word, “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desire for other things enter and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (Mark 4:19). Do you know the uneasiness

that comes when walking in sin? In contrast, walking in right paths supplies a steady and clean conscient. We rest in God by obeying God in faith.

4. *Rest by celebrating that the living God is your King.* Moses called Israel to keep the Sabbath holy in a way like how Yahweh God rested on the seventh day (Exod 20:11). After God finished creating the universe including his earthly kingdom, he refreshed himself through a rest of sovereignty, wherein the world was rightly ordered and at peace with him (Gen 2:1–3; Exod 31:17; cf. Ps 132:7–8, 13–14). By restoring Sabbath rest in Jesus, God reasserts his sovereignty as the one from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things (Rom 11:36). Already “God has made [Jesus] both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36); already Jesus is seated at the Father’s right hand “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Eph 1:21); already God has “put all things under [Jesus’s] feet and gave him as head over all things to the church” (1:22). Nevertheless, we still await the day when “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15). The true King has already secured Sabbath rest for us, and we will enjoy it fully when Christ returns. If you are part of the church, let your future desire become present delight and rest by celebrating that the living God is your King.
5. *Rest by being assured that you are right with God and at peace with him.* The fall disordered the world, replacing Sabbath rest with chaos and requiring God to initiate his redemptive purposes climaxing in Christ. Thus, Jesus claimed, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (John 5:17). Yet through our spiritual rebirth, God reestablishes our proper place in his world by helping us revel in his kingship over all (Ps 47:2; Zech 14:9). Righteousness is about right order in God’s world, and right order exists where he is at the top. Justice is about giving to persons what they rightly deserve, and the greatest injustice in this world is the failure to give God the glory he deserves. All mere humans fall short of this glory (Rom 3:23), but Jesus—the God-man—was perfectly righteous because he lived for God’s glory in all things (Isa 50:8; 53:11; John 17:4; 1 John 2:1). Therefore, Jesus could be a just substitute for us, bearing on the cross the wrath we deserved and making a way for us to be forgiven (Rom 3:26). For all who believe, God counts our sins to Jesus and counts his righteousness to us (Isa 53:11; 2 Cor 5:21)—“not ... a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil 3:9; cf. Tit 3:4–7). And having “been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). “There is ... now no condemnation” (8:1). We enjoy life, not death, so do

not let your failures result in despondency. In Jesus, you can rest by being assured that you are right with God and at peace with him.

6. *Rest by knowing God is the one who sanctifies you.* Through Israel's 6 + 1 rhythm of life, God tested them to see whether they would walk in his law or not (Exod 16:4) and to teach them that he was the one who could make them holy (31:13). Jesus died and rose not only to justify us but also to sanctify us. Through seasons of suffering and uncertainty, God tests our faith and obedience in the way gold is purified through fire. He heats us to strengthen us and to shape, prod, and whittle us into the holy likeness of his Son, and by this he shows us his love (Rom 8:28–29). Those who have been declared righteous in Jesus prove themselves new creations by living righteously, doing all in Christ's name and for his glory (1 Cor 10:31–33; Col 3:17, 23; 1 John 3:3). Yet the only sins we can conquer are those Christ has already addressed at the cross. So, knowing that we have been declared righteous in Christ means that the King is even now one hundred percent for us and will give us all we need (Rom 8:31–32). Indeed, because Christ, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, is with us (Matt 28:18, 20), our souls can be still (Ps 46:10). God has promised that “among those who are near me I will be sanctified” (Lev 10:3) and he said that in the new covenant era he would show himself holy through the lives of his people before the eyes of the nations (Ezek 36:23). So, pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name ... on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:9–10). And approach God, trusting in his provision of the substitute, and see your life transformed. As you pursue holiness today, rest knowing that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). Rest, being certain that “he who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess 5:23–24). Rest by knowing God is the one who sanctifies you.
7. *Rest by remembering that the God who is greater than all redeemed you.* In Deuteronomy's version of the Ten Commandments, Moses stresses Israel's freedom from bondage in Egypt to emphasize the need to let everyone in the Israelite households cease from work the last day of the week (Deut 5:15). Thus, Sabbath rest symbolically portrayed redemption accomplished and liberation from enslavement and pointed to the great redeemer and liberator. Israel had been impotent under Egyptian oppression, but Yahweh interceded with an arm stronger than Pharaoh and his gods. Thus, the Sabbath celebrated God's supremacy to save, free, and remove fear of evil powers. Through the new exodus, Christ delivers us from a greater enemy and thus supplies a greater freedom. Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who

are zealous for good works” (Tit 2:14). Whereas we were once “slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness,” we are now “slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification,” whose end is “eternal life” (Rom 6:19, 22). Because the Spirit of God in us is “greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4), we can rest, knowing that when we “resist the devil,” “he will flee” (Jas 4:7). Indeed, “if God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom 8:31–32). Brothers and sisters, do not let sin have an upper hand in your life. Rest by remembering that the God who is greater than all redeemed you.

8. Rest by extending the grace you enjoy to others under your care.
9. Rest by finding refreshment in God and his gifts.
10. Rest by embracing that you are home, no longer in exile.
11. Rest by settling into paradise and enjoying God’s presence and people.
12. Rest by being confident you are safe in God, protected from every enemy.
13. Rest by rejoicing that you receive and extend God’s international salvation.
14. Rest as one who knows all these blessings come in Christ alone.

Conclusion

As the sign of the old covenant, the weekly Sabbath dramatized for Israel that the goal of their existence was that they and the redeemed from other nations would enjoy rest with God, which included absence of toil, the blessing of his presence, complete redemption, perfect provision, and freedom from all enemy hostility. In Jesus, these hopes are realized. If you are among the saints today who have been bought with the Passover Lamb’s blood, you are among the redeemed who get to delight in his deliverance and all it means for you. Amid a care-filled world, we can know peace. His presence remains with us, and he is constantly speaking over us that “there is no condemnation.” The greatest power in the universe is now working for us, ensuring that no evil force will have the final word in our lives. In short, because Jesus has fulfilled Israel’s Sabbath hopes, you and I have rest and hope today. We have hope that God will supply our every need according to his riches in glory. We have hope that we our selfishness can be slain, that tomorrow will include fresh mercies, and that a future is coming when there will be no more terrors, toils, or tears. The Sabbath realized means Christ reigns now, that Satan’s time to deceive and destroy is short, and that full rest is coming. Let your desire for that ultimate rest generate true delight in rest today. “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body”

(Col 3:15). Because the substance of the Sabbath belongs to Christ (2:16–17), he realizes rest for you and me, even amid the brokenness of this age. Rest in Christ.