

Unit III: The Church and Its Teachings

Rhythms of Rest and Work

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 118:19-24

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 12:1-14;
28:1-10; John 20:19; Acts 20:7; Romans 14:4-6; Revelation 1:10

PRINT PASSAGES: Exodus 20:8-11; Romans 14:4-6; Revelation 1:10

KEY VERSE

In six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. (Exodus 20:11, KJV)

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“In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” (Exodus 20:11, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Compare and contrast the Old Testament command to honor the Sabbath with the practice of worship in the early church.
- Feel a sense of connection to God’s creative energy in the rhythm of your work and rest.
- Affirm and defend each other in the various ways you respond to God’s saving grace at work in your lives.

*Key Terms

Blessed (Exodus 20:11)—Hebrew: *barak* (bawrak’): knelt; congratulated; God blessed the Sabbath.

Remember (Exodus 20:8)—Hebrew: *zakar* (zawkar’): recall; call to mind; mention; consider.



The Biblical Context

The broader context of Exodus 20:8-11 is found within Exodus 19–24, which describes the Mosaic covenant, God’s law given to Israel at Mount Sinai after their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The immediate context is the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:3-17), which set forth God’s holy standards to govern Israel’s relationship with Him and one another as His covenant people. The fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11) falls within the first section of these laws and focuses on Israel’s duty to God. It commands them to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” establishing a weekly rhythm of rest, reflection, and worship. This sacred observance was a covenantal sign that acknowledged God as the sovereign Creator and expressed His concern for equitable renewal and compassion toward humans and animals. Although Christians under the new covenant of grace are not obligated to observe the Sabbath in the exact manner given to Israel (Romans 14:5-6; see Colossians 2:16-17), its principles of rest, reflection, worship, and compassion remain relevant to our covenant relationship with God. Jesus sustained the Sabbath’s intention when He emphasized that its purpose is a gift rather than a burden (see Mark 2:27). The writer of Hebrews also connects the Sabbath concept to a deeper spiritual rest found in Christ (see Hebrews 4:9-11). Sabbath principles continue to invite believers into a rhythm of renewal that strengthens our relationship with God and fosters compassion for others.

The events of Revelation 1:10 occurred as the apostle John, exiled on the island of Patmos, received a powerful vision from the risen Christ while worshipping “in the Spirit” on the Lord’s Day, likely referring to Sunday.

church is no longer under the old covenant. Instead, Christians have traditionally gathered on Sunday—the first day of the week—to honor Christ’s resurrection. This became known as the “Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10). While Sunday worship became common, Scripture does not command it.

Esteemeth (Romans 14:5)—Greek: *krinó* (**kree’-no**): to judge, decide, conclude; “considers” (NIV).

Sabbath (Exodus 20:8)—Hebrew: *shabbath* (**shab-bawth’**): intermission; seventh day.

Spirit (Revelation 1:10)—Greek: *pneuma* (**pn̄yoo’-mah**): ghost; life; breath; the rational soul.

Work (Exodus 20:10)—Hebrew: *melakah* (**mel’aw-kaw’**): occupation; craftsmanship; service.

***(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**

Introduction

What is the Sabbath day, and how does it apply to the Christian church biblically? To answer this, we must look closely at the Sabbath’s origin, meaning, and purpose. God commanded Israel to rest from work on the seventh day of the week to remember His creation. After making the world in six days, He “rested” on the seventh (Exodus 20:8-11). The Hebrew word *Shabbat* means “rest” or “stopping,” showing that the Sabbath is meant to be a day of rest.

Today, many people think of the Sabbath as a set day for worship. But originally, God’s command focused on resting from labor. In Israel, worship happened every day through offerings and sacrifices at the tabernacle. Still, the Sabbath included a “sacred assembly” (Leviticus 23:3, NIV), making it a special day. Sabbath keeping also served as a sign of Israel’s covenant with God (see Exodus 31:13, 17). In the New Testament, Christians are not required to observe the Sabbath as Israel did under the Law of Moses. The

Whether a believer chooses to rest or worship on Saturday, Sunday, or another day is up to personal conviction (Romans 14:6). What matters most is honoring God with regular worship and setting time aside for rest, reflection, and spiritual renewal.

The Sabbath reminds us of God's rhythm of work and rest. In Christ, we find true spiritual rest, and through Him, we are free to worship and rest in a way that strengthens our relationship with God.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The Sabbath: God's Gift of Holy Rhythm *(Exodus 20:8-11; Revelation 1:10)*

KJV

8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:

10 But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:

11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

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10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet.

NIV

8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

9 "Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

10 "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 male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

11 "For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

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10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet.

These verses record the fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments that God gave Israel at Mount Sinai, approximately three months after their deliverance from Egypt. In verse 8, Israel was commanded to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." The word *Sabbath* (or *Shabbat*) means "rest" or "cease." Thus, the Sabbath was to be observed as a day set apart, a weekly rhythm of rest and ceasing from labor. The command to "remember" involved more

than simply recalling information. It was a deliberate call to honor and observe the Sabbath in both thought and practice, with intentional purpose. The term also echoes God's earlier instruction regarding gathering manna—not collecting it on the seventh day, for it was a holy day of rest, set apart for the Lord (see Exodus 16:22-30). To keep the Sabbath holy meant designating it as a sacred day dedicated to God's purposes: rest, worship, and acknowledgment of His power and provision. Verses 9-10 detail how the Sabbath was to be observed. All necessary work and daily responsibilities were to be completed in six days, followed by a seventh day that God declared belonged to Him. This command applied to everyone in the community—family members, servants, livestock, and even foreigners dwelling among them—reflecting God's equitable and compassionate care for all creation. Verse 11 provides the theological foundation for the Sabbath by grounding it in God's creative work (see Genesis 2:2-3). God worked for six days and rested, not from fatigue, but because He finished creating, establishing a pattern for humanity to follow. By doing so, He sanctified the seventh day as sacred time. Keeping the Sabbath served as a memorial of God's completed creation and a continual reminder of His sovereignty, power, and covenant relationship with His people.

Although the New Testament does not require the church to observe the Sabbath in the same manner as Israel, the theological and practical principles of a regular rhythm of work and rest remain relevant, as reflected in the pattern of the early church, which set apart the Lord's Day in honor of the Resurrection on the first day of the week (Revelation 1:10).

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does the fourth commandment reflect God's concern for spiritual devotion and social justice?

The Sabbath: Live to Honor God (*Romans 14:4-6*)

KJV

4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

5 One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

NIV

4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

5 One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.

6 Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

There are many believers whose opinions differ regarding issues where the Word is neither specific nor silent. Paul addresses one such problem in Romans 14. This phenomenon among Roman Christians revolved around rules and restrictions about the Mosaic Law, particularly foods sacrificed to idols and observing special days like Jewish festivals and the Sabbath. Some were fully convinced that their freedom in Christ allowed them to eat or drink anything and observe or not any special days and were guilty of passing judgment on those weaker in their faith who believed it was wrong to disregard them. Paul addressed this judgmentalism by affirming that every believer is accountable to Christ, that others are not their masters, and that Christ alone has the authority to evaluate and uphold them (verse 4).

Paul reminds believers that God allows liberty regarding observing special days, like the Sabbath, provided their response is out of conviction to honor Christ (verse 5). In verse 6, Paul reinforces this spiritual principle by emphasizing that believers might continue observing these special days or not as long as their motive, in either case, is to honor and give God thanks. There are differing opinions among Christians within God's family who disagree regarding when, how, or whether to observe the Sabbath day, leading to division and judgmentalism. If we apply Paul's instructions to the Romans on this issue, it doesn't matter if the choice is Saturday, Sunday, or any other day, as long as the heart's motive is to do everything in a spirit of thanksgiving and worship, doesn't cause a believer to stumble, and is modeled after Christ's unconditional love.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How can the church use this passage to respond to other believers who make their own choices regarding special communal worship days?

A Closing Thought

Under the new covenant, the Christian church is not required to observe the Sabbath day like Israel under the Mosaic covenant. However, Scripture affirms that the theological principles underlying the Sabbath remain relevant as spiritual practices for believers today. God established a rhythm of work and rest at Creation, long before the giving of the Law (see Genesis 2:2-3). Jesus later redefined the Sabbath, not by abolishing it, but by clarifying its purpose as a gift to humanity (see Mark 2:27-28). In doing so, He invited believers to find rest in Him while still embracing the value of setting aside time for spiritual reflection, worship, and physical renewal—a practice modeled by the early church as they gathered on the first day of the week, which became known as the Lord's Day. Still, because every true believer in Christ is under spiritual liberty, observing a specific Sabbath day is a matter of personal conscience. What matters most is not the day itself but if and when it is a matter of the heart.

Your Life

This lesson challenges us to evaluate how diligently we make time to rest and engage in spiritual reflection, devotion, and worship—Sabbath theological principles we must practice to honor God’s established rhythm of work and rest. This week, consider planning a weekly “rhythm of life” for now and the future that reflects the principles embedded in the Sabbath command.

Your World!

A major issue among believers is division over nonessential practices, leading to unnecessary arguments and judgment. One example is Sabbath observance. However, the Bible clearly teaches how to handle such differences—by remembering that all true believers belong to God’s family, that only Christ has the right to judge, by using our Christian freedom with a clear conscience and genuine love, and by making sure that everything we do honors the Lord. This approach helps maintain unity and prevents conflict over matters that don’t affect salvation.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank You for providing the Sabbath to honor Your creative and liberating acts as a living testimony of Your gift of rest as we look forward to the eternal rest we have in Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week’s Lesson)

Next week’s lesson challenges us to prioritize mission and stewardship to experience the abundant life that Christ promised. Read Acts 1:6-8; 2 Corinthians 8:3-9.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, February 16	“Blessings to Those Who Give”	(Malachi 3:7-12)
TUESDAY, February 17	“Giving More than Enough”	(Exodus 36:2-7)
WEDNESDAY, February 18	“May God’s Ways Be Known”	(Psalm 67)
THURSDAY, February 19	“Ready with Voluntary Gifts”	(2 Corinthians 9:1-6)
FRIDAY, February 20	“Bountiful Sowing and Reaping”	(2 Corinthians 9:6-15)
SATURDAY, February 21	“Go and Make Disciples”	(Matthew 28:16-20)
SUNDAY, February 22	“Excel in Generous Giving”	(2 Corinthians 8:3-9)