



17. Ten Words Take Two Exodus 20:1-17

This is our last session on the Ten Commandments or ten Words. In the first session we saw how the Commandments were a product of grace, not of law. People entered into a covenant relationship with God because of His grace and as a result the commandments defined where the limits of that relationship were. Last time we saw that most of the commandments are self-evident:

7 "Do not use my name for evil purposes, for I, the Lord your God, will punish anyone who misuses my name.

12 "Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you.

13 "Do not commit murder.

14 "Do not commit adultery.

15 "Do not steal.

16 "Do not accuse anyone falsely.

17 "Do not desire another man's house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns."

But two are labourted and one comes to the inevitable conclusion was that these have an imperative associated with the. The first was what is essentially the first (and second) of the traditional commandments – they were to have no other God but Yahweh and we looked at that last time.

The other, seems a strange one and it was the commandment relating to the Sabbath.

8 "Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy.

9 You have six days in which to do your work,

10 but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work — neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. 11 In six days I, the Lord, made the earth, the sky, the sea, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the Lord, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.

Deut 5:12 "Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy, as I, the Lord your God, have commanded you. 13 You have six days in which to do your work, 14 but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work — neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. Your slaves must rest just as you do. 15 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt, and that I, the Lord your God, rescued you by my great power and strength. That is why I command you to observe the Sabbath.

These are a few verses that Christians often struggle with. The Sabbath in the Jewish calendar is the seventh day. It's holy to them. But we don't mark Shabbat as a holy day – traditionally it has been Sunday.

When I was a boy quite simply Sunday was the Sabbath. It was a day for worship and no work. Shops were close, only necessary occupations worked. You know it all. Look in most normal diaries and Monday is the first day of the week. No-one really questioned it. Sunday was the Sabbath, God's day.

The only problem is that to Jews Sunday is not Shabbat, Saturday is. So how come it changed? So many Christians rationalised it by demonstrating that in the NT Christians met on a Sunday and even called it the Lord's Day. But the NT is silent on any sanction from God to recognise Sunday as

Sabbath. A Sunday Sabbath is not scriptural. Where did Sunday worship come from? It started early in the history of the church – you'll find that Christians did meet on the first day of the week in the NT e.g *Acts 20:7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.* Look as well at *1 Cor 16:2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.*

Significant things associated with Jesus happened on a Sunday – the resurrection and post resurrection appearances, the Day of Pentecost were on (or probably on) the first day of the week. But there is no definitive statement that Sabbath had been effectively changed or abolished.

As the church became more Gentile and as the Jews became so hated in the Roman Empire after the revolts in the 60s AD, Christians seemed to have wanted to distance themselves from Jewish practices and worship on the first day seemed logical. The practice was firmly established by the time of Constantine and the legalisation of the church.

So the Scriptural sanction for it is just not there – not from Jesus, not from the apostles – but the practice arose. So as far as I can see Shabbat is the seventh day of the week – Friday evening to Saturday evening in the Jewish world. It's not anything else. It was established here in Exodus and it never has been changed anywhere. Now Jesus endorsed the commandments and even repeats them verbatim except the Sabbath one. However He quite clearly kept Shabbat, even though He had the view that the Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath, so he rejected their silly ceremonial laws.

In its place have been a number of approaches to dealing with this command in Exodus 20.

Firstly, as you know, there are Seventh day Adventists and indeed Seventh Day Baptists that say, the ten words apply to us so we should keep Shabbat and not Sunday. But does the Old Covenant apply to us or has it been subsumed into something else?

Secondly, there are others who argue that the Ten Words are not for us but the Jews only. The Deuteronomy version is far more specific about relating Sabbath to their release from slavery. Rather, the New Covenant fulfills the first law and we have a deeper commitment to God as suggested in the Shema. So we recognise the ten words but also recognise everything else that God has given us. Our faith is no more than a fulfilment – as development of Torah. So rather than seeing the 10 words as being for us – we see the shema as how we should deal with law. But to do that; does it mean we ignore Shabbat? The problem is it is laboured heavily in Exodus 20 and that suggests us we should sit up and take notice of what it is and why it's there.

Finally, there is the common Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant position that Sunday is effectively the Sabbath. It's known as semi-sabbatarianism.

So what approach is right. So have Christians got it wrong for 2000 years? The answer I believe lies with Jesus:

Mark 2:23 One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. 24The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" 25He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26In 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." 27Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (NIV)

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

The basic principle of Shabbat is that it is a holy day – a special day. For what purpose is it special? Let's read it: *8 "Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. 9 You have six days in which to do your work, 10 but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work — neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. 11 In six days I, the Lord, made the earth, the sky, the sea, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the Lord, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.*

What's the purpose of Shabbat? Rest. And that's it. Rest. You work 6 days and then you take a break, have some R & R - unlike Orthodox Jews on Shabbat and zealous Christians on Sunday who busily make sure they cram it with busy worship. The Sabbath is about one thing and just one thing alone – Rest. The Sabbath was made for man. That was the day on which everyone was to relax, because in doing so they recognised that God is the Timeout God. He's not all fluster and bluster – He is a God of rest.

And what did the Jews do – they turned it the other way around and rather than the Sabbath benefiting people, it became a self serving festival. The Pharisees had laws that made sure no-one worked on the Sabbath – or even moderately looked like it. Similar laws exist amongst orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jews today.

And Jesus comes along and said in effect “what a load of old tat”. The disciples were hungry on the Sabbath so Jesus encouraged them to eat heads of grain. Having lunch wasn't about work, but about R & R. Jesus uses the example of David eating the holy bread he wasn't supposed to to make a point. Law should exist for people's benefit. When it exists for its own sake it's not of God.

The son of man is Lord of the Sabbath: his authority over it switches it back from organised religion to what it was for. And what was it for? It was to rest. God rested – so should we – verse 10 *the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me*. We shouldn't constantly work – it's bad for us. We need R & R and God ordained a day which was holy to do just that.

And holy here means the same as it does elsewhere in the Bible. It's not a mysterious word. Holy simply means “set apart” and doesn't necessarily mean religious holiness. Yes it means that it was an opportunity to rest and to enjoy God's creation and enjoy God but the Jews turned it into a self-serving religious day full of regulations. But was it that? Not from what is here. Look at the rest of the Law and you'll find the worship of God was twined into the whole fabric of society Their faith was to be part of their life and their work and worship recognised that.

In this command God called them to rest on a day of rest dedicated to Him. Just that. It's a simple human requirement because God modelled us on Himself. He is a God of rest as much as He is a God of action. Without rest we wither as people. It's bad for us and that's self-evident. They weren't commanded to worship, they were commanded to rest. It was a day of rest dedicated to Him and rest from the toil and trouble of their workaday lives was their act of honour and worship.

Sunday is a great opportunity to worship as the church celebrates it's Saviour. Christians have used the Lord's Day for organised worship as long as the Church has existed as I've said, and I'd say that makes it completely scriptural to use it for such purpose – but it isn't Shabbat. In fact Sunday's far too busy for Christians to be Shabbat. When I was young I went to church three times on a Sunday. How was that rest? It may have been good to do as a Christian, but hardly Shabbat. For as long as I can remember, it's never been a restful day – quite the reverse actually. Now Saturdays are much quieter.

Ah, that's it. Enshrined in our culture is perhaps the answer to our spiritual conundrum. Shabbat – a rest day is important to each one of us. So we have one. It's Shabbat, sabado – Saturday and it's rapidly disappearing as our country de-Christianises. Saturday was and is a family day. Most of us still don't work Saturday. We go shopping, mow the lawn, clean the house. Have some R and R. We do special things. We do Shabbat – restful things. On Sunday we worship. 2000 years of Christian existence and there is Shabbat, still enshrined in our culture. We haven't ignored it, we've embraced it in its full intent – as a day of rest. Unfortunately we've lost the recognition of God in it. We've forgotten who was the author of that rest.

Observing Saturday as a rest day wasn't always true in our History, but wittingly or unwittingly, we maybe have got the right balance even if we never realised it. That said, a Saturday-Sunday approach was common in the history of the church, particularly the Eastern Orthodox up until the Reformation.

Perhaps we need to fight for Saturday as much as we fight for Sunday. We need the rest, we need the worship. And God has given us the opportunity to do both on two days! Now isn't that good?