

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹²Observe the Sabbath day by setting it apart as holy, just as the LORD your God commanded you. ¹³Six days you are to serve and perform all of your regular work, ¹⁴but the seventh day is a sabbath rest to the LORD your God. You are not to do any regular 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 alien who resides inside your gates, in order that your male servant and your female servant may rest like you. ¹⁵Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the day of rest.

Happy Day

I.

Laws were made in order to make sure things would be done correctly.

God said: “Observe the Sabbath day by setting it apart as holy, just as the LORD your God commanded you... ¹⁴but the seventh day is a sabbath rest to the LORD your God. You are not to do any regular 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 alien who resides inside your gates, in order that your male servant and your female servant may rest like you” (Deuteronomy 5:12, 14, EHV).

God’s framework for the Sabbath was obviously *much* too broad. What, exactly, did he mean by no *regular* work? Certainly the average person couldn’t be trusted with such a broad framework. People need to be told what to do—*exactly* what to do. *Obviously* the ordinary guy needed experts to explain exactly what “no regular work” looked like.

As often happens, the advice of the experts changed from time to time. Certain things would be in vogue for observing the Sabbath for a time, then out again. By the time of Jesus the “expert” Pharisees had codified the whole business. There were 614 rules pertaining to observing the Sabbath. 614 explanations of exactly what one must *do* in order to not be doing any “regular” work.

It was hard work to make sure no “regular” work was done on the Sabbath day. Somebody *had* to do it; the Pharisees saw it as their duty—perhaps their “work,” in a way. It’s too bad they didn’t have Facebook or Twitter; those might have been great tools to shame people who might deign to violate one of those Sabbath rules. Of course, had there been Facebook and Twitter, it would probably have been a violation to use them on the Sabbath—all that typing or swiping would be “work.”

In the Gospel for today, the Pharisees took to their version of Twitter—they publically complained to Jesus about his disciples. “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?” (Mark 2:24, EHV).

Perhaps you noticed: the Pharisees had turned the Sabbath into a work day. Not a “regular” work day, but a “no work work day.” It was a lot of work—a burden, you could say—to make sure you were doing no work on the Sabbath.

II.

I remember Blue Laws. Around here, some vestiges of them remained until just a few years ago. When I was growing up, only a few places were open on Sundays in my hometown to provide some essentials. One gas station was open for people traveling

through. All the stations in town rotated so that none of them would have to provide that service every week. Around these parts, there are still neighborhoods where mowing your lawn or washing your car on a Sunday are seriously frowned on.

It takes a lot of work to make sure people don't work on Sunday.

Blue Laws are mostly gone. I don't really know of any who will take to Facebook or Twitter to shame you for doing work on a Sunday any more. But what about Sabbath rules? I know, we worship on Sundays rather than Saturdays, but do we have our own kind of Sabbath rules?

Church becomes a chore for many. Some boring guy stands in the front and blathers on and on about something or other. He reads some Bible passages. He prays some prayers. We sing some songs. That's the rule. Whether you find it interesting or not, just going and parking your butt in a pew—or in a lawn chair today—gives you points. You've done your Sunday work by being in church. Wait...don't forget your offering; that's part of the "rules," too. Your prayers, whether on Sundays or other days, are part of your church rules. Whatever you might volunteer to help out with around the church—that will get you some points, too, right?

It sounds ludicrous when I say it out loud, doesn't it? But isn't this the way modern Christians think? Do we slip into thinking like the Pharisees?

Such thoughts poison our relationship with God. We turn "church" and "Sunday" into work. When you think that way, God becomes your boss, and you are an employee. What's the paycheck you are seeking from your boss? Salvation? Can you get enough points by following all the rules to earn enough in your paycheck?

III.

In today's Gospel, Jesus replied to the Pharisees: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, EHV).

All those Sabbath rules about "regular" work didn't apply to the priests. Did you know that the word "Sabbath" means rest? The priests certainly didn't rest on the Sabbath, they worked. They worked hard. There were rites of purification that had to be performed. They had to slaughter animals for the sacrifices. They had to cut and lift and burn those sacrifices. It was work. Since they were priests, it was even their *regular* work, yet it did not violate the Sabbath rules. Why? Because the point of the rest of the Sabbath was to worship.

Moses says: "Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the day of rest" (Deuteronomy 5:15, EHV).

"Remember" was a very crucial part of restful Sabbath worship. Moses wanted the People of Israel to take some time and look back on the time of slavery in Egypt. Life was hard there. There was no rest. They were to rest and remember that God had delivered them from slavery. They had done nothing to "help" God with this—he had taken care of every detail.

"Remember" meant: listen to the great things God has done. Think about them. Reflect on them. What a great and mighty God it is who was able to deliver them from Egypt and the powerful Pharaoh who dictated absolutely everything about their lives. "Remember" meant to take some time to say "thank you." God had done it all. "Remember" meant to look at all the great things God was still promising—they would have forgiveness in the Messiah whom he would send for them someday.

The “rules” about the Sabbath were changed for New Testament believers. Jesus said: “The Son of Man is the Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:28, EHV).

Sabbath rules were part of the Ceremonial Law. All the things Israel was to do for worship were part of the Ceremonial Law. What a person could and could not eat were part of the worship rules. Not doing regular work on the Sabbath were part of the worship rules. What kinds of things made a person ceremonially unclean, and therefore unfit for worship, were part of the worship rules.

Jesus fulfilled all the worship rules. Jesus was the sacrifice all the Sabbath sacrifices pointed ahead to. He was the sacrifice that really mattered. All those worship rules meant to point out how serious sin is, and that it has separated you from God. Jesus paid for all those sins. He paid for the sins of seeing your attendance and your offerings and your volunteer efforts at church as brownie points that make you right with God. He paid for the sins of trying to work out salvation for yourself.

His sacrifice made all the worship rules irrelevant. That’s why Paul could write: “Do not let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in regard to a festival or a New Moon or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷These are a shadow of the things that were coming, but the body belongs to Christ” (Colossians 2:16-17, EHV). If there is regular work that has to be done on a Sunday, it doesn’t violate worship rules, because Jesus has done away with them. We can eat bacon if we want to, because there are no dietary rules in place to be part of our worship of God. We don’t have to carefully monitor things that might make us ceremonially unclean and unfit for worship, because Jesus has cleansed us and purified us for worship.

IV.

What we *do* want to do is remember. “Remember that you were slaves” (Deuteronomy 5:15, EHV). We weren’t slaves in Egypt, but we *were* slaves to sin. Jesus freed us from that sin.

Paul told us: “Do not let anyone judge you in regard to...a Sabbath day” (Colossians 2:16, EHV). We are free to chose any day for worship we would like. What a happy day Easter Sunday was, when Jesus rose from the dead. That’s why the Christian church chose Sunday as our regular worship day.

Rather than a boring pastor with some boring readings and some boring Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, we are happy to worship because we get to remember. Remember that once we were slaves to sin, but now we are freed by the blood of Jesus. We will inherit heaven because all he has done for us. Remember on this happy day and every day. Amen.