

Introduction

I'd like to begin by asking you a question. What should we do and not do on the Lord's Day? In Jesus' world, the scribes and Pharisees defined in detail what people shouldn't do on the Sabbath day. One action they prohibited, for instance, was carrying a burden. But what was a burden? They wrote that it was anything that weighed as much as two dried figs. That means I shouldn't have done what I did this morning. I carried my computer from my house to my car to the church when I arrived – and it weighs more than two dried figs.

The scribes and Pharisees were obviously clueless about what we should and shouldn't do on the Lord's Day. But I want you and I not to be and so that's what I'm going to preach about today.

The Lord's Day

In our text, Ezekiel 20:18-26, God recounts what He said to the second generation of Israelites that came out of Egypt 500 years before. Generally, it was two things. First, according to verse 18, they shouldn't live according to the statutes of their fathers. They shouldn't believe and do the ungodly things the first generation believed and did. Second, according to verse 19, they should live according to the statutes of God.

Having articulated generally what the Israelites shouldn't and should do, God gets specific in verses 20, 21, and 24. He focuses on one statute in particular that He gave. It's the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:8, **"Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."** The Sabbath day of course is the last day of the week, Saturday.

What the Sabbath day was to the Israelites, Sunday is to Christians. Exodus 20:11 and Deuteronomy 5:15 reveal that the Fourth Commandment is historically based. It's rooted in two events: God resting on the seventh day of creation and delivering the Israelites from Egypt. But when Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday, that event, along with His birth, became the central event in history. Consequently, by the 90's AD,

Christians were calling Sunday **“the Lord’s Day”** and worshipping on it instead of Saturday. It’s valid, therefore, to apply to Sunday what the Old Testament generally and Ezekiel particularly teach us about Saturday.

A Claim and Gift of God

One of the things Ezekiel teaches is that the Lord’s Day is a *claim* of God. We see that in verses 20 and 24 and the term **“My Sabbaths.”** God expresses the same sentiment in Isaiah 58:13. He calls it **“My holy day”** and **“the holy day of the LORD.”** Those designations mean that it’s His day. He established it for His benefit. The word **“pleasure”** in that same verse, 13, clarifies what that benefit is. It’s that He be pleased or delighted. That is the primary purpose of the Day.

But the Lord’s Day isn’t just a *claim* of God. It’s a *gift* of God as well. Jesus makes that perfectly clear in Mark 2:23-28. He boldly declares in verse 27, **“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”** While the Lord’s Day is primarily God’s, it isn’t solely His. It’s ours as well. While it’s primarily for His benefit, it isn’t solely for His benefit. It’s for ours as well. God’s commentary on the Fourth Commandment in Exodus 20:9-10 implies what that benefit is. It’s the invigoration of our spiritual, psychological, and bodily lives.

Those then are the two purposes of the Lord’s Day. It’s primarily a *claim* of God. It’s meant to bless Him. It’s secondarily a *gift* of God. It’s meant to bless man (us).

Sanctify the Lord’s Day

But how do we achieve those purposes? God tells us in verses in verses 20, 21, and 24. On the positive side, we **“sanctify”** the Lord’s Day. The Hebrew word translated **“sanctify”** is the same word translated **“holy”** in Exodus 20:8. It means **“to set apart.”** So, we set it apart from the other six days. On the negative side, we don’t **“profane”** it. To profane it means not to set it apart from the other six days.

Let me tell you a story I told my Sunday school class. When I was

home from college one summer, my sister, brother-in-law, their children, and I skipped church one Sunday to go to a Cincinnati Reds game. The next Sunday morning, our 75 year-old pastor, Jason Sherwood, confronted us about that after church. He told us in no uncertain terms that we had broken the Fourth Commandment and sinned the Sunday before. He then explained why, **“You spent it as an unbeliever would have.”**

That was an instructive comment. It helps explain in general terms what it means to sanctify and profane the Lord’s Day. We sanctify it by regarding and treating it as being different than the other six days. We think and act as if it’s a special day. We profane the Lord’s Day by regarding and treating it as being the same as the other six days. We think and act as if it’s an ordinary day. Or in Pastor Sherwood’s terms, we spend it as a secularist would – like my family and I did.

The Lord’s Day as a Sign

Now that we know, in general terms at least, what we should do, sanctify the Lord’s Day, let’s examine why we should do that.

Verses 12 and 20 tell us. The Sabbath Day was a sign between God and the Israelites. It was an observable practice that identified them as His people and that distinguished them from the pagan peoples around them. It’s the same with God and Christians today!

Let me ask you three questions about S. Truett Cathy to illustrate what I mean. First, for what was he widely known? He founded Chick-fil-A. Second, was he a Christian? Yes, he was. And third, how do you and most people, including secularists, know he was? It’s because He sanctified the Lord’s Day by closing his restaurants on Sunday.

The Lord’s Day was a sign between God and Cathy – and it’s the same between God and us. It’s an observable practice that identifies us as His people and that distinguishes us from the secularists around us. It’s also a visible manifestation that we’re devoted to Him. It is, as a result, one of the most powerful of all our Christian witnesses.

So let’s get serious about it. Someone to whom I told the Jason

Sherwood story asked, **“Weren’t you offended by what he said?”** The answer is that I wasn’t. On the contrary, I learned something from it. I should be as serious about the Lord’s Day as he was – and so should you! We get serious about it by doing two things. First, we learn in practical terms how to sanctify it. And second, we live out what we’ve learned. Let’s do the first of those now – learn how to sanctify it.

Bless God

First, we sanctify it by blessing God. We make Him its emphasis by directing our minds and bodies, with focus, to His person, works, and word. During the week, we’re necessarily preoccupied with a host of responsibilities and affairs, primarily work. But on the Lord’s Day, we forget about those responsibilities and affairs. We’re then able to direct our minds and bodies to the person, works, and word of God in a continued and concentrated manner we can’t during the week. As the New Testament instructs, we do that, if possible, in a corporate setting. We fellowship, learn, and worship with brothers and sisters in Christ.

We offer you three opportunities on Sunday morning to do that. We begin with our 8:30 unprogrammed service. This service allows us to **“center down”** as the first Quakers said it. In corporate silence, we set our minds and hearts on the person, works, and word of God. We then respond with our bodies as the Holy Spirit moves us to. At 9:30, we continue with Sunday school. In Sunday school, we learn together the defining realities and truths of God’s written word, the Bible. What a privilege that is. Finally, at 10:45, we worship God. In union with other Christians, we set our minds and hearts on the person and works of God. We then use our bodies to publicly praise and thank Him.

Fellowshipping, learning, and worshipping corporately on Sundays greatly blesses God. It pleases and delights Him in ways that are beyond our grasp. So let’s sanctify the Lord’s Day by doing those things.

Bless Man

We sanctify the Lord's Day not only by blessing God, but by blessing ourselves as well. Exodus 20:10-11 reveals how we do that. We **"do not do any work."** We do nothing in the way of laboring. We rest in other words. This **"Sabbath rest,"** as it's called, has three components.

One is the invigoration of our bodily lives. This component addresses the issue of tiredness. After six days of laboring, we need to be renewed physically. To rest, therefore, means not to do anything that wearies us - that drains our stamina, energy, or strength.

The Sabbath rest has a second component - the invigoration of our psychological lives. This component addresses the issue of tension. God wants the Lord's Day to cultivate a pervasive sense of peace in us. So, we don't do anything that causes us to strive inwardly or outwardly.

Finally, there's a third component to the Sabbath rest - the invigoration of our spiritual lives. This component addresses the issue of trust - in God.

Most of us are in bondage to our own efforts. We think that we're pulling the load of life alone. So we trust in our own efforts to get done what needs to be done or to achieve what needs to be achieved. The very idea, therefore, of taking a day off from things that needs to be done terrifies us. How will those things get done if we don't some of them on the Lord's Day?

The answer is that they'll get done because God Himself will see to it that they do. By resting on the Lord's Day, we're casting our cares on Him. We're trusting Him for our existence and the things that need to be done to secure it. Resting on the Lord's Day expresses our trust in His greatness and goodness. But it also cultivates it. The Holy Spirit honors our rest by working in us to increase the trust we've already expressed.

That then is how we sanctify the Lord's Day. We bless God by preoccupying ourselves with Him. And we bless ourselves by resting.

Application

Now that we've learned how to sanctify the Lord's Day, let's turn to

living out what we've learned. We ask and answer a question. Is the consequence of a particular activity consistent or inconsistent with the Lord's Day as a sign, as a claim of God, and as a gift of God? If it's consistent, we can do it. If it's inconsistent, we can't do it.

What about reading or watching the news, for instance, on Sunday? The issue here is the second component of rest – the invigoration of our psychological lives. I don't read or watch it, especially political news, because it usually upsets me when I do. It robs me of the very peace the day is supposed to give – sort of like watching the Browns play does.

Or what about mowing yards? One issue is the first component of rest - the invigoration of our bodily lives. Is it labor that wearies us? Another issue is the Lord's Day as a sign. Does it make us indistinguishable from secularists? Does it manifest that the Lord's Day is an ordinary day to us?

Or what about eating out at restaurants? One issue is, again, the first component of rest, since our action contributes to others having to work. Another issue is, also again, the Lord's Day as a sign.

Over the years, people have asked me if the following activities profane the Lord's Day: shopping, eating out at restaurants, jogging, mowing the yard, watching football games, cooking, children playing sports, and more? I can't tell you. You need to prayerfully and carefully decide for yourself and you now know how to do that.

Conclusion

I close with an observation. We can make one of two opposing mistakes in our approach to the Lord's Day. One is to be slavish or legalistic about it. It's to nit-pick and impose burdens on people that are too grievous to bear. The other mistake is to be careless about it. It's to give little or no thought to its purposes and whether or not we're pursuing them. Assimilating the thinking of our popular culture, we do anything we want to on it. Don't make either of those mistakes. Be Biblical instead. Do sanctify and don't profane the Lord's Day.