



# REMEMBER THE SABBATH

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Many people who revere the Ten Commandments don't think that the Fourth is particularly important, let alone binding. Once you understand it, however, you will recognize how life-changing, even world-changing, the Sabbath commandment is. And you will begin to appreciate how relevant it is to your own life.

The Fourth Commandment reads: "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 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 nor daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns."

Why is this so important?

First, perhaps more than any other commandment, it elevated the human being. How so? For nearly all of human history, life consisted overwhelmingly of work. In effect, humans were beasts of burden. This commandment and only this commandment changed all that by insisting that people cease working one day out of seven.

Second, more than any other commandment, the Sabbath Day reminds people that they are meant to be free. As the second version of the Commandment -- the one summarized by Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy -- states, "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt." In other words, remember that slaves cannot have a Sabbath. In light of this, I might add that in the Biblical view, unless necessary for survival, people who choose to work seven days a week are essentially slaves -- slaves to work or perhaps to money, but slaves nonetheless. The millionaire who works seven days a week is simply a rich slave.

Third, while the Bible could not universally abolish slavery, the Sabbath commandment greatly humanized that terrible institution and even helped make slavery impossible. By definition, a slave owner was under no obligation to allow a slave to ever rest, let alone to rest one day every week. Yet, that is exactly what the Fourth Commandment commanded. Even a slave has fundamental human rights. Therefore a slave too, is a human being.

Fourth, the Sabbath almost singlehandedly creates and strengthens family ties and friendships. When a person takes off from work one day every week, that day almost inevitably becomes a day spent with other people -- namely, family and/or friends. It has similar positive effects on marriages. Ask anyone married to a workaholic how good it would be for their marriage if the workaholic would not work for one day each week -- and you can appreciate the power of the Sabbath Day.

Fifth, the Sabbath commandment granted animals dignity. Even one's animals had to rest one day a week. It is, to the best of our knowledge, the first national law in history on behalf of animals. And its benefits to animals surely went beyond a mandatory day of rest for them. People who felt divinely obligated to give their animals a day of rest were much less likely to treat their animals cruelly any day of the week.

Now, all five of these life-changing and society-changing benefits of the Sabbath are available to anyone. You don't have to be a Jew, a Christian, or even a believer in God to derive all these benefits. But the reality is that those who believe the Ten Commandments were given by God are the ones who have kept the Sabbath alive.

The God factor plays another role in the Sabbath. Just as faith in God brings people to the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath brings people to faith in God. That is why the first version of the Ten Commandments, the version in the Book of Exodus, ends with these words: "For in six days God made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore God blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

However you interpret six days – and many Jewish and Christian believers do not translate "days" as 24-hour periods – the point is this. Every time you keep the Sabbath you are affirming that there is a Creator, that the world didn't just happen, that life isn't some meaningless coincidence, but that it is infinitely meaningful and therefore each of us has a unique significance and purpose.

Not bad for one day a week. No wonder that the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments. No wonder that those who have it in their lives are often happier, with richer family lives, more serenity, a community of friends, and, yes, are even healthier. You might want to give it a try.

I'm Dennis Prager.