

What do you think about the Ten Commandments? A pastor once asked a group of churchgoers to name one of the Ten Commandments. It was quiet for a moment. Then one woman spoke up. She said, “Thou shalt not do anything.” It sometimes seems like Christians have a love/hate relationship with the Ten Commandments. Part of the reason is that they make us feel bad. We know we don’t do what they say. They make it abundantly clear that we’re not living up to God’s standards. The ten commandments are like a mirror that shows every last flaw. They show us who we really are, and that’s never fun or comfortable, and our preference is always going to be fun and comfortable. But here’s the catch. Without the discomfort created by God’s commands, there’s no such thing as meaningful forgiveness. In other words, if you don’t realize at the very core of your being you are prone to doing wrong and not doing what’s right—if you don’t realize that, if you don’t own that, what is there to be saved from? Why would you even need a Savior? Being a Christian means that I don’t deny the discomfort; I don’t run from the discomfort; I let the discomfort drive me to the only solution. And let me give you a hint, the solution is not you trying harder to be a little better.

And here is an interesting twist. The fact that God’s commands make us feel bad does not mean that God’s commands are bad. The truth is, they’re beautiful. In Psalm 19, it says “The law of God is perfect, reviving the soul...the commandments of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.” Why does the Bible say that? Because: embedded in the law; embedded in the commandments; embedded in the rules of the Lord is a way of life that leads to blessing, if we could only do it right. The problem is we can’t, not entirely; not consistently. The solution is Jesus can, and He did, and because he did, we can catch glimpses of the beauty of God’s way, and sometimes we can even live in it. But the message is not “use Jesus as an example.” Instead it is “Jesus has credited your account with His perfection.” What He did counts for you, and one of the things that means is that you can begin to see the beauty in what used to be a burden.

With that in mind, I’d like to zero in on just one of the commandments today, specifically the Third Commandment. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” What kind of a command is that, really? It’s a health issue—a mental, emotional, spiritual health issue. If it only means “stop skipping church,” then there’s no point in preaching it, because you’re already here. It means far more than that. Believe it or not, this commandment is an invitation to spiritual wellness.

Let’s break it down. “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” The first word is the easiest. “Remember” doesn’t just mean to recall information from storage. Even in our own language, much more is implied. For example, “Did you remember my prescription?” means, “Did you pick up my prescription?” Or you could say, “We remember our veterans by raising this flag.” “Remembrance” is thought that leads to action, and at the same time, it is action that keeps thought alive. By the way, this is what Jesus was getting at when he gave bread and wine to his disciples in the Upper Room and said: “Do this in remembrance of me.”

The word Sabbath isn’t quite as obvious. What it really means is to stop. God’s people were supposed to stop for one day each week. This flows out the Genesis account of creation, where God stopped and rested on the seventh day. And what was the point of the Sabbath? For God’s people, it was to remember, once a week, together, what they were doing here on this earth. It was to remember their

bond with God. It was to be an oasis from the storm of busyness and distraction. It wasn't an extra duty. It was a rest from duty. That's why Jesus said that "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." The stop day was supposed to be a gift for men and women. For what purpose? To stop and remember the holiness of God, and in doing so, to have some of that holiness rub off on us.

We need something to keep us holy, because we sure can't do it ourselves. We tend to slide away from holiness without even trying. You may not even think of "holiness" as something you consciously want in your life. About the only time we use the word in everyday conversation, it's negative. Do you know what I'm thinking of? When we call someone "holier-than-thou," it's not a compliment. Holiness has a bad name. That's pretty messed up.

So here we are, actively participating in God's stop day that keeps us holy...what is that holy-ness that we need to be kept in? What does it consist of? It consists of the real, true God. "Holy" is what God is. God is completely clean, completely good. Completely well. God is free from anything that causes death. God is totally alive—He is the source of all life and energy. He is life that death could not hold down. This God of life made the "stop day" for you and me.

That's why, when we come together, and we worship in the way that we do, the words that we speak and the words that we sing and the words that we hear are God's words, and the Bible says His words are Spirit. His words are life. They contain the energy and power of God! And, when you receive the Bread of Life, God's life comes into you. Stop. Take and eat. Take and drink. Stop. Jesus tells you again, "Your sins are forgiven. I paid dearly for them." Stop. Remember who you are: a person who's been adopted in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever seen a child with night terrors? You have to wake them and get them to stop. You have to bring them out into the real world, away from the dark horror in their head. You wake them, comfort them, and hold them.

Well, listen. God has a world full of children with night terrors. Even his baptized ones lose their way and come down with fevers and nightmares. His Sabbath is to make it stop, to bring you into the real world. Can you hear his words? Can you feel His arms? You are here. So is He. Hear Jesus say to you: "I'm glad you remembered. Don't be afraid. Stop for a while, my child. Let me hold you."