

Back to the Basics

The Ten Commandments Pt. 3

The Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God, so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

This Commandment raises some questions for us. What is the *Sabbath Day*? My grandmother called Sunday the “Sabbath.” For the Jews (and some Christians), Saturday is the Sabbath. The word gets its origin from the Hebrew word ‘*sabat*’, which means ‘rest.’ The Sabbath was ordained by God at Creation (**Genesis 2:3**). It is a day of rest. For some, that means it’s a day to “not work and do as I please.” While it *is* a day of rest, it’s so much more. God **blessed** the day and made it **holy**. To be holy means to be “set apart, consecrated for the service of God.”

God set aside this day for us because we need a break. In the 3rd Commandment we are told to remember it by “keeping it holy.” This means we give it back to God. It is our tithe of time. We give it back to Him in worship and by hearing, reading, and meditating on His Word.

Like the two Commandments before it, this one is about our relationship with God. It concerns His Word more than it does a day. To understand this, we must understand the Law God gave to Israel. There are three types: Civil, Ceremonial, and Moral.

Some of the Civil Laws can be found in **Exodus 21—23**, laws concerning social justice. This is how Israel, as God’s nation, was to govern itself. Since we are not God’s nation, these do not apply to us today.

Examples of Ceremonial Law can be found in **Leviticus 1—7** (the sacrificial code), **Leviticus 11** (dietary code), **Leviticus 14** (cleanliness code), and **Leviticus 23** (feasts). Christ has fulfilled these laws; He is the ‘substance’ and they are the ‘shadow’ (**Colossians 2:16-17**).

The Moral Law are outlined by the Ten Commandments and summarized in **Deuteronomy 6:5** (*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might*) and **Leviticus 19:18** (*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*). These still apply today.

The Third Commandment is unique, in that it is part Moral and part Ceremonial. The Moral part is that we need a day to rest and focus on God. The Ceremonial part is that it must be the seventh day, Saturday.

That is why the church could set aside Sunday. To distinguish themselves from the rest of the Jews and, primarily, because it’s the day of Christ’s Resurrection. It’s also why churches can have services other days of the week if necessary (such as our Monday 6:30 PM service).

So, what is forbidden by this Commandments? According to the **Explanation of the Small Catechism**, we “sin against the Third Commandment when we despise preaching and the Word of God.” This happens when we avoid worship service, when we avoid the Word and Sacrament, and when we

are careless with the Word and Sacrament. Biblical examples of this are how King Saul rejected the Word of God (**1 Samuel 15:10-23**) and the Pharisees rejected Baptism (**Luke 7:30**).

Allow me to say a word about on-line worship. If you're attending one because you can't get out to an in-person worship service, it's an adequate substitute. If you're doing it because it is easier or more convenient, you may want to re-think your priorities.

What are we to do, according to the Third Commandment? We should give preaching and the Word of God their rightful, sacred place by hearing, learning, and meditating on the Word. See the Bereans in **Acts 17:11**. We should honor and support the preaching and teaching of the Word (**Galatians 6:6-7**). Finally, we should spread the Word gladly as Jesus said in **Mark 16:15**, "*Go into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation.*"

Christ is the Word of God (**John 1:1-5**) and in Him we find our rest (**Matthew 11:28; Hebrews 4:9-10**). So, the Commandment about rest is about the Word of God—living, written, and spoken. How do I love the Lord my God with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my mind? Put Him first, take His name seriously, and hold fast to His Word through preaching and the Sacraments.