



"The 7 Modern Sins: Politics without principles, Pleasures without conscience, Wealth without work, Knowledge without character, Industry without morality, Science without humanity, Worship without sacrifice."

—Canon Frederic Donaldson

**28-Feb-20**

## **Skipping Services? Consider Carefully**

After a long week of work, Fred arrives home early Friday evening and drags himself inside. He is looking forward to the [Sabbath](#) and the extended rest [God](#) allows us to enjoy on His day. He smells something delicious cooking on the stove, and the mere thought of good food shared with his family begins to ease the tension in his shoulders. He kisses his wife, and after catching up on their respective days, he heads to the bedroom to change into more comfortable clothes.

After dinner, he considers calling his friend out on the West Coast, but at the last minute, he remembers the difference in time zones. He decides to wait an hour or so to let his friend eat and relax a bit. He can read or talk to the kids in the meantime. More than an hour later—closer to two—he dials up his buddy, and they video-chat for a long while, catching up on weeks of news. Fred glances at the clock, noting that it is well after 11 PM. He signs off and heads to bed. When he turns out the light, it is almost midnight.

He wakes long past his accustomed hour of rising. The family eats a leisurely brunch, and once finished, they have an hour or so before they need to begin getting ready for church services. Fred heads out to the back porch with his Bible and spends much of his time watching the hummingbirds flitting about between his and his neighbor's feeders. He considers how spectacular God's creation is and wishes he had more time to study it.

His wife pops her head out the back door, reminding him that he needs to get into the shower immediately if they want to make it to church on time. He downs the rest of his cold coffee and slowly makes his way inside. Work had been so exhausting, and now he has to go to church! Attending church really saps my energy, he thinks. He has already committed to helping a buddy get his old clunker running again on Sunday morning, and in the afternoon, the whole family would get together at his brother's house across town. On Monday, another tough week of work would start bright and early.

Fred realizes that thinking about it all is only making him more tired. He finds his wife in the bedroom rummaging through her closet for a dress to wear and tells her that he has decided to stay home from church today. He says, "I'm so glad God gives us a day of rest each week!"

Have we ever experienced a thought-process like Fred's? Do we find ourselves thinking like him more frequently? If so, we need to recall and consider a few principles from Scripture.

The idea of the seventh-day Sabbath being a day of rest originates in [Genesis 2:1-3](#):

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

In [Exodus 20:11](#), within the Sabbath commandment, [Moses](#) repeats God's sanctification of the seventh day as the day in which He "rested" from His

creative labors. God does not need rest, and the word *shbat*, used in the Genesis account, reflects this, as it more accurately means "to stop" or "to cease." Rest, however, is the normal consequence of a human being ceasing his work, as seen in [Exodus 20:11](#), which uses *nûach*, a more precise word meaning "to rest."

Rest, then, is an intrinsic component of Sabbath observance, but it is only part of what God intends that we do on His day. [Leviticus 23:3](#) expands Sabbath activity: ". . . the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation." The addition of the words "a holy convocation" marks the Sabbath as a time of God's calling His people together for worship, so what we call attending church services should be a vital part of a Christian's regular Sabbath routine.

The prophet Isaiah preached during King Hezekiah's reign when the northern Kingdom of Israel was about to fall to Assyria. A significant part of Israel's (and Judah's) apostasy concerned their misuse of the Sabbath. Back in [Exodus 31:12-17](#), God had made a covenant with them to remind them that the Sabbath acts as a sign that He sets them apart as His people. Their slackness on the Sabbath was a sure indication that they were forsaking God Himself. Thus, [Isaiah 58:13](#) provides vital principles about Sabbath-keeping:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words. . . .

Simply put, our observance of the Sabbath should focus tightly on God. Though [Jesus](#) does say in [Mark 2:27](#), "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," He means that He created it for man's benefit, and combined with [Isaiah 58:13](#), we learn that we benefit the most when God, not ourselves and our supposed needs, stands at the center of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath service is one of the most essential benefits of the day. It is a formal meeting between God and His elect, an occasion when He can

instruct them about His way of life. In turn, His people profit from their worshipful response to Him by heeding His teaching, singing praises to Him, and joining with their brethren in prayer.

In addition, the gathering of God's people permits the essential fellowship of believers, which the writer of Hebrews urges us not to abandon: ". . . not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" ([Hebrews 10:25](#)). As an example to us, Jesus Himself habitually attended the service in the local synagogue each Sabbath ([Luke 4:16](#)).

There are good reasons not to attend Sabbath services from time to time. If an individual has a communicable illness, he should stay home so that, in [love](#), he does not spread his sickness to others. No one expects a mother to attend church for several weeks after giving birth, but the father should do his best to represent the family at church in short order (see the principle of male representation in worship that can be derived from [Deuteronomy 16:16](#)). Sometimes car trouble or some other emergency like inclement weather makes getting to services difficult, and those who live hours away cannot be expected to make the trip every week.

However, skipping services for personal convenience or justifying it with a lame excuse should not characterize our Sabbath-keeping. Many remote brethren would love to fellowship every week with even a small group of God's people, so those members who live near other brethren should capitalize on the opportunity God has given them. He calls us to assemble on His holy day and expects to see us there out of love for Him and for our brethren—and frankly, for ourselves. How else will we receive the full benefit of God's gift of the Sabbath?

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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**From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **Sabbathkeeping (Part 1)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Keeping the right days on the calendar is no guarantee of attaining a right relationship with God. How and why a person keeps the Sabbath determines whether this test commandment is really a sign between God and His people or an idolatrous act of futility. The Sabbath could metaphorically represent a date between God and His affianced bride, a special 24-hour time to become more intimately acquainted, the actual courtship stage before marriage. Letting worldly concerns enter the Sabbath is like committing adultery or flirting with other lovers. When we take time to know God, we become refreshed, strengthened, and actually liberated from worldly entanglements.

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### **From the Archives: Featured Article**

#### **The Fourth Commandment (Part Two): Christ's Attitude Toward the Sabbath**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Most are not aware that in the Gospels, questions about the Sabbath center on how to keep it, not whether it should be kept. John Ritenbaugh explains how Jesus approached the Sabbath as an example to us.

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