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Gift of Rest

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Gift of Rest

Abstract

Posting about the blessing of Sabbath rest from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/the-gift-of-rest/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service](#) at Dordt College.

The Gift of Rest

 [inallthings.org/the-gift-of-rest/](https://allthings.org/the-gift-of-rest/)

Aaron Baart

Once when I was a kid, probably about 11 years old, I decided to surprise my grandfather one day by biking to his house so I could visit him. I expected that he would be delighted to see me. What I experienced was something altogether different. In fact, what I encountered when he opened his front door wasn't a look of joyful surprise but deep disappointment. Almost anger. You see, it was Sunday. I had rode my bike *on the Sabbath*. Clearly, I had broken the fourth commandment. Grievously. To this day, I think that was the only time I had ever seen my grandfather angry.

Growing up after that experience, along with the many other Sabbatarian practices I witnessed in my youth, I began to feel like honoring Sunday was a bit of a guessing game. I didn't know which activities made God angry and which ones didn't. And most adults, including the parents of all my friends, seemed to have a different interpretation on the technicalities of lawful obedience to the fourth commandment. Meals out. Certain sports. Particular chores. You just never really knew for sure.

As I entered into stages of life where I had the freedom to make all of my own decisions, I resolved internally and before the Lord that I wasn't going to be legalistic like the church I grew up in. After all, in response to the way that the leaders of his time has judiciously parsed the fourth commandment out a little too specifically, Jesus himself reminded us that “the Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath” ([Mark 2:27](#)). There you have it, I thought. The trump card. Sabbath and all its iterations was God's gift to me, not mine to him. I was free to interpret that however it blessed me most. I thought I had found resolution.

Fast forward a few more years . . .

During a season of great busyness in my life I went in to see my doctor for an annual check-up. He asked all the regular questions but as we got on the topic of my anxiety and depression, he began to ask more pointed questions. One of them was this: “How about Sundays? Are you keeping Sabbath?” Now, I thought, there are enough invasive things that occur during an annual physical but even for a doctor, this seemed off limits, not to mention irrelevant to the topic at hand. But as his questioning began to press deeper, I realized where he was going.

My doctor, by training and by practice, believed that there were certain creationally-structured needs built into the human being: sleeping, eating, breathing, and the list goes on. But what I also began to realize that day is that I was living into the Apostle Paul's warning to the Corinthians: “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive ([1 Corinthians 10:23](#)).

What I learned from my doctor that day was a more invitational message than I had heard from the pulpit in my youth: Sabbath keeping wasn't a legality issue; it was an image-bearing issue. I was made for it. It was embedded into the creational structure. God rested and if I was to move in the direction of looking more like him, I needed to as well. I was created to run on a 6:1 formula so ignoring Sabbath in my life was like pouring diesel into a gas engine. I had neglected this gift of rest and now I wasn't running right.

That's what Jesus meant when he said it was made for me and not me for it—that I wasn't enslaved to its rigorous rules; rather, I was invited into the rest of God. I was free to rest from my toiling and remind myself that there is a God; and it isn't me. I was free to live into a greater faith that acknowledged that God could do more with six days of work than I could pull off in seven. I was free to be reminded that he created me to be the object of his love and not perpetually at work in search of his approval. I was free to be a human *being* and not a human *doing*.

I wish I could go back and apologize to my grandfather. When I went for a bike ride that sunny Sunday afternoon, I

never meant to communicate to him that I wanted time with him and not my God. I realize now as well that his heart was in the right place. For all the hard work he put in every day to provide for his family, his Sabbath rest reminded him that one greater than he had already offered history's greatest work. This gift was worthy of his acknowledgement and so he wanted to honor that in whatever way he could. Resting in the promise of God's work by not doing any of his own one day every week makes more sense to me now.

My grandfather has long since passed away from this world, entering into God's eternal Sabbath rest. I wonder if he has a bike there?