

## Exodus 20 – Part 2

This second lesson on Chapter 20 will concern itself with the two positive words about remembering and keeping the Sabbath and honoring father and mother (vs. 8-12). Both words offer a radically different vision for life than that offered by Egypt and the rest of the world.

We begin with the word concerning sabbath. What is interesting about this word is that the term “sabbath day” has not been used before. The term sabbath in Hebrew means to “cease”, to “desist from labor.” The only “sabbath” that the people had experienced was the seventh day in the wilderness when they were not supposed to gather any manna. So, in some ways, this idea of resting (especially for slaves who were worked to death) was a novel idea.

While the concept of having a day of “ceasing” was not new, the reasons for ceasing were. The Babylonians ceased work every seven days based on the cycle of the moon (and always ceased work on the day of the full moon) because those were days of bad luck brought about by evil forces. And there were other ancient civilizations that had similar rest days. Sabbath and resting for the children of Israel, however, were based on an entirely different rationale. The rationale for resting given by God is that they are to rest because God rested on the seventh day of creation. As a reminder, creation was not finished on the 6<sup>th</sup> day, but on the seventh when God took a sabbath. This roots and grounds rest not in evil spirits, but in the very act of creation itself. It roots and grounds rest in God’s having declared the seventh day to be something special, a time set apart to follow God’s lead in resting from the wearisome toil of work. Additionally, this rationale also adds “creator” to God’s resume of liberator and provider.

Though the sabbath is linked here with creation, later in Deuteronomy sabbath is linked with Israel’s liberation from slavery: *Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day* (Deut. 5:15). Though this connection to liberation is not mentioned directly in the Exodus text, it is hinted at when the command to rest is given not simply to the children of Israel, but to its sons, daughter, slaves, livestock, or aliens. In other words, no person or animals owned by persons is to be a slave to work. The new natural order to God’s creation is one in which sabbath plays a central role.

We turn now to the word ordering honoring your father and mother. What we should notice first is that the command is to honor both mother and father, not merely father. In a patriarchal culture this is a remarkable statement. The word honor in the Hebrew carries with it the concept of “weight” or to give something weight. This is not worship or blind obedience (remember Jesus commands following him over following parents) but it is to give parents the “weight” they deserve because the parents are creators even as God was a creator. Just as God created the heavens and the earth, so parents create a child. What honoring parents precludes is the human tendency to patricide, where children kill their parents to gain power in the family. Finally, if God’s people are to love neighbor as self, they must begin by loving themselves through honoring their parents to whom they are biologically connected.

**Reflections:** What makes for an ordered and orderly society? Those are the questions for which the people of God need answers and God delivers. God’s answer is that rest and respect are at the heart of an ordered society. First, there must be rest or people will rebel against being treated not as human beings, but as machines. Second, there must be respect between individuals and according to these words, that respect begins at home among family members. Without rest and respect there can be no meaningful community.

### Questions:

1. How do you allow for sabbath in your life?
2. Where have you seen our society treat human beings as machines and not beloved children of God?
3. How did you honor your parents?