

Letters

Peter Faber

It seems that everyone today has a different idea of what we may or may not do on Sunday. The fourth commandment tells us not to work and I understand this. But what, for example, is wrong with things we do the other days of the week that are really not work, but have no spiritual benefit? I am thinking here of reading, homework, or playing basketball.

-Michigan

You are correct on the assumption of which your question is based. Everyone has a different idea what we may do on the Sabbath. Instead of looking at the fourth commandment and saying we may do this and we cannot do that, I would refer you first to Isaiah 58:13-14. "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Isaiah wrote this 2,800 years ago when the Jews were in captivity in Babylon. In many ways, the situation for us today is the same as when Isaiah lived. God had commanded that Israel would keep the Sabbath holy, but this command took on extra significance in Babylon. Israel's observance of the Sabbath day was to show and witness to all in Babylon that Israel worshiped the God that created the heavens and earth in six days and rested the seventh. We must always remember that our actions reflect to others who we worship.

Isaiah says "If thou turn away from the Sabbath" this means, our feet are quick to tread the steps taken the other six days of the week so we must turn away from our usual path on this special day. Isaiah follows this by saying that we are not to do our pleasure on His holy day but call this day a delight. Our pleasure is forbidden. Many times, Christians must decide whether or not to do something on the Sabbath. One must stop before making a decision and ask, is this God's pleasure or my own pleasure?

Isaiah continues, "shalt honor him, not doing thy own ways, nor finding thine own words." We must do God's pleasure not even speaking our own words. We must always guard our tongues, but on the Sabbath Isaiah says we must put extra effort to speak God's word, not our own.

Understanding Isaiah's "commentary" on the fourth commandment, let it be understood that God calls us plainly to cease from all work and rest. Work is more than our job. Work must stop and a certain rest must be pursued. Rest here is not meant as doing nothing but the rest that must be pursued is a rest of our pleasure and the pursuit of God's pleasure.

If we do God's pleasure and make this our delight, then verse 14 of Isaiah 58 applies to us "Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Sin is in the low places. We will be on the high places. On the earth? Yes, but close to Him.

- Editor

Are we growing toward godly character or ungodly character? Are we growing in love or selfishness; in harshness or patience; in greed or generosity; in honesty or dishonesty; in purity or impurity? Every day we are training ourselves in one direction or the other by the thoughts we think, the words we say, the actions we take, the deeds we do.

-p. 83, "The Practice of Godliness" by Jerry Bridges, Navpress 1983

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