

Dear Group Leaders and Hosts,

Last week I encouraged you to take some time to plan your group meeting. The minutes are precious and fly away quickly when we are together so do your best to lead your meeting well. Write out a plan of action and bring it with you to the meeting. Have a definite activity to begin such as I recommended last week. Even if you end up off script you will have used your time better than if you hadn't planned. The Wednesday women's group, of which my wife is a member, share their prayer requests via email before they meet rather than in person for the very purpose of saving their meeting time for more valuable in person activities such as actually praying or discussing ideas, insights, or applications of the passage. Well done Laura and company!

Remember another way to handle prayer requests is using the "prayer of agreement" taught by Bishop Gideon Thompson of Jubilee Church. Instead of talking about our requests, we pray them out loud so others can hear and then add their prayer to ours before praying their own requests out loud. I share this as another example to make the most of your time together.

Now on to this week's sermon recap. The 10 commandments are given in both Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 and I read this comment regarding the Sabbath command in [The Rest of God](#) by Mark Buchanan:

"Exodus grounds Sabbath in creation. Deuteronomy grounds it in liberation. Exodus remember Eden, Deuteronomy Egypt. In Exodus, Sabbath-keeping is about imitating divine example and receiving divine blessing. In Deuteronomy, it is about taking hold of divine deliverance and observing divine command. Exodus looks up. Deuteronomy looks back. Exodus give theological rationale for rest, and Deuteronomy historical justification for it. One evokes God's character, the other his redemption. One calls us to mimicry - be like God; the other to holy defiance - never be slaves again. One reminds us that we are God's children, the work of his hands, the other that we are no one's chattel, not Pharaoh's, not Nebuchadnezzar's, not Xerxes, not Beelzebub's. One is invitation. The other is warning" (page 87).

In my children's sermon, I emphasized being trapped and being set free. The Passover is a yearly festival that celebrates God's freeing of Israel from Egyptian bondage. It is during the celebration of this liberation that Jesus takes the symbols of bread and wine and applies them to himself. He, like Moses, came to set his people free. But unlike Moses, Jesus did not set them free from their new political/military oppressors, the Romans. Instead Jesus came to set free the heart/will, not the body. Remember the Israelites were not set free from Egypt by God for the sake of freedom itself but to be free to worship God and be his people. It was a freedom to more than a freedom from, a freedom to God more than a freedom from Egypt. But the ensuing history of Israel demonstrated that the Israelites had not really been set free; they quickly fell into grumbling and complaining when water and food were scarce and even idolatry with the golden calf while Moses was on the mountain in the presence of God. They even wanted to return to Egypt! They needed more; they needed their hearts delivered from the bondage of

self, of being in control because of a mistrust of God. They had been freed from slavery but they were still not free.

This is the work Jesus came to accomplish. He came to set us free to follow God. In my message with the children I tried to demonstrate our tendency to selfishness by offering this scenario: What if I wanted to give a thank you gift for participating in my message but only had enough gifts to give them to either the boys or the girls? I asked the boys, "Who should I give the gifts to, the boys or the girls?" "The boys!" most replied. But when I asked the girls the same question Arabelle said, "Give it to the boys to make them happy"! While this does speak well of girls, and rightly so :-), I think we all know that the girls can be every bit as selfish as the boys given the right test. Nevertheless kudos to Arabelle!

I was trying to make a very profound point simple; we are enslaved by the disposition our own hearts. We put our needs before others which is a demonstration of our mistrust of God's care and provision for us. The order of the two greatest commandments is important: We love (trust) God so we can love our neighbor as ourselves. The first empowers the second. But our hearts fail us when it comes to trusting God and so we think we need to look after ourselves, even at the expense of others. This is the human condition. In my message I briefly mentioned Oswald Chamber's reflection found on October 5th in My Utmost. I find it very interesting and on target. Here it is:

The Nature of Degeneration

By Oswald Chambers

Just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned... —Romans 5:12

The Bible does not say that God punished the human race for one man's sin, but that the nature of sin, namely, my claim to my right to myself, entered into the human race through one man. But it also says that another Man took upon Himself the sin of the human race and put it away—an infinitely more profound revelation (see Hebrews 9:26). The nature of sin is not immorality and wrongdoing, but the nature of self-realization which leads us to say, "I am my own god." This nature may exhibit itself in proper morality or in improper immorality, but it always has a common basis— my claim to my right to myself. When our Lord faced either people with all the forces of evil in them, or people who were clean-living, moral, and upright, He paid no attention to the moral degradation of one, nor any attention to the moral attainment of the other. He looked at something we do not see, namely, the nature of man (see John 2:25).

Sin is something I am born with and cannot touch— only God touches sin through redemption. It is through the Cross of Christ that God redeemed the entire human race from the possibility of damnation through the heredity of sin. God nowhere holds a person responsible for having the heredity of sin, and does not condemn anyone because of it. Condemnation comes when I

realize that Jesus Christ came to deliver me from this heredity of sin, and yet I refuse to let Him do so. From that moment I begin to get the seal of damnation. "This is the condemnation [and the critical moment], that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light..." (John 3:19).

Well that is a lot to think about! Here are some practical ideas to discuss as we continue our study of God's rest. First, have you personally experienced the liberation that Christ provides? If not, are you considering it? Do you understand the bondage of the heart that was expressed in the sermon? If yes, what were you personally set free from and how did you experience being set free to be God's? For example in my own life I was set free from apathy concerning God and arrogance in my own self-determination and was set free to read Scripture, pray, think about God all the time, and seek out a church community to be a part of.

Second, God tested the Israelites so that their hearts could be revealed and they could then turn to God for his deeper saving work (Deuteronomy 8). While Jesus delivers our hearts in this deeper way, we too need to work out what God works in. We too need to learn through testing that we don't live on bread alone but on every word of God. How is God working out your deliverance from self to himself at this time in your life? What lessons are you learning or struggling to learn? How can we support and encourage each other in this regard?

Third, what Sabbath practices or ideas do we have that can help us keep in mind our deliverance and freedom? Free people can rest; enslaved people cannot. Strangely the Israelites were tempted to go back to Egypt; what taskmasters are we tempted to allow back into our lives that interfere with our freedom to be God's people? Mark Buchanan says "Taskmasters despise rest" (page 91). He goes on to say, "In some ways, the whole point of the Exodus was Sabbath. *Let my people go*, became God's rallying cry, *that they might worship me*. At the heart of liberty - of being let go - is worship. But at the heart of worship is rest - a stopping from all work, all worry, all scheming, all fleeing - to stand amazed and thankful before God and *his* work. There can be no real worship without true rest" (page 94; italics the author's). How do we overcome our taskmasters through our Sabbath observance?

Fourth, pray for someone you know who needs to be set free from themselves to God. Spend some time together interceding for them. Check out 1 Samuel 12:20-25; esp. v. 23. May the Lord give them the gift of repentance (2 Timothy 2:24-26) and may the Lord gift all of us with his presence in a special way as we gather in our groups this week.

Blessings,
P Dan

The writer of Hebrews, while reflecting on the ministry of Jesus as the high priest of the new covenant says, "For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said:..." (Hebrews 8:7-8). The writer goes on to quote the promise of the new covenant from Jeremiah 31, the

promise of changed hearts and minds. This is the work of new creation accomplished through Christ