

Dear Friends,

Exodus 20: 8-11

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

The first four commandments are about your duty to God. The first three have been "Thou shalt nots", they have told you what you are not to do. We come now to a "Thou shalt", something which you are to do. You are to keep the Sabbath.

There are seven days in a week, one of those seven is to be kept holy, that is, it is to be set aside for God's purposes and not your own. And what does God require you to do with this day? God commands you to rest. In case you need a demonstration, God gives it to you. The story goes that in six days God created heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them. Then on the seventh day God rested.

Sometimes there are things to be done and you need to engage in them, that is the time when you need to breathe out. But there are other times when you need to stop and take a deep breath in. God says, have a rest you need it. It is essential to your well being and happiness. It is essential as a way for you to recharge and be recreated so that you may give yourself to others in love.

And the Sabbath is a blessing which is generously given to everyone. It's for you, and for you to share with others. It's a gift which levels everyone up. The list of those who are to receive it includes, "You, your son, your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, the alien resident in your towns". There is equality about this. Women, men, children and animals all benefit. It's for those who have lived together for generations and for those who have come from other countries seeking sanctuary or wanting to make a new home. It is for those at the top like Moses and for those at the bottom whose lives are spent in service. The slaves have one day when they are equal with everyone else. They too have a right to rest. Of course, on this point we go much further. Israel may have given their slaves more than was given in other cultures, but they do not give nearly enough. Slavery is no way to treat human beings who are made in the image and likeness of God. There needs to be more than one day a week free of slavery. It must be entirely abolished.

Honour your father and your mother.

In that fourth commandment we crossed the bridge that links our duties to God with our duties to others. Both sides of this bridge are of equal concern to God.

The rest of the commandments are about your responsibilities towards others. That starts close to you with your parents, those who brought you into the world. You are to treat them well. The old words "Charity begins at home" can be a bit unhelpful especially if they ever turn into "Charity ends at home". You do however have a particular God given duty towards those who are closest to you. Don't let your love stop there, but there's no need to neglect them and certainly no need to feel any guilt about enjoying your time with them and taking care of them.

God bless you,
Tony