

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. (Colossians 2:13-17 NIV2011)

God-Made Rest

We know how to work. You put in the effort, put in the time, you do something. We can argue later about what is the best type of work whether that's outside or behind a desk. At the end of the day, work is good. Often it's hard; often it takes a lot of effort and too often it is underappreciated. Still, work is a blessing from God. We know how to do it.

Do we know how to rest? I'm not so sure. While resting there's this nagging feeling in the back of the mind, whether it is from society or self-invoked, that we should be doing *something else*. After resting, you sometimes feel obligated to assure yourself that it was okay that you did it. There's a reason the doctors and nurses tell patients multiple different times after surgery not just to do your therapy but also make sure you rest. We aren't good at it. Rest sometimes seems to have this bad connotation. Rest is after you've done your work. Rest is for those who can't keep going. Rest is when you've reached your limit. Rest is for when you don't have anything else going on or different plans. But there's always more work to do. We don't want to admit we have a shortcoming or limits. There seems to be more things going on all the time. So although we know we need rest—our bodies tire out, our brains start to feel like mush, our patience runs thin, we need to get away—rest is often looked down on, equated with laziness, and failure. Rest may be good but it's not as good as work.

So why did God rest? For in six 24-hour days God creates the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, but on the seventh day God rests (Exodus 20:11). Why? It's not because he is tired. It's simply that his creating work is done and it is very good. It's not like he is in heaven taking a nap. He's still actively at work in our lives. It's not because he couldn't keep going reaching the limit of his power. No, he rests in the satisfaction and joy of the fruit of his labor and that his creation is very good. He rests to set aside this one day. He makes it holy. He blesses the day to be a source of blessing for mankind. It's God-made rest. **“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God”** (Deut. 5:13, 14). Sabbath means rest. For the people of Israel, that day was Saturday: a day set apart for resting from work and resting in the Lord, remembering, marveling at all his work for them, and

receiving rejuvenation from the Lord. It was commanded by God. For the Christian church, we don't have a day where we "have to" do this. At the same time, we need rest not only for our bodies and minds, but also resting in God. That's difficult for hard-working Americans. Being busy, having a lot to do, that seems to be a more commendable virtue in our world. But to rest; no one is going to commend you on how well you rest. And still, it's something we need. Deep down it's something we all crave. It's something God gives.

But we are sinful creatures. And so we take a gift from God—this rest—and twist it into something for which you have to work. That's what this group who have some Jewish background are doing and then pressuring the Colossian Christians to do as well. I don't know how much of this is malicious or it's them just trying to do the best they can to find rest. For them, their rest was in rules. Drink this; don't drink that. Eat this food and not that food. Be sure to celebrate these festivals and celebrations while being sure to keep up on the Sabbath day regulations. Do this; then you will have rest. Do it well, and you will feel more restful. Do this and you can deserve to rest.

It makes sense. Still does. We are still falling into it. Go to church because you know it will make someone feel happy. At least it will get them to stop bothering you. Go to church because you maybe haven't been there for a while. Need to make sure to make yourself good with the "big man upstairs", so put your time in. Go to church because that's just what you do. You do something, then you can rest. And unless you feel like it is doing something for you or you are getting something out of it, you may have a hard time answering the question, "Why do you go to church?" Because to say, "To rest in Jesus," somehow feels wrong. You could be doing something else...

It's no surprise that this spills over into how we see our time in God's house; it's how we live. You can rest, once you meet enough expectations from other people on top of the expectations I have for myself. You can rest after you cross off enough from your to-do list. Do your best, try your hardest, put in the hours, then you can rest in a job well done. Rest in working more; being able to do stuff. Rest in vacation. Rest in retirement. And while you do, you are sure someone is judging you somehow and in some way whether or not you have done enough to rest.

We do the same thing when it comes to our sins too. One may think, if I learn to forgive myself, then maybe I'll be allowed to have rest. If I make myself feel awful for long enough, then I can have the rest of the forgiveness. If I do something to make up for what I did, then I can have rest from this uncomfortable feeling in my relationship. If I work hard enough, then I can show God that really appreciate his rest.

And it works; until it doesn't. And you try again, and around and around we go. You feel restless. Again, we shouldn't be surprised. Paul says, "**You are dead in your**

trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh.” In other words, you can’t do enough to have that rest you really need. We will never find the rest we crave from this world or from ourselves. We don’t want to hear it. It is the most offensive thing for me, for you to hear: “You can’t do this.” Right of way we think, “Why not? That’s not fair! I’ll prove you wrong.” And Paul says: “Too bad; you were dead.”

Hard to believe it only gets worse. But, the thing is, you had an agreement with God that you would do better; in the reading it’s called “a charge of legal indebtedness” (v. 14). Written on our hearts and our minds, we know there are certain expectations and standards to live by. By nature you know that murder is wrong; no one had to teach you that. Whether Christian or not—most people rightfully get upset with mass shootings and certain crime because “it’s just wrong.” Born into this world, created in God’s image as all humans are, all are held to his standards. At the moment of conception every human being, including you, signed the agreement with God: “I will follow your code. And if I don’t, I owe you.” Well, look at your life and see how well you have walked that line. No wonder we are restless. We have this document that stands against us. Here is damning evidence that no amount of hard work will make disappear. Try to defend yourself in God’s courtroom and you will lose.

That’s why God established these various festivals, celebrations, food and drink stipulations, and Sabbath regulations. It was to set His people, the Jews, apart and show them where to find rest. The Sabbath day, the celebrations, all of that was shadow of something to come. They were to rest on this promise of something better coming around the corner. It was to drive home the point: your rest is not found in you doing something. They looked ahead to the promise to come. We look behind and see how that promise was fulfilled. But like them, you were dead. And like them, Paul says, “God made you alive in Christ” (v.13). He did it. He forgave your sins. Not because he had to or was obligated to, but for the joy of setting you free from the debt, he did. Not just some of them. Not just the really bad ones. All of them. The distracted living, the misplaced priority and intention, the white lie, the bad attitude, all of them forgiven. The debt is canceled. He doesn’t just ignore them. That would be like him standing on the sidelines winking at you, “Yeah we both know you did something but...” That does nothing for the debt! It would still be against you. Instead, he takes that agreement with your name written on it away from you and nails it to Jesus’ cross. When that nail pierces Jesus’ hands for our transgressions, our trespasses, our crossing the line, it drives right through that document. The nail rips apart the agreement and obliterates it so that it no longer exists. Jesus’ blood pours out and pays for every sin. You can be absolutely sure because the Father would not let his Holy One, his own Son Jesus, see decay in the grave. The payment was made on the cross. The debt is gone. So the Father raised Jesus from the dead; and what he did for Jesus he did for you. With that cross of

Christ marking your head and heart, you who were united with Jesus at his death in your baptism also rise with Jesus, a purchased and won, redeemed child of God. God has made you alive with Christ!

Therefore, rest. Paul says, let no one judge you (v.16-17). God has done it all for you. You are set free from the Law and its obligations, festivals and Sabbaths. They were the shadow. They already served their purpose. Now you have something better: the reality that is in Christ. So, rest in Christ. It's not a rest that means sitting around doing nothing. It's a confident rest knowing your sins are forgiven, all of them, and God wants you to stop trying to make up for them. You are forgiven; deal with it. It's a rest that marvels at God's goodness and receives not a shadow of forgiveness but the reality with Jesus' body and blood poured out in the Lord's Supper. It's a rest found here in God's house where we stop from the business of life, step away from the expectations and demands of this world—the work will still be there when you are done with church—and to just rest, to listen, to be fed with God's Word and Sacrament. It's a rest that we want to go out and share in this restless world. Invite him, encourage her to come and join you in this rest won at the cross of Christ and sealed to you in his rising from the dead. Whether you recognize it or not, they need it; you need it. It's God-made rest. Amen.