



How to be a Good Steward of Your Time

If you are at all like me, you look at the title of this article and cringe. I remember my first reaction to finding out that I had been assigned this topic: How will I have enough time to write an article for the *Reformed Herald*? Or maybe you are thinking: Why should I take the time to read an article about managing time? Is that even good time management?

I also remember what I was doing when I found out about the assignment to write this article. I was at the 2003 Synod meeting and we were debating a motion on the floor as to how we could make better use of our time next year at synod. It took us over an hour to discuss it and then refer the motion to a committee.

It is easy to be cynical about the subject of time management. Think about it. Everyone has exactly the same amount of time in a day, yet no one is happy with the amount of time in it. Depending upon the person, there is either too much time, or not enough. In either case, you will still probably be late for work.

In all seriousness, the subject of Time Management is a compelling concern for everyone. My focus in this article will not be on offering some insight into how you can "Master Time in Three Easy Steps." I leave that for the Efficiency Engineers. I would like to consider Time Management from the perspective of the Fourth Commandment.

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."

Let's look at the teaching of the Fourth Commandment it relates to the use of time and then consider some applications for us in the cultural context of AD 2004.

The rationale for the Fourth Commandment is God's creation of all things in six days and His rest on the seventh day, which is also set forth in Genesis 1 and 2. In the Fourth Commandment we are reminded of the truth that all things are "of Him and through Him and to Him," and for His glory (Romans 11:36). In the Romans passage, as well as the Fourth Commandment, we see what some have called the Principle of Dedication. Man is to remember that he and all creatures and created things exist for the purpose and glory of God our Creator. Time also is part of that creation work of God. In order to show that all of our life and all of our time must to be dedicated to the glory of God, God commanded one day in seven be separated out for rest. In the same way, that separating out and giving a tithe was a means of acknowledging that everything is from God and to His glory (see Genesis 28:22), so, separating one day in every seven for rest was a means of dedicating all of life to God's glory.

The basic requirement of the Fourth Commandment is rest. But this rest is not cessation from all activity. It is the ceasing of the regular activity of the other six days. Note that this rest extended to all that normally contributed to that six day activity, so that all in the family's household may enjoy this rest-refreshment (see Exodus 23:12). Though from the beginning of time work was intrinsically good, after Adam's rebellion and fall, work became full of toil and difficulty due to the curse, leading to the groan, "all things are full of weariness" (Ecclesiastes 1:8). The eighth chapter of Romans

tells us even the creation – and created things – groans under the curse. The Fourth commandment requires a rest from that six-day toil.

But to man alone was given the full capacity to enjoy the rest God requires in the Fourth commandment. That is because the *rest* of the Fourth Commandment centers in worship. *"The seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation"* (Leviticus 23:3). In other words, assembly was, and is, required.

It is in this rest-worship combination that we receive the blessing God intended for man in the Fourth Commandment. For in this rest-worship, we are to remember creation, more accurately, our Creator. We belong to Him and were made for Him; we are not our own. We are to rightly know our Creator, heartily love Him, and live with him in eternal blessedness, to praise and glorify Him (HC 6). By ceasing our six-day labor we acknowledge our dependence upon God our Creator. We confess our trust, not in ourselves, but in Jehovah, our God who sustains us and all things moment by moment. We rest from our evil works: from hearts that are virtually idol-making factories, to paraphrase John Calvin; from the labor of hands that are put to work in the service of fashioning idols; from lives that tend to look like a tug-of-war between service to Mammon and God.

In Deuteronomy 5 the Fourth Commandment teaches us that our rest-worship is also to commemorate God's mighty work of redemption (Deuteronomy 5:15). In other words, we remember and are taught to live out of the Gospel! Out of mere grace, and tender mercy God has sent His Son to redeem fallen and rebellious sinners from bondage to sin so that we might rightly know Him, and live in fellowship with Him. In other words, that we might be set apart for His glory.

In our rest-worship we look forward to the consummation of all things. All of time is flowing toward the Judgement Day, and the full manifestation of God's eternal kingdom and glory. We will dwell in the New Heaven and the New Earth, and God will dwell with us and we with Him. There will be no more sin, nor the effects of sin. Just as time had a beginning, it will have an ending. The pattern of our rest day and worship is a foretaste of the fullness of God's kingdom. In our worship we taste of the powers of the age to come, the Holy Spirit's work in us through the gospel and the Lord's Supper. God draws near to us and we to Him. Our prayers and songs and offerings are dedicated to the glory of God. We are taught and remember that we are not like senseless animals and rocks, nor like the unredeemed. We are not caught in a meaningless flow of days, weeks, months, years, flowing into an unknown meaningless future.

So the first principle for time management we are taught in the Fourth Commandment is this: that one day in seven is set apart by God for rest and worship.

The second principle in the Fourth Commandment for time stewardship is that we are to work the other six days of the week. As noted above, these days, too, are dedicated for the glory of God. We are not redeemed to be part-time Christians. The Heidelberg Catechism has hit the nail squarely on the head when it teaches that the blessings of the day of rest and worship have a cascading effect upon the six days of labor. There we learn that the second requirement of the Fourth Commandment is: *"All the days of my life I rest from my evil works, allow the Lord to work in me by His Spirit, and thus begin in this life the everlasting Sabbath"* (HC 103).

In other words, woven throughout our days and nights, eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and harvesting, studies, homework and test-taking, our playing, all manner of participation in entertainment, our work as parents and spouses, is the desire and earnest effort to do all to the glory of God. You see, living for the glory of God is not an appendage to our six-day activities, it is what our six-day activities are all about.

That we are required to labor six days, and rest one is a pattern set by God Himself. As images of God, our lives reflect God's life. In a society that has turned work into an idol, our six-day labor pattern bears witness to the world that work is not an end in itself, but is to broadcast God's glory. Our labor as images of God also testifies to the fact that neither we who labor, nor the things we receive from that labor are to be deified; and that neither we nor our things are to receive glory due to God. As images of God, if we are lazy or careless with our use of time, if we are sloppy in our labor, we tell a lie about God. Idolatry, laziness, sloppiness, worldliness, these are all spiritual

problems. If we cling to them, they bar the entrance of our hearts from allowing the Lord to work in us by His spirit. It is from these evil works we are to rest every day.

So the two principles of the Fourth Commandment that I have tried to apply to stewardship of time are that one day in seven we rest and worship God, and that we so manage our time that we do our normal work in the remaining six days. By now I trust these principles are clear enough, though certainly much more could and should be said about them. I would like to move on to some applications of these principles for the use of time in our cultural context in the year 2004.

Rest and worship one day, work the other six. The principles of the Fourth Commandment equip 21st Century Christians with a clear God-glorifying focus in a culture that seems to be returning to paganism. In a 24-7-365 society, Christians are often heard lamenting the consumerism and the entertainment-driven mentality of our times. But do we image God's pattern, or society's, in our work and consumption and entertainment habits?

Applying the rest one, work six principle of time management, 21st Century Christians bear eloquent testimony to the life changing power of the Gospel. Christians often express frustration with and confusion about how we might more effectively bear witness of Christ in our spiritually dark culture. What better way to bear witness to a generation dedicated to self-pleasure, to people enslaved to "stuff", than to "diligently attend church on the day of rest", as the Catechism puts it. As we gather for worship we are declaring that we are not our own, but belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

Churches and families with a clear understanding of the Fourth Commandment's weekly rest, worship, work principles are provided with a uniquely biblical discipleship perspective. "I wish I had more time to study the Scriptures" is a familiar statement many believers say to each other. Yet, the maintaining of the ministry of the gospel and the schools, the learning of the word of God are all part of the dedicated day of rest. The cumulative effect of diligent church attendance to learn the Word of God weekly, monthly, yearly should produce a breadth and depth of Scripture knowledge for all of God's people.

The fact is, the gathering of the Church of Jesus Christ for worship and our participation in it is something we are not to neglect (Hebrews 10:24). We need it to survive. As a pastor, I have known people, even entire families, who thought they could get by with irregular church attendance. Sadly, for the most part, those people are no longer active church members; many of them have left the church altogether. We are not as strong or as wise as we think. We need God's Word proclaimed to us. We need the sacraments. We need the fellowship of the saints. If we think we can serve the Lord on less, we are saying we are wiser than God is.

"I wish I had more time for works of mercy, I wish I had more opportunity to contribute to the life of the church, I wish I were a better parent, or spouse," and on and on the list might go. I don't want to seem simplistic or too reductionistic about the very real challenges people face daily in their desire to serve the Lord. But the requirements of the Fourth Commandment teach the Christian, and remind the Church to keep two things inseparable. What we learn and the blessings we receive from our rest and worship is to serve the goals of our six-day labor. We are to desire daily to make progress as Christ's disciples by resting from our evil works, allowing the Lord to work in us by His Spirit, and thus begin in this life that for which we were created: To live with God in eternal blessedness praising and glorifying Him.

Whatever time the Lord in His providence gives each of us in this New Year, we could make no better or wiser use of our time than in working out the principles of the Fourth Commandment as they relate to Time Management.

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