

Loving Christ in All of Life

Week 10 - The Sabbatical Year & Jubilee

Exodus 23:10-12, Deuteronomy 15:1-6, Leviticus 25:1-28

- The foundational principle of the Sabbath is life - rest, renewal, regeneration
 - Man's fall put all creation under a principle of death, including the earth itself (Gen.3:17)
 - Creation is promised its redemption and consummate rest through Christ - Rom. 8:18-23
 - The Sabbath anticipates the redemption of both man and of the rest of creation
- God's law testifies to this by requiring a rest for the land every seventh year
 - Planting, maintaining, and storing were all prohibited - the people could use what fell naturally as an immediate food source, but could not reap, harvest, or store
 - Profession of faith in God's provision that marked the weekly Sabbath on a grand scale
 - People were to trust that the Sovereign over the earth would provide for them
 - Actually conforming life to the reality that God gives fruitfulness and life
- The earth is created and loved by God; Sabbatical Year was primarily for the earth
 - God created the earth to be respected as His creation and wisely stewarded under His law
 - God's authority vs. man's autonomy - God knows what is best for creation and man is required to submit himself to this
 - Natural processes (especially since the fall) need to be guided by man, but in themselves they are built into creation by God and are good and useful
 - In his rebellion, man seeks to supercede these processes and ignore God's design, ultimately leading to curse and destruction

"By this rest, the soil also is restored and revitalized. By allowing the field to grow weeds, the weeds of the field are given the opportunity to bring to the topsoil minerals from below and to revitalize the soil. The vines and trees are given free growth, unpruned, and again renew their vitality. The fruit which falls and rots again contributes to the soil. The value of the sabbath in regenerating the soil is very great. But man, lacking faith, prefers his own work to God's work, and his proposed rest to God's sabbath. God's method is called crude, and modern sprays, manufactured fertilizers, and other devices are used, and the soil is steadily mined and abused. The soil is treated as something science can make and remake, and even do without...The earth clearly is renewed by rest, or it is exploited ruthlessly and finally turned into a desert" (RJ Rushdoony).

- God made the Sabbatical year central to Israel remaining in the land - Lev. 26:33-35, 2 Chron. 36:20-21
- How is this different from modern environmentalism, paganism, and pantheism?
 - God's law doesn't call for man's renunciation of authority over nature or sacrifice of himself to nature (i.e. paganism/environmentalism)
 - Creation is not seen as all on the same level (pantheism) - man is rightly over nature

- Also not Gnostic - material is good, created by God, and we must respect it for *what it is*
 - Has a legitimate place in God's order, not merely an object for our use

"Man is not to be sacrificed, as pantheism sacrifices after all, he was made in the image of God, and given dominion. And yet nature is to be honored, each thing at its own level...Christians, of all people, should not be the destroyers. We should treat nature with an overwhelming respect. We may cut down a tree to build a house, or to make a fire to keep the family warm. But we should not cut down the tree just to cut down the tree" (Francis Shaeffer).

- Year of Jubilee was the highest expression of the Sabbath principle
 - Began on the Day of Atonement - the rest they enjoyed was rooted in their full forgiveness of sin
 - Pointed forward to new creation rest - Jesus described His mission with language of Jubilee themes - Luke 4:18-21
- Forgiveness of debt and restoration of land was central to Sabbath years and Jubilee (Deut. 15:1-6)
 - Any "sale" of land was effectively a lease until the Jubilee
 - Acknowledged God's sovereign ownership of the land, protected family inheritances, and provided stability and continuity in communities
 - Built on the remembrance of God's deliverance of Israel from slavery
 - Forgiveness we receive from God causes us to treat others with mercy and to forgive
 - Principle instituted in the law of debt forgiveness
 - No free man under God had the right to make himself a slave - no right to permanent indebtedness
 - Sabbatical year ensured that all debts given could be expected to be repaid in six years
- Principles of these laws ought to be applied, even if specifics have been fulfilled
 - Land should be rested and not overused and exploited
 - Future planning, wise stewardship, use of resources sparingly is in keeping with God's design
 - Maintaining continuity of land ownership is a good thing - landowners should be protective from predatory taxation/land speculation
 - God desires a debt-free society - His laws are intended to mitigate and prevent poverty
 - Culture of indebtedness is a slave society
 - The Sabbath acknowledges God's total sovereignty, allowing for holy rest in His abundant provision, which His people ought to enjoy heartily