

ABSTRACT

A Survey of Biblical Sabbath Rest: Creation's Invitation to Communal Celebration

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Amidst a culture that increasingly values consumerism, productivity, and individualism, communal practices of rest have largely been lost, specifically Sabbath-keeping. This thesis will argue the necessity of restoring the practice of biblical Sabbath rest while simultaneously diagnosing a prominent challenge to honoring Sabbath. The ancient vice *acedia*, characterized by states of extreme restlessness or weariness, directly opposes the practice of Sabbath rest. The writings of the monastic fathers Evagrius and Cassian will be examined in order to support this diagnosis of *acedia's* incompatibility with biblical Sabbath rest. Further, this thesis will offer a biblical understanding of Sabbath rest primarily through a comprehensive analysis of Sabbath within scriptural passages from both the Old and New Testaments. Looking to the life of Jesus and his healings performed on the Sabbath, this thesis intends to contrast the Pharisees' legalistic understanding of Sabbath with Jesus' ministry of healing and restoration. Building on this foundation, this thesis will trace significant implications of the Sabbath command, specifically the equality and dignity of humankind, rhythmic rest for all creation, and communal accountability in establishing practices of rest that do good to one's neighbor.

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COMMUNAL CELEBRATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: <i>Acedia</i> in Opposition to Sabbath Rest	4
Chapter Two: Exegesis of Sabbath in Scripture	25
Chapter Three: Sabbath's Implications for Justice and Social Issues.	46
Bibliography	62

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INTRODUCTION

The Need for Rest

The need for rest is universal; it is a reality of existing as a finite human with limitations. In agrarian cultures, much like the biblical setting, people typically followed the rhythm of the seasons as a guide for their own seasons of work and rest. Likewise, the people relied upon the rhythms of the sun rising and setting daily to govern their own days as they were dependent on its light. In the modern-day, much of how people choose to structure a day has significantly changed and productivity is too often valued above rest and enjoying the fruits of one's labor. The ways in which people both partake in periods of rest and invite others to do the same not only reveal their values, but further reveal their understanding of themselves as created beings.

I was inspired to initially pursue and research the topic of biblical Sabbath rest during the spring and summer of 2020 as COVID-19 became a world-wide reality. Throughout that time, as schedules were involuntarily cleared and plans postponed to the unseeable future, the notion of holistic rest was thematic to my experiences living at home and existing in a significantly slower pace of life. While initially causing frustration and boredom, there was a remarkable sense of freedom to embrace practices of rest that were nourishing to the soul.

Communal practices of rest have largely been neglected in contemporary culture. Particularly in the United States, where individualism, consumerism, and busyness have become the idealized pillars of a successful life, intentional rest is long forgotten, too often being replaced with mindless distractions, excessive laziness, and/or the

abandonment of commitments to one's community. Counter to this culture of incessant work is the call for the people of God to uphold the practices of Sabbath rest. In doing so, they anticipate the coming of God's kingdom structured on the foundation of his justice and mercy.

The purpose of this thesis is to argue the challenges opposing the practice of Sabbath rest and trace the biblical vision for the Sabbath command, particularly giving attention to its implications for love of God and love of neighbor. This thesis will examine the ways Sabbath rest serves as a marker of a covenantal relationship between YHWH and his people as well as Sabbath's calling for all creation to participate in the rest and wholeness of Shalom.

The first chapter will diagnose a significant challenge to Sabbath rest, namely the ancient vice *acedia* which manifests in extreme restlessness or weariness in one's spiritual life. To do this, the chapter will rely upon the writings of the fourth and fifth century desert fathers Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian which provide their interpretations and experiences wrestling with the vice *acedia*. Next, the second chapter will examine relevant biblical passages from the Old and New Testaments which detail the context in which the Sabbath command was given and later, Jesus' teachings and actions surrounding Sabbath-keeping. This chapter will also highlight Jesus' healings on the Sabbath as a guide for Sabbatical neighborliness and restoration rooted in acts of mercy.

The final chapter will trace prominent social implications of biblical Sabbath rest as it pertains to issues of justice. Using a vision of the wholeness of creation extracted from the scriptures, the chapter will argue Sabbath's alternative to the oppressive systems

of labor and exploitation that do not allow rest for laborers, creatures, or the land. Further, this chapter will emphasize Sabbath's affirmation of human dignity while rejecting the concept that human value is based upon what a person can do. This thesis will conclude that the Sabbath command establishes rest for all creation, particularly ensuring rest for the vulnerable and marginalized. This biblical structuring of life anticipates Heaven and calls God's people to persevere in practices of neighborliness and communal rest.

CHAPTER ONE:

Acedia in Opposition to Sabbath Rest

Introduction to the Vice Acedia

This chapter will seek to diagnose the prominent ancient vice *acedia* which poses incredible challenges to the practice of Sabbath rest, through analysis of its threats, particularly to the spiritual life of the ancient desert fathers, and ensuing symptoms. The first section of this chapter will examine the history of the vice tradition, with particular attention given to *acedia*. The second section will comment on the temptation of Jesus in the desert as it relates to the monk's temptation of *acedia* in the desert. The following sections will discuss the ways in which the meaning of *acedia* was interpreted by the fourth and fifth century desert fathers Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian, prominent figures in the Western monastic tradition. This will include a section which considers Evagrius' counsel to remedy *acedia* as a solitary monk. The following section on Cassian will expand Evagrius' understanding of *acedia* to apply within a communal monastic framework. Next, will follow a brief commentary on Aquinas' contributions to interpretations of *acedia*. The final section will examine a modern-day understanding of the vice, commonly referred to as 'sloth,' in relation to ancient interpretations of *acedia* in order to determine how its meaning has been shaped over the centuries. Underlying all sections will be an ongoing analysis supporting *acedia*'s incompatibility with Sabbath rest. The analysis will detail evidence for the vice's opposition to the practice of the spiritual disciplines, which are foundational to the practice of Sabbath-keeping.

History of the Vice Tradition and The Seven Cardinal Sins

The vice tradition emerges with concepts and traditions culminating from a variety of races in the Near Eastern and Mediterranean worlds.¹ Many ideologies surrounding the concept of “the sins” or vices were derived from Hellenism, through which Greek culture was spread in the Hellenistic Age spanning from the death of Alexander the Great to the fall of Rome.² The notion of the seven cardinal sins was “purified and adopted, not eradicated, by the Church” as it was “deeply rooted in the religious consciousness of the age.”³ Although their roots arise from pagan and even heretical beginnings in the eyes of the early Christian church, the concept of the cardinal sins was adopted by Christians and still is taught in many Christian traditions to this day.

In this vice tradition, concepts of what were considered to be the “deadly sins” emerge and were gradually shaped by various people and movements throughout the Medieval period. There is an important distinction that must be made between the “cardinal” and “deadly” sins in respect to their origins, which has been abandoned over the centuries. As indicated by their names, the deadly sins are those that were believed to lead the soul into death and eternal separation from God, whereas the cardinal sins are the capital or chief sins, deemed most threatening to the health of one’s spiritual life.⁴ Confusion arose concerning these lists primarily due to the sacrament of penance as

¹ Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan: State College Press, 1952), 1.

² Bloomfield, 1.

³ Bloomfield, 1.

⁴ Bloomfield, 43.

“confessors needed a convenient and handy list of sins for their work.”⁵ As centuries passed, the two names converged to refer to the same list of vices poisonous to the soul.

The original references to the seven cardinal sins are found in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* which is a pseudepigraphic piece of the apocryphal scriptures connected with the Bible that is dated circa 109-106 BC.⁶ The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* are originally a collection of Jewish documents with Christian interpolation added to it. The *Testaments*, consisting of the last words and exhortations from the twelve sons of Jacob, are relevant in examining the history of the vice tradition as they focus largely upon adherence to God’s commandments and examine virtues and vices which influence such adherence. Each testament in the collection focuses on virtues encouraged and vices condemned by each of the twelve patriarchs. The primary vices warned against in the testaments are lust, envy, pride, avarice, fornication, anger, falsehood. The *Testament* refers to these sins as the “spirits of deceit,” which reveals a significant ancient concept that the sins were understood to be evil spirits.⁷ Tertullian, an early Christian writer from Carthage, was the earliest person to call each of these recognized sins ‘deadly sins.’⁸ Throughout the Middle Ages, various lists of sins are documented, though there was disagreement over the exact list. Through much of the Middle Ages this list of sins deemed deadly was not set as there were a variety of lists that named different vices.

⁵ Bloomfield, 43.

⁶ Bloomfield, 44.

⁷ Bloomfield, 45.

⁸ Bloomfield, 51.

History of the Ancient Vice Acedia

The origin of the word *acedia* springs from the Greek compound “*a-keidia*,” which means a state of intentional torpor or “lack of care.”⁹ The vice is not passive in its nature but is rather a willful refusal to care, particularly about spiritual duties. The history of *acedia* spans from as early as the fourth century BCE to the modern-day, with significant transitions regarding its context and meaning throughout the centuries. Rebecca DeYoung organizes the history of *acedia* into different stages that outline its journey, starting with Evagrius Ponticus, a fourth century monk and ascetic, as well as John Cassian his pupil, then ending with the secularization of the term, providing what is modernly recognized as ‘sloth.’ Though DeYoung gives an overview of five broad stages in the history of *acedia*, special attention will be given to the stages which involve the early desert fathers Evagrius and Cassian. Both were monks in the desert following the manner of Jesus and facing the temptation of *acedia*.

Jesus Tempted in the Desert

In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, the Spirit leads Christ into the wilderness where he fasts for forty days and forty nights. Abstinence from bodily pleasures, such as fasting for the purpose of spiritual refinement, likens to the tradition of asceticism pursued by the ancient monks. On this matter Gabriel Bunge writes, “Early monasticism was convinced of this: that in the desert the monk would meet no one else but ‘the prince of this world.’ Going into the desert with Christ does not mean to evade

⁹ Robert B. Kruschwitz, “Introduction,” *Christian Reflection (Acedia)*: 9.

all temptations, but rather, with him, to learn how to confront the tempter ‘nakedly.’”¹⁰ Christ, like the monk, faced temptation by the “prince of this world,” the devil, in the desert while in his weakest state. The scriptures include descriptions of three consecutive temptations presented by the devil. It is crucial to not merely note the fact that he encountered the devil in the desert weary and weak, as would the monk, but that he confronted the devil himself by speaking the scriptures aloud in the face of temptation. His response to the devil’s cunning invitations is not to flee, as the one succumbing to *acedia* would, but rather to declare scriptural truths.¹¹ These practices drive the devil away. Jesus affirms the authority of scripture as a weapon against the power of the demons and their temptations, and sets a precedent for dependence on the fortitude of God’s word. Furthermore, he faced the tempter himself “nakedly,” as he was physically weak from fasting for a long duration of time.

Evagrius on Acedia

The fourth century desert father Evagrius became a monk around 380 AD. He was a prominent figure in early monasticism in Egypt. As a Christian monk, Evagrius practiced solitary asceticism, meaning his time, energy, and life purposes were centered around cultivating both interior and exterior stillness, a state which he termed “*hesychia*.”¹² In the monastic pursuit of *hesychia*, the ascetic monk would embrace a

¹⁰ Gabriel Bunge, *Despondency: The Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), 24.

¹¹ One of Jesus’ scriptural declarations is from Matthew 4:4 which reads, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

¹² Evagrius, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), n.p.

solitary life by removing himself from society and living alone or with a brother of the same mind as himself, pursuing the same holy commitments.¹³ In order to further eradicate distractions beyond that of society, monks such as Evagrius would forsake material possessions, only keeping what was deemed essential. He would also simplify his diet in order that his consuming of food would not lead to distraction or gluttony. Each of these sacrifices, among others not listed, were done for the end of “preparing himself for pure or immaterial prayer,” where the monk’s connection with the divine would not be hindered by his attachment to the material goods around him.¹⁴

Evagrius’ writings are instruction for those seeking to pursue the monastic life of physical and spiritual disciplines. In them, he outlines the deadly sins and vices that beset the monk. In his *Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Evagrius formulated a list of eight distinct vices or sins, known as the eight thoughts, *acedia* being the most prominent of them all. The eight thoughts include gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, *acedia*, vainglory, and pride. Morton Bloomfield writes that “Evagrius made the Sins a basic part of his moral teachings, and conceived of them as the basic sinful drives against which a monk had to fight.”¹⁵ Lists of vices such as Evagrius’ were circulated and deeply studied among monastics and their communities, as these specific vices were understood to be the primary threats against the monk’s communion with God. In Evagrius’ interpretations of the vice *acedia*, it was understood solely as a vice which “threatened only those who

¹³ Evagrius, *Corpus*, *The Foundations of the Monastic Life: A Presentation of the Practice of Stillness*.

¹⁴ Evagrius, *Corpus*, *On the Eight Thoughts*, Section 6. *Acedia*.

¹⁵ Bloomfield, 57.

chose the religious life in the strict sense,” or in Evagrius’ case, a life committed to solitary asceticism as a desert father.¹⁶

Perseverance in the Battle Against Acedia

Just as Jesus battled Satan in the desert, the monks battled against the demons of the vices. A fundamental characteristic of the ancient vice tradition is its portrayal of humanity’s battle against evil as a struggle against real demons. This concept is consistently woven throughout the ancient writings of the desert fathers, which include remarkably vivid depictions of demons.¹⁷ It was common for these vivid depictions of the vices to consider the demons as “lieutenants of the devil who had the power of entering the bodies of animals or men and of working deadly harm.”¹⁸ In this perspective, the struggle against sin is a persistent spiritual war fought within the soul against evil spirits. This is especially relevant to the spiritual life of the monk: “With men of the world, the demons fight mostly by means of things. However, with the monks, [they fight] mostly through thoughts; for they lack things on account of their isolation.”¹⁹ Evagrius here claims the men of the world become overly attached to material goods which gives a strong foothold for the demons to distract and corrupt their souls. In contrast, the monks who forsake all but the essential material goods in life lack “things” for the demons to occupy their minds with, so instead their souls are targeted by the demons primarily through distraction of the mind. The monks’ thoughts, which lead them into

¹⁶ Rebecca DeYoung, “Resistance to the Demands of Love,” *The Thomist* 68, no. 2 (2004): 176.

¹⁷ Bloomfield, 62.

¹⁸ Bloomfield, 62.

¹⁹ Gabriel Bunge, *Despondency: The Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012), 23.

contemplation of the holy, prayer, diligent work, and commitment to their solitary lives, once attacked by demons, become weapons of destruction that cause the monks to succumb to vices such as *acedia* which deteriorate their spiritual lives.

In his writings, Evagrius portrays *acedia*'s grip on the soul as a spiritual battle in which a monk must fight against two extreme manifestations of the vice: weariness, both spiritual and physical, and restlessness. First, interpretations of *acedia* among the ascetic monks indicate the vice to be a "temptation to escape one's commitment to the solitary religious life, due to both physical weariness (a result of their extreme asceticism) and weariness with the spiritual life itself."²⁰ Spiritual weariness here refers to the monk's lack of care regarding the commitment to his religious community. *Acedia* would drive him away from these commitments, particularly his commitment to prayer, his fellow brother within the community, and the work set before him.

While *acedia* affects the soul in its response to ongoing spiritual warfare, there are external factors that cannot be neglected which further contributed to a monk's susceptibility in succumbing to *acedia*. During the dreaded noon-day hour in which the sun was fully overhead and much of the day remaining, monks such as Evagrius were most susceptible to bodily weakness, particularly hunger, thirst, and physical exhaustion. Evagrius' *The Praktikos* characterizes *acedia* as the "noon-day demon" which is most troublesome to the monk in his weakest hour:

The demon of *acedia* – also called the noonday demon – is the one that causes the most serious trouble of all... First of all, he makes it seem that the sun barely moves, if at all, and that the day is fifty hours long... Then too he instills in the heart of the monk a hatred for the place, a hatred for his very life itself, a hatred for manual labor. He leads him to reflect that charity has departed from the brethren, that there is no one to give encouragement... This demon drives him along to desire other sites where he can more easily procure life's necessities,

²⁰ DeYoung, 175-176.

more readily find work, and make a real success of himself. He goes on to suggest that, after all, it is not the place that is the basis of pleasing the Lord. God is to be adored everywhere. He joins to these reflections the memory of his dear ones and of his former way of life.²¹

Here, Evagrius characterizes the noonday demon in such a way as to demonstrate the breadth of his control and influence over the thoughts, emotions, will, and motivations of the one afflicted by it. First, the demon makes the day and its demands seem unending and unconquerable by “mak[ing] it seem that the sun barely moves,” causing its captive to fall into a state of weariness and hopelessness.²² The ensuing discouragement and loss of purpose in the life of the monk is carefully used by the demon to grow that desire for “other sites where [the monk] can more easily procure life’s necessities.”²³ A “hatred for the place... hatred for his very life itself... and hatred for manual labor” all the more violently drive the monk from his station and spiritual commitments.²⁴ Lastly, the noonday demon drives the monk away from simple presence in the moment by persuading him to believe his life in the past or that which awaits in the future is far more desirable than where he finds himself at present. By driving the monk away from gratitude, presence, and rest and leading him toward restlessness, disdain, and discontentment, the noonday demon secures a grip on the soul of the monk which wearies him in mind, body, and spirit.

Second, in addition to this hindering weariness, he also is susceptible to experiencing extreme restlessness which drives him out of his cell. Such restlessness is

²¹ Evagrius. *The Praktikos; Chapters on Prayer*. Trans. John Bamberger. Cistercian Studies Series; No. 4. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981.

²² Evagrius, *Praktikos*, Praktiko 12.

²³ Evagrius, *Praktikos*, Praktiko 12.

²⁴ Evagrius, *Praktikos*, Praktiko 12.

often disguised by virtuous actions such as “visiting the sick,” which is a means by which the monk is “fulfilling his own purpose.”²⁵ He succeeds in fulfilling his own desire by performing seemingly righteous acts but, nonetheless, it is evident his heart and mind are set on abandoning his commitments within his cell in order to feed his restlessness rather than genuinely serve others. Evagrius further warns, “A monk given to *acedia* is quick to undertake a service, but considers his own satisfaction to be a precept.”²⁶ The one ruled by *acedia* fulfills his own purpose by placing his own satisfaction above his commitment to the spiritual duties that await him if he remains in his cell. In fleeing his station, he succumbs to *acedia* by escaping his commitments to do something “virtuous” rather than address the temptations he faces.²⁷

Evagrius contends that the monk is not helpless before *acedia*. He argues that the greatest weapon one afflicted by *acedia* can possess is the perseverance to remain in place and willfully struggle against that demon which relentlessly plagues one’s soul. In the context of monasticism, Evagrius claims, “the spirit of *acedia* drives the monk out of his cell, but the monk who possesses perseverance will ever cultivate stillness.”²⁸ Thus, perseverance here is understood to include the cultivation of stillness which should encompass mind, body, and spirit. In an excerpt in Evagrius’ *Greek Ascetic Corpus*, he further defines his understanding of perseverance in the face of *acedia* by encouraging

²⁵ Evagrius, *Corpus*, On the Eight Thoughts, Section 6. *Acedia*.

²⁶ Evagrius, *Corpus*, On the Eight Thoughts, Section 6. *Acedia*.

²⁷ Evagrius, *Corpus*, On the Eight Thoughts, Section 6. *Acedia*.

²⁸ Evagrius, *Corpus*, On the Eight Thoughts, Section 6. *Acedia*.

the one afflicted to “valiantly welcome all attackers,” and that to persevere in this instance is to “not abandon the cell in the time of temptations.”²⁹

In another description of *acedia*, Evagrius provides a vivid definition of perseverance:

Perseverance is the severing of *acedia*, the cutting down of thoughts, concern for death, meditation on the cross, fear firmly affixed, beaten gold, legislation for afflictions, a book of thanksgiving, a breastplate of stillness, an armour of ascetic works, a fervent work of excellence, an example of the virtues.³⁰

In this image, Evagrius depicts perseverance primarily as it evinces the armor of God as a primary means of protection against *acedia*. Through his use of imagery in which perseverance is likened to protective armor, Evagrius illumines the truth that perseverance guards against the oppressive rule of *acedia* which weakens the life of the soul. In the monk’s “meditation on the cross,”³¹ he is reminded of Christ’s sufferings and sacrifice which should inform his own perseverance. The cross is the very place where *acedia* and all other sins are atoned. By opening a “book of thanksgiving,”³² the monk receives the gift of remaining present within his own life while also expressing gratitude for the obstacles which perseverance helped him overcome in the past, as well as the challenges that await him in the future. In the cutting down of thoughts through perseverance, the monk relinquishes the hindrances of *acedia* which plague his mind by means of distraction.

²⁹ Evagrius, *Corpus*, On the Eight Thoughts, Section 6. Acedia.

³⁰ Evagrius, *Corpus*, On the Eight Thoughts, Section 6. Acedia.

³¹ Evagrius, *Corpus*, On the Eight Thoughts, Section 6. Acedia.

³² Evagrius, *Corpus*, On the Eight Thoughts, Section 6. Acedia.

In the history of the vice tradition, the spiritual disciplines were often practiced to counter the oppression of the deadly sins and the demons associated with them. The armor of “stillness” and “ascetic works” which Evagrius speaks of are necessary pieces in the protective defense of perseverance, and therefore must be practiced.³³ Evagrius in his writings points to Christ’s example of perseverance in the desert by encouraging the monk to face the temptation of *acedia* through practices of stillness and prayer.

Cassian on Acedia

The following stage in DeYoung’s history of *acedia* shifts to an understanding of the vice which is interpreted largely in terms of the vice’s harm among members within a religious community. In this, desert father John Cassian is the model. Cassian was a fifth century desert father in a Western monastic community. He was born in Dacia (now Romania) around 360 AD, and in his twenties or thirties, he departed his homeland and became a member of a monastery in Bethlehem.³⁴ During his time in Bethlehem, he visited Egypt on two occasions, developing his interest in Egyptian monasticism.³⁵ Cassian’s travels continued over the years and he eventually founded two monasteries in Marseille, France.³⁶ *The Institutes*, a collection of teachings written in twelve books, are aimed at instructing the community. The latter eight books each identify and address a cardinal sin, with Cassian’s list of cardinal sins matching that of Evagrius: gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, *acedia*, vainglory, and pride. Cassian’s interpretation

³³ Evagrius, *Corpus*, On the Eight Thoughts, Section 6. Acedia.

³⁴ John Cassian, *The Institutes*, Tenth Book: The Spirit of Acedia, chapter 7. Ancient Christian Writers; No. 58 (New York: Newman Press, 2000).

³⁵ Cassian, *Institutes*, introduction.

³⁶ Cassian, *Institutes*, introduction.

of the vice *acedia* is found in the tenth book, which will be the focus of the following analysis, particularly in regard to the vice's influences in religious communities.

Cassian was a disciple of Evagrius, therefore sharing much of his mentor's views of the vice *acedia*. Though his interpretations of the vice, in many ways, parallel Evagrius' teachings, Cassian shifts *acedia*'s application to concern not only the individual monk and his spiritual life, but specifically to warn of the vice's impacts within a monastic communal setting.

Within a communal framework, Cassian outlines common deceptions that a monk would fall into believing, such as the delusion that his soul will be absent of "spiritual fruit" while remaining a member of his particular community or that his brothers are "careless and unspiritual."³⁷ Each of these ideas breeds contempt within him for his community and chosen life. DeYoung summarizes Cassian's stage in the progression of ancient understandings of *acedia* by describing it as one in which the vice was interpreted as "a temptation to shirk one's calling to participate in a religious community and its spiritual life," rather than a "longing to escape solitary communion with God."³⁸

Cassian draws upon scripture to develop his account of *acedia*. The initial scriptural passage Cassian references is from Psalm 91:6. He finds in this verse the presence of the dreaded "noon-day demon," of which Evagrius warns in *The Praktikos*. The verse speaks of the deadly "pestilence that stalks in the darkness," then points to the demon of "destruction that wastes at noonday" (ESV).³⁹ This noon-day demon repeatedly

³⁷ Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 2.

³⁸ DeYoung, 175.

³⁹ All biblical references in the remainder of this thesis will use the English Standard Version.

and relentlessly comes to tempt the Psalmist and plague his soul particularly in the middle of the day.⁴⁰ In commenting on this verse, Cassian draws a stark contrast between the demons of darkness or evil of the night and a disease or pestilence that corrupts its victims during the height of the day. Noonday indicates the time of day in which the sun is at its peak, thus making it an unusual time for the presence of the warned against demon. Cassian exposes the destructive intentions of the “noon-day demon,” which inflicts destruction on the monk’s vocation. He claims:

For the adversary will the more frequently and harshly try a person who he knows, once the battle is joined, will immediately offer him his back and who he sees hopes for safety not in victory or in struggle but in flight, until he is gradually drawn out of his cell and begins to forget the reason for his profession, which is nothing other than the vision and contemplation of that divine purity which is more excellent than anything else and which can be acquired only by silence, by remaining constantly in one’s cell, and by meditation.⁴¹

From the opening of his warning, Cassian alerts of the demon’s persistence, particularly upon the person who has proven to habitually flee his commitment to his community in the face of affliction. By choosing not to remain where he is and conquer the demon of *acedia* through stillness and meditation, he abandons “the vision and contemplation of that divine purity” which is the heart of the work he commits his life to pursuing.⁴² He is clearly thus deceived in fleeing given this specific action of flight provides greater opportunity for the demon to prey on his weakness and leave him defeated by *acedia*.

In further examination of *acedia*’s corruption upon the spiritual life of the monk, Cassian illumines a lack of spiritual acuity that results from *acedia*’s reign over the soul

⁴⁰ Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 1.

⁴¹ Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 3.

⁴² Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 3.

of the monk. Cassian references Psalm 119:28: “My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!” The Psalmist’s soul, wearied with *acedia*, is in dire need of strengthening by the steady truths of scripture. This is the lesson Cassian takes from the accounts of Jesus’ own temptations in the desert. Cassian then acknowledges the negative effects of *acedia* upon the soul’s desire for the divine good as it obscures the truth and turns its captive from dwelling on anything of spiritual significance. He states, “the soul that has been wounded by the weapon of this disturbance is asleep with regard to any contemplation of virtue and any insight provided by the spiritual senses.”⁴³ Cassian’s language of *acedia* as a harmful weapon harkens to Evagrius’ “armor” imagery in which he claims it is essential for the soul to be protected by the “contemplation of virtue and any insight provided by the spiritual senses.”⁴⁴ Therefore, through meditation, stillness, ascetic works, and the truths of scripture is the soul of the monk guarded from the temptation of *acedia* within his monastic community.

Pauline Remedies for the Ailment of Acedia

In *The Institutes*, Cassian gives considerable attention to the remedies for *acedia* which are both advised and practiced by the Apostle Paul. Although the Greek word for *acedia* is not found explicitly in the New Testament, similar obstacles which hinder the soul’s communion with God and others are referenced. Cassian begins by admiring the Apostle’s tender care with the “deadly wound” or “diseased place” caused by what he considers the spirit of *acedia* manifested in idleness.⁴⁵ After commending the brothers in

⁴³ Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 4.

⁴⁴ Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 4.

⁴⁵ Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 7.

Macedonia for loving one another well, Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 4, progresses to advise them to “make an effort to be quiet,” to “pursue [their] own affairs,” to “work with [their] own hands,” to “walk honorably for the sake of outsiders,” and to “desire nothing of anyone.”⁴⁶ Paul warns that the dangers which lie here are the temptations to seek community solely for personal benefit and to cause disruptions within that community. Cassian identifies the interwoven threads connecting each of these instructions in claiming, “a person cannot be disquieted or concerned about other people’s affairs if he is satisfied with concentrating on the work of his own hands.”⁴⁷ Keeping to his own work, in a way, safeguards the monk from desiring an alternative life rather than his own, and further spares him from comparison to his fellow brother within the monastic community.

Furthermore, in 2 Thessalonians 3:6, the Apostle instructs the brothers to “withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition that they received from [him].” This is crucial particularly within Cassian’s communal practice of monasticism as “the disease of sloth, like some deadly contagion, may corrupt even healthy members with its creeping infectiousness.”⁴⁸ Both the Apostle and Cassian here acknowledge the negative impact one disorderly brother can have upon his surrounding community.⁴⁹ Since the brothers within a monastic community share almost every aspect of their lives with each other on a daily basis, the temptation of *acedia*, which can lead humans into idleness, can figuratively be infectious insofar as its corruption easily spreads from one member to the next. If a brother does succumb to

⁴⁶ Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 7.

⁴⁷ Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 7.

⁴⁸ Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 7.

⁴⁹ Cassian, *Institutes*, chapter 7.

idleness, which even can manifest itself as busybody work, his brothers must warn him and continue their own mindful work, treating him not as an enemy but admonishing him as a brother.

Aquinas on Acedia

Thomas Aquinas largely influenced interpretations of the vice of *acedia* in the thirteenth century. In one of his primary works, *Summa Theologica*, he incorporates elements from a Cassianic understanding of *acedia* and further identifies *acedia* to be the specific vice that counters the virtue of charity.⁵⁰ Aquinas claims, “it is proper to each virtue to rejoice in its own spiritual good, which consists in its own act, while it belongs specially to charity to have that spiritual joy whereby one rejoices in the Divine good.”⁵¹ Through Cassian’s interpretations of the vice, it is evident *acedia* opposes the Divine good rather than rejoicing in it. Aquinas builds off Cassian’s foundation by arguing “sloth,” or *acedia*, to be a “sorrow for spiritual good.”⁵² Aquinas defines charity as a virtue “whose object is our friendship with God (our participation in the divine nature).”⁵³ Throughout his work, he highlights *acedia*’s power to work against the spiritual life of the soul, primarily by cutting a person off from giving and receiving charity. To Aquinas, “*acedia* counts as a vice because it threatens (from within) the process of human perfection and its *telos*” which – as he establishes – is relationship with God.⁵⁴ Following

⁵⁰ DeYoung, 176.

⁵¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1911-1925), IIa-IIae, q. 35, art 2.

⁵² Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, IIa-IIae, q. 35, a.1

⁵³ DeYoung, 177.

⁵⁴ DeYoung, 179.

Aquinas's argument, *acedia* threatens the soul's path toward perfection and right relationship with God primarily by causing a corruptive "sorrow over an internal and divine good" within a person.⁵⁵ Therefore, *acedia* counters the practice of the virtue of charity, which is characterized by love of God. Charity is a foundational component of Sabbath rest since in receiving the charity of God, humans are invited to participate in a celebration of relationship with God as it is intended. Thus, *acedia* wholly inhibits the practice of Sabbath rest through causing a person to sorrow over the divine good instead of rejoicing in it.

This discussion surrounding the virtue of charity initiates a significant transition in interpretations of *acedia*, as the vice may apply to any human capable of receiving charity, rather than sole association with those who have devoted their lives to a committed religious order, such as the monks like Evagrius and Cassian. DeYoung argues this stage is a "key point in the history of *acedia*, a point at which previous strands of the Christian virtue tradition converge and after which the heuristic force of the traditional schema of virtues and vices is considerably dissipated."⁵⁶

Modern-day Sloth

The last of DeYoung's stages in the history of *acedia* is what she labels "humanizing and secularizing tendencies of thought," which were largely developed after the medieval period.⁵⁷ *Acedia* had been previously understood as a vice which plagued

⁵⁵ DeYoung, 179.

⁵⁶ DeYoung, 174.

⁵⁷ DeYoung, 177.

only those in a monastic context, such as Evagrius and Cassian, who devoted themselves to spiritual service and contemplative prayer. The vice's interpretation shifted again once Aquinas claimed it affected those who had received the gift of charity, indicating everyone to be eligible for temptation by *acedia*. However, understandings of *acedia*'s pertinence to the ordinary man remained lacking as it was not yet understood in relation to one's work, or vocation. With these considerations in mind, little of the ancient interpretations of the vice seems to remain relevant to those in a secular context seeking to understand *acedia* and its modern-day implications. Nonetheless, a contemporary understanding of *acedia*, more commonly known as sloth, has been constructed for application to the ordinary person and often is associated most with laziness or sluggishness, though there is far more that is pertinent to this interpretation.

Occurring in 16th century Europe, the Reformation transformed Western Christianity primarily by splitting the church into Protestantism and the Roman Catholic Church. With the Reformation came a significant broadening of *acedia*'s interpretation, specifically pertaining to changes around the conception of spiritual vocation such that vocation came to encompass all work and labor, rather than only those specific religious duties performed by monks.⁵⁸ Martin Luther largely influenced this shift in thought surrounding spiritual vocation by bridging the divide between secular work and monastic duties. Following these changes in the understanding of work, *acedia* was then applicable to the ordinary person whose work was vocation. With this alteration in the understanding of work as spiritual service, the manifestation of *acedia* now could include neglecting any form of work.

⁵⁸ DeYoung, 176.

Henry Fairlie provides a secular example of a modern-day understanding of sloth in his book, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today*. He defines sloth to be “a state of dejection that gives rise to torpor of mind and feeling and spirit; to a sluggishness, or as it has been put, a poisoning of the will; to despair, faintheartedness, and even desirelessness, a lack of real desire for anything, even for what is good.”⁵⁹ From a secular perspective, that which is considered “good” could regard accomplishment, success, wealth, fame, and even health, among many other worldly desires. In many cases, this “good” may even regard perceived moral good. Such lack of desire, even for what is considered good by man, mirrors earlier concepts of *acedia* influenced by Cassian in which a person would be sorrowful concerning the divine good. Though the undesired goods from these two perspectives are disparate, they are similar in their contradictory nature of a person losing the desire to seek that which is good in their life. This secular viewpoint helpfully develops the concept that *acedia* or sloth drives a person away from a desire to perform the work that achieves these goods in their life. Fairlie provides the following images of those overcome by sloth:

... if Sloth has taken root, their eyes are already downcast with their own emptiness of spirit, their mouth is already slack with lack of purpose either to speak or to embrace, and in their flesh are already the intimations of fold upon fold of the worldweariness that they seem to have known since childhood.⁶⁰

From Fairlie’s perspective, the one plagued by sloth not only appears lifeless in terms of bodily weariness, but suffers an “emptiness of spirit,” void of passion and purpose for

⁵⁹ Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 113.

⁶⁰ Fairlie, 120.

life.⁶¹ Once given over to “fold upon fold of worldweariness,”⁶² where is the renewal of hope to be found for the unbelieving person whose soul ages more by the day?

The answer for the believing person, as identified by Evagrius and Cassian, is found through hope in Christ and obedience to his loving commands. The following chapter will examine the Sabbath commandment, God’s command to keep the Sabbath day holy. The internal disease of *acedia* proves detrimental to the practice of Sabbath rest as it leads a person into despair, which is the antithesis of Sabbath-keeping, as it stands in absolute opposition to the virtue of hope. *Acedia* or sloth, according to Aquinas, is “a kind of sorrow” or despair and, moreover, is “opposed to joy,” which is a key component of Sabbath rest, as communion with God and neighbor should lead the soul into joy, even amidst sorrow and temptation.⁶³

Conclusion

The myriad afflictions of *acedia*, which received in-depth exploration through the interpretations of Evagrius, Cassian, Aquinas, and a contemporary lens, highlight the cruciality of perseverance and the spiritual disciplines as weapons that cast out the demon of *acedia* and its consequential restlessness, hatred, and discontentment. While countering *acedia* is not the sole purpose of Sabbath-keeping, it is nonetheless crucial to recognize *acedia*’s significant impact upon living out the commandments God has lovingly put into place.

⁶¹ Fairlie, 120.

⁶² Fairlie, 120.

⁶³ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 35, a. 1.

CHAPTER TWO:

Exegesis of Sabbath in Scripture

Introduction

Chapter two will examine relevant biblical texts on God's commandment to keep the Sabbath holy. It also will explore interpretations of the Sabbath command given in the Mosaic law, taking into account the context in which the command was given to God's people and its implications for how they should live their lives in covenant with YHWH. Additionally, consideration will be given to New Testament biblical passages on Sabbath, with special attention given to Jesus' healings on the Sabbath. Through this biblical lens, the chapter will highlight the Sabbath commandment as an affirmation of God's care for all creation, pointing toward God's future renewal and restoration of fallen creation. Solely regarding the Sabbath commandment as a binding rule constitutes a shallow understanding of Sabbath that neglects its widespread implications.

Sabbath in the Old Testament

Historical Emergence of Sabbath Laws

The post-exilic period for the Israelites was a time marked by transitions of numerous kinds, but particularly a shift in their communal identity as people in covenantal relationship with YHWH. Pre-exilic accounts written to guide the Israelites in covenant with God do not mention Sabbath laws; however, the concept of Sabbath-keeping emerges in post-exilic accounts. While in Babylonian exile, the Israelites had no

king to uphold justice among their people and no temple as their place of atonement.¹ Upon the Israelites' return from Babylonian exile, the Torah becomes central to their identity as God's people as their devotion transitions from the temple to adherence to Torah law after the temple is destroyed.² Much of the emphasis regarding this shift is seen in the intertestamental period. The creation account found in Genesis 1 emerges post-exile, followed by the core of the Torah, which is the Ten Commandments.³ Though the Ten Commandments, referred to as the Decalogue, come from an older tradition, they were particularly significant in the post-exilic period as Israel was reconstructing as a nation with the Torah as their foundation. In the post-exilic period, these accounts reemerge with additional emphasis as God's people sought to habituate the commandments in their lives. The Ten Commandments are divided into two primary sections: the Sabbath commandment and the first three commands concern Israel's relationship with God, and the remaining six commandments pertain to Israel's relationship and dealings with others in their community, constituting practices of neighborliness. The object of the first four commandments is love of God, and the object of the remaining six commandments is love of neighbor.

Introduction to the Sabbath Commandment

The Sabbath commandment is God's command for the Israelites to keep the Sabbath day holy. This command is mentioned more frequently in the Torah than any

¹ Andrew E. Arterbury, W. H. Jr. Bellinger, and Derek S. Dodson, *Engaging the Christian Scriptures: An Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014).

² Cyrus of Persia, in 538 BC, decreed that the conquered peoples could return to their land and remain a part of the larger empire.

³ During this period, Torah becomes central in defining Judaism.

other of the Ten Commandments.⁴ It is also the first commandment that is structured as a positive command, rather than a negative prohibition.⁵ God's command to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8) is the first of six Sabbath commands in Exodus (Ex. 23:12; 31:13, 14, 16; 35:2), which then is followed by an additional six commands in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (Deut. 5:12; Lev. 19:3, 19:30, 23:3, 23:32, 26:2).⁶ The Hebrew word introduced in this passage, 'šabbāt,' literally means 'to stop.'⁷ What is especially worth noting is God's early revelation of the Sabbath commandment and its significance before the Israelites even arrive at Sinai.⁸ This revelation is found in Exodus 16:22-30 when YHWH gives his people specific instructions as to how they should daily partake of his provision of manna:

On the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each. And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, 'This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.' So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, 'Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.' On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, 'How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.' So the people rested on the seventh day.

⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 337.

⁵ Alan Cole, *Exodus* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1973), 157.

⁶ Hamilton, 257.

⁷ Stephen Allen Geller, *Manna and Sabbath: A Literary-Theological Reading of Exodus 16* (Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education, 2005), 7.

⁸ Exodus 16:22-30

Before God articulates the Sabbath command in giving the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, the practice is instituted. YHWH goes before his people in preparing their minds, hearts, and bodies for the keeping of the Sabbath commandment. Moreover, Hamilton echoes, “here, even before the Sabbath is formally institutionalized in the Decalogue, the Lord already impresses on his followers the exceptional nature of the seventh day.”⁹

Having been liberated from slavery in Egypt and sent out into the wilderness of Sin immediately after, the Israelites were in desperate need to learn how to rest. Living as an enslaved people over the period of a couple centuries, both learning to set apart time solely for rest and regulating their own time would have presented challenges. However, before the Law is given to Moses, the Israelites are habituated to resting from labor: God provides bread for six days, supplying two days’ worth of bread on the sixth day. Only after the practice is established do they receive the command as his people to honor the Sabbath on the seventh day.¹⁰ Immediately prior to God’s provision for his people, the Israelites had been grumbling against their leaders, Moses and Aaron, and against YHWH, who was ready to provide for their needs. The people’s complaining was characterized by a desire to have “died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt” when they “sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full” (Exodus 16:3). Their fear of starvation and lack of provision in the wilderness drove them to accuse both their leaders and, most importantly, their God, of “[bringing them] out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Exodus 16:3). Regardless of having previously “witnessed a tremendous series of miracles in Egypt and at the Sea,” the Israelites are “quick to

⁹ Hamilton, 257.

¹⁰ Hamilton, 257.

complain and to doubt divine providence.”¹¹ Though they had been delivered from Pharaoh by YHWH, their trust waned quickly when faced by the reality of the desert. In spite of Israel’s complaints and grumblings, God abundantly provides specifically what each person needs for sustenance even as “some Israelites gather more, some less, but, miraculously, when it is weighed they find that everyone has just enough to eat for that day.”¹² As seen in the remainder of Exodus, God leads his people by giving them the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. The following sections will examine the Sabbath commandment in multiple Old Testament passages and determine its implications for God’s people.

The Sabbath Commandment in Exodus

When God reveals the Sabbath commandment to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 20:8-11, he references the significance of his own rest on the seventh day of creation:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The reason given for the Sabbath command in this passage in Exodus alludes to the creation story found in Genesis 1 during which God works for six days to complete the work of creation, then rests on the seventh day. The Israelites are to keep within their

¹¹ Geller, 6.

¹² Geller, 6.

minds the memory of God's rest on the seventh day and likewise honor the Sabbath day. Eskenazi, Harrington, and Shea, scholars of the Jewish and Christian traditions of Sabbath, interpret God's rest on the seventh day as indication of his dependence on humanity to continue his work; however, scripture challenges this claim. These scholars maintain the claim that "God's rest is made possible because there is a substitute in his image delegated to maintain the world order and ensure the fruitfulness of the earth."¹³ However, this view does not align with scripture. Isaiah 40:28 declares that, "the Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable." Unlike finite human beings, God does not tire nor is he dependent on rest to continue his work in the world. While God indeed invites humans, created in his image, to participate in the goodness and wholeness of his work and contribute to its fruitfulness, he is not dependent on humankind for its maintenance or flourishing. Although his creative activity took on a different form during his rest on the seventh day, he eternally remains active in creation, even through purposeful delight in the completeness of his work.

The Wholeness of Creation

The Pentateuch, especially in Exodus and Deuteronomy, develops the concept of a new sacred time centered around God's covenant with the Israelites.¹⁴ Since God's command to his people in Exodus 20 to keep the Sabbath day holy is grounded in his rest

¹³ Tamara C. Eskenazi, Daniel J. Harrington S.J., and William H. Shea, *The Sabbath in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 5.

¹⁴ Andrew G. Shead, "An Old Testament Theology of the Sabbath Year and Jubilee," *Reformed Theological Review* 61, no. 1 (2002): 19.

from work on the seventh day of creation, there are implications that “the sabbath day was an anticipation of life in fruitful harmony with God.”¹⁵ In God’s rest, he stepped back from the work of creation and acknowledged its goodness which flowed out of the harmony between himself and all living things. In his work of creation, God blesses and establishes a new time that would set a sacred framework for creation to flourish within. Living in God’s established framework of time, “what was created could now enjoy an ongoing existence of fruitfulness, dominion and relationship.”¹⁶ A biblical term for such flourishing is the term Shalom, which refers to the “functioning and flourishing of the entire created order according to God’s revealed purposes for it.”¹⁷ The theme of Shalom will resurface throughout the following sections.

The Sabbath command in Exodus calls humankind to participate in God’s purposeful enjoyment and appreciation for the goodness and wholeness of creation, as God models through the seventh day of creation. Scholars of conservative Judaism describe the Sabbath as the “seal of Creation,” as it was set apart as holy from the beginning of time.¹⁸ The commandment implicitly calls for humanity’s active participation in the wholeness and goodness of God’s creation. Genesis 1:31 reveals, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” Upon the completion of six days

¹⁵ Shead, 19.

¹⁶ Shead, 19.

¹⁷ Mark DeVine, *Shalom Yesterday, Today, and Forever: Embracing All Three Dimensions of Creation and Redemption* (Eugene, UNITED STATES: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019).

¹⁸ Seymour, Siegel, *The Sabbath and Conservative Judaism*, (New York: American Jewish Congress, 1982), 45.

performing the miraculous work of creation, God sanctifies the seventh day through celebration of the fruit of his work.

A Sign for All Generations

The latter portion of Exodus 31 declares Sabbath-keeping as a sign of a continual covenant between YHWH and his chosen people of Israel. Exodus 31:12-18 states:

And the LORD said to Moses, “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

These verses reveal the significance of Sabbath rest not only for participation in the completeness of creation, but also as covenant faithfulness. Exodus 31:12 establishes Sabbath to be a “sign between [the LORD] and [the Israelites] throughout [their] generations,” indicating Sabbath rest is both an outward and inward identifier of God’s covenantal relationship with the Israelites which sets them apart from the world. This sign is a mark that distinguishes God’s people from the rest of the world, evidencing a covenant established by YHWH himself. The sign of Sabbath here is largely tied to Israel’s identity as “observance of Sabbath was Israel’s way of remembering who they were,” dependent on their God for flourishing, blessing, and rest.¹⁹

¹⁹ Shead, 19.

Sabbath's Affirmation of Human Dignity

Exodus 20:10 details all who are invited to participate in the rest given through the Sabbath commandment. This verse reads, “On [the Sabbath] you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.” The Sabbath command in Exodus affirms the dignity of all humans through its invitation that not only extends to the people of God, but to all of creation, including servants and foreigners, calling them to participate in the enjoyment of God’s creative work. Here, Sabbath rest is an equalizer among men of status, the wealthy, the poor, servants, foreigners, and even animals. The explicit inclusion of all kinds of people as well as animals provides a glimpse into God’s affirmation of the worth of the beings he has created. The context of the command implies that the gift of receiving Sabbath rest is not to be withheld from anyone or any creature. Further, the account in Exodus anticipates all people living in harmony with YHWH and participating in his good creation by the means of both stewardship over and enjoyment of it.

Similarly, in the Deuteronomic Sabbath commandment, the dignity of all people, including slaves, is highlighted as YHWH calls his people to remember their enslavement under Pharaoh in Egypt. Deuteronomy first affirms the extension of the commandment to those aforementioned and provides the reasoning for observing the command.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 states:

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall

remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

An important piece of the command that mirrors the framework of Exodus 20 is the inclusion of all who should be recipients of Sabbath rest, from masters to servants, children to animals, and as well as sojourners residing with the Israelites; none here should be excluded from God's liberating command. In Deuteronomy, however, a rationale is given for observance of the Sabbath. Observance for all "lies in the slave's need for rest and the memory of Israel's slavery in Egypt and subsequent salvation."²⁰

Victor Hamilton notes, "In the Ten Commandments in Deut 5, the Sabbath is explained also in terms of the exodus, but as a simple humanitarian response to slavery: no work may be done, even one's slaves and beasts must rest."²¹ The Deuteronomic Sabbath command calls the Israelites to "observe" and "remember" on the sacred Sabbath day lest they forget "the mighty hand" of God that rescued them from the oppression of slavery, and further, lest they fail to grant rest to other people who are enslaved, just as they once were. As the Israelites treat their servants, they are to remember their own enslavement and extend rest to those under their authority.

Understanding the Exodus and Deuteronomic Accounts Together

The Sabbath command found in Deuteronomy does not provide a replacement for the command's original stated purpose in the Exodus account, but rather serves as an extension to the Sabbath command at Sinai.²² Hamilton argues that "both [commands in

²⁰ Tsevat, 448.

²¹ Geller, 10.

²² Hamilton, 339.

Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5] call the faithful to rest on the seventh day because of some beautiful work of God. That beautiful work of God is bringing something into existence that did not exist before, his cosmos and his covenant chosen.”²³ Hamilton’s claim highlights the sovereign work of God in both Sabbath commands. The work of God, as seen in his work of creation, holds the power to bring light and life out of darkness and nothingness. Beyond this, God’s work is powerful enough to liberate his people and create an everlasting covenant with them which he will uphold even in their unfaithfulness. Both biblical passages point to God’s work, then command the Israelites to rest in keeping the Sabbath day holy. This pattern first acknowledges God’s sovereignty over all things, then from that understanding, calls the chosen people of God to rest in remembrance of all the work he has accomplished.

Sabbath for All of Creation

The Old Testament develops a distinctive theology surrounding Sabbath rest which encompasses both the people and the land. Israel’s identity as a redeemed people was foundational to their daily living in the land into which God brought them. The land promised to them and now given, was the “place in which [the covenant] relationship was to find expression,” which is specifically described as “the rest which YHWH is giving you” (Deuteronomy 12:9).²⁴ The structure of the Sabbath commands and ensuing instructions provided a sturdy framework for shaping the people of God in humility, dependence, and covenantal love. The Old Testament passages in Exodus, Leviticus, and

²³ Hamilton, 339.

²⁴ Shead, 19.

Deuteronomy regarding Sabbath offer detailed instructions concerning how the Israelites ought to dwell obediently in the land given to them, remembering, “the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1). Included in these instructions are the commands not only for keeping Sabbath, but also for a Sabbath year and a year of jubilee. The following sections will provide a contextual understanding of the Sabbath year and jubilee as established in the Pentateuch as a development of the law.

Fallow Year for the Land

Exodus 23 outlines YHWH’s requirements for the Israelites during the fallow year which was to be honored every seventh year, typically commenced on the first day of the seventh month, following six years of reaping and sowing. Exodus 23:10-11 states:

For six years you shall sow your land and gather its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.

The term fallow means “to let fall” or “to leave untilled,” and as the passage above indicates, God instructed that the land lie fallow for an entire year.²⁵ The purpose given here for the Israelites’ abstinence from reaping or tilling the field is that “the poor of your people may eat” and that “what they leave the beasts of the field may eat” (v. 11). In this Exodus account, those in poverty and the animals are the intended recipients of the spontaneous growth and production of the land throughout the year. One scholar of the Sabbatical year reasons that “according to the creation narrative in Gen 1:1-24a, the land created by God could produce plants without human intervention, and these plants were

²⁵ Shead, 20.

used for the food of humans and animals that were created subsequently to the land.”²⁶

Similarly, during the Sabbath year, the Israelites were instructed to not tend to or prune the crops and vines of the field while trusting YHWH’s provision promised to them in the sixth year. The harvest of the field was to be left accessible for all people and creatures in need.

Leviticus 25:6 broadens the realm of beneficiaries to include “male and female slaves, your hired worker, and the sojourner who lives with you.” These instructions intentionally bless those who are greatly dependent on another’s provision. God explicitly mentions the grain of the field, the vineyard, and olive orchard to signify the fullness of the blessing as ‘grain, new wine, and oil,’ which are the elements of the “Deuteronomic triad of blessing.”²⁷ God’s blessing here is to be extended to all living in his land.

Sabbath for the Land and Year of Jubilee

Another significant aspect of God’s command to let the land lie fallow is the reality of a rest for both the land and its workers. By this it is evident that the Sabbath year “involves the cessation of the main work of Israelite society – agriculture – for 12 months,” as both the land and those attending it are called to participate in a routine season of rest.²⁸ Similarly, in Leviticus 25:3-7, instructions regarding the Sabbath year are repeated with some additions:

For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD. You shall not sow your field or

²⁶ Sun-Jong Kim, “The Group Identity of the Human Beneficiaries in the Sabbatical Year (Lev 25:6),” *Vetus Testamentum* 61, no. 1 (2011): 75.

²⁷ Shead, 20.

²⁸ Shead, 20.

prune your vineyard. You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest, or gather the grapes of your undressed vine. It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you, and for your cattle and for the wild animals that are in your land: all its yield shall be for food.

Here, God instructs that the land have “a year of solemn rest,” and explicitly labels it a “Sabbath,” also proclaiming a Sabbath rest for workers, slaves, foreigners, and the animals. Therefore, it can be implied that the “land, like the people, presses forward to a goal of untroubled fruitfulness and blessing, and that its normal existence under the toil of the plough is not its ultimate destiny nor the purpose of its existence.”²⁹ Sabbath envisions, and presses toward a reality of harmony and fruitfulness among all creation as God intended it. In this Levitical passage, the rest of the land is central to the command of Sabbath year. In the command to observe the Sabbath year, God “invites His people to restore the original creation destroyed by human greed.”³⁰ Sabbath, then, requires the relinquishing of greedy ambitions, ceaseless work, and the exploitation of creation, whether it pertains to humans, animals, or the land God has created.

In the Jewish tradition of keeping the Sabbath day holy, “every seventh day the Israelite renounces his autonomy [over his time] and affirms God’s dominion over him.”³¹ On Sabbath:

Just as in the seventh year of release, man desists from utilizing the land for his own business and benefit, so on the Sabbath day he desists from using that day for his own affairs. And just as the intervals in regard to the release year and the jubilee years are determined by the number seven, so too is the number seven determinative for that recurring day when man refrains from his own pursuits and

²⁹ Shead, 20.

³⁰ Kim, 75-76.

³¹ Tsevat, 455.

sets it aside for God. In regular succession he breaks the natural flow of time, proclaiming that the break is made for the sake of the Lord.³²

The Sabbath rhythm not only reinstates fruitfulness and blessing for God's people, but further, for all living things and the land itself. This intended rhythm of creation declares the purpose of life to not be found in endless toil but in the blessings of God's provision and sustaining care which will be realized in full when God creates a new Heaven and Earth.

Another prominent rhythm given in the Pentateuch for the flourishing of God's people and all creation is found in Leviticus 25:8-12, which provides detailed instructions for the year of jubilee. In this chapter, God commands the Israelites, saying:

You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field.

As the passage reveals, God's instructions regarding jubilee called for the proclamation of a release throughout the land to all inhabitants during the forty-ninth year and consecration of the fiftieth year as the year of jubilee. The jubilee was characterized by each person returning to his family property and to the clan to which he belonged. Therefore, as its name indicates, the year of jubilee is a year marked by joy since "joy cannot be everlasting unless it flows from sabbatical harmony of relationships."³³ In addition to each person returning to his property and clan, in the following part of the

³² Tsevat, 453-454.

³³ Shead, 26.

passage the Israelites are instructed to not “wrong one another” but instead “fear [their] God” by fairly making sales to neighbors and paying them accordingly when purchasing crops (v. 17). Though the Israelites are instructed to “neither sow nor reap” the produce of the field, they are permitted to “eat the produce of the field” and share among others in the jubilee of the land, as a celebration of YHWH’s provision (v. 11-12). These instructions call the Israelites to act justly toward others and honor God’s Sabbatical design intended to reset the ownership of the land and restore relationships. God’s commands regarding the year of jubilee are one of many of the means used to ensure that the Israelites would dwell in the land securely and invite others to do likewise.

Jesus’ Teachings on the Sabbath

Old Testament excerpts concerning the Sabbath commandment and adherence to it lay a strong foundation for the careful examination of Jesus’ ministry of compassion and healing in the New Testament Gospels. Throughout the Gospels, many people perceive Jesus’s actions to be in opposition to the law, yet he is clear he is ready to fulfill the law. The following sections will examine the life of Jesus Christ as it pertains to a fuller understanding of the purpose of Sabbath rest and identify various Jewish interpretations of the law, particularly in first century Judaism. Further, they will provide an analysis of Jesus’ healings on the Sabbath and debates concerning Sabbath’s meaning found primarily in the Synoptic Gospels. The biblical accounts that will follow reveal the ways Jesus challenges the religiosity of Sabbath through his claims that he is the fulfillment of the law and that the Sabbath is a day to do good to others through acts of mercy and restoration. Further, the New Testament accounts will point to Jesus’ work of restoring Sabbath practices to their original intent.

Jesus' Challenges to the Religiosity of Sabbath

Much of the conflict surrounding Jesus' healings on the Sabbath arises from disagreement upon how the Jews should honor the Sabbath and the nature of its prohibition of work. Healing, through the work of miracles, presented a unique form of work to be evaluated against the rules and regulations surrounding Sabbath-keeping. In Jesus' early ministry, he performs healings on the Sabbath that are not publicly criticized; however, later in his ministry, his miraculous healings performed in mercy receive significant opposition, to the point of extreme hatred. Although Jesus' healings became progressively more public as time went on, there still seems to be a distinct shift in perceptions of his work as "it appears... that Jesus' Sabbath practices were not reviled by anyone at first, until opposition began to mount and Jesus himself was reviled."³⁴ Jesus did not appear to contravene the regulations of the Halakah, a collection of Jewish religious laws compiled from the written and oral Torah. The Halakah was put in place to guard the Torah and permitted necessary duties and acts of mercy on the Sabbath.³⁵ Considering the Halakhic regulations, Jesus actions do not appear to conflict; however, he is eventually despised by the Pharisees for his healings performed on the Sabbath.

One instance of conflict over Jesus' healings on the Sabbath is documented in Matthew 12. In the verses before, Jesus had just claimed "the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath," establishing his authority over the Sabbath day and its significance and practice

³⁴ D.A. Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 59.

³⁵ Carson, 59.

in daily life (Matt. 12:8). Following Jesus' monumental statement regarding the Sabbath, Matthew continues:

He went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?' – so that they might accuse him. He said to them, 'Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.' Then he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him (Matt. 12:9-14).

In this instance, Jesus does not directly refer to specific Sabbath regulations, but rather directs the eyes of his accusers to a key component of Sabbath observance: seeking the good of others as service to God.³⁶ Ringe concludes from Jesus' response that, "at issue is not whether to keep specific Sabbath rules, but how to make a day holy, which is what those rules were meant to assure."³⁷ As revealed in relevant passages from Exodus and Deuteronomy, to keep the Sabbath holy calls for active participation in ensuring that all creation can dwell in restful harmony with its Creator. While the Pharisees were caught in the specifications for their regulations, Jesus' remarks on the nature of Sabbath deconstruct the religious paradigms of Sabbath-keeping established by the Pharisees in order to reconstruct its meaning. In his culturally radical claims regarding the Sabbath, Jesus challenges ritualistic adherence to the law that neglects the good of one's neighbor, calling attention to justice implications for Sabbath, specifically the dignity and renewal of all persons made in the image of God. It is evident Jesus intends to shift the eyes of the religious elite from their legalistic living to instead desire mercy, goodness, and

³⁶ Sharon H. Ringe, "Holy, as the Lord Your God Commanded You: Sabbath in the New Testament," *Interpretation (Richmond)* 59, no. 1 (2005): 19.

³⁷ Ringe, 19.

restoration. In further analysis, Ringe argues, “The answer of the pericope is that one keeps the Sabbath by not failing to do good, an omission that is equated with doing evil, something clearly inappropriate on the Sabbath.”³⁸ This answer flips the understanding of the Pharisees on its head. Performing of healings on the Sabbath is not evil, though perceived as such by the religious leaders. Rather, Jesus declares it is evil if the Pharisees neglect to do good on the Sabbath, especially toward another human being. Jesus’ rebuking of the Pharisees’ interpretation of the Sabbath law creates space for his ministry to reinstate the intended purpose behind the Sabbath commandment and point toward himself as the fulfillment of the law.

Jesus’ Interpretations of Sabbath

Ringe further notes that there were “legitimate exceptions to the prohibition when it is necessary to save the life of even an animal.”³⁹ The exception in this case should be permitted all the more in the case of saving a human being, who has been created in the likeness of God. Matthew 12:11-12 reveals Jesus’ passionate response to the Pharisees’ neglect of their neighbors: “Of how much more value is a man than a sheep!” However, in these instances in which Jesus heals on the Sabbath, there is no imminent threat of death that necessitates instant miraculous healing. In light of this, Ringe argues that “the Gospel writers are thus really arguing that healing or wholeness of life carries the same urgency as the literal preservation of life.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Ringe, 19.

³⁹ Ringe, 20.

⁴⁰ Ringe, 20.

In another instance of healing recounted in John 5:16-18, Jesus is charged for performing healings on the Sabbath, and therefore breaking Sabbath. The answer Jesus gives toward his persecutors on this account was, ““My Father is working until now, and I am working,”” which further angers them as he calls God his own Father, “making himself equal with God.” Jesus’ response indicates his Father works even through the Sabbath day and therefore he is working in unison with him. Jesus appears to be pointing to the broken Shalom, or rest and wholeness, of creation and his ministry of restoring it, thereby reestablishing Sabbath rest. His work among various peoples in need of healing provides good news to the poor and “appears to have been central to his identity, and specifically his interpretation of what it means to keep the Sabbath holy.”⁴¹ Jesus’ healings reflect his desire for justice and mercy, inviting all creation to exist in the harmony of Shalom, or full rest and wholeness in God. In Jesus’ eyes, healings even beyond those salvific in nature were essential in reaching the poor and lost while simultaneously spreading truth regarding how God intends the Sabbath to be kept holy.

Conclusion

The biblical accounts of the Sabbath and its implications point to God’s plan to restore all of creation back into fruitful harmony with himself. The Sabbath commandment, found in Old Testament accounts, was given by YHWH to the Israelites as a sign of their covenant with him that would set them apart and last throughout their generations. However, the Sabbath’s impact extends far beyond solely the people of God as all people, and more broadly all of creation, are invited to partake in the celebration of the goodness of God’s creation and blessings. Jesus’ life on earth challenged the

⁴¹ Ringe, 21.

religiosity of the Sabbath command in the ways he contested its meaning if separated from compassion and care for others. The biblical accounts of Sabbath examined in this chapter acknowledge the goodness of God's creation and further anticipate its coming renewal and completeness when God restores it to what he intends it to be.

CHAPTER THREE:

Sabbath's Implications for Justice and Social Issues

Introduction

With a foundation from which to understand the establishment of the Sabbath command in the Old Testament, it is logical to transition to examining the widespread implications for the Sabbath command, and particularly its application in the present day. Before delving into this portion of the thesis, it is crucial to keep in mind how the previous chapter established Sabbath rest as a sign that set YHWH's people apart through communal practices of rest and neighborliness, an equalizer of all people which affirms human dignity, and a means of ensuring rest for all creation as it all belongs to God. This chapter will provide a social perspective on biblical Sabbath rest which details its implications for contemporary practice. The implications discussed in this portion will include Sabbath rest's relevance to justice issues, neighborliness, worship, human dignity and worth, compassion, and humility. Additionally, it will continue to build upon the notion that *acedia* opposes Sabbath rest by enslaving humans to extreme restlessness and weariness, as seen in Pharaoh's oppression of the Israelites. Furthermore, the chapter will demonstrate the ways in which Sabbath-keeping affirms the dignity and value in all people as created beings made in the image of God, while rejecting the notion that human value is measured by work and accomplishment. In its totality, the chapter will offer a concrete example of how a holistic understanding of Sabbath rest transforms the way in which to love God and neighbor more fully.

The Slavery of Acedia

Previously, in the chapter on *acedia*, the vice was presented as posing a significant threat to biblical Sabbath-keeping as it is characterized by spiritual weariness and restlessness. *Acedia*, by its self-seeking and self-gratifying nature, offers the temptation to escape one's commitments to the spiritual life and one's community. Because of this persistent temptation, *acedia* consequentially surfaces in the extreme neglect of one's neighbors and fails to seek their good. In essence, *acedia* presents a form of spiritual slavery to which many souls are bound in the present day. The aim of the following arguments surrounding *acedia's* opposition to Sabbath rest is primarily to emphasize the urgency and need for a figurative modern-day exodus from the enslavement of *acedia*. Without such an exodus, the hope of biblical Sabbath rest will remain threatened. As previously concluded in the chapter on *acedia*, an exodus from this vice requires the spiritual disciplines of persevering prayer and reliance upon the truths of scripture amidst temptation.

The Vices of Pharaoh's Empire

The vices practiced in the present day under the slavery of *acedia* largely mirror the vices of Pharaoh's empire in Egypt and stand in direct opposition to Sabbath justice.

In Exodus 1:9-14, the new king of Egypt, Pharaoh, says to his people:

'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.' Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves

and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

From the account of Pharaoh's words in this biblical passage, it is evident Pharaoh desired to oppress the Israelites to accomplish his own vicious purposes, as well as his fears of their domination over him and his people. Pharaoh's actions demonstrate an abuse of his power and authority over the Israelites, particularly in his exploitation of them for his own benefit as they "built for [him] store cities" and "work[ed] as slaves" under his command (vv. 11, 13). It is evident Pharaoh is driven by the vices of *acedia* and *avarice*. There exists a particular restlessness in his heart associated with *acedia* as well as a consuming desire for the acquisition of more goods, characteristic of the vice of *avarice*. Consequentially, these vices led Pharaoh to worship acquisitiveness, consumption, and productivity at the expense of other vulnerable human beings, presenting a significant biblical justice issue. Arguably, Pharaoh's afflicting of the Israelites reveals an important warning of the harm that can be done out of a heart ruled by *acedia*. It seems that the restlessness sown in Pharaoh's heart by *acedia* led him to *avarice* in his self-seeking hunger for more. Further, his willful oppression of the Israelites constructs a system that devalues the human and worships consumption and greed for self-benefit.

Liberation by Sabbath Rest

Sabbath rest radically changes the narrative of slavery to *acedia* by establishing within God's people a new identity rooted in both receiving rest and extending it to others. YHWH, who intervenes on Israel's behalf, is "attentive rather to the cries of those 'left behind' and comes to open futures by exit (exodus) from systems of restlessness into

the restfulness of neighborliness.”¹ For generations, the Israelites had been trapped in Pharaoh’s oppressive empire built upon the pillars of restless productivity and greedy consumption. In Exodus 3:7-10, God informs Moses of his plan of deliverance for the people of Israel, to be accomplished by God’s working through Moses. Not only does YHWH “[hear] their [cries],” but he “knows their sufferings” and intervenes by liberating them from their slavery and bringing them into the land promised to their forefathers (v. 7). Israel’s exodus from Egypt “birthed an identity awareness as a people that was rooted in God’s gracious intervention on Israel’s behalf.”² Israel’s deliverance from slavery by the work of YHWH brought about a new identity for the Israelites which called them to learn to rest through “counter[ing] anxious productivity with committed neighborliness.”³ Instead of continuing to live according to Pharaoh’s structure of ceaseless productivity and work, YHWH called the Israelites to counter that oppressive manner of living and instead rest through surrendering their time to God and using it to serve others, thereby committing themselves to neighborliness. Having been oppressed throughout generations, the Israelites are given the Sabbath commandment which both commands them to rest as a community and extend this rest to others as a counter to the cultural values of acquisition and consumption at the expense of others. Though they were not extended rest under Pharaoh, they could now receive YHWH’s perfect rest and enable others to share in it. In this way, “Sabbath-keeping is a way of making a statement of peculiar identity amid a larger public identity, of maintaining and enacting a counteridentity that

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 17.

² Kent Blevins, “Observing Sabbath,” *Review and Expositor* 113, 4 (2016): 480.

³ Brueggemann, 28.

refuses ‘mainstream’ identity, which itself entails anti-human practice and the worship of anti-human gods.”⁴ This alternative identity, founded in YHWH’s liberating Sabbath rest, serves as an enduring sign of Israel’s covenant with the God who exchanges ceaseless toil for abundant blessing.⁵

Social Implications for the Sabbath

When considering the social implications for biblical Sabbath-keeping, it is essential to acknowledge the differences of cultures, societal structures, and concepts of time across various ages and cultural contexts. For example, in the ancient world, weekends did not exist.⁶ Further, the most demanding and dangerous forms of labor were performed by those of lowest status and power, a system that continues to exist in the present day. Such people did not possess the privilege of resting from their labor whenever they desired, but instead were subject to another’s authority when it came to permitted times of rest. Sabbath counters these societal norms. Rather than discriminating among people, Sabbath secures rest for the marginalized and lowly in society. The following sections will show the ways Sabbath rest calls its partakers to defend the weak and vulnerable through compassionate acts of mercy and commit to aligning with God’s present and future works of justice in the world.

⁴ Brueggemann, 20-21.

⁵ Richard H. Lowery, “Sabbath, a ‘Little Jubilee,’” *Christian Reflection* (Sabbath): 12-13.

⁶ Blevins, 482.

Land as Inheritance

The biblical Sabbath year establishes an economic and social structure that provides for the Israelites and intentionally protects the alien residents and poor among them. Deuteronomy 15 outlines detailed guidelines for the observance of Sabbath year and how it safeguards against social and economic disaster. When this system was first established, every Israelite family had its own piece of land to dwell in that would provide them with economic security and prosperity.⁷ In time, natural disaster would pass through, the crops of the land fail, or an ill-intentioned authority intervene and send the landowners into financial instability.⁸ Consequentially, the Israelites were highly susceptible to separation of the family, poverty, loss of land, and often times, sickness and malnutrition which could leave them working as day-laborers or even as slaves.⁹ The Deuteronomic Code provides a proactive remedy for these financial and social concerns through the remission of debt every seventh year and liberation of slaves in order to “[halt] the ‘normal’ process of socioeconomic marginalization and impoverishment.”¹⁰ Deuteronomy 15:4 gives the reason for this structuring, declaring, “there will be no poor among you.” The condition of this statement is that if the Israelites obey YHWH’s commandments set in place, then they may prosper in covenant with him and in the land. There will not be a lack of God’s provision among them.

⁷ Ross and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 14.

⁸ Kinsler, 14.

⁹ Kinsler, 14.

¹⁰ Kinsler, 14.

Sabbath Neighborliness

Sabbath restores the broken and discriminatory systems of ceaseless, and often oppressive, work through its social, economic, and spiritual realities centered around the justice of God and practices of neighborliness. Closely mirroring the oppressive rule of Pharaoh over the Israelites, societal dehumanizing persists in the present day. The way in which a society is structured has wide-reaching negative impacts, particularly among the most vulnerable within that society. The impact of broken systems created by broken people create designated tiers that discriminate between people, often dehumanizing them as these systems either trap them in ceaseless work in order that others may greedily consume or constrain them to poverty where provision is lacking. The Sabbath challenges these cultural structures of superiority and acquisitiveness by establishing an “alternative economic-social-spiritual order.”¹¹ This order, a central marker of the coming kingdom of God in the world, illumines Sabbath to implicate far more than a routine pause of rest.

Brueggemann claims:

[Sabbath] is an occasion for reimagining all of social life away from coercion and competition to compassionate solidarity. Such solidarity is imaginable and capable of performance only when the drivenness of acquisitiveness is broken. Sabbath is not simply the pause that refreshes. It is the pause that transforms. Whereas Israelites are always tempted to acquisitiveness, Sabbath is an invitation to receptivity, an acknowledgement that what is needed is given and need not be seized.¹²

The manifold facets of biblical Sabbath rest, as outlined previously in chapter two, call humans into both a way of living and a way of being that is shaped by what

¹¹ Kinsler, 9.

¹² Brueggemann, 45.

Brueggemann considers “compassionate solidarity.”¹³ The unified, uniquely designed framework of Sabbath, including Sabbath year, the year of jubilee, and Jesus’ acts of healing performed on the Sabbath, testifies to God’s compassionate solidarity with all people, yet particularly his concern for the vulnerable and weak who are trapped by economic and societal systems of acquisitiveness. A right perspective of YHWH’s commands surrounding Sabbath-keeping and Sabbath-living radically alters how earthly possessions are perceived and stewarded. Such an understanding, united with obedience, was the key to the Israelites’ flourishing in the land YHWH gave to them as inheritance. On this matter, Brueggemann reasons, “If the land is possession, then the proper way of life is to acquire more;” however, “if the land is inheritance, then the proper way of life is to enhance the neighborhood and the extended family so that all members may enjoy the good produce of the land.”¹⁴ A shift in perspective regarding God’s manifold provisions through Sabbath proves a determining factor between expressing compassionate neighborliness and remaining enslaved to the gods of acquisitiveness and greediness. To practice neighborliness is to view and act toward others as God does, instead of how fallen humanity does. To those bound by sin, other humans are competitors to be defeated, but to those liberated by God’s grace, other humans can now be viewed as neighbors and welcome recipients of compassion and care. In this way, Sabbath rest, and its framework for life, transforms the way in which to view others and extend the same compassion one has received from God.

¹³ Brueggemann, 45.

¹⁴ Brueggemann, 38.

Communal Work and Rest

Communal Responsibility in Sabbath-keeping

The biblical call to Sabbath rest encompasses a specific responsibility in ensuring the most vulnerable and marginalized in society receive the gift of rest, which YHWH desires for all. Whereas *acedia* causes humans to flee the commitment of community, Sabbath-keeping calls for a deep commitment to community that is marked by accountability, humility, and a shared identity, which is only made possible through viewing others as one's equals. Blevins highlights the communal nature of Sabbath rest in his claim:

The [Sabbath command] is revolutionary because of what it requires the addressee to do in relation to others – others who are socially subordinate. The male head of the household is to ensure that no one works – not children, not slaves, not animals, not resident aliens. The command is not intended to have an individualistic application, but rather to be applied to the community as a whole.¹⁵

The Sabbath command in Exodus is addressed to the male head-of-household; however, the application is not merely that he alone should rest, but that all under his leadership and authority should also rest as he does.¹⁶ It is crucial to note that the “independent Israelite, however pressing his need for work, is free to interrupt his labors, at least for a little while, whenever he is exhausted or thinks he can afford it.”¹⁷ Those working under the Israelite head of the household, specifically the laborers, animals, and children are

¹⁵ Blevins, 481.

¹⁶ Blevins, 482.

¹⁷ Tsevat, 450.

those most in need of a law that secures and protects for them consistent times of rest.¹⁸

The Sabbath laws actively guard those who are dependent on another, bringing the wellbeing of the vulnerable to the center of a community's care for its neighbors.

Human Dignity and Freedom

Though humans may discriminate in who may receive the blessings of the Sabbath command, the Sabbath commands do not discriminate based on economic, financial, or social status or standing, but rather defend and protect the vulnerable and lowly. The Old Testament notes repeatedly God's compassion for those overlooked in society, specifically the vulnerable and exploited.¹⁹ The New Testament further reveals God's concern and care for those marginalized in society through Jesus' earthly ministry. Those who were particularly vulnerable in biblical times, namely the orphans, widows, and foreigners, are "outside of the economic structure of the household," and thus, protective measures are established to ensure they do not need remain in the lowest class of people for the rest of their lives.²⁰ As the resident alien is included in this invitation to Sabbath, foreigners are to be welcomed into joining this community grounded in the rhythms of Sabbatical living. Though "the foreigners who join the community are the proselytes who keep the Sabbath," Gosse argues from an eschatological viewpoint that, "the possibility remains for 'all humanity' to participate in the cult of the Lord" and come "to worship before [him]."²¹ Isaiah 66:22-23 states:

¹⁸ Tsevat, 450.

¹⁹ Blevins, 481.

²⁰ Blevins, 485.

²¹ Gosse, 369.

For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the Lord.

This vision anticipates the “commonwealth of God’s desire, a world of jubilee justice, where all people live and work with dignity and freedom, caring for one another, enjoying life together, and delighting in contented rest.”²²

Anticipating the Rest and Justice of Heaven

The Sabbath command anticipates the rest, or Shalom, of Heaven of which God’s people have only perceived a glimpse. Revelation 14:13 speaks of God’s people “rest[ing] from their labors.” Similarly, Hebrews 4:9-10 states, “So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.” This “Sabbath-rest for the people of God” is both a possessive and prospective reality for the one who has received in faith God’s gift of salvation, meaning it will not reach its full realization until Heaven.²³ God’s people presently possess access into God’s rest made possible through his completion of the work of salvation on their behalf. Yet, prospectively, his people still await the day in which they can fully realize the extent of his rest through eternally existing within the perfect Shalom of God’s just kingdom. However, while still residing on earth, humans receive the Sabbath call to “claim the power and accept the responsibility to make the world better” to more closely resemble the peace and justice of Heaven as God works

²² Lowery, 15.

²³ Hamilton, 339.

through his people. Practical implications of living out this calling are to assess habits of living in community with others and “make decisions that promote dignity, freedom, well-being, and life-giving power” for all people.²⁴ By committing to the freedom and dignity of others through the invitation to Sabbath rest, God’s people joyfully anticipate the fullness of Sabbath rest that awaits in Heaven.

Receiving Work as Gift

Just as Sabbath rest calls humanity to participate in God’s justice and restoration in the world, so too does God’s intention for work aim for this end. Culturally, work is all too often viewed as a burden or something that restrains a person from living the life he truly desires. However, examining work through a biblical lens reveals it to be a gift that was given to Adam in the Garden of Eden, and though all humanity now lives under the curse of the fall, there remain widespread implications regarding God’s vision of work in relation to rest.

Receiving work as gift from God greatly transforms the way humankind performs work; however, *acedia* tempts humans to work for selfish gain. Andrew Borrer highlights the significance of viewing work in light of God’s work of creation. He states, “Accepting the givenness of creation liberates work to be pursued from a place of freedom – that is, working *from* rather than *for* an identity.”²⁵ Borrer’s claim emphasizes the end goal, or aim, of work. Either humans can strive in their work solely to earn a certain identity, as those enslaved to *acedia* do, or they can work from an identity,

²⁴ Lowery, 16.

²⁵ Andrew Borrer, “Playful Seriousness: The Quandary of Exercise in a Technological Age,” *Christian Scholars Review*, L, no. 4 (2021), 395.

meaning the security of their identity frees them to work for something or someone greater than themselves. As seen in the analysis of *acedia*, those enslaved to the vice may outwardly perform good works but inwardly exhibit spiritual emptiness. Consequentially, those under the rule of *acedia* lack the desire to do good work for the sake of serving God first and neighbor second. Instead, they work for an identity that is outwardly appealing, though deceptive, as their inward being is void of spiritual fruit. Such fruit can only grow in the conditions of a soul well nourished by an identity anchored in God's redemptive work, rather than one's own accomplishment. Receiving work as gift from God frees humans to both work and rest rhythmically as created beings who are secured in the identity of a sovereign Creator.

Good work is rooted in a love of God and neighbor, mirroring the ethical and reconciliatory structuring of Sabbath. Borrer quotes a summary of Karl Barth's understanding of God's work in relation to man's work:

Good work is communally attuned, reflective, and playful because it does not conceive itself as enacting self-salvation. Instead, it finds its meaning solely in following and witnessing to the work of God... because it is founded on God's love for humanity and creation, [it] is attentive to the richness of that creation and to the speaking God who draws us into his reconciling service to humanity.²⁶

Borrer here defines good work as a testament to God's redemptive work in the world, suggesting a certain humility is fundamental to a right understanding of work. In contrast to self-seeking work that serves the gods of acquisitiveness, consumption, and productivity, work that aligns with the humanitarian purposes of Sabbath rest is work that

²⁶ Andrew Borrer, "Playful Seriousness: The Quandary of Exercise in a Technological Age," *Christian Scholars Review*, L, no. 4 (2021), 395.

participates in God's "love for humanity and creation" and his "reconciling service to humanity."²⁷

Receiving Rest as Gift

Sabbath rest is a gift to be received in faith and lived out in celebration of God's work in creation and humanity. In Mark 2:27, Jesus responds to the Pharisees' questioning of the disciples' actions on the Sabbath by claiming, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." This response aims to recenter those who keep Sabbath on the nature of the gift of rest given to them. If the Sabbath, given by YHWH, is not recognized as gift, the focus then shifts to legalistically keeping the command, even at the cost of another's good. In reference to Exodus 31:17, Cole interprets the gift of Sabbath rest:

The reason given for sabbath here is the same as that in Exodus 20:11, the 'rest' of God. This is the key to Christian understanding of the principle involved. By faith the believer has ceased from his 'work' (in the sense of trying to earn his own salvation) and entered into that spiritual rest and peace of heart that comes to those who know themselves to be already accepted and justified by God.²⁸

Similar to the notion of working from a secure identity instead of working for one, receiving rest as gift requires it to be received in faith, understanding that God alone saves and extends rest to humanity. To enter that inward reality of Shalom or "spiritual rest and peace of heart" and outwardly express that reality through celebration, an understanding of leisure is essential. Josef Pieper, in writing on this subject, claims "the

²⁷ Andrew Borror, "Playful Seriousness: the Quandary of Exercise in a Technological Age," *Christian Scholars Review*, L, no. 4 (2021), 395.

²⁸ Cole, 211.

soul of leisure... lies in ‘celebration.’”²⁹ To Pieper, celebration is expressed through divine worship as humankind praises God for his sovereign work in creation. Further, Pieper supports the notion that:

Leisure is an affirmative condition (the very opposite of idleness) by which man transcends the world of work, and having transcended it, is enabled to contemplate these things which lie beyond it – himself, the universe, and God.³⁰

While idleness is characteristic of the weariness of *acedia*, leisure is an active state of contemplation, rising above goals of productivity and accomplishment surrounding work. Idleness offers a cheap alternative to rest, whereas the discipline of leisure invites a person into practices of genuine rest. For Pieper, contemplative leisure’s focus is the intellectual enjoyment of truths regarding God, himself, and the universe within which he finds himself existing. Leisure, and likewise Sabbath rest, are forms of active rest that are to be received then celebrated through contemplation and praise of God’s work in the world and inside man’s heart. YHWH repeatedly calls his people to remembrance throughout the Old Testament, and Pieper’s concept of leisure appears an effective discipline for routinely recalling the work God has accomplished in the world and the rest he secures for humanity. When Sabbath is rightly received as gift, it becomes shareable in the sense that one’s neighbors can too partake in the enjoyment and celebration of God’s work in creation and the rest he offers.

Conclusion

The biblical Sabbath command has widespread implications for both living in covenant with YHWH and in community with others. The temptation of *acedia* through

²⁹ Josef, Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, (Indianapolis: Random House Inc., 1964), 44.

³⁰ Pieper, 149.

worshipping gods of acquisition and greediness proves discordant with Sabbath's invitation to do good toward one's neighbors through acts of mercy and justice. The writings of monastic fathers Evagrius and Cassian revealed the essentiality of practicing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, reading the scriptures, solitude, and silence in order to persevere in combatting the temptation of *acedia* rather than succumbing to it.

As the Sabbath command ordains rest for all creation, including those often overlooked, such as the slave laborers or foreigners, and even the land itself, it aims to anchor creation in rhythmic rest that anticipates the fullness of jubilee celebration in a new Heaven and a new earth. Moreover, the intentionally detailed design of biblical Sabbath reveals YHWH's compassionate solidarity with all people, especially those who are marginalized by society. The establishments of seventh day Sabbath rest, Sabbath year, year of jubilee, and Jesus' miraculous healings on the Sabbath all demonstrate God's care for the freedom and flourishing of all creation. Further, this thesis concludes that Sabbath illumines both work and rest as gifts to be received, with implications to act justly and humbly toward others in extending the invitation to rest.

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