

Series: Words & Deeds: “They Matter”  
“Rest Can Be Yours”  
Zechariah 9:9-12  
Psalm 145:8-14  
Romans 7:15-25a  
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Continue to be converted, transformed, and welcomed into the new world of the God movement. Each of us has a worldview that set of beliefs and values, which acts as a filter on how we see things. Some of us are more legalistic and others more permissive in those beliefs and values. Neither extreme creates true rest!

I struggle with “control.” At times, I behave as if everyone would see things and do things the way I do, the world would be a better place. When I live in the “My Way” mode, Janet points out and so do others that life’s too short and no, the world really won’t be a better place. “My Way” is a series of legalistic or permissive prescriptions. Transformation of my life, others, and situations is difficult at best. Truly, living that way provides no rest. In fact, I’m stressed and exhausted.

According to a 2022 poll, most Americans believe the United States Congress is morally corrupt. Sixty-three percent of Americans, including a majority of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, told pollsters they believe the House and Senate are immoral. Nearly 9 out of 10 said morality is important to them, but at the same time, only a few people prefer a moral candidate to an effective one. The poll asked Americans: Would You Prefer a Candidate Who Is More Moral but Less Effective?

Responses: 26% More moral; 19% More effective; 40% Neither; 15% Don’t know.<sup>1</sup>

I imagine that this poll on candidates for office, in particular, and the House and Senate of Congress, in general, would translates the same way regarding human beings.

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<sup>1</sup>Source: Editor, “Effective Representation,” *CT magazine* (January/February, 2023), 18.

When we combine the intended meaning of law and the intended meaning of grace, moral consensus happens. Reconciliation occurs. Jesus lives his life in and through us for our sake and the sake of others. Brenda Salter McNeil, the author of *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, writes, “Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance and justice that restores broken relationships and systems to reflect God’s original intention for all creation to flourish.”<sup>2</sup> When we flourish, we are experiencing, more often than not, rest. Ponder what I just said in your own life right now.

Zechariah 9:9-12, Psalm 145:8-14, Romans 7:15-25a, and Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 make this point. The religious leaders are out of step with God. They don’t get it, no matter how God approaches them. Whether the message is self-denial and asceticism or joy and celebration, the Pharisees can be counted on to go another way than God’s leading.

Romans 7 teaches us one thing. Sin results from unrestrained legalism and permissive grace. Simply put, both unrestrained legalism and permissive grace make us think that if we just work harder and smarter, we can accomplish righteousness on our own. Wrong! An individualism disconnected from union with Jesus causes the gifts that God has given us to serve their own ends. Like Paul, when it comes to living Christianly, we do not do the things we want, but the very things we hate. We must reconcile ourselves to our need for God. And to get to that place we must combine the intended meaning of the Law with the permissiveness of grace. In that combination, rest begins to take a deeper rootedness in our lives. Brenda Salter relates the following about the need for a worldview with such a combination.

We learned from Mavis that after World War II, the British government had encouraged mass immigration from the countries of the British Empire...to fill the shortages in England’s labor market. Many Jamaicans and West Indians came with the hope of

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<sup>2</sup>Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 22.

making a better life for themselves and a brighter future for their children. However, instead of being embraced and received as equal members of society, as was promised by the 1948 British Nationality Act, ...immigrants found that they were relegated to a low status in the economic and racial class system of England, with no hope of ever being fully accepted as “British.”<sup>3</sup>

In Britain’s case, an unrestrained immigration law coupled with unrestrained permission to the powerful, an entire people group were relegated to a low status in the economic and racial class system of England.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 addresses the most probable interpretation of Jesus’ puzzling mini-parable. The true and authentic leaders in the marketplace are Jesus and John the Baptist. The uncooperative children are the religious leaders. The point is no matter the tone—John’s severe, Jesus’ joyful—those determined to reject the message always found a justifiable excuse. This is an important point for today: if a message fails to get across, there is either a problem with the messenger or the receiver. Jesus is saying that the messengers are not the issue, it is the hearers who fail to repent and follow God due their sin and selfishness.<sup>4</sup>

We must be careful not to rationalize away our own rebelliousness. Often the reasons we give for failing to worship—the style of music, a principled dislike of the pastor, the plethora of liturgical tastes—are only so many excuses for failing to seek God. Instead, we should cultivate an active listening, yearning to discern God’s will in any circumstance. What would Christ have us do here and now? Wisdom does not consist of words—our many cultivated opinions about authentic church worship—but in aligning our wills to the Father through Christ and going and living like he did. Remember worship is to be an experience of Sabbath.

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>4</sup>In the three paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Robert A. Ratcliff, Stephen Breck Reid, J. Clinton McCann Jr., Renata Furst, Patrick W. T. Johnson, Mihee Kim-Kort, and Nibs Stroupe in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 120-123, 123-125, 126-129, 130-132, 132-134, 135-137, and 137-138.

Transformation occurs when we expect Jesus and his ways to show up. There is new life in Jesus. You see, God delivers us from unrealistic standards and a guilty conscience. Allow God to use law and grace to reach into your own brokenness and the brokenness of others. Through obedience, grace kicks in. Confession, far more than the sermon, is where we meet God most profoundly in worship. Rest is found in and through confession. Newness of life is discovered. We are set free. Then, Romans 7:25 becomes ours, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

When we combine the intended meaning of law and the intended meaning of grace, moral consensus happens. Seek reconciliation with God, self, and others. Believe anew in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, yes, even now. Live a worldview free from unrestrained legalism and permissive grace. Pursue the will of God. God is redeeming you making your life new. Experience rest. Rest is designed by God. Live the Sabbath. Start living in freedom today! Amen.

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 09 July 2023  
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