WHO DO WE CELEBRATE?

Birthday parties typically honor the person born on that day. Yet, on the day of their birth, it was their mother who had to endure labor to bring them into the world. An argument could be made for the birthday celebration to honor the mother who birthed on that day.

At the end of the creation week, God instituted the Sabbath. It serves as a memorial of His creation. As the fourth commandment states, on the Sabbath we remember that God completed His work of creation in six days (Exod. 20:11). Just as with birthday celebrations, we may find ourselves so focused on God’s work that we miss the God who did the work.

Because God is infinitely greater than we are, there are many things we cannot fully comprehend about His nature. Yet, as far greater as He is than us, God condescends to be known by us. And it is through His works that we come to know Him.

This week we turn our focus to the Creator God. In speaking of who He is, we cannot but speak of what He does, but we will try to peer deeper than the surface. Going beyond His actions, what can the Sabbath teach us about God Himself? How can the Sabbath serve as a reminder of His character?
Write out Exodus 20:8–11 from the translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
GOD IS GOOD

In response to Moses’ request to see God’s face, God gave him a glimpse of His character, part of which was His being “abundant in goodness” (Exod. 34:6, KJV). This goodness of God is elsewhere presented as foundational to repentance (Rom. 2:4). David invites his readers to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8), and boldly describes God as “good and upright” (Ps. 25:8). Indeed, “the Lord is good” (Ps. 100:5). Case closed—or so it seems!

With such a compelling biblical witness to the goodness of God, why is this goodness so often questioned by finite beings, many of whom are self-proclaimed believers? Even the crucifixion (the greatest expression of God’s goodness) is sometimes offered as proof that God the Father is heartless! How can this unjust view be overthrown? The Sabbath commandment may contain the resolution to this dilemma.

In the Bible, God introduces Himself first as the Creator of heaven and earth, not as its Savior. This by no means dilutes the potency of Calvary, but it does establish a foundation of certainty regarding God’s goodness. No one berates God for creating flowers, birds, trees, air, water, sunlight, animals, fish, fruits, grass, stars, and so on. This flurry of divine activity is described as “very good” (Gen. 1:31). The very chronology of creation proclaims God’s goodness in the sense that everything necessary for happiness was provided before humanity appeared on the stage.

The Creator instituted the Sabbath as a weekly reminder (uninterrupted by secular concerns) of His goodness. Since God is unchanging and He entered Scripture as good, no subsequent act of His can alter His goodness. He does not change! This means that the good Creator must be the prism through which we see the Flood, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, or Calvary. A God who begins as good cannot end badly.

God was Creator eons before He was Savior; and He will continue as Creator long after He ceases to be Intercessor and Savior. Indeed, had there been no sin, there would have been no need of a Savior. But there has been and always will be the good Creator.

The one who faithfully observes the Sabbath commandment will be reminded weekly, in a very focused way, of the unchanging goodness of God. As surely as God is “our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6) and “our peace” (Eph. 2:14), so surely is He our goodness.

The Sabbath declares that God is good. The Sabbath-keeper believes it!
PREREQUISITES

In the educational system of the United States, and probably in most countries, prerequisites are requirements for advancement to a major area of study. For the pursuit of a medical degree, a student is required to take biology, chemistry, anatomy, physiology, and other related science subjects. For engineering, one prerequisite is most surely mathematics. Success in these prerequisites presumably establishes a firm foundation for the expectation of success in a specialized field.

The completed degrees then function as prerequisites for employment in related professions. The one who desires to work as an auditor should have training in accounting. For some forms of employment, the requirements are not as much academic as they are moral. Is there a comprehensive prerequisite that covers every area of study and employment? For the follower of Christ, there is!

Of the many sweeping statements found in the Bible, one of the most wide-ranging is the claim that there is One “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3, KJV). This fount of all knowledge is the Creator. He made heaven and earth and thus put in place all the laws of the physical sciences (astronomy, chemistry, physics, earth sciences). The same applies to biological science, because God is the Creator of life. There is not an area of study related to heaven or earth that falls outside the scope of creation. All true knowledge centers in the Creator!

A sweeping prerequisite for any branch of legitimate learning is the concept that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7). As regards the application of knowledge, the Bible declares that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). From God’s viewpoint, both the acquisition and application of knowledge should rest upon the acknowledgment of God as the source of both, because “all things” were created by Him (Col. 1:16).

The Sabbath commandment is a weekly reminder that God is the fountainhead of all knowledge (sin excepted) and that the true purpose of learning is to discover God. Ellen White wrote, “There is no branch of legitimate business for which the Bible does not afford an essential preparation. Its principles of diligence, honesty, thrift, temperance, and purity are the secret of true success.” (Ellen G. White, Education (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 135.)

True worshipers of the Creator will pursue courses of study to know God first. The grade is a secondary goal! Ellen White writes, “In a knowledge of God all true knowledge and real development have their source. Wherever we turn, in the physical, the mental, or the spiritual realm; in whatever we behold, apart from the blight of sin, this knowledge is revealed.” (White, Education, 14.)

The one who endeavors to see everything from God’s point of view will see learning as a search for God, and employment as service to God. The commandment that elevates God as Creator and Lord is the finest prerequisite for life!
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What relationship do the following verses have with the themes of Hebrews?

Psalm 19:1-6
Genesis 1
Psalm 111:10
Colossians 1:15–20
Psalm 27:13
Psalm 107

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with the fourth commandment?

Review your memorized verse from Exodus 20:8–11.
HANG IN THERE

The Bible says, “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (Gen. 1:3, KJV). The passage pulses with immediacy. As soon as the word was spoken, the light came. The One who uttered those creative words was the One who said, “I will; be thou clean” (Matt. 8:3). Matthew records, “Immediately his leprosy was cleansed” (Matt. 8:3). A similar experience of instantaneous healing at the word of Jesus befell the man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:9), as was the case with blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:52). A similar instant effect seemed to have come upon the wind and the waves (Mark 4:39).

Creation was instantaneous at the word of God. Maintaining creation, however, is a long, drawn-out process accomplished by the same word. Peter writes, “By the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water. . . But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store” (2 Pet. 3:5, 7, KJV). Ellen White writes, “And God cares for everything and sustains everything that He has created.” (Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1892), 86.)

Creation and maintenance of creation are inseparable. If maintenance ceases, creation ceases. The word accomplishes both!

There is a most serious spiritual parallel. Paul writes, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col. 2:6, KJV). “Received” is equal to “justification” (conversion) as “walk” is equal to “abide” (sanctification). Both are accomplished by the word. The Bible declares, “Being born again, [justification] not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet. 1:23, KJV). Ellen White offers this support, “The new birth is accomplished by the reception of the word of God.” (Ellen G. White, Signs of the Times, April 30, 1896, par. 2.)

O that believers would meditate on these words: “God requires the entire surrender of the heart, before justification can take place; and in order for man to retain justification, there must be continual obedience, through active, living faith that works by love and purifies the soul.” (Ellen G. White, Faith and Works (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1979), 100.)

None need miss the glaring elements of justification (spiritual creation) and continual obedience (sanctification or spiritual maintenance). If the powerful word that creates is the same powerful word that sustains, then a failure in maintenance is effectively an annulling of creation. May the reader who honors the Sabbath understand that as creation must be maintained, so must justification be maintained—by the creative word of faith!
DISCERN HIM

Because He had rested upon the Sabbath, “God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it,”—set it apart to a holy use. He gave it to Adam as a day of rest. It was a memorial of the work of creation, and thus a sign of God’s power and His love. The Scripture says, “He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered.” “The things that are made,” declare “the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world,” “even His everlasting power and divinity.” Genesis 2:3; Psalm 111:4; Romans 1:20, R. V.

All things were created by the Son of God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. . . . All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.” John 1:1–3. And since the Sabbath is a memorial of the work of creation, it is a token of the love and power of Christ.

The Sabbath calls our thoughts to nature, and brings us into communion with the Creator. In the song of the bird, the sighing of the trees, and the music of the sea, we still may hear His voice who talked with Adam in Eden in the cool of the day. And as we behold His power in nature we find comfort, for the word that created all things is that which speaks life to the soul. He “who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6. (Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 281, 282.)

God gave to men the memorial of His creative power, that they might discern Him in the works of His hand. The Sabbath bids us behold in His created works the glory of the Creator. And it was because He desired us to do this that Jesus bound up His precious lessons with the beauty of natural things. On the holy rest day, above all other days, we should study the messages that God has written for us in nature. We should study the Saviour’s parables where He spoke them, in the fields and groves, under the open sky, among the grass and flowers. As we come close to the heart of nature, Christ makes His presence real to us, and speaks to our hearts of His peace and love.

And Christ has linked His teaching, not only with the day of rest, but with the week of toil. He has wisdom for him who drives the plow and sows the seed. In the plowing and sowing, the tilling and reaping, He teaches us to see an illustration of His work of grace in the heart. So in every line of useful labor and every association of life, He desires us to find a lesson of divine truth. Then our daily toil will no longer absorb our attention and lead us to forget God; it will continually remind us of our Creator and Redeemer. The thought of God will run like a thread of gold through all our homely cares and occupations. For us the glory of His face will again rest upon the face of nature. We shall ever be learning new lessons of heavenly truth, and growing into the image of His purity. Thus shall we “be taught of the Lord”; and in the lot wherein we are called, we shall “abide with God.” Isaiah 54:13; 1 Corinthians 7:24. (Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons (Battle Creek, MI: Review and Herald, 1900), 25–27.)

When we look on the sun and the stars, the trees and the beautiful flowers, we should remember that Christ made them all. And He made the Sabbath to help us keep in mind His love and power. (Ellen G. White, The Story of Jesus (Nashville: Southern Publishing, 1900), 67.)
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

In what ways is the goodness of God challenged?

Some religions believe in a creator god that is not good. What are the ramifications of an evil creator god?

How can Sabbath-keeping deepen the goodness of God in the mind and heart?

Where are areas in your life that need more “diligence, honesty, thrift, temperance, and purity”?

How have you experienced “spiritual creation” and “spiritual maintenance” in your life?

How can the focus of God be kept throughout Sabbath?

What are factors that cause us to lose the focus of God on Sabbath?

How else are salvational concepts linked with creation and Sabbath?

The Right Focus