

“The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath” Mark chapter 2 verse 27

One of the most important commandments in the law of Moses seems to be the one which commands people to keep the Sabbath day holy. This day was the last day of the week, Saturday in Jewish culture, and on that day people were supposed to rest from their work and worship God.

By the time of Jesus the teachers of religious law had refined this command so that it dictated every tiny detail of what could and could not be done on the Sabbath day. That is why the disciples of Jesus were criticised by the Pharisees for picking heads of grain to snack on as they passed through the fields. That was classed as work, and a violation of the Sabbath. Jesus replied that the institution of the Sabbath was for the benefit of people, not so that they could have every moment of their lives conformed to strict regulations.

In our world today we need systems, organisation and regulations. Life would be chaos without them. Some people are very good at organising things and creating systems so that things work better (I'm not one of those people, as many of my friends will testify).

But I have noticed recently, in several different situations, that people are not very good at conforming to systems and living according to regulations. The stricter and more all-embracing the systems are, the more trouble people have living according to them. If they become too complex people cannot keep track of them, or if they become too strict people begin to resent them. In order to make systems work better, people may attempt to enforce them with legislation, scrutiny and sanctions, but if they are successful they often end up with dehumanised and dispirited populations, or workforces.

The reason for this is that systems are supposed to be put in place for the benefit of people, not to conform them to a formal pattern so that they can be kept under control. Something in us rebels and resists being constrained like this. People are not systems; they work best in loving relationship.

The law of God was not something intended for religious leaders to hold over people's heads as a demand and a threat, but rather to help them live in love for God and one another. When we have faith in Jesus, the requirements of God begin to be written, not as legislation on tablets of stone thundered from a blazing mountain with threats and warnings, but on our hearts as we come to know God personally and, knowing him, love him and, loving him, obey and serve him.

## Prayer

Father, thank you for those people who are able to bring organisation and order to our chaotic lives. Please guide them in knowing what to put in place and where so that “our ordered lives (may) confess the beauty of thy peace.” But please also help us all to recognise the point where our systems and organisations begin to demand too much control over our lives. Give us the wisdom to know that our organisation and systems are supposed to serve us and not the other way around. In Jesus' name, amen.

*All these devotionals can be found on our website [inghamitechurch.org](http://inghamitechurch.org) on the 'Resources' page. Click on the link to go there.*