

6-1 Ratio

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God."

Exodus 20:8-11

A Labor Day Sermon by Rev. Derek Elphick

INTRODUCTION

The Lord encourages us to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

In preparation for that day of rest, we are told to "labor" six days.

But why not labor for five days and rest for two?

Or better yet, labor for three days and rest for four?

Why this 6:1 ratio?

Isn't this ratio of work to rest a little disproportionate, a little over the top?

Now, you might be thinking, "Well, these numbers are symbolic."

"The Lord isn't saying we *literally* have to work six days and rest one."

"And, besides, the 'six days,' like the six days of creation, correspond to the work of regeneration, our spiritual combats or trials against evil and falsity, with the "seventh" day being the peace and 'rest' of heaven."

And, of course, you'd be right (see AC 10360).

But for the purposes of our sermon today, I encourage you to first...

- sit for a while w/this 6-1 ratio of "work to rest" that is specified in the 3rd commandment of the Decalogue.

I encourage you to...

- not skip over those literal numbers...
- partly because there's *power* in the letter of the Word...
- but also because those numbers, those "*proportions*," are very instructive and "telling..."

This ratio is setting a *tone*, an *expectation*, and is the "**reigning idea**" for how the Lord is encouraging us to view our...

**work, our labor,
not just in our paid jobs or volunteer work but also
in the work, the labor, required in all of our *relationships***

**w/family, friends
or in a marriage
or in the workplace
or in retirement...**

And so, in recognition of this Labor Day weekend, we'll be exploring...

- the true meaning of "rest" from labor,
- & the *satisfaction* of putting in a good day's work,
- & the *growing pains* associated with this 6-1 ratio
- & the misconceptions people have about heaven and what the angels in heaven actually do!

In many ways, this is a sermon about *happiness*...

because all the things we'll be talking about hinge on our concept of **what we think will make us happy**...

and, as tempted as we may be to "tinker" with the Lord's 6:1 ratio of work to rest ...

we'll see that this ratio is just what our soul craves,
the perfect "balance" for true peace and happiness.

With this in mind, let's begin with...

1. MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT HEAVEN

The teachings of our church spend a significant portion of time (many pages) talking about the nature of the afterlife...

about heaven and hell
 about angels and devils
 about what we need to do here on earth to...

- train our minds
- and prepare our hearts to be "in sync" with the...

lifestyle, the pace, the 'mindset' of the residents in that vast, eternal realm.

And one of the frequent refrains, common reports, is that people on earth...

- have wildly mistaken ideas about the nature of heaven (and hell)!

One teaching puts it bluntly:

"Almost all the people who arrive in the other life are ignorant of the nature of heavenly bliss and happiness..." (HH 412)

And this is not so much because people have picked up bad ideas as much as it is a *projection*,

- a **projection of what people want heaven to be like...**

Think for a moment if you knew nothing about heaven and someone asked you, "What do you imagine heaven to be like?" Another way of asking the same question would be to ask, "What do you think will make you happy, not just now, but forever?"

For lots of people (you?), the answer might be, "I just want peace, rest, calm..." They might say,

*"I picture heaven (or happiness) to be a place in which I'm free...
 free of any conflict,
 free of any kind of struggle...
 free of the pain that comes from exerting myself,
 ...from having to put time and effort and concentration into
 something like a project or task."*

Others might say,

*"I imagine heaven to be free of annoying bosses, annoying people, free
 of having to answer to anyone, free of having to live by a schedule..."*

And pretty soon thoughts about...

sandy beaches,
 putting your feet up, taking it easy,
 not ever having to work again,

creep into this "picture" of heaven,
 this concept of what would make us happy.

**But this, we're taught, is *not* the source of heaven's happiness, appealing as that
 idea of "freedom" and "rest" might be!**

It's interesting, and perhaps surprising, that even religious people, people who
 know the Bible, have wildly inaccurate pictures of heaven too.

The "religious" often think heaven *"and heavenly joy consists solely in
 praising and glorifying God"* when, in reality, *"God has no need of praise
 and glorification..."* (HH 404).

Even in the New Church, we might be tempted to think of heaven as...

- "Churchy" or "ecclesiastical" in nature
- a never-ending extension of "church" activities

- a realm only for pious, devout, religious types.... (forgetting, of course, the teachings that say in addition to ecclesiastical uses in heaven, there are civic and domestic affairs, the running of trades and businesses, industry, governmental affairs, etc. - see HH 387-388).

But again, to think of heaven this narrowly misses the core element of heaven.

2. THE SATISFACTION OF HARD WORK

Well, the teachings of our church reveal a very different "cause" for heaven's happiness, and **it has everything to do with the six days of labor *prior to the Sabbath.***

In the opening pages of the book, Married Love or Conjugal Love, there is a long discussion about the mistaken ideas of heavenly joy and happiness we've been talking about, and the question is raised, "*What, then, is heavenly joy?*"

And we get this wonderful answer (revelation):

"It is the pleasure of doing something that is of use to oneself and to others...the pleasure in being useful...is the life and soul of all heavenly joys..." (CL 5).

This beautiful definition of happiness gives context to the readings you heard this morning, that those in heaven...

"...are content with their lot and are conscientious and careful in their work, and **prefer work to idleness**, and behave honestly and reliably, [thereby] leading Christian lives" (HH 364)

Those in heaven "...are **caught up** in a love of their work" (HH 393)

And they say, "...a life with no activity **has no happiness**" (HH 403)

We might wonder, then, that if work, meaningful work, what we traditionally call the performance of "uses," is the ***"life and soul of all heavenly joys"*** then why would people's ideas of heaven be so misguided, so mistaken, so far off the mark?

Why would people not see the *connection* between the work they do here on earth, the *satisfaction* of a good day's work, as having a counterpart, a corresponding equivalent, in heaven?

Why would people assume heaven's happiness has nothing to do with...

...the fruit of their labors here on earth?

...or how they use their unique gifts and talents?

...or how they engage their God-given creativity?

...or the fact that many, if not most, of the "jobs" people do here on earth benefit other people and, as such, mirror, albeit in an imperfect way, the jobs done in heaven?

Why would people be looking for happiness (heaven) in all the wrong places?

And more to the point, why would people assume you *stop* working once you get to heaven?

It's a curious thing, isn't it, especially when one of the Ten Commandments emphasizes the importance of labor over rest, 6-1!

Well, let's dig a little deeper, and examine further the nature of "work" since we've learned a wonderful thing - that the work people do in heaven is directly proportional to their level of happiness...

3. GROWING PAINS

At the beginning of this sermon, I held you off from going straight to the spiritual sense of this commandment, but now we're ready.

To labor six days, spiritually speaking, is to engage in the conflicts against evils and falsities (see AC 10360).

We engage in this battle, this "labor," our whole adult life.
We are, of course, battling our own selfish tendencies,
our own material wants and needs

And...

- we're not always willing to put others first
- we can get arrogant, stubborn, self-centered
- we can refuse to look to the greater good around us because of perceived threats to our good name and reputation
- we can also get lazy, unmotivated, and entitled, thinking we deserve more "rest" than work...

So our six days of "labor" is ultimately a battle for **supremacy**

Will the Lord and our neighbor be our chief concern?
Or will the world and self be our chief concern?
(see HH 396)

And the point is, this battle for supremacy gets played out, not in some theoretical realm, but in our labor, our work.

As mentioned earlier, our work, our labor,

is not just our paid jobs or volunteer work. It's also
in the "work," the "labor," required in all of our *relationships*

w/family, friends
or in a marriage
or in the workplace
or in retirement...

With regard to our day jobs, our paid work, most people approach their work in one of three ways:

- as a **"job"** - do it for the \$, pay the bills, etc.
- as a **"career"** - larger goals - promotions, prestige, etc.
- as a **"calling"** - see their work as contributing to the greater good no matter if the job be deemed "lowly" or "important"

The goal for our work, our labor in this world, whatever it may be, is to come to see it as a "calling" because this **will draw us out of ourselves and into connection with people and uses beyond ourselves**.

- and this will make us happy, happy in this world,
- happy in the next

CONCLUSION

Whatever our "work" may be - paid job, volunteering, relationships, etc. we will go through growing pains. This is the spiritual meaning of laboring six days, but no matter the pain,

the anguish,
the hard work,
the frustration,
yes, even the annoyance...

It's worth it because, contrary to the mistaken idea that the life of heaven should be free of any kind of work, free of any kind of effort and concentration and problem solving, our joy, our happiness, actually rests in the satisfaction of engaging in this hard work,

- of *not* avoiding pain or discomfort
-but, instead, of eagerly seeking ways to serve the people around
with the goal of focusing on uses larger than ourselves...

The satisfaction that comes from this type of work is the "rest" of the seventh day, the Sabbath, a time in which we humbly thank the Lord and our neighbor for the privilege, the honor, of being a part of our spiritual community.

When this is our focus, we experience the happiness of heaven because...

Our happiness, our peace, our contentment, comes from recognizing the wisdom of the Lord's ratio between "work" and "rest."

AMEN.