

Weekly Encouragement

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Comfortable Chains

By Rev. Peter Eng



Photo courtesy of Flowerpictures

"But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus" (Luke 6:11)

She was kidnapped by a radical political group and was missing for about two months. Then in April 1974, she resurfaced. A security video showed her with others robbing a bank. The story of Patty Hearst, victim turned accomplice bewildered everyone. The radical group was eventually destroyed and Patty arrested. She was a willing accomplice in the crimes of the group. But it also became apparent that she was a victim of the Stockholm Syndrome.

This phenomenon was identified a year earlier in Stockholm when the hostage victims of a bank robbery in Stockholm became sympathetic to their captors; refused rescue and would not testify against their captors. It is the mystery of

loving an abuser. Victims become comfortable in their chains. It is when prisoners who have spent so many years in prison, that the confines and regiments of prison are preferred to the scary unknown freedom in society.

From the Jewish diaspora in 586 BC, perhaps one tradition more than any other, identified the Jews as Jews. It was their Sabbath practices. Jewish literature shows an obsession with laws governing what constitutes keeping the Sabbath. Resting one day in seven was unknown except for the Jews.

One day of rest in seven to decompress is now recognized as being essential to productivity. It was given to us by divine revelation through Moses, maintained by Jewish tradition, and now accepted as a basic human good.

This wonderful gift of rest became cluttered by human laws and tradition. Yet, it would be fair to say that a Sabbath rest with all its problems is better than no rest. Still, the Sabbath had devolved into something other than what God intended. So when Jesus came to earth, he reminded the people that he is the Lord of the Sabbath. He gave them the Sabbath, he sets the rules, he explicates his intention, that Sabbath is not about prohibitions.

The Jews had become so tangled by their

laws of the Sabbath, and become so comfortable with them that they don't want to be freed from the onerous laws of Sabbath and return to God's gift of worship and rest. When Jesus healed on the Sabbath, they were incensed. They have become comfortable in their chains, they have to do something to stop this attempt to free them.

It is a sad state of affairs. It is a spiritual Stockholm Syndrome. These people became so identified with a corrupted form of Sabbath that they no longer recognized true Sabbath. Weep for them.

Wait... Weep for us.

Has the pendulum swung too far to the other side? I think we can see that Christians today have scant regard for Sabbath rest. While the Jews were obsessed with eliminating activity or limiting activity on the Sabbath, Christians do not give a second thought to crowding our lives with other things on our Sabbath worship and rest.

While the Jews were imprisoned by what they were not allowed to do on the Sabbath, Christians today don't even need to ask what they can do on the Sabbath. Without a second thought, we crowd God out of our Sabbath with scant regard to the purpose of the Sabbath. I think we are even guiltier than the Jews in forgetting the purpose of the Sabbath.

Christians today seem to think we are doing God a favor by going to worship. In fact, this is so ingrained in our psyche that many churches today thank people for coming to worship – strange that we should suggest to worshippers they are doing God a favor when we worship.

We can be so comfortable in our prison of activities on Sunday that we begin to

think of worship as a burden. We can refuse rescue. We can even decide that we need to do something about the person who brings us back to God's purpose for our day of worship and rest.

If we are harried and stressed, perhaps not setting aside one day in seven to worship and rest has something to do with it?

Note: The ESV is used unless indicated otherwise.

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.