



The Fourth Commandment

PROTECTS RESPECT FOR THE DIVINE DAY

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.”

EXODUS 20:8-11

KEY IDEA: The time we give to God in worship protects our souls and proves our love.

OUTLINE:

- A. THE PERIOD (v.8)
- B. THE PRINCIPLE (vv.9-10)
- C. THE PRACTICE (v.11)

DISCUSSION:

- When you hear the word “sabbath,” what comes to your mind?
- Which day is the sabbath, and why do you think God commanded that we set it apart?

LESSON:

On June 8, 1725, John Wesley's mother, Susanna, wrote him this answer to the question of *what is sin?* She said:

“Take this rule: whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off your relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.”

Dear friends, you can't find a wiser word of counsel for meditation and application. However, we are given a greater word to help us define what sin is: The Ten Commandments. The Decalogue, as it is called, is the divine standard, which sets before us what God requires in our worship of Him as our Creator and Redeemer.

RECAP OF THE FIRST THREE COMMANDMENTS

- **The first commandment** speaks to us about **WHOM** to worship.
“You shall have no other gods before Me.” (Ex.20:3)

- **The second commandment** speaks to us about **HOW** to worship.
"You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth." (Ex.20:4)
- **The third commandment** speaks to us about **OUR ATTITUDE** in worship.
"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain..." (Ex.20:7)
- **This fourth commandment** speaks to us about **THE TIME** we give to worship. (*Heb.10:24-25*)

KEY PERSPECTIVES ABOUT TIME

There are two meanings for "time" used in the Bible. The first is "chronos," which speaks of a *succession of time*. The second is "kairos," which speaks of a *season or opportune time to do something*. Although time is a human concept, it is nevertheless a *gift from God*. God *created time, determines our time, and will bring an end to time* (*Gen.1:1; Eccl.3:11, 14; Ps.31:15; 139:16; Job 14:5; Rev.21:1ff*). As far as control is concerned, man has nothing to do with time. However, the word we are given as believers is to "[redeem] the time..." (*Eph.5:16 KJV*). The word picture takes us to the market square of life where time is being put up for auction. There are many bidders, and what we are called to do is *redeem it, or buy it for ourselves*, so that we may put it into service for our King—the Lord Jesus.

From a biblical perspective, time can be viewed as a talent with which to trade and a trust for which we shall be accountable (*Eph.5:16; 1 Cor.4:2*). What we give "our" time to reveals much about *who we are, what we value, and how we feel* about those in our lives.

Time given to a loved one says, *"I care about you."* **Time neglected** with your kids or a spouse says, *"Something or someone else is more important."* A great deal of the hurt that kids and adults carry inside stems from the fact that they feel that no one has "time" for them. Someone has said you can give no greater insult to a person than to say, "I don't have time for you." We may not say this aloud, but we do say this by the way we treat others—don't we? On the other hand, we pay a tremendous compliment to a person when we say, *"I always have time for you."* Why is time so important to us? It is important because *the God who made us created us as relational beings.*

This fourth commandment tells us that God cares about the time we give to Him.

Read Luke 14:16-24. In *the Parable of the Dinner*, Jesus spoke of a man (*representing God*) who was giving a big dinner and invited many to come and spend some time in fellowship and celebration. He graciously made all the provisions necessary, but when the invitation was extended, *"...they all alike began to make excuses..." (v.18)*. One man used *his business* as an excuse; another used *his possessions* as an excuse. Still another thought he had an unshakable alibi in *his wife or his family*. In giving these three examples, Jesus shows us the three things that men allow to come between them and the Lord: *business, possessions, and family*. And do you remember the response of the head of the household? Jesus said that he became *"angry" (v.21)*. The parable is plain to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see—*those who are excluded from the kingdom have only themselves to blame*. God desires our fellowship, and He cares very deeply about the time we give to Him. There are certain things we cannot experience without "time."

- You cannot develop a *relationship* with someone else without time.
- You cannot *grow* into spiritual maturity without time.
- The *best meals* that we enjoy require time.

God has designed us as creatures of time, and we can only deepen and enjoy our fellowship with Him when we spend *time* with Him in worship.

- **Do you have time for God?** He made you for Himself (*Ps.100:3*). Do you have time for the God who *created* you, *blessed* you, and *saved* you by shedding His blood on Calvary's cross? This is what the fourth commandment is really teaching us.

Reflective illustration: The Chinese have a legend. They tell of a man who went to the marketplace one day with a string of seven coins. He saw a beggar, gave him six of those seven coins, and placed the seventh in his own pocket. But the beggar, who was also a pickpocket, lifted the seventh coin and took that for himself also. No doubt, this is a parable of the modern-day man. God has given us six days to do our work, and man says, "Thank you, and by the way, I think I will steal the seventh also for myself."

Simple observations: Consider briefly some of the jewels that lie on the surface of this fourth commandment.

- **It begins with a loving memo**—"Remember the sabbath day..." We are so prone to forget to give God time in the busyness of life—so He lovingly and clearly reminds us: remember!
- **It is a very reasonable request**—at its core, we find that the Creator Redeemer requests that we remember *one day in seven*. Is this a harsh request of God to command time to share His heart with you and allow you to share your heart with Him?
- **The day is to be made or kept holy**—what does it mean to be holy? It means to be set apart for sacred use and not used for common or ordinary things.

Let's drill down into the details to extract the gold from the mines of God's Word.

A. THE PERIOD (v.8)

⁸ "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."

What is the Sabbath day? The Hebrew word "*shabbath*" means *rest*. The Sabbath day is the seventh day, and the seventh day is *Saturday*. It originated before the giving of the Law at the time of creation (*Gen.2:1-3*). To whom does it apply? *Everyone!* The Ten Commandments are universally binding upon every human being. They are *moral laws*—*not ceremonial laws*, which applied only to Israel. Jesus affirmed that this fourth commandment is binding upon every human being when He said, "*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath*" (*Mark 2:27*). He did not say it was made only for Israel, but for man—the entire human race.

Why do we worship on Sunday? As Christians, we do not corporately worship on the Sabbath or Saturday; we gather for worship on the Lord's Day—*Sunday*. We do not worship on the seventh day of the week, but on the first day of the week. Who changed this and why? It was not the church or some council of religious leaders that made this change; it was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. As the King of His kingdom, Jesus Christ has the final say on the issue of the Sabbath (*Mark 2:23-28*).

Why do we worship on the first day—the Lord's Day? We can find nine facts in Scripture:

- Fact #1: On the first day of the week, *Christ rose from the dead.* (Mark 16:9)
- Fact #2: On the first day of the week, *Jesus met with His disciples.* (Mark 16:12)
- Fact #3: On the first day of the week, *Jesus appeared twice to His disciples.* (John 20:19, 26)
- Fact #4: On the first day of the week, *Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit.* (John 20:19-22)
- Fact #5: On the first day of the week, *Jesus gave the Great Commission.* (John 20:21; Cf. Matt.28:18-20)
- Fact #6: On the first day of the week, *Jesus poured on His Spirit at Pentecost.* (Acts 2:1ff)
- Fact #7: On the first day of the week, *Jesus gave John the book of Revelation.* (Rev.1:10)
- Facts #8: On the first day of the week, *it was the practice of the apostles and the early church to meet for worship.* (Acts 20:6-7)
- Fact #9: On the first day of the week, *collections were to be received for the work of service.* (1 Cor.16:2)

Let's bring this part of the fourth commandment into perspective by seeing it in the big picture context of Scripture.

The seventh day celebrates the Lord's work of *creation*; the Lord's Day commemorates the finished work of *redemption*. The Sabbath day commemorates the creation of *natural life*; the Lord's Day celebrates the beginning of *supernatural life*. The first Sabbath is intended to remind man of *the work of God's hand*—where God created the heavens and the earth; the Lord's Day, the first day, is intended to celebrate *the work of God's heart*—the sending of His Son. The Sabbath Day reminds us of *God's power*; the Lord's Day reminds us of *God's grace*.

What about those who worship on Saturdays (Seventh Day Adventist) or those who make Sunday a day when nothing of pleasure or entertainment can be done (Sabbatarians)? According to Paul, they are living on the wrong side of Calvary (Read Col.2:14-17).

The Sabbath Day was calculated to serve as *a continual reminder to all mankind of our dependence on God and of our moral accountability to Him*. So, do we call Sunday the Sabbath? No, we call Sunday *the Lord's Day*; nevertheless, we need to be clear about the principle of the commandment.

B. THE PRINCIPLE (vv.9-10)

There are two main principles found in the fourth commandment:

- **First, we see the principle of work**—“*Six days you shall labor...*” The fourth commandment is not simply about *rest*; it is also about *work*. Work is spiritual worship, and spiritual worship is work. It is said that Spartan children were not allowed to eat breakfast until they produced sweat on their brow from morning labor. Even the ancient parents believed in the truth of Genesis 3:19—“*By the sweat of your face you will eat bread...*” In the book of Proverbs, Solomon speaks of those who eat the “*bread of wickedness*” (4:17) and the “*bread of idleness*” (31:27). Some work *dishonestly* while others act *irresponsibly* by doing no work at all. A lazy man or woman who is not willing to work, not just in the workplace of the world, but in his or her station in life—whether that be a homemaker or stockbroker—that person, according to the Word of God, is not worthy to eat (2 Thess.3:10)—or live!

This principle applies to those who are unwilling to work, *not to those who are unable to work*. Melancthon called idleness “the Devil’s bath, because he bathes himself with delight in an idle soul.”¹³ Idleness, slothfulness, and laziness are a breach of this fourth command!

The fourth commandment sanctions diligent labor for six days, which includes not only our domestic and secular duties, but also *our personal recreation and pleasures*. However, one day in seven, God calls us to set time aside for communion and reflection with Him. The purpose of the day is not *inactivity*, but rather *activity*—namely, giving ourselves to God in our worship, service, and fellowship.

An additional thought: God says we are also not to be responsible for causing anyone else to neglect time with Him—“...in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.”

What activities are appropriate on the Lord’s Day? In Mark 2:23-28, Jesus defended three actions on the Lord’s Day:

1. **Works of necessity:** These are works that *we cannot avoid or postpone until another day*. There are clear areas like *emergencies or necessities, feeding your children, the work of police officers, firefighters, etc.*
 2. **Works of mercy:** These are works done because of *sympathy or compassion* for human suffering without motive for financial gain.
 3. **Works of piety:** These are works that reflect our devotion to Christ—things such as *reading, praying, fasting, teaching, serving, witnessing* (reaching out to that neighbor, friend, co-worker, or relative), *fellowship with other believers, visiting the sick and needy, writing to missionaries, etc.*
- **Second, we see the principle of worship**—“*but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.*”

What are the benefits that come to those who practice the principle of worship found in this command?

1. Honoring this fourth commandment replenishes your spirit (Ex.23:12). Our spirits can be spiritually run down, just like a car battery. God has given us a day to recharge and to renew our spirits—and it’s the Lord’s Day.

A man in Pennsylvania was passing the coal mine in the old day when they used mules to pull the coal wagons through the mines. He noticed that the worker had his mules out of the mines and in the pastures on Sunday. Out of curiosity, he spoke to the miner, and this is what coal miner said: “*If I were to leave those mules in the mines seven days a week without bringing them up into the sunlight on Sunday, they would go blind!*”

This is the danger of being absorbed in work to the neglect of worship on the Lord’s Day! As sinners, we can be blinded by busyness and become forgetful about God.

¹³ As quoted by Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, p.98

2. Honoring this fourth commandment refreshes your soul. The soul is to the human body what a fuse is to a light bulb. Fatigue has been described as the soul running ahead of the body and the body failing to catch up.
3. Honoring this fourth commandment restores your body. Worship on Sunday with the people of God renews, reinvigorates, and replenishes your spirit and soul, which in turn helps your body.

Thomas Watson once said of this fourth commandment:

"The Sabbath is the market day of the soul....This is the soul's festival day, on which the graces act their part: the other days of the week are most employed about earth, this day is about heaven...on this holy day affections are quickened, the stock of grace is improved, corruptions are weakened, and Satan falls like lightning before the majesty of the Word....The heart, which all the week was frozen, on the Sabbath melts with the word....It files off the rust of our graces; it is a spiritual jubilee, wherein the soul is set to converse with its Maker."¹⁴

C. THE PRACTICE (v.11)

¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

The Jews misinterpreted God's Commandment and made this practice a day of legalism. Scholars tell us that they possessed over 1,521 ways to keep from breaking the Sabbath.

- You could not eat an egg that was laid on the Sabbath.
- If you got a thorn stuck in the sole of your shoe, you must stop and take it out, lest you be accused of carrying a burden on the Sabbath.
- You could swallow vinegar, but you could not hold it in your mouth if you had a toothache because that was considered healing on the Sabbath.
- If a flea bit you on the Sabbath, you had to let him gnaw on you because there was no hunting on the Sabbath.

Do you see how legalistic and ridiculous this can be if we are not biblical?

CONCLUSION:

How do we keep the Lord's Day? How do we honor the Lord on the Lord's Day? It is NOT by comprising a list of *DOs and DON'Ts*. The moment you start making rule sheets, you are already on the slippery slope of legalism. If the heart of the fourth commandment is all about *a time of worship*, then the issue is not so much about simply attending church from 8:00am to 12:00pm and then spending the rest of the day doing what you'd like. The issue is really about the place that Jesus has in your heart, which will reveal itself in your *priorities*, your *schedule*, your *desires*, and your *delights*.

¹⁴ Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, pp.97, 95

Where do we start?

- *By solemn preparation for it*—If the pastor or an elder were to come to your home for fellowship, a slice of sweet potato pie, and a glass of milk, most people would make *preparations* in anticipation of his arrival. On the Lord's Day, God Almighty intends to have fellowship and sweet communion with you, His child! Will you not get prepared?
- *By delightful observation of the Lord's Day*—Sunday, in the mind of the believer, is to be the best day of the week! In our home, Sunday is the King's Day, and Monday is the queen's day (although the queen is not always served). There is to be no question as to where we will be on the Lord's Day! God's people gather in *God's house*, on *God's day*, in *God's name*, around *God's Word*, to honor *God's Son*, in the power of *God's Spirit*, for *God's glory*!

Let's read Isaiah 58:13-14 to find out what the two-fold blessing is that God has promised to those who seek to honor Him by setting the Lord's Day apart and keeping it holy.

- **Isaiah 58:13-14**—If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your own pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and honor it, desisting from your own ways, from seeking your own pleasure and speaking your own word, then you will take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Do you see it? If we make the Lord's Day, a day of spiritual pleasure, "*Then you will take delight in the LORD...*" then God will make our lives one of spiritual prosperity, "*...and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father...*"

What does this mean FOR YOU?

APPLICATION:

THE COMMANDMENTS and CHRIST—How did Christ fulfill the fourth commandment?

THE COMMANDMENTS and THE CHRISTIAN—How do we violate the fourth commandment today, and what will help us fulfill it?

What is your takeaway from this lesson?

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