

# The Commands of Christ The Fourth Commandment—B

*Exodus 20:8-11*  
Part Twelve

*With Study Questions*

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*10/11/2009*

# The Fourth Commandment—B

*Exodus 20:8-11*

**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. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (Exodus 20:8-11).**

## **Review**

We have discussed how the Sabbath is God's design, not only for His own glory, but also for our benefit as His children. It was made for us as the ultimate discipline in our pursuit of piety. If we lose a proper pursuit of the Sabbath we will begin to lose the heart of the first three commandments, which will utterly incapacitate us from keeping the next six. The first four commandments are God's transcription for how we ought to love Him. The Sabbath can be compared to the family meal.

I tried to make the argument of the continuance of the Sabbath by pointing out that it existed before the law (Moses), during the law, and that Jesus referred to Himself as the Lord of the Sabbath in the New Testament; that the New Testament references which seemed to downplay the Sabbath were likely referring to sabbaths that were unique to Israel, rather than *the* Sabbath which existed before Israel.

## **III. Sabbath Keeping**

Assuming there is a Sabbath and that obeying the Sabbath is honoring to God and yields great blessings, how are we to approach Sabbath-keeping? What day is the Sabbath? What are the reasons for the Sabbath? What is, and what is not, allowed on the Sabbath? What is our focus on the Sabbath? Where will ignoring the Sabbath lead? Where Will

## Keeping The Sabbath Lead?

### 1. What Day is the Sabbath?

In the old covenant the Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, which was Saturday. **“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb” (Matthew 28:1).** Saturday was the Sabbath and Sunday was considered the first day of the week. This is verified in Mark. **“Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen” (Mark 16:2).**

With this before us, why does the church meet on Sunday rather than Saturday? One reason is because the New Testament church gathered on Sunday. **“And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight” (Acts 20:7).** The early, new covenant, church met on the first day opposed to the seventh day, which was the Old Testament Sabbath (on the seventh day the Lord rested). Again, we see in First Corinthians:

**Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.<sup>2</sup> On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come (1 Corinthians 16:1,2 NASB).**

Sunday was the day our Lord rose from the dead. From that day forth, the church recognized the Sabbath to be the day of Christ's resurrection – the Lord's Day.

### Multiple Sabbaths?

Christians may embrace the principle, or spirit, of the Sabbath, but merely apply it personally and in a solitary fashion. But the commandment is to the *covenant people* of God, and was to be applied universally. The command involves you, your household, your servants (which could include anyone who might serve you), your animals and even strangers. The problem with the Sabbath being on multiple days is one of corporate recognition within God's covenant people of a day that is His.

One might say that Thursday works best for me, but that falls short of the people of God recognizing one day that is holy unto the Lord. It's the Lord's Day, not the Lord's 'two hours;' not to mention that we are to recognize the Sabbath as a body, not merely as individuals.

My father-in-law really enjoys his family. He has four children and looks forward to seeing them. Although he enjoys them individually, there is an increased sense of joy when they all come together for special occasions. It is a glory to God for the church universal to recognize this commandment in harmony.

## 2. Reasons for the Sabbath

Jesus speaking in Mark 2:27 states, "**The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.**" It is the ultimate discipline and is designed for our benefit. There are some 200 allusions to the Sabbath and what it is for. Among these reasons are:

1) To commemorate the work of Creation (Exodus 20:11).  
2) To preserve the knowledge of the only living and true God. There was a time when Sunday was quite different than all other days of the week. As a child I remember Sunday being a day when all the stores were closed. Unfortunately I was never told why. The reason was the effect the Sabbath had in preserving within our culture an understanding and respect for God. You probably have relatives you never visit. In failing to do so you are making an indelible mark upon your children that these relatives are not important to you. When we ignore the Sabbath, we give the same message regarding Christ.

3) It is a day when we turn our thoughts toward that which is unseen and spiritual (Luke 4:16).

4) It is a day that is set aside for instruction and worship of God (Luke 4:16).

5) It is a day of rest and cessation from normal daily activity (Nehemiah 13:15-19).

**\_Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed (Exodus 23:12).**

6) It foreshadows our ultimate rest in God (Hebrews 4:9).

## **A Humane Reason**

All of these things are in the best interests of man and the glory of God. God's design in instituting the Sabbath was purely a humane one. God intends it not as a burdensome ceremony to gall the necks of men to no benevolent purpose, but as a means of promoting the true welfare of the human race.

From a purely practical and pragmatic standpoint the question must be asked: "Would the human race, would the church, be richer or poorer by observing one day in seven to the Lord?" It would be difficult to answer 'no' to this question!

### **3. Allowed, and Not Allowed, on the Sabbath**

Reading from the Gospel of Matthew we see a New Testament record of Sabbath activity.

**At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath through the grainfields, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, 'Behold, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.' But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did, when he became hungry, he and his companions; how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 'Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath, and are innocent? 'But I say to you, that something greater than the temple is here. 'But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 'For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.' And departing from there, He went into their synagogue. And behold, there was a man with a withered hand. And they questioned Him, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?'—in order that they might accuse Him. And He said to them, 'What man shall there be among you, who shall have one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it, and**

**lift it out? 'Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.' Then He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand!' And he stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. But the Pharisees went out, and counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him" (Matthew 12:1-14 NASB77).**

## **Biblical Versus Legalistic Sabbath keeping**

The whole drift of Jesus' argument is to show that when properly understood, His disciples had not broken the Sabbath at all. They had complied with it and there was no need of lowering of its sense in order to escape its condemnation. In this passage Jesus is not repealing the Sabbath, He is giving instruction on what the Sabbath truly is. If He were repealing the Sabbath, all He had to do was tell the Pharisees that the Sabbath is no longer.

### **Allowed on the Sabbath**

The keeping of the Sabbath allows for acts of necessity and mercy. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. He indicated that it is proper to retrieve your sheep from a pit on the Sabbath. Firemen, policemen, the man who keeps the electricity and gas flowing to your homes and to hospitals, *etc.* are all in compliance with the Sabbath.

### **Not Allowed on the Sabbath**

The keeping of the Sabbath means cessation from our normal workday week. Our behavior should be markedly different than the rest of the week. Question 117 of the Larger Westminster Catechism states that Christians are to rest from worldly employments and recreations (Exodus 16:25-28; Nehemiah 13:15-22).

Whether this forbids a walk in the park or tossing a ball back in forth to your three-year-old I can't say. But it certainly means avoiding all unnecessary commerce and missing church twenty-two times a year because of soccer and little league.

## **4. The Sabbath Focus**

The Sabbath is a day we are to set aside for the corporate worship of

God. The Gospel of Luke records that Jesus “as His custom was... went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day” (Luke 4:16a). The keeping of the Sabbath means that as a covenant people, and as individuals, we have one full day which is set apart from all other days, to fix our thoughts uniquely upon Christ. Fulfilling this call on our lives would be impossible if we were engaged in our normal duties.

Natural questions arise like: What does this look like? Do we read the Bible all day? Pray all day? Talk theology all day? Not necessarily. The focus of the Sabbath can be achieved by both what we do and what we don't do. In the same way fasting (something we don't do, *i.e.* eat) reminds us of a focus on prayer and piety, when we decide not to do something on the Sabbath, like go shopping, the decision not to go shopping reminds us of what day it is.

## 5. Where Will Ignoring the Sabbath Lead?

So what are the consequences for neglecting the Sabbath? To a society that neglects the Sabbath it is written:

**Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, and were not careful to observe My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them'; but they profaned My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them and fulfill My anger against them in the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:21).**

Basic observations show us:

- a) The family will suffer for lack of unity and worship together.
- b) Work will increase because the standard will require working an extra day. In order to 'keep up,' working on the Sabbath will become a necessity.
- c) Time for solace and reflection will decrease and people will quit thinking about why they're doing what they're doing altogether. I was a youth pastor for many years. During this time I used to run week-long camps, let's call them Sabbath camps for this purpose. These weeks were a great time of soul-searching by both teenagers and counselors. We were plucked out of our routine and were required to think about life and God

and deeper things. Honoring the Sabbath would make this a regular thing in the life of the Christian.

d) As a society, like that family member we used to visit on a regular basis but now seldom visit, we will cease acknowledging God altogether and find that we have mushroomed a generation that has little regard for God. This will inevitably lead to evil thoughts, deeds, and, little doubt, some form of judgment.

Some of the greatest enemies of the Sabbath are things that seem so innocent in nature—soccer leagues, little league, professional sports, *etc.* If the Sabbath is repeatedly violated in order to cater to events scheduled on Sundays, an indelible message will be sent to the next generation—a message indicating what we think is genuinely important.

## 6. Where Will Keeping The Sabbath Lead?

**If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. The mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isaiah 58:13, 14).**

## **The Difficulty of Resting**

So isn't this an interesting commandment? God is commanding us to rest. Seems like it should be so easy. All that stuff we're so busy with all week—don't be busy with it today! Go to church, have a time of prayer, reflection, fellowship and enjoyment of your faith.

We often times speak of surrendering to Jesus, as if it's an easy thing to do. But it's much easier to be the victor than the one who surrenders. Surrendering to Jesus (which is ultimately obeying His commands and resting in the results) may be the most difficult thing in the world to do. Keeping the Sabbath may fall into the same category.

As one who sees the value of the Sabbath and does seek to keep it, I must confess (as I would hope every one of you would) that I fail miserably. I am not confessing this to justify my continued Sabbath=breaking, as if God can be mocked; but the Sabbath, like any other commandment, is utilized by God to reveal to us just how sinful we are. At times I'll hear people mock the Sabbath by saying things like, "So I can't say hi or think about my job... even for a minute!"

All this as if our failure to keep the Sabbath is an indictment against the Sabbath instead of against us! "It's impossible, who can do it?" may be a true lament. But the Sabbath, like any other commandment should push us, in humility, in a certain direction—resting not in the Sabbath, but in the Sabbath-keeper.

## **Resting in the Sabbath Keeper**

Jesus kept the Sabbath perfectly. He gives the free gift of His perfect Sabbath-keeping—His perfect law-keeping—to all who in sincerity call upon His name. He has fulfilled all righteousness. When we call upon His name we become, in the eyes of the Father, the righteousness of God. It is in this, what the Scriptures call the gospel, that we take rest and rejoice.

If we are a people who desire to ride on the heights of the land and feast on the inheritance of God's provision, we must find the purity of our Sabbath-keeping in something or someone wholly detached from our own efforts. This is found by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ the righteous.

## Questions for Study and Meditation

1. When did the Sabbath begin? Is there still a Sabbath? What are different aspects of the Sabbath?
2. What day is the Sabbath?
3. What is wrong with the idea of multiple Sabbaths?
4. Discuss the reasons for the Sabbath.
5. What are things allowed, or not allowed, on the Sabbath? What is the focus?
6. Where will ignoring the Sabbath lead? Have you seen any of this in your lifetime?
7. Where will keeping the Sabbath lead? Why do you suppose?
8. What does it mean to rest in the Sabbath Keeper?