

The Fourth Commandment

Written by Dr. John E. Russell Sr -

Text: Exodus 20:8-11

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (Exodus 20:8-11, NIV).

Introduction

The idea of this commandment's validity for today has been questioned. Thiessen makes these comments:

This does not mean that the precepts of the Decalogue [The Ten Commandments] which are grounded in the character of God have no authority today. As a matter of fact, careful investigation reveals that every commandment except the fourth, is reaffirmed in the New Testament. [Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, revised by Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 171].

However, the Sabbath principle still is valid.

Sunday and the Sabbath

CHRISTIANS MET ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

This is the day Christians celebrate as the day that Jesus rose from the grave:

On the first day of the week very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; he

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has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: `The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then they remembered his words

(Luke 24:1-12, NIV).

(See also Mark 16:2; John 20:1; Matthew 28:1; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; and Revelation 1:10). Sunday, the first day of the week, replaced the Sabbath for Christians. The Sabbath or Saturday is the sixth day of the week.

SOME JEWISH CHRISTIANS PROBABLY KEPT THE SABBATH

Technically, the Jewish Sabbath is from sundown Friday through sundown Saturday. Also, our days probably vary from the time that Moses spoke this commandment to Israel, so we really do not know exactly what day the Jews originally celebrated as the Sabbath.

Some Christians in the early church probably kept the Jewish Sabbath. However, Gentile Christians were not required to. James, the pastor of the Church in Jerusalem said,

"It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood. For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath"

(Acts 15:19-21, NIV).

The Jerusalem Church and church leaders sent the essence of James' recommendation in a letter to the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:22-29).

Jesus Taught That The Sabbath Was Made for Man

JESUS IS LORD OF THE SABBATH

God created man. Much later he created The Fourth Commandment. The Fourth Commandment was given to man. God did not need it for himself--he does not need to rest or sleep:

He will not let your foot slip-- he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep (Psalm 121:3-4, NIV).

Being the Son of God, Jesus was the Creator of man and later designed the Ten Commandments. Jesus explained the rationale for the Fourth Commandment in the two parallel accounts below:

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?"

He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath"

(Mark 2:23-28, NIV).

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I [Jesus] will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light* [italics mine]."

At that time Jesus went through the grain-fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread--which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

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Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus

(Matthew 11:28-12:13, NIV).

THE SABBATH IS FOR MAN

The purpose of the Law is to help people--not to break people! This commandment was designed to give people rest after six days of hard work. The Master Designer knew that people would need rest.

Strict Jews interpreted Jesus' disciples picking grain to eat as the work of harvesting and thrashing. Since no work was to be done on the Sabbath, they condemned the disciples. Jesus' reply to the Jews condemnation taught that their use of the Law was destructive.

In Matthew's account, Jesus healed a sick man on the Sabbath. The legalistic Pharisees condemned him for this, although they would rescue an animal in danger on the Sabbath. Thus, we have Jesus' approval for medical people who work on the Sabbath.

Jesus also mentioned that priests in the Old Testament broke the Sabbath in order to minister. Thus, we have Jesus' approval for people who minister on the Sabbath.

Paul Taught That Every Day Is Sacred

WE ARE TO LIVE FOR GOD EVERY DAY

Paul teaches,

One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as

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special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God
(Romans 14:5-6, NIV).

KEEP SPECIAL DAYS FOR GOD AND ALL DAYS FOR GOD

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day
(Colossians 2:16, NIV).

The True Sabbath

The writer of Hebrews explains the true Sabbath:

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said,

"So I declared on oath in my anger, `They shall never enter my rest.'"

And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work." And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest."

It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before:

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience
(Hebrews 4:1-13, NIV).

Those who have received Christ as Lord have entered the true Sabbath because they trust in Christ and rest in God. Keeping the Sabbath is a state of being rather than observing certain days in a legalistic fashion.

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Conclusion

For the believer, every day is the Sabbath. We are resting in the LORD. Every day should be a day of worshiping the LORD. God has put a song of praise and thanksgiving in the heart of the believer. Let us express that praise and thanksgiving every day!

The principle of setting aside one day per week of rest for man and animals is still needed. It is also good to gather to worship the Lord on that day, if possible. However, some cannot take time for physical and mental rest on the Lord's Day. This is the hardest day of work for ministers. Medical people also must work this day. Firefighters and other emergency people must work also. However, *everyone* should set aside one day per week for rest and recuperation.

Should the state enact "Blue Laws"? Constantine passed a law in AD 321 stopping work in the cities of the Roman Empire on the Lord's Day. We would probably find it easier to rest if it were law. But we need to discipline ourselves in this matter.

Chapter IV of my ebook, *The Ten Commandments*. Download this book free at <http://BusterSoft.com/JRCM/>

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