

not earthly minded? Isn't the failure to remember the Sabbath day and reasoning against having to do so actually unrealistic about who we are in and of ourselves, even when become true Christians, by God's grace? But to see more now the need to keep the fourth commandment, let us move from the continuance of this fourth commandment to the character of this fourth commandment.

Here I would have us notice three particular truths about the fourth commandment. So often there is resistance to the fourth commandment because it is thought of mostly in negative terms, more in light of the Jewish perversion of it than in the light of God's intention with it. Yet a careful study of the Sabbath commandment shows that God made this law for one thing, as a special sign of the close and saving relationship He established with His people. Listen to what God says in Exodus 31 about this. In verses 13 and following we read the Lord saying, "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD Who sanctifies you."

What is God saying here? Is He not teaching that the keeping of the Sabbath was a sign of faith in Him and trust in Him, a sign proving their expectation was in and from the Lord their God in all their needs for body and soul? The keeping of the Sabbath would be like the proof of the pudding concerning their faith life and the sweetness and value of it! As one commentator put it, "Would God's people keep the reins in their own hands, or would they confidently entrust their lives to the Lord?" Observing the Sabbath rest requires faith and commitment to God. It is the temperature gauge of our heart relationship with God. Where faith is absent, or love becomes cold, there the Sabbath commandment is also discounted and dishonoured. Thinking about the Lord's Day and keeping it holy as being a sign of our faith life, what does that sign say about you? Listen again next week as we continue our study of God's fourth commandment. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

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February 19, 2006

Publication No.246

BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America

Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT [1]

In our series on the Ten Commandments of God, we come now to the fourth commandment as found in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, 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."

Do you hear what God says here? Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, to keep it distinct, special, separated for the Lord and His worship and praise and service! Who does not know we live in times where this commandment is both hardly known and practiced all too little. Increasingly, if people do respect the Sabbath day which the Christian church, based on the Bible and Jesus' resurrection from the dead on the first day of the week, now holds to on Sundays, it is mainly only for the morning service and the rest of the day is for us to do whatever we think and like. Isn't that the trend indeed?

What is, in fact, so sad and tragic is that it is within the Christian church itself that we have to strive and battle to defend and promote the keeping of the fourth commandment. Those who would keep Sunday holy are a real minority today, not just in the world but in the Christian church at large. Isn't it rather telling even, if you think about it, that the one commandment that begins with, "Remember" the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, that, keep in mind, is the exact commandment even above all the others that we are being told we don't need to remember, and that it doesn't have to be kept in mind by believers any more today.

Well now, even as I have begun the first of two messages on this fourth commandment, already all kinds of questions may be popping up in your mind. My main aim with the two messages on this commandment of God is to point out and promote that honouring our Saviour God goes together with remembering the Sabbath day, and keeping it holy. What I will do is first show the continuance of the fourth commandment, and then speak of the character of the fourth commandment. All throughout, hopefully, what will become clear is what should be the conduct of true Christians in connection with this holy commandment of God.

How can I prove first of all that with the saving work of Jesus Christ, surely the Saviour did not abolish the fourth commandment or minimize it? Often you will hear confessing Christians say something like, 'The Sabbath law doesn't count for us anymore. It has been fulfilled in Christ. It is the one law of all the Ten Commandments not mentioned in the New Testament as something we need to keep living by. In fact, Paul even says in Colossians 2:16, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days." But regarding that Scripture verse, you need to realize that in its context, it is saying nothing about the fourth commandment so much as about the Jewish believers insisting on Gentile believers still following Jewish customs and ways to be truly saved. It is not at all discounting the Lord's Day, and remembering to keep it holy. Rather, there the Apostle is discounting all Jewish legalism which was being promoted and pushed so much by a certain school of Jews in His times. In His ministry, it seems maybe Jesus too was disregarding the Sabbath, but He did not disregard it so much as expose the deadness and wrongness of the Sabbath as the Jews were observing it, making it a day of dreary bondage in promotion of works righteousness rather than a day of joyful delight in celebration of God's saving and liberating works for us.

Many in the Christian church today wrongly teach and promote that we are called to live by all the other nine commandments, but not the fourth commandment. They say it is to be taken more symbolically and spiritually, and we don't need to observe literally a special whole day of rest, one in seven. To go to church is good and important even, but we don't need to keep the Sabbath day anymore since Christ's coming and fulfillment of the law. Please hear me as I show otherwise from God's Word.

What should make us realize the continued validity of the fourth commandment without question are Jesus' words as we read them in Matthew 5:17-19. Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. He came not to make the law changed but to make a way that sinners like you and me not be condemned forever under the law, but rather to become by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, joyful followers of the law in thanksgiving and praise to Him. "The law", says Paul in Romans 7:12, referring especially to the Ten Commandments, "is holy, and the commandment[s] holy, and just and good." Jesus didn't make the commandments, not a single one of His moral laws as given in the Decalogue written with His own finger on stone as we are told in Exodus 31&32 suggesting by itself their enduring permanence, to not hold true for our New Testament times. No, Jesus did not come to minimize or discount any one of God's Ten Commandments! In fact, rather, His whole life and ministry emphasizes the enduring importance of them, and the eternal weight and significance they each and all have.

Where some of the confusion comes in with the fourth commandment is that in the Old Testament we see the Sabbath

commandment was so much insisted upon by God that it also was very much reflected in the civil and ceremonial laws of Israel. With Christ's coming and fulfillment of the law, we do acknowledge in accordance with New Testament Scripture itself that the civil and ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath laws now need not be observed, but that in no way takes away from the essence of the fourth commandment for our daily lives. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. While those civil and ceremonial Sabbath laws of the Old Testament are no longer binding, yet God's moral law, which these civil and ceremonial laws served temporarily to support in anticipation of Christ's coming, always still holds. The Ten Commandments are God's foundational and eternal standard of judgment and righteousness which holds for all people at all times in all places! Nowhere in the New Testament will you find a verse that says as Christians we are free from obeying the law of God or free at least in connection with the fourth commandment. No, instead, listen to what Jesus says in John 15:10, "If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

Absolutely nowhere do we read in Scripture that all the commandments are binding except for the fourth commandment. Rather, even the fact that the Sabbath rest commandment finds its root already in the first week of creation, when God rested the seventh day, should underscore for us its ongoing validity as one of God's Ten Commandments still to be followed today. Consider too the fact that before the giving of the Ten Commandments with the provision of manna, God ordained it to be for six days and the seventh there would be no manna. This is how God operated for forty years even, week after week, all promoting strongly the ongoing validity and importance of the fourth commandment. What Jesus through His saving work has done is not discount the fourth commandment, but lifts it to a higher plain even. This is evident in that now in the New Testament age, we keep the first day of the week holy, the Lord's Day, which was also the day of Jesus' resurrection and the day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The law still holds for God's people to live by. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Indeed, a study of the Old Testament will bring out that the fourth commandment is a very key commandment that God emphasized, and emphasizes, over and over.

For sure, it is a serious error to minimize in the Christian life any of God's commandments, particularly also the fourth commandment as I hope to show further. A question to be asked in this regard is, 'Doesn't failing to honor the Lord's Day and to keep it holy and not seeing it as important and necessary for us today, actually not only minimize Christ's saving work, but also minimize our depravity by nature, and our slowness to seek and serve the Lord'? As we need rest for our bodies physically each week, what about spiritually? Who doesn't need a day in seven to be a check for us and a support to us to stay focused rightly, and truly to be heavenly minded and