

The Fourth Commandment HONOURING THE LORDS DAY

“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.” Exodus 20:8-11

It would appear that never before in history have so many people been so busy. No other generation has had so many labour-saving and time saving devices, and yet it would appear that our generation is one of the most rushed and frantic generations in all of history.

One would have thought that with our electricity and plumbing, refrigerators, stoves, kettles, microwaves, dishwashing machines, clothes washing machines, vacuum cleaners, drive-through car washes, personal computers, laptops, Blackberry's, cell phones, and every other kind of labour and time saving device, that we would be less rushed and have more free time.

But no! No other generation in history seems to be so determined to cram every minute full of frenzied activity. Studies indicate that every year Western people spend less and less time with their spouses, their children, their neighbours and with God.

There is a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction. In the materialistic *rat race* there is a constant frantic striving for more: more possessions, nicer homes, better cars, more shoes and clothes. There is an obsessive accumulation of things and a desperate desire to fill empty lives with noise and stimulation: films, television programmes, DVDs, music, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, playstation, X box, walkmans, MP3 players, Ipods, SMS, Mix-it, Face Book and My Space. In a frenzied rush for more fun and friends, more social contacts and events, lives are being flooded and swamped by a tsunami of stimulation, noise and temptations.

Time and again one hears the complaint: *“I'm so tired!”*. People are continually complaining of being emotionally drained, physically fatigued, spiritually empty. Burned out!

Generally, when an electrical appliance, a vehicle or a computer malfunctions, we turn to the manufacturer's handbook to read the instructions. In the same way it would be wise for us to re-read the Creator's Manual. In His Ten Commandments we will find the solution to most of our problems. If we would only do what God has already commanded, we would save ourselves much grief.

“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy Days, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy Day of the Lord honourable, and shall honour Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you on your heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Isaiah 58:13-14

We are all given 52 weeks a year, seven days a week and 24 hours in each day. The question is: what are you doing with the time that God has given you? Are you expending and investing it in the way that He wants you to?

Anyone who violates the Fourth Commandment is really missing out on tremendous blessings and refreshment in the Lord. Great joy comes from taking time each week to devote to searching and studying the Scriptures, focusing on God in prayer and worship, enjoying fellowship with other Christians.

“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 that sanctifies you.” Exodus 31:13

The Puritans described the Lord’s Day as *“The market day of the soul.”*

Sir Winston Churchill declared: *“Sunday is a Divine and priceless institution, the necessary pause in the national life. It is the birthright of every British subject, our responsibility, privilege and duty to hand on to posterity.”*

US President Theodore Roosevelt wrote: *“Experience shows that the Day of Rest is essential to mankind – that it is demanded by civilisation as well as Christianity.”*

English Member of Parliament and ardent Abolitionist William Wilberforce declared: *“There is nothing in which I would recommend you to be more strictly resolute than in keeping the Sabbath holy; and by this I mean, not only abstaining that Day from all unbecoming sports and common business, but from time consuming and frivolous conversation, which often leads to a sad waste of this precious Day.”*

The 19th Century Prime Minister of Great Britain, Benjamin Disraeli, declared: *“I hold the Day of Rest to be the most valuable blessing ever conceded to man. It is the cornerstone of civilisation.”*

Reformer John Calvin wrote: *“The city will be safe if God be truly and devoutly worshipped and this is attested by the sanctification of the Sabbath...”*

Puritan writer John Bunyan, the author of Pilgrim’s Progress, wrote: *“A man shall show his heart and life, what they are, more by one Lord’s Day than by all the days of the week besides. To delight ourselves in God’s service upon His holy Day gives better proof of a sanctified nature than to grudge at the coming of such days.”*

The famous Puritan Bible commentator Matthew Henry wrote: *“The Sabbath is a sacred and Divine institution; but we must receive and embrace it as a privilege and a benefit, not as a task and a drudgery. First, God never designed it to be an imposition upon us, therefore we must not make it so to ourselves...Secondly, God did design it to be an advantage to us, and so we must make and improve it...He had some regard to our bodies in the institution that they might rest...He had much more regard for our souls. The Sabbath was made a Day of Rest, only in order to it being a Day of holy work, a Day of communion with God, a Day of praise and thanksgiving; and rest from worldly business is therefore necessary, that we may closely apply ourselves to this work, and spend the whole time in it, in public and private...See here what a good Master we serve, all whose institutions are for our own benefit!”*

Puritan pastor Thomas Watson taught: *“The reason why God instituted the old Sabbath was to be a memorial of the Creation; but He has now brought the first day of the week in it’s place in memory of a more glorious work than Creation, which is Redemption. Great was the work of Creation, but greater was the work of Redemption....The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former (Haggai 2:9). So the Glory of the Redemption was greater than the glory of Creation. Great wisdom was seen in making us, but more miraculous wisdom in saving us. Great power was seen in bringing us out of nothing, greater power in helping us when we were worse than nothing. It cost more to redeem than to create us. In Creation it was but speaking a Word, in redeeming there was shedding of blood. Creation was the work of God’s fingers. Redemption was the work of His arm. In Creation God gave us ourselves, in Redemption He gave us Himself. By Creation we have life in Adam. By Redemption we have life in Christ. By creation we had a right to an earthly paradise. By Redemption we have a title to*

the Heavenly Kingdom. Christ might well change the seventh day of the week into the first, as it puts us in mind of our Redemption, which is a more glorious work than Creation.”

Antinomians may hate the Fourth Commandment. Legalists may make it unpleasant. However, a dedicated Christian should delight in the Lord’s Day. The Fourth Commandment is pastoral, and protective. It is an eternal moral Law. A gift from God at Creation, which was later made a Commandment from God as well. This Day of Rest and refreshment was to benefit servants, visitors and one’s animals as well (Exodus 20:8-11). This Day of rest was given as a reminder that God is the Creator and the Redeemer.

Setting aside the first day of the week as a special day is good for our spirit, mind and body. We need time set aside for relaxation, reflection and restoration. It is a matter of rhythm and routine, but also a matter of revelation and remembrance of the Lord’s great work of Creation (Exodus 20:8-11) and Salvation (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...”

Hebrews 10:24-25

By ordering our week to set apart the Lord’s Day as a special day for the family to rest and to worship the Lord – we proclaim to the world that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and He is Lord of our lives.

Resting one day in seven is also healthy – spiritually, emotionally, physically and economically. It is good for business, good for families and good for any country.

God has given us this commandment, like all of His other Commandments, for our benefit. Not only of Christians, but of society in general.

D.L. Moody observed: *“No nation has ever prospered that has trampled the Sabbath in the dust. Show me a nation who has done this and I will show you a nation that has got in it the seeds of ruin and decay. I believe that Sabbath desecration will carry a nation down quicker than anything else.”*

As Christians, we should repent for allowing the Lord’s Day to become so encroached upon and desecrated by shopping, sports and worldly entertainment.

The French revolutionary and atheist, Voltaire, declared: *“If you want to kill Christianity, you must abolish Sunday.”*

In fact, the Revolutionary Convention, during the French Revolution, attempted to abolish the Christian calendar and introduce a ten-day work week, counting the years from the establishment of their ‘republic’, beginning 1792.

It needs hardly to be pointed out that they failed, but why does our week consist of seven days? Why not make it ten or twelve for that matter? The seven-day week came from Old Testament sources and spread through the Christian influence. The seven-day week is a powerfully testimony to the fact that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. The fact that Sunday, the first day of the week, is our Day of Rest, instead of the Jewish Saturday, is a weekly reminder that Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week.

Some claim that we are not observing the true Sabbath unless we are observing it on Saturday. Instead of being concerned about the ‘why’ of the Lord’s Day, they are more obsessed with the ‘when’. Some will even claim that the Emperor Constantine is the one who changed the Sabbath from Saturday and the

reason we observe it now on Sunday is because this Caesar of Rome established the tradition in A.D. 325.

Actually, the institution of the Sabbath was changed to the Lord's Day on the first day of the week by Christ and His Apostles. Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the first day of the week. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost, on the first day of the week. We read that the Disciples gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). The Apostle Paul told the Christians to set aside their tithes and offerings on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). The Apostle John received his revelation from Christ while worshipping on the first day of the week – which he described as *“the Lord's Day”* (Revelation 1:10).

Whereas in the Old Testament the Jewish believers observed the last day of the week as the Sabbath in commemoration of the Lord's work of Creation, Christians celebrate the resurrection of Christ Jesus from the dead and His work of re-creation, looking forward to the new heaven and the new earth – the everlasting Kingdom of God brought about by Christ's victory over death, hell and the grave in His resurrection.

The early church fathers, long before Constantine, taught that Christians were to set aside the first day of the week as the Lord's Day. These included Polycarp and Barnabas. Justin Martyr, in A.D. 150, wrote: *“Sunday is the day on which we all hold our communion assembly, because Jesus Christ, our Saviour, on the same day arose from the dead.”*

Clement of Alexandria wrote in A.D. 194 that: *“Believers (in fulfillment of the precepts according to the Gospels), keep the Lord's Day.”*

Tertullian in the second century wrote that on the first day of the week, *“on the Lord's Day, Christians should, in honour of the Resurrection of the Lord, defer all worldly business.”*

The Lord's Day is an opportunity for us to stop, turn away from all the things of this world, and regain spiritual perspective by focusing on God, His Word and His will.

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...” Acts 20:7

The Lord's Day Sabbath rest is crucial for the health of our souls, and a vital part of our Christian witness. We are commanded to remember the Sabbath Day, and to keep it...The Hebrew word for keep means more than to retain or maintain it, but also to honour an appointment.

The story is told of James Garfield, who went on to become President of the United States. At one point when he had been appointed President of a large business corporation he was informed of a very important meeting the next day. He replied: *“I'm sorry, I won't be able to be there.”* His aides insisted that this was a very important matter, a crisis that must be dealt with. However James Garfield shook his head and reiterated: *“I'm sorry, but I have a previous appointment. I cannot make it.”* When they pressed him to understand what appointment could be more important than this, he explained: *“I have an appointment with the Lord God Almighty tomorrow at 10:30, in His house, at His table, and I will be there.”*

Another very busy businessman who had his priorities straight was J.C. Penny, whose name is still prominent in the USA in the stores he established. J.C. Penny said this: *“If a man's business require so much of his time that he cannot attend the Sunday morning and the evening services, and Wednesday night prayer meeting of his church, then that man has more business that God intended him to have.”*

It has frequently been said that *“as goes the Sabbath, so goes the nation.”* Many may wonder how a day of rest could possibly be that important. The Lord's Day promotes an awareness that God, His ways

and His Laws are important to all of us. As Winston Churchill declared: *“The necessary pause in the national life.”*

Eric Liddell, the famous Olympic gold medallist whose refusal to run for the main Olympic race on a Sunday was the subject of the film *Chariot's of Fire*, observed: *“There are many people today who think of those who honour Sunday in the old fashioned way as killjoys. They feel that during the years of youth they ought to have a chance to have their ‘fling’. Give me the Day of the Rest, when all that savours of organised games can be put to one side, and all of life's joys will be greater because of it. To me, personally, it is a time of communion and fellowship with God – a time of quiet, in fact a time of recreation and fellowship with God. I believe that Sunday, as we have had it in the past, is one of the greatest helps in a young man's life to keep all that is noblest, truest and best. That is why I say: ‘young person, stand for the Lord's Day, for by losing it you will lose far more the Day, you will lose the spirit that it stands for’”.* Eric Liddell went on to win an Olympic gold medal for a race he had not specifically trained for, and then became a successful missionary to China, courageously dying in a Japanese concentration camp during World War II.

When we get up, get dressed and go to Sunday morning worship, we are joining hundreds of millions of people all over the world in testifying to the fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Nothing else could explain the move from the Jewish seventh day Sabbath to the Christian Lord's Day on the first day of the week. Nothing other than the victorious Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead would explain the unique institution of Sunday as a Day of Rest.

Of course, our Lord Jesus taught that it is good and right to do works of mercy and necessity on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:11-12). Christians have always recognised that. There are necessary emergency services such as those that are performed by fire fighters, paramedics, doctors, nurses, policemen and soldiers. However, we don't abandon speed restrictions on the roads simply because the police and the emergency services need to go faster. We make laws that will be good for society in general, and then discuss the necessary exceptions.

The point is – the Lord's Day should be a special day without any commercial activities. We are to make every effort to ensure that the minimum number of people are forced to work on Sundays. Many Christians have lost jobs, or failed to obtain jobs, or been denied promotions, for their principled stand on not being willing to work on Sundays. Nobody should be forced by legislation to go to church on Sunday, but it would be right for governments to make legislation to keep people free from commercial obligations on Sunday. Just as there is legislation such as compulsory wearing of seat belts for motorists and crash helmets for motorcyclists, against drug abuse and other protections, it would be appropriate for the state to pass legislation allowing people the freedom not to work on Sundays, although no government may tell people what to do with their free time.

The pioneer inventors of the aircraft, the Wright brothers, had this to say: *“We were brought up to have respect for the Lord's Day...we would never fly on a Sunday.”*

The Westminster Larger Catechism lists under the Duties Required in the Fourth Commandment (Question 116): the duty of resting from employment which would be lawful on other days and the duty of public and private worship.

“In those days I saw people in Judea treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath Day. And I warned them about the Day on which they were selling provisions. Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah and in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judea, and said to them, what evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath Day? Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath. So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it

began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted some of my servants at the gates, that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath Day.” Nehemiah 13:15-19

“So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath Day...” Luke 4:16

Under the Sins Forbidden in the Fourth Commandment, the Westminster Larger Catechism includes:

The sin of omitting duties (*“Her priests have violated My Law and profaned My holy things. They have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, nor have they made known the difference between the unclean and the clean; and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.”* Ezekiel 22:26).

The sin of careless, negligent, unprofitable performing of duties (*“For with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain”* Ezekiel 33:32; *“You also say, ‘Oh what weariness!’ And you sneer at it...should I accept this from your hand? says the Lord”* Malachi 1:13).

The sin of profaning the day by idleness and doing what is in itself sinful (*“Moreover they have done this to Me; they have defiled My sanctuary on the same Day and profaned My Sabbath.”* Ezekiel 23:38).

The Lord’s Day offers us a regular opportunity for gratitude and worship, to be challenged by the Word of God, stirred, inspired and moved in our hearts, drawn closer to the Lord, amazed and thrilled by the Word of God, built up in our understanding and doctrine. It is a Day for Spiritual growth, a Day to help us establish our priorities and to demonstrate our obedience to the Lord. It is a dramatic and significant Day of testimony, helping to show commitment to the Lord, and prove the sincerity of believers to neighbours, relations and doubting children. Obedience is more eloquent than any words.

Neglect of the Lord’s Day includes a whole family of offences, including lack of commitment, unspiritual priorities, neglect of Devotions, disobedience to practical duties for Christian living. The Lord’s Day leads the way in establishing the believers attitude to all these matters.

Those who honour the Lord’s Day will live longer, be happier, enjoy better health, and their relationship with the Lord will be vastly deepened and strengthened.

Jesus invites us: *“Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest.”* Matthew 11:28

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