

END-TIMES ISSUES



#68 Commandment #4 – The Sabbath (Introduction).

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1

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

God spoke this command on Mount Sinai:

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 which you must not do any work—

Exodus 20:8–10a (BSB)

Between these two occasions, God gave Israel a number of instructions on how they were to do this.

Moses reaffirmed it, many years later:

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but **the seventh day** is a Sabbath to the LORD your God, on which you must not do any work—

Deuteronomy 5:12–14a (BSB)

2

This command was to apply to:

- 1) The individual.
- 2) Everything under the individual's control.

<p>neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant or livestock, nor the foreigner within your gates.</p> <p>Exodus 20:10b (BSB)</p>	<p>THE REASON: So ALL can rest. [Foreigners and animals: mentioned in Exodus 23:12.]</p>	<p>neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox or donkey or any of your livestock, nor the foreigner within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest as you do.</p> <p>Deuteronomy 5:14b (BSB)</p>
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3

This command was based on God's accomplishments:

<p>God's creative work, and the day of rest that followed.</p> <p>For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that is in them, but on the seventh day He rested.</p> <p>Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy.</p> <p>Exodus 20:11 (BSB)</p> <p>(See Genesis 2:2-3.)</p>	<p>God's redemptive work, deliverance of his people from slavery.</p> <p>Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.</p> <p>That is why the LORD your God has commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.</p> <p>Deuteronomy 5:15 (BSB)</p> <p>(See Exodus 1-15.)</p>
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4

There is a lot to this commandment!

⇒ **Teachings and principles; issues to consider:**

- **In Scripture:** Instructions, commands, examples, warnings.
- **Among Christians:** Questions, disagreements, uncertainty.

⇒ **The concept of "sabbath":**

- The Hebrew word is derived from the concept of "rest" or "to cease (from doing something)."
- People associate the Sabbath with *Saturday*, because the Jewish *weekly* Sabbath occurred on Saturday. But there were other "non-Saturday" Sabbaths in Israel (which we will look at in the future).
- Most Christians meet together for worship on *Sunday*. We will have to ask why! Also, to what extent do the instructions given to *Israel* apply to us? (We will consider these things in the future.)

⇒ **TODAY'S GOAL:** We are going to look at how this commandment has been applied by Christians in times past – as seen in some of the historic catechisms that deal with this issue.

5

⇒ **Considering the "Sabbath" concept in Christian history:**

- Most Christians have considered the "Sabbath" to be a special day. We will look at two catechisms to illustrate this. (Whether or not people *consistently* practiced this is a different issue).
- ✓ **The Heidelberg Catechism** – which we have looked at in the past. As before, we will compare it to passages in Scripture.
- ✓ **The Westminster Larger Catechism** – just for comparison purposes. (We will not be looking at Scripture references.)
- These catechisms emphasize somewhat different issues; but both attempt to have *Scripture* (not tradition and ritual) as their basis.

⇒ **The usual reminders:**

- These documents are of *human* origin. We can learn from them, but will need to evaluate what they say, according to Scripture.
- We can disagree with them (if necessary), *if* we can show that Scripture says something different (and we're not just picking verses we *want* to believe, and ignoring others).

6

>> THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM <<

We've been using this catechism to illustrate the types of issues that are represented by the various commandments.

Q. What is God's will for you in the fourth commandment?

A. First,
that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained, ...

- The starting point focuses on the need to *proclaim* the message of Scripture. Implied is the need to *learn* it – ourselves and others, whether leaders, potential leaders, or laypeople.

What does Scripture say?

- There are *many* passages in Scripture, in which people are instructed to teach, to learn, to help others in this matter, etc. **For example:**
 - Teaching one's *children* (= an *obligation*) implies a willingness for the *parents* to learn – and (as necessary) a need for teachers.

7

- ✓ The need to teach – one's self and one's children.

These words I am commanding you today are to be **upon your hearts**. And you shall **teach them diligently to your children** and speak of them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (BSB)

- ✓ Being taught – necessary for salvation and life.

But as for you, continue in the things you have learned and firmly believed, since you know from whom you have learned them. **From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures**, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:14-17 (BSB); see 1:5. (He was taught by his mother and grandmother.)

8

- ✓ The need to teach others – from generation to generation.

And **the things that you have heard me say** among many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be qualified to **teach others** as well.

2 Timothy 2:2 (BSB)

... and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I diligently attend the assembly of God's people ...

- The "festive day of rest" refers to the "sabbath" concept – a day when we change our focus from "daily activities" to God. Most Christians say this day is now Sunday. This catechism focuses simply on the *need* for these things to be done, not on a specific day to do them.

What does Scripture say?

Let us not neglect meeting together, as some have made a habit, but **let us encourage one another**, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:25 (BSB)

(Scripture also provides many examples of people meeting together.)

9

- This assembling of God's people is to be done for a number of specific purposes:

... to learn what God's Word teaches,
to participate in the sacraments,
to pray to God publicly,
and to bring Christian offerings for the poor.

What does Scripture say?

- Scripture contains many commands and instructions and examples of these practices.

TEACH

Until I come, devote yourself to **the public reading of Scripture**, to **exhortation**, and to **teaching**.

1 Timothy 4:13 (BSB)

PRAY

First of all, then, I urge that **petitions, prayers, intercessions**, and **thanksgiving** be offered for everyone ...

1 Timothy 2:1 (BSB)

10

SACRAMENTS (OR
ORDINANCES)

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you:

The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took **bread**, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; **do this in remembrance of Me**."

In the same way, after supper He took **the cup**, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; **do this**, as often as you drink it, **in remembrance of Me**."

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 (BSB)

MONEY FOR
HELPING POOR
CHRISTIANS

Now about **the collection for the saints**, you are to do as I directed the churches of Galatia:

On the first day of every week, each of you should **set aside a portion of his income**, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will be needed.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 (BSB)

(More about this collection can be found in 2 Corinthians 8-9.)

11

Second,
that every day of my life
I rest from my evil ways,
let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, ...

- In contrast to the *weekly* sabbath, preparation for the *eternal* sabbath is an *every-day* activity. This involves repentance, spiritual growth, etc. – a daily pursuit.

... and so begin in this life
the eternal Sabbath.

What does Scripture say?

There remains, then, **a Sabbath rest for the people of God**. For whoever 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 the same pattern of disobedience.

Hebrews 4:9-11 (BSB)

12

>> VARIOUS OTHER HISTORIC CATECHISMS <<

Most include both "positive" and "negative" applications of this commandment (obligations and prohibitions); but they don't mention the "eternal Sabbath," which the Heidelberg Catechism referred to.

Some observations.

- Many denominations/groups do not use catechisms, or have only very short statements.
- The Larger Lutheran Catechism contains some very good insights; but it is more like a sermon, report or commentary on the issue.
- The Catholic Catechism is quite extensive, but much of what it says about this commandment is based on what *people* say, not *Scripture*.
- The Westminster Larger Catechism is quite comprehensive. We will use this one to illustrate the nature of this commandment.
- There is a Westminster Shorter Catechism and a Baptist Catechism, which are condensed versions of the Westminster Larger Catechism.

13

>> WESTMINSTER LONGER CATECHISM <<

- **We may or may not agree with everything** that this catechism says; but it attempts to be based strictly on Scripture. Each point comes with a comprehensive list of Scripture proofs that can be evaluated.
- **Today, our purpose** is just to present the text (in modern English), to give us a general idea of the type of viewpoint that has been held by many Christians, down through the centuries (at least during times when people focused on adhering to Scripture's teachings). This perspective is quite different from the views held in many modern churches.
- **This catechism** divides the explanation into seven sections, beginning with this introduction question:

Q. What is the fourth commandment?

[Here it quotes the fourth commandment, based on the Exodus passage.]

14

Q. What is required in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment requires that all people sanctify and keep holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his Word, expressly one whole day in seven, which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, so to continue to the end of the world.

The first day of the week is the Christian Sabbath; in the New Covenant it is called the Lord's Day.

- Most Christians, down through the centuries, consider the "Christian Sabbath" to be Sunday – a day set apart for a special focus on God.
- We are to treat the day as *special*.

15

Q. How is the Sabbath, or Lord's Day, to be sanctified?

A. The Sabbath or Lord's Day is to be sanctified by holy resting all day,

not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but also from worldly employments and recreations that are lawful on other days, making it our delight to spend the whole time (except as much of it as is taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in public and private exercises of God's worship.

To that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with foresight, diligence, and moderation, we are to dispose and resolve our worldly business in a timely way, so that we may be more free and fit for the duties of the Lord's Day.

- **"Holy resting" defined:** We are to have a *God*-focus, not diverting our attention to sin, or even to normally-legitimate activities. We will need to prepare ourselves *in advance*, to minimize distractions.

16

Q. Why is the charge of keeping the Sabbath more specially directed to heads of families and other authorities?

A. The charge of keeping the Sabbath is more specially directed to heads of families and other authorities because they are bound not only to keep it themselves, but to see that it is observed by all those under their charge, and because they are often prone to hinder those under them by assigning tasks of their own.

- Leaders have the obligation to encourage those under their authority to "keep the Sabbath."
- This also means that they are *not to be* guilty of *hindering* others from keeping it.

All of these catechisms take the view that God, who created us and saves us, has a right to be given part of our week (= 1 day in 7); and that it applies to *everyone*, not just to "super-religious" people.

17

Q. What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are the following:

- all omissions of the duties required;
- all careless, negligent, unprofitable performing of them and being weary of them;
- and all ways of profaning the day by idleness, by doing that which is in itself sinful, and by all needless works, words, and thoughts about our worldly employments and recreations.

- This includes sins of "omission," as well as sins of "commission."
 - ✓ Not doing what we ought to do.
 - ✓ Doing what we ought to do, but with the wrong attitude.
 - ✓ Replacing our duties with something else (even if that "something" is good, under normal conditions).

18

Q. What are the reasons added to the fourth commandment, to reinforce it?

- A. The reasons added to the fourth commandment to reinforce it are taken
- from the equity of it, namely that God allows us six days of seven for our own affairs, and reserves only one for himself, in these words: *"Six days you shall labor, and do all your work;"*
 - from God's claiming a special ownership of that day: *"the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God;"* from God's example: *"in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day;"*
 - and from the blessing that God put on that day, not only sanctifying it to be a day for his service, but also ordaining it to be a means of blessing to us in our sanctifying it: *"Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."*

19

Q. Why is the word "remember" set at the beginning of the fourth commandment?

- A. The word "remember" is set at the beginning of the fourth commandment partly because of the great benefit of remembering it: we are helped by this in our preparation to keep the Sabbath, and, in keeping it, helped to keep all the rest of the commandments and to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption (which are a short summary of religion).

PART 1: "Remembering" helps us...

- To *prepare* for the Sabbath.
- To *keep* the Sabbath – and keeping the Sabbath will help us in our attitude toward the *other* commandments and in our gratefulness for what God has done (by creating us and redeeming us).

20

[continued]

Also, the word "remember" is used partly because

- we are very ready to forget it, because there is less light of nature for it;
- because it restrains our natural liberty in things that are lawful at other times;
- because it comes only once in seven days, and many worldly activities come in between and too often distract our minds from thinking about it, either to prepare for it, or to sanctify it;
- and because Satan with his devices works hard to blot out the glory and even the memory of it, to bring in all kinds of indifference to religion and impiety.

PART 2: "Remembering" is important, because it's easy to forget!

- The things of this world don't remind us.
- It helps us to *not* become preoccupied with what the world offers.
- The devil tries to distract us.

21

❖ TODAY'S GOAL WAS: To have a starting point for our study of this Fourth Commandment.

- For this purpose, we observed how *Christians of the past* have typically viewed the Fourth Commandment and its application to Christianity.
 - ✓ For some, this may come as a surprise. Many churches today deny *any* application of the Fourth Commandment to Christianity. (At the same time, they also do not recognize the 10 Commandments as representing *categories* of commands, instructions and examples.)
- **If our goal is to be faithful to Scripture...**
 - ↳ We cannot accept the views expressed in the catechisms, *until we know whether or not they represent the teaching of Scripture.*
 - ↳ That being the case, it's OK if we end up disagreeing with them ... but only if Scripture (not personal preference) leads us in a different direction.

22

Our MISSION!

- ❖ **Be aware:** This topic can be a highly emotional issue!
- ❖ **Consider:** How do these catechisms compare to *your* views about the Sabbath?
- **Regardless of your views on this matter...** Can you support them by what Scripture says? Are there *other* verses that support a *different* perspective? [If so, then accept them *all*!]
- **How should we respond?**
 - ↳ Perhaps we will discover that Scripture *agrees* with us. Perhaps we will discover that Scripture says something *different*.
 - ↳ If changes in perspective are needed, it may take serious resolve and reliance on the Holy Spirit (and encouragement by God's people) in order for it to be applied to life.

23

Credits

SCRIPTURE

- Scriptures marked "BSS" – Taken from The Holy Bible, Berean Standard Bible, BSS; Public Domain (CC BY NC ND). <https://bereanbible.com/>

CATECHISMS

- Heidelberg Catechism – <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/HeidelbergCatechism.pdf>
- Westminster Long Catechism – https://www.cityreformed.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/wlc_in_modern_english.pdf; italics added; slight text change (one word added) for easier reading.

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24