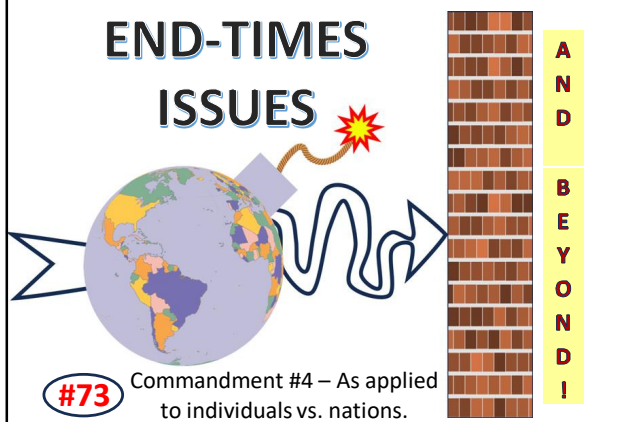


END-TIMES ISSUES




#73 Commandment #4 – As applied to individuals vs. nations.

1

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

were given by God to the *nation* of Israel.



- Some of the commands may be worded in a way that is best suited for a *nation*.
- Some of the penalties for violating the commands are intended to be enforced by a *nation* (i.e., by civil government).

• Yet since each commandment represents a *category* of commands, instructions and examples, there will be many applications of these commands that apply to *individuals*.

EXAMPLE: "Do not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16) is given in a form best suited for governing one's testimony in a court of law. But there are other commands in this category that are well-suited for governing an *individual's* day-to-day actions, such as: "Do not lie" (Leviticus 19:11b).

2

How can a NATION respond to these commandments?

(After all, *nations* are comprised of both *saved* and *unsaved* people!)

- **People who are saved** will *desire* to obey the commandments. They have an *internal* motivation to do so – something that many of the Israelites *did not* have.
- **People who are unsaved** would be *compelled* to obey the commandments. As long as the commandments were enforced by the nation, the commandments would tend to have a *restraining influence* on the sins of these people.

In symbolic language, this group has "uncircumcised hearts."

- Moses warned Israel about it (Deuteronomy 10:16); and so did Jeremiah (Jeremiah 4:4).
- Moses also told Israel about a *future* day, after a time of national apostasy and exile, when God would *change* their hearts (Deuteronomy 30:3). This is a reference to the New Covenant, which Jeremiah also mentions (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

3

About restraining the unsaved:

- **What it does NOT mean:** Restraint does *not* mean they stop sinning or that they are saved. Nor does it mean that all the "really bad" sins totally *cease* to exist in society, or that "everyone" will be obeying the commands.

Even today, unsaved people who are raised with an awareness of the commandments tend to have their sins *restrained* (unless they *totally rebel* against all righteousness). We can observe this in our own nation's history, by comparing times in the past (when most people were conscious of the Ten Commandments) and today (when the Ten Commandments have been almost totally erased from society).

- **Whose job is it to enforce the commandments?** It would depend on the nature of the violation.
 - ✓ It could be parents directing their children. But the most serious violations would require a punishment that was administered *not* by the *individual*, but by the *group* (i.e., by civil government).

4

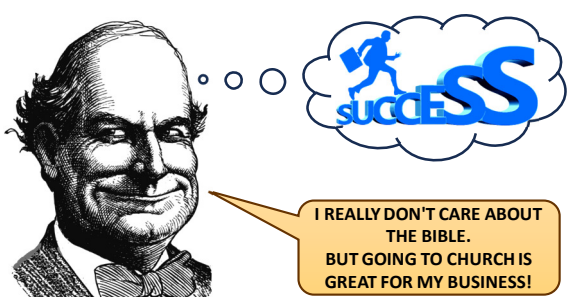
What about the Fourth Commandment?

- **This commandment can have value even for the *unsaved*!** Even *superficial* obedience to it may have a positive effect on both the individual and society.
 - ✓ A society *needs* a weekly "time out," in order to function properly. Doing so has a positive effect on people – mentally, emotionally, physically, etc.
 - ✓ God designed this commandment's concept of "rest" to impact *all* aspects of society, directly or indirectly.
 - ✓ If a person ignored the "God-related" aspects of this command, yet followed its "people-related" aspects, there would still be a positive effect on society – even if people followed it *only* because the nation *enforced* it (such as by not letting companies *force* people to work seven days a week).
- **When people have an awareness of the *Fourth* Commandment:** They normally have an awareness of the *other* commandments – and this additional awareness also influences society, and restrains sin.

5

A WORD OF CAUTION:

- **Appearing to obey the *Fourth* Commandment is *not proof* that a person is saved.** In a society that has been influenced by the Bible, a person may do good things just to impress other people.



6

How serious is *violation of the Fourth Commandment*?

- The following instruction was given to Israel, *as a nation*. It tells Israel what to do if someone profanes the Fourth Commandment. Note that God gave this obligation to punish to the group, not to the individual.

Keep the Sabbath, for it is holy to you. Anyone who profanes it **must surely be put to death**. ... the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day **must surely be put to death**.

Exodus 31:14a, 15b (BSB)

- EXAMPLE:** When a person was found violating this command...

And the LORD said to Moses, "The man must surely be put to death. **The whole congregation** is to stone him outside the camp."

So **the whole congregation** took the man outside the camp and stoned him to death, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Numbers 15:35-36 (BSB)

7

Should NATIONS obey (and enforce) this commandment?

- Perhaps they *should*, but none do. To a *limited* extent, modern Israel does. But realistically, no nation *consistently* follows the Fourth Commandment regulations, since it would require submission to the true God. (This probably won't change until Jesus returns to rule.)

Should INDIVIDUALS obey (and enforce) this commandment?

- As far as obedience is concerned: **YES!** Scripture has *many* commands, instructions and examples that are related to this command.
 - ✓ The passages don't always include the word "Sabbath." But they focus on various concepts related to: ① the pursuit of holiness, and ② resting from our "work-week" activities.
- As far as enforcement is concerned: **IT DEPENDS!**
 - ✓ It may be our duty to enforce it in certain situations (such as parents over children). But the punishments would be less severe.
 - ✓ It is NOT our duty to do the *government's* function (assuming that this obligation still exists today).

8

HOW should *individuals* respond to this severe punishment statement?

- As a **COMMAND? NO!** We do *not* take matters into our own hands, and inflict this punishment on people who don't obey the Fourth Commandment – people who *profane* what God has declared *holy*.
- As a **FACT? YES!** As individuals, we *cannot* do what this command told Israel to do (as a *nation*). Though it is given in a *command* form, we (as *individuals*) are to treat it as a *fact*. For example, we might view it this way: "It is a *fact* that God commanded this to be done by the civil government."
 - ✓ Viewed this way, we would realize that *obeying* this command (and what it teaches) is a *serious matter*. *Holiness* is a serious matter; and when we disregard it, we are *worthy* of death.
 - ✓ Though judgment will probably not come in this present life, we know that a day of accountability is coming. All people will someday stand before the Final Judge, and will answer for what they have done (or not done).

9

Many people *oppose* applying the Ten Commandments today – especially the Fourth Commandment.

- Some people just don't like them, because they love to sin.
 - ✓ Today, we live in a society that *despises* holiness and treats it as having little or no value. Such people find it easy to *condemn* God as being "harsh and unloving" for requiring punishments like death, for violations of some of the commandments.
 - ✓ In reality, all they prove is *their own wickedness* – which is so deeply embedded in their hearts, that *they cannot recognize the serious need for holiness*, when in the presence of the living God.
- There are others who are "against" applying the Commandments, yet are *not* enemies of Christ.
 - ✓ It's just that their view of the New Covenant leads them to think that the commandments have been *replaced* by Christ's teachings.
 - ✓ We may consider them "misguided" in their interpretation; but they are not enemies. In most issues, they may reach the same *practical* conclusions as we do.

10

Has God *replaced* the Ten Commandments?

- Some people claim that the entire Law of Moses (including the Ten Commandments) has been replaced by a New Testament "Law of Love." People who hold to this view may have a wide range of opinions about what that means. **TWO EXAMPLES:**
 - ✓ Some may leave "love" undefined, so that they can allow all kinds of sin to exist, under the guise of "love."
 - ✓ Others may "replace" the Old Testament law with commands they find in the New Testament. They end up with something similar to what the Old Testament law teaches, but without the ceremonial or civil regulations.
- Jesus does *not* say that "love" *replaces* the law; rather, he *connects it to the law!* He *quotes* the law to prove it! (See Matthew 22:37-20.)
 - ✓ We can *accept* the law (without cancelling it), and let God show us the changes that occurred when the New Covenant was instituted. He has done so with *direct statements* (Scripture) and *providence* (circumstances that make certain practices *incapable* of being done, such as the destruction of the temple).

11

Does the Fourth Commandment apply today?

- NO:** Some claim that the *entire Fourth Commandment* *doesn't* apply today... *especially on a national level*.
 - ✓ They may argue that this commandment applied *only* to Israel, but not to anyone else.
 - ✓ Yet if we realize that the commandment represents a *category* of commands, instructions and examples, we will see that even the New Testament says much that reinforces it.
- PARTLY:** Others may argue that the *command itself* is still relevant, but that the *punishment requirements* aren't – that they applied only to Israel.
- YES:** Some may conclude that the *entire commandment* *does* apply today – even the punishments. Yet even if we have concluded that the entire commandment (including the punishments) *does* apply today, it is *still NOT* our responsibility to take matters into our own hands, if the government fails to fulfill its obligations.

12

Certain facts could suggest that the Fourth Commandment remains **relevant** on both the national and individual levels:

- **First**, when God reveals to us **basic moral obligations**, they apply to **all people worldwide** – not just to *saved* people, and not just to a single *nation* (Israel). **All** people will someday be judged by the God who gave us these moral obligations – even if, right now, people claim to “not believe” in them.
- **Second**, the laws God gave to Israel were the **most righteous of laws**. As Moses told the people:

See, I have taught you **decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded** me ... Observe them carefully, for this will show your **wisdom and understanding** to the nations, ...

And what other nation is so great as to have such **righteous decrees and laws** as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Deuteronomy 4:5a, 6a, 8 (NIV)

(This would still allow for changes to occur, when the covenants changed.)

AS WE LEARN TO APPLY THE SABBATH CONCEPT, HERE ARE SOME THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- ① **Today, we live under the New Covenant**, and we may discover that some things *have* changed. But moral issues and basic concepts have not changed.
- ② **We can learn from both Old and New Testaments**. Some of the most basic concepts are found in *both* testaments, such as:
 - ✓ **The need to periodically change one's focus** from “everyday” things, to God.
 - ✓ **The need for holiness** – and the need to rely on *God* for this holiness. (This is a focus on *what God does*.)
 - ✓ **Expressing love for God**: What we must do, in order to pursue holiness. (This is a focus on *our responsibility*.)
 - ✓ **Expressing love for neighbor**: Our interaction with other people, encouraging and enabling them to *share* in this change of focus.

③ **We need to remember what our final authority is.**

- **People's teachings NO!** When we first introduced the Fourth Commandment, we looked at its explanation, as given in two catechisms. This was to illustrate the range of concepts that this commandment represents.
 - ✓ For one of the catechisms: We looked at some of the Scripture passages that formed the basis of its statements.
 - ✓ For the other catechism: We presented it just to illustrate some additional concepts that are often associated with this commandment. (We did not look at the Scriptural support for what it said.)
- **Scripture? YES!** Ultimately, Scripture is our authority. The catechisms illustrate the *range of issues* we should consider, as we explore what Scripture says. We don't have to accept anything in the catechisms that we cannot support with Scripture. On the other hand, we can accept anything in Scripture that might have been omitted by them.

OUR MISSION

⇒ In the past few weeks, we have looked at a variety of issues related to the Fourth Commandment. We have attempted to show that this commandment represents a category of commands, obligations and examples that are related to the concepts of holiness and rest.

⇒ As we look at our specific obligations (as individuals under the New Covenant), we can take into consideration the commands and facts found in Scripture, realizing that even the commands that *don't* apply to us (as indicated by the context) can *teach* us something about the importance of holiness and rest.

⇒ **Here are two ways we can prepare ourselves for learning our Fourth Commandment obligations:**

#1 WE CAN REMEMBER THIS BASIC PRINCIPLE:

- ✓ **FACTS** are to influence our thinking.
- ✓ **COMMANDS** are to influence our actions.

(Practice doing this with **ALL Scripture!**)

—For each, the *context* will determine how we are to respond.

#2

#2 WE CAN ALSO ASK OURSELVES THIS QUESTION:

- Since all people will someday stand before God and be judged according to their works...
- Do we want holiness to characterize our lives at that time?
- If so, then how do we want to pursue it (starting NOW)?

We have only TWO options to choose from:

1. We can focus on working to earn holiness – by obeying the Law (whether it's the O.T. Law or the N.T. commands).
2. We can focus on trusting God for holiness – by relying on God to accomplish it in us. (Then we can let our trust in God *guide* our actions, based on what we learn in Scripture.)

WHICH DO YOU CHOOSE?

Credits

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