

# 4th Commandment Part 4

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 06 March 2011

Preacher: David MacPherson

[ 0 : 00 ] Thank God it's Sunday. Seriously, take a moment and thank God for Sunday.

I have to confess, if indeed it is a confession, that as I grew up as a child or teenager, I don't know if that prayer was ever on my lips.

But we are indeed to thank God it's Sunday. Sunday, a day of rest, is a very special gift from God to His people.

It is a commandment, and we recognize that it is and the implications that that carries. But it is a gift. The two things are compatible.

A gift not only to His people, indeed, as we've considered previously. It is a creation ordinance, a gift for all people, and a gift that gives evidence of how well He knows us and how well He knows what our needs are.

[ 1 : 15 ] And indeed, it gives evidence of His loving concern for our welfare. A couple of weeks ago, we were encouraging you to thank God it's Monday.

Well, tonight, press the rewind button 24 hours, and our concern is that we would thank God it's Sunday. And as we reach our fourth and final sermon on the fourth commandment, we want to focus on what is involved in enjoying and fulfilling God's purpose of keeping one day holy.

What does it mean to keep the Sabbath day holy as we are instructed to do? Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, we are told there in Exodus 20 and verse 8.

What does that mean? What does it involve? I want to suggest that we can understand what is involved in keeping the Sabbath day holy by looking in three directions.

By looking to God, by looking to ourselves, and by looking to others. Or to put it differently, hopefully more clearly, biblical Sabbath observance involves these three elements.

[ 2 : 41 ] It involves gratitude to God. It involves care for self. And it involves care and justice for others. These three elements we're going to consider in the light of the text of Scripture, and particularly this commandment that we are considering.

Now, as we do consider each of these categories, or each of these elements in turn, it will become apparent, I hope, that there is considerable overlap between these three elements.

But though there is overlap, and we'll, I think, notice the overlap, I think there is merit in making the distinction and exploring the meaning and purpose of the commandment within this framework.

That it encourages us, or requires of us, to give gratitude to God, to take care of ourselves, and also to take care and seek justice for others.

So, let's think of each of these in turn. First of all, gratitude to God. We can't say that the first and central purpose of the commandment is Godward.

[ 3 : 57 ] We're thinking of directions, and what direction we need to look. And we must begin in that direction, looking towards God. It is a day set aside for God.

Listen to the language of the commandment. 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.

It is a day for, to the Lord your God. The day in a distinctive and particular way belongs to God.

Now, some might say, and quite rightly, that every day belongs to God. And that is, of course, true. And those who maybe would want to shy away from the requirements of this particular

commandment might be very prone to make that point.

Every day belongs to God. And of course, yes, we say amen to that. But we say amen to that and hold on to our conviction on the basis of God's Word that this day of rest, this Sabbath day belongs to God in a special way.

[ 5 : 14 ] Indeed, the language that we also find in the commandment, the language of keeping it holy, remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, further reinforces this truth.

The language points to this day, this Sabbath day, this day of rest, this one day in seven. The language points to this day being devoted to divine service, being separated from the other days that it might be dedicated entirely to the service of God, that it might belong to God in a special way, in distinction from the other days that also belong to God, and on which we must also render service to God.

But what does that mean? What does it involve to make this claim, simply really to direct your attention to what the Bible says concerning the Sabbath day as belonging in a particular and special way to God?

Well, what does that mean? What does it involve for us? Well, at heart it is about providing us an opportunity to give our thoughtful and undivided attention and gratitude to God, and to do so in two complementary ways that are highlighted for us in the very language of the commandment. How are we to give or to give expression of our gratitude to God? Well, we are to do so in these two complementary ways, remembering and worshipping.

[ 6 : 56 ] Let's just think a little bit about these two elements. Now, we're still considering this first element of the commandment in terms of what it requires.

It requires that we be grateful to God. And this gratitude to God will be shown in the measure that we do these things, in the measure that we remember, and in the measure that we worship.

And of course, they're very much intertwined. But first of all, remembering. What are we to remember very especially and very particularly on the Sabbath day, on the day of rest?

Or on the Christian Sabbath on Sunday, as we've dealt with that particular aspect on a previous occasion. What are we to remember? Well, first of all, we are to remember God's work of creation. Notice that in the very text of the commandment, we are reminded of this. In verse 11, having been told what we are to do, to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, we are then told, So we're very particularly required, encouraged to remember God's work of creation.

[ 8 : 29 ] Now, why is that important? And what does it involve? Well, to remember God as our creator is to acknowledge at least three things, or certainly three things that I want to highlight this evening.

To remember God as creator. First of all, as we bring to our attention, as we remind ourselves, as we ponder on and consider that God is the creator, that God is our creator, it helps us to acknowledge our absolute dependence upon Him.

Meditating on this truth, that God is the all-powerful creator, that He has created us, that He has created all that there is, reminds us that we live in absolute dependence upon Him.

Now, that is very important to do on a regular basis, on a periodic basis, and the day of rest allows for that periodic remembrance, that we are creatures and that our God is the great creator.

And that is so important because we are prone to pride. We are predisposed to pride, to glory in our own achievements, and to take delight in what we can do and achieve.

[ 9 : 55 ] Indeed, in the very context of remembering the commandments, we are reminded that that will help us not to be proud. If we look in Deuteronomy 8, and just notice there, what is said in Deuteronomy 8, and verse 11.

First of all, Deuteronomy 8, and verse 11, we read, Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws, and His degrees, that I am giving you on this day. This is in the context of the renewal of the covenant and the Ten Commandments being given once again. And then if we just jump to verses 17 and 18, one of the reasons why it's important to remember these commandments and to observe these commandments, we read there, You may say to yourself, My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me, but remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant, which He swore to your fathers as it is today.

So as we remember, very particularly on this day, God as our Creator, it helps us to acknowledge our absolute dependence upon God, and would correct that tendency that there is within us to pride and to self-sufficiency.

But remembering God as the Creator also reminds us of our continuing obligation to Him as creatures.

[ 11 : 38 ] He is the all-powerful Creator. We are creatures. We are obligated to Him. Indeed, as we remember the account of creation as it is provided for us in the Scriptures, we find very clearly that we have been created with an obligation to God to do His bidding, to live as He commands us.

And so to reflect on, to remember God as Creator, it reminds us of our continuing obligation to Him as creatures.

But also, as we remember God as Creator, it stirs up in us, or ought to stir up in us, deep gratitude to Him for the generosity and the beauty of His creation.

Even on a day such as this, a beautiful sunny day, as we just reflect on, in a way that would be difficult in the busyness of the rest of the week, we just reflect, and admire, and enjoy the creation of God.

We are stimulated to greater gratitude for His great generosity to us. So our gratitude to God involves remembering.

[12:53] It involves remembering, very specifically, God's work of creation, but also it involves remembering God's work of redemption. We've already read in Deuteronomy, the version, if you wish, of the Ten Commandments as we find them in Deuteronomy.

And let's just remind ourselves what we find there that we don't have in Exodus. In Deuteronomy chapter 5 and verse 15. As the people are encouraged, exhorted to observe the Sabbath day, one of the reasons that they are encouraged to do so is found in verse 15.

Remember, again this word remember, remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. Remember that you were slaves, the people are told. As you, on this one day of the week, set aside from the others, would gather to worship, would seek to spend the day fittingly, well this is one of the things you must do.

Take advantage of the opportunity that it provides to remember God's work of redemption, His work of creation, but also His work of redemption.

[14:17] Remember that you were slaves. And of course, this truth is as applicable to us as to the Israelites who had been freed, liberated from Egypt.

We too were slaves, slaves to sin, far from God, rebels in a far country, wholly incapable of securing our freedom.

As incapable as the Israelites were of securing their own freedom from Egypt, perhaps even more incapable. And yet, we have been redeemed. As we have put our trust in Jesus as our Savior, we have been liberated, we have been rescued.

And we are told that it is important for us to reflect on that, to remember that. And again, there would be those who would say, well that's something we must do permanently and constantly.

And yes, we agree. But God in His infinite wisdom has given us one particular day when we can remember these truths, when we can remember what God has done for us, when we can look back and consider in grateful remembrance His goodness and His salvation.

[15:28] We were slaves, but God rescued us. And as in Egypt, deliverance was secured at the blood cost of the firstborn.

So, for us and for all sinners, deliverance has been secured at the blood cost of God's only Son, our Savior, Jesus. And we are to remember this.

We are to remind ourselves of these things. We are to ponder on and meditate on these things. We are to glory in them. We are to celebrate these truths. And God has given us one day as a special day when we can spend time remembering.

We remember God's work of redemption. We remember Jesus. We remember His life. We remember His death. We remember His resurrection. Indeed, as we observe the Christian Sabbath, as Sunday is sometimes called, we particularly remember and celebrate the fact that Jesus rose, triumphant from the grave, having secured our redemption.

And so, the Sabbath day, this day of rest, provides an opportunity for gratitude to God, remembering, but also worshipping. Now, here is where we can see that these categories, if you wish, or in this case, this way of dividing what is involved in gratitude to God, remembering and worshipping, the two are so intertwined.

[17:08] You could say that it's a necessary corollary of remembering is to worship. It is inconceivable, or it ought to be inconceivable, that we could spend time remembering God as creator, remembering God's work of redemption, and then fail to worship Him.

Indeed, you could argue that remembering itself is part of worship, though I think it is fair to distinguish these two elements. But we are to worship.

This is a day set aside for worship. And again, and forgive me if I repeat myself in some of these things, some might protest, or some might argue, well, aren't we to worship every day in the New Testament age, as we look back on all that Jesus has done, is it not the case that we are to live our lives as a permanent act of worship?

Well, by all means, that is as it ought to be. But there is a very real sense in which God has granted to us, has given to us, this day as a special day, as a particular day when we can engage in the worship of God.

If we think of how things were ordered in the Old Testament under the Mosaic law given by God, notice one interesting element that we find in Numbers, chapter 28, and verses 9 and 10.

[ 18 : 40 ] This is in response to the concern that there might be that is it not true that every day should be dedicated to the worship of God? And we say yes. But notice how in God's law given through Moses there was this distinction made between the day of rest and the other days.

Numbers, chapter 28, and verses 9 and 10. We read there, on the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah, of fine flour mixed with oil.

This is the burnt offering for every Sabbath in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. Now clearly, this is all part of the ceremonial law that has found its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ.

But the principle here is an interesting one. There's a recognition that there were offerings to be given on every day. But on the Sabbath day, there was, in addition to the regular offering, the opportunity, the privilege, the invitation to offer something more.

And I think the principle that is embedded there is one that holds for us today. Yes, we worship God every day. We ought to with our lives and the manner in which we live them.

[ 20 : 02 ] But God has given us one day where we can bring in addition to our regular worship, special worship to Him.

What does that look like for us today? It doesn't involve bringing offerings of grain or lambs. It doesn't involve that. So what does it involve? What does it look like?

Well, today, surely this opportunity for worshiping in a way that is not possible in the rest of the week is afforded by a gathering such as this, when as God's people we can come together for public, for corporate worship, where we have the opportunity to spend time in praise and prayer as we listen to God's Word preached and explained to us.

That is something we simply cannot do every day of the week. We can't do that on the other days of the week. But we can do it today. We can do it on the day that has been set aside, especially for that purpose.

So as we consider what is required in this commandment, as we consider this first element, that it is an opportunity to give gratitude to God, and we do so as we remember His work of creation and His work of redemption and as we remember so we are brought to the place of worship, where we worship the God of creation and redemption.

[ 21 : 35 ] So gratitude to God is at the heart of this commandment, but also we said there was a second element and that is care for self. Care for self.

Now what do I mean by that? Well, we're familiar with the words of Jesus that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. We've considered in a small way the significance of that on a previous occasion.

Certainly what we can say without going into any depth on that particular verse because we're not going to, but it certainly is a clear indication that the Sabbath is for our own good.

It's for our own good. And that truth is evident when we consider the purpose of the rest that is prescribed by the commandment. The commandment prescribes rest.

We are forbidden from work in order that we might rest. Now, what I want you to do or what I want to do is to think a little bit about the purpose of this rest that is prescribed by the commandment.

[ 22 : 41 ] The concept of rest is at the very heart of the commandment. The very name, the Sabbath day is a name that comes from a root meaning rest or cessation from work.

But the question is, why rest? What is the purpose of resting? What is the purpose of ceasing from our ordinary work? Well, I think the purpose is twofold. In the first place, the purpose is to facilitate, and I'll notice in a moment what I mean by that.

But secondly, the purpose of rest is to refresh and to restore us. We are the ones who need to be refreshed and restored. And so the rest, on the one hand, facilitates something, we'll see just in a moment, but it also has the purpose of granting us refreshment and restoration.

What does it facilitate? Well, this really follows on what we've already been noticing. When I say that the purpose of the rest is to facilitate, I'm simply recognizing that the command to rest facilitates or provides the opportunity to remember and worship.

You see, if God were to say to us, you really must remember in a special way that I am your creator, that I am your redeemer, you really must in a special way worship me, but He didn't give us the opportunity to do so, He expected us to work seven days just as if all were the same, then it would be very difficult for us to do so.

[ 24 : 09 ] But He facilitates this activity of remembering, of worshiping, by giving us a day of rest where we are freed from the responsibilities and the work of the rest of the week.

So the purpose is to facilitate. But the purpose of the rest is not only to facilitate. It's not simply that we can clear the decks and spend the whole day in church.

That's not the only purpose of this rest. It also has, as its declared purpose, to refresh us, to restore us.

It is intended to provide us with an opportunity for rest that will serve to refresh and restore us physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually.

Notice what God says in Exodus chapter 23 and verse 12 in connection with this very commandment and in connection particularly with the manner in which it provides this opportunity for rest and refreshment.

[ 25 : 21 ] Exodus 23 and verse 12, six days, do your work. That's familiar language. But on the seventh day, do not work. Okay? Why? That you would have the whole day available to go to church?

No, it then goes on, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household and the alien as well may be refreshed. See, the purpose of this rest isn't simply to facilitate worship, though that is one of its purposes.

Its purpose is also that we might rest and be refreshed. This particular verse speaks of animals and of servants.

It speaks of the animals resting, of the animals being given one day when they can settle down and be quiet and graze, perhaps. It speaks of the servants and there another verb is used.

It speaks of the servants being refreshed. And the root meaning of this verb, refreshed, is the word breath. In our language, we would speak of somebody catching their breath, somebody who's very busy and needs to catch their breath in order to continue.

[ 26 : 34 ] Well, servants needed to catch their breath, to be rejuvenated, to charge their batteries, to enjoy restoration of strength and so continue the week with new life and vigor.

Now, this need for rest, for physical rest, for physical refreshment was that only necessary for animals and servants? Clearly not. It is necessary for all those to whom the commandment is directed.

Indeed, in Deuteronomy, that is made explicitly clear. In Deuteronomy 5, and verse 14, let's just notice it again. Again, there's a detail in Deuteronomy that is absent in Exodus.

In Deuteronomy 5, and verse 14, having made reference to the importance that the servants and the animals and the aliens also rest, we then read, let's read the whole of the verse so that we get the idea.

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 ox, or your donkey, or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that, listen especially to this, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest as you do.

[ 27 : 53 ] So this idea of the servants being given rest and refreshment is simply saying, well, they should receive what you also receive. You will rest in that way, and they also have the right to enjoy that rest.

So this second element of the commandment is also important for us to be clear on. Yes, at the heart of the commandment, if you wish, the central requirement or privilege is that it is a day set aside when we can give gratitude to God.

But it is also a day that requires us and allows us to take care of ourselves, that we would have the rest and the refreshment that we need.

So we are to rest on this day that God has given us. Now I hope that as we are noticing, these categories cannot be separated one from another.

The two that we thought of so far, gratitude to God and care for self. They can't be separated just to illustrate that in the following couple of ways. For example, in the giving of ourselves over to worship, gratitude to God, that activity in and of itself ought to be a refreshing and an invigorating activity.

[ 29 : 18 ] So, it's intertwined, this idea of being refreshed and invigorated. In worship, there is to be an element of refreshment and of being renewed.

What if we think from the other perspective of the physical rest and refreshment that we need?

Imagine on a Sunday afternoon, going for a walk in the hills or in the forest or in a park.

That is, of course, physically refreshing, but it is also an opportunity to remember and appreciate God as Creator and to give thanks for who He is and what He has done.

So, these first two elements, gratitude to God, care for self, and then one third requirement or element of the commandment that we can identify and it is this, care and justice for others.

Now, we've already touched on this as we've noticed what is said there in Exodus 23 concerning rest for the servants and, or rest rather for the animals and refreshment for the aliens.

[ 30 : 27 ] And the point that I want to make here is simply that this commandment has what we might call a social justice dimension.

We are not to selfishly think only of ourselves. If we turn to the commandment itself in verse, in Exodus 20 and in verse 10, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God, on it you shall not do any work.

Fine. But then it goes on as we're very familiar, neither your son or daughter nor your manservant or manservant nor your animals nor the alien within your gates.

So, it's not only for ourselves that this rest is to be provided, but those of us and the commandment has been directed to those who have responsibility for the household, they are to be concerned for the welfare of others.

Who are they to be concerned for? Well, we can notice two categories, I suppose. They are to be concerned for their own family, but they are also to be concerned for what we might describe as the weak and the voiceless.

[ 31 : 41 ] They are to be concerned for their own family. You shall not do any work nor your son or daughter. Now, as an interesting aside, it's worth pondering on why here we don't have anything said about your wife, your son, or your daughter.

And I think a strong case can be made for saying that the reason why the wife is not mentioned is that God considers the you as being directed to husband and wife. That in itself is interesting in terms of God's perspective on husband and wife together, having a responsibility for the household that he has placed them over.

But we're not going to explore that any further. Simply to notice that one of the categories of care that the head of the home is to be concerned about is his own family.

His own family are also to participate in this day of rest. They also are to enjoy this day of refreshment. But of course, it goes on and it speaks of those that we might describe as the weak and the voiceless, your manservant, your maidservant, your animals, and the alien or stranger or foreigner within your gates.

Now when the head of the household or the joint head, husband and wife, responsible for the household if we want to understand it in those terms, when they are being told that their servants are also to rest and their animals are to rest and the foreigner within their gates is also to rest, the primary concern of God here is not that the head of the home legislate and enforce strict Sabbath observance among his servants.

[ 33 : 29 ] The servants would have been delighted for a day of rest. They wouldn't have had to be obligated to rest. They would have wanted that more than any others. They'd been working all the hours of the day for six days.

Nobody would need to force them to take a day of rest. God isn't saying, make sure they don't work, make sure they're not Sabbath breakers. No, He's saying they deserve a rest. You are to be concerned for them.

You are to give to them what they deserve. They may be servants, they may be slaves, but they must have a day of rest. They are not to be deprived of the blessing of the day of rest. Even the animals were to be considered and granted the rest that they required. Now, some might say, well, this is simply a practical outworking of the fact that men and women would not be working.

Very difficult for animals to work without the oversight of men and women. And so, if men and women can't work, then obviously the animals can't work either. But I think it goes beyond that. [ 34 : 32 ] I think there is a real sense in which God is saying, yes, even the animals deserve to be treated properly. Even the animals deserve rest. They've worked hard all week.

Well, give them a day when they too can rest. Then there's the reference to the aliens, the languages we sometimes find a little bit strange. The foreigner who is within your gates. And this term, within your gates, is also interesting because here the responsibility goes beyond the immediate household. What we've seen thus far, you could say, well, here God is directing these instructions to those who have responsibility over the household and saying, well, you are under obligation.

Your family is under obligation. Your servants are under obligation. Your animals are under this obligation. But here when it says within your gates, it goes beyond the household to the whole community. The gates is a reference to the gates of the community.

And what God is saying, those within your community who are strangers, who are foreigners, they too are to be granted protection from exploitation.

[ 35 : 38 ] They too are to be blessed by the Sabbath. And again, I think the primary concern isn't so much that they would be forced to obey this day of rest, that they would be forbidden from working. Though no doubt that was so.

But that they would be able to enjoy the privileges of the day. That the people of Israel wouldn't say, well, they're foreigners. We'll get them to work. We're not going to work. We, out of love and loyalty to God, we won't work.

But they're foreigners. They can work. We can make them work. They can work seven days a week. And God says, no. They too must be given the privilege and the blessing of a day of rest. Now, the application of the principles ingrained in this aspect of the commandment are multiple in the area or the field of workers' rights, of care of and right treatment of animals, of our responsibility toward immigrants, towards overseas students, towards asylum seekers.

We could develop this in so many directions. Time doesn't allow us to do so. We also recognize that drawing a direct parallel between Israel as a theocratic society and our own largely secular society is a very complicated and messy parallel.

[ 36 : 55 ] And we have to be careful in drawing parallels. But the principles we find here are certainly enduring. Let me just give you one example of how we could apply this principle of seeking the care and protection, seeking justice for the voiceless and the weak as a requirement of this commandment.

How could you, and I'm going to finish with this, how could you break the fourth commandment? I ask you the question and see if you can think of an answer quickly before I develop it further. How could you break the fourth commandment in the matter of buying a pair of jeans?

Think for yourself. How could you break the commandment in this matter of buying a pair of jeans? My immediate response to that would be, well, I would break the commandment by Sunday afternoon heading down to Union Square and purchasing those jeans on a Sunday afternoon.

I would break the commandment by engaging in that commercial transaction and involving others in work on a Sunday, breaking the commandment. Well, no doubt. What if you were to make that purchase on a Monday?

Would all be well if you made the purchase on a Monday? Well, perhaps. Or would it? What if the reason that the pair of jeans that you bought for a bargain price, five pounds for a pair of jeans, you can buy jeans for five pounds?

[ 38 : 18 ] What if the reason why they only cost five pounds is because those who manufacture the jeans are working a seven-day week in a Bangladeshi sweatshop? What if that is the reason they're so cheap?

You see, you can buy it on a Monday, but you're still going against the principles ingrained, embedded in the commandment that we are to be concerned for the care and for justice being

afforded to others?

Certainly within our gates, but again, I think the principle goes further, especially in the global village that we live in today. I just give you that as an example of something to ponder on.

And as I say, we could develop the themes here in so many directions, but we're not going to. Well, let's close. Thank God it's Sunday, a day to give thanks to God as we remember His work as Creator and Redeemer and give Him the worship that He is due, a day to cease from work and so rest and be refreshed, a day to care for and ensure justice for the weak and the voiceless.

Will we so honor the day? Will we remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy? Let us pray.