

4th Commandment Part 1

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[0 : 00] I remember speaking to an old botach in Razze. Now, I probably need to explain at least two of the words in that sentence, but for some who are present, Razze is an island off the east coast of Skye, between the mainland and Skye. And an old gentleman that I was speaking to there on Razze, this was several years ago. And I still remember vividly the conversation, and one of the things that he said to me, he proudly declared, and I don't think I'm doing him an injustice by saying that it was proudly that he declared this. He declared that the island, the island of Razze, could boast the best-kept Sabbath in Scotland. This was his proud boast.

Now, I chose not to delve deeper into the conversation or inquire further as to the evidence for this proud boast. I imagine that he might have pointed, among other things, to the stern warning at the entrance to the play park concerning the use of the swings, and indeed all the other games, on the Sabbath day. I imagine he may have considered that part of the evidence, I speculate. It might have been an idea for me to remind him of Paul's solemn vow declared to the Galatians, may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As a denomination, the Free Church of Scotland, of which we are a congregation, we have been characterized by the practice of what we call or has been called Sabbath observance.

And many of us here who were brought up, have been brought up in the Free Church and are grateful to God for that privilege, will remember the many prohibitions of our childhood. For some, no doubt, many more than for others. Well, that was in significant measure back then. But in the words of Mr. Dillon, the times, they are a changing. In many of our homes, the rules have been relaxed and often abandoned, abandoned altogether. Is this freedom from legalism, or is it simply evidence of spiritual declension? Well, whatever our answer might be to that question, and for the moment I shall keep my own counsel, there is one thing I am sure we would all be agreed on, that on this matter, as on any other matter, the final arbiter must be the Word of God. Whatever our Christian tradition, whatever we have been used to doing, whatever we have been in the habit of doing, everything we do must be brought under the gaze and the light of the Scriptures. So, let us turn to the Word of God as we consider this commandment, the fourth commandment. And we'll read the commandment as we find it in Exodus 20 and verse 8.

Exodus 20, verse 8, it's on page 78 in the Church Bible. Exodus 20 and reading from verse 8 through to verse 11, the three verses where we have recorded for us this particular 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. On it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all the days in them, but he rested on the seventh day.

[4 : 27] Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. The Word of God. It's the longest commandment and certainly in recent times the most disputed. And it will occupy us for three evenings. I don't know if today and the following two Sunday evenings, but certainly it will take three evenings to deal with what we have in this commandment. And I'll just set out for you the manner in which we want to do that, what we'll do this evening, but also what we will do subsequently.

The first question that I want to consider this evening, because it's necessary to do so in the light of differing views that are held within the Christian church. And so the first question we want to consider is, does the commandment that we've read here, this commandment that was given by God through Moses on Mount Sinai, does this commandment still apply to us today? There are those who would say that it does not. And so we must deal with that question, at least in a measure. Does the commandment apply at all? It's a very fundamental question, because if it doesn't, then

we would be excused in not giving great importance to it. Maybe draw one or two principles, but we would not need to dwell on it in any great measure. So that's the question we want to deal with this evening. There's a second question that we will deal with very briefly, indeed, if time allows this evening, and that is, what is the day we are to keep holy? We know, I don't need to explain this in great detail, we know that the day that is referred to here in the commandments was, as is explicitly stated, the seventh day, the Saturday. And yet we are gathered here not on Saturday, but on Sunday evening. So what is going on there? What is the day?

If indeed we are to keep one day in seven as holy to the Lord, what is the day that we should do that on? That's what we hope to do this evening. Next Sunday evening, all being well, we will deal with what I'm calling the forgotten verse within the commandment. The forgotten verse, perhaps not the most accurate definition, but I'm giving it that name, is verse 9, where we read, six days you shall labor and do all your work. It's integral to the commandment. The focus, I think rightly, is on the one day that we are to rest. That is the primary focus of the commandment. And so rightly it is what is given a greater emphasis, and so it should be. But there is, within the commandment, within these instructions that God gives to His people, this commandment, six days you shall labor and do all your work. And we want to consider the importance of work in God's purposes. Work as a good thing, work as a gift of God, work as an obligation that is laid upon us by God. And we want to develop a little of what that involves.

And then finally, we want to think about keeping one day holy. And what does that involve? How is it that we are to remember the Sabbath day? In what way are we to keep it holy, as we are instructed to do here in the commandment? Now, in setting out what we want to do, those of you who are listening carefully will probably detect that we're almost prejudging the answer we're going to come to that we're going to consider this evening about whether the commandment still applies to us today. But so be it. Let's move on then to that question. Does this commandment, the fourth commandment, concerning the Sabbath day, does it apply to us today? Now, some might legitimately respond to that and say, well, should we even be asking the question? You know, would we ask that question of any of the other commandments? Would any of us, would any Christian say, well, thou shalt not kill? Does that really apply to us today? It's a ridiculous question. Would any Christian say, well, this business about not committing adultery, does that really apply to us today in the New Testament, in the freedom that we enjoy in Christ? Would anybody ask that question? No.

It would be a ridiculous question to ask. I think all Christians would say, well, of course, that commandment applies to us. This is something that we ought not to do, to kill, to lie, to commit adultery. Indeed, the commandments we've already considered concerning idol worship and concerning having no other gods before the Lord. All would be agreed, I would hope, that these are things that remain very relevant and current and applicable to us. And yet, for some reason, this of the Ten Commandments is subject to this questioning, whether it is applicable to us. And given that there is this questioning, given that there are those who hold differing views on this matter within the Christian community, it is necessary to ask the question, and more importantly, to be able to give an answer.

[10:19] As I say, for the reason that there are those who would argue, or many who wouldn't even argue, they would simply presume that the commandment does not apply for us in the New Testament age.

But there's another reason why it's important to ask and to answer the question. And that is to recognize that the commandment is different to the others in one important respect. And that is that the keeping of it has changed in a significant way. I wouldn't want to overstate the significance of it, but there is a change. There has been a change in the manner in which it is kept. And in this, I refer to the day. We're going to be thinking about that in a moment. But the reality is that the people that received this commandment, Moses, as he shared these commandments of God with the people of Israel, it was the seventh day, the Saturday that was kept. And today, we are observing today, the Sunday as a day of rest. So, there is a change. That is not something you would find in any of the others. There is no change of any kind in the other commandments. And why that is important is that some might wonder, maybe go beyond wondering, and some might ask the question and say, well, if the day can be changed, could it not be also that the manner of its observance could also change?

It is a reasonable question to pose without, at the moment, giving the answer to it. So, for these reasons, we do need to ask the question and, I trust, give a reasonable and coherent answer to it. [12:03] Well, does the commandment then apply? Well, I'll lay my position clearly. I wouldn't expect, or I certainly hope it wouldn't be a surprise to anybody, that the answer I would give to the question is that yes, yes, this commandment does apply, is current, is in effect for us today.

Now, I want to give reasons for that. What are the reasons that we can give for contending that this commandment, the fourth commandment, together with all the others, remains applicable, remains in effect for us as God's people today? There are three reasons that I want to propose. And as we present the reasons and present them in their chronological order, we will be following, if you wish, the sweep of redemptive history from creation right through to the coming of Messiah Jesus. Three reasons that follow, as I say, the sweep of God's dealings with His people. The first reason is that the Sabbath rest, the Sabbath day, the Sabbath principle, whatever you wish to call it, is a creation ordinance. An ordinance simply means that it was ordained, it was determined by God at creation. It is a creation ordinance. And therefore, the kids who are filling in the sheets, there's one of the answers you need. It is a creation ordinance. The Lord Himself grounds the commandment in this fact. We've read the commandment in Exodus chapter 20, and this commandment is given, God chooses to give us a reason why. He doesn't always choose to do so. But on this occasion, He gives us a reason why. In verse 11, we have the reason. Verses 8 to 10 tell us what it is we ought to do, what it is we ought not to do, and then a reason is given. God gives a reason. For in six days, the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them. But He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, for this reason, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

The principle on which the commandment is based, possibly the commandment itself, though that is open to debate, certainly the principle upon which the commandment is based goes back to the very beginning of time. We can read what is being referred to by God in the commandment as we turn to the very beginning. In Genesis chapter 2 and verses 2 and 3. Genesis chapter 2 and verses 2 and 3. We read from the the beginning of the chapter, Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day, God had finished the work He had been doing. So on the seventh day, He rested from all His work.

[15:30] And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that He had done.

In the work of creation, a work that God could have achieved if He had wished in the twinkling of an eye. He did not require the time that He chose to spend in His creative work. But in His creative work, He establishes a pattern for His creation. He establishes a pattern for mankind. Six days of work and one day of rest.

At the very beginning, this is established by God. In the verses that we've read in Genesis, two verbs are used that are then echoed in the commandment. We read there in verse 2 of Genesis chapter 2, by the seventh day, God had finished the work that He had done. There it simply is stating what that word means in English. He had ceased from the work that He had done. He had been working, He stopped working.

He ceased from working, given that He had completed all that He needed to do. But then, as we read on in these two verses in Genesis chapter 2, we find another verb repeated on two occasions, translated, rested. So, on the seventh day, He rested from all His work. And then that verb we find again in verse 3.

There is a ceasing from work, and there is then a resting on the seventh day. There is a resting that allows God to enjoy, to celebrate that which He has done. There is, we could put it this way, a ceasing and a celebrating. He ceases from His work, and He celebrates in His work. And God establishes this as the pattern for the world that He has created. The actual term, Sabbath day, is not present in these verses in Genesis chapter 2. But the verb, the verb, Shabbat, to rest, is the verb that we have there on two occasions. And then we find that same verb, the root for the term, Sabbath day, as we find it in the commandments. Ceasing and resting in the commandment, not working and keeping holy the day that God has given. I think it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the Sabbath principle as a creation ordinance in determining this matter of its permanent applicability. If we're asking, well, is this applicable? Is this commandment about keeping the Sabbath day holy? Does it apply to us today? We couldn't exaggerate the importance of recognizing that this is at the very beginning something that God has established. The Sabbath

principle is not something peculiar to the people of Israel. It's not some innovation that God introduces at Sinai, though He would be perfectly at liberty to introduce any innovation if He so chose. But it's not. It is no innovation that is brought in. The Sabbath principle, is part of the very DNA of the created order. It is the way things are. It is the way God intends them to be. Six days of work, one day of rest. To say it no longer applies would be a bit like saying gravity no longer applies. It is simply a ridiculous statement. God has established that this is the way it is.

[19 : 33] God has established a pattern for us. A Sabbath principle. Six days of work and one day where we cease from work and we rest. The core principle, and this will be relevant in a moment when we consider other matters, is this one day in seven separated from the other six. So, that's the first reason. To my mind a very fundamental and very powerful reason that would support the contention that this commandment is one that remains valid and applicable to us today. The second reason is that it forms part of the moral law of God. This is our concern to consider the Ten Commandments. Those of you who were present on the first Sunday when we began this series and we introduced the matter, we recognize that within the law of Moses, or perhaps to avoid any confusion, the law of God given through Moses, we can notice distinctions, divisions among the whole body of law that was given. There was the ceremonial law that finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus Christ. There was the civil law that applied to Israel as a body politic, as a nation, the principles of which still apply but the details of which no longer do. But there was also the, or what has been termed the moral law of God as we find it summarized in the Ten Commandments, given directly by the finger of God engraved in stone, the moral law of God of perpetual application, as our subordinate standards, our confession and catechism make very clear. This commandment is within and at the very heart or immersed in part of these Ten Commandments, the moral law of God.

And so, on that basis alone, it can no more be dispensed with than any of the others. Just as we had noted earlier, and we don't need to repeat the illustration, we wouldn't dispense with any of the others and say, well, they don't apply. They're no longer relevant. Well, why would we give that treatment to this particular commandment? Now, some have sought to argue that this commandment, unlike the others, is part of the ceremonial law that we've noted and previously gave more time to noting, is fulfilled in Christ.

Christ. The language of Christ as our rest is sometimes used in that connection. Now, it's not my intention this evening to deal with the New Testament passages that would be relevant to that particular debate of Christ as our rest, and Christ in some way fulfilling this commandment. Certainly, one of the chapters that would need to be dealt with is Hebrews chapter 4, but we're not going to do that this evening. What I would say is this, that none of the purposes of the Sabbath for the blessing of God's people, indeed not only for the blessing of God's people, but for the blessing of mankind, none of the purposes of the Sabbath have passed away with the coming of Christ. The need to rest remains as valid and as relevant today as ever it was. The need to remember, to remember what God has done, to ponder and to consider what He has done, is something that remains necessary for us as God's people. The need to worship as this day allows, where we set aside the concerns and the duties of the week and are able to concentrate our attention on the worship of God. These are needs that we continue to have as God's people. It would be a great loss to us were this gift that God has given be removed from us. Now, that's very different. When we notice that the purposes of the commandment remain as necessary today as ever they were, that is very different to other of the ceremonial commands. The command to sacrifice a lamb or a goat for the sins of the people. Now, that is something that so clearly is no longer necessary. It is so clearly not necessary in the light of the death of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

There it is so clear that this ceremonial command would no longer be appropriate. It would be quite wrong to do so today. Very different to this commandment concerning the Sabbath day. That's the second reason that we can give for arguing and for proposing that this commandment remains applicable to us as God's people. But the third one, and we have to move on, the third one is that it is validated and commended by Jesus. We have to move on to the coming of the coming of the coming of the coming of the Messiah Jesus. And there is one passage in particular we want to notice. We have read it already in Mark chapter 2, and we have to notice briefly the opinion that Jesus has, the teaching that Jesus gives concerning the Sabbath. Some have suggested that in the New Testament all the other commandments are quoted explicitly, but this

one is not. Well, let's see what Jesus says about this commandment. And what I'm suggesting is that He validates and indeed commends the commandment. The context is, the general context is the fact that at the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had burdened the people with a legalism surrounding the keeping of the Sabbath day that was tyrannical. They went well beyond the demands of Scripture, invented their own multitude of rules of do's and don'ts, and particularly don'ts, concerning the Sabbath day. That's the context.

[26 : 09] And in that context, the disciples are being criticized for simply picking some ears of corn as they walk through the cornfields. And Jesus responds to that. And our concern is to simply notice what He says, or one part of what He says.

He says in verse 27, He says to the Pharisees, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Even in these few words, the Sabbath was made for man. There are three revealing words that declare to us, make clear to us what Jesus' opinion was.

First of all, the word made. The Sabbath was made for man. Now, we read that and we can, it passes us by, it doesn't seem to have great significance. But the word that Jesus uses, the Greek word that He uses, is a word that means means became or came into existence or could be translated created. The important thing to say here is that Jesus is not saying the Sabbath was ordained for man or the Sabbath was instituted for man. He says the Sabbath was made for man. And in so doing, He goes right back to creation. He doesn't go back to Exodus. He doesn't go back to Moses. He goes all the way back to creation. And He says the Sabbath was created for man. At the very beginning, it was God's intention that there be this day of rest for man.

Jesus says this is a creation ordinance. But then there's another word that's significant. He says there, the Sabbath was made for man.

And the word that we have translated man is a word that we can understand as mankind or humankind. The Sabbath was made for humankind. Now, why is that important? Because Jesus is not saying the Sabbath was made for Israel.

[28 : 05] He's saying, no, it was made for mankind. It was made for everybody. It is a gift that God gives to everybody. That as there is a need to work, so there should also be the opportunity for rest. It was made for the world. It was made for men and women. It was made for everybody.

The third word, well, we've already said it several times, but just to focus on it, that it was made for man. For man. The purpose of the Sabbath is our good.

It is for our benefit. It is for the well-being of mankind. It's not to be a burden. It's not something that would be tiresome and weelish. It is for our good.

And so Jesus, in this very clear way, responds to the excesses and the tyranny of the Pharisees, the legalism of the Pharisees. But he doesn't do so by saying, no, you've got it all wrong. We don't need to keep that commandment anymore.

No, he validates it. He recognizes where it comes from, from the very creation. He recognizes its purpose as being a gift of God for the good of his creation.

[29 : 15] And in that way, he validates and commends the Sabbath principle. Now, I was going to go on and speak a little bit about, really in response to legitimate questions that could be asked concerning one or two things Paul says concerning Sabbath days and the keeping of one day or another, and that we should not judge one another on these matters.

But time doesn't allow us to do so. We may pick up on that subsequently. We'll see. But what I would say is this, and by all means, you can approach me face to face if you want to ask more about what Paul says on this matter.

What I would conclude, and I can't substantiate it, I simply have to state it, is that while we are persuaded that Paul does not teach that the Sabbath principle of one day and seven is a thing of the past, and those verses where that might appear to be what is being said can and should be understood in another way, while we don't believe that he is leaving aside the Sabbath principle, it is only charitable to recognize that while we may not believe that Paul is leaving aside the Sabbath day as one to be kept and to be honored, we should not be quick to judge those who, in our opinion mistakenly, may come to a different conclusion.

It's difficult really to speak meaningfully about that without having gone into the verses and commented on them, so forgive me for that. But we have three reasons then, three reasons for affirming that the Sabbath principle and the commandment grounded in the principle are of perpetual application.

I also said that we would consider briefly which day we are to keep, whether it be the seventh day as originally indicated, commanded by God in the Ten Commandments, or what we do, and that is to keep the first day of the week, what is described in our catechism as the Christian Sabbath, the Sunday.

[31 : 40] We're going to leave that. I don't want to rush through it in a way that wouldn't do justice to it. That is something we will pick up on, definitely, before proceeding on what lies ahead as we consider this commandment.

But I will close by saying this. God is good. He is a loving, heavenly Father. And the gifts that He gives us are good gifts.

We know how it is that where we have the recording of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy, and following those commandments we recorded for us, we are told, the Lord tells us through Moses, that these words had been given to the people, that it might go well for them.

Not as a burdensome thing, not as a tiresome thing, not as a thing that would be difficult for them to do, and would be a great burden for them to carry, but that it might go well for them.

And so, as we would recognize that this commandment is a good gift of God for us, the challenge is that in the words of the Lord through the prophet Isaiah, we would be able to call and to make the Sabbath a delight, that it would be a delightful thing for us, that it would be that great gift that we are given and that we receive and that we enjoy and that we are blessed by, and that the manner in which we will do so is a matter that we will tackle on a subsequent occasion.

[33 : 22] Well, let's close now by praying. Amen.