

4th Commandment Part 3

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[0 : 00] There is a chain of restaurants whose name alone manages to break two commandments.

That's pretty good going that the name alone could achieve such a thing. I wonder if anybody has any ideas. I don't know if there is one of them here in Aberdeen.

I'm thinking of TGI Fridays. Thank God it's Friday to give the full title. I say it breaks two commandments because the name alone first of all breaks the commandment not to take God's name in vain.

It simply as a joke makes use of the name of God in the very title or name of this particular chain of restaurants.

What about a second commandment that it manages to break or in any case challenge? Well I would suggest it's the fourth commandment. We're going to be thinking this evening of how within that commandment there is a command to work.

[1 : 09] Now if God commands us to do something it is because it is a good thing. God will never command us to do something that is not good. And so if he commands us to work it is because work is good.

And yet of course that name of that restaurant seems to suggest the opposite. Isn't it a good thing when we stop working? Isn't it a good thing when work is over and we can leave work behind and be idle or in any case do fun stuff that we like to do at the weekend?

Well as will be evident we are back after a break of a few weeks to consider the commandments.

And particularly the fourth commandment. Those of you who have good memory and who were here when we began this particular commandment will remember that we've already given some thought to the matter of the continued applicability of the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath day.

And we argued that it remains a commandment that we are under. We noted how it was a creation ordinance that there should be this day of rest.

[2 : 35] We noticed that it is part of God's moral law of perpetual importance and significance and also how it is validated and commended by Jesus himself.

Then we also dealt with possible objections that some would make based on some occasions where the Apostle Paul appears to suggest that the keeping of one day or another is a matter indifferent.

And we attempted to deal with those objections. Well today we move on. And we move on to consider what we might call the forgotten verse of the commandment.

In any case that's what I'm calling it. The forgotten verse of the commandment. Verse 9 of Exodus chapter 20. Well let's read the whole commandment and then focus in on this one verse of it.

Exodus chapter 4 and verse 8. 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.

[3 : 38] 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. But 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 the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Our concern this evening then particularly is verse 9.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work. A right and proper focus on the day of rest that is the principal concern of this commandment has, if not by intent, but in practice often relegated to near obscurity, what is an integral element of the commandment.

Namely, the commandment to work. And this evening we want to, in a small way, perhaps try and redress that imbalance if indeed that imbalance exists.

And we'll use the commandment as our starting point and indeed we'll be returning to it in the course of what we have to say. But we'll also draw on other biblical material as we consider this matter of work and what ought to be our biblically informed attitude to it.

[5 : 06] And there are three basic points that I want to make this evening concerning work. First of all, that work is a God-given blessing. Work is a God-given blessing.

The second thing we are going to notice is that work is a God-commanded duty. And then finally, that work is a God-ordered activity.

So these three things. Work is a God-given blessing. It is a God-commanded duty. And it is a God-ordered activity.

First then, work is a God-given blessing. Now, many, and I think if we're honest, we would have to say including many of us, consider or at least on some occasion or at some point maybe in the working week, we'll consider work as an unnecessary evil.

We have to work. We have to have employment. Why? Because it is the means whereby we secure the money that we need to survive and also to do what we really enjoy, having fun or not working.

[6 : 17] We have to work in order that we can then not work. And sometimes it does reduce itself to that rather sad situation of we are working simply because that will allow us at some point to not work anymore.

Now, this attitude, very negative attitude to work, sometimes might even be justified, or some might try and secure a theological grounding, if you wish, for this point of view or this manner of thinking.

And we say, well, work is after all, is it not, part of the curse of the fall? Work is something that has come in as a result of man's rebellion against God, and we've been cursed with having to work.

So, it would be suggested. Now, we'll notice in a moment that that is far from being the case, but maybe sometimes in a very careless or superficial way, as some might argue in that way.

Well, let's go back to the very beginning, as we consider this first point that work is a God-given blessing. And when I say back to the beginning, I mean to the very beginning.

[7 : 37] And I ask the question, what is the first reference to work in the Bible? Who is the first one who is described as working?

Well, we have the answer to that question in Genesis chapter 2. And we can read verses 2 and 3 of Genesis chapter 2. And there we read, By the seventh day God had finished the work He had been doing.

So, on the seventh day He rested from all His work. 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.

Who is the first worker that is presented to us in the Scriptures? Well, it's God Himself. God works in creating a perfect universe. He did so by means of work.

He worked and fashioned and crafted with great power and artistry and spectacular ability all that there is.

[8 : 43] And placing the stars in the firmament and all that He has done and all that we can see and enjoy and appreciate. It is the product of God's work. So, that fact alone, a simple fact, but that fact alone blows out of the water any suggestion that work is, in and of itself, a bad thing.

God would not be party to anything that was bad. God would not be party to anything that was bad. And part of His work, as we consider the work that He has done, part of His work, indeed what is presented as the pinnacle of His creative work, was the creation of men and women, of you and me, of human beings created in His image.

And as we have been created in His image, it ought not to surprise us that we too, in turn, have been designed to work. God, who is a worker, has created us in His image as workers.

That is how God has created us. That is God's intention for us, that we would work. And we notice that long before the fall, Adam and Eve were given work to do.

And clearly, the implication being that their descendants were also to continue in the work that they were given. We can notice just a couple of verses that speak of the work that Adam particularly, and by extension, Eve and those who were to follow, were given.

[10 : 24] For example, in chapter 1, in verse 28, we read, God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it.

Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every living creature that moves in the ground. This mandate, this command that is given to Adam, given to the first human beings, involves work.

They are to subdue the earth. They are to fill it, to increase in number, and to subdue it. And the reference clearly isn't simply about multiplication in numbers, but the subduing of the earth.

It does speak of a work that was to be done. A rich and almost inexhaustible task given to men and women that by thought and skill and energy, they might bring the earth and its resources under such control that they would serve the purposes that they were created for.

Namely, the service of mankind. This earth has been created for man. Just as we've considered previously about the Sabbath as being created for man and not man for the Sabbath.

[11 : 45] So we can also say that the earth has been created for humankind and not humankind for the earth. Now that alone is something that merits consideration in terms of what it means and how it should be applied in how we consider matters.

For example, environmental issues. Contrary to increasingly popular thinking, the earth is intended to serve the needs of men and women.

Men and women have been given by God the task of subduing the earth, of making use of the resources that it provides for their own service.

Now, don't misunderstand what I'm saying. This is not in any way to justify the wanton destruction of the earth that humankind has been very guilty of.

And particularly in our own generation, that is not to be justified at all. But nonetheless, this basic principle that the earth has been provided by God for us, for the pinnacle of His creation, humankind, is important to recognize.

[12 : 59] And it should inform our engagement with and involvement in environmental issues that it is important to be involved and engaged with.

People, to put it in a more popular or simpler way, people are of more value than forests or whales or even cute little seal pups.

Now, again, that's not to say that we should treat badly the rest of creation. But it is important to have our value system as to what is of greater value informed by the Scriptures and not by popular current thinking.

So, at the very beginning, we find God working, but we find God giving man work to do. Also, if we notice in chapter 2 of Genesis and verse 15, we read, The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

To work it and take care of it. And here, the language that is used makes it very clear that the work involved combines a right and wise exploiting of the riches of the earth and also our duty of care of the planet in trust for future generations.

[14 : 21] We are to work the garden, but we are also to take care of it. This is work that man has been given to do by God. So, the basic point that we're making here as we explore this truth that work is a God-given blessing is that work is a creation ordinance.

As the Sabbath, a day of rest, is a creation ordinance, so work also. The cycle of work and rest established by God at the very beginning in His pristine, unfallen world.

Part of that creation declared by the Creator as very good, and that includes the command to work.

Now, I mentioned just a moment ago concerning the fall and how sometimes it might be suggested that the fall brings with it the curse of work.

But that is not so at all. The curse that indeed is pronounced upon man is not the curse of work. It is the pain and the hardship so often connected with work.

[15 : 36] And time doesn't allow us to explore that or delve into that in any detail. But it is important just to make the point that work itself by no means is to be identified with the curse that was pronounced upon man following his rebellion.

Now, as we think about these things and think about what implications they have for us in our day-to-day life and in our day-to-day work for that matter, we do need to get to grips with this and work hard at ensuring that we view work, our work, your work, in this positive way as a God-given blessing.

And I think if we do, if we are able to have this biblical mindset concerning work, if we are genuinely grateful for the work that we have and relish engaging in and performing the work that we have been given, I think this does give us, provides us an opportunity and a challenge to be different in the world in which we live, in a positive and in an attractive way, to demonstrate in our day-to-day life, in our work, our calling to live life to the full.

And that must include, if we are to live life to the full, as the Lord would call us to so live, that must include gratefully enjoying and relishing the gift of work.

Now, the big question is, do you, most of us here, work in one way or another? And work, of course, should not be reduced to paid employment.

[17 : 31] Some folk maybe don't have paid employment. Maybe you would wish to have and don't have. Or some, perhaps, at the stage of life that you're at, you are no longer in paid employment, but you still are involved in work of one kind or another.

And the question that I pose to you is, do you relish the work that you do? Do you enjoy your work? Is it something that you are grateful for? Maybe if it's difficult for you, honestly, to answer that question affirmatively, maybe it is necessary to think about the work you're doing, to ask yourself, well, can I enjoy this work that I'm doing?

Maybe, and these, of course, are questions for you to ponder on and to answer. Maybe you need to think about a change of work. If you are looking into the future 10, 20, 30 years of enduring work, then that is not pleasing to God.

God has not called you to endure work. God has called you to relish and to enjoy work. And if the work that you do you cannot imagine ever being able to enjoy, then maybe you should think about a change of direction.

The first thing, then, that we can say concerning work, that it is a God-given blessing. But the second thing that I said I wanted us to notice this evening is that work is a God-commanded duty.

[18 : 57] Now, here in presenting this as a second truth or a second point of the sermon, we have to be careful. We're not suggesting that as a commanded duty it is any less of a gift and blessing, as if somehow the idea of a blessing and of a duty go against each other.

To do our duty is intended by God to be pleasurable. To do what we ought to do is not intended to be a burden by God.

It's intended to be something that we can relish and enjoy. So, to recognize that work, sorry, is a God-given blessing and that it is also, secondly, a God-commanded duty really aren't two very different things.

But maybe we can look at this from slightly different angles by using this language. But to develop a little bit this idea of work as a God-commanded duty.

And the command to work, of course, doesn't begin in the Ten Commandments or at Sinai, where we find there in verse 9 of Exodus chapter 20, a command to work.

[20 : 15] The command to work precedes Sinai, it precedes the fall, and as we've already noticed, can be found in a pristine Garden of Eden. Work from the beginning is commanded by God.

We've already noticed a couple of verses that speak of God mandating, commanding man to work. And it is commanded with the intention that blessing will come to those who obey the command.

So, though the command goes right back to Eden, it is also true that in the fourth command, which is our particular concern, or in any case, the starting point for what we're saying this evening, in the fourth command, we do have work very explicitly commanded.

Six days, you shall labor and do all your work. Now, to recognize that what we have here in the commandment is a command to work is an interesting contrast to the language of the catechism that speaks of work as simply allowed on the six days.

If I can just read the question and answer in the catechism, in the shorter catechism, it's question 62, and the question posed is, what are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment?

[21 : 37] Notice how it answers that question. The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment are, first of all, God's allowing us six days of the week for our own employments.

Now, that is true. God does allow us six days of the week for our own employments, but I feel the language didn't really do justice to the commandment. It is not just that God allows us to do what we want with six days.

The language would seem to suggest that really there's not that much of an interest of God in those days, but the seventh day, yes, that is really of interest to God. No, God commands us.

He doesn't just allow us to work in our own employments. He commands us to work six days, and then to enjoy a day of rest.

Work, then, is a God-commanded duty. Not simply allowed, but commanded. And it is commanded to all, which is another thing we can notice from the commandment.

[22 : 47] The verse that we're considering, verse 9, doesn't in any explicit way say, who are being commanded, it says, six days you shall labor and do all your work.

But if we go on to read in the commandment, those who are explicitly mentioned as meriting or deserving of a day of rest, notice how inclusive and how extensive it is.

Those who are to be given this day of rest, those who are to enjoy this day of rest, who are they? It is you, the one being addressed, your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, your animals, the stranger or alien within your gates.

All of these are to enjoy the day of rest. Now, it's entirely reasonable, then, to draw from that, that equally all of these are commanded to work on six days, and then on the seventh day to enjoy the rest that follows.

All are commanded to work, and that, bringing it to ourselves this evening, means that you are among those commanded to work. Now, given that it is a duty that is commanded, it ought not to surprise us.

[24 : 08] The strong language that is used of those who are work shy or just plain lazy. Now, we can limit ourselves to a couple of passages where Paul broaches the subject.

We've read one already in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, and we don't need to dwell on it, but even if you were following the reading, the language he uses is very strong.

And the condemnation that he pronounces against those who are idle is a very strong one. Notice again, or we can remind ourselves of what he says there in verse 6, In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you receive from us.

Clearly, a reference to teaching that he had given to the church there in Thessalonica concerning the importance of working, of diligent work. And he says, keep away from those who are idle.

He goes on to use this very memorable phrase, If a man will not work, he shall not eat. Again, very strong language.

[25 : 26] But why? Why is it strong language? Well, it's strong language because Paul recognizes that work is commanded. And to not work is to disobey a divine commandment.

And so it merits a strong exhortation and correction. If we just move a couple of pages on in Paul's letter to Timothy, in 1 Timothy chapter 5 and verse 8, We have another occasion when Paul broaches this matter of work.

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. And clearly this provision that Paul is speaking of is a provision that requires work.

If somebody won't work, if somebody is idle, if somebody is lazy and doesn't provide for his own family, then Paul, in this very strong language, even stronger than we've already seen in his letter to the Thessalonians, says he's denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Why such strong language? Well, because to fail to work is to disobey a divine command. It is sinful disobedience and an act of rebellion against God's established order.

[26 : 46] Now, as we recognize that, as we must, we have to be careful that we don't equate work exclusively with paid employment. We're not for a moment condemning those who are not in paid employment.

You know, we live, especially at the moment, at a time of recession, where maybe there are those who would love to work, who are desperate to find work, who are searching for work, and who are unable to find work.

Now, clearly such a person is not being condemned by the language Paul uses. Clearly such a person does not fall under the criticism that Paul here levels.

But it is true that if, for whatever reason, paid employment is not possible, or maybe for some people it's not necessary, that they're at a stage in life where that is not what they are doing.

Well, that is fine and well. But there are other ways in which we can work. There are other ways in which we can be gainfully employed, and so respect the order that God has established.

[27 : 57] Equally, we should be concerned, in as much as it is within our powers to do so, given the importance that God gives to work, that if we can enable or give opportunity to others to work, then that is something that we ought to do.

So then, work is a God-given blessing. It is a God-commanded duty. Let's examine ourselves and see if we are, or if our attitude to work is one that tallies with what we're discovering here in the Bible.

But finally, work is a God-ordered activity. A God-given blessing, a God-commanded duty. And given that it is both of these things, it is not surprising that it is also a God-ordered activity.

Now, the biblical data is extensive, but this evening I just want to limit myself to an umbrella principle, if we can call it that, that covers all that we do as believers, but also specific indications that we find in the commandment, there in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 9.

First of all, the umbrella principle to remind ourselves of as we consider work as a God-ordered activity. The umbrella principle, or what I'm calling an umbrella principle, we can find in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 and verse 31.

[29 : 32] And what do we read there? So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Whatever you do, clearly that also includes the world of work. The work that you do, the work that tomorrow you will be going to, when you get into the office at 9 or 8, or whenever it is, the work that you'll be doing, the essay that you'll be working on, the employment that you will be engaged in, that work is under this direction, that you should do that work to the glory of God.

Do you work to the glory of God? What would that look like? And that's something you have to think about for yourself, in the work that you have to do. What would it look like doing that work to the glory of God?

Are there any changes that you need to make, in the manner that you work, in the attitude that you have to your work, that you might be able to do that work to the glory of God?

Again, these are questions for you to consider. That's the umbrella principle, but also specific indications. We're considering work as a God-ordered activity, and I just want to notice some specific indications that are found in or certainly suggested by the commandment and the language that we find there in verse 9.

[31 : 03] Six days you shall labor and do all your work. Three things, briefly, to notice. First of all, there is this presentation of a rhythm of work.

Six days of work followed by one day of rest. That is a weekly cycle that God has established in the very creation of the world.

But I think the principle of a rhythm of work and rest can be applied not only to the weekly cycle, it can be applied even to our working day. There is a time to work followed by a time to rest.

We can apply it to a working year, that there are times when it is right and proper that we should rest from our work, have a time of rest and relaxation, of holiday following a period of work.

Indeed, in our lives, there is this cycle of working followed by a time of rest. God has ordered things in that way.

[32 : 04] There is this cycle that God has established. Now, we know, and this is in a sense a common sense, but a failure to respect this God-ordered cycle, this rhythm of work and rest will or certainly can have very serious consequences on our physical and indeed on our mental health.

There is then a cycle of work that God has ordered. Now, again, just to avoid misinterpretation, this cycle of six days of work followed by one day of rest does not mean necessarily six days of paid employment.

There are probably very few of us here who are involved in six days of paid employment. The pattern now for most is five days of paid employment followed by the weekend.

But, of course, the six days that are referred to here need not be of paid employment. There are other duties and responsibilities that we can take upon ourselves combined with rest and relaxation and, in that way, respect the cycle that God has established.

So that's the first thing we can say about work as a God-ordered activity, as we find data in that very verse in the commandment. But the second thing that I notice here is that we all have work to do.

[33 : 30] And really all I'm highlighting is that in verse 9, we're told, Do all your work, the work that you have to do.

God commands us to do our work, not somebody else's work, but our work, my work, your work. We all need to establish what that work is. What is the work that God has given you to do?

Now, this is related to the matter of vocation. It's related to identifying and using the gifts and abilities and opportunities we've been given. It's related to the duties of family and bringing up children.

It's related to different spheres of activity, paid employment, studies, work at home, work in the church, work in the community. The point is we need to be clear what it is that our work is and to do it.

That is what we are told. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. Do you know what your work is? Be sure what it is and be sure to do it. And finally, I think we can also find at least a suggestion in these words of verse 9 that we are to work responsibly and with integrity.

[34 : 45] I say that because God commands us that in these six days we are to do all our work. All our work. All the work that we have is to be done in the time allotted for that purpose.

And as we think of ourselves, especially as Christians, as disciples of Jesus Christ, in this matter of work, we should be characterized by integrity.

We should be seen as responsible and hardworking. We should be known as those who do all our work. Not some of it. Not the minimum required to get by.

Not what we can get away with. But all our work. If you have work to do, do it all. And do it well. Do it responsibly. That is what God requires of you.

And that is how you can be a witness to others concerning who you are as a disciple of Jesus Christ. I won't make you cringe by applying that in all kinds of ways to doing essays and attending lectures and other matters.

[35 : 51] I leave it to yourselves to make the applications. Well, let's leave it there. Thank God it's Friday. Well, by all means, thank God it's Friday.

But equally, thank God it's Monday. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, Heavenly Father,