

4th Commandment Part 2

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[0 : 0 0] Do you remember Christmas, or is it a very distant memory? It was only, what, three weeks ago or so, but certainly in my mind it seems a very distant memory. But I'd ask you, just as we begin, to cast your mind back to Christmas and to the matter of gifts. Is the matter of giving the right gifts an annual nightmare for you as Christmas approaches and you have to decide on what you'll buy for relatives or family or friends? I think there are three elements to ensuring the perfect gift if there is such a thing. There's the will, there's the wisdom, the will, that is you want to give something, the wisdom, that is to know what it is the person would appreciate or would be good for them, and there is the means, or if we wanted to sound very clever we could say the wallet, the will, the wisdom, and the wallet. So you might want to give somebody something, you might know exactly what would be good for them, but you're not in a position to do so, you don't have the means. So there's these three elements. Now that is difficult for us to combine the three. Sometimes we don't want to give somebody something. We do it because it's expected of us, or maybe we want to, but we don't want to in any great, with any great intensity. And certainly we often don't know what to give, even when we do have the will to do so, and often we don't have the means.

God has no such difficulty in giving gifts to His people, in giving gifts to us, in giving gifts to all men and women. He is the ultimate giver of good gifts. He has the will, He loves us deeply, He has the wisdom, He knows us perfectly, and He has the means. He is the creator and owner of all.

One such gift that demonstrates the good will of God, the wisdom of God, and the means at His disposal is the Sabbath day, the rest day that He has given to us, that He has given to His creation.

His wisdom in the giving of this gift is evident in that He knows what we're like, He knows that we need rest, that we need a Sabbath day, we need a rest day, and I think it's recognized. Even common sense would back up the assertion that many of the health problems that many of us have, be that physical health or mental health, are problems that we suffer because of a lack of rest, because we're too busy, because we're too overburdened and stressed and worried 24-7. Many of the relationship problems that we have, many of the family problems that are a feature of our society, are also caused by, or in any case exacerbated, by the absence of rest in our 24-7 lifestyles. God has the wisdom to know that this is a gift that we need that is good for us. His will to give is grounded in His love for us, and in that love He has provided for us this wonderful gift to help us in this regard. He shows His love by giving us this day of rest, this Sabbath day, and of course the means.

He is the one to whom belong the times and the seasons, and it is entirely within His prerogative to set aside one day in seven for the good of man, for the good of men and women, for the good of humankind, and indeed extending beyond humankind to all creatures. Now, it's important for us, as we continue to consider the fourth commandment, to do so in that context, in the context of the Sabbath day being a wonderful and precious gift of God to us. I say that's important because for two reasons. One is that sometimes the image that the Sabbath day has is of it being a terrible burden, and there are reasons for that, and perhaps in a measure we are culpable for that. And we have to get over that image problem, if you wish, and remind ourselves just what a wonderful and precious gift the Sabbath day is for us. It's also important as we continue in this particular sermon, because what will occupy our attention are matters that in a way are fairly involved and complex, and so you will have to concentrate. I will endeavor to concentrate and present what I am presenting clearly. I trust that I will manage that, but you will also have to concentrate and help me out by listening. And as we do consider matters that may seem rather involved and complex, and may not seem that important in the grand scheme of God's purposes, let's do so always remembering that this gift of the Sabbath day is a demonstration of how good God is, that He loves us and He wants the very, very best for us.

[5 : 49] Now, this is week two of our consideration of this commandment. We had suggested, well, not suggested, we stated last week that there would be three, but bear with me, it's grown to four. And the reason for that is that last week we didn't cover everything that we had intended to do. Those of you who were here will remember that last week we were considering the matter of the abiding application of the fourth commandment. And we argued that the commandment does have an abiding place in God's purposes for His people, and indeed for humankind, for three reasons. We noticed that it was a creation ordinance, the Sabbath day, this one day and seven. We also noticed, and this particularly relates to our study of the commandments, that it's within what we understand to be God's moral law of perpetual and abiding application, the Ten Commandments. And we noticed in the third place that the commandment is validated and commended by Jesus. That was all last week. What we had intended to do but weren't able to do was to consider the manner in which Paul, on occasion, would appear to teach in a way contrary to the conclusion we had reached, that the commandment is of abiding and perpetual relevance and application. And we also left undone the question, what day is to be kept holy? And those two things that were left undone we intend to do this evening. So, first of all, to think of Paul and his objections in inverted commas, because we don't believe they are objections, but just for the sake of presentation, consider Paul's supposed objections to Sabbath observance. And there are two passages in particular that are often pointed to in this connection, and we're going to consider both of them briefly. They are in fact very related in terms of the matters that they discuss, and indeed the manner in which Paul deals with this issue. The first passage is the one that we read in Romans chapter 14, and we are going to focus in on one particular verse, which is the critical verse as we consider this matter. Does Paul say that in actual fact it's no longer necessary for us to observe the Sabbath day?

Is that what he contends, as some would argue? And they would argue on the basis in the first place, or in any case, on the basis of this and of other arguments. But the one that we have here, Romans chapter 14 and verse 5, and there we read, Now we read that, and at face value, it would seem to be a clear case of Paul granting to us liberty on the matter of Sabbath observance. If you wish to keep the day, that's fine. That's fine. If you wish to do so, you're free to do so. By all means, go ahead and do so. But if you choose not to keep the day, well, that's okay as well. It's up to the individual conscience of each believer, whether they keep the day or they don't keep the day, each one be fully convinced in his own mind. That would seem to be, as we read it, face value of what Paul is saying, or at least that's how it could be understood.

Is that what he's saying? Well, I would argue that that is not what he's saying. Why? Well, we need to think about the context of the verse and indeed the content of what Paul says here. The context of the discussion that Paul is engaged in is the discussion of the weak and the strong brother. That's how the chapter is entitled, the weak and the strong, where the weak brother is the one who has yet to fully understand, to fully appreciate the implications of the coming and the work of Christ and His fulfillment of Old Testament shadows and ceremonial regulations.

And that weak brother, because he hasn't fully understood the implications of Christ's work, considers himself still to be obligated by certain ceremonial regulations, perhaps not by all, but by some of them. That's the context of what Paul is dealing with.

Now, that this is the issue is clear by the reference to, in verse 3, the man who eats everything and the man who does not, there in verse 3 of chapter 14. That the matter is the matter of the Old Testament ceremonial regulations. Well, there's one in particular that Paul immediately deals with the food laws of the Old Testament. And Paul says, well, there's some people who think that they're still obligated by them. Well, that's their understanding. They haven't fully understood the implications of Christ's coming and His fulfilling of these things, and that's okay.

[11 : 11] They choose not to eat certain things. Well, that's okay. You know, don't make a big deal about it. But equally, if you think you ought not to eat, don't condemn those who understand that they are able to eat. That's how he begins the chapter. He then goes on to consider the matter of days, which is our particular concern there in verse 5. And as he goes on to consider the matter of days, it's clear that he considers this matter to be in the same category as the matter of eating or not eating. That becomes clear because having mentioned the matter of days in verse 5, he then goes on, verse 6, to once again mention the matter of eating or not eating. And indeed, he combines the two things. The matter of eating or not eating, the matter of keeping a day or not keeping a day, are intertwined. Evidently, both are in the same category. So, if the matter of eating is, I think, entirely reasonable to be understood of reference to Old Testament ceremonial law, then it's entirely reasonable to understand his reference to days, special days, the keeping of one as more sacred than another, as also in that category of Old Testament ceremonial regulations. The Jewish religious calendar had many of them, many festive days of one kind or another. And Paul, it would seem very clear, is referring to those days, not in this case, to the Sabbath day at all. He makes no reference to the

Sabbath day in this passage. The language of the Sabbath day doesn't even occur. And the reason it doesn't occur is because that's not what he's dealing with. He is dealing rather, it would appear, with Old Testament ceremonial regulations, the Jewish religious calendar that had fine, that finds its fulfillment in the work of Christ. So, this particular passage, I would argue, would be not suitable or could not be employed by those who would say, well, the Sabbath day, that no longer has an application to us. But what about the second passage? There are not only two, but there are two principal ones, and they're the ones we are considering this evening. The second one is in Colossians, Colossians chapter 2. And if you turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 2, verses 16 and 17, and see what we find there. Colossians chapter 2, verses 16 and 17. We can read these two verses and then, again, briefly identify the context and what it is Paul is saying here.

Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come.

The reality, however, is found in Christ. Now, the point Paul is making here is very similar to the one that he is making in his letter to the Romans. But there are some additional elements. And one specific additional element that is very relevant to our concern is that he does make specific reference on this occasion, unlike in Romans, to the Sabbath day. Let no one judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. So, here, we find that he is talking, it would seem, about the Sabbath day. And again, as we read that, he would seem to be saying, well, let anyone choose how they are to keep or not keep that day. Let no one judge you on these matters. What can we say about this passage in particular? Well, again, as with

Romans, let's just notice the context of the passage. The context here is the presence in the church at Colossae of false teachers. From the very beginning of the letter, Paul has made very clear and explicit reference to the threat that is being posed by false teachers. The danger that is facing the church in Colossae is of a greater magnitude than the problem that was being addressed in Rome, the problem of the weak and the strong brother. That was an important matter. But here in Colossae, it's a more serious matter.

[16:07] There are actually false teachers who are bringing in false teaching. And Paul's concern is to protect the believers from these false teachers. The false teachers essentially were saying, if you are to be saved, then faith in Jesus Christ, yes, that's important, that's necessary, but it's not sufficient. It's also necessary for you to keep the Jewish ceremonial law, or certainly the elements of it. Now, there is some debate as to whether the Colossian heresy was solely concerned with faith plus Jewish ceremonial law, or whether it was complicated by also pagan influences and Jewish ceremonial law mixed up with pagan ideas that some of the converts were bringing in, perhaps not deliberately or surreptitiously or surreptitiously, but ignorantly into the gospel. It's not our concern to delve into that debate. What is sufficient to say is that the false teachers were saying that faith plus was necessary for salvation, or in any case for a full appreciation of salvation. Yes, faith is necessary, but if you're going to be at the highest level of Christian life, then you must also do these things, or not do these things.

And they had their list of do's and don'ts in order to achieve this greater level of spirituality. That is the context of what Paul is addressing. Now, what does Paul say in response to this threat?

Well, he urges the Colossians not to allow others to judge them on these matters. On what matters? Well, it's in those two verses that we've read. First of all, what you eat or drink.

Here, I think entirely reasonably, we can say, well, again, the issue is ceremonial food laws that no longer apply, as they are, as Paul goes on to say, a shadow of things that were to come.

But he also says, don't let anybody judge you, don't let these false teachers judge you, concerning a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. Now, this is a little bit more difficult. Hence, I need to concentrate, and you also need to concentrate.

[18:37] Now, some argue that the Sabbath day, or let me change the emphasis here, some argue that the Sabbath day is not being referred to here by Paul. And they point to the fact that the word translated there in verse 16, a Sabbath day, is actually in the plural form and could be translated Sabbath days. And so, some would say, well, that gets us off the hook, as it were, in terms of this going against what we understand to be the abiding significance of the Sabbath day.

Paul here isn't talking about the Sabbath day at all. He's talking about Sabbath days, plural, special Sabbaths of the Jewish festal calendar. Some argue in that fashion. I don't think that argument is really very convincing, and it has a flavor of special pleading, or coming to the text, having already decided what you want it to say. And it also ignores the fact that the plural form that is indeed what we have there in verse 16, the Greek sabbaton, which is in the plural form, it ignores the fact that that plural form is regularly used in the New Testament with a singular sense.

So, really all we're saying is that it's entirely legitimate to translate it as Sabbath day singular. It could be translated Sabbath days, but Sabbath day is a perfectly reasonable and legitimate translation.

I don't think there's any need to try and remove the Sabbath day from what Paul is saying here. There's no need for this approach, as we can still hold that Paul is here referring to Jewish ceremonial law, even if we do accept that there is a reference to the weekly Sabbath in the phrase that he uses.

I think there is a reference to the weekly phrase in this, to the Sabbath day in this phrase that he uses. The term that he uses, it's a, what could we call it? It's an umbrella term that covers a whole package of Jewish religious calendar.

[21 : 00] The religious festival, new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. A reference to annual events, to monthly events, and to the weekly Sabbath. Not only is it an umbrella term that Paul is using, it's not an original one.

Paul is simply using language that we find on many occasions in the Old Testament to cover in that way or to include this whole Jewish religious calendar.

For example, just to give one example where we find the same language used in the Old Testament, and so Paul, it would seem, is simply using language that his readers would have been familiar with, certainly his Jewish readers.

In 1 Chronicles 23 and verse 31. And there we read, we probably have to read from verse 30 to get the sense, they were also to stand every morning to thank and praise the Lord.

They were to do the same in the evening. And whenever burnt offerings were presented to the Lord, and notice that, whenever burnt offerings were presented to the Lord on Sabbaths, and at new moon festivals, and at appointed feasts.

[22 : 08] The order is inverted, but essentially this catch-all of three elements is found there in Chronicles, and on many other occasions in the Old Testament, and Paul uses the same language here in his letter to the Colossians.

Now this whole package of ceremonial observance that Paul is referring to here in the Colossians, in the letter to the Colossians, and is saying to the Colossians, don't let any of you judge you on the Jewish religious calendar under this whole package of days and festivals.

This whole package included, or maybe more precisely, involved the Sabbath day. Not because the Sabbath day was per se ceremonial, but because the ceremonial observances involved ceremonies conducted on the Sabbath day.

I'm going to say that again, because I prepared this and I'm struggling a bit, so if you're hearing it for the first time, it maybe would help. This whole package of ceremonial observance, what we have there in verse 16, a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day, this whole package included, or rather involved the Sabbath day, not because the Sabbath day was or is per se ceremonial, but because ceremonial observances involved ceremonies conducted on the Sabbath day.

Like we read in Chronicles, the burnt offerings on a Sabbath day, on a new moon festival, or at a religious festival. That was the day on which they took place. Those ceremonies, and indeed some elements in the manner of the observance of the Sabbath day, need to be distinguished from the day itself, and its abiding significance and application.

[24 : 10] So we don't need to wriggle out of Paul here speaking about the Sabbath day. He is, it seems to me, speaking about the Sabbath day. But he's speaking about it in the context of the observance of Jewish ceremonial law.

So what Paul is saying is that the Jewish religious or ceremonial calendar is a matter on which Christians should not be judged. But he is not saying that the Sabbath principle itself is no longer applicable.

To put it another way, Paul is condemning any insistence on Sabbath observance that is connected inappropriately to Jewish ceremonial law.

And possibly to any underlying pagan influence that we touched on but didn't develop. He is not, in this letter to the Colossians, he is not undermining or questioning the creation ordinance itself of the Sabbath day, of one day in seven, appointed by God as a day of rest.

So, I would argue it's entirely reasonable to understand that Paul, when he refers to days and their observance or otherwise, is referring to the Jewish ceremonial law and not to the Sabbath principle, established in creation, incorporated into the moral law and validated by Jesus, as we were considering last week.

[25 : 46] And we reach this conclusion on the basis of a defensible interpretation of the passages themselves and also as we imply a core principle of biblical interpretation that involves any given passage, these ones that are presented by some as saying, oh, we no longer need to keep the Sabbath, this core biblical principle of interpreting these passages in the light of the overall teaching of Scripture.

This is what we were seeing last week. We were seeing core reasons why the Sabbath principle remains valid. It's a creation ordinance. It's in the moral law. It's validated by Jesus.

These realities need to be brought to bear to passages like this. We can't simply go to this passage and read it and say, oh, well, it's black and white. It says very clearly we don't need to worry about days or Sabbath days or any of that nonsense.

That's all past. We can treat each day alike. We can't do that. We need to go to these passages, particularly passages that are disputed, and interpret them in the light of truths that are clear.

The truths that we were mentioning last week are very clear, that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance. That is so clear, that it's in the moral law. That is so clear. It's indisputable.

[27 : 09] That Jesus Himself validates and commends it is also clear. And that clarity must be brought to bear on passages that would seem to allow for different interpretations or would seem to support a different conclusion to the one that we have reached.

The principle, one day in seven, as a day of rest, dedicated to the remembrance of God's saving work, holds.

Paul does not question it. Paul does not undermine it. Paul does not teach a different message. Which brings us on to the next matter that we wished to consider.

And it is this. What about the day that is to be kept holy? If we are persuaded, as I hope we are, that it is clear that one day in seven is to be kept holy as established by God, what is that day?

Well, in the Old Testament, it's explicit. It's not just one day in seven, but the day itself is specified. It's specified by example in creation, and it's specified by decree in the commandments.

[28 : 28] It is the seventh day. And that language is explicitly used in both Genesis and Exodus. But we don't keep the seventh day. We are here, gathered in the public worship of God on the first day of the week.

Now, by what authority do we keep a different day to the one that is clearly presented to us in the Old Testament? Well, on this matter, our confession gives us an answer.

I'm going to read the section of the confession that deals with this matter and then briefly talk through what is being said or the argument that there is presented for.

Yes, keeping a day, but keeping a different day. No longer the seventh day, but the first day. First of all, I'll just read what it says in chapter 22 of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

It says as follows, As it is the law of nature that in general a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God, so in His word by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages, He hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy unto Him.

[29 : 46] That much, I hope, is clear from what we've been thinking about these past two Sunday evenings. It continues. Now, regarding which day? Which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week, the seventh day of the week, and from the resurrection of Christ was changed into the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's Day and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath.

This phrase, the Christian Sabbath, obviously has its intention to say the Sabbath principle holds, but the day has changed and so we can give it this designation, the Christian Sabbath.

Well, it's easy enough to state that, but does the change of day that the confession really limits itself simply to state, does it enjoy biblical sanction?

Well, I believe that it does. but I would say that I have no difficulty in respecting as defensible the arguments of those who arrive at a different conclusion.

I think the change of day is one, as we will notice, that has sanction. But as I say, there are those within the Christian church, not many, it has to be said, but there are those who take a different view.

[31 : 08] And as I say, if they do so with an open Bible in hand, I really don't think it's a huge issue for us to get upset about. But why the change?

We obviously do practice or observe a different day. Why do we do that? We can work backwards, really, in making the case. And we'll do this, we'll do this briefly, a lot more briefly than the first point.

The first thing that we can say as we work backwards is, well, that the day was changed. Now, I have no interest in going into a detailed historical case, but I simply am making the point that it is a matter of observable fact that in due course, the Christian church observed the first day of the week rather than the seventh.

That's simply a matter of historical fact. The next thing we can say is that that change, it would appear, enjoyed apostolic sanction. There isn't explicit apostolic sanction in the New Testament.

On that, we have to be honest. But there is indications that this change of day did enjoy apostolic sanction. Two verses in particular that we can notice.

[32 : 20] First of all, in the book of Acts, chapter 20 and verse 7. Acts, chapter 20 and verse 7. And some of these verses, I imagine, will be familiar to many of you or their use in justifying the day that we recognize as the Christian Sabbath.

Acts, chapter 20 and verse 7. It's a descriptive passage that we do have to recognize. But nonetheless, what do we find there? We read, On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread.

Paul spoke to the people, and because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. And it stated, very matter-of-factly, that the gathering of Christians in this nascent, developing New Testament church was on the first day of the week.

Now, in fairness, somebody could legitimately turn around and say, well, that's simply describing what happened on one occasion. You couldn't, on that basis alone, say there was this change.

It points in that direction. But on its own, it would be difficult to say this sanctions the change. But it certainly points in that direction.

[33 : 31] But then we have another verse in 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 2. And this is, I think, one that carries greater weight. 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 2.

We'll read from verse 1 to get the idea. Here, it's different for a couple of reasons. One is it's not simply a descriptive passage, but it's a prescriptive passage. It's where Paul is giving instructions to the church.

Indeed, he makes it clear that the instructions apply to all of the churches. We'll notice that as we read it. We read there in chapter 16, verse 1, Now about the collection for God's people, do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

So he's already given this instruction to the Galatian churches. He's now giving it to the Corinthians. A reasonable implication is that this was the instruction that was given to all the churches. And what was the instruction?

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come, no collections will have to be made.

[34 : 34] Paul doesn't actually explicitly say that this will happen in a worship service. But again, it seems reasonable that that is what is implied, that the Christians would gather as they did on the first day of the week, and that would be the opportunity when they were all together to set aside this offering for the churches that Paul would then collect in due course.

So this change from the seventh day to the first day would appear to enjoy that apostolic sanction. Now, if indeed it did enjoy apostolic sanction, then it must have involved divine instruction, even if there's nothing that explicitly states that.

the apostles would not have sanctioned something had they not been given divine instruction on the matter. They would have had no authority, nor would they have taken upon themselves such an authority.

So if they are, as it would appear, instructing the churches that the day on which they are to gather is the first day of the week, they do so, it seems reasonable to conclude because there was a divine instruction in that regard.

On what would that divine instruction have been grounded? And this is the final part of this argument backwards from a historical reality. Well, that divine instruction grounded in the need to remember God's completed redemptive work in Jesus Christ.

[36 : 10] And so in the New Testament we have two memorial ordinances. And these two memorial ordinances allow us to remember the two pivotal aspects of Christ's redeeming work.

We have the death of Jesus remembered by the Lord's Supper. And so there is instituted for us a manner in which we can periodically and regularly and until He comes remember the death of Jesus.

but also we have the resurrection of Jesus remembered by the Lord's Day. The Lord's Supper to remember His death and the Lord's Day to remember His resurrection.

And the term the Lord's Day being one that John uses to describe the day that commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ which as we know was on the first day of the week.

And so this divine instruction that it seems reasonable to conclude was behind the apostolic sanction is grounded in remembering the first day in celebration in remembrance of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

[37 : 27] So His work of redemption receiving that seal of approval. the change of day is justified and significant but as I had already hinted at or stated is not of the same order of importance as the principle of one in seven.

And so it's not a huge issue if some choose to observe the seventh rather than the first. Or indeed the practical matter of what day to observe in countries where Sunday the first day of the week is a normal working day and Saturday is the day of rest.

And so it seems to me that in those contexts for the Christian church to adopt as their day of rest the Saturday in this case really for practical reasons it seems to me entirely reasonable and justifiable.

The principle of one day in seven is being maintained. No doubt it would be and should be their preference to be able to remember the first day but it seems to me not a huge issue if that is not possible and so the Saturday for example is the day that is recognized or set aside as the one day in seven.

Well it's important to consider these matters matters where Christians disagree but it's also important to know why we believe what we believe and do what we do and though it is important and with this I conclude we ought not to lose sight of the wood for the trees.

[39 : 15] My introduction had as its purpose to help us not to lose sight of the wood for the trees but I close with that same concern. The bottom line is as I say where we began.

Our God is a good generous and wise heavenly father who has given us a wonderful and very special gift. A day of rest where we can set aside the legitimate business and activities of the week and enjoy fellowship with him and with one another.

He is not a God who would withdraw such a precious gift and so let us give thanks and enjoy his good gift and in the words of God through the prophet Isaiah let us learn to call and make the Sabbath a delight.

Let's pray. Let's pray.