

Part 5

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[0 : 0 0] At that time Jesus went through the corn fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some ears of corn and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this they said to him, Look, your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.

He answered, Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.

Or haven't you read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.

If you had known what these words mean, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Going on from that place he went into their synagogue and a man with a shriveled hand was there, looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. They asked him, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?

[1 : 1 0] He said to them, If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Then he said to the man, Stretch out your hand. So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

And then turning back to Exodus where we were looking this morning at the third commandment, we are going to look this evening at the fourth commandment which is on page 78.

It is on page 78 and it is from verse 8 forward. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

In six days you shall labour 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, nor daughter, nor your man servant, or maid servant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

[2 : 3 0] 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 the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

So we are going to look at this commandment tonight. Can I borrow someone's notes, the sermon notes? Not because I don't have them, but because they are probably different from what I have got.

And I want roughly to be singing from the same sermon note sheet. Just so I know what you are looking at if you are looking at it.

What I want to do this evening, because this is a massive area, and this commandment is in some circles, in some ways it is quite a contentious one, quite a difficult one.

I want us to be honest this evening and look at at least some aspects of it. I am sure we will look at other aspects when we split into groups later on if you are willing to do that, if you are able to stay.

[3 : 33] But I want us to look at this commandment in the light of Scripture and look at various aspects of Scripture and then draw some principles together towards the end of the sermon and hopefully that will at least lead us in the right direction.

Because saying for example in a congregation like this, there is a lot of different opinions about the Lord's day, about the Sabbath day and how to observe this commandment, how to live in this way.

We come from different traditions, from different countries, from different parts of the world and different Christian cultures so that we find that there is a lot of different interpretations and understandings of this commandment.

Ourselves we come from quite a strict interpretation in our tradition of this commandment. If you ever see anything about the free church in the newspapers it usually adds to it strict sabaterians as the only thing that they describe us as, as if that is all we stand for, which is a bit sad as well from lots of different points of view.

But there would be that kind of tradition that we come from and then there is other traditions which could be classed as antinomian. That is that they don't believe necessarily in our keeping of the law because of what Christ has done and all these things are now irrelevant and there are many different shades in between.

[5 : 04] And maybe these are two extremes, there can be legalism on one extreme and there can be a license on the other extreme as it were. But tonight I want to provoke some discussion for later on by, and some biblical thought among us, by allowing scripture, which is a very primary and important principle for us, by allowing scripture to interpret scripture.

So we allow for example the New Testament to interpret the Old Testament before we add on our own understanding to that. So within its domain we have scripture and scripture has its own authority and it interprets itself.

And I would like to challenge maybe both extremes this evening with some biblical thought and then take some principles which you may want to discuss, because it's very significant to think about and to consider this great commandment.

First of all maybe could I challenge those who would just look at this commandment in a completely black and white way and say yep it says you've got to observe the Sabbath day and you've got to keep it holy, there's no questions whatsoever, it's obedience without questions.

Let's get back to how we did it in the old days and we're giving way to liberalism and to not thinking in a proper way. It's clear cut and it's easy for us just observe the Sabbath day, keep it holy.

[6 : 35] I'll just say one or two points from scripture that at least maybe for us make it not quite so clear cut. For a start we recognise that we don't of course any of us obey this commandment as it's given in Exodus chapter 20.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy because we don't remember the Sabbath day, the Sabbath day was a Saturday. So already there has been a change in our understanding because we have moved from the seventh day of the week as our day of worship to the first day of the week, now there's very good reasons for that which we'll go into in a minute.

So already there's a difference in this commandment, we've moved away from a literal interpretation of this commandment by moving the day. In the New Testament we recognise that it's not called the Sabbath day, well it's not called the Christian Sabbath anyway.

Any reference to the first day of the week as a day of worship in the New Testament it's called the Lord's day. So there's a difference there as well whether we should be calling it the Sabbath for us in the New Testament.

We also know of the dangers of legalism that is highlighted in the New Testament in Galatians 4-10. We've been looking at Galatians in our Bible studies where Paul warns about turning back to those weak and miserable principles.

[8 : 03] Do you wish to become enslaved to them all over again? You're observing special days and months and seasons and years where he was exposing the danger of outward observance of any day, whether it was a special day or the Lord's day or whatever, and aware of that danger of merely outward observance of any day or of any particular way of doing things.

And then in Colossians 2-17 the Sabbath day is called a shadow of things to come. 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 things are a shadow of the things that are to come. The reality however is found in Christ. So there are some ways in which we recognise under New Testament teaching that the Sabbath day as it's given to us here is a shadow of what is to come.

The reality comes in Christ. So there are differences according to the Bible that remind us of that. Romans 14 and verse 6 speaks about again special days.

Each should be fully convinced, the one who regards one day as special does so to the Lord. And so there's a sense in which Paul is speaking about some Christians who held special days now, whether that was the Lord's day or not, is maybe a different discussion, different point.

[9 : 32] But nonetheless we see the possibility of that in the New Testament and nonetheless whatever is the case, Paul says you still have to give an account, you're still accountable to God.

Maybe significantly as well in the New Testament, in all of the sin lists that we have in the New Testament and on Wednesday night with the fruit of the Spirit we were looking at Galatians, we were also looking at the acts of the sinful nature, where there are lots of different lists given of sinful behaviour that we recognise as not being Christ-like, Christ-centred.

You know, all the things like debauchery and sexual immorality and idolatry and all these things. But in none of the sin lists of the New Testament is the breaking of the Sabbath listed.

It is not included within that order and that may be significant. So there are various reasons for us to recognise that it's not necessarily black and white, it's not necessarily simple for us, it's not necessarily a case of observance, clearly not a case simply of outward observance.

So maybe these are some things to think about if we just want a black and white line and rule of how to live our lives. But then can I maybe go to the other side to give one or two thoughts as well.

[10 : 58] If you come maybe from a tradition or if you think that today it no longer matters, that one day is just like every other day, that as Paul says it's a shadow, the reality is in Christ.

We don't need to consider the Lord's day at all, it's all about grace. We don't have one day of worship, all of our life is worship. It's legalistic to have a certain day.

Who am I to judge what other people do with regard to that? As Jesus says, the day is made for man, so we can just live any way we want and do anything we want on this day because it was made for us.

So there's maybe that other extreme which gives a different understanding of the Lord's day. Some of it may have biblical bases, loose at least biblical bases.

Well what can we say in challenging that position? Well we can surely challenge us about what James preached about on the introductory sermon on the Ten Commandments that this is part of God's moral law and we freely recognise that the other Nine Commandments still have bearing and still have relevance for us as Christians.

[12 : 14] Why do we choose one particular command to not be part of that? There would need to be strong biblical precedent and argument for that to happen, for us simply to ignore one.

It would loosen the power and the authority and the relevance of all the other commands if we just simply choose to leave out one, at a whim because well, it's no longer relevant.

Then we have of course a teaching of Jesus in this sermon in the Mount. A lot of people who argue against the Lord's day will argue, or having a special day would argue that it's the only commandment of the Ten that isn't kind of revalidated by Jesus in the sermon in the Mount or broadened in the sermon in the Mount, but I disagree with that.

Because when Jesus talks about the law and the prophets, he says, I've not come to abolish the law and the prophets, I've come to fulfil them. He goes on to say, anyone who breaks these commandments and causes these little people so to do, they shall be called least in the kingdom of God.

So he recognises that these commands still have great validity. Certainly there's a change. Certainly we're going to look at them differently, as I hope you've been finding that we are so far in our studies.

[13 : 30] But clearly these commands still have relevance from what Jesus is saying. Now we read in Matthew 12 that Jesus acted differently on the Sabbath to what the Pharisees expected of him.

But in going on to speak about that, he claimed lordship over it. That he is Lord of the Sabbath. And it is his day.

He himself as a Jew observed the day on the Saturday, that pattern of rest and teaching and worship, wherever he went, he went to the synagogue with God's people and he worshipped on that day. And we saw that he maintained this recognition of a day of worship and adoration.

Now what's also very important about it is that it is a day which we're challenged by because it reminds here, in this commandment in Exodus 20, it's a reminder, or sorry, no it's not a reminder, but rather its basis goes back to creation.

The reason that it's there is because it goes back to creation. That's why we observe that day. It's got nothing to do with the Israeli nation as such at one level because it goes back to the beginning of the world.

[14 : 56] For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the season, all that's in them, he rested on the seventh day. Therefore God blessed the seventh day at the Sabbath day and made it holy. So we have the foundation for this pattern going right back to creation.

So it's a creation mandate, a creation ordinance for this observance, for this day. In reflecting the nature and the character and the behaviour of God.

So it's not just a few laws for the Jewish people in the Old Testament. It goes right back to creation. But if you look at Deuteronomy where we have a repetition of these commandments given to us, there's an additional reason given in Deuteronomy.

They're asked to remember not just because of creation, but they're asked to remember because God had redeemed them from slavery and had set them free.

And it was to be a reminder to them that they were set free and they were set free not to be slaves. You remember what they were crying about in Egypt?

[16 : 04] We are being made to work all the time, 24-7. It's a miserable existence. We don't have any time off and it's nothing like what God intended.

And so part of God's redemption was a redemption to enjoy His created pattern for them again, one day off. Freedom.

So there's a redemptive element as well as a creation element within it. And both of these things still matter today.

We have a day that reminds us of the creation model for us as people made in God's image. But we also have the redemptive model. And I'll say a little bit more about that because it's a good reason for it changing from the seventh to the first day of the week.

But there's a redemptive element in our remembering which it's poor to just ignore if you no longer think the Lord's day matters. And the last thing is with regard to these arguments about the Lord's day is that it's clear in the New Testament that the people of God, the Christians, did gather together for worship.

[17 : 16] And they did gather right from the upper room on the first day of the week. That was the pattern that was set. They came together on the first day of the week. And it was the resurrection day.

It was the day of Pentecost when they were gathered together in worship. It's the day when they're encouraged to bring a collection to God's people on that first day of the week. It was the day, the Lord's day, it's called in Revelation 110, where John was in the spirit on the Lord's day.

So by revelation, by the time of revelation, it was a clearly defined day, the Lord's day, named as such. So I think that there's clear evidence from Scripture that it does matter.

And there's also clear evidence that it has changed. So it's difficult to be dogmatic, isn't it? We shouldn't be dogmatic. It is there, but it has changed.

What principle, one or two principles can we take into mind for it? And these are important for us. I think they're important for humanity. I also think they're important for us as Christians. Really important because God loves us.

[18 : 27] And He doesn't ask us to do things that are bad for us. He doesn't ask us to do anything. He doesn't enslave us. He sets us free. There's good reasons for having a Lord's day.

Biblically, bearing in mind some of the things that we've said in Scripture and interpret Scripture. And most importantly, I don't have all the answers. And there's lots of freedom within this.

And there's lots of conscience within this. And there's lots of wisdom required within this day. I know how difficult it is to observe the Lord's day in a heartfelt, Biblical way.

Tremendously difficult. It's tremendously difficult with family. It's also tremendously difficult in a secular world where nobody cares about anything to do with the Lord and His people in His day.

And where His day is simply like every other day. So there are difficulties, clear difficulties for us in our lives. But that's just one or two things that I hope are encouragement for us as we think about the Lord's day.

[19 : 38] And it first goes back to creation, to use a very untheological term, the rhythm of life. It sounds a bit like the Lion King or something. But the rhythm of life that God set in place in His theological treatise of Genesis 1, which speaks about beginnings, and speaks about patterns and models.

And He gives us there in His own image His pattern of six days' work, one day rest, and that day becomes hallowed, set apart.

The argument initially is creational. It's part of the rhythm of life. That this is God's model for humanity, that we are to work.

That work is an ennobling and a good thing. And He gives us six days to do it. And that rest is also great. Work and leisure. A few years ago I did a series on that, work and leisure.

And the importance not just of work, but also of leisure and of rest and of recuperation. That is the optimum. Now I know a lot of different models have been tried in society. Some societies have tried ten days of work, one day off.

[20 : 51] Two weeks of work, two days off. And lots of different models. But I think generally it's been found that the optimum is six days and one. And that that has been the pattern from the very beginning. And remains the pattern.

Our whole calendar is based on that particular model. And we are made, remember we are made in God's image. And He gave us that pattern, six and one.

We're made in His image. And so He knows, you know, He knows what's best for us. And this rhythm of life is one that He imbues significance to.

And of course, imbues worship into and praise into as well. So from a very practical point of view, and I'm not here speaking really strongly about spiritual truths, but very practical truths for us, it's part of the rhythm of our lives.

And it's a good way for us to realign our time. I used to be on a congregation where lots and lots of people worked for four and six months without a day off, or maybe not as long as a month, or maybe six weeks on rigs and places like that, without a day off.

[22 : 06] And there was a phenomenal pressure on them, and on their families, and on their mental and physical health as they lived their lives.

Tremendous pressures, and time takes on a completely different perspective. And in the society in which you live, which is 24-7, everyone's working, everyone's doing their thing.

Nobody has any time left. Then God has said, I want to realign this, because my pattern is that you stop on a weekly basis, and you recognise that you need rest, and also that as Christians, you recognise you need God in a different way to balance your life, and to focus your attention again on Him.

He gives us that use of time, which is good, where we are free to rest and not feel guilty about it. That's a great thing, a very positive thing about it.

I used to love it, I get to speak to the students here, I used to love, I wasn't a very diligent worker, okay? But I used to love having no sense of guilt for not doing any of my studies on the Lord's Day.

[23 : 23] Now of course you get your work done the rest of the week, of course, because you work six days, and take rest, I'm not quite sure if that was often the case, but nonetheless there was a great freedom there, didn't feel any guilt or any need of any particular, no, I know it's not always like that, and I know some people have to work for various reasons.

But this is this great universal validity that He has given to this day. I didn't have any time, and I really wish I had more time to study, maybe one of these days you'll give me a sabbatical, very relevant, and I'll study the Sabbath, because there's lots in the Bible, isn't there, about the Sabbath principle, not just the day, but then one year and seven was a Sabbath year, and then seven-seven year, the 49th year, and the 50th year, the Jubilee year, we had two years, there were Sabbath years, celebrations, festivals, a rest for the ground, a rest for the animals, a rest for creation, a rest for people.

So we have within the Sabbath principle, social, natural, environmental, wildlife implications that come across, you know, not just yourself, but your family, those around you, your animals, your visitors, because it saw the relevance and the significance of this day.

It's a command against slavishness, against exploitation, economic, against exhaustion, against slavery, this is a good God who gives us a good day and who recognises that that is the rhythm of life.

So there's a rhythm of life from creation within it, but there's also a redemptive reality within it that we mentioned earlier. Remember, God says here, remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, and all that it means for them. The Israelites were freed from slavery, working 24-7, and He released them in a miraculous way, that redemption, and even in the desert, they were to just pick man on six days and not in the seventh day, and God provided for them, and God honoured them when they honoured Him, and they had this hope and this redemption and this freedom that they were to remember through worshiping on this day.

[25 : 54] Now for us, the redemptive reality is much greater, and I believe that that's why the day has changed. In the Old Testament, they were still in shadow, weren't they?

They were looking forward to a fuller redemption that was to come in Christ, so it was the last day of the week, the seventh day. But in Christ, we have that redemption reveal.

We have the cross, we have the resurrection, the ascension, we have the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, so it's moved to that resurrection day, the first day of the week, so that as Christians, we look back each week to the first day, to the day where our redemption has been accomplished, where it's been finished, where it's been won, and where we rest in that redemption, and when we rest in what Christ has done, and where we give thanks and we worship Him, we are loved, we are redeemed, and He has given us not just a day physically to rest, but a day spiritually to luxuriate in Him for His redemption.

And there's a... it's important for us to remember that, it's a bit like the sacrament. We have a tendency to forget, don't we? The Lord's Day dovetails beautifully with the sacrament to remember, and it helps us, the Lord's Day helps us to remember our redemption, helps us to fellowship, helps us to praise and worship, helps us to serve.

Is it Christian enslaved really? Are we enslaved? Because we recognize this freedom, and we are able to rest in this day. Is it us who are enslaved because we have this day?

[27 : 39] So often, isn't it, we think, ah, ah, you know, the Lord's Day, the Sabbath Day, the Sunday, it's a drag, it's a dull, shouldn't be for us. It's a freeing, releasing day when we don't need to be under the weight of relentless activity and work free to rest.

So there's that principle of redemption and remembering. And the last thing I want to say is that the key for us as we interpret it in the light of the New Testament is His Lordship and His love.

You know, this is His Day. He is our Lord. Now, I had a quote, I've got far too many bits of paper here, and I've forgotten the one that had the quote on it. But I had a quote from Bill Gates, who was asked about religion at one point, and he said, I don't believe in God.

Words to this effect, I don't have the quote exactly, but I don't believe in God. One of the reasons is that I've got far better things to do on a Sunday morning.

It's an unproductive, yeah, he used kind of business terms, it's an unproductive use of time. I've got far more important things to do on a Sunday morning. I don't believe in God and I don't believe in religion. And it was a quote along these lines.

[29 : 06] Now, that is absolutely right for him, because he can't see. He can't see the Lordship of Christ and the love of Christ who has redeemed those who come to Him by faith.

But we shouldn't think like that. We shouldn't think like Bill Gates, with regard to our faith, because He's our Lord and we love Him. He's the Lord of the Sabbath, He says.

He's the Lord of the commands. He's fulfilled them, but He expects them, us in love, to recognise their value. Jeremiah 31, 33 says something very significant.

It says that the new covenant will be revealed in Christ, prophetic, the mention of Christ. And God's people, the law of God will be written on their hearts. This is the law of God.

It's written on our hearts. What he's saying there is that we want to serve Him. We want to love Him. We want to recognise His pattern, His model for life, because of what He's done for us.

[30 : 18] Now, you're a husband and a wife. You see your husband and your wife every day, usually. But no one would think it's strange if you said that you wanted to have a special day for them.

You wouldn't think, well, what on earth are you doing that for, because you see them every day? It's all right. And a good thing that you want to spend special time with somebody that you love.

And the same is true of us in Christ. You know, we desire Him. And, you know, if people say, oh yeah, if you believe in the Lord's day, you're saying that the Lord's day is one day, and you've got the other six days. That's not right, because we should be living sacrifices.

All of our lives. Of course that's true. All of our lives are living sacrifices. Of course they are. We know that. We recognise that. And there is a danger in Sabaterianism of thinking, if I just give God this day, and I observe it very strictly, and I wholeheartedly give Him the day, and the rest of the time is mine.

That's a danger that we can make a dichotomy in our lives between just giving Him one day as it were. The other six is mine. I could do what I like.

[31 : 39] But of course all of our lives are His. But He gives us this day as a special day of remembrance, a day of wonderful things. He did wonderful things on the Lord's, or on the Sabbath day in the New Testament.

He healed people. He fellowshiped with people. He taught people. He was in people's company. He worshiped God. It's a great day. And it's a great day for us as we use it in love recognising what He's given us.

We need to rest. We do, physically, need to rest. And if you can't rest, like me, you work on Sunday, then you need to find another day to rest. Principles 1 and 7. Sometimes people have to work on Sundays, then they need to find another day to rest. And worship, which of course brings problems with it.

Great day of fellowship. Great day of worship. Great day of rest. A great blessed day. He blessed that day, we're told, you know, and made it holy. A blessing is a positive, good thing.

And I think probably today we need it more than any time. Not in a legalistic, ritualistic, sabaterian kind of way, which drains it of life and of happiness and of blessing. But we need to recognise that He is good.

[33 : 04] And we are in a battle. And it's a struggle to be a Christian. But He's given us this oasis, a day when we can worship Him, and fellowship, and rest, and recuperate, and not be burdened even by all our day-to-day worries and concerns.

Not saying that we just forget them as if they're not there, but we can lay them aside. And that mentally is great for us to be able to do that. It's terrible to be always carrying a burden all the time.

You can lay aside your responsibilities if you're very many high responsibilities in employment. Lay them aside on His day and take rest and recuperation.

So in conclusion, two questions, or two spot thoughts. If you're a Christian and you're not sure about the Lord's day, why would you not want a special day to help you focus on Him as your Savior and Redeemer?

Why would you not want that? It seems crazy, doesn't it? That we wouldn't want that? That we argue against it? No, no, no, no, no, no, no. As if somehow we're kind of being very theologically astute.

[34 : 13] But why would we want that? Why would we want not to be in His company as Christians? But then on the other side, we need to be aware of being judgmental and legalistic about other people who have different understandings of Scripture and on this matter, maybe have different traditions and come from different angles on it. Beware of being legalistic and judgmental and use His day positively.

So I hope there's maybe things there that we can discuss together downstairs. We'll just bow our heads and pray. Lord God, help us we pray and bless us and bless our discussions and bless your word in our lives. Amen.