

The Ten Commandments #8

The Fourth Commandment

by: Ronald L. Dart

If you were to take a survey among Christian people you would find that most of them believe in the Ten Commandments. After all, the Ten Commandments are the basis of all morality and the basis for the worship of God. Why is it then, that the vast majority of Christian people, outright ignore one of those Commandments? No I don't mean 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' Christian people sin, but they know adultery is wrong. It is not so much that they're ignoring the commandment, they are simply breaking it, and in many cases they will repent later of breaking it.

Now I am talking about a commandment that is ignored altogether. That is violated without even a sense of guilt. Now, which commandment might that be?

Remember the Sabbath

You'll find the Ten Commandments in the 20th chapter of Exodus and you'll find this commandment beginning in verse eight, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. {9} Six days you shall labor, and do all your work. {10} But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall not do any work, you, your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates. {11} For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day, wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."

Now I don't know what could be clearer than this. Work six days and rest one. The odd thing is, there was a time when many, if not most, Christian people honored the Sabbath day on Sunday. Sunday was a Christian Sabbath and Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath, but never mind that difference for the moment. Just consider the thing in principle. Why did the Christian church forsake even nominal observance of the Sabbath Day? Because they did. You can see the progression clearly in modern history, it's inescapable.

You can go back as far as Teddy Roosevelt, Teddy Roosevelt's father was a strict Sabbatarian. The families work and even their recreation were sharply curtailed on Sunday, which they considered to be the Sabbath Day.

A friend of mine once told me that his grandfather would not plow a field along side the road. He didn't worry about Sunday but if he was going to plow a field, he would plow one

on the back 40. He would not plow the one on the side of the road because his neighbors might see him on the way to church and he would be scandalized of his violation of the Sabbath day.

You know as late as 1978, I recall many states still had Sunday Closing Laws, by then stores were staying open on Sunday but would not sell stuff you would use for work. You could go down the aisle in some place like Home Depot, which I don't think existed then. But you could go down the aisle, and you would find some shelves roped off, that you could not purchase items from those shelves, but you could from others on Sunday.

Religious Discrimination

When religious discrimination became a problem, the Texas Legislature ruled that you had to close one day a week. It could be Saturday or Sunday, but you couldn't stay open every day.

So one liquor store, I knew of, divided his store into two stores that were there side-by-side. He closed one side on Saturday and the other side on Sunday, so that he could stay open seven days a week.

Now there are no restrictions on when stores and places of business can be open and I think that's true in every state in the union. Now, the odd thing is, that Christian practice seemed to follow the same progression.

When I was a boy I could recall deacons leading the church in prayer and asking God, "To bless us on this glorious Sabbath morning," and people didn't work at their regular jobs on Sunday, unless it was really essential.

Now Sunday is no longer the Sabbath, it is the Lord's Day, but it really doesn't dedicate the day to God, only the hour of worship. After that, its business as usual. It's golf. It's whatever it is you're going to do, football games, basketball games, whatever work you have to do. That doesn't matter anymore.

I was asking some friends, who were old enough to remember, what would they think had led to this development? They answered without missing a beat, "World War II." I looked puzzled and they said, "Well, factories and plants began running 24 hours a day, seven days a week, during the war years and when the war was over, they never really stopped. It just changed the habits of the entire nation. We had to turn out tanks, the airplanes, the ammunition. We could not take a day off during the war, and so when the war was over, we just kept right on working that way.

The Sabbath Was Undermined

That may have had a lot to do with it, but I think the Sabbath was undermined long before that. Whatever the reason, I think it's fair to say, that relatively few people who call

themselves Christians make any gesture toward observing a Sabbath day as such any longer and they are terrible losers for having done so.

Don't Work on the Sabbath

Did you notice in the commandment, it says, "But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God, in it you shall not do any work, you, your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, your cattle, nor your stranger within your gates" (Exodus 20:10).

Nobody, not even your mule, is to be required to work on the Sabbath Day. Someone reported that the animals they ride down through the Grand Canyon were found to live longer if they rested them one day a week. And you would have thought, that somebody would sort of applied the same principle to human beings. The person who rests one day a week will live longer than the guy who burns the candle at both ends. Intuitively, we ought to know that but you would never guess that we know it by the way we live it.

God does not define work in the Commandment. He leaves that to us to determine in good faith, after all, what He's doing is telling us, "Take the day off!" He's not trying to make things harder for us. He's trying to make them easier.

The Israelites to whom this commandment was originally given had been slaves all their lives, for the first time in all their lives, they were being told, that they had value, that their life had value apart from the work they could do. You have to understand, in Egypt, the only value of a slave was work. Now they are out of Egypt. They are at Mount Sinai and God tells them, "You are to take the seventh day of the week off."

Now you might want to ask yourself the question, why did God tell them they had to take a day off? Why didn't He just tell them they could now take a day off? Well, the answer is, because they probably wouldn't have. In fact, we can take a day off, can't we? Do we? Or do we just keep blazing right on through, maybe exchanging one kind of work for another.

Now one of the most profound revelations of the Ten Commandments, and the Fourth Commandment in particular, is that man has value apart from the work he can do. The Sabbath recognizes that.

Why Can't You Pick Your Own Sabbath Day?

So let's take one day off in seven to rest and be refreshed. There is no reason to kill ourselves with work. It is such a good idea. Well then, why did we abandon it so easily? There is a reason for that, and when you think about it, it's a logical reason.

If you can establish the Sabbath on any day you please, you will move it around to suit you, and sooner or later it will not suit you at all. So is it possible that God was not prepared to allow the Israelites to choose their own Sabbath Day?

Manna

There's a story in the 16th. chapter of Exodus, and it's very revealing on this issue.

After the Exodus, and the crossing of the Red Sea, reality began to set in on the Israelites. They had a lot of mouths to feed and nowhere near enough food. They began to become afraid of starvation and they just outright accused Moses of bringing them out of Egypt to kill them with hunger. So God moved to see to it that everyone would have enough to eat.

Exodus 16 verse 4, "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, so I can prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or not."

"I will rain bread from heaven," what a thing to say. But God was doing a little more than filling their bellies, something else was involved. God said in verse five, "It shall come to pass, on the sixth day they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather every other day." Why would He do that?

Well, two things are going to happen. They're going to have quail to eat in the evening. A great flock of the birds would settle in on the camp, and then the next morning, they would have, well, bread from heaven. They called it "Manna," which I guess if you are really going to translate it roughly, you would say, "It's a whats-it-ma-callit." They had never seen it before, so they named it in Hebrew "What's it?" or manna.

Let's continue in verse 13, "It came to pass, at evening, the quails came up and covered the camp and in the morning the dew lay all around the host. {14} And when the dew was gone, behold on the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as hoarfrost on the ground. {15} And when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" for they knew not what it was. And Moses said, "This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.""

Discipline and a Miracle

Now the instructions for the manna are very interesting because what we see being introduced immediately is a clear discipline.

In verse 16 of Exodus 16 it says this, "This is the thing which the LORD has commanded, Gather every man of it according to his eating, an omer for every man, according to the number of your persons, who are in his tents."

Every man was to have one measure of manna that was equal to about 2 quarts. 2 quarts of manna per person.

Verse 17, "And the children of Israel did so, and gathered some more, some less. {18} And when they did measure it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, he that had

gathered little had no lack, they gathered every man according to his eating {19} And Moses said, "Now, let no man leave it until the morning."

Everyone was to have a full belly and an empty bowl. nothing left to store, nothing left to go bad, nothing left to spoil. But you know how it is, there are always some people who never get the word or if they do get the word don't pay attention to it. Some of them did not listen to Moses. Some of them left it till the morning and found it with worms and smelly. Oh, it must've been bad!

Moses was furious because people came around raising cain about what was happening.

So they began to gather every morning, every man according to his eating, and when the sun grew hot the manna melted. There was nothing left for later in the day. If you didn't get out early, you went hungry. If you got a little bit for breakfast, ate that, and went out again at noon for lunch, nothing there.

So discipline is being brought to bear.

Now it came to pass on the sixth day they were out gathering twice as much. Four quarts for one man.

And the rulers of the congregation came to Moses and said, "Are we heading for trouble again here?" They were concerned that there would be a stink the next day because it had really been bad before. Now four quarts to go bad if necessary, but Moses said, "No. This is what the Lord said, "Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will make today. Cook what you will cook, and that which remains over will lay up for you to the morning.""

The message is really clear. We want you to be able to rest on the Sabbath day. You don't have to work. We don't want your wife to have to work either. We don't want her to have to be slaving over a hot fire, cooking your meals. Cook it all today. This is the preparation for tomorrow because tomorrow is the Sabbath." Simple, so this time they laid it up until the morning, like Moses told them, it didn't stink and there weren't any worms. It was a miracle. Obviously a miracle.

God has handed down a divine miracle in order to persuade these people, convince them, or teach them, that this is the Sabbath Day and no other day is. How hard is this to understand?

So they laid up until the morning, like Moses told them, It didn't stink. There were no worms. Moses said, "You eat that today, for this is the Sabbath to the LORD. You will find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none." Now do you get the picture?

It wasn't there was some for none, and some for others, there was none for anyone, because it came to pass, that there went some of the people who went out on the seventh day to

gather. These were the people, the hard noses. the hard heads, that had not gotten double the amount on Friday. They got up Sabbath morning, they were hungry and they went out to gather some, and there wasn't any. The Lord looked upon this and said, "How long are you people going to refuse to keep my commandments and my law? Look, the LORD has given you the Sabbath, so He gives you on the sixth day, the bread for two days. Stay home. Don't go out of there trying to gather manna on the Sabbath day because it's not going to be there." Now when you are dealing with a fairly hardheaded and stubborn people, sometimes it takes a certain amount of discipline to get the idea through their heads.

And finally verse 30 says, "So the people rested on the seventh day." Do you see the problem? They were not allowed to decide for themselves when the Sabbath was. This wouldn't work on Wednesday because the extra you prepared would spoil and no matter what day you decided to keep, there would still be no manna on the seventh day, whatever day you thought you ought to rest.

The day of the Sabbath was established as a matter of discipline. It was not just one day in seven, it was the seventh day for everyone.

Now I know there are those who believe that this is purely a matter for the Jews and has nothing at all to do with Christians. But what if those people have gotten it wrong.

Would you think about this for a moment, maybe they're wrong, maybe there's something else we should understand about this.

The Sabbath Identifies God

In the 31st chapter of Exodus verse 13, God speaks to Moses and said, "Go tell the children of Israel this, "Verily my Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD that does sanctify you."

So yes, the Sabbath is a sign between Israel and God but the operative phrase is this, listen, "That you may know that I am the LORD that does sanctify you."

Now this is a little more pointed than most Bibles have translated it because it actually uses the name of God. In your Bible where you see the small capital letters of the word, "LORD," inevitably that is a substitution for the Hebrew word YHWH, otherwise known as Yahweh or Yehoveh. What He is saying is, "The Sabbath is a sign between Israel and God, that you may know that I am Yahweh that does sanctify you."

Circumcision identified the Jews. On this issue there is no question. When this issue was raised in the early Church, they called a conference and decided the issue firmly. You will find that in the 15th chapter in the book of Acts.

The Gentiles did not have to be circumcised, but there was nothing in Acts 15 to say that Jews should not be. Circumcision identified the Jews but the Sabbath identified God!

A Shocking Statement

Here's the question that Christians have to answer. Are we worshiping a different God? Is this somebody else? Are we worshiping the same God that brought Israel out of Egypt and said "I am the LORD your God," and "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy?"

Now I am going to make a statement that may shock you. Throughout the entire New Testament period, throughout the time when the apostles were still alive, and while the New Testament was being written, everywhere in the world where there was a Christian Church, all Christians observed the Sabbath Day on the same day the Jews observed it. Now in case you didn't quite get that, let me tell you again, "Throughout the entire New Testament period, when the apostles were alive and they were writing the New Testament, every Christian Church in the world, and all Christians observed the Sabbath Day on the same day the Jews observed it."

Now I told you it was a shocking statement, but I am prepared to give you the evidence. If you really want to study this, drop us a line or give us a call and ask for a free booklet entitled, "The New Testament Sabbath Day." Call toll-free 1(888) Bible 44 or drop us a note at Born to Win - PO Box 560, White House, TX 75791.

I want you to understand this is not an argument based on a few proof texts that we can argue about. The Sabbath is woven into the warp and woof of the entire New Testament, and it is inescapable. I will challenge you, drop us a line and request this booklet. I think you will be very surprised.

New Testament Church Observed the Sabbath

Understanding this about the New Testament, that the entire New Testament Church observed, what you and I would call the Jewish Sabbath, makes it all the more difficult to understand why the modern Christian church has so completely abandoned the Sabbath. When I say completely, I don't mean just moved it to another day, they do not observe it all anymore.

Lord's Day or Day of the Lord

The Sabbath identifies God. The early Christian Church observed the Sabbath Day and we're left here explaining why it is, we have either chosen another day or no day at all. The choices made by many to keep Sunday as the Lord's Day rather than keeping the Saturday Sabbath. There is a certain amount of honesty, at least, in saying we are not going to call it the Sabbath anymore, we will call it the Lord's Day instead.

To tell the truth, that just might be a little more accurate than calling Sunday the Sabbath. Increasingly Christians are saying, Sunday is not the Sabbath and so they looking for something else to call it, but here's the problem, if you get your Bible concordance and you look up 'Lords day' in the Bible, you'll find only one reference and when you read it, you have to realize it may not be about a day of the week at all!

The Scripture in question is Revelation chapter 1 verse 10, John is writing, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice of a trumpet."

There's an interpretation of this passage that compares the expression the Lord's Day to another expression that you find very often in the Bible, 'the day of the Lord.' And when you find it, what it is talking about is that 'day of the Lord' at the end of days, at the end of time, when God begins to intervene in the affairs of man, and in fact, it is the 'day of the Lord' that the book of Revelation is all about.

Therefore, when John says "I was in the spirit of the Lord's day," he is talking about the 'day of the Lord' and not about a day of the week at all.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

But even if the Lord's Days passage of John 1:10 were defining a day of the week, one should still ask the question, "What day might that be?" Now there is an interesting encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees that might shed some light on this. Now if you have read the New Testament, you probably have noticed from time to time, that it's almost as though Jesus gets in the face of the Pharisees on this issue of the Sabbath Day. It is not that he doesn't observe the Sabbath Day, He most assuredly does, His custom was to go to synagogue on the Sabbath Day (Luke 4:16), but the part of the problem that really bothered Jesus, and it should bother us as well is, the Pharisees had a tradition that it was wrong to 'heal people on the Sabbath Day' and so Jesus just went out of His way to heal people on the Sabbath whenever he could, because He wanted to make the point of how stupid that was.

On one occasion, this is in the book of Mark chapter 2 beginning in verse 23, Jesus and His disciples were walking through a field of corn (grain) on the Sabbath Day and His disciples began as they went, to pluck the ears of corn, {24} And the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Why do your disciples on the Sabbath Day do what is not lawful?"

Now there's a big question mark here, what do you mean not lawful? It is not lawful according to who? Because the law does not prohibit reaching out and gathering a handful of corn, popping it in your mouth, as you walk through a field on the Sabbath Day. There's nothing there to prohibit that, unless, you define 'work' as harvest and gathering one handful of grain as harvesting. Well then by your definition, you can make it unlawful, but the Bible doesn't.

Jesus said, {25} "Haven't you ever heard what David did when he had need and was hungry, he and the men that with him? {26} How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and also gave it to them that were with him?"

What Jesus seems to be saying is that sometimes there can be an exception to the law based on hunger. Which I don't think the Pharisees would've been very impressed with it all.

Then Jesus said something really surprising. This is in verse 27, "Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath."

The Sabbath was an incredible gift of God to man. He comes to man and says, "You have been working for all your life, 24 seven, now take one day a week off folks. STOP IT!"

Therefore Jesus said, {28} "Therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath."

Two things in this is of really profound importance. One, "The Sabbath was made!" When was the Sabbath made? The answer to that is in Genesis 2 verse two, "On the seventh day God ended his work which He had made, and He rested on the seventh day from all his work which He had made. {3} And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it because in it He had rested from all his work which God created and made."

God rested, He blessed the seventh day. He sanctified it and set it apart. That's when the Sabbath was made! Okay, the Sabbath has been here since creation, not just Moses, and so therefore the Sabbath was for man, not just for Jews.

The second thing of profound importance, Jesus said, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath Day."

So I suppose, if you would go back in the Bible and begin to look to see what you could find about what day would be the Lord's day, how could you come up with some other day, other than the Saturday Sabbath? Because the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath.

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