

The Fourth Commandment

by A.W. Pink

The Fourth Commandment reminds us that God is the sovereign Lord of our time, and it provides a day of rest and worship for us to delight ourselves in the Lord.

Scripture: Genesis 2:15, Exodus 20:8-10, Nehemiah 13:17-18, Psalm 118:24, Isaiah 58:13, Mark 2:27, John 20:1, John 20:19, Hebrews 4:8

Topics: "Sabbath Observance", "Work and Worship"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the significance of the Fourth Commandment, which calls for the observance of the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship. He explains that this commandment is not merely a restriction but a divine provision for humanity's good, allowing for a balance between work and worship. Pink highlights that both work and rest are essential, with six days designated for labor and one for holy observance, reflecting God's own example in creation. He asserts that the Sabbath is perpetual and applicable to all people, not just the Jews, and should be honored with family worship and acts of mercy. Ultimately, Pink encourages believers to prepare for the Sabbath and engage in holy activities that draw them closer to God.

Transcript

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work" (Ex. 20:8-10). This commandment denotes that God is the sovereign Lord of our time, which is to be used and improved by us just as He has here specified. It is to be carefully noted that it consists of two parts, each of which bears directly upon the other. "Six days shalt thou (not "mayest thou") labour" is as Divinely binding upon us as "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

It is a precept requiring us diligently to attend unto that vocation and state of life in which the Divine providence has placed us, to perform its offices with care and conscience. The revealed will of God is that man should work, not idle away his time; that he should work not five days a week (for which organized labor once agitated), but six. He who never works is unfitted for worship. Work is to pave the way for worship, as worship is to fit us for work. The fact that any man can escape the observance of this first half

of the Commandment is a sad reflection upon our modern social order, and shows how far we have departed from the Divine plan and ideal.

The more diligent and faithful we are in performing the duties of the six days, the more shall we value the rest of the seventh. It will thus be seen that the appointing of the Sabbath was not any arbitrary restriction upon man's freedom, but a merciful provision for his good: that it is designed as a day of gladness and not of gloom. It is the Creator's gracious exempting us from our life of mundane toil one day in seven, granting us a foretaste of that future and better life for which the present is but a probation, when we may turn wholly from that which is material to that which is spiritual, and thereby be equipped for taking hold with new consecration and renewed energies upon the work of the coming days.

It should thus be quite evident that this law for the regulation of man's time was not a temporary one, designed for any particular dispensation, but is continuous and perpetual in the purpose of God: the Sabbath was "made for man" (Mark 2:27) and not simply for the Jew; it was made for man's good. What has been pointed out above upon the twofoldness of this Divine statute receives clear and irrefragable confirmation in the reason given for its enforcement: "for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day" (v. 11).

Observe well the twofoldness of this: the august Creator deigned to set an example before His creatures in each respect: HE worked for "six days," He "rested the seventh day!" It should also be pointed out that the appointing of work for man is not the consequence of sin: before the Fall, God put him "into the garden of Eden to dress and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). The lasting nature or perpetuity of this twofold Commandment is further evidenced by the fact that in the above reason given for its enforcement there was nothing which was peculiarly pertinent to the nation of Israel, but instead, that which speaks with clarion voice to the whole human race.

Moreover, this statute was given a place not in the ceremonial law of Israel, which was to be done away when Christ fulfilled its types, but in the Moral Law, which was written by the finger of God Himself upon tables of stone, to signify to us its permanent nature. Finally, it should be pointed out that the very terms of this Commandment make it unmistakably plain that it was not designed only for the Jews, for it was equally binding upon any Gentiles who dwelt among them. Even though they were not in covenant with God, nor under the ceremonial law, yet they were required to keep the Sabbath holy--"thou shalt not do any work... nor thy stranger that is within thy gates" (v. 10)!

"The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God". Note well it is not said (here, or anywhere in Scripture) "the seventh day of the week," but simply "the seventh day," that is, the day following the six of work. With the Jews it was the seventh day of the week, namely, Saturday, but for us it is--as the "another day" of Hebrews 4:8 plainly intimates--the first day of the week, because the Sabbath not only commemorates the work of creation, but it now also celebrates the yet greater work of redemption.

Thus, the Lord so worded the fourth Commandment as to suit both the Jewish and the Christian dispensations, and thereby intimated its perpetuity. The Christian Sabbath is from midnight Saturday to midnight Sunday: it is clear from John 20:1 that it began before sunrise, and therefore we may conclude it starts at Saturday midnight; while from John 20:19 we learn (from the fact it is not there called "the evening of the second day") that it continues throughout the evening, and that our worship is also to continue therein.

But though the Christian Sabbath does not commence till midnight on Saturday, yet our preparation for it must begin sooner, or how else can we obey its express requirement, "in it thou shalt not do any work"? On the Sabbath there is to be a complete resting the whole day, not only from natural recreations and doing our own pleasure (Isa. 58:13), but from all worldly employment. The wife needs a day of rest just as much as her husband, yea, being the "weaker vessel," more so.

Such things as porridge and soup can be prepared on the Saturday and heated on the Sabbath, so that we may be entirely free to delight ourselves in the Lord and give ourselves completely to His worship and service. Let us also see to it that we do not work or sit up so late on the Saturday night that we encroach on the Lord's day by staying late in bed or making ourselves drowsy for its holy duties. This Commandment makes it clear that God is to be worshipped in the home, which, of course, inculcates the practice of family worship.

It is addressed more specifically than any of the other nine Commandments to heads of households and to employers, because God requires them to see to it that all under their charge shall observe the Sabbath. To them, more immediately, God says, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." It is to be strictly set apart to the honor of the thrice holy God, spent in the exercises of holy contemplation, meditation, and adoration. Because it is the day which He has made (Ps. 118:24), we must do nothing to unmake it.

This Commandment forbids the omission of any duties required, a careless performing of the same, or a weariness in them. The more faithfully we keep this Commandment, the better prepared shall we be to obey the other nine. Three classes of works, and three only, may be engaged in on the "Holy Sabbath." Works of necessity, which are those that could not be done on the preceding day and that cannot be deferred till the next--such as tending to cattle. Works of mercy, which are those that compassion requires us to perform toward other creatures--such as ministering to the sick.

Works of piety, which are the worship of God in public and in private, using with thankfulness and delight all the means of grace which He has provided. We need to watch and strive against the very first suggestions of Satan to corrupt our hearts, divert our minds, or disturb us in holy duties, praying earnestly for help to meditate upon God's Word and to retain what He gives us. The Lord makes the sacred observance of His Day of special blessing; and contrariwise, He visits the profanation of the Sabbath with special cursing (see Neh. 13:17, 18), as our guilty land is now proving to its bitter cost. "A Sabbath well spent, brings a week of content And strength for the toils of the morrow; But a Sabbath profaned, whate'er may be gained Is a certain forerunner of sorrow."

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