

The Fourth Commandment: Worship and Rest

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[0:00] Amen. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

! Amen. So I have to ask, did our Old Testament reading sound familiar this morning? We've been on that one for the past few weeks, haven't we? You know, a big part of the reason why I've done that is that I've come to realize that there was a time when pretty much everyone in our culture knew what the Ten Commandments were, because the culture kind of reinforced them, even when the Church didn't.

We are no longer living in times like that. So if the Church isn't teaching people the Ten Commandments, well, people aren't going to know the Ten Commandments. We are on the Fourth Commandment this morning.

So I thought about this. I remembered that I dealt with a recurring ailment as a child. Now the symptoms of this ailment could vary widely. Sometimes it was pain from beyond all description, like from something like a skinned knee.

[1:15] Sometimes it was an incredibly itchy bug bite. Sometimes it was a headache that might or might not have all been in my head. Sometimes it was sudden, inexplicable fatigue.

Sometimes it was a case of the sniffles. The symptoms were many, but they had one thing in common. The onset happened when it was time for little Caleb to get ready to go to church.

I call this disease churchitis. And I had a bad case of it when I was a kid. I was one of those kids who would try anything to get out of going to church.

Growing up in the Baptist church, that meant having to try to get out of church three times a week. Run short of excuses pretty quickly that way. Now, if that wasn't bad enough, my mom was unsympathetic to my plight.

And it wasn't just kind of sketchy illnesses either. I'd say, Mom, can I miss one of the two Sunday services to go play paintball with my friends?

[2:22] Nope. Mom, can I stay home on Sunday evening to watch the Super Bowl? Nope. Mom, can I play this sport that might occasionally interfere with one of the two evening services?

She actually ended up budging a little bit on this one, but only because my football games would almost always be done before the evening service. One of my favorites, Mom, I was up all night playing video games and I'm exhausted.

Can I miss church this morning? And the answer was no. She was taking that whole training up a child and the way he should go thing, seriously.

But you know, my mom knew something. She knew that there was nothing in the world more important than knowing Jesus. And that nothing should take priority over gathering with God's people to worship Him.

Now, I might have fought it tooth and nail with made-up illnesses, but I sure do appreciate it now. Clearly, it shaped who I am.

[3:27] It made a lasting impression. Now, I have to admit, I've had the temptation to miss worship from time to time. As a college student, especially, I've found myself worshipping, as they say, at St. Mattress of the Springs a few times.

Otherwise known as sleeping in, instead of going to church. All that to say, we really are tempted to break the fourth commandment.

We read in Exodus 20 this morning that God's people, Israel, were to set aside the seventh day of the week for God and to rest. And that day belonged to God and wasn't for their labors.

So, we might ask, it's 2018 and we are not ancient Israel. What does this fourth commandment thing have to do with us? I think there's a tendency for Christians to forget about our commitment to observe the fourth commandment or to not really think about it.

Now, it does look different in the new covenant than it did in the old covenant. And I'll talk more about that in a minute. But the commandment is still there. Remember when we talked about how the moral law still applies to Christians today?

[4:46] We see the moral law broken down for us in the Ten Commandments. And keeping the Sabbath makes the cut. Now, even among those, among Christians who believe that the fourth commandment still remains in effect for us, there are differences about what that means.

Here's one. Is any work at all allowed on the Lord's Day? With the exception, of course, of necessity or mercy. Works of necessity or mercy. Which pretty much anyone will allow.

Some would say, no, you're not allowed to do any work that isn't a work of necessity or mercy. So unless it's something like performing emergency surgery, healing someone with leprosy, or being on patrol as a police officer, or standing in the pulpit, you're probably not supposed to do it.

Now, I don't want to dwell on this too extensively because this will take us down a rabbit trail. But I think that agonizing about what kind of work is or isn't allowed. Instead of doing that and sort of saying, can I cut my grass?

Is it okay to take a job that sometimes costs me to work on Sundays? We should simply recognize in general and in principle that the Sabbath is a day of rest.

[6:03] And so the Lord's Day that we observe is a day of rest. And God gave us this day for our good and to remind us that us and our time belong to Him.

Now, getting fussy about how far we're allowed to walk on the Lord's Day, or agonizing about if we're allowed to help our livestock when they've fallen into a ditch, seems like something Jesus wouldn't approve of.

I think He talked about that a little bit, didn't He? But another question that arises, on what day should we observe the Lord's Day? Most Christians, of course, worship on Sunday, not the seventh day of the week as is specified as the Old Testament Sabbath day.

Why is that? Well, in the Old Testament, we see that God rested on the seventh day after His work of creation. He then set aside the seventh day as a day of rest and devotion to God.

So, why do we observe the Lord's Day on Sunday? Well, so full answer here. Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday, and His resurrection changed time and history as we know it, ushering in a new creation through His victory over death.

[7:18] That is why we observe the Lord's Day on Sunday. It's the day of new creation, a day of rest that points us to our eternal rest in Christ to come. So, we observe Sundays.

Should be a day of rest. What else is clear about it? Well, here's the big one that everyone agrees on. Here's what I think we need to focus on this morning, because it's not a problem for most of us to observe Sunday as a day of rest.

We like that idea. It also belongs to God as a day of worship. That's our big New Testament application that I want us to think about today.

Hebrews 10 we read, Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, all the more as we come nearer day by day to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[8:37] Have you ever fallen into that habit of neglecting to meet together? I suspect that a lot of us have at some point.

But we are called to a better way. So why weekly worship? Why is that the standard, the bare minimum, we would say? Well, Sabbath observance in the Old Testament was a weekly thing, so that provides a good pattern for us.

But we can also look at it from another direction. I'll start with a question. Should worshiping the Lord be the most important thing in our lives? What do you think?

So then we have to ask, is there anything more important than hearing God's Word preached and communing with Jesus in worship? The answer is that worshiping the Lord, glorifying Him, thanking Him for the salvation we have in Jesus, the answer is that that is the most important thing in our lives.

And I would hope that we would say it is. Then it's committing an hour and a half to it once a week, that big of a deal. At the end of the day, failing to gather for weekly worship, weekly resting in Christ,

says something about the state of our hearts.

[10:06] And what it says to us is hard to hear. It tells me I am putting this other thing ahead of God. I found this flow chart on the internet that takes up the question of if I should go to church on Sunday.

Now, I won't go through it all because it's a little hard to keep track without the visual aid, but I'll hit some of the high points. It begins by asking this question. Do you have something better to do than going to church?

If your answer is no, it tells you to go to church. But if your answer is yes, it asks you if you're sure about that. If your answer is still yes, this instruction follows.

I just want you to hear yourself say it first out loud. I am going to do blank on Sunday, and it is more important than worshipping the Lord. Go ahead and say it.

Now that you've said it to yourself, say it again to the Lord. Go on. Still think it's more important?

[11:18] The flow chart admits that works of necessity that can't be done at another time or on another day, and it specifies that these don't include sporting events, are acceptable reasons for missing church, but all other roads on this flow chart lead to telling you to go to church.

In the constitution and canons of our church, the Anglican Church in North America, we read that it is the duty of every Christian to worship God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit every Lord's Day in a church, unless reasonably prevented.

And interestingly enough, that's the first duty that's listed. Duties of every Christian. Because, is there anything more important than worshipping the Lord?

That is the primary task of the church. Everything else flows from that. So we worship the Lord every Sunday so that we are not neglecting the admonition to meet together.

And it's not just a duty. It is a delight that nothing of this world can match. So we do it unless we are reasonably prevented.

[12:34] What does that mean? Well, we're going to talk a little bit about that. We've already talked a bit about the works of necessity. Things that absolutely have to be done right now.

Sometimes our jobs can fall into this category. Some jobs, by their very nature, require occasional work on Sunday. On Sundays, we still need EMTs. We still need police officers.

We still need nurses. But other jobs, other than those, might still require us to work the occasional Sunday. That happens.

That might be unavoidable. But I will say that it's best to try to avoid that, if possible. I, one time, found myself passed over for a job because I told them in my interview that I absolutely couldn't work on Sundays.

They actually admitted that, which was probably illegal on their part. But my point is that I think we need to do what we can to make sure that our jobs aren't always intruding on Sunday worship.

[13:37] Being reasonably prevented might also look like being sick or having to care for a sick child or family member. And I mean really sick, not just a case of church-itis.

How do we know when being sick means that we're too sick to come to church? Well, I'm about to embarrass our senior warden by calling him out. Sorry, Mark. But he once told me that his standard is that if he's not too sick to go to his job, he's not too sick to go to church.

Now, that is a standard that works for me for obvious reasons. But I think it's a good one for all of us. Also, not being able to get there because of, say, just to cite one example, bad weather is being reasonably prevented.

But being reasonably prevented does not include being generally busy with things that could be done at another time. It doesn't include being out of town.

If we're out of town, we can still find a church to visit. If we're out in the middle of the wilderness, say we're out camping, which happens sometimes, we can still pray and worship with whoever's there with us or even by ourselves if no one else is around.

[14:58] So I have to say, as I've gone through this, I hope that this morning's sermon hasn't hit like a sledgehammer. I hope not.

I can be honest and say that I have not always been perfectly consistent in my church attendance either. But I went into quite a bit of detail on this point because we often don't think about why it is that we observe the Lord's Day weekly, why we worship every week.

And because we don't think about it, we're tempted to treat weekly worship as relatively unimportant. Have you ever treated weekly worship as unimportant and blown it off for other things?

You don't have to answer that out loud. But you know what? I can say that I have. And when I did it, the honest truth is that what I was doing was worshiping that other stuff instead of worshiping God. Like all of God's law, the fourth commandment with its application of being regular in worship and resting in Christ has the effect of exposing our sin.

[16:19] It has exposed mine. When that happens, there is only one thing to do, and that is to repent and believe the gospel. Trust in the one who obeyed all the commandments perfectly on our behalf and died for our sins and our place.

Having done that, let's remember that the fourth commandment, our call to rest and to worship, is a delight to the believer, not a mere burden.

We should, of course, never trust in the fourth commandment as a means of earning our salvation. We should never trust in any of the commandments. In that way. But we should see it as a God-given delight.

And see it as a wonderful expression of gratitude for the salvation that we have in Jesus Christ.

Jesus says, in our gospel reading for today, that the Sabbath was made for man.

My brothers and my sisters, the day of worship and rest in Jesus is a gift from God. There is nothing that I look forward to like our weekly worship together.

[17:35] Gathering together with you, praising my Savior, reading His Word, gathering around His table. Jesus is so great, and He gives us with His very presence.

Isn't that amazing? Why would we settle for anything less than that on Sunday mornings, my brothers and my sisters?

Why would we settle? I like sleeping in, but sleeping in has nothing on Jesus. I might like lounging around in my jammies, and you know what I do.

But the encouragement that I get when I see you, my brothers and my sisters in Christ, and worship and fellowship with you, is better.

Being encouraged by you, trying to encourage you, as the day of our Lord Jesus draws nearer, that is better than anything else I could be doing this morning.

[18:33] This is a foretaste of heaven. A reminder that Christ is our eternal Sabbath rest. A reminder of the perfect joy that is ours in Him, and will be ours forever.

Heidelberg Catechism does a great job of addressing the question of what God intends for us in the fourth commandment. It begins by treating the subject of public worship, which of course is what I've spent most of this sermon addressing, but finishes with some very beautiful teaching.

It says that in the fourth commandment, God intends that every day of my life I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through His Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

Guess what? It starts now. My brothers, my sisters, let's not neglect gathering for worship as is the habit of some.

Let's encourage one another. Let's allow the Lord to work in us through His Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal Sabbath, our eternal rest, and delight in our Lord Jesus Christ.

[19:56] in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.