

# The Law of Life - 1 : The Fourth Commandment

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## The Fourth Commandment

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, 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, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man servant nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.” Exodus 20.8-11

## The Origin of “Difficulties in Scripture Interpretation”

This commandment, like every other, is exceeding broad, and we can never exhaust it. Yet, with all its breadth and depth, it is exceedingly simple and easy to be understood. Nevertheless, it is very much misunderstood, and many professed Christians seem to find great difficulty in it. Because of the general perversion of this commandment, it is necessary to clear the ground of some misapprehensions, before we come to the consideration of the real teaching of it. The difficulties connected with this commandment, like those with any part of the Bible, are wholly in the minds of men, and not in the commandment itself. Perverted minds pervert the word. Whoever comes to the study of the Bible, wholly free from prejudice or selfish motives, with a sincere desire that he may learn the will of God in order to do it, will never find any difficulty in it; for “if any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching.” John 7.17

All the difficulties of “interpretation” lie in this: *People come to the Bible with more or less fixed opinions of what is right. They take it for granted that the ideas and practices that they have received by tradition from their fathers, and which are common among men, must be right.* But they find things in the Bible that do not sanction their course, and since their minds are not open to change, they feel it necessary to make the Bible harmonize with their practice. Bible study is very difficult under such conditions.

## Which Day?

Although the commandment states the case in the plainest language, there is a great deal of questioning as to which day is the Sabbath. Nothing could be more simple and direct than this: “The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord the God;” but the majority of professed Christians observe the first day, calling it the Sabbath, and hence arises one of the difficulties to which we have just referred. It is true that many observers of Sunday have not found any difficulty over it, because they suppose that it is the seventh day spoken of in the commandment. Their attention has never been called to the matter, or else they would see the fallacy of their supposition; for if you ask them why they observe Sunday, they will say that it is in honor of Christ’s

resurrection, which they know took place on the first day of the week. "The Sabbath day according to the commandment" is the day before the first day of the week. (See Luke 23.56, and 24.1.) Hence it is the seventh day *of the week*.

It is very plain, therefore, that the fourth commandment as given by the Lord from Mount Sinai requires the observance of the seventh day of the week, and that the observance of the first day of the week by professed Christians is not warranted by it. There is no revised edition of the commandment, for God's Word is settled in heaven for ever, and Christ said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Matthew 5.17, 18

But some say, "It all depends on where you begin to count; if you begin to count with the second day, you make Sunday the seventh; or if you should begin with Wednesday, you would make the third day the seventh." The fallacy of this statement should be apparent to every one. If a man has seven sons, you cannot make the first-born the seventh by any process of counting. Call them what you please, the first-born is still the first son, and the last one born is the seventh. Calling black white does not make it white. Calling the first day the seventh does not make it the Sabbath; it still remains the first day, and one of "the six working days." The same principle applies to the seventh day; no matter what men call it, or where they begin their count of days, it still remains the seventh day, which "is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God."

At the very time the law was spoken from Mount Sinai, when God said, "*Remember the Sabbath day,*" He was making it plain that the Sabbath is a definite day, and that it was not left to man to choose which day it should be, nor how it should be kept. The giving of the manna emphasized the sacredness of the day, and showed its definiteness. For forty years manna fell six days in the week; on the seventh day none fell, but a double portion being given on the sixth day made up the lack. While ordinarily the manna that fell one day could not be kept till the next day without spoiling, the extra portion given on the sixth day was sweet and good for use on the seventh. Nobody could change the day, or was free to choose for himself.

### **Do We Know the Origin of the Seventh Day?**

But some tell us that the reckoning of days has been lost, and since we cannot know which is the original seventh day, one day is as likely to be right as another. Such objectors forget that the Word of God "lives and abides for ever." The commandment speaks to us as directly as it did to the Israelites gathered about Mount Sinai. It is not four thousand years old, but is new every day. We have no more ground for saying that we cannot tell, which is the Sabbath day according to the commandment, than the Israelites had when they heard it spoken. God does not command impossibilities, and the fact that He still speaks to us in His commandment, requiring the observance of the seventh day, is evidence enough that it can be kept. But to take away every

shade of doubt, and to show positively that the original Sabbath cannot possibly have been lost, we will briefly trace its history.

In the beginning God rested on the seventh day, and sanctified it (Genesis 2.13); and this is given in the commandment as the reason why we should observe it. God makes no mistakes, and never gets confused in His reckoning, so we may know that the Israelites in the desert had the identical seventh day upon which God rested. During all their history they were in direct communication with God by means of prophets, and the fact that they never lost their reckoning of the days is shown from the frequent reproofs God sent them for their violation of the Sabbath. Finally they were carried into captivity because of their transgression of the commandment; but God would not have punished them for disobedience if it had been impossible for them to know the truth. After their return from captivity they were very scrupulous in their observance of the Sabbath, at least outwardly. Then Christ came, God's Representative, and the Giver of the law. If the Jews had lost a reckoning, He would have set them right. But He recognized the day they were observing as the Sabbath day, and reproved them only because they made it a yoke of bondage, instead of the blessing that God designed it to be.

Shortly after Christ's ascension the Jews were dispersed, and ever since they have been found in every part of the world. But they have remained faithful to the *tradition* of Sabbath keeping, and no matter how widely separated, they all still observe one and the same day. It is absolutely impossible that all should have lost the reckoning of days, and all made exactly the same mistake at the same time, so that nobody ever detected it. It is plain, therefore, that all that is required in order that one may know that he has the identical seventh day on which God rested, and in regular succession from the creation, is the ability to count seven.

### **The Essence of the Commandment**

Whoever reads the Bible with care will notice that there is never any suggestion of the possibility of doubt as to which day is the Sabbath. The whole burden of the Scripture is as to its nature, and the manner of its observance. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." *We are not required to make it holy*; God himself did that in the beginning, to which the commandment refers us. When the heavens and the earth were finished, God "rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made." Genesis 2.2, 3. To sanctify is to make holy. The same word is used in the commandment as in Genesis 2.3. *The idea prevails quite generally that men can keep any day holy, that they can make any day holy on which they choose to rest. This is a grave error. Only He who can create can make holy.* For any man to claim that he can make a day holy is to put himself in the place of God, claiming equal power with the Creator. When God says, "Hallow My Sabbaths," He does not ask us to do what He has already done, but to recognize it and conform to it.

It is not for the benefit of the Sabbath itself that we are required to keep it holy. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man to the Sabbath." Mark 2.28. Those who

observe Sunday often bewail the little regard that is paid to it by the mass of people, saying, "We have no Sabbath;" and so they ask for laws to protect it. In these efforts to enforce Sunday observance by law, they disclaim any wish to make people religious by law, but say that they merely want *protection for the day*, as though people could injure a day by anything that they do on it. He who knows the true Sabbath day will never have any such thoughts about it. And our keeping it does not add any sacredness to the day, and our violating it does not make any difference in its sanctity. The Sabbath is not a fragile thing that must be kept in a case, lest it be broken to pieces by rough usage. It does not need to be protected: it itself is a protection for those who keep it. "His truth shall be thy shield and buckler." It is never true that we have no Sabbath. If every man on earth violated the Sabbath, it would still remain the same holy day. *You cannot abolish the Sabbath day, any more than you can abolish God.*

Recall the text quoted in our study of the first commandment: Joshua 24.19: "Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is a holy God." "God is Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth." John 4.24, R.V., margin. The law is spiritual (Romans 7.14), and only those who are spiritual can keep it. John was keeping the Sabbath according to the commandment when he was "in the Spirit of the Lord's day." No one can serve God unless he is holy. We are to "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Does that shut anybody off from serving Him? No; this is the blessing of the Sabbath day: "I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them." God gives us the Sabbath, to make us know and remember that He has the power to make us holy, so that we can serve Him acceptably. God sanctifies man by His creative power, in order that they may keep the whole law. *To keep the Sabbath holy, therefore, is the sum of all commandment keeping. (To be continued.)*