

THE SABBATH AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Is the Sabbath commandment still a part of the Decalogue? Or is it the only one of the Ten Commandments that is now obsolete?

Nowhere in the New Testament are the Ten Commandments listed in order from one to ten. Nowhere in the New Testament is the Sabbath command repeated verbatim. Without the Old Testament we would not know the exact construction of God's basic law. Without the Old Testament we would not even know that the exact number of commands is ten. These are startling facts that many of us have never stopped to consider.

What about it? Is there any logical biblical reason why we should keep the Sabbath today? Should we now keep all ten of the Ten Commandments—or only those points that pertain to our neighbor? Should we love God only in a very general manner?

Old Testament Background. By way of a brief background, the first Sabbath day followed the six working days of creation (Gen. 2:1-3). A command to remember this first Sabbath day was later inculcated into ancient Israel's basic constitutional law listed in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 (see accompanying box on next page). These fundamental decrees were the only ones spoken and written by the Creator Himself. All other codified laws, statutes, judgments and ordinances were relayed to Moses through angelic mediation.

Moses later summarized God's personal role as Lawgiver in the book of Deuteronomy: "At that time the Lord said to me, 'Hew two tables of stone like the first, and come up to me on the mountain, and make an ark of wood. And I will write on the tables the words that were on the first tables which you broke, and you shall put them in the ark.' So I made an ark of acacia wood, and hewed two tables of stone like the first, and went up the mountain with the two

tables in my hand. And he [God] wrote on the tables, as at the first writing, *the ten commandments* which the Lord had spoken to you on the mountain out of the midst of the fire on the day of the assembly; and the Lord gave them to me" (Deut. 10:1-4, RSV).

Another summary account is also well worth quoting: It shows the vital significance that God attributes to His basic moral law: "... The Lord said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them *hear my words* [personally and directly—not through either Moses or angelic mediation], so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children so.' And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain. . . . Then the Lord spoke to you. . . . And he declared to you his covenant, *which he commanded you* to perform, that is, the ten commandments. . . ." (Deut. 4:10-13).

New Testament Application. The apostle James referred to the whole Decalogue in his general epistle to the twelve tribes of Israel. He wrote: "If you really fulfil *the royal law*, according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors [sin is the transgression of the law; see I John 3:4]. For whoever keeps *the whole law* but fails in *one point* has become guilty of all of it. For he [remember this is God] who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' said also, 'Do not kill.' If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty" (James 2:8-12).

James, here, establishes several significant facts:

1) The royal law is summarized by the Old Testament command to love your neighbor as yourself (see Lev. 19:18).

2) The royal law has distinct points.

Two of those points include the sixth and seventh commandments as listed in the Decalogue.

4) Transgression of any of these points is sin.

5) Failure to keep one point is considered, spiritually, as breaking them all.

6) This royal law is also termed the "law of liberty."

7) Christians are to be judged by this royal law of liberty.

A few questions should be asked at this juncture. Do the points James mentions exclude the first four commandments defining man's relationship with his God? Or do they refer to *all* ten as duly delineated in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5? Are Christians required to *specifically keep* only the last six commandments defining man's proper association with his neighbor, while observing the first four only in some sort of an ethereal sense?

Let us withhold judgment until we have examined a few more of the New Testament scriptures.

Jesus and the Ten Commandments. A rich young ruler once came to Jesus and asked Him a vitally important question: "Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?" (Matt. 19:16.) Jesus answered: "If you would enter life, *keep the commandments*" (verse 17). But the young man wanted to know *which* commandments Jesus was specifically referring to. "And Jesus said, 'You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and

mother, *and* You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (verse 18).

Here Jesus specifically enumerated five of the last six commandments and capped them off with the summary commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.

Later, a lawyer asked Jesus a very similar question: “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25.) This time, because of the motive of the questioner, Jesus answered in a different manner: “He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? How do you read?’ And he answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself’” (verses 26-27). The lawyer replied by first loosely quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, and secondly Leviticus 19:18, in the Old Testament. Love of God was emphasized first and then love of neighbor. Jesus did not disagree with this lawyer: “And he said to him, ‘*You have answered right*; do this, and you will live’” (verse 28).

Another account in Matthew phrases virtually the same answer in *Jesus’ own words* (examine any red-letter Bible). Jesus was asked: “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” And he [Jesus] said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. *This is the great and first commandment*. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets’” (Matt. 22:36-40).

Are we to believe that the second overall commandment to love your neighbor has distinct points, but the first and great commandment has none? Are we to believe that the God of the New Testament does not tell us how we are to love Him in distinct, practical ways?

New Testament Emphasis. Nonetheless, whenever a substantial portion of the Decalogue is quoted in the New Testament, the emphasis is nearly always on “love your neighbor.” Why?

James gives us just a hint. He wrote: “With it [the tongue] *we bless the Lord and Father*, and with it we

curse men, who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so” (James 3:9-10).

Apparently, at the time when the events were happening that occasioned the later writing of the New Testament documents, the main, outward problem revolved around the violation of the last six commandments specifically pertaining to one’s neighbor. For instance, the Pharisees made a fetish out of the fourth com-

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Love for God

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make yourself any graven image.
3. You shall not take the name of the Eternal your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Love for Neighbor

5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not kill.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

mandment. They used it as *an excuse* not to love their neighbors. They severely criticized Jesus for healing a man blind from birth on the Sabbath day (see John 9). They, in reality, did *not* love the poor man. Instead, they wound up threatening to ostracize both him and his parents from the religious community. But the point is: They used the Sabbath commandment to camouflage their disobedience to the great principle of loving one’s neighbor.

They even excused themselves from economic support of their aged parents for “religious reasons.” You

can read what Jesus said to these hypocrites in Mark 7:9-13. There is no way to dishonor one’s parent and simultaneously love God. It simply can’t be done!

The apostle John deeply understood this inextricable interrelationship between loving God and loving neighbor and the irony of claiming to do one while omitting the other. “If any one says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, *cannot love God* whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also” (I John 4:20-21).

It also works the other way. Notice in the next chapter: “By this we know that we love the children of God, *when we love God and obey his commandments*” (I John 5:2). Love and obedience to God go hand in hand: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome” (verse 3).

The Sabbath Commandment. As we stated earlier, nowhere is the Sabbath command repeated verbatim in the New Testament. However, *neither* are the first three commandments (showing us how to love God) repeated verbatim. This is a fact people often forget. One really has to hunt in the New Testament for even veiled references to these three commandments. In actual fact, there is more quantitative New Testament information and instruction concerning the Sabbath commandment than any one of these other three.

So the emphasis in the New Testament is on the last six commandments and also on the *interrelationship* between the broad principles bridging the last six and the first four. In Ephesians 5:5, the apostle Paul related that *covetousness* (number ten) *is* idolatry (number one).

However, the Ten Commandments, as magnified in the New Testament, still present one whole, complete law *with ten points*. Jesus tells us that to love God is the first and great commandment; James tells us that there are points to God’s royal law; John tells us that we cannot hate our fellowman and love God simultaneously.

The Ten Commandments are a

“complete package”—one commandment cannot be arbitrarily ripped out of God’s ten-point law. If one is broken, all are broken in principle.

The Sabbath law is still one of the Ten Commandments! It has, however, been greatly magnified by Jesus’ own personal example and instruction, typified by His famous statement that “the sabbath was made for

man, not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Keeping God’s seventh-day Sabbath does *not* involve an endless list of burdensome do’s and don’ts. The Sabbath was intended to be a great blessing for mankind—*not* a terrible yoke of bondage.

This article has broached but one aspect of the overall Sabbath question. We recommend the following booklets

and articles as further study guides: *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?*; *The Ten Commandments*; “Were the Ten Commandments in Force Before Moses?”; “Are All the Ten Commandments in the New Testament?”; “The Sabbath Was Made for Man.” Be sure to request this free literature. Mailing addresses are listed on the back page. □

Is Every Day “Just Like Any Other”?

“**T**omorrow’s just another day since you went away; tomorrow’s just another day to cry. . . .”

So goes a popular country and western song of a bygone era. And to the average person, one tiresome, monotonous day does indeed seem to melt into another.

Deeply distressed and discouraged over the death of a life-long mate, an elderly person I know lamented about how he had just spent Thanksgiving. “Just another day,” he told me with tears in his eyes.

But the Creator never intended for men and women to live dry, dull, irksome, boring lives, barely eking out some sort of ersatz existence, never understanding why they draw breath on this planet of ours. He never intended life to be so hard that one depressing, trouble-filled, twenty-four-hour day was just another link on a chain into another.

King David of ancient Israel well knew that the Creator never envisioned such a dull, uninteresting existence for millions of men and women. Notice: “. . . weeping may endure for a night, but joy [a change] cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5).

We humans need frequent rest and deliverance from the trials and troubles that seem to result from “just living.” Man needs a time free from the normal routine, a time in which to rest and reflect, to be recharged, reenergized and restored, a time to learn *why* we were put on this earth.

The Birth of a Special Day. The Creator designed a weekly cycle of seven days for the benefit of man. He set apart the last day of the seven for a special, spiritual purpose. According to the biblical narrative, man was fashioned and made to have an intimate, spiritual relationship with his Creator. To keep man and woman in this intended life long friendship and spiritual proximity to God, the seventh day was given a very vital and special significance.

Regarding the biblical account of the six-day creation, the Genesis writer records: “And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God *blessed the seventh day* and hallowed it [set it apart for a holy use or purpose], because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation” (Gen. 2:1-3, RSV).

The sabbath rest was *created* on the seventh day of the week—less than a day after man himself came on the scene. Jesus Christ of Nazareth referred to the birth of the sabbath in Mark 2:27. “The sabbath was made *for man* and not man for the sabbath,” he explained.

The word “sabbath” means “rest” in the original Hebrew. Simple physical rest and refreshment after a grueling work week is an obvious reason for the sabbath. But the true meaning and purpose of this God-ordained institution goes far beyond

physical, mental and perhaps even emotional respite. For the seventh day is inextricably interwoven into God’s transcendent purpose for creating man in the first place.

Genesis 1:26 explains: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . .” (KJV). When one really comprehends the fullness of this short biblical phrase, it means that men and women are made to conform to the spiritual image and character of God—eventually actually becoming personalities in the God family. (*Important:* We have available two vital free booklets to help you understand this almost incomprehensible truth. Request your copies of *Why Were You Born?* and *Just What Do You Mean—Born Again?*)

From the beginning the Creator attached a special significance to the seventh day. He never asked man to rest on, or in any way commemorate, the first six days of the week. It is only the seventh day that takes on deep spiritual proportions.

The seventh day is a time to meditate and muse upon the reason for the whole six-day creation and especially man’s part in it.

A Brief Biblical History. On the very first sabbath day the Creator began to educate our first parents.

Chapters one through six of Genesis are only a brief outline of the first 1,650 years of human history. However, it is clear that the concept of the weekly cycle remained very much in

the mind of the early patriarchs. Noah sent forth a dove out of the ark based on seven-day cycles (see Gen. 8:10, 12). Noah's descendant, Jacob, was also fully cognizant of the seven-day weekly cycle (Gen. 29:27, 28).

Eventually Jacob's descendants found themselves in a state of captivity in Egypt where they probably suffered religious persecution as well as political slavery. Apparently they lost the knowledge of the sabbath and the specific day on which it fell. So the Creator reminded ancient Israel of its existence, making it crystal clear not only that it fell on the seventh day, but also that sabbath observance was a vital part of the nation's constitutional law—and especially that portion governing man's relationship to God (see Exodus 16:22-30).

The Spiritual Import. So important is the seventh day to God's overall spiritual plan that he placed it in the Decalogue, spoken by his own voice and written by his own finger. It is the fourth of the Ten Commandments (the first four reveal how man is to worship his Creator), and the bridge to the other six revealing the basic moral relationship between man and his neighbor.

Here is the fourth commandment "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested *the seventh day*; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it" (Ex. 20:8, 10 RSV). The Creator, here, does *not* institute the sabbath. The first word of the commandment is "remember." In codifying the sabbath as an integral part of his basic moral law, the Creator reminds man once again of when (at creation) and why the seventh day was given.

The sabbath is not just any old day to God—"just like any other." It should also be a special day to man, but tragically for most it is not.

Man has been deceived into thinking that the seventh-day sabbath was designed to be a "yoke of bondage." Unfortunately men have sometimes made it into precisely that. Such is the antithesis of God's thinking. He meant his rest day to be an occasion for feasting, joy and rejuvenation

(notice Lev. 23:2-3; Isaiah 58:13, 14).

A History of Israel's Sabbath breaking. In spite of all of God's revelation, much of the history of ancient Israel was an exercise in sabbath breaking. The prophet Ezekiel records the Creator's thoughts on Israel's defiling of his holy day. "Moreover I gave them my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I the Lord sanctify them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness; they did not walk in my statutes, but rejected my ordinances, by whose observance man shall live; and *my sabbaths they greatly profaned*" (Ezek. 20:12-13, RSV).

After God physically disinherited both the nations of Israel and Judah for sabbath breaking, among other reasons, the House of Judah (the Jews) finally seemed to get the point. Ezra and Nehemiah, after that nation's return from Babylonian captivity, vigorously preached and taught against sabbath breaking.

And as humanity is wont to extremes, the Jewish nation (between the testaments) plunged headlong into the other ditch. Some of their religious leaders *added* an incredible number of do's and don'ts to the original sabbath commandment—making it into an ecclesiastical monster. When Jesus Christ began his ministry, the time had come to strip away these sabbatical traditions *of men*. Jesus showed how the sabbath day should be kept to fulfill its fullest spiritual intent (Matt. 5:17; Isa. 42:21). He removed the yoke of bondage that the religionists had attached to the sabbath.

But one point is clear: Jesus Christ did keep the day itself. "And he [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, *as his custom was*, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read" (Luke 4:16, KJV). Notice verse 31: "And [Jesus] came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them *on the sabbath days* [plural]."

The New Testament Sabbath Rest. Hebrews 4:9 is crucial to the purpose of this article: "There remaineth therefore *a rest* to the people of God" (verse 9, KJV). The margin

says: "There remaineth therefore *a keeping of the sabbath* to the people of God."

The Revised Standard Version has it: "There remains *a sabbath rest* for the people of God."

The Jerusalem Bible: "There must still be, therefore, a place of rest reserved for God's people, *the seventh-day rest.*"

Today's English Version: "As it is, however, there still remains for God's people a rest *like God's resting on the seventh day.*"

The vital meaning of this verse has been obscured by the King James translators. Everywhere else in chapters three and four of Hebrews the English word "rest" is translated from the Greek word *katapausin*, simply meaning "rest" or "a place of rest." However, in verse 9 the original Greek word for "rest" is *sabbatismos* which refers to an actual practicing of resting.

Verses 10 and 11: "For whoever enters God's rest [the kingdom of God] also ceases from his labors as God did from his [on the seventh day following the six working days of creation]. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience" (RSV).

God's seventh-day sabbath is not "just any other day." It prefigures the eternal rest humanity will have with God in his eternal, never-ending kingdom. □

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