

# OpenTheo

## 4th Commandment



### Ten Commandments - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments, which focuses on the Sabbath. While some argue that the Sabbath was switched to Sunday in Christianity, there is no biblical authorization for this change, and it isn't necessary for Christians to observe the Sabbath on Sunday. The Sabbath is considered a moral law in the Ten Commandments, as it is a sign of God's covenant with Israel. However, Paul doesn't recognize the obligation for Christians to keep the Sabbath, and Christians don't need to follow Old Testament rituals, as they follow a New Covenant.

### Transcript

Tonight, we're going to be talking about the fourth commandment in the Decalogue, that is, in the Ten Commandments, and this commandment stands out, in my judgment, from the other commandments in some significant ways. I feel that there is reason to believe in Scripture that this commandment is different in character than all the other nine, and indeed, it is the only one of the ten that is never reiterated in the New Testament as an obligation for believers. All the other nine, as a matter of fact, can be found in the writings of the Apostles, or in the teachings of Christ, as being part of the obligation of Christians to observe, but this fourth commandment is never so described in the New Testament.

Now, notwithstanding that omission in the New Testament, there are many Christians today who believe that keeping of all ten commandments is incumbent upon us as Christian believers, and if that is true, then that would include, of course, the fourth commandment, which, in case your memory is a little rusty, is found in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 8. God said, Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work, you nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.

For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it. And that is the end of the fifth commandment, as it's found in the original recitation of

the ten commandments in Exodus chapter 20.

Now, this is the commandment about keeping the Sabbath. Well, Christians, I think, for the most part, do not understand what the obligation is to those of us who are followers of Jesus Christ in this age with reference to the keeping of this commandment. I think that many Christians are of the opinion that we are supposed to keep the Sabbath.

Perhaps most Christians believe that we are to keep one day out of seven holy unto the Lord. Now, to say most Christians believe that we should does not mean that most Christians actually do this. There are people who believe that we should keep the seventh day as a Sabbath to the Lord.

That would be, of course, Saturday in the week. And those who do so are usually called Sabbatharians. Probably the best known group for taking this position and defending it is the Seventh Day Adventists.

But there are other Seventh Day Sabbath keepers out there. There's a Seventh Day Church of God, and there's other Seventh Day denominations, as well as just individual Christians who don't belong to any of these groups, but they have felt convicted on the basis of the presence of this command in the Decalogue that they should keep Saturday as a separate day in the week to keep it holy to the Lord. Now, most Christians do not necessarily keep Saturday as a Sabbath and do not believe that they should.

It is very common among many, and I would say that Reformed theology and Catholic theology both would tend toward this view. It is common for them to believe that we should keep one day holy, but that day that we should keep is Sunday, which is, of course, not the seventh day of the week at all, but the first day of the week. The argument for this is usually something along these lines.

Well, Jesus rose from the dead early Sunday morning, the first day of the week, and therefore the early Christians began to have their meetings in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ, and they gave up the worship of God on Saturday and changed, as it were, the Sabbath to Sunday. Now, Sabbatharians who keep a seventh day Sabbath today usually view that position as something that arose in the Roman Catholic period in the Middle Ages, maybe the early Middle Ages. It is commonly said, for instance, by Seventh-day Adventists that the keeping of Sunday as a Sabbath is something that was introduced by the Roman Catholic Church, and since the credentials of the Roman Catholic Church as a true church are very questionable in the minds of many, and certainly in the minds of the Seventh-day Adventists, then it would suggest that this is a human tradition, and not a good one at that, but it is a human tradition that is an abomination to God because man has changed the Sabbath of the Lord from Saturday to Sunday.

They say that the early church met on Saturday, and that Jesus kept Saturday as a

Sabbath, and the apostles, and that this change from Saturday to Sunday was a corruption of the Sabbath that occurred maybe in the, who knows when they think it was, fourth or fifth century. Well, let me just say this. I do not believe either of these views.

I do not believe that we must keep a seventh-day Sabbath or a first-day-of-the-week Sabbath. Now, I'll tell you why. I mean, don't tune me out just because I disagree with your viewpoint, but I'll tell you why and what I think the Bible teaches on this, but let me just clarify one thing.

If we are to keep a Sabbath, if the New Testament teaches, or if by implication the Old Testament teaches that New Testament believers are to keep one day holy, and that is to be the Sabbath, then there can be no argument biblically made for changing the Sabbath to Sunday. You cannot keep Sunday as a Sabbath because Sunday is not the Sabbath. It is made very clear that God made the earth in six days, and it was on the seventh day He rested, and therefore He commanded Israel to rest on the seventh day.

That day was made holy and separate from other days and was said to be the Sabbath. If we are to keep the Sabbath, then we'd best keep it on the only day God ever called the Sabbath, and that is on Saturday. On the other hand, I don't necessarily believe that the New Testament imposes this obligation on Christians.

It does not anywhere authorize the change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. It is true that we read of at least one Christian meeting in the book of Acts chapter 20. One Christian meeting at least met on the first day of the week.

It was a Christian congregation in Tyre where Paul was visiting on his way to Jerusalem, and since he was leaving the next day, they had a meeting that went all night, and he preached at that meeting. We're specifically told in Acts that that meeting occurred on the first day of the week. Now, it doesn't tell us that the Christians always met on the first day of the week.

It may be that just this meeting was on the first day of the week because the next day Paul was leaving, and so they had it on that day, and it happened to be the first day of the week. We really don't know, but the important thing to note is that there is no evidence in Scripture that the early Christians met regularly on Sunday. But even if they did, which they might have, that doesn't mean that they had changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

In fact, as you read through the book of Acts, you'll find the term Sabbath is used frequently by Luke in the book of Acts, and you know what? He always applies it to the Jewish Sabbath. He always applies it to Saturday. We read that on the Sabbath day, Paul and Barnabas went into the synagogue where the Jews were gathered on their Sabbath and would preach to them there.

So, whenever the word Sabbath is used in the Bible, it is used of the day Saturday. This is true both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, and there's no evidence that this first day of the week was ever called or regarded to be the Sabbath by the early Christians. On the other hand, there is evidence outside the Bible that early Christians, certainly before there was a Roman Catholic church to make such a decree, the early Christians did meet on Sunday frequently.

It doesn't say so there in Acts, although it does mention a meeting on Sunday, but in the Didache, which is a document of the early church that dates either from the end of the first century or the beginning of the second. In other words, it probably was written in the generation just after the apostles, and it was considered authoritative by many in the early church, so much so that there were some who wished it to be part of the New Testament canon. I'm not saying it should be, but that's just how it was regarded in the early church.

It is a description of early Christian worship, and it tells us that there was a day, the first day of the week, Sunday, which was referred to as the Lord's Day, and that was the day that Christians had their weekly meeting. Now, whether that agrees with the apostles' practice or not, we don't know, but we can say that very early, at the end of the first century, it had become the practice of Christians to meet on Sunday. This does not suggest that it was introduced by the Pope some centuries later.

Likewise, Justin Martyr, not much later than that, one of the early church fathers, mentions as he describes the church meetings that they were met on, as he put it, the first day of the week, the day that is named after the sun, that is Sunday. So, in the days of the Didache and of Justin Martyr, the first couple centuries of the church, we know that the early Christians were meeting on Sunday. That's fine.

That doesn't mean we have to. There's no command of Scripture to meet on Sunday, and there's no command of New Testament to meet on Saturday either. The point I'm making is, the change of a Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday is not authorized in Scripture.

But it is also wrong to say that the early Christians did not meet on Sunday. They did meet on Sunday. We have ample documentation of that.

This was not introduced by the Roman Catholic Church. There's plenty of documentation that meetings on Sunday were very common as early as the end of the first century, that is, less than 100 years after the death of Jesus. So, meetings on Sunday were traditionally very early practiced by the Christians, but there's no evidence that they saw this as a continuation of the observance of the Sabbath law, or that they had changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.

Now, my understanding is that the Bible does not teach Christians to observe one day above another at all. Christians are allowed to do so, Paul indicates, but they are not

commanded to do so. But how can this be, if the Ten Commandments themselves contain this word, Thou shalt remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.

Now, that's the fourth commandment. Why would Christians feel themselves obliged to avoid idolatry, to avoid blasphemy, to avoid disobedience to parents, to avoid taking the name of the Lord in vain, to avoid murder and adultery and theft and bearing false witness? Why should Christians feel they must observe these rules, but they don't keep the fourth commandment? That is something that we need to question. But I think the answer is, I think there is a good answer, and I think that we ought to know what it is.

But I don't think that we do any good by giving the wrong answer, like saying, well, the Sabbath is changed to Sunday, we keep that now. You know, as I said, the Bible doesn't authorize any change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, and even if it did, most Christians who go to church on Sunday do not observe Sabbath on Sunday. That is, they do not abstain from all work.

So, if anyone tells you they keep Sabbath on Sunday, you'd want to look at their life and see whether they are really observing it or not, or whether they're just copping out. Now, I personally believe, and I'll state my thesis here, that the observance of Saturday, of one day of the week as a holy day, was strictly a convention of the Old Testament law. And that it was specifically a symbolic thing, like the other special days that were kept under the law, the new moons once a month, the festivals that were kept once a year, the sabbatical years that occurred once every seven years, or the year of Jubilee that occurred every 50 years.

These periodic, holy days and years were part of the ritual, ceremonial aspects of the law. And these were imposed on Israel for symbolic purposes. They were a shadow of future things, and those future things have come to us now in Christ.

But let's go back to the earliest mention of the Sabbath day and work through the scriptures on this so we can get the whole picture of what God has revealed on this subject, and if we can see if we can get it right here from him. In Genesis chapter 2, we have, in the first three verses, really a conclusion of the first chapter. The chapter division here is strange, because in chapter 1 of Genesis, you have the six days of creation.

In chapter 2, verses 1 through 3, you have the seventh day, and it seems like it really should belong with the other six. But the chapter divisions are artificial, we needn't worry about them. But in Genesis 2, verses 1 through 3, it says, Now when we read of God resting, we need to understand that God resting is something a little different than me, or you, resting at the end of a hard day.

Because you and I rest because we are exhausted. We use up our energy. We have limited strength, limited energy.

We work hard, and once we've worked hard, we've used up our resources, and we have to rest to recover. God did not have to rest for those reasons. He didn't have to recover.

God has infinite power, infinite resources. He does not become weary or faint, the Bible says, nor does he slumber. The rest, of which it speaks here, is resting from a particular activity, or that is a cessation of a particular activity.

And that activity was the activity of creation. You see, God didn't rest because he was tired. God rested from that activity.

It would be quite a mistake to suggest that God, on the seventh day, lapsed into total inactivity, since the Bible teaches elsewhere that every breath that we breathe, essentially, is something God gives us. The planets in their courses remain there because God holds them there. Every atom holds together by the word of his power.

God is actively working in the universe at all times, and he certainly must have been working on the seventh day, or else the universe would have flown to pieces, and Adam and Eve, who had been created the previous day, would no doubt have died of suffocation, since God wouldn't be giving them breath and so forth. To say God rested didn't mean that he was doing nothing. It just means he was doing nothing more along the lines of the project that he had just completed.

Likewise, we have a similar concept in the New Testament. In Hebrews chapter 10, we read that in the Old Testament, the priests were forever standing and offering sacrifices. The idea of standing suggests they were not in a posture of rest.

They were not sitting. They were standing. And the reason is because they had to offer again and again more sacrifices, because the definitive sacrifice for sin had not been offered yet.

But it says in Hebrews 10 that Jesus, after he offered one sacrifice for sin, that is, he offered himself, he sat down at the right hand of God. Now, what that means is that he actually finished the work that the priests were only working at for thousands of years. The priests in the temple worked at the offering of sacrifices to cover sins.

Jesus finished that work. He offered himself, completed the work, just as God had completed his work of creation on the sixth day, and he rested on the seventh. So Jesus, on the cross, when he completed the work of redemption, said, It is finished, and shortly thereafter sat down at the right hand of God the Father.

This is the basis for the whole argument of the writer of Hebrews, that we enter into his rest. We cease from our own works and rest in the finished work of Christ. We are seated in Christ, Ephesians tells us, Ephesians 2, 6. We are seated in Christ in heavenly places.

That means in a posture of rest as opposed to of labor. The idea being that there is no

more work necessary to do to acquire our redemption, and therefore Christ, having done it, sat down having nothing more of that project to do. He still has plenty to do, but not along those lines.

Likewise, God rested on the seventh day after creating everything, because there was nothing to do along those lines, and he hallowed it, he made it a holy day. Now, in Genesis chapter 2, where we read of this, it does not tell us that God gave any particular command to man at this time. About Sabbath observance, God did rest, God did hallow the day, but we read nothing of him giving Adam and Eve, or any other people, instructions about how to treat that day any differently than any other.

The first indication that the seventh day was to be treated differently by man occurs in the 16th chapter of Exodus. After the children of Israel had escaped from Egypt, miraculously, and they were traveling in the wilderness, God began to give them manna to eat, and he told them, okay, on six days of the week you gather manna. On the sixth day you gather twice as much, because I don't want you going out gathering it on the seventh day.

So you gather it up on the sixth day twice as much, so that you don't have to gather on the seventh day at all. Now, that's the first indicator in Scripture that God was going to expect his people to do something different about the seventh day than what they did on other days. And only four chapters later, we have the Ten Commandments given in Exodus 20, and he says, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, and he tells them don't do any work on the Sabbath day.

So, we have this command. The next question is, is this a command that applies to you and me? As Christians. What is the mind of God on this? Well, of course, the first thing we have to ask ourselves is, are the Ten Commandments a law code that belongs to Christians? If so, then that answers the other question for us.

We need to keep the Sabbath because that's in the Ten Commandments. But are the Ten Commandments a law code that pertains to Christians? I'm going to suggest to you they are not. Simply because the Bible never records that the Ten Commandments, as a body of legislation, were ever given to any people other than the nation of Israel.

And that doesn't mean that there were not some things in the Ten Commandments that would be applicable to other people if they are mentioned elsewhere and applied to other people. But in terms of the Ten Commandments written on stone, there is nothing in the Bible that says these Ten Commandments provide the legislation for mankind. No, actually they were the law that God gave in association with the Sinaitic Covenant.

When He entered into a special covenant relationship with the children of Israel as His people, He gave them these laws. These were the stipulations of the covenant He had with them. And the keeping of these laws was for them a sign that they were faithful to

the covenant.

And they were certainly to be punished severely if ever they violated this because it was considered a violation of His covenant. How do we know this? Well, over in Exodus chapter 31, verse 13, Exodus 31, 13, God says, And speak to the children of Israel, saying, Surely My sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations that you may know that I am Jehovah who sanctifies you, that is, you Israel. Down in verse 16, He says, Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.

It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever. Now notice this. They are to keep the sabbath as a perpetual covenant.

It is a sign between God and the children of Israel. Now, it was not a sign between God and the Edomites, or God and the Moabites, or God and the Ammonites, or God and the Babylonians, or the Phoenicians, or the Egyptians. God didn't make this covenant with them.

He made this covenant with Israel. God was in a covenantal relationship with Israel that He was not in with other nations. And He said the keeping of a sabbath day was the sign of that covenant.

And it was a sign of the covenant between God and Israel. It was not given to the other nations. And you never find a time in Scripture where it actually is.

Now, some might say, Well, wait a minute. I know of a case in the Bible where Gentiles are said to be obligated to keep the sabbath. And that would be over in Isaiah chapter 56.

In Isaiah chapter 56, beginning at verse 3, God says, Do not let the son of the foreigner, that would be a Gentile, who has joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying, The Lord has utterly separated Me from His people. Nor let the eunuch say, Here I am a dry tree. Now, the reason the eunuch is mentioned is because the eunuch would be a sample of somebody who was under the law, excluded from the tabernacle.

A eunuch could not enter the tabernacle. And a son of a foreigner, that was a Gentile, could not go into there either. But now He talks about the son of the foreigner and the eunuch.

He says, They should not say they're excluded. For thus says the Lord, To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me, and hold fast My covenant, even to them I will give in My house, and within My walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters, I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. Also, He says in verse 6, the sons of the foreigner, the Gentile, who join themselves to the Lord to



serve Him, and to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants, everyone who keeps from defiling the sabbath, and holds fast My covenant, even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer, their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on Mine altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.

Now here is a reference to Gentiles not defiling the sabbath and being accepted in God's house. So, did God impose the sabbath law on Gentiles? No, He imposed the sabbath law on those who were under the Sinaitic covenant. Most of these people were Jewish, but a Gentile could join himself to Israel, could become part of Israel by becoming part of that covenant.

That's why God says, everyone who does not defile My sabbath and who holds fast My covenant. What covenant is that? Well, in Isaiah's day, if a Gentile wanted to be among God's people, he had to become a Jew. He had to come on the terms of the Sinaitic covenant.

He had to keep the sabbath and so forth. But to suggest that this means that all Gentiles were supposed to keep the sabbath, would miss the point entirely. The point here is that Gentiles were permitted to become part of Israel, and it was Israel that was the nation that was to keep the sabbath.

And to show that they had become part of Israel, these Gentiles who became proselytes would have to keep the sabbath, which they did not have to do if they were not part of that covenant people. Now, to suggest that because this speaks of the need for Gentiles to keep the sabbath, therefore we today who are Gentiles need to keep the sabbath, certainly proves too much because in the same passage that says they should not defile the sabbath, it says in verse 7, their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted at My altar. Well, God's altar is at the Jewish temple.

And you and I don't go to the Jewish temple and offer animal sacrifices any more than we keep sabbath. The sabbath observance and the keeping of the sacrifices and so forth were all part of what it took to become part of Israel in the days of the Old Testament. And Gentiles who did so, that is Gentiles who became part of Israel, had to live under the terms of being in the nation of Israel.

But that's a very different thing than saying that the sabbath was commanded to the Gentiles in general. No, the sabbath was part of the Sinaitic covenant. Those eunuchs and those Gentiles who wanted to keep that covenant and draw near to the Lord on the basis of that covenant had to meet the conditions of that covenant, including keeping sabbath, including offering animal sacrifices.

That's of course a very different thing than saying that Christians today are to keep the sabbath. To know whether that is so or not, we would have to actually look at the New

Testament, which we will in a moment. But some people say, well, the sabbath is for all people because it is based on the fact of God creating everything in six days and resting on the seventh.

Now that's not just something that had to do with Israel. That happened a long time before Israel existed. That has to do with something for all mankind.

Well, it is true that in Exodus chapter 20, the resting of God on the seventh day is given as the basis for God's command that Israel keep the sabbath. But when he gave the Ten Commandments again, in Deuteronomy chapter 5, by the way, there's two places in the Bible that list the Ten Commandments. One is Exodus 20, which we read from, and then the other is a restatement of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy chapter 5. Now when we come to the sabbath commandment there, in Deuteronomy 5, 14 and 15, it says, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord your God.

In it you shall not do any work, you nor your son, your daughter, or your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox or your donkey or any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within you in your gates. Now that all, of course, agrees with what it says in Exodus 20. Then it goes on and gives the reason.

Where Exodus 20 gave the reason of because God rested on the seventh day after he created everything in six, here's the reason that's given in Deuteronomy. That your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you, and remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God brought you out from there by mighty hand and outstretched arm, therefore the Lord your God commands you to keep the sabbath day. Now what's that got to do with anything? Well, first of all, it's clear that the command is to Israel, because he says, you keep this because God brought you out of Egypt.

He's talking, of course, to those people who literally came out of Egypt, of the children of Israel. But he also implies that one reason you rest on the seventh day is to remember that God gave you rest. You were slaves, you were doing hard labor in Egypt, and God delivered you from that and brought you into this land of rest, and therefore keeping the seventh day, in addition to commemorating the end of creation, it also is the end of your bondage.

God gave you rest from your toil by bringing you out of that slavery and bringing you into the land of rest of Canaan. So, obviously, the reason that is given for keeping the sabbath here applies very directly to the people of Israel, that nation that had come out of Egypt, and not particularly or necessarily to any others. But the real question, of course, as to whether Christians should keep the sabbath day or not, has to be answered by appeal to the ultimate authority in the life of the Christian.

You see, when Jesus sent out his disciples in Matthew 28, 18, he said, All authority in

heaven and earth has been given to me, that is, to Jesus Christ. All authority is his. And Jesus said, Go, therefore, and teach all nations, or make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all the Ten Commandments, right? No, that's not what Jesus said.

Jesus said, Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. Now, that's interesting. Jesus said that the disciples should go out to the nations, to the Gentiles, to preach, to make disciples, to baptize, and to train these people in behavior.

And that training was to consist in what? Teaching them to observe everything Jesus commanded. Why? Because all authority in heaven and earth is given to him. He's the authority.

We better do what he says. So, Christians are to be taught not to do what Moses said, not to even be taught what was written on the stone tablets, but we're taught to observe what Jesus commanded. So, we need to look at the commands of Jesus and say, Well, what in the world did he say regarding the Sabbath? Well, one of the first things we need to look at is a very, well, in some ways, difficult statement of Jesus.

In Matthew chapter 5, certainly those who believe that we must still keep the Sabbath often quote this verse, because it says in Matthew 5, 17 and 18, Do not think, Jesus said, that I came to destroy the law or the prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law until all is fulfilled.

I said this passage has difficult aspects to its wording. It does. Jesus seems to say that no aspect of the law, not the smallest detail, will pass away until it is all fulfilled.

Does that mean that if it's not all fulfilled to this day, maybe it won't be fulfilled until heaven and earth pass away, that all the law is enforced and nothing is changed? Well, that can't be so, because the New Testament tells us in many ways that there are changes that have come to the law. Now, Jesus must not, therefore, have been saying he didn't come to change it. He said he didn't come to destroy it.

He came not to destroy it, but to fulfill it. Now, to say that he didn't come to destroy it, but to fulfill it, doesn't mean that he didn't come to change it. Certainly, Jesus brought many changes in the law.

For example, on one occasion, in Mark chapter 7, he essentially declared all foods clean by saying it's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, but what comes out of his mouth. And Mark seems to indicate by his comment on this that Jesus thus declared all foods clean. He thus purged all foods, or made them, declared them clean.

This was a change in the law. We certainly don't read very far into the New Testament before we realize that circumcision is not required of Christians to observe. That's a

change from the law.

And certainly, the law had a great deal to say about offering animal sacrifices at the Jewish temple. We don't do that anymore, nor can we, because there is no Jewish temple today. And therefore, that's changed.

So, when Jesus said he didn't come to destroy the law, he didn't mean I didn't come to change it. He certainly came to change it in many respects. As a matter of fact, in Hebrews chapter 7, where the writer of Hebrews is telling us that Jesus has a priesthood that is different than the priesthood of the Old Testament, the writer tells us in verse 12, Hebrews 7, 12, for the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law.

Now, what he means by this is that the law allowed only one priesthood, the priesthood of Aaron. But now there's a different priesthood, the priesthood of Melchizedek, which Jesus possesses. And the writer says, well, obviously, if the priesthood is different, that suggests there must be a different law.

There's been a change in the priesthood, and that argues necessarily for a change in the law. So, let us not make more of Jesus' statement than the New Testament writer's belief should be made. Jesus indeed did not come to destroy the law, he came to fulfill it, whatever that means.

I believe, among other things, that means he came to bring it into its fullness. Much of the things in the law looked forward to something spiritual, and were shadows of those spiritual things. And he brought in those realities, he filled the law full of its real reality and meaning.

But he did not deny that the law was going to change. And the law did change immediately in Jesus' lifetime, and especially as a result of his death and resurrection. And that was something that the early Christians didn't understand quite immediately.

Paul understood it a little better, a little sooner than most. Peter got to understand it a little bit when he was on that rooftop in Joppa. Because God said, what I have cleansed, don't call unclean, referring to unclean animals in that case, but also more properly referring to Gentiles.

But the point here is that there has been a change in the law. The question we must ask then is, if the change has come in the law, has this affected the Sabbath law? After all, if some laws have changed, and not all have, which ones have and which ones have not? And would the Sabbath fall into the category of those laws that have not changed? Or would it fall into the category of the laws that have changed? Well, that's, I think, a very important question. And let me try to simplify something for you.

I hope it will not be hard for you to accept it. It should be quite easy, really. When you

look at the Old Testament laws, there are three kinds of laws there.

There are laws that are, for lack of a better term, we could call them moral laws. Moral because their legislation embodies a moral principle, an unchanging moral standard. Now, why do I say an unchanging moral standard? Because morality, that is, things that are intrinsically right and wrong, are determined by the character of God Himself.

And He doesn't change. Why is it wrong to commit adultery? Because committing adultery is an act of unfaithfulness. And unfaithfulness is against the character of God, who is a faithful God.

Why is it wrong to murder somebody? Because it's an act of injustice. And injustice is against the character of God. Any law that springs forth from the holy character of God is a moral law.

And since God's holy character will not change, then morality will not change. And so in the Scriptures, in the Old Testament, we do find some laws of that type. They embody a moral principle.

But there are some laws that don't seem to embody a moral principle. For example, the law that a leper would be unclean, or that a woman on her menstrual period would be unclean, or that people who are in battle and somebody falls dead next to them, that that person who survived them is unclean. Now, there's nothing immoral about having a menstrual period.

There's nothing immoral about being a leper. And there's nothing immoral about being next to somebody who drops dead in battle. Those things, they're not moral issues.

Those have to do with what we'd have to call ritual cleanness. And that's part of the whole ritual or ceremonial legislation that has to do with the tabernacle and people's access to the tabernacle. Now, the New Testament tells us that these rituals of the tabernacle were symbolic.

They represented spiritual things that are eternal. But the rituals themselves were symbolic and temporary. And so, a ritual law would be one that is not permanent.

And the reason it is not permanent is because it is not a moral issue. As I said, being a leper or not being a leper is not a moral issue. It's a ritual concern.

Whether a person keeps three festivals during the year or 20 festivals during the year is not a moral issue in itself. Now, I'm not saying that the Jews could have neglected these laws without incurring moral guilt. But I'm saying that God's concern in these laws was not some unchanging moral issue.

His concern was that these laws are symbolic of something bigger than themselves,

something spiritual. The rituals themselves depict spiritual realities. And once those spiritual realities have been realized, then the rituals can be kept or left.

They're not necessary. They've served their purpose. Jesus said he came to fulfill the law and the prophets.

Well, how do you fulfill the prophets? Well, Jesus fulfilled the prophets by doing and being the things that the prophets anticipated in their predictions. But likewise, he fulfilled the laws that way because the ceremonial laws were, in essence, prophecies. They were predictions.

When a Jew offered a lamb in the temple, that was a foreshadowing prediction that the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, would some day be offered for the sins of the world. They may not have fully understood that, but that's what that ritual was about. And likewise, every ritual of the temple symbolically foreshadowed or predicted Jesus.

And just as he fulfilled the predictions of the prophets, he fulfilled the predictions of the law. And that would be the ceremonial laws whose rituals pointed forward to the reality that Jesus brought about. Now, we know that something is a ritual instead of a moral law by this consideration.

If you'd ask yourself, could God have made this law different than he made it without violating his own character? Consider this. What about the law, you shall not bear false witness? Could God have made that law different without violating his character? No, of course not, because bearing false witness is unfaithfulness. It's lying.

And God cannot lie, the Bible says. He's faithful. It violates his character to lie.

And therefore, God could never have given a command, thou shalt bear false witness or thou shalt murder, thou shalt commit adultery, because these things would be intrinsically violations of his moral character. But could God have said, instead of saying, I want you to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem three times a year, could he have said five times a year or two without violating his own moral character? Of course he could. There's a certain arbitrariness to those things that are ceremonial merely.

Could God have said, lepers are not unclean, but people who have acne are unclean? Well, he could have if he wanted to, and he would not violate his own moral nature at all. Those would be ceremonial considerations. Now, the third category of law, besides moral law and ceremonial law, is civil law.

Now, that just has to do with the laws that God gave to the magistrates or the judges as to what penalties to impose on people who do certain crimes. How much restitution should be required of a thief? Who should receive the death penalty? What kind of crimes should be punished that way and so forth? These are instances of case law, such as would be the concerns of the courts in Israel. We could call that civil law.

But for our main concern, when we think about the Sabbath law, is that a moral law or is that a ceremonial law? Many would say it's a moral law because it's in the Ten Commandments. And it would seem obvious that all the other laws in the Ten Commandments are themselves moral laws. And some would even say this, that the Ten Commandments are the moral law of God, and the other rules and statutes that God made in the Old Testament are the ceremonial laws of God.

But that can't be really true. Because, for example, the forbidding of incest or the forbidding of homosexuality or bestiality, these certainly are moral issues, and yet they're not found in the Ten Commandments. They're found in the other parts of the law.

The command that a kidnapper should be put to death is not a ritual question. It's a moral question. See, those are not in the Ten Commandments, not directly.

They might be related to things in the Ten Commandments. But, you see, it is quite a false dichotomy to say, well, the Ten Commandments, those are the moral law and they're permanent. And the other rules in the Old Testament are the ceremonial law and they're not permanent.

No, it doesn't work that way. You will find some moral laws outside the Ten Commandments. And I'd like to argue that you will find some ceremonial law inside the Ten Commandments.

Now, on what basis could I say that? Well, I would say on this basis. Jesus and Paul both equated Sabbath-keeping with, in terms of its weight, they equated it with ceremonial laws. Now, where did they do that? Well, if you look over at Matthew chapter 12, that would be one place where you'll find it.

Jesus' disciples were walking through grain fields on a Sabbath day. They were grabbing some of the grain in their hands and rubbing it to separate the wheat from the chaff and then they were eating the wheat. To pluck the grain and to separate the wheat from the chaff like this was technically harvesting and winnowing wheat.

Which, on normal weekdays, were the kind of work that farmers engaged in. Therefore, the Pharisees criticized Jesus' disciples because they were doing on the Sabbath day that which was considered to be work. And they said they were violating the Sabbath.

Now, how did Jesus answer this? Verse 3, Matthew 12, 3. Jesus said to them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him? How he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless? Now, he gives two examples from the Old Testament that he thinks make a point of defense for his disciples. What are these points? Well, first, David, when he was hungry,

he went into the tabernacle and he ate bread. That according to the ceremonial law, only the Levites were allowed to eat that.

He was not a Levite. So David essentially violated the ceremonial law. He did it because he was hungry and no punishment or condemnation was incurred by him because his hunger was actually a bigger issue in God's mind than the ceremonial law that he broke.

And likewise, it says that the priests violate the Sabbath and they're guiltless. Now, how do the priests violate the Sabbath? Well, they do their ordinary work on the Sabbath. You see, the ordinary work of the priest was offering sacrifices every day of the week.

Seven days a week the priest did this. They didn't take a break on the Sabbath. As a matter of fact, on Saturday they offered twice the amount for morning and evening continual burnt offerings.

And so the priests actually violated the Sabbath in their working. But, of course, they were guiltless. Now, of course, they were doing it for the temple, but it was a violation of ceremony mainly is what Jesus was saying.

And Jesus said in verse 7, But if you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. Now, a couple of things here. Jesus said that his disciples in this matter were guiltless, although they had been condemned by the Pharisees.

He said the Pharisees would have avoided making this mistake if they had learned this lesson. Now, the lesson he quotes is from Hosea 6, 6, which says, I desire mercy rather than sacrifice. Jesus said you should have learned that lesson.

Well, that's an interesting quote. What is that lesson? What does it mean, I desire mercy rather than sacrifice? Well, mercy is, in fact, a moral issue because it relates to the character of God who is a merciful God. Sacrifice is part of the ritual or ceremonial law of the Old Testament.

God required them to offer these sacrifices a certain way. That was ritual. The writer Hosea says that in God's mind, issues of mercy are more important than issues of ritual, like sacrifices and such things.

Now, Jesus was defending his disciples on this basis. He was allowing them to eat when they were hungry, just as David was allowed to eat when he was hungry, even though David violated ceremonial law and his disciples violated ceremonial law, but they were guiltless, he said, because mercy, extended to them, is to be preferred over a strict adherence to the ceremonial law, like sacrifice. Now, notice what Jesus has done.

He has compared Sabbath observance with offering animal sacrifices and with violating the law of showbread, which David did. These are both ceremonial things. The disciples



violated the Sabbath law, but that's no big thing because David violated this other law.

Both of them are ceremonial. Jesus equated the magnitude of violating Sabbath with the magnitude of violating the showbread law. Now, if Sabbath was a moral issue, it would be a different story.

For example, suppose the disciples had murdered somebody and Jesus didn't criticize them. Would he be able to say, well, come on, you remember how David ate the showbread? Why pick on my disciples just because they murdered somebody? Well, he couldn't do that because murder is a big issue. Murder is a moral issue, but Sabbath observance is not.

Now, some people say, well, Jesus wasn't saying that the disciples actually did break the Sabbath. He's saying, I mean, what the disciples broke was not the Sabbath, but the Pharisees' interpretation of Sabbath. Therefore, Jesus was not defending his disciples for breaking the Sabbath.

He was defending his disciples for ignoring the Pharisees' traditions about the Sabbath. Well, I'm afraid that's not a correct answer. Jesus could have answered that way if he wanted to.

He did on another occasion in Matthew 15 when the disciples were criticized for eating their bread without washing their hands first. That was violation of a tradition of the rabbis. And Jesus took the rabbis to task when they criticized the disciples.

He said, listen, why keep your traditions at the expense of obeying the word of God? Jesus could have answered that way this time if that was the issue. The issue here was not that the disciples were violating traditions of the elders. They were, in fact, violating a ceremonial law, which is why Jesus compared it with what David did.

David violated a ceremonial law. And the priests in offering sacrifice on the Sabbath violate a ceremonial law. What he is saying is, yes, my disciples did, in fact, violate the Sabbath.

But there were extenuating circumstances as there were in the times of David. And, therefore, it's not that big a deal. That's his argument.

That is his argument, you see. Now, there's more to it, and we're going to look at that a little later, this chapter again. But look at what Paul said over in Colossians 2. Because I told you that both Jesus and Paul equated Sabbath-keeping with ceremonial law, not moral law.

If you look at Colossians 2, the Apostle Paul mentions Sabbath, and he mentions it in the connection that I'm talking about here. If you look at verse 16 and 17, Colossians 2, 16 and 17, Therefore let no one judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival, or a new

moon, or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. That is, Christ is the reality.

These ceremonies of the Old Testament were shadows. They foreshadowed Christ. They anticipated Christ, and He has come.

He's the reality. They were the mere shadows that sort of resembled the reality. Now, notice this.

He says, don't let anyone judge you about food and drink. That's ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness. Or regarding a festival.

That would be like Passover or Pentecost or the Feast of Tabernacles. Or a new moon. Now, the new moons happened on the first day of every Jewish month.

They were supposed to be treated as holy days. Or Sabbaths. Now, don't let anyone judge you about Sabbaths.

Why? Because there's no law about it for you. If there was a law, you could be judged by it, but you're not breaking a law. You don't keep Sabbath.

You're not breaking any law that's imposed on you as a Christian, because the Sabbath isn't imposed on Christians. It's not part of the New Covenant. It was part of the Old Covenant with Israel, not part of the New Covenant.

Now, Paul said those things were all a shadow. Now, Sabbath keepers today say, well, Paul isn't referring here to the Lord's Sabbath, but to the miscellaneous Sabbaths that were occasional, related to the festival weeks. This is not a reference to the weekly Sabbath, they say.

But I think they better take a closer look. First of all, the word Sabbaths in Scripture, just look it up every time you want to. It always refers to the seventh-day Sabbath.

Period. You're not going to find the word Sabbath applying to something other than the seventh-day Sabbath very often, I don't think at all. But furthermore, look at the structure.

He mentions festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths. You see, the festivals were annual holy days. The new moons were monthly holy days, and the Sabbaths were weekly holy days.

He mentions the holy days at different intervals. The festivals were yearly, the new moons were monthly, and the Sabbaths were weekly. Certainly, the structure of his statement indicates he is indeed talking about the weekly Sabbath.

He says, don't let anyone judge you about that. That's not an issue. It's like the food restrictions.

It's like the festival restrictions. Keeping the seventh-day Sabbath was very much as part of a ritual as keeping a festival or a new moon, or keeping dietary laws. Now, look at Romans chapter 14, if you would.

In Romans 14, the Apostle Paul is addressing a situation in the church of Rome where some of the Christians were apparently keeping Sabbath, and some were not. Probably, the Jewish believers were keeping it, and the Gentile believers were not. That seems likely.

But it's also the case that some in the church were keeping the dietary laws, and some were not. Probably, again, it was the Jewish Christians versus the Gentile Christians. But Paul says this, in the opening of Romans 14, Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

For one believes he may eat all things, another who is weak eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has received him. Who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.

Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. Verse 5, One person esteems one day above another, another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

Now, notice this. Paul said there's a couple of areas of disagreement among the Christians in Rome. One of the disagreements has to do with eating or not eating clean and unclean foods.

The other has to do with observing one day above others. Obviously, a reference to the Sabbath. Paul treats them both as equal issues.

The matter of eating unclean foods is on the same level as keeping a Sabbath or not. They're ceremonial issues, and therefore Paul says, Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. In other words, do whichever thing you feel you want to do in your conscience.

Now, Paul couldn't say that about something like adultery or theft. He couldn't say, Well, some of you think it's okay to steal, some don't think it's okay to steal. Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind.

The reason he couldn't give that liberty is because thieving is a moral issue. Sabbath-keeping is not. Therefore, he says, You can keep it or not, it's up to you.

Quite clearly, Paul did not recognize any obligation on Christian believers to keep the Sabbath. Now, again, Sabbath-keepers, when they see this passage, they often say, Well, he didn't say anything about the Sabbath. He's talking about other special Jewish

holy days.

He's not talking about the Sabbath here. But read what he said. One person esteems one day above another.

Another esteems every day alike. Now, true, he doesn't use the word Sabbath when he says one man esteems one day above another. But certainly, when he mentions that some people esteem every day alike.

Well, a person who esteems every day alike certainly isn't taking one day out of seven and calling it a holy day. If he does that, he's not esteeming every day alike. It's clear that Paul recognizes two valid conscience issues that people could take in the church.

If people want to keep one day or so as a holy day, that's fine. But if people want to esteem every day alike, and when you do that, you're not keeping a Sabbath. If you esteem every day alike, that's okay too, Paul said.

Now, I myself don't keep a Sabbath day. I esteem every day alike. You see, I believe that every day is a holy day, and that's what I want to get around to here.

But the Apostle Paul made it clear that he did not think Christians were obligated to keep Sabbath. It was like eating meat or not eating meat. It was a ritual issue.

We know that circumcision was a ritual issue, and look what Jesus said in John chapter 7. This is an important passage for more than one reason. It tells us a couple of things about Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath, I think. John 7, verse 22 and 23.

Jesus said, Moses therefore gave you circumcision, not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers. In other words, Moses wasn't the first, but the earlier fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also recognized the institution. And you circumcise a man on the Sabbath.

If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a man completely whole on the Sabbath? Now notice what he's saying here. The Jews would circumcise a man on the Sabbath day if necessary. Why? Because they had a prior law.

That earlier law that God gave to Abraham was that every one of his seed, who is male, must be circumcised on the eighth day of his life. Well, let's face it. There are people born every day of the week.

So what about a child who is born on a Saturday? Well, what is the eighth day of his life? It's going to be the next Saturday. It's going to be a Sabbath. Well, should he be circumcised or is the act of circumcising him a violation of Sabbath? That's the priest who does it has to work.

Okay, should the boy be circumcised a different day so that he doesn't violate the

Sabbath? Well, no. The Jews had decided that the circumcision law and then the requirement to circumcise on the eighth day was more important than the law about keeping Sabbath so that you could even violate the Sabbath to observe the circumcision ritual. Right.

That's what Jesus pointed out. You would rather break the Sabbath than violate the law of circumcision on the eighth day. That's what he says so that you will circumcise on the Sabbath.

Now, Jesus agreed with this. He says, now, if a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses should not be broken, that is, the law of circumcision should not be. Are you angry with me because I made a man completely whole on the Sabbath? What he's saying is what I did was right.

Just like what you do is right. When you circumcise a man on the Sabbath, you're doing the right thing. And for that reason, what I'm doing is the right thing.

So Jesus and the Jews recognized that circumcision and the law of circumcision actually trumped the law of Sabbath. Now, circumcision is ritual. It's not a moral issue.

It's a ritual issue. It has to do with ritual cleanness and uncleanness. And yet it is a more important law than the Sabbath law, according to Jesus Christ and even according to the rabbis themselves.

What that means, of course, is that the Sabbath must be a ritual also and not even as important to one as circumcision. Now, one thing that's interesting, when God instituted circumcision with Abraham, he made this statement to Abraham in Genesis chapter 17. Genesis 17, 11, God said, and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

Do you recognize that language? That's what God said to the children of Israel about Sabbath-keeping. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel of the covenant. But so is circumcision.

Circumcision and Sabbath-keeping were both signs of God's covenant. Circumcision, the sign of God's covenant with Abraham. Sabbath-keeping, the sign of God's covenant with Israel.

But the sign that was given to Abraham preempts the sign that was given to Israel when there was a conflict. If it was a matter of either don't circumcise on the eighth day or go ahead and do it even though it's the Sabbath, you go ahead and do it. The sign that God gave to Abraham carried more weight than the sign he gave to Israel, which was Sabbath-keeping.

Now, that being so, I think it should be understood that Jesus and Paul, the New

Testament writers, treat the Sabbath as a ceremonial law. Do they not? They do. Now, is there any positive teaching about Sabbath in the New Testament? There is, and I'd like to give it to you if I could.

Now, first of all, let me point out to you that there was a negative teaching we observed. Namely, that no one should judge anyone else about whether they keep Sabbath or not. Paul said that in Colossians chapter 2. He said that also in Romans chapter 14.

If somebody wants to keep the Sabbath, let them do it. If they don't want to, let them not do it. Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind.

So, with reference to the law of Sabbath, the New Testament makes it clear there is no obligation imposed upon the Christian to keep the Jewish Sabbath in the Jewish manner. That's a negative. What is positively said about the Sabbath day? Well, let's have a look.

Back at Matthew chapter 12, we were there earlier. Jesus makes two very positive statements about what is lawful for the believer to do on the Sabbath. Now, I'm going to read one of the verses I read earlier.

Matthew 12, 5, and I want to read through verse 8. Jesus said, What does that mean? The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. Well, it has to do with this. He said there is one greater than the temple here.

What he has pointed out is that the priests are permitted in the law to break the Sabbath because their work is a necessary work being the work of the temple. The fact that the temple is so exalted and its work is so essential requires that the priests even work on Saturday. They even violate the Sabbath in order to carry on the work of the temple.

Well, Jesus said, I'm greater than the temple and my disciples are carrying out my work. And if the priests can violate the Sabbath while they're carrying out the temple work, then my disciples can certainly violate the Sabbath while they're carrying out my work because I'm greater than the temple. That's his argument, is it not? How could anyone make anything else of his argument than that? And then his statement succinctly stating that in one sentence, he says, For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

What does it mean, even of the Sabbath? What it means is this. Jesus, the Son of Man, is Lord. His disciples have one obligation and that is to obey their Lord.

They are to do His will. They are to do what He approves and what He wants them to do. That's what it means to have a Lord.

He is the Lord of Monday. He is the Lord of Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday. That means that on Monday and Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, because He is the Lord of those days, my obligation on those days is simply to do what He wants me to do because He's the Lord of those days.

But you know what? He's Lord also of the Sabbath day. That means on Saturday, what is my obligation? Same as any other day, to do the will of my master, Jesus Christ. Whatever Jesus wants me to do is my only concern.

I don't have to look at the calendar to see what day of the week it is. My obligation is the same every day of the week. Namely, Jesus is my Lord.

I am to follow His instructions. I'm supposed to do the will of Christ at all times. And I don't have to be concerned what day of the week it is because He's the Lord of every day, including the Sabbath day.

And therefore, the disciples who were on their master's business, and it happened on the Sabbath day, it's okay. They didn't keep the Sabbath that day, but they were doing their master's business. And He was worth more than the temple.

And He was their Lord even on that day. And that was the issue. To the believer, when we say, well, what does God want from me? There's a very simple answer.

Jesus is Lord. Jesus said, why do you call me Lord? Lord, you don't do the things I say. The whole obligation of the Christian is to do what Jesus says, to do what Jesus wants.

Now, He never told anyone to keep the Sabbath. We never read anywhere of Jesus telling anyone to keep the Sabbath. Though we read often of Him telling people to break the Sabbath.

Like the man He found at the pool of Bethesda, and He said, take up your mat and walk. Well, that was a violation of the Sabbath. Was it? Was that a violation of the Sabbath? Did Jesus break the Sabbath and tell someone else to break the Sabbath? That's what the Bible says.

It's in John chapter 5. Anyone can look there who's interested in seeing it. It says, after Jesus told this man to walk and carry his pallet on the Sabbath, it says in verse 16, well, verse 16, it says, for this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. And the next verse says, but Jesus said to them, My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.

Therefore, John tells us, the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath. Now, John tells us that. John tells us Jesus broke the Sabbath.

He not only broke the Sabbath, but He also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal to God. So, according to the Gospel writer, the inspired writer, Jesus broke the Sabbath. And why did He do it? Well, He said, because My Father works every day, and I do what My Father does.

In other words, Jesus did not interpret His obligation to do the Father's will based on what

day of the week it was. If His Father had worked for Him during the Sabbath, and His Father was working on the Sabbath, then He was going to do the work that His Father wanted to do, regardless of whether it was Sabbath or not. And likewise, for the disciple of Jesus, we are to do the will of our Lord.

To do so on the Sabbath is fine. If He wants you to do something on the Sabbath day, you don't have to worry that it's the Sabbath day. He's your Lord, even of the Sabbath.

Now, back in Matthew 12, another important thing Jesus said. Jesus said in verse 11 and 12, Matthew 12, 11 and 12, says, He said to them, What man is there among you who has one sheep? And if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not lay hold of it and lift it out? They would. To save a sheep from dying overnight, they'd pull it out on the Sabbath day.

Although that's a violation of the law about bearing a burden on the Sabbath. He says, Of how much more value then is man than sheep? Therefore, note this last line in Matthew 12, 12. Jesus said, Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Whoa! We could not ask for a more positive statement from the lips of a higher authority than Jesus Christ Himself, as to what we are supposed to do on the Sabbath. Jesus said, It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Well, let me ask you this.

What are we supposed to do the other day? Bad? No. The Christian life is supposed to be a life of seamless good works. We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which He has foreordained that we should walk in them.

He redeemed us to be a people for Himself, zealous for good works, we're told in Scripture. The Christian life is a life of doing good. Now, Jesus said, It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

That means it's lawful for me to do on the Sabbath day what it's lawful for me to do on any other day. If what I am doing is indeed the good thing that God wants me to do any other day, then I can do it on the Sabbath as well. Is it a good thing to support my family? Yes.

Is it a good thing to do it on Monday through Friday? Yes. How about Saturday and Sunday? Well, if necessary, yes. It's lawful to do good on the Sabbath, Jesus said.

In other words, I don't have to check my watch to see what day it is to know whether I can obey Jesus or do good. I'm supposed to obey Jesus and do good every day of the week. And it's lawful for me to do that, Jesus said.

Isn't that important? Now, in telling the same story about Jesus teaching about the Sabbath on the occasion when the disciples were criticized for rubbing grain in their hands, Mark, in his parallel account, actually says something interesting. He includes in



the mouth of Jesus these words. He has Jesus say in Mark chapter 2, I believe it is, or 3, excuse me.

He has Jesus say these words. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Now, that's an important observation, too.

The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Now, Sabbath keepers understand that very differently than I think Jesus meant it. They think that what Jesus meant was the Sabbath was not made for just Jews, but for mankind in general, for all men.

The Sabbath was made for man, not just Israel. And so when people like me say, no, the Sabbath law was just made for Israel, not for all people, not for us, they say, ah, but Jesus said the Sabbath was made for man, aren't you man? Well, then it's made for you. That is missing his point altogether.

What Jesus is saying is this. The giving of Sabbath law was not in order to bring man into bondage to the law of Sabbath, but rather to be a boon and a benefit to man. The people who keep the Sabbath have a benefit from it.

They get a day of rest. And that's what God intended. It was to be good for people, not bad for people.

It wasn't to bring them into bondage to it, but rather it is their servant. It is to help them. Now, when he says man here, he means, of course, the men who were put under the Sabbath law.

And we have no record of anyone ever being put under it except the Jews. So Jews are men, too. And what he's saying is when God gave Israel the law of the Sabbath, he did it to benefit them as people.

He did not do it to bring them into bondage. God didn't make man for the Sabbath. He made the Sabbath for man.

Now, if we want to argue that what Jesus was really saying is that God made it for all mankind, we would have to understand him to say something like this. The Sabbath was made for man, not for Israel. And Jesus would then be arguing against somebody around there who apparently had the position that needed to be corrected, and their position would have to be that God made the Sabbath only for Israel.

Well, that wasn't necessarily the position of the Pharisees, nor was anyone making that point there. You see, Jesus is arguing that the Pharisees have taken the Sabbath law and tried to force people into behaviors that are not good for them, including not being able to eat when they're hungry, because they have to keep the Sabbath. Now, you're missing the whole point.

The benefit was for man. That is, for people, for Israelites. But if Jesus were understood to say the Sabbath was made for man, that means Gentiles, too, then we'd have to show that he was arguing against the false notion that some of them were teaching or held that the Sabbath was made only for Israel, and Jesus was trying to correct that and say, No, it's made for everybody.

But that hardly fits the context of anything that's going on there. What does fit the context is to realize that Jesus is saying, You have used the Sabbath as a club to beat men up, rather than as what God intended for it to be, and that is to be a boon and a benefit to man. That is, to the men who are under it, including the disciples, who are the ones in question here, or the Jews in general.

Now, this is, I believe, what we find that the New Testament teaches. There are some very positive things said about the Sabbath. But the things that are true positively of the Sabbath in the New Testament are true of every day of the week.

You see? The Son of Man is the Lord of every day, even the Sabbath day. We are supposed to do good every day. It's lawful to do good every day, and it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath day.

The point here is that Christians no longer have to worry about the day of the week. They only have to worry about whether they're doing the will of their Master or not. Now, you might say, well, why would the Sabbath be so important in the Old Testament, and then be of no importance at all in the New? Well, we could ask the same thing about circumcision.

Why was circumcision so important in the Old Testament, but it's not important in the New? Or, for that matter, worshipping in the temple. Why was that so important in the Old Testament, but it's not important in the New Testament? Or animal sacrifices, or keeping holy days of other kinds. The fact is that the ceremonial law of the Old Testament was there to teach important lessons.

God did not want the Jews to stop observing these things. It was important for them to keep it up so that the lessons could be communicated generation after generation. But when the One to whom they pointed, Jesus Christ, came, it was no longer necessary to perpetrate the shadows.

Because the body had come. Jesus Christ is the real thing. These things were the shadows.

It was important for the Jews to keep them while they were under those ordinances. Now, someone says, well, but the Bible says several times that the Sabbath is a perpetual ordinance for all generations and forever. True.

It does say that about the Sabbath. It also says that about circumcision, if you'll read

Genesis 17. It also says that about the Levitical priesthood.

God said to the Levites that they would walk before him as priests forever. It also says about the temple of Solomon. When he built the temple, God said, I will dwell in this house, meaning Solomon's temple, forever.

There are a number of things that God said in the Old Testament were to be forever. Like Solomon's temple, the priesthood of Levi, circumcision, Sabbath keeping, among other things. Now, you know what? Christians don't worship in Solomon's temple.

We don't need to. It's gone. It's not there.

No one does. The Levitical priesthood is gone. We don't observe it.

We don't have to. It's gone. We don't keep Sabbath necessarily.

We can if we want to, but we're not obligated to. We don't have to circumcise. In fact, in Galatians, Paul tells Gentiles they should not circumcise because they'll make Christ worthless to them if they get circumcised.

Now, how can this be? How can these things in the Old Testament be said to be eternal, and yet in the New Testament we don't have to do them? Well, here's the deal. In these ceremonies, the concept of these rituals is eternal, but the ritual itself as a depiction of the concept is not. These things had two phases.

They had their ritual phase and their eternal spiritual phase. Circumcision began as a ritual. It has its finality in the reality spiritually of the circumcision of the heart.

Once we have our hearts circumcised, physical circumcision is no longer an issue. The Temple of Solomon has been replaced by a spiritual temple, which is the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit made of living stones. The Levitical priesthood has been replaced by the church, a kingdom of priests.

The Sabbath observance continues in another mode, just like these others do. They've all become spiritual. The ritual has passed.

The spiritual has remained and will remain forever. What is the spiritual fulfillment of the Sabbath? Well, if you'll turn to Hebrews chapter 4, the writer of Hebrews tells us. In Hebrews chapter 4, he's talking about us entering into God's rest, and he uses two Old Testament types of the reality of this rest.

One is when the Jews went into Canaan with Joshua and conquered the land, they entered into rest of a sort. Moses in Deuteronomy referred to that as the rest. When they had not yet gone into Canaan, Moses said, you have not yet entered that rest that God gives you.

In Psalm 95, he refers to them not entering his rest when they were driven back from the land and had to wander for 40 years. Entering the land of Israel, or Canaan, and taking it, was entering into a rest of sorts, because they'd been wandering for 40 years before that. They rested from their wanderings.

They were able to settle down. They were restless, wandering in the wilderness, but when they came and conquered Canaan, they could rest there. They could settle in.

Then there's this other image from the Old Testament, and that is, of course, the Sabbath rest. We find it in Hebrews 4.4. For he has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way, and God rested on the seventh day from all his works. Now, in this chapter, the writer of Hebrews brings two Old Testament rests into our view.

The rest that was associated with coming into Canaan with Joshua, and the rest that's associated with the Sabbath. And he joins them together, and basically says, we have a rest now, too, that corresponds to these. These two Old Testament things were types and shadows of the spiritual rest that we have, and he says it right there in verse 9. He says, for there remains, therefore, a rest for the people of God.

Now, the word rest in verse 9 is different in the Greek from the word rest in the other parts of this chapter. In fact, this word rest in verse 9 means a keeping of Sabbath in the Greek. So, in Hebrews 4.9, the writer says, there remains, therefore, a keeping of Sabbath, or a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

That's for us Christians. Then he explains what he means. For he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from his.

Let us, therefore, be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience. Now, this rest for the people of God, is this keeping the physical Sabbath on one day of the week? Is it going into the land of Canaan, entering the rest? No, those were types of it. The rest that remains for us, the Sabbath rest that is ours today, is this.

He who has entered this rest has himself ceased from his own works as God did from his. That is, as God ceased from his activities of creation on the seventh day, the person who has entered into God's rest has ceased from his activity of trying to recreate himself, and trying to redeem himself. That's already been accomplished by Christ.

It is a finished work. Just as God rested on the seventh day because the work was finished, so also the work of our redemption, and the creation of the new creation in Christ, which we all are, that is a finished work, too. And we do not rely on our own works to redeem us.

We have ceased from that. And what are we doing now? We're resting in a finished work of Christ. And therefore, the spiritual rest that is the antitype, or the fulfillment of the

type of entering into Canaan, or of keeping the Sabbath, these are the two rests of the Old Testament, well, the antitype of that is a spiritual rest, the reality of resting in the finished work of Christ for our redemption, not having to work for that, but being justified freely by his grace through faith, not through works.

So we've ceased from our own works as a means of seeking to be right before God, and we're resting in the finished work of Christ. That's the spiritual rest of Sabbath. Now, one thing that's kind of interesting, and maybe ironic, is that today, there are people who would like to impose an actual legalistic seventh-day Sabbath Jewish rest on Christians today.

In so doing, they are actually going against the very meaning of the Sabbath. The Old Testament Sabbath was a ritual that looked forward to this spiritual rest. And that rest that we have now is a freedom from these legalistic attempts to make ourselves righteous, including keeping a physical Sabbath.

We are resting from that legalistic works involvement. We're resting in that which is already finished. And therefore, unless Jesus tells us to keep Sabbath, we don't have to, because he's our Lord, and we're supposed to do what he says.

Let me show you one other passage that's very important in understanding the relationship of the Christian today with the law of the Old Testament, and particularly of the Sabbath, for example. In Romans 7, Paul uses the example of a marriage. He says, So then, if while her husband lives, she marries another man, she should be called an adulteress.

But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. What's that got to do with all this? Well, verse 4 brings it all together. That we should bear fruit to God.

Now, what's this about? Paul is saying that we have died to the law, so we could be married to another. What do you mean another? Well, the law was the first thing we were married to. We were married to the law.

But that marriage has ended with death, and we are therefore free to marry another, Jesus. Now, in the imagery he gives, we are like the woman who has a husband. We're bound by the law to the husband.

We have to obey the husband. The husband is the head of the wife, and the wife has to obey her husband. The Bible teaches that.

Both Old and New Testament teach that. So, we married to the law. It's as if the law was our husband, and we had to obey it.

But we have died in Christ, through the body of Christ. We were in Him, and we died in

Him. That first marriage has ended by death.

One of the parties died. In this case, us. But we rose again.

But that death has ended the marriage to the law. We're dead to the law. But now we're married to another.

To Jesus. Now, He's the one we have to obey. Now, notice this.

A woman who marries a man may be told by him to do any number of things. To get up at a certain hour. To cook a certain thing.

To order her day a certain way. And she should obey her husband. But suppose she has a husband who's given her such instructions, and then he dies.

How many of his instructions does she have to keep? None. He's dead. But what if she marries another man now? A second man.

And what if he gives her instructions? And what if some of those instructions are the same, but not all the same, as the instructions her first husband gave? Well, she has to obey her present husband. Now, suppose some of the things her present husband wants her to do are the same as her former husband wanted her to do. And her friend said to her, Why do you still get up at four in the morning to fix breakfast for your husband? Your husband's dead.

She says, Well, that's not because my first husband wanted me to, but my present husband wants me to. I'm not doing anything because my first husband wanted me to. He's dead.

But I have to do everything my present husband wants me to do, and he's alive. And he wants me to do that same thing. Now, what's that got to do with the law of the Sabbath? Well, simply this.

Sabbath-keeping brethren sometimes say, Well, why do you keep nine of the Ten Commandments, but you don't keep the fourth commandment? There's really a simple answer. I don't keep nine of the Ten Commandments. I don't keep the Ten Commandments.

They are not my husband. They are the law. I'm dead to the law.

I don't have to do anything that my dead husband wanted me to do. However, I am married to another, and that's Jesus Christ. I have to do everything he wants me to do.

Has he instructed me to avoid murder? Yes. Adultery? Yes. Theft? Yes.

Idolatry? Yes. To honor my parents? Yes. Actually, as it turns out, nine of the Ten

Commandments he has repeated, but he never said anything about keeping the Sabbath.

If anything, he always put himself at odds with the Jews' conception of Sabbath, and he never said anyone should have to keep it. Therefore, the reason I seem to be keeping nine of the Ten Commandments is not that I'm keeping nine of the Ten Commandments, but it just so happens that when I obey my master, in obeying him, I happen to live in accordance with some of the things the old husband wanted, including nine of the commandments. But I'm not keeping the Ten Commandments.

I'm just keeping the words of my Lord. The church is obligated not to teach the Ten Commandments, but to teach men to observe all things whatsoever Jesus has commanded. And if you can find anywhere in the Scripture where Jesus said I should keep the Sabbath on the seventh day or the sixth or the first or any of the days, I'll be glad to do it, but I don't find it in the Bible.

Jesus never gave that instruction. Now, sometimes they say, but wait, Jesus himself kept the Sabbath, and so did the apostles. That's why we do.

Well, I've heard people say that, but I've never heard them demonstrate it. We don't have record of Jesus keeping the Sabbath or the apostles either. What we have record of, of course, is that on several Sabbath days, very commonly, they did go into the synagogue.

But going to the synagogue is not keeping the Sabbath. The Old Testament never commanded anyone to go to synagogue on the Sabbath day. The command for the Sabbath day is that you do no work on the Sabbath, and Jesus worked as much on the Sabbath as he did any other day.

Going to the synagogue was something he did as an outreach. Jesus went to the synagogue to preach there, and he did it on the Sabbath because that's when there would be an audience there. Likewise, Paul and his companions, when they traveled, they'd go to the synagogue on the Sabbath.

Why? Because that's when he'd find an audience. But we never read of Christian meetings being conducted on the Sabbath. I will not say that Christian meetings weren't.

We simply don't have any record that Jesus or the apostles organized special meetings on the Sabbath day. Rather, they, in order to reach the Jews, they went where the Jews were. Where are the Jews gathered? On the Sabbath day, they gather in the synagogue, so Jesus went there.

But again, in observing synagogue attendance on the Sabbath is not the same thing as observing the Sabbath, since the Old Testament law never said a word about going to synagogue. The synagogues aren't even mentioned in the Old Testament. So, to say that

Jesus kept the Sabbath is quite a stretch.

Jesus did outreach, and so did Paul, among the Jews, on the Sabbath day, and he did so at the synagogue. But to say that they did no work on the Sabbath is to go beyond anything the Scripture says. We have no record in the Scripture of Jesus keeping the Sabbath, and we do have record of him breaking the Sabbath.

As it says, I pointed out in John 5, 18, Therefore, the Jews hated him the more because he not only broke the Sabbath, but he also said God was his father. And that was the point. Because God was his father, he was his son.

The son doesn't know how to do anything except what his father shows him, he said. My father works every day, and I do his work. I guess I have to work every day, too.

I have to do my father's work every day. The first recorded words of Jesus in the Gospels, the earliest chronologically, are when at age 12, he said, Did you not know that I must be about my father's business? And the Christian has a similar creed. Did you not know I must be about my Lord's business? And it doesn't matter what day of the week it is, my Lord is the Lord even of the Sabbath day.

My job description is to do what pleases my Lord. And he never told me to keep the Sabbath, but he did tell me to love my neighbor as myself, and to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. And I will do that, and I'll do it every day of the week.

It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day. I might point out that the whole concept that Christians ought to keep one day above another sacred doesn't even agree with the early church practice in Acts chapter 2, because we read there that they met daily. They met daily for the breaking of bread and prayers and fellowship and the sitting of the apostles' teaching.

They didn't meet once a week, they met every day. The Bible does not say how often Christians must meet. It only says that we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together.

If you want to meet on Saturday with other Christians, that's great. If you do it because you call it the Sabbath, that's fine too. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

That is the New Testament teaching on the Sabbath. And it is therefore the teaching that is applicable to the Christian's behavior with reference to the Sabbath.