



# Ten Words to Live By

Oct-Nov 2023

## 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment – Unhindered Rest

(sermons: Nov 19)



### Introduction

The instructions for the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment are nearly the same in Exodus and Deuteronomy but they give different reasons for keeping the day of rest.

The Jewish Sabbath was Saturday (from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset). The first Christians, who were Jews, continued to keep the Sabbath on Saturday. Jewish and Gentile Christians met to worship together on Sunday (the first day of the week *e.g. Acts 20:7*) as the day that Jesus was raised from the dead. 300 years later, the Christian Emperor Constantine made Sunday the official rest-day in the Roman Empire.

### Exodus 20: 8-11 A Special Day of Rest

*v.8 the Sabbath day – ‘Sabbath’ means to stop, or rest.*

*v.8 keeping it holy – keeping it separate, or different, dedicated to God*

*v.11 he rested on the seventh day – see Genesis 2:2-3; making it a day of special blessing and celebration*

1. What is not allowed on the Sabbath? Who does this commandment apply to? How does it help everyone to be able to have a day of rest if it is the same day for most people?
2. How can this day be ‘*a sabbath to the Lord your God*’ (v.10)? What does it give us time to focus on? Since the 7<sup>th</sup> day is the culmination of God’s work of creation, how can it be used to see the rest of the week in perspective? How does resting show faith in God to provide?
3. Is there also a positive command here about working as well as resting? What can we do to make sure that everyone has fulfilling ‘work’, whether paid or unpaid?

### Deuteronomy 5: 12-15 Sharing the Benefit of the Sabbath

*v.15 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt – so the Israelites were not to oppress their servants/slaves but give them the weekly rest that they too needed.*

4. What additional reason for keeping the Sabbath is given in this version of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment? As Christians what principle and what motivation is there here for our family and work relationships?

### Matthew 12: 1-14 Jesus Teaching about the Sabbath

*We may wonder why the religious leaders of Jesus’ time made such a fuss about the rules for keeping the Sabbath. The Pharisees believed that God had punished his people with Exile because they had rejected his ways (including the Sabbath) and that God would completely forgive his people and restore their independence under his divine kingship only when they obeyed his Law (including Sabbath observance) completely. So they gave very detailed interpretations of what constituted ‘work’ that had to be avoided on the Sabbath, focussing on what was prohibited rather than on the Sabbath as a joyful day to share in God’s celebration of his creation. Jesus upheld the Law but asked who had the right to interpret it.*

*v.1 pick some ears of corn – the Law allowed you to pick some corn in anyone’s field by hand for immediate consumption (Deuteronomy 23:25), so there was no question of stealing.*

*v.2 what is unlawful on the Sabbath – the Pharisees said that the disciples were working by ‘harvesting’.*

*v.3 Haven’t you read what David did – Jesus is challenging the Pharisees’ narrow interpretation of the Sabbath law. He refers to the incident in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 when David persuaded the priest to give him special sanctuary bread (which was replaced each week on the Sabbath) to feed his hungry men.*

- v.4 *on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day – as the worship is part of their ‘work’.*
- v.7 *I desire mercy not sacrifice – the quotation is from Hosea 6:6; it goes on ‘... acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.’ Hosea was condemning empty religious ritual in the place of true worship and loving service. Jesus is saying that the Pharisees have emphasized the Sabbath rules above the truths that they were intended to teach about God and how he wants us to live.*
- v.8 *For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath – so Jesus (who often used this title) is the One who has authority to interpret the Sabbath Law rather than the Pharisees.*
- v.10 *a man with a shrivelled hand – a disabling condition but not a life-threatening one, so the Pharisees would have taught that doctors’ ‘work’ could wait until the next day*
- v.11 *if.. a sheep.. falls into a pit on the Sabbath – different Jewish authorities disagreed about whether to lift the animal out, throw in branches for it to climb out itself, throw in food to keep it going until the next day, or whether to do nothing; Jesus suggests that in general they are more ready to protect their own property (the sheep) than to meet the needs of a suffering human being.*
5. What was really at issue in Jesus’s disagreement with the Pharisees about the Sabbath? What had the Pharisees got right? What had they got wrong? Where had they failed to see what was important?
6. Christians disagree about whether, or how far, the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment applies to how Christians use Sundays, so it may not be helpful discussing for too long what we should *not* do on Sundays. But what *should* we give priority to on Sundays if they are to be our special day (because Jesus was raised on Easter Sunday) and if they are a way of celebrating God’s good creation and doing good? What preparations do we need to make in the remainder of the week so that we – and others – can enjoy a day of positive rest?  
How can we use – and stop using – technology to do this? Can we ‘switch-off’ on Sundays?
7. This commandment shows how God knows that we need a rhythm of work and rest. How can we live in a way that is a witness to his loving wisdom, keeping our work in perspective and using rest and recreation in positive ways? How can this rest be a foretaste of heaven on earth (*Hebrews 4:9-11*)?

#### **Exodus 20: 8-11**

<sup>8</sup> ‘Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labour and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

#### **Deuteronomy 5: 12-15**

<sup>12</sup> ‘Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. <sup>13</sup> Six days you shall labour and do all your work, <sup>14</sup> but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. <sup>15</sup> Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

#### **Hebrews 4: 9-11**

<sup>9</sup> There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; <sup>10</sup> for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. <sup>11</sup> Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.