

The Ten Commandments in the 21st Century - 4

The Sabbath, and Obeying Parents

4. Remember the Sabbath Day, to Keep it Holy

The fourth commandment takes us back to the week of Creation. In six days, God created the world and everything in it, including mankind.

On the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done (Genesis 2:2).

The Hebrew word here for 'rested' does not mean to be weary. It just means to cease from what you were doing. It is as if God could now enjoy looking at the great world He had brought into being. We read in verse 3 that He set aside the seventh day as special, and made it holy.

The number 'seven' demonstrates completeness in the Bible. After every seventh day, a new cycle of seven days begins again. It is interesting that all over the world, people still divide time into seven days, not eight or ten but seven.

Just as God rested on the seventh day, the Israelites had to stop work on this day, and devote it to God. This rule applied to horses, camels, oxen and slaves as well – see Exodus 23:12. There was also a practical aspect, as they all had to rest and be refreshed. If we continue working day after day without a rest our efficiency drops. We need a day to look forward to, a day

when our blisters can heal and our spirits be refreshed.

There was another, deeper meaning behind the Sabbath. In God's great plan, a day is coming when all the earth will rest. In the Kingdom of God, all mankind will be able to rest from their 'slavery' to sin and death, and enjoy the peace and beauty of God's work. We can see this idea clearly in Hebrews 4:1–4.

Effectively, every week the Israelites were treated to a little taste of the Kingdom of God, as something to look forward to. And we can see now why Jesus so often healed sick people on the Sabbath Day. As the crowds saw the sick and paralysed walk away healed, they could see a picture of the Kingdom of God, with sin and death and illness removed.

So, the Sabbath Day commandment was a wonderful institution. It not only brought relief from hard labour, and a time for talking about God, but it also pointed forward to the great hope of the future.

Christian Observance

Do Christians need to keep the Sabbath Day? Some religious groups believe we should, and they hold their services on Saturdays. What does the New Testament say?

A key point is, what happened when Gentiles (non-Jews) were baptised? In Acts chapter 15, the Christian 'council' in Jerusalem made the decision that

Gentiles were NOT obliged to keep the Law. They wrote a summary of their findings, and they did not say that Sabbath keeping was essential.

More precisely, the Apostle Paul writes in Colossians 2:16 that we should not condemn anyone for NOT keeping the Sabbath.

As the early church developed in the centuries after the time of the Apostles, many customs from the Law were brought back into church services, such as priests and altars and incense and holy days. This was against the ruling of the Apostles.



For the Christian, the first day of the week, Sunday, is more important than Saturday, because that is the day Jesus rose from the dead. We can see that this is the day when Christians met to remember Jesus in breaking bread:

Now on the first day of the week, [when] the disciples came together to break bread (Acts 20:7).

So Christians are not obliged to stop work on Saturday or Sunday. In the western world, both days are normally kept free from work, although this has changed, especially in shops, health-

care and transport. If we have Sundays free, we can be thankful this gives us opportunity to come together to break bread. In fact, every day of the week is an opportunity to serve God and think about Him and His great plan.

5. Honour Your Father and Mother

This commandment moves from God and His plans for the earth to our own homes and families. The Hebrew word for 'honour' carries the meaning that it is imperative that your parents are to be treated with respect. Every Israelite was to give their parents the authority they deserved. Israelites lived in a patriarchal society, where the oldest male in the household was the head of the family. Conversely, even teenage boys were obliged by this law to obey their parents. If they were persistently disobedient, they could even be handed over to a court to be punished – see Deuteronomy 21:18–21.

Honouring parents also meant that you were responsible for caring for them in old age. In a society where there were no state pensions, this was an important part of the social order.

Spiritual Effects

One result of children growing up to respect and obey their parents when they were little was that when they grew up they would be more likely to respect God, their Heavenly Father. Thus the fifth commandment was also linked to the first four, which all relate to our attitude to God.

What does the New Testament say about this? It insists that it is still important in the life of a Christian. Paul quotes the fifth commandment and applies it to Christians.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3).

What about caring for our parents in old age? This, too, is essential for believers. In 1 Timothy 5:4-8 we read that anyone who neglects this duty is not worthy to be called a Christian – that is a strong message!

The Situation Today

That brings us to the present day, because there is a great spirit of rebelliousness in our world. Often we find children disobeying parents, and treating them as equals or worse. Then when the parents get old, their children avoid caring for them, perhaps even failing to visit them regularly.

At the same time, lack of respect at home leads to lack of respect for teachers at school, for managers at work, and for the police. When a society as a whole turns its back on God, one of the first things you notice is that children disobey their parents – see Romans 1:28-32. This is typical of our age, and it will get worse until Jesus returns to teach a better way.



So it is important that we teach our children from a young age to do what they are told, to be quiet when we are speaking to someone else, to be polite, and to obey family rules at home. In doing this we are giving them a good foundation for the future.



More Practicalities

Now we come to a question that is frequently asked on this topic. “Must I ALWAYS obey my parents, especially if I am an adult and still live with them?”

The answer depends on what it is they are asking you to do. If the request is reasonable, for example “please get home before dark”, that would obviously be something we would do without question. But if the command was “you must not have anything to do with the Bible!” we would have to disobey. When there is a conflict between what God wants us to do and what other people want us to do, whoever they are, we must obey God first.

So, in summary, the fifth commandment asks us to respect and care for our parents. And it promises us God’s blessing if we carry out this duty.

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