

**"WHY SO SERIOUS"**

**SO FAR:** Commandments #1, 2, 3 → the central importance of every person's relationship to God  
→ and the seriousness of it!

**THIS WEEK:** The 4<sup>th</sup> of the 10, in which we see even more the seriousness of our relationship to God.  
In fact a matter of life and death!

**COMMANDMENT #4**

**Exodus 20:8-11** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

**How serious?**

**Numbers 15:32-36** While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation. They put him in custody, because it had not been made clear what should be done to him.

And the Lord said to Moses, "The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, as the Lord commanded Moses. The death penalty! A serious matter! "**Why so serious?**"

We are failing to understand the significance of this 4<sup>th</sup> commandment if we don't see how breaking the Sabbath could be a capital offence. There was something very important being violated here.

And here we have come to a common objection to the Bible and faith in the Bible. Fuel for the fires of popular atheists...

**NOTES:**

1. The Sabbath was so serious because it was a sign.

**Deuteronomy 5:15** You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Centuries later, through the prophets, God is still explaining to his people what he was doing for his people.

**Ezekiel 20:12-20** Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness. They did not walk in my statutes but rejected my rules, by which, if a person does them, he shall live; and my Sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make a full end of them. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out. Moreover, I swore to them in the wilderness that I would not bring them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey, the most glorious of all lands, because they rejected my rules and did not walk in my statutes, and profaned my Sabbaths; for their heart went after their idols. Nevertheless, my eye spared them, and I did not destroy them or make a full end of them in the wilderness. And I said to their children in the wilderness, Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor keep their rules, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I am the Lord your God; walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules, and keep my Sabbaths holy that they may be a sign between me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.

**SO OUR QUESTION OF UNDERSTANDING: what was the Sabbath a sign of?** Can you picture the generations and generations of the Old Testament people faithfully observing the Sabbath, week after week?

The Sabbath gave a shape to every week.

*Work work work work work work, cease!*

And the ceasing was a sign. Of what exactly?

From the words of Ezekiel, we see that it was a sign of **God's sanctifying work**. [Vs.12] (Making them a people who are set apart for God)

And associated with **life**. ["... he shall live" vs. 13]

And (Reading the “fine print”) it is associated with **entrance into the Promised Land. [Vs. 16]** and also freedom from idols. And a sign that God is the Lord their God [**vs. 20**]

So every week for the whole of his life, the Old Testament person had a day-long opportunity to consider the progress he was making in becoming a holy man of God, set apart by God, through his obedience to the Law of God for the blessing of living for God.

**Galatians 3:24** So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came...

Really important because of the two things that God was always doing for Israel.

“TO DO” LIST RE: Israel

✓ **Preserve the people to whom Christ would be born** Israel was being kept from disappearing into surrounding cultures.

✓ **Prepare the people for whom Christ would be born** ... which leads us to the second reason why the Sabbath was such a serious thing:

2. **The Sabbath was so serious because it was a shadow.**

This is a **New Testament revelation** and sets us up, as New Testament people, for a **new take on Sabbath keeping**.

The new reality began with the behavior and teaching of Christ on the Sabbath. His actions were a scandal. Healing on the Sabbath. Snacking on the Sabbath. **Mark 2:27-28** And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.

But more explanation was coming. In Paul’s letters he writes of the keeping of days as a matter of personal conscience, with no single right approach. **Romans 14:5-6** One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. [ The Sabbath laws are here associated with the food laws, which were quite radically changed by the New Testament (**Mark 7:19**) → ] The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

It is in his letter to the Christians living in the city of Colossae that Paul fills in this second blank for us.

**Colossians 2:16-17** Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a **shadow** of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. It’s this contrast between a **shadow** and **the substance** that explains why a behavior which was in the Old Testament a **capital offense** is in the New Testament a **personal matter of conscience**.

**Q. So what was the Sabbath exactly a shadow of?**

**A.** Eternal life. The Promised Life. Life in the Promised Land, allegorically speaking. The Sabbath was a shadow of the life that the Lord was referring to when he offered the people “rest.”

**Matthew 11:28-30** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. The “substance belongs to Christ”.

Specifically the rest that is experienced by people who learn how to get to the state of being in which they no longer need to work for their salvation. See? **“Work”!** “Sabbath” means “cease” Cease what? Cease working!

**Galatians 3:24** So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

The book of Hebrews makes this really clear, I think... A book, a document, of dire warning! Particularly to the people of the first generation of New Testament living, which was the last generation of Old Testament living (“the last days” and “the last times” they are called all through the New Testament writings. E.g. **Hebrews 1:2**)

**Hebrews 3:12-13** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

**Hebrews 4:1** Therefore, while **the promise of entering his rest** still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.

**Hebrews 4:3** For we who have believed enter **that rest**, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,' " although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

**Hebrews 4:8-11** For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains **a Sabbath rest for the people of God**, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. **Let us therefore strive to enter that rest**, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

I think that **4:11** needs to be tied to **3:12**.

**Hebrews 3:12** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. The urging of **4:11** is directed specifically to people who may still have a **3:12** "*evil, unbelieving heart*"

#### **ACTIONS:**

- a) In this and in all aspects of living for Christ, be very careful to distinguish between the shadows and the substance.

*That is*, hold fast to Christ: not to rules, for **he** is our life. **He** is our sanctification.  
**He** is our source of real life, eternal life.

- b) In your commitment to the "substance" of the Sabbath, do not neglect the principle of the thing.

Notice that in the first statement of the Sabbath law, the LORD refers to the seven days of Creation, with six days of work and a day of rest.

- c) Use "Action b)" to make progress in "Action a)"

Work on making use of a "non-work day" to work on your commitment to Christ.

Choose the details of your Sunday routines carefully. And choose to make the most out of them.

**Romans 14:5-6** One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord.

Particularly in regard to what the Lord means to do with your life → to set you apart for the great and important purposes for which he has brought you into the world --- and into "the Promised Life".

**Next commandment: (February 7)**

**"HONOURING FATHER AND MOTHER"**

**Exodus 20:12**