

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1)

Saturday or Sunday?

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 22-Jan-94; Sermon #111

I have before me a clipping that was taken out of a Catholic publication called OUR SUNDAY VISITOR. The particular aspect that is being covered in this writing is called "Ask Me A Question." The author of it is a Catholic theologian by the name of Frank Sheedy. The question is this:

Please comment on Herbert W. Armstrong's book, *The United States and Britain In Prophecy*, and the *PLAIN TRUTH* magazine. I have been reading the magazine for a year. I find its articles helpful in my spiritual growth and understanding of the Bible. The book clearly states the seventh day of the week is the Sabbath of the Lord. It is one of the Ten Commandments. [Then this person asks this Catholic theologian] How can we change a commandment of God? Also we, as Catholics, are like pagans who worshipped idols—with our images of Christ and Mary in our churches and homes.

The questioner asked that his name be withheld; but gave the city that he was from as New Athens, Illinois. Now, here is the answer that was given:

Your letter reveals the reason why I have continually urged in this column that Catholics not watch Protestant and cultic programs on TV, because listeners are continually being brain-washed with the beliefs of the TV personality.

The Worldwide Church of God is a mishmash cult, rooted in the odd personality of its founder—Herbert Armstrong. Like the Seventh Day Adventists, the church worships on Saturday instead of Sunday. Like Jehovah Witnesses, it denies the Holy Spirit is God and the existence of the Trinity. Like the Jews, its members eat only kosher food and observe Jewish festivals.

William J. Whalen, who has studied this sect, says in his book *STRANGE GOODS* that the cult is an amalgam of Adventism, Mormonism, Judaism, Russellism, Fundamentalism, and British Israelism. The latter is the curious notion that the Ten Lost Tribes made their way to England and set up a new

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Israel there.

Armstrong denies the immortality of the soul and affirms that men can become God.

I have not the space to answer Armstrong's absurdities, but there is no commandment making Saturday the Sabbath. The Jews chose that day, as the apostles chose Sunday. And if you worship the statues in church, then you are an idolater like the pagans. Catholics do not worship statues.

I want you to see there that the answer that he gave to the person's question was no answer at all. He avoided what was asked. I think we need to consider why he avoided what was asked. I think that it would have put him on the spot with regard to what the Bible has to say about the Sabbath. The Catholic Church, in their official publications, admits that Saturday is the Sabbath and that they were the ones who changed the day from Saturday to Sunday.

Over the last couple of years, I have stressed the importance of idolatry in our lives as a negative force, drawing us away from the one true God—the Source of truth, beauty, goodness, and a way of life that produces right relationships. If one examines the central issue of the first several Commandments, one will find that the First [commandment] concerns itself with *what we worship*. I want you to turn to Romans 1:24-25, where Paul writes:

Romans 1:24-25 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a [the] lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Remember what I just said—that the first commandment concerns itself with what a person worships. *Worship* is the devoted service one gives to what one regards above all, and what one regards above all, is that person's God. The first commandment says what we are to worship, and what we are to worship is **the Creator God**. Nothing else is to be given that kind of devotion.

As this verse shows, one can give devoted service to created things as well as the Creator. They turned their attention *from* the Creator and *to* the created. So Paul is

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

telling us that one can do that. The tenth commandment says that **covetousness** is idolatry too—clearly amplifying that our devotion can be given to things other than the true God.

You may have heard the argument that all religions are good. One of our landlords used to say, "All religions are good." That is, that none of them teach you bad things. But, brethren, that simply is not true. These two verses [Romans 1:24-25] prove that.

It is Paul's argument that God *gave them up*. It literally means that God *abandoned them* to uncleanness. Therefore, any religion other than the one true one is **a curse!** It is a punishment. It is saying that all religions are NOT good. There is only one that is good. These people that Paul describes exchanged **the truth** for **the lie**. How can that be good?

Here, **the lie** is that someone, or something (other than the true God) can be properly worshipped. That is, that it will be good for the person's salvation. But worshipping things other than the Creator turns the thrust and the direction of our lives off the true path of God's purpose. And though those objects (that they give all of their time, and attention, and devotion to) may be otherwise harmless in themselves, it is **sin** to give them that devotion—because you are going to *miss the mark*. That is what sin means—to miss the mark.

The second commandment deals with *how we worship*. Turn with me to John 4:24, where it says:

John 4:24 God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Worship, which is our response to God, is what we give in our devoted service. The worship of God involves the totality of life. Therefore, it cannot be confined to a particular location. A little bit earlier, Jesus said, "Neither in Samaria, nor in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem." He means that God is not confined to any one place, nor is the worship of Him confined to any one place; it cannot be confined to just an hour or two on a particular day—because, in a biblical sense, the worship of God is our response to Him in all of life. So He cannot be isolated to an hour or two on the Sabbath even.

We have to respond to Him in our home—in the way we speak, in the way we act towards one another, in the way we rear our children, our homemaking practices. It has

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

to do with the way we work. It has to do with the way we drive our cars. It has to do with the way we dress. It has to do with the way we use our eyes, ears, nose, throat—everything! It involves the totality of life, because religion is a **way of life**. Christianity is a way of life that impacts on every area of life.

So, the second commandment deals with *how we worship* God. The focus of our worship is to be on **imitating Him**. There are to be no material aids in this, because no man can capture God in a work of art—a statue, a picture, or whatever. God wants us to concentrate on what He IS and not what He looks like.

It is not easy for human nature to surrender its dominance over one's life. Human nature's first step backwards—to giving up its dominance over our life—is usually in grudging willingness to share time and energy with God. But think about this. When Jesus was asked, "What is the first and great commandment," He said that you are to love Him with all of your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. You see, it is not just part of your life—but with everything. The second commandment has to do with *how*, and anything less than what Jesus stated in that commandment is going to effect the **quality** of our worship.

Now, the third commandment specifically involves *the quality of our personal witness* of everything that the name of God implies. **His name** stands for what He is. He is Creator. He is the Giver of Life. It stands for His character, His power, and His offices as the great Ruler, the Sustainer, and the Provider of this universe.

Matthew 28:19 "Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name. . ."

That word translated "in" is the Greek word *eis*. It means "into"—put inside of. You are baptized **into** water. You are baptized **into** the church, by means of the Holy Spirit. You are baptized **into**. . .

Matthew 28:19 ". . . the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit."

His name becomes *ours* by begettal (or adoption, as Paul says in Romans 8). It is **our spiritual Family name!** And, therefore, our responsibility is to grow and uphold that name—and to bring honor upon it by our words, our attitudes, and our deeds.

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Isaiah 43:8-9 [Isaiah wrote:] Bring out the blind people who have eyes, and the deaf who have ears. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled. Who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified.

..

The word picture, which Isaiah is describing here, is a court of law. And God is saying, "Okay, you bring your witnesses; and I'm going to bring My witnesses." What does a **witness** do? A witness gives testimony—in a court of law—of things they have seen or heard.

Isaiah 43:9-12 . . . or let them hear and say, "It is truth." [Now, God says to His people:] "You are My witnesses," says the LOORD, "and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me [We are chosen to know and believe Him.], and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LOORD, and besides Me there is no savior. I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign god among you; therefore you are My witnesses," says the LOORD, "that I am God."

This is where the third commandment comes into play. The third commandment involves *the quality of our personal witness*. We are not to blaspheme **the name of our God**. We are not to profane it. We are not to bring it down into the ground and trample upon it—by means of what we say, and the actions of our lives, and our attitudes. We represent Him, because we bear His name **as His children!** And so our responsibility is to uphold the quality of that name. And that name bears the very HIGHEST QUALITY of any name in all of the Creation.

The church is not a great nation. It is not a military power. It is not a cultural institution organized to change this world. We exist solely **to glorify God** through our witness for God. And the primary witness is the way one lives his life. Each believer is a witness before the world of **the worth** of his relationship with the great God of heaven. It is in making this witness that God's purpose is carried out—through personal conduct, and preaching.

Now, how can one witness in a quality way unless one knows what to do? How can one know unless one is taught? This is one of the major purposes of the fourth commandment. Do you see how these things fit together, as a chain? The Fourth

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Commandment is given to provide a means of *unified instruction*; and, therefore, it plays **a major role** in the process of conversion.

This sermon is going to provide a foundation for a series on the Sabbath. It will touch a little bit more heavily on *why we should keep it* and a little bit less heavily (than others will that will follow) on *how it should be kept*. Let us begin with a familiar scripture in the New Testament.

Mark 2:27-28 And He said to them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

There are a number of important aspects to note here. The first is that the Sabbath was not made for its own sake, as the other days of the week were—but as a service to mankind. The Sabbath was made "**for man**." (Mark 2:27-28) It can also be translated, "it was made **on account of** man." Therefore, the Sabbath is a thoughtful gift of the Creator.

The second item is that it was not just made for the Jews, but it was made for *man*. Its intention, as God created it, is universal. [Regarding] His intention at Creation, it is not something that was for any one particular group of people. It is made for *all of mankind*. It was made to insure man's physical and spiritual well being.

A third point is that Jesus claims the authority to show and to tell us how to keep it—not whether to keep it! The approach is always that He expected us to keep it. There was never any argument between Jesus and the Jews as to *whether* it was to be kept. The arguments were always over *how* it was to be kept.

Men honor other men, who have made significant contributions to mankind, by **setting apart a day** as a memorial to them so that others will also remember their contributions. And so, a day is set aside to honor—to memorialize—George Washington. It draws our attention, for at least a brief period of time, to the man that we honor as the father of our country. We have a day set aside for Abraham Lincoln. We just passed the day that was set aside for Martin Luther King. And, on that day, there was a great deal of attention paid in the news—on television, the radio, and also in newspapers—of things that were done by and through Martin Luther King during the '50s and '60s.

God is to be **memorialized** by the Sabbath. Compared to any man, God's contributions are beyond counting; but there is one that stands out over all of the others. **God is Creator!** "In the beginning, God created. . ." is the way the Book begins—so that, right

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

at the very beginning, attention is drawn and focused on *what God is doing*. God creates! Does that give you any ideas? I hope it does, because **the Sabbath memorializes God as Creator**.

When it says, "In the beginning, God created. . ."—that is an awesome statement that needs to be considered. Everything in this fantastic, floating, greenhouse that we call "the earth" is a tribute to His genius, to His power, and also to His love. He created it in beauty. He created it to provide us with everything we need for the purpose that He is working out.

Mankind has yet to develop his first flea. What kind of honor is going to be given to some man who claims that he has created "life"? Even if it is only a tiny speck of life that is in a test tube, and let us say it only lives for a few seconds. I do not know that it will ever occur. But the man would really be hailed, would he not? What might a person like that demand from those who give that person the honor, by acclaiming what he has done?

Genesis 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And 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. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

It is this series of verses that sets the tone for the keeping of the Sabbath; and, again, the Sabbath is shown to have universal validity. It is **from Creation**. It is not from any of "the fathers." It is not from Abraham. It is not from Isaac. It is not from Jacob. It is not from Moses. It is not from any Jew. (When God did this, there were no Jews.) It is from the Creator God.

I want you to notice, too, that it is very clearly established in the first two chapters of the book of Genesis that the Sabbath is **the** seventh day—not **a** seventh day. It is *the* seventh day! That is established by the second chapter of the book of Genesis. This may not be the theological beginning of the Sabbath. Yet, without doubt, Exodus 20:11 clearly establishes that the Sabbath has its roots in these three verses.

In Exodus 20:8, God says "Remember the Sabbath day." Then He tells us that we are to work six days, and the seventh day we are not to work. In verse 11 comes the reason why.

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Exodus 20:11 "For in six days the LOORD made the heavens and the earth [There is the example!], the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. [Again, *the* seventh day, not a seventh day.] Therefore the LOORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

There it is firmly established as law, to be kept. Yet it is very clear (as I stated earlier) that, when it is established as law in Exodus 20, the law has its roots in Genesis 2:1-3. That is, in **the example that God set** in what He did. He rested, and He blessed the seventh day.

God could have rested at any time. Or, we might say, He did not need to rest at all. But He did. He does not grow weary. He does not get tired. He could have ended the creative cycle at the end of the sixth day, but He did not. Do you understand what I am saying there? Creation did NOT stop at the end of the sixth day. It is very important that you grasp this concept. The Creation did NOT stop at the end of the sixth day. ***The seventh day is a creation of God.*** He kept right on creating, only this time He created by desisting from work—by not working.

So, what did He do? He created a period of rest, and of holy time. That is, a very specific period of time—*the* seventh day. And something was created that was just as specific as the things that were created on the other six days. And so, on [the] Sabbath, creating continued; but it took on a different form. It was a form that is not outwardly visible; and the Sabbath symbolizes to man (Get this!) that **God is still creating.**

I want to turn to a verse, and maybe now yo will understand this verse a little bit better. In John 5, Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath.

John 5:16-17 For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. [Now, notice Jesus' answer.] But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."

The issue is the Sabbath. God does NOT stop working on the Sabbath. But He is not laboring in a steel mill. He is not laboring bending over an engineering table. He is not laboring by doing work on His automobile, or cutting His lawn, or anything. But what is God doing? Psalm 74:12 tells you that **God is working salvation** in all the world, and *that work* does not stop on the Sabbath.

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Jesus was justifying what He did on the Sabbath by the fact that He was doing the same thing that God was. He was expending His energy *in God's creation*; and, therefore—because God works at this—it was also justifiable for Jesus to work. So, creative acts—creative work—of the kind that God is involved in on the Sabbath does NOT stop just because the Sabbath arrives.

The Sabbath is, therefore, an integral part of the same process of Creation that God began on that seventh day. The *physical aspect* was finished at the end of the sixth day. But the *spiritual aspect* began with creation of the Sabbath; and it *continues* to this day, as Jesus established there in John 5.

In the physical sequence of events—the first six days—God created an environment for man, and life. But God shows *through the creation of the Sabbath* that the life-producing process is not complete with just the physical environment. The Sabbath plays an important role in producing *spiritual life*. It is life with a dimension that the physical cannot supply. And so the Sabbath is not an afterthought of a tremendous Creation. Rather it is a deliberate memorializing of the most enduring thing that man knows—**time**.

Time plays an important role in *God's spiritual creation*. It is as if God said, "When this day rolls around, look at what I have made; and consider that I am not finished yet. I am reproducing Myself, and you can be part of My spiritual creation." The Sabbath was created, by God, by resting from His physical exertions; and, thus, He set us the example that we must also rest from our physical exertions.

In a way, that is kind of a negative thing; but He also blessed and sanctified the day too, which is a positive thing. He did this to no other day! I bring this to your attention just to reinforce what you already know. He did not bless and sanctify the other six days of the week, but He did bless and sanctify the Sabbath. Yet people will argue, even with Christ, that we should not keep it as Jesus did. He kept it, and it is very obvious that He kept it. They know that He kept it. Is this the "least of all the Commandments" (Matthew 5:19)? Boy, if it is not, it is awfully close. It is the one that men tend most to disregard as though it is nothing.

Exodus 20:8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

That word *holy* is the same word that is used here in Genesis 2:3—where it says that God *sanctified* it [the seventh day Sabbath]. The only difference is that the tense that is used in each of them is different.

Now, it takes a **holy God** to make *holy* time. And He made no other time "holy" than His Sabbaths. Man can be made "holy" by God as well; but man *cannot* make something holy, because he does not possess the holiness to pass that on to anything. It takes a holy God to make something holy. Thus, any other day than what God has made holy—even though billions of men may proclaim it to be holy time—*cannot* be holy time. It is utterly impossible. Sunday cannot be made holy. It is impossible.

What this means is that the Sabbath is worthy of respect, of deference, and even of devotion that is not given to other periods of time. It is set apart for sacred use because it is derived directly from God. The whole implication of its usage—because of the assignment of the word **holy** to the Sabbath—changes this day into something special. The general thrust of the word *holy* means *different*. The root word means *to cut*. It means, "to cut out." It means, "to separate from." It means, "a cut above." The Sabbath is **separate from** other days, even though it is a part of the same cycle. It has been cut out, apart from, the other days—sanctified. It is a cut above other days. Because it was made **holy**, it is different.

And so the Sabbath is different from what is common or ordinary. The other six days are common, and they are given for the pursuit of the common and ordinary things of life. On the Sabbath, we should strive to avoid those mundane things that promote the making of the Sabbath into an ordinary day. The Sabbath is a day for special things—different things. If you will turn with me to Exodus 3, we will see what makes the day holy. It is not merely proclamation by God. Here we have a biblical example of *how something becomes holy*.

Exodus 3:1-5 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush does not burn." So when the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground."

This is what makes the Sabbath **holy**—different. Because God was present, the ground had to be treated in a different way—with respect and with deference that one would not give to something that is common. Until God put Himself in that area, the ground where

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Moses saw the burning bush was no different from all the other ground that was all the way around the area. But as soon as God put **His presence there**, it became sacred. It became holy.

It became holy by means of a **spiritual action**. It is something that is not physically discerned. And it is interesting to note, right in this context (in Exodus 3:1-5), that Moses was not aware that it was holy—until God told him! So the Sabbath is a spiritual thing. Its being holy is not something that is physically discerned. It is something that had to be *revealed* to you. (I Corinthians 2)

Now, how do things become holy? Like time and areas of ground—they become holy because **God puts His presence there**. For the sake of His people and for the sake of His spiritual creation, God's presence is in the Sabbath. Don't ask me how He does it. I do not know the logistics of it. I only know that He does it. He puts His presence into *the weekly Sabbath* and into *His holy days*; and it makes them different to those to whom He has revealed that it is holy time.

Now, back to the book of Amos. Here's an interesting statement—made by God, through Amos.

Amos 3:3 Can two walk together, unless they be agreed?

It is a translation that is a little bit misleading. The question is really "Can two walk together, unless they have an appointment?" That is, that they have agreed to meet at a certain place and at a certain time. Of course, the application of it has been extended to other things in terms of going in a way of life. But it literally means, "Can two walk together, unless they have made an appointment to walk together?"

Now, let us apply that principle to the keeping of the Sabbath. It means, if one wants to be in God's presence in this special way—that no other day will do. God has **an appointment** with His people to meet with Him at a special time—at a set time. And it is different from other time—even as your appointment with a professional (like a doctor, like a dentist) is different from anybody else's. But you make an agreement (with the doctor, the dentist, the receptionist, or whatever) to meet with them at a certain time. Unless you made that appointment and you both agreed on it, you would not meet at that time—would you?

Okay, it is the same way with God. He reveals a time that He wants to meet with us; and if we should choose to meet with Him at a different time, sorry folks. He just will not be

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

there, because He has put His presence in what He has made holy. Perhaps this is an oversimplification, but you get the point that He is making here. **God has set a time** by which—by appointment—we are to meet with Him; and no other time is acceptable in terms of meeting with Him in congregation.

Let us go back to the book of Exodus, and we will add a little bit more to this. This time in Exodus 31, which you are probably aware has to do with the special covenant that was made; and it is in regards to the Sabbath.

Exodus 31:13 "Speak also 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 the LORD who sanctifies you.'"

That is quite informative. The Sabbath was made so that we would **know God**, and that He would know us.

Exodus 31:14 "You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. [It has been cut away from the other days, and God has put His presence in it.] Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death."

Exodus 31:17 "It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days [Here we go back to Creation again.] the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed."

Did you ever think about where this covenant appears? It is in the book of Exodus. But it is after chapter 20, where the Commandments are given. So God proposes a **special covenant** that is put right in the midst of all of the instructions for building the tabernacle. That is very interesting. What it means is that, even though these people were employed to construct such an important edifice to the worship of God, they were NOT to desecrate the Sabbath by working on it. Even the construction of the tabernacle had to take second place to the keeping of the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a **sign**. It is not a mark. Bible usage shows that a *sign* is something that is **voluntarily accepted** — whereas a *mark* is put on one against his will. The Sabbath is a special sign. It is a special covenant between God and His people. Who are His people?

A sign identifies the occupation. We say "*Joe Smith, dentist*" — or plumber, or

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

electrician. It is identifying a person's occupation. A sign also gives purpose for something. We look at a sign; and we see that this is why something is being used, or done, in the way that it is. A sign gives directions. "*This way to a certain city.*"

A sign can also bring people together with shared interests and common purpose. I understand that some fraternal organizations have special signs that they pass back and forth with one another to identify what lodge, or organization, it is that they belong to. It unifies. It brings them together. A sign can be a pledge of mutual fidelity and commitment. Signs are used by organizations to designate membership. People wear a little badge on their lapel that says that they belong to such-an-such an organization, and by it members recognize one another.

That's part of the way that the Sabbath is also being used. The Sabbath serves as an external and visible bond that **unites** us and **sanctifies** us from everyone else. Here in the United States and Canada, almost everybody else who is religious keeps Sunday—or nothing. And so, if you keep the Sabbath, you are being *cut away from, separated from, sanctified* by the very fact that you are keeping it. And, though these people don't realize it yet, it becomes A SIGN to them that you are in the process of being sanctified. That ought to be a sign that you are very much aware of, because you are keeping it.

Now, everybody who has ever kept both Sunday and Saturday knows this: Sunday sets almost no one apart—because everybody who is "religious" is already doing it. Big deal! What's so different about that? They are only sanctified from the people who don't keep any day at all. But for those who are "religious," it doesn't sanctify them—because the Baptists are keeping the day, and the Catholics are keeping the day. The Mormons are keeping the day, the Pentecostals are keeping the day. The Church of Christ are keeping the day, the Disciples of Christ, and the Congregationalists. All those people are keeping Sunday; and it is not separating, or sanctifying, anybody.

But you keep the Sabbath, and it immediately begins to sanctify you—to separate you from everybody else. God has a purpose that He is working out. He has made a tremendous investment—in the Creation, and through the death of His Son. And the Sabbath is a means by which He protects His investment.

If the only reason He created the Sabbath was because we need rest, then any ol' time would do. But listen to this. Ultimately, *how* and *why* one keeps the Sabbath is what becomes **the real sign**. There are others who "keep" the Sabbath, aren't there? The Jews keep the Sabbath. The Seventh Day Adventists keep the Sabbath. And what really becomes the sign is not merely that we are setting the day apart for religious

purposes, but HOW and WHY we keep it.

That will become very important in the next few sermons, because it is *how* and *why* we keep it that makes us different. That is what does the sanctifying. "Sanctify them through Your truth," Jesus said. God's Word is truth. If people accept it and use it, they are going to be using the Sabbath for different purposes than others are.

So the Sabbath is what God created to educate His people in His way. This is what prepares them for the witness. This is part of that process, but I'd like for you to think of this: Suppose that a basketball coach said to his players, "*Come to the gym and meet with me at such-and-such a time.*" But some of the players decided that they would go to a different gym, and that they would go at a different time, and that they would be with a different coach. Do you get the point?

Brethren, players on a team begin to take on the qualities and the philosophy of their coach. Anybody who is familiar with athletics understands this. I have heard people, who involve themselves with athletics almost as a way of life, say that they can always tell whether a certain player has been coached by a certain coach. They will even say, "*That player has the John Wooden look about him*" or "*the John Thompson way about him.*" And what has happened is the player has taken on the **sign** of the coach; and it has *sanctified* him from the other players, who are not coached by that particular coach.

The same principle is at work with God and us. He is our Coach. He has made an appointment with us to meet at a certain place, at a certain time. And IF we choose not to go to where He is going to be, THEN we are going to begin to take on the image of that coach that we do use. The Sabbath was created because it both enhances and protects one's relationship with God. And it provides *the witness* — to God, to the person, and to the world—of whom is keeping it. That's how it becomes the **sign**. It is a witness to God. It is a witness to the person who is keeping it, and it is a witness to the world that the person is keeping it—all at one and the same time.

And so the Sabbath exists to keep us in a proper frame of mind and provided with the right material to negotiate the way to God's Kingdom. Brethren, we live in a grubby, grasping material world. Every day has a built in bias towards material things, and it is very difficult to keep one's mind focused on things that are spiritual. But the Sabbath—if a person is keeping it—will almost force a person into a spiritual mode, point him towards God, and acknowledge Him as Creator of another great Creation.

What the Sabbath does, then, is that it presents us with the opportunity to consider the whys of life, to get our head on straight with the right orientation so that we can properly

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

use the other six days. The Sabbath is the kernel, the nucleus, from which the proper worship—which is our response to God—grows.

Existentialist philosophers tell us that that life is absurd—that all of life is nothing but a prelude to death. But keeping the Sabbath is **a celebration of Life!** It is just the opposite. It tells us that God's creative process is continuing and that He is creating us in His spiritual image—so that we might **live** with Him forever. For the great God, the Sabbath is a day of Creation. The Sabbath insures us that life is not absurd. Rather, it is a prelude to Life on an infinitely higher and greater level. The more we become like Him, the more sanctified we are from the world. It is in experiencing the refreshing elevation of the mind—that we get a little tiny foretaste of what is going to come.

Now, turn with me to Deuteronomy 5. The Fourth Commandment is changed a little bit between Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. That is, in the forty years that they were in the wilderness. [Here] the people were getting ready to go and take over the Land; and God altered the Fourth Commandment.

Deuteronomy 5:12-15 "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 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 male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. And remember [Here comes the change.] that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day."

Here is another way that the Sabbath sanctifies you. The emphasis here in the Fourth Commandment is that it be kept so that you and I will **remain free**. He says, "*Remember on this day that you were a slave.*" The implication is obvious. The Sabbath draws one to a remembrance of the past, and our spiritual slavery in Egypt, and where we are headed. We are headed towards the Land.

The Sabbath looks *back*, and it looks *forward*—but with somewhat different perspective than it did in Exodus 20. Before it was merely tied to the Creation. The fact was that God does still have a creative process going on. But now we find that His creative process is designed to produce **freedom**. That is, to continue the **liberty from sin**—and

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

from Satan, and from this world—that God accomplished through the death of Jesus Christ.

This is done through the messages. We hear about the world tomorrow. We hear about the world today. Almost all messages involve *sin* in some portion of them. "Sin is the transgression of the law." On the other hand, the Ten Commandments are the law of liberty. (James says that.) And by keeping them, one remains free of enslavement by Satan and this world. And it is on the Sabbath that God instructs His people, through His Word, about how to keep the Commandments and remain free.

Exodus 16:4 Then the LOORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not."

Exodus 16:22-23 And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. Then he said to them, "This is what the LOORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LOORD. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.'"

The inference here is obvious. This instruction was given by Moses so that they would not work on the Sabbath day. What I am drawing our attention to here is this: The first Commandment that God specifically revealed to His people after coming out of Egypt was **the Sabbath**—the Commandment most important for keeping people *free*. And IF people miss their **appointment** because they have something else going, THEN they are missing the opportunity to remain *free*—squandering the time that God has given to mankind so that they can be in His Kingdom. The Sabbath is **a wonderful gift** that He has given to us.

In Ezekiel 20, the elders came to Ezekiel to inquire of God through him. The chapter does not state what their question or questions were. It can only be ascertained from the answer that was given by God. It may have been one question, or it may have been a whole series of questions. But it seems to be pretty obvious that they were asking God, "*Why are we having all of this trouble? Why are we in captivity?*"

Remember that Ezekiel was among the captives by the river Chebar. He was in Babylon. These Jews, who were inquiring of God, were also in captivity with him. They might be saying to God, "*What is the problem?*" They might be saying, "*When can we*

expect to return to Jerusalem?"

God's answer is twofold. The reason they were in captivity was because of *idolatry* and *Sabbath breaking*. And it is possible to interpret the idolatry as being Sabbath breaking. That is not twisting the Scriptures at all. Their idolatry was perpetrated by the fact that they kept the day to themselves and not in honor to God, and the keeping of it in the way that they did was idolatry.

I don't think that we will overlook the importance of Ezekiel 20. Though they committed sins that mounted to the very throne of God in heaven, the sin that God pointed out—as being the one that most specifically took them into their captivity—was that *they broke the Sabbath*. Without keeping the Sabbath, they therefore lacked the wherewithal to keep the other six days right. They were missing their ***appointment with God***. They were missing ***the fellowship*** with Him that He made available to them. They were missing ***the sanctification*** that resulted from their being in the presence of God on that day.

So *idolatry* and *Sabbath breaking* go hand in hand. Israel failed totally, as you can find in that chapter [of Ezekiel 20]. And God accomplished what He set out to do, only to uphold the reputation of His name. (You can read it right in the chapter.)

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Do you see the Day approaching? Is what is happening in the United States making you aware that Day is approaching—as we see the calamities piling one on top of the other? Not just piling up on top of one another, but increasing in intensity and occurring in shorter and shorter intervals.

Hebrews 10:26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins...

Brethren, let me ask you a question here. What Commandment seemed to be most specifically involved in this series of verses? When are God's people **commanded to assemble together**? On the Sabbath day! And though it is not directly stated, the implication there is very strong that there were people, weak people, who were

The Fourth Commandment (Part 1) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

separating themselves from the people of God—from the church of God; and they were not assembling where God was assembling with His people on the Sabbath day.

And so he goes on that "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" because the sin becomes deliberate. It is a rejection of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to willfully break this Commandment (or any Commandment, for that matter).

Hebrews 10:27-31 ...but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Why have the Sabbath? The most basic answer of all is because we are human. Also, God has a specific purpose that He is working out. We need the physical rest. We are so bound up in a physical world. We need a reminder of God's spiritual creation. We need the time to fellowship with God. We need the time to be taught about God's wonderful way of life. We need the time to contemplate its application and meaning. We need the time to evaluate our progress. We need the time to fellowship with those of like mind. We need the time to escape the social inequities of this world.

There is no other Commandment that so clearly identifies with God's purpose. The Sabbath is an awesome blessing—an awesome gift to man. And we need to celebrate this memorial to our Creator and His purpose, that we might also share in the glow of its honor.