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# VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: TEN COMMANDMENTS

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## LECTURE 11: THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

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**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

**John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

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# *Module*

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## **TEN COMMANDMENTS**

**18 LECTURES**

**REV. A.T. VERGUNST**

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## *Lecture 11*

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# THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

“Lest we forget...” Those words refer to the lives of fallen soldiers but also apply to God’s law. Particularly this applies to the one commandment many omit to honor. It is the command that doesn’t open with “Thou shalt not...” Instead it emphasizes us to “Remember!” The gift of the weekly Sabbath is given for our benefit and blessing. Honoring this day brings multiple blessings. Families and nations will prosper from the weekly rest, refreshment in reflecting on God and His Word. Soul and even our body will prosper when we to remember to use God’s gift of the weekly Sabbath day.

### TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 11

Welcome, dear friends. I have the privilege again today to speak to you about another portion of God’s holy law. And this day we will consider God’s weekly gift of the Sabbath Day, based of course on the 10 Commandments, the fourth commandment in Exodus chapter 20 where God says, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” In Deuteronomy 5, Moses recorded it as “Keep the Sabbath day,” or observe the Sabbath day, “to sanctify it, as the LORD thy God commanded thee.” God has a great reason for commanding us this, and I am excited to show you what’s the background and what the intent of the fourth commandment is.

But before we do that, let’s take a look at a fourth principle that applies to all ten of the commandments. And that is that the actual transgressions of God’s holy law are in two categories. The sins of commission are the sins of doing what He forbids, but [there are] also the sins of omission, the sins of not doing what He commands. Now, the sin of commission is when He says, “thou shalt not steal,” and I walk into my neighbor’s house and I steal his money. That would be a committing of a sin, but there’s also the sin of omission. For example, when I have extras, and I face a needy neighbor who is hungry or cold, and I don’t give to him, now I’m also stealing in the reverse of the commandment, “thou shalt give.” That’s a sin of omission. James defines that sin in James 4:17, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”

Now, it is quite common for us to think more about our sins of commission than the sins of omission. Perhaps it is because the law of God is worded in the “thou shalt not,” commission. But, friends, in reality it’s the sins of omission that outweigh the sins of commission. The times I didn’t love as I should. The times I didn’t speak up for God’s honor but was silent. The time I didn’t share the message of hope with a neighbor. The time I didn’t praise Him when another mercy touched my life. And the list goes on and on. The sins of omission outweigh. And let [then] both commission and omission make us realize how we need the blood of Jesus Christ and His righteousness on a daily basis.

So, having considered that principle, let’s now turn our attention to the weekly gift of the Sabbath day as God has legislated in the fourth commandment. There are two basic principles we need to for a moment look at before we look at the commandment itself. And the first is that the fourth commandment has a permanent character.

As New Testament Christians, we are still obliged to honor the weekly Sabbath day. There [are] a few arguments that we can give for that.

First, the fourth was written with God's finger in the stone tablets of the law just as the other nine, and there's no indication that God meant that fourth to be erased or to be rewritten. Remember the Sabbath day was not a Mosaic institution. "Remember to keep the Sabbath day." It refers to creation day already. The purpose of the Sabbath day is as needed today as it was in the days of Moses. God's purpose for the Sabbath day was to delight Himself in the works of His own creation, and that's why also we need that. Interestingly, in Exodus 31:17 Moses wrote, God "rested, and was refreshed" on the Sabbath day. Now, the word *refreshed* is a unique word. God needed no physical rest, but God refreshed Himself in viewing the works that He had created. That hints, that word *refreshed*, hints clearly at the intention of the weekly Sabbath day. It is given for our refreshment.

So, no New Testament Scripture proves anywhere that this pattern of six days work followed with one day rest has been overturned or changed. What the New Testament doesn't repeal, or doesn't forbid, stands as the Old Testament has worded it, for the Old Testament has as much authority as the New Testament. So in sum, then let's consider that the 10 Commandments remain the base law, the basic constitution of the kingdom of God. Indeed, there are some ceremonial or civil aspects that have changed in the New Testament, but the moral character of the Sabbath day remains the same.

The second principle, that of course we could spend much more time on and would require a separate lecture to support, is that the Sabbath day in the New Testament has become the first day of the week instead of the seventh. There's only one support I share for that at this moment. If you compare Exodus 20 with Deuteronomy 5, you notice that the reference point of the Sabbath day observation has changed. In Exodus 20, Moses, or God Himself rather, referenced it to the creation. Moses, however, referenced it to the exodus from the land of Egypt. The redemption of the Israelites became for them the observation point where the Sabbath day was linked into.

Now, that is in the New Testament an even greater reason when we have the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ on the first day of the week. And ever since, the early Christians observed the first day of the week as their reference point for the Sabbath day. And this changed from the seventh day to the first day. It also fits beautifully in the story of redemption in the unfolding of the beauty of the gospel message. In the Old Testament when we stand before Christ and His work, it's like the Old Testament church is looking forward to the rest, working six days to come to the rest. But now in the New Testament, the gospel is [full] and clear: we begin with the rest on the first day, and out of that we face our task and do the work that God is calling us to do. So, the Christian Sabbath day is anchored in Christ's merits; and resting upon His finished work, we go forth in our work week. That change, of course, of day didn't affect the moral character of the Sabbath day.

And so, let's now consider then what exactly does God mean when He commands us to keep the Sabbath day holy? There [are] two main questions that I propose we will consider. First, why did God legislate this fourth commandment? And secondly, what is meant with keeping or observing the Lord's day as a holy day? So first, why did God legislate this fourth commandment? He did this to protect His very special gift to us. One day in a seven day cycle God gives us as a free day from the daily labor, a day in which we may be refreshed [and] renewed, a day in which we may be recalibrated in our relationship to Him, with God, in the worship of Him so that we may be more ready to go forth in the work days of the six days coming. And you'll notice, as you look around in the history of the world, that every culture and every age that has honored the weekly Sabbath day, according to the biblical principles, has experienced, especially in that commandment, the great reward that God gives upon honoring the fourth.

It's clear that it promotes physical health. It promotes our emotional well-being to step away from the rush and the stress and the strain of the daily work. It's obvious that this refreshes and restores the spiritual life, and we may focus our mind on the heavenly, the spiritual, as the Word and the Spirit [work] together to restrengthen again in our heart what spiritually can often suffer in the week. It strengthens the bond of fellowship when we come together with fellow Christians, and for some of us [these are] the only Christians we might meet the whole week as we work out in the secular world. It also even benefits our farm animals, if we have some, or even our visitors or our travelers who happen to come by. In the days of the Bible times, of course, when the whole society shut down, yes, even travelers [would] have to shut down their business and participate. And it was an evangelical purpose as well, to show to the nations the beauty of the weekly Sabbath day.

God knows, friends, that every relationship needs quality time. If a relationship is to grow deeper, it needs quality time. It needs to have a focus upon each other. Six days of the week most of us are busy. We carry out God's work in our daily task, whatever that may be. It takes lots of energy, sometimes [with] little time left to enjoy or to focus our mind upon our Creator. And therefore, the Lord as our divine Employer says, 'Look, six days you must do your work; the Sabbath day, I release you from your daily labor to give you a Sabbath day, a day set aside for you. No, for Me and you.' That's not an idle day. Let's not make that conclusion. It's not a sleep day. It's not a day to go do your favorite hobby or consume the entire day in parties and sightseeing. No, it's a day in which we are given the time to rest, to refresh, to refocus. It's an opportunity to hear His Word, to worship Him in corporate fellowship [and] in acts of mercy. It all allows us time away from what is normally taking [our time] to spend time with God. "The LORD thy God," the commandment says.

So when we pull in, then, the words of Jesus in Mark 2:27-28, let's not draw the wrong conclusion of that statement, as so often seems to be done. Jesus says there, to the Scribes and Pharisees, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." Now, if you study the context of this Scripture, you notice that Jesus is again being confronted by the Scribes and Pharisees for breaking the Sabbath Day, and all He's doing is doing good. And so, in that context, Jesus unpacks the Sabbath Day from all the rules and regulations that hinder the beauty of the day. And, the day has become for many of these Jewish people almost unbearable by all the rules that they have to keep. And so, that was His intention, to again redeem the Sabbath Day, to bring out its real intention.

So then, what is the real intention? What is meant with keeping, and observing, the Lord's Day holy? The word *holy* means to be separated, means to be set aside, to keep it special. The Sabbath Day stands apart from all the other six days in the week in which we do our daily and our regular and ordinary duties of life, and they differ for all of us. Some of you go to school, study hard all week. Some of us are family, busy with that. Others are working in factories, or we are in the medical field. We're earning money for our families to be maintained. Now, one of those [days] every six days, the day [was] set apart from these ordinary labors.

Now, this pattern of six work, one rest, is set by God's own pattern in the creation week. That's why the fourth undoubtedly begins with "remember." What has been the pattern ever since the creation of the world, that pattern is to continue. God ceases from His ordinary labor. So are we [to cease]. God continues His work of providence, so we may continue to provide for families the meals, may provide for taking care of the kids [or] when somebody needs help [or] is wounded. We need to take care of the safety and security in the hostile world we live. Those are the necessary works. Those obviously may and must continue. So, think about the many Christians today that through the political circumstances in which they are, or maybe economic pressures, are not even having the opportunity or the liberty to take one out of the seven days to keep it separate. That was obviously also the experience of the Jews in the time of the Egyptian slavery.

So, let us then look at four ways in which we are to keep the Sabbath Day holy so that it reflects the intention of the fourth. The first one is that we decisively stay away from making the Sunday into a Fun Day. In my area, many of the Christian churches have church services on Saturday night and on Monday night. And upon inquiry for that, the answer simply was, "Well, that allows our people to use the Sunday for their games and for their fishing and for their outings. And so, they can go visit their friends. They don't have the inconvenience of attending church. That's why we do it on another evening." You see what's behind this? We reschedule God to a place in our week that fits our schedule better. That's self-will worship. That is not the intention of God's fourth commandment. I remind you of the words of God in Isaiah 58, where God speaks about the Sabbath Day keeping. And it's worth it to listen for a moment to the exact words that He speaks there. "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and thou shalt call the sabbath a delight, [the] holy of the LORD, honorable; and thou shalt honor Him, not doing thy [own ways], [nor finding thine own] pleasure, nor speaking thy own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I," there's the promise, "I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." Do you notice in this verse how God shows the great reward of keeping the Sabbath Day? That's what was His intention. It wasn't to take away from us that He made the fourth commandment. It was to give to us that He set boundaries around each Sabbath Day.

So secondly then, that means that keeping the Sabbath Day holy is that we stop our ordinary labors. “Six days thou shalt labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh is the sabbath of the LORD thy God.” The fourth commandment also includes God’s will that we work six days a week, that we provide for our families in the lawful calling of life six days of the week, but each seventh is a day of rest for everyone. That means not only our children. It also means those who work for us, if we have servants, employees, even visitors that day. And of course, as I said already, that’s not just a day for sleeping and for [lazing] around. It’s a day to use differently than the other six days of the week. It’s not just a free day to do the things that we didn’t have time for in the other six days because we [were] so busy with work. The command to cease from our labor is to free up our time to give closer attention to God, to ponder His Word, to look at His work, also those of nature.

Therefore, let’s not fill up this day with all kinds of activities that take away our focus again away from God for which this day was truly given. That’s like a couple that goes on a date. [They] set aside a day to spend time together. And yet, instead of spending time together, they’re both on their phones, or they’re both doing different things. That’s not a day in which the relationship is deepened and built. Now of course, some will need to work on the Lord’s Day. I’m an example of that. It’s one of my busiest days of the week! And indeed, in ministry or in medical work or others in security forces and so on, they obviously will work on the Lord’s Day. But, what is for them then still important? That they have a Sabbath Day also, after their six days of work. In my case, that becomes usually the Monday. Now, that is my Sabbath Day, and so others need to remember even if they are required to work on the Lord’s Day for necessary reasons, that they are to keep the Sabbath Day.

Now thirdly, keeping the Sabbath Day holy is that we are to direct our focus and our attention upon our Creator, or your Redeemer, or spiritually your husband, your Father, the Lord Jesus. This is the day, friends, that God has given for our spiritual benefit. I cannot improve the words which I will now quote from an author who said, “On this day, as we give our attention to the majestic Word of God, we spend time in prayer and meditation privately, and we share the fellowship with fellow saints in corporate worship of hearing, praying, singing, using the sacraments, that through His Word and Spirit, our souls are cleansed from sin, what we’ve all been defiled with this week, when our affections again are drawn up to the God we are to worship. That the stock of our grace is improved and ennobled when the corruptions of our heart are subdued again and the bonds of fellowship are strengthened.” That was the gift of the Sabbath Day, the real intention.

In this day, think of it as the shepherd calls us back together from out of all of our tasks in life, and says, “Come here and rest a while. Come here in the sheepfold. Hear what I have to say.” We’re nourished. We [lie] down in the green pastures. We drink from the still waters. And then, the next day, we go back into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. We’re going to face the challenges, the temptations, the tasks that we have. And there’s something drastically wrong if we have the attitude of ‘Well, let’s get this commitment to spend time with God over as [quickly] as possible, so we can do our own things.’ If that is our attitude and that’s how we look at the Lord’s Day observance, then that’s a spiritual chore instead of a delight.

Let this day also then be a day in which you, as family heads, structure the day for your children to be a spiritually profitable day. Set time aside to instruct your children, parents. This is the day for that. [There’s] no school, no other things. This is the time that you spend as families building up the relationships, deepening the understanding of the Word of God. That requires steadfastness and proactive thinking as we raise our families.

Now lastly, fourthly, this day is a day in which we can be involved in the works of charity. Our Lord Jesus gave that example that He did many great acts of mercy on the Sabbath Day. Though it stirred the anger of His leaders, of the religious leaders, He was only doing the Lord’s work. And so, we are there, by the example, also given the instruction to use the Sabbath Day in works of mercy that otherwise perhaps we don’t have time for in the week. So, let’s train our thinking into the direction to use some of our extra time to minister to our needy neighbors, no, not to go and mow their lawn and do their shopping and clean up their houses. That’s not a necessary work. But no, [we are to minister to] the spiritual, the emotional, the social [needs]. Some of them are lonely. Some of them are needy. Some of them also are hungry. And James points out that that’s a sin when we see a brother and a sister who [are] hungry, and we say at the end of the service, ‘Well, have a nice week and be warm, or be fed,’ and we do not take him in and feed him and nourish him.

So, having considered these main principles of God’s fourth commandment, I have not answered every question that comes up. Can we do this? Can we do that? There is no end to that. These very case applications,

friends, are some of the things you and I need to make ourselves. And what is the best way to do that? [It] is [to] use a framework of a few questions, to look at these various questions of what not and what yes, through the framework of questions. I have four questions I often ask myself when I deal with Sabbath Day keeping. The first one is, 'Will this activity dispose me or distract me from the delight in the spiritual worship of God? What will it do to my mind or the minds of my children?' Secondly, 'Will this activity help my family but also my neighbors, maybe even my unchurched neighbors, to take the Lord's Day seriously?' And thirdly, 'Is what I do simply to indulge myself physically or mentally or socially? What is now the main purpose of it? Is it really to refocus my thoughts on God, or is it just selfish? And is what I do or what I allow [aligned] to keep the character of the Sabbath Day special?'

Now, when you look at those four, then really there is no question whether you should prioritize going to the Sunday worship services to hear the Word expounded and to understand what God is saying to us, and preferably, twice a day. You probably experienced the first service as the cleansing service, as we come out of this secular setting, often, and we're again confronted with the Word of God. The second service is often far more profitable as we then are nourished and deepened in our understanding of the will and the being of God. Take some extra personal time on the Lord's Day for prayer and reading. That ought to be nonnegotiable.

And so, let's conclude with saying this: To neglect the Lord's Day brings huge spiritual damage to the quality of our personal, family, [and] church life, in general. When we are not face to face with God in His majesty, when we are not listening and drinking in the truths of God's Word, when we are not nourished and prioritizing our relationship with God above all others, it will affect our life. [As a] matter of fact, the gateway to the slippery slope of declension and of an apostasy is to do away with the fourth commandment. In my pastoral ministry, I see when people are beginning to compromise the fourth commandment and the Lord's Day, you see them gradually slipping away, if not them, certainly their children and their grandchildren. So, friends, the fourth commandment begins with "Remember, observe, keep." God knows how sacred this day is. A little children's song puts it in perspective. "The Lord's Day well spent brings a week of content and strength for the toils of tomorrow, but the Lord's Day profaned, whatever is gained, is a certain forerunner of sorrow."

Well, that completes the first table of the law. We hope to take up the second table of God's 10 Commandments, and they are just as beautiful and valuable as again they reflect God's devotional love for our wellbeing. Thank you very much. May God bless us.