

The Fourth Commandment (Part 5)

Conclusion of Series

John W. Ritenbaugh

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I don't believe that any of us intentionally acts to break God's Sabbath. There are times that we do break it. And there are times that we undoubtedly do a bit of "planning" about breaking it. Or, at least, we are ambivalent about whether or not we are going to be doing it; but we go ahead, against our conscience, and do what we were going to do anyway.

We certainly have come to have knowledge of it, and we have been keeping it for a number of years. But, if you'll remember last week's sermon, so did those to whom the book of Hebrews was written. I think that you understand — maybe not directly in terms of being named — but the Sabbath appears in the context of three different chapters in the book of Hebrews (in chapters 3, 4, and 10).

There had been a time when these people were intensely concerned about following through with their responsibilities. It says this very clearly in chapter 10. But somehow, through a series of circumstances, they had come to the place where they had to be strongly warned not to neglect the things they had heard, lest they let them slip away. And it is obvious, from the book of Hebrews, that they had slipped very badly.

We have to pick up on this because we don't want to let *our knowledge* and *our enthusiasm* for doing the things of God slip away from us. I think that it is good, from time to time, to reflect on personalities in the Bible who DID let things slip away. So, we are going to begin this sermon by looking at Solomon — because I think he is an outstanding example of somebody who has let the good things that he had slip away from him.

1 Kings 3:5-10 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" And Solomon said, "You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You. You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing.

You understand, then, that God promised him what he had asked for, and things that he had not asked for — because God was so pleased with what had been asked.

Did anybody ever have such a good start as Solomon did? Perhaps the outstanding thing was the attitude he was in when he asked. Commentators feel that he was somewhere around twenty years old when this occurred. Others say that he might have been thirty. But the majority seems to think that he was closer to twenty.

Maybe it doesn't matter how old he was; but at least it shows, in this context here, what he felt about himself in relation to what had become his responsibility. He said, "I am a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in." In other words, "I don't know how to conduct the affairs of office. I feel that I am not adequate to do the job that has been given to me."

So he began with such promise, and maybe most of all was that wonderful attitude. It was childlike. He was humble. He was willing to listen. He was willing to be admonished and commanded by God. And that's why God responded in the way that He did.

It was Jesus who said, "To whom much is given, much is required." Perhaps nobody was ever given as much as Solomon had been given. So, he is an excellent study case of one who *neglected his gifts* in favor of something of lesser value. The cause of his fall is here summarized:

I Kings 11:1-10 But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites —from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded.

Solomon had very special evidence of God's love. I am going to give you *four evidences* that he

had, which are shown in the context — between the beginning of his reign to the end of his reign. First of all, he was chosen king contrary to the normal custom. In other words, he was hand picked to do the job. Had the normal custom been followed, Adonijah would have been made king. But, no, it fell to Solomon. And, of course, God is the one who sets kings up and puts them down. So we have to understand that, out of all the sons of David, He handpicked Solomon to be the one who would succeed David.

In addition to that, he was given a change of name. Not many are aware of this. But like Abram's name was changed to Abraham, and Jacob's name was changed to Israel, and Saul's name was changed to Paul — people who went through unusual experiences sometimes received a name change to reflect something that had occurred in their lives. Solomon's name was Jedidiah. Jedidah means "beloved of the LORD." That was a special assignment of the name to him—somebody that God really smiled upon.

number 3 — He received every benefit imaginable: understanding, wisdom, wealth, and power as well. Of course, the indication in the Bible is that these things flowed out from God — for his benefit, and for the nation's benefit. And number 4 — Two times (twice) he was visited by God — for encouragement, and for admonishment.

In addition to this, he had clear evidence of God's power working directly for him. Going back to the Adonijah/Solomon incident at the very beginning of his reign, [we find] that Solomon was put on the throne in the face of the entrenched political power of the day — represented by Adonijah, and particularly Joab. Once David died, the most influential person in the nation was not a member of David's family. It was Joab. So, in the face of all of that, Solomon still became king. And it has to be recognized that *God manipulated things* to put him on the throne.

He was granted unparalleled, unchallenged power and prestige as a king. People came from all the nations to admire Solomon — admire his wisdom, admire the building projects, admire the wealth that there was in the nation. And, of course, they gave all the credit to Solomon (at least, as it appeared to them). In reality, the Bible is showing that it was *God's power working on Solomon's behalf* that did these things.

He was given success in all of his endeavors — beyond what anyone could normally expect. I mean, he was King Midas. Everything he touched, as it were, turned to gold. Whether it was in botany, biology, building projects, wine, women, and song — Solomon hit the top of the charts in everything that he did.

But Solomon also had a problem. He was distracted by his interest in women. He was a great man; but he had feet of clay, and he succumbed to idolatry. Now, it didn't happen overnight. It happened by degrees. I want you to understand that he never openly renounced God, but neither was he ever very devoted either.

It reminds me very much of II Thessalonians 2, where it's talking about the man of sin. The apostasy is taking place there, and God said that He was going to allow delusion to come upon people; and "a blindness" to occur. Well, that's what happened to Solomon, individually. We can see it by reading the story in I Kings. But when you add to this what is taught to us in II Thessalonians, we find that the blindness there is, in reality, *self-imposed*.

God didn't make Solomon blind. And God isn't going to make the people (affected by the fulfillment given there in II Thessalonians 2) blind either. But neither is He going to stop their progression towards it, because of what they are doing. We find, in II Thessalonians 2, that it's not that the people utterly refuse to accept truth — just like Solomon never renounced God. The people in II Thessalonians 2 don't refuse to accept truth. The problem is that *they don't LOVE it!*

The problem is one of dedication. What was Solomon dedicated to? He wasn't very "dedicated" to God for very long after the beginning. He was dedicated to his projects, wasn't he? Dedicated to building Jerusalem, building the temple, building his home, building botanical gardens, building things that had to do with expanding his great overwhelming vanity.

He ignored what God said in Deuteronomy 17. (That's what it draws our attention to here in I Kings 11.) He ignored what God said in Deuteronomy 17, and that was sin. Unfortunately, unlike David, Solomon did NOT have the spiritual resources *to recover* from what he did. David recovered when he sinned — because he had a relationship with God. Even though he sinned, he would bounce back from it.

It says in verse 4, that Solomon "clung to" his wives. Normally, that would be good. A man should cling to his wife — cleave to his wife. The problem was that Solomon cleaved to the wrong women! That was the problem, and his attachment to them led him astray. As he tolerated their worship of other gods right in his home, his resistance wore down; and he became increasingly vulnerable. Before long, he was participating in the worship of their gods. And once he was accustomed to it, it wore away at his loyalty — as each compromise made the next step easier. His vanity deceived him into feeling that his strength and resolve were so great that he would not fall. But he did. And he paid a bitter price.

Now, one of the deceptive aspects to what Solomon did is something that any of us could fall prey to. It doesn't have to be foreign women. It doesn't have to be something like a hobby, or whatever. I'm thinking now of religion, because this is what especially entrapped him—through his wives. One of the deceptive aspects of this is that there is a *similarity of terminology* in virtually every religion.

Can you name a Christian religion that doesn't use the terminology "born again," "salvation," "saved," "redemption"? We could go on and on. "Justification," "mercy," "kindness," "forgiveness," "grace." All Western religions (and maybe now even some of these New Age religions) share some of the same *terminology*; but the *theology* behind the terms is radically different.

You can be sure that — in Solomon's day — the religion of Ashtoreth, Molech, Baal, Chemosh, and all of these others used terminology very similar to the *terminology* that was being used in Israel; but the *theology* was vastly different. Radically different! And here's the problem. This is what trapped Solomon. Once a comfortable *syncretism* is accepted, God is gradually neglected, and idolatry adopted.

It was Thomas Jefferson who was credited with saying that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. That is just as true in regard to religion as it is to civil liberty under a government. My purpose today is to emphasize the spiritual aspects of the Sabbath. Hopefully this will serve as

a reminder that we don't neglect our responsibilities in regards to the Sabbath.

You'll recall that, when we were ending the sermon last week, we were in Isaiah 58; and I want to go back there.

Isaiah 58:13-14 "If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."

I mentioned to you that instruction in regard to the Sabbath is not given in specific details but, rather, in *broad principles*. There are broad principles right here that cover virtually anything that might occur on the Sabbath; and, if we are being led by God's Spirit, we should be able to determine what is right. This does not mean that we are going to do things perfectly, and it doesn't mean that there aren't going to be times when we bounce around in our understanding of what is right. It also doesn't mean that there aren't going to be times when we won't be in doubt — because [at times] we will be in doubt.

It is very evident that, the way that the Jews were keeping the Sabbath at the time of Christ, one would have an awfully hard time calling the Sabbath "*a delight*." They had made a tremendous burden out of it. They did it in their zeal. I would have to say that they did it in a good attitude. They wanted to ensure that people did not break it. But they ended up making the day a burden to people—where they were practically afraid to turn around, or do anything that might require a little bit of labor (a little bit of thinking, or whatever) for fear that they were going to break the Sabbath.

You can only *delight* in things that you hold to be good, things that you hold to be valuable, and things that you do well. In the Old Testament, there's a great deal of emphasis about "not working." I think that we've begun to see some of this cleared up — in that God is not concerned about the energy that is expended as much as He is about why it's being expended. What's the motivation behind what's being done?

If you are called upon to put out your neighbor's fire because it's burning down his house on the Sabbath, you would actually be breaking the laws of God not to help that person, even though it might take you all day long to help him to save his house, or his furniture, or save his possessions. The motivation is what God is concerned about. Why are we doing what we are doing? And that's what these four principles that were given here [in Isaiah 58:13-14] kind of cover.

That doesn't mean that one is free to work to earn a living. That's what God is concerned about. IF you are working at earning a living, THEN your mind is definitely on the wrong kind of thing. It is something that is not in harmony with His intent for our using the Sabbath. So just remember and keep that clear.

Now, he tells us here to *turn your foot away*. It has to do with one's overall approach to the day—one's attitude towards the day. It has to do with respect. I told you that we can pick up the principle there in Exodus 3:5, where God told Moses, "Take off your sandals, because the ground you are standing on is holy ground." Looking at it physically, the ground was no different where Moses was standing than it was 150 feet away. But the thing that made it *holy* was the fact that God was there. And, because *God was there*, the ground was sanctified by the holiness of God.

The same principle is at work in regard to the Sabbath, because God has put Himself into it. Don't ask me how He does it, but God puts Himself into the day. It's like He occupies the day. Therefore, what we have is the sanctification — the making holy — of time! So, even as Moses took off his sandals, here God is saying, "Don't step all over My holy time." It has to do with our general *attitude* towards the day.

We are to look at it as time that is different from other time, even though physically it may appear the same as all other time. That is, just the same as Sunday through Friday — every day being the same. The sun always comes up in the east and sets in the west. We have smog. We have clear. We have rain. We have snow. It's no different that way. But it is *holy time*. So, the attitude is what He is concerned with. That is, *respect for that time*.

He goes on to speak about "our ways." A *way* indicates a path that is leading from one place to another. It is a direction — a manner or a method of doing something. It has to do with, in this case, *a way of life*.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

There's only one end—no matter how many *ways* that man might have. There might be an American way, a Japanese way, and a German way. There might be family ways. There are all kinds of ways that people can walk. But there is end to all of them, and that is "the way of death."

Mankind has—in his ignorance and presumptuousness—thought that 'any old way' will do. What God wants us to understand is, "Yes, maybe that's true; but it all depends on what we want to produce at the end." What do you want to produce at the end of your life? If you want to produce the same things that God wants to produce — then you are going to walk, you are going to conduct your life, a certain way. And that, of course, is the way of God.

Thus, in Proverbs 14:12, He is giving us an overview of life. And the idea, or the conclusion, that He wants us to get from there is that God wants us to take a long-ranged view of life — because He wants us to understand and conduct our lives according to this principle: *It is what happens at the end that counts*.

Present appearances can be deceiving. There are people who may look good, respectable, discreet, civil. Then there are others who don't look so good. Yet, at the end, the ones who don't look so good right now may turn out to be the ones who have eternal life—whereas the ones who look respectable, and civil, and so forth right now may be the ones who don't end up

so good.

If you had to look at Solomon at the beginning of his relationship with God, and you looked at a harlot (like the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with precious oil)—on the surface, who would you think might have the better chance? Present appearances are deceiving. God says to aim for the end. "Seek you first the Kingdom of God" is the unspoken direction here.

The Sabbath, then, was given to man to help provide for *the revelation of God's way* through communication and fellowship with God, through sermons, personal study, and prayer. Of course, the focus of all these things is to be His way.

Anything that does not have to do with this way—in thought, action, or conversation—may very well be *a distraction* from God's intention for Sabbath use; and it may be missing the mark. (I'm just saying "May" because I don't know. It would have to be judged within its context.) What God wants us to use the Sabbath for is that we have time to point our lives in the direction of the conclusion that He has for us.

Let us start thinking about "*your pleasures*." It says here that you shall honor Him, "not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure." I think that we can see (from the sermons that proceeded this, and all of the examples that were given there) that God doesn't intend that the Sabbath be a day of rigorous abstinence. In verse 14, He said that — if we do it right — the day is going to be a delight. I don't know that rigorous abstinence is ever a delight. But the Sabbath can be a delight.

The word *pleasure* is not wrongly translated, but it is somewhat misleading in the meaning that we might get from it. Within the context, its intent is better-translated *business*. It can also be translated *desire*. It can be translated *purpose*. It can also be translated *matter*. It is what one finds pleasure in occupying himself in doing.

So, a man's business can be his pleasure. He just loves to do it! A person's pleasure might be riding a bicycle. But maybe the Sabbath isn't a day to be out riding a bicycle the way he would like to be riding a bicycle. What He's talking about here are the things that normally keep us busy during the other six days. That's a generalized statement.

The emphasis here is on the word "your." ("Your" pleasure. "Your" business.) It could refer to hobbies, sports, and entertainments. The Sabbath, you see, is not designed for swimming, jogging, hunting, fishing, TV, boating, woodworking, ham radios, raking leaves, stamp collecting — or whatever it is that we do to preserve our physical life. The reason I've listed these is because I've had questions on all of them.

I have known people who say they just love to rake leaves. So, when the leaves fall down to the ground in the autumn, they like get out there. They smell fires burning in the neighborhood somewhere, and that smoke is so nice. It is so relaxing. So energizing. It makes them feel so good to get out there and rake the leaves. But the Sabbath wasn't designed for raking leaves. This would fall under the category of "your pleasure."

Now, is there anything wrong with raking leaves the other six days of the week? Of course not! Neither is there anything wrong with sports, entertainments, and those sorts of things as well—as long as they are not sin in what is being done. But all of those things that we would

tend to do on the other six days of the week, which are attached to "your pleasure," are NOT good uses of Sabbath time.

What about "your words"? It says in Matthew 12: 34 that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." The key there is *out of the abundance of the heart*. That is, "what is in the heart." "What's in the heart" is what we want to talk about. "What's in the heart" is what we do talk about. Of these four broad areas here in Isaiah 58: 13-14, this is probably the most difficult one for us. We wrestle with it — wondering whether "what we are saying" should be said, or not.

Again the emphasis is on the word "*your*". In context, it means that our conversations should not be the same as they are on the other six days of the week — where our conversation would tend to be on those things that are *our* pleasure. What God wants on the Sabbath are things that are His pleasure — not ours. But IF we are growing spiritually, THEN what is "His pleasure" is also going to be in our heart.

I John 1:1-3 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life — the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us — that which we have seen and heard we declare to you.

Think about what John is doing here. He's telling these people what he — one of God's apostles — has talked to them about. That is, what was in his heart! And what did he do? He *declared* what was manifested to him. He *declared* the Life that he had seen. He *declared* the things that had taken place between the apostles and Jesus Christ in their fellowship in that three and one half years.

I John 1:3-4 That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. [And, I might add, that your Sabbath may be a delight.]

I don't know whether any of you ever read J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy on the one ring of power. (I'll call it that.) Actually, there were four books. It began with "The Hobbit," and then three other books. The title of the first of the last three — the trilogy — was very interesting. It was called "The Fellowship of the Ring." The story was a fantasy about a group of people who were chosen to destroy the one ring of power. And, if you understand the symbolism, their enemy was Satan. He wanted to keep this one ring of power alive and working among the nations. And it was up to Frodo Baggins, and the group of people who were with him, to destroy that one ring. All three books (each one of them three or four hundred pages or so) were describing what happened to this "fellowship." That is, all of their experiences that they had in carrying out this quest to destroy the ring. The good times, the bad times. The good weather, the bad weather.

The fear, the courage; the discouragement, the sickness, and the injuries—all of these things are being described while they were along the way. All of the things that they fought against and overcame; all of the difficulties; all of the trials — and all the while carrying the burden of trying to make sure that this one ring of power was able to be destroyed.

There are a lot of good lessons there; but I bring this in as an illustration, because this is to be the subjects of our conversations. It is our fellowship — first of all with God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ; and all of us, are within this fellowship. The things that we experience with the Father and Son, the things that we experience with each other — our discouragements, our hopes, our dreams, our failures, our successes, our courage, our fears, our worries, our crying, our happy times. All of these things become a part of *the way*.

The fellowship that we have *along that way* to the Kingdom of God — those things are 'fair game' to talk about [on the Sabbath]. There are all kinds of things to talk about that we might consider mundane, but there are lessons contained within them. There are happy times and sad times that we share with our brothers and sisters, you see, who are in the faith. "This happened to me." "That happened to me." "I'm glad this happened." "I'm not so glad that happened." "I'm hoping this happens."

But when we start throwing in things that we are planning to do about entertainments, sports, etc.—we're beginning to drift away, aren't we? Is that part of *the way*? Is it part of *the fellowship*? Probably not, but it could be. I'm not saying that it could not be. But it begins to give us a framework within which we can see what is right.

God doesn't intend that we spend our whole time [on the Sabbath] turning to a scripture here and turning to a Scripture there. Certainly, those things are right and good. But there is nothing wrong with talking about our fellowship and all that entails. That is, things that we have experienced within that fellowship. So there is a great deal that can be explored in these areas, and that we can feel comfortable — with good conscience — talking about them. And we can share them with one another.

A very great deal of what we say is just so much vanity; but a great deal of good lies in the experiences that we have had, the lessons that we can pass on, the encouragement that we can share. There are multitudes of things and subjects that fit within positive purposes for which the Sabbath was created.

Turn with me to Malachi 3. This is a very interesting section, as it leads chronologically within the book towards the end.

Malachi 3:13-15 "Your words have been harsh against Me," says the LORD, "Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?' You have said, 'It is useless [vain] to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts? So now we call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.'"

This is a complaint of the people about the difficulty of God's way. And they see things that are

within the nation that are unfair. Those who are real assertive, those who are real aggressive, the people with a lot of carnal drive and energy — they are getting ahead. "*What good is it to be godly?*" these people are saying. And God comes back with *a promise*. He doesn't say that He's going to end it right there. But He does come back, in verse 16:

Malachi 3:16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another,
and the LORD listened and heard them.

Is His ear on our conversations? Sure it is. Psalms 139 tells us that His Spirit goes everywhere! He's aware. He's not real judgmental, but He's aware of what's going on; and He wants to encourage us to grow. This is an encouragement to grow.

Malachi 3:16 So a book of remembrance was written before Him for
those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.

It means that they esteem or honor His name.

Malachi 3:17 "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "on the day
that I make them My jewels."

Incidentally, that word *jewels* is not well translated. It just means "something valuable."

Malachi 3:17 "And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who
serves him."

There's a wonderful promise! This instruction is intended for the church at the time of the end. It is intended to be encouragement to those who are genuinely trying to be faithful to God; but there are a great deal of frustrations and doubts arising, in seeing what is going on around them.

And so God comes back with this encouragement *to those who speak on His name, those who meditate*. You know what that means. It means those who have the Word of God in their mind, those who have it in their heart, those who are speaking to one another about this wonderful fellowship that we have been drawn into — and our relationship with God. We are tying God into all of the aspects of our life. That is, what is going on here; what is going on there; what we hope will be accomplished.

God says that He is writing up a book of remembrance, and He is going to reward them for their faithfulness. So it is obvious that what these people are meditating on and talking about is God's name and that which is contained within their hearts — and it's good. This is a major purpose for the Sabbath. That is, to get God's Word into our heart and mind — to get it into our conscience. He is a part of our life, and we need to think about Him being a part of our life. Do you "see" God? That's what this is about. Do you see Him as a part of your life? Do you see Him as a part of your future? When we do, then we talk about those things.

The Sabbath is given to man to give him *time* to have a break from his normal affairs, his business, and his pleasures — so that he can have God's Word in him. Words are the symbols by which we think, by which we make decisions, by which we communicate. The Bible is God's Word. It contains *His way of life*. It is by His words that He expects us to think, to make decisions, and to communicate.

It is through Jesus Christ that He has broken the bondage that we were held into by Satan; thus opening access to Him by His Spirit, and giving us the liberty to obey Him. That includes keeping the Sabbath, so that we can be ensured having His Word in us; and thus virtually assuring salvation. What a gift the Sabbath is! "Made for man."

Now, keeping the Sabbath *properly* requires a great deal of work. Let's go back to Exodus 16.

Exodus 16:4 Then the LORD 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."

A test is coming. Of course, I think you understand the context here. The test was *the keeping of the Sabbath*. What He shows us within the context of this is that *the Sabbath should be prepared for*.

Exodus 16:23 Then he [Moses] said to them, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. 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.'"

God has commanded that we do our heavy cooking — roasting, baking, boiling, broiling — on the day before the Sabbath. It's good to notice how clear this command is. And it is also good to think about how frequently men think that "what God says" doesn't really apply to them, or that it doesn't matter. In that kind of a case, even if they are aware of it, what they do is that they presume to *add* or *subtract* from His Word.

Wait a minute. God said that He was going to give Israel a test. The test had to do with keeping the Commandment — the Fourth Commandment, the Sabbath Commandment. He wanted to see whether they were going to obey Him. He then *commanded them* to prepare for it, so that they could pass the test!

Does God mean what He says, or doesn't He? What He is telling me here is that He is serious enough about our keeping of the Sabbath that He added *an additional commandment* to make sure that we are prepared — so that we could keep it, and so that we would pass the test. So the test is not whether we know about the Sabbath. THE TEST is *how we keep the Sabbath*. And in order to keep the Sabbath, He is saying that it has to be prepared for.

Whether or not we will live by God's Word (and not our own ideas) depends upon our faith — because, in reality, THE TEST is one of our faith. That is, whether we *believe* what God says.

Remember that I said that, if we are depending only upon our eyes (only upon our senses), we are quite limited. There are things that we can't see, things that we can't hear, or whatever, that are very important to God. By appearance, the Sabbath is no different from any other day of the week. So everybody is confronted *by a test of faith* in keeping it properly, and *preparation* has to do with keeping it properly.

John 9:4 [Jesus said,] "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day: the night is coming when no one can work."

Jesus was the only converted person at this time, and He was doing the work of God. He had to work while it was day. I want you to think of this in relation to the Sabbath. Think of this in relation to *we must work*, because now we have been drawn into this. We are part of the Body of Christ. So we, too, must work while it is day. In relation to preparation day, you work until when? The limit is "sunset" on the preparation day. When the night comes, you don't do any work — because it is now the Sabbath. Isn't that correct?

Now think of the Sabbath and what it symbolizes spiritually. What does it symbolize, especially for the future? It signifies the rest of God. It signifies the Millennium. That is, the seventh one-thousand-year day. It signifies the time when redemption and salvation for the church are complete, God's Kingdom is on earth, and He is giving it rest. (Hebrews 3 and 4)

Romans 13:11-14 And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent. The day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Paul is using the day/night metaphor here; but he switches them, and the night is far spent. The *night* is this period of time that we are living in — in the darkness of Satan's rule over the earth, and all the governance of men, and all the false religions, and so forth. But the sense, the teaching, is exactly the same as John 9:4. That is, that there is only so much time to get prepared for the Kingdom of God. You only have so much time to get prepared for the Sabbath. You only have so much time to get prepared for the Kingdom of God. There is a powerful lesson here in regard to the preparation day.

I think that it is reasonably clear that God has allotted six one-thousand-year days for man, and one one-thousand-year day for Himself. That's going to be a rest for His Creation. We are near the end of the sixth one-thousand-year period, and the "day" is coming when no work can be done. For us, it will be, "That's all she wrote."

Preparation day is intended to teach us that lesson. Preparation is commanded just as surely as the Sabbath is. It doesn't have the same weight (if I can put it that way) because it is not

part of "the big Ten;" but it is certainly a valid attachment to the Fourth Commandment.

This is a particularly tricky concept for us, living in this time — because it is possible for us to justify doing things on the Sabbath on the basis that it is so easy now. Technology has come up with all kinds of automatic equipment to do things. We can flip a switch; and, you see, the machine isn't "working." But is that what God had in mind? I'll let you answer that one. Just remember that the Sabbath is *the test Commandment!* THE TEST is to show whether we live by faith. That is, whether we believe God's Word.

I think that this ought to be of particular interest to those of you are interested in calendar calculations. Should there be a preparation day before every Sabbath? The Jews believe there should. Are they right? Is one holy day Sabbath any less important than the weekly Sabbath? Is any less preparation required for one of those days than for any other [Sabbath] day?

God knows the end from the beginning, doesn't He? He surely knew that men would develop machines to cook and preserve food. Why did He establish the preparation principle? We are seeing that the issue is not merely the labor or the muscular energy expended. It's "the whole package" that God is concerned about. WHY are we doing this? What is the *motivation* and the *purpose* being accomplished?

Why do we need this kind of training? God wants to train us so that we don't make bad judgments. He's preparing kings and priests for His Family — for the world tomorrow. Are we not prepared when Sabbath comes around because we've managed our week badly? That's a possibility. Is it because we are involved in things the other six days — and maybe especially on the preparation day — so that preparation is impossible? What kind of adjustments should be made?

It might be good to remember that the preparation day begins on Thursday night (as we look at it today), and there is time to do things there. So you might consider using that time. I think that you can see that *God's intent* is that the Sabbath be kept free from distractions that would keep us from properly using it. And the primary use of the day is that we might fellowship with Him.

Exodus 16:27-29 Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his house on the seventh day [on the Sabbath].

For them, these people being talked about were not prepared; and they had to go out. The command to them was so that they didn't have to go out. Within the context, it means so that they didn't have to go out and gather and prepare food. The reason is because it is already gathered and already prepared.

Usually my heaviest day in preparing sermons is on Friday. That's spiritual food. So I prepare

them then. But there are preparations in other areas too that I know that I try to do. I try to know what clothing I am going to wear on the Sabbath, so that thinking is done with. "I'm going to wear this particular suit." The shoes are set aside and polished. The auto is fueled. The house cleaned (My wife takes care of that.) You see, the whole purpose is "to clear the deck" for proper Sabbath observance.

Let's get another spiritual reminder regarding this, back in Matthew 25. This is in the midst of the Parable of the Ten Virgins.

Matthew 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.

Did you see that? "*Those who were* (Let's change the word) *prepared.*" I'm trying to devote this group — the Church of the Great God — to *preparation*, because there is only so much time. We have to get ready! How much time is there? I don't know. But the time is coming when no man can work. It's like the door will be shut, the Sabbath will have begun, and we can't work any further. We have to get ready. These people weren't prepared. So, what did they have to do? They had to go out. When they did, the door was shut. We have to be prepared for Christ's coming.

Obviously, in the New Testament, God shows that there is room in God's laws for circumstances that do not conform to the regular pattern, so that we don't have to feel constrained that the Sabbath is a burden. But under normal situations, we should be *prepared for its arrival and use*. There are a lot of things that could be gone into here regarding preparation, but I am not going to do that.

Luke 14:5-6 Then He answered them, saying, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" And they would not answer Him regarding these things.

This is the famous "ox in the ditch" example. I think that, if you noticed the way that I read it (and if you have a New King James Bible), they have changed to word from "ditch" to "pit." Ditch is incorrect. Pit is correct. It is virtually impossible for an ox or an ass to fall into a ditch. They have four legs, four hooves. They are among the most stable and sure-footed of all domesticated animals. Man has two legs, and how many times do you fall in a ditch? Almost never have you ever fallen in a ditch. And an ox, or an ass, is hardly ever going to fall in a ditch. (Probably less times than you ever will.)

But they did (every once in a while) fall in a pit. He's talking about a cistern. Like we, who have had cisterns in the past, they caught rainwater and stored it in a cistern in the ground. People occasionally, carelessly, left the lid off the cistern. Every once in a while, a person would step into the hole — or an ox, or an ass, would step into it too — not seeing it; and they would fall into the pit because of human carelessness. Sometimes it was a life or a death situation,

because the thing might be filled with water quite a number of feet deep.

But I think you can see that the chances of an ox or an ass falling in a pit are probably about as good as you seeing a blue moon. They just don't happen all that often — very infrequently. This, of course, applies in principle to emergency situations that might arise on the Sabbath. True emergencies just don't happen all that often. They do every once in a while, but most of the time they don't.

If somebody comes to you with what they claim to be an emergency, YOU make the decision as to whether it is an emergency. Don't let them bulldoze you, because often the "emergency" to them is going to be, "I forgot to buy sugar yesterday, when I went shopping. And now I need to go to the store." There's a big difference between that and, "My son just fell out of the apple tree and broke his arm." One is a genuine emergency. The other is merely an inconvenience. And we have to make the decision as to whether or not it truly is an emergency.

If we do "any old thing" just because somebody else decides it's an emergency, there's not going to be any witness — is there? That is, no witness that we are really keeping the Sabbath holy. In addition to that, we'll probably be a *weak* king — because we'll let any special interest group just bulldoze us into doing something. So we need to decide whether this is going to be resolved the way they want, or the way that we want.

Let's summarize very quickly here. These are points to consider regarding the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a day of rest, sanctified by the Creator at the end of the Creation Week; and, thus, it is a memorial of the Creation.

It is a recurring period of time (the most enduring thing man knows); and the Creator promises to be in that time, thus guaranteeing man that He will be with man in helping those who keep His Sabbath to attain to the Creator's purpose. (What an awesome gift!)

It is a day Christ clearly associated with liberty, redemption, and salvation — as He showed by His preachings, healings, and casting out of demons; thus relieving people of their bondage to Satan.

The issue in the New Testament never dealt with whether one should keep the Sabbath, but always with how to keep it.

The emphasis, though, changes from the Old Testament nationalistic system of communal Sabbath keeping (a letter of the law approach) to the New Testament individual responsibility of personal worship on the Sabbath (fulfilling the spirit of the law). The Sabbath thus becomes a present type of 'the rest of God' to come. Hebrews 3 and 4.

So we have the Sabbath as a memorial of the past, the present redemption, and the future salvation (the rest of God). The emphasis changes from the Old Testament nationalistic system of communal Sabbath keeping (fulfilling the letter of the law) to the New Testament individual responsibility of personal worship on the Sabbath (fulfilling the spirit of the law). The Sabbath becomes a present type of the "rest of God" yet to come.

In the New Testament, "not working" becomes a secondary, though still important, factor in proper Sabbath keeping — and gives place to fellowshiping with God and others of like mind, and to doing good works.

Preparation is essential to proper Sabbath keeping in order to "clear the decks" of as much of the ordinary mundane activities as possible, so attention can be given to the Sabbath's spiritual aspects and activities.

I will conclude with two quotes from the book "From Sabbath To Sunday" by Samuele Bacchiocchi (which I used a great deal from, for this series of sermons). They are from page 318 and 320.

"The most that we can do in our closing remarks is to emphasize the basic difference between Sabbath and Sunday. While the aim of the latter [Sunday]...is the fulfillment of a worship obligation, the objective of the former [Sabbath] is the sanctification of time."

"Resting on the Sabbath is an expression of our complete commitment to God. Our life is a measure of time and the way we spend it is indicative of where our interests lie. We have no time for those toward whom we feel indifferent, but we make time for those whom we love."

If you love God, you will keep the Sabbath — the time that He has sanctified.