

could hold to the continuance of these provisions no more than we could hold to the continuance of the Mosaic economy itself.

And so we come to the real point at issue: may it be said that we are free to observe less strictly the fifth and seventh commandments? The abolition of certain Mosaic provisions guarding and promoting the sanctity of these two commandments we must recognize. But has the sanctity of these commandments been in any way revoked or the strictness with which we observe them relaxed? The very thought is, of course, revolting. And every enlightened mind and tender conscience recoils from the suggestion. The fact is that the sanctity of these commandments is more clearly revealed and enforced in the New Testament than in the Old, and the depth and breadth of their application made more apparent. Is this not the burden of the Sermon on the Mount? And this is just another way of saying that the demands of strictness in the observance of these commandments are made more potent than they are in the Old. It is because this is the case, because the revelation of the sanctity of the commandments is more abundant and the illumining and sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit more profuse, that the regulations guarding and promoting the observance of these commandments under the Old Testament have been abrogated. Hence the abolition of these regulations is coincident with the deeper understanding of the sanctity of the commandments. It is this same line of thought that must also be applied to the fourth commandment. Abolition of certain Mosaic regulations? Yes! But this in no way affects the sanctity of the commandment nor the strictness of observance that is the complement of that sanctity.

And so it is to confuse the question at issue to speak of observance under the present economy as less strict than under the Old. As in the case of the other commandments, it is the fulness of New Testament revelation and redemptive accomplishment that serves to confirm the sanctity of the Sabbath institution and the strictness of observance demanded of us. The only way whereby the logic of this conclusion could be controverted is by driving a wedge of sharp discrimination between the fourth commandment and the other nine. And this is a position which the proponents of less strict observance have not been successful in proving.

Sometimes appeal is made to what Jesus said on one occasion, 'It is

lawful to do well on the sabbath days' (Matt. 12:12), and these words of our Lord are interpreted to mean that it is lawful to do on the Sabbath days everything that it is lawful or well for man to do. If that were the case, then it would be lawful to do on the Sabbath everything that man might lawfully do at any time, and there would be no necessary distinction between the activities on the day of rest and the activities of the six days of labour.

This word of Jesus was spoken in a context, and the context always determines the meaning of what is said. Jesus was vindicating and defending the doing of certain things on the Sabbath day. If we examine the context we shall find that the works defended and approved by him are not works of every conceivable kind; they are works which fall into certain categories. These categories are indeed very instructive—they are the categories of piety, necessity, and mercy. A work of piety, that is, work connected with the worship of the sanctuary, is in view when he says, 'Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?' (Matt. 12:5). A work of necessity is referred to when he says, 'Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?' (Matt. 12:3, 4). That is to say, dire necessity warranted the doing of something which under normal conditions would have been a culpable violation of divine prescription and restriction. And a work of mercy is in view when he says, 'What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?' (Matt. 12:11). It is this service of mercy which Jesus then in the most conspicuous way exemplified when he said to the man with the withered hand, 'Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole like as the other' (Matt. 12:13). It is in reference to such works of piety, necessity, and mercy that Jesus says, 'Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days?', and, more specifically, it is in reference to the work of mercy illustrated by drawing a sheep out of a pit, and exemplified in the concrete situation by his own miracle of healing the man with the withered hand.