

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

by
R. W. Dale
M.A.

Introductory Note: Many excellent points are made in this analysis of the fourth commandment--"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). Perhaps most important is Dale's thorough and well-argued point that the Christian day of worship, Sunday, is *not* the Sabbath shifted from Saturday to Sunday. The following is the answer to question 59 in the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession--and it is just plain wrong:

From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath.

However, I feel it important to mention one point in Dale's discussion with which we do disagree. He writes, "The Jewish revelation has become obsolete because a nobler revelation has been made in Christ." Much could be said to argue against this position. Suffice it to say that the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 states,

"Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

The heart of the Mosaic Law that God gave his people Israel is the Ten Commandments, and the New Covenant does not abolish this law or those commandments for Israel, but rather writes it in their hearts, enabling them to obey it. This is the New Covenant that Christ inaugurated during the last Passover with his disciples just before his death (Luke 22:14-22). However, the Sabbath never had been obligatory on Gentiles and was not considered to be so by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. Jewish believers continued to observe it then and should continue to do so today. -- KM

"Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates; for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the seventh day and hallowed it."--Exodus 20:8-11.

You will remember that in the second chapter of the book of Genesis, in immediate connection with the story of the creation, it is said that "on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all the work which God created and made."

It has been hastily inferred from this that the Sabbath was imposed as a law upon Adam himself--as some think in Paradise, or as others think immediately after the Fall. But this early reference to the Sabbath in the book of Genesis is no proof of its early institution.

There can be no doubt that in the Pentateuch, Moses (if as I believe, he partly edited and partly

wrote it) embodied traditions and documents which had been preserved from the earliest times and had descended to the Jewish people through the patriarchs. But there can be just as little doubt that Moses felt himself at perfect liberty to introduce additions, explanations, and comments of his own.

Suppose that I were writing a life of Christ. I should begin with an account of His birth, and I might very naturally add that Christmas Day was instituted to commemorate it, without meaning to imply that the institution of Christmas Day dates from the time of Christ or even from the time of the apostles. We know that it had a much later origin. And so it is perfectly intelligible that when Moses was writing the account of God's resting on the seventh day, he should add that this was the ground and reason of the institution of the Sabbath, although the Sabbath may not have been instituted till many centuries later.

That the Sabbath was instituted immediately after the creation of man is supposed to be proved by the indications which are tolerably numerous in the book of Genesis, that the custom of dividing time into weeks of seven days existed in the very earliest periods of the world's history. But this does not affect the question. There were many ancient nations which divided time in this way. The Egyptians did it. The Chaldeans did it. The Greeks, who at first divided the month into three periods of ten days, afterwards found it more convenient to adopt the week of seven days. The Romans who, almost till the time of Christ, had a week of eight days, made the same change. The same division of time has found its way into India, though whether it was carried there by the Mahometans or by the Buddhists is uncertain. Curiously enough the week of seven days--or something very near to it--was found to exist among the nations of Peru. But though there is this general concurrence in the practice of dividing time into periods of seven days, there is no such agreement in the custom of observing one of these seven days as a Sabbath. If in a document or an inscription referring to the habits of some ancient people you discovered a reference to the existence among them of this convenient grouping of days into sevens, it would be altogether illegitimate to conclude that they had a day of rest or of worship either at the beginning, or at the end, or in the middle of the week.

Although there are very many references to *weeks* in the book of Genesis, there is not a solitary passage which even suggests that the patriarchs kept the seventh day or any other day as a Sabbath. There is nothing about a weekly rest. There is nothing about the consecration of one day in every week to worship.

I have very little doubt that in the earliest times God revealed Himself to man as the Creator of all things, and in condescension to the limitations of the human intellect gave to man that representation of the creative work which constitutes the basis of the wonderful Psalm contained in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. That revelation, I also believe, suggested the thought of dividing time into weeks of seven days each; and this division of time has gradually extended over a very large part of the world. But, I repeat, the practice of dividing time into weeks is one thing. The practice of keeping one day in every week as a Sabbath is a very different thing, and of this there is not the faintest trace till after the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt.

In behalf of the earlier origin of the Sabbath it is alleged that the suspension on the seventh day of the supply of manna proves that the Sabbath was recognised as a day of rest before the giving of the Ten Commandments. But it proves nothing more than this--that God began to prepare the people for the Sabbath before its actual institution.

It is also alleged that the word "Remember" in the Fourth Commandment implies that the Sabbath was known before the Commandment was given, since they could not "Remember" the Sabbath if this was the first time it was instituted. This is certainly a most curious argument. Its force is broken by our most familiar habits of speech. When I say to a friend who is going to London, "Remember to call at such and such a bookseller's and get me such and such a book," I do not mean that I ever asked him to render me this service before. And if he said, "I cannot 'remember' it because this is the first time you have spoken about it," I should probably think that he had gone mad. I should

answer, "I do not want you to remember now, at this moment, anything I asked you yesterday. But when you are in London and you have the opportunity of calling at the bookseller's, I want you to remember *then* what I ask you *now*." And so this Fourth Commandment is a Commandment requiring the Jewish people to "remember" when the seventh day came round to keep it holy.

There is another ground on which it is sometimes alleged that the Sabbath must have been instituted immediately after the creation of man. Our Lord said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." And I have no doubt that there have been many sermons preached on that text in which the preacher has vehemently exclaimed, "Yes, for *man*; not for the *Jew*, but for man whatever his race, whatever his colour, whatever his language. All men need the Sabbath, and it was made for all men."

But clearly that was not what Christ meant. He did not say that the Sabbath was made for man, not for the Jew merely; but that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," meaning (to quote the felicitous language of Mr. Rogers),

to inculcate the great principle, illustrated by a special instance, that all ritual and positive ordinances of religion must be for the sake of the worshipper, not the worshipper for the sake of them. Had he, therefore, been speaking of any such institution as on *all* hands was acknowledged to belong exclusively to the Jews and in which the Christians had no part, it would have been equally natural and appropriate for Him to use just the language He did. For example, had it been the Passover or Circumcision that was in question, it would have been equally natural to remind his auditors that these were made for man (for the *Jews*, indeed in this case, but still as they were men), and not man for the Passover or Circumcision.

There is yet another -- motive-- (I must call it rather than argument) which induces some excellent christian people to assert that the Sabbath was instituted immediately after the creation. They see that there is no commandment to keep the Sabbath in the New Testament. The Fourth Commandment was given to the Jews, and they have some difficulty in determining how it can be shown to have authority for us. And therefore they are anxious to believe that Adam himself was required to keep the Sabbath, supposing that this would make the Sabbath of universal and perpetual obligation.

Of course, no real proof that Adam received a commandment to keep the Sabbath can be founded on the alleged necessity of such a commandment for the support of the present obligation resting on all men to keep a weekly day of rest. But if such a commandment had been actually given and distinctly recorded in Holy Scripture, I do not know why it should have any greater authority for us than the Commandment given to the Jews. The Jewish revelation has become obsolete because a nobler revelation has been made in Christ. But the Jewish revelation itself was nobler than any previous revelation; and if Moses has vanished in the diviner glory of Christ, all that preceded Moses must have vanished too.

Dismissing, therefore, all arbitrary fancies about a primitive Sabbath, let us consider the characteristics of the Sabbath given to the Jews.

(1) *The Jewish Sabbath was founded on a definite Divine command.* About the duty of keeping it there could be no doubt. It was instituted by the same authority that instituted the Feast of the Passover and the Rite of Circumcision. It was invested with exceptional solemnity by being placed among the fundamental laws of the nation.

(2) *The particular Day which was to be kept as a Sabbath was authoritatively determined.* The nation was not left at liberty to make the first day of the week a Sabbath, or the second or the third. For a Jew to have rested on the first day and worked on the seventh would have been a presumptuous

violation of the Divine law.

(3) *The purpose of the day was expressly defined.* It was a commemoration of the great work of Creation and a profession of religious faith in Jehovah as the Maker of the heavens and the earth.

In Deuteronomy, singularly enough, Moses omits this reason for the institution of the Sabbath and reminds the people of their bondage in Egypt, partly to enforce the duty of giving the Sabbatic rest to their servants, and partly to connect the remembrance of their rest from the sordid and intolerable labours of their Egyptian bondage with the weekly rest of the Sabbath. . . .

(4) *The manner in which the Sabbath was to be kept was very distinctly stated.* The Commandment was definite--"In it thou shalt do no manner of work."

The Commandment does not forbid recreation. From the earliest to the latest times the Jews seem to have regarded the Sabbath as the proper day for family parties and friendly festivals. The early Christian Fathers taunt them with their luxurious and self-indulgent manner of spending the day. Augustine tells them that it would be better to plow on the Sabbath than to dance. Whether as a moralist he was right or wrong, it is quite clear that dancing on the Sabbath was not forbidden to the Jew, but plowing was forbidden.

It was not lawful to kindle a fire on the Sabbath, and as Mr. Rogers says in the article from which I have already quoted, "When the Jews gave a Sabbath dinner party the collation was probably cold." But he adds that "in the climate of Syria this was no great matter." Michaelis, however, tells us that the later Jews had a method of keeping hot for very many hours the dishes which were prepared before the Sabbath began, and this ingenious invention may have come down to them from very early times. Some of the Rabbis made it a religious duty to have at least three meals on the Sabbath. So far from supposing that the law required that the day should be kept as a fast, they insisted (and, as I think, rightly) that the very idea and purpose of the day required that it should be kept as a festival.

There is a passage in Isaiah about the Sabbath which has been very much misunderstood. The prophet, speaking in God's name, promises his countrymen large and glorious blessings if they will faithfully obey this Fourth Commandment. "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words" [Isa. 58:13], then joy in God, security, and glory will be the crown and reward of obedience. It is supposed that Isaiah required the Jews to keep what has been called a Puritanical Sabbath.

I believe that this is a complete misconception of the prophet's meaning. Their "own ways" which the people were forbidden to follow on the Sabbath were the common secular labours of the week. Doing their "own pleasure" has no reference to recreation or amusement. Some translators render it doing their "own business." But it probably means here, as it constantly means elsewhere, doing "what they liked." Luther translates it admirably, doing their "own will." They were to spend the Sabbath as God had commanded them--in Rest. They were not at liberty to follow their own inclination by carrying on their ordinary trade. Their "own words" which they were not to speak on the Sabbath were the words in which their business was transacted, words which like the business itself belonged to the other days of the week. What the prophet forbids on the seventh day is what the Commandment forbids--not Pleasure but Work.

The stricter rabbinical schools built upon this general prohibition of all work innumerable minute precepts, many of which are so grotesque that to quote them would be to answer no other purpose than to amuse you. One ingenious commentator, who happily appears to have had only a very few disciples, insisted that as it was a duty to rest from the beginning to the end of the Sabbath, all

muscular exertion was sinful; and that, therefore, strict fidelity to the Commandment required that a man should remain during all the twenty-four hours of the Sabbath in exactly the same position, without moving a limb or a finger--a kind of "Rest" which must have been very much more exhausting than hard work.

Nothing is said in the Commandment about the duty of celebrating public worship on the Sabbath. The reason is very simple: there was no public worship out of Jerusalem till after the Captivity. The law required that on the Sabbath the sacrifices in the Temple should be doubled, and this observance seems to have included the whole of the religious duties which were authoritatively connected with the consecrated day.

No doubt the Day itself reminded the people that Jehovah was the Creator of all things, and reminded them too of the great manifestations of His power and goodness in delivering their fathers from Egypt and giving the nation "Rest" in the Land of Promise. A devout Jew would be likely to spend part of the leisure which the day brought with it in silent meditation on the supernatural history of his race. Parents would show to their children "the praises of the Lord, and His strength, and His wonderful works which He had done . . . that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His Commandments."

But if a man's own heart did not incline him to spend any part of the Sabbath in religious observances, he could not be charged by priest or prophet with the sin of breaking the Commandment. The Law required Rest; it did not require Worship.

It is probable that the use of the word "Holy" in connection with the Sabbath confirms what I suppose is a common mistake about the manner in which the Jewish Sabbath had to be kept. A moment's consideration will enable you to perceive that this word implies nothing more than the "separation" of the day from common uses. Vessels employed in the service of the Temple were "holy," though, of course, it was impossible that they should have any moral or religious character at all. Priests, even when their moral and religious character was altogether bad, were "holy" too. The "holiness" of the seventh day consisted in this: that it was fenced round against the intrusion of common work as a perpetual memorial of the Divine rest after the creation of all things.

(5) *The sanction which defended the law of the Sabbath was most severe.* The Sabbath-breaker was to be put to death.

The institution, as I have already said, was unique. Nothing like it so far as I know has ever been found among any other people. It was in harmony with the whole system of Judaism, and was a most characteristic expression of one of the great ideas of which Judaism was the development. A nation was "set apart" from all other nations, was invested with special prerogatives, and entrusted with special duties. Within that elect nation itself a tribe--the tribe of Levi--was "set apart" from all the other tribes and similarly distinguished. In that sacred tribe a priestly family--the family of Aaron--was "set apart" from all other families. In that family of priests an individual--the High priest--was "set apart" from all other priests, and in him this idea of personal consecration to God was represented in its highest form.

A sacred building--the Temple--was "set apart" from all other buildings as being God's dwelling-place. The inner court was "set apart" from the rest of the Temple as being especially God's home. And in that inner court the Holy of Holies was "set apart" from the Holy Place itself as the very chamber of the Divine presence. In the same way the first fruits of the harvest were "set apart" for God, and the firstlings of the cattle. Then a tithe was "set apart" from the rest of the crops and the rest of the flocks and herds; and probably a second tithe was taken from what remained and similarly consecrated.

In harmony with these remarkable customs, the Seventh Day in every week was "set apart" as a day in which no work was to be done. The seventh year was "set apart" as a year in which no seed was to be sown. And at the end of seven times seven years there was a great festival during which the whole land was to rest, and when debts were to be cancelled, alienated estates to return to their owners, and slaves to be set free.

Consecrated Men, consecrated Property, consecrated Space, consecrated Time--declared that God still claimed the world as His own, and that in all the provinces of human life He insisted on being recognised as Lord of all.

The separation of the Sabbath from the common uses of other days was an essential part of a vast and complicated system for the assertion and maintenance of certain great spiritual ideas. I do not wonder at the severity of the penalty attached to the crime of Sabbath-breaking. The High Priest himself was forbidden under the penalty of death to enter the Holy of Holies on any other day than the day of Atonement. To violate the sanctity of that mysterious chamber was a profanation of the Space which God claimed as His own. To violate the Sabbath was a profanation of the Time which God claimed as His own.

The defence of the sanctity of the Sabbath was exceptionally necessary in the early times of Jewish history. Before Synagogues were built and public worship was celebrated in every part of the country the vast majority of the people, but for the institution of the Sabbath, would have been seldom reminded of God except when they went up to Jerusalem to keep the great feasts. The weekly rest from their common labour was a constantly recurring appeal to them to remember the God of their fathers.

The Sabbath was a singularly beneficent institution. The law simply required abstinence from work. That this should ever be regarded as a severe and intolerable requirement is quite unintelligible. It was a law which gave freedom instead of imposing bondage. Human life indeed was probably not so hard among the Jewish people in the better periods of their national history as it is among us. Their climate was kindly and a great part of their soil fertile. There was a more equal distribution of wealth and their wants were comparatively few and simple. There were not large masses of people congregated in great towns, many of them on the edge of starvation, and a vast proportion of the rest defending themselves from the same misery only by incessant and monotonous labour. No clouds of smoke hung over the cities of Judah and Israel. Nor was the roar of machinery heard in them. None of them were so large that the people were imprisoned in a wilderness of dreary and melancholy streets. They saw the sun. Olive trees and vineyards were within reach. The mountains were not far away. Near to many of them were green pastures, and still waters, and the music of torrents, and the peace of lonely glens to give them refreshment and joy.

And yet with the Jewish people as with us, the greater part of life had to be spent in work--and in hard work too. Many a back ached through bending hour after hour over the vines; and the heat of the corn harvest and the vintage exhausted them. The shepherd had to walk over the rough hills after his wandering sheep, and the fisherman get weary of casting his net. An agricultural and a pastoral life, though it seems to us a life of romance and delight, brings the sweat to the brow and makes the limbs long for repose. And God in His goodness took the side of man against the inevitable hardships of his lot and made rest from work a religious duty.

The Sabbath was a perpetual witness that though (under the actual conditions of our life in this world) severe toil may be absolutely inevitable, it is not God's will that all our days should be spent in drudgery. We were made for something better than that--for peace, for joy, and for freedom, and not for perpetual enthrallment [enslavement] to the inferior necessities of our nature.

It was specially beneficent in relation to slaves. To them at least we may be sure that the Sabbath was always "a delight." It was beneficent, too, in relation to the animals which man has subjected to

his service, and for which rest is as necessary as for ourselves if their life is to have any freshness, elasticity, and vigour.

There were some, no doubt, to whom the Sabbath was an offence and a constant source of vexation--men who were eager to accumulate wealth and who could not endure any suspension of business. Such men, when the Sabbath came round, looked upon their sons and their daughters and their slaves and their cattle taking their ease, and calculated how much they lost by this fantastic and absurd institution; reckoning, no doubt, in their folly that if they could only make their people work seven days instead of six, they would increase their profits by the worth of the additional day's labour--and forgetting that they worked more effectively on the six days because they rested on the seventh. [These were] men who, to quote the words of Amos, asked impatiently, "When will the new moon be gone that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath that we may set forth wheat?"

If you have any pity for the sufferings inflicted on such men as these by the compulsory weekly rest, I have none. That they were obliged on one day in seven to suspend all common work was a singular proof of God's goodness both to them and to the people under their power.

In what relation does the Jewish Sabbath stand to our Lord's Day? This is not a necessary part of my subject, for I am speaking about the Fourth Commandment; and it is quite clear that however rigidly or devoutly we may spend Sunday, we are not keeping the Sabbath. The Christian Sunday and the Jewish Sabbath are absolutely different institutions--different in almost every particular that constitutes a characteristic of either.

Let me remind you of the characteristics of the Sabbath which I enumerated just now:

(1) The Sabbath was founded on a specific Divine command. We can plead no such command for the obligation to observe Sunday.

(2) The Sabbath was to be observed on a particular day which was determined by Divine authority. The Jews were commanded to keep "holy" the seventh day of the week. Among us the seventh is a common day, and it is the first day of the week that we celebrate as a religious festival.

(3) The purpose of the Sabbath was to commemorate the manifestation of God's power in the creation of all things, and of His goodness in redeeming the Jews from their misery in Egypt. The Christian Sunday commemorates the Resurrection of Christ from the dead.

(4) Obedience to the law of the Sabbath required physical rest and nothing more. Neither public nor private worship constituted any part of the obligation which was imposed upon the Jews by the Fourth Commandment. The great object for which the Christian Sunday is set apart from other days is to secure opportunity for religious thought, for thanksgiving, and for prayer.

(5) The penalty for breaking the Sabbath was Death. There is not a single sentence in the New Testament to suggest that we incur any penalty by violating the supposed sanctity of Sunday.

The only similarity between the Lord's Day and the Sabbath is that both recur once a week and that both are religious festivals. But if you change the Day of a festival, change the Facts which it commemorates, and change the Manner of celebrating it; if one festival is instituted by the immediate authority of God and the other not; if one is protected by the Penalty of Death and the other by no Penalty at all, [then] it is difficult to see how the two can be regarded as identical.

It was the grim custom of some of the old Nonconformists to celebrate the thirtieth of January (the anniversary of the beheading of King Charles) by a dinner. Suppose now that a man had directed in his will that this day should be kept by his children according to the traditions of Nonconformity. And suppose that his children, in their old age, had given up the dinner on the thirtieth of January in

commemoration of the beheading of King Charles I, and instead of that had gone to church on the twenty-ninth of May to thank God for the return of King Charles II, thus changing the day of the festival, changing the event which the day commemorated, and changing the manner of celebrating it. Do you think that the mere fact that in both cases a day was kept as an annual holiday--and as a holiday in celebration of a great national event--would have made the two days in any national sense the same? Could they have appealed to their fathers' authority which required them to celebrate the first day [Jan. 30] as a sanction for their celebration of the second [May 29]?

Now I do not mean to say that the spirit and idea of the Christian Sunday are as absolutely different from the spirit and idea of the Jewish Sabbath as was the thanksgiving service at church for the return of Charles II from the Nonconformist dinner in commemoration of the beheading of Charles I, but I do say that between the two religious institutions, as such, the differences are not less flagrant. Their direct origin is different; they are kept on different days; they are kept in a different manner; they commemorate different things.

At what time the early Jewish Christians ceased to keep the seventh day as a Sabbath is doubtful. At first some of them appear to have made an effort to induce the Gentile converts to keep it, an effort which St. Paul firmly resisted. It is probable that the practice gradually died out like the practice of attending the Temple Service. The Apostles were in no haste to break up the ancient traditions and customs of their countrymen. They did not promulgate a new law abolishing the old. They permitted the old law to be gradually displaced and superseded by the growing strength of the life and spirit of the new faith. But for several centuries, both in the East and in the West, the seventh day continued to receive special recognition even after it had ceased to be kept as a Sabbath. In the East it was kept as a fast because on that day Christ lay in the sepulchre. In the West it was still kept as a festival.

As it is difficult to determine the exact time when Jewish Christians ceased to rest on the Sabbath, it is also difficult to determine the exact time when Christians generally began to rest on the Sunday. But the origin of the Christian Sunday is very explicable. Our Lord Jesus Christ was not merely a great religious teacher who came into the world to promulgate certain new religious truths. He established a church. The supernatural life which He communicated to His disciples created a system of supernatural relationships between His disciples themselves as well as between His disciples and Him.

The organisation of a supernatural society was the necessary expression of these relationships. The perfection of Christian strength, wisdom, and joy was not to be possible to Christian men apart from communion with each other. It was not enough that the solitary soul should be brought into fellowship and union with Christ. It was necessary in a far higher sense than that in which the writer of the Acts of the Apostles used the words that "all that believed" should be "together" and have "all things in common." Free and habitual communion with each other was almost as necessary for the development of the new life as free and habitual communion with God.

But this rendered it necessary that Christian Churches should appoint fixed and frequent times for meeting; and the instincts of Christian men led them to adopt the first day of the week. The most memorable appearances of our Lord to the apostles after His Resurrection from the dead were on that Day. On that Day the Holy Ghost descended on the church. These external events confirmed the disposition of the Church to commemorate the Day of Christ's Resurrection by consecrating it to worship. It was felt that the supreme event in the history of the human race was not the Creation but the Resurrection of the Lord. The first was the commencement of the natural life of the race, the second of its supernatural life. Christian men knew that they had risen with Christ and entered with Him into the kingdom of heaven. Old things had passed away, all things had become new. For them the most sacred day of the week was not that which commemorated the completion of the old Order but that which commemorated the beginning of the new. The spiritual instinct of the church determined its duty.

According to the ancient prophecy, under the new Covenant the law was to be written on the heart; and as to the heart of the Church, Christ's Resurrection had an infinitely greater interest than the creation of the material universe, and seemed a far more glorious manifestation of the power and love of God. The meetings of the church for worship were fixed on the first day of the week instead of the seventh. Wherever churches were founded, this custom was established. On the first day of the week they met to "break bread" and to offer worship and to receive instruction in Christian truth and duty.

But there is no reason to believe that the apostles required their converts to keep the first day of the week as a Day of Rest. In the whole of the apostolic epistles there is only one commandment, so far as I know, about the way in which the Sunday was to be observed; and this is a commandment which I am afraid that nine Christian people out of ten habitually violate both in its letter and its spirit. St. Paul did not tell the Corinthian Christians to do no common work on the Sunday. The commandment which he gave them was one which most of us have forgotten: "*Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God has prospered him,*" that he may have money to devote to purposes of charity and religion. This is the only precept about Sabbath observance in the New Testament.

It is clear that for a long time the Sunday, though part of it was consecrated to worship, was not kept as a day of rest by the Christian Jews (who continued to rest on the seventh day of the week) nor by the Gentile Christians (for they had inherited no weekly Sabbath from their heathen ancestors). And there is no trace of any obligation having been imposed upon them by the Apostles to commemorate the Resurrection of Christ by abstinence from their ordinary occupations. They met for worship before the day's work began and, perhaps, after the day's work was over.

But as time went on Christian men came to feel that it would be expedient to secure larger opportunities for Christian communion by protecting one day in the week against the intrusion of common business and care. As the Church grew stronger it became more and more able to do this. The remembrance of the gracious and beneficent character of the Jewish Sabbath intensified the craving for a similar break in the monotony and weariness of life. In the weekly rest which had passed away with Judaism, God had revealed that man was not made merely for exhausting labour. And though the old Sabbath was no longer obligatory, the revelation which it contained was felt to be permanent.

In the time of Constantine this craving for rest had become so general that the Emperor was able to promulgate a decree requiring the closing of the courts of law and the suspension of all work on the Sunday. The Emperor, however, or his advisers, felt themselves at liberty to use their own judgment about the extent to which this interruption of common business should be enforced. The Jewish law absolutely forbade all work. If a crop of wheat had been cut on Friday, and when the Sabbath commenced was ready to carry, the Jewish farmer was not permitted to carry it though a thunderstorm might be gathering which was certain to destroy it. In Palestine this restriction inflicted very little inconvenience as the weather in harvest was uniformly clear and steady, and a storm was so rare as to be regarded as almost preternatural. But it was very different in many of the provinces of the empire, and Constantine therefore made a special exception in favour of agriculturists. They were to be permitted to work on Sunday if they thought it necessary.

Constantine's decree was the first of a series of imperial acts which secluded the first day of the week from ordinary uses, and so the weekly rest was gradually established as a secular as well as a religious institution for all Christendom.

The contrast, as illustrated by this historical review, between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sunday is very striking.

The Sabbath was originally nothing more than a day of physical Rest. After the Captivity it was the day on which devout Jews met in their synagogues for worship, but this was because the day was already free from ordinary business. But the Sunday originated in the meetings of the Church for Worship. The Rest was secured afterwards in order that the Worship might be possible. In the history of the Jewish Sabbath the Rest came first and the Worship followed. In the history of the Christian Sunday the Worship came first and the Rest followed. To the idea of the Jewish Sabbath, Rest was essential, Worship was an accident. To the idea of the Christian Sunday, Worship is essential and Rest is an accident.

The Rest of the Sabbath was prescribed by a law which made Rest a duty. The law was beneficent and gracious but still it was a law, and the consciences of men were "exercised" in determining what the law permitted and what it forbade. The Rest of the Sunday is protected by no law. It has been gradually won as a privilege and is now to be protected as a right.

The Jewish Sabbath was a Divinely ordained discipline intended to enforce the remembrance of God's creative acts, and to check by an authoritative institution man's complete absorption in secular business. The Christian Sunday is the expression of the exulting joy of Christian hearts in the Resurrection and Glory of Christ, and of their desire to vindicate their place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

If I were to say anything about the questions of casuistry [oversubtle reasoning] by which some good people are perplexed in relation to the manner of observing Sunday, it would not be with the intention of discussing them but to show that they ought never to be raised at all. It is a direct inversion of the whole idea and theory of the Day to ask, "What common things may I do upon it and yet be blameless?" The true question for every Christian man is, "How far is it possible for me to escape from the common cares and common joys of my ordinary life, and how completely can I dwell for one day in the week at least in a fairer world than this, breathe a purer air, and rejoice in the light of a Diviner heaven?" The observance of the Sunday as a religious institution is a question of privilege, not of duty.

When we consider the weekly Rest as a social and moral institution, the case is somewhat different. There are innumerable reasons which make it desirable to have a break in the world's business at least one day in seven. Physical health suffers and the vigour of the body declines without it. When in the fierce heat of the first French Revolution it was determined to abolish every trace and memorial of the Christian Faith in France, the revolutionists still felt that it was necessary to provide for a regular interval of Rest; and they therefore appointed a week of ten days with a regularly recurring holiday. After twelve years experience, they abandoned the week of ten days and returned to the older and more kindly custom of resting one day in seven. The institution is so invaluable to the physical well-being of nations that to break it down by engaging in unnecessary business, or by unnecessary travelling, or by encouraging exciting public amusements, is not so much a religious as a social offence.

It has its intellectual uses, even though as is too often the case, the day is spent in intellectual idleness. Mere rest renews the vigour of the brain.

It is also a check on that feverish and insane devotion to secular business which is one of the most serious perils to the moral life of our own country. There are too many people in England on whose gravestones the French epitaph might be written, "He was born a man and died a grocer." Apart altogether from the higher relationships of man, it is for the interest of the nation that tradesmen, manufacturers, and merchants should find the doors of their shops, their works and their counting-houses locked and barred against them during one day in seven; and that for twenty-four hours they should be emancipated by a compulsory law from the bondage which they love too well, and should be compelled to spend their time with their children and friends.

As a social institution, the Sunday imposes upon us an obligation to keep it as free as possible from ordinary work. But as a religious institution it does not so much impose obligation as offer privilege. The great question we have to ask in relation to any possible infraction of its religious sanctions is not, "Shall I by doing this break a law?" but, "Shall I by doing this miss a blessing?"

Everything will fall into its right place and every question will receive its true answer if we once seize the true idea of the Day. It is a Day to rejoice in; a Day not of bondage but of freedom, not of gloom but of gladness; a Day in which we declare that we are not merely merchants, mechanics, shopkeepers, and lawyers, but men--children of God and heirs of immortality; a Day in which we assert our position as the rulers and lords of the material universe and refuse to be in thralldom to it, and in which we claim to be the citizens of an invisible and Divine commonwealth.

It perpetuates the memory not of our rescue from slavery in Egypt but of a still nobler redemption. It bears witness to the Resurrection of Christ and to our resurrection with Him--it is "an Easter Day in every week." It reminds us not of the completion of the Old Creation but of the commencement of the New, in which at last the sins and sorrows which have marred and desolated the fair beauty of this world shall be known no more, but in which the glory of God shall be man's inheritance because in the life of man the life of God shall be perfectly manifested.

And in this weekly Rest, which has not been imposed upon us by any external law but has been demanded and won by an inward spiritual instinct, we anticipate the blessedness of the new Heavens and the new earth in which righteousness shall dwell--the everlasting Sabbath of the regenerate and glorified sons of God.

This is Chapter 5 in *The Ten Commandments* by R. W. Dale (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1871). The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.