

## LEGALISM & THE LORD'S DAY

### The Christian Sabbath

*"Are we to obey the Fourth Commandment? And if so how?"*

**Introduction:** There are two questions to settle regarding the Fourth Commandment:

1. Does it apply to the Christian?
2. How is it to be obeyed if it does apply?

#### **"I did not come to destroy the law"**

Referring to the Ten Commandments Law, Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17). A modern theory which has risen in the last century argues that the Ten Commandments do not apply to the Christian. This is the modern position of a small handful of dispensationalists who think that Christ's death eliminated the moral law of God as codified in the Ten Commandments as relating to the Christian. The viewpoint misunderstands the nature of the Law and fails to make the biblical distinction between aspects of Israel's legal system. It is helpful to understand that the term "Law" while being used in the singular actually has various parts to it. In America we speak of "the Law" and yet understand that there are numerous facets of the Law; traffic law, zoning law, marital law, tax law, immigration law, etc. So too in Israel. Israel had the following.

1. **Ceremonial Law** – having to do with laws about the clothing of priesthood, animal sacrifices, and the whole worship system of Israel. These ceremonial laws were all done away in Christ. When Paul spoke of "Sabbaths" in Colossians 2:16, he was referring to the many "Sabbaths" (Sabbath years, holidays and so forth as in Lev. 25:4) imposed on Israel, other than "The Sabbath Day" (Exodus 20:8; 35:1-3) of the Fourth Commandment.
2. **Civil Law** – these laws have to do with how to govern a country. They are governmental laws, not personal ethics. They deal with taxes, criminal penalties, and so forth.
3. **Moral Law** – these are the Ten Commandments. They are a reflection of the nature of God Himself and apply to all people at all times. The moral law was given long before it was written in stone for Moses.

#### **"For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth"**

Commandment number four is a "creation command" it is not a command given first and only to the nation Israel. God wrote, "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. . . .For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Ex. 20:8, 11). Notice, the Lord does not say they should keep the Sabbath because it was merely a new law given to Israel in their new land. The Lord commanded them to keep the day because he set the pattern at creation. A creation commandment is a law *established at creation* before God ever gave the Law to Moses.

- Marriage is a creation command.
- Human government is a creation command.

- The death penalty for murder is a creation command.
- Paul reasons for the male headship and female submission based, not upon culture, but on the order and purpose of creation (1 Cr. 11:9).
- Paul argues for male leadership in the church and that women are not to teach men or have authority over men based, not upon culture, but upon the creation order (1 Tim 2:13).

### **The Balance between Two Extremes**

A.W. Pink wrote, "It is, then to the practical side of our subject we now turn: may Divine wisdom be so granted us that we are preserved from going to an undue extreme either on the right hand or on the left. No one who is acquainted with human nature or who is conversant with the history and literature on this branch of our subject can honestly doubt there is a real danger of failing to preserve the balance here – as everywhere. On the one hand care must be taken lest in our zeal for the sanctity and spirituality of the Sabbath we go to an **excess in multiplying rules** [emphasis added] for its observance, and thereby fall into the Pharisaic error of rigor and excess. On the other hand, there is a far greater danger today of erring on the side of laxity and of accommodating the laws regulating this institution to the lusts of the flesh and yielding to the corrupt practices of an evil and adulterous generation" (*The Holy Sabbath*, 76).

The Lord Jesus Christ spent many passages in the Gospels clarifying the meaning of the Sabbath and correcting the Pharisaical abuses of it. He showed how it was not breaking the Sabbath to walk through a grain field on the Sabbath and pull off the heads of grain (harvesting) rub the grain in his hands to remove the chaff (threshing) and eat the grain. This was outrageous to the hairsplitting Pharisees. They wrongly interpreted the command "you shall do not work" to emphasize "NO WORK." Jesus showed that their interpretation was entirely wrong! They had missed the heart of the command. The Fourth Commandment was not given as a prohibition but as a blessing! The Sabbath was made for man; man was not created for the Sabbath. Pink wrote, "We must beware of **adding to** [emphasis his] those commands" (*The Holy Sabbath*, 77). Jesus quoted the Old Testament account of King David.