

“Objections to the Fourth Commandment”
(Romans 14:1-9)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. If we’re going to walk with God throughout the whole of our lives, we’ll need especially to walk with Him on the Lord’s Day or the Christian Sabbath – since this is the day He calls us to fast the world and focus on Him – but if we are to fast the world and walk with Him on the Lord’s Day, we must be firmly convinced in our minds and hearts that this is what He calls us to do.
2. Last week, we saw some of the reasons we are still to observe the fourth commandment in the New Covenant.
 - a. First, God exists and because He does, He is to be worshiped and worship takes time. We couldn’t know how often or how long apart from the Lord telling us, but He does in His Word.
 - b. From the very beginning, God established a pattern of work and rest and worship.
 - (i) He created the heavens and the earth in six days – not because He needed six days to do it, but so He might establish the pattern – and rested on the seventh.
 - (ii) That day of rest He sanctified and blessed and set apart not for Himself, but for man – that he might rest and worship God.
 - (iii) This is certainly how Adam and Eve understood it.
 - c. What He instituted from the very beginning, He also wrote with His own finger on tablets of stone – along with the rest of the moral law – to show us the enduring character of this commandment. This commandment will never actually be abrogated – when we die or when we enter the New Heavens and the New Earth, even then the Sabbath won’t end, but will just be beginning.
 - d. And so it shouldn’t surprise that the fourth commandment continues into the New Covenant.
 - (i) The Lord said it would in the OT – the foreigners and eunuchs who kept His Sabbath under the New Covenant would be blessed (Isa. 56:1-7); the day the stone the builder’s rejected became the corner stone would be a day of rejoicing (Ps. 118:22-24).
 - (ii) And He tells us the same in the NT – our Lord declared Himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28); He told His disciples to pray that their flight out of Jerusalem in 70 AD would not take place on the Sabbath (Matt. 24:7); He told us through the author to the Hebrews that the Sabbath observance remains because the possibility of our entering into Christ’s rest remains (Heb. 4:9-10); and He showed us by the example of the early church who met for worship on the day of Christ’s resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).
 - (iii) The evidence for its continuance is very strong.

B. Preview.

1. But you know as well as I that arguments for the Sabbath are only one-half of the picture.
 - a. It seems there are always arguments against that we have to contend with.
 - b. And so if we are going to have a well grounded conviction in the continuance of the fourth commandment, we need to deal with the objections.

2. Why are there so many who deny the clear teaching of Scripture on the Sabbath? Let me suggest four reasons:
 - a. Some say that none of the Ten Commandments remain in force and so we don't need to keep the fourth.
 - b. Others suggest that since Christ has fulfilled the fourth commandment, we now keep it by trusting in Him and entering into His rest.
 - c. Some believe that not all of the Ten Commandments have been set aside, but the fourth has, since it is the only commandment not repeated in the New Testament.
 - d. And finally, there are those who believe that Christ Himself set it aside by divine revelation.
 - e. Let's consider these objections this evening in the hope of building a firmer conviction that the Lord desires us to sanctify His holy day.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, some suggest that none of the Ten Commandments remain in force and so we don't need to keep the fourth.
 1. They believe there is a clean break between the Old Covenant and the New.
 - a. The Mosaic Law was given to the Jews.
 - b. But now that we are under a new Mediator, we are also under a new law.

 2. There is a sense in which this is true, and a sense in which it isn't.
 - a. It's true that since we are no longer in the Old Covenant we don't need to keep the Ceremonial Law.
 - b. And it's true that in the New Covenant we are under the Law of Christ.
 - c. However, Christ, who has the absolute right to declare the terms of the New Covenant, did not abolish the Moral Law, but upheld it.
 - (i) "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. *Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven*" (Matt. 5:17-19).
 - (ii) He then went on in the Sermon on the Mount to correct the Jewish misinterpretation of the Law and to lift it back up to what God intended.
 - (iii) Since all these laws, even the least, are to be kept and taught, we must keep the Sabbath.

(iv) The Law of love, which the whole Law and Prophets depends on (Matt. 22:37-40), would also argue that we keep it: if we love God, we will certainly want to give Him the time He desires in worship.

B. Others suggest, second, that since Christ has fulfilled the fourth commandment through His own perfect obedience, we may now keep it by trusting in Him and entering into His rest.

1. If you ask them if they keep the Sabbath, they would say yes, they keep it in Christ.
2. Again, there's a sense in which that's true and a sense in which it isn't.
 - a. Christ is our righteousness – He has kept, not only the Sabbath, but the whole Law for us so that we might enter into heaven.
 - b. But does that mean we no longer need to obey the fourth commandment?
 - (i) Jesus obeyed the first three commandments: does that mean we're free now to worship false gods, worship the true God other than how He has commanded us, or to make false vows by His name?
 - (ii) Jesus obeyed the last six commandments: does that mean we're free to dishonor our parents, injure or kill others, commit adultery, steal, tell lies about others, and covet all we want?
 - (iii) Neither does it mean that we are free to break the fourth commandment merely because He kept it.
 - (iv) Christ did not obey the Law to give us the freedom to disobey, but to give us the power to obey it.

C. Third, others believe that though nine of the Ten Commandments have not been set aside, the fourth has – it's the only commandment not repeated in the New Testament.

1. The only way anyone can come to this conclusion is if they disregard what Jesus said in the Gospels.
 - a. There are those who believe that what Jesus taught had mainly to do with the Jews.
 - b. They believe the church should rely on the NT letters, since they were written to the NT church.
2. Again, it sounds plausible, until you consider a few things.
 - a. First, what Jesus taught in the Gospels was just as much for us as it was for the Jews of His day.
 - (i) Consider what Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 28, as He was commissioning them to build His church by reaching both Jews and Gentiles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:19-20).
 - (ii) They were to teach the nations to observe *all that Jesus commanded them*.
 - (iii) What did Jesus command them?

- (a) Among other things, He commanded them to keep the Sabbath.
 - (b) Jesus corrected the Jewish misinterpretations of the Sabbath, but He never told His disciples that it was abrogated.
 - (c) Far from that, Jesus declared the Sabbath to be made for man, and that He was the Lord of the Sabbath. “Jesus said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath’” (Mark 2:27-28).
- b. Consider, second, the passages we saw in the OT that the Sabbath would continue in the New Covenant, it would be a day of rejoicing (Ps. 118:22-23), and that those who honored it would be blessed (Isa. 56:1-7).
 - c. Consider, third, that the NT letter to the Hebrews tells us that there remains a Sabbath keeping for the people of God (Heb. 4:9-10).
 - d. As long as we are on this side of our heavenly rest, the Sabbath will continue as a picture of what we are to be striving to enter, and as an oasis to refresh our souls on the way.
- D. Finally, there are still others who believe that Christ Himself set the Sabbath aside by divine revelation.
- 1. They say the apostle Paul clearly identifies it as part of the Jewish economy that has passed away.
 - a. He writes in Romans 14:5, “One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.”
 - b. And he writes in Colossians 2:16-17, “Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath Day – things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.”
 - c. If these were the only passages we had on the subject, we might be tempted to conclude that the Sabbath was part of the Ceremonial Law that Christ fulfilled and set aside, and that our observance now was purely a matter of personal conviction.
 - 2. But this can’t be the case for several reasons.
 - a. First, it proves too much to say that every day is alike (Rom. 14:5).
 - (i) If there are no distinction of days, then when is the church supposed to meet?
 - (ii) Why did the early church meet consistently on the first day of the week?
 - (iii) The whole purpose of the fourth commandment was the fix the time of worship for the church – the seventh day, the whole day; don’t we need to worship any longer or to worship together?
 - (iv) Also, if there are no distinctions of days, then what was John referring to in Revelation by the Lord’s Day: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” (1:10)?
 - (a) The adjective used here, “Lord’s,” refers to something that particularly belongs to Him.
 - (b) It’s used only here and for one other ordinance: the Lord’s Supper.

- (c) John Murray argues that the Lord has left us with two memorials to the two pivotal points in Redemptive History – the Lord’s Supper to remind us of His death, and the Lord’s Day to remind us of His resurrection.
 - (d) It’s clear that He wants us to remember His resurrection on at least a weekly basis. What about His death?
- (v) The point is that Paul can’t be referring to the weekly Sabbath in Romans 14:5, because we’ve already seen that the Sabbath has been set apart both by divine example (Gen. 2:1-3) and appointment (Ex. 20:8-11).
 - (vi) A better interpretation would see it as referring to the Jewish feast days which were fulfilled by Christ, since their main purpose was to point to Him and to His work.
 - (a) These are the days, according to Paul, that may be regarded by some and not by others.
 - (b) Paul had no objection if the Jewish believers wanted to keep them because of custom.
 - (c) He had Timothy circumcised so as not to offend the Jews (Acts 16:1-3), and paid the expenses of four men under a vow to show that he himself still walked according to the Law of Moses (Acts 20:20-26).
 - (d) As long as they understood that it was merely religious custom and not a work to save themselves, he allowed it, but said that each must make their own determination and not try to bind another’s conscience (Murray Romans 2:258-259).
- b. Second, can it be that the fourth commandment Sabbath was part of the Ceremonial Law, and as such we are no longer bound to keep it? – Colossians 2:16-17, “Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath Day – things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” – This also can’t be true for several reasons.
- (i) Again, the Sabbath was instituted at the Creation, from the very beginning, long before the Ceremonial Law was instituted, to be a day of rest, worship and blessing for man.
 - (ii) The command to observe the Sabbath was written in stone, along with the other nine, and placed in the ark, and not in the book set beside the ark, showing that the Lord distinguished it from the Ceremonial Law.
 - (iii) Again, the OT predicted the continuance of the Sabbath, Christ enforced it, as well as the author to the Hebrews.
 - (iv) So what is Paul telling the Colossians that they are to avoid?
 - (a) Most likely, he is telling them to avoid the Judaizing notion that they needed to continue to keep the Sabbaths of the Ceremonial Law.
 - (b) John Owen writes, “It is known and confessed, that at that time all Judaical observations of days, of the days which they religiously observed, whether feast or fasts, weekly, monthly, or annual, were by themselves and all others called their Sabbaths, as we have before

[proven]. And that kind of speech which was then in common use is here observed by our apostle. It must, therefore, necessarily be allowed that there were two sorts of Sabbaths amongst them. The first and principal was the weekly Sabbath, so called from the rest of God upon the finishing of his works. This being designed for sacred and religious uses, other days separated unto the same ends in general came, from their analogy thereunto, to be called Sabbaths also, yea, were so called by God himself, as hath been declared. But the distinction and difference between these Sabbaths was great. The one of them was ordained from the foundation of the world, before the entrance of sin, or giving of the promises, and so belonged unto all mankind in general; the others were appointed in the wilderness as a part of the peculiar church worship of the Israelites, and so belonged unto them only. The one of them was directly commanded in the Decalogue [*i.e.*, the Ten Commandments], wherein the law of our creation was revived and expressed; the others have their institution expressly among the residue of ceremonial, temporary ordinances” (Hebrews 2:382).

- (c) These are the Sabbaths Paul is referring to. It becomes even clearer now when we reread the text, “Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath Day – things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col. 2:16-17). Everything else in the passage refers to the Ceremonial Law.
- c. The point is, the Lord has not said yes and no to the Sabbath.
 - (i) He clearly shows us that the fourth commandment remains in force, which means if we are going to love God and walk with Him, we must honor His holy day through rest and worship.
 - (ii) Next week, we’ll consider which day of the week He wants us to observe this Sabbath. Amen.