"Remember the Sabbath to Keep It Holy"
(Exodus 20:8-11)

Introduction: Last week we finished the third commandment, and now we are moving on to the fourth. By now you should understand what is meant by the fact that the Ten Commandments are a SUMMARY of our whole duty both to God and man. They are very broad; they cover a vast area of responsibility. The analogy that I used earlier is that they are the chapter titles of a much more lengthy book. Perhaps it may be more accurate to say that they are the book titles of much more lengthy books. Or even the set titles of a lengthy sets of books. The psalmist said, "THY COMMANDMENT IS EXCEEDINGLY BROAD" (Ps. 119:96b). You might of thought that I was spending a great deal of time on each commandment. But we could easily spend the rest of our lives on them and still not run out of material for new sermons. What I am trying to do is to survey the breadth of the landscape without going too deep to show you the direction of the Lord for your life.

As I've said, tonight we are moving on the fourth commandment, the keeping of the Sabbath Day of the Lord holy. Of all the commandments, this one is probably the most controversial. In the many churches today we find a broad range of convictions with regard to it. Some believe that there is no Sabbath. They believe that whereas the other nine are repeated in the New Testament, the fourth commandment is not. And so they do not observe a day to the Lord, but choose a day which is convenient for all to worship on. Some believe that the Sabbath is still in force, because it was never abrogated by the New Testament. Some believe that the day that is to be observed is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. So say the Seventh Day Adventists, and some baptist groups. There are also differences of opinion within the Reformed camp. Some say that the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ and that we no longer need to keep it. There is not even a day which is specified as the day of worship in the Scriptures. However, it is a good idea to have a day designated for worship, so that all will be able to meet together. There are still others who hold to a strict Sabbath, believing that the day is still in force in its original form. They also believe that the day which is to be observed has been changed from Saturday to Sunday, and that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day, the day in which Christians should worship. Even within the OPC there are differences of opinion on exactly what the Scriptures say. There are some who believe, as many of the non-Reformed groups do, that the Sabbath has been fulfilled by Christ and that the Christian need no longer observe it. If you can make it to one of the services, well and good. What you do on the rest of the day is not important to the Lord, as long as you don't sin, for that is always forbidden. On the other hand, there are those who believe that the Sabbath is still in force much as it was under the Old Covenant. The Lord changed the day to the first day of the week, but it is still to be a day wholly consecrated to the Lord for worship and rest. This is the position which our *Westminster Confession of Faith* takes. But even so, there are probably many shades of variation among our church officers, some accepting certain aspects of it, and rejecting others. All this is to say that the subject of the Sabbath is not an easy one. It is very complicated and involved. But it is an important one, one upon which the well-being of the church, or the lack of it, rests. Sabbath breaking may be the main cause of spiritual lethargy in our churches today.

The position that I am going to try to defend is that of the *Westminster Confession*, for I believe it to be biblical. I hope that I never try and defend any doctrine simply because it is included in the *Confession*, or because it is Reformed. All Christians are called upon by God to examine all things carefully and to hold fast that which is good, even if it puts you at odds with your church. Better to be at odds with your church, than to be at odds with the Lord. But our Confession is a sound and biblical one. And I believe that it is right on target here.

What I would like to do over the next several Lord's Day evenings is to look at what the fourth commandment says, show that it still remains in force, show that the day in which it is to be observed has been changed, but that its character is essentially the same as in the Old Covenant. Then we will end by looking at how the day is to be observed to the honor and glory of God. I believe that if we take this commandment to heart, that we could see the reversal of a great deal of spiritual deadness in Christ's church, and perhaps the beginning of a revival. Tonight, I want to begin by looking at the fact that,

The Sabbath still continues to be in force in the New Covenant.

I. We Must First Of All Consider That Not Everything Alike is Clear in the Scriptures.

A. There Are Those Doctrines Which Are Plainly and Explicitly Revealed in the Scripture, and There Are Those Which Must Be Deduced from Scripture.

1. For instance, we may turn to 2 Timothy 3:16 and learn that the Scriptures are God-breathed, or inspired by God; we may turn to Deuteronomy 6:4 and learn that there is only one God; and we may turn to Acts 16:31 and find that a person may be saved by faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. But to which verse would you turn to show that the Bible teaches the Trinity, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the inerrancy of Scripture, or the falsity of the notion of apostolic succession?

a. Isn't this one of the reasons why there is so much debate over what the Bible teaches on these subjects.

b. There are other reasons as well, such as unbelief, sin, lack of education, not having the gifts to understand some of the things of God, the influence of our church upbringing, etc.

c. But sometimes the difficulty lies in the fact that there is no verse and chapter to point to, but that it must be deduced from several passages.

d. Don't misunderstand at this point, the fact that it is more difficult to see, does not make it any less true.

B. If Any Truth Is Revealed to Us in Scripture, It Is to Be Believed and Practiced.

1. Such is the case with the Sabbath day. It is more difficult to see everything which is revealed about it. But it is not impossible.

2. And so I want to deal first with the issue of whether or not the Sabbath is revealed as continuing in the New Covenant. But I will do so from a variety of passages and arguments.

II. There Are Good Reasons to Compel Us to Believe that the Sabbath Does Continue to be in Force Today.

A. First of All, There Is the Matter of the Duty of Worship Which All Men Owe to God.

1. Since God does exist, and since He has commanded that all men worship Him, then there must be time set aside for that purpose.

2. And since God is holy and will not be easily slighted, it is important that the right situation exist where we can devote ourselves whole-heartedly to worship Him, without being interrupted by such matters as work, or recreation.

3. It would also be wise, that this time be the same for all men, so that they would not interrupt one another, but rather help one another. This would especially be true if they were to worship God as a community, rather than as individuals. It would be difficult in any society of people for everyone to have a different time to worship.

B. *Secondly, If Men Are to Take Seriously the Fact that They Should Worship God, Then the Questions Arise: How Often and How Long?*

1. *Does it matter how often I worship God? Can it be once a year? Once every two years? Or 100 times a day?*
   a. *If the times of my personal worship are too far apart, I may tend to forget God.*
   b. *On the other hand, if they are too close, it may not leave me with the time I need for the other necessities of making a living and raising my children.*
   c. *There must be a frequency which will work better than another.*

2. *And there is the question of how long I am to worship God.*
   a. *If the time is too short, it may not be enough to really get the things of the world out of my mind and to focus on the Lord.*
   b. *And yet if it is too long, it may again interrupt those other things I need to do to support my family.*
   c. *But yet, knowing that there is a God, and knowing that this God ought to be worshiped, these are things that you and I must work out in order to please God.*
   d. *Now since we do have a revelation from God in the Scriptures on how to know Him and love Him, would it be reasonable to suppose that He did not reveal it there?*

C. *It Would Not Be Unreasonable for Us To Suppose that This Was God's Original Intention in His Creative Pattern at the Beginning.*

1. *In chapter 2 of Genesis, verses 1-3, we read, "THUS THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH WERE COMPLETED, AND ALL THEIR HOSTS. AND BY THE SEVENTH DAY GOD COMPLETED HIS WORK WHICH HE HAD DONE; AND HE RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORK WHICH HE HAD DONE. THEN GOD BLESSED THE SEVENTH DAY AND SANCTIFIED IT, BECAUSE IN IT HE RESTED FROM ALL HIS WORK WHICH GOD HAD CREATED AND MADE."*
2. *What better time to introduce the frequency and length of time which man was to devote to his Creator than at the beginning, when He first made man. After all, man was not made simply to worship God formally in the garden all his days, stopping only to eat and to sleep. Man was put in the garden "TO CULTIVATE IT AND TO KEEP IT [or guard it]" (Gen. 2:15). He therefore needed revelation from God to show him how often and how long to worship the One who had created him.*
3. *And it would not be unreasonable to suppose that God's working six days in creating, resting the seventh, and then blessing and sanctifying the day was meant to show us ~~that~~ this very thing. He surely didn't rest on that day, bless it and sanctify it for His own benefit, but for man's.*
4. *And notice that He didn't do this for the Jews only, as though it was a later innovation of the Law, but for man when He created him. He intended this to be a pattern for ~~men~~ all men, that they should work six days, and rest the seventh, sanctifying and hallowing it.*
5. *And so we see here that the Bible does give us the frequency, one day in seven, and the length, one day.*

D. *But We Have More than Reason to Rely on, and Reasonable Inferences. We Have the Direct Commandment of God Himself.*

1. *God clearly tells us what His will is in the fourth commandment. "REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY. SIX DAYS YOU SHALL LABOR AND DO ALL YOUR WORK, BUT THE SEVENTH DAY IS A SABBATH OF*

THE LORD YOUR GOD; IN IT YOU SHALL NOT DO ANY WORK, YOU OR YOUR SON OR YOUR DAUGHTER, YOUR MALE OR YOUR FEMALE SERVANT OR YOUR CATTLE OR YOUR SOJOURNER WHO STAYS WITH YOU. 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 MADE IT HOLY" (Ex. 20:8-11).

2. *This command, along with all the others, is the unchanging moral standard of God. It was not only for Israel, but for all men, for all nations. All will be judged by this and by no other standard. Every nation must keep every seventh day holy.*
3. *The fact that it is unchanging is brought out by the fact that it was engraved in stone by the very finger of God, along with the other 9. The ceremonial laws were not engraved in stone, but written in a book set beside the ark. They were abrogated in their old form by Christ's fulfillment. The moral laws however do not change. They cannot change, for God doesn't change.*
4. *Neither did Christ abolish the Sabbath, but upheld it in the Gospels. He said, "THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN, AND NOT MAN FOR THE SABBATH. CONSEQUENTLY, THE SON OF MAN IS LORD EVEN OF THE SABBATH" (Mark 2:27-28). This is important to realize, for only God can nullify or abrogate a law which He sets in force. And neither Christ nor the apostles anywhere set the Sabbath aside.*
5. *There are some who say that the apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, set aside the Sabbath.*
   a. *They argue first that Paul eliminates the Sabbath in Romans 14:5, where he writes, "ONE MAN REGARDS ONE DAY ABOVE ANOTHER, ANOTHER REGARDS EVERY DAY ALIKE. LET EACH MAN BE FULLY CONVINCED IN HIS OWN MIND."*
      (i) *On the surface, this passage does seem to destroy any possibility of a Sabbath, and seems to leave it in the hands of man as to which day he will regard, if any.*
      (ii) *But this argument, if this is what Paul meant by his statement, proves too much. It destroys any distinction in days. When then is the church of God to bring its sacrifice of praise to God? Edwards writes, "For it is the very design of the command to fix the time of worship. The first command fixes the object, the second the means, the third the manner, the fourth the time" (Works 2:95).*
      (iii) *But there is a distinction of days mentioned in the Bible. John tells us, in Revelation 1:10, "I WAS IN THE SPIRIT ON THE LORD'S DAY."*
      (iv) *The adjective used here which is translated "Lord's" is used in only one other context, that of the Lord's Supper. It is used to refer to something which is uniquely the Lord's, something set aside for His purposes.*
      (v) *John Murray has argued that the Lord has left us with two memorials to the two major pivotal points in redemptive history. Those two pivotal points are His death and His resurrection. The two memorials are the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day. The Lord's Supper causes us to remember His death, and the Lord's Day causes us to remember His resurrection for it was on this day that He rose again from the dead.*
      (vi) *This, by the way, also argues strongly for a weekly communion, for it would be appropriate to remember both His death and His resurrection weekly.*

(vii) *But the point that I want you to see here is that Paul cannot be referring to the Sabbath in Romans 14:5, for it is clear that the Lord's Day is set apart by divine example and appointment.*

(viii) *A better interpretation of this passage 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. These days, according to Paul, may be regarded by some and not by others. If the Jews wanted to keep them because of custom, he had no objection. He himself had had Timothy circumcised so as not to offend the Jews (Acts 16:1-3), and he had paid the expenses of four men under a vow and purified himself ceremonially to show that he himself still walked according to the Law (Acts 20:20-26). As long as it was understood that it was merely religious custom and not a compromise of the Gospel, it was allowable, and men may make their own decisions with regard to it (Murray Romans 2:258-259).*

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b. *Another verse which is appealed to in Paul's writings which is believed to teach the abolishment of the Sabbath is Colossians 2:16-17, which reads, "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."*

(i) *It appears from this passage that the Sabbath was merely a part of the ceremonial law which was fulfilled in Christ. Now that the substance has come, the shadow has passed away.*

(ii) *But there are several problems with this interpretation. First, the word for "Sabbath" is in the plural, not the singular. There were other sabbaths which were a part of the ceremonial system of law. QUOTE OWEN.* all these times are Judaical rel. days, feasts, fasts, weekly, monthly, annual, sacrificial by the moths + other Sabbaths. The text simply to speak ceremonial Colossians may also refer to Sabbatical years (Lev. Hebrews 4 vs 1-3).

(iii) *It is more likely these Sabbaths which were done away with and not the weekly Sabbath. Is Paul now saying that man does not need time to worship God? That God is not concerned if man works seven days a week and sets no time aside to worship Him? What has changed in the New Covenant to bring this about? Surely we have more reason to worship Him now than then, for the New Covenant reveals an even greater grace to us.*

(iv) *This would also constitute a change in the Ten Commandments. But aren't these commandments the unchanging moral requirements of God's righteousness? Isn't this why they were originally engraved in stone by the finger of God? And isn't it also true that the ceremonial commands were kept in a separate book beside the ark, rather than in the ark of the Covenant, as were the 10 Commandments? (Even if the fourth commandment were non-moral in nature, as those who hold this position maintain, does that prove that it does not continue today?)*

(v) *And in light of the several references to a continuing Sabbath in the New Covenant, this cannot be the correct interpretation.*

(a) *In Isaiah 56, Isaiah is speaking of the blessings of the New Covenant which are about to be brought in. We know this because it speaks of the breaking down of the ceremonial laws and the bringing in of the Gentiles. At that time, the Lord declares, "THUS SAYS THE LORD, 'PRESERVE JUSTICE, AND DO RIGHTEOUSNESS, FOR MY SALVATION IS ABOUT TO COME AND MY RIGHTEOUSNESS TO BE REVEALED. HOW BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO DOES THIS, AND THE SON OF MAN WHO TAKES HOLD OF IT' WHO KEEPS FROM PROFANING THE SABBATH, AND KEEPS HIS HAND FROM DOING ANY EVIL.' LET NOT THE FOREIGNER WHO HAS JOINED HIMSELF TO THE LORD SAY, 'THE LORD WILL SURELY SEPARATE ME FROM HIS PEOPLE.' NEITHER LET THE EUNUCH SAY, 'BEHOLD I AM A DRY TREE.' FOR THUS SAYS THE LORD, 'TO THE EUNUCHS WHO KEEP MY SABBATHS, AND CHOOSE WHAT PLEASES ME, AND HOLD FAST MY COVENANT, TO THEM I WILL GIVE IN MY HOUSE AND WITHIN MY WALLS A MEMORIAL, AND A NAME BETTER THAN THAT OF SONS AND DAUGHTERS; I WILL GIVE THEM AN EVERLASTING NAME THAT WILL NOT BE CUT OFF. ALSO THE FOREIGNERS WHO JOIN THEMSELVES TO THE LORD, TO MINISTER TO HIM, AND TO LOVE THE NAME OF THE LORD, TO BE HIS SERVANTS, EVERY ONE WHO KEEPS FROM PROFANING THE SABBATH, AND HOLDS FAST MY COVENANT; EVEN THOSE I WILL BRING TO MY HOLY MOUNTAIN, AND MAKE THEM JOYFUL IN MY HOUSE OF PRAYER. THEIR BURNT OFFERINGS AND THEIR SACRIFICES WILL BE ACCEPTABLE ON MY ALTAR; FOR MY HOUSE WILL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE PEOPLES" (Isa. 56:1-7). The eunuch was excluded by the ceremonial law from the assembly of the Lord. It isn't until the New Covenant that we see eunuchs included, such as the Ethiopian eunuch of the court of Candace to whom Philip spoke. At that time, the Sabbath is still in effect.*

(b) *Jesus also spoke of the Sabbath as being in force after His death and resurrection. In Matthew 24, speaking of the future destruction of Jerusalem, He says, "BUT PRAY THAT YOU FLIGHT MAY NOT BE IN THE WINTER OR ON A SABBATH" (v. 20). If the Sabbath were abolished with Christ's coming, this statement would have no meaning.*

(c) *And the author to the Hebrews also tells us, "THERE REMAINS THEREFORE A SABBATH REST FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD" (4:9). The word translated "Sabbath rest" refers literally to the keeping of a day as holy to the Lord.*

(d) *The weekly Sabbath is not abolished or nullified by Paul, or by any of the New Testament writers, but it remains in force.*

6. *There are those who would argue that Christ fulfilled the righteousness of the Law, and therefore it is not necessary to keep this commandment any longer. The only rest that we observe is resting in Christ.*
   a. *But what is true of one is also true of all. Does this mean that the Christian can now murder, commit adultery, lie, steal, and dishonor his parents? That of course would be ridiculous.*

b. *Christ's fulfilling the righteousness of the Law does make the imputation of that perfect righteousness possible to those who believe in Him, but it does not take away any of our responsibility to walk in the holy requirements of God.*

7. *Lastly, there are also those who say that of all the Ten Commandments the fourth commandment dealing with the Sabbath is the only one not repeated in the New Testament.*
   a. *We've already seen that that is not true. God said that the Sabbath would continue in the New Covenant dispensation through Isaiah the prophet, Jesus said that it continued in His time and that it would continue in the future, and the author to the Hebrews tells us that there yet remains a "SABBATH KEEPING" for the people of God. As long as we are yet on this side of our heavenly rest, there will be the Sabbath to picture that rest earned by Christ, and to give us the refreshment that we need to finally reach it.*
   b. *People of God, the fourth commandment is binding upon us as Christians today. It is important therefore that we know what it says and observe it in the way that God would require.*
   c. *Next week, we will look at the change of the day on which the Sabbath is observed, and see even more evidence of its continuance in the New Covenant. May God help us by His grace to honor Him on His holy day. Amen.*