

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

(According to the original book by H.H. Pope Shenouda, III)

### *The Fourth Commandment*

***"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"***

*"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 to the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work: you, your son or your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Ex. 20:8--11), (Deut. 5:12--18)*

- **Remember The Sabbath Day And Keep It Holy:**

It is a blessed day, a day of **rest in the Lord**. It is an old Commandment given by God to people before writing down the Ten Commandments. Or we may say it is the first Commandment that the Lord God Himself carried out before giving to the people. Ought not we to carry it out rather more?

This commandment dates back to the beginning of the world when the divine inspiration said, *"So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it because on it God rested from all the work that He had done in creation" (Gen. 2:3)*. God blessed and consecrated the Sabbath before giving the Law or the commandments.

God did great things. He created the light, the heavens, sea, earth, plants, the sun, the moon, and the stars, the animals and man. It is not said about any of the days of creation that God blessed it. It was just said, *"And God saw it was good" or "it was very good" (Gen. 1:12, 18, 21, 25, 31)*.

**The only day that God blessed and consecrated was the day of rest to show us that labor and working - even though useful and productive - cannot be blessed as one calm day which man spends with God.**

Imagine! Even creating the sun, the moon and the stars does not equal a calm day away from work. Martha was doing many good deeds, causing joy, by which she served the Lord, however all her deeds did not match what Mary did by sitting calmly at the feet of the Lord Christ.

- **When Did The Lord God Rest?**

God blessed the seventh day because He rested on that day. But what does the word "rested" mean? Does God get tired and needs to rest? Or "rest" represents some great meaning, which we shall understand on these pages?

**And what thing God toiled for; is it the making of the world, or the redemption? The creation of the world did not take from God any effort but giving the order or just willing** as David the Prophet says, *"For He spoke, and it came to be; He commanded, and it stood firm" (Ps. 33:9)*. He said *"Let there be light"*

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and there was light...Let the waters under the sky be gathered, and it was so. Let the earth put forth vegetation ... and it was so... What toil did all this cause to God? None.

**But the real toil was in the redemption**, for it required from God to be incarnate, to quit His glory and take the form of a slave, to labor, receive insult, be crucified, suffer, die and rise again. This is the real hard labor.

**Therefore the true rest God took was after the salvation of man, while the rest on the Sabbath had been just a symbol of the true rest after the redemption.**

On that Great Friday He exterminated sin through death and He had still to put an end to death that was the wage of sin (*Rom. 6:23*) which thing He performed on Sunday by His Resurrection. Only then God rested from His work; for what use would there be of creating mankind if they were all to go to death and perdition?

The Lord God did not toil in creating man but really toiled in saving him. So the Sabbath of the Old Testament was just a symbol.

**Furthermore, the word Sabbath is a Hebrew word which means rest, and the real rest God obtained was on Sunday when He condemned sin and overcame death.** Thus Sunday is called the Lord's Day of which David said, *"This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it"*. This is the Sabbath in its spiritual not literal meaning.

- **When Was The Commandment Of The Sabbath Given?**

It is older than the Ten Commandments. Therefore when God wrote it on the first tablet, He started it with the word *"Remember"* to remind them of it. The Ten Commandments are written in Exodus, Chapter 20, while the Commandment of the Sabbath comes in chapter 16 with the rules of gathering the manna.

God rained manna from heaven for them and they were allowed to gather it day by day and on the sixth day gather twice as much as they gather on other days. And Moses told them *"This is what the Lord has commanded: Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning"* (*Ex. 16:23*).

So they put it aside until morning and it did not become foul, and Moses said, *"Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none...See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath, therefore on the Sixth day He gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are so the people rested on the seventh day"* (*Ex. 16:22-30*).

Thus they kept the Sabbath holy; they worked nothing on it nor came out of their houses to search for food. They did not even cook but they rested. God blessed the bread of Friday giving them double the amount.

**The blessing they had on Friday in the manna given them from heaven was a symbol of the blessing given to the whole world by the Lord Jesus Christ** *"the bread of life...that came down from heaven... whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the worm is My flesh"* (*Jn. 6:32-51*).

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God gave the commandment of the Sabbath among the commands concerning the manna as we have seen, then He put it in the Ten Commandments written in Exodus and Deuteronomy, and repeated it many times in Exodus as well as in the prophets... Any work on the Sabbath was thus considered defiling the Sabbath.

- **Seriousness of the Commandment of the Sabbath and the punishment of violating it:**

Some people often make light of the Commandment of the Sabbath thinking it less serious than the other Commandments: you shall not kill, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, etc., while God mentioned it before all the other commandments. Its seriousness appears in that its punishment was putting to death the person who violates it as God said to Moses, "*You shall keep the Sabbath because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people... Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death*" (Ex. 31:14-17).

The same punishment was mentioned again in (Ex. 35:1-3) "*on the seventh day, you shall have a holy Sabbath of solemn rest to the Lord; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. You shall kindle no fire in all your dwellings on the Sabbath day*".

So, breaking the Sabbath or defiling it was not a slight sin as some may think; for whoever did so was put to death and cut off his people. A **practical example of this is stated** in Numbers (15:32-36): "*when the Israelites were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. Those who found him, brought him to Moses. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him outside the camp'. The whole congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death, just as the Lord had commanded*".

**God even threatened all the city of Jerusalem of the same punishment for breaking the Sabbath.** He said, "*But if you do not listen to Me, to keep the Sabbath day holy... then I will kindle a fire in its gates; it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem and shall not be quenched*" (Jer. 17:27).

Keeping the Sabbath was the concern of Nehemia after the return from captivity. When he saw people working on the Sabbath he said, "*Then I remonstrated with the nobles of Judah and said to them 'What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your ancestors act in this way, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us... Yet you bring more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath'*" (Neh. 13:17-18). And he warned them he would lay hands on them if they did so again.

Ezekiel the prophet also talked much about profaning the Sabbath saying that because of it God said, "*I would pour out My wrath upon them and spend My anger against them in the wilderness*" (Ezek. 20:21).

**All these punishments demonstrate how serious keeping the Lord's day is.**

Do we now keep the Lord's day to make it holy, or neglect that, seeing that there is no punishment now? Today, who breaks the Lord's day is not cast out of the camp, not killed, nor stoned. Would this be a cause for us to neglect God's commandments? God forbids.

- **Rest For All People Because He Knows Our Nature:**

Moses the prophet said, "*See, the Lord has given you the Sabbath*". Great! It is then a gift or a reward from God, not a burden or a heavy load.

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Because God created us, He knows our nature that it needs one day rest every week. So, **keeping the Sabbath is useful for you**. You cannot work every day. Your body is like a machine that has a certain capacity, if you run it at a greater capacity it will be damaged. Your body is the same; its capacity is to work 6 days a week. If you make it work seven days, it will be damaged. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ said, *"The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath"* (Mk. 2:27).

Many people work continually, weeks pass without their taking any rest. Some are taken by heart failure, others by angina pectoris or nervous breakdown. So, God gave you the Sabbath as a gift for rest, and you should thank Him for it. *"You shall not do any work-you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave...Remember that you were a slave..."* (Deut. 5:15).

Here the spirit of mercy and equality is clear in the Law. It is not proper that the master takes rest while the servants go on working. It is not proper that the old take rest while the young go on working. All must take rest as the Scriptures say, *"so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you"* (Deut. 5:14). *Even the livestock need rest because they have bodies like us!*

Some may think that the donkey for example does not get tired and they say "donkey work"! But the Scriptures say something different, *"Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed"* (Ex. 23:12). How merciful God's heart is!

- **Even The Solid Land Takes Rest:**

God gave rest even to the solid land, He said: *"For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow"* (Ex. 23:10).

In our days, we complain that the crops are weak. There are many reasons among which is that the land takes no rest. God created the earth with its land and knows its nature; so He commanded that it should take rest every seven years, to enjoy its Sabbath as well. We are not wiser than God!

We cultivate the land unceasingly and it does not yield all its power. You may say 'I cultivate it for seven years to have yield? But I say to you: Even if you cultivate it for six years only, it will give you more yield. If you obtain 6 ardeb (an Egyptian measure of capacity) per year for seven years, it will yield a total of 42 ardebs. But if you cultivate it for 6 years only, it will give you 9 ardebs a year with a total of 54 ardebs, much more than 42.

*"We should not forget that when God ordered to rest the land the seventh year, He gave His blessing in the sixth year so that the land yielded a crop for three years"* (Lev. 25:20-22).

This is God's way in giving rest to someone or something. He gives more fruit. By this He teaches us that coveting for worldly matters destroys us spiritually, physically and financially.

Take for example a person who works the whole week; his health gets worse, his nerves and spirituality break down. He cries to the Lord, but the Lord replies, 'I have given you the Sabbath, but you did not obey'!

- **Blessings of Keeping the Sabbath:**

If you keep the Lord's day, you will benefit physically and spiritually. Moreover, you will have a blessing

according to the Lord's promise, *"Who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it...and hold fast My covenant - these I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar...I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off"* (Isa. 56:2-7). He also said, *"If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath, from pursuing your own interests on My holy day; if you call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable...then you shall take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth..."* (Isa. 58:13,14).

- **The Sabbath Is Given As A Sign:**

The Sabbath was a sign as the Lord said, *"You shall keep My Sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you"* (Ex. 31:13).

**So, the Sabbatherians say: as long as the Sabbath is a sign, it should not be changed or replaced! But we answer them "Circumcision was also a sign, and it is replaced by baptism".** Circumcision was certainly a sign as it is written, *"This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you...Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you"* (Gen. 17:10,11).

**These two signs then; the circumcision and the Sabbath, were distinguished but were also symbols replaced in Christianity by the things they symbolized.**

Circumcision was the removal of a part of the body to make it die, which symbolized mortifying the body and its lusts. This was a symbol of baptism which is death with Christ (Rom. 6:3,4) and so was replaced by it.

The Sabbath was a sign for rest, bodily rest, and it was replaced by the rest of the spirit when we rested from sin and death. Thus it was replaced by Sunday on which the Lord took real rest as we explained earlier. What is the Sabbath but the Lord's day that we should keep holy? In its essence it is not abolished; for we still honor the Lord's day, but in a more powerful way.

The Sabbath was a sign. But of what? The Lord says, *"a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you"* On Sunday we feel this actually; for we remember how the Lord sanctified us with His holy blood putting an end to sin and death. But on the old Sabbath, I wonder how they felt the Lord had sanctified them!

When we keep the Lord's day holy, we remember that He sanctified us with His death and resurrection. You may ask: We know that the Lord sanctified us when He exterminated sin by His death. But how did He sanctify us when He overcome death by His resurrection? Death in the Old Testament was a punishment, the wage of sin, and whoever touched a dead body was defiled because the dead died with his sin. But now, as the Lord Christ died for us and paid off the wage of our sins, He sanctified our dead. Thus, death became just departure and who touch a dead is not defiled anymore since the Lord exterminated the power and sting of death by His death.

They say also that the Sabbath was a sign of delivery from servitude as the Scriptures say, *"Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there...therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day"* (Deut. 5:15).

This servitude was a symbol of the servitude of sin, while coming out of the servitude of Pharaoh was a symbol of coming out of the servitude of Satan which has been realized when the Lord Christ overcame death on Sunday.

- **Saturday and Sunday:**

To those who argue if Saturday is still the Lord's day or is replaced by Sunday, we say the express words of St. Paul the Apostle, *"Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons or Sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come"* (Col. 2-16,17). These are only symbols and references to the spiritual matters of the New Testament.

The same was said also about the circumcision (*Acts 15:10-24*). It was only a sign just as the Sabbath.

When God rested on the seventh day from creating the world, this was a symbol of His true rest when He redeemed us and overcame death on Sunday. Even this Sunday on which we rest refers to the great Sabbath in the everlasting eternity *"when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father... The last enemy to be destroyed is death... So that God may be all in all"* (1Cor. 15:24-28). Only then we come to the everlasting rest, the rest of eternity.

**This small Sabbath then has changed into Sunday in Christianity. On that day the disciples used to meet and break bread (Acts 2:46). It is also the day on which the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples and the early Church was founded. It was on Sunday also that the Lord Christ appeared to the disciples and women.** The main point is that we keep the Lord's day holy and make of it a blessing to our lives and rejoice and be joyful on it in the Lord.

- **You Shall Not Do Any Work:**

The Law commanded that no work be done on the Lord's day. And as they were used to celebrate the Sabbath from evening to evening (*Lev. 23:32*), they prepared themselves from Friday and they called Friday *"the day of preparation"* (*Lk. 23:54*).

**The Jews used to carry out the Commandment "you shall not do any work" in a literal way lacking spirit. Even doing good on the Sabbath was considered by them a sin! So they opposed the Lord Christ regarding this matter.**

But the commandment not to work on that day did not mean turning the Lord's day into a day of laziness, sleep and rest in bed! Good things ought to be done on it. So a question that caused argument between the Jews and the Lord Christ was, *"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"* (*Mt. 12:10, Lk. 14:3*).

**The Lord used to heal and teach on the Sabbath.** The Lord used intentionally to heal many people on the Sabbath:

- **The man born blind was healed by the Lord on the Sabbath intentionally** *"Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes"* (*Jn. 9:14*). He was born blind and the Lord could have healed him on any other day. It would not matter if he continued blind another day. But the Lord made it with purpose to establish a rule concerning the Sabbath. He created eyes to the blind, out of the mud, in a miraculous way that demonstrated His divinity, but the Jews were literal and did not see the greatness and significance of the miracle but only said that He was a sinner because He did not observe the Sabbath (*Jn. 9:16,24*).
- **The Lord also healed the man with the withered hand, and discussed the matter with them if it was lawful to cure on the Sabbath** (*Mt. 12:10-13*). He said to them, *"Suppose one of you has only one*

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*sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep/ So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath".*

- **He healed on the Sabbath also the woman who the devil crippled for eighteen years.** He said to the leader of the synagogue, *"You hypocrites. Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the Sabbath day?" (Lk. 13:10-16).*
- **The Lord healed also the man at Bethesda who had been ill for 38 years.** The Lord could have healed him at any other day no matter if the 38 years increased by one or two days. But the Lord wanted to give a principle, He did not only heal the man but also ordered him to carry his bed and walk (*Jn. 5:2-8*).
- On the Sabbath, He healed also the man who had dropsy (*Lk. 14:1-6*).
- Furthermore, when His disciples plucked heads of grain on the Sabbath and the Pharisees objected, He answered them, *"The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:23-28)*, and said to them, *"I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Mt. 12:7).*
- To prove to them that a spiritual work is lawful on the Sabbath He said, *"On the Sabbath, the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and yet are guiltless" (Mt. 12:5, 6).* By this, He **meant circumcision on the Sabbath**; for a child was to be circumcised on the eighth day, and if this came on a Sabbath, he was circumcised and yet they were guiltless. Thus He said to them, *"If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with Me because I healed a man's whole body on the Sabbath?" (Jn. 7:21-23).*
- **Doing Mercy On The Sabbaths:**

We ought not understand the commandment of the Sabbath in a literal way, *"for the letter kills" (2Cor. 3:6).* Let us see some examples for this:

- Suppose a physician keeps the Lord's day holy by not working on it, and one Sunday a person in danger, about to die called for his help, would he say: No, let him die and the Lord's day be not broken! In this case the physician has no mercy and God desires mercy and not sacrifice. It does not mean that a physician ought to open his clinic every day without need waiting for the clients, giving himself excuse that his work is to comfort people's pains! No. We mean only urgent cases. For example a surgery which can be postponed for some days should not be performed on the Lord's day. But if it was so urgent that if it is not performed immediately the patient would die, doing it will not be breaking of the Lord's day. The same applies if it is necessary for a patient to have some injection at a certain time or have a wound dressed on Sundays.
- Another example: a house is on fire on a Sunday; would we say: This is the Lord's day, we leave it to burn today and put out fire from the remaining part on Monday! This is unreasonable. The same can be said in case of a person who is drowning or a case which needs urgent help or a merciful work that cannot be postponed.
- **Religious Teaching And Worship On The Lord's Day:**

God has commanded that the Sabbath be allocated to worship *"a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation" (Lev. 23:3).* It means that spiritual meetings should be held on it. He said also, *"from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before Me" (Isa. 66:23).* He ordered also that burnt offerings and grain offerings be offered to Him on the Sabbath (*Ezek. 46:4*). The Holy Scriptures were also read on that day *"For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every Sabbath in the Synagogues" (Acts 15:21).*

**Not only was the Sabbath a day for worship, but also for teaching. The Lord Christ taught on the**

**Sabbath (Mk. 6:2). His apostles did so as well.**

St. Paul the Apostle used to teach in the synagogues every Sabbath *"Every Sabbath he would argue in the Synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks" (Acts 18:4)*. And in Thessalonica, *"Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days argued with them from the Scriptures" (Acts 17:1,2)*.

**Therefore the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church in the Mass every Sunday, and sermons are delivered to the people, and children are taught in the Sunday schools.**

The Lord's day is not a day for laziness and sluggishness, but a day for worship, contemplation, spiritual meetings and readings and not just stopping worldly works; otherwise we would be negative on it.

**The expression "Keep Holy" means "designating". Keeping the day holy, then, means designating it for the Lord, and so it is called the Lord's day because on it He rests as He rested on the Seventh day and our spirits rest in Him.**

Be careful also not to think that the Lord's day means taking rest at home, listening to the radio, reading newspapers and magazines or entertaining yourself in places of amusement. Remember rather that the Lord requires you to make this day holy for Him.

- **It Is A Day For The Lord:**

You do not own this day to act on it as you like. It is the Lord's, you should give it to Him; learn verses from the Holy Bible, learn hymns, sing for the Lord and praise Him, pray, serve the Lord, visit His children or contemplate on the Holy Books. Do not spend it in making errands, shopping, or cleaning your house. Let all the day be for the Lord.

**If you cannot give all the day to the Lord, in case you are not on holiday in your work, give what you can out of it to the Lord and compensate the rest on another day.**

**A Story:**

One day a rich man was returning home in his car after shopping, and he was stopped on a sudden by a godly man crying to him 'Take care, you man, see what you are treading on'. He stopped quickly thinking he ran over a child, but he found nothing. He asked that godly man who answered him, 'You are treading on the Lord's day. You tread on the Fourth Commandment'.

**See what St. John the Beloved said in the Revelation, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10).** What a beautiful verse to contemplate on and to carry out in your life.

Do the works that make you grow spiritually; for as your body is in need of rest, your spirit also needs to rest - in the Lord.