

Part 32 The Third and Fourth Commandments (20:7-11)

The Third Commandment

• *The point – to protect the holy character of God*

The **third commandment** refers to the way in which we think and talk about God. God had revealed His name, Yahweh, to Israel. He made known His holy character. He revealed Himself as the God who redeems by the blood of the lamb. The point of the third commandment was to protect the holy character of God. No one in Israel was allowed to start casually speaking of Yahweh with no special purpose in his talk. It would give a false impression of Yahweh, the God who had redeemed the people by the blood of the passover lamb.

• *God's name not to be used casually*

Negatively, the third command meant that one was not to use God's name casually. The name 'Yahweh' (sometimes spelled Jehovah but mistakenly) was not to be used carelessly; it was the name to which God gave meaning at the time of the exodus. One's general references to God were not to be so casual as to slander His holy character.

• *God's name not to be abused when taking vows*

In Israel the third command meant that one would never use the name 'Yahweh' of a false god (as the Israelites would soon do when they worshipped Yahweh in the form of a golden calf). It meant that they were not to use talk about God to get their own will done. They were not to try to manipulate people by using God's name when putting pressure on them. They were not to abuse the name Yahweh when taking vows or oaths.

• *To speak of God as He is*

The command meant that they were to let God be Himself! They were to honour Yahweh as the God who redeemed them. They were to praise Him and worship Him as He really is. They were to call upon Him in time of trouble, and ask His blessing over everything they did. They were to speak of His name to the surrounding nations, pointing the peoples of the world to the one-and-only Yahweh who had saved Israel and who intended to bring world-wide blessing through Israel. The third command would be upheld by punishment for any who misused the name 'Yahweh'.

• *Upheld by punishment for those who misuse*

• *Upheld by Christians*

The 'name' of God is His radiating, active, shining presence and power. To revere the 'name' of God was a matter of very great importance in ancient Israel, and in their own way Christians fulfil the third command.

The Fourth Commandment

• *Background in creation*

The **fourth command** concerns 'the sabbath day'. The sabbath was first of all an event in the life of God. The command has its background in creation, as Exodus 20:11 says. God is like a workman. He did the work of creating the universe in six 'days', and then on a seventh 'day' (which has still not ended) He rested. God's sabbath is His enjoyment of what He had done. It included God's desire to share what He had done. He wished to involve the human race in His enjoyment.

• *Highly important for Israel – breaking punishable by death*

So important was this 'sabbath-rest' of God, it became part of the 'Ten Commandments', the central ten-point summary of everything that God was wanting His people Israel to do. It was extraordinarily important and the breaking of the sabbath brought upon itself the death penalty.

• *Jesus prepared the way for its abolition*

Jesus honoured the Saturday-sabbath but resisted enlargements of it and prepared the way for its abolition. Then the early church came swiftly to treat 'the sabbath' as a matter of indifference.

• *The resurrection of Jesus transformed the entire situation*

• *Sunday a useful day – a reminder of the resurrection*

• *A matter of usefulness, not legislation*

• *Christian influence*

In the early days of the Jerusalem church one hears very little about 'the sabbath'. Christians soon came to realise that the death and resurrection of the Jesus had transformed the entire situation of the people of God. Gentile Christians were free to work out for themselves what day they wanted to meet on. They chose not to use the sabbath but to use the first day of the week. Paul taught that although the Mosaic law was holy, righteous and good, it was also temporary, and Christians were now released from it. The Spirit fulfils the law by walking in the Spirit. No New Testament letter ever hints that any kind of keeping of a holy day by Christians is obligatory. Galatians 4:10, Romans 14:5 and Colossians 2:16 are evidence that a Christian was free in these matters. Sunday was not a 'new sabbath'. It was simply useful to meet on one day a week and Sunday reminded the Christians of Jesus' resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But it was a matter of usefulness not legislation.

The old Saturday-sabbath of the Mosaic law is not fulfilled in a new 'holy day' at all! Sunday is a great and useful tradition in the Christian church. But this is a matter of Christian influence. It is wonderful when there is sufficient consensus about shops and businesses closing down for Sunday.

Entering into rest

The sabbath spoke of 'entering into rest' as a spiritual experience. This is the heart of the matter for the Christian today.

• *God's activity a threefold pattern*

In the original event of creation, 'sabbath' was a spiritual experience in the heart of God which men and women were able to share. God's activity in creation followed a threefold pattern. (i) The planning and the working was done by God. (ii) There came a point where the work was accomplished, and God rejoiced in what He had done. (iii) Men and women were to enter into the joy of what God had done.

• *Speaks of the way in which we are to live*

This threefold pattern is the way in which God wants to work in His world. It is the way in which we are to live. (i) Life must be led and governed by God. (ii) Eventually God achieves His purpose. (iii) 'Entering into rest' is the occasion when we reap the benefits of what God has done. It is a large subject and cannot be explored in all of its fullness here. Entering into rest is the final consummation of God's covenant. It is when He swears the oath of the covenant and says – on oath – 'I will indeed bless you'.

• *Entering into rest – the final consummation of God's covenant*

			
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