

# **Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, The Ten Commandments**

## **Session 5, Commandment 4: The Sabbath**

This is Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino and his teaching on the Ten Commandments. This is session 5, Commandment 4: the Sabbath.

So moving along now to the fourth commandment, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

But some of you are familiar with the name Eric Liddell and the movie, The Chariots of Fire. Remember that? One of the few movies that has a clearly religious theme that ever won major acclaim, but probably more for the music than anything else I would imagine. But Eric Liddell was a Scottish sprinter who had been selected to compete in the 1924 Olympic Games.

And the problem was that Liddell was a very devout Christian and he refused to race on Sunday. So consequently, when he learned that the finals for the hundred meter dash would be held on a Sunday, he decided to bow out of that event, which was his best event. And he chose instead to run the 200 and 400 meter races.

Before the 400 meter race, we're told that he was handed a note by a woman and he opened it up and there was scripture scribbled on the note. It said, he who honors me, I will honor. And Liddell went on to win the gold medal in the 400 meter dash, even though it had not been his best event.

Now, thanks to Hollywood, Liddell has probably become one of the most famous Sabbath keepers in recent history, but it should be noted he's really not the only one. There are actually several others, particularly pro athletes who were quite prominent. Eli Herring, 1995, refused to enter the NFL draft because the games are played on Sundays and he felt that he needed to honor the Sabbath day of Sunday.

He had been a shoo-in for six figure contract, and yet he refused to compromise his principles. His quote was, Sunday is the day for church, not for making money. Michael Jones was a soccer player, rugby player rather, star rugby player in the 1991 New Zealand World Cup match scheduled on a Sunday.

And Jones refused to play because it was on Sunday. And as a result, his team came in third and Jones went from being a national hero to becoming something of a pariah in New Zealand. So, even today, trying to keep the Sabbath can have some detrimental effects on people.

So the fourth commandment, remember the Sabbath day, make it holy, six days you shall labor, you can do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh

your God. You shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male servant, your female servant, your cattle, or the sojourner within your gates. For in six days, Yahweh made the heavens and the earth and the sea and all that's in them, and rested on the seventh day.

Therefore, Yahweh blessed the seventh day and made it holy. So the Sabbath day, remember the Sabbath day. What does Sabbath mean? Now, this is one of those words that the scholars have kicked around the etymology of this, it seems fairly simple, and yet, of course, it's never as simple as it seems.

Apparently, the word comes from a Hebrew verb Shabbat, which means to cease. And Sabbath could be a word meaning to cease, or to stop. One of the problems is that the noun form doesn't make a lot of sense in this case, but it kind of seems to make logical sense, because you're ceasing from labor, and so you call it the ceasing day, or ending day, or whatever.

There's a dual significance here. Clearly, it is referring to end of the week, so the week has ceased, but it's also referring to ceasing from work. The legal implications of Sabbath, what it meant for somebody to refrain from work, this was not really well defined in the Old Testament.

It wasn't until the Pharisees came along, who decided that they were going to pile all kinds of rules upon it to make it crystal clear what it meant, at least from their perspective, to keep the Sabbath, that this became much more of a clear, and we might even say burdensome kind of issue. Okay, so Sabbath is what we technically call weird. The idea that you take one day, and that you set it aside as a day of rest, a day of refraining from work, a day of worship, a day when you don't make money, that seems a little contrary to our American spirit, you might say, because a true American works 24-7, and that's virtue.

It's virtuous to never take a break, and so the idea of Sabbath is kind of strange and foreign to us. Where does this come from? Were there lots of people in the ancient world observing Sabbath, and the Israelites just happened to be one of them? Well, that doesn't seem to be the case. Now, this is kind of interesting, you know, I've actually known a number of professors who weren't aware that circumcision was actually very widespread in the ancient Near Eastern world, that many of the peoples around Israel practiced circumcision in various ways.

The Egyptians practiced circumcision as a rite of passage when the boy reached about 13, which I think is kind of cruel, but you know, taboo on pork is another thing that was really quite common in the ancient world. There were several other peoples around Israel who wouldn't eat pork either, besides just Jews, but there is no evidence of any of Israel's neighbors observing every seventh day as a day of rest. There is some evidence that the Egyptians might have set aside the 10th day, but

there's not a lot of clear, well, the evidence is sort of contradictory, and so it's not really certain what kind of significance they attached to that.

Clearly, for Israel, the Sabbath day was an identity marker. It was a sign of the covenant of Sinai, much as circumcision was a sign of the covenant of Abraham. And so, they regarded it as something that made them unique and set them apart from other peoples as well, and it did.

It's that simple. Why did they get this notion? Where did it come from? Well, back around early 1900s, a German scholar by the name of Meinhold came across a Babylonian term, Sheputu, which has also been interpreted as Sebutu, because the morpheme or phoneme can be pronounced kind of either way in Babylonian. Old theory thought that the Sebutu, which was apparently some kind of a festival in Babylon that occurred monthly, might have been the origin of the Israelite idea of the Sabbath.

There is some possible evidence, and for a long time, this theory kind of fell out of favor, and yet now it seems to be coming back again. And so, just very briefly, what some of the things that seem to be in support of this idea are oftentimes in the Old Testament, when Sabbath is mentioned, it's mentioned in connection with New Moon. So, in the book of Kings, we'll look at a couple of passages which will talk about the New Moon or the Sabbath.

In the books of the prophets, it's sometimes mentioned, I hate your New Moon festivals and your Sabbaths. And so, New Moon and Sabbath are oftentimes hooked together. And so, this old theory surmised that Sabbath could refer to the full moon, and that this was somehow derived from the Babylonian idea that you had this monthly festival.

And so, the Sabbath was originally a monthly festival that was celebrated in the New Moon. On the other hand, some very ancient texts in the Bible talk about how every seventh day you were to rest, and to give your animals rest, and give the land rest, etc., etc. But some of those passages, in fact, some of the passages which scholars consider very early, do not use the word Sabbath.

So, the theory is that eventually the Sabbath, which was a full moon festival, came together and got merged with the seventh day of rest thing and became the Sabbath day. Very speculative, not a whole lot of evidence behind it. Clever, but I'm not sure if we can really say that it's convincing.

If that isn't the source, then we are still left with some issues, because it is a little bit contradictory. Some of the evidence is spotty, to say the least. So, the biblical record indicates that the Sabbath was observed in Israel even before the giving of the Ten Commandments, which is interesting.

Here, the passage which is of most interest to us comes from Exodus chapter 16, and this is the story of the giving of the manna. So, you remember the way that the story goes is that the people cried out to the Lord, were complaining because they didn't have any bread, so God sent manna. Every morning they would go out and gather the manna, but they were told they were not to gather manna on the Sabbath day, and this is really the earliest reference to Sabbath day in the Bible, Exodus 16.

He said to them, this is what the Lord commanded. Tomorrow is to be a day of Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord, so bake what you want to bake, boil what you want to boil, save whatever is left, and keep it over until the morning. This is before Exodus chapter 20, before the law is given at Sinai.

So, the implication is that the seventh day was already set aside as Sabbath rest before the giving of the law at Sinai. Significance, kind of hard to say. They saved it until morning, and Moses commanded, that did not stink or get maggots, eat it today, Moses said, because today is a Sabbath to the Lord.

You will not find any in the ground today, which might imply that God himself rests on the Sabbath day. Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day of the Sabbath, there will not be any. So, this is the first mention of Sabbath in the Bible, and as I say again, it occurs before the giving of the law at Sinai.

Does that seem strange? Well, a little bit, but you know, you got to remember the Israelites believed that you shouldn't kill before they were given a command at Sinai saying you shall not kill. So, to believe that they were to observe the Sabbath even before they got the formal command, the command in the Sinai covenant formalized it, but it doesn't mean that there was no possibility of having observed Sabbath before the giving of the Sabbath law. According to Exodus 20, the foundation of the Sabbath is in creation, and also Exodus 31 17 repeats this affirmation.

Why do we observe Sabbath day? We observe Sabbath day because God established the principle himself. God worked six days. On the seventh day, God rested from his work.

Therefore, you people can work six days, but on the seventh day, you must rest. Deuteronomy 5 does not mention creation. We remember this from maybe a couple of lectures back.

Rather, it gives another rationale for the Sabbath. Remember, you were a slave in the land of Egypt. The Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and outstretched arm.

Therefore, the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. So, that is a different kind of rationale, which is based in the covenant relationship between God and Israel, which was very significant, very central to the whole message of Deuteronomy. And so, in the context of Deuteronomy, that rationale kind of makes sense.

Otherwise, you know, you read through the Deuteronomy reiteration of the Ten Commandments, and everything is pretty much the same as it is in the book of Exodus. So, I don't think we should see these as contradictory. Rather, I think we should see these as supplementary.

I think that the rationale initially in the minds of the Israelites is that the seventh-day cycle was established by God at creation, and that the case of the fact that the Israelites had been themselves enslaved, they knew what it was to be worked and to be worked and driven without rest. They needed to be people of compassion, because the Lord had demonstrated to them his compassion when he brought them out of Egypt. Numbers and Leviticus frequently discuss the Sabbath, but they never give a rationale for why the Sabbath was to be observed.

So, we're stuck, we might say, with a bit of a theological conundrum. Does God need to rest? If you take the story of Genesis very literally, you know, God ceases from his labor on the seventh day, and then blesses the seventh day, and the seventh day becomes the day which his people, too, are to rest, following the example of God. We can take this very literally, but if we did so, we would be going against a long tradition in the church and in Judaism, which took this more figuratively than literally.

Both Jews and Christians were offended by the notion that God would need to rest. And so, rather than interpreting this literally, they both argued, both traditions, held that the story was meant to be a lesson for us, not because God needed rest, but because we need rest. And so, the principle for why there would be a day of rest was established at creation itself, as a way of establishing a life rhythm that's really foundational to the universe.

The Sabbath isn't to be just a Jewish thing. It isn't to be just an Israelite thing. The Sabbath isn't like regulations regarding not eating pork.

It's not like regulations about not having two different kinds of material in your clothing. Rather, the Sabbath is established even before any of those principles and is to be binding, in a sense, upon all of nature, not simply upon the Jewish people. Of course, being part of the Ten Commandments, it becomes a special part of the relationship between God and his people, as they say, an identity marker.

And yet, the rationale moves beyond that context and places it in a larger context of God's relationship with all of creation. Now, in the Old Testament, theoretically, the penalty for breaking the Sabbath was very, very severe. Numbers 15, while the people in Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day.

And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and all the congregation. They put him into custody because it had not been made clear what should be done to him. And the Lord said to Moses, the man shall be put to death.

All the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp. And all the congregation brought him outside of the camp and stoned him to death with stones as the Lord commanded Moses. The idea here is that the community was endangered by his action.

And therefore, the community would take responsibility for his punishment. It's, I guess, difficult for us to wrap our minds around so severe a punishment for something that seems to us so minor. But when you think about it, and about the possible consequences of one person deciding that they're going to ignore the Sabbath day, it can become more, I think, make a little bit more logic sense to us, at least, even if, you know, the, I don't think the shock is ever going to quite wear off.

But I remember back when I was a student in seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, many, many moons ago, that society was going through some changes in those days. Wilmore had been what we call a blue city, you know, where you don't do any business on Sundays, and everything was closed. And well, somebody decided that they were going to open up their convenience store on Sundays.

And one of the arguments which was made against it, I mean, it really was quite the controversy in the little bitty town of Wilmore, Kentucky. But one of the arguments was made is once one business opens up on Sunday, all the businesses will think they have to open on Sunday. And what happened is, indeed, the business opened on Sunday.

And many of us, myself included, true confessions, actually stopped in on Sundays and bought stuff at that little business. And now, Wilmore is no longer a blue town. You know, there are many other businesses open on Sundays.

Did that first business, like open the dams or something? Very possibly. It is all too true that the community as a whole might feel the need to compete and to follow along with the example set. And so the idea here was that the community was taking it upon itself to police itself to make sure that the Sabbath was observed throughout their generations.

That if one person starts thinking that they can get ahead by working on the Sabbath day, that soon everybody will feel an obligation to do the same. Well, how about an Old Testament history? How do we see the Sabbath day acting out and work out in the rest of the Old Testament? Outside of the Pentateuch, we rarely see the Sabbath mentioned. And we have mentioned before a couple of passages in 2 Kings.

We'll talk about those here in a minute. But Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings never mentioned the Sabbath day, which might lead one to wonder, you know, is the Sabbath actually being observed in those days? 2 Kings 4.23, the Shunammite's husband said, why go to the prophet Elisha today? It is neither the new moon nor the Sabbath. And she said, be still.

This again is one of those passages which seems to associate the Sabbath with the new moon. And again, new moon is something, of course, that would happen once a month. It would be a special festival day.

Sabbath apparently is viewed here as being some day of religious observance rather than as a day of rest. An interesting thing to think about it, and again, one of the ironies and difficulties regarding the Sabbath and its formulation is, she's about to go on a journey to see the prophet, the man of God. And her husband says, why are you going to go see the man of God? And why are you going to undertake this journey? It's not the Sabbath day.

You know, Jewish tradition, they weren't to travel on the Sabbath day. So was Sabbath here understood to be the same way as it was understood later? I don't know. The passage is what we call puzzling.

In 2 Kings 11, there is a reference to the guards who were on duty on Sabbath day at the king's house, and it talks about the changing of the guards. One course of guards going off duty and another course of guards coming on duty on the Sabbath day. So apparently it was not considered a violation of the Sabbath to have guards working in the temple.

Okay? Which again might lead some, lend some credence to the notion that the Sabbath at this time was understood to be more of a festival day rather than a day of rest. As I say, it's not real easy here. Okay? The chronicler, on the other hand, he mentions Sabbath sacrifices a number of times, several times.

Sabbath sacrifices were never considered to be a violation of Sabbath tradition for some reason, but it was always an essential part of Sabbath observance. And in the Dead Sea Scrolls, there is a text called the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifices, which seems to imply that not only is this a Jewish thing, but rather it is set in heaven itself, that the angels up in heaven every Sabbath day are performing sacrifices as well, and

singing these songs, these various compositions which were written to accompany the Sabbath sacrifices, so that the Qumran, or Dead Sea Scroll community, as they were performing these sacrifices on the Sabbath day, felt that they were doing so in union with the angels who were also performing sacrifices in heaven. Once again, by that point, by the time of the writing of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a couple hundred years before Jesus, they clearly had this sense that Sabbath isn't just about Israel.

Sabbath is set in creation itself. Nehemiah 10, 31 and 13, 15 through 22, the governor enforced a commerce ban on the Sabbath. Jeremiah, one of his big complaints about the people of Judah in his day, of the people of Jerusalem, was that they kept the gates open and trade was conducted on the Sabbath day.

And here, when Nehemiah becomes governor and he gets into power, he enacts a ban on any kind of commerce on the Sabbath. Interesting here that the people who had been violating the Sabbath by conducting the activities on Sabbath day are not said to have been executed. So apparently, even though they began to enforce the Sabbath trade bans at the time of Nehemiah, they were not being real strict about how you penalize those who had been breaking the Sabbath.

In the prophets, we have a few references to the Sabbath, both pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets condemn Israel for conducting business on the Sabbath day. So you want to talk about the commandments that seem to have been maybe the least enforced Sabbath seems to have been one of them. Amos 8.5, Amos of course one of the earliest of the prophets, maybe one of the earliest books written in the Old Testament in the form we've got it, but Amos saying, when will the new moon be over so we can sell grain and the Sabbath so that we may offer wheat for sale? Interesting thing here is it implies that on the Sabbath day they weren't supposed to be conducting business and they knew it and apparently it was being discouraged in Amos' day in Israel.

Jeremiah 17 is where he talks about a bearing of burdens as a desecration of the Sabbath and he tells the people to stop carrying stuff around. Ezekiel 20, Israel profaned the Sabbath which God had given as a sign, let's say an identity marker, the Sabbath is a sign that Israel has a special relationship with God and Ezekiel says that they have violated that that relationship by not keeping the Sabbath. Isaiah 56, I believe post-exilic passage as well, promises that there will be rewards for eunuchs and foreigners who do not profane the Sabbath because those people are becoming part of God's covenant community by taking upon themselves the responsibilities that go with the covenant that God has made with Israel.

Second Temple Judaism is when Sabbath keeping really starts to become more of an identity marker. You got to figure that at this point Israel is coming into far more interaction with their neighbors and it is becoming more and more important for them to distinguish themselves from their neighbors and so those practices which set



them apart from the Gentiles were becoming more significant at least to certain factions of Judaism. Now there were some factions of Judaism in those days that wanted to just try to blend in, become like everybody else, the book of Maccabees even talk about them trying to undo their circumcision.

So they were going to extremes in some segments of Judaism to be like everyone else you know and of course the reaction to that is for people to emphasize even more strongly those things that set them apart from other people and so you have polarization taking place. So in the Second Temple period Sabbath keeping was becoming a very significant issue of conflict. Again Sabbath keeping an identity marker.

Hellenizing Jews in Judea according to First Maccabees 143 profaned the Sabbath. So not only are they trying to undo their circumcision, the sign of the covenant of Moses, they are also trying to undo the Sabbath, the sign of God's special relationship with his people Israel. And it really became a major issue during the Antiochian persecution because at that point the Jews were confronted with the fact that they were fighting against the Greeks, Macedonians and their allies who did not respect the Sabbath day.

And so in one famous incident we have the faction and a couple of major factions at the beginning of the revolt, the Hasidian faction, pious ones if you will, and the Maccabean faction. A group of the Hasidians were attacked on the Sabbath day by the Greek forces and they refused to defend themselves. It's the Sabbath day they refused to take up swords and so they were all slaughtered.

The Maccabees at that time swore an oath saying we will fight against anyone who attacks us even if it is on our Sabbath day. So the Maccabees took on this policy that said that preservation was more important than even this identity marker. That was not without controversy and there were people who criticized them for that later and there are still people today who debate whether or not that was the right choice to have made.

But you know some people say well if they hadn't done what they did then all Jews would have been exterminated. That's not true. It's simply not true because of the fact that there were Jews well beyond the of the Antiochian persecution.

There were Jews in Babylon, there were Jews in Persia, there were Jews in Egypt, Jews who would not have been subject to the same kind of persecution that Antiochus was raining down upon the Jews in Judea. So we can't say that the Maccabees preserved the Jewish people by deciding to fight on the Sabbath day. The flip side of the coin of course is that if the word had spread that the Jews wouldn't defend themselves on the Sabbath day then of course a very wise policy would have

been for the Greeks to only attack them on the Sabbath day and very soon the Antiochian revolt would have the Maccabean revolt would have been over.

Temple period, after the time of the persecutions and so on, after the Jews were conquered by the Romans, the Jews became part of this much larger community of people. And sometimes it doesn't register in our minds just how significant the Jewish presence was in the Roman Empire. Because the Jews believed that having lots of kids was a sign of God's blessings, they tended to have very big families.

And that didn't escape the notice of the Greeks and the Romans, because the Greeks and the Romans were obsessed with having very small families, typically one, maybe sometimes two children. Whereas your average Jew, six, seven, eight, who knows how many? You know, birth control wasn't real effective in those days. And so the Romans and the Greeks practiced infanticide.

And that was how they kept their families small. Jews were horrified by that practice and refused to do it. So the Jews spread and grew.

And many estimates say that they were probably the largest ethnic group in the Roman Empire. And the Jews found them interesting, rather, the Romans found the Jews interesting. The Romans were rather really quite fascinated with the Jews.

They hated them. Cicero, the famous Roman orator, had several speeches where he railed against the Jews. And from these speeches, one of the things we learn is that the Jewish practice of keeping the Sabbath was being imitated by Roman women.

And so Cicero was horrified by that, you know. But the Sabbath day was becoming more than just a Jewish thing. It was becoming, oh, isn't that quaint kind of thing? So everybody in upper society in Rome was trying to be kind of like the Jews in their ways, you know.

Very interesting, because it's sort of like the Romans were intrigued by anything that seemed novel, and particularly things that came from the East that seemed a little bit strange and unusual, like, you know, that secret name Yahweh, for instance. So the Jewish Sabbath day was adopted by some of the Gentiles, some of the Romans, and not by any means by all of them, not by any means, but by some of the Romans as well. So it was becoming more notarized, noted.

And for the Romans, it was kind of an interesting sort of ambivalence that they had towards Sabbath. On the one hand, they thought it was just an excuse for laziness. Many of them claimed that the Jews were all lazy people, and you couldn't make them work on their Sabbath day, and you couldn't get, if you had a Jewish slave, you just couldn't get any good day's work out of them on that Sabbath day of theirs.

On the other hand, there was this fascination and this emulation that was taking place. So interesting kind of perspective. What does Jesus have to say about the Sabbath? Well, you know, this becomes one of the major kind of clashes that Jesus has with the Pharisees and other religious leaders of his day, because, as I mentioned, you know, the Ten Commandments are a little vague.

Remember the Sabbath day? Well, what does it mean to remember it? Oh, hey, it's a Sabbath day. I almost forgot. No, probably a little more than that.

Remember, bring it back up again each week. Remember the Sabbath day. Keep it holy.

Sanctify it. You don't work. You do your labor on the other six days, but you don't labor on the seventh day.

So there's that. You don't do any work on the Sabbath day. How do you keep it holy? Well, eventually, of course, they have these Sabbath sacrifices that they always perform and synagogue services outside in the diaspora regions.

But what were you allowed to do? What were you not allowed to do? What constituted work? You know, a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day apparently constituted work to the extent that they would stone him to death because of it. This is kind of interesting when you think about it. You wonder if they held him over until the next day before they stoned him to death.

Would stoning him to death have been considered doing work? Picking up sticks is work. Picking up stones? Anyway, so the Pharisees and other Jewish sects developed sets of rules regarding what constituted work. And certainly, we see some of the later laws that we find in the Mishnah and the Talmud reflected already in the Gospels.

And these include things like the question of whether or not you could heal somebody on the Sabbath day. And I was teaching a class one time at the University of Chicago, and they had some Jewish students in the class. And one of them became quite belligerent about the issue, about the Gospels saying that the Pharisees were angry because of Jesus' healing on the Sabbath.

And she said, no Jew would ever say you couldn't heal somebody on the Sabbath day. And I said, and pointed out to her in the Mishnah, the Jewish holy book, it says that you were not allowed to set a bone if somebody broke a bone on the Sabbath, that you were not allowed to straighten a broken arm or broken leg, that you could soak it, but you couldn't rub it on the Sabbath day. So yeah, the idea that rubbing a broken bone or trying to set a broken bone on the Sabbath day was work became instituted in Jewish law.

And we see that again, as I say, already reflected in the Gospels. When Jesus gets in trouble for healing a man on the Sabbath day, well, not once, but several times, right? Jesus frequently clashed with the Pharisees regarding Sabbath day observances. Is it lawful to alleviate human suffering on the Sabbath? One day his disciples are passing through a field and they're plucking ears of grain and eating them as they're walking through the field.

And the Pharisees say, Why do your disciples do what is not lawful on the Sabbath day? If all the grain had been lying in a heap somewhere, and they'd picked up a handful and eaten it, that would not have been a violation of the Sabbath day. But because they're plucking the grains, it is a violation of the Sabbath. And Jesus responds by telling them about the story of how David and his men ate consecrated bread when they were hungry, and has this wonderful statement about how the Sabbath was made for the benefit of humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath.

We are not created for the purpose of keeping the Sabbath. The Sabbath is created for our benefit. You know, and basically what it comes down to for Jesus is if keeping the Sabbath day becomes a burden, then you have undermined the very purpose of the Sabbath day, right? He took a practical approach to the Sabbath.

Maintain his benefits, maintain the benefits of rest, maintain the benefits of worship, but not by a legal adherence to a whole bunch of rules. That was clearly what Jesus tried to get across with the Sabbath. The Sabbath is meant to be beneficial to us, not a burden to us.

Later in the New Testament, we find that there is a continuing emphasis on the Sabbath, but several mentions of the Sabbath day. The book of Acts depicts the disciples several times going to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. So they continue to observe Sabbath, even though they're followers of Jesus, they're continuing to go to synagogue, and typically they're teaching there, right? Paul warned the Colossians, who were not originally Jewish, most of them probably, not to allow people to judge them and how they kept the Sabbath day.

And interesting question here, is Paul telling the Colossians that they don't have to keep the Sabbath, that they can just ignore it? I don't think so. Rather, it has to do with those Judaizers, those people who would want to impose rules on the Colossians about how the Sabbath should be observed. And Paul says, don't let them tell you that you're doing it wrong.

Do it the way that works for you. What benefits do you have? That's Jesus's approach. What benefits do you have? How does Sabbath work for you? How is it a day of rest for you? In Hebrews, in the book of Hebrews, typical Alexandrian style of exegesis that we find in the book of Hebrews, you know, the Alexandrian style of

exegesis likes to spiritualize and find the spiritual meanings in a lot of these Old Testament practices and laws.

And our author of Hebrews seems to follow that same kind of example. When he sees a spiritual significance in the Sabbath day, he argues that the Sabbath is a foreshadowing of the rest that we will have in heaven. Now, I've had some people challenge me on this occasionally about saying, well, doesn't the book of Hebrews say that we don't have to do Sabbath here because Sabbath is waiting for us in heaven? I don't think that's what the author of Hebrews is saying.

I think what he's saying is that there we will experience a true, pure Sabbath. The Sabbaths that we have here are kind of like the foreshadowing. It's sort of like, you know, it's platonic, you know, the pure and perfect Sabbath is that which we will enjoy in heaven.

The Sabbaths that we have here are a dim reflection of that pure and perfect Sabbath, which occurs there when we are in the presence of God. I should point out that no New Testament authors actually repudiate the idea of keeping the Sabbath. Nobody ever says in the New Testament, you need not keep the Sabbath, or certainly nobody says you shall not keep the Sabbath day.

Do the principles of the Sabbath day apply in different ways in the New Testament? Certainly, Christianity and Judaism diverged at this point. There's no question about it. Now, eventually Christianity did develop rules and regulations regarding their own observance of the Sabbath day, but it was a different kind of spirit than the spirit that prevailed in Judaism.

So, how do we switch from Saturday to Sunday? There's always something that's an interesting question, you know, and once again, we see already in the time of the apostles, the New Testament tells us that the Christians gathered on the first day of the week, Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection. They did this according to Acts 20, according to 1 Corinthians. They were coming together on the first day of the week.

Were they still? Were they calling it Sabbath? No, they were not calling that the Sabbath day at that time. There was the Lord's day, it was the first day of the week, and that was being set aside as a special time of worship. Why were they doing that? Very likely, it has to do with the fact that in the Roman world, Sunday was the day of rest, the day that you got off work, and the reason is that that was typically the day when they would have the great festivals regarding the sun and those kinds of things.

So, when you had these big parties on Sunday, you let your slaves off work while the Christians took advantage of that and they would gather and they would have their meetings because so many of the early Christians were slaves. So many of them had to work on Saturday, you know, and so they just met on Sunday instead. As the

church became more Gentile, it began to distance itself from the Jews by focusing more on Sunday.

And we see this in some of the rhetoric of some of the early church fathers. Already by 100 AD, it was common practice that the church would observe Sunday as its day of worship and rest rather than Saturday. And yes, there were early church fathers who repudiated the Jewish Saturday Sabbath.

And so the conflict was beginning at this point. It seems to have started out in a very practical way, a way of honoring the fact that you're supposed to have a day of rest and a day of worship and focus on God, but you couldn't do it on Saturday because of the Roman calendar. I think Jesus would have approved, you know, and you infused the day off Sunday with a new meaning.

This is the day when God created light. This is the day when Jesus rose from the dead. What better day for us to get together to worship, to set aside time for refreshment, and for family than on Sunday? And so Sunday became kind of the Christian identity marker.

The formalization of Sunday as a day of rest occurred in 313 AD when the Emperor Constantine declared it. The Sabbath day actually came a little bit later than Sunday, which was declared the Christian Sabbath day. And I'm not even sure if that's ever been formalized.

I would actually have to check on that. But it really did come a little bit later in church history before Sunday was declared the Christian's Sabbath. It was informally our Sabbath, though, and it has been informally our Sabbath really since the first century AD.

Again, I mentioned this a couple of times, Jesus had a practical approach to the Sabbath. And here, too, we see that the day of observation of the Sabbath was practical, that it just made more sense for the church to do it on Sunday. And so I believe that that is keeping with the spirit of the Sabbath.

So, should Christians today observe the Sabbath? This is kind of like the crux of the whole thing, because there are those who say, no, Sabbath was a Jewish thing. It was part of all those laws that made Jews part of God's covenant people. We are not bound by those laws any more than we are bound by the laws that say that you need to abstain from pork.

We are not bound by Old Testament laws. I don't really think that Israel was bound by Old Testament laws. I think it was freed by Old Testament law, but that's another question.

Paul uses the image of the law as a tutor. It teaches us good principles, and those principles are things that we continue to observe. When you are under a tutor, eventually you graduate, and you don't need a tutor anymore.

Does that mean you forget all the lessons you learned? Let us hope not. Rather, the lessons that we learned, those things that were truths that were placed in us by the tutor, continue to have significance for us later. I mean, we don't have somebody standing over us with a stick ready to whack our hands if we don't get our lessons right, but we incorporate the principles into our hearts, into our souls.

Though Sabbath was a sign of the Sinai covenant, it was established at creation. That is the rationale given in the book of Exodus. It is the rationale that is later cited by the rabbis and in Intertestamental Judaism.

The understanding is that there is something universal about Sabbath, not something specifically Jewish about Sabbath. Jesus emphasized the keeping of the Sabbath as a benefit for humanity, not just a benefit for Israel. Jesus did not say the Sabbath was made for Israel, not Israel for the Sabbath.

He said the Sabbath was made for humanity, for all of us to benefit from receiving a day of rest, a day of refreshment. So, let's talk about some of the benefits of having a day of rest here. These are all pointed out in various scriptures in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as well.

First of all, the environmental benefit of the Sabbath. The world needs rest. Living creatures need rest.

You're going to let your animals rest on the Sabbath day. Cats don't have any problem. They've got that part mastered.

But the land was to have its Sabbath. Now, those Sabbaths usually run every seven years, or a monthly Sabbath, or something like that. But there were days when the land was to be given rest so it could refresh itself.

The animals were to be given a day off every week. Now, don't push your animals. Don't work them.

They need rest. So, the idea of having a time of rest for the land, for the world, for your creatures, and for yourselves, all that was very significant and very important and central for the establishment of Sabbath, and still benefits us today. Now, there have been various times in history when tyrants have tried to do away with the seventh-day Sabbath.

And it was done in France during the French Revolution. The Russians tried to do it at one time because the idea was that if they could get rid of the Christian Sabbath, they could undermine Christianity and their new world orders. It didn't work because people need rest.

The land needs rest. The animals need rest. When they tried to switch France over to a 10-day work week, they found that the horses were dying of exhaustion.

There is something built into our world that just seems to work better on that seventh-day cycle. Which, by the way, I should point out, is a Jewish thing. You look at the Babylonians, the Egyptians, or the Romans, and they didn't have seven-day weeks.

That all came from the Jews. But it works. God seemed to know what he was doing for some strange reason.

The ethical rationale is our responsibility to give other people and animals the rest they need. Of course, this is emphasized both in Exodus and in Deuteronomy, the idea that you're not to work people to the bone. Sabbath keeping in our country has been enforced by the state.

We have these Sunday laws. This is from the province of Ontario. Prohibits labor, with certain exceptions, except for certain required tasks.

If somebody couldn't take Sunday off, they could take another day off. The important idea there was that you've got a time of rest. If we didn't enforce it somehow, if we have, as I've mentioned before, this kind of rationale in our minds that says, work is good, rest is not so good.

We push people. It has drastic consequences, as we've seen in some societies in our own day, where people are dying on the job from exhaustion. The plan of God is that people would not be able to work their employees to the bone.

They had to give them fair times of rest. And so, there is that ethical implication built into the Sabbath as well. We have a responsibility to the oppressed.

We have a responsibility to protect them from those people who would exploit them. There are people who would work their people as long as they could, as long as they could make the money off of them. And there are people who are desperate enough that they will continue to work well beyond when they should be working.

By planning and following that cycle, which has that built-in day of rest, we are putting ourselves on the side of those people who are oppressed, on the side of those people who are being exploited by the greedy. And then, of course, there's a



spiritual side to it as well because keeping the Sabbath day holy means keeping it set apart for God.

There should be a sense where we can devote a portion of our time each week to worship, to reflection, to family, and reconnecting in holy ways with our neighbors and with our own loved ones. We've got a day that kind of sets a pattern for the rest of our week when you think about it. How do you spend your Sunday? It's going to make an impact on the rest of your week in one way or another.

If we spend our Sundays on the golf course, we're not getting the kind of holiness; we're probably getting frustration. If our days are spent in front of the television set or at the office, as many people do these days, we are avoiding a possible encounter with God. And we are cutting ourselves off from those opportunities that we have to meet with others, to have our spirits encouraged, to get ourselves refreshed for the rest of the week where we're going to be out there going about our daily tasks and perhaps cut off from those very things that would feed our souls, our spirits.

I'll tell you a little story here. More than 75 years ago, there was a woman by the name of Lettie Cowman. She was a missionary and an author.

And she shared a story about a traveler who was making a long trek through Africa. And they had hired men from a local tribe to carry their loads for them. Well, on the first day, they went rapidly through and they marched far, and the traveler was just excited about how good progress they're making.

On the second morning, the tribesmen refused to move, just sat down, and rested. And when the travelers cajoled them and offered them more money and tried in various ways to get these people to move, they simply refused. And so finally they did something that would seem maybe kind of obvious to us.

They asked why they wouldn't go on any further. And what they said was they had gone too far on the first day and now they had to stop to let their souls catch up with their bodies. Lettie Cowman concluded by exhorting people in this way.

She said, this whirling, rushing life, which so many of us live, does for us what that first day of March did for those poor jungle tribesmen. The difference is that they knew what they needed to do to restore life's balance. Oftentimes, we do not.

Of course, you think about it, that was 75 years ago, and how much more whirling is the pace of life today? How much more precious, how much more important might the Sabbath day be? How much more significant could it be for us to, in fact, let our souls catch up with our bodies by taking a day of refreshment, of rest, and of Sabbath.

This is Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino and his teaching on the Ten Commandments. This is session 5, Commandment 4: The Sabbath.