

# Is the Sabbath Commandment Quoted in the New Testament?

Copyright (c) 2007 by Frank W. Hardy, Ph.D.

## Introduction

The Greek word *sabbaton* [sg] (or *sabbata* [pl]) in its various forms occurs some 68 times in the New Testament. It is translated both "Sabbath" (40 times from a Greek singular, 19 times from a Greek plural) and "week" (3 times from a Greek singular, 6 times from a Greek plural). But these references to the Sabbath do not quote what the commandment says. They merely remind us that there is such a commandment. In this paper we raise the question whether there are actual quotations from the Sabbath commandment in the New Testament. There are, but perhaps not in the way one might expect.

## Command and Explanation Clauses

The fourth commandment is the longest of the ten, with 55 words in the Hebrew original.<sup>1</sup> Like all of the first five commandments, it has two main parts – a command and an explanation.<sup>2</sup> The first five commandments, with a total of 146 words, are about equally divided between command and explanation (47.3%). The last five, with a total of 24 words, are much shorter and lack explanation clauses.<sup>3</sup> The percentage of words in explanatory clauses should tell us something about God. See tables 1 and 2 (below).

---

<sup>1</sup> This word count ignores methegs. If the term "metheg" is unfamiliar to you, this note is irrelevant. Skip it. If you know what methegs are and counting them does matter, there are 13 methegs in the fourth commandment, which reduces the word count by 13. Of course there are methegs in other commandments as well, so their lengths relative to each other remain largely intact either way. For those who are interested, the number of methegs in the various commandments is as follows: 1 (3), 2 (6), 3 (7), 4 (13), 5 (3), 6 (0), 7 (0), 8 (0), 9 (1), 10 (1).

<sup>2</sup> There are a number of ways to divide up the commandments, but in my view Exod 20:3 is the command clause of the first commandment, while vs. 2 is the corresponding explanation clause. Thus the sequence of clauses in vss. 2-3 is explanation first, then command. In commandments 2-5 (vss. 4-12) the sequence is command first, then explanation.

<sup>3</sup> In Matt 5 the explanations resume where they left off in Exod 20, at commandment #6.

Table 1  
Summary of Word Counts in Exod 20:2-12

Commandment	Command Clause	Explanation Clause	Total
1	7	9	16
2	21	22	43
3	7	10	17
4	29	26	55
5	5	10	15
Totals	69	77	146

Table 2  
Summary of Word Counts in Exod 20:13-17

Commandment	Command Clause	Explanation Clause	Total
6	2	N/A	2
7	2	N/A	2
8	2	N/A	2
9	5	N/A	5
10	13	N/A	13
Totals	24	N/A	24

If our concept of the fourth commandment is that its sole function is to command us to "Remember the Sabbath day . . .," we won't find that in the New Testament, although as I hope to show later on in the paper there is a close approximation of something just this concise.

The New Testament does indeed quote the commandment – directly, extensively, and more than once. But these quotations do not come from the command clause; they come from the explanation clause. We must know how to look for them, because the explanation clause of the commandment does not read like a command. It reads like an explanation. The explanation clause of the Sabbath commandment is the part that says, "For in six days . . ." (vs. 11). This clause appears seven times in the Old Testament (Neh 9:6; Ps 69:34; 96:11; 135:6; 146:6; Amos 9:6; Hag 2:6) and five times in the New (Acts 4:24; 14:15; Rev 5:13; 10:6; 14:7), with two other possible literary allusions (Rev 12:12; 21:1).

## Hebrews 4:4

In Heb 4:4 ("And on the seventh day God rested from all his work") we have a direct reference back to, well, back to what? Does this verse refer to the Sabbath commandment itself or to the creation story on which it is based? Below I compare the Greek translation of Gen 2:2, Exod 20:11, and Heb 4:4.

Text Exhibit  
Greek Text of Gen 2:2; Exod 20:11; and Heb 4:4

Gen 2:2	<i>kai katepausen</i>		<i>tē hēmera tē hebdomē</i>	<i>apo pantōn tōn ergōn autou</i>	<i>hōn epoiēsen</i>
Exod 20:11	<i>kai katepausen</i>		<i>tē hēmera tē hebdomē</i>		
Heb 4:4	<i>kai katepausen</i>	<i>ho theos en</i>	<i>tē hēmera tē hebdomē</i>	<i>apo pantōn tōn ergōn autou</i>	

In the above text exhibit notice that Heb 4:4 inserts *ho theos en* ("God on"), explicitly stating the grammatical subject of *katepausen* ("He rested"), in contrast to both Gen 2:2 and Exod 20:11. In Heb 4:4 the words *apo pantōn tōn ergōn autou* ("from all His work") are a clear reflection of Gen 2:2. The author of Hebrews does not complete the line by adding *hōn epoiēsen* ("which He had done"), but this is only a minor difference. Exod 20:11, on the other hand, lacks the entire second half of the sentence which appears in Gen 2:2 (*apo pantōn tōn ergōn autou hōn epoiēsen*, "from all His work which He had done"). From this comparison it is clear that the base line for Heb 4:4 is Genesis rather than Exodus – the creation story rather than the Sabbath commandment.

## "Heaven(s)," "Earth," and "Sea(s)"

We have briefly discussed a passage that gives the appearance of quoting the Sabbath commandment, but does not. How can we recognize other passages that do? What would a quotation drawn from the fourth commandment look like? I suggest that whenever the words "heaven(s)," "earth," and "sea(s)" appear together in one verse, in the context of God's creatorship, that is a reference to the fourth commandment. Taken together, these three words come to the heart of what the commandment is about.

Finding the three terms "heaven(s)," "earth," "sea(s)" together in one verse is an important clue when searching for later references back to the fourth commandment, but not the only one. Rev 12:12 and 21:1 bring together all three of the terms listed above, but have no connection with the idea of creation and therefore no direct connection with the commandment. There is another clue to consider that we introduce a bit further on.

### The three main terms

It might seem that some verse within the creation story itself would bring together all three of our main terms, but nowhere in Gen 1 or 2 do we find such a verse. So not only does Exod 20:11 bring the terms "heaven(s)," "earth," and "sea(s)" together in one place; it is the first passage of Scripture to do so.

Seven verses previously, Exod 20:4 speaks of making "an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters [*bammayim*] below," but, while the Hebrew words *mayim* ("waters," vs. 4) and *yāmîm* ("sea," vs. 11) are similar in meaning, they are not the same, so a reference to the one cannot be accepted as a reference to the other. The first passage that has all three of the terms "heaven(s)," "earth," and "sea(s)" is vs. 11, not vs. 4.

Separately, there are over 200 passages in the Bible which refer in some way to "(the) heaven(s) and (the) earth," but that formula omits the third term, "sea(s)." And there is a fourth term to consider.

#### A fourth term

I said earlier that, within the context of God's creatorship, the three terms mentioned above are one clue and that there is another. After the reference to "heavens," "earth," and "sea" (*'et-haššāmayim w<sup>e</sup>'et-hā'āreš 'et-hayyām*) in Exod 20:11, the text adds, "and all that is in them" (*w<sup>e</sup>'et-kol-<sup>a</sup>šer-bām*). This fourth term, or what we could call a tag element, does not carry over with complete consistency into the twelve later passages discussed in the present paper. It is always there is one form or another, but the wording of this fourth element is relatively free. Nevertheless, finding it in connection with the three main terms from Exod 20:11, in the context of creation, is like finding a thumbprint. This combination of textual identifiers (the three main terms, the fourth element or tag, all in the context of God's creatorship) is reliable evidence that whatever passage contains them refers to the Sabbath commandment.

Among the seven Old Testament examples discussed here, the fourth term ranges from Amos 9:6 (*'al-p<sup>e</sup>nē hā'āreš*, "over the face of the land") which is not especially close to the wording found in Exod 20:11, at one extreme, to Ps 146:6, where the Hebrew of the fourth term of the earlier passage is reproduced exactly. For the full text of all seven Old Testament passages in question, see table 3 below.

Among the five New Testament passages also the fourth term assumes a variety of forms. In Rev 14:7 (*kai pēgas hudatōn*, "and the springs of water") there is a weak approximation of the tag. In Rev 5:13 (*kai ta en autois panta*, "and all that is in them") and 10:6 (*kai ta en autē*, "and all that is in it") the approximation is stronger. In Acts 4:24 and 14:15 the Greek text of Exod 20:11 is reproduced exactly, with every letter and accent in place. Here the exactness of the quotation extends not only to the fourth term but to the entire clause. Thus, in Exod 20:11; Acts 4:24; and Acts 14:15 we have *ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai panta ta en autois*, "the heaven and the earth and the sea and all [that is] in them" (literal gloss). Although slightly different from each other in NIV and other English translations, the relevant portions of Acts 4:24 and 14:15 are identical to each other in Greek.<sup>4</sup> For the full text of all five New Testament passages, see table 4 below.

#### Discussion

Ironically, the passage with the closest rhetorical connection to the commandment does not have the closest verbal connection. The fourth term in (Rev 14:7) (*kai pēgas hudatōn*, "and the springs of water") does not reproduce the Greek wording of Exod 20:11 LXX with precision, but does make clear that the earlier passage was in view by showing that a fourth term is expected following the words, *ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai thalassan*, "the heavens and the earth, and sea" (Rev 14:7, literal gloss) and by doing this in the context of God's creative power.

---

<sup>4</sup> But the Greek is not identical to the Hebrew. The word "and" is present in Greek translation before the third term ("sea"), but not in the Hebrew original. The comparison here is among representatives of the Greek form of the text – with "and" (*kai*).

In two additional passages (Rev 12:12; 21:1) the tag element is missing altogether and the context is not that of creation, although all three of the main terms from Exod 20:11 are present. So I do not consider Rev 12:12 or 21:1 to be references to the commandment.

By contrast, in two cases (Neh 9:6; Rev 10:6) a tag element is added, not only after the third term, but after each of the three. Thus, the form of the clause is term 1 + tag 1, term 2 + tag 2, and term 3 + tag 3, rather than term 1 + term 2 + term 3 + tag, as in the other examples.

## The Passages

For ease of exposition I now give an overview of the seven Old Testament passages mentioned above. (See table 3.) Words in the English column that provide a link to the commandment are bolded and Hebrew and Greek parallels, for those words only, are given in transliterated form.

Table 3  
Seven Old Testament Passages

Ref	English (NIV)	Hebrew (Quoted)	Greek (Quoted)
Neh 9:6	You alone are the LORD. You made the <u>heavens</u> , even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the <u>earth</u> and all that is on it, the <u>seas</u> and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.	<i>’et-haššāmayim šēme haššāmayim w<sup>e</sup>kol-šēbā’ām hā’āreš w<sup>e</sup>kol-’āšer ’āleyhā hayyammim w<sup>e</sup>kol-’āšer bāhem</i>	<i>ton ouranon kai ton ouranon tou ouranou kai pasan tēn stasin autōn tēn gēn kai panta hosa estin en autē tas thalassas kai panta ta en autais</i>
Ps 69:34	Let <u>heaven</u> and <u>earth</u> praise him, the <u>seas</u> and all that move in them,	<i>šāmayim wā’āreš yammim w<sup>e</sup>kol-rōmēs bām</i>	<i>hoi ouranoi kai hē gē thalassa kai panta ta herponta en autois</i>
Ps 96:11	Let the <u>heavens</u> rejoice, let the <u>earth</u> be glad; let the <u>sea</u> resound, and all that is in it;	<i>haššāmayim . . . hā’āreš . . . hayyām ūm<sup>e</sup>lō’ō</i>	<i>hoi ouranoi . . . hē gē . . . hē thalassa kai to plērōma autēs</i>
Ps 135:6	The LORD does whatever pleases him, in the <u>heavens</u> and on the <u>earth</u> , in the <u>seas</u> and all their depths.	<i>baššāmayim ūbā’āreš bayyammim w<sup>e</sup>kol-t<sup>e</sup>hōmōt</i>	<i>en tō ouranō kai en tē gē en tais thalassais kai en pasais tais abussois</i>
Ps 146:6	the Maker of <u>heaven</u> and <u>earth</u> , the <u>sea</u> , and everything in them – the LORD, who remains faithful forever.	<i>šāmayim wā’āreš ’et-hayyām w<sup>e</sup>’et-kol-’āšer-bām</i>	<i>ton ouranon kai tēn gēn tēn thalassan kai panta ta en autois</i>
Amos 9:6	he who builds his lofty palace in the <u>heavens</u> and sets its foundation on the <u>earth</u> , who calls for the waters of the <u>sea</u> and pours them out over the face of the land-- the LORD is his name.	<i>baššāmayim . . . ’al-’ereš . . . l<sup>e</sup>mē-hayyām . . . ’al-p<sup>e</sup>nē hā’āreš</i>	<i>epi tēs gēs themeliōn . . . to hudōr tēs thalassēs . . . epi prosōpon tēs gēs</i>
Hag 2:6	"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the <u>heavens</u> and the <u>earth</u> , the <u>sea</u> and the dry land.	<i>’et-haššāmayim w<sup>e</sup>’et-hā’āreš w<sup>e</sup>’et-hayyām w<sup>e</sup>’et-heḥārābā</i>	<i>ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai tēn xēran</i>

In table 3 notice concerning the fourth element, or tag (comparable to "and all that is in them," Exod 20:11), that it changes from verse to verse. Thus, in addition to the three main items we have: "and all their starry host," "and all that is on it [i.e., on the earth]," "and all that is in them [i.e., in the seas]" (Neh 9:6); "and all that move in them" (Ps 69:34); " and all that is in it"

(Ps 96:11); "and all that is in them" (Ps 146:6), we also find "and all their depths" (Ps 135:6); "over the face of the land" (Amos 9:6); and "the dry land" (Hag 2:6).

The five New Testament passages which refer back to Exod 20:11 appear in table 4 (below), with two others in table 5 (below).

Table 4  
Five New Testament Passages

Ref	English (NIV)	Greek (Quoted)
Acts 4:24	When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the <u>heaven</u> and the <u>earth</u> and the <u>sea</u> , and everything in them.	<i>ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai panta ta en autois</i>
Acts 14:15	"Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made <u>heaven</u> and <u>earth</u> and <u>sea</u> and everything in them."	<i>ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai panta ta en autois</i>
Rev 5:13	Then I heard every creature in <u>heaven</u> and on <u>earth</u> and under the earth and on the <u>sea</u> , and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"	<i>en tō ouranō kai epi tēs gēs . . . kai epi tēs thalassēs kai ta en autois panta</i>
Rev 10:6	And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the <u>heavens</u> and all that is in them, the <u>earth</u> and all that is in it, and the <u>sea</u> and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay!	<i>ton ouranon kai ta en autō kai tēn gēn kai ta en autē kai tēn thalassan kai ta en autē</i>
Rev 14:7	He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the <u>heavens</u> , the <u>earth</u> , the <u>sea</u> and the <u>springs of water</u> ."	<i>ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai thalassan kai pēgas hudatōn</i>

Table 5  
Two Possible Examples

Rev 12:12	Therefore rejoice, you <u>heavens</u> and you who dwell in them! But woe to the <u>earth</u> and the <u>sea</u> , because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."	<i>hoi ouranoi . . . tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan</i>
Rev 21:1	Then I saw a new <u>heaven</u> and a new <u>earth</u> , for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any <u>sea</u> .	<i>ouranon . . . gēn . . . hē thalassa</i>

In table 4 each example has a tag element ("and everything in them" [Acts 4:24]; "and everything in them" [Acts 14:15]; "and all that is in them" [Rev 5:13]; "and all that is in it" [Rev 10:6]; "and the springs of water" [Rev 14:7]). In table 5, Rev 12:12 and 21:1 do not have this tag and do not have a strong contextual relationship to the idea of creation. In table 5 this is not the case. This fact excludes the last two passages from being references back to Exos 20:11.

## Do Acts 4:24 and 14:15 Refer Back to Exod 20:11 or to Ps 146:6?

The similarity between Exod 20:11 and Ps 146:6 is so close that we should ask which passage Acts 4:24 and 14:15 have in view. Could they be references to Ps 146 instead of to Exod 20? This is not difficult to decide. The wording of Acts 4:24 and 14:15 refers to Exod 20:11, not Ps 146:6. There is only one translatable difference between the relevant portions of Ps 146:6 and Exod 20:11, but it enables us to distinguish between the two possible origins for the verses in Acts.

In Hebrew Ps 146:6 omits the object marker *'et* and with it the definite article twice. Thus, in the Hebrew of this verse we have "heavens and earth" rather than "the heavens and the earth." (The object marker *'et* is untranslatable.) In Greek Ps 146:6 omits the word *kai* ("and") before *tēn thalassan* ("the sea"). Thus, in Greek the text reads "the sea" instead of "and the sea." See tables 6 and 7.

Table 6  
Comparison of Exod 20:11 and Ps 146:6  
(Hebrew, Greek)

Ref	Text
Hebrew	
Exod 20:11	<i>'et-haššāmayim w<sup>e</sup>'et-hā'āreš w<sup>e</sup>'et-hayyām w<sup>e</sup>'et-kol-<sup>a</sup>šer bām</i>
Ps 146:6	<i>haššāmayim wā'āreš 'et-hayyām w<sup>e</sup>'et-kol-<sup>a</sup>šer bām</i>
Greek	
Exod 20:11	<i>ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai panta ta en autō</i>
Ps 146:6	<i>ton ouranon kai tēn gēn tēn thalassan kai panta ta en autō</i>

Table 7  
Comparison of Exod 20:11 With Acts 4:24 and 14:15  
(Greek)

Ref	Text
Exod 20:11	<i>ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai panta ta en autō</i>
Acts 4:24	<i>ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai panta ta en autō</i>
Acts 14:15	<i>ton ouranon kai tēn gēn kai tēn thalassan kai panta ta en autō</i>

Notice that the first two examples of *'et* in Exod 20:11 are excluded in Ps 146:6 and that only the second example of *kai* in Exod 20:11 LXX is excluded in Ps 146:6 LXX, while both Acts



4:24 and 14:15 reproduce the Greek translation of the original exactly. Thus, while both the Hebrew and Greek of Exod 20:11 and Ps 146:6 are similar, there is a difference between them, both in Hebrew and in Greek. It is a small difference, but one that will have interesting implications later in the discussion.

My point in this section is that the early disciples were consciously and carefully quoting the Sabbath commandment in Greek translation when they praised God for the privilege of suffering reproach for their relationship with Jesus (see Acts 4:21-31). And Paul was just as consciously and just as carefully quoting the same commandment in Greek translation when he tried to keep the men of Lystra from sacrificing a bull to him for healing a lame man (see Acts 14:8-18).

Notice that in the one case the Sabbath commandment is used as a vehicle for praise and that in the other case it becomes an argument against idolatry. Is there a natural connection between the Sabbath commandment and the Bible's case against idolatry? Idolatry is the worship of something other than the Creator – anything other than the One who made us. True worship does not just mean worshiping God on the Sabbath; it means worshiping Him at all – on the basis of the fact that He made us. There are many other things to praise Him for, but God's creatorship is the basis for all true worship in every age, just as forgetting His status as our Creator is the basis for all idolatry. Thus, thoughtful Sabbath keeping is a guarantee against idolatry because it constantly reminds us that God is the One who made "the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Exod 20:11), i.e., us and everything that surrounds us.

## Themes

One theme that emerges from the present study is the close connection between God's creatorship and human praise. I submit that the Sabbath does more than give us time for praise. A right celebration of the seventh-day Sabbath is itself a form of praise. One definition for praise is an "Expression of approval, commendation, or admiration."<sup>5</sup> The most fundamental thing we do when obeying the fourth commandment as God intended is to reflect approvingly on His act of bringing our world into existence.

Another theme is the connection between God's creatorship and divine judgment. I didn't say creatorship and punishment. Judgment is not the same as punishment. The two can overlap, but the words are separate and distinct.

Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns." The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. 11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; 12 let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; 13 they will sing before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth. (Ps 96:10-13)

The above passage deserves to be read carefully. In the Bible, judgment means being decisive – bringing things to a head. This could involve reaching a timely decision, caring for people in need rather than allowing their situation to be neglected, bringing people to punishment when they deserve it, rescuing the nation when its people have separated from God. For insight into what the Bible means by judging, there is no better place to start looking

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/praise>.

than in the book of Judges. The judges mentioned there were not raised up to punish, but to deliver. They took decisive action on behalf of Israel. In the present case, it is appropriate that God should judge the whole earth because He made the whole earth.

## Discussion

A Scripturally informed memory of who God is offers the best reason anyone could ever have for worshiping Him. Because our God is the One who created both us and everything else, He merits our worship. This is the reason why praise is always fitting and why any type of idolatry must always be hopelessly misguided. A number of seemingly different themes come together nicely in the context of the Sabbath commandment.

### False worship

By definition, the things we make cannot have made us. And so the things we make can never merit our worship. Saying this is not a small or unimportant part of what the Bible says to mankind. It is supremely important for us to remember who is God and who He is not.

By constantly reminding us that we owe our existence to Yahweh, the Sabbath commandment strikes at the heart of every kind of idolatry. A reminder like this is not something to be lightly set aside. It is something we should cling to and cherish. We do this by obeying what the commandment tells us to do, in the manner specified. The only day which fulfills the requirement of resting on the seventh day, is the seventh day. The seventh day is not the first day. One is not seven.

### True worship

In Rev 14:7 an angel flying in midair makes a distinction between two ways of worshiping God. By endorsing the one he condemns the other. What he says is,

"Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." (Rev 14:7, NIV)

No one would deny that Christians of every denomination worship the Creator. They may or may not believe what the creation story says, but they worship the God of the Bible. And yet the first angel of Rev 14 implies that not all worship is necessarily acceptable.

Is there a way of worshiping God that does not specifically acknowledge His role as Creator? By contrast, is there a way of worshiping God that focuses on the fact that He, and no other, is God by virtue of the fact that He created all things? Are these two ways of worshiping different from each other? And why should this matter?

In the beginning God worked for six days creating the world and everything in it, and then set the seventh day apart from the other six, making it holy. At the time when He did this, the only people He could have done it for were Adam and Eve. If there is no distinction between Jews and Greeks in Gal 3:26-29, there was certainly no distinction of racial groups in Gen 2:1-3. Adam and Eve were neither Jews nor Greeks, but the parents of all humankind. We all owe our existence to one God through one set of human parents.

By keeping the Seventh day holy in obedience to the fourth commandment we show that we worship the God "who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (Rev 14:7), because He is the One who made these things. This is the type of worship the angel had in mind when he said what he did in Rev 14:7. The thing that is needed is not just to worship God, but to worship Him because He is the Creator of all things.

## Conclusion

God has set apart a day to be with us and we must set apart that same day to be with Him or show ultimately, by our unwillingness to do so, that our hearts are not with Him. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:21). If Jesus is our Treasure, we will want to be with Him – not in a way we decide would be good, but in the very way He indicates. Nor can we pit the Father against the Son, or the Son against the Father, as we make our decisions. Jesus says, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). We can obey God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – or not, but we can't have it both ways. Obeying God must include doing what He says. What He says, in this case, is recorded in Exod 20:8-11, and in Rev 14:7.

Is a whole day too long to spend with Jesus? If so, what will be our attitude toward Him in eternity? Will we love being with Him in heaven after having no time for Him on earth? His command to rest – physically as well as spiritually, for an entire twenty-four hour period, even if it is from sunset Friday evening to sunset Saturday evening – will not be onerous if we love Him. On the contrary, having an opportunity to be with Jesus on a recurring cycle like this will be a source of delight and a wellspring of praise.

It is my understanding that we have not kept the Sabbath until we've enjoyed keeping it. This does not mean enjoying ourselves on God's special day by doing whatever we like. It means enjoying Him – immersing ourselves in God's presence by doing what delights and pleases Him. That might involve spending time in public worship. It might involve getting out into nature with your kids in the afternoon. It might involve taking walks out of doors with those who share your beliefs. It might involve visiting people who can't get out into nature, or anywhere else, and are lonely. It might involve singing for people in nursing homes. There are different ways to do this. The point is to spend time with Jesus, in the person of those with whom He identifies, and with them – or just by yourself – to celebrate His creative power in nature.

The New Testament does not tell people to keep the Sabbath, in part, because it had not become unimportant by New Testament times. The early church was keeping the Sabbath and that practice gradually faded away. But as for the earliest Christians, telling them to keep the Sabbath would have been like telling them to breathe. They were going to do it anyway. No one in the first century had to be told to do this. And why should we? Why should we have to be told to do what ought to be our greatest source of delight?

Notice that even Rev 14:7 tell us to keep the Sabbath. It tells us to worship the Creator. The connection between keeping the Sabbath and the worshiping the One whose work it commemorates should be clear, but the wording does reference the Sabbath commandment, it commands our worship, and it specifies that the Object of that worship must be God. This is important, because worship, to avoid being idolatrous, must be directed to the One who made us – instead of being directed to things we have made.

The first two commandments (not to have other gods, not to make idols) are not the only ones that deal with such matters. So does the fourth. Together these commandments provide a bulwark of protection against every form of idolatry. Is this commandment still relevant for Christians? It is. Is it quoted in the New Testament? A number of times. But not the command clause; the explanation.

There is a similarity between the holiness of the seventh day and the holiness of the ground on which first Moses, and then Joshua, were standing when God commanded them to remove their sandals (Exod 3:5; Josh 5:15). There was nothing special in the dirt itself. What made the ground holy was the presence of God.