

# God's Sabbath: A Conflict That Comes with a Blessing

**Author:** Larry W. Wilson

**‘If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord’s holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.’ The mouth of the Lord has spoken.” (Isaiah 58:13,14)**

Adam and Eve were created in God’s image. (Genesis 1:26, 27) They enjoyed a natural proclivity to live in harmony with God and His laws because His laws were written in their hearts and minds. Adam and Eve did not need a published set of laws by which to live because selflessness and righteousness came naturally. However, when Adam and Eve sinned, there was an immediate change in their natures, attitudes, and dispositions. They suddenly became hostile toward God and His authority. This curse has plagued mankind ever since.

After they sinned and when Adam and Eve began to have children, all of their offspring were born with sinful natures. (Romans 5:12) Cain, their firstborn, was born with a sinful nature that was predatory, selfish, and self-centered. Succumbing to his sinful nature caused him to become a murderer. What makes this situation so terrible is that the curse continues to multiply as the population grows, resulting in escalating violence, wickedness, and decadent behavior. This explains why God has to step in at times to cauterize the malignancy of sin’s cancer. He destroyed the world in Noah’s day, Sodom and Gomorrah, Jericho, and the empires of the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Grecians, and the Romans. Ultimately, because of wickedness, He destroyed even His own people and the city of Jerusalem.

## God Requires a Change of Heart

To inherit eternal life, Jesus said a person has to be “born again.” (John 3:3) Since a person cannot create a “born again” heart within himself, how does this occur? There are three steps involved with receiving the miracle of a born again heart. First, we must listen for the Holy Spirit’s voice. (Revelation 22:17) When God speaks, and He will, we must surrender to His demand. (Note: The voice of God is unlike all of “the other voices” that can be heard. When God speaks, there comes a nudge to do better, to make things right, and to live in harmony with His laws of love and righteousness.) God speaks to everyone who will listen because He is not willing that any should perish. (2 Peter 3:9, KJV) When God speaks, He wants to see a response. (Matthew 3:8) Second, we respond by admitting our failure(s) and by making things right with God and man. Third, we must be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to refine our tastes, thoughts, habits, and attitudes. He does this by drawing us into the study of God’s Word. These three steps create a problem. Everything God wants from us in these steps is contrary to our rebellious, predatory, and selfish natures.

If a person is willing to walk with God by gratefully accepting the refining condemnation which

the Holy Spirit creates within him, he will grow spiritually and be genuinely happy. God blesses everyone who is willing to live the born again life with a peace and joy that passes understanding. Keep in mind that living the “born again” life is a daily experience. This is important because many Christians get started in the “born again” process, but soon “fall off the wagon” because the battle with self is just too hard.

The apostle Paul summarized the Christian experience this way: **“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.”** (Romans 8:5-7)

## **Being Born Again Starts with the Sinner's Prayer**

Generally speaking, the rebirth process begins with “a sinner’s prayer.” It goes something like this: “Lord, I am guilty of the following sin(s) (fill in the blank \_\_\_\_\_) and I know the curse of sin lives within me. Thank You for promising to forgive my sins if I confess them and make them right. I understand the death penalty that looms over all sinners. I cannot deny or escape the curse of sin on my own. Nevertheless, I want to be a part of Your coming kingdom. I want to please You so that I may walk with You. I recognize the incredible sacrifice You made for me on Calvary and my desire is to glorify You before others. I want to serve You and I believe that You have made salvation possible for anyone who will surrender their hearts to You. I believe that You will enable me, through the indwelling power and direction of the Holy Spirit, to overcome bad habits, tastes, thoughts, attitudes, rebellion, selfishness, and my predatory ways. I am willing to go wherever You direct, to become all that You want, and to do all that You command. I want to be Your child. I surrender to Your Lordship. Please be my King and Savior. Transform me and bless me so that I may live blamelessly in Your sight, so that when we meet face to face, You will be mine and I will be Yours. Amen.” Every time a heartfelt prayer like this is made, God is pleased and the angels rejoice!

Paul wrote, **“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is [yet] to come.”** (2 Corinthians 1:21,22, underline and insertion mine) As Paul said, the Holy Spirit is a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Whenever a person attempts to live by faith, he soon discovers an enormous struggle within himself. The sinful nature and the spiritual nature are strongly opposed to one another, and the only solution to this conflict is the death of one nature. **“For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the [indwelling power of the] Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body [you overcome the passions of the sinful nature], you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”** (Romans 8:13,14, insertions mine)

The profound problem with the “born again” life is that the sinful nature will not stay dead very long. The sinful nature comes to life every few hours after being put to death. It is a Christian’s worst nightmare. Paul wrote about his own experience after being a Christian for more than 25 years: **“We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, [that is, I came into this world**

at birth] **sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin [my own natural rebellion] living in me.**" (Romans 7:14-17, underlining and insertion mine)

## God Will Soon Seal His People

Now that we have discussed the nature of mankind before and after the fall of Adam, consider this short summary: All have sinned. (Romans 3:23) Therefore, each person is born with a natural predisposition to be predatory, selfish, and rebellious toward God's laws because the curse of sin lives within us. When a person realizes his true condition before God and the penalty that looms over his head, he has two choices. He can remain rebellious and die the second death for his own sins, or he can surrender to God's terms and conditions of salvation and receive eternal life. If a sinner surrenders to God's voice each day and puts his faith in Christ for salvation, God puts His seal of ownership (as a son or daughter of God) upon him. The evidence of this seal of ownership is "a deposit" of Holy Spirit power within us, "guaranteeing what is to come." The promise to come is this: **"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."** (Hebrews 8:10)

The Bible describes a time when our sinful natures will be removed and God's children will no longer have to deal with the curse of sin that lives within our hearts and minds. What began with a deposit will someday be paid in full. The saints who live during the 1,260 days of the Two Witnesses will experience the marvelous fulfillment of this promise. Of course, everyone who is resurrected at the Second Coming will also experience this marvelous fulfillment. Meanwhile, until we reach the 1,260 days given to the Two Witnesses, those living the "born again" life must live with two natures warring over the mastery of their souls. This war is not hopeless; it is just difficult. Paul understood the challenge. He wrote, **"I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."** (Philippians 4:13)

## God's Sabbath Rest and Isaiah 58:13,14

Now that we have considered the ways of the sinful nature, we can examine God's Sabbath and how it relates to the sinful nature. Genesis 2:1-3 indicates that God created the seventh day and made it holy during Creation Week. Contrary to what most Christians believe, Hebrews 4:9,10 indicates that God's Sabbath rest has not been abolished. Before their fall, we can be sure that Adam and Eve naturally looked forward to each Sabbath rest, especially those Sabbaths when the Creator Himself came to visit. Sin ruined this perspective. Not only did Adam and Eve lose their garden home, they also lost their natural proclivity to love and obey God. As a result, the Sabbath became an obstacle for them as it is for everyone when the sinful nature is dominant. God foreknew that Adam and Eve would sin. Before He created His Sabbath, God foreknew they would fall into the curse of sin. God deliberately created the Sabbath, and later, He underscored its perpetual importance with the fourth commandment so that it would not be forgotten. God created the Sabbath for man so that man can test his

relationship with God each week. God's Sabbath is a spiritual "weather vane" indicating within each of us whether the sinful or the spiritual nature is dominant. This weather vane is a fitting illustration because it faithfully reveals which wind has the strongest influence.

The sinful nature does not want to give up one seventh of its time to God. The sinful nature is naturally hostile to God's laws and when the laws of God are imposed upon the sinful nature, man's rebellion deepens into open defiance. This was the state of Israel in Isaiah's day and the same can be said today of many Christians. God said to Isaiah: "**The Lord says: 'These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men.'**" (Isaiah 29:13)

Isaiah 58:13,14 is a simple test. If you find that honoring God's Sabbath by "not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words" and you find it a delight, your spiritual nature is dominant! Your walk with the Lord is on track! If this is not the case, your sinful nature is dominant. The sinful nature can say many things that are not in keeping with God's plan for His holy day.

The Sabbath was made for man. (Mark 2:27,28) God's Sabbath was created to be a sign between Him and His people. (Exodus 31:17, Ezekiel 20:12) In a world cursed by sin and controlled by the sinful nature, God's Sabbath can only be a delight when the spiritual nature is in control. God's Sabbath is a spiritual "weather vane" indicating which nature has dominance. When the spiritual nature is dominant, God's Sabbath is a deliberate conflict that comes with a blessing.

Larry Wilson