

Observing the Sabbath Day

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Interest and awareness is growing around the world that Saturday, the seventh day of the week, is God's holy Sabbath. (Gen 2:1-3; Exo 20:8-11; Heb 4:9,10) Within recent months, I have received numerous letters asking, "I want to keep the Sabbath. How should it be observed?"

I have also received letters from people who have been Sabbatharians for awhile, and they question how not to alienate family members, friends and employers who do not understand the Sabbath. There is no doubt about it.

When you choose to observe God's Sabbath, you will face many challenges. To be sure, it is humanly impossible to resolve every issue satisfactorily regarding this topic. However, it is my hope that the next few pages will be helpful if you are dealing with issues regarding Sabbath observance.

Three Simple Points

The word holy means "to set apart." When God created "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," He made the tree holy by "setting it apart" from all other trees. (Gen 2:17) The fruit on that tree did not belong to Adam and Eve.

In a similar way, when God created the seventh day, He *set apart* twenty-four hours of time from the rest of the week that do not belong to us, even though that 24 hour time span was made for our benefit. (Gen 2:1-3; Exo 20:8-11; Isa 58:13,14; Mark 2:27,28) Review the fourth commandment:

"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy." (Exo 20:8-11)

At the physical level God stipulates three things in the fourth commandment:

1. Six days are allotted for work
2. Work is forbidden on the seventh day
3. Do not allow those under your control to work on Sabbath

The first point is not hard to understand. God says that the first six days of the week *are not* holy. If we claim it does not matter and that all seven days are holy, we have erroneously given

common days the designation of "holy," which lessens the distinction and place of honor God gives to the seventh day. Ezekiel 22:26 recorded how the priests of Israel committed this sin and how deeply it offended God. The second point is not hard to understand either.

God said, "**On it** [the seventh day], **you shall not do any work.**" What does God mean by "work?" Work is continual exertion, whether mental or physical, that is done for gain or an increase of some kind. God forbids this type of exertion on the seventh day.

Last, God tells us not to allow those people who are under our jurisdiction to work on this day either, even including your animals. Your work, your labor, and your efforts for increase must stop on Sabbath, so that everything you own is at rest. God's basic intent for this law is that man should *stop* working and rest. Resting on Sabbath can be a very pleasant "time-out," especially if you love and trust God, and gladly submit to His Sovereign authority.

On the other hand, if our affections are set on the things of this world, 24 hours of mandated "time-out" can be viewed as a great hindrance and a very big obstacle to business, pleasure and leisure.

Every human being is naturally selfish, especially about their time and money, and God challenges our inner being by constantly asking for some of both. It is a contest of wills. The fourth commandment is law, a legal declaration made by our Creator, the King of Kings. The fourth commandment is also a test to see if we will yield and humbly obey God.

The Sabbath has a Legal Basis

The seventh commandment states: "Thou shalt not commit adultery," therefore the commission of adultery is a sin in God's sight. The fourth commandment is also a part of God's decalogue and working on Sabbath is also considered a sin in God's sight. It makes no difference whether we agree with God's declaration or not, Sabbath observance is a legal mandate upon the whole human race. (See Lev 4:13,14.)

Contrary to what most people think and most preachers say, the Ten Commandments are not "ten suggestions" that everyone should consider every now and then. Instead, the Ten Commandments are ten laws which God unilaterally imposed upon the human race and He will judge every person by these ten commandment standards. (Eccl 12:13,14) Men may neglect, reject or deny the obligation of the Ten Commandments, but God reads every human heart. He knows our rebellious ways and He will deal with each of us accordingly on judgment day.

Legalism

Because Sabbath observance is commanded in the Ten Commandments, it makes Sabbath observance a legal matter. In God's sight, disregarding the observance of Saturday is just as wrong as killing, adultery, stealing or lying. In spite of all this, most Christians do not observe Saturday as God's holy day.

To understand how this change occurred, we need to briefly review a bit of early church history. By A.D. 50, the governing Roman's hatred for the Jews had grown very intense and Christians were regarded as a sect of Judaism. To distance themselves from their Jewish roots, Christians in Rome were moving away from Sabbath observance and eventually abandoned the "Jewish" Sabbath altogether.

Over time, the Church of Rome became dominate throughout Europe and Sunday became the official day of worship. Many Christians today erroneously believe that Sunday is the Lord's day and claims of sacredness for Sunday are extracted from "the voided Sabbath commandment."

Obligation of the Law

Since we have determined that the observance of Sabbath is a legal issue, let us review two legal issues that surround this commandment today. First, there are Sabbatarians who defend the obligation of the fourth commandment to keep Saturday holy.

Their antagonists claim they are legalists and insist the Ten Commandments were made null and void at the cross. They also claim that nine of the original commandments (minus the Sabbath commandment) were restored and imposed upon mankind by God in the New Testament. Interestingly, both sides of this argument are legalistic in nature, since Sunday proponents adamantly defend their view.

In the final analysis, the controversy still centers on whether or not the Ten Commandments became nine commandments.

The *Intent* of the Law

The second legal issue surrounding the fourth commandment concerns activities during Sabbath hours. It is this side of the legal issue that so many questions have been asked. Unfortunately, some Sabbatarians have given the Sabbath a bad reputation by imposing more requirements on the Sabbath than God Himself imposed! The fourth commandment only specifies the three items stated earlier, and nothing more.

The fourth commandment requires a higher level of submission to God than the other nine commandments because the fourth commandment requires man to rest at an appointed time. The Sabbath commandment sticks out like a "sore thumb" in a world that never stops.

When God said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery, bear false witness, covet, steal or kill," these laws are self-evident and considered socially reasonable. Most people agree that these are laws everyone should live by. When God said, "Thou shalt not have any other Gods before me," this also seems self-evident within the Christian community since Christianity is a mono-theistic religion. But, when God said, "Do no work on the seventh day," this commandment seems uniquely unreasonable to most people.

Why? Especially in today's society, Sabbath observance forces the believer into a very awkward

position. If a person refuses to work on the seventh day because he wishes to honor God, what impact does that have on his or her colleagues at work? What impact does it have on an employer? What impact does the action have socially? What impact does it have in a home where the spouse or other family members do not understand?

Some Sabbatarians believe that "a cessation" from work is all that the Sabbath commandment entails. In their case, the Sabbath is a free day, a day for doing whatever one wants to do. At the other extreme, some Sabbatarians believe that even the most menial tasks violate the Sabbath. (Mark 2:23,24) The *intent* of the law is missed in both of these cases. The purpose of the fourth commandment is threefold.

First, God wants man to recognize Jesus as Creator, Landlord and Owner of Earth. His laws are above all laws. **"For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."** (Exo 20:11)

Second, God established His Sabbath as an everlasting sign that distinguishes His children from the children of the world. **"The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested."** (Exo 31:16,17)

Third, God wants human beings to honor Him by worshiping Him according to the fourth commandment. **"Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth to every nation, tribe, language and people. 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 heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."** (Rev 14:6,7)

God wants us to cease from our labor so that we might demonstrate respect for Him in a world that gives Him no respect! (See commandment number one! Exo 20:3) These three purposes may sound simplistic, but the intent of the fourth law is to have a "time-out" for God.

People who respond according to the fourth commandment make a social statement in their sphere of influence they are standing up for God! Do not forget that the three Hebrews who are remembered for all time in Dan 3, experienced notoriety for standing up when everyone else was kneeling down before the golden image.

Because the Sabbath is a gift of 24 hours, Sabbath observance is a mirror reflecting our relationship with God. Consider this parallel: If a ten year old boy is regularly given \$10 each week as a gift, wouldn't his consistent use of the money reflect the desires of his heart? Of course it does. So, what does our use of God's time say about the contents of our heart? God gives the human race a gift every week. It is His Sabbath. (Ezekiel 20:12, Mark 2:27)

He could have given man a ten day week with every day being dedicated to labor, creating endless cycles of work that would weary His children to death with toil. Great God that He is, He

created something much better. Just as He created man to rest in sleep *before* beginning each day of work (the evening precedes the morning), He created the Sabbath so that man could rest and be renewed physically, spiritually and mentally *before* beginning a new week. (Incidentally, Adam and Eve's first full day of life was a Sabbath.)

God's yoke is not heavy. (Mat 11:28) One of man's greatest challenges is to be ever alert and on the lookout for selfishness creeping into the human heart. (Jer 17:9) The gift of the Sabbath can be used in wrong ways if our attitudes toward God are not Spirit-led.

For example, if we have allowed ourselves to become overextended with the demands of life for six days, we can end up **using** the Sabbath to do things that we did not have time to do on other days. Or, we can **use** the Sabbath to physically recover from our previous week's intemperance so we can commit more intemperance in the coming week. Does this use of the Sabbath satisfy God's intent for the Sabbath? Of course not. Which is the best day of the week?

In the beginning, which day did God set apart for oneness with Himself? Which days did God give to us to labor for an increase? It takes six days to prepare for Sabbath if we truly understand that it is our privilege to meet with God on Sabbath!

First-day Christians

It was said earlier, legalism is not limited to Sabbath keepers. Some first-day Christians are as legalistic regarding their beliefs about the sacredness of Sunday as Sabbath keepers. A minority of "Sunday keepers" conscientiously cease from work on Sunday, citing the fourth commandment as their authority for doing so. They believe that even though the day of worship has been changed from Sabbath to Sunday, the sacredness of "the Lord's day" remains.

In general, though, the sacredness of Sunday has lost a lot of ground over the past 50 years in the United States through commerce, communication and travel. At the present time, only 54% of the workforce in the U.S.A. work 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., five days a week. This means that almost half of all U.S. citizens are working all hours of the week, including Saturday and Sunday. Even though most Christians in the U.S.A. believe that Sunday is the Lord's day, they do not conscientiously restrict themselves from doing anything they want to do on Sunday.

I have asked several Sunday keepers about their observance of Sunday and have been told, "If I am required to work on Sunday, then *I must do so* to keep my job." I have also heard, "If I need to go shopping on Sunday, I see nothing wrong with that because it's the only time I can do it." Even if Sunday was the Lord's Day, do these responses justify a violation of the fourth commandment? Not according to the Bible.

Can we violate the holiness which God placed on the Sabbath and expect God to honor us with His presence? (See Neh 13:15-22.) Many Sunday keeping Christians view Sabbath observance with an obvious disdain. They believe Sabbath observance is legalistic because it is their contention that the fourth commandment was abolished at the Cross.

This is such a paradox. How can Sunday be "sacred" if there is no law concerning the sacredness of Sunday? In other words, the observance of a holy day is a legal matter if it is based on law. Since no law is found in the Bible that declares Sunday to be holy, the observance of Sunday is not mandated.

Sabbath observance can be problematic if it creates social and financial problems. The Sabbath can also be a social impediment because Sabbath observance is out of sync with the godless ways of the world. Many people are surprised to learn that from the beginning, God designed the Sabbath to produce obstacles to test our faith and encourage our dependence on Him!

Sabbatical Years

Faith in God is not only the means to salvation, it is the essential experience that every person needs in order to know God. Naturally, we do not like testing and adversity because it is uncomfortable and contrary to our pursuit for gain and happiness. We do not like the storms of life, but smooth seas do not make good sailors. God knows this. Every time we are faced with an overwhelming challenge, we need God.

To develop Israel's faith, God required a sabbatical rest for the land every seventh year. In an agricultural society, the requirement not to plant or harvest crops for an entire year must have seemed outrageous! I am sure many Israelites thought, "How will we eat?" "Ah," said the Lord, "I want everyone to realize that you eat regularly out of my hand because I am faithful. I send the rain. I send the sunshine. I, the Lord, do all these things.

To build your confidence in my faithfulness, I will send you a double portion in the sixth year so you will not have to plant and harvest during the seventh." (See the details in Lev 25.) The point is that God deliberately created the sabbatical year, as well as the Sabbath, to interrupt life on all fronts.

The Sabbath means to stop going in the direction you have been going and rest. There were social, financial and other consequences for resting at the appointed time and Israel learned that living by faith was more difficult than they bargained for. If you will remember, when Israel violated 70 sabbatical years, God killed two-thirds of the people and sent the remainder of the nation into Babylonian captivity. (Eze 5:12; 2 Chr 36:21)

Inherent Need for Oneness

Whether we realize it or not, oneness plays a *very* powerful role in our lives. Oneness means to be included and given respect, acceptance and love. Adults often speak about the strength of "peer pressure during adolescence" without realizing that peer pressures never end, they just change.

Peer pressure occurs when our inherent need for oneness with some person or group of people is juxtaposed against the possibility of being "cut off" or rejected. Some people are very insecure about their social standing within their family, work or church, and unfortunately, they

will compromise their conscience in order to remain within the favor of a person or a group of people which they think are significant. No character trait is more despised in the movies than cowardice.

Yet, only a minority of people in real life actually have the courage to stand up for the right "though the heavens fall." Few people are willing to stand up and singularly bear rejection for the sake of conscience. This is where Sabbath observance comes in.

When God made the Sabbath, He made it for man's benefit. (Mark 2:27) Yes, in the Garden of Eden, the Sabbath was a day of greatest delight. No doubt the Creator Himself came to Earth and visited with Adam and Eve on special Sabbaths. But, God foreknew the rise of sin and when it occurred, He gave the Sabbath a new purpose.

God used Sabbath observance to frustrate man's oneness with the world by offering restoration and empowerment through oneness with Himself. Consider these possible scenarios and notice how oneness with God overcomes the world: If you have been publicly censured by your former church friends because your beliefs about God have changed, you have felt the painful loss of oneness (rejection).

If you have been ridiculed and rejected by your best friends because your beliefs about God have changed your behavior (perhaps your activities on Saturday are now different), you have felt the pain of rejection because you are no longer "one" of the gang. If you have been harassed at work because your co-workers did not understand your commitment to follow your conscience instead of going along with the crowd, you know the stigma of rejection.

These illustrations highlight the importance of oneness and show what a very powerful force it is in our lives. We are always in the process of developing oneness (bonding) with those around us. On a daily basis, we are forced into different degrees of oneness by work, school, church and other social contacts. However, God knew that unless He interrupted our bonding with the world, His children would sooner or later become *one* with the world. (Mat 13:24-30)

We are Invited

God foreknew that Adam and Eve would sin. God foreknew the seeds of rebellion that would grow in every human heart. God foreknew the degenerative process of sin *before* He created the world. So, when He created the world, He created the Sabbath for a number of reasons. The Sabbath uniquely provides *a time* for oneness, as well as *a weekly test* to see who really wants oneness with Him. Oneness with God is only possible when doing God's will.

Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me . . . If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." (Joh 14:23,24; 15:10)

Oneness is the delightful experience of well-being you experience when you are with someone that you really admire. Oneness operates on several levels. For example, intimate oneness with your spouse can be very engaging and fulfilling. Experiencing oneness with someone of exalted stature is wonderful, e.g., your boss, the president of your company, your Senator, etc. Oneness in experience with others can be unforgettable.

Army buddies often experience a type of oneness after going through some difficult and threatening situations together. Successful companies have managers that promote a type of "work-place oneness" through teamwork and mutual respect. A successful lifetime marriage depends, on the effort put into renewing the oneness in the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions. Another type of oneness is the delightful experience of winning.

The fans at the Super Bowl may not know one another, but a type of oneness forms within minutes after the coin toss. Being invited to a party, or simply being invited over to someone's house is a gesture to "come over" and experience oneness with us. In a similar way, this is what Sabbath is all about. God has commanded us to cease from our labors so we can come into His presence and experience oneness. God wants the *whole* day with His children.

He wants us to step out of our existence and into His. He wants to renew our awe of His ways because man's behavior is directly influenced by his perception of God. God invites us to come into His presence and find the transforming power of His love. These examples make the point that oneness in attitude, purpose, plan or action is no small component of human life.

Summary

The starting point for Sabbath observance is found in the fourth commandment: Cease from work. Thereafter, the guideline is quite simple: Pursue oneness with God. Invite others to join you on Sabbath. Study His Word and share experiences of faith. Attend church if possible.

Teach your children that Sabbath is a special day by doing special things with them that keep them directed toward God. The Sabbath experience matures as we go through phases and transitions in our knowledge of God. As we grow, we find ourselves exchanging activities that take us away from God for those activities that draw us closer to God. The Holy Spirit will be heard saying, "This is the right way *for you*, walk in it." Of course, our faith in God will be tested by keeping His Sabbath.

God likes to see if His laws are written in our affections or merely in our customs. If we approach the Sabbath with a healthy attitude, there is a great deal of freedom to define and enjoy a unique oneness with a very personal Jesus. Many Sabbath-keepers do things on Sabbath that I cannot do in good conscience and vice versa. It's supposed to be this way. Each person must discover God for himself. I am in no position to condemn anyone for their actions.

The Sabbath is the reciprocal of what we really want in life. If our heart's desire is oneness with God, the Sabbath will become a timely vehicle that helps us get there. If our heart's desire is "a day off" so that we can have time to pursue a personal agenda, the Sabbath can be *used* as a convenient means for doing this.

No doubt many Sabbath-keepers and Sunday-keepers alike fail to reach holy ground. I say this because I know what it is like to miss the mark. We reach holy ground when we take the time to submit to oneness with our Creator on His holy day.

Therefore, I try to guard my actions on Sabbath so that I do not miss the rest and joy that is possible in God. Each week, I look forward to a Sabbath rest. I am also eagerly looking forward to the commencement of the Sabbath millennium! Whenever I sit down at the keyboard to meditate with music, I like to play this old gospel song written by C.B. McAfee:

"There is a place of quietest rest, near to the heart of God.
A place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.
Oh Jesus, blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God.
Hold us who wait before thee, near to the heart of God."

If you have comments or questions, let us know. For a more comprehensive study on the history of the Sabbath, see the June 1996 issue of *Day Star*, titled "[What happened to the Lord's Day?](#)" For a comprehensive study on God's legal covenants, see the October 1998, *Day Star* article "[What Changed at the Cross.](#)" Both articles can be downloaded from our web-site at: [wake-up.org](https://www.wake-up.org), or call the office to purchase your personal copy.