

# How to Make the Sabbath a Delight

Like many of the Bible's teachings, proper Sabbath-keeping has become a controversial issue. Is the Sabbath governed by a strict list of "do's and don'ts"? Christ said that the Sabbath was made for man. What does this mean? Now you can know how to properly keep and enjoy the Sabbath—as God intended!

**G**OD GAVE MAN His laws so that we can enjoy life to the fullest. Contrary to what many believe, those laws are not a burden (I Jn. 5:3). They were given so that we can have a proper relationship with God and our fellowman.

Most professing Christians "agree" with nine of the Ten Commandments. They vaguely understand that it is wrong to worship other gods and practice idolatry, although they unwittingly do so. Most would say that it is wrong to take God's name in vain. Some feel that it is at least a good idea to show some degree of respect to parents. Some are of the opinion that it is morally wrong to kill, steal, lie, commit adultery and covet the things of others.

Very few actively attempt to *practice* these nine commandments as a way of life. After all, they just *know* that the law "was nailed to the cross." But they still basically accept them as "nice principles."

But when it comes to God's command to "Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:12), practically all churchgoers find a way to relegate the

Sabbath to "something that the Jews do," or "something lost in antiquity." Or they claim, "it doesn't matter what day you keep, as long as you keep a day." They concoct endless arguments as to why the Sabbath command does not apply today. But God's Word reveals that the Sabbath was made for *all* people, for *all* time.

## Established at Creation

After creating the earth and all its physical wonders in six days, God created the Sabbath by resting on the seventh day (Gen. 2:2-3). He did not rest because He was tired (see Psalm 121:3-4). By resting, He established the pattern He expects us to follow. We are to do all of our work, take care of all of our business transactions and enjoy our recreational pursuits during the first six days of the week. That is our time. **THE SABBATH IS GOD'S TIME.**

God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). He does things decently and in order (vs. 40). He did not create Adam first, before everything else, and then say, "Okay, now let's find something for you to do." He created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, with the instructions to "dress it and keep to it" (Gen. 2:15). Verse 19 shows that God sent all the animals to Adam so he could name them.

If the Sabbath would have been made first, before Adam, Christ could not have stated, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Also notice that He did not say, "The Sabbath was made just for the Jews." There were no Jews at the time God created the Sabbath.

Likewise, God did not create the Sabbath on the first day of the week (as many seem to believe) so that He could rest from the six days of work that He had *yet* to perform. And He did not ordain the Sabbath as the seventh day of the week, only to later change it to the first day (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8).

The Bible shows that *seven* is God's number for completion and perfection. Aside from the *seven* days of creation, God states, through King David, that His Word is purified "*seven* times" (Psa. 12:6). We are to forgive those who sin against us "*seventy times seven*" (Matt. 18:22). God commands us to keep *seven* annual Holy Days (Lev. 23; Deut. 16), depicting His *7,000*-year plan of salvation. *Seven* seals and *seven* trumpets usher in the Day of the Lord, the time of the pouring out of God's wrath upon a sinful, rebellious mankind (Rev. 6-9).

The Sabbath is holy time, something we cannot detect with our five senses. We *do not* have the right to determine what is holy. *God reveals to us* that this day is different.

Consider the following analogy: Seven identical glasses are set in front of you, each containing fresh water. You cannot tell the difference between them.

But one glass is special. It is holy—set apart by God. Your five senses—taste, smell, touch, sight, hearing—

cannot tell you which one is holy. Only God can!

Since God's way is love (II Cor. 13:11; I Thes. 4:9), He would not say, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," then not tell you what day it is!

### **Sign Between God and His People**

After two-and-a-half centuries in Egypt, God's people, the ancient Israelites, had lost all knowledge of His Law. God had to teach it to them again. After freeing them from slavery, the first great law that He gave them was the command to keep the Sabbath.

This was before the Old Covenant was established. The Ten Commandments were not given as part of the Old Covenant. They had been in force since creation. (Read our book *Should You Obey THE TEN COMMANDMENTS?*)

Exodus 16:4-30 records the account of God first providing the Israelites with manna. In verse 19, Moses instructed them, "...Let no man leave of it till the morning." Some ignored the instructions. They kept some of the manna until the next morning. It bred worms and stank (vs. 20).

In verse 5, God said, "...on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily." They were to use the sixth day to prepare for the Sabbath: "Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, in it there shall be none" (vs. 26).

Again, some ignored God's command. Instead of gathering twice as much manna on the sixth day, they went out on Sabbath morning, looking for it. They found none (vs. 27).

In Exodus 31:13, God told Moses, "Speak you also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily My Sabbaths you shall keep: for it is a *sign* between Me and you throughout your generations; that you may know that I am the LORD that does sanctify you." Also read Ezekiel 20:12-13.

Speaking to the Jews, Christ stated, "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heav-

en, that a man *may eat thereof, and not die*" (John 6:49-50).

The apostle Paul wrote, "But he is a Jew, which is one *inwardly...*" (Rom. 2:29). He also wrote, "Now all these things happened unto them for [*examples*]: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (I Cor. 10:11). The Old Testament was written so that we, as Christians (spiritual Israelites), could learn from it.

### **Sabbath Not a Burden**

The apostle John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and *His commandments are not grievous*" (I John 5:3). This verse is one of God's descriptions of His law, which He also calls "holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). It is not up to us to decide what God means by that statement. It is not up to us to determine what is "not grievous" and then say, "I know this is how God wants me to live, because *this is what feels good to me.*"

People usually take the *easy* route. Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 state, "There is a way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

God has promised not to put more on us than we can bear (I Cor. 10:13). Men do, with their customs and traditions (Luke 11:46). Christ stated, "For My yoke is *easy*, and My burden is *light*" (Matt. 11:30). God did not create the Sabbath to be a burden, but rather a *delight* (Isa. 58:13). It is time that He has *given us*, at the end of each week, to slow down from the hectic pace of our daily lives, and to reflect on His Way. The Sabbath is a weekly reminder that we are God's people, and that He is our God.

Those who seek to truly please God will find that, just as *they* work for the first six days of the week, the Sabbath *works for them*.

Let's now consider some principles that answer basic questions concerning Sabbath observance.

### **Dining Out on the Sabbath**

"Can I eat at restaurants on the Sabbath?"

It is fine to do so—in balance! Just don't overdo it. Most restaurants are open for business on the Sabbath, whether we choose to dine out or not. By dining out, we are not creating work for them that they would not otherwise be doing.

This question has also arisen concerning dining out on annual Holy Days. The same principle applies. God does not expect us to skip meals on His feast days.

It is fine to have a meal at a restaurant with other brethren to continue Sabbath fellowship. But if it were to last several hours (due to extenuating circumstances or certain cultural traditions), you could be in danger of breaking the Sabbath.

Christ showed that it is not wrong to satisfy immediate hunger on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-5). He cited David's example of eating the showbread from the Temple (I Sam. 21:6).

### **Watching Movies and TV on the Sabbath**

"Is it wrong to watch films or documentaries with biblical themes on the Sabbath?"

To set aside time on the Sabbath to watch a Bible-related movie could potentially detract from God's intended purpose for the day—for us to reflect on His ways. As Christians, we have to determine if this helps us *properly keep* the Sabbath, or is something done *in place of* keeping the Sabbath.

It is not a *sin* to watch such movies. However, Hollywood's depiction of biblical events and circumstances is always inaccurate (sometimes very much so). Film producers seek to promote their own ideas and misconceptions about the Bible, generally so that people will watch their films, and to make money. They know that people will more readily pay to watch *fiction* than *fact* (especially when it comes to the Bible).

Their films show great men of God having long hair (which the Bible states is a shame; see I Corinthians 11:14). They are portrayed as weak, odd and mentally unbalanced. The



depiction of their attire is based on Hollywood's imagination rather than historical information.

As if trying to *convince* viewers of the humanity of God's servants, Hollywood places emphasis on their mistakes. In doing so they use lurid scenes to titillate the senses. This clouds the PLAIN TRUTH of the Bible.

Also, in many such films, King James English is used. In ancient times, none of God's servants spoke English.

English did not yet exist. They generally spoke Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. They would not have spoken in King James English: No *thee, thou, thine, couldst, wouldst, blesseth*, etc.

"Is it proper to watch news programs on the Sabbath?"

Christ instructs us to "Watch you therefore: for you know not when the master of the house comes" (Mark 13:35). We should be watchful not only six days of the week, but also on the Sabbath. To watch a news program, giving details as prophetic events unfold, is not wrong. But to make it an "all-day affair," getting every network's angle, *is* breaking the Sabbath.

#### **Kindling a Fire on the Sabbath?**

"Is it permissible to cook or build a fire on the Sabbath?"

Some have cited Exodus 35:3 as evidence that we are not to cook on the Sabbath: "You shall kindle *no fire* throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day."

When the entire context of the scripture is examined, the meaning of God's words becomes clear. The Israelites were showing extreme zeal in their desire to build the tabernacle. The people later brought an over-abundance of raw materials to construct the tabernacle. Many had to be turned away (36:5-6).

What God was forbidding (35:3) was the burning of *industrial fires* on the Sabbath. In the course of building the tabernacle, the Israelites were engaged in metal-working. God did not want them to do this on His Sabbath.

This command in no way forbids cooking on the Sabbath. However, the



main preparations should always be done on the preparation day (Friday), before the Sabbath.

### Husbands and Wives

“Is it proper for a husband and wife to have intimate relations on the Sabbath?”

God does not command married couples to abstain from such on the Sabbath. Notice Genesis 1:26-28: “And God said, Let Us make man in Our image, after our likeness...So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; *male and female created He them*. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, *Be fruitful, and multiply*, and replenish the earth, and subdue it...”

God created Adam and Eve on the sixth day of the creation week, just before the Sabbath (vs. 31). “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet...Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: *and they shall be one flesh*. And they were both *naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed*” (2:18, 24-25).

Would God have created man and woman, given them the instructions we have just read, and then have said, “Now wait until after the Sabbath to come together”? Of course not!

“Should Sabbath concessions be made for *unconverted* mates, as long as they are ‘pleased to dwell with you’?”

Let’s look at an example: Is it wrong for a wife to prepare a meal for an unconverted husband on the Sabbath?

This is not breaking the Sabbath, unless the husband were to make unreasonable demands (e.g., expect the wife to go to the store on the Sabbath, or to prepare an elaborate meal that would be time-consuming and distracting). If your mate is truly pleased to dwell with you, he or she will not seek to cause you to compromise.

“Is it wrong to attend a dinner function with an unconverted mate on Friday night?”

Again, the same principle applies. Consider the influences that would be present. Would you benefit by going? Probably not! Or would you *both* ultimately benefit if you respectfully decline (I Cor. 7:14, 16)? Almost certainly, yes! Remember: “...whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23).

### Weddings and Funerals

“Is it wrong to attend a wedding or funeral on the Sabbath?”

As long as it does not conflict with Sabbath assembly, it is not wrong to attend a ceremony for someone close to you. Again, certain judgments have to be made. If attending the ceremony would keep you from attending Sabbath services, it would be wrong. If you can attend both (with *proper* emphasis placed on Sabbath-keeping), then it would not be wrong.

### Doing Good on the Sabbath

“Is it acceptable to do ‘good deeds’ on the Sabbath?”

Some have asked: Is it wrong to help someone with a flat tire, or other mechanical difficulties, on your way to Sabbath services? If it is someone you know, such as a Church member on his way to services, no.

However, in this day and age, when it is potentially *dangerous* to stop and assist *strangers*, you must rely on God’s wisdom to make the right decision.

Christ’s example was to do good on the Sabbath *as situations presented themselves* (Matt. 12:1-9, 12; Mark 3:4; Luke 6:7-9; Jn. 5:7-9). He did not go out of His way *in search of* good deeds to do on the Sabbath.

What would God expect you to place more importance on: An opportunity to render *physical* assistance to an *unconverted* person (who, in doing his own thing on God’s Sabbath, ran into minor difficulties)—or the opportunity to serve (spiritually and physically) brethren of like mind, with whom we usually fellowship only on the Sabbath?

Again, we must use *good judgment*. If it is someone you know, then it would not be wrong to stop and offer assis-

tance. Remember, you may be the only Bible some ever read. Some may see your good deeds and “...glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

If, in your zeal to get to services on time, you show no concern for your neighbor, you have missed out on an opportunity to “Let your light so shine before men.” Your assistance would have shown him: (1) You keep the Sabbath; (2) It is alright to do good on the Sabbath.

Everything in life requires good judgment. For instance, it would not be wrong to stop at the scene of an accident in which someone is obviously injured and in need of immediate help (and to do what you can until emergency personnel arrive). In such a case, it would be wrong to callously drive by (Gal. 6:10; Jms. 4:17).

### What About an “Ox in the Ditch”?

“What if an *emergency situation* appears, requiring work on the Sabbath?”

Many have struggled with the issue of what qualifies as an “ox in the ditch” situation. Through that example (Matt. 12:10-11; Luke 14:1-5), Christ defined it as an unforeseen situation beyond our control.

Some have liberalized this issue by digging a ditch on Friday, intentionally unlocking the gate, leading the ox onto the road, and *pushing* it into the ditch. They are Pharisaical in their lists of “do’s and don’ts,” but then try to get around them by pushing the ox into the ditch. Some forget that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Overly focusing on the *day*, they go to the opposite extreme, worshipping it, instead of the GOD who made it.

In theory, if men made the Sabbath, they could have the right to tell you how to keep it. But since it was made *for* man, not *by* man, man does not determine how it should be kept. God does!

We must exercise good judgment and planning. For instance, if you are inviting brethren to your home after Sabbath services, look ahead and anticipate what you will need.

Even if you are not expecting guests, you should plan for the Sabbath so that you and your family can keep it as God commands. For instance, if you know that you are running short on particular foods that you normally enjoy on the Sabbath, or if there is something special that you would like to eat, plan ahead.

Also, make sure you have enough fuel for the car before the Sabbath. It is also a good idea to check the tires and other vital fluids. To experience mechanical problems on the Sabbath can make it difficult to rejoice. Although we cannot foresee every possible problem, addressing those we can is an important part of proper Sabbath planning.

To address every potential “ox in the ditch” scenario would require more than an article. They can come in every conceivable size, shape and color—from standard plow-grade oxen in a standard roadside ditch to “Babe the blue ox,” knee-deep in the Grand Canyon.

As Proverbs 22:3 states, “A prudent man foresees the evil, and hides himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” Different circumstances require different levels of planning and preparation.

One example of a regularly scheduled (but avoidable) “ox in the ditch” is experienced by dairy farmers. Cows have to be milked twice daily. It is a manual chore that requires approximately fifteen minutes per cow. Even if done mechanically, certain intermediate steps must still be done by hand. It is time-consuming.

Keep in mind, many of God’s Old Testament servants were farmers or ranchers—and God blessed them. They must have planned their various duties so that they did not interfere with proper Sabbath-keeping. They got the job done!

In the past, successful dairy farmers in God’s Church tended to the needs of their livestock without breaking the Sabbath. They simply confined nursing calves with their mothers before sunset Friday, and released them after sunset Saturday. The job got done, and the Sabbath was not violated!

There are many other farm-specific issues that could be addressed. But if Abel, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses and others made it work, it can also be done today.

In today’s society, based on greed, “factory farming” is the standard. Farms are increasingly becoming corporate-owned “assembly lines,” operating “24/7.”

But this was never God’s intention. God had placed Adam in the garden of Eden to “...dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15). God never places people into situations that force them to compromise with the laws He commanded them to keep (Jms. 1:13).

However, if a farmer regularly finds himself in Sabbath predicaments due to *improper planning*, he should consider how to reduce his workload or even another occupation. The same applies to any profession.

### **What Is Your Attitude Toward the Sabbath?**

Do you view the Sabbath as God intended? Do you *anticipate* it each week, as time to put aside your daily concerns (going to work, paying bills, shopping, etc.) and focus on your relationship with your Creator? Or do you view it as a burden, as time taken away from you? Do you watch the clock on the Sabbath, waiting for sunset, so you can “get back to your things”?

The Sabbath is God’s weekly *gift* to His people. We should consider it much like His command to tithe. God gives us six-sevenths of the week to do with as we please, within the confines of His Law. All He requires in return is that we keep the seventh day holy.

He commands us to use the sixth day of each week to *prepare* for the Sabbath. This means *proper* planning—looking ahead and making sure that everything is in place well before sunset Friday, so that we are ready to *receive* the Sabbath, in the same way that we receive blessings for obeying God’s tithing command: “I will...open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be enough room to receive it” (Mal. 3:10).

Unlike tithing, God gives us *our* six-sevenths of the week “up front.” Only at the end of the week does He test us “...whether [we] will walk in [His] law, or no” (Ex. 16:4).

Those with children should plan Sabbath activities for them that will help them properly appreciate the day. Proverbs 22:6 states, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

We should take the time to sit down with our children *regularly*, and read God’s Word to them. This way, not only will they be more attentive to the messages given on the Sabbath, but they will also be able to better understand and appreciate that Christianity is a WAY OF LIFE, not just a one-day-a-week event.

Take walks with your children on the Sabbath and point out the beauty of God’s creation. Always remember that God is offering your children the same reward He is offering you. We should do everything we can to instill within them the desire to inherit the kingdom of God.

### **Sabbath Dress**

“How should we dress for the Sabbath?”

This is another aspect of Sabbath-keeping that has been liberalized and watered down among God’s people. Many have forgotten that they are *coming before God*. While you may not have a large congregation to meet with, and are keeping the Sabbath in your home (or the home of just a few other brethren), you are still assembling in God’s presence. Even if no one else sees how you are dressed, God does.

Remember Herbert W. Armstrong’s example when traveling abroad, visiting world leaders: If he had two shirts—one to wear for his Friday meeting with a king, president, prime minister, etc., and one for the Sabbath—he would reserve the nicer of the two for the Sabbath. He knew he would be coming before God.

Your Sabbath attire should not be loud and extravagant, drawing attention to yourself. Our focus should be on *God* and how we can serve *others*.

Men should wear a suit and tie. For women, dresses or skirt-and-blouse ensembles are appropriate. Modesty is the rule in determining such things as proper skirt length, etc. We should never base our clothing choices on current Hollywood standards, which are set by worldly (and in many cases, homosexual) fashion designers.

### **Sabbath Murmurings**

The Sabbath is a time to put aside the previous six days' events and more squarely focus on the importance of our calling. It is the time God has given us to assemble and fellowship with those of like mind (Phil. 2:5). We should use it to encourage one another (Heb. 10:25).

It should not be spent simply "downloading" all our problems and difficulties on brethren. While we should mention certain trials we are enduring, so

that others can pray for us, that should not be the main focus of our conversation. We should focus on the *positive*.

Remember, the Sabbath is a weekly reminder of the millennial rest and rejuvenation that the *entire world* will enjoy after Christ's Return (Heb. 3:11; I Pet. 3:8).

Exodus 3 gives the account of God speaking to Moses from a burning bush. Most professing Christians are familiar with this passage. But there is an overlooked lesson in it pertaining to the Sabbath. In verse 5, God commanded Moses, "Draw not near here: put off your shoes from off your feet, *for the place whereon you stand is holy ground.*"

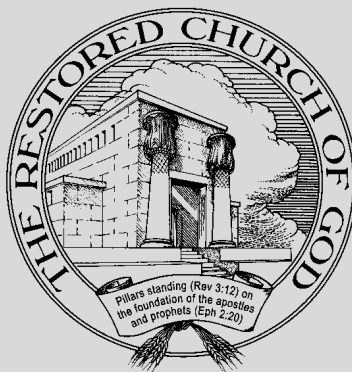
What is the connection here to the Sabbath? The prophet Isaiah was inspired to write, "If you *turn away your foot from the Sabbath*, from doing

your pleasure [business] on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a *delight*, the holy of the LORD, *honorable*; and shall honor Him, NOT doing your *own ways*, nor finding your *own pleasure*, nor speaking your *own words*: Then shall you delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of the LORD has spoken it" (58:13-14).

The Sabbath is *holy time* that points to God; we must not profane it. It is our weekly opportunity to rehearse the coming millennium—the 1,000-year Sabbath rest for all mankind, when all people will learn God's Way.

By keeping the Sabbath as God intended, we express our desire, "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). □

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