

The Sabbath

Def: Sabbath means rest, intermission.

I. The Continuing Obligation of the Sabbath principle.

- A. Instituted at creation. Gen. 2:2-3. Q: What were some of the things that God instituted at creation? A: marriage, procreation, labor, and Sabbath. Even Adam in a state of innocence needed a day set apart from labor to worship God. Jesus used this approach to interpretation in Matt. 19:1-10 concerning divorce. Notice that this passage does not say "the seventh day **of the week**." It only says the seventh day, which could just as easily be interpreted as the seventh day in a pattern of seven. After six days of work, the seventh is to be set apart. We have no way of knowing whether God's week was the same as man's week. Of course, for the Jew, the seventh day of the week was the Sabbath. He had no reason to observe any other day of the week as the Sabbath. Christians **do** have reason to observe another day of the week as a Sabbath as we'll see later, but the essence of the institution is that a seventh day after a period of six days of labor is to be set apart.
- B. Practiced before the giving of the Law. possibly Gen. 4:3, lit. "at the end of days". Ex. 16:4-6, Ex. 16:21-30. Not a part of the ceremonial regulations given to Moses since it was practiced before the giving of the ceremonial law.
- C. Emphasized as moral law in the Ten Commandments. Ex. 20:8-11. Ten Commandments are moral law. Look at context to see how Ten Commandments were set apart from the other ordinances. They were written by the finger of God on tablets of stone, spoken to the people by God in an audible voice, referred to as a unit (the Ten Commandments or Words). See Deut 10:4. See Eph. 6:1-3 where Paul quotes from the Ten Commandments as authoritative. He wasn't reinstating the commandment. He was appealing to a passage that his readers would have already considered authoritative. (Not appealing to fourth commandment, but it comes from the same document, which is always treated as a unit in Scripture.)
- D. Christ emphasized proper keeping of the Sabbath. Mentioned in Matt., Mark, and Luke. Why so much emphasis if it was to be done away with shortly? Handled Sabbath issue in way typical of his teaching on moral (vs. ceremonial) law. He freed it from its Pharisaical interpretations and additions and emphasized its spiritual nature. (Compare his handling of the dietary laws -- Mark 7:14-23.) Never suggested that it was being done away with, but proclaimed himself "Lord of the Sabbath." He also taught that "the sabbath was made for man." (Mark 2:27) Matt. 12:7 ("I desire mercy rather than sacrifice") implies that the Sabbath was not a ceremonial law to be done away with since Christ wanted the Sabbath observed for its spiritual nature ("mercy") and not burdened by "ceremonial" additions ("sacrifice").
- E. Commemorates God resting from his creative works as well as Christ resting from his redemptive works after being resurrected from the dead. Heb. 4:9-11. Translation: "There remains a Sabbath-keeping for the people of God. For the one (Christ) who has entered his own rest has also ceased from his own works (the works of redemption, as God did from his own (the works of creation)."
- F. Objections considered:
 1. "Only ceremonial." (Rom. 14:5, Col. 2:16). There were many special days in the OT called "sabbaths" which were not **the** sabbath. (See Lev. 23 and 25) Six others mentioned. Given the overwhelming weight of evidence for a continuing Sabbath and the fact that the apostles met regularly on a specific day of the week (I Cor. 16:1-2), we must conclude that the "special days" and "sabbaths" referred to as ceremonial are referring specifically to these ceremonial sabbaths. Compare Isaiah 1:11-14 with Isaiah

58:13-14.

2. "Every day is God's day." Even Adam in a state of innocence needed to set aside time to concentrate on worshipping God. Creatures of time need time to worship God. Anyone in touch with reality knows how hard it is to worship God in the middle of some other distracting activity.

3. "Sabbath commandment not repeated in the New Testament." Paul said that "**All** Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3:16) We can't just throw out the whole OT just b/c it's not repeated in the NT. If a principle is established as eternal in the OT, then there's no need to repeat it in the NT. Jesus reemphasized the Sabbath in the gospels. Hebrews 4:19 says that "there remains then a Sabbath-rest for the people of God."

4. "Would necessitate Saturday worship." Cover in next section. Never does the command say the Sabbath is the seventh day **of the week** -- only the seventh day after a period of six days labor. Ex. 23:10-11 uses the same wording to describe the land's seventh year Sabbath after six years of planting as it does to describe the seventh day Sabbath in v. 12. Since the Sabbath year merely described a pattern of one year in seven rather than a particular year, we may conclude that the Sabbath command does not contain any specification regarding the day of the week.

II. Day of the Week Changed to Commemorate the Lord's Resurrection.

- A. "Six days work--one day rest" pattern is not abrogated by a change in the Sabbath's day of the week. Ex. 20:8-10. Never does the OT use the phrase the "seventh day of the week." In the OT there was no reason to adopt anything but the seventh day of the week, but that isn't the essence of the Sabbath. In the NT we **do** have reason to observe another day. People say "The first-day-of-the-week Sabbath is never commanded in the NT. Therefore we don't have to observe it that way." Well, a seventh day-of-the-week Sabbath was never commanded in the OT, but they had to observe it. If anything, it's much clearer which day of the week we are to observe than it was in the OT. Also, God isn't bound by our demands. God can communicate His will by example as well as by command.
- B. Christ had authority to change it. Matt. 12:8.
- C. Scripture notes plainly in every Gospel that Christ appeared on the first day of the week. Matt. 28:1, Mk. 16:9, Lk. 24:1, Jn. 20:1. This is in contrast to most other significant events wherein the day of the week was not mentioned. The resurrection is the foundational significance of the first-day-of-the-week Sabbath. It emphasizes and illustrates the new creation just as the original Sabbath day emphasized the first creation.
- D. The pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was on the first day of the week. Acts 2:1-4, Lev. 23:15-16.
- E. The NT church consistently gathered on the first day of the week. See Acts 20:6-7 (where Paul stayed 7 days in order to break bread & speak on the first day of the week even though he was in a hurry, v.16). See I Cor. 16:1-2 (where it was assumed that the congregation would be gathered on the 1st day of the week in order to set aside a collection).
- F. The fact of weekly observance of this special day shows its connection to the observance of the Sabbath. Why meet weekly? The only OT observance that occurred weekly was the Sabbath.
- G. The "Lord's day" of Rev. 1:10 is parallel to the "Lord's holy day" of Isa. 58:13.

III. The Proper Observance of the Sabbath.

Heart of the commandment--God has designated one day in seven to be particularly set apart to Him.

- A. The Fourth Commandment is a moral obligation. Just like sanctity of marriage, sanctity of life, sanctity of truth (parallel to other commandments in the Ten Commandments).
- B. All work should be done in six days. This is a must in order to properly set apart the Sabbath. Ex. 20:9. Recreation is legitimately included in this period of six days.
- C. We are to use our sphere of influence and authority to encourage others to honor the Sabbath. Ex. 20:10. If the Sabbath is a moral obligation (and it is), and people will be judged for breaking it, we are to help others avoid breaking it.
- D. We are to cease from those activities which normally engage us during the week so that the day might be properly set apart to the Lord as holy, and that we might take delight in it. Isa. 58:13-14. Primary activities to pursue:
 1. Public and private worship. Heb. 10:24-25.
 2. Fellowship. Acts 2:42.
 3. Prayer.
 4. Study of the Word.
- E. The Sabbath is for man's benefit. Mk. 2:27. Physical and spiritual benefit. In the 4th Commandment, even the animals are supposed to observe the Sabbath. Doesn't that say there is something in the way we are created such that we need a Sabbath? It's as much a part of healthy living as is getting a good night's sleep. We need a day's rest every seventh day. Also, we should learn that proper Sabbath observance was never intended to be detrimental to our health.
- F. The Sabbath is a day for celebration. Ps. 118:24 (see vv. 22-23 and reference in Acts 4:10-11 to resurrection)
- G. Works of mercy, necessity, and piety (conducting worship) are lawful on the Sabbath. Matt. 12:1-4, 5-7, 11-13, Acts 20:7. Be careful about rationalizing here. Anything can be justified if we stretch these categories enough -- which would overthrow the whole purpose of the Sabbath, that it's to be a day **set apart** from the usual activities of the week. Be sure not to divorce these Scriptural exceptions from their biblical basis (Matthew 12).

Ask yourself these questions concerning activities on the Sabbath:

- Will it (activity, thought, or conversation) promote the worship of God for myself or others?
- Will it tend to cause the Sabbath to become more like the other days of the week, making it less holy to the Lord?
- Is it a work of necessity, mercy, or piety?

Bottom line -- If it is our desire to make the Lord's Day a day that is really set apart to God, if we really want to set aside a day for worshiping God and developing our relationship with Him, then most of the nit-picking questions that come up about Sabbath observance would fall away. Ultimately, only you can know what kinds of activities will distract you from worshiping God. What good does the Sabbath do you and how much does it honor God if you decide you're not going to do this or not going to do that; then while you're sitting there trying to study your Bible or pray, you'd really rather be doing something else? The key is the attitude. Of course, a proper attitude toward the Sabbath will work its way out in specific actions and principles. For example, here are a few specific issues that seem crystal clear -- watching TV all day (how can you commune with

God while your mind is engaged in entertainment?), students doing homework (this is as much work for a student as is digging ditches for a ditch digger), unnecessary commerce (ultimately encourages and forces more people to work and thus break the Sabbath). However, we need to guard against legalism.

IV. Activities for the Lord's Day (in addition to those required, i.e. worship).

General activities:

- discussion of sermon and applications
- discussion of the things of God
- reading and studying God's Word
- prayer
- reading Christian literature
- sharing your faith
- encouraging other believers
- "doing good to all men"
- "examining yourselves to see whether you are in the faith"

Specific suggestions:

Be creative. There are many ways to keep the Sabbath holy without falling into a monotonous routine on the Lord's Day.

Invite others over for lunch, and have everyone discuss how to apply the truths learned that morning to everyday living. How much do you really think about the morning's sermon or Sunday School lesson? The sermon is not designed simply to be filler for half an hour. It should be meditated on, discussed, and even debated on occasion. This can be done with others but should also be done individually.

Get together with a few Christian friends to share the ways in which God has been blessing you, teaching you, or disciplining you over the past week.

Get together with other folks from Sunday School or church to learn how they came to know the Lord. You can really learn a lot about God's sovereignty by doing this -- not to mention learning how to have deeper fellowship with other believers.

Set aside some time to pray for all the things that you think you don't have time to pray for.

The Sabbath is a good time to start reading some of those good Christian books you've been meaning to read but haven't had time for.

Write letters to encourage believers who are away at school and to witness to friends who don't live nearby.

Visit a nursing home. Hold a Bible study for the patients.

Visit some of the older people in the church. How often do you take time out to learn from and to encourage God's mature saints? "Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?" Job 12:12.

Actively encourage one another to keep the Sabbath holy.

References:

- The Lord's Day* by Joseph Pipa, Christian Focus, 1997, 256 pp.
- The Day God Made*, by Glen Knecht, Banner of Truth, 2004, 101 pp.

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