

How Do You Keep The Sabbath Holy?

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By Joseph F. Dumond

July 31, 2015

News Letter 5851- 0221

15th day of the 5th month 5851 years after the creation of Adam

The 5th Month in the Sixth year of the Third Sabbatical Cycle

The Third Sabbatical Cycle of the 119th Jubilee Cycle

The Sabbatical Cycle of Earthquakes, Famines and Pestilence

The Year of the Tithe for the Widows, Orphans & Levites

August 1, 2015

Shabbat Shalom Family,

How to Keep the Sabbath Day Holy

Sabbath-keeping reflects our relationship with God. How can we recapture positive principles and grow in this area?

Exodus 19 and 20 talk about how God, when He gave the Ten Commandments, caused the earth to tremble and shake—the manifestations were absolutely awesome. God said He came to test them “that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin”.(Exodus 20:20)

Exo 20:20 And Moses said to the people, Do not fear, for God has come to test you, and so that His fear may be before your faces, so that you may not sin.

How do we respond to these words? In this article we are not talking about proving the Sabbath. We are really talking about what we need to do in keeping this particular day.

A Test Commandment

We have talked for many, many years about the fact that the Sabbath is a test commandment. God measures us by what we do with His law. And we have come to realize that judgment begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17).

1Pe 4:17 For the time *has come* for the judgment to begin from the house of God. And if *it first begins* from us, what *will be* the end of those disobeying the gospel of God?

Many times people think of this judgment as condemnation. But it's a process of evaluation, of learning, of growing, of walking with God. We are the people of God and He is showing us how to observe this day and to keep His laws in the way that He intends so that we can be prepared to enter His family.

One of the most important things that we can understand about this subject is that our job is to continually expand our understanding of God's law concerning the Sabbath.

So how we keep the Sabbath says something about us. God wants to learn something about our character, what we are going to do with this command. It is important for us to continue to grow in understanding not only the letter of the law, but the spirit.

God made a very special Sabbath covenant with His people back in Exodus 31. We see from that chapter that the Sabbath is an identifying sign of God's people. It identifies people, not agreements. And so the Sabbath day is a very important day, not greater than the other nine commandments, but a part of the Ten Commandments and a sign between us and our Creator. As we serve Him on this day, there is something special that we learn about the Sabbath.

Ezekiel wrote about the severe consequences when the people defiled God's Sabbaths (Ezekiel 20:11-13).

Eze 20:11 And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, which *if* a man do, he shall even live in them. 12 And also I gave them My sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, that *they* might know that I *am* Jehovah who sets them apart. 13 But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes, and they despised My judgments, which *if* a man does, he shall even live in them. And they greatly profaned My sabbaths. And I said, *I will pour out My fury on them in the wilderness to destroy them.*

God was very serious about the Sabbath being a test commandment. How we keep God's Sabbath tells God something about how much we really want to be in His family.

The Jews were convinced that the Sabbath was the primary reason they went into captivity, so they proceeded to make rules for their Sabbath. But they went into the other ditch, becoming so "pharisaical" that they developed 39 categories of activities that comprised "work"—everything from swatting a fly to helping an injured man. No wonder Christ condemned the Pharisees. But if that ditch is wrong, the other ditch is wrong as well. There is a balance.

I am not trying to create some kind of yardstick religion, but over the last few years many have asked for a little bit more information on Sabbath-keeping. The observance of the Sabbath became, in many cases, something different than it was years before. People began to dress inappropriately. People treated the Sabbath as simply another day rather than a feast day, a special day. They didn't get involved as they used to in preparing for it and looking forward to it. So all I am trying to do is to re-emphasize some of these areas to help us better understand how we should keep the Sabbath.

I think the most interesting thing that happened after I did a teaching on this subject was how many young people from age 18 to 30 came up and said they had never heard things like that before. That was shocking to me because it made me realize that we haven't spoken on this topic for a long time.

Four Primary Principles

There are four primary principles of Sabbath-keeping. First, the commandment tells us *not to work*. This means not to make a productive increase from working—receiving pay and so on.

Second, the commandment tells us *to rest*. This does not mean that we stay in bed all day. Rest means to change the overall approach that we have from the six days of go, go, go and work, work, work, to being able to just stop and enjoy the day.

Third, we are told *to assemble with others for worship*. We are required to congregate. It is a part of the walk. You really can't just be a living room believer. A great part of keeping God's law has to do with interaction and involvement with the people of God on a regular basis.

Leviticus 23:3 says that it is a holy *convocation*. The word implies the product of official summons to worship. To put it another way, God said *be there*.

Lev 23:3 Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day *is* the sabbath of rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work. It *is* a sabbath to Jehovah in all your dwellings.

When we receive a summons to appear in court, what do we do? We take it seriously. Similarly, God has said to us that we should respond by being here.

There was a man in one of the churches a few years ago who brought a portable dialysis machine in his truck so he could be at church! And there are many wonderful examples of people who desperately want to be at church.

The fourth point is that we are here *to fellowship*. Hebrews 10:25 says we need to be gathering ourselves together so much more as we "see the Day approaching." We are here to learn from the other members, to hear the teaching. Apostasy sets in when fellowship becomes lukewarm.

It is very important that we gather together to help and encourage the brethren, and to allow them to give us encouragement when we have need after a bad week. We receive prayer updates and find ways we can serve the brethren.

The Sabbath was designed to serve mankind.

Mar 2:27 And He said to them, The sabbath came into being for man's sake, and not man for the sabbath's sake.

On it we learn about life's purposes, why we're here, where we're headed. Most important, we learn how to live.

Proper Sabbath observance allows us to develop and maintain a personal relationship with both the human family and the spiritual family of God.

Reverencing God's Sanctuary

Part of properly keeping the Sabbath is reverencing God's sanctuary.

Lev 19:30 You shall keep My sabbaths and revere My sanctuary. I am Jehovah.

This includes respect in the way we dress and by arriving on time. We need to be in our seats, ready to be a part of the service.

We need to have our "wedding garment" on. We need to be properly attired, wearing the best we have. It's like the high priest who on the Day of Atonement wore a special garment to show respect and reverence.

Lev 16:4 He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches on his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen miter he shall be dressed. *These are* holy garments. And he shall wash his flesh in water and put them on.

The Preparation Day

Exo 20:8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

It is interesting that the word *remember* is used. The *Soncino* commentary says this means we should always keep the Sabbath in mind during the week. If we are thinking about the Sabbath, then we will begin to make some of the modern-day preparations that are needed.

Instead of running for six days and coming to an abrupt stop all of a sudden when the sun goes down, we can take the opportunity to begin to switch gears early enough to think about what we are going to do. For example, shining our shoes, pressing our clothes, preparing foods and thinking about what we are going to do with our children.

One of the most enjoyable times for my wife and me was when we had Friday nights together as a family. Every Friday night we would have one of our favorite meals. The first time it would

be my daughter's choice, the second time my son's, the third time my wife's and last of all the old man's.

We shut everything down and it became our time. Sometimes we would go downstairs and play a game. Sometimes we would sit in front of the fireplace and talk and have our dessert there. It was very special.

The Dos

Now, with the principles of Sabbath-keeping that we have gone through, we must individually grow in proper judgment, continually expanding our understanding of God's laws concerning the Sabbath. In this article, rather than giving you the don'ts, I want to give you the dos. I want to show you some very positive things you can do based on the teachings of Isaiah 58.

Isa 58:13 If you turn your foot because of the Sabbath, *from* doing what you please on My holy days, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of Jehovah, honorable; and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking *your own* words, 14 then you shall delight yourself in Jehovah; and I will cause you to ride on the high places of the earth, and feed yourself with the inheritance of Jacob your father. For the mouth of Jehovah has spoken.

In the context of the right kind of fasting and the wrong kind of fasting mentioned earlier in Isaiah 58, God then addresses the Sabbath. As with fasting, God contrasts the right approach to His holy time and the wrong approach. The right approach will cause God to take notice, enhance our relationship and cause us to take delight in the things that are eternal.

We have to be careful that our Sabbath does not degenerate into a meaningless weekly ritual. There is more to the Sabbath than simply acknowledging that it is Saturday and not Sunday, and not working, and going to meeting. The Sabbath is set apart for a particular purpose, and this is the positive side of understanding what we should be doing with the Sabbath.

So let's start with a question that many people raise. How do I use my television set? What about my computer? What about a radio? What about printed material such as books and magazines and newspapers?

The world we live in comes into our home through many vehicles. How we use these vehicles on the Sabbath will depend on our interpretation of Isaiah 58:13-14. Do we use these vehicles for personal entertainment? Do we use these vehicles for information?

The Sabbath turns out to be a day of highly positive import. It liberates man for meeting God. Do these vehicles help you do that? This is what you have to evaluate. These are some of the questions we must judge in our Sabbath-keeping.

Now let me give you two sides to the story. Let's say that there are some people who spend seven hours watching television on the Sabbath. They might decide to watch an R-rated movie on Friday night. Now to me that is one ditch. The other side of that might be simply turning it off and never using it at all, when there are some things that can be used in a proper way.

Sabbath observance is not a burden. It liberates man for meeting God. It is a day of joy. It is a day of delight. The person who calls the Sabbath a delight is one who delights in the Lord. Our thinking begins to shift. We worship God and find enjoyment through and in Him and in what He provides, both spiritually and physically.

Our Ways Vs. God's Ways

Isaiah 58 contrasts our ways versus God's ways. God claims the Sabbath day as His, and I think the Sabbath is to be a pleasurable and an enjoyable day. It is to be a day of happiness and cheerfulness.

What makes us happy? Not the same thing that makes the world around us "happy"—not just physical pleasures. We focus on the spiritual aspects of the day, thinking about God, getting closer to God, learning about His ways. In essence God says, "Pay attention to Me on the Sabbath. Treat the Sabbath as an honor to Me." When you begin to do that, you find that television, radio and the computer all find their proper place. But their place is not in spending hours watching R-rated movies on the Sabbath. That just doesn't seem to be the ditch we should be in.

In verse 14 God shows that we are going to be a part of His Kingdom. Thinking about those things on the Sabbath day and the life we have chosen becomes a very important thing.

Isaiah 58:13-14 tells us to focus on God and not self. Secondly, they tell us to focus on the eternal things and not the trivial. That is basically God and the big picture. It is not saying it would be wrong to think about other things, more mundane things, but the big picture should take center stage.

The Sabbath pictures the Millennium. The Sabbath pictures the coming of the Messiah and of God's government. And so from the concept of, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," we recognize that if our thoughts are only on our own interests, our own pursuits and our own pleasures, then our focus will be on the self.

In Isaiah 58:13, "your own ways" means the course of life, your employment, your enterprises, your finances, the serious business of making a living that we have to do six days a week. We don't involve ourselves in working at that on the Sabbath day. We do that the rest of the week. Those things by which you feed, clothe and care for yourself physically, you put away. You remove yourself from that and you begin to think about those areas that are important spiritually.

Forsaking "your own pleasure" does not mean the Sabbath is a rigorous day of abstinence. I found that those Friday nights with my children were a wonderful time. I found that being with the brethren after services or being able to enjoy a picnic or a walk in nature was very much a part of having our mind and our energies taken up in that Sabbath attitude.

“Nor speaking your words”: I think this is a spiritual application of the first two principles. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew12:34). What we talk about, what we are thinking is known every Sabbath day when we talk with the brethren.

Making the Sabbath a Delight

Now let’s look at some ideas about making the Sabbath a delight. I told you about one that my family did for many years when my children were at home.

The Sabbath can also be a chance to visit the sick and the widows. When we begin to reach outside of ourselves, wonderful relationships can be established.

Many people have used the time to write a letter or a card of encouragement to someone. It’s wonderful to know someone was thinking about you and cared enough to send you a card.

Studying the Word of God and reviewing God’s plan is another important use of the Sabbath. It is a crazy world we live in right now. Find escape in what God is going to do, and realize that it is going to happen because He can’t lie. Take the time to review God’s plan.

The Sabbath is also a good time for talking about goals, about the future, especially the spiritual future ahead. I find that looking back on what God has done for us, and then looking forward to what He is going to do, is very encouraging. This is a day to think about the positive things, to reach forward and to reach upward.

Some people read sections of the Bible that deal with God as Creator, the Sabbath theme, and then watch videos or certain programs that highlight the creation of God. There are some wonderful videos from Moody Bible Institute about different aspects of the creation. Focus on the Family also has some wonderful videos on family.

Take a walk in the park. Sometimes, we don’t get a chance to smell the roses. Alvin Toffler said we are stressing ourselves half to death. The Sabbath gives us a chance to reverse that.

Have interactive discussions with your family about newspaper and magazine articles on current events and prophecy. Talk about the problems of the world and the solutions that God is going to bring.

Special family time at meals is very important. I found one of the most enjoyable things was having a picnic in the park after Sabbath services, where you just sit down, take off your tie and visit with a group of brethren. Or have a potluck at home. Have special friends over Friday evening.

So considering all these things, how much would you get involved with the world coming into your house during the Sabbath? Probably a whole lot less.

Taking the Sabbath More Seriously

The Sabbath is a wonderful gift that God has given us in worshipping Him. Generally today the tendency is to take the Sabbath for granted. More people seem to be too liberal with the Sabbath than those who are too strict. I hope we will get back to remembering these important things.

Notice what the prophet Ezekiel says to us. "I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them.' Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them" (Ezekiel 20:11-12). The Sabbath is a sign between God and His people. Israel forsook God and the holy time that He set aside. They paid the price for it, a very dear price to pay.

Can we assume that if God held a whole nation accountable for breaking the Sabbath, that He would spare one individual? We all need to take the Sabbath more seriously. I think we need to understand that perhaps we've let some things slip.

We must keep the Sabbath holy because our salvation depends on it. I hope you will bring these basic principles back to your Sabbath-keeping and allow it to make your Sabbath day most enjoyable and most delightful.

What About Ox-in-the-Ditch Situations?

What about the ox in the ditch (Luke 14:1-6)? Sometimes people look at their job or their situation as an ox in the ditch. The Bible shows that emergencies, ox-in-the-ditch situations, justify work. When one has a legitimate emergency, a life-or-death illness or accident, he or she is not condemned for doing what is necessary to meet the challenge of the emergency.

Dealing With Legitimate Emergencies

The Second Narrows Bridge between North Vancouver, British Columbia, and the mainland collapsed. Hundreds of people were thrown into the water from this high bridge. Many died and some were badly injured. A member of the Church in Vancouver—a nurse at a hospital—was asked to come to work. She worked an entire shift during that time because there was death, mayhem and confusion. There was an emergency where they needed to have trained people there. This lady had always told her boss that she could not come in from Friday night sunset until Saturday night sunset, and they honored that. But they said to her, "We have an emergency that we have never had before. Will you come?" And she said, "Yes, I will."

We had a man who used to work on high power lines. He made sure his boss knew that he would not be there to work on the Sabbath. But one Friday night there was a terrible, terrible storm. He had to spend eight hours taking care of lines that had fallen across roads and would have injured people.

Now, he let his boss know. The nurse let her boss know. These people recognized that if their bosses were to continue time after time asking them to come to work, then they would have to face the question, What is a legitimate emergency and what is created by the boss?

Someone asked the question; How do you handle situations when responsibilities considered critical by your company keep encroaching into Friday evening? I think the answer is that we have to begin to plan ahead to avoid foreseeable “emergencies.” If they continue to encroach upon the Sabbath, you may need to find another place to work.

But in most cases—I would say in 99 percent of cases—when people plan ahead and talk to their employer and explain their needs, it all works out. And then there may be a legitimate emergency that requires you to make a judgment.

Is the Sabbath Worth Dying For?

Someone asked another question: If you could not find a way to survive because every occupation required you to work on Saturdays, is the Sabbath worth dying for?

Strong question, isn't it? But there's a scripture that addresses it. It's found in the context of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego and the fiery furnace. They, too, faced this question of faith. They refused to bow down to the image, to break one of the Ten Commandments, and the king said he would throw them in the furnace.

They responded, “If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand... But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:17-18). It comes down to a matter of faith.

We have found over the past 45 to 50 years that most people who have held their ground and obeyed God's Sabbath command have found a way to make it through the problem and actually be blessed! But you must understand, this is not an ox in the ditch. It comes down to a matter of a choice about God's Word and God's law. Now some people, if they are weak in faith, may give in to something. But you will find that over a period of time you will be convicted, and you will be finding yourself having to either decide to justify or to realize that you are going to have to carry out that command regardless of what men say or think or do.

Eating Out on the Sabbath

Exo 20:10 But the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of Jehovah your God. You shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger within your gates.

If you were to eat out in a restaurant, or if you were to go and buy your gas on the Sabbath you are in fact employing someone to cook for you. To serve you and to cater to you.

The reason these establishments are open on the Sabbath is because there are people out there willing to break the Sabbath. Do not be one of them.

If no one was going out on the Sabbath then the restaurants would close down on Saturday.

Rediscovering the Sabbath

Nan Chase, a writer of Jewish background, wrote an interesting article about rediscovering the Sabbath. Here are excerpts:

“In a moment of divine inspiration I decided to try an old-fashioned cure for my space-age blues. It is called the Sabbath. And it’s a mental health tool that works as well today as it did 3,200 years ago...

“Now if someone told you that there was a way to stop the onslaught of everyday obligations, improve your social life, keep the house clean, revive your tired marriage, elevate spiritual awareness, improve productivity at work, all overnight without cost, you would probably say the claim was absurd. I certainly did, but I was willing to see if some cosmic miracle cure might really work...

“No shopping or paying bills, no pulling weeds or pruning shrubs, nor cleaning or repairing the house. Not even talking about or thinking about work and the office. The Sabbath is a day without labor, a time to savor the sweetness of life with a delicious meal, wine and lovemaking, napping, reading and strolling. My personal life, my professional life, my family life have all improved, and I plan to go on celebrating the Sabbath, the most powerful and illuminating discovery for me because of the sudden understanding of how an ancient edict can have such thoroughly modern applications...

“My quest began at a marriage counselor’s office. After 22 fruitful years of marriage my husband, Saul, and I found ourselves deadlocked over crises of time management, of growth and change...

“The first Sabbath I took Friday afternoon off from work to clean the house from top to bottom. If a family with three teenagers is going to get a day without work, we should start with everything extra clean. This practice proved to be an instant winner, and I have permanently changed my workweek to the benefit of our home life...

“Saul came home from work Friday afternoon, cleared away a stack of bills, and before the sun went down finished all that he had to do. What next? We felt duty bound to try the wine.”

—Source: Nan Chase, “Ancient Wisdom,” *Hemispheres*, July 1997.