

Sabbathkeeping (Part 1)

The Day's Importance

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In the history of both the nation of Israel and the Israel of God (the church)—as recorded in the Bible—there is never a question as to which day of the week is set aside for the worship of God. It is always the Sabbath. Even the Catholic Church fully agrees with this position. We are all agreed on that, so I am not going to be spending very much time proving that we are to keep it. Most of the time Israel kept it in a fashion that gave at least some form of lip service to God, by means of the fact that they set aside [on their calendars] the seventh-day Sabbath.

God requires more than lip service to meet His standard because of what the Sabbath means to our relationship with Him and our development into His image in the Kingdom of God. In order to more fully see this, the Sabbath has to be put, I feel, into the right context and not separated from the rest of the plan and purpose of God (like many Protestant organizations do by claiming that the Sabbath is merely a ceremonial form).

We are going to begin this series in the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 1:10-14 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom, give ear unto the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? Says the LORD. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates: they are a trouble unto me: I am weary to bear them.

Amos 5:21-22 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts.

I want to begin here because I want us to understand that because He calls them *your* Sabbaths, or *your* feast days, does not necessarily mean that they were not even meeting on the correct days (as far as the calendar is concerned). The context shows that they were doing the ceremonial things. It says in Isaiah 1:11 that they were doing that. It says that also in verse 13, and it also says that in Amos 5: 22. It is very clear that they were doing the ceremonial things.

If Israel regarded the Sabbath as merely ceremonial, then they were at least keeping the Sabbath in a ceremonial way. When He says "your new moons," or "your Sabbaths," they could very well have been on [the calendar] the same days that God commanded, and not something "new" that they came up with. There is a possibility in the book of Amos, because of Jeroboam I, that indeed they may have been keeping different days. But, in Isaiah 1, it seems "the Sabbaths" He refers to there, are "the Sabbaths" that we know of today as Saturday.

This leads me to a conclusion: if indeed they were still keeping the weekly Sabbath and the holy days (at least in terms of the right days on the calendar), then God's displeasure was caused by the *way* that they were keeping them, their attitude and lack of understanding as to *why* they should be keeping them. That is what concerned God. So bad were these issues, that as far as God was concerned, those days that they were keeping were no longer His, and He was separating Himself from them.

For some short periods of time, small groups of people in Israel kept it right—but how to keep it was almost always a bone of contention between God and Israel. That issue is heavily written about in the Bible, and is going to be the subject of this series of sermons. I think that you will find more and more proof, as we go along here, that indeed the conclusion that I have reached is very likely right. It is not that they were keeping the wrong days. But it was *how* they were keeping them, and their lack of understanding as to *why* they were keeping them—that God was very concerned about.

There is a great deal in the Bible about this commandment. When one includes what is written concerning "the keeping of the holy days," the annual Sabbaths, with what is written concerning "the keeping of the weekly Sabbath," there is more written directly about this commandment than any other one (except the first commandment). We are not without instructions as to God's mind toward it. We have lots of instructions on how we are supposed to keep the Sabbath.

I think it is well understood that God did not inspire a list of hundreds of dos and don'ts to be written down. Instead He chose to reveal, by means of a few commands, examples, and broad principles, that we are supposed to study into, meditate upon, reach conclusions, and put them into practice in our lives. I believe it was done this way to teach us to *think* through the process of choosing, and coming to an understanding of why we are doing these things, and to develop our understanding of the mind of God.

Now the goal of this way is that we would not become creatures of rote, but rather, we would be doing things because they are right, and avoiding things because they are wrong. We would be making choices of our own free will that are in line with the mind and will of God.

You might recall that Herbert Armstrong often referred to the Sabbath as the "test commandment." In regard to this commandment, it is the intention—the motivation—that precedes the act and provides us with our justification and what we will permit ourselves to do, that God is testing.

Sometimes, in defense of ourselves, we will say, "Well, I didn't mean to hurt you." Maybe not. But, the fact is, the other person was hurt. This position is not good enough, because it still falls short of the glory of God.

It is good to remember the road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions. God wants *the intentions and the act* to be right. If one gets the intention right, there is a much, much greater chance that the acts we permit ourselves to do on the Sabbath are going to be right. It must be this way, because the batting average for right intentions bringing forth right acts, is exceedingly higher than the other way around. God wants us to understand why we are doing what we do, before we do it.

Turn to Matthew 5. In this sermon we are going to go through quite a number of very familiar scriptures in regard to the keeping of the Sabbath while we are thinking on these things. We are going to narrow in on this subject.

Matthew 5:17 "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

That applies to the Sabbath just as assuredly as it applies to any of the other commandments. He did not come to destroy the Sabbath, but to magnify it.

Matthew 5:18-19 "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

James 2:8-12 If you fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well: But if you have respect to persons, you commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, "Do not commit adultery," said also, "do not kill." Now if you commit no adultery, yet if you kill, you are become a transgressor of the law. So speak you, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

Let us put these two scriptures together. In Matthew 5:19 He mentions "the least commandment." That word "least" modifies. It is parallel to verse 18 where it says "not one jot or one tittle." Those are the least things that are part of the law of God. Using that principle, consider this: there can be no doubt that, of all the Ten Commandments held in respect and honor by the people of the world, the Sabbath commandment is the least of the Ten. It is the least in terms of regard and respect when compared with the other nine. I think that there is no doubt about that.

The Catholic Church thinks so little of it, they feel that they have the power to disregard it altogether. Even though officially admitting that the day is commanded in the Bible, the Catholic Church thinks it has the authority to change it.

The Protestant churches' justification is to argue around it on twisted technical legal grounds, but ultimately reducing it to being merely ceremonial in nature.

Let us think about James 2:8. The fourth commandment is just as much a part of the Royal Law. Do you know what the Royal Law is? It is the Ten Commandments. If not one jot or tittle—not even the least commandment—is done away within the Royal Law until everything is fulfilled—the conclusion has to be that the Sabbath is still in effect regardless of what men say, and to break it is immoral. It is just as immoral as adultery. It is just as immoral as fornication. It is just as immoral as lust or lying *to break the fourth commandment*.

The world does not think of immorality in terms of the Sabbath commandment. The world does not think of immorality in terms of breaking the first commandment, the second commandment, the third commandment, or the fourth commandment. I wonder how many people *in the church* think of breaking the fourth commandment in terms of immorality. It is immoral to break the fourth commandment.

James also refers to the Royal Law as being the law of liberty. We can clearly see that if one keeps the seventh commandment, it keeps the world free from adultery and fornication. If people keep the

eighth commandment, if people keep the ninth commandment—it keeps the world free. *It keeps people free.* It keeps those that keep it free from stealing and lying. If one keeps the Sabbath, it leads to freedom. It produces freedom. It is a law that liberates.

In our carnality, human nature tends to make us think that keeping the Sabbath constrains us—holds us in and keeps us from doing things. We feel in some cases almost imprisoned by it. Well, that is human nature thinking. That is not God's thinking. It helps to understand what our thinking has to become. The Sabbath is a day, the breaking of which is immoral, and the keeping of which will produce liberty.

There was a time that a group of people we know of as the Pharisees, contrary to most of the rest of the world, believed that the keeping of the Sabbath was probably the most important of the commandments. They produced hundreds of laws in a vain attempt to try to keep people from breaking it, but they missed the point altogether.

Because they understood Ezekiel 20, and maybe some other sections of the Bible as well, they knew that one of the reasons for their captivity was Sabbath breaking. So the reforms that were begun under Ezra were taken to radical extremes by people after Ezra died. Their conclusions, though begun with good intentions, were worldly and their keeping of it, in that way, was just as wrong as the liberal tendencies that most of the world has toward the Sabbath.

I think that we can safely say that neither the Pharisees nor most of the people who have lived on this planet have ever grasped God's intent for the Sabbath. My concern is that because so much of this world's thinking carries right on into the church, some of us, I fear, are thinking in much the same way the world does.

The Ten Commandments are a unity. To break one breaks them all, regardless of what level men think each commandment is on. To break the fourth commandment makes us just as guilty and worthy of death, as breaking any of the others. That is where we have to begin. This is not a commandment that can be just shoved aside. It cannot be taken for granted any more than any of the other nine. As we are going to see, God's intent for it is very important for our lives.

Let us go back to Ezekiel 20. We are going to spend a bit of time in this chapter. You might hold in the back of your mind a very interesting fact that is actually easily proved, that the book of Ezekiel was written over 120 years (actually it is maybe closer to 135 or 140 years) *after* Israel went into captivity. The people of Israel never received the book of Ezekiel. Some Jews did, and they certainly are a part of Israel.

The ten northern tribes never received the messages that came from God through Ezekiel. The reason I want you to hold that in your mind (to plant a little seed) is in order to understand that the book of Ezekiel is written for modern Israel. We will explore that a little bit later and make it much more specific.

Ezekiel 20:3-4 Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel, and say unto them, Thus saith the LORD GOD; Are you come to enquire of me? As I live, says the Lord GOD, I will not be enquired of by you. Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Cause them to know the abominations of their fathers.

This statement begins a panoramic view of Israel's relationship with God from God's perspective. Ezekiel's charge from God is to judge—to pronounce judgments on Israel on God's behalf; to tell them plainly why they went into captivity.

I think it is very interesting that He gives this charge to Ezekiel—"You do it, Ezekiel," and then turns around and gives Ezekiel the judgment. Ezekiel did not have to work hard for this. God gave them to him anyway. Now listen to these things:

Ezekiel 20:10-13 Therefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and showed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctifies them. But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my Sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them.

What He says here is very interesting in light of this commandment. The first thing that He does after telling them that He gave them His laws (the Sabbath is His), is reminds them that the Sabbaths are a sign that He is their God. He is emphasizing here the importance of observing this day.

A sign identifies. A sign identifies something. A sign gives evidence of a quality or state of a thing. As idioms, we say: "It's a good sign," or "It's a bad sign." "This is good evidence," or "This is bad evidence." A sign distinguishes. It separates so that one may recognize one thing from another in order that people may know who is who or which is which.

A sign draws people's attention to what is going on inside of a building, or an institution, or what it is being used for. A sign draws people's attention, and thus some businessmen market themselves by having flashing signs. There are gorgeous gaudy signs all over Las Vegas telling you before you go in what is going on inside of the building. Think of these things in relation to the Sabbath.

Those of us here are not dealing with a business. We are not dealing with a profession. We are not dealing with a trade. We are not dealing with doctors. We are not dealing with carpenters. We are dealing with a religious institution of which there are many in this world. The Sabbath is the most visible sign that distinguishes us from them. "My Sabbaths I gave them as a distinguishing mark."

We are going to draw this a little bit further, because one can keep the Sabbath like the Jews do, or the Seventh Day Adventists do, and not be the true church. And so it is not merely that the day is being observed; He is far more concerned with *how* we keep the day. That is the *real* sign.

The Pharisees kept the Sabbath. Was the way they kept the Sabbath the way their Creator—Jesus Christ—wanted the Sabbath to be kept? Was this a good indication, a sign, evidence of whether or not they were the true church? Not at all. As we are going to see over and over again, it is *how* it is kept that is the real sign. Anybody can set the day aside on the calendar and not be at all connected to God.

We are going to draw this even a little bit further. We are beginning to get down to the nitty-gritty of why God wants us to keep this day. Ezekiel is reminding them—and us—that the observance of this

day identifies the peculiar relationship between us and God. People can keep the Sabbath and not have a relationship with God. The relationship that we have with God is peculiar. To the world: it is odd, it is strange—it is different because of the way that we keep it, primarily. The keeping of the Sabbath is evidence of who we are, and who our God is. The way that one keeps it gives evidence—a sign of the quality of the relationship. Remember, it gives evidence of a quality or state of a thing—a good sign, or a bad sign.

Of all the commandments that God could have chosen to inspire Ezekiel to talk about and write about, He chose the commandments regarding idolatry and Sabbath breaking. Sabbath breaking is of particular importance to us because it is how we keep it that is important. Now why? Because the proper keeping of the Sabbath compresses into a single concept the whole covenant relationship with God. That is what makes us peculiar. We really have a relationship with God. The proper keeping of the Sabbath identifies those who have this peculiar covenant relationship with Him, and it needs to be protected at practically all costs.

Sabbathkeeping is not like the physical circumcision of a body part, or of spiritual circumcision of the heart—neither of which is clearly visible. The keeping of the Sabbath is *publicly* visible. It is the very fact that we keep it, plus *how* we keep it, that separates us from all of the other world's religions. It is *the* sign to the world, to us, and to God who His peculiar people are. It is the responsibility of every son of God to witness to the world of this relationship. When one becomes lax in carrying it out, it is a sure indication that he is losing his respect and fear of God.

Let us notice something else that is very interesting in this context.

Ezekiel 20:10 Therefore I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness.

Ezekiel 20:13 But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my Sabbath they greatly polluted.

What am I drawing your attention to? I am drawing your attention to Egypt, and the wilderness. The context that God is referring to here of Israel's Sabbath breaking is the wilderness journey. I want you to think of this. This is very, very early in the relationship. In addition to that, if there was any time—in all of the history of Israel's relationship with God—this was a time during which they had no excuse for Sabbath breaking. He was in the cloud right with them. He was in the pillar of fire. He was right with them. They were a completely closed society. There should have been no other God to worship.

All of the people were gathered in one general location. There was no place to go. Double manna fell each Friday. No manna fell on the Sabbath. They had no excuse for losing track of what day it was. God, jarringly, had a man executed for Sabbath breaking as a reminder of how important the day is, and to instill within them respect for it and God says still they rebelled. That tells me again—it was *how* they were keeping it God was concerned with.

They undoubtedly gave lip service to the Sabbath although it was set aside on the calendar. When that day came around, I am sure that if there was any commercial business in the wilderness, it came

to a halt that day. They did not do the normal labor of traveling. It was what they were doing personally and individually—or not doing—within that day that subtracted from, or negatively impacted on their relationship with God that was the issue.

God consistently uses a word translated in my King James as "polluted." My margin says "profaned," which is a little bit more modern word. Pollute means to defile. We talk about polluted air and polluted water. It means the water is defiled, the air is defiled. It means that it is stained. It means that it is, to some degree, poisoned. It is contaminated. It is foul. It is desecrated, violated, and profaned. Profane means to treat with irreverence, with disrespect. Maybe this will help you to understand a little better: it means to treat as common just like Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. "*To treat as common.*"

What is it that motivated them to despise, to pollute His Sabbaths?

Ezekiel 20:16 Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my Sabbaths: for [Here comes God's judgment as to what it was] their heart went after their idols.

Here we are getting to what causes us to break the Sabbath. Proverbs says, "Out of the heart spring the issues of life." Jesus updated this in Matthew 15 when He said, "Out of the heart proceeds murder, adulteries," and He listed about a half a dozen or more sins that come out of the heart. But just as surely as those things come out of the heart, so does *good* come out of the heart.

Now what God said caused them to break the Sabbath was that their heart went after their idols. In a spiritual application, an idol can be anything we give our time or attention to, to the detriment of the relationship with God. But here is what we have got to understand: Idolatry forces a person to do *its* will rather than God's. If the heart goes after the idol, the rest of the body is going to follow the heart. The heart, the thinking processes, imposes its will on the hands, on the eyes, and on the mind. So the hands, the eyes, the ears, the mouth, the tongue, and the other parts of the body just follow what the heart wills to do. If the heart follows the idol and we are doing these things on the Sabbath, God says it is going to break the Sabbath.

The idol does not have to be the same from one person to another. In relation to the Sabbath, the result is always the same, that all or some part of the day is used as one good-and-well pleases—pursuing one's interest on the day rather than what God intends. Are you beginning to see why in Isaiah God said, "I want you to speak My words"? When we are not speaking God's words, our tongue is following after the idol. Sometimes we do things ignorantly. There is no doubt about that. For most of us, we know better, but our heart is going after our idol. So we can reach another conclusion: idolatry is at the foundation of Sabbath breaking. That is from God's own Word, right out of His own mind.

Ezekiel 20:18-20 But I said unto their children in the wilderness, Walk you not in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you . . .

That is kind of interesting, is it not? If we treat God's Sabbath day as holy, then it can be a sign. We can set the day aside on the calendar, and give lip service to it, but if we do not treat the day holy from within—by what we do, or fail to do (even if we are not working)—then there is no sign between God and us.

Ezekiel 20:20-21 . . . that you may know that I am the LORD your God. Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my Sabbaths: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness.

In verse 18 He makes the statement about "the statutes and the judgments of your fathers." Applying this in context, it means, "Don't follow the choices of your parents." He made this statement in relation to this commandment. This is the second generation that He is speaking to here. The whole first generation (except for Joshua and Caleb) died in the wilderness, so at the beginning of Ezekiel 20, He is speaking to that generation. Now it has shifted to the generation that is going into the land, and He tells that generation, "Don't make the same choices—bad choices—as your fathers made." Of course He means their parents.

Now let us change that wording just a little bit, and still keep the sense—the spirit—of what is being said there. There are no other people more influential to children than their parents, and so what He is saying here is, "Don't follow the judgments and the Sabbath breaking that so-called influential people have made in the past." To make it even clearer, He says, "Don't follow their idols." Now why?

Ezekiel 18:4 Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die.

That same verse appears in chapter 20. It is pointing out that God holds us individually responsible. Just because influential people—like parents or like ministers—made judgments in the past regarding the way they decided to keep the Sabbath, God is saying "I am holding you (the next generations) individually responsible. Just because you saw a minister do this or heard a minister say something like this doesn't necessarily mean it's right." Maybe it was. Maybe it was not. He is saying that you have to judge the situation and come to your own conclusion. He is going to hold you responsible and will not accept the justification that you are just following what your father or mother did. If they did what was right—fine. But, if they did not do what was right, then you have got to have the character to step out and do it differently than they did.

Ezekiel 20:24 Because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, and had polluted My Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols.

There it is again. Idolatry and Sabbath breaking are what God specifically draws attention to as powerful irritants to the relationship that He and Israel had. They began breaking them right from the get-go in the wilderness, and they apparently never really understood what it was that He wanted from them regarding it.

We are going to see some more confirmation of this in Ezekiel 22. This begins very similar to Ezekiel 20.

Ezekiel 22:1-3 Moreover the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Now, you son of man, will you judge, will you judge the bloody city? Yea, you shall show her all her abominations. Then say you, Thus saith the Lord GOD, The city sheds blood in the midst of it, that her time may come, and makes idols against herself to defile herself.

To whom is He speaking here? Everybody knows that it is Jerusalem. Remember that Jerusalem in many contexts is a code name for the church. Just file that away in the back of your mind, because it is going to become important later on.

Ezekiel 22:6 Behold, the princes of Israel, every one were in you to their power to shed blood.

This is kind of an unwieldy translation. It says though, "The princes used their power to shed blood in them." In other words, he did not hold his position in very high regard, and he used it to his own honor and glory.

Ezekiel 22:8 You have despised my holy things, and have profaned my Sabbaths.

Why am I reading these verses? Because idolatry and Sabbath breaking are accusations that are directed squarely at the leadership (more specifically at the ministry) for poor leadership and failure to live and to teach the things of God.

Ezekiel 22:26 Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned my holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they showed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

The last phrase of verse 26 is more accurately translated, "They shut their eye to the keeping of my Sabbaths."

Ezekiel 23:36-39 The LORD said moreover unto me; Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah [These are code names for Israel and Judah.]? Yes, declare unto them their abominations; that they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery, and have also caused their sons, whom they bare unto me, to pass for them through the fire, to devour them. Moreover this they have done unto me: they have defiled my sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned my Sabbaths. For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into my sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of my house.

What vile possibilities there are in that verse, that these people were committing on God's holy Sabbath days! They went and worshipped the idol, sacrificed their children, burned them in the fire, and after that was over, they presented themselves at services at the Temple. That is pretty horrifying! God specifically mentions that they were doing it on the Sabbath. They were doing it on *His* day. That is how far idolatry will take a person and force—impose—its will on the actions of an individual.

This is something to be very careful about. These people were guilty for a very frequent Israelitish sin of idolatry: syncretism. They were trying to blend the world's way with God's way and of course

God would not accept that. They would have services, supposedly in honor and out of respect for the Creator God after offering—**killing**—their children in the fire.

Nine times in these three chapters where a brief summary in which an overview of the relationship between God and Israel is given, idolatry and the profaning of the Sabbath are specifically named as the *major reasons* God drove them into captivity.

Now what did God want from them in regard to keeping the Sabbath? What does He want from us? We are not going to give the whole answer here, but we are going to see an overview as we continue to lay the foundation. Let us go back to Genesis 2.

Genesis 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

That is pretty clear. I do not think there is a need to look too much further there except to establish the fact that God is our model in everything. Of course the One whom this is speaking about was Jesus Christ. He was the One who rested on the seventh day, setting the example. He is the model for mankind and as He did—He also wants mankind to do.

Go now to Exodus 31:17. It is very interesting where this appears within the context. It appears at the *beginning* of the operations of building the tabernacle in the wilderness—building a "type" of the church.

Exodus 31:12-13 And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying, 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.

Exodus 31:17 It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

We have a modification of what is in Genesis 2:3 where it only says that "He rested." Now "He rested and was refreshed."

Now let us go to the New Testament to John 5. This is interesting context here, because Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath—of telling a man to work on the Sabbath and carrying his bed with him. Here is Jesus' defense—His justification:

John 5:17 But Jesus answered them, My Father works hitherto, and I work.

I will not go into a long explanation here, but "hitherto" is a word that we do not use much anymore. It means that the Father began working at some unexpressed time in the past. He began working on something, and He is working right up till now, Jesus said. He has never stopped. They got the point, because they are saying here that God was working on the Sabbath.

If He never stopped working, He worked seven days a week, 365 days a year, decade after decade, century after century, and right up until this present time when Jesus uttered these words. He says that He is working and has never stopped for the Sabbath. And then He added, "And I work." They did not like that at all, because Jesus was associating Himself with God, and therefore Jesus was saying, "I work on the Sabbath too." He threw it right back at them. I do not think He did it in a smart-alecky way. I do not mean that at all. I am sure that He was respectful of them. But the very fact that He said it incensed them because they knew immediately that, in order to do this, He had to be equated with God.

And so we have the Father and the Son who began working on some project in the indefinite past. Once that project began, they worked without stopping—"hitherto"—right up till now. Remember, God is our model, and He works on the Sabbath.

Isaiah 40:28 Have you not known? Have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding.

From this we can understand that when God rested on the Sabbath, it was not because He was tired. The *rest* has some other meaning. Remember, He is our model. Again these things will become clearer as we keep going through the sermons that follow. Right now we are just laying foundations. I want to focus on the word *refresh* for a little bit.

Mark 2:27 And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

This, of course, was said at the conclusion of another accusation against Him—that He had broken the Sabbath day. This was the conclusion of His justification for what was done. The disciples had gone through the cornfield, and had reaped and threshed the grain, in order to eat it.

The Sabbath was made for man. It is a gift from the Creator God to mankind that man might profit greatly from its proper use. The intention is to have a noble God-honoring and liberating function, by which we are rested and refreshed as well.

The word "rest" means "a cessation of activity." The second one is a cessation of worry. Exertion can mean relief. Now listen to what "*refresh*" means. God was refreshed. It means, "to give fresh spirit or vigor to." The one I liked is: "to revive or stimulate, especially by consulting the source of one's information." Who is supposed to be the source of our information regarding how to live? "To revive or stimulate, especially by consulting the source of one's information." It means to restore, to replenish, to enliven, to breathe new life into, to energize, to invigorate.

I have no doubt that Israel in the wilderness set aside the Sabbath as a day on the calendar in which they did not labor. I also have no doubt that they were not using the day to worship the God who gives us every breath of air, and a great hope to prepare for besides.

Maybe I can illustrate it this way. The Sabbath is a date. It is an appointment set up by the commandment of God, that we should meet with Him every seven days. That seventh day is the Sabbath. So it serves the function of a date—like a date with a person that maybe you are intending to get to know a little bit better. Now how would you like to go out on a date in which the person you

asked to go out gave you a little token of attention, and then spent the rest of the day paying attention to *everything* and *everybody* else but you? What would you think of such a date? I do not think that you would want to go out with that person again. You would probably seek out somebody else.

The central issue in the keeping of the Sabbath is about our relationship with Him. It is the issue that should guide our intentions. God makes it very clear that this is *His* concern—and it should be *ours*—in the keeping of it. Every Sabbath we have a date with God in order to get to know Him better.

When we make a date, an appointment, with a doctor, dentist or a lawyer, is not that time set aside so we can take care and resolve issues of mutual concern? Do we make an appointment with a doctor to talk about automobiles? Do we make an appointment with a lawyer to talk about the last time he filled our teeth?

Is not the purpose of dating between a man and a woman to enjoy occasions together, to get to know each other in a wide variety of circumstances? In our relationship, it is God that we are dating—and we have gone beyond mere dating. We are in the courtship stage, and each date is a serious step in preparation for marriage.

Let us bring this back into another area again. Do we understand that this commandment provides the bridge between our relationship with God and our relationships with each other? Do we understand that this commandment stands between the three commandments that have to do with idolatry (the ones that most specifically regulate our relationship with God) and the six that regulate our relationships with men? Do we understand that it is *the* commandment which, if properly kept, plays a major role in ensuring that we have good relationships with both God and man? It is the one that God has set apart for us to fellowship with Him; to come to know Him and His way.

It is essential to understand what Jesus said in verse 3 of John 17 in this prayer.

John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

This is one of those succinct, yet very broad biblical definitions. We have a tendency to think of eternal life as simply endless life. It is not. Here is Jesus' definition of eternal life. Eternal life is *knowing God*. Eternal life is understanding the way God lives. The quality of life that God lives is eternal life. He does not live like a man. He lives on the God-plane. We have to learn to live as He lives, to think as He does, to act as He does, to have His image in our mind.

The Sabbath is set apart so we can know Him; so we can know what eternal life is—and live it. Knowing Him *is* eternal life. It is being intimate with Him. He is not intimate with people who rebel against Him. He is not intimate with people who, on the Sabbath day, have their mind on everything else but Him; on everything else but His way of life, and who are talking about everything else except the things that concern Him and our relationship. We do not come to know Him by going out on a date with Him, and then not paying any attention to Him.

Do you understand that the proper keeping of the Sabbath is given to man that in it he might come to know God better on this day than on any of the other days of the week? We have a whole twenty-four hours to spend with Him. It is no wonder He got upset with Israel, because they were ignorant of

what He wanted from them on the day. So they spent precious little time with Him. They were not digging into His Word. They were not sitting down and discussing His words, His attitudes, His character, His prophecies. Their mind was on everything else, it seems, but Him.

Fellows and girls, you know that if you went out with somebody of the opposite sex that you expected to have an enjoyable time with, and they paid attention to everybody else except you, you would be frustrated and angry. You would never want to go out with that person again. That is the issue. Eternal life describes the way God lives, and the Sabbath is set apart so that we can come to know Him, to be intimate with Him, by paying attention to Him.

People spend an untold number of years preparing to earn a living. Like doctors—they have four years of college. Then there is medical school and internship. They might go through eight, ten, or twelve years preparing to be a doctor (to serve in their profession)—to be successful in the world.

God commands one day a week from the time that we are called to be set aside to help us prepare for living endlessly in the highest quality in His culture that He will establish.

Brethren, I mean *one day*. A whole day. Not just church services. Some, like Protestants and Catholics, seem to think their obligation to God for keeping the day finishes as soon as services are over. As soon as services are over, they run off to a restaurant or to some other kind of amusement.

Isaiah 40:28 Have you not known? Have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding.

We do get tired. We do faint. We do wear out. We are not God yet. How are we rested and refreshed? *By the Sabbath day.* Verse 29 begins to give the answer.

Isaiah 40:29-31 He gives power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Brethren, do you understand this is where the "*rest*" comes from? This is where the strength comes from. This is where the power comes from. This is where the refreshing comes from. It comes from the relationship with God within the proper keeping of the Sabbath day. *He gives it to us!* It is a gift of His grace.

He restores our energy. He gives us the power to overcome—to grow. He gives us peace of mind so that we are truly rested. He helps us to recover our strength. He enables us to live confident, hope-filled lives. He gives us good health and sound minds. "The Lord gives His beloved sleep." He gives us strength-restoring sleep.

All of these things are gifts of grace from time well spent fellowshiping with Him, developing the relationship with Him and communicating with Him in Bible study and prayer. How we use this day tells Him very much about how we will do in His Kingdom. I fear, brethren, that many of us have put the wrong emphasis on it. We have a tendency to look at the day as things that we cannot do rather than things we can do—things that are truly liberating things we cannot devote time to on the other six days of the week.

