

Sabbathkeeping (Part 4)

Principles of Keeping the Day

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 18-Sep-99; Sermon #413

In preparing this sermon, I thought it was going to be the last in this series on the Sabbath. It may be, yet. It depends on how far I get. I'm going to list a number of fundamental things that we have covered regarding it in the three previous sermons.

As an overall summary to this point, I would say that I have been stressing that we see the Sabbath correctly in its overall context. That is, its importance to God and His purpose for mankind—and therefore its importance to each of us personally. It should not be understood that keeping the Sabbath is going to save anybody, but rather it is part of a whole scheme that fits within His purpose of creating us in His image. No other day will do, because this is the one that *He* has designated.

Some may say that any old day will do because God can be worshipped at any time, anywhere—that God is not so small or mean as to be that narrow. But first consider that it indeed may be arbitrary, but God is sovereign, having every right to issue arbitrary orders. Our job is to learn to submit.

Secondly, everybody ought to be able to understand that deviations from a recipe alter the outcome of the product. We may not understand why, but God has His reasons for everything He commands or gives examples of. Because of His nature, they are all given for the good of His purpose, and for the good of those He is commanding.

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

I think that this statement captures the essence of what I am saying. The Sabbath was made for mankind. The Sabbath was made to serve mankind, and therefore it also serves God's purpose.

Notice that He did not say it was made for the Jews only, as most people seem to read into this. Some people say that Jesus kept the Sabbath because He was a Jew. To me that is a dodge. God says what He means, and He means what He says. Jesus clearly understood He was to keep it, and He did. If it was God's intent that only Jews keep it, He would have written it that way. The Sabbath is made for mankind.

God has also designated that the Sabbath is to be the sign between Him and His people. It is evidence that He, the Creator, is our God, and those that keep it are His children. Taken as a whole, what the Bible shows on this subject is that it is not merely that **it is observed**, but also *the manner* in which it is observed that makes it the sign.

The Jews are not His children except by creation, but they keep the Sabbath. The same thing applies to the Seventh Day Adventists. It is not merely that it is being observed, but the manner in which it is observed that makes it **the sign**. If that were not so, He would not have shown so much concern as to how it was observed—even going to the extent to show that breaking it was one of the major reasons why Israel was forced into captivity and divorced by God.

Here is a brief summary of what we have covered so far:

- 1) In the Bible, by command and example of Jesus and Paul, the issue is never which day on the calendar to keep; it is always *how* to keep it.
- 2) By way of contrast: in the world, the Sabbath is considered the least of the commandments; but keeping it is a matter of morality. It is one of ten parts of the Royal Law. Keeping it *right* is an act of love.
- 3) Ezekiel 20 shows that Sabbath-breaking was one of the major reasons why God sent Israel into captivity.
- 4) The Sabbath is made for man's benefit. It is a major regulator of man's relations with God and man because it is the day God set

apart for direct fellowship with Him, and instruction in *knowing* Him. "Knowing Him," Jesus said, " *is* eternal life."

5) The Old Testament is no less binding on a Christian than the New Testament. The Bible was primarily written for the church, and most specifically for the end-time church.

6) There are numerous code names for the church used throughout the Bible. The church is "the Israel of God,"—the Israel that belongs to God. The Sabbath was specifically revealed to Israel by God. This is a very important point.

7) When we read the history of ancient Israel in the Old Testament, we are also reading a broad but accurate overview of the patterns of the church's relationship with God as well, because some things in all of history never change.

The important thing for us, at this point in this series, is that when we read and study the Bible (whether Old or New Testament), we understand that we are reading and studying the patterns of the church's relationship with God—just as surely as we are reading the history of ancient Israel. Thus when we, the church, experience an event such as the church is now going through, we can search the Book and find its causes and solution.

Because of Ezekiel 20, we can *know* that Sabbath-breaking is playing a role in the scattering of the church. Because other prophecies concerning the end-time are coming to pass, we find ourselves in a unique convergence. God is beginning to wrap things up at the time of the end of the church's judgment (I Peter 4:17), and at the same time setting the forces in motion that are going to bring the salvation to all of Israel and the Gentile nations. ***Brethren, we do not want to drop the ball at this critical time in history .***

Isaiah 58:13-14 If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day 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.

In Exodus 20, the rendering of the commandment lays down the basic rule concerning the Sabbath's use. It says:

Exodus 20:8-11 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shall you labor and do all your work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God [It doesn't belong to man; it's God's.]: in it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger that is within your gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

No other day is hallowed in the way that the Sabbath is. It is set aside as holy to God. It belongs to Him. It is time *for* Him. And so the basic rule that the commandment lays down is that God requires that each person set aside this day for the worship and service of Him. There is nothing here that even begins to indicate that this commandment is merely ceremonial in nature. I say that because that is one of the reasons that the Protestants say we don't have to keep it, that the Sabbath is just a ceremony. But there is nothing here to indicate that it is only a ceremony.

Just like the other commandments, its function has to do with relationships. One set of relationships—the business and work-a-day, world ones—are broken off (stopped). They end on Friday at sunset. And another set of relationships—the spiritual ones—are emphasized. In addition to that, the commandment, as it is rendered here in Exodus 20, looks back on creation. It identifies the reason that we are to keep it is because God, the Creator, set it apart at creation.

From here I want you to turn to Deuteronomy 5 because a change is made. There are actually a couple changes, but I only want to really touch on one.

Deuteronomy 5:15 And remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the LORD your God brought you out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD your God commands you to keep the Sabbath day.

What this rendering of the commandment does, is it adds that we are to remember that we were servants in Egypt—shifting the spiritual emphasis from looking back on creation to looking back on redemption. It doesn't lose entirely its connection with creation, but rather is added to it. So it not only now looks back on creation (that our God is the Creator), but also now the Sabbath has to do with God our Savior, and being redeemed. Creator/Savior.

Therefore the commandment implies that it has to do with liberty—release from slavery, as well as its preservation and its relationship with the Redeemer (the One who saves). We're beginning to see why no other day will do. We're beginning to see **specifically** why no other day will do.

It is not only the sign that He is the Creator, it is also the sign that He is our Savior. It is a day that He appointed as *the* day to memorialize that He sets us free and maintains our liberty. As long as we are looking to it, the relationship with Him is going to be preserved.

Nowhere does God give a specific listing of dos and don'ts. Rather He shows some examples and broad principles (two of which I just enunciated to you: creation and salvation, being Savior and Redeemer) from which He expects us to make judgments. Specific events that might arise on any given Sabbath, or specific events that might arise only once or twice in a lifetime—have to be evaluated as they occur.

Isaiah 58 shows several broad principles. First of all He shows a general attitude toward the Sabbath. He expects a great deal of respect for the Sabbath day. He says it to be a day of joy, of delight. Over what? Over the fact that we have been honored to know of it, and honored to know that we are to use it with understanding.

God says in verse 13 that it is to be held "honorable." That word "honorable" means "*right*." This is in contra-distinction to any other day of the week. The other days of the week are **wrong**—that is, to be set aside as the day of honoring Him. This does not mean that a meeting cannot be held on the other days. He's talking here about our consistent and regular practice. It is the Sabbath that is right. It is the Sabbath that is proper. It is the Sabbath that is appropriate. It is the Sabbath that is fitting. It is the Sabbath that is worthy. All of those words are synonyms for "honorable" (as it appears there).

God is instructing us, very clearly, that to consider it a burden is anathema to Him. If the Sabbath is a burden, God is a burden. He takes it personally. We are to honor Him and **it**, in our use of it.

This word "honor" means something a little bit different. This word means "*to praise, to glorify, to acclaim, to salute*" (show respect). We honor Him in the way that we use it. A bit more specifically, we are to honor Him by using it to do **His** pleasure. "Pleasure" here is kind of general. It is broad, but we will get a little bit more specific as we go along here. We honor Him by doing **His** pleasure rather than our pleasure—what we would normally do on the other six days.

Pleasure is used here in the sense of desire, will, wish, or preference. Feed those words in: "Not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words." So it's a day to do **His** desire, **His** wish, **His** will, **His** preferences.

We're going to see that this leads one to understand that the emphasis in these commands (on keeping the Sabbath), is not on how much energy is expended, by any given person, on any Sabbath, but rather on what end or purpose it is expended.

All of these commands taken together show God's concern about **what** and **why** we do what we do on His holy time, with a great deal of emphasis on the words **what** and **why**—what and why we do things on His holy time. Therefore, what we are doing, and the intent for doing what we do, is of greater importance.

The Pharisees seem to be, at least subconsciously, considered as the model of the way most of the Jews kept the Sabbath. But that is not so. They were merely one dominant sect that adhered to what is usually referred to as "the oral law." They adhered to it strictly, and the people were afraid of their [the Pharisees'] condemnation. But there is little evidence the Sadducees shared in the Pharisees' narrow nitpicking views, and this is not unusual.

Today, Baptists do not hold the same interpretations of Scripture as Lutherans or Presbyterians or Methodists, and yet all of them are considered to be Protestants. So back then, they were all Jews, but they weren't all keeping the Sabbath exactly the way the Pharisees were, because each one of those groups had a little bit different interpretation of the way things ought to be done.

Every Jew did not keep the Sabbath as the Pharisees did, and so the Sabbath commandment needed to be expounded upon, and its authority and application magnified. Jesus did this, just as He magnified the sixth commandment and the seventh commandment in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sabbath was magnified in other places.

The tendency in life is more strongly toward becoming more loose rather than becoming more conservative. The Pharisees' application of the Sabbath law is unusual in that regard. But it was radically wrong, and it needed to be corrected lest people consider the Sabbath to be a grievous burden. How can it be a delight? How can it be something that is honorable in people's minds if it was a grievous burden? But that's what the Pharisees turned it into. It is instead intended by God to be a liberating delight, functioning to produce right relationships with God and fellowman.

We're going to go back into the New Testament to John 7:21-24. It is interesting that this command, that we are going to read about, involved deciding whether something is able to be performed on the Sabbath. The episode that we're going to read in John 7 actually has its start at the beginning of chapter 5, in the book of John. It occurred on a feast day—a Sabbath day—when Jesus healed a man.

John 7:21-24 Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave unto you

circumcision (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers), and you on the Sabbath day circumcise a man: If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are you angry at me because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day? [Here comes the command.] Judge not according to the appearance, but judge *righteous* judgment.

Jesus' command or instruction (however strong of a word you want to use) is that they quit judging superficially. This is kind of interesting because I am sure that the Pharisees, for centuries—I kid you not. I don't mean the *same* Pharisees, but the Pharisaical sect, the organization—for centuries had been poring over the Scriptures, and all of that time was wasted. Jesus said that all of their thinking about the Sabbath was superficial, and they weren't judging righteously.

Since God didn't give us a list of dos and don'ts regarding Sabbath-keeping, it is imperative that we judge righteously, using the principles and examples He did give us. There is no list of do's and don'ts. The list is very short:

- 1) Don't work on the Sabbath.
- 2) Call it a delight.

That's a pretty short list. He did give quite a number of principles in other areas and examples that we can look to.

To judge means, "*to consider*." It means, "*to evaluate*." It means, "*to size up, to appraise, to discern*." It means, "*to come to an understanding of*" in order to form an opinion. What this means in practical operation, is that we're going to have to gather information (in some cases from several sources) to compare them and to balance them against each other—in order to determine the right way.

It's good to note here that Jesus did not find fault with circumcising on the Sabbath. In fact He used it as His illustration of a correct judgment. Now why? Because in this case the Jews looked into God's word and they saw that God commanded circumcision. They righteously concluded that it was God's pleasure, it was God's will, and it was God's desire that the circumcision be

performed on that day. Or we might say, regardless of the day. Circumcision was of such overriding importance as the seal of the Old Covenant that the practice superseded any given Sabbath. In other words, in that sense, circumcision was bigger and greater than the Sabbath.

Now it didn't happen very often in anybody's lifetime that it would occur. A family might have ten children, ten boys, and out of those ten boys maybe none of them would be born in such a configuration (in relation to the Sabbath) that it would ever have to be done. It might only turn up once in the lifetime of a fairly large family, and maybe never. But when it did occur that the eighth day fell on a Sabbath, they rightly judged that because of what circumcision represented, it should supersede that Sabbath. It only took a few minutes and it was over. You had a squalling baby, and home you went. You see, the covenant in this case was more important than the Sabbath.

In like manner, today baptism—which has some parallels with circumcision—is done on the Sabbath by the true church without one whit of a guilty conscience. Why? For the same reason. Baptism is such an overriding importance, in regard to the person's making of the New Covenant with God, that at that time it supersedes the Sabbath. You can see why Jesus drew on this, because it is a principle that is so easily seen. He reckoned that the Jews judged righteously, and of course went on to His conclusion that it was not wrong for Him to make a person whole on the Sabbath day.

Matthew 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Now this "judgment, mercy, and faith" can be paraphrased to make them fairly easy to understand. It means, "*being fair and even-handed in judgment* ." It means, "*being compassionate and kind in action*," as well as "*being loyal to God in keeping His law*." Justice (which would be a more accurate modern translation of the word "*judgment*") means, "*to be fair*." Mercy means, "*to be compassionate and kind*" in action. Faith is actually closer there to the English word "*faithfulness*," or even "*trust*." So we have then justice, compassion, and faithfulness (or loyalty).

Jesus applied these concepts in His situation—confronting the Pharisees—because the Pharisees had reached a tragically wrong conclusion regarding the *intent* of God's laws.

The word "weightier" means, "*more important.*" It means, "*central,*" or "*more decisive*" as compared to what is peripheral or secondary. And so what Jesus is saying here is that the intent of God's law is to produce justice, compassion and kindness, and loyalty to God. Of course we know that the big thing that would be produced is a right relationship with God and men. And character will be built.

The Pharisees were guilty of a massive distortion of God's will, or we might say God's pleasure, and thus in their zeal to be absolutely correct, they actually corrupted those they were leading. They had an "attitude toward law" -problem that was almost queerly 180 degrees from what most people have. Like I said, most people have a tendency to become more loose and more liberal. But for some strange reason the Pharisees had a quirk, and they corrupted the law in another direction altogether. And so God felt it necessary to correct this corruption so that we would understand.

Micah 6:6-8 Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? [Now think of yourself in this in regard to your relationship with Him.] Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul [or my life]? He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you, but to do justly [Notice how this parallels Matthew 23:23. What does God require? To be just, to be fair and even-handed in dealing with people.], and to love mercy [To be kind, to be compassionate, to be filled with love. Actually that word "mercy" can be translated accurately into "*loving-kindness.*"], and to walk humbly with your God?

This shows the intent of God's law. Jesus virtually lifted this word-for-word from Micah and applied its principle there in Matthew 23. But He substituted

the word "faithfulness" for "humility," because a person who is truly humble will show that humility by submitting to God's law, and he will also thus prove himself to be faithful.

The essence of its instruction, here in Micah 6, is not that God did not want the sacrifices of the Old Covenant in Micah's day. But, rather, He did not want rigid hollow conformity (to even ceremonial obligations), without a corresponding understanding of their intent, and the application of that intent in their conduct and attitude in daily life. That's what Jesus was correcting there in Matthew 23. The Pharisees had corrupted the *intent* of tithing. They corrupted the *intent* of honoring your parents (which He addressed in Mark 7). They corrupted the *intent* of the Sabbath and came up with a perversion of the keeping of it.

I mentioned earlier that the issue of how much energy is expended is not a Sabbath issue. What the energy is expended upon—and why—is what is important. I'll give you some very clear examples. It is good to remember that somewhere between two and three million Israelites marched out of Egypt with all of their possessions on a Sabbath day. How much energy was expended doing that?

One week later, on another Sabbath, the same group of people marched through the Red Sea, fleeing for their lives, and herding all of their cattle, their sheep, their goats, their oxen pulling carts with all of their possessions, their chickens, their ducks, their geese, their donkeys, and whatever household goods and clothing that they could carry with them. Forty years later, when they conquered Jericho upon entering the land of Canaan, they marched around the city on the Sabbath day.

Now, what gave them permission to expend the time and energy was that it was God's desire. It was His pleasure that they do so on these three occasions, because He was using what they did for His purpose. They left us an example, and God wrote it down, and He accomplished something in their redemption. They did what they did because it was His pleasure that they do so.

Let's carry this a little bit further. Numbers 28 and Numbers 29 contain a long list of required offerings that the on-duty priests had to perform for each

day, each weekly Sabbath, and each appointed feast (which was also a Sabbath). Again the justification for these heavy and time-consuming labors on the Sabbath was that it was God's pleasure that they be done.

Turn to Exodus 16 and we will see something that God clearly establishes as His pleasure for the Sabbath day—actually for the day before the Sabbath. Exodus 16 begins the depositing of the manna. Instructions were clearly given to Moses, which he in turn passed on to the children of Israel, including what they were supposed to do on Friday. They were supposed to gather twice as much on Friday, because they were not supposed to go out and gather what they needed to eat on the Sabbath day.

Exodus 16:23 And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD has said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which you will bake today, and seethe that you will seethe; and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning.

Brethren, this principle is still in effect. Now don't say that you do not have the time to prepare. If you do not have the time to prepare, something is wrong with your work. That is, in the use of the other six days of the week. Maybe your sense of order and priority habits need to be changed. The preparation day begins at sunset on Thursday [since Friday is the preparation day, and the day begins at sunset]. Meals can be prepared, even including leafy salads. They can be prepared ahead of time, and if they are done properly with fresh things—they will be nice and crisp on Sabbath day, twenty-four hours later. God says to prepare. He does not want ordinary weekday work done on the Sabbath day.

Leviticus 23:3 Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work therein: It is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.

No work is to be done because it is the Sabbath. That's God's reason. The only other day in this whole listing here in Leviticus 23 that is similar, in wording, is the Day of Atonement.

Leviticus 23:30 And whatsoever soul it be that does any work in that same day, the same soul will I destroy from among his people.

We don't eat on the Day of Atonement. No food is necessary, and there is no work. You feed that back into the ordinary "day to day" commandment, and you will find that God does not want our wives doing the preparing of food on that day.

In Leviticus 23:7, He is giving the restrictions regarding the first day of Unleavened Bread—the 15th of Nisan.

Leviticus 23:7 In the first day you shall have a holy convocation: you shall do no servile work therein.

The wording here is different from the weekly Sabbath. He adds the word "servile." If you look in modern translations they will generally translate that word "servile" as "*customary*," and it means what you would ordinarily do on the other six days. My Study Bible, which I am using right here, says the word means "*laborious*," servant work, slave work. They have chosen the translation "*laborious*."

I want you to turn back to Exodus 12:16 and we will add one more factor here regarding some differences between the weekly Sabbath and the Day of Atonement as compared to Holy Days.

Exodus 12:16 And in the first day there shall be a holy convocation [the 15th of Nisan—the first day of Unleavened Bread], and in the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save [or except] that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you.

You can see that God makes a difference between Holy Days (except for the Day of Atonement) and the weekly Sabbath. The weekly Sabbath is actually more restrictive than Holy Days.

There is at least one logical reason for this, and that is that Holy Days normally require travel to a central area. So people are out of their normal

circumstance. And being out of the normal situation (out of the normal circumstance), God permits the preparation of a meal to be done on the Holy Day.

In many cases, there is no reason for us to take full advantage of that, because most of us are still near home. At the Feast of Tabernacles, we're not at home. God had forethought, and He made that commandment a little bit more looser. Remember this: His law is not so inflexible, so rigid, that it will not bend. He will allow alteration for circumstances. He has clearly shown this when Israel went out of Egypt into the Promised Land, and for doing the work of a priest on the Sabbath day. Keep that in mind. That's a conclusion in that section, because He is already showing us that there is a little bit of bend—even in the commandment that no work shall be done, like on the weekly Sabbath.

You understand what I am doing here. I am giving you principles. I am not giving you a list of dos and don'ts. God doesn't do that. He wants us to learn to make righteous judgments.

Matthew 12:1-8 At that time Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, your disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungered, and they that were with him: How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat; neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.

I want you to see how Jesus analyzed the situation and how He illustrated His conclusion. Jesus used two illustrations to correctly justify what He permitted His disciples to do. In the first illustration He used the situation

where David and a number of his starving men were fleeing for their lives from Saul. Ahimelech the priest gave them the shewbread from the table in the Holy Place in the tabernacle to eat. That presents us with two activities that normally would be sin under ordinary circumstances. Notice how Jesus shows that the law will bend in unusual situations.

1) The shewbread was commanded by God to be baked fresh each Sabbath (which is kind of interesting in itself) and placed on the table in the Holy Place.

Now for us, it would be work to bake bread on the Sabbath. It would be ordinary work, customary work. It would be servile work, which is forbidden. But for them, it was not sin because it was God's pleasure that the priests do that. They were not sinning by doing what would be sin for us to do. I hope you'll see something here: The law does not apply absolutely the same way to everybody. Some people get upset about that. "*Well, if they can do that, why can't I do that?*" Ask God that.

2) The shewbread was not to be eaten by anybody except priests.

After it was replaced with the new bread, the old bread could be taken off, and could be eaten **only** by priests after it was removed from the table. David and his men were not priests, and that too would normally be sin.

Remember that the intent of the law is to be compassionate and kind. Now what Jesus ruled was that the higher laws of meeting a necessity and extending mercy overruled the normal situation. Thus God is clearly showing that it is His pleasure that we show mercy and/or meet a necessity—when a situation occurs that demands to be taken care of. And we can do it with a clear conscience.

Now right here, brethren, is very frequently where the rubber hits the road in regard to righteous judgment. The desire is almost always present in us, because of human nature, to be quick to declare something *we* want to do (our pleasure), as a necessity, an emergency, or an act of mercy. Some amount of caution is necessary lest our judgment be less than righteous. It's very easy to abuse this liberty.

Consider two more things impacting on this situation. First of all, David was not an ordinary citizen in Israel, and therefore neither he, nor his men, could be regarded as ordinary hungry men. You can see how Ahimelech probably had quite a number of things going through his mind. "*Oh, how am I going to judge this? Here is the king, the anointed one, right in front of me, and he's fleeing for his life, and he's got these hungry men with him. What am I going to do?*" David was God's anointed, and Ahimelech knew that. I am sure that it figured into his judgment.

If you will go back and read it in I Samuel, what complicated matters is that David lied to Ahimelech. That might have perverted the judgment, but it didn't. Maybe Ahimelech did not realize at the time that David was lying to him. Please do not think that Jesus said David's lying was all right. It was not. It's never right. What Jesus did was say, that regardless of the lie, what Ahimelech judged was correct because David and his men truly were hungry. I mean they were legitimately hungry, and Ahimelech reached the right decision. I just wanted to put that in there to show you that this was not a cut-and-dried issue. Ahimelech had to figure it out, and he reached the right conclusion.

Today we can look back and understand that David was a type of Christ, and his soldiers were a type of the disciples. I interject this because a word to the wise here: we would do well to be cautious about declaring something to be a necessity. In this case it was. Ahimelech made the right judgment.

You feed that kind of thing into what Jesus was doing with these disciples of His. These men had left their former occupations. They no longer had the regularities associated with them. They weren't living in their homes. They were itinerant because they were following Jesus wherever He went, wherever He moved, wherever He traveled. Thus they were subject to *His* schedule, and unable to organize their time, as they formerly had. So all told, there was very good justification for Jesus' decision.

Perhaps these are rather simple illustrations that I'm going to give you here, but consider this: God commands that you be here, fellowshiping with His people on the Sabbath day. Suppose your car has a flat tire on the way here.

What do you do? You take care of it, because the keeping of the Sabbath, in fellowship with God and His people, overrides the amount of labor that might be necessary to change a tire.

What if you are home and the water heater springs a terrible leak and it's spouting water all over the place? It's the Sabbath day. What do you do? You take care of it. Maybe at the very least you shut the thing down and at least do what you can to contain it at that time. Maybe it won't require a great deal of work, but you take care of that.

What if your neighbor's house catches on fire? You help him in that situation regardless, because mercy overrides the normal keeping of the Sabbath. You see, there are circumstances that demand that we take care of the situation.

Now would you help your neighbor move a whole house full of furniture on the Sabbath day; something that could have been planned for some other day of the week? No. It was not a necessity. It was not an emergency in that kind of a situation. What Jesus is saying here is that if there is an emergency—an act of mercy necessary—you take care of it.

If something tragic happens to an animal, like it falls into a pit—you take care of the situation. You can be merciful to animals. If a cow is calving and having a very difficult time in giving birth to it—you take care of it. You show mercy to the cow and assist it in the delivery of its calf. How often is that going to happen? Not very often unless you have an awfully big herd. But most of us in this kind of situation do not have a big herd. Maybe the thing to do, if it is happening real often, is to cut down on the herd.

You get the point. There are things that can be done in order to honor God's Sabbath. But when an emergency does truly arise, you take care of it. I think that most of you can think this through.

In Matthew 12:9-14 we have something very similar to what we just read in John 7. In this case it is very interesting because Jesus healed a man with a chronic problem. In this case it was not an emergency. He could have allowed the person to go on, and heal him after the Sabbath was over. But He deliberately chose to heal the person on the Sabbath day. Why?

The answer to that is to show us that God's mind, His nature, His law, is to always be merciful under *every* circumstance. What we have to make sure of is that what we are doing, the intent, really *is* giving mercy to the person. Necessity in this case did not demand that He heal the man on the Sabbath, but it did provide an excellent example that mercy is always right when the opportunity presents itself.

To the best of my knowledge, even though Jesus had the power from God to do this, He did not very frequently go out of His way to heal people on the Sabbath. On the other hand, if people did come to Him on the Sabbath, He healed them.

I think one of the things that is interesting here is that the Pharisees in this situation were so far from God that they were blinded to what wickedness they were planning to do. They were looking for an opportunity to get information against Jesus to kill Him. Their wicked motivation for what they were doing is probably the most gross Sabbath violation in all of the Bible. They were using the Sabbath to plot the murder of an innocent Man.

To do good, on the Sabbath, is *always* right. Just a note of caution here. Jesus helped alleviate human misery and discomfort. Just make sure that you use the principles that are given here. Now does this permit, let's say, hospital work? Isn't it the relieving of human misery? The answer to that is: no. Because, by the Bible's definition, that would be servile work—customary work. It's what you do the other six days of the week, and so you get yourself scheduled off on that day.

I have heard of people going shopping on the Sabbath day to buy things for the church. That is not a legitimate use of the Sabbath unless it was truly an emergency. So you have to ask yourself the question: Where is the emergency? Why is it a necessity? Or is doing something like this merely convenient and therefore your pleasure rather than God's?

I'm sure that I didn't give enough examples, and there are probably hundreds of specific questions that one might be able to come up with. There is one thing that I want to address. Lately, it has become [a trend] to think it's righteous to **not** eat out on the Sabbath at all.

I have in my possession a tape of Herbert Armstrong given during a Friday night Bible study at the auditorium just a few years before he died. He was asked the question, "*Is it all right to eat out at a restaurant on the Sabbath day?*" just before he went up on stage. He didn't have any time to prepare to answer the question more formally. So he reasoned it aloud while he was sitting there on stage. What struck me, and I think would strike you, was how hesitant he was to give *any* whole-hearted approval. He did eventually say he felt it would be okay *occasionally* to go out for a meal in a restaurant on a Sabbath.

Let's analyze a few things here. First of all, whether we eat out in a restaurant will not determine whether the waitress will work, or the chef, or the cook, or the cashier, or anybody else. That is not the issue here. They're going to be working anyway. Their conscience is not being defiled by their not keeping the Sabbath. Sabbath-keeping is a personal responsibility of the called who have made the New Covenant with God. When these others (the waitress, the chef, the cook, the cashier, or anybody else) are called, the Sabbath is made known to them, and they will keep it. Then their choices will be for keeps too. It is part of this "*to him who knows to do good*" principle.

The Sabbath is a time for fellowship. It's a time for doing good. It's a time for being merciful. It's a time for setting free. It is a time for relieving burdens. Sometimes eating out in a restaurant can accomplish all of these things at one time. Sometimes, you men *occasionally* might consider doing this for your wife—freeing her from much preparation work. You might take out a less well-off family, or a widow, or a widower, on such an occasion. It can be very rewarding for those people. It can be encouraging, uplifting—a wonderful time to fellowship.

Some have decided they will not eat out on a Sabbath even during the Feast of Tabernacles. Now remember the principle there in Exodus 12:16. God says that it's okay to prepare food on a Holy Day. God allows for a certain amount of preparation on the Holy Days, and the reason is obvious. Like the disciples there in Matthew 12, people are out of their normal home environment, and so God makes an exception to the normal Sabbath routines and allows things not normally permitted. If He allows His own children,

who have made the New Covenant with Him to do this (to prepare even on a Holy Day), He will surely have no objection to those who are not His called (and not responsible in the way His children are), to go through their normal routines and serve those who are keeping the Feast of Tabernacles.

There is absolutely no room for one to stay in one's room and to eat crackers or sandwiches during the Feast of Tabernacles unless it's one's conscience. If your conscience bothers you, don't go out to a restaurant. The boss of old, Herbert Armstrong, said it was okay, especially at a Feast, and even on a weekly Sabbath... *occasionally*. But it is so easy to abuse it.

A Summary:

- 1) God's pleasure for the day holds the highest priority. Our pleasure must be put into the background.
- 2) It's also family time. (This is something that could be gone into quite a bit.)
- 3) Most exceptions fall into two categories: (A) Necessity and (B) Merciful acts, including lifting a burden.
- 4) Some things we have the liberty to do, like occasionally eating out on the Sabbath, are easily abused.
- 5) Remember, the Sabbath was made for man. Its primary function is the promotion of and regulation of our relationships with God and man. A physical resting is in reality a minor issue because the true rest is the spiritual effect of our fellowship with God and His giving of grace.