

Tasting the World to Come

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A legend relates that "at the time when God was giving the Torah to Israel, He said to them: 'My Children! If you accept the Torah and observe My Mitsvot, I will give you for all eternity a thing most precious that I have in My possession:

'And what' asked Israel, 'is that precious thing which Thou wilt give us if we obey Thy Torah?'

'The world to come.'

'Show us in this world an example of the world to come.'

'The Sabbath is an example of the world to come'" Pg 79 Saunders

The Sabbath as our example of the world to come! That makes it most precious.

We know from the scriptures therefore that the time beginning Friday evening through Saturday evening (the Biblical Seventh day) is given to us by God as a time of rest and refreshment to spend with Him and with His people. In it, we are to honor God in respecting His gift, and we are to strengthen our faith relationship with the Him. But that is not the sum of it. The Sabbath is also to be a foretaste of heaven.

Now most people I know are looking forward to living in heaven and having eternal life. We all want to see Christ coming in the clouds to take us there.

What about our attitude toward the Sabbath day?

For many years I had been dissatisfied with the quality of Sabbath keeping, both within my own home and with what I have observed in others. I have said to myself and my God "What is wrong? This doesn't taste right. What is lacking?" Gradually the answer has come to me - like pieces in a puzzle - that our Sabbaths seem far more concerned with law and duty than with love and joy.

Certainly, joyless Sabbath keeping cannot represent the world to come. As one writer put it...

The Sabbath kept legally is as lifeless and valueless as no Sabbathism . . .

Legalism in regard to the Sabbath leads to 'bondage and gloom'" Saunders pg. 91

Now the Sabbath is not a day meant to bring bondage and gloom -- but freedom and joy through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

That was the problem Jesus so often faced in talking to the Pharisees of His time. They had turned the holy hours of the Sabbath day into an obligation, filled with hundreds of do's and don'ts that they had intended to protect the people from making mistakes in their Sabbath observance. In reality their 650 some laws for Sabbath keeping blocked Israel from experiencing the communion with God and the rest of faith God had intended. They strayed so far from the true purposes of the Sabbath through their legalism, that when Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, came among them they plotted against Him and ultimately crucified Him.

How do we learn to keep Sabbath properly, without legalism? The scripture give a simple answer to that question by showing us the true principles to guide our rest in Christ during the Sabbath hours.

Whereas the Pharisee's developed over 600 different laws to bind up Sabbath keeping, I believe we only need three scriptural principles. I call them - "Rules to Keep Sabbath By."

Rule#1 - Be Guided by the Word of God, not tradition (Thine own way) of men. Isaiah 58:13

13. "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, ...

It is human tradition that brings legalism to bear on Sabbath keeping. Note Jesus' Sabbath keeping verses that of the Pharisees in Mat. 12: 1 - 14 (Read)

1. At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them.
- 2 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."
- 3 He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when

he and his companions were hungry?

- 4 He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread-- which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.
- 5 Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent?
- 6 I tell you that one greater than the temple is here.
- 7 If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent.
- 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."
- 9 Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue,
- 10 and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"
- 11 He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?"
- 12 How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."
- 13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.

- 14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

Which was breaking the Sabbath? Healing or plotting? Now look at Mark 7:13 Jesus warned the Pharisees saying: "Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down."

What is the effect of human tradition upon the Laws of God? It nullifies them. So Tradition, whenever it is implemented without being scripture based and scripture tested, becomes a tyrant and destroys the Law of Liberty to which we have all been born in Christ.

But if we do not have tradition to guide us, what will we use to show us how to keep the Sabbath holy? God's Law, just as it is written in scripture. So what does God's law say about Sabbath Keeping?

- a) Do no work on that day - (meaning employment for personal gain) Exodus 20:10

The seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

So relax, get out of the workplace and, insofar as possible, the kitchen. Banish the rat race for a day. Simplify, Simplify, Simplify. It's time for something better to happen. It's time to think of joy and heaven. But notice that the command not only talks about you and me working, but about you and me employing others to work for us.

- b) Do not employ others to do work for you. Exodus 20:10

This would include using restaurants and gas stations to some extent on the Sabbath (except in emergencies). We should try to avoid causing others, even if they do not share our Sabbath convictions, to have to do work for us on the Sabbath.

I'm not talking here about indirect employments. The postman or woman carries and sorts mail on the Sabbath day, and some of it may be your mail. Your car may still be in the shop, and you don't have a whole lot of say about when the mechanic gets around to it. (You could try, but you would only cause confusion in his mind).

But going to a restaurant after church when you could just go home and warm up the meal prepared earlier in the week is employing somebody to wait table and cook for you, and that violates the commandment.

- c) Rest from all vocational toil - even agricultural harvest time. You can make hay another day. Ex. 34:21

Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.

- d) It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath - Mt. 12:12 Works of healing, and mercy and kindness are always appropriate for the Sabbath day.

- e) It is lawful to work in God's service on Sabbath - Mt. 12:5

Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent?

It can be quite enjoyable to open the Bible share with others the things of God or go for a walk and pass out literature or loafs of bread. The work of the church and it's program are sometimes strenuous, but they are in service to God, whose day this is. And so ministers and deacons and deaconesses and teachers and so forth are guiltless.

f) It is lawful to relieve suffering on the Sabbath - Mt. 12:11

He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out?"

And here is the exemption for farmers who must care for their animals on the Sabbath. Cows must be milked or they suffer great pain and injury. Other animals need to be fed and cared for. To allow them to suffer when we could give them aid would not be God's will.

g) It is lawful to respond to emergencies involving life, health and sometimes property -
Mt. 12:11

h) It is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Mt. 12:13

My sympathy for the medical profession here - for sometimes they

have no Sabbath due to the sickness in this world.

But notice what is not said in these texts. Nothing is said specifically about leisure time when we are not employed or employing others in labor or involved in the service of God or some emergency need. The Sabbath - in revoking work - will create free time. The Law does not tell us specifically how to fill it. So how can we be guided where the Law itself makes no clear statement?

That's were we need to consult rule #2. If we do not find specific guidance in the Law, we must search out the principles that are behind the law to guide us.

Rule #2 - Be Guided by the principle of love to God and man. Isaiah 58:13

"Call the Sabbath a delight, Holy of the Lord, Honorable."

If somebody makes time for you, it is not love to snub them. The Sabbath is time God made to be with us.

Jesus exposed the two under girding principles of the Law when he said "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, And your neighbor as yourself." Mt. 22:35-40 Love is the only motive that fulfills the law. See Romans 13:10.

"Love does no harm to its neighbor.

Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

The principle of love with respect to the Sabbath will clarify our intents through the following questions.

Does this activity draw me closer to Jesus?

- Ez. 20:20 - Sabbath is a sign to remind us of God.

Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God."

- Isa.58:14 - Our joy will be in the Lord not in other things or accomplishments.

then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land

So to apply this principle ask: "Will this activity help me to grow closer to God or does it take me away from Him?"

- Faith leads us into God's presence and His will. Hebrews 11:6

"...Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

- Rm. 14:23--

But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Even obedience to law is unacceptable unless it is a response of faith and love. Heb 11:6

Obedience can come from many things: Desire for personal gain, habit, curiosity, and narcissism - "love of self." But God points us to a better motive.

Read Hebrews 4:9 – 12

- 9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;
- 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.
- 11 Let us; therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.
- 12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. NIV

The real action here is in our thoughts and motives. We all live in an increasingly secular society. Our young people face questions every week about what is right or wrong regarding the Sabbath? Public schools hold functions on Friday night. Should I go? Athletic events often take place on the Sabbath hours. Can I participate?

I'm thankful for our youth who answer "No, I cannot go to this or participate in that because I have another important engagement. The Sabbath is the day that God set aside to be with me. The only things I want to be involved in today, are the things that bring me closer to God." That's Love of God. And, parents and adult church

members, this makes it important for us to plan our Sabbaths so they truly help our youth grow closer to Christ. Amen? Even in this time of modern things and distraction, the Sabbath rest remains so that we can enter it.

NOW ALL THESE THINGS MAKE FOR LIBERTY IN SABBATH KEEPING: Liberty such as Jesus and his disciples practiced. But there is one more sacred consideration we need to keep before us.

It is Rule # 3 - the principle spoken of in Romans 14:..Let not my liberty be an occasion for another to stumble.

- 13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.
- 14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that nothing is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.
- 15 If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.
- 16 Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil.
- 17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,
- 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing

to God and approved by men.

- 19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

An Example:

In America, most people consider swimming not to be a Sabbath activity. However, in Europe I understand things are different. In Europe on a hot day, Adventists think it is O.K. to take a dip in the water. There is no Bible passage specifically saying not to swim. And the second principle shows that If you can learn of Christ's love in the water, then well and Good.

The story is told that an American minister was visiting a mission teacher in another land. When the Sabbath came, the American went out with his binoculars to study the birds. On the path he passed the mission teacher, dressed in swimming trunks and carrying fins, mask and snorkel.

"What are you doing and what are you carrying there?" asked the shocked minister.

"What are you doing and what is that around your neck" rejoined the teacher.

"Why, these are binoculars and I am going bird watching" said the minister.

"I see." said the teacher. "well than, know that this are skin diving gear and I am going fish watching."

Now which activity is correct? Or are they both incorrect? It depends on whether you come closer to Jesus in studying his creation or whether you are just looking for a diversion? Whether you swim or not, or whether you scope out birds or not, it must be a response of

faith. But! - it must not cause another, seeing you, to stumble.

To activate this principle you need to ask yourself: "Even though this activity may be good, and help me grow in Christ, Is there someone who, seeing me in it, might misunderstand my motive and be misled by my example of liberty into following a way of sin?"

In America where we have certain traditions – Bird watching is considered acceptable, swimming is not. I do not want my liberty to harm another, for whom Christ died. Therefore, I would be careful of his or her sensibilities in this respect.

A friend and church member whom I greatly respected once told me the story of how, once, when she was weak in her adherence to truth, she would often go into her garden on the Sabbath to tend her roses. She thought there was no trouble in doing such gardening, but one day she overheard her neighbor gossiping with another neighbor about her.

"They must all be hypocrites" she heard. "Here they say to us to stop work on their Sabbath and there she is over there working in her garden"

Now, it is probably true that a person might gain much insight into his or her creator while pulling weeds and pruning roses, but those weak in their faith don't know that, and when my friend realized this and that she was becoming the cause of other people rejecting this message of the gospel she vowed never again to use the Sabbath hours for gardening.

These guidelines can help us so order our activities on Sabbath as to make the day a delight to all the family. They will remove fear and frustration, and build love and harmony between God and ourselves if we follow them.

Freed from worry about the rightness and wrongness of lesser projects - we can learn to evaluate our Sabbath keeping by its central purpose: That of building up our relationship with Jesus. The Sabbath will become a delight - holy of the Lord - honorable, for we will learn to subject every thought, and every activity to the purpose of these special hours, We will build our Sabbaths in faith around the precious Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Now if you are a visitor here today, and you have never heard of the Sabbath day I want you to know that this time was set aside by God for you too. It belongs to you as much as it does to me. This can be a special time for you to get to know God and you can begin it with the simple ABC's of faith that will help you to find Him.

A – Admit your need. We are all sinners and therefore we cause harm to others and ourselves. We don't often want to face that fact, but it is true. If you would like to join the fight against bad behavior, simply admit your need for help to overcome.

B – Believe in Jesus. The purpose of Christ's death for us on Calvary was so that we could come to God in spite of our sins and find help from Him to change for the better.

C – Claim Jesus as your Lord and Savior, and begin to follow Him today.

That's simple enough. And the Sabbath is your time to get to know your new Lord and Savior better, and to learn about service in His Kingdom.

I hope you will take advantage of the opportunity of this service to take these three simple steps to a new life just now, as we pray.