

I'm an oldfashioned preacher who believes in honoring the sabbath. And one reason behind my conviction is that I was raised in a preacher's home, where the sabbath was honored religiously.

The sabbath began for us when we children were awakened early on Sunday morning for a full day in church. First came Sunday morning church, followed by lunch. And after lunch, we all had to take a nap, whether we wanted to or not. (Sometimes this seemed just awful. We had to lie down just when we felt full of life!)

After we rose from our naps, we were allowed to do some quiet reading or perhaps listen to gospel music. Then, on Sunday evening, we all went to church again. And after we came home, we went straight to bed.

This was the typical sabbath of my growing up years. And every Sunday, all day long, we had to refrain from doing anything lively, such as playing ball or romping around. We weren't even allowed to use scissors to cut paper for school. Our parents constantly reminded us, "This is the Lord's day, and it's a day of rest." And so we kept it holy.

In those days, "blue laws" were in effect. This meant no businesses were allowed to operate on Sunday, except vital ones such as hospitals or gas stations. Very few stores were open at all. In fact, if a shopkeeper opened his store for some reason, people would whisper, "That man has lost his religion!" Even the rankest sinner didn't think of buying anything on Sunday.

A century ago, the great evangelist D.L. Moody preached a fiery message deploring every form of sabbath-breaking. Moody's sermon condemned sweethearts who

# Honoring the Sabbath

*"Thou Shalt Carry No Burden on the Sabbath!"*

cruised around on bicycles-built-for-two during Sunday afternoons. He also cried out against men who read newspapers on the sabbath. He even spoke harshly of women who paraded in fine dresses and big, fancy hats on Sundays. He warned them all: "You're breaking the sabbath. Everything you're doing is a matter of pride and arrogance against God's holy ordinance!"

To Christians living today, this all may sound extreme. But the fact is, Moody voiced the deep feelings and opinions of a multitude of believers of his day. The sabbath was the Lord's day - and it was not meant for pleasure or self-gratification. It was a day to worship God and to rest from all other activities.

**Today, however, Sunday is no longer a hallowed day. On the contrary, it has become the biggest retail shopping day of the week. More money is spent on Sunday than on any other day.** If you drive by any suburban mall on a Sunday afternoon, you'll see the parking lot absolutely

packed. Blue laws are now a thing of the past.

Sunday has also become a time for pleasure and recreation. People fill the day with football, sports, shopping, picnics. And if it doesn't interrupt their leisure activities, they may squeeze in an hour for church, just to ease their consciences.

Sadly, **Sunday as sabbath no longer has meaning even for a majority of Christians.** On any given Friday, millions of believers can be seen heading for their family hideaway - a cabin in the mountains, a house in the country, a chalet at the lake. For them, Sunday is one big play day - a time set aside for boating, swimming, skiing, going on cruises or outings.

You may wonder - is all this activity simply a break away from rigid legalism? Is it actually good that we've made the sabbath a spiritual observance, rather than just an outward, legal obedience? Could this even be a sign of spiritual maturity?

### In the Old Testament, God jealously Protected This Holy Day!

The Lord heaped honor on His sabbath all through the Old Testament. In one passage, Moses says, "...the Lord hath given you the sabbath..." (EX 16:29). In other words, the sabbath was meant as a gift from God to man. And it had a holy purpose.

You see, the word "sabbath" means, literally, "to cease," or, "to stop what you're doing." And when the fourth commandment tells us, "*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy*" (20:8), it describes obedience this way:

*"Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work... 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"* (verses 9-11).

To the ancient Israelite, "sabbath" meant ceasing from virtually all actions. Yet in Numbers 15, we read that a certain Israelite took this commandment lightly. He was caught outside the camp gathering firewood on the sabbath.

When the people brought him to Moses, however, Israel's leader wasn't sure how to punish the man. Every Israelite knew that God had commanded His people to keep the sabbath holy. But there were no clear guidelines on how to chastise someone who breaks that commandment.

As Moses pondered what to do, the Lord gave him this amazing word: "*The Lord said to Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp*" (NUM 15:35).

Now, agnostics have used this passage to mock the justice of God. They say, "This is a clear picture of just how cruel God is. He would stone someone to death just for picking up sticks on the sabbath!"

No! That's a distortion of this passage's meaning. In reality, God was teaching His people that His laws are just, and that they always

have man's best interests in mind. God was saying, "I'm giving you principles to lift the burdens of life from you. But if you continue to break these principles, you'll burn out. And, eventually, you'll break down the very fiber of your society!"

God's word makes it clear that the sabbath law was a perpetual covenant, never to be broken:

*"Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant"* (EX 31:16).

You may think, "But this sounds like we're supposed to return to legal observances of the sabbath. Didn't Jesus say the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath? And didn't He and His disciples 'work' on Sunday, picking grain from the fields to eat?"

True - Jesus ate, traveled and even healed on the sabbath. In fact, the Pharisees' greatest accusation against Him was that He was a "sabbath breaker."

Yet, I have to admit - I still have a great respect for the sabbath as a day of imposed rest. To me, Sunday is still a holy day. And I believe God honors those who give the day to Him, to keep it holy.

Now, I don't intend to go into a discussion about Saturday being the actual sabbath, since it is legally the seventh day of the week. Very simply, the reason Christians observe Sunday as sabbath is because that's the day Jesus was resurrected.

(Luke affirms Sunday as the sabbath observance among early Christians: "*Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them...*" [Acts 20:7]. Also, Paul states in First Corinthians 16:2 that believers met on the first day of the week.)

Yet, having said all this, what does it mean to keep the sabbath holy? What does God require of us in keeping this fourth commandment? If it's not just a matter of legalistic obedience, and is rather a spiritual observance, then what must we do?

**By the Time of the Old  
Testament Prophets,**

### Sabbath-Breaking Had to Do With Burden-Bearing.

Every sabbath, long lines of animals - mules, donkeys, camels - paraded in and out of Jerusalem, carrying merchandise for the purpose of commerce. This practice was so common that the sabbath soon became identified with burden-bearing.

God's prophets were heartbroken at the sight: Hordes of buyers and sellers, herding their heavily burdened beasts, came and went in total disregard of God's commandment. City dwellers left their homes to go shopping, then came home carrying big burdens on their backs. And rural people entered the city gates carrying all their crafts and goods to market. All of God's children were carrying heavy burdens on the Lord's sabbath!

As Jeremiah watched this scene one sabbath, the Spirit of God moved on him powerfully. And, suddenly, the prophet stopped all traffic with a loud cry:

*"Thus saith the Lord; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers"* (JER 17:21-22).

I imagine a huge traffic jam, with long lines of mules and donkeys braying, as Jeremiah prophesied: "This is the sabbath - and according to God's Word, you aren't allowed to carry a burden. You can't take anything to or from your home without breaking the law. It's a hallowed day - and you're sinning!"

Beloved, like all Old Testament stories, this one provides a lesson for us in these last days. Indeed, I believe it contains a life-changing message for us, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear it.

Here is what I believe God wants to tell us about his holy sabbath:

**When Scripture Says God  
Rested on the Seventh Day, It  
Has Nothing to Do With His  
Becoming Weary!**

*"Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?..."* (ISA 40:28).

The Bible makes it clear: God never sleeps. Scripture says His arm is never too short to help us, His ears never closed to our cries. So, when Genesis says God "rested," it doesn't mean He simply sat back and took twenty-four hours off because He was tired.

As I mentioned up front, "sabbath" means to "cease" or "finish." I believe that even though the Lord had His creation fully in place after six days, He couldn't rest - because His work wasn't truly finished. Yes, He could behold His marvelous creation - the sun, the planets, the earth and its moon, the stars, the galaxies, as well as the living image of Himself, man. But God still couldn't say, "It is good." Why not?

The fact is, God's creation - as perfect as it seemed - could fail. And that's because at the center of it all was man - a creature made to live in innocence and glory, but who also had the potential to sin by his free will. Simply put, man had the ability to bring ruin upon God's work.

So, the Lord couldn't rest until He had devised a plan to save His creation, should it fail. He knew that if man failed, sinning by His free will, he wouldn't be able to bear the heavy burden of his sin; he would simply collapse in despair. And so, in His perfect foreknowledge, God devised a plan of salvation - the capstone to His work of creation.

Here was the plan: If the first Adam failed, God would bring forth a second Adam - His own son. And He would invest in Him all His own power over creation. God could say, "Nothing can destroy My creation now! When men and women become loaded down with their sin, they won't have to carry the burden - because I will give them a burden bearer!"

Thus Jesus was begotten by the Father - to bear every burden brought upon humankind by sin. Indeed, David saw the Lord as the burden bearer of all humankind: *"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never*

*suffer the righteous to be moved"* (PSA 55:22). And David acknowledged his own need for a burden bearer: *"Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me"* (38:4).

No, Jesus' coming to earth was not an afterthought. He was begotten by the Father from the very beginning, as the capstone to all creation. And at that point, God - like an architect putting the last line on His project - took a look at His work, then stepped back from it. It was finally complete. Now He could rest from His creation!

**This is why Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished!" He was saying, "Father, the redemptive plan you laid out when you first created man has been accomplished. Everything is now complete!"**

God rested the moment He set the day of grace - that is, Christ's day - as the seventh day of His creation. Indeed, the six days prior were a time of works - representing all of history before the cross. But today is the day of faith. And since the time of Christ's resurrection, we have been living in God's day of rest - the holy sabbath!

Now, when God's Word speaks of rest, it includes physical rest. But the Lord's holy rest begins in the soul: *"There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God"* (HEB 4:9). What is this rest? It is the laying of all our sin-burdens on Christ!

Jesus himself says, *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"* (MATT 11:28). He's saying, "By faith, you must enter into the father's sabbath rest. You must refuse to carry your burdens to and from your home any longer, and instead lay them all on Me. I am the Lord of the sabbath. And I'm the only one Who can bear your burdens!"

I ask you - why do so many Christians refuse Jesus' offer? I believe that if Jeremiah were living today, he would be dumbfounded by all the Christians who continue to carry their own burdens of sin and battles with temptation. He probably would cry out:

"Why are you bearing all these burdens on such a glorious sabbath? Didn't Jesus say to you

as I said to Israel, 'Bring no burden into your house'? So, why do you continue to carry such a load around? You shall carry no burden on the sabbath - for it is a holy day unto the Lord!"

The point here is that **sabbath means we are to cease from our own works - our striving in human strength - to merit God's salvation:** *"Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers"* (JER 17:22).

**Here is the secret to how we're to hallow the sabbath: We're to give all our burdens over to Jesus, and trust His Holy Spirit to give us strength for life. That's right - we honor the sabbath by laying down all self-effort in trying to make our way through sin and temptation.**

**This is a command we're to observe not just on Sunday - but every day!**

**I Believe This Entire Passage In Jeremiah Is Prophetic of Christ and His Church!**

*"And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the Lord, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein;*

*"Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever"* (JER 17:24-25).

Now, we know Christ is the seed of David. And we know He sits as King on David's throne. But who are the kings and princes Jeremiah describes here - the inhabitants of Jerusalem riding on horses and in chariots?

We are those people! And we have been given an incredible promise here: By taking all our burdens to the burden bearer, we will live in peace forever. His plan is for us to live free of all bondage!

Indeed, **Jesus' command to lay our burdens on Him is not an**

**option. We are to do it as a matter of trust in Him. Only when we allow Him to bear our burdens will He truly be King and Lord of our lives:**

*"If ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched"* (verse 27).

The prophet is saying, "If you will not obey God's command to stop carrying your burdens on His sabbath, you'll end up consumed by them! You'll spend all your time talking about your pain, stress and sorrow. A fire will burn inside you, and it won't go out. And in the end, you'll be destroyed - because you carried your own burden!"

Tragically, this describes many believers today. Some can hardly sleep at night, because they never stop thinking about their problems. They turn things over and over in their minds, wondering, "Where did I go wrong? And how can I make it all right?"

When they wake up, their minds go straight to their burdens. They recall one while in the shower... then another while getting dressed... then another at the breakfast table. Finally, by the time they walk out the front door, they're so burdened down they can't even smile. They're like donkeys - loaded down, never having peace, hauling their burden from place to place.

Many such Christians never know even an hour of rest in Jesus. What an incredibly poor testimony! They're telling the world that Christ has no power to relieve us of our burdens!

### **Laying Down Your Burdens Is No Easy Task!**

You can tell yourself, "Here, Lord - take all my cares and concerns. I lay them all on you. I don't want to carry them one more day!"

Yet this is not as easy as it might sound. Laying down your burdens takes drastic action. It requires a powerful act of determination - and a kind of spiritual surgery that only the Holy Spirit can perform.

We see this illustrated in the book of Nehemiah. At the time, the Israelites had faithfully and diligently rebuilt Jerusalem's gates. But once the gates were back in place, the people completely overlooked the sabbath observance. Every week, long lines of laden-down animals passed through Jerusalem's gates, going to and from the city market bearing all kinds of merchandise.

Like Jeremiah, Nehemiah was angered when he saw all this activity taking place on the sabbath. He writes:

*"In those days I saw in Judah some treading wine presses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold their victuals"* (NEH 13:15).

The prophet warned the people to lay down all their burdens and honor God's sabbath. But they wouldn't listen. So Nehemiah stepped up the level of his appeal: *"Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?"* (verse 17). He was saying, "I chided them, preached to them, warned them. But nothing worked!"

Finally, Nehemiah had had enough. He knew the people needed spiritual surgery. So he took drastic action:

*"And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day"* (verse 19).

Nehemiah put sentries at the gates. But even then the burden-bearing people wouldn't be deterred! They camped out all night long, carrying their burdens around as they waited for the gates to open: *"So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem..."* (verse 20).

Beloved, your burdens will always be camping outside your mind - waiting for an opportunity to jump

right back in. You may lay them down at night. But in the morning, there they'll be - the same old worries and concerns - waiting for you to pick them back up. No sermon can evict them, and no warning can drive them out.

So, what did Nehemiah do to stop all the burden-carrying? He says, *"Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath"* (verse 21).

When Nehemiah came to end of his endurance, he threatened force. And, beloved, that is just what we're to do, to keep all burdens outside the gates of our minds! Like the prophet, we're to cry out from our soul, "This isn't God's way! I live in the day of sabbath rest - yet my soul is anything but at rest. All my cares and worries come and go as they please. I must take dominion over these burdens, at any cost!"

Like Nehemiah, we have to talk to our cares and worries - to address them directly, in God's language: "You can't wear me down anymore - because I have a burden bearer! Jesus has promised to lift everything from me. And I cast you out right now, in His precious name!"

"I shut the gates of my mind to you. You no longer have access. And if you try to come back to harass me, I'll bind you up and cast you into outer darkness!"

Scripture says, *"...came they no more on the sabbath"* (verse 21). **Beloved, if we remain faithful to lay down our burdens, they will "come no more on the sabbath."** And that will be proof enough that we're truly living free of all heavy burdens!

Then, Nehemiah says, *"...the gates should be shut, and... they should not be opened till after the sabbath..."* (verse 19). What does this last phrase mean - "after the sabbath"? It signifies "heaven" - our final home! You see, **God's sabbath calls us to live all our days free of fear, worry and anxiety - to walk in the Spirit, with no more heavy burdens - until Jesus comes and takes us home!**

I ask you - are you keeping the sabbath in your life right now? Or are you breaking the sabbath? Dear saint, the truth is, **you have no right to carry a single burden any longer.**

Pray with me now: "Jesus, by faith I push all these worries and burdens out of my mind. I won't put up with them any longer. Here, Lord - take my financial burden, my grieving heart, my physical pain, my temptation. They're all yours.

This is the day of your sabbath - and I will honor Your command!"

by David Wilkerson  
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