



BOOKLET NO. TWO

THE

SABBATH

PRINCIPLE

A KEY TO FRUITFULNESS

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CHAPTER ONE

THE OLD COVENANT SABBATH

Lately there have been many vital old truths that have begun to fade into the background of the church. One of them is the truth of the Lord's day or the Sabbath Principle.

As a pastor I've consistently observed that when someone begins to take the Lord's day lightly, spiritual decline is in their future. And I'm sure other pastors and Christian leaders have made the same observation. Without apology I want to claim that not just some of the time but every time a believer takes the Lord's day lightly he is headed for spiritual problems.

Why is that true? What does the Bible really have to say about the Lord's day, and why is it so important? Why do we still gather together on the Lord's day, even though we are in the new covenant era? Why don't we just treat every day alike? Why don't we just do our own thing on the Lord's day and trust in the grace of God to cover us? What is the Sabbath Principle?

A. THE SABBATH PRINCIPLE AND FRUITFULNESS

Is there any link between being fruitful and honoring the Lord's day? The Lord has been speaking a lot to us about reaching out to people and touching the world with the gospel. It's clear that the Lord wants us to be fruitful. Is there some connection between the fruitfulness of our lives and the Sabbath Principle? And remember, when we talk about fruitfulness we're not referring to material blessings or some external idea of success. We're talking about bearing

spiritual fruit, fruit that comes forth from our lives as a result of the presence of the Holy Spirit, fruit that others can eat of. Does the Sabbath Principle have any bearing on our spiritual fruitfulness?

I would like to suggest that there is a clear relationship between spiritual fruitfulness and the Sabbath Principle. We see that relationship clearly in the Scriptures. Isaiah 58 contains a promise from the Lord to His people to make them fruitful. This is obviously an Old Testament passage, but the New Testament (see 1 Corinthians 10:11) makes it clear that the dealings of God with His Old Testament people have direct application to His New Testament people today. The New Testament didn't reinvent the spiritual wheel — it simply built new revelation on the strong foundation of Old Testament revelation. So it is perfectly valid for us to look at the prophet Isaiah for a connection between fruitfulness and the Sabbath Principle.

In Isaiah 58, the Lord declares to His people that they must not fast for purely religious reasons. Their fasting, and their entire service of the Lord, was to have a much deeper meaning:

6 *“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?*

7 *Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?*

8 *Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.*

9 *Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk,*

10 *and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*

11 *The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.*

12 *Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called repairs of broken walls, restorers of streets with dwellings.*

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,*

14 *then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. The mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 58:6-14, NIV).*

Usually when we read this chapter we stop at verse 12, but I would like to suggest that the Sabbath Principle found in verses 13 and 14 is an important part of Isaiah's whole message. The promise comes to the people that the Lord will guide them and help them in their time of need. He then

promises that they will be like a well-watered garden and like springs of water that never fail. That is clearly a promise of fruitfulness.

GREAT FRUITFULNESS

The condition for the Lord's blessings resulting in great fruitfulness is the faithful keeping of the Sabbath. The application of the Sabbath Principle was to lead to fruitfulness. In the context of rebuking the people for their heartless religiosity He exhorts them to keep the Sabbath. Therefore, He must be referring to more than just a purely religious Sabbath-keeping. There is evidently a spiritual principle at stake in this powerful prophecy.

In fact, some would mistakenly claim that the Sabbath Principle is purely an aspect of the Mosaic law and covenant and therefore not relevant to the new covenant. However, the Sabbath Principle began long before the Mosaic covenant.

The Sabbath Principle began in Genesis 2. Before God made a covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai He defined the principle of the Sabbath. This principle was given by God and modeled by God at the end of the week of creation.

"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." (Genesis 2:1-3,KJV).

On the seventh and final day of creation God established a principle of rest. There are four things that took place on that seventh day:

1. God ended His work. He labored for six days and then

He ended His labor on the seventh.

2. God rested. You wouldn't imagine that God Almighty would need to rest but that's what the Scriptures declare. On the seventh day God entered into His own rest.

3. God sanctified the seventh day. He set the seventh day apart for a holy purpose.

4. God blessed the seventh day. The seventh day was to be a day of blessing for those who would enter into the rest of that day.

Genesis 2 reveals that one out of seven days belongs to the Lord and that the seventh day has been sanctified and set apart by the Lord as a day of rest and blessings. It is therefore to be a day when God's people cease from their own labors and enter into the rest and blessings of the Lord.

B. ISRAEL AND THE SABBATH

This Sabbath Principle was then consistently taught and applied to the lives of God's people, from Adam to Noah to Abraham to the people of Israel. It did in fact become a part of God's covenant relationship with His people and we can learn some important principles by studying the role of the Sabbath in God's relationship with His people.

Here are some scriptures concerning Israel and the Sabbath:

"Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy. Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. For six days, work is to be

done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.' When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God" (Exodus 31:12-18, NIV).

"And God spoke all these words: 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me...

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but 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. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" (Exodus 20:1-3,8-11, NIV).

"On the Sabbath day, make an offering of two lambs a year old without defect, together with its drink offering and a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil. This is the burnt offering for every Sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering" (Numbers 28:9,10 NIV).

Dedicating the seventh day to the Lord was the seal of the covenant relationship between God and His people. In fact, those who refused to keep the Sabbath were to be cut off from that relationship. The ten commandments, the very foundation of the law, contained a clear commandment concerning keeping the Sabbath. Because God had entered into His own rest on the seventh day of creation, so the people were to cease from their labors and enter into the Lord's rest on the seventh day.

The Sabbath day was to include certain offerings. Two lambs were to be offered to the Lord, signifying the offering of the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the way in which we must enter into God's rest. These lambs were to be offered as a burnt offering to the Lord as a sign of their dedication to and worship of the Lord. The burnt offering was to be accompanied by a drink offering, a sacrifice of praise and joy. The sacrifice was also to include a grain offering, painting a picture of the people feeding upon the word of God. These offerings were to be given to the Lord on every Sabbath day.

A DAY OF REST

The word "sabbath" simply means "rest, cessation from work, ending your own work." Keeping the Sabbath day means that you have ceased from your own works and are dedicating a period of time to the Lord, who is our Sabbath. Christ is our Sabbath and we can celebrate the Sabbath Principle only because of Him. As we come before Him we will find rest for our souls. This was clearly pictured in God's relationship with Israel. When they came before the Lord, they ceased from their labors, worshiped Him in the prescribed way, and the Lord blessed them and gave them rest.

Have you ever noticed that you can be very weary from a difficult week of labor, come into the house of the Lord on the Lord's day and worship Him, not out of tradition but from your heart, and before long you find yourself being refreshed? In the presence of the Lord you find rest for your soul. The mountainous problems you had been facing before you came into the house of the Lord suddenly seem to shrink in the light of His presence. They take on their proper perspective in the light of eternity and the Lord gives you the spiritual strength you need to enter into another six days of fruitful labor.

By studying these Old Testament examples I'm not proposing that we enter into an old legalism, but rather that we try to rediscover the real spirit and principle of the Sabbath. Here is an example from Nehemiah:

"When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts" (Nehemiah 10:31, NIV). "In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, 'What is this wicked thing you are doing — desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city?

Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath'" (Nehemiah 13:15-18, NIV).

The Israelites promised that when neighboring people came, wanting to buy and sell on the Sabbath, they would not cooperate with them. Yet it wasn't long until the people's greed and rebellion led them to violate the Sabbath.

Nehemiah needed to remind them that refusing to keep the Sabbath had been the cause of their earlier captivity, implying that they would surely go back into captivity if they did not return from their hearts to the Sabbath Principle. This Sabbath Principle had been started by God in the beginning. One of the reasons the city walls had been broken down in the first place was the violation of the Sabbath. Their forefathers had ignored the Sabbath and had paid the price. Now they were repeating the same mistake. They were using the Sabbath for their own purposes, to advance their own interests, for their own pleasure and gain. The hallowing of the Sabbath was to be a sign of the people's relationship with their God. Instead, it had become just another day dedicated to the pursuit of selfish goals. The Lord had clearly declared how important keeping the Sabbath was to Him. Keeping the Sabbath would result in blessings and great fruitfulness. Ignoring the Sabbath would eventually remove the blessings of the Lord and would result in a barren life.

Let me repeat that from my own experience I've never seen an exception — whenever anyone begins to take the Lord's day lightly, they're headed for a downward spiral spiritually. And I'm not talking about occasional legitimate reasons why a person would have to miss assembling together on the Lord's day. I'm talking about people getting caught up in their own interests, their own prosperity, their own goals, and as a result, deliberately choosing to forsake

the Lord's day in order to have one more day to do their own thing. This is an obvious sign that the Lord's priorities are no longer their priorities. They are no longer relying on the Lord to be their provider. They no longer see that with the Lord alone they lack nothing. They are now living their lives centered around their own goals, doing their own thing in their own way. And when that happens, they will not know the Lord's rest, the blessings of the Lord will decrease in their lives, and they will begin to experience spiritual barrenness. That individual or family will begin a serious downward spiral that will eventually result in spiritual death.

Please understand that I'm not focusing in on a specific day as an end in itself. I want us to see the principle of the Sabbath day. And I want us to see how that principle applies to us in the twentieth century. We're living in a day when an understanding of and respect for the Lord's day is almost unheard of. The Sabbath Principle is no longer a part of the Christian mindset. Gathering together on the Lord's day is just something we do on Sunday to be religious. That's exactly what happened in Israel. They continued to keep the law but their heart was no longer in it. This eventually resulted in their hearts being attached to their idols rather than to the Lord. As a result, they spent forty years in the desert.

“Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us, so they would know that I the LORD made them holy. Yet the people of Israel rebelled against me in the desert. They did not follow my decrees but rejected my laws — although the man who obeys them will live by them — and they utterly desecrated my Sabbaths. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and destroy them in the desert. But for the sake of my name I did what would keep it from being profaned in the eyes of the nations in whose sight I

had brought them out. Also with uplifted hand I swore to them in the desert that I would not bring them into the land I had given them — a land flowing with milk and honey, most beautiful of all lands — because they rejected my laws and did not follow my decrees and desecrated my Sabbaths. For their hearts were devoted to their idols. Yet I looked on them with pity and did not destroy them or put an end to them in the desert. I said to their children in the desert, ‘Do not follow the statutes of your fathers or keep their laws or defile yourselves with their idols. I am the LORD your God; follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. Keep my Sabbaths holy, that they may be a sign between us. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’ But the children rebelled against me: They did not follow my decrees, they were not careful to keep my laws — although the man who obeys them will live by them — and they desecrated my Sabbaths. So I said I would pour out my wrath on them and spend my anger against them in the desert” (Ezekiel 20:12-21, NIV).

Ezekiel shows that the reason they spent forty years in the wilderness, the reason they were under the wrath of God, the reason they were not fruitful and the reason they wasted a whole generation was because they wouldn't keep the Sabbath day as a sign of their covenant relationship with their God.

When I read this Scripture from Ezekiel, I am forced to conclude that the Lord was very interested in what His people did on the Sabbath. Starting on the seventh day of creation He set a particular day in the week aside to bless His people and give them rest. But, if they didn't respond and keep that one day holy, then they would not experience the blessings of the Lord and their lives would become

unfruitful.

C. THE JEWISH SABBATH

In discussing the Sabbath Principle let's take a look at the Jewish Sabbath. How did Jewish people typically keep the Sabbath day?

1. On the Sabbath Day, no personal work or business was to be done.

2. Nothing was to be done just for personal pleasure on the Sabbath.

3. It was a day when the true Jew delighted in Jehovah and His law.

4. They were to sacrifice two lambs every Sabbath. They were to worship the Lord in the prescribed way. New Testament sacrifices, according to Hebrews 13:15, involve the fruit of our lips, a sacrifice of praise to the Lord. The Bible says in 1 Peter 2:5 that we come to offer spiritual sacrifices. With such sacrifices the Lord is well pleased. But in that day they sacrificed lambs as worship to the Lord.

5. They assembled together on the Sabbath.

6. The Sabbath was a time of celebration. In the Sabbath celebration they sang psalms and songs.

7. They then read and taught from the Scriptures. We have an example in Luke 4. Jesus went into the synagogue, as was His custom, picked up the Scriptures and read from Isaiah 61, claiming that God had anointed Him to preach the gospel to the poor. The Scriptures had a prominent role in every Sabbath celebration.

8. And they prayed on the Sabbath. Many prayers of petition and thanksgiving were offered to God by His people.

9. On the Sabbath day they also reached out to the poor and the needy.

10. Finally, they rested their physical bodies after the toils of the week. The Sabbath was ultimately a day of rest.

The elements of the Jewish Sabbath celebration sound very much like a New Testament Lord's day gathering. We come together to worship, to sing, to hear the Word of God and to pray.

D. JESUS AND THE SABBATH

When we come to the New Testament period we see the development of what the Israelite people call the "Talmud." The Talmud is a compilation of regulations that were to govern the people's actions. In the Talmud there are 1,521 rules governing the Sabbath. The early rabbis tried to restrict the people on the Sabbath as much as possible. They understood that the reason why the people had gone into captivity was their refusal to keep the Sabbath. So the Pharisees and scribes developed 1,521 specific descriptions of what the people could and could not do on the Sabbath. It was these additional traditions added on to the Sabbath that Jesus objected to. In an attempt to enforce covenant loyalty, legalism was coming into Judaism. Jesus came to fulfill the law and so rejected the legalistic solution of the rabbis.

There's a very important difference between legalism and obedience. Obedience comes from the heart. Legalism comes from the head only, and not from the heart. Legalism is enforced by fear. Obedience takes place because of love.

Matthew 12 is an example. In this passage the disciples are walking through the fields on the Sabbath.

"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. When the

Pharisees saw this, they said to him, 'Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.' He answered, 'Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 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. Or haven't you read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is LORD of the Sabbath'" (Matthew 12:1-8, NIV).

The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath. In other words, the Son of Man is the reason for and the object of the Sabbath. Sabbath-keeping is not just a religious tradition, it is an act of worship to the Lord. It is a day set aside when God's people come together to meet with the Lord who is the Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus was constantly in trouble with the Pharisees and scribes concerning his conduct on the Sabbath. Never once was He violating the principle of the Sabbath, but He was attacking all the traditions that had been added to the Sabbath. The people were under tremendous bondage to these Sabbath traditions. They couldn't care for their most basic needs. They could only travel so far, no matter what the reason. If keeping the Sabbath meant starving, so be it.

HEALING

Jesus exercised quite a ministry of healing on the Sabbath. I believe He was so active on the Sabbath because He wanted to give a demonstration of the fact that He, the

Lord of the Sabbath, had come to give Sabbath rest to His people. He came to bring Sabbath blessings to those who would believe in Him.

In Luke 6 we see Jesus healing a man with a withered hand. When Jesus said, "Stretch forth your hand," it was the Sabbath. As a result, the religious leaders rebuked Him.

In Luke 13 Jesus healed a woman who had been bowed over for eighteen years. Jesus told her to stand upright and she was miraculously healed. The Jewish leaders opposed the healing because it had taken place on the Sabbath. This daughter of Abraham had been under bondage to Satan and now they wanted to put her under religious bondage. But Jesus fulfilled the meaning of the Sabbath Principle by healing her on the Sabbath.

Again, in Luke 14 Jesus healed a man stricken with dropsy. He was once again rebuked and opposed because He had healed him on the Sabbath.

John 5 tells of a man who had been at the pool of Bethesda for thirty-eight years. Every time he tried to get into the waters when they were troubled, somebody would get in ahead of him. Jesus said, "Take up your bed and walk," and he was healed. But it was the Sabbath. To make matters worse, he carried his mat away on the Sabbath. The scribes and the Pharisees rebuked Jesus. They didn't want Jesus to help people on the Sabbath. But He rejected their rabbinic traditions.

In John 9 Jesus healed a blind man on the Sabbath. In fact, Jesus was always getting in trouble because He was reaching out to people on the Sabbath. He was demonstrating His power on the Sabbath and in that way was demonstrating the meaning of the Sabbath. Jesus certainly healed people on the other days of the week as well, but I believe there is something unique about the ministry of the

Lord on the Sabbath. Jesus comes to bring spiritual health and wholeness as well as physical healing. He came to bring His people rest from bondage, and that rest is best symbolized by the Sabbath Principle.

Look at what Jesus said in Mark 2:27,28: "Then he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath'" (NIV). Remember this: the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. God's great design was to set one day a week aside for man's blessing. Medical science has discovered that man is not capable of working more than six days without resting. If he does, he will begin to physically deteriorate. He has to rest that one day from his physical labors in order to be healthy and have the strength to move on. God knew that when he made man. He knew that when He set the seventh day aside in Genesis 2. He knew that when He made a covenant with the people of Israel. And God still knows that today. The benefit of the Sabbath is for man.

I suggest that if we today have adopted a light attitude toward the Lord's day, that we repent. We must not be like our Old Testament forefathers who abandoned the Lord's day or turned it into an empty tradition. Once we understand that the Lord's day is a blessing God has given to man, that one day a week is to be set aside to focus entirely on worshipping the Lord of the Sabbath, that the Sabbath represents the abandonment of all our idols and selfish interests for the Lord, then we will learn again to take pleasure in the Lord's Sabbath. Nothing can be as exciting as gathering together to worship the Lord, to receive life and strength in His presence, to be fed upon His Word, and to renew our covenant relationship with Him in a life of fruitful service. Nothing is more important than the Lord and our obedient worship of Him.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW COVENANT SABBATH

In discussing the Sabbath we must ultimately come around to our own application of the principle. How does all the teaching about the Sabbath apply to us? In fact, why don't we worship the Lord on Saturday as they did in the Old Testament? Why do we instead worship on Sunday?

We've been discussing the principle of the Sabbath, a principle begun in Genesis 2:1-3 and intended to be kept in all generations. The Lord worked during the six days of creation and on the seventh day He rested. This was the beginning of Sabbath rest. This principle was then included in the covenant God made with Moses and the nation of Israel. Sabbath-keeping was the seal of the old covenant. The Sabbath Principle did not originate with the Mosaic covenant; it began in creation, but it became an important part of God's covenant relationship with His people.

The Sabbath Principle was instituted by God, not by man. God designed it to be a blessing for His people. It was to be a sign that His people were trusting in Him alone for rest. As a result, I have found that whenever this principle is consciously and unnecessarily violated, spiritual decline and barrenness result. Whenever a believer becomes so dedicated to his own agenda, his own pleasure, his own goals, that he no longer sets aside one day a week as a special day of worship and rest, spiritual problems are in store for him. His relationship with the Lord and his overall fruitfulness are drastically affected.

The Sabbath was to be a day set aside to worship and honor the Lord. It was to be a holy day, a special day of

blessings for God's people. If they honored that day by not going their own way and not doing as they pleased, by not speaking idle words but rather in delighting and rejoicing in the Lord, then they would know the blessings and refreshing of the Lord. They would know the joy of the Lord and from that joy, His strength.

Even today, if we honor the Lord in this way, if we make the Lord's day a day of joy and delighting in the Lord, not a legalistic, religious ritual, but a day of worship and prayer, then we will find our joy in the Lord and that joy will be our strength for the next six days. The Lord will honor us as we honor Him. And our lives will be fruitful.

Keeping the Jewish Sabbath was the seal of the Mosaic covenant. It was a sign of the nature of the relationship God wanted to have with His people. 1 Corinthians 10:11 tells us that "*all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*" By studying the old covenant Sabbath we can discover the principle that was involved. We're not interested in some kind of Jewish legalism. We want to live our lives according to the principles of God's Word. Why was the Sabbath so important to the Lord? What did He ask His covenant people to do on the Sabbath? What can we learn from their example? And if the Sabbath is so important, why don't we keep it in the old way?

A. WHY WE DON'T KEEP THE JEWISH SABBATH.

Remember that by the time we come to the New Testament period, the Jewish Talmud had added 1,521 very specific restrictions to the keeping of the Sabbath. The rabbis turned the principle of the Sabbath into a crude legalistic system that was a source of religious bondage for the people. Jesus did not feel it necessary to honor these traditions, but

He did honor the principle of the Sabbath.

So, why don't we keep the Jewish Sabbath?

1. Because it's impossible to keep the whole law. The law came to be a schoolmaster: "*Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.*" (Galatians 3:24, KJV). If you attempt to keep the Jewish Sabbath in a very literal way, you will have to sacrifice two lambs, you'll have to avoid all work even if it means great hardship to you and your family, you'll have to attend a church close by since your travel will have to be limited to 1200 yards, you will not be able to carry anything heavy out of your house, and if you don't keep the Sabbath, you will be excommunicated. The Jewish Sabbath had its place in the Old Testament economy and in the Mosaic covenant. But it is to be our schoolmaster, giving us the principles that will help us come before the Lord in the New Testament. In Galatians 5:3 Paul says, "*For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.*" If we try to return to keeping the old law, including the old Sabbath, we will be indebted to keeping the entire law. And if we break one part of the law, we will be guilty of breaking the whole law, and the penalty of breaking the law of God is death. Jesus has come to give us life and to write His laws on our changed hearts. To attempt to return to the old law would remove us from the grace of God.

2. Then why did Jesus keep the Sabbath? He didn't keep all the traditions of the elders but He did keep the Jewish Sabbath. He worshiped on the Sabbath, He taught on the Sabbath, He healed on the Sabbath, He reached out and helped people in need on the Sabbath. Jesus kept the old Jewish Sabbath every Saturday. Why? "*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were*

under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons," (Galatians 4:4,5, KJV). When Jesus came, He was under the law. Jesus was under the Mosaic covenant. He came to fulfill the law and so had to live it out perfectly. This meant that He had to keep the Sabbath in the prescribed Old Testament way.

3. Why did the apostles keep the Jewish Sabbath? Paul said in Romans 1:16 that the gospel was to be preached "to the Jew first." And the most logical place to do that was in the Jewish synagogue where the people gathered every Sabbath day. If the gospel was to be preached to the Jew first it had to be preached in the synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath. And that's exactly what the apostles did. They were involved in a transition period. So the saints in the early church often met on the Jewish Sabbath and on the first day of the week. They met on the Jewish Sabbath because they were trying to reach out to the Jews.

4. When did the Jewish Sabbath-keeping end?

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come: the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Colossians 2:13-17, NIV).

The cross brought the end of the Jewish Sabbath-

keeping. When Jesus Christ came, all of the regulations that controlled the Mosaic economy, including the keeping of the Sabbath, ended. They were nailed to the cross. The old covenant came to an end and a new covenant was instituted.

2 Corinthians 3:6-11 compares the old covenant with the new covenant:

"He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant — not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts" (NIV).

Paul, comparing the old and the new covenants, says that the old was glorious but the new is eternal and has greater glory than the old. The cross brought the end of the old covenant and replaced it with a better covenant.

Look at Hebrews 8:7-13:

"For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. But God found fault with the people and said:

'The time is coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the

covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the LORD. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the LORD. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.' By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear" (NIV).

We are now at a time when the old covenant has been made obsolete and the new covenant has begun. And the seal of the new covenant is not Sabbath-keeping — that was the seal of the covenant of Moses, the old covenant.

The seal of the new covenant is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer: *"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise,"* (Ephesians 1:13, KJV). When we entered into a new covenant relationship with the Lord, that relationship was sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is a very important part of the new covenant. That's what happened at the day of Pentecost. They were all sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. If you want to be in covenant relationship with the Lord you must have the seal of the covenant in your life. In the same way, to be in covenant relationship with the Lord in the Old Testament, you would have had to keep the

Sabbath day and all the restrictions and regulations that controlled it. Now Jesus has come and brought a better covenant, doing away with the old covenant requirements. To reinstitute the Jewish Sabbath as if it were still the seal of the covenant is to confuse the covenants. You must understand what covenant you're under. Those who teach that we must still keep the Jewish Sabbath do not fully understand which covenant we are now under.

5. Which covenant are we under now? We are under the new covenant:

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:26-29, KJV).

This was just before Jesus' death on the cross. He's saying that the bread and the wine of the Passover meal were symbolic of what He was about to do in instituting the new covenant. He then said that He would not partake of the new covenant meal with them again until He did it in His kingdom. The kingdom of God can only be entered into by the new birth. We gain entrance into God's kingdom under the new covenant by being born again by the Spirit of God. So it is clear that we are now under a new covenant.

In Acts 15 we see this very issue being discussed in what was probably one of the most crucial moments in the early church. This issue almost divided the early church. Luke says that there was a great dissension: *"When therefore Paul*

and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them" (verse 2, KJV). That means that they were arguing fiercely with one another, they were withstanding each other to their face and their discussion was very heated.

It was not just a pleasant little chat. There was no small disputation, no small discussion, no small dissension or division among them. What was the problem? On one side of the issue were those who wanted the new Gentile converts to first enter into the old Mosaic covenant. Paul withstood them, claiming that they were now under a new covenant. As a result, a major council of the apostles was called to discuss this situation.

The question was, "Is circumcision and Sabbath-keeping still in effect?" Some of them were saying, "Absolutely! That's what was given to Moses and it still applies to us today. Maybe we accept Jesus as the Jewish Messiah but we're still under the Mosaic covenant." But Paul said, "No way! That day is over and that covenant has been replaced by a new one."

After all, Jeremiah had prophesied about a new covenant. They all knew that there was something new coming from the Lord. They also knew that the Scriptures had prophesied the day when the Sabbath would cease: "*I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her Sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts*" (Hosea 2:11, KJV). The debate was heated and long, but finally they came to a conclusion that was good to the Holy Spirit and to all the brethren. James stood up to answer this problem by quoting the prophet Amos:

"And after they had held their peace James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his

name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the LORD, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the LORD, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood." (Acts 15:13-20, KJV).

James quoted Amos 9:11 concerning the tabernacle of David. That tabernacle was a place where all the people could come before the presence of God without the usual restrictions. The Mosaic restriction concerning entering into the Holy of Holies was suspended in the tabernacle of David. All the priests, not just the high priest, could come before the ark of the covenant. And so, the Lord declared through Amos, "I'm going to build it again," referring to the establishment of the new covenant.

The Council of Jerusalem could have easily added the requirements of circumcision and Sabbath-keeping to the new Gentile converts. But they didn't. Instead, "*it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things*" (Acts 15:28, KJV). The Lord had shown them that they were no longer under the Mosaic covenant. God had given them a prophetic generation during the reign of David to demonstrate His desire that all men be able to come before His presence and seek Him without legalistic restrictions. We are still under the covering of new covenant when all men are to know the

Lord. We all have direct access into His presence. And as participants in the new covenant we are no longer obligated to keep the Jewish Sabbath.

6. All of the ten commandments are repeated in the New Testament except the fourth. The fourth, the keeping of the Sabbath, is not mentioned anywhere in the New Testament. It was the seal of the Mosaic covenant and therefore did not have a specific role in the new covenant.

B. THE LORD'S DAY

So why do we even keep Sunday as the Lord's day? Let me give you some biblical and historical reasons:

1. Because Christ's resurrection took place on the first day of the week. The most important event in human history was Christ's resurrection. His death was important, but if He had not been raised from the dead, we would not be here today. And Christ's resurrection took place on the first day of the week. Typically it was foreshadowed in Leviticus 23:11 with the waving of the firstfruits on the first day of the week. Jesus Christ is the firstfruits from the dead. He is our firstfruits who has come to bring many sons to glory. This all took place on the first day of the week.

2. The Holy Spirit, the seal of the new covenant, was poured out on the first day of the week, on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost means "fifty." In Leviticus 23:15-16, the day after the seventh sabbath, the fiftieth day, was to be the day of Pentecost. So typically, not only was the resurrection predicted on the first day of the week but also the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

3. The early disciples met and broke bread on the first day of the week after the resurrection of Christ (Acts 20:7).

4. The early believers gathered together and gave offerings on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Already in the first generation of the church the saints had a regular practice of gathering on the first day.

5. Some claim that it was the Roman Emperor Constantine and the Imperial Catholic Church that changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. However, the historical evidence shows that the early church worshiped on Sunday from the earliest days. Let's look at some of the writings of the early church fathers concerning their worship on Sunday.

The epistle of Barnabas was written around A.D. 100. In that epistle he says, "*wherefore also we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose from the dead.*"

The epistles of Ignatius were written in A.D. 107. Ignatius was a pupil of the apostles and was commended by Polycarp who was a friend of the Apostle John. He wrote, "*And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the LORD's day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all days.*" It was true that some of the early Christians participated in the Jewish Sabbath since the gospel was to be preached to the Jews first. Then they gathered together on the first day of the week for the Christian celebration. In the earliest writings Sunday was referred to as "the Lord's day", the day He rose from the dead. Ignatius goes on to say, "*those who were concerned with old things have come to newness of confidence, no longer keeping the Sabbath, but living according to the LORD's day, as which our life as risen again through him depends.*"

Justin Martyr, who wrote in A.D. 145 said that "*Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly. Because it is the first day of the week and Jesus Christ our savior on that same day rose from the dead.*"

In the second century, the Apostolic Constitution instructed the people that *“on the day of the resurrection of the LORD, that is the LORD’s day, assemble yourselves together without fail, giving thanks to God and praising him for those mercies God has bestowed upon us through Christ.”*

Tertullian wrote in 200 A.D., *“in the same way, if we devote Sunday to rejoicing, for a far different reason than sun worship, we have some resemblance of you, the Jews, who devote the day to Saturn, to ease and luxury.”* He’s saying that you can’t accuse the Christians of worshipping the sun any more than you can accuse the Jews of worshipping Saturn. He then states that *“he who argues for the Sabbath-keeping and circumcision must hold that Adam and Abel and the just of old times observed these things. We observe the day of the LORD’s resurrection, laying aside our worldly business.”*

Constantine did not change the Christian day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. The New Testament declared the first day of the week to be a day of worship and the writings of the early church fathers confirm its consistent practice. To insist on returning to the Jewish Sabbath is to confuse the covenants and ignore the witness of history.

I believe that the enemy has been working to destroy the application of the Sabbath Principle in the church today. He wants to get us bogged down in a debate over specific days and lose sight of the principle. We do not worship the day, we worship the Lord of the day. The whole purpose of the day is to set aside time to worship the Lord.

The Bible warns us that we are not to be pressed into the world’s mold and to adopt the world’s ways. Instead we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

It’s not that many years ago in our nation that very few

businesses were open on Sunday. Today the malls are bustling. The busiest shopping day is the Lord’s day. I was raised in a time when the Lord’s day was special. As a child I couldn’t do as I did on the other days of the week. And I loved Sundays. We did a lot of wonderful things with the family. We gathered for great feasts and times of fellowship. There was always something different and special about the Lord’s day.

HONORING THE LORD’S DAY

We have a number of softball teams playing in city leagues. Sometimes they have a winning season and even win first place and get into the play-offs. What if they then came to me and said, “Pastor, we won it! We won the championship of our league. And now the tournament starts for the State Championships. And if we win the State Championship we’ll go on to the National Championship. There’s only one problem. We will have to play on the Lord’s day.” Would we be willing to devote the Lord’s day to playing softball? Absolutely not! Any team claiming to represent the Lord’s house will not spend the Lord’s day playing ball, even if it means we don’t win a trophy. The Lord’s day is a special day of worship and is not to be spent doing our own thing for our own pleasure or gain.

And remember that spiritual fruitfulness is linked to honoring the Lord in this way. When we honor, not the day itself, but the Lord of the day, when we set aside that day to worship the Lord and express our love and covenant loyalty to Him, He will bless us.

Nothing irritates me more than to get a phone call from someone wanting to do business with me on Sunday. “We’re just checking out your credit,” or “We wonder if you’d like to buy...” I say, “I’m sorry, this is the wrong day to talk to

me about that. You call some other day and I'll be glad to talk to you." Very few even consider the Sabbath Principle any more.

The Sabbath Principle is in the Bible from cover to cover. We need to be so in love with the Lord and His ways that it is our joy and delight to set aside one entire day a week to cease from the pursuit of our own pleasures, our own work, our own goals, and focus solely on delighting in the Lord and hearing His voice. If our daily delight is in the Lord, His Word, His ways, in the family of God, then we will not object to setting aside the first day of the week as a special day to the Lord.

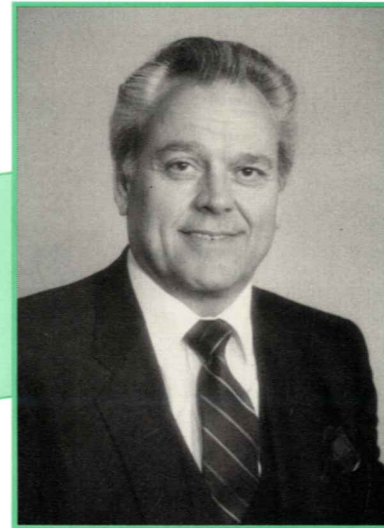
I believe we ought to teach our children to honor the Lord's day and to teach it first of all by example. I remember that whenever the house of the Lord was open on the Lord's day, nothing could keep our family from being there. It didn't matter if there was an ice storm or snow storm or anything else, my mother, father, two brothers and I got into the car and drove through the rain and through the snow in Minnesota and headed for the house of God. Even if no other families were there, mom and dad and three little Iverson brothers were there to worship and to serve the Lord. It was a time we had set aside to honor the Lord. I grew up delighting in Sundays. I didn't understand all the ramifications as a child. I just knew it was a special day. I had to treat the day with respect. I thank God for parents that taught me that there is meaning and fruitfulness in life when we serve the Lord and give Him that one day a week.

The Lord will guide us if we can just focus our attention on Him. The world has so many distractions. We walk through a real mud pit all week long. It's wonderful to walk into the house of the Lord where there's love and wholesomeness and sit for a few hours and worship the Lord, open His Word and enjoy the fellowship of the

brethren. That to me is the most blessed time of the week.

There is a principle involved in the Sabbath. Keeping one day a week holy unto the Lord brings the blessings of the Lord. It's not legalistic. He's not going to kill you if you don't do it. But the Lord is calling us back to Himself, to the kind of covenant relationship signified by the Sabbath Principle. The Lord is calling His church once again: "Come, let's spend this day together. Come and let me feed you the Word and strengthen you. Let me love you and bless you. Let your brothers and sisters come around you and support you."

It's no wonder we are to love this day. This is the day we have set aside of all the days in the week to be special, to be holy unto the Lord.



DICK IVERSON

Dick Iverson speaks from over 40 years of pastoral experience, and has a background that allows him to see and understand what God is saying to the church today. He is the senior pastor of Bible Temple, a large growing and influential church in Portland, Oregon. Dick Iverson is a recognized pastor of pastors and international conference speaker. Author of several books to leaders with a vision to see the church function as an instrument of God to extend the kingdom of God in the earth.

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