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REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY, TO KEEP IT HOLY

We know the commandments in Exodus chapter 20, right? We know the fourth commandment off by heart, right? After all, we have observed the Sabbath for many years now. For years we have attended the Church of God every Sabbath day, unless sick or otherwise unable to do so.

We also know that before his death Mr. Joseph W. Tkach did his utmost to convince members of the Worldwide Church of God that the Sabbath commandment is NOT binding on Christians today. It was this false teaching by Mr. Tkach which triggered the mass exodus from the Worldwide Church of God in 1995. We didn't accept this false teaching; we know that we really should observe the Sabbath.

So ... do we really keep the Sabbath day HOLY? How do we know that we're keeping it holy? What exactly do we do to keep it holy? How do we understand God's instructions for the Sabbath day?

We have been in God's Church for a number of years, and the chances are that most of us are indeed observing this day as God intended. After all, this is not some mysterious and difficult subject. Since coming into God's Church our understanding has in all likelihood been basically correct, and we have observed the Sabbath in accordance with that understanding.

So this article is not about presenting "new truth" which would cause us to suddenly keep the Sabbath in a totally different way. But there is nevertheless something that many of us have been deceived about, and that is THE MEANING OF A HEBREW WORD which was deliberately changed by the Jewish sages about 1800 years ago. The meaning of this word was changed for the explicit reason of providing a justification for the pharisaical traditions regarding the Sabbath.

So while this in all likelihood does not affect the way in which we keep the Sabbath, we can all benefit from a greater and fuller understanding about this subject of the weekly Sabbath day.

So what exactly ARE God's instructions?

THE HEBREW WORD FOR "SABBATH"

The Hebrew word "shabbath" is used for the first time in the Bible in Exodus 16:23.

And he said unto them, This [is that] which the LORD hath said, TO MORROW [IS] THE REST OF THE HOLY SABBATH UNTO THE LORD: bake [that] which ye will bake [to day], and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. (Exodus 16:23)

Here the noun "shabbath" is introduced to us without being defined, other than specifying WHEN it would be. It is assumed that the meaning of this word "shabbath" will be obvious to the people. This noun has been formed from the primitive root verb "shabath". Without this verb "shabath" there would be no noun "shabbath".

To illustrate this in English: we only have the word "RUNNER" in the English language because there is a verb "TO RUN". Without the verb "run" there would be no noun "runner". Furthermore, the meaning of the word "runner" is readily apparent to anyone who understands the word "run", in that a runner is someone who engages in the action described by the verb run.

That's what it is like in Hebrew with this noun "shabbath"; its meaning is closely linked to and understood from the verb "shabath", from which it is derived.

And while the noun "shabbath" is never used in the Book of Genesis, this VERB "shabath" is used three times in Genesis, twice in the account of the re-creation week and once in Genesis 8:22.

Let's notice those first two occurrences:

And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and HE RESTED ("shabath") 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 ("shabath") from all his work which God created and made. (Genesis 2:2-3)

In these two verses the Hebrew verb "shabath" is twice translated as "RESTED". But that is in fact a mistranslation, as I will show. In the only other occurrence in the Book of Genesis the verb "shabath" is translated correctly into English:

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night SHALL NOT CEASE ("shabath"). (Genesis 8:22)

This Hebrew verb "shabath" means "to cease from an activity", "to come to an end".

In the Hebrew of the Old Testament there are at least ELEVEN different root verbs, all of which are at times translated into English as "rest". And not all eleven of them really mean "rest", as we will see, even though they appear as such in the English text.

To be clear on the meaning of the Hebrew noun "shabbath", we first need to be clear on the meaning of the verb "shabath". And in order to establish the correct meaning of this verb "shabath", we need to briefly examine all of these eleven verbs. That will highlight the different perspectives with which the word "rest" is presented in the KJV of the Bible, as well as highlight where they have in some cases been translated incorrectly.

There is something that very few people seem to understand. And that is this: In order to justify their own unbiblical traditions, the Jewish sages of the first and second centuries, known as "the tannaim", CHANGED THE MEANINGS OF CERTAIN HEBREW WORDS! This is explained in some detail in the section of my website entitled "Scriptures Which Contain Words For Which The Jews Have Changed The Meaning". And this is also the case with the verb "shabath", as I will show.

Now let's examine these 11 Hebrew verbs.

HEBREW VERBS TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH AS "TO REST"

When we talk about a "primitive root verb" in Hebrew, we mean a word which has not been derived from any other word in the language, and its meaning is not based on any other word. Instead, it itself is the root word from which other words have been formed. The following eleven verbs are all primitive roots; none of them are related to each other etymologically, though their meanings certainly overlap in certain ways. Here are some brief facts about these words. The definitions I present are all based on Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament, though the conclusion I present for the verb "shabath" is my own.

1) SHABATH: this word is used 71 times in the O.T.. In the KJV it is translated as: CEASE = 47 times; REST = 11 times; miscellaneous = 13 times.

In Exodus 12:15 this verb is translated as "PUT AWAY", illustrating the scope of this verb. Notice this example.

Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day YE SHALL PUT AWAY [SHABATH] leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. (Exodus 12:15)

Gesenius defines this word as: to cease from doing, to leave off, to rest, to sit down, etc. However, IN THE BIBLE this verb did not really have the meaning "to rest"; this meaning was only added to this verb much later, after the whole Old Testament had been completed. More on this later.

2) NUWACH: this word is used 64 times in the O.T. and in the KJV is translated as: REST = 55 times; CEASED = 1 time; miscellaneous = 8 times.

Exodus 23:12 is an interesting verse which uses both of the above words. Notice:

Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day THOU SHALT REST [SHABATH]: that thine ox and thine ass MAY REST [NUWACH], and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed. (Exodus 23:12)

So we see that here a totally different verb is used to describe "resting". God said that His people were to "shabath" so that the domestic animals could "nuwach". Clearly what God intended for the domestic animals for the seventh day was that they would REST. That's all animals can do in this regard, rest from being beasts of burden as they are on the other days of the week. The verb "refreshed" for the slaves and servants also makes clear that "resting" is intended for the verb "nuwach".

The contrast in the first part of this verse is NOT: "six days you shall do all your work, but on the seventh day you shall REST"! No, the correct contrast in the first part of this verse is: "six days you shall do all your work, but on the seventh day YOU SHALL CEASE FROM WORKING". The concept of "not working" on the seventh day is NOT identical to the concept of "resting" on the seventh day. And AS A CONSEQUENCE of us "ceasing from our work" the domestic animals and the servants would then be able "to rest".

The biblical meaning of "shabath" is to cease from doing work, to conclude an activity. And the idea of RESTING is a consequence of the verb "shabath", but resting is not the actual meaning of "shabath" itself. The verb "nuwach" conveys EXACTLY what we in English understand by "resting"!

Gesenius defines this word as: to rest from labour, to sit down (as if to draw breath), etc..

3) SHA'AN: this word is used 22 times in the O.T. and in the KJV is translated as: LEAN = 9 times; STAY = 5 times; RELY = 4 times; REST = 3 times; LIETH = 1 time.

This word is used by Abraham in speaking to Christ and the two angels in Genesis 18:4.

Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, AND REST YOURSELVES [SHA'AN] under the tree: (Genesis 18:4)

The word is defined as: to lean upon, to rest upon, etc..

4) SHA'AN: while this Hebrew verb is transliterated into our alphabet in exactly the same way as the previous word, it is in fact a different word, spelled differently in Hebrew and not related to the previous word. This word is used 5 times in the O.T. and in the KJV translated as: AT EASE = 2 times; QUIET = 2 times; REST = 1 time.

Job 3:17-18 uses two of the above words, plus another word we will see in a moment. Notice:

There the wicked CEASE [CHADAL] from troubling; and there the weary be AT REST [NUWACH]. [There] the prisoners REST [SHA'AN] together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. (Job 3:17-18)

Job is venting his frustrations here and he is speaking about death. He mentions three different categories of people, and he uses three different words for "resting" in death for these people. He says: the wicked rest (chadal), the weary rest (nuwach) and the prisoners rest (sha'an). More about these two verses in a moment.

This word "sha'an" is defined as: to be tranquil, to be quiet, etc..

5) CHADAL: this word is used about 57 times in the O.T. and translated in the KJV as: CEASE = 20 times; FORBEAR = 16 times; LEAVE = 5 times; LEFT OFF = 5 times; REST = 1 time; miscellaneous = 10 times.

Thus we see that in the above two verses Job is saying that in death:

- the wicked leave off causing trouble (chadal);
- the weary sit down and rest from labour (nuwach);
- the prisoners have peace and tranquillity (sha'an).

The word "chadal" is translated as "rest" in Job 14:6:

Turn from him, that HE MAY REST, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day. (Job 14:6)

This word is defined as: to leave off, to become loose, limp, etc..

6) SHAQAT: this word is used 41 times in the O.T. and translated in the KJV as: REST = 16 times; QUIET = 16 times; QUIETNESS = 4 times; STILL = 2 times; miscellaneous = 3 times.

The word is used, for example, in the Book of Judges:

And the land HAD REST forty years. And Othniel the son of Kenaz died. (Judges 3:11) ...

So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel. And the land HAD REST fourscore years. (Judges 3:30)

The word is defined as: to rest, to have quiet, to lie down, etc.

7) SHAKAN: this word is used 129 times in the O.T. and is translated in the KJV as: DWELL = 92 times; ABIDE = 8 times; PLACE = 7 times; REST = 3 times; miscellaneous = 19 times.

The word is used in Psalm 16:9.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also SHALL REST in hope. (Psalm 16:9)

It is also used in Nahum 3:18.

Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles SHALL DWELL *in the dust*: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth *them*. (Nahum 3:18 AV)

The word is defined as: to let oneself down, to settle down, etc.

8) SHAKAB: this verb is used 212 times in the O.T. and is translated in the KJV as: LIE = 106 times; SLEEP = 48 times; LIE DOWN = 43 times; REST = 3 times; miscellaneous = 12 times.

The word is used in Ecclesiastes 2:23.

For all his days [are] sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart TAKETH NOT REST in the night. This is also vanity. (Ecclesiastes 2:23)

A typical use is also in Lamentations 2:21.

The young and the old LIE on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain *them* in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed, *and* not pitied. (Lamentations 2:21 AV)

The word is defined as: to lie, to lie down, etc..

9) CHARASH: this verb is used 73 times in the O.T. and is translated in the KJV as: PEACE = 26 times; PLOW = 13 times; DEVISE = 5 times; KEEP SILENCE = 5 times; HOLD TONGUE = 4 times; REST = 1 time; miscellaneous = 19 times.

The word is used in Zephaniah 3:17.

The LORD thy God in the midst of thee [is] mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; HE WILL REST in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. (Zephaniah 3:17)

The word is also used in Deuteronomy 22:10.

THOU SHALT NOT PLOW with an ox and an ass together. (Deuteronomy 22:10)

This word is also used in Habakkuk 1:13

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and HOLDEST THY TONGUE when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? (Habakkuk 1:13 AV)

The word is defined as: to cut into, to inscribe, to plow, to be deaf, to put to silence, etc..

10) SHAMAT: this verb is used 9 times in the O.T. and is translated in the KJV as: RELEASE = 2 times; THROW DOWN = 2 times; REST = 1 time; miscellaneous = 4 times.

The word is used in Exodus 23:11.

But the seventh [year] THOU SHALT LET IT REST and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, [and] with thy oliveyard. (Exodus 23:11)

The word is defined as: to smite, to strike, to throw down, to let lie (i.e. a field untilled), etc..

11) RAGA: this verb is used 13 times in the O.T. and is translated in the KJV as: REST = 5 times; DIVIDE = 3 times; SUDDENLY = 2 times; BROKEN = 1 time; EASE = 1 time; MOMENT = 1 time.

The word is used in Isaiah 51:4.

Hearken unto me, my people; and give ear unto me, O my nation: for a law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment TO REST for a light of the people. (Isaiah 51:4)

It is also used in Jeremiah 47:6.

O thou sword of the LORD, how long [will it be] ere thou be quiet? put up thyself into thy scabbard, REST, and be still. (Jeremiah 47:6)

And it is also used in Job 7:5.

My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust; my skin IS BROKEN, and become loathsome. (Job 7:5)

The word is defined as: to terrify, to restrain by threatening, to be afraid, to tremble, to be still, etc..

As already noted, all of the above 11 primitive root verbs are at times translated into English in the KJV by the verb "rest". To clearly understand the Hebrew verb "shabath", we should notice how it differs from some of these other verbs.

Since some of these 11 words clearly have other meanings, we can narrow down our examination to these 5 verbs:

- shabath

- nuwach

- shaqat
- chadal
- sha'an (to be tranquil, quiet, etc.).

So let's notice some passages where two or even three of these words are used in the same context. This can help to illustrate differences in focus. We have already seen Exodus 23:12 and Job 3:17-18, where two and three of these words are used respectively. Now notice a few other passages.

And it shall come to pass in the day that the LORD SHALL GIVE THEE REST ("nuwach") from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, That thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How HATH the oppressor CEASED ("shabath") the golden city CEASED ("shabath") (Isaiah 14:3-4)

And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I WILL CAUSE THEE TO CEASE ("shabath") from playing the harlot, and thou also shalt give no hire any more. So WILL I MAKE my fury toward thee TO REST ("nuwach"), and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I WILL BE QUIET ("shaqat"), and will be no more angry. (Ezekiel 16:41-42)

The mirth of tabrets CEASETH ("shabath"), the noise of them that rejoice ENDETH ("chadal"), the joy of the harp CEASETH ("shabath"). (Isaiah 24:8)

And it came to pass, when Baasha heard [it], that HE LEFT OFF ("chadal") building of Ramah, and LET his work CEASE ("shabath"). (2 Chronicles 16:5)

But fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed, O Israel: for, behold, I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob SHALL return, and BE IN REST ("shaqat") and AT EASE ("sha'an"), and none shall make [him] afraid. (Jeremiah 46:27)

Moab HATH BEEN AT EASE ("sha'an") from his youth, and HE HATH SETTLED ("shaqat") on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed. (Jeremiah 48:11)

With this background we come to basically the following meanings for these verbs:

SHABATH: This verb means TO STOP DOING SOMETHING; stop sinning, stop mirth, stop oppression, stop having leaven, etc. The consequence of stopping these things may sometimes be rest, though not necessarily. The above verses make clear that "resting" is NOT really the meaning of "shabath". The correct focus of this word is TO STOP DOING SOMETHING that had been going on until then, irrespective of whether that results in "rest" or not.

NUWACH: This verb focuses on RESTING; resting from labour, resting from sorrow, etc. The focus is on being refreshed as a result. THIS is the most obvious Hebrew verb for "to rest"!

SHAQAT: This verb also refers to RESTING, but the focus is on an atmosphere of calm, peace and tranquillity.

SHA'AN: This verb is similar to "shaqat" and also refers to RESTING in peace and quiet, with a focus on being freed from troubles and stresses.

CHADAL: This verb is somewhat similar to "shabath" in that it refers to stopping doing something; but the focus is specifically on STOP CAUSING TROUBLE, stop breaking God's laws, leave off doing what is wrong, etc..

So we can group these five verbs into two groups. Three of these verbs (i.e. nuwach, shaqat and sha'an) focus on "RESTING", while the two other verbs (i.e. shabath and chadal) focus on "CEASE DOING SOMETHING".

With this basic understanding we can now look at the noun "Shabbath", which is always translated as "Sabbath". The Hebrew dictionary will tell you that the noun "shabath" is AN INTENSIVE FORM of the verb "shabath". The noun "shabath" EMPHASISES the activity (in this case really "lack of activity") of the verb "shabath".

Thus the main and the immediate and the inherent meaning of the Hebrew noun "shabath" is:

"EMPHATICALLY STOPPING ACTIVITIES PREVIOUSLY ENGAGED IN!"

The immediate focus of this word is NOT on resting, on peace and quiet and tranquillity, though all these things should be the automatic results of stopping the activities previously engaged in. The immediate focus is on "STOP DOING WHAT YOU WERE DOING BEFORE".

With this background we are now ready to look at the Commandment itself.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

REMEMBER the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. (Exodus 20:8)

The command starts with the instruction TO BRING TO MIND (Hebrew verb "zakar") the day of stopping activities. This is an obvious reference back to Genesis 2:2, where God had "stopped from doing all His work", but without at that point saying anything about "resting". God doesn't ever get tired, and God certainly wasn't tired in Genesis chapter 1. As Isaiah tells us:

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? *there is* no searching of his understanding. (Isaiah 40:28 AV)

So the only reason God would "rest" is to set us an example. But that is not mentioned in the account in Genesis. However, here in the actual commandment God DOES use the word for "rest", as we'll see in a moment.

The Hebrew verb translated as "to keep it holy" is "qadash". This word means to set apart for a special use, to hallow, to sanctify. Here this verb is used with the piel stem, which signifies intensive or intentional action. So this tells us that we are to INTENTIONALLY set the Sabbath day apart from the other days of the week. The reason for this is given at the very end of this specific commandment in verse 11 ... because GOD INTENTIONALLY hallowed it ("qadash") in the beginning.

The commandment continues:

Six days SHALT THOU LABOUR, and DO all thy work: (Exodus 20:9)

The verb for "you shall labour" is "abad" and the verb for "do" is "asah". Both verbs are quite commonly used in the O.T. ... "abad" is used 290 times and "asah" is used 2633 times, a very common verb. "Abad" is translated as "serve, work, do, till (the ground), labour", etc. and "asah" is translated as "do, make, deal, execute, perform, work, keep", etc..

This verse sums up ALL THE ACTIVITIES with which we may typically be involved in the course of our everyday lives. The emphasis in this verse is on doing things, on being active for six days.

The next verse introduces a contrast:

But the seventh day [is] the sabbath of the LORD thy God: [in it] THOU SHALT NOT DO ANY WORK, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that [is] within thy gates: (Exodus 20:10)

First of all, this defines when the Sabbath day (the day when we are to stop doing things) is to be. It is to be the SEVENTH day of the week. Next, this verse tells us WHAT we are to do. We are to STOP DOING the things we do on the other days of the week. This phrase ("you shall not do any work") is an expression of the meaning of the Hebrew noun "shabbath". It means: cease from doing things. A point to note is this: nowhere in this command (i.e. verses 8-11) does it actually say: "YOU SHALL REST". It only focuses on "cease doing all your work".

The noun translated as "work" is "melakah". This word is used 167 times in the O.T. and is mainly translated as "work" (129 times) and as "business" (12 times). But then it is also translated by a variety of other words and expressions. For example: in Genesis 33:14 it is translated as "cattle"; in Exodus 22:8,11 it is translated as "goods"; in Exodus 31:3; 35:31 it is translated as "workmanship"; in Leviticus 7:24 it is translated as "in any other use"; in Leviticus 13:48 it is translated as "in any thing made"; in Judges 16:11 it is translated as "that (never) were occupied"; in 1 Chronicles 25:1 it is translated as "workmen"; in Jonah 1:8 it is translated as "your occupation"; etc..

All of these uses of the word "melakah" indicate that this word "work" should not be restricted to our specific profession by means of which we earn a living, but that it means our "work" in a more general sense, including basically all our activities and endeavours. (Other Scriptures relating to the Sabbath, which we will look at later, will also bring out this more general application of "work".)

The command is extended to include all those over whom we have authority: our children, our employees and our livestock. But it is jointly addressed to both spouses in a marriage.

The next verse introduces a reason for this instruction.

For [in] six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them [is], and RESTED ("nuwach") the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. (Exodus 20:11)

The reason given here is that God MADE ("asah") things for six days. God was involved in certain activities for six days. And then God RESTED from those activities ("nuwach") on the Sabbath day. And BECAUSE God stopped doing things (Genesis 2:2-3) and had rested (Exodus 20:11), THEREFORE He blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart for a special use (i.e. hallowed it).

So we now have the following points about the Sabbath:

- 1) God STOPPED doing things ... His work of re-creating.
- 2) God also RESTED.
- 3) In this God set an example for us.
- 4) God BLESSED the Sabbath day.
- 5) God set the Sabbath day apart from the other days for a special use.
- 6) We are to STOP DOING the things we normally do.
- 7) In so doing we will reap a blessing.
- 8) We are to maintain this set-apart (i.e. hallowed) status God gave to the Sabbath day.

That is the whole Sabbath commandment.

Even though the commandment states that God "rested", verse 10 spells us that we are "to cease from activities", and "rest" per se is not actually commanded for the Sabbath, though it is certainly implied.

Now here is a point we should keep in mind:

Even though this commandment contains a specific "you shall do something" (work for six days) and a specific "you shall NOT do something" (not work on the Sabbath), it is nevertheless still **PRIMARILY A STATEMENT OF A PRINCIPLE!**

In this commandment God has not given us any lists regarding the things we are to stop doing on the Sabbath. There is no such God-inspired list anywhere in the Bible. This command is only a statement of principle, which God requires us ourselves to apply to our own circumstances. Other Scriptures will give us more guidelines in how to apply this principle correctly.

Here is something else we need to understand.

THE SABBATH IS A TEST COMMANDMENT

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong explained many times that the Sabbath is a test commandment, and that it is a sign between God and His people (Exodus 31:13-17). Actually, the Sabbath command is a test in more ways than we may have realized.

1) The way Mr. Armstrong meant this is as follows: once we understand that God commands us to keep His Sabbath days holy, THEN we are tested as to whether or not we are willing to put God first, and whether we are willing to obey this commandment.

But once we have accepted this point, then there is ANOTHER WAY in which we are TESTED by this Sabbath commandment. And that is as follows:

2) The Sabbath commandment is nothing more than a statement of principle regarding the seventh day of the week. **WE ARE TESTED AS TO WHETHER WE WILL SEEK OUT THE PRINCIPLES**

INVOLVED! AND WE ARE TESTED AS TO HOW WE WILL THEN APPLY THOSE PRINCIPLES TO EVERY SINGLE ASPECT OF OUR LIVES ON THE SABBATH!

Can we grasp this?

God intentionally did not give us any lists of do's and don't's for this day. That is not because God could not have devised some list of do's and don't's regarding the Sabbath. Actually there ARE very definite things which are NOT appropriate for the Sabbath, but God expects us to seek these out for ourselves and to then APPLY new and deeper understanding as we come into it.

SABBATH-KEEPING IS A WAY OF TESTING OUR CONSCIENCES BEFORE GOD!

When we are new to Sabbath-keeping, we may start out copying other people, doing the things they do on the Sabbath and not doing the things they don't do on the Sabbath. That's fine for our initial learning phase. But we MUST go beyond that point. We need to get to the point where we CLEARLY and CORRECTLY understand THE PRINCIPLES of this commandment. WHY did God give us this commandment? WHAT is this commandment supposed to achieve?

And once we understand the principles correctly, THEN we need to make decisions about how to best apply those principles to every potential Sabbath activity.

THAT'S PART OF OUR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT PROCESS!

This is extremely important to understand. People who say: "JUST TELL ME what I can do and what I can't do on the Sabbath and I will do that", are in fact short-circuiting their own character development to some degree.

God is not looking for "yes-men" to resurrect into His Family. "Yes-men" often lack character and often they lack convictions. God wants to know whether we are able and willing to correctly grasp PRINCIPLES which He has set in motion, and whether or not we have GROWN to the point where we can correctly apply those principles to ANY situation that may arise.

Specific do's and don't's cover one specific situation at a time. This is typically the way human laws are formulated. Additional situations require additional instructions. But principles, by contrast, cover ANY situation that may develop or come about.

Now God does not operate in the realm of specific do's and don't's, each of which regulates one specific situation. God's existence and His lifestyle is based on PRINCIPLES. Those principles cover every possible situation that has ever arisen or that may ever arise in the future. No new additional laws are required to regulate new conditions that may come about, as far as the continued existence of God is concerned. The principles cover everything!

And so God gave us human beings the Sabbath commandment.

Keeping the Sabbath holy is a training-ground for us. It is training in taking specific principles and correctly applying them to a variety of situations. And as with any form of training, we are likely to make some mistakes in applying these principles. It is from the fruits (i.e. the results) which those mistakes will produce that we will learn that we in fact made a mistake.

And so part of this learning process will reveal that at times we were too strict in applying the principles, while at other times we may have been too lenient in the things we allowed for the Sabbath. That is par

for the course when we ourselves have to translate principles into specific actions.

The Sabbath is not an end in itself, but it is a very powerful tool for learning to think like God.

When we understand this, then we should also realize that those people who want a minister to spell out and either approve or else disapprove every single activity as far as Sabbath-keeping is concerned, are in fact stunting their own character development. Doing or not doing something on the Sabbath simply because someone else either approved or rejected the activity does not really develop GODLY character. Yes, certainly, we can seek guidance and counsel from a minister about such questions. But ultimately we must reject dubious activities because we ourselves UNDERSTAND the principle involved and we ourselves understand how this principle needs to be applied to the specific situation we have in mind.

Let's look at a common situation, one which most ministers will have faced at one time or another.

A COMMON SITUATION

You or your friends have thought up a great activity. But it is either totally or partially on the Sabbath. Or it may require long distance travel on the Sabbath to get to the potential activity. You would really like to do the activity, but you wonder whether you should be doing it on the Sabbath. So you go to your pastor, and you say:

"John Brown is organizing activity X for the weekend three weeks from now. There are about a dozen of us who want to take part in it. Since it does involve a little bit of time on the Sabbath, do you think it would be okay for us to go ahead with the activity?"

What is happening here?

You see the potential for a very enjoyable activity. You would like to participate in that activity. You have already been keeping the Sabbath for quite a number of years. But you are AVOIDING making a decision based on the understanding that you already have of the Sabbath commandment. This means that you are AVOIDING learning to think like God by correctly applying the principles of His laws to your specific circumstances. Instead, you would like someone else to make a decision for you, and you are HOPING to receive approval for what you really WANT to do.

The result?

Irrespective of whether the minister says "yea" or "nay" to your request, you will have missed an opportunity for developing a little bit more of the mind of God. Abiding by the minister's "yea" or "nay" will not really develop any character in you. You have not made any effort to think through and then to apply any principles at all; you have simply hoped for approval for your request.

Now please don't misunderstand. I do not mean that it is wrong to go to your minister for advice and counsel. Certainly you should feel free to seek his counsel on many questions. But there are also many cases where you yourself already know that PROBABLY what you would like to do is not suitable for the Sabbath, but you just don't want to make the final decision. Either you are hoping that MAYBE the minister will actually approve your doubtful request, or you feel more secure hiding behind a statement like: "Well, the pastor said we can't do it", rather than saying up front: "As far as I am concerned, that activity is not appropriate for the Sabbath, so count me out, gang."

A variation of this situation arises when the wedding or the funeral of a relative or a friend is scheduled

for a Sabbath day. Possibly it even involves another church, one with which you don't really feel comfortable. In your own mind you have some reservations that this occasion is really compatible with keeping the Sabbath holy. But you'd rather not make the decision regarding attending or not attending yourself. You want the minister to tell you what you should do. By all means ask your minister for advice. But in explaining the situation to him be sure to state VERY CLEARLY what you yourself feel you should do, and ask the minister to correct you if what you intend to do is not right in his opinion. Don't go to him without FIRST having thought through the whole situation and having reached a tentative conclusion, one you make known to him.

Thinking the whole situation through, discerning which principles are involved and then reaching the right conclusion, one you fully intend to implement, is what develops your character. Having reached a conclusion, by all means seek counsel before you put that conclusion into action. That can help you avoid making mistakes. But if you have already observed the Sabbath for quite a number of years (I am not speaking about novices to Sabbath observance), then always try to avoid the indecision of telling your pastor: "Here is the activity that is planned or where I am expected to take part, and I just don't know what I should do. Should I go or should I not go? I just don't know. What do you think?"

Faced with that sort of question, the minister should at least turn the question around and ask the person: "Well, what do YOU think that GOD would expect you to do under these circumstances? Can YOU think of any principles that God would want you to apply here?" If the person still says: "I really don't know", then the minister should realize that he is dealing with someone who is reluctant to make commitments. That is a weakness. With GOD we simply have to commit! Both, hot and cold, are better with God than lukewarm. Convictions require us to make commitments.

Understand something else: in those cases where an activity is not really appropriate for the Sabbath, but you take part in the activity, then God will hold you accountable for that. Whether a minister approved the activity or not has absolutely nothing to do with YOUR accountability before God. If it is indeed wrong, then you are accountable, irrespective of who may have expressed approval for the activity. YOUR accountability for anything you do in life (not just for Sabbath activities) is never diminished because other people promoted the activity or gave their consent to it.

Therefore beware of ever seeking approval for activities about which you yourself have serious doubts. If you are not convinced that something is really right, then don't do it! And don't look for people who will talk you out of your doubts about the activity. As Paul explained:

And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because [he eateth] not of faith: FOR WHATSOEVER [IS] NOT OF FAITH IS SIN. (Romans 14:23)

Whatsoever is not done in faith will destroy your character.

THE PRINCIPLES INVOLVED IN THE SABBATH COMMANDMENT

It should be clear that A RANGE OF PRINCIPLES can apply to Sabbath-keeping. Many of these principles are either exemplified in biblical examples, or they are found in further biblical instructions. So let's notice some of these principles.

STOP DOING OUR NORMAL WEEKDAY ACTIVITIES:

As the word "Sabbath" inherently tells us, it is a commandment to stop doing something. However, this does NOT mean that God wants us to spend the Sabbath doing nothing at all! The commandment is not about how many calories or kilojoules of energy we may or may not expend on the day. Nor is it a

commandment that restricts us from putting forth effort towards some purpose. It is a command to stop doing the things we do on the other six days.

This is made clear by a statement God makes through the prophet Isaiah. Notice:

If thou TURN AWAY THY FOOT from the sabbath, [FROM] DOING THY PLEASURE on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, NOT DOING THINE OWN WAYS, nor finding THINE OWN PLEASURE, nor speaking [THINE OWN] WORDS: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken [it]. (Isaiah 58:13-14)

Here God lists three categories of things which can break THE INTENT of what God wants the Sabbath day to be. These three things God refers to as:

- doing or going our own ways;
- seeking our own pleasure or desires or delights;
- speaking our own words or about our matters of concern.

Notice that here God does not even use the word "melakah", translated as "work" in the commandment in Exodus chapter 20. Instead, here God focuses on three other words: ways, words and pleasures.

Isaiah 58:13 is an expansion of THE PRINCIPLE inherent in the commandment in Exodus 20. Isaiah 58:13 reveals WHAT GOD INTENDED when He gave the commandment originally. So here is the very first principle we need to understand about the Sabbath commandment:

SABBATH-KEEPING IS ABOUT CONTROLLING OUR MINDS MORE THAN ABOUT CONTROLLING OUR ACTIONS!

The first consideration about any potential Sabbath activity is THE MOTIVATION for engaging in the activity. For example:

- it's our job; it's what we do to earn a living;
- it's what we enjoy doing for our leisure time;
- it's our entertainment (TV shows, etc.);
- it's a subject we enjoy discussing or studying;
- it's something we didn't have time for on the other days.

These are the type of things we are to STOP DOING ON THE SABBATH! [Obviously some of the things which ARE acceptable for the Sabbath could also be described in some of the above terms. Later we can be more specific in this regard.]

For some people their jobs may involve a great deal of physical work. Other people earn a living simply by being somewhere without having to do very much. They are paid for their presence. In some cases

they are even allowed to sleep "on the job". It doesn't matter whether people spend a lot of energy, or whether they don't do anything at all; if it is the thing they do to earn a living, the thing they are paid for, then the Sabbath commandment says: **DON'T BE INVOLVED IN THAT ON THE SABBATH!**

People who focus on whether someone is actually "working" or not miss the principle. Some people may reason: "But on this job I am not actually **DOING** anything, I am just physically there; but I can do what I want to do, like pray, study the Bible, sleep, etc." And the answer is: "Yes, but you haven't stopped doing what you do on the other days for the purpose of earning a living ... **YOU ARE THERE!**"

The same applies to our hobbies, our leisure activities, our sporting activities and the entertainment we seek on television. Some of you might remember a Bible Study Mr. Armstrong gave back in the early 1980's, and which was then played in all congregations, in which he mentioned that in many cases "even the television **NEWSCASTS** have been turned into a type of entertainment", the format and the manner of presentation being guided by the motivation to entertain the viewers. That may or may not be the case today, but it was a concern Mr. Armstrong did nevertheless at least express. His point, amongst other things, was that we have to watch the news for half an hour in order to get five minutes worth of news. And then it is dramatized out of proportion to attract the viewers and to boost the ratings.

Isaiah 58:13 simply says that on the Sabbath we are not to look for our own pleasure. Can we ourselves apply the principle of this instruction to all of the above activities? As far as television viewing is concerned, the underlying **MOTIVATION** is the key. **WHY** do we want to watch something on television?

People will sometimes reason as follows: "I want to watch this because it is **SO EDUCATIONAL** or **SO PROFITABLE**. And it is after all something about **NATURE**, about animals or about the universe, about God's creation. So that should make it suitable for the Sabbath, right?" Well, actually that depends; it depends on your perception and your level of understanding. Is the Sabbath the day we are to be educated about **SECULAR MATTERS**? Or is secular education only an incidental and occasional concomitant of spiritual education? Is the Sabbath the time to watch all your "National Geographic" videos? And if it is okay to watch a video about animals, then is it also okay to attend a biology or zoology lecture at a university, where the same video may possibly be screened? In what way do these activities contribute towards setting the Sabbath "**APART**" from the other days of the week?

So what is the principle about "education on the Sabbath"?

The Sabbath is about **SPIRITUAL** education, not just about education in a general way. Yes, there may very well be exceptions, times when some secular education (i.e. non-biblical education about nature or other "profitable" subjects) demands a certain amount of prominence within the context of the Sabbath; but the motivation remains the key. **WHY** are we doing this?

What about the instruction to not speak our own words? What is it that our words reflect? They reflect our thinking, what our minds are on. And as I said earlier, Sabbath-keeping is about controlling our minds. As Christ said, it is out of the abundance of our hearts that we speak (Matthew 12:34); our words reflect, sometimes in disguised ways, our innermost thoughts and concerns. So the things we **SAY** on the Sabbath can sometimes indicate that we haven't **REALLY** "stopped" at all; with our actions we comply with the command, but with our minds we are still on the other wavelength. You know that is true some of the time, right? And you and I are tested as to how we apply the principle of this instruction.

Isaiah 58:13 spells out in detail just what a tall order the Sabbath commandment really is! It shows us what God is **REALLY** looking for in us when we observe His Sabbath days. This verse shows that God meant the word "work" ("**melakah**") in Exodus chapter 20 in a fairly general way, though not necessarily in an all-inclusive way.

That tall order from God is that FIRST we are to submit our minds to His instructions, and then the right actions will follow. Any wrong actions (through a lack of understanding) do not affect our integrity before God. If we knowingly engage in the wrong actions, then at that point in time our minds are not submissive to God. But if we lack understanding and err in the integrity of our hearts, then God will "wink" at the times of our ignorance.

On the other hand, when people submit to THE RIGHT ACTIONS WITHOUT first submitting their minds to God, then the actions alone will not achieve any character development!

Understand something:

At no point is godly character ever developed in the absence of the total and unconditional submission of the mind to the will of God!

And the right actions (e.g. physically abstaining from working on the Sabbath) are of no value before God WITHOUT the submission of the mind. The submission of the mind is the important thing, and the right actions are only secondary to this. Remember that man looks on the outside, but God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). The heart must be right first before the right actions are of any value.

So understand this first and most important principle that applies to the Sabbath commandment, that Sabbath-keeping revolves around controlling the mind.

Let's look at the next principle.

CALL THE SABBATH "A DELIGHT"

Isaiah 58:13 not only tells us to stop doing certain things; it also instructs us in what we ARE to do. We are to call the Sabbath "a delight", or "pleasant", something to be happy about. As the next verse points out, we are to "delight ourselves in the Eternal".

So what is the principle which is involved here?

We are to seek out AND DO (!) those things which will please God. Delight results from the things we do, not from a state of total and utter inactivity.

So:

- we are to seek out the things that PLEASE GOD, not our own pleasures;
- we are to seek out GOD'S WAYS, and not our own ways;
- we are to speak GOD'S WORDS, and not our own words.

This means that we use the Sabbath to seek contact with God. We seek to understand the mind of God more clearly. So the things we not only "can do", but really "SHOULD DO" on the Sabbath include spending additional time in prayer to God and spending additional time in studying the Word of God, the Bible. And while the diligent involvement in these activities is certainly a form of work or labour, and the mental energy involved may be very considerable (comparable to that of many office-type jobs), it is assuredly not the type of work Exodus 20:10 commands us to cease from doing.

It is not the "working" per se that Exodus 20:10 legislates against; it is THE MOTIVATION for working

that needs to be examined. Thus: carefully studying a business report or a market research paper in order to reach decisions that will affect the course of some economic venture is prohibited by God's commandment; but carefully studying any book or passage of the Bible in order to more fully understand the will of God is not only acceptable, but is in fact highly desirable. Yet the level of concentration and of mental focus may be identical for both activities.

Similarly: seeking contact with a financial institution (in person or by phone) for the purpose of obtaining financial support for some business opportunity is not acceptable for the Sabbath, but prayerfully seeking the help and intervention of God in your personal trials and affairs is very much something you can and should inculcate into your Sabbath activities, and you may end up expending more energy on your knees before God than you would have spent on the phone talking to your bank manager. And so the activity that involves "more work" is desirable for the Sabbath, while the activity requiring "less work" is forbidden.

I have presented these obvious illustrations to make one point: when we are commanded not to do "any work" on the Sabbath, then that has NOTHING to do with either the physical or the mental energy we are permitted to expend. It is an instruction to stop doing THOSE THINGS which are motivated by our needs and desires on the other six days of the week. Instead, we are to DO those things which help us to have contact with God and which enable us to understand God's ways more fully. We are to DO those things that will please God, that show God we want to think the way He does.

The Sabbath commandment is not "a confinement"! It is not "a restriction" of some kind, like being "restrained" in a state of inactivity for 24 hours. The Sabbath commandment gives us FREEDOM, freedom from the shackles of this world and its "god", freedom to renew, to strengthen and to confirm contact with, and bonding to the mind of Almighty God.

So the point is that on the Sabbath we should seek to do those things which will please God.

Let's note another principle that applies to the Sabbath.

THE SABBATH IS A REST DAY

We have already seen that the focus in Genesis 2:2-3 was that God stopped doing something on the Sabbath day, the verb used in those verses being "shabath". But we have also seen that in the statement of the commandment the point is made that God "RESTED" from His work, and the verb used there is "nuwach".

Thus the Sabbath is clearly intended to be A REST DAY!

It is to give us the opportunity to be refreshed. It is to provide a break from our everyday routines.

This does not mean that "resting" is to be taken to the extreme, seeking a state of total and complete inactivity for 24 hours. It is obviously understood that under normal circumstances all "vigorous" activities are to be avoided. But there is nothing wrong with walking on the Sabbath, for example, even though that is also a form of activity.

A pleasant walk, an interesting study of some part of the Bible, enjoyable conversations with family and friends, pleasant and relaxing meals ... these can all be a part of "resting". Seeking closer contact with God through private and intense prayer can have a restful effect, an opportunity to unburden our minds.

Freedom from the duties and responsibilities and the worries of the other days of the week likewise has a restful effect, provided we can also free our minds from those things.

Let's notice another important principle.

THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN

You know about the time when Jesus Christ and His disciples walked through the wheat fields on the Sabbath day. The account is recorded in Matthew 12, Mark 2 and Luke 6. Notice the account in Matthew 12.

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. (Matthew 12:1)

Here is the situation:

- 1) It was the Sabbath day.
- 2) They were walking through the wheat fields.
- 3) The disciples were hungry.
- 4) So they plucked a few ears of wheat and ate the grains.
- 5) Those ears were customarily left standing for precisely this purpose, to provide something to eat for strangers and travellers.

Here is how the Pharisees responded:

But when the Pharisees saw [it], they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do THAT WHICH IS NOT LAWFUL TO DO UPON THE SABBATH DAY. (Matthew 12:2)

That is an utterly ridiculous and untrue accusation! It was NOT "UNLAWFUL" at all, as far as the laws of God are concerned, to pluck an ear of grain or an apple or a pear or a fig on the Sabbath for the purpose of eating that fruit or that grain.

By no stretch of the imagination were the disciples "WORKING". Any claim to that effect is absurd!! Plucking an ear of wheat or two while walking along the road is not what God means by "work", any more than taking an apple out of your refrigerator is "work".

Don't fall for the definitions and the arguments of the Pharisees! Plucking something edible off any plant so that you may eat it right then and there is most assuredly not what God means by "WORK" when He tells us that we are not to do any "work" on the Sabbath. It is no more "work" than placing some food on the table, or conveying such food from your plate into your mouth, or peeling an orange or a pineapple, or slicing some roast beef, or spreading some butter onto a piece of bread. None of these things are what God means by "work"!

The average lady is going to expend far more energy, and certainly more time, on combing her hair on a Sabbath morning than any of those disciples spent on plucking a few ears of wheat and then rubbing the grains in the palms of their hands ("harvesting" and "winnowing" by the standards of the Pharisees!) as they continued to walk with Jesus Christ through those fields.

So understand the following:

It is not a matter that: "the Sabbath commandment forbids all work, BUT that certain 'work' is exempted from this prohibition. And therefore it is permissible to do certain 'work'." That's not it at all!

Rather, the point really is that: "the Sabbath commandment forbids all work, BUT certain activities GOD SIMPLY DOES NOT CONSIDER TO BE 'WORK'. Such activities include, but are not limited to, the process of eating and taking care of personal hygiene, even though those activities may require us to expend a few extra calories of energy."

God is not concerned about whether the food we consume on a Sabbath is taken out of a fridge or out of a tin or off a shelf or plucked off a tree or pulled out of the ground. God is not concerned about whether we eat an apple directly off the tree, or whether we first take the trouble to wash the apple, or whether we eat a carrot that we have pulled out of the ground. None of these activities have anything to do with what God means by "work" in Exodus 20.

A foolish argument that has often been presented goes like this:

"Christ did not deny that what the disciples were doing was indeed "work". Therefore we can assume that the Pharisees were correct in their accusation that the disciples were in fact guilty of having done some "work" ... etc."

GARBAGE!

Why on earth should Jesus Christ have allowed Himself to be dragged into some stupid argument about their absurd standard of what constituted "work"? The Pharisees' ideas about what amounts to "work" were ridiculous to the extreme! Their views of "work" included things like: if you carried more than the weight of one dried fig, then you were "carrying a burden" on the Sabbath; if your house caught fire on the Sabbath, you were not permitted to "CARRY" your clothes out of the house, but if you quickly put on the extra layers of clothing then you could take them out of the house on your person because you were "WEARING" them, take them off, run inside and quickly "PUT ON" some more clothes to save from the flames, etc.. For more of these illogical pharisaical ideas about what constituted "work", check the "Torah she-be-al Peh", the "Oral Law", better known as "the Talmud". None of these ideas have anything to do with "the law of God".

There was no point in trying to reason with the Pharisees about their irrational ideas about work. That would only have produced further arguments. So instead Jesus Christ focused on two specific examples for which the Pharisees would not have an answer; the two things being:

- 1) something David did in an emergency when he was hungry;
- 2) the physical rituals the priests performed on the Sabbath.

The implied reasoning is as follows:

- 1) If God did not disapprove of David eating bread which was ceremonially reserved for the priest's family, then why would God disapprove of hungry men plucking a few ears of wheat in order to have something to eat?
- 2) If God permits the priests to work hard physically on the Sabbath (killing and preparing sacrifices was hard work!), then why would God object to a man pulling off an ear of wheat in order to have something to eat?

The first example focused on what God allows when a person is hungry; the second example focused on the amount of physical work God allows (when the reasons are valid!) on the Sabbath. Compared to BOTH examples what the disciples had done was SO INSIGNIFICANT that there was nothing the Pharisees could really have said!

And when we understand the lessons from both of these examples, then we should understand THE CONCLUSION which Jesus Christ then presented. This is recorded in Mark's account. Notice:

And he said unto them, THE SABBATH WAS MADE FOR MAN, AND NOT MAN FOR THE SABBATH: (Mark 2:27)

It is helpful to keep in mind that this is A CONCLUSION which Jesus Christ drew from the two examples He had cited in connection with the incident at hand. This statement means:

- 1) God created the Sabbath as a specific benefit for man.
- 2) Without human life the Sabbath has no meaning.
- 3) This is a statement of priorities; the existence of mankind is more important than the Sabbath.
- 4) The Sabbath was created to provide a service for human life; the Sabbath is a means towards an end.
- 5) The Pharisees had their priorities mixed up; they viewed the Sabbath as more important than the human existence; to them the Sabbath was an end in itself.
- 6) The same principle applies to ALL of God's laws; they were ALL created for us to benefit from; none of them are an end in themselves.
- 7) The two comparative examples Jesus Christ referred to simply illustrate this principle.

So this very important principle is:

THE SABBATH WAS SPECIFICALLY MADE FOR MAN TO BENEFIT FROM, TO ENHANCE MAN'S EXISTENCE!

When we understand this principle and its application, then we should be able to understand that there was no point in arguing with the Pharisees about whether pulling an ear of wheat out of the ground was work or was not work. Whether it was work or not was not really important!! EVEN IF it had indeed been work, which it was not, it STILL would have been perfectly acceptable to God in view of the men being hungry.

Now this principle ("the Sabbath was made for man") should also tell us that it is certainly acceptable to take care of genuine emergencies on the Sabbath. It should also make clear that THE PRINCIPLE of the Sabbath law is absolute, but THE APPLICATION is conditional on circumstances, as I explained earlier. In other words:

"We are not to do any work on the Sabbath" means:

We should not devote any time and energy to writing a business report; but we may spend a

similar amount of time and energy studying the Bible. It means we should not drive our car as a taxi for making money; but we may spend the same amount of time driving our car to and from Church services. A teacher should not prepare his next biology lecture on the Sabbath; but a minister may spend the same amount of time and research in preparing a sermon. A butcher should not cut up an ox or a sheep which he had purchased at the abattoir; but the priests at the Temple were required to kill and to cut up animals on the Sabbath.

Sabbath-keeping is designed to enhance our existence; and sometimes that may involve the expenditure of a certain amount of energy on the part of some people.

This leads us to the next principle.

AN OX IN THE DITCH

People are familiar with this phrase, though the biblical phrase usually is "an ox in a pit".

This principle was actually mentioned by Christ on two separate occasions. The first occasion was when Christ healed a man who had a withered hand. This statement is only recorded by Matthew in his account; Mark and Luke omit this statement. The accounts are found in Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6 and Luke 6:6-11. Here is the statement in Matthew's account.

And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have ONE SHEEP, and if it FALL INTO A PIT on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift [it] out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore IT IS LAWFUL TO DO WELL on the sabbath days.
(Matthew 12:11-12)

The second account is only recorded by Luke, in Luke 14:1-6. This involved a man who suffered from dropsy (edema) and took place in the home of a Pharisee. Notice what Christ said:

And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have AN ASS OR AN OX FALLEN INTO A PIT, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And THEY COULD NOT ANSWER HIM again to these things. (Luke 14:5-6)

So notice the following things about these two situations:

- 1) Both cases involved Jesus Christ healing someone who was sick and who was suffering.
- 2) Christ's statements make clear that the Pharisees themselves were ALSO ALREADY prepared to deal with certain emergencies on the Sabbath. So they were willing to expend some energy under certain emergency conditions. The animal was a part of their wealth and possessions ... if the animal died, then they would have suffered a loss. So their motivation was to a degree selfish. And because they were prepared to take care of such "wealth-preserving" emergencies, therefore "they could not answer Him". In their own minds they had reconciled that such emergency actions on their part were not really work.
- 3) In neither case did Jesus Christ actually "do any real work"; He simply spoke and the people were healed (in the case of Luke 14:4 it doesn't tell us exactly what Christ did). There really was no "working" involved, unless someone would argue that Jesus Christ's FOUR WORDS "stretch forth your hand" (Matthew 12:13) amounted to "work".

Don't be confused by arguments from omission, i.e. arguing from what is NOT said. Some people argue

as follows: "Christ did not deny that He was working when He healed people. THEREFORE it is clear that He agreed that He did in fact perform some WORK when He healed people."

There are THOUSANDS of other things Christ also "did not say". They don't prove anything. He didn't have to say: "What I am doing is not really work". Why should He ... to get into some long argument about what constitutes "work"?

The point is that healing usually involves the forgiveness of sins, and forgiving sins is certainly not what God had in mind by the word "work" in the commandment. When Jesus Christ healed people, no work was needed from Him at any time (making some mud and anointing the eyes of a blind man wasn't really what God means by work either). But when WE HUMAN BEINGS try to heal people (i.e. try to help restore their health), then on our part it very often will involve work. But simply because it takes work when we are involved in "healing" someone, this does not mean that we should evaluate the healings Christ performed from our perspective. He simply didn't do the things we would do in our efforts to heal someone.

4) In the account in Matthew chapter 12 Jesus Christ made very clear that "it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days". However, people have also taken this statement out of context and applied it to any number of situations that it should not be applied to.

So understand the following:

"It is lawful to do well on the Sabbath" is NOT A FREE-STANDING AND TOTALLY INDEPENDENT STATEMENT!

This is where people sometimes lack discernment, and they reason: "It is certainly within the law of God for me to do this or that activity on the Sabbath BECAUSE I am actually helping some other people." Or they say: "I am providing an essential service."

You should be "helping people" on the other six days of the week as well. "Helping people" is most assuredly NOT the criterion in deciding whether something is "lawful" or not. On the Sabbath you should not be going out and LOOKING FOR opportunities to get involved in activities which in some way "HELP" other people. Look for those opportunities on the other six days!

The point of Christ's statement is this:

IN THE CASE OF AN EMERGENCY ON THE SABBATH it is CERTAINLY lawful to do good!

But you are not supposed to be going out and looking for "good" things to do on the Sabbath, and neither are you to go out looking for emergencies. The main principle of Sabbath-keeping tells us to CEASE FROM DOING THINGS! The main principle tells us to REST from the things we do on the other days!

However, when we are unexpectedly confronted by emergencies on the Sabbath, THEN it is most assuredly lawful to do good. The "doing good" is in response to an ox in the ditch.

So how should we apply this principle of an ox in the ditch? Here are some guidelines to consider.

A) YOUR JOB is never an ox in the ditch. Your job (whether it involves physical labour or not) is the thing you are first and foremost to CEASE FROM on the Sabbath. Yes certainly, there may at times even be genuine emergencies at your place of work; but that's not where the "doing good" applies, unless there

has been an accident at your place of work and you are well located for taking someone to a hospital, or emergency help of that kind.

B) EVERY SINGLE OX IN THE DITCH that you are forced to deal with should teach you something. When the Sabbath is over you fence off that particular ditch, so no animals can fall into it in future. There are plenty of other ditches that are left to confront you. It is highly likely that all of us will at times make the wrong decision, and we will have learned that in future we will handle that particular ox in the ditch in a different way. Often that will involve certain situations where we had a vested interest, where we wanted something, or we wanted to get somewhere or take part in something. Once we acknowledge our own selfish motive in justifying the activity, then character growth can take place. We will have learned something and our convictions have been strengthened.

C) Prudent people, who LOOK AHEAD and anticipate where there could be potential problems and then take evasive actions, will certainly face far fewer "ox in the ditch" situations than those people who go through life without looking ahead, blissfully unaware of the potential situations that could arise for them. Generally, predictable situations that arise for us on the Sabbath are not really an ox in the ditch; we should have taken some evasive action before the Sabbath started, though that may not be possible in all cases. At any rate, we are supposed to learn from each "crisis" situation we face. There is a lesson somewhere for people who are frequently faced by ox in the ditch situations.

D) Generally dealing with ox in the ditch situations should only involve A VERY SHORT TIME! In Christ's own examples here the healings took no more than a few seconds ... just as long as it takes to say the four words "stretch forth your hand". While there may be exceptions (e.g. helping with disaster relief after an earthquake), dealing with most genuine emergencies or acts of compassion should not require several hours of your time. The immediate emergency is taken care of and the rest is seen to after the Sabbath. In fact, often we'll find that many things can actually wait until after the Sabbath. Keep in mind that the decisions you make in these situations will mold your character.

E) We must distinguish between "genuine needs" and "personal wants". You may WANT the newspaper on a Saturday morning, and so you reason: "God tells me to watch world events; therefore it is okay for me to go out and buy a paper". But the paper you go and buy is not a need, it is only one of your particular "wants". You already know that VERY LITTLE in that newspaper is devoted to really watching world events; it is mainly the local gossip that is dramatized to appeal to the readers' desire to want to know about these things.

F) Once you have decided that some emergency is indeed an ox in the ditch for you, then do whatever you can do whole-heartedly. Don't agree to help out in some way, but then give your help reluctantly. That is not right! If you are only helping reluctantly, it indicates that you are probably compromising your conscience; you wish you weren't there or didn't have to do what you are doing. Either don't get involved in something, or help the best way you possibly can to take care of the immediate problem; but don't get involved reluctantly and don't compromise your own convictions.

G) Jesus Christ did not go out looking for opportunities to heal (i.e. "to do good") on the Sabbath, but simply dealt with each situation as it confronted Him. And then it generally was a brief episode which on His part usually only involved speaking a few words. For us these ox in the ditch situations will usually involve more than just speaking a few words; we are usually called upon to perform certain actions.

While we should do our best in these cases once we have decided to get involved, we should also keep in mind that this is an exception, an emergency, a one-off situation. We should not lose our overall focus that the Sabbath should, as a general thing, be governed by the previously mentioned principles. It is to be PRIMARILY a day on which we CEASE DOING the things we do on the other days, a day on which we REST from our normal weekly activities. Emergencies are to be the exceptions in our

Sabbath-keeping routines.

So, when you are faced with an emergency situation, YOU go ahead and make a decision, and then act on it whole-heartedly. Have confidence in the decision you have made. Never consent to engage in an activity about which you have some doubts in your own mind. Yes, you are likely to at times allow something that, once you have gone through that particular ox in the ditch situation, you will in future avoid. That's part of the learning process. It is through experience that we internalize the Sabbath commandment into our lives and into our characters. But never let the fear of failure prevent you from making a decision and then acting on it.

At other times we may later come to the point where we are "less strict" on ourselves, where we will allow activities that we would have rejected out of hand in previous years. A correct grasp of all the principles involved in "an ox in the ditch" simply takes time, and experiences on both sides of centre will help us to come to a sound understanding. We will learn from having sometimes been "too strict" and at other times "too liberal". It takes practical experiences to correctly apply these principles in future situations.

That should basically cover the ox in the ditch principle. So let's move on to other principles that apply to the Sabbath.

SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES THAT ARE IDENTIFIED IN THE BIBLE

The Bible refers to specific activities. We have already seen that on the Sabbath God does not want us to seek our own pleasures or our own ways or to speak our own words (Isaiah 58:13-14). Let's notice a few other things.

BUYING AND SELLING : In the time of Ezra and Nehemiah a colony of Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity to the area of Jerusalem. They were surrounded by other people, many of whom were Babylonians who had been settled there by an Assyrian king, and who did not observe the Sabbath. Nehemiah was the civil governor who had been appointed by the Persian authorities. So notice this comment in Nehemiah 10:31:

And [if] the people of the land bring ware or any victuals ON THE SABBATH DAY to sell, [that] WE WOULD NOT BUY IT OF THEM ON THE SABBATH, or on the holy day: and [that] we would leave the seventh year, and the exaction of every debt. (Nehemiah 10:31)

So we see that they clearly perceived that the Sabbath day is NOT the time for buying and selling.

A few chapters later we have another reference to the Sabbath days.

In those days saw I 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 VICTUALS. There dwelt MEN OF TYRE also therein, which BROUGHT FISH, AND ALL MANNER OF WARE, AND SOLD ON THE SABBATH unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. 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? (Nehemiah 13:15-17)

The picture we see here is very much like our modern cities today: all the shops are open on a Saturday.

The focus is that trade was going on as usual. Notice that Nehemiah referred to shopping on the Sabbath as an "EVIL THING", something which "profaned" (the Hebrew means: to pollute or make common) the Sabbath day.

Since he was in charge, Nehemiah decided to simply close the gates of the city BEFORE the Sabbath started. Notice:

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. (Nehemiah 13:19)

So Nehemiah ENFORCED a ban on buying and selling on the Sabbath. He closed the gates of the city. By the way, this is NOT some kind of tacit approval that "guard duty" is okay to perform on the Sabbath. Nehemiah was faced with an "ox in the ditch", and so he whole-heartedly ENFORCED the ban on selling in Jerusalem. The emergency required that for three weeks or so, as a temporary measure, some of his men stood guard duty beside the closed city gates. That was the best way to ensure that the Sabbath would not be defiled by these foreign traders coming in to sell their goods. The motive for the "guard duty" was to ensure proper Sabbath-keeping.

So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware LODGED WITHOUT JERUSALEM ONCE OR TWICE. 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. (Nehemiah 13:20-21)

It is clear that to Nehemiah not allowing any shopping on the Sabbath was an important issue! But for us shopping is such an integral part of our modern societies, something we are virtually dependent on, that in many cases we find it hard to picture a situation where no shopping of any kind would be possible at all. And thus many of us can immediately think of a flood of "what about ...?" questions. What about eating out so that the wife has less work in the kitchen? What about buying petrol (gas) for the car on the way to church services? What about buying food supplies you have run out of? What about ...?, etc..

One caution I would mention here is this: don't necessarily rely on MODERN precedents to tell you what you may do and what you should not do in this regard. It is one thing to have a biblical precedent to base your decisions on. It is another thing altogether to say: when Mr. X was my pastor in New York or in London or in Vancouver ten years ago, I know that he frequently did this or that on the Sabbath; therefore I know that it is also okay for me to do this now. Don't follow an example of what type of shopping is acceptable on the Sabbath, simply because you know that someone else is doing that or has done that.

It is a fallacy to want to find CATEGORIES of shopping that are acceptable for the Sabbath. That approach is looking for carte blanche approval for our actions, as long as we stay within the confines of that "category" (e.g. eating out on the Sabbath). Every single situation that will potentially involve buying and selling on the Sabbath should really be evaluated on its own merits, its own circumstances. And yes, in our modern societies with our modern lifestyles of travelling long distances to services, etc. there will on occasion be situations where we decide to buy something on the Sabbath for a number of different reasons. And making wise decisions, discerning which decision would be most pleasing to God under each set of circumstances, is what will help to shape our character.

While there may be exceptions, as a general thing we should strive to avoid buying on the Sabbath as

much as we are able to do so. Instead of viewing potential buying and selling situations as falling into specific categories, view each situation on its own merits, making an individual decision for each case as it arises. When David ate the shewbread on one single specific occasion, that did not give him carte blanche approval to again eat the shewbread in future. Eating the shewbread had simply been an emergency measure. That's the way to view shopping on the Sabbath, as an emergency measure in other than "normal" circumstances. Under "normal" circumstances we should in our minds view shopping on the Sabbath as did God's servant Nehemiah.

That then brings us to the next point.

PREPARING FOR THE SABBATH: When God had brought Israel out of Egypt, He led them through the wilderness down to Sinai. On the way down to Sinai God started to provide manna and quails for food for the people of Israel. In this way God also clearly identified the Sabbath to the people, by providing manna for six days and not on the Sabbath days.

And so in Exodus chapter 16 we find the very first instructions regarding the Sabbath (back in Genesis we have the example of what God did, but without any specific "you shall ..." instructions for mankind). Notice the account there.

When they came to the wilderness of Sin, the people complained about not having food (Exodus 16:3). God replied that He would send bread from heaven (Exodus 16:4). Then God instructed that on the sixth day they were to gather twice as much manna as on the other days, to provide enough food for the Sabbath (Exodus 16:5).

This was God's initial instruction to the people TO PREPARE for the Sabbath, as far as food was concerned.

So the people started to gather manna (Exodus 16:17). Then Moses instructed that they were not to keep any manna over to the next day (Exodus 16:19). Some people did not listen and the manna they kept over spoiled and "stank" (Exodus 16:20). This was a clear indication that this food supply needed to be replenished on a daily basis, something the people came to understand very quickly.

On the sixth day the people then gathered a double portion, as they had been instructed to do (Exodus 16:22). Moses then elaborated on the instruction to prepare the food for the Sabbath on the Friday. Notice verse 23.

And he said unto them, This [is that] which the LORD hath said, To morrow [is] the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: BAKE [that] which ye will bake [to day], and SEETHE (i.e. BOIL) that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over (i.e. of the manna) LAY UP for you to be kept until the morning. (Exodus 16:23)

This is the key instruction in the Bible regarding "PREPARING" for the Sabbath!

The rest of Exodus 16 shows that there was no manna on the ground on the Sabbath, and that the people of Israel ate manna as their staple food for 40 years. However, they also ate quails at times, and at times they would have slaughtered some of their animals and eaten them.

The preparing Moses referred to is summarized by three words: BAKE + BOIL + STORE UP. The "storing up" referred to procuring the food supplies (in their case gathering it from the ground every morning). The equivalent for us today is to go and BUY the food we think we will need for the Sabbath. Thus we have the principle of "shopping in advance".

The "baking" and "cooking" referred to preparing and processing the food available to be in the state in which they wanted to eat it (baked or cooked as opposed to raw). Keep in mind that the staple food God provided for them (manna) was perfectly good for eating "raw". The options of baking or cooking it were merely available to provide some variety.

Further, keep in mind that for the Israelites in the wilderness, basically living in tents, to bake and to cook would have been a major operation, something that would have required several hours at the very least ... starting with first having to find the wood to make the fire in order to cook or to bake. They would have cooked on open camp-fires, which is a very time-consuming procedure. Thus Moses' instruction to cook and bake on the Friday the things they wanted to eat on the Sabbath saved SEVERAL HOURS of potential efforts at preparing food on the Sabbath.

It was a matter of doing in advance the time-consuming things as far as the preparation of food was concerned; it was NOT a matter of worrying about every single minute that might be involved in putting the food on the table on the Sabbath. God, through Moses, was not focusing on every last possible physical activity in serving the food on the Sabbath ... it was a matter of addressing THE BIG ISSUES: COOK AND BAKE those things that you can cook and bake in advance. Don't worry about the little things that take a minute or two to prepare for eating ... God is not counting minutes. When all the cooking and baking was done in advance, then for the Israelites the OVERWHELMING portion of the preparation of food had been taken care of.

The application for us in this age is as follows:

- 1) Plan ahead for the Sabbath meals. Don't be caught unprepared. Make sure you have all the ingredients you feel you are likely to want to use. Think ahead about those items where your supplies are likely to run out.
- 2) Then plan the meals in such a way that the major work actually CAN be done in advance. This requires some planning, rather than assuming that everything must be prepared at the last minute.
- 3) Then actually DO most of the work on the Friday. Very many things can in fact be done in advance; vegetables can be washed and chopped, desserts can be made, fresh bread can be baked, etc.. Fruits and many vegetables can be eaten raw. A roast can be cooked in advance and then sliced when it is cold, and eaten as cold roast beef on the Sabbath. A stew can be prepared on the Friday. Pizzas can be almost completely made in advance and stored unbaked in the fridge (certain fresh ingredients can be stored separately until it is time to bake the pizzas). There are many options.
- 4) Then, on the Sabbath, the activities that are required to "complete" the preparation of the food and then to serve that food will be minimal. And that is what God intended with the instructions He gave through Moses, that the actual time spent in preparing and serving food would be drastically reduced from what would normally be the case on the other days of the week. It is not that NO TIME AT ALL is spent with preparing food (e.g. slicing bread, cutting a pineapple, heating what has been prepared, etc.) and then serving it; it is that this time has been very greatly reduced!

While Moses said nothing to the Israelites about also "cleaning out their tents" in preparation for the Sabbath, the principle of preparing clearly goes beyond the matter of just preparing food. Back then their tents may not have required any special preparation for the Sabbath. With our modern way of life preparing for the Sabbath would also include things like cleaning our homes on a Friday, preparing our clothes for the Sabbath and filling up our cars to ensure we have sufficient fuel to drive to Church services. Any planning ahead that can help to eliminate, or at least to minimize, some of the needed mundane actions on our part on the Sabbath would be included in this principle of "preparing for the Sabbath". That would leave us more time to engage in the actions GOD would like us to focus on for the

Sabbath day.

DESIRABLE ACTIVITIES FOR THE SABBATH: Now let's look at some of the activities we should now have more time for on the Sabbath, as a result of minimizing the more mundane things. That would include things like:

1) Time to attend Church services. The Sabbath is called "a holy convocation" in Leviticus 23:3. That means it is an assembly which has been called on the authority of God (thus: "holy"). Jesus Christ attended Sabbath services in the synagogues during His ministry, and later the Apostle Paul did the same thing. Paul also admonished us as follows:

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some [is]; but exhorting [one another]: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

So the Sabbath is a time to attend services and to fellowship with other Christians. That is the day of which Jesus Christ said He is the "Lord" (Mark 2:28). The purpose for attending services is to be taught and instructed from the Word of God. Physically attending somewhere is not an end in itself; it is to serve a purpose.

It follows that there is no benefit in attending services with a Church which you are convinced is teaching heresies, as is the case with the Worldwide Church of God at this point in time. Attending somewhere, where you know in advance that the truth of the Bible is going to be twisted and distorted, defeats the purpose of the Sabbath.

2) More time to devote to personal prayer and Bible study. The Sabbath is God's time, and we ought to spend some of that time seeking a closer contact with God. Many of us easily short-change prayer and Bible study in the course of the week. If that has been the case for us, then it is especially important to spend extra time in these activities on the Sabbath. Prayer and personal Bible study are our lifeline to God and we should strive to never neglect them.

3) For those of us who have small children, the Sabbath is also very appropriate to spend time teaching our children about God and about the Bible. Even though the Church has over the years developed various programs in this area, it is still primarily a parental responsibility to do this teaching. The Church may be able to provide us with some helpful materials, but we parents will have to do the actual teaching. And that requires time.

4) Having fulfilled our own responsibilities (see the above three points), the Sabbath is also an opportunity to fellowship with other Christians. That could be on the Friday evening over a meal or before or after Church services on the Saturday. This ties in with what we read in Malachi, that "they that feared the LORD spoke often one to another" (Malachi 3:16).

5) While we are focusing on what we should or might do on the Sabbath, we should not lose sight of the fact that it is also intended to be a time when we rest from all our other activities. It is to provide us with the opportunity to be refreshed.

6) That time for "resting" need not only consist of perhaps some extra sleep (many of us easily go a little short on the sleep we may need during the course of the week) or some relaxed sitting around in a family context; that can also include some very relaxing walks in gardens and parks and similar areas of natural beauty. There is a definite therapeutic benefit from being in a natural environment, away from the man-made environment so many of us live in from day to day. Recall that Jesus Christ was WALKING THROUGH THE WHEATFIELDS when His disciples ate a few grains of wheat on the Sabbath.

Exposure to God's creation can be very restful. Even if technically the walking may burn up a few calories of energy, that is certainly not what God meant by refraining from "work" on the Sabbath.

The above points are not meant to be an exhaustive list of possible activities for the Sabbath, but merely an indication of some of the scope available to us, as well as certain priority considerations we should keep in mind.

Now let's look at exactly when the Sabbath should be observed.

FROM SUNSET TO SUNSET

It is generally understood that the Sabbath goes from Friday sunset until Saturday sunset. A few years ago the Worldwide Church of God tried to confuse this point by claiming that the days go NOT from sunset to sunset, but rather from darkness to darkness. The ulterior motive behind that claim was to justify changing the teaching about when the Passover lambs were originally killed in Egypt, before the exodus. Shifting the start and the end of the day from sunset to darkness was the pivotal point around which the claim that the lambs were killed AT THE END OF THE 14TH DAY was built, since the phrase "between the two evenings" very unambiguously refers to the time of dusk, between sunset and darkness. Without the claim that the day starts and ends at the point of darkness they found it impossible to support their claim of a Passover sacrifice at the END of the 14th day.

In Genesis chapter 1 we are told six times that "THE EVENING and the morning" was ... the first day, the second day, etc.. In this regard Genesis 1:5 is quite clear. With the corresponding Hebrew nouns in parenthesis, this verse reads ...

And God called the light ("owr") Day ("yom"), and the darkness ("choshek") he called Night ("layil"). And the evening ("ereb") and the morning ("boqer") were the first day ("yom"). (Genesis 1:5)

First of all, we can see that the word "yom" is used with two meanings: it refers to the daylight part of the 24-hour period, and it also refers to the whole 24-hour period (i.e. day and night together). Prior to sunset it is still "yom". In English we use the word "day" with these same two meanings as well.

Next, in the first part of this verse God distinctly delineates between the daylight part and the darkness part of a 24-hour period. Each part has a distinct name. The next part of this verse then defines a day: it STARTS with "the evening" and it is then followed by "the morning".

The Hebrew noun "ereb" (i.e. "evening") is derived from the verb "arab", which means "to grow dark". This root verb "arab" is used, for example, in Isaiah 24:11:

[There is] a crying for wine in the streets; all joy IS DARKENED, ("ARAB") the mirth of the land is gone. (Isaiah 24:11)

So the Hebrew noun "ereb" refers to the time "when it grows dark". That is the time after sunset which we call "dusk". In other words, "the evening" is the period of transition between "the light" and "the darkness".

In the New Testament we see that the Jews understood that AT SUNSET the Sabbath ends. In Luke 4:31-37 we have an account of Christ teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, from where Christ then went to Simon Peter's house (Luke 4:38-39). Then verse 40 tells us:

NOW WHEN THE SUN WAS SETTING, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. (Luke 4:40)

Notice carefully! This is a description of what THE PEOPLE there did. THEY felt it was not right to bring sick people for healing on the Sabbath. THEREFORE they waited until "the sun was setting", and THEN they brought all their sick people to Jesus Christ. From this verse it is quite clear that the Jews there in Capernaum clearly understood that the Sabbath started and ended with sunset, or with "the evening".

Back in the Old Testament we also have a clear statement in Leviticus chapter 23:32.

"... FROM EVEN ("ereb") UNTO EVEN ("ereb") SHALL YOU CELEBRATE ("shabath") YOUR SABBATH ("shabbath"). (Leviticus 23:32)

(This is in the context of the instructions for the Day of Atonement, and we'll look at the whole verse in a moment.)

Here we have a clear statement about the start and the end of a Sabbath. Notice:

- The Sabbath STARTS with "the evening".
- The Sabbath ENDS with "the evening".

So the question is:

EXACTLY WHEN is "the evening" ... at the start or at the end of the day? The answer is: at both! It depends on the context in which you use the word "evening". It is the same as with the word "yom" (i.e. "day") ... it is the context that tells you whether it refers to the daylight part only or whether it refers to a whole 24-hour period.

We have the same situation when we say that a day goes "from sunset to sunset". The question then is: is sunset at the start of the day or at the end of the day? And the answer is also: at both! It is the context that will tell us whether sunset is used to refer to the start of one day, or whether it refers to the end of one day.

Most of the time we tend to focus on the fact that the day STARTS with "the evening". And that is correct! But the expression "from even unto even" makes equally clear that the day ALSO ENDS with "the evening". This is something we sometimes overlook. Just think about the expression "from even unto even".

This brings us to Leviticus 23:32, which people sometimes find a little confusing. Notice the whole verse:

It [shall be] unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: IN THE NINTH [DAY] OF THE MONTH AT EVEN, FROM EVEN UNTO EVEN, shall ye celebrate your sabbath. (Leviticus 23:32)

Leviticus 23:26-32 is devoted to a discussion of the Day of Atonement. Now obviously, Moses, under direct inspiration from God, was not recording a clear contradiction in these seven verses. In verse 27 God clearly spelled out when Atonement is to be.

Also ON THE TENTH [DAY] OF THIS SEVENTH MONTH [there shall be] a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. (Leviticus 23:27)

Thus there is no question but that the Day of Atonement is on the 10th day of the 7th month. That is quite clear. So the question is: then WHY does verse 32 say "IN THE NINTH DAY, from even unto even"?

The answer is that this "even" is a reference to THE END OF THE DAY!

This verse defines Atonement as going FROM THE END OF THE NINTH DAY UNTIL THE END OF THE TENTH DAY. If verse 32 had stated: in the TENTH day, from even unto even", THEN Atonement would effectively have been defined as going from the BEGINNING of the 10th day until the beginning of the 11th day ... taking the word "even" ("ereb") as referring to the beginning of the day.

Now Atonement is different from the other days in that it involves fasting. And the fasting doesn't really only start at the beginning of the 10th day; it really has to start some little while (at least!) before the end of the NINTH day. We have to stop eating and drinking BEFORE the ninth day ends ... that is what Leviticus 23:32 points out to us.

Leviticus 23:32 is simply a more precise way of stating the point of verse 27. The whole tenth day is defined as going from the end of the ninth day until the end of the tenth day.

The problem for some people arises because they attempt to limit the word "even" to referring only to the start of the day. But the expression "from even unto even" makes clear that it can refer to either the start or the end of the day, even as in English we could say that a day goes "from midnight to midnight", and "midnight" can be counted as the start or the end of the day.

So the Sabbath is observed from sunset to sunset.

And that about covers the things I wanted to mention about Sabbath-keeping. God made the Sabbath holy, and we are instructed to keep it holy. Instead of giving us a long list of things we can do and another list of things we cannot do, God has given us PRINCIPLES, which He expects us to apply. Learning to discern those principles and then correctly and wisely applying them to every situation that may confront us on the Sabbath is one of the ways in which godly character is developed in our lives. Observing the Sabbath as God intended is in itself a learning process.

So let's determine to continue keeping the Sabbath holy.

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