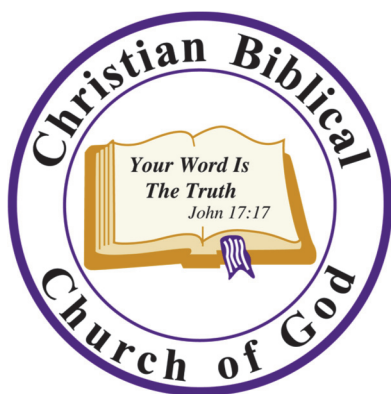


How to Keep the Sabbath Day



by
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God, in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth. After a rebellion of one third of the angels, the earth was left in a condition of chaos and confusion. God then *recreated* the heavens and the earth in preparation for His ultimate creation—*man*. Man was created in God’s image and likeness in order to become His very own children, His very own family, dwelling with Him in glory for all eternity.

Following His last act of creating man on the sixth day, God *rested* on the next day—the seventh day. He declared that the seventh day was the last day of a cycle—the weekly cycle. In resting, He not only placed His blessing on that day, He *set it aside* for a very special purpose—for all eternity. This seventh day is God’s holy Sabbath day—and is a vital part of God’s plan for mankind.

As we will see, it is in the faithful observance of the weekly Sabbath—along with God’s annual Sabbaths—that we come to have an intimate relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. So the key question is, *why* did God create this vitally important day?

We’ll let Jesus answer. When the Pharisees criticized Him about the actions of His disciples on the Sabbath, He said: “The Sabbath was made for man, *and* not man for the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27-28). (All scriptural references are from *The Holy Bible In Its Original Order—A Faithful Version*.)

The Pharisees had placed so many burdens on the keeping of the Sabbath that they were violating its very purpose. The Pharisees’ approach was the exact opposite of God’s intent for the Sabbath: because of His love for mankind, God created the day for our joy and benefit—not as a hurtful burden.

King David—who God said was a man “after His own heart” (Acts 13:22)—expressed the true spirit of the Sabbath:

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“This is the day which the LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24). Indeed, many of the psalms of David express the spirit of joy, of worship, of praise, and of obedience that befit our keeping of this all-important day. David loved God’s laws, because they showed him how he should live and please God.

With these thoughts in mind, let us ask *How do we keep the Sabbath holy?* Many ask this question as they first begin to honor the Sabbath. We all have. How then are we to be pleasing to God as we attempt to keep His Sabbath?

Start at the Beginning

Concerning His Sabbath, God gave these clear instructions: “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying, ‘**Truly you shall keep My Sabbaths**, for it [the keeping of God’s Sabbath] *is* a **sign between Me and you** throughout your generations to [enable you to] know that I *am* the LORD Who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath therefore, for **it is holy** [set apart] **to you**. Everyone that defiles it shall surely be put to death, for whoever does *any* work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done, but on **the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD**. Whoever does *any* work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to **observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever**; for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed’ ” (Ex. 31:13 -17).

Thus God reveals the importance of His Sabbath—that it is a *sign*, that it is *holy*—wherein no customary work is to be done. And it is binding as a *perpetual* covenant.

The *Fourth Commandment* gives us additional points: “**Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy**. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of

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the LORD your God. In it **you shall not do any work**, you, nor your son, nor your daughter; your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your livestock, nor the stranger within your gates. For *in* six days the LORD made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and **rested the seventh day**. Therefore, the LORD **blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it**” (Ex. 20:8-11). By resting on that day, God *sanctified* it—i.e., He *set it apart* from all other days. He “set it apart” for a special use—rest, worship, and spiritual fellowship.

Some will object and claim that the Sabbath was given only to the Jews. But there were *no Jews* when God created the Sabbath in Genesis 2. And Jesus did say that the Sabbath was made for *man*—not just for Jews. (More on that point at the end of this paper.)

In fact, God’s Ten Commandments were given for the benefit of *all mankind*, not only Israel. And for those in the Church of God today, you are part of “spiritual Israel”—the body of Christ. Being a Jew or a non-Jew is irrelevant; you are a *new man* in Christ—and the new man is subject to God’s laws and commandments: “For as many *of you* as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you *are* Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to *the promise*” (Gal. 3:27-29).

Key Points to Remember

We are to keep the Sabbath: *Keep* means to *hold securely* in one’s possession—thus to guard and protect it—by observing it! We are to treasure the Sabbath and its purpose and meaning for us as God’s “called out ones.”

We are to remember the Sabbath: To *remember* requires thought as well as action. In this hectic and stressful world, it is easy to forget the Sabbath and take it for granted. But God has instructed us to *meet with Him* from sunset on Friday to sunset Saturday. This 24-hour period is what He calls the Sabbath.

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The Sabbath is a sign: A *sign* identifies something or someone. Sabbath-keeping identifies those who are God’s true followers—and it reveals the true Creator God, separating Him from all false gods and idols. In Exodus 3:5, God told Moses to take off his sandals because the ground on which he was standing was *holy* ground. God’s *presence* made it holy. Likewise, God’s *presence* “in the Sabbath” makes it holy, special. The ultimate purpose for the Sabbath revolves around our spiritual fellowship with God. We were created to have a deep spiritual relationship with God. This is *only possible through keeping the Sabbath*—the day God set aside to spiritually meet with us!

Sabbath-keeping is a unique test: Exodus 16 shows that God used the Sabbath in particular as a “test command” to see if the children of Israel would obey Him or not (verse 4). Today, God is still using Sabbath-keeping as a “test commandment.” Mainstream “Christianity” has come up with numerous arguments against keeping the Sabbath; none of them are valid. It is really a quite simple, but profound, test: God just wants to know, “*Are you going to do what I command—or not?*”

The Sabbath is a day of rest: The Bible is clear that we are to cease and abstain from the work we normally do to earn a living. We are given six days to devote to our livelihood—to provide for ourselves and our families. But on the Sabbath, we are to *cease* from that work. In Hebrew, the word “Sabbath” comes from a root that means to *cease* or to *rest*.

The Sabbath is a day of spiritual rejuvenation: There is more to keeping the Sabbath than simply ceasing from the work of our livelihoods. We are to cease from *all other forms of work* or activities that we normally do all week. The idea is not to just *rest*—to cease from physical activity—but to enjoy a day of mental and spiritual rejuvenation. This can only happen if we change our focus. We must get our minds and hearts off of the mundane, the routine—and focus instead on the spiritual, on God and His plan, on the purpose of life, on the Kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33).

God knew man would need a special time of refreshing,

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rejuvenation, and rest from daily routines. As we saw in Genesis 2, God created the Sabbath by *resting* from all of His labors of the previous six days. He commands us to *rest* as well. And again, God put His *presence* in the Sabbath day. Thus, no other day can bring *spiritual* rejuvenation.

In Leviticus 23, God lists all of His annual Sabbaths—holy days. But He prefaces the chapter by reiterating the importance of the *weekly* Sabbath. Like the holy days, the weekly Sabbath is a commanded assembly or a “holy convocation.” It is a special day when we are to assemble with other members of God’s Church.

Notice what God told Moses: “Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘Concerning the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, even these are My appointed feasts. Six days shall work be done, **but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, a holy convocation.** You shall not do any work. It *is* a Sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings. These *are* the appointed feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim in their appointed seasons’ ” (Lev. 23:2-4).

Convocations, by definition, are gatherings of people—usually a large formal assembly. God’s “command” to assemble has the force of the word *subpoena*. When you receive a subpoena, you are required by the courts to appear on a particular day. It would not be pleasing to the court or the magistrate if you ignored their command to appear—or tried to come on a different day. In other words, you cannot keep God’s Sabbaths except on His actual Sabbaths!

God desires for us to come before Him, to be in His presence with the rest of His children—to fellowship with Him and others in His family, to learn of Him and His ways. God’s Sabbaths are a true blessing, a reflection of His love and grace. And when kept and honored in a spirit of love and worship, His Sabbaths are a source of great delight, joy, and thanksgiving.

Paul was inspired to write: “And let us be concerned about one another, and *be* stirring up *one another* unto love and good

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works; **not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together**, even as some *are* accustomed to do; but rather, encouraging *one another*, and all *the* more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb. 10:24-25).

What if I Can’t Meet With Others?

In today’s difficult times, it is not always possible to meet on the Sabbath (or annual holy days) with others of the family of God. Under such circumstances, remember Jesus’ words of encouragement: “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there, I am in *the* midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Realize that first and foremost we are meeting on the Sabbath with God the Father and Jesus Christ. Secondly, whenever possible, we are to meet with those of the *ecclesia*—the “called out” ones, the Church—those of like mind who are led by the Holy Spirit.

When we find ourselves alone and unable to meet with others, one alternative is to meet with others online or listen to live-streaming services. We can also listen to CDs and recorded messages—knowing that many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are doing likewise. If this is the best we can do, then it is certainly acceptable and pleasing to God. We are still keeping the Sabbath. But always make every effort to assemble with others of like mind where possible.

Questions and Recommendations

Certain questions come up from time to time concerning Sabbath-keeping—especially among those who are new to the Sabbath. For example:

Can I use the TV or the Internet? Watching an uplifting or spiritually edifying show on TV (or the Internet) would not be wrong on the Sabbath—if done so *occasionally*. There are many wonderful shows that highlight God’s beautiful creation—such as “God’s Awesome Planet.” But do so *occasionally*. If watching a “nature show” on the Sabbath becomes routine, then we have

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likely compromised the sanctity of the day. It just becomes another routine. And keep it short. It would be wrong to spend *hours* on the Sabbath watching even the most uplifting show. Nothing should rob you of your Sabbath fellowship with God and with brethren.

What about listening to music? The same principles apply to listening to music on the Sabbath. Do so occasionally and keep it limited. And of course, the music itself must be relaxing and uplifting. Background music could be played at length on the Sabbath. Just ask yourself, *Does this music create an atmosphere of peace and joy? Is it uplifting and pure?* There are many beautiful and uplifting songs and music selections that can enhance the spirit of the Sabbath. Always ask yourself: *Is God pleased with my Sabbath-keeping choices?*

Is it okay to “kindle a fire” on the Sabbath? This question originates from Exodus 35:3—“You shall kindle no fire throughout your living places upon the Sabbath day.” This verse does not refer to building a fire to keep warm, such as in your wood stove or fireplace, or to making a fire on which to cook (if you cook on a wood stove). Rather, it refers to fires built for the purpose of construction, blacksmithing—fires for metal working. But just as the bulk of the work in cooking should be done before the Sabbath, you should also have your firewood at hand, ready to use. You don’t want to go out and chop firewood on the Sabbath!

Is it proper to eat out on the Sabbath? Balance is the key here. Restaurants are generally open for business on the Sabbath whether we choose to dine out or not. When we choose to eat at a particular establishment, we are not creating work for them that they would not otherwise be doing. In fact, Jesus showed that it is not wrong to satisfy one’s hunger on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-5).

It is fine to have a meal at a restaurant with brethren in order to continue and enhance Sabbath fellowship. And many times dining out is the only realistic way to have such fellowship. But be balanced. We should not make eating out on the Sabbath our weekly routine. Rather, do so sparingly, using it for special

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times and for holy days.

What about doing good on the Sabbath? It is always right and good to help someone in need on the Sabbath—if there is no alternative. A good example would be helping someone who is having car trouble. But we must use good judgment. If someone asks you for help, but the need is not immediate or urgent, offer to help them after the Sabbath ends, or even on another day. God wants us to do good to all men when it is within our means to help. But be discerning.

What about a personal emergency—the “ox in the ditch”? What if you find yourself in an emergency situation requiring work on the Sabbath? There are times when unforeseen situations arise that are beyond our control. They are not the result of poor planning on our part; rather, they are genuine emergencies.

God knows our intentions—and He will lead us to discern wisely. But we must be careful and not “push the ox into the ditch” just so we can deal with it on the Sabbath. As Proverbs 22:3 shows, it is prudent to plan ahead and try to anticipate trouble before it comes—thus avoiding the “ox in the ditch.” Yes, the Sabbath was made *for man* (Mark 2:27); but taking liberties with the Sabbath is dangerous territory!

Preparing for the Sabbath

Properly *preparing* for the Sabbath will help us to keep the day holy—and make it a delight. The Bible actually refers to Friday as the “preparation” day (compare Mark 15:42). Remember, the Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday. So Friday is naturally used, in part, to prepare for the “arrival” of the Sabbath. (Also, any day that falls right before a holy day is a preparation day.)

How do we prepare for the Sabbath? There are several things to consider. First, we should “wind down” our day—begin wrapping up your work, chores, etc. well before sundown. Try to shift your focus from the mundane and physical to the spiritual as

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the Sabbath draws near. We don't want to *rush* into the Sabbath—or be caught out still working when the sun sets.

Also, we should try to “set the stage” for the Sabbath by 1) making sure the house is clean and neat and quiet; 2) completing the preparations for the evening meal. Do as much cooking and other work as you can beforehand. Still, some last minute “work” will typically be required even after sundown—hopefully just warming the food. This is fine. Planning ahead will help keep it to a minimum; 3) being properly attired for the evening (nice casual, not still in your dirty work clothes!); and 4) making sure we are relaxed and mentally prepared for holy time.

Another point to remember is to prepare for Sabbath *services*. This means having the car fueled and ready, having your Sabbath attire ready, etc. And if it is a “pot luck” Sabbath, have that food also prepared in advance as much as possible.

In Exodus 16 we see that the Israelites were instructed to prepare for the Sabbath by collecting a “double portion” of manna on the sixth day. Today, we don't have manna falling out of the sky, but the principle is the same: use Friday to *get ready* for the Sabbath—whatever that might require. One reason some people do not find the Sabbath to be a delight is that they *rush unprepared* into the Sabbath!

Making the Sabbath a Delight

God created the Sabbath as a wonderful gift for man. It is much needed, both physically and spiritually. But God doesn't want rote obedience when it comes to Sabbath-keeping. He wants us to come to love the Sabbath, to consider it a great delight—a blessing we look forward to each week. However, this perspective on the Sabbath doesn't happen overnight; it takes time and practice keeping the Sabbath to come to really appreciate the day as the awesome blessing God intended.

Look at what God says through Isaiah the prophet: “If you turn your foot away from [trampling on] the Sabbath, from doing your own desires on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a

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delight, the holy of the LORD, honorable; and shall honor Him, **not doing your own ways, nor pursuing your own desires, nor [even] speaking your own words**—then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the inheritance of Jacob your father...” (Isa. 58:13-14).

If we approach the Sabbath with this mindset, we *will* come to see the Sabbath as a true delight. Obedience to God’s teachings always leads to greater understanding and a deeper appreciation of God’s design.

As Isaiah 58 shows, the Sabbath should be a time when we avoid concerning ourselves with the routine things of this world—and that includes our *conversations*. We don’t need to talk about sports, politics, our favorite movies, our jobs, etc. Such things are fine to mention in passing. It is a matter of *balance*. Our conversations should be uplifting and edifying—with a focus on God’s way of life. We should view our Sabbath-keeping through the lens of Philippians 4:8-9: “Finally, brethren, whatever *things* are true, whatever *things* are honorable, whatever *things* are just, whatever *things* are pure, whatever *things* are lovely, whatever *things* are of good report; if *there be* any virtue and if *there be* any praise, think [and speak] on these things. Whatever things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, you do also; and the God of peace shall be with you.”

Overall, nothing should be allowed to compromise our Sabbath fellowship with God. This is *His* time—time He created to spend with us.

Some practical ideas on how to make the Sabbath a delight might include: 1) making mealtime extra special; 2) engaging the family in activities that focus on spiritual topics; 3) investing in family Bible study (and prayer) time; 4) going for a walk in the park or woods to enjoy God’s creation; 5) taking the time to deeply *meditate* on God and His plan.

Everything said or done on the Sabbath should bring praise and glory to God. This will ultimately result in our learning to take great *delight* in the Sabbath.

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Conclusion

God has determined to preserve Sabbath-keeping throughout *eternity*. Note this passage from Isaiah: “ ‘For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before Me,’ says the LORD, ‘So will your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one month to another, and **from one Sabbath to another**, shall all flesh come to worship before Me,’ says the LORD” (Isa. 66:22-23).

The seventh-day Sabbath was created by God to enhance man’s relationship with our Creator. It functions as a *conduit* between man and God. It is absolutely *fundamental* to God’s plan of bringing many sons and daughters into His eternal family!

Why not *begin this week* to keep God’s Sabbath—and reap the wonderful benefits!

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