

Keeping Sabbath Holy

By John Thiel, [mp3](#)

Scripture reading: Exodus 35:2 Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD:

*O Jesus, let me ever hail
Thy presence with the day of rest.*

Sabbath day is a *holy day*. And as we worship the Lord of the Sabbath, we want to dwell upon His holiness and the glory of the holy Sabbath day. We want a view of its sacredness, so that as we contemplate the Sabbath and its holiness we may better keep it than we have done in the past. This is our purpose now—to be so affected by the holiness of the Sabbath that we will keep it holy.

The burden of my soul in reference to this, why I want to share this, is because frequently people come to me with a question; they ask me: Is it right to do this or that on the Sabbath? But to give detailed answers as to the minutiae of Sabbath keeping always fills me with a certain perplexity to answer that question which is posed to me. I am asked: “Is there anything wrong with doing this on the Sabbath?” or “What about this?” And then other people say, “Oh this is wrong; they shouldn’t be doing this; John, what is it?” And when this is uttered, I am perplexed, because I don’t want to communicate a legalistic approach to the Sabbath. If I say, Yes, this is definitely not right; then people begin to think within themselves, Oh, I’m going to sin if I do this. And we miss the point.

Not Merely a Legal Matter

How to answer a question regarding certain things that are to be done or not to be done on the Sabbath? Hear with me the Testimony of Jesus in reference to this:

At the very beginning of the fourth commandment the Lord said: "Remember." He knew that amid the multitude of cares and perplexities man would be tempted to excuse himself from meeting the full requirement of the law, or would forget its sacred importance. Therefore He said: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." Exodus 20:8. {6T 353.3}

All through the week we are to have the Sabbath in mind and be making preparation to keep it according to the commandment. We are not merely to observe the Sabbath as a legal matter. {6T 353.4}

So the Sabbath is not to be regarded merely *as a legal matter*. The legalities of the law of God can spoil our focus upon the holiness that we are to contemplate in regards to the Sabbath. Let us, then, reflect to receive God's perspective of the Sabbath.

What Is Sabbath?

Exodus 35:2 Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the LORD:

We want to actually appreciate God's perspective here. He is saying, This day is a *holy day*; it is a *Sabbath of rest to the Lord*.

Isaiah 58:13 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:

Again, here are those clear expressions. The Sabbath is *the holy of the Lord*; it is *honourable*. And because it is holy to the Lord and it is honourable, therefore watch your ways, honour Him; don't do your own ways, don't seek your own pleasure, or speak your own words. The word of God is seeking to impress us with the understanding of how we approach the keeping of the Sabbath. It has something to do with the Lord, with the holiness of the Lord.

Consecrated, Holy Time

Genesis 2:3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it:

So the Sabbath is to be holy to the Lord. It is the *holy of the Lord*.

Remember that every moment is consecrated, holy time. {FLB 34.8}

As we permit God's perspective to permeate our understanding, we appreciate something that applies to what we do during that *consecrated, holy time*.

All heaven is keeping the Sabbath, but not in a listless, do-nothing way. On this day every energy of the soul should be awake, for are we not to meet with God and with Christ our Saviour? We may behold Him by faith. He is longing to refresh and bless every soul. {FLB 35.3}

What do we read here? As the Sabbath comes upon us and we are to keep it, what is involved in keeping it? We are *to meet with God and with Christ*; we are to *behold Him by faith*. This is exactly what we were singing:

*O Jesus, let me ever hail
Thy presence with the day of rest;*

God's Presence

Thy presence—this is what I want to lay out before us; the Sabbath holiness has to do with God's presence. It is a day of the week, like every other day. It's a day, it's time. But what makes it holy? What makes it so special that He says it is *the holy of the Lord*? It is because He, God, is in it. It is His presence that makes anything holy.

When Moses came to the burning bush, he was fascinated with this marvellous thing; and as he came close, the Lord said something to him:

Exodus 3:5 ...Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest [is] holy ground.

Why was it holy? Because God was there. When He wasn't there anymore, was that ground holy? Is the ground holy anywhere else? No; it is God's presence that makes it holy.

There was another occasion when this reality was expressed. Shortly after Joshua had crossed the river Jordan with the children of Israel, he was met with the Captain of the Lord's host;

Joshua 5:15 And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest [is] holy.

That place was holy because God's presence was there.

Again, at Mount Sinai, that was interesting. It was just a mountain like all the other mountains. But when God's presence came upon the mountain it was to be regarded as holy. In fact, there was a barrier put around it; and anyone who should carelessly move across that boundary was to be struck dead, because it was holy ground; it had to be respected.

In elaboration of both Joshua and Moses' encounters, the Spirit of Prophecy tells us:

This was no common angel. It was the Lord Jesus Christ, he who had conducted the Hebrews through the wilderness, enshrouded in the pillar of fire by night, and a pillar of cloud by day. The place was made sacred by his presence, therefore Joshua was commanded to put off his shoes. {1SP 348.1}

The burning bush seen by Moses was also a token of the Divine Presence; and as he drew nigh to behold the wonderful sight, the same voice which here speaks to Joshua, said to Moses, "Draw not nigh hither. Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." {1SP 348.2}

The glory of God hallowed the sanctuary; and for this reason the priests never entered the place sanctified by God's presence with shoes upon their feet. {1SP 348.3}

This is, then, the reality: Wherever God is specifically present, that becomes a holy precinct. So when the Sabbath comes, at the beginning of the Sabbath, that day commences as holy because of what? Because the holy God is in it.

God in the Sabbath

So as the sun is setting and we are approaching the beginning of the Sabbath, we are in fact approaching unto God. And the realisation of who He is is to affect our keeping of the Sabbath. He is holy.

He who has declared that His words are spirit and life should have their faith in strong exercise that the Lord Jesus is an honored Guest in their assemblies. "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" [Matthew 18:20]. If He is there, it is to enlighten and bless. Therefore, as we assemble together, we all have a solemn sense of the presence of God, and know that the angels of God are in the assembly. The messengers of the gospel know by experience its truth, power, and excellence. It is the hours of the Sabbath that are sacred and sanctified and holy, and every true worshiper who keeps holy the Sabbath should claim the promise, "That ye may know I am the Lord the doth sanctify you." {21MR 294.1}

It is God's presence in the Sabbath that sanctifies us, because He sanctified the Sabbath by His presence.

I tried to make this point as impressive as possible, that the Sabbath day was a special occasion on which the people of the Lord were celebrating the memorial of His creation; that on the Sabbath the Lord was in the assembly to bless and sanctify, and if they have faith in the Lord, every Sabbath would be a day when His people, in a special manner, will be blessed in their acts of obedience in keeping the commandments of God. {21MR 294.2}

Because God is there. He is there to sanctify us in the Sabbath time, sacred time.

The Sabbath is a golden clasp that unites God and His people. {FLB 33.6}

It is not just the day; it is God's presence in the day that makes it so special. And it is on that day that God's presence is clasping us and we are uniting with Him. Therefore, as we stop to ingest this reality, that the Majesty of the universe, the holy God, is meeting with us on the Sabbath day; as we realise who He is, what happens to us?

Whom No Man Can See

I was reading not long ago from the Spirit of Prophecy, and there in her vision Sister White looked into the throne room and she saw the Father and the Son sitting on the throne. She saw Jesus in His visible form; but she couldn't see the Father because He was covered with a cloud of light. Then she asked Jesus whether the form of the Father was the same as His; then Jesus answered and said, Yes, it is; but if you were to see Him, you would cease to exist. God has an appearance that would absolutely squeeze the life out of us if we saw Him. And He is in the Sabbath. Can we begin to feel what Sabbath keeping is really all about? Spending time with God so that He can sanctify us—this is what the Sabbath is about.

Let us reflect again on those words:

Isaiah 58:13 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;

As we embrace this reality that this is His day because He is in it, we will honour Him and not do our own ways. You don't really need any detail to tell you what is your own ways when you are concentrating on the presence of God in your life on the Sabbath day.

The Coming of a Dear Friend

As you ask the question, "How do I keep it? Can I do this, can I do that on Sabbath?" you will get the answer as you focus on this relationship with the mighty God, the holy God. What are we doing on this day? Is what I am doing associated with our relationship with the holy God?

Jesus is your best Friend. {TDG 310.2}

Jesus is our *best Friend*. As we come to the Sabbath and we are meeting with God and Jesus, our best Friend, this is the counsel:

The children should be taught to respect the Sabbath. On the day of preparation, clothing should be put in proper repair, shoes polished, baths taken. Then around the family altar all should wait to welcome God's holy day, as they would watch for the coming of a dear friend. {ST, May 25, 1882 par. 9}

Watch for the coming of the day as *a dear friend*? Why is the day identified here as *the coming of a dear friend*? Because as the day approaches you and me, Jesus is in it; and He is our best Friend. And God, our Father, is our Friend. So the Sabbath welcoming and the preparation to meet Him, is like the welcoming of a very dear friend that you are going to spend your full attention on, because He is your very dearest Friend.

Not Polluting the Sabbath

Let us expand as to why we have to be conscious of God's holiness in spending time with Him, so that we don't in any way do something that would spoil that focus. The following scripture is very interesting language. We are the strangers; we were not Jews; we are Gentiles, and we are the strangers that join themselves to the Lord through the gospel

Isaiah 56:6 Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant;

The word *polluting* we well understand today, because the world is being polluted. The rivers are polluted; there are no lovely, clear crystal rivers anymore in the city, is there? They have been polluted. As we join ourselves to the Lord, *to love the name of the Lord, to be His servants*; as the Sabbath comes in, the total enjoyment of our worship and appreciation of the presence of the holy God in me in my life can be polluted somehow. This is the issue. What am I doing? Am I in one way or the other polluting my appreciation of the closeness of God right there on this holy day? I don't think you have to be told what you need to do and not to do in order not to pollute that relationship. Otherwise you fall into legalism again. And you can be so particular about the minutiae of Sabbath keeping because you are in the presence of God, rather than the minutiae of dos and don'ts. Can you see the difference? It is a relationship in which I am enjoying myself with God; and any thought, any word, any action that actually spoils my focus on this, is actually polluting the Sabbath. This is what we are told in the Spirit of Prophecy.

When the Sabbath is thus remembered, the temporal will not be allowed to encroach upon the spiritual. {6T 354.3}

Anything temporal that we occupy ourselves with will not be permitted to encroach upon the spiritual relationship with Jesus that I am having on the Sabbath day. *The temporal will not be allowed to encroach upon the spiritual.*

No duty pertaining to the six working days will be left for the Sabbath.
{Ibid.}

Nothing that can be done during the temporal activities of the week *will be left for the Sabbath*; because while God is with us during the week and we can do all our different temporal things then, on the Sabbath He says, This is my holy time with you; nothing is to be permitted to spoil that in our minds.

On that day have no loose, cheap, common talk. {21MR 295.1}

No loose, cheap, common talk. That would spoil our spiritual focus on the mighty God who is our Friend. We are spending time with Him. This is not a legalistic thing; not *a legal matter* merely. It is a relationship matter.

So consider the ways by which we may pollute our intimacy with the holy, sacred sense of His presence. How would we do that?

How Do We Pollute It?

You've opened Sabbath on Friday evening. This is now the Sabbath. You have prepared everything so that you can spend your full focus upon the Lord. You don't need to be distracted from focusing upon the Lord; it is His holy presence in the holy day. Now anything that takes me away from that devotional spirit will be polluting the Sabbath, won't it?

I get up in the morning to go to church, my heart is preparing to be there; and all that I need to do is do everything that has to do with my Lord, to take to church what I need to take, and it has all to do with my worship with Him. Then if I think of someone, or something that I have to do on the Sabbath, and I have to think of that, what have I just done? I have thought of giving something temporal to someone on the Sabbath; I am doing something temporal during that time, and I am actually bringing that into my thoughts, and my mind is taken away from the Lord straight away. This is what happens. I am to concentrate my full attention upon the Lord, not to have to think of this or that or something that has something to do with my temporal affairs.

The words and thoughts should be guarded. Those who discuss business matters and lay plans on the Sabbath, are regarded of God as though they engaged in the actual transaction of business. To keep the Sabbath holy, we

should not even allow our minds to dwell upon things of a worldly character. {CCh 269.3}

Not even to permit our minds to dwell on the things of a worldly character. So if on Sabbath morning I have something of a worldly character that I have to think about to bring along to church, what am I doing? I am permitting that to interfere. I know it to be true; and I have had to confess this to the Lord many times. "I have just turned my attention to something menial and temporal, and I have lost deep communion with You." It's got nothing to do with legality; it has to do with what I am doing on the Sabbath with my Lord. This is what it's about.

Clothed to Worship

And in this holy time, in the presence of God, how do we relate to the presence of God in reference to this following example? God was going to meet with His people on Mount Sinai, and there was something special that He drew their attention to. This is again in relevance to His holiness:

Exodus 19:10 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, 11 And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.

He would come down to meet with them at that holy place. What were they to do? They were to sanctify themselves, to have *their clothes* washed. Here is now in the following statement a simple act of devotion that has to do with our clothing. Let the Spirit of Prophecy assist us in our attitude on this holy day with our holy God:

Many need instruction as to how they should appear in the assembly for worship on the Sabbath. They are not to enter the presence of God in the common clothing worn during the week. All should have a special Sabbath suit, to be worn when attending service in God's house. While we should not conform to worldly fashions, we are not to be indifferent in regard to our outward appearance. We are to be neat and trim, though without adornment. The children of God should be pure within and without. {6T 355.2}

But our minds must not take a funny turn and say, Oh, I must have a Sabbath suit. No; our mind should be, I am coming into the presence of God, and He is holy and pure, and I am to be in a clothing that assists me in the sense of His presence. This is what it's about. He expressed His specifications for the Mount Sinai, and here it is as well.

As we permit our minds to expand on God's holiness and His presence in reference to the Sabbath day, our attitudes to the things we do in God's presence, needs to be illuminated in our mind—the sense of holiness, the sense of the Majesty of God—to fill us with the understanding as to true Sabbath keeping. And as we permit this consciousness of the revelation of God in the presence of God in the Sabbath making that time holy, we will then see what is the meaning of the following scripture; because the Sabbath is a time of sanctification, and the work of sanctification in the perpetual covenant is directly connected with the Sabbath. When we appreciate the deep sense of God's presence, something happens inside of us.

I Will Write My Law in their Hearts

Jeremiah 31:33 But this [shall be] the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;

Can you see what this is? This is not legalism; this is something in which we have an intimate relationship with God, and He comes intimately to me and puts a sense of His law in my inward part, and writes it in my heart.

Jeremiah 31:33 ...and [I] will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

When I have the deep knowledge of the presence of God in my life, do I need anyone to tell me, You shouldn't be doing this; and, You should be doing that? It says it here: *They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord.* You know Him! You know He is holy, you know He is pure, and you want special time with Him. Sabbath keeping is associated with the deep knowledge of His closeness, and He puts it into our hearts, so that we within ourselves think, I wouldn't do this today; and I certainly wouldn't do that; because it has nothing to do with the spiritual.

A Deepening Sense of the Sabbath Glory

As the following statement expresses it, in our progressive walk in the light of the presence of God, our deep appreciation of true Sabbath keeping, and seeing its importance, will deepen as we go on, and we will become more and more faithful Sabbath keepers.

I saw that we sensed and realized but little of the importance of the Sabbath, to what we yet should realize and know of its importance and glory. I saw we knew not what it was yet to ride upon the high places of the earth and to be fed with the heritage of Jacob. {Mar 245.3}

We need to know what that is; we need to experience it. Sister White says we do not know it as we ought to know.

But when the refreshing and latter rain shall come from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power we shall know what it is to be fed with the heritage of Jacob and ride upon the high places of the earth. {Ibid.}

As the Holy Spirit in the latter rain is poured inside of our being, *we shall know what it is*, this glory of the Sabbath.

Then shall we see the Sabbath more in its importance and glory. But we shall not see it in all its glory and importance until the covenant of peace is made with us at the voice of God, {Ibid.}

This is when the seventh plague takes place. The believers who have died under the third angel's message are raised, and all the 144,000 hear together the voice of God. We will make an experience there. Then it will be seen *in all its glory and importance*. Then

...the pearly gates of the New Jerusalem are thrown open and swing back on their glittering hinges and the glad and joyful voice of the lovely Jesus is heard richer than any music that ever fell on mortal ear bidding us enter. [I saw] that we had a perfect right in the city for we had kept the commandments of God, and heaven, sweet heaven is our home. {Ibid.}

May God indeed lift up our understanding to the appreciations of His person, the appreciations that the Sabbath has to do with me and my God, us and our God meeting together with us; and as we come together, this is our communication, and anything temporal is left out, not allowed to encroach upon that sacred and beautiful engagement with Him. This is what we are called upon by the Holy Spirit; and this is not legalism.

May God bless us that we may have a deep sense of His presence as we continue to keep the holy Sabbath day.

Amen.