

Understanding the Sabbath

(Sermon Notes)

By Warren Zehrung – 10/5/2013

A short list of the characteristics that God has revealed about the Sabbath shows that the Sabbath is a holy convocation, a sign, a delight, and a rest.

The Sabbath was blessed by God and sanctified.

The Sabbath is prophetic and it is to be remembered.

The Sabbath was made for man, but it belongs to God.

And – – the Sabbath is a **Feast**.

The purpose of this sermon is to bring some clarity to our understanding of God's Sabbath Day, and to specifically address the matter of eating out on the Sabbath. We will begin by looking at some of the **basics** of the Sabbath – again, from God's point of view in the Bible. We must possess right spiritual discernment in order to correctly understand the mind of Christ.

One of the things that I wish to accomplish in today's sermon **is to document** – from the Bible – a number of the **foundational aspects** of the Sabbath from **God's point of view**.

We read that the Sabbath is a '**sign**' between God and His people.

Exodus 31:

13 Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a **sign** between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.

Exodus 31:

17 It is a **sign** between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.

OK, it is documented by inspired scripture to be a **sign** and is therefore profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:

16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

God said that the Sabbath was His '**test**' commandment – to see if we would be obedient.

Exodus 16:

4 Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may [**test**] prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or not.

The Israelites **never** properly understood the purpose of the Sabbath. They were unconverted.

The question that we must ask ourselves is whether or not – we, the converted Church brethren – properly understand the purpose of the Sabbath?

Since the death of Herbert W. Armstrong there has arisen among **some** of the brethren in God's Church – a **new test** commandment.

The test commandment – their hallmark doctrine – that sets them apart other Christians is that they **do not eat out** on the Sabbath.

Their objections to eating out on the Sabbath generally revolve around a number of aspects related to the keeping of the Sabbath.

They sincerely wish to keep the Sabbath properly.

They desire to do what God says.

They also saw that there were so many who attend with us who did not keep the Sabbath properly as they should have. That improper behavior by some brethren encouraged the rational for trying to keep the Sabbath so much better – so they decided, "We won't even eat out on the Sabbath Day – that's how well we will keep the Sabbath."

This sermon is for them, especially since:

- A. They have been taught that **paying** for food on the Sabbath – or **doing business** on the Sabbath is against God's will.
- B. They assume that people outside of the Body of Christ are being violated on the Sabbath by causing them to work or do business on the Sabbath.
- C. Some base their conclusion to not eat out on the Sabbath, on the Book of Nehemiah.

What does the Bible reveal about "eating out" and doing "business" on the Holy Sabbath Day?

Those are some of the aspects that we will look into in today's sermon. If we take the different aspects – one by one – of keeping the Sabbath according to the Scriptures, I believe that we can gain a better idea from God's point of view.

Not many people have gotten this Sabbath keeping understanding down correctly throughout history – I believe that we need to give it a good look.

Let's start at the beginning... Genesis 2.

Let's see if we are able to find the correct fellowship, convocation, worship and spirit of the Sabbath observance that God intends.

It is good that we review what God has to say from time to time – even with regard to the Sabbath Day itself.

Everyone within the sound of my voice **desires** to **keep** the Sabbath Day **holy** as God intends it to be observed.

What is God's mind on the matter? What is God's intent? Our heart's desire is to please God.

The Sabbath Day is **holy** – that means that it is set apart from the other days of the week for **spiritual** reasons and purposes.

Our mission is to make the Sabbath more **spiritual** – not more physical.

The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week.

Genesis 2:

- 1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.
- 2 And on the **seventh day** God ended **His work** which He had made; and **He rested** on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.

Here God shows us an important component of the Sabbath Day – 'rest.'

We know that God does not get tired. But God is teaching us about the Sabbath Day. **God rested** on the seventh day from all His work – giving us an example.

Genesis 2:

- 3 And God **blessed** the seventh day, and **sanctified** it.

God **elevated** the Sabbath Day above the other days and He **sanctified** it. He made the Sabbath a **holy** day.

"Sanctified" means that God set the Sabbath Day apart for **spiritual** purposes.

What we find then is that God initiated the **spiritual process** for man that would be a major component in mankind becoming children of God – eventually born into the eternal Family of God.

God enjoys a good feast. The concept of **great abundance** on the table is symbolic of God's blessings.

What is the **literal** meaning of the word "Feast?" Physically ...speaking – it is a great meal – with all the trimmings.

The Sabbath is designed by God to **also** be a Spiritual Feast. God is teaching us to be like He is, and more than anything, we want to be in His Kingdom. The Bible defines what a 'Feast' is:

Genesis 19:

- 3 And [Lot] pressed upon the [messengers] greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he **made them a feast**, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.

Genesis 21:

- 8** And the child [Isaac] grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a **great feast** the same day that Isaac was weaned.

That is Joy and celebration with great abundance of food and drink being shared.

The Sabbath is a '**feast**.'

Luke 5:

- 27** And after these things [Jesus] went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, [this was no less than the dreaded IRS agent and tax collector that we know as the Gospel writer, Matthew] sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me.
- 28** And [Levi] left all, rose up, and followed [Jesus].
- 29** And Levi made him a **great feast** in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.
- 30** But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

Abraham made a **feast** for the Lord and two other messengers in Genesis 18 – it is something very meaningful to God.

Genesis 18:

- 6** And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes upon the hearth.
- 7** And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it unto a young man; and he hastened to dress it.
- 8** And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set it before them.

We in God's Church need to understand the **spirit and purpose** of the Sabbath. Let's establish from the Scriptures that the **Sabbath** is very much a **feast** of the Lord.

Leviticus 23:

- 2** Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the **feasts of the LORD**, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even **these are my feasts**.

Please notice that the very first **Feast** mentioned – is the weekly Sabbath.

Leviticus 23:

- 3** Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of **rest**, an holy convocation; ye shall **do no work** therein: it is the Sabbath of the LORD **in all your dwellings**.

It is interesting that it is the Sabbath of the LORD **in all your dwellings**. The Sabbath begins where you live.

There were no synagogues or churches at this point – and there were no political corporate organizations for that matter. It is the Sabbath of the Lord **in all your dwellings**, God said – wherever you are living.

How did Sabbath observance come to mean – to so many – that attendance with one of the political corporate organizations was mandatory? Jesus clearly said:

Matthew 18:

20 For where **two or three** are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

Leviticus 23:

3 Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of **rest**, an holy convocation; ye shall **do no work** therein:

We see here also, that there is to be ‘**no work**’ on the Sabbath.

And as we go along today we will see that this ‘no work’ concept is defined **to allow for** – miracles, emergencies, **good works**, Temple service, and even animals in distress – among other **exemptions**.

Yes, there are many exemptions to this ‘**no work**’ concept. That is why the Pharisees were so upset with Jesus’ Sabbath activities.

The Sabbath is a ‘**delight**.’

God’s intent is that we make the Sabbath a delightful feast.

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, honorable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words.

Leviticus 23:

4 These are the **feasts** of the LORD, even **holy convocations**, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons.

We see emphatically that the Sabbath Day is a **holy convocation**. Who we meet with – how we meet – what we **do** with one another are very important things to consider. There are many shut-ins that could use a good visit.

One Scripture that is improperly quoted and used is in Hebrews. “Don’t forsake the assembling of yourselves together,” has come to mean that you must meet with one of the political corporate organizations.

We will see what the Bible actually says.

We need to take a good look at what the Scriptures say to insure that we are not drifting off course.

Mark 2:

27 The Sabbath was made for man.

Too many brethren learned **only** that its observance was **mandatory**, and that there was a long list of things **not to do**. There is so much more to the Sabbath than that.

What about **PAYING MONEY ON THE SABBATH?**

* There is **not** one single place in the Holy Scriptures that defines *business or commerce* as the **exchange of money**.

There is not one single place in the Scriptures that prohibits '**paying**' for something on the Sabbath.

One Worldwide evangelist – now deceased – felt that the problem was with the exchange of money for food. He concluded that was "business," so he would make arrangements at the Feast to pay the restaurant bill on a **different day**.

Brethren, the Bible never intimates any such thing – let's review what God says:

God says that we are to use **MONEY** for our **Feast food**.

Deuteronomy 14:

22 Thou shalt truly **tithe** all the increase of thy seed, that the field brings forth year by year.

23 **And thou shalt eat** [the 2nd tithe] **before the LORD thy God**, in the place which He shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; **that thou may learn** to reverence the Lord thy God always.

OK – this is HOW we learn to revere God properly.

Deuteronomy 14:

24 **And if the way be too long for thee**, so that thou art not able to carry it; or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee:

25 **Then** shalt thou turn **it into money**, and **bind up the money** in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose:

26 And thou shalt **bestow that money** [that means **pay**] for whatsoever thy soul lusts after, for oxen [beef-steak], or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, [Like a Long Island Ice Tea] or for whatsoever thy soul desires: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, ... And the Levite...

* God says to use your money to purchase food for the Feast.

The bible **does not support** the supposition that states that it is wrong to purchase a meal on the Sabbath or holy day.

And just so that the point is not missed:

* Obviously if you are **paying for your meal** as God says to do – SOMEONE is selling it to you. That point is clearly resolved by Scripture:

We use our electricity and city water on the Sabbath – and that is not "commerce" or "business," but it does cost money.

Some people have erroneously gotten the idea that since they "pay" for those services on another day of the week - that makes it okay.

That kind of reasoning is **legalistic** and **superficial** - it is not based in Christianity.

We 'rent' our rooms at the Feast on the Holy Days – don't we?

Some brethren are even earning interest on their savings accounts or investments on the Sabbath.

It is not wrong to use public utilities on the Sabbath.

In the world tomorrow – when God's Spirit is poured out on all men – there will still be electricity and water, restrooms and kitchens, heating and air-conditioning – and someone will be providing those things on the Sabbath Day.

But what about **MAKING OTHERS WORK** and serve you on the Sabbath.

God did expect that **some work** would be done in serving up food on Sabbath days.

Notice what God says (and these are Feast Days here).

We saw that "**no work**" was to be done on the Sabbath.

But please notice God's **exception to the rule** where it applies to **meal preparation**.

Exodus 12:

16 In the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; **no manner of work** shall be done in them, **except that which every man must eat**, that only may be done of you.

God clearly says that work to prepare a meal on the Sabbath days may be done.

Let's look at a New Testament Example in Matthew 8.

We all understand that **Atonement** is a specific **exclusion** to this rule.

Leviticus 16:

29 And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do **no work at all**, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourns among you:

Matthew 8:

14 And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever.

Keep in mind that all this is taking place on the Sabbath.

Peter's mother-in-law was sick in bed burning up with a fever. It was obviously more than a case of the sniffles.

Matthew 8:

15 And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and **ministered unto them**.

Again, all this is taking place on the Sabbath Day.

The Pharisees exerted so much fear upon the town's people that they would not approach Jesus until the Sabbath was over with.

Matthew 8:

16 When the **even** was come [Sabbath ended – sun set], they brought unto [Jesus] **many** that were possessed with devils: and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick:

On this particular Sabbath Day, Peter's home is like Grand Central Station – with people coming and going.

But what I want you to notice is that Peter's mother-in-law got up and went **to work** – serving them – waiting on them – ministering to them all – on the Sabbath Day. And all this serving, and ministering was in keeping with the proper observance of the Sabbath.

But what about PEOPLE IN THE WORLD preparing meals for us?

Paul says that there is a clear distinction between those in the world and our brethren in God's Church (1 Corinthians 5:9-10).

Exodus 20:

10 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:

Workers at restaurants are **not** our servants – nor are they of our household within our gates. Tell them to go home and give up their Sabbath job and see if they follow your command. They do not work for us. We have no control over them – like we do of those within our household.

In an agrarian society we are forbidden to work our animals – treading grain and turning the mills etc.

Today, I wouldn't allow my mechanical equipment to do productive work on the Sabbath – but I would insist that the air condition run for an elderly person on a hot day.

Can we tell the difference?

God doesn't want us eating cold weenies and beanies on His Feast Days – that is not His intent. God desires that we greatly enjoy and delight in His Sabbaths.

When we go to the Feast – it is proper to eat the breakfast prepared by the Motel staff down at the complimentary breakfast bar. And we need not be conflicted about when or how it is paid for on the Sabbath. Please do not be so Pharisaical as to consider things like – if the price of breakfast is included in my Motel bill – and I don't pay for it on the Sabbath – THEN I am approved in God's site.

That is **not** how God thinks at all.

When Jesus Christ healed on the Sabbath He was not "breaking" the Sabbath. But He was certainly accused of it by those who had no understanding. We are supposed to follow Christ's example - not make hard and fast rules that go beyond what God meant.

You see, I can make a rule like, "It's wrong to eat out on the Sabbath." Then I can say, I don't eat out on the Sabbath - I'm righteous, and everybody else doesn't measure up to my righteousness."

Some say it is "safer" to keep the letter of the law on the Sabbath. **Jesus doesn't think that way** - that is why we have been given examples like David and the shewbread. "Playing it safe" on the Sabbath rather than serving the brethren is the same as burying our talents.

The Sabbath is a **Feast** day - first a *spiritual* feast. But it is not wrong to bring food to someone in a nursing home; nor is it wrong for a hospital or a nursing home to prepare hot meals for its patients; nor is it wrong to take an elderly person to a buffet on the Sabbath. It is not wrong to fellowship with scattered brethren on the Sabbath - even breaking bread together. We are not making people work for our pleasure. We cannot look down on those who do not keep the Sabbath, as though we were better than they are. It will be wonderful when everyone keeps the Sabbath - and we all have those big potlucks on the Sabbath? That's the millennium!

POT LUCK MEALS

God knows that there is work that is required in serving up a Feast. Yes there is the preparation day for getting things ready.

But there is still a great deal to be done on the Sabbath Day itself – just ask any of the ladies who do the yeoman’s task of putting on a church pot luck – warmers – hauling – utensils – cups drinks pots and pans – and garbage and clean up and repacking again...

God said that there was to be no planting, nor harvesting, nor butchering cattle or hauling loads to market, but it is proper to **serve up meals** on the Sabbath.

Some will inquire about the Bible verse that says that there is to be **NO FIRE** on the Sabbath.

As important as construction of the Temple was - work was to stop for the Sabbath - God commanded no Temple fire be built.

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: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death.
- 3** Ye shall kindle **no fire** throughout your habitations upon the Sabbath day.

To us that might sound like a heater to warm the room on a freezing day or a fire on the stove to prepare a meal...

When we read **in context** – we find that this is not what God is speaking of at all.

God is saying that there are to be **no blast furnaces fires** or forges for molten metal – notice:

Here they are making metal castings from molten metal.

Exodus 35:

- 10** And every wise hearted among you shall come, and **make all** that the LORD hath commanded;

Exodus 35:

- 14** The **andlestick** also for the light, and his furniture, and his lamps, with the oil for the light,

Exodus 35:

- 16** The **altar** of burnt offering, with its **brass grate**, his staves, and all his vessels, the hangings of the court, his **pillars**, and their **sockets**, and the hanging for the door of the court,

Building the Tabernacle required substantial construction fires.

Exodus 35:

- 21** And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the LORD'S offering to **the work of the tabernacle** of the congregation.

These verses are about CONSTRUCTION fires – not cooking fire.

I had a **metal** fabrication facility in my construction career – and I can tell you from first-hand experience that working with **molten metal** is not something to engage in on the Sabbath.

As important as construction of the Temple was - work was to **stop** for the Sabbath - God commanded no Temple fire be built. In the same way, we do not anoint the dead with sweet spices on the Sabbath – Even the body of Christ could wait.

Mark 16:

- 1 And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint [Jesus' body].

But there are people in God's Church who will not start their car motor or make toast in a toaster because they believe that it is **too much fire**.

They should read the Bible in context – these verses are addressing the Tabernacle construction.

NEHEMIAH

What would Nehemiah think if he were resurrected and saw a number of brethren "breaking bread" in public on the Sabbath?

As a Godly man, he would have the exact same response Jesus had when the apostles were eating the grain.

The Book of Nehemiah does not prohibit the purchase of a meal on the Sabbath day!

Some of our brethren have fallen into a spiritual trap because they have been taught that it is more righteous not to observe the Sabbath as a Feast day.

Jesus explained to the Pharisees that **they were wrong** in applying the law in the exact opposite way from that which God intended.

That is what has happened with the Book of Nehemiah.

Yes, technically you could say that the disciples were harvesting, and the Pharisees tried to make something sinister out of it.

But the **spirit of the law** intends that **we do good** on the Sabbath.

Mark 3:

- 4 Jesus saith unto them, Is it **lawful to do good** on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

In the same way, Nehemiah **clearly** distinguished between trade that is **big business** as usual for the purpose of commerce (on one hand), and (on the other hand) having a meal with the brethren.

Please do not read something into Scripture that is not there. Let's read closely:

Nehemiah 13:

15 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.

That verse is all about the economy, manufacturing and harvesting - not about a meal.

The movies call a cowboy's plate of beans, "victuals or vittles," but the scriptural meaning of "victuals" refers to the **entire** processed deer, or slaughtered beef.

Those that Nehemiah prohibited from entering Jerusalem made their **livelihood** from hunting wild venison or livestock – this word does not refer to a meal of food.

"Victuals" is not a plate of food - it is a **wagon load** of produce.

These were mule trains ladened of wine, tools, hardware and produce.

Nehemiah was talking about big business – like interstate commerce today – **not someone's lunch**.

Meals on wheels on the Sabbath is perfectly fine for those on Hospice and the elderly.

Are we able to discern the difference between hauling truckloads of textiles and goods as a matter of regular business, and giving care to those in need?

Are we able to discern the difference between true Christian practice and the letter of the law?

Nehemiah 13:

16 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.

17 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?

18 Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath.

Business and commerce that is **usual** during the week is prohibited on the Sabbath, and it is wrong - God intends a day of rest from our physical labors - so that we may do good (*spiritual*) works.

Nehemiah 13:

19 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.

20 So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.

21 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.

Very few people realize what personal offense Nehemiah was concerned about:

Nehemiah's transgression or offense was to cause the Levites **to work** by standing guard at the gates on the Sabbath to **prevent** the outsiders from coming into Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 13:

19 ...some of my servants set I at the gates...

Nehemiah prays for God's **mercy**:

*** Nehemiah 13:**

22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy **mercy**.

The Book of Nehemiah does **not** address or forbid what the Bible refers to as a meal wherein "every man must eat" as we saw in Exodus 12:16.

Chapter 10 in the Book of Hebrews is all about **sacrifices**.

After Paul explained that Jesus Christ has **offered** one sacrifice for sins, perfecting them that are sanctified forever, he tells us what our part is **whenever** we interact with other brethren.

Hebrews 10:

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto **love** and to **good works**:

Ask yourselves, brethren, when was the last time you provoked someone to **care for someone's needs** – incited someone to do good spiritual works?

Paul did not limit this sacrifice of a broken spirit and a contrite heart to the Sabbath day alone.

Psalm 51:

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

* Brethren, do not assume that we are able to make the Sabbath **holier** than God has already made it when He blessed it and sanctified it.

I know a man who not only does not treat the Sabbath as a **feast** day – he will not start his car engine because of those 10,000 little fires that form every minute at each piston head – and as a result he no longer attends with other brethren. Paul continues:

Hebrews 10:

25 **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.

Today, we can **write, call and visit** others of God's people.

These verses reveal our great responsibility when gathered together with other brethren. In many congregations today no one mentions the sermon after services or brings up a beneficial spiritual concept.

Who today, among God's people keeps the Sabbath like that? Provoking one another unto **love** and to **good works**?

What is the purpose of the Sabbath?

The Sabbath's primary purpose, to the chagrin and consternation of many, is **not a social** gathering. The Sabbath is a pivotal Commandment.

* How many people who will not eat out on the Sabbath - actually spend their time and energies giving God the sacrifice He desires on the Sabbath Day?

God is not looking for an occasion to smite us, or find us guilty of some vague technical infraction. He wants us to grow and develop as Christians in the care, concern and service that we show to one another.

It is always proper and right to "do good" on the Holy Sabbath day.

End: Understanding the Sabbath