

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #5

Good Work on the Sabbath

LawstSheep Ministries

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Welcome to another Lord of the Sabbath program. This is Brother Kenny wishing you a joyful and refreshing Sabbath day.

Last week we began studying what those who choose to keep the Sabbath day are commanded to do. We found two essentials. We might call them “valid requirements” written in stone by the very finger of God. Anyone can easily comply with them.

1. Remember the Sabbath day

One valid requirement was to remember the Sabbath. Bringing the Sabbath to mind is to be done weekly on the seventh-day of the week. This is easy to understand; and to do.

2. To keep it holy

The other valid requirement was to keep it holy. This means it is to be a day set apart to our LORD, our God. The seventh-day of the week is a special day, not to be like the other six. This too is conceptually easy to understand. But, it lacks details to know just how that command is to be obeyed.

Fortunately, our LORD knows our needs BEFORE we even ask. So, He added some verses to give us a better understanding of how we are to keep the Sabbath holy. In fact, these additional words, written on the tablet of stone, make the Fourth Commandment the longest of the Ten Commandments! It suggests to me it was pretty important to God to make sure we would understand what He commanded.

Without repeating those verses (Ex. 20: 9-11), we saw last week that we are commanded to labor six days and do all our work but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD our God. This command is from the very mouth and finger of God Himself. I believe it!

Nowhere in the Bible does the LORD God, or Jesus, declare a change in the LORD’S day. Nowhere in the Bible does God or Jesus announce that with the coming of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel that the LORD’S day established at creation is changed to the first day of the week. Nowhere does our Bible state that Christians are to keep the first day of the week holy instead of the Sabbath. Don’t believe me. Be a noble Berean and check your own Bible to see if what I say is true.

I am well aware that various religious men will tell you that Sunday is the Day of the LORD. But, in all humility, I find that not to be the Truth recorded in Scripture. It is what they have reasoned.

Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath and He said so Himself. Who will you choose to believe concerning this special LORD’S day sanctified and set apart by God at creation: Jesus,

or a leader of some pious-sounding religion?

When the seventh day of the week arrives, we are to remember it and keep it holy by doing no work in it. Neither are we to have others within our gates, and under our authority and control, do any work, not even our cattle!

Last week, I asked a brain teaser about the list in Ex. 20: 10 of persons within one's gates who also should not work on the Sabbath. I noted that a wife is not mentioned. I asked if anyone could explain this omission.

Several brethren were quite surprised that a wife is not mentioned. They could hardly believe their eyes. None had a reason. All admitted they had never actually noticed that a wife was not listed. Only one man named Steven, from the Akron, Ohio area, ventured an answer. He suggested the context inferred a household having a husband and wife as those in authority over work within it. They would have authority over what their sons and daughters and male and female servants do. Since the husband was not named, why would it be necessary to mention a wife? No problem with the omission.

But, isn't a husband the head of the household AND head of his wife? Is she no less under his authority as the children or servants or cattle? Well, before I give my opinion, I am going to hold this brain teaser open for at least another week and see if anyone has a different answer. If you do, why not send it to me via the Internet or the post office. At the end of the Program, we'll give you the contact details. I may include your opinion on the air next week, especially if it is different than Steven's answer.

But, back to the basic Sabbath command, we quickly run into one of the most controversial elements of Sabbath keeping. What is the WORK that you are not to do on the Sabbath as stated in the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20?

The list of questions is endless. Can one brush their teeth on the Sabbath? Can one go for a walk in the woods? Can one take a swim in your backyard pool on the Sabbath? Can you wash dishes? Can you wash your car before driving to a facility for a Sabbath assembly? Can you set up chairs, or a sound system, for a holy group assembly? Are such activities the kind of work that are prohibited on the Sabbath?

First, we must not assume a scientific definition of work. One based merely on an expenditure of energy such as in making an effort or taking an action. If expending energy is what is prohibited on the Sabbath, we could not get out of bed much less go for a walk around the neighborhood or have a holy assembly.

I feel confident that this context of work is not what is meant in the command. Why? I know the Lord of the Sabbath got out of bed and walked through a grain field on the Sabbath. I am sure the Lord of the Sabbath was acting lawfully.

Some of the confusion about work that is not to be done on the Sabbath can be cleared up by realizing that our English Bibles translate different Hebrew words as "work."

Obviously, in the Hebrew commands, these definitional nuances are important to the meaning to be imparted.

So it is appropriate to get out a Concordance to see what Hebrew word was used when God said to do all your “work” in six days, then rest from that kind of work on the seventh day.

Let’s look again at the words God wrote with His own finger in stone for the Fourth Commandment. I am using Strong’s concordance numbers for the King James Version of the Bible if you want to follow along in Ex. 20: 10:

Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work (#4399), but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work (#4399),

Both times the word “work” appears here, it is translated from the Hebrew word “melakah” which is #4399 in Strong’s Concordance:

#4399 - MELAKAH (mel-aw-kaw)
from the same as #4397, malak (mal-awk) which means to dispatch as a deputy
Properly, deputyship, i.e. ministry; generally employment (never servile).

What this seems to indicate is that one should not be dispatched as an employee to do work as a deputy for an employer on the Sabbath day. You should do that kind of work the other six days of the week.

This seems to indicate that work done to serve someone else, being voluntarily by your own volition (without being directed or dispatched by an employer as his deputy), is NOT restricted by this command. From this understanding we can see why Jesus could heal a man’s withered hand on the Sabbath. If He was a carpenter the other six days of the week, His ability to work a healing on the Sabbath would not be against the command. It was a good work, not his normal vocation, and done to help someone else.

In all three verses where the Bible addresses doing no work on the Sabbath day that is done the previous six days, namely Ex. 20: 10, Lev. 23: 3 and Deut. 5: 13-14, we see this same Hebrew word “melakah” used for work.

There is another example that seems to support this understanding. When we study the feasts of the Lord discussed in Leviticus 23, you will notice that there are seven annual holy days to be observed. The requirement here is that on six of them, “ye shall do no servile work therein.” However, for the Day of Atonement the command reverts back to not doing “any work” which is the same command as for the Sabbath.

Now, the Hebrew word translated as “servile” in English, is the Hebrew word “abowdah” *ab-o-daw* (Strong’s #5656) and it conveys work of any kind, even work to serve others by doing good for them. I take this to mean that that on these annual holy days, the total focus is to be on the Lord and the purpose behind the holy day. It is very special day

where God comes first, even before a neighbor in need. So, the word usage seems to suggest that servile work (non-vocational work to help others) can be done on the Sabbath.

Well, I hope I have made some useful distinctions here. The work we are not to do is the normal work we do the other six days in order to earn a living. We are to rest on the Sabbath from such work. However, if we are moved to help someone in need on the Sabbath day, say lift a crippled person into or out of their wheelchair, that would be a good work and proper on the Sabbath day. However, if you are an orderly at a hospital or nursing home, hopefully someone else would do that chore on the Sabbath so that you could rest from this work. It does not take a life-threatening house fire in order to justify such a strenuous effort on the Sabbath day. And, in that case, even the orderly would be blameless in helping save the life of the patient or prevent injury.

There is another aspect of this somewhat sticky issue of what work can and can't a person do on the Sabbath that I would like to explore. The work that the LORD rested from on the seventh day was His CREATION work; His making of something new.

God did not stop all work-like activity on the Sabbath day. He did maintenance work on the Sabbath. He kept all the universe that He made humming under control. The work God rested from on the Sabbath day was ONLY His creation work; work making things.

We can see further evidence of this idea in John, Chapter 5. John records an incident that happened when Jesus was in Jerusalem. He was there for one of the three feasts that the Jews kept holy. These are the feasts of the LORD described in Leviticus 23 which include the weekly Sabbaths. I mentioned them earlier. Not even servile work could be done on the annual feast days to be kept holy to the LORD with a joyful heart.

While in Jerusalem, at the pool of Bethesda (meaning a house or place of mercy), Jesus spots a man with an infirmity that had afflicted him for thirty-eight years. It is a touching story. For when the water would be stirred by an angel, whoever stepped in first would be healed. But, since no one would help this sick man get into the pool, by the time he would get there himself, someone else would have already have stepped in and been cured.

Jesus, knowing this, has mercy on the sick man. He asks the man, "Do you want to be made well?" Now, hear what Jesus said to the man in John 5: 8-9:

Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked." And, that day was the Sabbath. The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

Can you believe it? Can you comprehend the blindness of these Jews? A man is miraculously healed on the Sabbath. The one who healed him says to pick up his bed and walk. Rather than rejoicing with the cured man, these Jews accuse him of breaking the

Sabbath by lifting and carrying his bed, of doing what is not lawful (according to them) on the Sabbath. I guess it weighed too much and was therefore unlawful work effort.

When the man tells these Jews that it was Jesus who healed him and told him to pick up his bed and walk, their reaction is most telling. We find it in John 5: 16-18:

For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

Here again, as with the case of the man with a withered hand, Jesus heals, He does a good work unto another on the Sabbath. The Jews, specifically the Pharisees and Scribes, all experts and strict keepers of the laws of God, see work being done that is in their eyes unlawful. What you will find in this, and several other commands of God, is that the Jews had added to the law of the LORD God various oral traditions for proper Sabbath keeping. These were provisions that they believed would help people obey the God-given and written law of the Sabbath by building a preventative fence around the command.

Even if they meant well, these extra requirements made Sabbath keeping more of a burden for the Jews than the benefit the LORD intended. These voluminous and detailed restrictions by the rabbis, not commanded originally by God, caused one to live in a fear of breaking or profaning the Sabbath. It continues much the same today in orthodox Judaism.

But, Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, who knew the purpose or end or aim of the law of the Sabbath, showed us a true and better way to keep it. Within clear, written limits on work for keeping the Sabbath holy, one was free to do good work unto others on the Sabbath.

It was not just the amount or type of effort expended that mattered to God, it had to include the purpose of the work. That is why the Levite priests could do otherwise forbidden work on the Sabbath and be blameless. And, that is why God and Jesus could also do good work on the Sabbath and not be blamed.

I have digressed somewhat. Returning to my prior point about allowing certain maintenance-type work on the Sabbath, but not creative work, we see that Jesus claimed that both He and His Father had been working until now. Isn't that in contradiction with the Genesis account that on the seventh day God rested, as if He did NO work of any kind?

Well, here is the nuance. Looking at the Genesis 2 account carefully, it says that God "rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done." The work He had done was the creation of new things. He ended His creation work on the seventh day and rested from it. Does that mean that God did no work on the seventh day? I don't think

so. The entire creation is sustained by God. He works to maintain what He made. It is good work done for us, His creation.

So, what's my point? It is this, do not be like the Pharisees who accused others of breaking the Sabbath because of the work they would observe someone else doing. One needs to know the purpose of that work in order to make any proper and fair judgment. If it was work for the good of others, it might be blameless work. If it was work to maintain something you already made, it might not be unlawful.

Let me try an example. Someone observes Brother Kenny outside on the Sabbath. He is shoveling a foot of snow from his driveway. It would be easy to accuse me of doing laborious and unlawful work on the Sabbath. But, what if the reason is to allow friends to visit on the Sabbath for holy fellowship? Does this affect whether this heavy and exhausting manual work is sinful in God's eyes? Does it allow Brother Kenny to do good work like this on the Sabbath and still be blameless? Maintaining a driveway clear of snow, for other brethren to have fellowship safely may not be work prohibited on the Sabbath.

Let me try to make something else clear. I am not saying I know God's intent in the Fourth Commandment perfectly. God has not spoken to me about it like He did to Moses. I do not want to judge exactly what is and is not lawful work for you on the Sabbath. Don't write me with endless examples for me to render a generic judgment.

All I am trying to do is illuminate some principles taught by the Lord of the Sabbath that may help you decide what God's will in your particular case might be. I do count on God's mercy if I fail to understand His will for myself, or fail to comply perfectly in all things; not just regarding Sabbath keeping. I think it is way more important that we be merciful to those who may appear to do work on the Sabbath which we believe to be unlawful for us.

However, I know from many years of Sabbath keeping how easy it is for differing beliefs about what is and is not lawful to do on the Sabbath can cause division among brethren. I pray that brotherly love will cover a multitude of sins. I pray that we not get too concerned with slivers in others eyes while we walk around with logs in our own eyes.

Another time we again find Jesus in the Temple during one of the LORD'S feasts, in this case the seven day fall Feast of Tabernacles. And, the people there are divided about Jesus. Some saying, "He is good." Others disagreed and accused Him of deceiving the people and even having a demon. This was after Jesus accused them of not keeping the law that Moses gave to them. We know that, of course, they were not obedient. They were keeping laws that seemed right in their own eyes. Jesus asked the people in the Temple, "Why do you seek to kill Me?" They responded, "Who is seeking to kill You?"

Jesus then told them something that I believe is very consistent with what I have suggested about the Fourth Commandment: that we have to be careful about judging how others keep or profane the Sabbath. We find it in John 7: 21-24:

Jesus answered and said to them, “I did one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

We cannot judge whether Sabbath work is unlawful and sinful only by the appearance of work. We must judge righteously, knowing the heart and intent of the person working and the will of God. We must rely on the commands given by God in writing, not on the additional commands of men, whether given orally or in writing.

Now there is much more in Scripture dealing with the acts of men and whether they are proper or improper on the Sabbath. Can we buy things on the Sabbath? Can we take a 100-mile drive in a car on the Sabbath? Can we go to a funeral and burial on the Sabbath? Can we go to a restaurant on the Sabbath and allow others to cook for us? Can we light a fire in our home on the Sabbath? Can we use a grill to cook a burger on the Sabbath if we have no other food available? Can we use a microwave oven to heat up a previously cooked or frozen meal on the Sabbath? The list is endless.

Then there is the issue of doing our own pleasure on the Sabbath, even if it could not be considered work in a vocational sense. Can we take a refreshing float in the backyard pool on a hot summer day on the Sabbath? Can we play a little catch with a baseball with our ten-year old son? Can we ride a bike on a scenic path? Can we watch a baseball game on the TV or a religious tour of Israel? Can we have intercourse on the Sabbath day? Whoa!

I know this program isn't long enough to deal with such additional questions? Rather than address them further now, I am going to defer any such discussions until later in the year. It is important for us to study every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God in His revealed word to mankind. This applies to a good understanding about Sabbath keeping as well. If you have specific questions that concern you about principles governing the keeping of the Sabbath holy, especially concerning what kind of work is or is not prohibited, please contact me and I will offer whatever understanding I have. Otherwise, just try sticking to the basics that are in Scripture which I have shared.

I want to turn briefly to a different aspect of Sabbath keeping which I feel is every bit as important as the issues concerning work that will keep the Sabbath holy to the LORD. We find an additional requirement that can be confusing. It is found in Leviticus 23: 1-3.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation.’

Well, here we seem to have a new requirement not actually written in stone in the Fourth Commandment. The feasts of the LORD, including the weekly Sabbath, are to be proclaimed to be holy convocations for Israel. What does that mean? Surely, whatever it means, it seems to fit well with something positive we are to do on the Sabbath to keep it holy.

The emphasis on work is more on NOT doing certain kinds of work on the Sabbath day. Here, we seem to be getting God's instruction of something we ARE TO DO to keep the Sabbath holy.

The Hebrew word translated "convocation" in English is Strong's #4744. Here is the details from Strong's Concordance:

4744 **miqra**, *mik-raw*; from 7121; something called out, i.e., a public meeting (the act, the persons, or the place); also a rehearsal; assembly, calling, convocation, reading.

7121 *qara*, *kaw-raw*; a primitive root; to call out

Well, this sounds like a commanded public gathering on the Sabbath in order to keep it holy. So while rest from normal, vocational work is a valid requirement for the seventh day Sabbath, it seems we ought to have some sort of public assembly each Sabbath as well even if it takes some work effort.

Our time has fled away today, but next Sabbath we will look into what is behind this command and what a "holy convocation" looks like. Is it what most Christians (often referred to as those called out of the world) do when they go to Church? Or, is it intended to be something quite different than a modern Church service? As usual, we'll see not only what the written word of God has to say, but turn to Jesus and see what we can learn from what the Lord of the Sabbath said and DID to constitute a holy convocation.

Until next week, this is Brother Kenny praying that you will do all your work the next six days, and then return here next Sabbath when we deal with how we are to keep the Sabbath holy with a group convocation...even one by radio. Think about telling a friend about the Program or, better yet, gather with them to give a listen together!