

Sabbath — Imposed Rule or Design for Life?

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | January 1, 2019



I have many friends who were raised Seventh-day Adventist and were taught to observe the Bible Sabbath from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset—the same Sabbath hours the Jewish people observe. But many of them have found the day to be a day of restriction, a day filled with lists of all the things they cannot do.

I believe this is due to reading the fourth commandment through the lens of human, imperial law — rules enacted — rather than through design law — protocols upon which life is built.

God is Creator, and God built the universe — space, time, matter, energy, and life — and God's laws are the laws upon which all reality operates: the law of gravity, physics, and thermodynamics, as well as the laws that govern our minds and relationships — the moral laws. Breaking a design-law always injures and requires healing, while breaking imposed rules requires punishment be inflicted by the ruling authority.

Sadly, the fourth commandment has been translated through the lens of imposed law, causing the commandment to sound like some prohibition.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. (Exodus 20:8).

The key word in this verse is “it.” The Hebrew translation of “it” is: הוּא, הִיא [huw’, beyond, (Pentateuch), hiy’/hoo/] pronoun. A primitive word; TWOT 480; GK 2085 and 2115; 38 occurrences; AV translates as “that,” “him,” “same,” “this,” “he,” “which,” “who,” “such,” and “wherein.” 1 he, she, it. 1a himself (with emphasis).[\[1\]](#)

This allows for a completely different insight (not focused on merely the grammatical, but the actual application): Remember the Sabbath day, keeping *yourself* holy. Or, Remember the Sabbath day *in order to stay* holy.

Think about it: If we were to build a golden calf and have an orgy of pagan worship during the Sabbath hours, have we made the Sabbath less holy? If we spent the Sabbath hours in total righteous living, would we make the Sabbath more holy? We cannot keep the Sabbath holy, because we didn’t make it holy in the first place, thus we can’t make it unholy — we can only keep ourselves holy. And can a person keep themselves holy only one day in seven?

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27). For what reason? To aide humankind in holiness — in keeping themselves holy!

And what is holiness? Holiness is the state of being holy, which is what? I would like to suggest that being holy is being in harmony with God in all aspects of our being. Thus, being holy is living in harmony with God’s character, protocols, and methods — His design-laws!

And how is the Sabbath related to this?

When was the Sabbath created (remember the Sabbath was made for man)? At the end of creation of planet Earth and this solar system.

What was happening in the rest of the universe during that week? War! What kind of war and over what?

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Rev 12:7-9)

The Greek translated “war” is πόλεμος [polemos /pol-em-os/], from which we get polemic — it is a war of words or ideas.

Since Satan is the father of lies (see Jn 8:44), what has been the focus or target of those lies and where is this war fought?

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2Cor 10:3-5)

The war is over the truth about God, whether we can trust God and whether He is worthy of our love, devotion, and loyalty.

God wants our love, trust, loyalty, and devotion. Can any being get this from another by using threats, coercion, or the infliction of punishment? Of course not. In fact, what happens to love, trust, loyalty, and devotion when one threatens and coerces another is that love and trust are broken and replaced by rebellion.

So, if Satan could get intelligent beings to believe that God is coercive, threatening, and the source of inflicted pain, suffering, torture, and death, then love and trust would break down and rebellion against God would ensue.

How could Satan get intelligent beings to conclude this about God? By alleging God's laws are not the design-protocols the Creator built life to operate upon, but, instead, function no differently than the rules enacted by human beings — imperial laws that require the ruling authority to inflict punishment for disobedience.

Then, how does the Sabbath fit in?

What does it say about God, that in the context of an assault on His right to rule, rather than using His power to force all beings to bow to Him, He, instead, creates a day of freedom to think?

Who was watching as God created planet Earth?

“Where were you
when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you possess understanding!
Who set its measurements—if you know—
or who stretched a measuring line across it?
On what were its bases set,
or who laid its cornerstone—
when the morning stars sang in chorus,
and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4-7)

The heavenly beings were watching as God created Earth while a war over God's right to rule was raging. Why would God create planet Earth at this point in universal history? To demonstrate by actions (give evidence) that Satan's allegations were wrong.

Earth was created as the pinnacle of Godliness — a world of procreative power to operate upon love; a place where angels could look to find answers to the questions raised by Satan:

“We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.” (1Cor 4:9)

Adam and Eve were created in perfect love, to give of themselves in love and create beings in their image, and rule over the planet in other-centered love. In sinless perfection, Adam and Eve would have

had children, not to abuse or enslave them, but to care for and nurture them, thus the way they governed this world would be a microcosm of the universe, revealing how God lovingly rules His entire creation.

And after six days of overwhelming display of creative power, the Godhead says to all the watching beings, “You have heard the allegations against us, you have seen the evidence we have just given, now, Universe, We rest our case! Take 24 hours aside and think for yourselves, come to your own conclusions, and decide who you are going to trust.”

On days one through six of creation week, we learn that God has incredible power, but God doesn’t want His intelligent creatures to be intimidated, to be afraid, or to follow Him because of power. God wants His creatures to love Him, trust Him, and be devoted to Him in loyal admiration. Thus, after six days of creation, God created a day of freedom, a day where God stops using power and steps back, giving His creatures space and time to consider and think. Day seven is the only day that reveals the character of the One who wields the power: God presented evidence (truth), in love, and left His creatures free to decide for themselves. No coercion, no intimidation, no pressure, just freedom!

Then what is the Sabbath commandment about? It is about how one lives their life in harmony with God and His design for life. Do we present truth in love and leave others free, or do we use imperial rules and coerce others with threats of punishment?

All week long we are to **remember** the Sabbath, to keep ourselves holy. We are to be beings who present truth in love, while leaving others free. Only those who practice these principles of God in their lives are true Sabbath-keepers. Those who crucified Christ had the right day of the week, but did not have God’s principles written into their characters. They were not Sabbath-keepers.

With this in mind, we realize that God is Creator and His laws are the protocols upon which all life and reality is built to operate. As the Creator of time, God built into time a day for human health, holiness, growth, and development; a day of evidence to reveal truth about how God governs. Every seven days, every human being passes through this day, this reminder, this piece of evidence, this opportunity for healing, growth, renewal, transformation, contemplation, and freedom from the lies about God.

We can only experience these blessings if we throw off the lies about God and His law and accept His design protocols for life. But, if we insist on viewing the Sabbath as a “test of obedience” — a rule enacted by a powerful potentate who is watching to see if we break his rule — then the Sabbath becomes, not a sign of godliness, but a mark of beastliness.

The historic two days of worship within Christianity — Sabbath and Sunday — stand as two banners, signs, flags, marks, or pennants that represent two divergent systems of governing.

Just as the U.S. flag — the grand old Stars and Stripes — is a symbol or sign of the United States of America, so these two days of worship are signs of two different systems of governing. However, the flag is not the reality for which it stands. The U.S. flag is only a symbol of the USA. A person can wave the flag of America, while being an enemy of the U.S. For example, during WWII, German soldiers donned American uniforms, with the U.S. flag, and infiltrated American lines to sow discord and disrupt the U.S. war effort. Just because someone waves the flag doesn’t mean that they support what the flag actually stands for.

Likewise, with Sabbath and Sunday. These two days are signs of two different systems of governing.

The Sabbath is a day of rest by its creation; it was made by God for this purpose at the end of creation week. The Sabbath is an evidence of design-law — truth, presented in love, while leaving others free — and is a sign of God's method of governing.

Sunday, however, became a day of rest by legislative action, by human authorities making rules. Therefore, Sunday is a mark of imperialism, of law and government that functions like sinful humans — imposed rules that require infliction of punishment for disobedience.

However, these days of worship, with their origins establishing their significance, are just like the U.S. flag — symbols, signs, and marks — but they are not the governments they represent. So, a person could be a Sabbath-keeper, but practice the imposed-law model and teach that Sabbath-breaking requires God to inflict punishment on the violator. That person would be like the German soldiers described above, infiltrating God's church to sow discord and confusion. They would not be on God's team, but actually promoting the methods of the beast. These religious traitors to God's kingdom would be most powerfully exemplified by the Sabbath-keepers who crucified the Lord of the Sabbath.

Conversely, a person who worships on Sunday, but promotes truth in love, while leaving others free, is promoting the principles of the Sabbath and is on God's team.

The real question is: Who do we understand God to be:

- a Creator/Designer, whose laws are the protocols upon which life is built and who created the Sabbath for our spiritual health, or
- an imperial dictator, who makes up rules and then enforces those rules with threats of punishment, just like the church of the Dark Ages did for those who violated her Sunday?

I invite you to reject the imperial-law lie that makes God appear to be an arbitrary dictator and the source of inflicted pain, suffering, and death, and embrace the truth that God is Creator and His laws are the protocols upon which all life is designed to operate. Embrace the seventh-day Sabbath as a gift, designed by God, for all human beings to experience health, peace, joy, rest, healing, and growth, as every day of the week we **remember** the Sabbath, to keep ourselves holy, by practicing the methods of God — truth, presented in love, while leaving others free!

[1] Strong, J. (2001). Enhanced Strong's Lexicon. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.