

# The Sabbath & Church Duties

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | April 8, 2011



How one observes Sabbath has been a concern for faithful believers since the beginning of time. Historically, Jews, desiring to be obedient to God created long lists of rules to govern behavior during the Sabbath hours.

By the time of Christ the Sabbath had been so burdened with rules it was the most restrictive day of the week and rather than rejuvenating the believer was mentally and spiritually exhausting. Jesus demonstrated, by action, the true position of the Sabbath - a day to live for God, rest the mind, fellowship in love and do deeds that are in keeping with God's plan for mankind.

The restrictions of the Sabbath have to do with gaining livelihood, making money for self, promoting one's profession, engaging in self-interest. Activities which are "work" but are other-centered, giving, beneficent are all in keeping with God's character of love and therefore the Sabbath.

One Bible commentator describes this issue nicely:

Jesus stated to them that the **work of relieving the afflicted was in harmony with the Sabbath** law. It was in harmony with the work of God's angels, who are ever descending and ascending between heaven and earth to minister to suffering humanity. Jesus declared, "My

Father worketh hitherto, and I work." All days are God's, in which to carry out His plans for the human race. If the Jews' interpretation of the law was correct, then Jehovah was at fault, whose work has quickened and upheld every living thing since first He laid the foundations of the earth; then He who pronounced His work good, and instituted the Sabbath to commemorate its completion, must put a period to His labor, and stop the never-ending routine of the universe.

Should God forbid the sun to perform its office upon the Sabbath, cut off its genial rays from warming the earth and nourishing vegetation? Must the system of worlds stand still through that holy day? Should He command the brooks to stay from watering the fields and forests, and bid the waves of the sea still their ceaseless ebbing and flowing? Must the wheat and corn stop growing, and the ripening cluster defer its purple bloom? Must the trees and flowers put forth no bud nor blossom on the Sabbath?

In such a case, men would miss the fruits of the earth, and the blessings that make life desirable. Nature must continue her unvarying course. God could not for a moment stay His hand, or man would faint and die. **And man also has a work to perform on this day.** The necessities of life **must** be attended to, the sick **must** be cared for, the wants of the needy **must** be supplied. He will not be held guiltless who neglects to relieve suffering on the Sabbath. God's holy rest day was made for man, and acts of mercy are in perfect harmony with its intent. God does not desire His creatures to suffer an hour's pain that may be relieved upon the Sabbath or any other day.

The demands upon God are even greater upon the Sabbath than upon other days. His people then leave their usual employment, and spend the time in meditation and worship. They ask more favors of Him on the Sabbath than upon other days. They demand His special attention. They crave His choicest blessings. God does not wait for the Sabbath to pass before He grants these requests. Heaven's work never ceases, and **men should never rest from doing good.** The Sabbath is not intended to be a period of useless inactivity. **The law forbids secular labor on the rest day of the Lord; the toil that gains a livelihood must cease; no labor for worldly pleasure or profit is lawful upon that day;** but as God ceased His labor of creating, and rested upon the Sabbath and blessed it, so man is to leave the occupations of his daily life, and **devote those sacred hours to healthful rest, to worship, and to holy deeds.** The work of Christ in healing the sick was in perfect accord with the law. It honored the Sabbath. - Desire of Ages, pp. 206-207

So, the principle of Sabbath keeping is the same as God's entire kingdom - are we operating upon other centered love? Are our activities selfless activities devoted to the good of others? Or are we seeking to promote self? Is counting the tithe or serving on church board a "holy deed"? Or are such activities for self? As to whether one should or should not - "let every person be fully persuaded in his own mind." The real issue is whether one is living in harmony with God's law of love, giving of self to bless and uplift others, rather than continuing a life of self centeredness.