

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

Health and Healing **Lesson 7: “Rest and Restoration”**

“Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). The big question is “rest from what?” And along with that comes: “how do we rest?” In today’s fast paced society most people would also ponder, “why?” Why should I rest when there’s just so much to do and so many things to see and so many people to interact with (and so many different ways to interact). Resting doesn’t enter into the equation.

In the last ten years, from the pens of a wide variety of individuals, discussion regarding a Sabbath rest has been increasingly bandied about as a necessary human social need. Society is suffering from its lack. It has been recognized that in the last one hundred and fifty years Western society has moved from a six-day to a five-day work week. Around the turn of the twentieth century the concept of a weekend of leisure time came into existence, but a short one hundred years later it was devoured by our passion for overachievement in every aspect of our lives. Workaholic parents driven by the desire for status obtained through financial or social position, are raising children who have no concept of the word “rest.” Rest (a ceasing of routine activities) whether from a good night’s sleep or a vacation away from home, leaves us feeling out of control and anxious about what we are missing while we’re disconnected from society. Rushing from activity to activity—soccer, football, music lessons, summer camps, pressure for successful school grades, Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, cell phones, interactive video games, and myriad other social connections—swamps us, consuming any “free time” we might have once had in which to seek the rest Jesus longs to give us. We simply don’t have time any more to “rest.”

Overachievement has created a sick society. The idea of an organized, institutionalized period of nonproductivity is the theme of thoughtful individuals who are concerned about the deterioration of the family unit and the increasingly neurotic condition of society in general. John Paul II wrote in his 1998 apostolic letter titled *Dies Domini*, that “even in our own day work is very oppressive for many people, either because of miserable working conditions and long hours, or because of the persistence in economically more developed societies of too many cases of injustice and exploitation of man by man.” He claims that oppression from excessive work is the reason why the Roman Catholic Church has “through the centuries, made laws concerning Sunday rest.” Placing the emphasis on the basic human need, John Paul further stated, “In our own historical context there remains the obligation to ensure that everyone can enjoy the freedom, rest and relaxation which human dignity requires, together with the associated religious, family, cultural and interpersonal needs which are difficult to meet if there is no guarantee of at least one day of the week on which people can both rest and celebrate” (par. 66).

In a more recent *New York Times* article, author Judith Shulevitz concurred with this notion of a universal need for weekly relief from work. “The Israelite Sabbath institutionalized an astonishing, hitherto undreamed of notion: that every single creature has the right to rest, not just the rich and the privileged. Covered under the Fourth Commandment are women, slaves, strangers and, improbably, animals. ... The Jews were meant to perceive the Sabbath not only as a way to honor God but also as the central vehicle of their liberation theology, a weekly reminder of their escape from their servitude in Egypt.” Shulevitz rightly states that “the story of Sabbath is that of creation: we rest because God rested on the seventh day.” However, her resulting inference seems flawed: “In other words, we rest in order to honor the divine in us, to remind ourselves that there is more to us than just what we do during the week” (“Bring Back the Sabbath,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 2003). What begins as a focus on the Creator God ends up being centered on our puny selves, and God as Creator, Master, and rightful owner of the universe is lost in the transition. Both John Paul and Judith Shulevitz’s magnanimous longing for a relief from the pressure of overachievement could be realized by ceasing from work on any of the seven days of the week.

Is this all that the Sabbath means—social down-time? Is Sabbath-keeping only about a twenty-four hour period observed once a week (whether the seventh day or the first) during which we strive to reduce our obsession with the world? Or is there a greater dimension than this that we should consider?

Jesus not only calls us to find rest “in Him” through faith in His righteousness, but He tells us that He alone is Lord of the Sabbath (the seventh-day, the true “Lord’s day”). He is Lord by virtue of the fact that He is Creator of all things, and sanctifier of the seventh-day as a special time for communion between Himself and His creatures. Communion, i.e. meaningful communication and fellowship between two parties, is a key element of true Sabbath-keeping. Perversion of even this simple concept has been a prime area of attack from Satan. Though we seem to be almost continuously “connected” to the world around us, how often do we converse face-to-face with family and friends—without some electronic go-between like e-mail, cell phones, or text messages? Satan uses every possible means to make good his claim on our time and attention, even using modern “conveniences” as a hook to snag us. Our obsession with and the pervasive convenience of electronic devices prevents us finding rest from the clamors of the world. Constantly “connected” to the material world, we find it difficult to hear the still small voice of God’s Holy Spirit.

Because we don’t allow God to have His rightful place in our lives we do suffer fatigue—mental, physical and spiritual—from constant struggles arising from day-to-day interactivity with the world. Excluding God from His rightful place in our hearts is the root cause of our problem. Ambition and self-absorption rules the world from the lowest strata to the highest pinnacle of achievement. Jesus is calling us from this rat race to rest and freedom in Him.

True freedom of religion is embodied in the seventh-day Sabbath, not only because it

points to God as the world's Creator, but because it symbolizes our inalienable right to freedom of choice endowed upon us by our Creator God. The seventh-day Sabbath is therefore at the very heart of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14. After the time of the apostles, the early church leaders sought to establish the kingdom of God on earth through coercive legislation and cooperation with the powers of the state. Constantine the Great reasoned that Sunday legislation would bring national, international, and religious unity to his empire, ensuring his place as supreme lord (*pontifex maximus*) over his people. Union of church and state makes allegiance to the state as sacred as the allegiance to God. But such autocratic ideas fail to uphold the truth of the seventh-day Sabbath, which is complete surrender and full allegiance to God alone. Appealing to and making use of the coercive power of the state to further the aims of the church results in a politico-ecclesiastical connivance and intrigue that is the very substance of ancient pagan Babylon and her successor, Rome (see Daniel chapters 3 and 6; and Revelation 13).

If Sabbath-keeping as described by John Paul and Judith Shulevitz—"ceasing" from the world of work and self-absorbed material activities—is the primary purpose behind the move to legislate one day in seven as a day of universal rest, then any day of the week would be as reasonable as any other. The first day would have no preeminence over the seventh-day, or vice versa. The crux of the matter of which day is the day of rest hinges on who has the authority over man's mind. God has created all intelligences absolutely free. Freedom of choice is essential to a moral world in which the exercise of this freedom of choice allows the individual, using the faculties and powers given to him by his Creator, freely to decide where his allegiance will reside. Divine government as it relates to both the Governor and the governed, is properly demonstrated when the service, worship and allegiance of the creature is rendered to God entirely through man's own free choice.

Our unwitting slavery to materialism and self-achievement must give way to complete surrender to God's will for our life. But it is a frightful thing to relinquish all control to Someone you don't know and trust. The two institutions given to humanity at creation (marriage and Sabbath) involve both of these concepts—surrender to and unconditional trust in another. God tells us that He is our divine Husband, thus we should freely desire to submit to His will, fully trusting that He has only our best interests foremost in His mind. This is also what true Sabbath-keeping is all about. No other day can substitute for it. Faith in God's power over the world; in His benevolent involvement in our lives; confidence in His claim for control over our minds and bodies results in a willingness to allow Him to engulf us in His arms of love.

Sabbath symbolizes the intelligent choice on our part to give back to our Creator what is rightfully His. Its objective is honor and glory to the One who redeemed us with His blood, who sanctifies us through His Holy Spirit, and recreates in us His righteous character, fitting us for fellowship with heavenly beings.

—Ann Walper