

Worship

The Sabbath and Worship

Lesson #3 for July 16, 2011

Scriptures: Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Isaiah 44:15-20; Romans 6:16-23; Matthew 11:28-30.

1. How central and important is the Sabbath to you and your worship of God? God's day of worship is very central to how we worship Him. Seventh-day Adventists like to talk about the Sabbath when comparing themselves with other denominations. We sometimes feel very smug about the fact that we keep all of the Ten Commandments! But, when talking among ourselves, the discussion is quite different. There are myriads of discussions going on—between parents and children, between pastors and church members, between liberal Adventists and conservative Adventists—about how the Sabbath should be kept. Does God allow for different ways of worshiping on the Sabbath? Did God give us specific instructions? If we should choose a different day, is that a kind of rebellion (sin)?
2. How many young people have left the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of what they perceived as a very legalistic attitude about Sabbath observance? So, what does the Sabbath mean to you? What is your favorite thing about the Sabbath? In your opinion, what is the most undesirable thing about Sabbath observance? How would you like to see the Sabbath observed? How do you think God would like to see the Sabbath observed? In the days of our ancestors when most people lived on farms, the Sabbath must have been a very welcome change from the duties of the rest of the week. In our day, going to church might not be much different from going to the office. But, the change is still real and necessary for our well-being. In a world where so much of what people focus on is entertainment, sometimes, the Sabbath service might seem like just another form of entertainment!
3. Read Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. What do these two passages tell us about Sabbath observance? Why the differences in wording? What happened to the children of Israel in the forty years between those two passages? Does the fourth commandment give us a basis for God's authority to give the other nine?
4. Think of all the events in human history—even in future human experience—that are directly connected with Sabbath observance. Of course, we begin with creation of which the Sabbath is supposed to be an ongoing, weekly reminder. Then, we come to the Exodus which is to remind us that God has freed us from the slavery of sin just as He freed the children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt. Next, we come to Passover weekend when Christ lay dead, resting in Joseph's new tomb as a reminder of the Sabbath rest that He commanded in the beginning. And we are reminded of all that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ should mean to Christians. But, we must not stop there. Isaiah 66:23 tells us to look forward to when the Sabbath will be observed in God's new headquarters on this earth as an ongoing memorial to all that the plan of salvation has cost, and what it means to all of us. Why would God want to change the day of observance of the Sabbath just between the first coming of Christ and His second coming? God has added still more meanings to the Sabbath?
5. Read Revelation 14:6,7. What is the significance of calling the gospel an "everlasting gospel"? Clearly, an everlasting gospel cannot be just about us because we have never been everlasting. As important as our salvation might be, it is not even close to being as

important as the truth about God which *is* everlasting. God has won the great controversy.

6. Thus, the Sabbath is intended to be a memorial—a reminder—in an ongoing exercise regarding creation, sanctification, and redemption. Let us not forget that in the end, there are only two options: 1) Observing the Sabbath—and all that implies—with God in heaven for the rest of eternity, or 2) Going back to ashes or dust. (Malachi 4:3) Does that sound like a threat? Is it any different from what God said in the Garden of Eden?
7. Why does the Sabbath commandment begin with the word *remember*? Is this evidence that God knows how forgetful we tend to be? Is it also a notice to us that the Sabbath began long before there was a Jewish nation? Consider all that God did for the benefit of the children of Israel. He called Abraham out of Ur and led him to Canaan and promised to give that land to him. God led through the drought that Abraham experienced which caused him to go to Egypt. There, Abraham lied to the Egyptians about his half-sister/wife. Because of that, the Egyptians made a law that Egyptians were not to associate with shepherds. (*Patriarchs and Prophets* 130.2) As a result, more than a hundred years later when the descendants of Jacob arrived in Egypt, they had to live in a separate section with clear distinctions between themselves and the Egyptians because they—as shepherds—were regarded as an inferior group. This was God’s marvelous provision to keep them a separate and distinct people. Otherwise, no doubt, they would have faded into Egyptian society. And finally, God led them out of Egypt by means of the plagues, the Passover, and the Exodus, and He established them in Canaan as a new nation at the crossroads of the world where they were expected to tell the gospel to all who came through their area. That should be plenty of evidence for us that God can not only create out of nothing but also He can restore even damaged goods.
8. God has asked us to return to Him one-tenth or a tithe of our income and dedicate one-seventh of our time to worshiping Him. Does this seem like a high price to you?
9. How would you describe the relationship between true Christian worship and Sabbath observance? Does Sabbath observance happen only from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday? Or, is it God’s plan that all week long we are making preparations for the future Sabbath and how we can observe it more fully and completely with Him? Would our children enjoy Sabbath more if we dedicated more time to planning interesting activities for their benefit?
10. Try to imagine yourself in the Garden of Eden on that very first Sabbath. Were Adam and Eve able to see the beings in the rest the universe celebrating with them? Who was visibly present in the garden during that ceremony? Did God Himself lead out? What did the angels and the beings from the other worlds say to Adam and Eve about what had happened during creation week? What did God say to them about Sabbath observance?
11. There is a fantastic section in the book of Isaiah from chapters 40-55 where Isaiah essentially says, “Will the real God please stand up?” Read Isaiah 40:25,26; 45:12,18,21,22; Colossians 1:16,17; Hebrews 1:2. Then compare Isaiah 45:15-20; 46:5-7. The true God is described as having the ability to create out of nothing. More than that, He is able to predict the future far in advance. Finally, He is able to perform miracles in the here and now. The idol-gods of the nations around Israel not only could not do any of those things, they had to be nailed down so they would not fall over! They were made by human hands and propped up! As Isaiah concluded in several locations, “There is no other God” than *Yahweh*.

12. Is it any wonder that Satan has made all-out efforts to try to discredit creation and prophecy? What obvious methods has Satan used to try to do away with God?
13. In your own thinking, what evidence is there for macro-evolution? We are all aware that there is variability within species. To a considerable extent, species are able to adapt to the environment in which they live. But, there always remains a very distinct line of demarcation. There is no such thing as an animal which is halfway between cat and dog, or half fish and half bird! While evolutionists keep touting what they believe is new evidence, even the *National Geographic* has had to admit that one of their recent announcements on that subject turned out to be a hoax. If Christians were half as “evangelistic” about their beliefs as evolutionists are about theirs, we might be far ahead of where we are.
14. The Sabbath is described as a period of rest. Is rest essential for the human organism? There is much evidence that we in the civilized world need more exercise, but we also need more regular, consistent, and in many cases longer periods of rest. Many biological changes take place when we do not get sufficient rest.
15. In the same way, we need more spiritual rest. (Exodus 31:13-17) How would you define *spiritual rest*? Why has the Sabbath been so largely discounted, derided, and ignored? How did Satan pull off that marvelous bait-and-switch with the Sabbath?
16. Read Romans 6:16-23. Have you ever thought of yourself as a slave? What does it mean to be a slave of sin? What does it mean to be set free from the slavery to sin? What does it mean to be a slave of righteousness? Paul repeatedly referred to himself as a slave of Jesus Christ. Paul seemed to talk about setting us free from the legal penalty of sin. But, being free from the slavery of sin must mean more than just release from a legal penalty. Paul seemed to think that he was a slave of righteousness. What does that mean?
17. Societies around the world have regarded time in different ways. In some societies little attention is paid to time, and schedules do not mean much. In other societies it is believed that time is cyclical. Such groups believe that events that have happened sometime in the past will eventually be repeated and then repeated again just as the yearly seasons and the lunar cycle recur. But Christians, in general—and particularly Bible-believing Christians—understand that time is linear. They understand that time is moving from what is past to a definite climax in the future.
18. If we believe that time is linear, then we need to look back to the time when the Sabbath began. There were no Jews present in the Garden of Eden! The Sabbath antedated the foundation of the Jewish nation by thousands of years. No wonder God said, “Remember.”
19. Read Exodus 31:13. The *Good News Bible* says, “Keep the Sabbath, my day of rest, because it is a sign between you and me for all time to come, to show that I, the Lord, have made you my own people.” What is the meaning of this verse? Compare Exodus 19:6 and 1 Peter 2:9. In New Testament times, Jesus and Peter have told us that the sanctification process is to spread to all Christians. Christians are now God’s true people and not just Jews.
20. What is the relationship between *holy* and *sacred/sanctify*? The Hebrew and Greek words being discussed mean in essence that God wants us to be set aside and to be made distinctive as His very own precious possession—His people. To be holy or to be sanctified means to become one of God’s special people. This is much more than just being forgiven. Eventually, it will mean complete freedom from sin. As we read in 2 Corinthians 5:17, we are to be joined to Christ and become new creatures.

21. As we have already noted, the Sabbath appeared almost at the very beginning of human history. It will continue—as far as we can determine from Scripture—forever. What does this tell us about God’s desire for permanent and stable relationships? God is, was, and will always be our Creator, Sanctifier, and Redeemer. Shouldn’t we look forward to a future of Sabbaths that will be marvelous times of celebration? Think about coming together each Sabbath and saying to God, “Let me tell you about all the exciting things I did this week!” And then having Jesus or the Father or even the Holy Spirit say to us, “Here are some other things that you might want to investigate or to explore; and next week tell us what else you have learned.” The Sabbath will be a marvelous time to come together and report what we have been doing, and hearing, and what others have been doing to worship God for eternity.
22. But, while we are still here on this earth, we need the rest, the change in activities, the vertical intimacy with God that is implied by true Sabbath observance. Jesus described that rest at least partially in Matthew 11:28-30. God intends for the Sabbath to be a special opportunity to celebrate our vertical intimacy just as we experience horizontal intimacy in the marriage relationship. In every way—physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually—we need the Sabbath. Each week it is supposed to remind us of what God has done, what He is doing, and what He will do for the rest of eternity on our behalf. Isn’t that sufficient reason to celebrate?
23. Seventh-day Adventist Christians have a religion which is absolutely and unchangeably linked to our belief that God is our Creator, Sanctifier, and Redeemer. It is impossible to be a true Seventh-day Adventist and reject the idea of creation. In fact, if it were possible for the human race to be developed through the processes which are described to us as evolutionary, would there be anything to celebrate? Would you be proud to describe yourself as one who had evolved from slime or ooze and who managed to have survived millions of years of competition until the time when some more powerful creature destroys you? Would that be anything to celebrate? Why would anyone choose not to be a child of our heavenly Father?

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