The Law of the Sabbath

General Statement

Mark E. Peterson

No law in all scripture has been more clearly defined than that of the Sabbath. From the time of Genesis to our own day, there has been no subject spoken of more directly or repeatedly than the Sabbath.

It is one of the laws most dear to the heart of God. Yet it is noted far more in its desecration than in its acceptance and proper observance. . . .

Our observance or nonobservance of the Sabbath is an unerring measure of our attitude toward the Lord personally and toward his suffering in Gethsemane, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead. It is a sign of whether we are Christians in very deed, or whether our conversion is so shallow that commemoration of his atoning sacrifice means little or nothing to us. ("The Sabbath Day," Ensign, May 1975, pp. 47, 49)

First Presidency Statement

[Ezra Taft Benson, Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson]

Since the creation of the earth, the Sabbath day has been established by God for the spiritual well-being of His children. Throughout generations of time, the sacred law of the Sabbath has been upheld by the prophets of God as a hold observance to help sanctify and bring joy to those who would keep the commandments of the Lord. So important is this matter that the observance of the Sabbath was one of the Ten Commandments written by the finger of the Lord on Mount Sinai.

Shortly after the restoration of the gospel, the Lord reaffirmed the importance of Sabbath day observance when He declared to the Prophet Joseph Smith:

"And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day;

"For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy devotions unto the Most High;

"Nevertheless thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days and at all times;
"But remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy
sacraments unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the
Lord.

"And on this day thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with
singleness of heart that thy fasting may be perfect, or, in other words, that thy joy may be
full." (D&C 59:9-13)

We sense that many Latter-day Saints have become lax in their observance of the Sabbath
day. We should refrain from shopping on the Sabbath and participating in other
commercial and sporting activities that now commonly desecrate the Sabbath.

We urge all Latter-day Saints to set this holy day apart from activities of the world and
consecrate themselves by entering into a spirit of worship, thanksgiving, service, and
family-centered activities appropriate to the Sabbath. As Church members endeavor to
make their Sabbath activities compatible with the intent and Spirit of the Lord, their lives
will be filled with joy and peace. (Church News, October 17, 1992, p. 4)

Scriptural Statements

Exodus 20:3-8

3. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
4. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . .
5. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them . . .
7. Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain . . .
8. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

JST Mark 2:26-27

26. Wherefore the Sabbath was given unto man for a day of rest; and also that man
should glorify God, and not that man should not eat;
27. For the Son of man made the Sabbath day, therefore the Son of man is Lord also of
the Sabbath.

D&C 59:9-13

9. And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go
to the house of prayer and offer up thy sacraments upon my holy day;
10. For verily this is a day appointed unto you to rest from your labors, and to pay thy
devotions unto the Most High;
11. Nevertheless thy vows shall be offered up in righteousness on all days and at all times;
12. But remember that on this, the Lord's day, thou shalt offer thine oblations and thy sacraments unto the Most High, confessing thy sins unto thy brethren, and before the Lord.
13. And on this day thou shalt do none other thing, only let thy food be prepared with singleness of heart that thy fasting may be perfect, or, in other words, that thy joy may be full.

The Purpose of the Sabbath

Bruce R. McConkie

The law of the Sabbath is so basic, so fundamental, that the Lord Jehovah named it as number four in the Ten Commandments themselves. The first three commandments call upon men to worship the Lord and reverence his great and holy name. The fourth gives us the Sabbath day as the weekly occasion on which we perfect our worship and put ourselves in tune to the full with Him by whom all things are. It is in no sense an exaggeration nor does it overstate the fact one whit to say that any person who keeps the Sabbath, according to the revealed pattern, will be saved in the celestial kingdom. The Sabbath is a day of worship; the requirement to rest from our labors, to do no servile work therein, is simply an incident to the real purpose of the day. Vital as it is to refrain from toil and to turn away from temporalities, these requirements are for the purpose of putting men in a position to do what should be done on the Sabbath, that is, to worship the Father in the name of the Son, to worship him in Spirit and in truth. True worship includes keeping the commandments, and those who devote their Sabbaths to true and proper worship obtain the encouragement that leads to full obedience. (*The Promised Messiah*, pp. 390-391)

Joseph F. Smith

The Sabbath is a day of rest and of worship, designated and set apart by special commandment of the Lord to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and we should honor and keep it holy. We should also teach our children this principle.—Oct. C. R., 1901, pp. 1, 2. [*Gospel Doctrine*, p.242]

David O. McKay

Is it better to cherish Church ideals on Sunday, or indulge in Sunday sports? This is simply a question of physical pleasure or spiritual development, and in that we should keep in mind the following: First, Sunday is a day of rest, essential to the true development and strength of the body, and that is a principle which we should publish
more generally abroad and practise. A second purpose for keeping holy the Sabbath day is: "... that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world...." (D. & C. 59:9.) That is a glorious phrase.

Third, keeping the Sabbath day holy is a law of God, resounding through the ages from Mount Sinai. You cannot transgress the law of God without circumscribing your spirit.

Finally, our Sabbath, the first day of the week, commemorates the greatest event in all history--Christ's resurrection, and his visit as a resurrected being to his assembled Apostles. [Gospel Ideals, p.397]

Howard W. Hunter

The Sabbath, then, refers to a day of rest from labor . . . . Although the fundamental concept is the cessation from labor, this alone does not exhaust the idea of the Sabbath. It is not to serve solely as a convenience for man by which he might rest from the labors of the days which precede; there is a religious aspect as well. The Lord blessed the Sabbath Day and hallowed it, thus making it a holy day, a day of worship, a day of devotion, a day to contemplate those things that pertain to God and man's relationship to him. (The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter, 113)

Ezra Taft Benson

- The purpose of the Sabbath is for spiritual uplift, for a renewal of our covenants, for worship, for rest, for prayer. It is for the purpose of feeding the spirit, that we may keep ourselves unspotted from the world by obeying God's command. (D&C 59:9.) (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.438)

- The new consolidated meeting schedule is a marvelous step toward achieving our expectations. Think on this! Every Latter-day Saint father gathering his family together on the Sabbath and instructing them in gospel principles, gospel responsibilities, missionary service, and genealogy work. Will this not cause every man, woman, and child to move toward the ideal to speak in the name of the Lord? Will not faith increase in the hearts of many? Will there not be more covenants made with sincerity, and more covenants kept? And will there not come from these faithful homes those who can proclaim the gospel message to others? As the families of the Church follow the counsel of their leaders and instruct their families in the gospel principles and obligations, we will see results far beyond that which we initially contemplated. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.440)

Spencer W. Kimball
• In Hebrew the term Sabbath means "rest." It contemplates quiet tranquillity, peace of mind and spirit. It is a day to get rid of selfish interests and absorbing activities. The Sabbath day is given throughout the generations of man for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between the Lord and his children forever. It is a day in which to worship and to express our gratitude and appreciation to the Lord. It is a day on which to surrender every worldly interest and to praise the Lord humbly, for humility is the beginning of exaltation. It is a day not for affliction and burden but for rest and righteous enjoyment. It is a day not for lavish banqueting, but a day of simple meals and spiritual feasting; not a day of abstinence from food, except fast day, but a day when maid and mistress might be relieved from the preparation. It is a day graciously given us by our Heavenly Father. It is a day when animals may be turned out to graze and rest; when the plow may be stored in the barn and other machinery cooled down; a day when employer and employee, master and servant may be free from plowing, digging, toiling. It is a day when the office may be locked and business postponed, and troubles forgotten; a day when man may be temporarily released from that first injunction, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground." (Genesis 3:19.) It is a day when bodies may rest, minds relax, and spirits grow. It is a day when songs may be sung, prayers offered, sermons preached, and testimonies borne, and when man may climb high, almost annihilating time, space, and distance between himself and his Creator. (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.215)

• The Sabbath is not a day for indolent lounging about the house or puttering around in the garden, but is a day for consistent attendance at meetings for the worship of the Lord, drinking at the fountain of knowledge and instruction, enjoying the family, and finding uplift in music and song.

The Sabbath is a holy day in which to do worthy and holy things. Abstinence from work and recreation is important, but insufficient. The Sabbath calls for constructive thoughts and acts, and if one merely lounges about doing nothing on the Sabbath, he is breaking it. To observe it, one will be on his knees in prayer, preparing lessons, studying the gospel, meditating, visiting the ill and distressed, writing letters to missionaries, taking a nap, reading wholesome material, and attending all the meetings of that day at which he is expected.

One good but mistaken man I know claimed he could get more out of a good book on Sunday than he could get in attending church services, saying that the sermons were hardly up to his standards. But we do not go to Sabbath meetings to be entertained or even solely to be instructed. We go to worship the Lord. It is an individual responsibility, and regardless of what is said from the pulpit, if one wishes to worship the Lord in spirit and in truth, he may do so by attending his meetings, partaking of the sacrament, and contemplating the beauties of the gospel. If the service is a failure to you, you have failed. No one can worship for
you; you must do your own waiting upon the Lord. [ "The Sabbath--A Delight," Ensign, Jan. 1978, 4-5]

Proper and Improper Sabbath Activities

Ezra Taft Benson

- We have requested priesthood leaders to minimize administrative meetings on the Sabbath so that families may engage in worship and family time. Our hope is that you will use this time to attend your meetings, render Christian service, visit family members, hold family home evenings, and study the scriptures. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.440)

- Many--too many--have almost ceased to observe the Sabbath. Not only is it a workday now, but it is supremely a day of amusement and recreation: golf, skiing, skating, hunting, fishing, picnicking, racing, movies, theaters, ball playing, dancing, and other forms of fun-making--all are coming largely to be the rule among too many so-called Christians. Some churches are said to encourage all these, if properly conducted. But God's law says keep the Sabbath day holy. "Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work" (Exodus 20:9). (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.438)

- What fits the purpose of the Sabbath? Here are a few suggestions: Activities that contribute to greater spirituality; essential Church meetings in the house of prayer; acquisition of spiritual knowledge--reading the scriptures, Church history and biographies, and the inspired words of the Brethren; resting physically, getting acquainted with the family, relating scriptural stories to children, bearing testimonies, building family unity; visiting the sick and aged shut-ins; singing the songs of Zion and listening to inspired music; paying devotions to the Most High--personal and family prayer; fasting, administrations, father's blessings; preparing food with singleness of heart--simple meals prepared largely on Saturday. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.439)

- I don't believe that it is possible to keep our spirituality on a high plane by spending our Sabbaths on the beach, on the golf course, in the mountains, or in our own homes reading newspapers and looking at television. When the Lord said, "And that thou mayest more fully keep thyself unspotted from the world, thou shalt go to the house of prayer" (D&C 59:9), that is exactly what He meant. We must have spiritual food.
Of course you can live a pretty good life out on the golf course on Sunday. But you don't build your spirituality. Probably you could worship the Lord out there, but the fact is you don't do it as you don't worship Him down on the beach. But if you go to the house of the Lord you will worship Him. If you attend to your prayers in your home with your family you will worship Him. And your spirituality will be raised. The spiritual food which your body requires will be provided and you are much more apt to have this joy. (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.439)

Spencer W. Kimball

- We encourage a thoughtful and prayerful review of the suggestions the Brethren have felt to approve for your consideration in planning Sabbath, home evening, and other weekly activities in our homes: "As we plan our Sunday activities, we may want to set aside time for our family to be together, for personal study and meditation, and for service to others. We might want to read the scriptures, conference reports, and Church publications; study the lives and teachings of the prophets; prepare Church lessons and other Church assignments; write in journals; pray and meditate; write to or visit relatives and friends; write to missionaries; enjoy uplifting music; have family gospel instruction; hold family council meetings; build husband--wife relationships; read with a child; do genealogical research, including the four-generation program and family or personal histories; sing Church hymns; read uplifting literature; develop our appreciation for the cultural arts; plan family home evening study and activities; plan other family activities; friendship nonmembers; fellowship neighbors; visit the sick, the aged, and the lonely; hold interviews with family members…." (The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, p.217)

- The Sabbath is a day on which to take inventory--to analyze our weaknesses, to confess our sins to our associates and our Lord. It is a day on which to fast in "sackcloth and ashes." It is a day on which to read good books, a day to contemplate and ponder, a day to study lessons for priesthood and auxiliary organizations, a day to study the scriptures and to prepare sermons, a day to nap and rest and relax, a day to visit the sick, a day to preach the gospel, a day to proselyte, a day to visit quietly with the family and get acquainted with our children, a day for proper courting, a day to do good, a day to drink at the fountain of knowledge and of instruction, a day to seek forgiveness of our sins, a day for the enrichment of our spirit and our soul, a day to restore us to our spiritual stature, a day to partake of the emblems of his sacrifice and atonement, a day to contemplate the glories of the gospel and of the eternal realms, a day to climb high on the upward path toward our Heavenly Father.
The question may be asked: Can one observe the Sabbath without attending his meetings and doing full service in his spiritual responsibilities? The sick and the afflicted might have excuse, but the well and firm people should fill the day with constructive spiritual service. It is not enough to do nothing. One is not justified in substituting home reading for sacrament meetings.

The Savior said that the Sabbath was for man and not man for the Sabbath. The Sabbath is for man to obey and in which to find profit but not to break or desecrate. The Savior repeatedly insists upon the hallowing of the Sabbath day. He recognized the fact that livestock must be loosed from the stall and taken to water and fed and that other chores must be done. He recognized also that the ox might get into the mire or the ass fall into the pit; but neither in the letter nor in the spirit did he ever approve the use of the Sabbath for ordinary and regular work or for amusements and play. He healed the sick on the Sabbath, preached in the synagogues on this day, but he gave the Sabbath not for amusement and labor but for rest to the mind and body, change and relaxation from heavy service, and leisure for works of mercy. The observance of the Sabbath is a part of the new covenant. (*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, p.216)