

# Ezekiel 44:17-27—What Does *Real* Holiness Look Like?

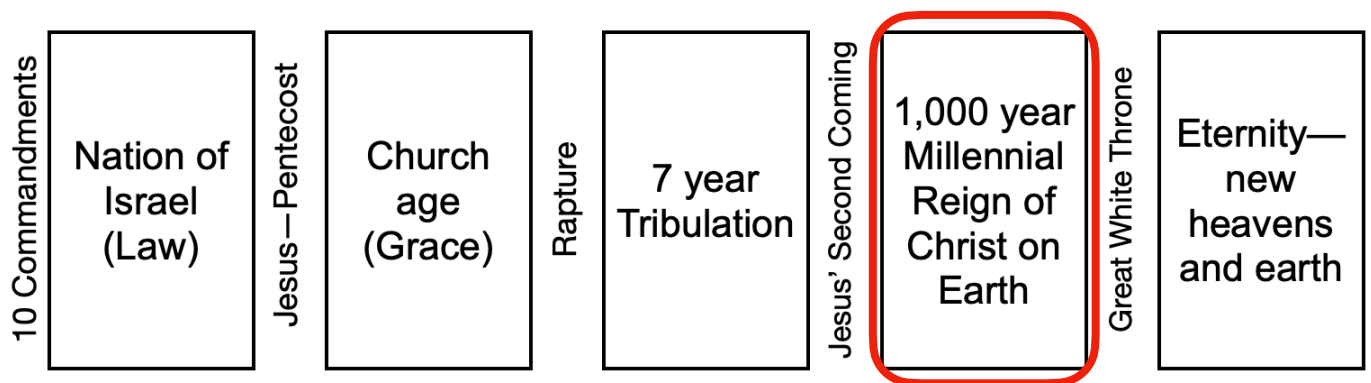
## Memory Verse

Ezekiel 36:26-27 NKJV

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

## Introduction

Ezekiel chapters 40-48 describe places, buildings, land allocations, and worship that are a part of Jesus' Millennial Kingdom, when He comes back to earth from heaven and He reigns for a thousand years on a beautifully renovated earth. The chart below shows when this fits in God's plan of the ages (red outline). The vertical writing represents the events that mark the transition from one time period (or dispensation) to the next.



## Outline of Ezekiel 40-48

Chapter 40—The measurement of the courts of the temple

Chapter 41—The measurements of the temple

Chapter 42—The outer court being described

Chapter 43—The glory of God returns to the temple and the altar described.

Chapter 44—Only the sons of Zadok will be allowed to go into the inner court; the other priests were not faithful.

Chapter 45—Describes how the land around the temple/city is divided up, and that the Passover will be one of the feasts observed each year.

Chapter 46—Describes the sacrificial offerings that will be made, and how the temple will be closed throughout the week and only open on the sabbath.

Chapter 47—Describes the river of living water that flows from the temple, and the boundaries of the Land of Israel.

Chapter 48—Describes the divisions of the lands given to each of the 12 tribes of Israel, and the gates of the city of Jerusalem.

## Revision

So far we have seen in Ezekiel chapters 40-44:16:

- The angel give the measurements and pattern for the Millennial Temple to Ezekiel (40-42)
- God (Jesus) comes to take His rightful place on the throne which is inside the temple, which He calls "My Throne". The throne represents authority over all creation. (43:1-12)

- The altar for burnt offerings and the instructions for its consecration including animal sacrifices (43:13-27)
- The shut eastern gate and the prince. The outer eastern gate of the temple complex will be shut forever because Jesus went in there, *and He will never leave—a picture of our eternal security*. The prince (very likely king David) will have access to the chamber of the gate where he will eat before the LORD. (44:1-3)
- Only the family of priests who had been faithful in Ezekiel's day, the sons of Zadok (whose name means righteous), would be allowed to serve in the temple itself. They would enjoy the glorious, delightful, heavenly, and extraordinary privilege of ministering and fellowshiping in the direct presence of the LORD Jesus in the temple itself. The other priests who had followed the rest of the nation into idolatry in Ezekiel's day would be limited to serving the people, as they loved to do as they offered sacrifices to the idols on behalf of the people. Each of us must choose—*will I be a man pleaser or a God pleaser—will I be motivated by what pleases God, or by what pleases man*. (44:4-16)

### **What God required of the priests so that they would remain holy (44:17-27)**

This week, we see that the priests were called to holy living in several different areas. "The Lord will also be particular about the conduct of the priests (44:17–31). He tells them what to wear (vv. 17–19), how to groom themselves (v. 20), not to drink wine while ministering (v. 21), who not to marry (v. 22), and at all times to show and teach the difference between clean and unclean (v. 23), even if a relative dies (vv. 25–27). They will act as judges and see to it that the law was honoured and obeyed (v. 24)." (Wiersbe)

There continues to be many spiritual applications for these physical or external laws. The theme of being a man pleaser God pleaser is further developed in these next verses. Before we start in Ezekiel, let's prepare our hearts to receive the message God has for us by reading two verses from Hebrews which we will come back to at the end.

Hebrews 4:12-13 NLT

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. <sup>13</sup> Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

**Ezekiel 44:17-18 NKJV—No sweat, the clothing of the priests**

**And it shall be, whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments; no wool shall come upon them while they minister within the gates of the inner court or within the house. <sup>18</sup> They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat.**

v 17-18 **Whenever they enter the gates of the inner court, that they shall put on linen garments ... no wool shall come upon them... they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat:** Practically speaking this is common sense—dress in thin, light, and cool clothing so you don't become drenched with sweat as you work. But what is the spiritual application of this? We'll come back to this at the end.

"The linen not only depicted purity by its whiteness, but its coolness kept the priests from perspiring and thereby becoming unclean." (Alexander)

**Ezekiel 44:19 NKJV—Be real, admit your faults, and don't play the hypocrite**

**When they go out to the outer court, to the outer court to the people, they shall take off their garments in which they have ministered, leave them in the holy chambers, and put on other garments; and in their holy garments they shall not sanctify the people.**

v 19 **When they go out to ... the outer court to the people, they shall take off their garments in which they have ministered, leave them in the holy chambers, and put on other garments; and in their holy garments they shall not sanctify the people:** When the sons of Zadok, the priestly family chosen to minister to the LORD in the inner court and the temple itself, were finished serving and fellowshiping with God, they were to remove their priestly garments and put “everyday” clothes on. Why? Why this rule to not be seen in their white priestly garments by the rest of the people?

**The literal or primary meaning:** There are two related principles in the Old Testament regarding holy things. Firstly, those who are holy must not touch anything unclean (including sweat, being a result of the curse). Secondly, those who were not holy were not allowed to touch what is holy. This is the separation of what is clean from what is unclean, the holy from the unholy (see Exodus 30:29, Leviticus 6:18 and 22:4-9).

Therefore, the priests were not allowed to touch sweat or be sweaty as it would make them ceremonially unclean. Also, the common people were not allowed to touch what is holy (the priestly garments will be considered holy during the Millennium). This continues the major theme of holiness and the separation of the clean from unclean or the holy from the common; **“This is the law of the temple: The whole area surrounding the mountaintop is most holy. Behold, this is the law of the temple.”** (Ezekiel 43:12 NKJV)

### **Application: Avoiding pride**

Pride causes me to want to appear more spiritual or holy than I really am. Consider that everything pride touches becomes “unclean” or unacceptable to God. This brings us back to the idea of being a “God pleaser” or a “man pleaser”. True holiness or righteousness must begin on the inside, and only happens when I humble myself and surrender my will to God, laying down my life as a living sacrifice on God’s altar (Romans 12:1)—I do this by praying as Jesus did, “not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42 NKJV). Remember the Bible’s definition of *worship; willing obedience and submission motivated by love*—this is what makes me a God pleaser.

Having only external righteousness is the perfect description of the hardhearted and man-pleasing pharisee; whom Jesus described as being *“like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. 28 Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.”* (Matthew 23:27-28)

We can think of the “hidden” white linen priestly garments as speaking of our personal holiness or righteousness before God: Who am I when nobody else can see me, when I am alone? Do I decide to put on the white priestly garments of inner holiness and submission to God and spend time in the inner court ministering to and in fellowship with the LORD? Or, do I seek to please my flesh, putting on the dirty garments of my sinful nature? Who I am when no-one else is looking is the real me, not what others think of me—the me that people see on Sundays and other public activities. **Remember that without these only-seen-by-God white linen garments, this inner holiness, my life fully submitted to God, I cannot approach God to enjoy fellowship with God.**

Jon Courson gives a good application of when our holiness is external and not internal: “Keep in mind that all these regulations for the millennial priests have application to us for Peter tells us we are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). When the priests were going out among the people, they were to take off their holy garments and not wear them among the people. This speaks of humility. Somehow there is perversion in our personality that wants people to think we’re more spiritual than we really are. So we’ll wear our holy garments and say, “As I was praying for you today at three in the morning...” to let people know how spiritual we are. The injunction here is important. Don’t parade around in your holy garments, trying to impress people with where you’ve been.”

Jesus gave the same message but in a different context. Although Jesus is talking specifically about giving here, we can easily apply this anything we do to try and impress others—serving, praying, Bible reading, being a good parent or worker... the list goes on.

Matthew 6:1-4 NLT

“Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. <sup>2</sup> When you give to someone in need, don’t do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. <sup>3</sup> But when you give to someone in need, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. <sup>4</sup> Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Jon Courson explains this passage well: “In the area of praying, giving, and fasting, Jesus will talk about the *hupokrites*, or hypocrites. *Hupokrites* is a Greek word that means “mask-wearer.” Hupokrites were actors in the Greek theatre who wore masks, very exaggerated in form, with huge smiles and frowns so that even people in the back row could see what kind of emotion was being portrayed. We get the word two-faced from this same idea.

Jesus said, “Don’t be hypocritical in your giving.” How did the hypocrites give? Originally, there was an area at the side of the temple courtyard called the Chamber of the Secret. People would go there and drop gifts designated for the poor in a large chest called the Trumpet. Later, the poor would come to the Chamber of the Secret and receive gifts from the Trumpet. It was all done very discreetly, with humility and honesty. But as the years went on, the Pharisees decided it wasn’t practical to go all the way to the temple to give alms to the poor. So instead, they tied a small brass or silver trumpet to their belts. Then, whenever they wanted to give to the poor, they stood on a street corner and blew their trumpets. Upon hearing this, the poor people in the area would gather around the generous Pharisee as he distributed his alms with great flourish, while everyone around said, “My! Look how righteous he is!”

Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites because they gave not out of concern for the poor, but that they might be seen by men.”

Wiersbe says concerning Matthew 6:1-4: “Jesus also warned about the danger of hypocrisy (Matt. 6:2, 5, 16), the sin of using religion to cover up sin. A hypocrite is not a person who falls short of his high ideals, or who occasionally sins, because all of us experience these failures. A hypocrite deliberately uses religion to cover up his sins and promote his own gains. The Greek word translated hypocrite originally meant “an actor who wears a mask.”

The righteousness of the Pharisees was insincere and dishonest. They practiced their religion for the applause of men, not for the reward of God. **But true righteousness must come from within. We should test ourselves to see whether we are sincere and honest in our Christian commitment.**”

We can take what Jesus said about giving gifts and apply it to how we like to be seen by others. Often we like to be seen as more righteous than we really are. My human nature wants me to hide or minimise my sins and failures, while at the same time emphasising my good works or outward holiness. Thus, I develop amongst my circle of friends a reputation that I must work so hard to maintain; how much I read the Bible, how much time I spend praying or witnessing or fasting etc—I blow my trumpet and bring attention to myself (ever so subtly of course—just a mention or an indirect reference).

**Summary:** Playing the hypocrite and maintaining a false reputation is hard and sweaty work, and will keep the believer out of fellowship with God. Why? Because it necessarily means the believer must hide some or all of their sins from those around them in order to maintain the outward illusion of a deep walk with God. As always, pride is the root cause of this grievous sin, which causes our hearts to grow hard, both towards God and others.

Why does hypocrisy keep the believer out of fellowship with God? Because a hidden sin is an unconfessed sin. Satan knows that if he can shame us into disobeying the command, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16 NKJV), then we will remain under the “snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will” (2 Timothy 2:26 NKJV).

Thus, playing the hypocrite is hard and sweaty work because maintaining the illusion of a holy life by outward observances is all done in the strength of the flesh (sinful nature). This satanic condemnation is why so many believers continue or fall back into habitual sin. They think, what would people think of me if they knew that I was doing this thing again—I can’t let them know, it would damage my now fake reputation of being mature and spiritual! Thus they don’t get help and so continue in the sin.

***Why pretend to be holy when I really can be holy (empowered by the Holy Spirit—see Romans 8:5-6).***

***Why pretend to be in fellowship with God when I truly can be (see Luke 18:9-14). I just need to be real with God and others (see James 5:16). “Fake it till you make it” is a lie from the pit of hell.***

Consider Jesus’s invitation: “Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you. **Let me teach you, because I am humble** and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30 NLT)

What is Jesus going to teach us? To be humble, to be like Himself.

**Ezekiel 44:20-22 NKJV—*Holy behaviour of the priests: appearance, alcohol, and marriage***

**“They shall neither shave their heads, nor let their hair grow long, but they shall keep their hair well trimmed. <sup>21</sup> No priest shall drink wine when he enters the inner court. <sup>22</sup> They shall not take as wife a widow or a divorced woman, but take virgins of the descendants of the house of Israel, or widows of priests.**

v 20 **They shall keep their hair well trimmed:** This means that they were not to shave their hair, nor grow it long, but instead keep it neat and tidy. Our outward appearance does matter—first impressions do count.

v 21 **No priest shall drink wine:** Alcohol (or any other drug) and holiness don't mix. We need our full faculties if we are going to be able to offer intelligent worship to God.

v 22 **They shall not take as wife a widow or divorced woman:** "The sons of Zadok in the days of Ezekiel's temple were also to observe the marriage regulations relevant to the priests of Israel." (David Guzik)

**Ezekiel 44:23-24 NKJV—Walking the talk**

**"And they shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. <sup>24</sup> In controversy they shall stand as judges, and judge it according to My judgments. They shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed meetings, and they shall hallow My Sabbaths.**

v 23-24 **They shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the unholy ... they shall keep My laws and My statutes:** It's vital that pastors teach their congregations and parents teach their children the difference between right and wrong, holy and unholy. It's also just as vital that we walk the talk. I remember that my dad once said to me, "do what I say, not what I do." I lost respect for him instantly. The pastor or parent who doesn't lead by example cannot expect their congregation or family to experience a close walk with God *as we can't lead someone where we haven't been*. Consistency is the key—if you say something, then do it, otherwise it's best not to say anything at all and avoid being a hypocrite. We need to be like Paul when he said, "*Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ*" (1 Corinthians 11:1 NKJV).

v 24 **In controversy they shall stand as judges:** The Levites were given the role of being judges over the people, meaning that they had the responsibility to resolve disputes and settle legal matters. They were given this responsibility because they had a good working knowledge of the word of God.

In the same way, we as the Church are priests and are instructed to judge among ourselves.

1 Corinthians 6:1-6 NLT

When one of you has a dispute with another believer, how dare you file a lawsuit and ask a secular court to decide the matter instead of taking it to other believers! <sup>2</sup> Don't you realize that someday we believers will judge the world? And since you are going to judge the world, can't you decide even these little things among yourselves? <sup>3</sup> Don't you realize that we will judge angels? So you should surely be able to resolve ordinary disputes in this life. <sup>4</sup> If you have legal disputes about such matters, why go to outside judges who are not respected by the church? <sup>5</sup> I am saying this to shame you. Isn't there anyone in all the church who is wise enough to decide these issues? <sup>6</sup> But instead, one believer sues another—right in front of unbelievers!

**Ezekiel 44:25-27 NKJV—Remaining pure**

**"They shall not defile themselves by coming near a dead person. Only for father or mother, for son or daughter, for brother or unmarried sister may they defile themselves. <sup>26</sup> After he is cleansed, they shall count seven days for him. <sup>27</sup> And on the day that he goes to the sanctuary to minister in the sanctuary, he must offer his sin offering in the inner court," says the Lord God.**

v 25 **They shall not defile themselves by coming near a dead person:** “As was true of the priests commanded by Moses, so it was to be of the priests in the time of Ezekiel’s temple. They were to avoid dead bodies and carcasses. Theirs was to be a ministry of *life*, not death.” (David Guzik)

“There would be individuals entering the Millennium with natural bodies from the tribulation period. These, of course, would ultimately die physically, though physical life would be much longer during the Millennium (cf. Isaiah 65:20).” (Alexander)

“Since death is viewed in Scripture as Levitically defiling, bringing to remembrance most forcefully the sin of Adam which introduced death into the human family, priests will have to be careful in their contact with the dead.” (Feinberg)

v 27 **He must offer his sin offering:** The priests were allowed to come near or have contact with a dead body only if they were a close relative. But after being near or touching the dead body, he must wait seven days and then offer the prescribed sacrifice before resuming his priestly duties.

## **Application: Keeping cool—walking in the Spirit**

**Ezekiel 44:18 NKJV**

**They shall have linen turbans on their heads and linen trousers on their bodies; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat.**

### **Sweat**

Sweat represents human effort; keeping cool represents walking by the power of the Spirit. Trying hard to be good enough, to try to achieve or maintain our own righteousness is hard work, it makes us sweat. This is a result of the curse, shown in a practical way by the way man now has to grow food in a post curse world.

Genesis 3:19 NKJV

In the **sweat** of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”

Before the curse, work and food production was easy. It was no sweat, literally. Yes, Adam and Eve would have been kept busy as they exercised their dominion over all creation and gathered food for themselves from the garden of Eden, but it was easy work. Imagine farming today with great soil and no weeds, plant diseases, or insect pests, and always the perfect amount of water—it’s almost unbelievable. Farmers would be bored as all they would have to do is sow, fertilise and harvest, with a guaranteed bumper crop every year.

You see, when we accept God’s provision for us life is easy, but when we choose to reject God provision and provide for ourselves, life becomes much harder. We have seen this illustrated in a practical way regarding growing food, but it is also true in a spiritual sense, especially regarding our righteousness.

What does sweat look like in the believer? Unbelief or a lack of faith or trust in God can and will cause: relapses into addiction and habitual sin, anxiety, depression, worry, bitterness due to unforgiveness, lack of joy, a prideful, controlling and critical spirit, spiritual exhaustion, anger, drunkenness, lack of self-control, selfishness, envy, jealousy, rage, sexual immorality, a desire for things of the world.

## The Sabbath rest

The idea of rest is very important in Scripture. It started in Genesis when God rested (ceased His work of creating) on the seventh day.

Genesis 2:1-3 NKJV

Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. <sup>2</sup> And on the seventh day **God ended His work** which He had done, **and He rested** on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. <sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

This verse is important as it shows that the Sabbath rest is more than just doing nothing, but rather the cessation of what I was doing in my own strength.

## The Sabbath was given to Israel specifically

The nation of Israel was then given the command to rest (cease from working) on the seventh day (Saturday). The keeping of the Sabbath was a part of the nation of Israel's ceremonial law, its main purpose being to make Israel different from the rest of the nations.

Exodus 31:15-17 NKJV

Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. <sup>16</sup> **Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant.** <sup>17</sup> **It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever;** for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.' ”

Ezekiel 20:12 NLT

**And I gave [Israel] my Sabbath days of rest as a sign between them and Me.** It was to remind them that I am the Lord, who had set them apart to be holy.

Interestingly, God's perpetual or ongoing covenant with the physical nation of Israel was for them to keep the Sabbath. This is why it seems that the whole world will be keeping the Sabbath during the Millennial reign of Christ on earth; because Christ will be ruling the world through the nation of Israel—righteousness will be enforced.

Notes:

\* Remember that the 10 commandments were given to Israel, God's chosen nation. God says numerous times in the Old Testament that the Sabbath was only for Israel to keep, the purpose being that it would sanctify or set them apart from the other nations—just like the Church is supposed to be different from the world.

\* Look for yourselves and you will find that nowhere in the New Testament is the church commanded to keep the Sabbath (the church met on the first day of the week (Sunday).

\* The rest of the 10 commandments are moral laws, and apply to all people. However, it must be stated that there is a practical or health benefit in resting one day in seven, it is good for us emotionally, physically, and spiritually—it just doesn't have to be on a Saturday.

\* While Christians aren't obligated to keep or observe the weekly Saturday Sabbath feast, they are strongly encouraged to cease from their own works and instead trust in God's strength and power—more on this below.



## **Shadow vs reality (the symbol vs it's spiritual reality or ultimate fulfilment)**

God gave Israel many laws to keep, and they are often helpful in helping us to understand spiritual things. For example, the Passover helps us to see how God's judgement "passes over" us when our sins have been washed clean by the blood of Jesus (see Revelation 1:5), through repentance and faith (see Mark 1:15). It's important that we understand the difference between shadows (the physical observance of a feast day) and the reality (the spiritual application or ultimate fulfilment).

Colossians 2:16-17 NLT

So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. <sup>17</sup> **For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.**

Keeping or observing the Passover never saved anyone because it was only a picture or shadow of the real substitutionary sacrifice—Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In the same way, keeping or observing the Sabbath every week will not cause you to enter into God's rest.

## **What does the Bible say the spiritual reality of the Sabbath rest is?**

Consider Jesus's invitation to come to Him and what we will receive if we do:

Matthew 11:28-30 NLT

"Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, **and I will give you rest**.<sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, **and you will find rest for your souls**.<sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 AMP

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy-laden and overburdened, and **I will cause you to rest. [I will ease and relieve and refresh your souls.]**

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am gentle (meek) and humble (lowly) in heart, **and you will find rest (relief and ease and refreshment and recreation and blessed quiet) for your souls.** [Jeremiah 6:16]

30 For My yoke is wholesome (useful, good—not harsh, hard, sharp, or pressing, but comfortable, gracious, and pleasant), and My burden is light and easy to be borne.

Hebrews 4:10 NLT

**For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labours,** just as God did after creating the world.

Hebrews 4:10 AMP

**For he who has once entered [God's] rest also has ceased from [the weariness and pain] of human labours,** just as God rested from those labours peculiarly His own. [Genesis 2:2]

God's rest is *ceasing from the weariness and pain of our human labours*. You might ask, what do you mean? Well let me ask you this question. What happens when you try to keep God's moral law, in thought, word, and deed, in your own strength? *It's really hard and we will always eventually fail. We will try and try but we will always fail again and*

again. What we need to do is understand that we need to rely on and utilise the power of the Holy Spirit living in us if we are going to have any chance of living a godly life. Only then will we experience God's commands as God's promises. Always remember that the difficulty of a task is measured by the strength, power and ability of the agent doing the work—if God is doing the work, then there is no difficult task, because nothing is difficult for God. Consider the following verses.

Romans 8:5-6 NLT

Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. **But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.**

Philippians 2:12-13 NLT

Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. <sup>13</sup> **For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him.**

Ephesians 1:19-20 NLT

**I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him.** This is the same mighty power <sup>20</sup> that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honour at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.

Galatians 2:20 NLT

My old self has been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.** So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

2 Peter 1:3-5a

**By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life.** ... These are the promises that enable you to **share His divine nature** and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

<sup>5</sup> In view of all this, **make every effort to respond to God's promises.**

**An example of what happens when a believer surrenders to God's will—Corrie Ten Boom when she meets and forgives a guard from the prison camp**

*After the war, she came to Germany several times and took part in the ministry, the main purpose of which was to help the Germans, who had to endure the horrors of the Nazi regime. Corrie spent the rest of her life preaching about the healing power of God's forgiveness, about His presence and comfort even in the most monstrous circumstances. Her faith and moral principles were tested. This happened in 1947, in Munich, in one of the churches. She came to a conquered Germany with the Good News about Christ and His forgiveness...*

**Conquer yourself**

*Many people in the church, hearing that God, forgiving our sins, does not remember them anymore, silently got up, took their coats and silently left... The ruthless war left too many scars and pain in their hearts. After the service, Corrie was approached by a bald man in a gray overcoat and a brown hat in his hand. He smiled and bowed politely. Corrie looked at him attentively, and a blue uniform and a cap with a cockade flashed in front of her eyes, and on it was a skull and two crossed bones. She immediately recognized him as a former overseer, one of the most cruel punishers and escorts in the*

Ravensbrück concentration camp, an SS officer. She remembered the shame with which she, her poor sister Betsy and other women walked naked in front of the guards, and in front of this man. Corrie writes of a deep inner struggle: “Here he stood against me with an outstretched hand, and I heard his voice: “Froilian, how nice it was to hear that God casts all our sins into the depths of the sea, and remembers them no more.”

He was talking, and I, who had just spoken so confidently about forgiveness, stood and rummaged in my bag in embarrassment, unable to reach out my hand to him.

“You mentioned Ravensbrück in your speech,” he continued, “and I was a warden there. But since then I have become a Christian and I know that God has forgiven me for all the cruelties that I have committed. And yet I would like to hear a word of forgiveness from your lips, Fraulein. **Can you forgive me?**”

**Her sister’s slow, horrific death resurfaced in Corrie’s memory...**

**The man stood with outstretched hand, hoping for forgiveness. It only lasted a few seconds, but to Corrie they seemed like an eternity. She continues, “Jesus, help me,” I prayed to myself, “I can reach out to him, and that’s all I can do on my own, but You give me the right feeling.” Corrie held out her hand to him – the former prisoner – the former camp guard. “I forgive you, brother... with all my heart.” She later wrote: “I have never felt God’s love so keenly as I did in that moment. But even then I understood that it was not my love, but God’s. I tried to love, but I didn’t have the strength to do so. But here the power of the Holy Spirit was at work, and His love ... “After that, she had every right to say:” Forgiveness is a volitional decision, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart” and again: “Memory is the key not to the past, but to the future.” (Reference: [churchcity.ee](http://churchcity.ee))**

## **The big question**

Why is it so hard for us as believers to submit to God, to simply stop trying to do things on our own strength and instead just “**respond to God’s promises**” of help and power? Pride. It’s a difficult pill to swallow that the old me is not a good person, that in my sinful nature dwells nothing good (see Romans 7:18), that it don’t even have the desire to do the right thing, and therefore I am completely unable to obey God as He has called me to. This what it means to surrender my will to God’s—I must stop relying on myself—and to do that I must accept the reality that my sinful nature is morally bankrupt.

## **How do I enter God’s Sabbath rest and what will stop me?**

To answer this question, we need to go to the book of Hebrews where this question is answered. The writer of the book of Hebrews quotes Psalm 95:7-11 and uses it to show us the reality or fulfilment of the shadow (physical observance) of the Sabbath. My comments are in italics. Keep in mind that the main point of this section of Scripture is to explain what it means to “enter into God’s [Sabbath] rest”.

Hebrews 3:7-4:13 NLT

<sup>7</sup> That is why the Holy Spirit says, ...

*Notice here that the writer of the book of Hebrews says that the Holy Spirit is the author of the Psalm 95:7-11. This is true for the whole Bible. Therefore, if you want to hear God talking to you, read the Bible.*

“Today when you hear His voice, <sup>8</sup> don’t harden your hearts ...

*Right away we see that the reality of the Sabbath is not about rule keeping, about ceasing from physical work on Saturdays, but rather about having a soft heart that responds to and obeys the Holy Spirit when He communicates to us.*

...as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested Me in the wilderness. <sup>9</sup> There your ancestors tested and tried My patience, even though they saw My miracles for forty years. <sup>10</sup> So I was angry with them, and I said, 'Their hearts always turn away from Me. They refuse to do what I tell them.' <sup>11</sup> So in My anger I took an oath: 'They will never enter My [place of] rest.' " [Psalm 95:7-11]

*Here we see that the Israelites didn't enter God's rest because they hardened their hearts by choosing to continuously rebel against God, even when God gave them many evidences of His love, provision, and power. This shows that we can be the people of God, yet still fail to enjoy all that God wants to give us; all because our hearts are hard and proud—we choose to love our sin and independence more than God.*

*Another important point here is that the nation of Israel was keeping or observing the Sabbath shadow the whole time that they were in the wilderness—every Saturday they would cease from their physical labour. When one man collected sticks on the Sabbath he was put to death according to the commandment (see Numbers 15:32-36). This proves conclusively that it's very possible to be observing the outward ritual or shadow, but miss the spiritual reality. This is the danger of legalism.*

*Again, you can keep the Sabbath every week without fail, but if your heart is hard, then like the nation of Israel you've missed the reality—it's like a man who is talking to and dancing with his wife's shadow; she wonders why he won't talk and dance with her. This is also what it's like when people focus on rules instead of relationship; Christ wonders why we won't walk and talk with Him.*

*For us today, we may not be keeping the physical Sabbath shadow, but our prayer, fellowship, and Bible reading can turn into loveless obligation—we too can miss the reality of entering God's Sabbath rest and instead just go through the motions.*

<sup>12</sup> Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> You must warn each other every day, while it is still "today," so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. <sup>14</sup> For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. <sup>15</sup> Remember what it says:

"Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled."

*Now we are starting to understand what it means by entering into God's rest (the reality or fulfilment of the Sabbath). If having a hard and proud heart means that we fail to enter into the reality of God's Sabbath rest, then having a soft and humble heart must mean that we have entered into God's Sabbath rest—it's that simple and easy.*

*Also notice here that there is a reward for faithfully trusting God and choosing to humble ourselves before God—we will share in all that belongs to Christ.*

<sup>16</sup> And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard his voice? Wasn't it the people Moses led out of Egypt? <sup>17</sup> And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn't

it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? <sup>18</sup> And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? Wasn't it the people who disobeyed him? <sup>19</sup> So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest.

*The picture is getting clearer and clearer. Unbelief, hard-heartedness, a rebellious nature will keep us from entering the reality or final fulfilment of God's Sabbath rest.*

4:1 God's promise of entering his rest still stands, so we ought to tremble with fear that some of you might fail to experience it. <sup>2</sup> **For this good news—that God has prepared this rest—has been announced to us just as it was to them. But it did them no good because they didn't share the faith of those who listened to God.** <sup>3</sup> For only we who believe can enter his rest. As for the others, God said, "In my anger I took an oath: 'They will never enter my place of rest,' " even though this rest has been ready since he made the world.

*Why should I tremble with fear that I might miss out on or fail to experience the reality or fulfilment of God's Sabbath rest? Because walking in God's power, being controlled by God's Spirit is: so awesome, so freeing, so dynamic, it's life, it's peace, it's love, it's joy, it's freedom, it's power, it's fulfilment, it's contentment, it's beauty, it's healing, it's comforting, it's encouraging, it's empowering, it's gracious, it's restoring, it's giving, it's blessing, it's beautiful, it's indescribably awesome.*

*1 Corinthians 2:9, 12 NKJV*

<sup>9</sup> **"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."**

<sup>12</sup> **Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.**

*The Christian who is living by their own strength is like the son of a billionaire who has been given a key to a mansion complete with servants and plentiful food and a comfortable bed etc, but instead he decides to live the life of the homeless—completely destitute.*

*There is another warning here: hearing and reading the Word of God is not enough. Unless we have a soft, humble, and teachable heart, no amount of reading the Bible will help us—**"But it did them no good because they didn't share the faith of those who listened to God."***

<sup>4</sup> We know it is ready because of the place in the Scriptures where it mentions the seventh day: "On the seventh day God rested from all his work." <sup>5</sup> But in the other passage God said, "They will never enter my place of rest."

<sup>6</sup> So God's rest is there for people to enter, but those who first heard this good news failed to enter because they disobeyed God. <sup>7</sup> So God set another time for entering his rest, and that time is today. God announced this through David much later in the words already quoted: "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts."

*Here is more good news. The time to enter into the reality of God's Sabbath rest, the time to cease from trying to obey God on my own strength, is **today!** God's rest is*

*always available to enter. It's just a matter of whether or not I will choose to believe. It's like the promise that God's mercies are new every morning (see Lamentations 3:23).*

<sup>8</sup> Now if Joshua had succeeded in giving them this rest, God would not have spoken about another day of rest still to come. <sup>9</sup> So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. <sup>10</sup> For all who have entered into God's rest have rested from their labours, just as God did after creating the world. <sup>11</sup> So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall.

*Here the illustration is expanded. The Sabbath rest is not just keeping the Sabbath but also entering and living in the promised land. Entering and living in the promised land represents the life of faith. Living in the wilderness represented a life of unbelief. Faith in God (the opposite of faith in ourselves) is required for us to enter into the reality or fulfilment of God's Sabbath rest.*

*This passage tells us that the Israelites crossing over the Jordan river was a picture of entering into God's rest, a picture of trusting Him, but the reality was still to come. Why? It wouldn't be possible until the New Covenant came into effect and the Holy Spirit would come and live inside of us. Only with the power of God living inside of us do we have any hope of loving and obeying God and so enjoying the blessedness of abiding in Christ.*

*However, there is a warning here as well—even with the Holy Spirit inside of us, we can still choose to not enter into the reality of God's Sabbath Rest—"So let us do our best to enter that rest. But if we disobey God, as the people of Israel did, we will fall."*

<sup>12</sup> **For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.** <sup>13</sup> Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.

*We come back to where we started. With our hearts being so deceitful and wicked, so prone to leading us astray, how can we correctly diagnose whether or not we are in the flesh or in the Spirit? Whether we are resting in and trusting in God's power or our own?*

*The Word of God is the only way that we can dispel the lies and see the raw truth of where our hearts are at. The Holy Spirit is like the expert doctor who uses the Word of God to reveal the hidden motives and sin in our lives; however, we must read the Bible with a humble heart otherwise we will miss what it is saying to us—pride will make us blind to it's truth.*

## **Conclusion**

To experience the joys of abiding with Christ we must both love and obey God (John 14:15-24). We can only do this as we enter the reality or fulfilment of God's Sabbath rest. Simple repentance is the cure for pride and all sin. Don't hide your sin any longer, instead confess it to a brother or sister in Christ and free yourself from satan's condemnation that is holding you in your own prison of guilt and fear of what others think of you. Let us humble ourselves so we can be free and enjoy our new life in Christ.