TAKE THE SHOES OFF

Salvation is simple. The jailor who awoke to find the prison doors opened but every prisoner still in their cell asked Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). The answer was straightforward and succinct: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31, KJV).

Salvation is also mysterious. Paul speaks of the “mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19). Peter states that even “angels desire to look into” “this salvation,” which “the prophets have inquired and searched carefully” (1 Pet. 1:10, 12).

Indeed, the gospel contains mysteries: how the Author of life died on a cross; how an omnipotent God could create a proverbial rock that He cannot move—that is, human free will; how we are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10) and yet still a work in progress (1 Cor. 15:1, 2, ESV); and “Christ in you, the hope of glory” is the mystery of how it is possible to present “every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col. 1:27, 28).

It would be arrogant to think that our finite minds could effortlessly fully grasp the infinite realities involved in God’s work. Salvation is a divine work consisting of elements that are equally simple and mysterious. Inasmuch as the Sabbath commemorates God’s work of creation, it furnishes lessons to help us comprehend, however limited, His work of salvation in our lives.

This week we focus specifically on the aspect of sanctification in the salvation experience. The Sabbath has lessons to teach us here, both as we reflect on the theological concept of the Sabbath and as we strive to observe it in our lives.
Write out Exodus 31:12–18 from the Bible translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
YOU CAN DO THIS

After concluding His interaction with the rich young ruler, Jesus reassured His befuddled disciples that “the things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27). The opposite principle is that the things which are possible with men God does not do. While this is not explicitly stated in the Bible, it is fully biblical. In support of this, Ellen White writes, “What human power can do divine power is not summoned to do.” (White, The Desire of Ages, 535.) Without attempting to improve on the phraseology of Ellen White, her quotation may be rendered, “God requires of His people only what is possible for them... with His help.”

What connection has this with Sabbath observance? Much in every way!

To the world, God says, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” (Exod. 20:8). He did not say, “Make it holy,” but, “Keep it holy.” No created being, angelic or human, can make anything holy. That can be done by God alone. But created beings are called upon to keep or preserve or guard or cherish what God has done. This they can do with God’s help. “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy” is therefore entirely possible for those to whom the commandment is given. No objection to this command can be offered on the basis of “I can’t,” because God effectively says, “You can!”

Ellen White writes, “The only-begotten Son of God came to our world as a man, to reveal to the world the fact that men through divine power could keep the law of God.” (White, Signs of the Times, April 10, 1893, par. 2.)

Obedience is possible. Or, disobedience is inexcusable, because God only requires of His people what is possible. All the commandments are Mission Possible!

In full support, John the Beloved wrote, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3, KJV). The Ten Commandments are not an unbearable weight. They can be kept. How reassuring are these words: “As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings.” (White, Christ’s Object Lessons, 333.)

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. You can do this!
GOD’S WILL

Solomon, the wisest person who ever lived, said that keeping the Ten Commandments encompasses “the whole duty of man” (Eccles. 12:13, KJV). From this statement, one may reasonably conclude that everything God requires of His children lies within the ambit of the Ten Commandments. The rightness or wrongness of any act is judged by the law of God, an expression of His righteousness. The Psalmist describes this law as “exceeding broad” (Ps. 119:96, KJV). Since laws or commandments are given to be obeyed, logically and theologically, this means that obedience is the whole duty of man!

The apostle Paul wrote, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3, KJV). He also wrote that Christ gave Himself for the church “that he might sanctify and cleanse it” (Eph. 5:26, KJV). The end result of this sanctifying and cleansing is “that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27, KJV).

This was the condition of animals offered to God in the sanctuary system of the Old Testament (Lev. 1:3, 10). This was the indispensable state of the ultimate sacrifice (1 Pet. 1:19). This will be the state of the redeemed (Rev. 14:5).

Is there a connection to Sabbath observance in all of this? There is!

The Sabbath of the Ten Commandments is explicitly described by God as a sign between Him and His people—a sign that He is the one who sanctifies them. “Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep [obey]: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you” (Exod. 31:13, KJV).

“You keep . . . I sanctify!”

Obedience and sanctification are inseparably linked in this passage. While sinners absolutely cannot sanctify themselves, they also cannot be sanctified without obedience. Ellen White makes this related statement: “While good works will not save even one soul, yet it is impossible for even one soul to be saved without good works.” (White, Faith and Works, 111.) It is impossible for anyone to be saved without obedience! This is not a conundrum; it is an expression of the truth that “in the work of salvation God requires the cooperation of man.” (Ellen G. White, Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, Oct 30, 1888, par 3.) How beautifully is this truth expressed in the most treasured Bible verse, “For God so loved the world, that he gave [God’s part] his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him [sinner's part] should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16, KJV).

True Sabbath observance acknowledges the unbreakable bond between obedience and sanctification. It is God who sanctifies, but He has a non-negotiable condition for this sanctification: obedience!
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

1 Thessalonians 4:3
1 John 5:3
John 17:17
1 Peter 1:2, 22
1 Samuel 15:22
Ephesians 2:10
Ephesians 5:25–27

What other verses/promises come to mind with Exodus 31:12–18?

Review your memorized verse from Exodus 31:12–18.
The well-known expression “Rome wasn’t built in a day” was first recorded in English in 1545 and was actually used by Queen Elizabeth I in 1564. The meaning is that important tasks take time. None will argue the truthfulness of this claim. It may be applied powerfully to spiritual matters.

The Bible says, “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exod. 20:11, KJV). The Omnipotent One took six literal days to accomplish something that He could have done in six seconds or fewer. Herein lies great comfort for those fighting the good fight of faith.

Physical creation has a spiritual parallel: salvation. As verily as the word created heaven and earth, so verily does the same creative word save the repentant sinner. Ellen White writes, “The new birth is accomplished by the reception of the word of God.” (White, Signs of the Times, April 30, 1896, par. 2.) This is merely a simplified version of the following: “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18, KJV).

Sabbath-keeping acknowledges the six-day duration of creation. Applied spiritually, the child of God may take comfort in knowing that the Creator who took six days to create the physical world will similarly take time to create a Christlike character in those who trust Him. Through the great apostle Peter, the Savior appeals thus to His followers: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that he may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2, KJV). And, “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18, KJV). As physical creation took time, so spiritual growth takes time—much more time! No one becomes a saint (or a demon) overnight.

Some who come to Christ after years of enslavement to one sin or another may become frustrated at the lack of spiritual progress. They need to understand that growth does not occur instantly. Growth in Christ (spiritual creation) takes time. Justification may be instant, but sanctification takes time. Rome wasn’t built in a day. “Godliness—godlikeness—is the goal to be reached.” (White, Education, 18.)
THE SIGN OF OBEDIENCE

The Word has made the statement, “I am the Lord that do sanctify you” if you observe the Sabbath. This is the only true sanctification in the Scriptures—that which comes from God because of obedience to His commandments. (Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1990), 347.)

From the pillar of cloud Christ declared concerning the Sabbath: “Verily My Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you.” Exodus 31:13. The Sabbath given to the world as the sign of God as the Creator is also the sign of Him as the Sanctifier. The power that created all things is the power that re-creates the soul in His own likeness. To those who keep holy the Sabbath day it is the sign of sanctification. True sanctification is harmony with God, oneness with Him in character. It is received through obedience to those principles that are the transcript of His character. And the Sabbath is the sign of obedience. He who from the heart obeys the fourth commandment will obey the whole law. He is sanctified through obedience. (White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, 350.)

We do not believe that the law sanctifies anyone. We believe that we must keep that law or we will not be saved in the kingdom of heaven. The transgressor cannot be saved in the kingdom of glory. It is not the law that sanctifies anyone, nor saves us; that law stands and cries out, repent, that your sins may be blotted out. And then the sinner goes to Jesus, and as the sinner promises that he will obey the requirements of the law, He blots out their guilty stains and sets them free, and gives them power with God. (White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, 343.)

Many are inquiring, “How am I to make the surrender of myself to God?” You desire to give yourself to Him, but you are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the habits of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you; but you need not despair. What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him. (White, *Steps to Christ*, 47.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

What are areas in your life where you can change?

What are areas in your life where you absolutely need the power of God to change?

How does one know the difference between these two areas?

How are obedience and sanctification linked? Why?

What are aspects of your spiritual development that have occurred instantaneously?

What are aspects of your spiritual development that have taken longer than you thought? Why do you think this is so?

How do you explain sanctification to someone who has never experienced it before?

What does the Holy Spirit working in you to will and to do of His good pleasure feel like?