

According to sydneyeruv.org.au:

The Sydney Eruv is created from a combination of natural walls (meaning the South Head Peninsula cliff faces), existing telegraph poles and cables, golf course and park perimeter fencing, and fencing around Bondi and Tamarama Beaches.

“What on earth is an ‘Eruv’?, and why are we talking about it today?”, I hear you ask... Well, that’s a very good question, and I’m glad you asked ...

Orthodox Jews (even today), have very strict rules about what they can (and cannot) do, on the Sabbath. Strict Jewish laws (not God’s Law from the Old Testament, but their own laws that they’ve written, to go alongside the Scriptures) – these laws forbid any work on the Sabbath, including lifting or pushing, or carrying stuff outside of your home...

So, what they’ve done, is they’ve devised an ingenious plan, and created a communal home, with a defining, physical boundary... Some places, they just run a wire, from pole to pole, and if you live within the boundaries of that unbroken physical defining line, you are classed as being in your communal home, so you can push the pram from your house to a friend’s house down the street, to visit them for lunch, because you haven’t gone outside of your communal home boundary.

Now, that’s an imperfect explanation, and there’s lots of rules and regulations to go with it, but I think, maybe that might give us a **bit** of insight into the thinking behind how the **Pharisees** viewed the Sabbath in **Jesus'** day...

There are still people today, who live by these binding rules, that turn the Sabbath into an intolerable burden, and so they

try and create loop-holes, so they can walk down the street with a set of keys in their pocket, or so they can carry their child...

You see, when someone tries to live by legalism, they're always looking for loop-holes, and that's essentially what an "eruv" is – a man-made loop-hole, for dealing with a man-made problem – the legalisation of the Sabbath...

So, **Biblically**, what is the Sabbath about? Well, it goes right back to creation. When God created the world, 6 days He did His work, and on the 7th day, He rested. And as God called His chosen people, there were 2 significant signs, that would separate God's people, from the rest of the world: The first was circumcision (the men were circumcised); and the second, was that His people would observe the Sabbath.

And the Lord was pretty serious about this:

The Sabbath day (the seventh day), was to be "holy" – now, that's the most important thing about the Sabbath day – that it is to be 'holy'...

And part of this holiness, is for it to be a day of rest:

- Which is why the Scriptures say: "Do no work on the Sabbath"... That's not such a bad thing, really, is it... – "Do no work on the Sabbath". Who wants to argue against the benefits of having one day off every week???

And Biblically, it doesn't legislate (to the nth degree), what "work" is. In the Bible, there's just a **few** examples of work that should be avoided, so for instance:

- Farming work... When you're farming (from my experience), the two most critical times, are planting and harvest... *Some paddocks are what we call "Sunday country", because on Saturday, there's patches in the paddock that are too wet to plant, and on Monday, there's patches in the paddock that are too dry to plant, and so you'd have to plant it on Sunday.*

And, I know some Christian farmers, who are quite open, that they don't work on any Sunday, except for during harvest...

And yet the Old Testament did say, that even in ploughing time, and in harvest timeⁱ, the people of Israel, would do no work. I guess the solution for them, was to increase employment capacity, so they could achieve as much in 6 days as they would otherwise do in 7

- Another example: They were commanded "Don't kindle the fire at home"ⁱⁱ. Alright, that gives **me** the image that even domestic work, like cooking, was to be suspended on the Sabbath day. **Everyone** was able to have a rest – not just the wage-earner... The husband didn't come home and put his feet up, and expect his wife to wait on him hand-and-foot. **She** had a day off too... Even slaves were to have a day off...
- No buying or selling of goods was to take place on the Sabbathⁱⁱⁱ... And if a trader broke that rule, by opening up to sell his wares on the Sabbath, the people of Israel, were not to buy from him...

- Likewise, the transportation of goods was prohibited^{iv}.
- In the book of Numbers, a man was stoned^v for gathering sticks on the Sabbath. We're not told **why** he was gathering the sticks – whether it was for a fire, or for making tent poles (or whatever), but the issue was, he was working, and he was the first person in the bible, who was punished for breaking the Sabbath.
- You see, the Lord was very serious about the identity of the people of Israel, being a people who honour YHWH, by keeping the Sabbath day holy. For those who broke the Sabbath, and worked on the Sabbath, the punishment was death. (that's pretty serious consequences)...

Let me read from Exodus 31:

¹² And YHWH said to Moses, ¹³ "You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, '**Above all** you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, **that you may know that I, YHWH, sanctify you**.' ¹⁴ You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵ Six days, shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to YHWH. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. ¹⁶ Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath

throughout their generations, as a covenant **forever**.

¹⁷ It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.' "

Alright, this was a sign for Israel, that they would know that YHWH sanctifies them... And we're going to come back to that a bit later.

Alright, so no normal work was to be carried out on the Sabbath. It's pretty serious consequences for those who did... So:

- Where do you draw the line between "work" and "play"?
- Where do you draw the line between vocation and recreation?

If reaping (or harvesting) isn't allowed on the Sabbath, is what those disciples did, "wrong", when, as they walked through the paddock and plucked a few heads and rubbed them out, and presumably had a snack?...

If you've ever grown up on a wheat farm (like I did), you'll understand very well, the difference between "work" and rubbing a few heads of wheat out to snack on...

And if carrying a burden – the transport of goods – is forbidden on the Sabbath, what constitutes a burden?

Years ago, a dear old Christian man came to me because he had a concern... He had seen me mowing my lawn on a Sunday afternoon, and the fact that a pastor of a church would do that, was hurting him... And I explained to him, for me, when I've spent my week in the office, writing sermons and doing RE and visiting people, - for me, a bit of quiet physical activity on a Sunday afternoon, was like recreation... But he couldn't understand it...

When I was growing up in Goondiwindi, the children of the Presbyterian minister, were not allowed to have a bash of tennis on a Sunday afternoon... It wasn't competition or fixtures or anything – it was just a bash of tennis – hit-and-giggle... But their father considered that, “work on a Sunday” ...

Where do you draw the line, between work and leisure?

Last week, Jesus said, “You can't put new wine into old wineskins”. “You can't patch an old garment with new cloth.”... What He was talking about, was the incompatibility of religious rules and regulations and ceremonies, and acts of legality, trying to regulate what is essentially a heart issue... Now, the presenting issue we talked about last week, was fasting. Today's issue, is the Sabbath. They are both, heart issues.

God had given the commandment: “Don't work”. “Keep the Sabbath holy”...

But that wasn't good enough for the Pharisees ... The boundaries weren't clearly enough for them. And so the Pharisees built up a hedge around the Law, so they had **better**

defined boundaries. But at the same time, it made the Sabbath to become an intolerable burden...

You see, the prophets foretold a time, when the people of God, would be filled with the Holy Spirit, and the Law would be written on our hearts (that's the new wine)... But the Pharisees weren't living by the Spirit – they were living by “legalities”. Their hearts weren't right with God, and so they wanted to know, “Where's the boundary? How much work can I do before I break the law?”... And because their hearts weren't right with God, they used their man-imposed boundaries, to accuse and convict others, and even to accuse and convict the Son of God...

Were the disciples of Jesus working, when they plucked those heads of grain and rubbed them out? Of course not. But according to the old religious legality, they were...

Anyway, the Pharisees had a dig at Jesus, “Why are your disciples breaking the law?” And Jesus' answer, may seem a little strange to us – it can almost be seen as giving another example of another wrong that someone else has gotten away with, and so 2 wrongs make a right... But that's not at all what He's saying:

David (before he was king) and a few men who were loyal to him, were fleeing from King Saul who was trying to kill them... And David and his men arrive in the city of Nob, and they're desperate for something to eat... And the priest there says, “I haven't got any normal bread.” “I've only got this holy bread, that only priests are allowed to eat”... But because David and his men met the rules for ‘holiness’ (apart

from being priests), the priest made an exception, and let them eat the bread...

And Jesus brings this story up as a reason why it's OK for **His** disciples to pick a few heads of grain... And I believe He was making 2 points here:

The first point, is "**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.**" And He is demonstrating, that the Law of 'need', overrides the Law of 'ceremony'.

And for us, even though the Early church shifted from worshipping on the 7th day (Saturday), to worshipping on "The Lord's day" (Sunday).... If we as Christians are serious about honouring God, and having a day of rest every week, it's important to remember that the Sabbath was made for us – not us for the Sabbath... Yes, having a day off every week, is marvellous. We're not designed to work every day. God took the 7th day, to rest and refresh. Are we better than God? No, we're made in the image of God. We're designed to have time out – we're designed, to have a day holy for the Lord, every week...

But if that day, ever becomes a rule that we have to live by, then we've missed the whole point. Whether your Sabbath is a Saturday or a Sunday – it's meant to be a matter of the heart – it's meant to be a giving of ourselves to God, from the heart... It's not meant to be a burden – it's meant to be a blessing...

And the second point, I believe Jesus was making, is the most **important** point. With His **first** point, He said something

about us... With His second point, He said something about Himself... The problem is, we humans are generally so self-absorbed, we usually make more out of the first point than what we do out of the more important second point.

"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. – Yay!, and that's what we concentrate on... But His 2nd point, is **so** much more important:
the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

Wohhh!!!!

That's a big call... Can you remember the revolutionary nature of that statement???

Jesus is referring to Himself here: **the Son of Man is lord** ... Do you know who the Jews called "Lord"? God – the Lord God almighty – The one who's name is YHWH, but they wouldn't ever say it, out of fear that they might say it the wrong way, and break the Law, and be stoned because of it...

And Jesus is saying, "I **am** Lord, – **lord even of the Sabbath.**"

Now, if you or I said that, that would be blasphemy... Who's Lord of the Sabbath? God is...

You know, when we humans ponder that **"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.** , a pretty common way to process that, is for us to behave as if "we are

lord of the Sabbath”... Are you hearing what I’m saying???

Sunday is ‘**my** day’... I have to work for my boss 5 or 6 days a week – Sunday is **my** day – it’s all about me...

But let’s not entertain that notion for one minute – **we’re** not lord of the Sabbath. **Jesus** is Lord of the Sabbath... The Sabbath isn’t all about us – it’s all about Jesus... The Sabbath was made, for man to rest, but we rest in the Lord of the Sabbath...

Righto:

Some people wonder, “Why would such a good man and someone as nice as Jesus, ever be hated so much, and crucified?”... Well, it’s because Jesus wasn’t merely a man. Yes, He was a man, but He was also the Son of God – He was Lord... And so when the Son of God, began to speak in a very God-like way, the Religious Leaders, saw it as ‘their duty’, to stamp Him out.

And so they set a trap.

On the Sabbath, there was a man with a withered hand, at the Synagogue. ² **And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.**

Jesus knew they were about to accuse Him, and so he baited them – He didn’t try to avoid conflict – He could have, very easily... But He called the man over to himself, and then he

asked the Pharisees: **"Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?"**

Well, the Godly answer, would be "To do good". The **Godly** answer would be "To **save** a life."

Do you know what the Pharisees said??? Nothing...

Do you know what makes Jesus angry??? It's when the truth is staring us right in the face, and we refuse to see it... Jesus looked at the Pharisees with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart... That's what a hard heart is –

- when the truth is staring us right in the face, and we refuse to see it...
- Jesus is demonstrating that He is the Son of God, and they're set against Him.
- Jesus is not only demonstrating, but personifying, grace and mercy, and the Pharisees are so against Him, that they won't admit it...
- τῆ πωρώσει τῆς καρδίας tē pōrōsei tēs kardias (the hardness of the heart)

And Jesus said to the man, **"Stretch out your hand."** He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

A mighty miracle of God, but did the Pharisees give glory to God? No, of course they didn't... They **went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians**...

Alright, so the Pharisees were the religious big-wigs... The Herodians were the political big-wigs, and together, they plotted on "how best to destroy Jesus" ...

So, let's come back to what it means for Jesus to be Lord of the Sabbath, and what it means for us (as disciples of Jesus) to **Honour** Him as Lord of the Sabbath,...

And I'm going to ask the question: "Is "keeping the Sabbath 'holy'", a means of us honouring Jesus?"

Remember, in Exodus 31, God told Israel, the reason for them to keep the Sabbath: **that you may know that I, YHWH, sanctify you**

Throughout the Old Testament, time and time again, the experiences (and even the religious ceremonies) of Israel, were looking forward to their fulfilment (that would come) in Jesus Christ... And the Sabbath, and what the Sabbath represents, is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Paul explains this, in his letter to the Hebrews. He explains that the concept of "Sabbath rest", is fulfilled, in Jesus Christ... ^{Hebrews 4:9} So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

And he explains that we find God's Sabbath rest, through the obedience of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.... He urges them, not to harden their hearts against God, but to believe. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and find rest... That's what the Sabbath is all about... And that's (of course), what the Pharisees missed...

So, the way I see it:

- no, there is no religious requirement that disciples of Jesus have to have a rest on a Saturday or a Sunday...
- No, there is no religious requirement, preventing disciples of Jesus, from buying a bottle of milk or a roast chook on a Sunday...
- There is no religious requirement,,,
- The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, has done away with that sort of religious requirement...

But if it is true, that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath, what does your heart tell you???

- Knowing that God rested on the 7th day; and
- knowing that through the blood of Jesus, we have been sanctified and made Holy; and
- knowing that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath,
- what's the Holy Spirit telling your heart about how to keep the day holy for the Lord???

I'll tell you what He's telling me:

- to do good;
- to worship;
- to honour Him
- to rest; by not working for profit (except in emergencies); and
- to never treat it as a legal requirement, or to make legal loop-holes to get around it.

That's where God's personally taken me... What's the Holy Spirit telling you?

ⁱ Exodus 34:21

ⁱⁱ Exodus 35:3

ⁱⁱⁱ Nehemiah 10:31

^{iv} Jeremiah 17:21

^v Numbers 15:32