

Should Christians Keep the Sabbath?

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Exodus 20:8-10 “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates”

Should Christians today remember the sabbath by not doing any work and/or worshipping on Saturday? The answer to both questions is a resounding no.

Five Reasons Christians Do Not Keep the Sabbath

1. It Wasn't Kept Before the Law

Some say the sabbath began when God rested in Gen. 2:2-3. This cannot be true, however, as we do not see the sabbath kept – or the word even mentioned – for the next 2,500 years. Were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, and Joseph, and all the other Old Testament saints living in disobedience to God? No. In fact, the scriptures tell us that men like Noah (“a just man and perfect in his generations”) and Abraham (“Friend of God”) were some of the godliest men to ever walk the earth. To be clear, there are universal laws given in and shown throughout Genesis that are to be followed today (e.g., marriage and tithing), but the sabbath law is certainly not one of them.

2. It Was a Sign Given to the Jews

The sabbath was given specifically as a sign to the Children of Israel that they were a sanctified (set apart) nation. It was not given to Christians. We know this because that's exactly what the Bible says.

- **Exodus 16:29** “See, for that the Lord hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.”
- **Exodus 31:13** “Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, 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 31:17** “It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.”
- **Ezekiel 20:12** “Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them.”

3. Christ Worked on the Sabbath

The sabbath rules were very clear and very strict – no work on Saturday or you die.

- **Exodus 20:10** “But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates”
- **Exodus 35:2-3** “Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day there shall be to you an holy day, a sabbath of rest to the Lord: whosoever doeth work therein shall be put to death. Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day.”
- **Numbers 15:32-35** “And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks ... And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp.”

When Christ came, he broke the sabbath rules very quickly, clearly, and often.

- Christ defended his disciples who gathered food on the sabbath (directly contrary to Exodus 16:26)

- **Matthew 12:1** “At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat.”
- Christ did a work in healing a man on the sabbath (contrary to Exodus 20:10)
 - **John 9:14** “And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.”
- Christ told a man to pick up his bed on the sabbath (contrary to picking up sticks in Numbers 15)
 - **John 5:8-9** “Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.”
- Christ, who tells us to be followers of him, even declared plainly that the miracles he did on the sabbath were work. And then John clearly states that Christ had “broken the sabbath.”
 - **John 5:17-18** “But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.”

4. It Was a Foreshadowing of Resting in Christ

Very early in his ministry, Christ announced that the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath. This means the sabbath was made to serve man (not for man to serve it). The sabbath does a service for all of mankind by teaching a valuable lesson. And Christ, the Lord of the sabbath, is the key to that lesson.

- **Mark 2:27-28** “And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.”
- **Colossians 2:16-17** “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.”

In the wilderness, God did the work to send enough manna for the Children of Israel on Friday and then told them to rest and trust in this provision on Saturday. The lesson Christians are to learn from this is not to look for bread to fall from the sky on Friday or to buy enough groceries earlier in the week. The lesson of the sabbath is much greater, pointing directly to Christ – the bread of life!

- **John 6:47-52** “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

The Jews’ response in John 6:52 is just like that of sabbath keepers today who continue to miss the spiritual lesson and application of the sabbath. Christ says to rest in him in Matthew 11:28-29, and then proceeds to work on the sabbath in the following chapter. The lesson? Christ does the work and our souls rest in him!

- **Matthew 11:28-29** “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”
- **Hebrews 4:8-10** “For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.”

The wonderful truth of salvation by grace through faith is undermined by sabbath keepers today. Like the sacrifices, the sabbath was a foreshadowing of Christ. With Christ shedding his blood and becoming the believer’s rest, there is no need for such foreshadowing today.

5. Gentile Christians Don’t Keep It

After the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), all ten of the Ten Commandments are reinforced in same way – except the sabbath. In fact, the New Testament does the opposite in Colossians 2 when it tells us not to judge people about keeping it. This is noteworthy because nowhere else are we told to stop judging people about

honoring their parents, killing someone, committing adultery, etc. To be sure, the sabbath ordinance has been blotted out, taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross.

- **Colossians 2:14-17** "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

In Acts 15:28-29, James outlines specific Jewish rules that gentile Christians were to follow and the sabbath is not one of them. After this point, the only time the epistles mention the sabbath is in the passage above.

Three Reasons to Worship as a Church on Sunday and not Saturday

1. The Sabbath Was Not for Worship

Although occasionally bumping up against a feast day, in the Old Testament and New Testament the sabbath was never a day of consistent religious services and worship. Paul and other saints would dispute with the Jews on the sabbath in the synagogue, but this was because Paul was trying to drag them out of Judaism – not fellowship with them in Christianity! No, the sabbath was a day of no work and no worship, and to combine the two would be problematic for churches today. With no work allowed, such as not even picking up sticks, who will pick up the song books, prepare the fellowship lunch, shovel the sidewalk, etc. Additionally, I Tim. 5 talks about church elders laboring (like an ox) over the word and doctrine. Much of this labor is to occur when the church gathers to worship.

2. The “Lord’s Day” is Sunday

The Apostle John used the phrase “the Lord’s day” in Rev. 1:10. This means there is a Biblical day of prominence for Christians. And the day was chosen by the Lord, not the Roman Catholic Church or anyone else.

- **Rev. 1:10** “I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet”

If John were referring to the sabbath day he would have used the word sabbath. Instead he uses a phrase that expresses something belonging specifically to the Lord. We see similar language in I Cor. 11:20, 26, and 29 in “Lord’s supper,” “Lord’s death,” and “Lord’s body.” What day do we see in scripture directly related to these things of the Lord? What day might be called the “Lord’s day”? Sunday. His tomb was found empty on Sunday, he appeared to his disciples on back-to-back Sundays, and he sent his Holy Spirit on a Sunday (the day of Pentecost).

- **John 20:1** “The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early...”
- **John 20:19** “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week...”
- **John 20:26** “And after eight days again his disciples were within...”
- **Acts 2:1** “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.”

3. New Testament Christians Worshipped on Sunday

Some 25 years after the disciples worshipped the risen Christ on back-to-back Sundays, we find Paul and the disciples holding communion (the “Lord’s supper”) on Sunday as well. In Acts 20, Paul is in Troas for seven days and chose to both hold communion and preach on Sunday instead of the other six days. We also see tithing in the church at Corinth on Sunday. Is all this a coincidence? Impossible.

- **Acts 20:6-7** “And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”
- **1 Corinthians 16:2** “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”

Closing

Remember Christ, the Lord of the Sabbath.

1 Corinthians 11:24-25 “And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.”

The Children of Israel were told to remember the sabbath day by not working. Christians are told to remember Christ by holding the Lord's supper. They are different ordinances. One was nailed to the cross, while the other was established at the cross. One pointed forward to Christ, while the other points back. A student of scripture will discern which ordinance to follow, and will look to scripture to see how and when it is to be done. Communion was observed by the New Testament church on Sunday.

Like Christ, Christians break the sabbath ordinances (which were nailed to the cross) regarding work yet are not guilty of breaking the sabbath commandment because we remember and honor the Lord of the sabbath. Sabbath keepers on the other hand, dishonor Christ in that they worship the shadow more than the body and the sign more than the savior.

A Warning to Sabbath Keepers

Christ is the manna from heaven and the Lord of the sabbath. Christians are to cease from their own works and rest in him for salvation. There is no better lesson on salvation by grace through faith than that of the sabbath. Furthermore, there is no more vivid an illustration that it is Christ who saves and not the keeping of the law than the fact that Christ replaced one of the Ten Commandments with himself. For modern day Pharisees to proudly reinstitute the commandment which Christ fulfilled, and to saddle others with such bondage, is to add confusion through a doubtful disputation, scatter men, and detract from what Christ accomplished. All sabbath keepers might not believe in works salvation, but by failing to rightly dividing the word of God on this topic, they surely are not helping the cause of Christ. Be warned.

- **Romans 3:27-28** “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”
- **Ephesians 2:8-9** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

As the Pharisees rebuked Christ for not keeping the sabbath, sabbath keepers today rebuke Christians. Some things never change. Be warned. Some of the people you rebuke are the ones actually serving Christ – working for his glory every day of the week and especially on the Lord's day. While you bind people with “heavy burdens and grievous to be borne” (Matt. 23:4), you are neglecting true judgment, mercy and faith.

- **Matthew 23:23-24** “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.”