

## Should Christians Observe the Sabbath?

There are several denominations today that meet for worship on Saturday, the last day of the week. They hold that the commandment to “*remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy*” (Exodus 20:8) obligates all Christians to meet on that day of the week. Is it the case that Christians are to meet on Saturday (the Sabbath), or on Sunday (the first day of the week)?

To answer these important questions, let us consider what the Bible says about these days. It does not matter what human tradition are about these days, but only what the Bible says (II Peter 1:3, II Timothy 3:16-17).

### The Sabbath Day

The Sabbath day command was one of the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai in Exodus 20. These particular laws represented the entire Covenant God made with Israel at that place according to Deuteronomy 4:13: “*So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone.*”

Since the entire law WAS the covenant, the Ten Commandments were a physical representation of all the laws of God given to Moses (Exodus 24:7). They were written in stone to symbolize that they could not be changed by men. When God spoke later of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31, He said that the New Covenant laws would be written on the heart, indicating it was a Spiritual law (in contrast to the carnal law of Moses as seen in 2 Corinthians 3:3).

When we read the Sabbath commandment in Exodus 31:15, several things can be determined. First, the Sabbath was Saturday, the seventh day. Second, it was a day of rest, NOT a day of worship. In fact, the word “Sabbath” means “rest” in Hebrew. Under the Law of Moses, days of worship were days like the Passover, Pentecost, and other feast days (Exodus 34:22, John 12:20). Not once is the Sabbath called a day of worship in the entire Bible. There is no record that Jews were expected to meet together every Sabbath; indeed, they were not to travel on that day of rest (Exodus 16:29).

Another important thing to understand is that, according to Scriptures, the Ten Commandments were nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14, Ephesians 2:15). In particular, we are told that the Sabbaths of the Old Testament were merely a shadow of the things to come in Christ. Paul says in Colossian 2:16-17: *So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a **festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*** Therefore, the authority of the Ten Commandments (and the rest of the Law of Moses) is no more.

However, many of the same laws in the Old Covenant became laws of the New Covenant as well. We understand that it was the legal basis and purpose of the Ten Commandments that was ended on the cross. It is similar to the transition of a territory into a state in our country; when the Oregon Territory became a state, many laws remained in place. However, the authority of law changed

entirely. All laws had to be reaffirmed to be valid. What is interesting to note is that when we examine the Law of Christ (the New Testament) the Sabbath commandment is uniquely missing.

<b>Law of Moses</b>	<b>Law of Christ</b>
No Other Gods	Mark 12:32
No Graven Images	I Corinthians 8:4
No Blasphemy	Colossians 3:8
Honor Sabbath	-
Honor Father & Mother	Ephesians 6:2
Do not murder	James 2:11
Do not commit adultery	Galatians 5:19
Do not steal	Ephesians 4:28
Do not bear false witness	Romans 13:9
Do not covet	Romans 13:9

From these points, what can we conclude about Christians and the Sabbath?

1. Sabbath was a day rest, NOT a day of worship.
2. Sabbath observance ended with the death of Christ on the Cross.
3. There is no commandment to worship (or even rest) on the Sabbath in the Law of Christ.

### **The First Day**

When we examine the New Testament, we find that there was a day called “*The Lord’s Day*” (Revelation 1:10). In Acts 20:7 we read the following: *Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.* Paul waited for six days for Christians to meet together “*on the first day of the week*”, the time which we are then told that they met “*to break bread*” (take communion). We are told that Paul was in a hurry to arrive at his destination of Jerusalem (Acts 20:16). If so, why would he wait seven days? Why not call the brethren together on any other day of the week, or the Sabbath, and then head on? The only explanation is that the first day of the week was the standard day Christians met (which is stated), and that even an Apostle could not change this day.

It makes sense that Christians would take communion on the weekly anniversary of the day Jesus arose from the grave. It also then stands to reason that this would be “the Lord’s Day”, the day that He arose from the grave. Just as on the first day of creation God created light, so now we worship the “Light of the World” on that day.

We also can find that Christians were commanded to take up a collection (as an aside, this is NOT a tithe; there is no command to tithe given to Christians in the New Testament) together at an assembly, again identified as the first day of the week (I Corinthians 16:1-2). We must conclude

that this is the same assembly which they met to partake of communion.

From these points, what can we conclude about New Testament Christians and the *First Day of the Week*?

1. The first day was the day when Christians met to partake of communion and take up a collection.
2. This is the Worship established by the Law of Christ.
3. Sunday is the Day of Christian worship.

Some Sabbath keepers today claim that the original church in fact also met on the Sabbath. As you have seen, the Scriptures do not testify to this. There is no passage in the New Testament that states that Christians met on the Sabbath to worship. However, as you have seen, there are passages that make it clear that Christians met on the first day of the week.

It is not only the Scriptures that testify to this. The ancient "Book of Barnabas", written in the second century, states that Christians meet on the day of the week Jesus arose<sup>1</sup>. The text "Epistle of the Apostles", also from the second century, speaks of Christians meeting on Sunday. Justin Martyr, writing about 150AD, states that Christians do not keep the Sabbath<sup>2</sup>, but instead met on the first day of the week<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, Clement of Alexandria (190AD), Tertullian (200AD), Origen (220AD), Ignatius (250AD) and many others testify that the day of worship, from the beginning of the church, was the first day of the week.

These testimonies are important because many teach that worship on Sunday was something that came about in the fourth century from the Emperor Constantine. There is absolutely no historical evidence of this. However, you can see that there is much evidence that the early church, from the beginning, met on the first day of every week. The first time that it was suggested that it

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<sup>1</sup> BARNABAS: *Wherefore we Christians keep the eighth day for joy, on which also Jesus arose from the dead and when he appeared ascended into heaven.* (15:8f, The Epistle of Barnabas, 100 AD, Ante-Nicene Fathers , vol. 1, pg. 147)

<sup>2</sup> 150AD JUSTIN: *... But the Gentiles, who have believed on Him, and have repented of the sins which they have committed, they shall receive the inheritance along with the patriarchs and the prophets, and the just men who are descended from Jacob, even although they neither keep the Sabbath, nor are circumcised, nor observe the feasts. Assuredly they shall receive the holy inheritance of God.* (Dialogue With Trypho the Jew, 150-165 AD, Ante-Nicene Fathers , vol. 1, page 207)

150AD JUSTIN: *But if we do not admit this, we shall be liable to fall into foolish opinion, as if it were not the same God who existed in the times of Enoch and all the rest, who neither were circumcised after the flesh, nor observed Sabbaths, nor any other rites, seeing that Moses enjoined such observances... For if there was no need of circumcision before Abraham, or of the observance of Sabbaths, of feasts and sacrifices, before Moses; no more need is there of them now, after that, according to the will of God, Jesus Christ the Son of God has been born without sin, of a virgin sprung from the stock of Abraham.* (Dialogue With Trypho the Jew, 150-165 AD, Ante-Nicene Fathers , vol. 1, page 206)

<sup>3</sup> 150AD JUSTIN: *"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place..... But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration."* (First apology of Justin, Weekly Worship of the Christians, Ch 68)

should be Saturday was in 1527 by Anabaptist leaders Andreas Fisher and Oswald Glait.

### **What Is The Sabbath For Christians?**

Christians do not “keep” the Sabbath (obey the command not to work on that day) because we are not commanded to do so. According to James 2:12, we are to act as those judged by the law of Liberty (Christ). As well, we are given a day of worship (NOT corresponding to the Sabbath), the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day (Acts 20:7, I Corinthians 16:1). If we study the Scriptures, we find that the fundamental purpose of the Sabbath was as a shadow of something to come in Christ (Colossians 2:16-17). What did it fore-shadow?

Hebrews 4:9-11 *There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.*

According to Hebrews 4:1-11 a “Sabbath” yet remains for the people of God. That Sabbath is the eternal rest with God in heaven at the end of our lives. We can see that the Old Testament Sabbath represented/foreshadowed heaven and eternal life. The Hebrew writer said we need to be diligent to enter it; we can fall short of it by: disobedience; being hearers only; being hard hearted.

To “remember the Sabbath” means to live in hope. Worldly hope is merely wishing for something, and is futile. Divine hope means we look to something promised by God and believed by faith (Hebrews 11:1). We are saved in this hope (Romans 8:24). Living in hope means believing in the reality of Heaven and living for heaven, not this life.