



Must Christians Keep The Sabbath?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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Must Christians keep the Sabbath Day? Which day is the day Christians should assemble together – the first day of the week or the Sabbath (seventh day)? The religious world is divided over this question; but, the Bible is clear on the matter. Let's observe how the Bible answers this question.

Keeping The Sabbath Was Part Of The Law Of Moses

As part of the Ten Commandments, the Lord commanded the Israelites: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it" (Exodus 20:8-11).

This Law was given to Moses (who would write them on two tablets of stone and then give the Law to the people of Israel, Deuteronomy 4:13) after the Israelites were delivered from Egyptian captivity. Prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments, God had not commanded the weekly observance of the Sabbath.

For instance, consider the instructions given in Exodus 16 concerning the manna God would give the Israelites from Heaven. During this time, they were instructed to gather twice as much manna on the sixth day so that they could rest on the Sabbath – for there would be no manna given on that day (Exodus 16:22-26). While this passage comes prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments, consider that this instruction concerning the manna was given to test Israel – in order to see whether they would be obedient to God or not (Exodus 16:4). Also consider that this instruction was a departure from the normal way of living for the Israelites (God would not have had to specify this instruction about the Sabbath if they had already been keeping it).

Furthermore, Nehemiah 9:13-14 demonstrates that this Sabbath law was only given at Mount Sinai (when Moses received the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20): “You came down also on Mount Sinai, And spoke with them from heaven, And gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, By the hand of Moses Your servant.”

So, the Sabbath Day instructions was only a covenant between God and the Israelites (which began at Mount Sinai). Exodus 31:16-17 says, “Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. 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.”

Also notice that the Sabbath Day was to be used to remember what God had done for Israel in delivering them from Egyptian captivity. Notice the instructions concerning the Sabbath recorded in the book of Deuteronomy: “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

Now, briefly consider some points concerning the keeping of the Sabbath Day. Evaluate for yourself whether those who advocate the keeping of the Sabbath today also advocate these points (as these elements were part of God’s law for the Sabbath). (1) It was to be a day of rest (Exodus 35:1-3; Exodus 20:8-10). (2) The penalty for violating the law of the Sabbath was physical death (Numbers 15:32-36). (3) A burnt offering was to be made every Sabbath (Numbers 28:9-10). (4) Travel was restricted on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:29; Acts 1:12). Given these facts, can you identify anyone who truly keeps the Sabbath today?

Christians Live Under The Law Of Christ

Now, if Christians have been given the responsibility to keep the Sabbath in the way that we have just described, then I encourage everyone who studies this to keep those commandments! So, the central question remains: Are Christians obligated to keep the Sabbath law today?

As I have already demonstrated in this study, keeping the Sabbath law was part of the Law of Moses (part of the commandments which were written upon the tablets of stone, Deuteronomy 4:13). Consider, then, that this law was nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:14). Christians are dead to the old Law of Moses – and have been joined to Christ under His new law (Romans 7:1-6). Hebrews 8:7-13 also demonstrates that there would have been no need for a second covenant if the first one had been flawless. But, as it was, God would establish His new

law/covenant – and make the first law/covenant obsolete. Finally, 2 Corinthians 3:7-16 demonstrates that the things “written and engraved on stones” (i.e. the Old Law, containing the Ten Commandments – compare with Deuteronomy 4:13) was a “ministry of death” and has been “taken away.”

Since the Sabbath Day laws were contained within the Law of Moses (which has been taken away), Christians are only obligated to observe the Sabbath *if* it has been brought into the new law of Jesus Christ! Yet, there is no command, approved example, or forced conclusion in the New Testament that would necessitate Christians keeping the Sabbath Day. Instead, Christians are taught not to observe such Jewish “holy days” as binding commandments (Galatians 4:10-11). To do otherwise would cause them to fall away from God’s grace (Galatians 5:1-4).

Under The New Testament, Christians Are Expected To Assemble On The First Day Of The Week

Colossians 2:16-17 declares that the observance of the Sabbath Day was only “a shadow of things to come, but the substance is in Christ.” Remember that we have observed the fact that the Israelites were to remember what the Lord had done for them (in delivering them out of Egyptian bondage) on the Sabbath. Today, the first day of the week also marks a memorial day for God’s people!

Consider, first, a couple of scripture references that demonstrate the need for God’s people to assemble on the first day of the week – instead of on the seventh day (Sabbath). Acts 20:7 identifies the first day of the week as being the day upon which Christians assemble to partake of the Lord’s Supper (a memorial for the Lord): “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.” Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 demonstrates that Christians were to take up a collection when they assembled together on the first day of the week: “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”

So, it is not the seventh day (Sabbath) that is significant for Christians today; but, the first day of week. After all, it was upon the first day of the week that our Lord rose from the dead after being crucified for our sins (Mark 16:9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). It was on this same day that Jesus met with His disciples after His resurrection (John 20:19). Then, it was on the first day of the week that Christ’s church was established in Acts chapter 2 (note that Pentecost always occurred on the first day of the week, Leviticus 23:15).

Given these facts, it is only fitting that God expects His people to assemble together upon the first day of the week and remember the sacrifice of Jesus Christ! But, while the Bible is clear that God expects Christians to assemble on the first day of the week, the Bible is silent (it says nothing) about Christians being obligated to fulfill the laws concerning the Sabbath!

Is The First Day Of The Week The “Christian Sabbath”?

Finally, it is not uncommon (even among those who understand the Christian’s responsibility to assemble on the first day of the week instead of the Sabbath) for the first day of the week to be called the “Christian Sabbath.” But, is the first day of the week accurately described in that way?

While it is true that Christians are to assemble on the first day of the week and remember what the Lord has done for them, the scriptures never call the first day of the week the “Christian Sabbath.” So, using this sort of language fails to speak as the oracles (utterances) of God (1 Peter 4:11). In addition, the Christian (as we have observed) is not bound by the same laws as the Israelites were bound to as part of the Sabbath Day observance.

Conclusion

The Sabbath Day was an essential part of keeping the Law of Moses; but, it has no part in Christ’s new covenant. Today, Christians have the responsibility to assemble with their brethren on the first day of the week to take of the Lord’s Supper and give as they have been prospered (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

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