

The Sabbath

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The Sabbath: If you like controversy, you've come to the right place! There are many views on the Sabbath, and we're adding ours to the mix. We think you'll find our interpretation interesting and simple. Our intention is to settle on a Sabbath theory we believe is consistent with God's character, and applicable to our lives. We do not discuss all the other views, only the one we've embraced.

Interpreting the Ten Commandments: There is a simple principle for interpreting the Law if you want to profit by it: *The Law is an earthly shadow of a spiritual reality.* We call this the "shadow principle of interpretation," and it is mentioned in the book of Hebrews: "*For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things...*" (Hebrews 10:1) When we study the Law, it is the "*very form of things*" we're searching for - the reality causing the shadow.

The "Shadow Principle" works well when interpreting the Ten Commandments, because the "*very form*" of what these commandments mean is given in the New Testament. Much of Jesus' Sermon of the Mount follows this approach, and we use it to interpret the meaning of the fourth commandment.

Fourth Commandment: Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.

Our Sabbath Theory: The Sabbath Day of the Mosaic Law falls on Saturday, and is intended to bring a margin of physical rest. The "*very form*" of the Sabbath is peace with God through Jesus Christ, who is Himself our Sabbath Rest.

Support: First, we want to "clear the table" of interpretive clutter. Much has been written about the Sabbath, and the arguments are complex (and emotional). As a general rule, we are convinced that if a theological position is complex, it is probably wrong.

Under the Mosaic Law there are two issues to address:

1. The Sabbath (weekly) or Sabbaths (ceremonial) are date-specific in the Old Testament.
2. The Sabbath was an eternal (i.e. non-ending) covenant. (Lv 24:8)

The following points show how we connect the dots regarding our position on the Sabbath.

- First, Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not abolish it (Mt 5:17). We take this to mean He fulfilled the purpose for Sabbath, and that He did not do away with it.
- Second, Jesus called Himself the Lord of the Sabbath (Mt 12:8), clarifying that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27). This means He claimed authority to define the Sabbath with regard to the human need for rest and healing.

- Third, Jesus said, *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”* (Mat 11:28-30) Stated differently, Jesus Himself is our Sabbath rest, and this is how the fourth commandment is kept. (This is similar to saying Jesus is our righteousness.)
- Fourth, Jesus told those who responded to His invitation for rest (Mt 11:28-30) to remain in Him *“as a branch remains in the vine”* (John 15:1-11). If we are correct, then there is a transition in the meaning of the Sabbath from *“shadow”* to *“very form”* (Heb 10:1). The date-specific Sabbath delivers physical rest, whereas faith in Jesus delivers spiritual rest.
- Fifth, the relationship a believer has with Jesus is eternal, which answers to the *“everlasting covenant”* (Lv 24:8) aspect of the Sabbath. Believers are instructed to remain in Christ. This is precisely how we understand Jesus’ words in John 15:1-11.

1) I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2) Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3) You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4) Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5) I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6) If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7) If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8) My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9) Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10) If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11) These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

- Sixth, Hebrews 4 (the entire chapter) supports the *“shadow”* to *“very form”* transition we see in the Sabbath (and Hebrews is one of the New Testament books that gives us this interpretive principle). It reads:

1) Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. 2) For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. 3) For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4) For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; 5) and again in this passage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." 6) Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 7) He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." 8) For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 9) So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10) For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. 11) Therefore let us be diligent to

enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. 12) For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13) And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. 14) Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15) For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16) Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

- Seventh, there are clear statements in the New Testament that a date-specific interpretation of the Sabbath(s) is incorrect. Notice how Paul uses the “shadow principle” when interpreting the meaning of the Sabbath (weekly and ceremonial) in Col 2:16-17.

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to ... a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day ~ things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

- Eighth, we have an add-on point: Because we are physical creatures, and a date-specific Sabbath is intended to provide physical rest, we like the idea of setting one day aside for that purpose. If the truth be told, I usually set aside 2 or 3 days a week! Ha! We think this is Biblical. There is a defining statement in Romans regarding the Sabbath that gives Christians a good deal of freedom on this topic. It is found in Rom 14:5.

One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

Summary: Many Christians worship on Sunday because they believe this is the “Christian Sabbath.” We think this is mostly a tradition of ignorance or wishful thinking. All that we’ve said about the Saturday Sabbath applies to any date-specific Sabbath-keeping (including Sunday). In the end, what matters is your relationship with Jesus Christ. Without Jesus there is no Sabbath rest, no peace with God and no eternal life.