

COMMON QUESTION NO. 10

SHOULD CHRISTIANS OBEY THE 4TH. COMMANDMENT (SABBATH)?

There are those who think that the commandment, 'To keep the Sabbath day holy,' was only for Old Testament times (Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15). They believe that the Sabbath has been fulfilled in Christ because it is a ceremonial and not a moral law. Some even falsely say that it is not repeated in the New Testament! Others teach, 'We are in the new covenant so we are not under the law' (Romans 6:14). Is this true, or is the Sabbath commandment to be kept today just as much as "You shall not kill"?

1. There is a day which is called the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). This is a day belonging to the Lord and is to be identified with the first day of the week, Sunday, the day on which our Lord rose from the dead. Therefore, to make Romans 14:5-6 teach that there are no special days at all is clearly false.

2. The Sabbath commandment *is* repeated many times by our Lord! He faced continual opposition from the religious leaders over how the Sabbath should be kept (John 5:18), but nowhere did Jesus even suggest that He has come to do away with the Sabbath. He gives the true intention of the Sabbath: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28). He answers His own question in the affirmative: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill," by healing the man with a withered hand (Mark 3:4-5). Jesus specifically taught that He had not come to abolish the Law, that not even the least commandment should be relaxed, and that the righteousness in His kingdom must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:17-20). We conclude that in the teaching of Jesus the 4th. commandment must continue to be obeyed, but according to His authoritative interpretation and not according to the teaching of the Pharisees.

3. The Sabbath is one of the 10 Commandments. Everything surrounding the giving of the 10 Commandments on Mount Sinai marks them out as very special. They were written with the very finger of God Himself, and on durable tablets of stone (Exodus 31:18, Deuteronomy 9:10). These were to be kept inside the ark of the covenant (Deuteronomy 10:1-5). The 10 Words, as they are sometimes called, are even termed the covenant itself (Deuteronomy 9:9,11), as they summarize *all* of God's demands on His people. This is why John Calvin, when he wrote his commentary on the first 5 books of the Bible, sought to explain every law under one of the 10 Commandments. Therefore the Sabbath may not be dismissed as a 'ceremonial law', nor can it be subtracted to leave just 9. The very number 10 speaks of completeness, a unity. The 4th. Commandment stands or falls with the other 9.

4. The Sabbath is a 'Creation ordinance'. More significant again is the fact that "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy" at creation (Genesis 2:2-3). It is true that there is no actual command given at this time, but God's seventh-day rest is the pattern for ours (Exodus 20:11). The clear implication is that from the beginning of the world, even before sin entered in man was to set aside one day in 7 for the Lord. All of the 10 commandments were in force before the giving of the law in Exodus 20 (specifically for the 4th. Commandment see Exodus 16:22-26). The Sabbath is as essential to human life as is work and marriage, the other 2 creation ordinances (see Genesis 2:15 & 24).

5. Isaiah looks forward to a true Sabbath being celebrated (58:13-14). Here are spiritual principles together with spiritual promises. It is so important to call the Sabbath a delight and

the holy day of the Lord honourable. This should not be dismissed as if being in Old Testament means it is irrelevant to us. Then we would have to discard the whole Old Testament as just having antiquarian interest.

6. There remains a Sabbath (Heb. 4:9). The ESV has translated *sabbatismos* as 'sabbath rest' yet the word for rest that is used 11 times in 3:11-4:11 is not here. Note that rest is 'God's' rest, His rest of the seventh day (4:4). The reason for a sabbath remaining is in 4:10, which is literally translated, 'for the one having entered His (i.e. God's) rest has also himself rested from his works...' This is a reference to Christ who has completed His work of the new creation and sits at God's right hand. And it is those who believe in Christ who also are entering God's rest (4:3). For such believers as ourselves, "there remains a Sabbath (observance)..."

7. Objection. Does not Colossians 2:16-17 that the Sabbath is but a shadow, fulfilled in Christ like the new moon? There were a number of other Sabbath days under Old Testament religion, for example in the 7th. month (Leviticus 23:24,32,39, see plural in v. 38). 'Sabbath' in Colossians 2:16 it is actually an indefinite plural in form – sabbaths. With all the other evidence above it is a weak foundation on which to build a case for the demolition of the weekly Sabbath, when it could refer to the sabbaths of the ceremonial law that were in dispute (together with festivals and new moons).

8. Question. How do we know the observance of the day was changed from the 7th. to the 1st. day of the week? There is no specific command given. There is the following evidence:

- Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week (John 20:1) and all subsequent resurrection appearances, where the day is noted, are on the first day of the week (20:19,26, Luke 24:13-49). The first day of the week is the completion of redemption (the new creation) as the seventh day is the completion of the first creation.
- The Christians in Corinth were instructed to put something aside "on the first day of every week" (1 Corinthians 16:2) as Paul had also directed the churches of Galatia (v. 1).
- Paul remained in Troas 7 days so that he could gather together to "break bread" with the Christians there, implying that the first day of the week was when they met together (Acts 20:6-7).
- Although it is recorded that Paul did go to the synagogue on the Jewish Sabbath (seventh-day) (see Acts 13:14, 17:2) it was to preach the gospel and not to worship as a Christian. There is no evidence that Christians worshipped the Jesus as Lord in the synagogue services. They met initially in the temple just as a place where they could gather, and in their homes (2:46, 3:1, 5:42, Romans 16:5, etc.).

9. How then should we regard Sunday? What does it mean to keep the Sabbath day holy under the new covenant? Why such opposition as if keeping commandments is legalism? It is the very mark of one who knows God (1 John 2:4)! What a privilege to set apart one day in seven, as we anticipate glory and an eternal Sabbath. To keep it holy is to set it apart as different from the other days of the week, doing what I really love to do as a Christian, giving myself to worship, fellowship and service of the Lord who gave Himself for me. If the heavenly glory is a glorious Sabbath, may the present weekly Sabbaths be a foretaste of heaven on earth!