

Is the SABBATH Command in the New Testament?

Is the command to observe the Sabbath found not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament? The *other nine* of God's Ten Commandments are in both the Old and New Testaments; but what about the *fourth* Commandment---to keep the Sabbath day holy?

In his booklet *Which day is the CHRISTIAN SABBATH?* Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong had this to say: "many have used the argument...[that *God*] abolished *all ten* of His commandments at the cross, and then brought back *nine* of them in the New Testament, **in order to get rid of the Sabbath**...The people of the world are willing to acknowledge the other nine Commandments ---but the Sabbath Command is the one they positively REBEL against!" (1976 ed., pp. 50, 57).

We will now examine 5 evidences *from the New Testament* which show that God still requires us to keep His Sabbath day holy.

(1) Hebrew 4:9

The KJV and the NKJV render this verse essentially the same: "There remaineth therefore a **rest** to the people of God" (KJV). This, however, is *not* the best rendering of the verse. Some publishers of the KJV and the NKJV offer an *alternate* rendering in the margin: "There remaineth, therefore, a **keeping of a sabbath** to the people of God" (KJV, *New Scofield Reference Edition*).

What about translations *other than* the KJV and the NKJV? A *great many* of them render it essentially the same as is rendered in the NIV: "There remains, then, a **Sabbath-rest** for the people of God."

Except for this *one* verse, everywhere else in chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews where you read the word "rest," it is translated *from* the Greek word *katapausis*, which simply means "rest" or "repose." But in verse 9, the original Greek word is *sabbatismos*, which means "a *Sabbath* rest" or "Sabbath keeping."

The next verse, verse 10, *reinforces* this point concerning the Sabbath: "For he [the Christian] who has entered His [God's] rest has himself also ceased from his works **as God did from His**." So we are to cease from *our* works **just as** God did from His. And *how* did God rest from His works? Verse 4 tells us: "...God rested **on the seventh day** from all His works." *Yes, we, like God, are to rest on the seventh day!*

Plainly, "There *remains*, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God."

(2) Mark 2:27

Now, let's consider a *second* evidence in the New Testament which shows that God *still* requires that His Sabbath day be kept holy.

Christ said, "The Sabbath was made for man..." (Mark 2:27). Notice: it was made **for man**---*not* just for the Jews---*not* just for Old Testament Israel!

When was the Sabbath made? It was made back at the time of the creation of the first man, Adam---*long before* there were any Jews! And notice that *at the time God made* the Sabbath, He **blessed it** and He *sanctified* it (set it apart for a **sacred purpose**): "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then *God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it*..." (Gen. 2:2-3).

Yes, back *when* the Sabbath was made, God blessed it, sanctified it---set it apart for a *sacred purpose*.

In other words, God made the seventh day **holy**! And that's exactly what we're told in the following passage: "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...* 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*" (Ex. 20: 8-11).

The above passage is one of God's ten great Commandments. The Ten Commandments have been in effect since the time of Adam!

What about *Jesus Christ*---did He instruct us to *keep* God's Ten Commandments? Christ said that if a person wants "to *enter into* [eternal] life," he must "**keep the commandments**" (Matt. 19: 16-17). And He then went on to show (in verses 18-19) that He was speaking of the Ten Commandments.

Yes, the Sabbath was made *for* man---to help *keep* man in the true knowledge and true worship of the true God. God made the seventh day as a *memorial* ---a memorial of God's *past* creation (the *physical* creation or renewal of the earth); and it was made to keep us mindful of His *present* creation (the ongoing creation of righteous character in His followers); and also to keep us mindful of the *future* creation (the coming Millennium---the final 1,000 years of God's 7,000-year plan. This 7th 1,000 year period, unlike the 1st 6,000 years, will be a period of rest---a 7th day Sabbath rest---a rest *from the sin* that characterized the first 6,000 years).

(3) **Matt. 24:20**

Here in the Olivet Prophecy of Matt. 24, Christ is speaking of a time yet still ahead---a time just before His second coming. He says this: "And *pray that your flight may not be* in winter or *on the Sabbath*. For then there will be **great tribulation**, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor **ever** shall be" (Matt. 24: 20-21).

Christ is plainly talking about God's people fleeing to safety *at the end-time*---a time of "great tribulation." Now, why would Christ *make* such a statement---speaking of a time yet still future---if the Sabbath has been done away? Why would it **matter** if your flight were on the Sabbath?!

Obviously, according to our Savior, it *does* matter whether our flight will occur on the Sabbath---which proves that the Sabbath *continues* to be **holy time**---which He expects us *keep* holy!

(4) **I Cor. 11:1**

Now, for the *fourth* New Testament evidence that God *still* requires observance of His holy Sabbath day. Paul, apostle to the Gentiles, instructs Christians to "Imitate me, *just as I also imitate Christ*" (I Cor. 11:1). Yes, Paul *imitated* Christ, and instructs us to do *likewise*!

Did Christ keep the Sabbath? Notice Luke chapter 4: "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And **as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day**, and stood up to read" (verse 16). So, here we see it was Christ's custom to worship on the Sabbath---i.e., it was something He *always* did. In fact, not only did Christ always observe the Sabbath day, He said that He is "Lord **of** the Sabbath"! (Mark 2:28).

So Jesus Christ *kept* the Sabbath, and Paul said that he *imitated* Christ. Did Paul, in fact, imitate Christ in keeping the Sabbath? Notice Acts chapter 18: "And he [Paul] reasoned in the synagogue **every Sabbath**, and persuaded both Jews **and Greeks**" (verse 4). (Also, see Acts 17:1-2.) Yes, Paul kept "**every Sabbath**"---*with his Gentile converts*---as well as with the Jews.

Acts chapter 13 provides an even *more* compelling example of Paul and his Gentile converts keeping the Sabbath. “Now when Paul and his party set sail from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia; and John, departing from them, returned to Jerusalem. But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, **and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day** and sat down” (verses 13-14). Then, in verse 16, Paul got up to speak. Paul proceeded to preach *Christ* to them (verses 23-41). Now, notice verse 42: “So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, **the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them [when?] the next Sabbath.**”

Notice what author Herbert W. Armstrong says about this: “Now since Paul was preaching ‘the grace of God’ (verse 43), here was his opportunity to straighten out these Gentiles, and explain that the Sabbath was done away. Why should he wait a whole week, in order to preach to THE GENTILES ON THE NEXT SABBATH? If the day had now been changed to Sunday, why did not Paul tell them they would not have to wait a week, but the very next **day, Sunday, was the proper day for this service? But notice what Paul did. ‘And the NEXT SABBATH DAY** came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God’ [verse 44, KJV]. Here **Paul waited a whole week, passing up a Sunday, in order to preach to the GENTILES on the Sabbath day.**”¹

Furthermore, verse 45 shows that this crowd was *mostly* **Gentiles**. It says, “But when the **Jews** saw the multitudes, they [the Jews] were filled with envy...”

So, we’ve plainly seen that, years *after* Christ’s crucifixion, Paul---*Apostle to the Gentiles*--- **imitated Christ** in keeping the Sabbath day. Furthermore, Paul instructs that **we Christians imitate him**---as he imitates Christ (I Cor. 11:1).

(5) **The Evidence of the Jews and History**

If the Sabbath had been *changed* in the New Testament, there would have been a *thorough discussion* in the New Testament of that change! Furthermore, there would be record in the New Testament of a tremendous *uproar* by the Jews! Yet, *neither* of these two things is recorded in the New Testament!

Consider the *controversy* which arose in the New Testament Church over the issue of *circumcision*. The controversy was so great that we read in the book of Acts of **a general assembly convened** (by the apostles) to deal with this issue! Notice this controversy in Acts 15: “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are *circumcised* according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ Therefore, when *Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them*, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question... Now *the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter*. And when there had been **much dispute**, Peter rose up and [spoke]...” (verses 1-2, 6-7).

“Then all the *multitude* kept silent and listened to *Barnabas and Paul*... And after they [Paul and Barnabas] had become silent, *James* answered...” (verses 12-13). Then, going down to verse 19, James said, “Therefore I *judge*...”---and James then proceeded to issue a **ruling** on the matter!

Then, the subject actually *continues* to be mentioned all the way through verse 31!

Now, consider how much *space* is devoted in the New Testament to this controversy over circumcision. Also, consider that the Church leaders make a very clear *ruling* on the issue---and that the ruling is put here in *writing* for later generations!

Furthermore, consider that this *same* standard of clear explanation occurs for *other* changes from Old Testament practices--- such as the question of how the law of “animal sacrifice” applies to Christians. This issue is dealt with *in detail*---in Hebrews 7:11 through chapter 10, verse 18.

Yet, do we see this kind of explanation and ruling in the New Testament regarding a supposed change for Sabbath-keeping? Absolutely not! You can search the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation, and you won't find a single verse authorizing any change about *which* day to keep---or *whether* to keep the seventh day Sabbath!

In fact, the **silence** of the New Testament concerning any such change can be taken as the strongest proof that the Church *continued to observe* the seventh day Sabbath!

Further considerations

Regarding point (5) above, also consider this. During the approximate 60-year history covered in the New Testament writings, *only* the issue of circumcision resulted in the convening of a *general assembly* of the apostles. Many Jewish converts to Christianity had become very vocal about demanding circumcision for all Christians, whether Jewish or not. It was an **important** subject, and it needed to be decided by the Church leaders in a clear and unequivocal manner.

Now, what about the Sabbath? Was Sabbath-keeping **as** important as circumcision? Yes, it was *more* important! Why? Consider these points:

- (a) The Sabbath, unlike circumcision, was one of God's ten great Commandments!
- (b) The Sabbath was created **by God**, and He created it back at the time of the creation of man---at which time God *blessed and sanctified* the Sabbath day (Gen.2:2-3; Ex.20: 8-11).
- (c) The Sabbath was to be "a sign" between God and his people: "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: "Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for **it is a SIGN between Me and you throughout your generations**, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is **holy** to you. *Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death*; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people... **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'" (Ex. 31:12-17).
- (d) It was largely *because* of Sabbath-breaking that God sent the Jews into captivity! (Neh. 13:15-18).
- (e) It is made plain in Zechariah chapter 14 that in tomorrow's world (*after Christ returns, and under the New Covenant*), **all nations** will be absolutely *required* to observe God's *annual* holy days. Those who refuse, will receive the *plagues* of God. Now, if all nations will be required to keep the *annual* holy days, how much **more** the weekly Sabbath---one of the Ten Commandments?! In fact, Sabbath-keeping in tomorrow's world is spoken of in Isa. 66:23.

So, as we have seen, the "Sabbath" has certainly always been *more* important than "circumcision!" The Sabbath was of such *paramount* importance that any attempt to *change* it---or spiritualize it away---would have caused a **massive uproar** among Jewish converts to Christianity! Such uproar would have made the "circumcision controversy" *pale* in comparison!

Yet, there **is no** such controversy in the New Testament concerning the Sabbath! All the apostles and converts *knew* that the seventh-day Sabbath **remained** in force for Christians---and therefore it never became an issue of discussion.

Why Not More Forcefully Reiterated in the N.T.?

Some might still wonder....Why doesn't the New Testament *more forcefully* reiterate (or repeat) the need for Christians to obey the Sabbath command?

It must be understood: That which we today call "the Old Testament," the early apostles *respectfully* referred to as "*the word of God*" (Acts 13:46). They referred to it as "*Scripture*" (II Tim. 3:15-16; II Peter 1:20-21).

These Scriptures of the Old Testament were **not** considered "old" or "no longer applicable." In II Timothy 3:15, Paul told Timothy that "...*from childhood* you have known the Holy Scriptures [speaking of the Old Testament], which are able to make you wise *for salvation* through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Yes, Paul said that the Old Testament instructs us unto salvation!

Yet, Paul, *in no way*, neglected the preaching of Christ. In fact, notice where Paul preached Christ *from* the Old Testament: "So when they had appointed him [Paul] a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, **persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets [i.e., from the Old Testament], from morning till evening**" (Acts 28:23).

"The New Testament refers to the Old Testament about 250 times. You cannot accept the New Testament without recognizing the authority of the Old. The two don't contradict; they *complete* each other. The Bible is one book. It cannot be divided."²

So, the answer as to why the New Testament doesn't *more forcefully* reiterate the Sabbath command, is that there was *no need* to repeat what was already abundantly emphasized in the only Bible they had---the Scriptures we now refer to as the "Old Testament."

Many mistakenly believe that Christians need keep *only* those Old Testament laws that are *repeated* in the New Testament. Such thinking, in effect, *abolishes* all guidance given by the Old Testament scriptures. Furthermore, that thinking is completely BACKWARDS! In reality, **we must keep ALL laws revealed in the Old Testament unless** they are specifically, or in spiritual principle, **abrogated** in the New Testament! And that certainly applies to each of God's holy *Ten Commandments*!

Scripture tells us that under the *New Covenant*, God puts **His laws** *in the minds and hearts* of Christians! (Heb. 8:10). Does that sound like it is alright in God's sight for Christians to *disobey* His law---to *disobey* the fourth Commandment to keep His Sabbath day holy?!

Note: For *more* proof that the Sabbath was not changed to Sunday, see the Living Church of God booklet *Which Day Is The Christian Sabbath?*

References:

1. *Which day is the CHRISTIAN SABBATH?* by Herbert W. Armstrong, 1976 booklet, pp. 93-94
2. "Is the Old Testament Inspired?" Dibar Apartian, *Good News* magazine, Dec. 1980