

## **Is Sunday the Sabbath Day in its Christian Form? What does Scripture say?**

Few topics generate so much controversy among those who name the name of Christ as the Sabbath. Some cling to it as the great badge of obedience; others discard it with little thought; and many sincere believers are unsure where to stand. Sabbatarians fear that any loosening of the fourth commandment dishonors God. Others fear that any return to Sabbatarianism dishonors Christ. One side believes they are honoring God by “holding fast” to a particular day, while the other is convinced that such observance drifts into legalism.

Yet beneath these different persuasions lies a deeper question, where does the Lord call his people to rest? The Scripture answers that question with unshakable clarity, our rest is Christ Himself. The only safe place to begin is not with days or debates, but with Christ Himself. He is our rest. He is our righteousness. He is our Sabbath. If we start anywhere else, we will inevitably drift into shadows rather than substance, into arguments about calendars rather than the Person in whom all God’s promises find their “yea and amen.” II Corinthians 1:20. My aim in this post is simple, to bring the discussion back to Christ. Not to diminish obedience, but to exalt the obedience of the One who fulfilled the law; not to diminish holiness, but to anchor it in the Holy One; not to minimize rest, but attempt to point to the ONE in whom all our rest is to be found.

Though at first glance the Sabbath question may appear to be a secondary matter, something belonging to the fringes of doctrine, it is in fact far more deeply connected to the gospel than many realize. That is why this subject matters. The question before us is not merely, “which day is the Sabbath” but, “where is my confidence? Where is my righteousness? Where is my rest?” If our rest is in anything other than the finished work of Christ, then even the most religious observance becomes a subtle denial of grace. The real controversy is not ultimately about a day, but about where the sinner finds rest, righteousness, and assurance before God. That is why Paul reacted so sharply when believers began turning back to days and seasons, for behind the calendar stood a theology, and behind the theology stood a heart caught between shadow and substance, attempting to hold onto signs that had already served their purpose in pointing to Christ. “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” Galatians 4:9-11. A heart that clings to a day is often a heart that struggles to cling to Christ, and this is why this subject cannot be dismissed as secondary. Whenever anything, no matter how sincerely well-intentioned, begins to share the ground that belongs to Christ, the gospel is being displaced, and the soul is being robbed.

All of this presses the issue closer than many are comfortable with, because once the question becomes one of rest, we are no longer discussing a day on the calendar but the posture of the heart itself, and the very thing meant to point us to Christ can, in the flesh, become something we trust instead of Christ. And this is precisely where the danger becomes more than theoretical, for what begins as a sign easily becomes a substitute. A weekly sabbath can become for some the last stronghold of self-righteousness, a familiar observance that offers a feeling of faithfulness that can create a sense of piety while bypassing the real rest found exclusively in Christ.

What makes the question even more striking is not merely what the New Testament says, but what it does not say. If the Sabbath were intended to remain a binding command upon the church, the apostles would have made that unmistakably clear. Paul, Peter, James, and John wrote to congregations filled with Gentile believers, men and women with no sabbath heritage, no seventh-day tradition, no Jewish framework to fall back upon. They reiterated every command that reflects God's unchanging holiness. They labored to instruct them in righteousness amid idolatry, sexual immorality, corruption, and doctrinal upheaval. They warn about adultery, idolatry, covetousness, lying, murder, blasphemy; they reaffirm the sanctity of marriage, the evil of sexual sin, the necessity of honoring father and mother, the wickedness of theft, murder, and lying. They apply these moral standards with clarity and urgency, but there is a divine silence concerning any "Christian Sabbath." And that silence is deliberate. It reflects the truth that what the Sabbath foreshadowed is now fully realized in Christ.

This silence becomes even more conspicuous when we remember that the early believers, from what we read, met constantly, daily in some cases, for prayer, fellowship, and breaking of bread. Acts 2:46. And when the apostles address the daily life of Christ's people, teaching them how to live, how to gather, how to worship, there are no instructions whatsoever regarding binding the conscience to any calendar-based observance. The emphasis falls entirely on Christ, not on assigning spiritual weight to one day above another. It reflects the reality that the "veil is rent," Luke 23:45, and the signs have completed their purpose in pointing us to Christ Himself.

And when Scripture finally speaks of the Sabbath in relation to the finished work of Christ, it does so not to resurrect it, but to bury it. "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holiday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." Colossians 2:16-17. The very place where a "Christian Sabbath" might be assumed, the Spirit of God explicitly denies it. Thus the New Testament does not leave the question open. It is not silent because the matter is unimportant. It is silent because Christ has come. And when Christ has come, shadows give way, signs are fulfilled, and types must fade, having accomplished their God-given purpose of directing us to the ONE in whom all rest is found.

If the gospel did not speak further on this matter, the argument would already be decisive. But the New Testament does more than remain silent about a "Christian Sabbath," it issues direct warnings about returning to days and seasons as a measure of spirituality. "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain." Galatians 4:10-11. "One man esteemeth one day above another, another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Romans 14:5. These warnings are consistent, urgent, and unambiguous. Paul is not correcting a minor misunderstanding about external observances, he is defending the very heart of Christian liberty. The danger is not that we might simply misread a command; the danger is that we might subtly shift our confidence from Christ to something else, something smaller or safer, something we can measure. Together they form a unified apostolic witness, that believers are not under days, but under Christ.

Nothing dismantles modern or reformed Sabbatarianism more quickly than simply watching Christ move through the Gospels. Sabbath after Sabbath, He overturned their entire structure, and demolished the very framework men now try to rebuild. He healed on the Sabbath repeatedly, deliberately, and publicly, and always in direct defiance of Pharisaic prohibitions. "And they watched Him, whether He would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse Him." Mark 3:1-5. The pattern repeats itself again and again: "And the Scribes and Pharisees watched him, whether he would heal on the sabbath day; that they might find an accusation against him." Luke 6:7. "And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, there are six days in which men ought to work; in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day." Luke 13:14. "And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes...therefore said some of the Pharisees, this man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day." John 9:14-16. And John summarizes the Pharisees' rage with sobering clarity: "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." John 5:18.

These repeated confrontations were not random acts of mercy; they were deliberate blows against a false understanding of God's rest. If their objections had not yet exposed the heart of the matter, the next confrontation certainly does. And it is here the narrative turns, from sabbath controversy to sabbath authority. And Matthew shows this most clearly as hungry disciples move through a field of corn under the gaze of Pharisees eager to accuse, bringing the whole dispute into its clearest focus. "But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day." Matthew 12:2. Christ meets their accusation head-on. He feeds His disciples when they forbid eating. He confronts their traditions on the very day they claim to honor most. What begins as a simple act, hunger met by plucking grain, becomes the moment in which Christ Himself interprets the Sabbath. Then He lifts the veil entirely: "One greater than the temple is here." Matthew 12:6. At that point the conclusion is unavoidable. If Christ is greater than the temple, then He is greater than all temple legislation, including the Sabbath, and with that declaration He establishes not only His superiority over the temple but over the entire legal system attached to it.

And then He speaks the words that collapse every Sabbatarian framework: "The Son of Man is Lord even of the sabbath day." Matthew 12:8. In that moment He does not merely reinterpret the Sabbath; He claims sovereign authority over it. The Sabbath points to Him. True rest is found in Him. By calling Himself "Lord of the Sabbath," Christ was not adjusting their tradition; He was revealing His deity. The Lord of the Sabbath is the Creator Himself. The Jews understood His claim immediately, so clearly, in fact, that they sought His death. "Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him." Matthew 12:14.

If Christ is Lord of the Sabbath, the next question must be asked, what has He done with it? He did not adjust the day but replaced the shadow with Himself, the One to whom the day always pointed. The Sabbath was never meant to be the final rest, it was a shadow, a weekly picture pointing forward to the true Rest that God would provide in His Son. And when the Lord of the Sabbath came, the shadow met its Substance. The sign reached its fulfillment.

The rest that could never be found in a day was now freely given in the Person of Christ. Scripture's testimony is unmistakable, the Sabbath was preparatory, provisional, prophetic, but Christ is the Rest. He is the One in whom weary sinners cease from their own works. He is the destination to which every Sabbath sign pointed. And unless we see Him as its fulfillment, we will cling to the shadow and miss the substance.

If the Gospels show us Christ as Lord of the Sabbath, Hebrews shows us what He has done with it. In Hebrews 3-4 we find the only extended New Testament exposition of the word Sabbath, and remarkably, the writer again does not direct us to a day, but to a Person. The Spirit of God defines the true Sabbath rest as entering into Christ by faith. Israel fell short because of unbelief, not because they mismanaged a particular day. The promise of rest "remaineth" not as a weekly observance but as a present, spiritual reality found only in the Son. "We which have believed do enter into rest." Hebrews 4:3. The argument of Hebrews 4 could not be clearer, the Sabbath was never the final resting place, Christ is. Not one day a week, but every hour in Christ. The weekly day was only a shadow; the true Rest promised from the foundation of the world is Christ Himself, and until the conscience is settled in Him, the heart will chase after days, patterns, and outward observances to find what only He can give.

There is yet another truth that helps settle this matter. The Sabbath, and the Sabbath alone, is explicitly called a sign. Not a moral law written on the conscience, not a universal standard, but a covenant sign given to Israel and Israel alone. And signs exist for one purpose, to direct attention to something greater. As Paul writes, "but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." I Corinthians 13:10. The Sabbath was such a sign. Signs are temporary by design; they vanish when the reality appears. Thus, when Christ came as the true Rest, the sign had reached its appointed conclusion.

The Old Testament underscores this repeatedly. In Exodus 31 the Lord declares the Sabbath to be "a sign between me and you throughout your generations." Exodus 31:13. Ezekiel echoes the same, "moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them." Ezekiel 20:12. The Sabbath was God's covenantal signature upon that nation under that dispensation. "I am the LORD your God; walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the LORD your God." Ezekiel 20:19-20. The Sabbath was not written on Gentile consciences. It was a visible boundary identifying Israel as a people redeemed out of Egypt. No Gentile nation was ever commanded to keep it. The point is underscored further by Paul's letters to Gentile believers, in which he never once binds them to Sabbath observance. And just as circumcision gave way to a new heart, and Passover gave way to the Lamb of God, so the temple gave way to the true dwelling place of God in Christ. In the same way, the Sabbath yields to Him who is the true Rest promised from the beginning.

Human tradition and man-made religion has a remarkable way of neutralizing the very commandments it claims to uphold. The result is neither true Judaism nor true Christianity, but a confused hybrid formed by blending what God never joined. When the professing church appeals to the Fourth Commandment to defend Sabbath-keeping, it unwittingly proves the point, the law it quotes is the very law it does not keep. Scripture says without

hesitation, “thou shalt not do any work,” and anyone who chooses the Jewish ground is bound to that unbending standard. The law does not bend, soften, or adjust to modern convenience. If we choose the law, we choose all of it, along with its solemn verdict, “cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” Deuteronomy 27:26; Galatians 3:10.

Nowhere does Scripture authorize a modified or softened version of the Sabbath command. And yet when I watch modern Sabbath-keepers, I am stunned by the ease with which they imagine themselves to be “keeping the day holy.” The disconnect is astonishing! Their selective abstentions bear no resemblance to the unbending standard of the Old Covenant, where a man gathering sticks was executed without hesitation. Numbers 15:32-36. To keep the Sabbath as law is to keep it as given, with its severity intact. Anything less is not obedience; it is a man-made substitute dressed in biblical language. Such alterations are exactly what our Lord condemned, traditions that make the “word of God of none effect.” Mark 7:13.

I have often wondered how a believer can imagine himself more holy on one day than on another. What changes? Does sin become less sinful on Monday and more sinful on Sunday? Are earthly tasks defiling on one day and harmless on the next? How can we suppose that our behavior becomes more pleasing to Christ simply because it is performed within a certain twenty-four-hour period? The idea that we can arrange our activities into “clean” and “unclean” categories based merely on the turning of the week seems, to me, a kind of mystery. Are we not to glorify Him in all things, every hour? If our actions are sinful on Saturday, they remain sinful on Sunday. What makes us imagine that we honor Christ more by declaring certain activities off-limits for a single day, as if sin were somehow less sinful on the other six? We work, we labor, we tend to our households, but in all these things, is Christ ever absent from the believer’s walk? Does He not sanctify our entire life, not merely one day? The notion that our spiritual condition rises or falls with the day of the week is difficult to reconcile with life in Christ.

Additionally, if one wishes to bind the conscience with a “Christian Sabbath,” a simple question must be answered, where and when did God ever change the day? Search the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation, and you will not find a single command, not even a hint, that the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh day to the first. Yes, the resurrection took place on the first day. Yes, the disciples met on the first day. But the Bible nowhere declares that the first day was set apart as a day to be kept in place of the seventh. The attempt to shift the Sabbath to Sunday exposes the weakness of the entire Sabbatarian claim. If the fourth commandment is morally binding in the same form given at Sinai, then the seventh day remains the seventh day. Let’s not be dishonest with Scripture or with ourselves, nor overlook the obvious, that every Sabbatarian argument collapses at this very point. If the seventh day can be replaced without divine command, then the supposed “moral law” has already been modified, proving it is not the immutable standard they claim. “Remember the seventh day” is not open to interpretation or subject to revision. The law does not permit substitutions. If the Sabbath law still stands, then the seventh day stands with it. If we insist on a Sabbath law, we must take it as given, “the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God.” Exodus 20:10.

Strip away all of the layers, and only one reality remains, the Sabbath command cannot be revived without reviving the entire covenant to which it belonged. The moment we insist upon the day, we bind ourselves to the whole. The moment we claim the law, we claim its curse. There is no going back. The law served its purpose; the Lord of the Sabbath reigns. And in His reign our rest is secure, our righteousness complete, and our salvation finished. (Marc Jacobsson, Greenville, Michigan, USA).