

The Sabbath

Christians do not keep the Sabbath. The church is not under the law. The Sabbath command is part of the law given to the nation of Israel. It was given as “a sign for Israel” (Exodus 31:16,17. Ezekiel 20:12).

When Jesus came, He was “born under the law”. That is, He was born into the Jewish race who were obliged to keep the law. That is why the gospels record Jesus keeping the Sabbath. But Jesus taught that the new wine of Christianity could not be contained in the old wine-skins of Judaism (Luke 5:33-39).

Christianity is not a reformed Judaism; but is based on a new covenant, where God’s laws are written on our hearts (Heb. 10:16-20), and brings us into a new society incorporating both Jew and Gentile in one body (Eph. 2:11-3:6). To live a life that pleases God in this new covenant relationship comes from the motivation and the guidance of the Spirit of God, not an external set of rules (2 Cor. 3:6; Rom. 8:1-4; Gal. 5:18,25.).

After the resurrection of Christ, there is no record of the church ever observing the Sabbath, though in the Acts we read that the believers took advantage of the Sabbath to preach the gospel in the Synagogues.

All the other nine commandments are re-iterated in the New Testament, but the only teaching given by the apostles on the Fourth Commandment was:

A. “Therefore, let no-one pass judgement on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival, or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come.” (Col. 2:16)

B. In Hebrews 4 the writer speaks of the Sabbath as a rest that the Christian enters into after becoming a child of God.

We need no longer strive to keep the law in order to earn merit with God; but we are justified (accounted righteous) by faith, and rest from trying to please God by our works. Hebrews also shows that the Sabbath was “a shadow of what is to come”, speaking of heaven. Surely, if God intended the Sabbath to be observed by those in the New Covenant, He would clearly say so, especially in view of the very prominent place it had in the Old Covenant with Israel!

In the New Testament the believers met together on the first day of the week. Paul’s visit to Troas was for a whole seven days, and then “on the first day of the week”, they gathered together. The clear inference is that it was the practice of Christians to meet on Sundays.

Sabbath-keeping by some individuals and churches today is based on the concept that the Sabbath was the day of worship. Though the Jews under the law did worship God on the Sabbath, that is not what the Sabbath law was about. The Sabbath command was to do no work on the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:8-11). Nowhere in Scripture is the Sabbath day commanded to be the day of worship. In Acts, whenever a meeting was held on the Sabbath, it was a meeting of Jews and/or Gentile converts to Judaism, not Christians.

When Gentiles began joining the church, some Christian Jews began unsettling them by insisting that they keep the law (Acts 15:5,24). The apostles and church leaders met and discussed the issue in the Jerusalem council and responded by sending a letter to all the Gentile believers saying: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity”. (Acts 15:28-29).

No mention is made of the Sabbath when answering the charge that Gentiles must keep the law! It is inconceivable that the apostles would neglect to include Sabbath-keeping if it was God's command for Christians to observe the Sabbath day.

After the first century, the early church fathers make clear reference to the normal custom of the church in meeting together on the first day of the week, being called at times "the Lord's Day". For example, Barnabas: "Wherefore we keep the Lord's Day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose from the dead"

From one of my sermons ...

The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ

- Scripture clearly states that the Law was given to Israel and not to the Gentiles or the Church (Deut.4:7-8; Ps.147:19-20; Mal.4:4).
- Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai from the Hand of God.

The purpose of the Law of Moses

1. To reveal the holiness of God, and therefore to reveal the standard of righteousness that God demanded for a proper relationship with Him (Deut. 5:22-28 Romans 3:20 and 28)
2. To keep the Jews a distinct people (Lev. 11:44-45; Deut. 7:6)
3. To provide Israel with occasions and means for worship.
4. To reveal sin (Romans 3:19-20, 5:20 and 7:7)
5. To lead sinners to faith in Jesus the Saviour (Gal. 3:24).

The unity of the Law of Moses

2 mistakes:

1. Dividing the Law into ceremonial and moral commandments...the believer is free from the ceremonial commandments but is still under the moral law.
2. The Ten Commandments are still valid today, while the other 603 commandments are not (even though ... written down as Moses was commanded by God).
 - The Mosaic Law is viewed as a unit.
 - The word, Torah or "Law," is always singular when applied to the Law of Moses, although it contains 613 commandments. (same: *Nomos*)
 - There is no scriptural basis for separating the Ten Commandments from the other 603

(ie. a person under the Law of Moses who eats pork is guilty of breaking the Ten Commandments, although none of the ten says anything about pork)

The Law of Moses is rendered inoperative

1. The Law of Moses has been rendered inoperative with the death of Messiah; ie. the Law no longer has authority over any individual (Rom 10:4 - *Christ is the end of the law* + Gal 2:16 & Heb. 7:19)
2. The Mosaic Law was never meant to be permanent. In Galatians 3:19, Paul describes the Law of Moses as an addition to the Abrahamic Covenant, as a temporary addition until Christ (*till the seed should come*).

3. With Christ there comes a new priesthood. Heb 7:11-12 explains that the Levitical priesthood could not bring perfection; only the Messiah's blood could do that (Heb. 9:11-10:18).

Heb 7:18 states that the Mosaic Law was *"set aside because it was weak and useless; for the law made nothing perfect"*

4. In 2 Cor 3:2-11 Paul calls the law the *ministry that brought death* and the *ministry that condemns*.

In v.11 - *katargeo* (The Law has been rendered inoperative).

The believer is under a new law

The new law is called the Law of Christ in Galatians 6:2, and the Law of the Spirit of Life in Romans 8:2. The Law of Christ contains all the commandments applicable to a New Testament believer.

The reason there is so much confusion is that the two have many similar commandments (9 of the Decalogue).

The principle of freedom

Sabbath keeping is, for the Christian, a matter of spiritual freedom, not a command from God. The believer in Christ is free from the necessity of keeping any commandment of the Law of Moses, but is also free to keep parts of the Mosaic Law *if he so desires* (shown in the actions of Paul's vow in Acts 18:18, his desire to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost in Acts 20:16 and keeping the purification rites in Acts 21:17-26). Sabbath-keeping is an issue where we are therefore not to judge each other.

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (Galatians 5:13-15)