

WHICH WAY, AMERICA?

Night 6 • Part 1

The Sabbath

1. Isn't the Sabbath for the Jews only?

Answer: No. Jesus said, "The sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27). It is not for the Jews only, but for mankind—all men and women everywhere. The Jewish nation did not even exist until 2,500 years after the Sabbath was made.

2. As Christians, shouldn't we be keeping the Lord's day, instead of the Jewish Sabbath?

Answer: First of all, the Sabbath is no more "Jewish" than any of the other commandments in God's law. The Sabbath is not the "Jewish Sabbath," but rather "the Sabbath of the LORD thy God" (Exodus 20:10). We should keep the Sabbath as well as the Lord's day.

Which day is the Lord's day? Let's get the answer from the Lord. There is only one day that He has identified as "My holy day."

Isaiah 58:13 says: "If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words."

What day did Jesus say He was Lord of? "For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day" (Matthew 12:8). (See also Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5.) When we keep the Sabbath, we are keeping the Lord's day!

3. Didn't Paul tell the Colossians that it was no longer important to keep the Sabbath?

Answer: The text referred to is found in Colossians 2:16–17. Here is what it says: "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

This is one of the most misused passages in the entire New Testament. Paul is referring to the Jewish feasts, meat offerings, drink offerings, and sabbath days, *which were a shadow of things to come*. Here (verse 17) is the *key* to understanding what Paul was referring to. He spoke of certain sabbaths "which are a shadow of things to come."

The question of course is, "Which are the sabbaths that Paul is describing to the Colossians as 'a shadow of things to come?'"

There are two specific types of Sabbaths in the Old Testament:

- a. The *weekly* Sabbath - a memorial of creation
- b. The *annual* (yearly) sabbaths - “a shadow of things to come.”

Paul leaves no doubt as to which sabbaths he is talking about in Colossians.

The yearly ceremonial rest days (called “sabbaths” or “holy days”) in connection with the yearly religious services, were not connected to the seventh-day Sabbath or even to the weekly cycle. Each of these ceremonial sabbaths, or rest days, fell on a fixed day of the year, and thus a different day of the week from one year to the next (like your birthday). They are therefore properly called annual sabbaths, in contrast to the weekly Sabbath.

These annual sabbaths on which work was forbidden are listed in Leviticus chapter 23:

- 1st Day of Unleavened Bread – 15th day, 1st month (vs. 6–7)
- 7th Day of Unleavened Bread – 21st day, 1st month (vs. 8, 11)
- Day of Pentecost – 6th day, 3rd month (vs. 16, 21)
- Feast of Trumpets – 1st day, 7th month (vs. 24–25)
- Day of Atonement – 10th day, 7th month (vs. 27–31)
- 1st day of Feast of Tabernacles – 15th day, 7th month (vs. 34–35)
- 7th day of Feast of Tabernacles – 22nd day, 7th month (vs. 36)

These annual sabbaths were to be kept holy “*besides the sabbaths of the Lord,*” (verse 38) which were the weekly Sabbaths of the fourth commandment.

The annual sabbaths were part of the ceremonial system that pointed forward to the life and death of Christ and ceased to have meaning when He died on the cross. They were a “shadow of things to come.”

In contrast to the weekly Sabbath, which was ordained for all mankind at the close of creation week, the annual sabbaths pointed forward to the coming Messiah. Their observance ended with Christ’s death on the cross.

The seventh-day Sabbath does not point to some future event, like the ceremonial sabbaths which, with their sacrifices, pointed forward to Christ. The weekly Sabbath points *back* to creation.

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy... *For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it*” (Exodus 20:8, 11).

Paul unmistakably states that the sabbaths to which he referred in Colossians 2 were “a shadow of things to come.” Incidentally, Paul, the writer of Colossians, faithfully kept the weekly Sabbath day holy (Acts 17:1–2; 18:4).

4. According to Romans 14:5 the day we keep is a matter of personal opinion, right?

Answer: We must admit first of all, that the word “Sabbath” is not found in the entire chapter. To assume that Paul is referring to the weekly Sabbath of God’s law is contrary to the context and to Scripture itself.

Romans 14 begins: “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.”

This chapter concerns “doubtful things” and is not a discussion of God’s law. The Ten Commandments are not “doubtful,” but rather are exceedingly clear, written with the finger of God on two tables of stone.

Notice that the whole chapter is on judging one another (verses 4, 10, 13). The “weak” brother “eats” some things and “esteems one day above another” while the strong brother believes that he may “eat all things” and “esteems every day alike” (Romans 14:2, 5).

The early Church was made up of Jewish believers and Gentile converts. Although Paul did not specify what “days” he was referring to, he was probably talking about the “esteeming” or “not esteeming” of certain Jewish fast and feast days (Luke 18:12) and certain pagan feast days when people were especially “eating of those things offered in sacrifice unto idols” (1 Corinthians 8:4).

A “strong” Jewish Christian who knew that “an idol is nothing” would have no scruples about eating “meat in an idol’s temple” on a pagan feast day (1 Corinthians 8:4, 10). Paul warned these “strong” Jewish believers: “But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak [the Gentile convert from idolatry]. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol’s temple [on a pagan feast day], shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish [if he is drawn back into idolatry], for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth” (1 Corinthians 8:9–13).

Jewish Christians were judging Gentile Christians for not observing the Jewish fast / feast days, and the Gentile converts were judging the Jewish believers for eating things offered to idols. Paul is simply saying, “Don’t judge each other” (see verse 4).

There is no evidence that the discussion about “the weak and the strong” in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8 has *anything to do with the Sabbath!* God has never said “one may choose to esteem my Sabbath, while another man may choose to esteem Sunday, or every day alike.” He has not left it with us to “pick a day, any day.” Instead, God has commanded, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy... the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God” (Exodus 20:8, 10).

5. Didn’t Paul express concern to the Galatians for observing certain days and months?

Answer: The text in question is Galatians 4:10–11: “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you.”

Have Christians ever thought of applying these words to Sunday? The context refers to the past pagan life of these converts: “Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. 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” (Galatians 4:8–10).

The Galatians were turning “again” to idolatry. They must have been slipping back into the observance of pagan “days, months, times and years.” They were also under attack from certain Jewish believers who wanted them to be circumcised and to keep the law of Moses (See Galatians 2:3–4; Acts 15:1). These Jewish believers were probably commanding them to keep the Jewish feasts of the ceremonial law (Passover, etc.) which Paul clearly said in Colossians 2:14–17 were nailed to the cross. The “weak and beggarly elements” leading to “bondage” were not the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandment law is “the royal law ... the law of liberty” (James 2:8–12).

6. Shouldn't we keep Sunday holy in honor of Christ's resurrection?

Answer: We cannot honor Christ by breaking His law! Jesus Himself said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Let's not use the resurrection of Christ as a reason for breaking one of the Ten Commandments (the Sabbath)! "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4).

Baptism is the ceremony to honor the resurrection (Romans 6:4). Those who truly wish to honor Christ will choose to obey His commandments rather than the traditions and practices of man.

Matthew 15:8-9: "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Mark 7:9: "And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition."

7. Didn't the Jewish leaders accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath because He healed people on that day?

Answer: The Sabbath was a big issue during the ministry of Jesus. The issue *was not what day is God's holy day*, but rather how to keep the day (the Sabbath) holy. The Jewish Pharisees had made the Sabbath a burden to people by adding nearly a thousand laws and traditions to the Sabbath commandment. Jesus openly rebuked them for laying these traditions "on men's shoulders" (Matthew 23:4). The Pharisees would help a suffering animal on the Sabbath, but refused to help a suffering individual (Matthew 12:11-12)!

The Jewish priests became very angry with Jesus because He did not keep the Sabbath *their way*. They made up a rule, "No healing on the Sabbath." Christ, the Creator of the world (John 1:1-3) and Lord of Sabbath (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5) ignored their "rule."

One day "the ruler of the synagogue" challenged Christ "because that Jesus healed on the sabbath day" (Luke 13:14). Jesus countered, "Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" (Luke 13:16).

In His many Sabbath healings (See Matthew 12:1-14; John 5:1-18; etc.), Jesus revealed His Divinity and His power over Satan. For this very reason, the Jews plotted His death. "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).

Jesus denied their accusations, stating plainly, "I have kept my Father's commandments" (John 15:10). He never broke the Sabbath, *and He is "equal with God."*

The Pharisees also accused Jesus of blasphemy (Luke 5:21; John 10:33) and of being demon possessed (John 7:20; John 8:48, 52). If we accept the Pharisees' accusation that Christ broke the Sabbath, we must also accept their charges that Jesus was demon possessed and a blasphemer.

8. If Christians are to keep the Sabbath, why did the apostles and elders who met at Jerusalem not mention it in their instructions to the churches?

Answer: The council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:19–20, 28–29) did not list all the duties of a Christian. The meeting was held to address certain issues. The two main issues were circumcision and meat offered to idols. The apostles said nothing to the Gentile Christians about stealing, lying, murder, and many other sins. Their silence on these issues no more condones the breaking of these commandments than does their silence about the Sabbath prove that the fourth commandment was abolished.

9. When does the Sabbath day begin?

Answer: The Bible says: “From even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath” (Leviticus 23:32). “And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath” (Nehemiah 13:19).

In Bible reckoning, the day begins in the evening when the sun sets. “Evening and morning were the first day,” “second day,” etc. (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). “And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils” (Mark 1:32).

The Sabbath then begins Friday evening at sunset.

10. How should we keep the Sabbath holy?

Answer: The Bible outlines clearly the things that we should do to keep the Sabbath holy, and to make the Sabbath “a delight” (Isaiah 58:13).

a. Refrain from secular business

The fourth commandment tells us: “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work” (Exodus 20:8–10).

We are to work at our normal jobs during the six working days, but from sundown Friday evening until sundown Sabbath evening, we should “not do any work.” Late Friday afternoon, after Jesus died, “the sabbath drew on” (Luke 23:54). Then Christ’s followers “rested the sabbath day according to the commandment” (Luke 23:56). Secular business should be laid aside. Shopping, laundry, homework, gardening, and housecleaning should be done during the six working days. The Bible also calls buying and selling on the Sabbath an “evil thing” (Nehemiah 13:15–22).

b. Attend church to worship God

Jesus, our example (1 Peter 2:21), faithfully went to church each Sabbath. “And 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 for to read” (Luke 4:16).

It was Paul’s manner also to attend church on the Sabbath (See Acts 17:1–2).

c. Go out into nature

“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither” (Acts 16:13).

The Sabbath is an excellent opportunity to take the family away from the sights and sounds of the city, and spend time together amidst the works of the Creator in nature. After all, the Sabbath is the memorial of creation! The Sabbath is a weekly family vacation away from the pressures and cares of life. It is an oasis of time with God in the weary desert of life—a time of physical, mental, and spiritual refreshment.

d. Minister to people

Jesus did not cease His ministry to people on the Sabbath. He taught them, healed them, and blessed them on the Sabbath.

The Sabbath day is an excellent opportunity to visit the sick and those shut up at home; a day to study the Bible with people, to share its truths and promises.

11. Doesn't Hebrews 8:7–13 say that the old covenant is done away with? If the old covenant was the Ten Commandments, why then do we need to keep the Sabbath today?

Answer: The question of the covenants has been greatly distorted and misunderstood. Briefly let us notice what the old covenant was not. It was not the Ten Commandments. Why? Because they did not wax old and vanish away (verse 13 – See Romans 3:31). They did not have poor promises (verse 6 – See Ephesians 6:1–3) and they were not faulty (verse 7 – See Psalm 19:7 and Romans 7:12).

Then what was the old covenant, and how was it ratified? It was an agreement between God and Israel described in Exodus 19:3–8 whereby the people promised to keep the Ten Commandments. It was ratified by the sprinkled blood of an ox (Exodus 24:7–8). The poor promises of the people failed because they tried to obey in human strength alone.

In comparison, the new covenant was instituted and ratified by the blood of Jesus at His death (Hebrews 12:24; 13:20; Matthew 26:28). It went into effect when He died, “For a testament [covenant] is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth” (Hebrews 9:17).

Now get this point also about the new covenant: “Though it be but a man’s covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannuleth, or addeth thereto” (Galatians 3:15). This means that after the death of Christ, nothing could be added to or taken away from the new covenant. This is why Jesus introduced the Lord’s Supper on Thursday night before He died – so that it would come under the new covenant (Matthew 26:28).

But ponder this question, and don’t miss the significance of it. When did Sunday keeping begin? All will answer, “After the resurrection of Jesus.” Then it could not be a part of the new covenant. Nothing could be added after the death of Jesus, the Testator!

12. Are all “Sabbath-breakers” lost?

Answer: Of course not! Throughout history millions of dedicated Christians have not known about God’s holy Sabbath. It was lost sight of during the many centuries of darkness and tradition when copies of the

Bible were rare. Even today Spirit-filled Christians are breaking the Sabbath unknowingly. The Bible says: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17).

The “Spirit of Truth” is working today to lead sincere seekers into “all truth” (John 16:13). The Bible says: “Thy law is the truth,” and “all thy commandments are truth” (Psalm 119:142, 151).

The prophet Daniel said that at, “the time of the end knowledge shall be increased” (Daniel 12:4). Knowledge is now increasing on the subject of the Bible Sabbath. Sincere pastors and Christians of many denominations are studying and accepting the truth about the Sabbath of Jesus Christ, and choosing to keep the Sabbath holy because they love Jesus.



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