

What Does the Bible Say About the Sabbath?

Recently I have had several people email me questions about the Sabbath. Should we keep the Sabbath? If so, how should we observe it today? Should we worship on the Sabbath? Is it alright to miss a day of worship? Should we refuse to work on the Sabbath? On what day should the Sabbath be kept?

These are just some of the questions that I have received. I decided to post my answers in this article. I am basically doing a copy / paste of the answers that I gave in my emails (with all personal information removed of course) so this article might be a little less formal than some of the others. I hope that the information is still beneficial!

The Sabbath was originally kept on Saturdays, but the very early Christians began to worship on Sundays (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2, Rev. 1:10). They probably did this because it is the day that Jesus rose from the dead (Mat. 28:1).

I am not aware of a Scripture that says that worship should only happen on the Sabbath, or even that the Sabbath was intended by God to be a day of worship. Jews and Christians did worship on the Sabbath, but the only commandment from God was that it would be a day of rest. The Sabbath was intended as a day of rest (Ex. 20:9).

Regardless of whether God commanded worship to happen on the Sabbath, there is no rule against worshiping on any other day. Why would God want His children to worship Him on just one day of the week? To say that a person *can't* worship on any other day but the Sabbath is just human tradition!

The Sabbath was intended as a day of rest. It was also included in the 10 Commandments, and the 10 Commandments are considered by most Christians (including myself) as being

morally binding even today. So should we observe the Sabbath? Yes, I think we should. But *why* should we observe the Sabbath, and *how* should we do it? Should it be a burden? Absolutely not!

See, Jesus made it clear that the Sabbath was created for man. God knows that humans need rest, and He created the Sabbath for that reason. Humans messed it up when they created so many rules about the Sabbath that it caused the Sabbath to become the exact *opposite* of what God intended (Mat. 12:1-14)!

At this point it might be beneficial to quote Matthew 12:1-14, then make a couple of observations:

"At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse Him. And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? "How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then He said to the man,

"Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him. " (Matthew 12:1-14, NASB)

Now, some observations about this passage:

1. Jesus' disciples picked grain on the Sabbath. They were hungry and needed to eat. Jesus approved that action.
2. Jesus pointed out that the priests in the Temple work on the Sabbath, but they are innocent. I think this point has a direct correlation with our church services today. The people who "work" in a church often find the "Sabbath" the most stressful day of the week! In that case, I think it's good that those people who "work" in the church be given a day in the week to rest.
3. Sometimes things have to be done on the Sabbath. If a sheep falls in a ditch, get it out. If your car breaks down and you have to fix it, get it fixed. If your boss demands that you work or be fired, then work. Sometimes exceptions have to be made. That's not my opinion, that's Jesus! (Mat. 12:11-13)

So what should we take from all of this? Well, my personal conclusion is that each person should try to have a day of rest in the week. I don't think it has to be a Saturday or a Sunday. I also think that

"rest" can mean different things to different people. Hiking a difficult mountain might be relaxing for one person but hard work for another. Cleaning the house might be relaxing for some people and work for others. For example, my girlfriend finds cleaning very relaxing. I find playing a computer game or going hiking very relaxing. The definition of "rest" is very dependent on a person's personality.

The core issue of the Sabbath is rest. Humans need a day of rest. And, as always, Jesus says it best:

"The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

With that said, there is still one question that needs to be answered: Is it alright to "miss church"?

The answer to this question is that the Bible does not say "thou shalt attend every church service." The first Christians met for worship every day (Acts 2:41-47; Acts 5:1-11). Sometime after that they began to meet on Sundays. But there is no Scripture that says a person has to go to church every single time the doors are open. However, the Bible does say that we should fellowship with fellow believers (Heb. 10:24), but that is only part of the command. The full passage says:

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:23-25, NASB)

There are three things to note from the above passage:

1. Fellowship is important, and it should not be ignored, but there is no "thou shalt go every Sunday from 10-12" (or whatever) command.
2. The reason we are to assemble is to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds."
3. (This is my personal opinion): If the church that a person is attending is not loving and/or doing good deeds—if church has become a burden, not a place of rest and spiritual edification—then it might be time to pray about finding another church =). But that's just my opinion =)