

# What Is the Christian Sabbath?

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Have you ever wondered what day Christians are to keep? Saturday? Sunday? Are we to keep the day as a Sabbath or as a Lord's Day? Or maybe there is no day for Christians to keep. This might sound like a relatively minor issue. But this question, simple as it sounds, has divided Christianity into four camps, each supporting its own view.

What's more, some people tend to judge others with different opinions on this issue. We are to defend the faith and expose error. But does the Bible authorize the judging of others over the issue of days? This article will answer these questions from the Bible. Whatever your view, please read this entire article to get the full picture. Also, please do not jump to conclusions about what my view is. I will state my view toward the end of the article.

I also want to point out that in writing this article, I am going to explain Scriptures as I see them. You, the reader, have the obligation to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures to see whether these things I say are so (see Acts 17:10-11). As you read this article, you will see that I point out the deficiencies of all of the views but the one I hold. I hold that view because I believe it is the teaching of the Bible and does not have deficiencies. In doing so, I am not judging the Christianity of anyone holding to a view different from my own. Romans 14 is a good chapter to study in this regard (I will have more to say about Romans 14 later). I am only trying to point out what I believe is the Scriptural and better way to understand the issue of keeping days. All of us, when dealing with this subject, must be careful not to add to Scripture (for example, by saying there is a command to keep a day when there is not), impose our views on others against their will, judge others' Christianity, or keep days to earn merit with God (which amounts to legalism).

The four views concerning the day Christians are to keep are:

1) *The Sunday-Sabbath View*. Christians are to keep the Sabbath because it is part of the moral law, but the day (Saturday) on which it was kept in the Old Testament was merely ceremonial and was changed to Sunday with the resurrection of Jesus Christ on Sunday morning. Those who hold this view sometimes call Sunday the Lord's Day, but because they view it as a Sabbath, their use of this term does not put them into the Lord's Day view discussed below. Presbyterians,

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Reformed Christians, Methodists, and some Baptists (especially Reformed Baptists), among others, have historically held the Sunday-Sabbath view. Today, however, only the more conservative churches in these denominations adhere—often quite adamantly—to Sabbath (Sunday) keeping. The rest seem to view the practice as a quaint custom of the past that has little relevance to today.

2) *The Seventh-day Sabbath View*. Christians are to keep the seventh day (Saturday) as the Sabbath as commanded in the Ten Commandments. This view is held, among others, by Seventh-day Adventists; the Seventh-day Baptists; the Church of God (Seventh Day); the Church of God 7th Day; and the various splinter groups of the Worldwide Church of God that adhere to the tenets of Herbert W. Armstrong, such as the Philadelphia Church of God, the United Church of God, the Living Church of God, and the Church of God, International.

3) *The Lord's Day View*. The Sabbath day belongs to the Old Testament and is past, but Christ, by His resurrection and appearances to His disciples, instituted a new day called the Lord's Day. The Lord's Day is Sunday. Those who hold this view do not always agree as to how to observe the Lord's Day. The spectrum ranges from those who treat the day as if it were a Sabbath in everything but name (and who are sometimes judgmental of those at the other end of the spectrum) to those who believe that it is the day on which we should go to church, but that it does not otherwise affect what we do outside of church. The Lord's Day view is held by most who do not fall into the first two views. Some people hold a variation of the Lord's Day view in which they say the Lord's Day was not instituted in the Bible, but should be kept because it was an early church tradition.

The Lord's Day view, by the way, is the official position of both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches (the Eastern church also gives some special regard to the seventh day [Saturday] as the day on which God rested from His works of creation and the day on which Christ rested in death in the tomb). In reality, however, the Roman church has wavered and continues to waver between the Lord's Day view and the Sunday-Sabbath view. Cæsarius of Arles led a movement in the Roman church in the sixth century that taught a form of the Sunday-Sabbath view, but the church officially opposed this. Albertus Magnus (1193–1280) and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) also held to a Sunday-Sabbath view.

Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic letter called *Dies Domini* ([http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_05071998\\_dies-domini\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_05071998_dies-domini_en.html)), wrote in 1998, "It is the duty

of Christians therefore to remember that, although the practices of the Jewish Sabbath are gone, surpassed as they are by the 'fulfilment' which Sunday brings, the underlying reasons for keeping 'the Lord's Day' holy — inscribed solemnly in the Ten Commandments — remain valid, though they need to be reinterpreted in the light of the theology and spirituality of Sunday.... [Jesus Christ]...restores to the Sabbath observance its liberating character, carefully safeguarding the rights of God and the rights of man. This is why Christians, called as they are to proclaim the liberation won by the blood of Christ, felt that they had the authority to transfer the meaning of the Sabbath to the day of the Resurrection.... Therefore, also in the particular circumstances of our own time, Christians will naturally strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy. In any case, they are obliged in conscience to arrange their Sunday rest in a way which allows them to take part in the Eucharist, refraining from work and activities which are incompatible with the sanctification of the Lord's Day, with its characteristic joy and necessary rest for spirit and body." It is interesting to see here how these words show that Catholics still struggle to explain how they believe that Sunday is not the Sabbath while also believing that somehow it is! Notice the equivocation: "...although the practices of the Jewish Sabbath are gone...the underlying reasons for keeping 'the Lord's Day' holy — inscribed solemnly in the Ten Commandments — remain valid.... This is why Christians...felt that they had the authority to transfer the meaning of the Sabbath to the day of the Resurrection."

This same thinking can be seen in Pope Benedict XVI, when, in 2007, he wrote in *Sacramentum Caritatis* ([http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_exh\\_20070222\\_sacramentum-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20070222_sacramentum-caritatis_en.html)), "...the Synod Fathers reaffirmed the importance of the Sunday obligation for all the faithful.... To lose a sense of Sunday as the Lord's Day, a day to be sanctified, is symptomatic of the loss of an authentic sense of Christian freedom, the freedom of the children of God.... Sunday thus appears as the primordial holy day, when all believers, wherever they are found, can become heralds and guardians of the true meaning of time. It gives rise to the Christian meaning of life and a new way of experiencing time, relationships, work, life and death.... For the sake of these important values — while recognizing that Saturday evening, beginning with First Vespers, is already a part of Sunday and a time when the Sunday obligation can be fulfilled — we need to remember that it is Sunday itself that is meant to be kept holy, lest it end up as a day 'empty of God.'... Finally, it is particularly urgent nowadays to remember that the day of the Lord is also a day of rest from work. It is greatly to be hoped that this fact will also be recognized by civil society, so that individuals can be permitted to refrain from work

without being penalized. Christians, not without reference to the meaning of the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition, have seen in the Lord's Day a day of rest from their daily exertions." Again, while avoiding explicitly naming Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, the pope references refraining from work on Sunday to "the Sabbath in the Jewish tradition" and, quite in the fashion of the Jews, even says that this Sunday rest begins on "Saturday evening" (Jews, both anciently and today, keep the seventh day Sabbath from evening to evening).

In the above references, both popes call for laws to protect Sunday observance. Is it preposterous that we could, even today, return to enforced rest on Sunday? Not at all. As I write, France is trying to enforce Sunday laws, which the Associated Press says are "aimed to support 'dominical rest'," against handbag manufacturer and retailer Louis Vuitton ("Louis Vuitton opens store Sunday amid legal battle" <http://www.newser.com/article/d96ujv800/louis-vuitton-opens-store-sunday-amid-legal-battle.html>). French "law empowers a Prefect, after consultation with employers' organizations and trade unions, to issue a formal decision concerning the Sunday closure of establishments within a particular sphere of activity and a particular geographical area" ("Sunday Rest" <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emire/France/SundayRest-FR.htm>). And, backed by Catholic bishops, the European Union has proposed a new law on Sunday rest ("European bishops back proposed EU law on Sunday rest" <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/new.php?n=15107>).

4) *The God's Rest Fulfillment View*. This position is somewhat similar to the third view in agreeing that the requirement to keep a Sabbath day (whether seventh day or Sunday) ended with the Old Covenant. The difference between this view and the Lord's Day view is that those who hold this fourth view believe that the Bible does not enjoin Christians to observe any day. The Sabbath was a shadow and a part of the law pointing to Christ. Christians have entered God's true rest and no longer need the shadow. Also, Jesus did not institute a new day called the Lord's Day for Christians to keep. This is very much a minority view held only by small groups of Christians.

### **The Sunday-Sabbath View**

The view that the Sabbath was transferred to Sunday, and that Christians are obligated to keep this day as a Sabbath, is called semisabbatarianism. In the thirteenth century, the scholastic theologian Albertus Magnus explained how this transfer from one day to another could have happened. He said that the command in the Old Testament to rest upon a Sabbath was moral and perpetual, but the day of the week on which this rest was commanded to the Jews was only a symbol subject to change. Those who today hold to a Sunday-Sabbath view still use this argument.

The Fourth Commandment, as found in Exodus 20:8–11 states: "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, 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, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: 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." Do these verses allow for the Sabbath to be transferred to Sunday?

Notice that the command says, "the seventh day is the sabbath." It does not say one day in seven is a Sabbath. It specifically names which day is the Sabbath—the seventh. It goes on to explain why that day is the day on which to rest: because God made the heavens and the earth in six days and rested the seventh. The commandment makes no distinction between the rest as moral and the day as symbol. Since the command actually defines the Sabbath as the seventh day, it is impossible to divide the command by saying the Sabbath is moral law, but the seventh day is ceremonial law. To say that another day—the first day—could be the Sabbath is to do violence to the commandment.

The Sabbath command is repeated in Deuteronomy 5, where again it is stated that the seventh day is the Sabbath. It is also repeated in Exodus 31, where it says, "the seventh [day] is the sabbath of rest" (verse 15), and "for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (verse 17). These verses all intimately connect the seventh day with the Sabbath rest. The two are inseparable. As far as these passages are concerned, one must conclude that as long as there is a day to be kept as a Sabbath, it must be the seventh day.

Of course, those who believe that Sunday is now the Sabbath have additional arguments to support their case. Central to these is Jesus' resurrection on Sunday. (The Seventh Day Adventist Church also teaches that Jesus was resurrected on Sunday, after resting in death in the grave on the Sabbath. But most other seventh-day Sabbath keepers believe Jesus was resurrected on the seventh day. For the Bible's answer to this view, see "3 Days + 3 Nights = 1 False Doctrine" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/3days.htm>) Other evidence offered includes the facts that Jesus, after His resurrection, met with His disciples on the first day of the week (John 20:19); that He met with them again "after eight days" (John 20:26), taken to mean a week later; that, during a visit from Paul, the disciples met to break bread (take the Lord's supper) on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7); and that Paul ordered everyone in the Corinthian church to "lay by him in store" on

the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2). This article will mention these Scriptures again in discussing the Lord's Day view. Here, only those aspects of them that specifically pertain to their being used as evidence supporting semisabbatarianism will be addressed.

Does Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week make that day a Sabbath? Proponents say that because Jesus' death and resurrection make possible God's free gift of grace, so that we can now rest in grace instead of doing the works of the law, and because the Sabbath pictures God's rest, Jesus' resurrection on Sunday shows that God was making Sunday the Sabbath day. Does the Bible say this? No. The Bible nowhere states that Jesus' resurrection changed the day of the Sabbath. In fact, as we have seen, the Old Testament Sabbath command does not allow for such a change.

Can we logically deduce that the day on which Jesus was resurrected became the Sabbath day? As mentioned above, Sunday-Sabbath proponents says that Jesus' death and resurrection make possible God's free gift of grace. It is certainly true that Jesus' death paid the penalty for the sins—past, present, and future—of all believers. His resurrection showed that those sins are truly gone because if He still bore them, He would have remained dead in those sins. It is also true that because of this, we are no longer bound to try to do the works of the law for our salvation, but can rest in God's grace. Because of what Jesus has done, we enter God's rest (more about this later). It is also true that the Sabbath day was a picture of that rest. All of this, God gives us as a free gift of His grace. But there is absolutely no reason to conclude that because Jesus was resurrected on Sunday, that Sunday became the Sabbath day. There is simply no logical connection. As a Lutheran minister, the late Leo Gruendemann, says of the proponents of the Sunday-Sabbath view, "Their conclusion therefore to say the least is not even a logical deduction" (<http://www.wlsessays.net/node/681>). Semisabbatarianism requires us to assume that God is using various hints to show us that He changed the Sabbath day to Sunday. But there is no reason to make such an assumption, and God does not change clear commands through vague hints.

In fact, there is biblical evidence that shows that after Christ's death and resurrection, the day that the Jews called the Sabbath and the day called the first day were different days. Matthew 28:1 states: "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre." Notice that it says that the Sabbath was ending as the first day of the week was beginning. Obviously, the first day of the week was not the Sabbath. Matthew wrote this several years after the resurrection. If he understood Sunday to be the new Christian Sabbath, why did he not take the opportunity of explaining it in the context of the resurrection?

And Mark 16:1–2 agrees: “And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.” Notice that on the morning of the first day of the week—Sunday—the Sabbath was past. Also, there are numerous places in the book of Acts where the day on which the Jews met in the synagogue—the seventh day—is called the Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 27, 42, 44; 15:21; 17:2; 18:4).

Nowhere in the entire Bible is Sunday or the first day of the week ever called the Sabbath. The reason is that it is not the Sabbath.

### **The Seventh-day (Saturday) Sabbath View**

If the Old Testament Sabbath commands do not allow for the separation of the day of the week on which the Sabbath was to be observed from its actual observation, and if nothing in the New Testament states or logically implies that the Sabbath was changed to another day, then the Sabbath day must still be the seventh day. The question that must be asked then is, Are Christians supposed to keep the Sabbath day?

Both sabbatarians (seventh-day Sabbath keepers) and semisabbatarians (Sunday-Sabbath keepers) will almost invariably try to prove the perpetuity of the Sabbath by saying that it began at the foundation of the world as a creation ordinance given to all humankind. To support this claim, they cite Genesis 2:2–3: “And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.” But we should notice that these verses do not contain a command to keep the seventh day as a Sabbath. These verses do not tell us that God told Adam and Eve or anyone else (before He told the Israelites just after the Exodus) to keep the seventh day as a Sabbath. These verses do not tell us that God even informed Adam and Eve or anyone else (before He told the Israelites just after the Exodus) that God rested on the seventh day and sanctified it. Context is important in understanding the Bible, so it is important to understand that Moses wrote Genesis 2 in the context of the Exodus, centuries after the Creation, just after he led Israel out of Egypt. He wrote this account in the context of the law being given at Sinai.

The connection of Genesis 2:2–3 to Exodus 20:11 cannot be overlooked, but neither should it be misunderstood. From the Creation to Exodus 16, the Sabbath is never commanded nor even mentioned.

We must conclude that the reason is that it had not yet been instituted. The Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write Genesis 2:2-3 to show why the seventh day was the day God later commanded the Israelites to rest on. This information about God resting on the seventh day is repeated in Exodus 20:11. By observing the Sabbath, they were keeping a type of the rest God had observed at the Creation as described in Genesis 2.

Another common argument of Sabbath keepers is that the Fourth Commandment says, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). If the Sabbath was something new, what was God telling them to remember? Only two possible answers fit the biblical evidence. 1) God was telling them to remember from that day onward. If I am giving a man directions, I might say, "When you get to Main Street, remember to turn right." This in no way implies that this is information he should have known before. It merely means that he should remember this information at the time he needs it. God may have started the Sabbath command with "remember" because he knew the Israelites would have a tendency to forget it. The reason God ordered the Israelites to make fringes for their garments (Numbers 15:38-39) shows us the Israelites had trouble remembering the commands God gave them at Sinai. 2) Another possible explanation for God using the word "remember" may be that He was telling them to remember the events of Exodus 16. This chapter is an account of how God introduced the Sabbath to the Israelites through a physical example, much as one might teach a child. He told them that He would give them manna for six days, that they would have enough for each day, and that they were not to keep any overnight or it would spoil. The one exception would be on the sixth day, when they would gather enough for two days. They were to prepare this two-days' worth on the sixth day, and they would be able to keep some overnight for the seventh day. They would not gather manna on the seventh day because it was the Sabbath. Exodus 16:23 is the first place in the Bible that the word Sabbath is found: "And he said unto them, This is that which the Lord hath said, Tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord: bake that which ye will bake today, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning." In Exodus 20:8, God may have been telling the Israelites to remember the lesson they learned in Exodus 16. Considering the lack of any evidence of the institution of the Sabbath before Exodus 16, there is no reason to assume that God wanted the Israelites to remember the Sabbath from some earlier period.

In Nehemiah 9:14 we read that God "madest known unto them [the Israelites] thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts,

statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant." This Scripture is important because it does not say that the Israelites knew of the Sabbath already and that God used Moses to remind them of it. It says that God, by the hand of Moses, made the Sabbath known to the Israelites. The Sabbath was first introduced to the Israelites at the time of Moses, over two thousand years after the Creation.

Ezekiel says something similar: "Wherefore I caused them [Israel] to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them. Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that sanctify them" (Ezekiel 20:10–12). Here again we find that God gave the children of Israel the Sabbath after He brought them out of Egypt. He says nothing about their knowing this before that time and His having to remind them.

An interesting point in this regard is found in Numbers 15:32–36: "And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses." The Sabbath command was so new that the people did not know how to punish someone who broke it.

There is another biblical proof that the Sabbath could not have been a creation ordinance given to all humanity. In Exodus 31:12–17, we read, "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth sanctify you. Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed." God says the Sabbath is a sign between Him and the children of Israel. Ezekiel 20:12 and 20 also say that God gave Israel the Sabbath as a sign between Him and them. If

the Sabbath had been given to all humanity at Creation, it would not be unique to Israel and, therefore, it could not act as a special sign between God and Israel.

Additionally, in Deuteronomy 5, in the listing of the Ten Commandments found in that chapter, God gives the Israelites a reason other than His rest at Creation for keeping the Sabbath. He says that because He brought them out of Egypt, therefore, He commands them to keep the Sabbath (verse 15). So God, in the Ten Commandments, gives two reasons why He gave the children of Israel the Sabbath. One is because he rested on the seventh day at Creation (Exodus 20:11). The other is because He brought them out of Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). This second reason, God's bringing Israel out of Egypt, happened only to the Israelites and is further evidence that the Sabbath day is specific to that nation.

Based on the above, then, we must conclude that the belief that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance, given at the Creation to all humanity, is an unfounded assumption. There is no biblical evidence to support this idea, and there is much biblical evidence against it.

Seventh-day keepers also see another reason in Exodus 31:12-17 to believe in the perpetuity of the Sabbath. What is pointed out is that the Sabbath is said to be "a perpetual covenant" and "a sign...for ever." The Hebrew word translated "perpetual" and "for ever" is *'ôlām*. (From this point forward, I will simply use *olam* for this Hebrew word, as not all browsers will display the correct characters and diacritics.) Although this word, when the context calls for it, can mean eternal, there are many places in the Bible where it clearly means for a simple duration, or for a long time.

For example, on the subject of a servant who wants to remain with his master, Deuteronomy 15:16-17 states: "And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee...Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever [*olam*]." A mortal human being cannot serve another mortal human being for all eternity. "For ever" in this verse is limited by the human life span of the parties involved. In Leviticus 6:20-22 "is the offering of Aaron and of his sons, which they shall offer unto the Lord in the day when he is anointed.... And the priest of his sons that is anointed in his stead shall offer it: it is a statute for ever [*olam*] unto the Lord; it shall be wholly burnt." Most Christians would agree that this offering is no longer required. Yet the Bible says it was to be "for ever." In Exodus 27:20-21 and Leviticus 24:2-3, God orders that the lamps in the Tabernacle were to be kept burning continually (*olam*). This was to be a statute "for ever" (*olam*). Are these lamps burning today? No. In Leviticus 24, the instructions concerning the showbread

(bread of the Presence) are described as "everlasting" and "perpetual." All of these examples, and many others we could cite, use the same Hebrew word translated in Exodus 31 as "perpetual" and "for ever."

A reexamination of Exodus 31 reveals that the Sabbath was to be a sign between God and the children of Israel throughout their generations—that it was to be a "perpetual" covenant, but this does not have to mean a covenant literally lasting for eternity. In Deuteronomy 5:2, we read that "God made a covenant" with the children of Israel "in Horeb" (Mount Sinai). From the verses that follow, we see that the Ten Commandments were that covenant. That covenant includes the Sabbath command (verses 12–15), which Exodus 31 says is a sign between God and the children of Israel. It is never said to be a sign between God and anyone else. No one else is ever commanded to keep the Sabbath.

God's covenant with Israel given at Mount Sinai is the Old Covenant, and it has been replaced by the New Covenant: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Hebrews 8:7–13).

You will sometimes hear people say that nine of the Ten Commandments are found in the New Covenant. I have said this myself. But it is not quite accurate and leads to the accusation that if we are keeping nine of the Ten Commandments, how can we ignore the Sabbath command? After all, did not James say, "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10)? Yes, if we were really trying to keep nine of the Old Covenant Ten Commandments while ignoring the Sabbath command, we would be guilty of breaking the whole law. But Paul said something very important in this regard. In Galatians 5:3, he states: "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the

whole law." Trying to keep any Old Testament law—including the Sabbath command—indebts us to the entire law (including circumcision), not just the Ten Commandments. The point is, we are not to try to keep Old Testament law. The Old Covenant law killed transgressors; New Covenant law never condemns. New Testament law is the reality that was only shadowed or typified by Old Covenant law. I will have more to say about this later in this article, and you can also read more in my article, "Dead to the Law." The only people in the New Testament who try to enforce Sabbath keeping and who accuse others of Sabbath breaking are the Pharisees and their ilk. As mentioned earlier, many Scriptures in Acts mention the seventh-day Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 27, 42, 44; 15:21; 17:2; 18:4). Certainly, these show that Jews continued to call the seventh day of the week the Sabbath, even after Jesus' resurrection. But they do not, as the promoters of the seventh-day Sabbath would like them to, indicate that Christians were obligated to keep the day.

In Acts 13, beginning with verse 14, Luke tells of how Paul and his companions went to the synagogue on the Sabbath in Pisidian Antioch and Paul preached. Afterward, "the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath"(verse 42).

"And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God" (verse 44). We might wonder why Paul would wait a whole week in order to preach to the Gentiles the next Sabbath. Some might say that this was because Paul observed the Sabbath. But the Bible does not at all indicate this. Instead, the Bible says that the congregation included both Jews and God-fearing proselytes (verses 26 and 43). The Gentiles invited Paul to preach the next Sabbath and Paul heeded this invitation and waited until the next Sabbath to speak to them as an assembled congregation. Also, as Paul and Barnabas said to the Jews after the Jews rejected them (verse 45), "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (verse 46). Paul waited until the Sabbath to speak, not because he observed the Sabbath, but because that was when he was invited to do so. Also, that was when he could speak to the assembled Jews, to whom he believed he had a responsibility to preach the Gospel first. There is no evidence that Paul waited until the Sabbath to speak because he kept the Sabbath.

Seventh-day Sabbath keepers sometimes point to Acts 17:2 and 18:4 as showing that Paul kept the Sabbath. Instead, these verses merely show that Paul used the Jews' assembling in the synagogue on the Sabbath as an opportunity to preach to them while they were all assembled in one place.

It should not be ignored—in fact, it should be seen as highly significant—that while sabbatarians and semisabbatarians busy themselves accusing the church and the world of Sabbath breaking, often saying it is the number one sin for which God will punish us—neither Jesus, nor Paul, nor any of the apostles ever once list Sabbath breaking as a sin. Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles and writers of the New Testament never list Sabbath breaking as a sin. Myriads of sins are condemned in the New Testament, but Sabbath breaking—despite its supposed importance—is not one of them. One would think that the Gentile churches, unfamiliar with God's law and in need of being corrected in Paul's letters on so many other points, would have been in need of some admonition concerning the Sabbath at least once. But no, not one such admonition is to be found. Why? To those who view the Bible with an unbiased mind, the answer is inescapable: God never intended the New Testament church to keep a Sabbath day.

Seventh day keepers often quote Martin Luther (1483–1546) out of context, giving the false impression that Luther agreed that Andreas Carlstadt's (ca. 1480–1541) sabbatarian views were right. This is what is usually quoted: “Indeed, if Carlstadt were to write further about the Sabbath, Sunday would have to give way, and the Sabbath - that is to say, Saturday - must be kept holy.” But now read the quote in context: “Indeed, if Carlstadt were to write further about the Sabbath, Sunday would have to give way, and the Sabbath - that is to say, Saturday - must be kept holy; he would truly make us Jews in all things, and we should come to be circumcised: for that is true, and cannot be denied, that he who deems it necessary to keep one law of Moses, and keeps it as the law of Moses, must deem all necessary, and keep them all” (“Against the Celestial Prophets” as quoted in *The Life of Martin Luther in Pictures*, p. 147). Carlstadt was trying to impose seventh-day Sabbath keeping, but Luther saw that the Bible did not support it. So we see that Luther, far from admitting Carlstadt to be correct, was rightly using the principles of Galatians 5:2–4 to show that Carlstadt was Judaizing, or making people debtors to the law.

### **The Lord's Day View**

According to Lord's Day adherents, Christians are not obligated to keep Saturday or Sunday as the Sabbath. But, this view further asserts, because His resurrection occurred on the first day of the week, Jesus instituted a new day, the Lord's Day. The evidence used to support this view contains many of the same Scriptures used to support Sunday as a Sabbath.

Central to this theory is Jesus Christ's resurrection on Sunday. Adherents to the Lord's Day view say that by His resurrection, Jesus instituted a new day that the church should observe. Yes, Romans 14 indicates that we are certainly free to keep a day, such as Sunday, unto the Lord. But the Bible never states that Jesus actually instituted such a day. There is no more reason to assume that Jesus instituted a new day called the Lord's Day with His resurrection than there is to assume that He changed the Sabbath day with His resurrection. It is not stated, and it is not logically implied.

Revelation 1:10 is often cited as evidence for the observance of Sunday as the Lord's Day: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet." Many scholars have debated the meaning of "the Lord's day" in this verse. Does it refer to Sunday, the first day of the week? It is true that in post-apostolic Christian writings, "the Lord's Day" is unmistakably used as the name of the first day of the week. The earliest of these writings seems to be the apocryphal Gospel of Peter (which was not really written by the apostle Peter), which dates to about A.D. 150. But does this mean that "the Lord's day" in Revelation 1:10 also means the first day of the week, or Sunday?

An important principle of biblical exegesis reveals that it does not. This principle is that the Bible interprets itself. There is absolutely nothing in the Bible that equates "the Lord's day" with Sunday, the first day of the week, or any day of the week. The closest words in the Bible to "the Lord's day" are "the day of the Lord." This exact phrase is found twenty-two times in the Old Testament and four times in the New. "The day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:8) and "the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6) are similar. These references concern a period of time, but not a day of the week. In fact, it is this time period that the book of Revelation is about. Thus, it makes perfect sense for John to say that he was in the spirit, in vision, on the day of the Lord (the Lord's day) when he heard behind him a great voice that sounded like a trumpet (compare Joel 2:1-2). In other words, John was describing the period that his vision was about. He was not describing the day of the week on which he received the vision.

And what should we make of the fact that the post-apostolic church called Sunday the Lord's Day? Is this not evidence that supports the Lord's Day view? No, it is not, because it is not biblical evidence. The evidence dates to a time after the Bible was written. Therefore, we cannot use it as a rule for doctrine or practice. Certainly, the church may have begun keeping Sunday as the Lord's Day in commemoration of the Lord's resurrection. But it did so of its own choice, not by any biblical command or by any valid deduction that could be made from the Bible that it ought to keep such a day.

But what of the Scriptures in John that show Jesus appearing to the disciples on the first day of the week? Do these Scriptures mean that Jesus was establishing the first day of the week as the Lord's Day? Suppose the President of the United States signed into law on a Wednesday a bill that abolished the federal income tax. He then gave a speech later that day, and he gave another speech the following Wednesday. Must we conclude from this that the President wanted every Wednesday to be kept as a national holiday? Of course not. We would know that, since he is the President, if he wanted Wednesday kept as a holiday, he would declare Wednesday to be a holiday. Likewise, if Jesus was instituting Sunday as a day we must keep, why didn't He say so? Jesus' appearance on the first day of the week in John 20:19 and 26 can in no way logically imply that He wants the first day of the week to be kept as a special day.

Acts 20:7 says that the disciples came together to break bread on the first day of the week. Some people take this as evidence that the apostolic church kept Sunday. But another Scripture in Acts says they met daily: "And they [the church] continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:42 and 46). It should be obvious that there can be no reason to single out the first day of the week in Acts 20:7 when Acts 2:46 says they were doing the same thing every day.

The events on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 are sometimes used to say that God was putting His stamp of approval on Sunday. Pentecost was an annual feast of the Jews. Because of the way it was reckoned (see Leviticus 23:15–16), Pentecost (which means "fiftieth") always fell on the first day of the week. Pentecost was the fiftieth day from the day after the Sabbath (in other words, the Sunday) that fell during the feast of Unleavened Bread. On that Sunday during the feast of Unleavened Bread, a sheaf of barley was cut from the field, threshed, parched over a fire, ground, and then presented before the Lord in the temple as the "wave sheaf." All of this was a type of Jesus Christ who rose from the dead on the Sunday during the feast of Unleavened Bread and presented Himself to the Father. Fifty days later, the Jews observed Pentecost by waving before the Lord two loaves that specifically had to be baked with leaven (Leviticus 23:15–17). Leviticus 23:17 says, "they are the firstfruits unto the Lord." These two loaves represent the firstfruits of the church. (Since leaven was typical of sin, false doctrine, and corrupt practices [Matthew 16:6, 12; Mark 8:15; 1 Corinthians 5:2, 6–8; Galatians 5:4–9], we see that these two loaves did not represent Christ, who was sinless [2

Corinthians 5:21].) In Acts 2, we see that on that Pentecost, Jews from many parts of the world became the firstfruits of the church, and this cosmopolitan aspect was a type of what was yet to come when Gentiles were added to the church. God began the New Testament church on Pentecost because He had planned Pentecost from its inception as an Old Covenant picture of the day we read of in Acts 2. Nothing in Acts 2 tells us to keep Sunday as the Lord's Day.

Some think 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 describes a collection to be taken up during a Sunday church service. But this is an assumption that is not supported by the evidence. This was not a weekly offering collected during church services, but a special collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem. Paul does not say to bring an offering to church on the first day of the week. He says that on the first day of the week, each person is to “lay by him in store.” Clearly, the setting aside of this gift of charity for the Jerusalem saints was to take place in each individual's house. The *Revised English Bible* renders verse 2: “Every Sunday each of you is to put aside and keep by him whatever he can afford, so that there need be no collecting when I come.”

Why did Paul choose the first day of the week? While some say that this was because it was a day of public worship, this is only conjecture. We simply do not know. We might suggest that it was to make it a priority in their week's duties.

So, while the resurrected Jesus appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week, He appeared to them on other days as well (John 21; 1 Corinthians 15:6–8). And, while there is an account of an occasion when the disciples met on the first day of the week, the Bible says they met daily. The bottom line is that nowhere does the Bible say the church is to observe Sunday or any other day as the particular day of worship or as the Lord's Day. This is despite the fact that the Old Testament clearly defines the days Israel was to observe. If there are days Christians are to observe, why doesn't the New Testament clearly define them? We must conclude that the observing of Sunday as the Lord's Day originated not by the command of the Bible but by the will of the people in post-apostolic times.

What Revelation 1:10, Acts 20:7, and 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 show is how easily we can fall into the error of reading into the Bible something from our own culture. Today, most Christians keep Sunday as either a Lord's Day or a Sabbath. So, when they read one of these Scriptures, they say, Aha, this is about keeping Sunday. But they have really just read their preconceived idea of Sunday-keeping into the Bible. A careful examination of these passages reveals that they have absolutely nothing to do with keeping Sunday (or any day).

## **The God's Rest Fulfillment View**

As we have seen, the Bible does not allow for bringing a Sabbath day—whether the seventh day or the first—into the New Covenant. The Lord's Day view, too, is flawed because it invents from vague, unconvincing evidence a day that it says Christians ought to keep.

But we have not yet examined all of the evidence. I have reserved the following Scriptures to be studied under this heading because, rather than just showing a lack of evidence to support the forgoing views, they are positive evidence that God has not instituted any day that He intends Christians must keep. The evidence in these Bible passages is so compelling that even if we ignored everything else in this article, these Scriptures alone prove that there is no Sabbath Day or Lord's Day that Christians must keep.

*Romans 14:* Paul begins this chapter by saying that we are to receive into the church those who are weak in the faith, but not to let this cause disputing. In verse 2, he points out that one person may believe he can eat all things, and another, who is weak in faith, may believe he can eat only vegetables. So he clearly delineates here that, in the matter of food, believing you can eat only vegetables is an indication of a weak faith. Nevertheless, neither of these two—the one who is strong in faith or the one who is weak—should despise or condemn the other for his difference (verses 3–4).

Now notice verses 5–6: “One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.” One person believes he needs to observe a day; another person does not observe a day. Each position is okay. God accepts both of these people, and we should not judge, or condemn, either person for his or her stand on the keeping of days (verses 7–13).

From this information, is it possible to determine Paul's—and even God's—view on the keeping of days? Yes, it is. If Paul believes that it is all right to keep a day and all right to keep no days, then he must believe that there is no particular day that must be kept. If God accepts the person who observes a day and the person who observes no days, He must not have a day in mind that He believes people must keep. If God accepts the person who keeps no days, He will not

condemn or even chasten that person for Sabbath breaking or for not observing Sunday as the Lord's Day.

This conclusion is so obvious, the implication of Romans 14 is so clear, that the way Sabbath and Lord's Day keepers try to get around it is by saying Romans 14 does not apply to the Sabbath or Lord's Day. But the Scriptures do not allow such an interpretation.

One of the most well known promoters of the seventh-day Sabbath, Samuele Bacchiocchi, on pages 365–366 of his classic work on the subject, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, says that Paul is not addressing anything to do with Mosaic law, but only asceticism. But Bacchiocchi's argument falls flat.

There is nothing in the context to pinpoint that Paul is addressing only asceticism. Paul, himself, identifies that what he is addressing in Romans 14 are “doubtful disputations” (verse 1). These might concern asceticism, pagan practices, or the law. In fact, examining the context of chapter 14, we see that Paul specifically addresses the Mosaic law in chapter 13. He says that love is the fulfilling of the law and lists some points of the law (Romans 13:8–10); he says that we should cast off the works of darkness and not make provision for the flesh (13:11–14). He then immediately (the chapter breaks in the Bible were added centuries later) says, “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations” (Romans 14:1). Contrary to what Bacchiocchi asserts, Romans 14 is written in the context of how we fulfill the law.

Richard P. Belcher and Richard P. Belcher, Jr., in their book *A Layman's Guide to the Sabbath Question*, summarize the position of those who hold the Sunday-Sabbath view toward Romans 14:5: “If one interprets this passage to refer to the Christian Sabbath and contends that even this day can be set aside, this is obviously an erroneous interpretation. If no day has any special significance, including the Lord's day, then the apostle John in Revelation 1:10 is either misleading, or is in conflict with Paul, or John is cast in the role of the weaker brother” (pages 67–68). John and Paul are not in conflict. This argument assumes Revelation 1:10 is a reference to Sunday and sees Romans 14:5 in that biased light. Since, however, no line of reasoning in the Belchers' book, nor any presented by anyone else I have ever read (and I have been studying this subject for many years) presents compelling evidence that Revelation 1:10 is a reference to Sunday, this argument is really saying nothing. Those who hold this position are telling us to believe that Romans 14 does not refer to the weekly Sabbath (they say it refers to the annual Jewish holy days) without presenting any real evidence.

Let's face it. Paul makes no exception. He says it is perfectly acceptable to esteem every day alike, which is the same as esteeming no day in particular. He gives no hint whatsoever that either the seventh day or the first day are exceptions to what he is saying.

Since Paul, in Romans 14, allows the keeping of days if one desires to do so, does this mean that Paul believed it was okay to keep a day, such as a Sabbath or a Lord's Day, thinking that in doing so one is earning merit with God? What if one keeps the day believing it is required and that not keeping it will bring chastisement from God? Paul addresses this aspect of the question in Galatians and Colossians.

*Galatians:* Anyone studying this subject should read Paul's entire epistle to the Galatians. I will pick out a few verses. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed" (1:6-9). It helps to understand this epistle to know that Paul is a Jew who is writing to Gentile Galatians who have been wrongly instructed by Judaizers to keep the law. Paul calls this another gospel; a perversion of the Gospel of Christ, and he curses those who preach it.

Now read Galatians 2:16, keeping in mind that Paul is a Jew who uses "we" to mean "we Jews." "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Paul is saying, Look, you Gentiles, even we Jews (at least, those of us who know better) know that no one is justified by trying to keep the law; therefore, we believe in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by faith. The implication is, the Galatians are being foolish to turn to the law that the Jewish Christians have given up for faith in Christ. "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (2:21).

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that

hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (3:10–14). Paul is saying here that if anyone, Jew or Gentile (he says, "every one" and "no man"), tries to attain righteousness by the law, that person comes under a curse. For example, anyone who thinks he can earn merit with God by keeping a Sabbath comes under the obligation to keep the entire law perfectly. As no one can do this (Romans 3:20–23), the attempt only condemns.

"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator" (Galatians 3:19). The law was given to Israel to expose their sinfulness only until Christ ("the seed") came. "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (3:24–25). Notice that Paul says "our schoolmaster." By "our" he means the Jews, the only people to whom the law was given. Paul equates the law to a "schoolmaster." The word "schoolmaster" is translated from the Greek word *paidagōgos*. "Schoolmaster" is a mistranslation. *Paidagōgos* refers to a slave-attendant who was assigned to keep a boy under control until the boy came of age. Paul says the law was a *paidagōgos* that was added to keep Israel under control until the Seed (Jesus Christ) came. He also says, in essence, that after the coming of faith, the time of the *paidagōgos* is ended. Since he equates the *paidagōgos* with the law, he means that "we are no longer under" the law. By "we" he means the Jews, but, again, the implication is that, if the law is ended for the Jews to whom it was given, certainly the Gentile Galatians should not be trying to keep it.

"Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world" (4:3). Notice that Paul again uses "we." He is saying that both he and all Jews, when under the law, "were in bondage under the elements of the world." This fact shocks many people, but Paul is clearly saying that the law was a bondage, and he calls it "the elements of the world." Now notice verse 9: "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?" (4:9). The Galatians had been pagans, not Jews. They had never been under the law. They were only *now* turning to the law. Yet Paul says they were *returning* to the "weak and beggarly elements." As shocking as it may sound, Paul places the Old Testament law in the same category as pagan rules and regulations the Galatians had once been under.

"Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of [or for] you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (4:10–11).

There are those who say the issue in Galatians is only circumcision. This verse shows that it is not true. The Galatians were turning to the keeping of "days and months and seasons and years" (4:10—*New King James Version*), such as the Sabbath, new moons, feasts, and sabbatical years. Paul, saying he was afraid for them for their doing this, indicated that his labors in preaching the Gospel of grace to them might have been in vain.

"Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?" (4:21) What law? Some pagan law? No. The Law of Moses is meant. "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar [Hagar]. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free" (4:22–31). Paul's teaching is clearly that we, as Christians, are not under the Old Covenant's laws, which lead to bondage. Whether we are Jews or Gentiles, we are to be free under the New Covenant.

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (5:1). "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (5:4). If we try to be justified by the law, we come under its bondage. We fall from the doctrine of grace, no longer believing in justification by faith alone in Christ alone.

"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (5:13–15). "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (6:2). As Christians, we are to keep the law of Christ, which is to love one another. We are enabled to do this when we are born again. "Biting" one another, such as accusing of sin those who do not keep the day you keep, is the real sin.

*Colossians 2:16-17*: "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." Paul's triplet of holyday, new moon, and sabbaths can only be a reference to the holy days, new moons, and Sabbaths of the Old Testament. Clearly, Paul is not addressing Gentile asceticism. Nor can the supposition of Gordon Clark (normally one of the better Bible commentators) concerning verse 16 in his *Colossians* commentary be taken seriously: "The conclusion is therefore that Paul does not abrogate the Lord's Day [by this, Clark means the Sunday Sabbath], but that he forbids the celebration of saints' days, Easter, and Christmas." Nowhere does the Bible equate holydays, new moons, and Sabbaths with saints' days, Easter, and Christmas!

Why does Paul use the plural by saying "sabbath days," or Sabbaths? Eighteenth-century Baptist theologian John Gill answers in his commentary on *Colossians*: "The 'sabbaths' were also shadows of future things; the grand sabbatical year, or the fiftieth year sabbath, or jubilee, in which liberty was proclaimed throughout the land, a general release of debts, and restoration of inheritances, prefigured the liberty we have by Christ from sin, Satan, and the law, the payment of all our debts by Christ, and the right we have through him to the heavenly and incorruptible inheritance. The seventh year sabbath, in which there was no tilling of the land, no ploughing, sowing, nor reaping, was an emblem of salvation through Christ by free grace, and not by the works of men; and the seventh day sabbath was a type of that spiritual rest we have in Christ now, and of that eternal rest we shall have with him in heaven hereafter: now these were but shadows, not real things; or did not contain the truth and substance of the things themselves, of which they were shadows; and though they were representations of divine and spiritual things, yet dark ones, they had not so much as the very image of the things; they were but shadows, and like them fleeting and passing away, and now are gone."

So, Paul is saying that regulations concerning dietary laws and observing festivals, new moons, and all Sabbaths are shadows that are passed, but the substance (body) is Christ's. Gill explains: "but the body [is] of Christ: or, as the Syriac version reads it, 'the body is Christ'; that is, the body, or sum and substance of these shadows, is Christ; he gave rise unto them, he existed before them, as the body is before the shadow; not only as God, as the Son of God, but as Mediator, whom these shadows regarded as such, and as such he cast them; and he is the end of them, the fulfilling end of them; they have all their accomplishment in him: and he is the body of spiritual and heavenly things; the substantial things and doctrines of the Gospel are

all of Christ, they all come by him; all the truths, blessings, and promises of grace; are from him and by him, and he himself the sum of them all.”

Therefore, we whose sufficiency is in Christ, who know that no law keeping can add to the salvation Jesus has bought for us, who know that the eating of certain foods and the keeping of certain days can only be indistinct and temporary shadows, should not allow anyone to judge or condemn us for exercising our freedom from dietary regulations and the keeping of days. Such things prefigured Jesus Christ, our separation through Him from sin, and our rest in Him. Now that the true substance of what these things pictured has come, the shadows have passed away. It is simply not possible for there to any longer be a need to keep days. This shows that even those who say they know they are not adding to their salvation by keeping a day but keep it to please God do err. Why should God be pleased with our keeping a shadow when the reality has come?

As we have seen, in Romans 14, Paul allows weak brethren to continue to keep days while they remain weak in faith (specifically, weak in their understanding of the concepts he teaches in Galatians and in Colossians 2). Of course, other Scriptures admonish us to not remain weak, but grow strong through knowledge (Ephesians 5:17; 2 Peter 1:2–8; 3:18). But in Galatians, Paul adamantly teaches against the false gospel that works such as circumcision (Galatians 5:2) and the keeping of days (Galatians 4:10–11) are necessary on top of the completed work of Christ. Any message that says or implies that Christ's work is not enough is a false gospel. In Colossians 2, Paul tells Christians not to allow anyone to pass judgment or condemn them for their understanding that observing dietary rules and certain days are merely the “rudiments [this is the same Greek word translated “elements” in Galatians 4:3 and 9] of the world” (Colossians 2:8, and 20).

From this information, we can draw additional conclusions. Paul tells the Colossians not to allow themselves to be judged concerning days, and in Romans 14, he says it is wrong for Christians to judge others concerning days. Therefore, those Christians who charge others with breaking the Sabbath (whether seventh day or Sunday) or not keeping the Lord's Day are violating the instructions of the Holy Spirit as written by Paul. Similarly, since we have seen that no day need be kept, those who accuse others of sinning when they do not keep a day are acting contrary to Scripture.

Now notice some quotes from people who do this. Herbert W. Armstrong, a proponent of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, wrote on page 56 of his book, *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?*, “To work on

the Sabbath, to defile it by your own pleasure-seeking, doing business, etc., is a major sin, punishable by eternal death! (Romans 6:23)." By saying this, Armstrong assumes that the Sabbath must still be kept today and that those who do not keep it are sinning and will earn the wages of eternal death. But as we have seen, the Sabbath does not need to be kept today. It is also significant that Armstrong's reference to Romans 6:23 is obviously only to its first half. He totally ignores the second half of the verse, and thereby ignores the heart of the Gospel. In its entirety, Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

The Living Church of God, headed by Roderick C. Meredith, on a page of its web site titled "Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?" (<http://www.lcg.org/cgi-bin/tw/booklets/tw-bk.cgi?category=Booklets1&item=1104414149>), says, "Did you know that your willingness to keep holy the *true* Sabbath day, which God made holy, *directly affects* whether or not you will be granted eternal life in the Kingdom of God? Did you know that keeping the true Sabbath is—and always has been—a special 'test' commandment in God's sight?" God did, in Exodus 16, use the Sabbath to prove, or test, the children of Israel's willingness to obey His law (see verse 4). But the Sabbath day is not given to the New Testament church.

John W. Ritenbaugh, of the Church of the Great God, writes, "God has also designated that the Sabbath is to be 'the sign' between Him and His people. It is evidence that He, the Creator, is our God, and those that keep it are His children. Taken as a whole, what the Bible shows on this subject is that it is not merely that it is observed, but also the manner in which it is observed that makes it the sign" (Sermon: Sabbathkeeping Part 4 <http://sabbath.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Audio.details/ID/527/Sabbathkeeping-Part-4.htm>). According to Ritenbaugh, the seventh-day Sabbath is the sign that identifies God's children. That it identified the Israelites as God's people under the Old Covenant is certainly true. But, as we have seen in Romans 14, Paul says that the keeping or not keeping of days is not a criterion of who should be accepted as a brother, and it is not a criterion over which we should judge one another. Obviously, then, under the New Covenant, the keeping of a day cannot be a sign of God's people. Under the New Covenant, Jesus has given us a completely different identifying sign: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

Seventh day keepers are not alone in accusing others of sinning for not keeping a certain day. J. C. Ryle (1816–1900) writes concerning Sunday, "There are two kinds of Sabbath desecration which require to

be noticed. One is that more private kind of which thousands are continually guilty, and which can only be checked by awakening men's consciences. The other is that more public kind, which can only be remedied by the pressure of public opinion, and the strong arm of the law" (<http://www.apuritansmind.com/TheLordsDay/JCRyleSabbath.htm>).

Charles Hodge (1797–1878), in his *Systematic Theology* (vol. 3, p. 347), writes, "We are bound, therefore, to insist upon the maintenance and faithful execution of the laws enacted for the protection of the Christian Sabbath. Christianity does not teach that men can be made religious by law; nor does it demand that men should be required by the civil authority to profess any particular form of religious doctrine, or to attend upon religious services; but it does enjoin that men should abstain from all unnecessary worldly avocations on the Lord's Day" (<http://www.apuritansmind.com/TheLordsDay/CharlesHodge4thCommandment.htm>).

A Puritan minister, Samuel Slater, warns, "To profane sabbaths is a very great and notorious piece of profaneness. Sins willfully and out of choice committed upon a sabbath are sins in grain, scarlet and crimson sins. To mind worldly affairs, to sit brooding upon worldly thoughts, to follow the trades and callings of the world, to open shops, and buy and sell, upon a sabbath-day, are God-provoking sins, acts of profanenes. These are lawful upon other days, in which God hath given you leave `nay, more, he hath made it your duty, to labour and do all that you have to do of this nature; but they are very sinful upon the Sabbath" (<http://www.apuritansmind.com/TheLordsDay/SamuelSlaterSuppressingProfaneness.htm>).

Nor are such statements to be found only in the writings of past centuries. Notice this from the Sunday-Sabbath keeping Protestant Reformed Churches: "...it cannot be denied that desecration of the Sabbath is in our day an evil that is assuming alarming proportions, and that the danger is more than imaginary that the Christian pilgrim, as he lives and travels through this strange land, will defile his garments and adopt the habits of the world in this respect" ([http://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet\\_36.html](http://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_36.html)). And, "Great issues are at stake in the Sabbath-question. And, alas, it is a question today, not merely in a society that, having once showed some influence upon it from Christianity by 'closing up shop' on Sunday, now works and plays on the Lord's Day as on any other day, but also among Reformed Christians. It is serious enough that the Sabbath is desecrated in practice—the poor attendance at the second worship service (where a second service is still held) and the extent to which professing Christians "skip church" altogether are witness enough to this widespread Sabbath-desecration. More serious still is the growing 'solution' to the problem that consists of denying that there is any Sabbath Day at all!... Although the apostasy from the truth of the

Sabbath receives little attention, we consider it to be one of the most serious departures in our day; and we consider our call to return to the old paths of our fathers, or to continue in those ways, as the case may be, to be urgent” ([http://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet\\_39.html](http://www.prca.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_39.html)).

*The Reformers:* Interestingly, while Reformed and Presbyterian churches trace their origins to the sixteenth-century Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564), Calvin believed the Sabbath to be past and the keeping of days to be superstitious. He advocated only a “practical Sabbath.” By this, he meant that one day should be set aside each week for church services, and that early Christians (not the Bible) had decided this should be Sunday in honor of Christ's resurrection.

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Henry Beveridge, trans.), Book II, Chapter 8:31, 33, Calvin wrote, “Hence, as the Apostle elsewhere says, ‘Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an 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,’ (Col. 2: 16, 17;) meaning by body the whole essence of the truth, as is well explained in that passage. This is not contented with one day, but requires the whole course of our lives, until being completely dead to ourselves, we are filled with the life of God. Christians, therefore, should have nothing to do with a superstitious observance of days... Paul informs us that Christians are not to be judged in respect of its [the Sabbath's] observance, because it is a shadow of something to come, (Col. 2: 16;) and, accordingly, he expresses a fear lest his labour among the Galatians should prove in vain, because they still observed days (Gal. 4: 10, 11.) And he tells the Romans that it is superstitious to make one day differ from another (Rom. 14: 5.)” (<http://www.reformed.org/books/institutes/books/book2/bk2ch08.html>).

Calvin “regarded the external observance of the Sabbath rest as a Jewish ceremonial ordinance and no longer binding on Christians.” He said of Sabbatarians that they “surpass the Jews three times over in a crass and carnal Sabbatarian superstition” (both quotes from Winton Solberg, *Redeem the Time—The Puritan Sabbath in Early America*, p.19). Calvin saw Sunday, not as a day to be kept, but as an issue of church order; it was a convenient time for the church to meet. According to Solberg, “in Calvin's Geneva, citizens were free to amuse themselves after Sunday worship, and they did so with military drill and bowling. Calvin himself bowled on Sunday and was buried on a Lord's Day afternoon” (*Redeem the Time*, p. 19).

Martin Luther, in his *Large Catechism*, writes in his exposition of the Ten Commandments,

But to grasp a Christian meaning for the simple as to what God requires in this [the Sabbath] commandment, note that we keep holy days not for the sake of intelligent and learned Christians (for they have no need of it [holy days]), but first of all for bodily causes and necessities, which nature teaches and requires; for the common people, man-servants and maid-servants, who have been attending to their work and trade the whole week, that for a day they may retire in order to rest and be refreshed.

Secondly, and most especially, that on such day of rest (since we can get no other opportunity) freedom and time be taken to attend divine service, so that we come together to hear and treat of God's and then to praise God, to sing and pray.

However, this, I say, is not so restricted to any time, as with the Jews, that it must be just on this or that day; for in itself no one day is better than another; but this should indeed be done daily; however, since the masses cannot give such attendance, there must be at least one day in the week set apart. But since from of old Sunday [the Lord's Day] has been appointed for this purpose, we also should continue the same, in order that everything be done in harmonious order, and no one create disorder by unnecessary innovation.

*The Large Catechism, V*

<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/catechism/web/cat-05.html>

So, Luther also held a practical view. He believed that a day should be set aside so that laboring people can rest and so people can have the time away from work to attend church. Notice also that Luther put no special significance on Sunday. He did not say that the Bible required that we keep Sunday, only that it was a day appointed, apparently by the church, from antiquity. Luther said that if Sunday were ever observed as holy for the day's sake or were put on a Jewish foundation, "then I order you to walk on it, to ride on it, to dance on it, to feast on it, to do anything that shall remove this encroachment on Christian Liberty" (from Solberg, *Redeem the Time*, p.17). Luther's and Calvin's treatment of days and their practical approach to Sunday put them very close to the God's Rest view.

*The Christian's True Rest:* While it is interesting to see what the Reformers said, our guide to doctrine and practice must be the Bible. We have seen in this article that the Scriptures that seventh-day Sabbath keepers, Sunday-Sabbath keepers, and Lord's Day keepers point to as supporting their views, do not, in fact, support those views.

The Sabbath of the Old Covenant was specific to that covenant and the people to whom that covenant was given, the children of Israel (the Jews). The New Testament neither commands nor implies that Christians keep a particular day or any day at all. From the biblical information given in this article, we have seen that we are not to judge others concerning whether or not they keep a day. We have also seen that we are not to allow ourselves to be judged concerning the keeping of days. And we have seen that Paul calls such observations shadows, weak and beggarly elements, and rudiments of the world. From this information, we must conclude there are no days that Christians must keep.

To say that Christians must either keep a particular day or risk their salvation is legalism. To say that God holds the world responsible for keeping a day because it is a creation ordinance is to add a yoke to the world's burden that the Scriptures do not support. To say that Christians are required to keep a particular day or risk God's chastisement is adding to the Word of God, as nothing in the Bible says or implies this. To correct someone for "breaking the Sabbath"—such as scolding a child for kicking a ball on the "Sabbath" or bringing church discipline against a man for trying to support his family by working on the "Sabbath"—is adding to the Word of God, is being blind to the commands God has really given Christians (1 John 3:23; 4:21), and is risking offending people away from God. All of this judging over days is unscriptural and uncharitable.

The Scriptural position is that God does not command, imply, or expect Christians to keep a day. If someone wants to keep a day, that is fine as long as he or she does not do so out of legalism or trying to earn merit with God, is not judging others, is not imposing his or her view on others, and is not adding to the Scriptures by saying there is a command to keep a day when there is not.

Today, most Christians in an area, other than those in the same household, would find it difficult or impossible to meet daily. For practical reasons, they should set a convenient day to meet. In most cases, the most convenient day is Sunday because it is the day that more people have off from work. But if another day is more convenient, then they should meet on that day. Some may be able to meet together two or three times a week. We should simply know that God has not specified a day on which to assemble.

In Matthew 12:1–8, Mark 2:23–28, and Luke 6:1–5, we find Jesus and His disciples walking through the grainfields one Sabbath. Being hungry, the disciples plucked a few heads of grain to eat. The Pharisees saw in this an opportunity to criticize Jesus for allowing His disciples to do what was unlawful on the Sabbath.

Jesus answered them by recalling the example of David, who did that "which was not lawful" (Matthew 12:4), but was innocent because mercy took precedence (Matthew 12:5–7). "Then Jesus said to them, 'The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath'" (Luke 6:5). If Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, should not we who have Jesus as our Lord keep the Sabbath?

Yes, if this is what Jesus told us to do. But Jesus did not tell His followers to keep a Sabbath day. Even in the above verses, Jesus, although speaking while the Pharisees still sat in Moses' seat and were to be obeyed (Matthew 23:2–3), told the Pharisees that there were things that were far more important than obedience to the letter of the law. In fact, one might really be breaking the law by keeping the letter in one point while ignoring a weightier matter, such as mercy, that should take precedent.

In Mark and Luke, this incident in the grain field is preceded by Jesus' teaching that new wine must be put in new wineskins, not old. What Jesus brought—the New Covenant that is entered by a new birth in which we are given the free gift of faith by which we are justified—was so new and radical a concept that the legal ordinances familiar to the Pharisees could not confine it. This truth encompasses the Sabbath. The real rest of God cannot be confined to a physical rest on one day of the week. In Matthew, the incident in the grain field is preceded by Jesus' call, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30). Jesus, as Lord of the Sabbath, released us from the Sabbath's legal obligation and opened the way for us to enter God's rest through faith.

How? The Sabbath command in the Old Testament was an enforced rest. But it was a rest that was, as Paul explained concerning the observing of all Sabbaths, only a shadow or type of the reality to come (Colossians 2:16–17). Jesus was the reality or antitype (verse 17). Jesus Christ was as much the fulfillment of the Sabbath as he was the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrifices by becoming the perfect sacrifice, or of the other laws by keeping them perfectly.

But how was Jesus a fulfillment of a rest? As we just read, Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.... and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28–30). *Anapausis*, the Greek word for "rest" in these verses (Matthew 11:28 contains the verb form, *Anapau*), is, according to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, p. 529, "the constant word in the Sept[ua]gint] for the Sabbath 'rest'." As Christians, we are to find our Sabbath rest in Jesus. Because

Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly for us, we must stop all attempts to work for our salvation. We must, instead, rest in Jesus. By doing so, we enter God's true rest.

*Hebrews 3 and 4:* These chapters of Hebrews are often used to justify the keeping of a Sabbath day. In fact, as we will see, this was very far from the writer's intent.

Although we do not know for sure who wrote Hebrews, it is obvious from the topics covered that the letter was addressed to Jewish Christians. In fact, the letter contains so much concerning the Old Covenant, the priesthood, and the temple, that it might have been directed specifically at converts to Christianity from the priesthood (see Acts 6:7). The writer specifically wants to emphasize the supremacy of Jesus Christ over the prophets, angels, Moses, and the Aaronic priesthood; the strength of grace over the weakness of the law; and the substitution of the New Covenant for the Old Covenant.

Hebrews 3 starts by pointing out the superiority of Jesus Christ over Moses. With this comparison in view, the writer then (beginning in verse 7) brings out a parallel between the Israelites entering the land of Canaan and Christians entering God's true rest. The Israelites hardened their hearts and "could not enter in because of unbelief" (verse 19). Verse 12 warns, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

The warning is repeated in Hebrews 4:1, with the additional information that we still have a promise of entering God's rest: "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." Verse 2 explains that the Gospel did not profit the Israelites because they did not have faith. "For we," verse 3 continues, "which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world." The King James Version translates the latter part of this verse somewhat confusingly. It is a quote of Psalm 95:11, which says, "Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest." Other versions, such as the New King James Version, translate the latter part of Hebrews 4:3 as, "'So I swore in My wrath, They shall not enter My rest,' although the works were finished from the foundation of the world." In other words, although God rested at Creation thereby showing that His rest was already a reality, He swore that the Israelites would not enter that rest because of their unbelief. But we who believe, the first part of the verse says, do enter that rest. Verse 4 simply points out God's rest in Genesis 2:2.

Verses 5–9 are the pivotal verses. Verse 5 again quotes Psalm 95:11; the Israelites did not enter God's rest. Therefore, points out verse 6, since it remains that some must enter God's rest, and those to whom it was first preached did not enter, then God designated another day [meaning time, not a 24 hour day] by saying through David (in Psalm 95:7–8), "To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." In other words, since the children of Israel under Moses refused to enter God's rest, typified by their refusal to enter the land of Canaan, God is calling others into His rest, as can be seen in the words of David many years after Moses. Of course, God decreed from eternity that all of this would occur. It did not catch Him by surprise. Nevertheless, from our perspective, we see this time sequence of the Israelites refusing to enter God's rest and God, then, calling others into His rest.

Now it might be argued that the next generation of Israelites did, after forty years of wandering in the wilderness, eventually enter the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. But Hebrews 4:8 explains that, by the physical entering into the land, they still did not enter God's true rest: "For if Jesus [Joshua] had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day." Bible commentators and modern Bible versions agree that "Jesus" in the King James Version of this verse is really a reference to Joshua (the names are the same in Greek). So, God speaks of another time for people to enter His rest. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God" (verse 9).

It should be pointed out that, with the exception of verse 9, the word "rest" in these verses has been translated from the Greek word *katapausis*. This word means a causing to cease. In Greek literature, it is used when someone stops and puts down his work. The word, as it is used in these verses that we have examined, is defined right in Hebrews 4, in verse 10: "For he that is entered into his rest [*katapausis*], he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his." So, the writer of Hebrews is using *katapausis* to mean to cease from one's own works, as God did from His.

The children of Israel did not cease from their own works because they did not have the faith to trust God. But we who have faith can cease from our own works, thereby entering God's rest. But we must learn from the Israelites' example of faithlessness. If we do not cease from our own works, we show a lack of faith and cannot enter God's rest.

In Hebrews 4:9, we read, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." Many writers have said that this means Christians are to continue keeping the Sabbath day (either seventh-day or Sunday, depending on the writer). But, in fact, the keeping of a day according

to the Law of Moses is completely contrary to the message the writer of Hebrews was trying to convey.

The Greek word translated "rest" in verse 9 is *sabbatismos*. It is found nowhere else in the Bible. This word does not emphasize the day of the Sabbath, but the celebration rest associated with the Sabbath. In a comment concerning this word, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, on page 529, says, "Here the sabbath-keeping is the perpetual sabbath 'rest' to be enjoyed uninterruptedly by believers in their fellowship with the Father and the Son, in contrast to the weekly Sabbath under the Law. Because this sabbath 'rest' is the 'rest' of God Himself, [Hebrews] 4:10, its full fruition is yet future, though believers now enter into it." This is not the seventh-day Sabbath. It is the **true rest** that was only **typified** by the seventh-day Sabbath, which was only a shadow of the reality.

Of Hebrews 4:9–10, *Unger's New Bible Handbook* (p. 588) states:

These verses refer to the rest called sabbath-keeping (*sabbatismos*, "a state of rest from labor"), [Verse] 9. It involves the believer's resting completely in a perfect work of redemption ([verses] 3–4) as God rested from a perfect work of creation, [verse] 10. This rest of redemption reposes *wholly* in the work of the cross, and ceases from all self-effort, human merit or legalistic claim as a means either of salvation or sanctification, [verse] 10 (cf. Eph 2:8-10). It projects the victory of faith in conquest over spiritual enemies (the world, the flesh and the devil).

There is another problem with trying to make Hebrews 4:9 mean that there remains a Sabbath day to be kept. Whatever remains in Hebrews 4:9 for us to enter is what Joshua, in Hebrews 4:8, failed to lead the people into. If what remains to be entered is the keeping of a Sabbath day, then the rest that Joshua failed to lead the people into was the Sabbath day. This, of course, is nonsense. Joshua failed to lead the people into God's true rest because the people did not have faith. The Sabbath day can have nothing to do with this. Joshua's not leading the children of Israel into God's true rest cannot be a reason why we should therefore keep the Sabbath day. Forcing Hebrews 4:9 to be a reference to the Sabbath day makes a hash of the Scriptures.

It is an interesting fact that Hebrews 4:9 is the first place in all literature in which the word *sabbatismos* is found. It is quite possible that the writer of Hebrews invented the word. Why? Why did he use, possibly even create, *sabbatismos* instead of using *katapausis*? Apparently, the writer wanted to not only express that we can through faith enter God's rest, or cease from works, but he wanted to also say

that when we enter that rest, it is the true celebration and delight that the Sabbath rest foreshadowed (notice in Isaiah 58:13 that God wanted the Jews to delight in the Sabbath).

Continuing in Hebrews 4:10–11, we read: “For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

If the writer of Hebrews wanted Christians to keep a Sabbath day, he could have clearly said so. But as we have seen, this was not his intention. His intention was to explain that we enter God's rest (of which the seventh-day Sabbath and the land of Canaan were only types) through faith, and we can fail to enter through lack of faith. To continue to rely upon the law by keeping a Sabbath day and to fear retribution if one were to fail to do so are symptomatic of a lack of faith.

The writer of Hebrews was concerned that the Jewish Christians to whom he was writing were wavering in their faith and again taking up their works from which they should have ceased. These verses explain that those who have entered God's rest (those who are in Jesus Christ) must cease from their own works just as God did from His at the end of the Creation week.

So, what is the answer to the question posed in the title of this article? What is the Christian Sabbath? Remember that the Bible says that the Sabbaths were only shadows, but Jesus Christ is the body or substance (Colossians 2:16–17). Jesus Christ, then, is the real Christian Sabbath. Because He was sinless and His righteousness is imputed to us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15), and because He died for our sins (Matthew 26:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10), we have our rest in Him. He is God's rest that we enter by faith.

The God's Rest view of the Sabbath is the only view that is consistent with the Scriptures. Therefore, it is sad that many churches, beginning about the seventeenth century, started misapplying Scripture to teach that certain days must be kept.

It is my prayer that God's people will shed their yokes of bondage, turn from the weak and beggarly elements, and rediscover their true rest in Jesus Christ.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Galatians 5:1