

# GOD DOES NOT REQUIRE CHRISTIANS TO KEEP THE SABBATH

MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE that the Bible commands Christians to not work on Sunday. However, is that actually the case? Does God really require believers to set aside Sunday as a day of rest?

In order to answer that question we need to know a little bit more about the Sabbath. While the Israelites were encamped at Mount Sinai, the Lord commanded them to honor the Sabbath day:

**Exodus 20:8:** “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

9 Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work:

10 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:

11 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.”

The first thing I want to point out is that the Sabbath day was the *seventh* day of the week. God was very clear about this: the reason He “hallowed” the *last* day of the week was because He created the entire world in six days and then rested on the seventh day. This means that the Sabbath is Saturday, not Sunday. *There has never been a commandment to rest on the first day of the week.* This means that our act of resting on the first day of the week has nothing whatsoever to do with this commandment. As Christians we do not have the liberty to take God's commands and say “Well, we'll just honor a different day of the week and call it the same thing”. There are no verses in the Bible that say the Sabbath was somehow changed or moved to a different day of the week.

The reason that Christians gathered on Sunday to worship was to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, who rose from the dead on the first day of the week. It had nothing to do with keeping the Sabbath.

But that's not all! If you read through the book of Exodus you will discover that this commandment was given as a sign between God and the Israelites. In other words, this commandment was specific to *the Jews*. Like circumcision, it never applied to Gentiles. That is made clear in this passage:

**Exodus 30:13:** “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.

14 Ye shall keep the sabbath therefor; 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.

15 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.

16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant.

17 It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.”

In this passage the Lord said *three times* that this commandment applied *to the children of Israel*. This was *not* said about the commandment to honor your parents, or not murder, or not commit adultery, or not steal. It would have been easy for the Lord to say that this command applied to everyone, but that is not what He said. Instead He made it clear that this only applied *to the Jews*.

The commandment was also extremely strict. Anyone who did any work at all on the seventh day of the week (which would be our Saturday, *not* our Sunday) was to be put to death. In other passages the Bible elaborated on what was meant by not being allowed to work:

**Jeremiah 17:21:** “Thus saith the Lord; Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem;

22 Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the sabbath day, neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers.”

As you can see, the Lord commanded the Israelites to not bear any burdens on the Sabbath. They were not allowed to go

about their normal business, or carry things into the city, or even carry things out of their house. In another passage the Bible went into even more detail:

**Exodus 35:3:** “Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations upon the sabbath day.”

Notice that there is no exception made for winter weather! The Jews were not even allowed to *start a fire* in their homes on the Sabbath. Even gathering sticks on the Sabbath was punishable by death:

**Numbers 15:32:** “And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day.

33 And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation.

34 And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him.

35 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.

36 And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.”

Simply put, you were not allowed to do *any* kind of work *whatsoever* on the Sabbath.

It's true that in the New Testament Jesus explained that this commandment was not intended to prevent people from helping each other. The Lord healed people on the Sabbath, which angered the Pharisees a great deal. But any kind of work at all – even something as mundane as starting a fire – was strictly prohibited on pain of death.

People today do not even come close to keeping this commandment. Not only do they rest on the wrong day (typically Saturday is very busy day filled with work!), but when they do rest they perform all kinds of activities that would have gotten them *executed* in Old Testament days.

It's worth remembering that this commandment says nothing about worship services, or going to the Temple, or anything of that nature. This was not a day where the Israelites set aside what they were doing so they could go to the Temple and offer sacrifices. Over and over the Lord said that He wanted the Jews to keep this day holy *by not working*. They did *not* keep it holy by singing hymns or listening to priests.

On top of that, the Sabbath was not the only holy day in the Jewish calendar. Leviticus 23 gives an entire list of days that the Jews were commanded to keep holy. The Sabbath is simply the one that we are the most familiar with. The Jews were required to keep *all* of the various holy days on their calendar. As Gentiles we are required to keep *none* of them.

If you search the New Testament you will find that many of the Ten Commandments were repeated and applied to the Church. However, one commandment that was *not* given to the Church was the command to keep the Sabbath day holy. Instead the New Testament teaches that the Sabbath doesn't apply to us anymore:

**Colossians 2:16:** "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:  
17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."

These verses state that we aren't to judge each other on the basis of whether we honor the Jewish holy days or Sabbath days. In other words, *it is left up to our discretion*. If we want to

celebrate the various Jewish holy days (of which the Sabbath is just one!) then we can, but if we don't then that is fine as well. This is a very far cry from executing someone for gathering sticks! In case we missed the point, the same idea can be found in Romans:

**Romans 14:5:** "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

6 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 give God thanks.

...

10 But why doest thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at naught thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

Far from teaching that Christians must not work on Saturday, these verses say that Christians have liberty to do as they think best. If they want to abstain from eating meat then they may do so; if they want to eat meat then that is fine as well. If one man wants to keep the Jewish calendar of holy days (which involves more than just Saturday!) then that is fine; if another man doesn't want to keep any of them then that is equally fine. That is *not at all* what you would expect the Scriptures to say if working on the Sabbath was a sin. There are no passages that give the Church that same kind of discretion when it comes to stealing, coveting, committing adultery, and so forth. All of those commands are still binding – but the one to honor the Sabbath day is not.

As a final note, some might point out that Jesus kept the Sabbath, and that is quite true. However, Jesus also kept the *entire Mosaic Law*. The reason He did this is because He was under that law and was required to keep it. The Mosaic Law did not pass away until after He was crucified. If the New Testament Church was required to keep the Sabbath then that fact would have been mentioned in the epistles to the churches. However, what we actually find is something entirely different. The Church is *not* required to keep Jewish holy days.

In summary, the law to keep the Sabbath was given only to the Jews and was never applied to the Gentiles. As Christians we do not have to keep Saturday holy by not working on that day. God has given us liberty to decide whether or not we want to keep the Jewish calendar of holy days. If we wish to keep them then we may do so, but if we do not then it is not a sin. What the Bible *does* say is that we should not judge each other on the basis of Sabbath keeping.

If you do decide to set apart Sunday as a day of rest, that is perfectly fine – but don't pretend that you are “keeping the Sabbath holy”. What you are doing is not related to that commandment in any way, shape, or form. You do *not* have the right to change the Law to suit yourself and then pretend that you're keeping it. The only person who could change that command is God – and He did *not* change it. That Law does not apply to the Church, and God did not move the Sabbath to a different day of the week.

