

Is The Sabbath To Be Observed?

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The Sabbath instituted
Exodus 20:8

The Sabbath repudiated
Isaiah 1:13; Romans 14:5; Colossians 2:16

The question of Sabbath observance has been debated since Emperor Constantine's edict of March 7, 321 CE, which declared the first day of the week, Sunday (Latin, *venerabili die Solis* - the sacred day of the Sun) as the official day of rest. Sunday observance from this point forward was considered Christian orthodoxy.

Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday ["sabbato" in the original: *shall not be idle on the Sabbath*], but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day they shall especially honour, and as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out ["anathema," - excommunicated] from Christ (Council of Laodicea, c. 337 CE, Canon 29; C.J. Hefele, "A History of the Councils of the Church," Vol. 2, p. 316; Ed. notes in brackets).

Thus began the official, and enforced, change of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday. The credit belongs to the Roman Catholic Church as the institution which first banned the observance of the seventh day of the week as the Biblical Sabbath day of worship. They would replace it with the institution of the first day of the week (erroneously called, the Lord's Day) as the "Christian" day of worship.

The Council of Laodicea ... **forbids Christians from judaizing and resting on the Sabbath day,**

preferring the Lord's day, and so far as possible resting as Christians (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1899 Edition, Vol. XXIII, page 654; emphasis added).

Since that time, various churches, organizations, groups, and individuals have asserted that this change occurred because, for one reason or another, God changed His mind concerning which day is the day of worship He requires His followers to observe. Is this true? Did God change His own commandment or was it a politically motivated human power-structure behind the substitution?

The fact that Almighty God instituted, blessed, and sanctified the seventh-day Sabbath at creation is rarely opposed (Gen. 2:1-3). However, it is frequently contended that the command to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy no longer applies to those who seek to follow Him.

In this brief study, we will examine the three Biblical passages that are most frequently cited as proof that Sabbath observance is no longer required by God.

God's command to His people.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy (Ex. 20:8-11; NASB throughout unless noted).

The first alleged Sabbath contradiction.

Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly (Isa. 1:13).

Reading the verse above in isolation appears, at first glance, to support the assertion that Almighty God no longer recognizes the solemn assembly of His followers. However, the practice of pulling a scripture out of context in order to use it as a pretext in support of a theory may fool some people, but will inevitably prove misleading upon further examination.

The entire sequence below reveals the context. In response to the rebellious kings of Judah, God says,

Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom (used symbolically as a type of sin); give ear to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah (a type of sin). ¹¹“What are **your** multiplied sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle; and I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. ¹²“When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you **this trampling of My courts?** ¹³“Bring your **worthless** offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies— **I cannot endure iniquity and** (together with) **the solemn assembly.** ¹⁴“I hate **your** new moon *festivals* and **your** appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. ¹⁵“So when you spread out your hands in *prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. **Your hands are covered with blood.** ¹⁶“Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, ¹⁷learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow (Isa.

1:10-17; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

It is due to the iniquity of the people, the rulers of the nation, and the trampling of God’s courts that the God-ordained Sabbaths, New Moons, and Festivals to become spiritually polluted. As a result, these holy days no longer remained holy - they had been altered by the disobedience of the nation. Consequently, these profaned appointed days no longer represented how God intended them to be kept. That is why He declares, “I hate **your** new moon *festivals* and **your** appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*” (vs. 14).

Almighty God did not repudiate His Sabbaths, New Moons or Festivals. Instead, He corrected rebellious Judah for profaning them and thereby rendering them worthless. God then commanded them to wash and make themselves clean (spiritually), to cease their evil deeds, and learn to do good. Doing so would make it possible for Judah to observe God’s appointed times in a holy, and thus acceptable, manner.

The second alleged Sabbath contradiction,

One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind (Rom. 4:15).

Again, taken out of context the verse above appears to imply that everyone may decide for themselves which day(s) they may regard above others as their time of worship. If this scripture was referring to the weekly day of worship, Paul’s instruction would cause considerable confusion. It would prove to be divisive, leaving the possibility that some would gather on each day of the week but never all on the same day.

This would contradict numerous commands, including the instruction given in Hebrews,

not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some... (Heb. 10:25a; emphasis added).

God's people cannot gather together if they are given the authority to choose any days of the week they wish for their weekly day of worship. More importantly, Almighty God has expressed His will numerous times regarding when and how His followers are to gather, rest from their daily labor, work, and worship Him,

But as for you, speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'You shall surely observe **My** sabbaths; for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you (sets apart) (Ex. 31:13; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

How blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who takes hold of it; who keeps from profaning the sabbath, and keeps his hand from doing any evil (Isa. 56:2).

The principle of observing the seventh-day Sabbath is repeated in the book of Hebrews and is associated with God's own conduct as He also "rested" on the Sabbath, setting the example for mankind (see study: Does God Rest?).

For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: '**AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS**'; ⁵and again in this *passage*, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." ⁶Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news (the Gospel) preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷He again fixes a certain day, 'Today,' saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,

"TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." ⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. ⁹So there remains a Sabbath rest (Gk. 4521, *sabbatismos*: Sabbath-keeping) for the people of God. ¹⁰**For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His.** ¹¹Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience (Heb. 4:4-11; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added).

Let's return to Romans and examine the entire sequence in chapter four.

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. ²One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. ³The one who eats (meat) is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat (meat), and the one who does not eat (meat) is not to judge the one who eats (meat), for God has accepted him. ⁴Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not (fasts), for the Lord he does not eat (fasts), and gives thanks to God (Rom. 14:1-6).

The first subject that Paul addresses concerns not passing judgment based on the opinions of others' that may be weak in the faith. A specific example is then given referring to those who were not comfortable eating meat (vs. 2).

There was reasonable cause for those new in the faith to be somewhat uncomfortable eating meat

since much of it was sold by unbelievers in the public markets. These unbelievers were by and large pagans, and as such, some, or perhaps most of the animal meat sold would likely have been sacrificed to idols. As could be imagined, it would be impossible to identify which meat had and had not been sacrificed to idols. Therefore, the alternative was to make a choice based on one's own conscience and not purchase any meat rather than potentially eat something which, as far as one who did not know any better, God may view as profane.

Paul addresses the same issue in another letter,

Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience' sake; ²⁶FOR THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND ALL IT CONTAINS. ²⁷If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience' sake. ²⁸But if anyone says to you, "This is meat sacrificed to idols," do not eat *it*, for the sake of the one who informed *you*, and for conscience' sake; ²⁹I mean not your own conscience, but the other man's; for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience? ³⁰If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? ³¹Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1Cor. 10:26-31).

Paul understood there is no god but the One True God, therefore idols are nothing and any meat sacrificed to them should not be considered unclean or defiled. However, Paul knew there may have been some individuals who did not yet understand this point and therefore should not be judged for it (cf. Rom. 14:23b).

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. ²If anyone

supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; ³but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him. ⁴Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. ⁵For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, ⁶yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him. ⁷However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat *food* as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled (1Cor. 8:1-7).

The second subject Paul introduced in Romans chapter 4 is related to his first point – that we should not pass judgment on others' opinions or choices regarding eating or not eating on certain days.

One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind (Rom. 14:5).

Some people may choose a specific day(s) to fast while others may not observe the same day(s). If a person chooses a particular day(s) to not eat food for a particular reason(s) then let them be fully convinced in his or her own mind.

He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and **he who eats**, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and **he who eats not** (fasts), for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God (Rom. 14:6; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

This scripture clearly shows that the subject Paul is addressing does not concern the weekly day of worship. Paul is not introducing a licentious

attitude toward God's law and commandments where individuals may choose for themselves which day(s) are holy and which are not.

Paul did not repudiate God's seventh-day Sabbath nor was he inspired to do so. Even if he had, he did not have the authority to instruct others to disobey God's word.

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! (Gal. 1:8).

Peter and the other apostles said,

...We must obey God rather than men (Ac. 5:29b).

The third alleged Sabbath contradiction.

Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day (Col 2:16).

It has often been asserted that the verse above essentially means, "we should not let anyone pass judgment upon us for keeping Sunday instead of the seventh-day Sabbath". However, it clearly does not say that. Paul is admonishing the church in Colossae not to allow anyone to judge them with regard to eating and drinking, especially during God's Feasts, New Moons, and Sabbath days.

What is not well understood is the fact that many Gnostic pagan sects extant at this time had adopted various Christian teachings, seeking to influence the true church and convince them to accept their philosophies and traditions. Paul addressed his concern regarding philosophy, empty deceptions, and the traditions of men a few verses earlier in Colossians 2.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ (Col. 2:8).

These Gnostic sects sought to convince God's people to abstain from certain pleasures, like various types of food and drink, as a form of self-abasement. This is called Page 6 asceticism. In denying oneself of physical pleasure, it was believed the individual could attain higher spiritual enlightenment. This is based upon human reasoning, elementary principles of the world, and the traditions of men rather than on the gospel.

Consider the following direct translation of Colossians 2:16-17,

Therefore, let **no one judge you** in eating and drinking, or in part of a Festival, or a New Moon, or Sabbaths ¹⁷(which is a shadow of things to come), **except the body of Christ** (RNT; emphasis added; cf. 1 Timothy 3:15).

Paul instructed the church in Colossae not to let anyone judge them in their observance of God's Festivals, New Moons, or any of the Sabbaths. Only the true body of Christ has the authority to make judgments regarding such things. In other words, as the church at Colossae had received the correct teachings of God, they should not let anyone make a ruling against them so that they should accept their judgment, compelling them to change how they worship God. Rather, they are to acknowledge the authority of the body of Christ with regard to the correct way to observe God's Holy Days.

The Gnostics sought to modify God's appointed times according to their own reasoning and non-biblical forms of religious worship. These false practices had a form of wisdom, they appeared

to be religious in nature, pertaining to righteousness, but were not from God. That's why Paul declared in Colossians, "Therefore let no one judge you... except the body of Christ."

Only the congregation of God, those who are His called-out ones, who keep His covenant and His testimony, are able to rightly judge on a matter concerning how these appointed times are to be observed. Therefore, the ones from whom judgment can be accepted, pertaining to the application of God's commands, are those of the true body of Christ (the local fellowship as they follow the law of God according to scripture).

The Apostle Paul addressed this point again a few verses later.

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in **self-abasement** and the worship of the angels (i.e. idols or false gods), taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,¹⁹ and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God... If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ...²¹ **Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!**"²² (which all *refer* to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?²³ These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence (Col. 2:18-19; 21-23; emphasis added; Ed. notes in parenthesis).

The elementary principles that are of this world are man-made practices which are contrary to God's way; they are sinful. If God's servants are considered physically dead through Christ's

sacrificial death, relative to the requirement of the law, then why would they then submit themselves again to decrees and commandments of men that consist of these elementary principles? In other words, Paul is asking the Colossians, "Why, if you have died to the penalty of sin through the death of Christ, do you act as though you are still alive in the flesh and choosing such carnal things as these false and base principles, like asceticism, to make oneself appear to be more righteous, but in fact hold no value?"

These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:23; NKJV).

Colossians 2:15 does not repudiate the Sabbath or any other of God's appointed times. Rather, upon closer examination, it confirms the early church was in fact keeping them all as God has commanded in His law. The brethren in Colossae were specifically instructed by Paul to guard themselves against the influence of pagan tradition and the human judgments and commandments of those who do not keep God's Holy Days correctly.

In conclusion, Almighty God did not change His mind by repudiating the seventh-day Sabbath as the weekly day of worship. Scripture is clear that God, in fact, never changes.

For I, the LORD, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed (Mal. 3:6).

God Himself prophesies that all of mankind will come to bow down before Him on all Sabbaths and New Moons continually.

For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me,' declares

the LORD, 'so your offspring and your name will endure. ²³**And it shall be from new moon to new moon and from sabbath to sabbath, all mankind will come to bow down before Me,**' says the LORD. ²⁴'Then they will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched; and they will be an abhorrence to all mankind' (Isa. 66:22-24; emphasis added).

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