

**Remember the Sabbath, Part 2**  
Men's Bible Study at Park View  
November 1, 2005

**Scriptures:** Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15.

This lesson is the second of two sessions on the fourth commandment. In the first session, we looked at the way this commandment was observed in the Old Testament. In this second session, we are examining the teachings of Jesus and Christian understandings of the Sabbath.

I have drawn heavily on Willard Swartley's work (*Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women*) in today's lesson. His careful writing helps to explain three different ways that Christians believe the Sabbath should be observed today. We will study each point of view as outlined below.

**1. Observing the seventh day of the week as a holy day of Sabbath. See Genesis 2:2-3, Matthew 24:20.**

Christian sabbatarians such as Seventh Day Adventists or Seventh Day Baptists generally believe the following: God ordained the seventh day as a Sabbath from the time of creation. It was observed by the patriarchs long before the time of Moses. Jesus broke only the legalistic Sabbath rules of the Pharisees, but kept the Sabbath as God intended it. The apostles and the early Jewish Christians kept the Sabbath, just as they kept all of the other nine commandments in the Decalogue. God intended that his people keep the Sabbath for all time, since it is a sign of the eternal Sabbath until the time that Christ returns. If Christians do not observe the Sabbath, they will be punished by God. The pope in Rome changed the day of observance from the seventh day to Sunday against the counsel of God.

"We . . . believe there has been a wholly unauthorized, unwarranted, and presumptuous change in the Sabbath by the Catholic, or great Roman, apostacy, as prophesied by Daniel (Daniel 7)" (Seventh Day Adventists cited in Swartley, p. 72).

**2. Observing Sunday, the first day of the week, as holy. (An alternate day could also be observed if Sunday cannot be kept). See Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Revelation 1:10.**

Those who observe Sunday as Sabbath have many of the same beliefs as the sabbatarians. In essence, they believe that Sabbath is rooted in creation, since it is mentioned in Genesis. Also, it is part of the moral law (the Decalogue), not part of the ceremonial law as were many of the laws in Exodus and Leviticus. Moral laws in the Old Testament are to be kept for all time, particularly if we have evidence that they were supported in the New Testament. Jesus kept the Sabbath, but freed the people to truly benefit from the original meaning of Sabbath rather than being slavishly tied to legalistic observances or prohibitions. There is clear evidence that the apostles began

meeting for worship on Sunday, which they called the Lord's Day. It was so called because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. Although Jewish Christians continued to observe Sabbath in their synagogues, the Gentile church began to observe Sunday as their Sabbath day of rest and worship in their own houses. The ante-Nicene fathers often spoke critically of the Jewish Sabbath. To some Christians, it is not so important to worship on a particular day as it is to choose one day out of seven. In other words, the form is not as important as the essence of Sabbath.

"We have argued, especially from the evidence of Eusebius, that the decree of Constantine was influenced by the church, rather than the reverse, and introduced nothing fundamentally new into Christian thought or practice regarding the Lord's Day" (Wilfrid Stott, cited in Swartley, p. 78).

**3. Observing seven days of the week as holy; Sabbath-keeping is unnecessary. See Matthew 11:28-12:14, Luke 4:16-21, Mark 3:16, Colossians 2:16-23, Hebrews 4:1-11.**

The essence of this position is the belief that Jesus supersedes the law, particularly the Sabbath. The Sabbath was established by Moses as a Jewish social institution to bring rest and social equality to people, particularly through the Jubilee. The Pharisees multiplied legalistic Sabbath laws which bound people rather than freeing them. Jesus broke the Sabbath laws to bring about healing and restoration in response to people's needs. This was the true meaning of the Sabbath. Jesus also announced Jubilee. The promised rest of the Messianic age is now available to God's people through belief in Jesus Christ. The connection between Sabbath and Sunday was established in the fourth century; it was not part of the early church.

"Much of the Christian interpretation of the Sabbath is simply going out into the junkyards of the Pharisees and bringing back stuff that Jesus swept out two millenniums ago." (Clarence Jordan, cited in Swartley, p. 78)

**From this study, we can conclude that:**

God intends a Sabbath rest for his people, whether metaphorical or literal.

We all benefit spiritually from the occasions when we stop our anxious striving in order to be re-created and rejuvenated by rest, worship, and fellowship with others.

Sabbath can be an antidote to consumerism, overwork, and spiritual disorder.

**Questions to ponder:** Discuss the upsides and downsides of each of the three different Christian positions outlined in this lesson. Which point of view most clearly reflects your own understanding or practice of Sabbath? What commitments would you like to make as a result of studying this lesson?