

Why NT Christianity Has No Sabbath Day

Tim Blencowe, Aug 2023

(1) In the beginning, God established the seventh day as a Sabbath Rest.

It's about God's good creation, in right relationship with Him, in peace and at rest...

Genesis 2:1-3

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Unlike the six days of creation in Genesis 1, this "day" is not described with any ending. *We see in Hebrews 4, this is because it's pointing forward to the eternal rest, which we enter by believing the Gospel.*

(2) In the Ten Commandments, Ancient Israel were commanded to observe the seventh day.

In the first giving of the Law, the Sabbath was about remembering God as the Good Creator...

Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labour and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

In the second giving of the Law, it was about remembering God had rescued his people and placed them in the Promised Land...

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. ¹³Six days you shall labour and do all your work, ¹⁴but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or

female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. ¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

Being in the Land was a picture of Rest – as God’s people, in God’s chosen place, under God’s good rule. *Hebrews 4 makes clear that for us, the Christian place of Rest is not in a Land, but rather to belong to Jesus.*

(3) The New Testament is clear that the command for weekly Sabbath-observance has been fulfilled

The Sabbath command was a “shadow” pointing to the reality...

Colossians 2:16-17

Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

The Sabbath command pointed forward to the true Rest we will have in Heaven. *Hebrews 4 explicitly references the sabbath, making clear that for us, it’s about being in Heaven...*

Hebrews 4:9-10

There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; ¹⁰ for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his.

In the New Testament, there are no holy days. However, if an individual Christians feels compelled to observe a sacred day, then it’s up to them, and between them and God...

Romans 14:5

One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind.

(4) Sunday (first day) is not the Sabbath (seventh day), but does get three special mentions in the New Testament

(i) Jesus rose on the first day of the week, and so many Christians have seen Sunday as the day of Christian beginnings...

Luke 24:1-3

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

(ii) In all the New Testament, there's only one mention of a Christian gathering which occurred "on the first day" of the week.

Acts 20:7

On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.

(iii) Finally, when it came to explain how to set aside money for donating to Christian work, Paul suggested this should be done on "the first day"...

1 Corinthians 16:2

On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

Some interpret this to mean that Christians are supposed to meet on that day, and that's when the money is donated. But it can be simply be a word about being sure to set aside money at the start of the week, not just giving from left-overs at the end of the week.

(5) There's one New Testament reference to a thing called "the Lord's Day"

The Apostle John describes how he received the vision of Revelation...

Revelation 1:10

On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...

Is this one mention of “the Lord’s Day” a reference to Sunday? It may be so, and many Christians have taken this to be support for treating Sundays as a “Christian Sabbath”. Just be clear that the evidence is only this strong.

(6) There is literally no New Testament instruction to observe a sabbath.

In all the New Testament Epistles, which instruct churches how to conduct themselves, there is never a word on sabbath-keeping, either on the seventh day or the first day. In the very places where we might expect such instruction (eg in Acts 15, where the Council of Jerusalem was deciding which aspects of Judaism should be respected by Gentile converts) sabbath-keeping is not mentioned as something to observe.

(7) Here are my personal thoughts....

Are Christians to Observe a Sabbath?

No. It was a shadow, pointing to the reality of eternal rest in Christ.

Is a rest day each week a good idea?

Yes, for sure. Learn the goodness of work *and* rest.

Are Christians free to observe a Sabbath-like Day?

Yes, if you feel you ought.

Can it be a Saturday?

Yes, if you like – that would honour the original command.

Can it be a Sunday?

Yes, if you want – that would honour the Resurrection Day.

Can it be a different day?

If you have good reason before God. No judgment here.

Can Sabbath observance be imposed on other Christians?

No. Not at all. It's not a thing.

What is meant to happen on that day?

I assume you're thinking of a day of rest from normal work, taking the time to give thought to the things of God. But just know that there is simply no prescription in the New Testament, so it's between you and God.

Can Sunday serve as a good day for church gathering?

Yes, if you like. It fits our heritage.

Is Sunday the designated "Church day" for Christians?

No, it isn't. Culturally yes, but Biblically no. We're free to have our church gatherings on any day. Not having it on Sunday will feel weird, but that's for cultural and personal reasons, not the Bible. That said, if you're convinced Sunday is "the Lord's Day" and a "Christian Sabbath", then I supposed you'd need to make it your church day, out of conscience. Sadly, I think "sabbath-keeping" is an unhelpful motivation for church-attendance and breeds legalism and duty-Christianity.

If it's not an act of sabbath-keeping, what's the motivation to go to church each week?

(i) Love: Out of love for the Lord and his people, and because we know how much he cares for his Church, and we want to serve and build up his people.

(ii) Growth: We come because we know how much we need the fellowship and encouragement of God's people, as we open his Word and share in the truth of the gospel.

(iii) Mission: Church gatherings are public events, and there's always great opportunities for growing the gospel.

(iv) Belonging: the church becomes my family of brothers and sisters in Christ, and it's my community and where I belong and have a place. They need me and I need them.