

Christians And The Sabbath Day

‘Remember to keep Shabbat holy. You will labour for six days and do all your work but the seventh day is a Shabbat to the Lord your God. You will not do any work on it, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servants, nor your livestock, nor your stranger who is within your house, for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them and rested on the seventh day, therefore the Lord blessed Shabbat and made it holy’ (Exodus 20:8 to 11).

‘Six days you will do your work but the seventh day you will rest so your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your servant and the stranger may be refreshed’ (Exodus 23:12).

‘The children of Israel will keep Shabbat to observe it throughout their generations, a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever’ (Exodus 31:16 & 17).

‘Six days you will work but on the seventh day you will rest’ (Exodus 34:21).

‘Observe Shabbat to keep it holy as the Lord your God commanded you. You will labour six days and do all your work but the seventh day is Shabbat to the Lord your God in which you will not do any work. You, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servants, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your livestock, nor your stranger who is within your house. Let your servants rest as well as you’ (Deuteronomy 5:12 to 14).

The word Sabbath, or Shabbat in Hebrew (pronounced Shubbut) was given to the children of Israel as a day of holy rest. The Lord did not want them to serve Him only one day per week. The Israelites were to serve God for six days and rest (from God’s service) on the seventh day. Shabbat was given to them to rest and spend time worshipping God. It was a holy day for the Hebrews to remember God and all He had done for them. Shabbat was given to the Hebrews for a day off to rest and be refreshed, both for the people and their working animals so they did not overwork, remembering their working day was not like modern working hours. They worked from before dawn until sundown every day. God ordained Shabbat so families could relax and be together for one whole day every week. The Jewish Shabbat is a very joyous, musical celebration, they invite strangers into their homes and provide an abundance of foods, making the stranger feel loved and welcome. Shabbat starts at sundown on Friday evening with the lighting of candles and prayer. They enjoy the breaking of bread and wine (consecrated grape juice) and instructions regarding Shabbat and the bread and wine. After that they have wonderful Jewish music, teaching from the Torah (Old Testament) and food – and lots of it. It is a very Jewish celebration and when the Messianic Jews, or Holy Spirit-filled Jews celebrate their Shabbat, the anointing of the Holy Spirit is tangible. Shabbat celebration is nothing at all like the Christian church service.

Shabbat was never given as an instruction to early Christians, it was given as part of the covenant to the children of Israel. Some modern Christians think it applies to them too, but the New Testament shows us the Gentile Christians did not celebrate Shabbat on the seventh day of the week – only the Jews did, and they still do. Gentile Christians did go to the synagogues on Shabbat to hear the Rabbis preaching. ‘When the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged for these words be preached to them on the next Sabbath ... On the next Shabbat, almost the whole city was gathered together to hear the Word of God’ (Acts 13:42 & 44).

The usual day of meeting for the early church was on the first day of the week – the day after Shabbat. Meeting together on Saturdays is not part of the new covenant and a few Christian sects have misunderstood the original purpose for Shabbat and have turned it into an erroneous doctrine. The whole aim of Shabbat was a day of worship, rest and fellowship together, God’s holy people spending time together with Him in the house of the Lord – keeping the day a holy day for Him. It was never intended to be a day of legalism and bondage. Shabbat was intended as a day to rest and regain strength. If people work all day every day their bodies become exhausted so all people, Christians and the unsaved and any working animals should rest for one full day each week for the sake of their health. That is what Jesus was indicating when He said God gave Shabbat for the good of mankind. He did not create mankind for Shabbat. Jesus said, “Shabbat was made for man, not man for Shabbat” (Mark 2:27). Jesus was referring to the Pharisees and other religious Jews who made such a doctrine of the Shabbat rest, they went too far. For example, they said Jesus sinned by healing people on Shabbat (Matthew 12:2), but Jesus said Shabbat was given for people and animals to take a day off and it is lawful to do good work on Shabbat. Jesus said the ancient priests did not always keep Shabbat and they were guiltless (Matthew 12:5). What Jesus was saying in effect was, have a day off and rest but do not make an issue of Shabbat – do not take the rest day as a day of complete inertia. He asked what man would not look for his lost sheep on Shabbat (Matthew 12:11). Jesus was looking for His ‘lost sheep’ among the children of Israel (Matthew 10:6; 15:24). Overly religious Pharisees made Shabbat an aspect of bondage and Jesus rebuked the religious people for having that

attitude. Although Shabbat was part of the covenant, Pharisees turned it into a law. Modern 'religious' people have made Shabbat into a doctrine instead of a day of relaxation, enjoyment, fellowship, refreshment and an opportunity to draw closer to God. The Hebrew word Shabbat means 'rest'. It does not mean bondage.

Some Gentiles use the Ten Commandments as their guide, thinking somehow they will please God if they attend church on a Saturday morning, but Jesus Himself introduced Sunday as the day for the early Christians to assemble together. The apostles always met on the first day of the week because Jesus rose on the first day of the week – that was the day after Shabbat – our modern-day Sunday, and there are many scriptures to verify that fact. After rising from the dead, Jesus Himself had the very first meeting with His disciples on the first day of the week – so Jesus started the brand new church with that very first meeting on a Sunday evening and the apostles continued with that theme, gathering on Sunday mornings to break bread (share communion) and give their tithes and offerings. Shabbat begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday. Each verse referring to the risen Lord, reads 'after Shabbat, at dawn of the first day of the week' and that tells us it was the early morning after the end of Shabbat – Sunday morning.

'After Shabbat, near dawn of the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary (Jesus' mother) went to take a look at the tomb ... The angel said, "Do not be afraid for I know you seek Jesus Who has been crucified. He is not here for He has risen, just like He said"' (Matthew 28:1, 5 & 6). 'When Shabbat was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James (and Jesus), and Salome (Mary's sister) brought spices so they might anoint Him. Very early on the first day of the week they came to the tomb ... When He had risen early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene' (Mark 16:1, 2 & 9). 'On the first day of the week at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the anointing spices they had prepared ... The angels asked, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He (Jesus) is not here but is risen"' (Luke 24:1, 5 & 6). 'On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went early while it was still dark to the tomb and saw the stone was taken away from the tomb ... When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were locked where the disciples were assembled, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said, "Shalom" (peace be to you)' (John 20:1 & 19). 'On the first day of the week when the disciples were assembled together to break bread...' (Acts 20:7). 'On the first day of each week, let each one of you save something as he has prospered, so no collections will need to be taken after I come' (1 Corinthians 16:2).

In the early church days, there were people who tried to insist Christians meet on Shabbat, but Apostle Paul dismissed them and said they were not to insist they meet on Shabbat. 'Let no one sit in judgement on you in matters of food and drink, or with regard to a feast day or a new moon or a Shabbat. Such things are only the shadow of things that are to come and they have only a symbolic value' (Colossians 2:16 & 17). Shabbat is a symbol of the eternal rest that is to come to God's dedicated people after Judgement Day when they have been judged to be righteous. 'There remains a Shabbat rest for the people of God. Those who have entered into their rest have rested from their works, as God did from His (after creation was completed)' (Hebrews 4:9 & 10). Shabbat is not part of the law. Jesus said He was Lord even of Shabbat (Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5). Jesus fulfilled the needs of Shabbat by healing people and the day He rose from the dead, he started the fulfilment of the brand new blood covenant on the day after Shabbat. Jesus never abolished the law because the ancient Commandments are still a guideline for mankind to follow. Jesus did do away with the law as a means of righteousness, making the only way of righteousness through faith in Jesus. Before Jesus came, the rituals in the temple, the sacrificing of animals and a commitment to God were the only means of righteousness. Jesus changed all that. The only means of righteousness is now our commitment to God through Jesus. 'Jesus is the fulfilment of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes' (Romans 10:4). 'If righteousness is through the law, then Jesus died for nothing!' (Galatians 2:21). 'If there had been a law given that could make us spiritually alive, then most certainly righteousness would have been of the law' (Galatians 3:21). 'Our righteousness is from God by faith in Jesus' (Philippians 3:9).

We encourage everyone to attend a Shabbat meal with our brothers and sisters in the faith, including the Jewish people. The Jews celebrate Shabbat as part of their ongoing covenant with God – not as part of the law. If there is a Jewish community near you, see if you can attend their true Shabbat celebration. You will be blessed and refreshed.

Amen and God bless you.

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