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Question: I have a question about keeping the Sabbath. It is my belief that we are free to worship the Lord on any day of the week, not one specific day. Am I not correct?

Answer: You may be surprised that my answer to your question is Yes, Christians are free to worship God any day of the week. For, you see, your question reflects a common misunderstanding about the Sabbath in our culture: that it is primarily a day to worship God. I suspect this derives from the fact that the most visible Sabbath activity of all Christians and Jews is their attendance at religious services on Saturday or Sunday morning. And since worship is one of the major activities that religious people “do” in church or synagogue, it's easy to assume that that's the primary purpose of the fourth commandment.

However, the Bible says very little about worship in its instructions about the Sabbath. The primary text in the Bible on Sabbath keeping is the fourth commandment, which says nothing about worship. Its major positive command is to keep the Sabbath holy, and its major negative command is to cease from work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). Other passages in the Bible suggest that ceasing from work includes housekeeping duties (Exodus 16:23). Nehemiah forbade buying and selling on

the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15-22), and Isaiah told his readers to call the Sabbath a delight (Isaiah 58:13). There is little evidence in the Old Testament that worship was to be a part of Sabbath observance, much less that it was the primary reason for Sabbath observance.

[Isaiah does, however, describe that in the New Earth to come in the future “...from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to *worship* before Me,' says the LORD.” Isaiah 66:23 NKJV]

The New Testament says that Jesus healed on the Sabbath and allowed His disciples to “harvest” a bit of grain to satisfy their hunger. And it also suggests that worship is appropriate on the Sabbath, because Jesus and the early apostles were quite faithful in their attendance at synagogue services on the Sabbath, where worship was presumably an important activity (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:1, 2). So while there is certainly biblical precedent for Sabbath worship, the day as a whole is about much more than worship.

Also, while the Bible says a great deal about worship, you can read it from Genesis to Revelation and you won't find the slightest hint that worship is to be restricted to the Sabbath. Your statement that Christians “are free to worship any day of the week, not one specific day” is absolutely correct. What a tragedy it would be if we could not pray, read our Bibles, and gather with other Christians

for worship and fellowship just one day a week!

A Primary Distinction

According to the Bible, the primary distinction between the Sabbath and the other six days of the week is that the Sabbath is holy time, not that it is the exclusive time to worship God. God set aside the Sabbath as holy time at Creation (Genesis 2:2,3). So it is clear that the Sabbath is an institution for the entire human race, not just for the Jews. God reiterated the sacredness of the seventh day in the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), and the rest of the Old Testament repeatedly calls attention to the holiness of the Sabbath (Exodus 31:15).

The real question we have to ask, then is what it means for a day to be holy and how one keeps a day holy.

In the Bible, the word *holy* is used to define times, places, and things that are set apart for a special use, especially in regard to God. When I was growing up, my parents taught me to treat the Holy Bible with special respect by always placing it *over* other books rather than *under* them. Several years ago, as I was visiting the chapel at a monastery in San Raphael, California, I heard loud voices laughing and talking just outside the front door. But when the door opened, the voices hushed to a whisper. Why? Because the people responded instinctively to the chapel as a place to

meet with God—a holy place.

Our Sabbath keeping should be like that. Biblical commands and rules for Sabbath keeping are important as guides, especially for new Christians. But the best Sabbath keeping arises out of our instinctive sense of the presence of God in those 24 hours that inspires us to spend the time in a way that is reverent and special.

We should, of course, spend time with God every day, and in a sense we can also call these times special and sacred, but these are random times that we are free to change as circumstances demand. However, God Himself pronounced the entire seventh day holy, because He knew that we need to spend that much of our week with Him in a special way. And that time we cannot change.

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This answer is prepared by Marvin Moore, editor of *Signs of the Times* monthly magazine and author of numerous book selections. (Used by permission)