

Question #14

Question: As a new Christian, I have learned that I should follow the example of Jesus for my life's choices. I soon discovered, however, that several of my Christian friends rest on another day of the week other than the one Jesus rested on. Do you think this is just a minor issue that I shouldn't be concerned about?

Answer: To begin, note the following Bible verses that will help to verify your choices as a new Christ-follower.

Jesus said: "If you follow Me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life" (John 8:12, NLT). The disciple John also wrote: "He who says he abides in Him [Jesus] ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6, NKJV).

Your friends probably would agree with this, but they may not have applied it yet to the question you are pursuing regarding the biblical day of rest and worship. Your example, no doubt, will have its influence with your Christian friends.

The Pattern Jesus Set

Let's first check the pattern Jesus gave for the Sabbath during His three and a half years of public ministry. Coming from His baptism at the Jordan River and the wilderness temptations, Jesus chose to publicly announce to His hometown synagogue family in

Nazareth on the Sabbath His mission as the Messiah (Luke 4:16-30).

This was not happenstance—His holy mission was rightfully announced on a holy day. In response, an unbelieving, unruly synagogue mob erupted in anger and attempted to push Jesus over a cliff. But with the help of angels, He miraculously disappeared through the angry mob.

As His renown grew, the fresh teaching and interactive style that Jesus gave to the Sabbath rest became one of the most frequent points of conflict between Jesus and the Jewish Rabbi leaders.

The issue for Jesus was not the Sabbath's relevance and permanence, but, rather, it was the stale formality and burdensome regulations that had been humanly placed upon the Sabbath day. These cumbersome distortions had upended the joy, praise, and inward renewal that the Sabbath was meant to be for the human family.

Jesus as a defender of the Sabbath

If God had intended that the seventh day Sabbath should come to an end when Christ's ministry was completed, and that another day, Sunday—the first day—should take its place, then there would have been no point in Jesus defending the seventh day so assertively.

You will notice that the ruling class wanted to kill Jesus over this issue (Mark 3:1-6). Jesus' assertive actions show how vital it was for Him to bring these reforms to the Sabbath experience. Jesus endured the death threats so that future generations would know how essential a correct understanding of the seventh day in the fourth commandment is

in Jesus relationship with the human family. Who in the 21st century, can overlook this?

In direct engagement with the ruling class, Jesus rightfully claimed His lordship of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8). Truly, He was its Maker. As such, He announced that the “Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:28), that is, for all humanity at every point in earth time. If the Sabbath day rest blessed and refreshed Adam and Eve in their innocence, why wouldn't it do even more for every human who would set foot on this planet since then?

On five different Sabbaths—some in the presence of synagogue audiences—the Gospel writers record how Jesus miraculously healed chronically diseased or deformed individuals. Note these five Sabbath miracles: a woman with a contorted back (Luke 13:10-13), a man with a withered hand (Matthew 12:9-14), a man born blind from birth (John 9:1-41), a man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6), and a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-17). In this way, Jesus demonstrated and restored the heavenly atmosphere the Sabbath was meant to radiate—joy, restoration, praise, and worship from the heart. He brought meaning to the Sabbath experience that, over time, had degenerated into cold words and meaningless ceremonies.

Jesus upholds the Creation week model

Why were each of the Gospel writers impressed by the Holy Spirit to record these restorative episodes in the ministry of Jesus? All four of the Gospel books of the New Testament were written 30 to 50 years after

the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension to heaven. Was there another day of the weekly cycle that would take the place of the seventh day? The record stands: no other day of the week would be in harmony with the Creation week model of Genesis 1 and 2 or with the fourth commandment, which was verbally stated from Mt. Sinai and then written by God in stone in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11).

It can now be understood that Jesus was not giving the Sabbath its death sentence, but rather was ordaining a fresh revival and restoring meaning for the seventh day for all future believers to enjoy into the 21st century.

For the one who has come to love and enjoy God, the Sabbath is not seen as an obligation but as a weekly promise of relational fulfillment.

It is vital to point out that, at the end of the Creation and immediately after Adam and Eve were placed in their Eden home, the first act of their Maker was to produce and establish the weekly Sabbath celebration. This is an eternal theme worldwide—the Creator and His human children brought together from week to week with unbroken rhythm throughout all earth time.

Christianity's dilemma of contradiction

As you point out in your question, the larger portion of Christianity honors another day (Sunday) other than the day Jesus gave example for. There are millions of Christians who sincerely love and serve Jesus but are willing to live with this contradiction of belief and practice. This continues to be a truly

puzzling enigma in Christianity. Does not this dilemma weaken the Christian witness and give a conflicting message to the world at large?

We ask: how is it that millions of God-fearing and God-loving individuals around the world choose to disregard the example of Jesus and His moral imperative for the “seventh day” stated specifically in the fourth commandment?

Why the seventh day is moral law

God's inward instinct is to endear Himself to His creation. Each individual who has walked the planet has received special note of attachment in the heart of God who brought them into existence. Each person is cherished by the Monarch of the universe. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NASB).

Therefore, the weekly Sabbath pattern, beginning at Earth's creation and modeled by the life of Christ (Luke 4:16), is encapsulated in divine moral law—the Ten Commandments. Each of these moral commands coming from its Author is an expression of His nature and character. No human can ever accuse God of being an absent landlord or a delinquent father. Week after week and from Sabbath to Sabbath, God expresses His passion and longing to interact with His human family made in His image.

So it is that God has ranked this expression of devotion to His human family on the distinguished level of moral law. The Sabbath is the main event of the week—this is who

God is; this is the essence of His glorious being! It will be so throughout the ages of eternity (Isaiah 66:22, 23). Who would dare to tamper with it? Who would be so fool hardy as to up end a moral imperative? But it is a strange reality that millions of God-fearing people the world over miss this sacred blessing by one day every week.

Human indifference—a high price to pay!

The late noted theologian R.C. Sproul gives this sobering definition of living apart from God's moral law, which includes the fourth commandment:

When God issues a law, when He legislates a kind of behavior, it is our duty as His creatures to do as He says. A moral obligation to conform to that law is imposed on us justly from His hand. When we don't conform, we are breaking that law, which means we are committing a crime in the sight of God. . . (The Truth of the Cross, Reformation, Truth Publishers, Lake Mary, Florida, 2007, p, 40)

The Ten Commandments are cosmic moral high ground. They embody the point of reference for the conscience of every person on earth. The Ten Commandment law is a revealing of the very essence of God's nature. To alter this divine description of the righteous God would be to change the very nature of His righteous being. On His inaugural Sermon on the Mount, Jesus announced: “. . . until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18, NASB).

Noted international Christian apologist, the late Ravi Zacharias, outlined the premise for the Ten Commandments:

The moral law also serves as a profound reminder that in God there is no contradiction. The moral law stands as a consistent, contradiction-free expression of God's character. If I violate this law, I bring contradiction into my life, and my life begins to fall apart. This is why a humble spirit, as it honors God, realizes how near and yet how far it is from God. (Ravi Zacharias, *The Grand Weaver*, p. 89, 2007, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 49530)

The Art of Being Guided

No doubt there are many who are thinking through for the first time this fourth commandment issue for God's holy day. It is, indeed, overwhelming to realize that millions of Bible-loving people may be missing a scheduled divine appointment every week.

For those individuals who have brushed aside this issue in the past from a viewpoint of a Sunday tradition, Ravi Zacharias's explanation may open a new way to recalibrate one's comprehension of the fourth commandment. God has identified a specific day of the week—the seventh day, our Saturday—as sacred and holy. Sunday is the first day of the week, which the fourth commandment labels a work day.

While others may have unknowingly taken a path of departure from the fourth commandment by calling Sunday “a sabbath,” it can now be understood that to depart

from the specified time of the Sabbath is a departure from the very example Jesus Himself gave.

There are several biblical guideposts that support Ravi Zacharias's observation regarding the nature and character of God:

1. God has stated that He does not change (Psalm 55:19).
2. Jesus said that He is the same yesterday today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).
3. Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man—all humans who live during earth time (Mark 2:27).
4. There is no evidence either in the Old Testament or the New of an authorized change in the day of “rest.” Even in His death, Jesus honored the Sabbath as He rested in the garden tomb during the Sabbath hours following His crucifixion.
5. That Jesus put His life on the line in His efforts to restore the meaning of the Sabbath during His ministry supports the ongoing relevance of the seventh day.
6. The apostle Paul states that the Ten Commandments are “holy, righteous and good” (Romans 7:12, NASB).
7. There is no documentation of a pattern of weekly first-day assemblies in the New Testament.
8. Never did Jesus initiate a change from the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day of the week. Earlier in His ministry He had announced Himself as “Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8).
9. On Mt. Sinai God explained to Moses that the seventh-day Sabbath would remain

- “forever” (Exodus 31:17).
10. Since the fourth commandment is a moral imperative, the day of the Sabbath should be the same for all humanity in every age.
 11. The fourth commandment points back to Creation week. “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it . . .” (Genesis 2:1-3, NASB). The seventh day has God's blessing; that blessing has never been removed.

The Art of Loyalty

Out of the heart of King David:

“Teach me, O Lord, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law And Keep it with all my heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it . . . Establish Your word to Your servant as that which produces reverence for You.”
Psalm 119:33-35, 38, (NASB)

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