

Chapter 15

A better way to rest

Let's summarize what we have seen about the Sabbath:

- The Bible does not say the Sabbath was commanded at creation.
- The Bible does not say the Sabbath was commanded before Moses.
- The Bible does not say the Ten Commandments are a permanent package.
- The Sabbath is commanded only within the old covenant, which is obsolete.
- Old Testament praise and warnings about the Sabbath should be seen as praise and warnings about old covenant obedience, not a permanent law.
- Jesus never commanded the Sabbath, and is never described as resting on the Sabbath.
- Jesus' example is that of work and activity on the Sabbath.
- The book of Acts tells us that the apostles preached on every day of the week, and describes a church meeting on the first day.
- Paul never commanded the Sabbath, and told people it was not a day to be concerned about.

There is no New Testament verse that says the Sabbath is now obsolete. Instead, there are verses that say the entire old covenant law is obsolete. The Law of Moses is not required — and that includes the Sabbath. The Sabbath is compared with things that are now obsolete: temple sacrifices, circumcision, showbread, a shadow. It is not a basis for judging one another, and it should not be taught as a necessary addition to Christ. The Sabbath is not required.

Surprising silence

If the Sabbath were a requirement, it would be astonishing that the New Testament never mentions such an important command. It has space for all sorts of other commands, but no occasion to command the Sabbath. Sweeping statements are made regarding the old covenant law, but never does anyone say, “except

the Sabbath.” If the Sabbath is essential, it is astonishing that no one is ever criticized for ignoring it.

Paul dealt with numerous problems of Christian living, and he lists numerous sins that can keep people out of the kingdom of God, but he never mentions the Sabbath. In describing sins of the Gentiles (Romans 1), he says nothing about the Sabbath. He says plenty about faith and love, magnifying the real purpose of God's law, but the Sabbath is simply not mentioned.

Instead, the Sabbath is an indifferent matter. People are free to rest on that day if they do it to the Lord. People are free to use the day in other ways, too, if they are living to the Lord. They may work on that day if they have faith that Christ has given them that freedom. This book is designed to help you be fully convinced that the Sabbath is not required.

Nor does the New Testament tell us that any other day of the week ought to be a day of rest. The Sabbath command is not “transferred” to some other day. Believers are free to meet on the seventh day of the week, or on any other day, whatever is convenient for them. Paul preached on every day of the week.

The Sabbath was a shadow of Christ, just as the sacrifices were. Jesus fulfilled the symbolism of the sacrifices, but in what way does he fulfill the symbolism of the Sabbath? We might make a few guesses, but the book of Hebrews gives us some helpful direction.

Christ better than the old covenant

The epistle to the Hebrews may have been written to Jewish believers who were still participating in (or at least attracted to) the customs of Judaism. The epistle explains that the old covenant is obsolete and its regulations have been set aside. When the word *sabbatismos* (a Sabbath-rest, NIV) is used in 4:9, it is not trying to subtly affirm an old covenant law when the rest of the epistle argues *against* old covenant laws.

Throughout the epistle, the believers are admonished that Jesus is much, much better than

anything the old covenant had. Jesus Christ is the main focus of the epistle. Tithing is mentioned, for example, only because it shows the superiority of Christ over the Levitical priests. *Sabbatismos* is also mentioned, not as a point in itself, but because it illustrates something about the superiority of faith in Christ.

Jesus is better than angels, better than Moses, better than Aaron, better than all the rituals, and better than the Sabbath. He has superseded them all, fulfilling the spiritual truths that they pictured, rendering their physical performance unnecessary. Hebrews 4:9 does not, contrary to the rest of the epistle, command the continuation of an old covenant practice.

Look to Jesus

Let us begin our analysis in Hebrews 3: “Fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.... Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses” (verses 1, 3). The epistle then quotes from Psalm 95, reminding the Hebrews that their ancestors had hardened their hearts and been faithless and disobedient under Moses’ leadership.

Don’t harden your hearts, the epistle exhorts, echoing the point that had been made in Hebrews 2:1-3. The Jewish Christians were apparently being tempted to go backwards, and the epistle exhorts them to be faithful to the superiority of Jesus Christ. Listen to what Jesus says (Hebrews 1:2; 2:1). Look to him, not to Moses, as our authority in faith and practice. Look to him as our High Priest in heaven, not to the Levitical priests in the temple, which are only shadows and copies of spiritual truth (Hebrews 8:1-5; 10:1).

Do not turn away from the living God, the epistle exhorts (Hebrews 3:12). Hold your faith in Christ firmly to the end (verse 14). Do not harden your hearts (verse 15). We cannot please God if we do not have faith (Hebrews 3:19; 11:6). Today, if you hear his word, believe it, and enter his rest. Don’t be like your unbelieving, disobedient ancestors, he says. They refused God so many times that he set them aside and shut them out. Don’t test his patience, he seems to say. Listen to what God is saying now.

Israelites did not enter rest

The epistle draws an analogy between the Israelites entering the promised land and Christians entering the better promise of the new covenant. This

analogy is again designed to show the superiority of Christ. When the Israelites were in the wilderness, they sent spies into Canaan to see the land that the Lord would be giving them. However, most of the Israelite spies were afraid of the Canaanites, and most of the Israelites believed the spies instead of God. God therefore declared that since they lacked faith and would not obey his order to invade Canaan, they would not enter the promised land: “They shall never enter my rest” (Numbers 14:26-29; Psalm 95:11; Hebrews 3:11).

The next generation of Israelites entered the promised land under Joshua’s leadership. Nevertheless, even after they entered the promised land, God continued to warn them, in the psalm, not to harden their hearts lest they fail to enter God’s rest. So the psalm was pointing toward a future rest (Hebrews 4:8). The promised land had been a physical symbol or foreshadow of a spiritual rest that the Israelites had not yet entered.

How we enter

Let’s look at chapter 4 verse by verse: “Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it” (verse 1). We can paraphrase the thought in this way: God makes it possible for us to enter his rest, so we need to make sure that we accept his offer. If we do not keep our faith in him (the main exhortation of this epistle), we will fail to enter.

How do we enter? Verse 2 tells us, “For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.” The author urges us to be diligent, then he talks about the gospel. This implies that we enter God’s rest by means of the gospel.

The ancient Israelites had the gospel in a veiled form, in symbols such as the bronze snake, the washings, the sacrifices and festivals. But despite the miracles, the people did not have faith in God and the message did not do them any good.

We do not have to make the same mistake. “Now we who have believed enter that rest” (verse 3). Believe what? Believe the gospel of Christ. All who look to Jesus, who have faith in Jesus, are entering God’s rest. The spiritual rest that the psalmist had spoken of, the rest that God wants us to enter, has arrived in Jesus Christ. And the way people might fall short is by abandoning faith in Jesus

Christ. We must be careful that we do not lose faith and lose the rest that we have entered.

In Christ, we have rest. He has freed us from the old covenant, which was a yoke too difficult to bear (Acts 15:10), and has given us a new covenant, which is a yoke that is so much easier to bear that it is called a “rest” (Matthew 11:28-30). When we are in Christ, we have entered God’s rest.

But didn’t God rest thousands of years ago? How can it be possible for us to enter something that is long gone? The author deals with this by bringing up the objection: “And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work’” (verses 3-4).

Genesis tells us that God rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2). That is, he had finished the creation. (He continues to work in the sense of upholding all things.) But the author of Hebrews observes that God’s work has been finished ever since, which means that God is still resting. God is still in his rest, and it is open for humans to enter. It was available for the ancient Israelites; otherwise there would be no point in saying, “They shall never enter my rest” (verse 5). Even though they refused to enter, God’s rest was available to them.

Still available for us

God’s rest is available to us, too: “It still remains that some will enter that rest” (verse 6). The offer is still open, and it is made even more clear and compelling through Jesus Christ. God exhorts people to enter his rest. We are invited to enter God’s end-of-creation rest by believing in the Son of God. By faith, we have joined with God in his rest.

By faith, we have become new creations, created anew. We have been brought into the kingdom of God. Our re-creation is not yet complete, but we are entering his rest. We have been reconciled and have fellowship with God through our High Priest, just as Adam and Eve had fellowship with God before they sinned. By faith in Christ, we enter God’s rest, as predicted by the psalmist.

We have entered into God’s *katapausin* rest, the same type of rest that he had on the very first seventh day (the Greek translation of Genesis 2:2 uses the word *katapausin*). This is far more significant than resting one day a week, because the epistle has already noted that God’s “work has been finished since the creation of the world” (verse 3).

God’s rest is an enduring rest, a permanent rest, and the believer’s rest is, too. As long as we have faith in Christ, no matter what day of the week it is, we have entered God’s rest and we are resting from our own work. Our own work cannot save us, but we are saved by grace through faith in Christ. We enter God’s rest permanently through faith in Christ.

The Israelites at the time of Moses, “who formerly had the gospel preached to them, did not go in, because of their disobedience” (verse 6). Their disobedience was evidence of their lack of faith. They did not believe that God would give them what he had promised.

“Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts’” (verse 7). Many years after Moses, God again spoke about rest, urging people to not harden their hearts and thereby fail to enter his rest. Hear him today, David urged in the Psalm. The offer was still good. People could enter God’s rest, and could be secure in his promise, if they listened with faith and willingness.

The author then eliminates another possibility: “For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day” (verse 8). The “rest” that Psalm 95 was speaking of was not the promised land, and it was not the weekly Sabbath. It was something that the Israelites, with few exceptions, failed to enter. They did not respond to God with faith and willingness.

Our Sabbath-rest

The author then concludes: “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest [*sabbatismos*] for the people of God” (verse 9). Is he bringing up a new subject? No — he is still on the same subject, using different words to develop it further. He is saying, Since people did not enter God’s rest in Moses’ day, nor in Joshua’s day, and yet we are still exhorted in the Psalms about God’s rest, the conclusion is that this rest still remains for the people of God today. It is still available.

The writer is using a different word for rest, but he is not referring to a different rest. Both *katapausin* and *sabbatismos* are being used as metaphors for salvation. As can be seen by the word “then” or “therefore,” it is the same rest that is mentioned in verse 8. (If the *sabbatismos* rest were different than the *katapausin* rest, then it would not logically follow that the *sabbatismos* remains simply because the

psalmist talked about a *katapausin*. Throughout the chapter, it is the same “rest” that “remains” for the people of God.)

He is talking about the “rest” of salvation. The writer of Hebrews is using the two words for rest as synonyms, one alluding to the creation rest and the other alluding to its weekly commemoration, but both referring to the rest that Christians are to try to enter. It is the *salvation rest* that remains for Christians to enter and to be careful not to fall short of through unbelief. We are exhorted to enter this rest through faith (verses 11, 3).

Why does he call this a Sabbath-rest? He is not slipping in a command for the seventh-day Sabbath. That would be totally out of context. His exhortation throughout this book is telling Jewish people to look to Jesus. He is not urging them to do a better job of keeping Jewish customs that they were already keeping.

The ancient Israelites, who had the Sabbath, did not enter the rest he is talking about. God’s rest is entered by faith — by believing the gospel (verses 3-4). The author is not interested in a day of the week — he is concerned about how people respond to Jesus. A person who keeps the weekly Sabbath but rejects Christ has not entered God’s rest. We enter God’s rest only by believing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why then does he call this a Sabbath-rest? By using this word, he indicates that this is what the Sabbath pointed to. Just as the bronze snake pointed to Jesus’ crucifixion (John 3:14), and the washings pointed to forgiveness, and the sacrifices pointed to Jesus, similarly, the weekly Sabbath pointed to something spiritual: our rest through faith in Christ. It is available — we may enter God’s rest. Don’t put it off — do it today. Trust in Christ, not in your own works!

“Anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his” (verse 10). God rested from his creative work, but what kind of work do we rest from? What do we quit doing when we come to have faith in Christ? We quit doing the work of trying to earn our salvation, the work of trying to qualify for the kingdom. When we look to Jesus for our salvation, we quit looking to ourselves.

Practical applications

The author draws a practical conclusion: “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of

disobedience” (verse 11). Since the rest is available to us, let’s enter it with faith. Ironically this requires effort, not passivity. If we disobey God by refusing his Son, we will fall!

Just as Psalm 95 said, we must hear God’s message with faith and obedience. His word contains both promise and command. It calls for our *response*. And as Hebrews 4:13 says, nothing is hidden from God’s sight. He sees everything we do and knows our thoughts, and we must give account to him. That is why we must respond, while it is yet today, with faith in Jesus Christ.

Then comes another practical application: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess” (verse 14). Again, the exhortation is not to a day of the week, but to Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Summary of Hebrews 4

Let us paraphrase the chapter: God promised a rest, but the first Israelites did not enter it because of unbelief and disobedience. Joshua brought them into the land, but the Israelites were still being exhorted to enter the promised rest. It was still future. Therefore, since there is still a promise of rest, we must be careful that we do not fall short of it. We who trust Christ enter the promised rest, which is called God’s rest.

God rested at the end of creation, so this is the divine rest, the supernatural rest, the spiritual promise that believers enter. Although some people fell short of the promise, it still remains for some to enter it. That’s why the psalmist was exhorting people to hear God’s voice and obey him.

If Joshua had fulfilled the promise, God would not have inspired the psalmist to continue exhorting people about the promised rest. Joshua’s entry into the promised land was symbolic of a spiritual entry into a spiritual promise, a spiritual rest. The psalmist was speaking about another day, a day in which people could enter the promise. Therefore, there continues to be a spiritual rest for the people of God, because anyone who enters God’s spiritual rest is able to cease from work, just as God ceased from his creative works. Therefore, we should strive to enter this spiritual promise, and not fall away through disobedience.

Why does the writer use the word *sabbatismos*? It clearly refers to the weekly Sabbath, but it is being used figuratively. The author is telling us that this

spiritual rest is what the weekly Sabbath had pictured all along. The Sabbath was not only a reminder of the end-of-creation rest and the Exodus, it also looked forward, prefiguring something, as a predictive shadow of a coming reality, our spiritual rest. We enter God's rest by faith in Christ (verse 3), and by doing so, we enter the rest that God entered when he completed his creation (verses 3b-4).

Our salvation rest is a Sabbath-rest, a fulfillment of the spiritual meaning of the Sabbath. If the author wanted to talk about the Sabbath day, he could have used the word for Sabbath. If he wanted to talk about keeping a law, he could have said that, too. But he did not use those words because he is not talking about the Sabbath day itself.

He is not saying whether it is necessary or unnecessary — he is not dealing with that issue. Rather, he is saying that the spiritual promise is a Sabbath-rest. Salvation was pictured by the Sabbath. Whether the Sabbath should continue to be kept as a weekly picture is not being discussed. The author is referring to salvation, the spiritual promised rest. He speaks of only one predicted Sabbath-rest, not an every-week picture of it. He is speaking figuratively of the kingdom of God. We enter our spiritual rest by faith in Christ. He is not exhorting us to keep a weekly Sabbath, but to enter the rest of God by having faith in Christ. We come to Christ, and he gives us rest.

The writer is describing an analogy, and we today often find analogies unconvincing. Even if there are parallels, we might say, that doesn't prove anything, and it doesn't prove that the Sabbath is no longer required in its old covenant details. That's true. Hebrews tells us what the Sabbath pictures, but it does not address Christian behavior regarding the Sabbath. For that, we must turn elsewhere, such as the statements of Paul we have already examined.

Additional questions

Whether we understand the symbolism of the Sabbath or not, the New Testament is clear that the Sabbath is not a requirement for Christians today. But perhaps we should deal with a few additional questions that are sometimes raised.

1) Jesus told his disciples that they should pray that they don't have to flee on a Sabbath (Matthew 24:20). Does this show that Jesus' disciples would be keeping the Sabbath?

This warning was given "to those who are in

Judea" (verse 16). It is only in Matthew's Gospel, which was probably written to Jewish Christians. Jesus' warning tells us more about practices in Judea than it does about Christianity.

Even under the old covenant, it would be permissible to flee for your life on the Sabbath. The reason it might be difficult to flee on the Sabbath, however, is that non-Christians in Judea are keeping the Sabbath, not that the fleeing Christians are. Perhaps the fleeing people keep the Sabbath or perhaps they do not, but either way it might be difficult to flee when the people of Judea have closed their shops, closed the city gates, etc. This verse does not prove that the disciples would be keeping the Sabbath — only that it might be difficult to flee on a Sabbath, just as it would be difficult to flee in winter.

2) The women "rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment" (Luke 23:56). Does this show that the Sabbath is still commanded for Christians?

The women rested on the Sabbath, but their example does not tell us whether that commandment is still in effect. This was before they knew that Jesus was resurrected, and long before the church understood that the old covenant had come to an end. Luke's readers might have wondered why the women rested even though they were faced with an urgent need. Luke told his readers that the women rested because of the commandment. He is not commenting on whether it continues to be required.

In a similar way, the phrase "a Sabbath day's walk" (Acts 1:12) does not imply anything regarding the distance we may travel today on the Sabbath. The phrase was simply a measurement of distance, just as "Sabbath" was the name of one day of the week. The name does not imply continuing obligation for Christians.

3) The Sabbath is a reminder of creation and it points to salvation. God is re-creating us, and our creation is not yet complete. Should we therefore continue to keep the Sabbath as a celebration of salvation in Christ?

The Sabbath was indeed a memorial of creation. And it foreshadowed and pointed to our salvation in Christ. And our salvation is not yet complete. Nevertheless, Paul says that we are new creations. John says that we have already been given eternal life, and that eternal life is in Jesus Christ. We do not yet have the fullness of salvation, but we have enough. Paul can say that we should not let anyone

judge us regarding the Sabbath. The reality is Christ, and we have the reality, even if it's not yet in its fullness.

The sacrifices pictured our cleansing from sin, and yet we see that we are not yet sinless. But that doesn't mean that we still need sacrifices. Although the last judgment has not yet been done, the verdict has been declared for all who have faith. Circumcision pictured a cleansed heart, and we are not yet perfect in our hearts, but the physical symbol is not required.

Likewise, although our re-creation is not yet complete, even the beginning is enough to make old covenant practices unnecessary and not a basis for judging others. Of course, we still have a practical need for physical rest and worship times, but we cannot use the old covenant to demand that everyone rest and worship at the same time that we do.

The Sabbath pointed to our renewal in Christ, and in that spiritual meaning, the Sabbath is still required — just as the spiritual meaning of circumcision is required, and the spiritual meaning of the sacrifices is still valid. But the physical details of such laws are another matter. That is why Paul could treat the question of special days in such a take-it-or-leave-it way (Romans 14:5). If the people had faith in Christ, if their entire lives were devoted to the Lord, then they were already abiding by the purpose of sacred days. We are to keep the Sabbath by having faith in Christ, not by requiring a particular day of the week.

4) The Sabbath points to the re-creative, redemptive work of Christ, which is the most important part of our history. Shouldn't we commemorate this weekly?

The Bible tells us to commemorate Christ's redemption by means of bread and wine, not by a day of rest. Jesus makes it clear, in his controversies with the Pharisees, that it is wrong to add requirements to God's law and make things more difficult. We cannot teach as a requirement something that the Bible does not. It is good to commemorate Christ's salvation in weekly worship services, but without a New Testament command, we cannot insist that everybody worship on the same day and time we do.

5) Many Christians have lost their jobs because they kept the Sabbath, and God miraculously provided better jobs. Doesn't his blessing show the correctness of their behavior and God's approval of Sabbath-keeping?

God looks on the heart, on the attitude, and he blesses his people even if their behavior is based on a misunderstanding. He honors sincerity. If we do something with the conviction that God wants us to do it, he is pleased with our willingness, and he often rewards such sacrifices, but his rewards do not necessarily endorse our particular understanding.

Some godly people have kept the Sabbath, and some have kept Sunday as a Sabbath. Some have been blessed for keeping Sunday, too. Some have been blessed without keeping any Sabbath at all. The example of these people, like any tradition, must be evaluated according to the biblical testimony. It is Christ we must preach, as he is revealed in the Old and New Testaments.

6) The Sabbath gives us rest from our physical labors, giving us more time for worship, fellowship and good works. It is a spiritually valuable time. Wouldn't it be wrong to neglect it?

The old covenant specified exactly when and how much time should be separated for the Lord. It specified when and how and where to make sacrifices. These physical requirements helped keep the people aware of God, reminding them of their need for reconciliation and fellowship with him. That was good.

In the new covenant, however, we have been given the fellowship with God that the old covenant customs pictured. The Holy Spirit lives within us, helping us be aware of our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit transforms our hearts, leading us to love the Lord and to desire to spend time with him. It is good for us to spend time with the Lord and with his people. Those who neglect worship time stunt their spiritual growth.

However, we have no biblical authority to mandate that everyone set aside the same time. We encourage people to set aside time for prayer, Bible study, fellowship and good works, but we should not judge anyone regarding the days they keep. It is physically helpful to rest from our labors. It is spiritually helpful to devote time each week to the Lord, and we encourage people to do this, but we do not condemn those who do not set aside a 24-hour block of time. Rather than relying on an external discipline of rules, each Christian needs self-discipline to devote time to the Lord for spiritual growth.

As a practical need, of course, churches have to appoint a day and time for worship. We encourage all

who can to meet with Christians and worship the Creator and Savior.

7) Shouldn't we uphold the law?

Yes, and we should use the law in a lawful way (1 Timothy 1:8) — and the new covenant, the law that Christians are now under, does not permit us to say when and how much time other Christians should give to the Lord. It does not permit us to make requirements for people and threaten them with the lake of fire if they don't comply with our understanding. The law we must be concerned about is the spiritual law, not the way the old covenant was to be administered.

We want to uphold the law in the way that is appropriate to the age after the coming of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The New Testament gives hundreds of commands. It gives a high standard of conduct for God's redeemed people. It requires sacrifice and complete allegiance. It often quotes Old Testament laws and amplifies them to the intents of the heart. But it never commands Sabbath-keeping, and it commands the church not to lay unauthorized restrictions on God's people. We cannot require circumcision, tassels, or any other obsolete law, including the Sabbath.

We who are led by God's Spirit want to obey our Creator and Savior. We encourage obedience, worship, and sanctification. We also emphasize that salvation is by grace through faith, and we accept as Christian everyone who has faith in Christ. Some Christians may continue to believe that their Savior requires them to keep the Sabbath. They may be mistaken, but we do not need to criticize them for acting in accordance with their beliefs. We are saying that we should not judge one another regarding this day. All we can do is teach what the Bible teaches, that the Sabbath is no longer required.

Paul did not preach that all law is done away. He knew that faith leads to obedience, and that love works within the boundaries of law. But he treated the Sabbath as a matter of individual conscience, not for enforced conformity. Why could he take such liberty with the Sabbath law? Our conclusion is that he could approach the Sabbath in the same way as he dealt with circumcision: He could take it or leave it. It was not a requirement because faith in Christ superseded it. We should uphold *faith*.

All who have faith in Jesus Christ are already abiding by the intent of the Sabbath law. If we walk by the Spirit, we are fulfilling the requirements of the

law (Romans 8:5). We have come to Christ and he has given us rest. All who believe have entered God's rest. Although a future rest yet remains, we have already entered into rest, and a specific day of rest is no longer required even though rest itself is physically and spiritually beneficial.

Our relationship with God depends on faith in Christ, not on a specific block of time. This does not do away with our practical need to give time to the Lord to pray, study, meditate, fast and imitate Jesus' life-style of good works to the needy and preaching the gospel. If we allow secular things to occupy all our time, we will become profane, like Esau, and grieve the Holy Spirit. There is a spiritual need for worship time. But the New Testament does not command a particular time.

8) The early church kept the Sabbath. Wasn't it the influence of paganism that motivated some people to abandon it?

The earliest church was entirely Jewish, and it continued the practice of circumcision and other old covenant customs, too. It was only through time, discussion and the intervention of the Holy Spirit that the church came to understand that Jewish customs should not be imposed on others. Although Gentiles were being grafted into Israel, figuratively speaking (Romans 11:13-17), making them spiritual Israelites, they did not have to live like Jews (Galatians 2:14). They did not have to obey all the rules that separated Jews from Gentiles.

However, it was not paganism that prompted Paul to say that he was not under the old covenant law (1 Corinthians 9:19-21), or that Christians did not have to keep "the Law of Moses" (Acts 15:5, 28). And it was not paganism that motivated Paul to say that days were not something to judge each other about (Romans 14:5; Colossians 2:16). And it was not paganism for Paul to wait until the first day of the week to meet with the Ephesian Christian leaders (Acts 20:6-7).

Many early Christian martyrs met for worship on Sunday. That doesn't prove that this was the only acceptable day of worship, but their willingness to die for the faith is evidence that they were not compromisers. They were not likely to give up essentials merely for convenience or to make Christianity more attractive to pagans. In their lives and in their deaths, the central issue was allegiance to Christ, not whether they abstained from work on any particular day.

Although some early Christians kept the Sabbath, many others did not, and accusations of paganism are designed more to frighten people than to examine history objectively. Our doctrine must be

based on Scripture, not on ancient or modern history. In our next chapter, we'll look at the history in more detail.

Review 15

- The New Testament commands many things, but never the Sabbath.
- The promised land “rest” pictured spiritual salvation; so did the Sabbath.
- We enter God’s rest by means of the gospel — through faith in Jesus Christ.
- Hebrews stresses the superiority of Christ over the old covenant — it does not encourage any “Jewish” practices.
- The *only* biblical commands for the Sabbath are in the old covenant period.
- Question: Should we keep old covenant laws “just in case”? How are we to be fully convinced?
- What does Jesus say about religious teachers who put unauthorized burdens on people?

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