

New Covenant Theology



Questions Raised by New Covenant Theology



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What about keeping the Sabbath?

- What does/did it mean to keep the Sabbath?
- Are Christians today obligated to keep the Sabbath?

What about “keeping the Sabbath”?

- There are a number of Christian groups who teach that as Christians we are to “keep the Sabbath”:
 - Some groups (for example, Seventh Day Baptists and Seventh-day Adventists) believe in continuing to keep the Sabbath on the original day: Saturday.
 - But most Christian groups who believe in “Sabbath keeping” (such as the Presbyterians or other “Reformed” groups) believe that Sunday has become the new “Christian Sabbath” – though the Bible never calls Sunday a Sabbath and there is not single passage of scripture that suggests changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday!

What about “keeping the Sabbath”?

- There is a great deal of variety among those who believe in Sabbath keeping as to what constitutes proper observance of the Sabbath:
 - Some would say the day should be set aside exclusively for spiritual activities such as worship, prayer, fellowship, etc.
 - Some would say that a Christian should not work on the Sabbath (either vocationally or even around the home), some would say this includes not participating in sports activities on that day.
 - Some teach that we are to “observe” the Sabbath, but don’t give much specific instruction as to how to “observe the Sabbath”.
 - For most of these groups, there is never any serious enforcement of Sabbath keeping or church discipline for violating the Sabbath.

What about “keeping the Sabbath”?

- The Sabbath, as originally given by Moses, was a very ***serious*** command.
- Sabbath keeping was to be ***strictly*** enforced – the penalty for violating the Sabbath was to be ***put to death!***
 - *Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be **put to death.*** (Exodus 31:15)
 - *Six days work shall be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be **put to death.*** (Exodus 35:2)
- If someone today believes that they are obligated to keep the Sabbath, what should they do about fellow church members work on the Sabbath?

What about “keeping the Sabbath”?

- To keep the Sabbath as it is commanded in the Law of Moses, you were not only required to personally observe the Sabbath, but you were not allowed to require those in your household or those who serve you to violate the Sabbath:
 - *But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you.*
(Deuteronomy 5:14)
- If someone today believes that they are obligated to keep the Sabbath, what would it look like for them to obey this passage?

What about “keeping the Sabbath”?

- Keeping the Sabbath involved more than just not doing work:
 - *You must observe the Sabbath rather than doing anything you please on my holy day. You must look forward to the Sabbath and treat the LORD's holy day with respect. You must treat it with respect by refraining from your normal activities, and by refraining from your selfish pursuits and from making business deals. ¹⁴ Then you will find joy in your relationship to the LORD, and I will give you great prosperity, and cause crops to grow on the land I gave to your ancestor Jacob. Know for certain that the LORD has spoken.* (Isa. 58:13–14 NET)
- If someone today believes that they obligated to keep the Sabbath, what would it look like for them to obey this passage?

What about “keeping the Sabbath”?

- As we have already seen, the Sabbath was a “sign” of the Mosaic Covenant given ***exclusively*** to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. (Exodus 31:16-17)
- The command to keep the Sabbath as a day of rest was ***never*** given to any other nation or people.
- Those who believe that we are still obligated to keep a Sabbath day of rest will argue that the Sabbath is a “creation ordinance” that was instituted by God on the seventh day of creation. And therefore it is binding on all men in all ages.
- Indeed, the book of Genesis tells us:
 - *God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.* (Gen. 2:3)
- But who was the first person recorded in scripture through whom God gave a command to rest on the Sabbath?
- The book of Nehemiah tells us that it was through ***Moses*** that God made his holy Sabbath known:
 - *You [God] made known to them your holy Sabbath... through Moses your servant.* (Neh. 9:14 NIV)
- How could anyone prior to Moses (e.g. Adam, Noah, Abraham, etc.) have even ***known*** about an obligation to observe the Sabbath?

Questions?

