

Q & A #9

Question: A prominent pastor explained that breaking the Sabbath is not a sin since it is not listed as one of the sins of the flesh that the Apostle Paul outlines in Galatians chapter 5. Is it true that violating the Sabbath day is not a sin?

Answer: Here is a straight (and possibly blunt) answer to your question. But stay with the Bible explanation that follows. It is important that you not be misinformed about this.

Assuming that you are referring to the seventh-day (Saturday) Sabbath of the 4th Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), it is indeed true that with few exceptions nearly the whole of Catholic and Protestant Christianity worship on another day other than the Sabbath specified by God in the 4th Commandment and practiced by Jesus Christ, the New Testament Apostles and all of early Christianity. Today Orthodox Jews, Seventh-day Adventists and several other smaller groups of Christians still observe the seventh-day (Saturday) Sabbath.

Your question is stated again: *Is it not a sin to break the Sabbath of the 4th Commandment?* After thinking through the following Bible information, you should be the one to make the call!

How serious is the Sabbath to God? One way to realize the Sabbath's significance is to observe what God has said about it. When Moses was on

Mt. Sinai receiving the tables of stone written with God's own finger, the Creator God singled out the Sabbath command stating to Moses that it was a “perpetual” covenant [meaning, valid for all time] and a “sign” forever [meaning, that it would have no end to it] (Exodus 31:16, 17). At the birth of this new beginning for Israel, the Sabbath is the centerpiece between the Creator and humans. The Sabbath is a covenant which includes ancient Israel and all God-followers down through time who claim—by faith—to belong to the seed of Abraham through Christ (Galatians 3:28, 29). The Sabbath is a weekly anniversary meant to be celebrated worldwide, declaring that God is the earth's Creator, and that He welcomes fellowship on this day with all humanity.

Note God's stated punishment for breaking the Sabbath under His direct guidance (the theocracy) during Israel's desert wanderings:

“Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.” (Exodus 31:15 NKJV)

Eight hundred years later, the nation of Judah was the only remnant left of ancient Israel. Because of widespread apostasy of its priests, who ministered in Solomon's temple, and of its kingly leadership, God had allowed Judah and Jerusalem to be faced with destruction by the Babylonian armies. Note these charges God brought upon these wayward leaders through the prophet Ezekiel:

“ 'Her priests have violated My law and profaned My holy things; they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy, . . .and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.' ” (Ezekiel 22:26)

Has God's regard for the Sabbath changed since this was written? How, then, does God regard those in our contemporary society who have “hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths”?

Does the New Covenant abolish the Sabbath command? Many followers of Jesus have been misled by well-meaning teachers to think that the New Testament /the New Covenant releases all believers from the 4th commandment. Yet, the other nine commandments are still valid.

This does not measure up to the words of Jesus who proclaimed: “ 'Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [fill full of meaning]. . . . Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; . . . ' ” (Matthew 5:17, 19)

Does the New Covenant have anything to say about God's Law? Read it here, and then—you make the call!

“ 'For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days,' ” says the LORD, “ 'I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. . . ' ” (Hebrews 8:10 & Hebrews 10:16, NKJV)

The Garden Tree and the Sabbath

The ramifications for obedience to the Creation Sabbath are very similar to that for Adam and Eve at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God commanded Adam and Eve *not* to eat of that tree. The penalty was death (Genesis 2:16, 17). The tree itself was perfect and wholesome. It was what God commanded about it that made all the

difference. As with the seventh-day Sabbath, the day is as any other day of the week—a period of light and dark of twenty-four hours. It is what God said about that day that makes it unique and vital. As with Adam and Eve, so it is with modern humans. Each must take God at his word trusting that what He has commanded is right. Will a person obey God's command to honor the seventh-day Sabbath, or like Adam and Eve—rely on their own inclination above God's Word? The issue for both is the same: Will I take God at His word or not? This is why the Sabbath is identified by God as a “sign”—it is a barometer of the heart toward God.

For Adam and Eve, their disobedience caused a rupture in their relationship with God. Just as God provided reconciliation for them, so it can be for the repentant in the New Covenant era: “**. . . I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more'**” (Hebrews 8:12). This is possible because Jesus, in His death on the cross, paid the price of redemption for human transgression.

Galatians 5

The pastor you have mentioned is referring to the Apostle Paul's description of the unregenerate and carnally minded society of his day out of which many of his Christian converts had come. In Romans 8, Paul says that the carnal mind “is enmity [at war] against God; for it is not subject to the law of God nor indeed can be. So then, those who are *in the flesh* cannot please God” (Romans 8: 7, 8, NKJV, emphasis supplied).

A change of mind and heart needs to take place that a person may cherish and embrace God's expressed will as revealed in Scripture. This supernatural experience is described by Jesus

as the “new birth” (John 3:3-7). Jesus and the Apostle Paul both describe how Spirit-filled individuals have been awakened in mind and attitude to the expressed will of God.

How does the Bible define sin?

The Bible declares that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Therefore, all humans are in need of God's redeeming grace.

In its most simple terms, this is the Bible's definition of sin: “. . . to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). The word “knows” is significant. God does not hold against the sinner sins done in sincere ignorance (see Acts 17:30, 31).

How is sin defined by other Bible writers?

The pastor you refer to, no doubt, will also know how the Apostle John defines sin: “Sin is the transgression of the law”(I John 3:4). The Apostle Paul identifies which “law” specifically: “. . . I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said 'You shall not covet.' ”(Romans 7:7). The reader will recognize this as the last commandment of the Ten Commandment law found in Exodus 20: 3-17. This Sinai Code is often referred to as the moral law of God. It is this law that was engraved in stone by the finger of God. That it is in stone signifies its permanent, unchanging, universal status for the entire human race.

Furthermore, Moses was instructed by God to place the Ten Commandments inside the Ark of the Covenant over which was the mercy seat. The foundational position given to the tables of stone demonstrates the degree of importance God placed on this code of moral conduct. Jesus Christ is not only the Lawgiver, but He was

the highest expression of the Ten Commandment law during His sojourn on earth. To say that these Commandments have been replaced or done away with in the New Covenant era is to nullify the very reason Jesus died on the cross—to pay the penalty of death for our breaking this very Law. In doing so, Jesus, our Lord and Savior, has confirmed to the onlooking universe the justness of His Law.

Jesus amplifies the Ten Commandments

When a lawyer asked Jesus which is the greatest commandment in the Law, Jesus took him by surprise. Jesus explained: “ 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart. . .soul. . .mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets' “ (Matthew22:36-40).

We must now ask: under which of the two sections Jesus gave must the 4th commandment Sabbath be placed? Is it not true that the seventh-day Creation Sabbath must be placed within the context of a relationship to God whom we must love with all our heart, soul and mind? The violation of that commandment by humans would not fit under sins of the flesh, but rather, as a spiritual rupture with the Creator God!

Why is the fourth commandment unique among the Ten?

The location of the Sabbath commandment is strategic—in the midst of the ten (Exodus 20:8-11). Hedged in on all sides, it is the most difficult to remove or ignore. Its authoritative role gives substance to all the others.

Life affirming elements give the fourth commandment rational and intelligent purpose. Note these several foundational checkpoints found in the 4th Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11):

1. “Remember”—the Sabbath has been made for humans; by respectfully *remembering*, they bring honor to their Maker. To forget is to show indifference and ingratitude to God.

2. “to keep it holy”—humans are called to holiness—a constant awareness that their lives are to be a reflection of the loving character of their Maker. That which is “holy” belongs to God; in this case it is sacred time. To keep it “holy” is to consciously draw the mind and heart to God, listening for His activity in nature, benefiting from the experiences of others, contemplating the Word of God, fulfilling a need in someones life, remembering God's providences and provisions for living life.

3. “six days you shall labor, but the seventh day. . .”
The weekly cycle is nearly universal around the world. Its invention was at Creation and it is one of the best evidences that the Genesis history is true. Humans are to be inventive and active even as they were made in the image of their Maker. Therefore, the Sabbath calls believers to rest from the week's labors in order to be refreshed and renewed.

4. “Sabbath, of the LORD your God.” The Sabbath is distinctly of His making, and it belongs to Him. It is by definition a period of time – one twenty-four hour day in time. Specifically, it is the seventh day of the week (Saturday). Jesus described it as “My holy day, . . . honorable” (Isaiah 58:13). It was made for humans to “delight yourself in the LORD”(verse 14). The

Creator invites all to engage Him and to see Him “close up.” This is the day to celebrate the Creator, and His righteous works in the earth through personal contemplation, collective worship and fellowship. It is a day for acts of kindness, healing, forgiveness and resting in the salvation God has provided in His son, Jesus Christ.

5. “the seventh day”—The last day of the week is mentioned twice in the 4th commandment—“the seventh day.” On the sixth day humans, the crowning feature of the physical creation and made in the image of God, came into being—Adam and Eve. On the “seventh day”—the glorious culmination of Creation week—humans are with God and God is with humans. This Sabbath oneness of God with humans demonstrates how much God has invested and involved Himself intimately with humanity. Designed by the Creator, this weekly cycle is to be continually repeated throughout Earth time without change. Human attempts to dismiss the Sabbath's sacredness are in actuality a dismantling of the handiwork of the Creator. And this is the ultimate goal of God's enemy to mock the Creator.

6. “you (husband and wife as one), nor your son, nor your daughter, . . .” The family unit, as God's design throughout time, is here established. The family unit's backdrop is the seventh-day Sabbath. Both originated before sin in a perfect world; both are God's design. Both are in the bulls-eye of God's enemy who wishes to destroy these two divine institutions from Eden.

7. “nor your manservant. . .maid servant. . .cattle. . .stranger who is within your gates.” Everyone in your home sphere should have the freedom for Sabbath rest—even the animals.

Sabbath observance is a personal choice extended to all under your “roof.”

8. “For in six days. . . and rested the seventh day.” The Creator Himself made the official declaration of how long it took to bring planet Earth into existence. There is no need for second-guessing or for a conflicting theory. The Creator God is not limited by time: “He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood firm”(Psalm 33:9). Such a feat urges one to stand in awe of the Creator. The weekly seven-day cycle has governed earth's inhabitants in unbroken sequence ever since. It is an ever-present reminder that the theory of evolution is an enormous lie purposely invented to detract the human family of their noble origin from the very Creator God who maintains every living organism.

9. “. . .the LORD made the heavens and the earth . . .” This phrase qualifies as the seal of the Sovereign of the Universe. Just as a “presidential seal” contains the name, title, and domain of authority, so the Creator God has stated His sovereign authority in the 4th commandment:

His name: The LORD (Jehovah God)

His title: “made”—Creator

His domain: “heaven and earth”

It is this “presidential seal” that makes legitimate all that God is commanding in the Ten Commandments. This moral Law describes God's righteousness character that is meant to be written into the character of all humans. This is the law by which all the angelic hosts abide. This is the law which God's enemy is at war.

10. “Therefore, the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” The Creator God has favored humanity with the Sabbath rest. It is full of heaven's spiritual treasures. Set in the midst of the human family, it is a connecting link with divine power and companionship. Blessed and hallowed by its Maker, what is its ultimate aim? Jesus expressed it in His prayer before going into the Garden of Gethsemane:

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word: that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that you sent Me.”
(John 17:20, 21)

The Sabbath remains a divine appointment for all humanity. Its weekly presence shows God's passion for humans and that we are all-important to Him. It proves beyond question how completely our relationship with Him matters.

“Blessed is the man [person]. . . who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it” (Isaiah 56:2, NIV).

The question remains: Is breaking the Sabbath not a sin?

You make the call. . .

Answer prepared by Daniel Knauff, author of *Sacred Time unRemembered—How the Original Sabbath Was Lost and Why It Matters*, (2014). This Q & A was edited by Kevin L. Morgan. (4/26/17)

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