

Is There a 'Lord's Day'?

by John Piper

The Lord's Day is a redefinition of the Sabbath, emphasizing the importance of worship and celebration on the first day of the week, rather than the seventh day.

Duration: 38:58

Scripture: Hosea 6:6, Matthew 12:1-4, Matthew 12:7, Mark 2:27, John 5:16-17, Romans 14:1-3, Romans 14:5

Topics: "Sabbath Rest", "Christian Mercy"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper discusses the importance of the Lord's day and the concept of Sabbath rest. He emphasizes that setting apart a specific day for worship and rest as a family is essential. He also mentions the importance of showing mercy and reaching out to others, such as visiting nursing homes or singing for the elderly. The sermon references Romans 14:5, which discusses the different perspectives on the observance of certain days. Pastor Piper concludes by highlighting Jesus' actions on the Sabbath, demonstrating that doing good and showing mercy is lawful and pleasing to God.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.DesiringGod.org Scripture text for this morning is from Romans chapter 14, verses 1 through 9. As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him. But not to quarrel over opinions.

One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls, and he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day observes it in honor of the Lord.

The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God. While the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord, and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself.

If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end, Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and

of the living.

Let's pray together. We love that truth, Lord, that whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. We are yours, bought with a price, a precious price.

So now I pray, as the Lord's servant, that you would help me to be faithful to your word, and to make this truth plain concerning the Lord's day. Give ears to hear, Father. Glorify your Son.

In his name we pray, Amen. Verse 5 raises the larger question concerning the Lord's day. Paul says, One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike.

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. Does that mean, since he's raised the question of the strong and the weak in the previous verses, that strong Christians don't regard one day in seven as set apart for the Lord, on which there should be acts to consecrate the day as the Lord's day? That only weak Christians feel obliged to sanctify one day in seven as special for the Lord. So is he saying it doesn't matter whether there's any special celebration or setting apart of a day, provided you do whatever you do for the glory of the Lord.

Now to answer that question, I would like to step back from the text, and deal with the larger issue of the Lord's day throughout the scriptures. And since it has to be short, let me make you aware that if every sentence that I spoke were to be filled out the way it should be, it would result in these. The Lord's day by Paul Jewett, a whole book.

The Lord's day by Joseph Piper, a whole book. A very thick book by D.A. Carson, from Sabbath to Lord's day. And I simply commend to you that if I point to things that need fuller treatment for you, which they all do, that you find one of these books or another one and go deeper on your own.

But this message has about it a very compact outline form, because I'm going to go from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation, on the Lord's day. Let's begin here. The week, that's W-E-E-K, the week exists.

Most remarkable fact. It's an absolutely stunning fact that there is such a thing as a week. Days exist because it takes that long for the earth to rotate.

Months exist because it takes that long for the moon to wax and wane. Years exist because it takes that long for the earth to go around the sun. Why do weeks exist? There's nothing in nature that creates a week.

The week exists because of Genesis 2-2. And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. The Encyclopedia Britannica, 1911 edition, says, Those who reject the Mosaic recital will be at a loss as to assign the week to an origin having much semblance of probability.

In other words, there aren't any explanations that work for the origin of the week, except that God, according to Genesis 2, took seven days to do his work, six days, and then rested on the seventh. So, there's a rootage of the very concept of seven, and now it raises the question of whether God's resting on the seventh day has any abiding significance for us. And the commandment, Exodus 20, verses 8-11, the fourth commandment says, Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Six days shall you labor and do all your work. On the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth.

Now, notice how he's rooting it back in creation. On six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

So, the commandment to keep a seventh day is rooted in creation, where God rested on the seventh day. Now, Jesus comes into the world as the Son of God, Messiah, fulfiller of all that the law and the prophets had taught. And one of the main things that happens in his ministry is that he collides with the Pharisees on the Lord's day, or on the Sabbath.

He collides with them, and it is one of the most serious, major issues that he has to deal with. Let me show you that from John 5.18, where it says, This is why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. In other words, this was a huge issue.

It got him killed, because it was all woven together with who he thought he was, and the way he put himself forward, and his dealing with the Sabbath was rooted in who he was as the Son of God, and it just infuriated those who knew their Old Testament best, it seemed. So I want to take you to a text where we get the most dense, compact response of Jesus to the Sabbath. If you want to turn there with me, it's Matthew chapter 12.

Matthew 12, first book in the New Testament, verses 1 to 14, and you listen now as I read, and follow along in your Bibles if you want to, and watch what Jesus does, and listen to what he says. Matthew 12, verse 1. At that time, Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.

But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath. And he said to them, Have you not read what David did when he was hungry and those who were with him? How he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests. Now I want to insert here Mark 2.7. Matthew and Mark do not report all that Jesus said here.

So Mark, at this point, everything's the same in Mark's story, except at this point he adds, The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So I'm going to stick that in there because I want to refer to that later. Now back to verse 5. Or have you not read in the law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here.

And if you had known what it means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice. That's a quote from Hosea 6.6. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. You would not have condemned the guiltless.

For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. And he went on from there and entered the synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand.

And they asked him, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? So they might accuse him. They obviously think it's not. Verse 11.

He said to them, I would love to have heard his tone of voice here. Which of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep? So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. And then he said to the man, Stretch out your hand.

And the man stretched it out and it was restored healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him how to destroy him. You want to get yourself killed? Behave like that on the Sabbath.

Here are three observations and five statements. Observation number one. And then five statements from Jesus.

Observation number one. The Pharisees accused Jesus disciples of law breaking because they picked grain and popped it in their mouth and ate it. And Jesus does not attempt to argue that that's not law breaking.

That's most significant. He does not even attempt to get into that argument that this is not law breaking. His response acts as though it is law breaking.

And then explains it. That's the first observation. The second observation is that in verses three and four, he refers to King David and his men like Jesus has his men.

David had his men. And he takes bread from the house of God that it is not lawful. Jesus says it's not lawful for him to eat.

And he eats it. And then in verse five, he refers to priests who work on the Sabbath and profane it, he says, and they are guiltless. So evidently, the needs of David's men and the needs of the temple service took precedence over ceremonial bread and Sabbath rules.

Third observation. Jesus heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath knowing it's going to get him in trouble. He intentionally provokes the controversy.

And it does get him killed. That is his reason for being on earth is to get himself killed. And he does it in relation to the Sabbath in particular.

Stunning importance we're dealing with here of the Sabbath. Now, what are you doing, Jesus? What is going on here? What are you telling us about the day set apart wholly to the Lord? And he makes five statements. And they are full of teaching.

Let's take them one at a time. Statement number one, verse six. Something greater than the temple is here.

And by implication, something greater than David and his men is here. So David and his men and the priests who serve, if they're innocent, how much more are my men innocent? Because you're dealing with something here that's greater than the temple and greater than David. He takes that further in his second statement.

Verse eight. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. I'm not just greater than David.

I'm not just greater than the temple. I'm not just greater than the Sabbath. I'm the Lord of the Sabbath.

I made the Sabbath. I made David. I conceived the temple.

This day is mine. I wrote the book. No wonder he got himself killed.

His behavior on the Sabbath is all bound up with these majestic claims. This is not just another rabbi we're talking about here quibbling about what one does on the Sabbath. It's mine.

Therefore, my disciples may do what I permit them to do. Number three. Third statement, verse seven.

I desire mercy and not sacrifice. If you'd known what this quotation from Hosea six, verse six meant, you wouldn't have condemned the guiltless. Evidently, this is just huge.

Evidently, he expects Pharisees and us to read our Bibles carefully. And when we read a verse like, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, he expects us to see a ranking. And there are all kinds of rules relating to ceremonial things.

And then there's mercy and the big issues. He expects us to do some ranking and to figure some things out so that if a man's in a pit, if it takes the sweat of your brow on Sunday to get him out, get him out. They didn't see that at all.

They were so superficial, external, rule-oriented people. They couldn't see Hosea six. Six.

If you'd known what it meant, you wouldn't have looked on some people picking grain for a few minutes. Statement number four is the one I inserted from Mark, chapter two, verse 27. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

That's just another way of saying, if there's some good that you can do for people, don't sweat the small stuff here. It is good to do good to people. So the last statement, verse 12, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Now, the upshot of all those statements and observations is not that there's no such thing as a Lord's Day. It does teach that there's a new liberty, a new criterion of what's permissible.

Jesus didn't try to settle with the Pharisees whether you can pick 10 pieces of grain or 12 pieces of grain or no piece of grain. He didn't get involved in that. He put the whole thing on a new plane.

This day exists to express my sovereignty over this day. That's the main thing about this day. It is about me being the Lord of the day.

It's mainly about me. So first of all, get that, Pharisees. It's mainly about me and worshiping me and honoring me and being like these guys following me through the field.

And secondly, it's about relieving man, not burdening man. It's about relief. And thirdly, it's about mercy.

It's about doing good. Now let's go to John 5. I'm going to read a couple of verses from John 5, 16 and 17. I doubt that you've thought much about these.

Those I think you're pretty familiar with maybe. They're pretty radical. This one blows everything out of the water.

John 5, Jesus has gone and done it again. He healed a man on the Sabbath and he made it even worse for the guy. Verse 8, chapter 5, he says to the man, get up.

Take up your bed and walk. Oh, no. Jesus, don't you know you're going to get this poor fellow in trouble.

Take up your bed. Carry your bed on the Sabbath. What are you doing to yourself and to him? And he knows exactly what he's doing.

He's creating a controversy. He has something he wants to say. And it gets said in verses 16 and 17.

The setup is in verse 16. This is why the Jews were persecuting Jesus. Because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

To which now, in John 5, 17, we get this response. Jesus answered them, my father is working until now. And I am working.

What's that? That's an amazing response to, they're really upset at all this stuff you're doing on the Sabbath. And he responds, my father is working until now. And I'm working.

Period. What's that mean? Well, that's why people write books, right? Let me put it in a little teeny paragraph. Here's what I think it means.

I think it means, when Adam and Eve fell out of my rest, my fellowship, my joy, I stood up and started to work again. Not this time on creation, but on redemption. And I've been working on this redemption with my people Israel for these thousands of years.

And I sent my son into the world to bring this glorious redeeming work to completion. And I'm working, and he's working. And guess what that implies? One day this work is going to be done.

And when it's done, a new humanity will be created. And a new creation will be inaugurated. And a new celebration will happen.

And it will be the resurrection of my son. And that's why the church shifted from day seven to day one. I think the key to the shift is right here in John 5, 16 and 17.

The work that the Lord is doing in redemption is going on. It happens in its consummation at Calvary. Jesus speaks those awesome words.

It is finished. And then on the third day, there is that celebrative confirmation and vindication as Jesus comes out of the grave. And the Father and the Son say, yes, that was sufficient.

That was good. The work of redemption was done and accomplished. And Jesus sits down at the right hand of the Father in His Sabbath rest.

And that's not quite the whole picture. Because if that were the end of the matter, if the Sabbath rest, the eternal, blood-bought Sabbath rest were totally present, I don't think there would be a Lord's Day. That's not the whole picture.

We have to look further. Let me do it like this. Let me point out in the shift from the seventh day to the first day some clues in the New Testament that this was happening.

Every time you find in the Gospels a reference to Jesus rising on a particular day, it says, on the first day of the week. And the construction used there is very unusual in the original language. It's like the number one of the Sabbath.

Or the day which is number one in the sequence of days determined by the Sabbath. It's not the word first isn't used. It's always translated first.

But there is a Greek word for first. It's used 156 times in the New Testament. It's never used to describe the day that the Lord rose on the first day of the week.

So you have this very unusual construction on the one of the week. Not the first, but on the one of the week. Four times in all the four Gospels.

Now, you come over into the Epistles and that day is referred to as special two times. And amidst all the hundred and fifty uses of the word first in the New Testament, in these two places alone do you get this construction that's used in the Gospels. This unusual construction.

So let me use, let me quote those to you. Acts 20 verse 7. On the first day of the week, that is on the one of the Sabbaths. On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day.

So there's an illusion, I believe, in this unusual construction that the first day is already in Paul's lifetime becoming the day of the gathering. The second one is 1 Corinthians 16. On the first day of the week, same unusual construction, only in these two places outside the Gospels.

On the first day of the week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper so that there will be no collecting when I come. Simply astonishing. And I only pointed out to say that in the New Testament, the shift was made from the seventh day to the first day, and it's rooted in the fact that Jesus rose on the first day of the week, Sunday, not Saturday.

And therefore, since the work of God, the second great work of God, first creation and arrest day, second redemption and arrest day, we now, honoring Jesus as the Lord, worship on the first day, the commemoration of the completion of the second work, new humanity, new creation, redemption, complete. Now, I said if the completion of the Sabbath rest were totally here, we probably wouldn't have a Lord's Day at all. Why do I say that? Hebrews chapter 4, verses 9 and 10.

Hebrews 4, 9 says, So then there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For whoever has entered God's rest has rested from his works as God did from his. Now, the picture there is Christians come to Christ.

Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. This is Jesus, our Sabbath. Jesus is welcoming us and says, Come to me.

In me, you enter into forgiveness of sins, freedom from the works of the law. You no longer have to earn any favor from me. Renounce all reliance on your work.

Depend on my work, and you are in Sabbath. You are in the eternal Sabbath. And you think, Okay, if I'm in the eternal Sabbath, if I'm in Jesus, if he's my rest, he's my Sabbath, then we're done with days.

The next verse says, verse 11 of Hebrews 4. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest. You're in it, and you should strive to enter it. That's the way we're saved.

There's an already, and it is sure and firm. We are in Jesus. He is our Sabbath rest.

And we should now, because he's taken hold of us, like Paul says in Philippians 3.12, we should take hold of him and strive to enter that final rest. There is a not yet, which is illuminated, I believe, by Colossians 2, 16 and 17. It goes like this.

Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food, drink, with regard to festival, new moon or Sabbath. These are a shadow of things to come. But the substance, the body that's casting the shadow, belongs to Christ.

What does that mean? The Sabbath? Don't let anybody judge you about this. The Sabbath is just a shadow. Of what? Christ.

Christ has come. He is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament, including the Sabbath. Christ is now our Sabbath.

Come to me. I will give you rest. Here is your Sabbath.

It's me. You can enjoy it every day of the week. Cease from your labors.

You cannot impress God. I impress God. I am God.

Come to me. I forgive sins. I welcome sinners.

Cease striving to be in me and rest by faith in me. I'm your Sabbath. But if it's true that there is yet warfare to be done, and the last day and the last Sabbath is yet coming when there will be no more night, no more day, no more month, no more week, no more year because the sun and the moon will be replaced by the glory of the Lord.

If that's coming, then perhaps, and for me it's not a perhaps, it's a given. The shadow remains in this age as a needed shade for this self-sufficient, weary world. I'm arguing that the New Testament assumes the Lord's day is valid now.

First day, not seventh day, and that yes, it's not the substance. We know that. We're freed in remarkable ways here.

But it is a beautiful shadow of Christ cast across the world, this hard-working, money-grubbing world, and the Lord wants there to be a shadow of the Lord's Sabbath cast across the world to say, you don't need to work every day. I work for you. You don't need more money.

I am your treasure. Rest. Lay it down.

Enjoy me one day a week. Say by one day a week, by what you do on it and don't do on it, say, I'm your treasure. I'm your worker.

I'm your Lord. I take care of you. That's a needed thing in our culture, and I am thankful for the remarkable roots of our land here that still have some semblance, a tiny, tiny semblance of Lord's day left.

Most of you do not have to work on Sunday, even though more and more people do because we won't renounce very much. What's the point of this shadow day? The point is Christ is risen. Jesus is Lord.

It's a day for worshiping Jesus. It's a day for saying by what we do and don't do that Jesus and not our work, Jesus and not our money is our treasure and our meaning. It's a day special for the honor and the glory of the Lord.

It's a day for mercy. It's a day for man. I just think probably families should not only worship together corporately, they should do some things as a family together to set it apart and probably some mercy, like visit a nursing home, sing a song for an old person, something like that, just some token of I'm free on this day.

I will not work for myself. I will, like Jesus, reach out to a withered hand and show that that's the kind of Lord that's over this day. Last question.

So what about Romans 14, 5? It's where we began. One person esteems one day is better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

Does that mean it's a matter of indifference whether there's a Lord's day? Let me close by quoting this book, Paul Jewett. It's the one that I got most help from. He says this, and I think he's right.

It is unconvincing to press Paul's statement in Romans 14, 5, so absolutely as to have considered John the Apostle a Judaizer for having called one day in the week the Lord's day in Revelation 1, 10, thus giving it the preeminence. You see, he's saying, if you take Revelation 1, 10, where John says, in the Lord's day I was in the Spirit, and you take Romans 14, 5, some regard all days alike, you should not press this one so far that you make this legalistic. To say there's a Lord's day and that it calls for something special by way of worship and lifestyle is not necessarily a contradiction of the meaning that Paul has behind verse 5 of Romans 14.

So I can't escape what appears to me to be the compelling evidence in the New Testament that the Lord's day remains till Jesus comes and that it is set apart for the glory of Christ, for the good of our souls. And so my prayer for you is that the Lord might give you the wisdom and the freedom and the joy as you think through for yourself and your family how to display that the work of Christ and the worth of Christ are greater than your work and all your money. How do you display that Christ is your Sabbath by the way you keep the Lord's day? Let's pray.

Father in heaven, there are many questions I have not answered. And I simply ask that what I have shown in the Bible would now inform the consciences of your people so that as they assess their behavior on the Lord's day, they would be led by your Spirit into ways that display Christ and His worth and His work most fully. Help us not to be judgmental in this regard.

Help us to say with the Apostle Paul before his own Lord he stands or falls. We all have our convictions. I certainly have my convictions for my family about what we do and don't do on the Lord's day.

But Lord, I leave that for now unspoken in the hope that you will guide this church and all her serious biblically saturated people. I commend them to you for your care and your guidance in this matter. Our world, I believe, needs their testimony regarding the shadow of our Sabbath, Jesus Christ.

In His name I pray. Amen. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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