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Is the Sabbath for Today/Part 8

< [Is the Sabbath for Today](#)

By: **Dr. Robert A. Morey**; ©2003

Some who observe the Sabbath argue that since the New Testament is silent on the subject, we must assume that it is still to be kept. We don't need a command, example or precept to prove it. But is that a valid argument? Dr. Morey explains why such a position is very problematic.

[Contents: Is the Sabbath for Today](#)

Contents

- [hide]
- 1 [Part II—An Examination of the Sabbatarian Arguments \(con't\)](#)
 - 1.1 [The Argument from Silence](#)
 - 1.2 [The Sabbatarian Position](#)
 - 1.3 [Examination of the Argument](#)
 - 1.4 [Conclusion](#)

Part II—An Examination of the Sabbatarian Arguments (con't)

The Argument from Silence

The Sabbatarian Position

The New Testament is silent about the Sabbath and this silence proves that they observed it. We do not need a command, example or precept in the New Testament to prove that the Sabbath is to be kept.

They go on to argue that:

- Since God had already commanded people to observe the Sabbath as a creation ordinance and as a moral law in the Old Testament, it is obviously still in force in the New Covenant age. Anything commanded in the Old Testament and not explicitly abrogated in the New is still in effect.
- The early church was Jewish and they kept the Sabbath, even though they changed it to the first day after the Sabbath. No one contested this practice or the change from the seventh to the first day. Thus it was never an issue of controversy to be mentioned in the New Testament.
- There were also "pastoral concerns" for not mentioning the Sabbath in the New Testament. Why would the New Testament writers bring up something which was already assumed? To be silent on the Sabbath would not cause controversy, but to discuss it would do so.

Examination of the Argument

Many Sabbatarians readily admit that the New Testament neither repeats the Fourth Commandment nor

applies it to Christians. Virtually all sides agree that there is a conspicuous silence in the New Testament about any present obligation of the Christian to observe the Sabbath. No rules or regulations are ever set forth for keeping the Sabbath. No examples of Christians keeping the Sabbath can be found. No one is ever disciplined for breaking the Sabbath. The only perceptual passages seem to abrogate the Sabbath (Col. 2:16-17). Why is the New Testament silent?

It is interesting to note that Baptists upbraid the Presbyterians for their use of the argument from silence to justify infant baptism and yet these same Baptists will often employ this same argument to defend sabbatarianism! The following comments refute the argument from silence.

1. The silence of the New Testament is crucial in this controversy. The fact that the other nine commandments are reinstated in the New Covenant as binding upon believers and only the Fourth Commandment is missing, cannot be brushed aside lightly. If this argument from silence is valid, why were the other nine reinstated and the Sabbath specifically stated to be a "shadow" (Col. 2:17)?
2. If "commanded in the Old and never abrogated in the New" means that an Old Testament law is still in effect today, it proves too much.
 1. We do not have explicit verses in the New Testament where the ceremonial laws are abrogated one by one. If the Sabbatarian argument is true, then all the ceremonial laws never mentioned in the New Testament are still in effect! This puts us in impossible difficulties by binding believers' consciences to many of the rules found in the Levitical Holiness code (cf. Lev. 11-12; 15:19-24).
 2. Why are the Sabbath commands about all debts liquidated every seventh year and all land returning to the original owners every seventy years not observed by Sabbatharians? They are never specifically abrogated in the New Testament.
3. The plain truth is that the New Covenant is not to be like the Old Covenant according to Jeremiah 31:31-32. Notice especially these words: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, *not like the covenant* which I made with their fathers."
4. We should approach the New Testament with the assumption that whatever is not reintroduced and re-instated in the New Covenant is no longer in effect. Everything in the Old Testament has been abrogated in principle by Christ. Whatever the New Testament sets forth is what the New Testament believer is responsible to observe.
5. The argument from silence can be valid when it is used to demonstrate that in principle all ceremonial laws have been abrogated and if something is not reinstated, it is no longer binding. This is using silence in a Scriptural manner.
6. That the argument from silence can be used against the Sabbath can be seen from an exegesis of Hebrews 7:14. Here the author builds his argument for the unique priesthood of Christ on the silence of the Old Testament.
7. The early church was not made up exclusively of Jews or Jewish proselytes. The missionary labors of Paul and others brought in pagan converts. These Gentiles had no Jewish background and were never instructed to keep a Sabbath after becoming Christians.
8. The history of the early church clearly shows that they did not observe the Lord's Day as a Sabbath or refer to the Fourth Commandment as binding on Christians. They taught that the Sabbath command was a ceremonial law fulfilled by Christ.
9. That the early Christian Jews could change the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day and not get involved in a controversy with the Jews or Judaizers is so foolish as to be self-refuting.
10. There were no "pastoral reasons" for the silence of the New Testament. The pastoral concerns of the apostle Paul led him to state clearly that the Sabbath was a "shadow" ordinance (Col. 2:17).

No one, therefore, can condemn you for not observing dietary laws, feast days or the weekly Sabbath (Col. 2:16). It is clear that Paul is dealing with the Jewish seventh-day Sabbath—and not the so-called "Christian Sabbath"—because he also speaks of dietary laws and "new moons." The New Testament, therefore, is not silent on the matter, but specifically indicates its passing away with the coming of Christ.

Conclusion

While the New Testament never re-institutes the Sabbath, it positively abrogates its significance as a day to be observed. The Sabbath found its fulfillment in Christ who is the Lord of the Sabbath. Thus Paul declared it "nailed to the cross." Christ alone in His Word can bind the conscience of the child of God.

The practical fruits of sabbatarianism have historically led to many evils such as:

- Legalism: Church leaders making up arbitrary rules and regulations to govern the Sabbath.
- Anarchy: Each Sabbatarian sets forth his own rules of what can be and cannot be done on Sunday.
- Party spirit: It breeds pride and an air of superiority.
- It fosters a critical and judgmental spirit.
- It kills the joy of the Christian's worship day by fostering a gloomy, morbid and even fearful attitude.
- It hurts families by forbidding laughter, play and, historically, even sexual relations between husband and wife.
- It has divided churches and split communities.
- It has brought about a state of bondage by taking away Christian liberty and imposing the "beggarly

elements" from the Old Covenant upon the Christian's conscience.

[To be continued.](#)

Navigation:

- Home
- About
- Watch
- Listen
- Shop Store
- Study
- Prayer Requests
- Ministry Gift
- Contact Us
- Log In
- User Preferences

Resource Center:

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Current Offer | Apologetics |
| Bible | Books |
| Cults | Jehovah's Witnesses |
| Masonic Lodge | Mormon Church |
| New Age | Death and Dying |
| Facts on Series | Historical Jesus |
| Islam | Practical Christianity |
| Prophecy | Roman Catholicism |
| Science | Social Issues |
| World Religions | |

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- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Apologetics | Artículos en Español |
| Bible | Questions & Answers |
| Christian Living | Current Events |
| Doctrine | Islam |
| Jehovah's Witnesses | Jesus |
| God | Guests and Authors |
| Masonry (Freemasonry) | Mormonism |
| Media Clips | Movies |
| New Age | Occult |
| Political Issues | Prophecy |
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| Worldview | |



Ankerberg Theological Research Institute
PO Box 8977 - Chattanooga, TN 37414 USA
423-892-7722 | [Contact Us](#) | Developed by [GuildDev](#)

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