

Is Sunday the “Christian Sabbath”?

By Rodney Pitts

It is often asked whether Sunday is the “Christian Sabbath.” This question is asked because God commanded the Jews to keep the Sabbath and many wonder whether God changed the Sabbath to Sunday for Christians. Well, my answer to this question is “no”—that Sunday is not the Christian Sabbath. The reason for my answer is not because I believe God still commands us to worship on the Sabbath, or Saturday, but because of plain Bible teaching that instructs us to the contrary.

A Contradiction

First, to say “Sunday is the Christian Sabbath” is a contradiction. The Sabbath was, by its very nature, to be observed on Saturday. In Exodus 20:8-11 Moses wrote, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the **seventh day** is the Sabbath of the Lord your God...For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (all emp. mine., rp). Thus, to say that Sunday, the **first day** of the week, is the “Sabbath” would be a contradiction and violate God’s reason for giving it to the Jews.

First Day of the Week Worship

To make the above point is not to say that Christians are to worship on Saturday. It is the teaching of the New Testament, the will of Christ today, that Christians worship on Sunday. For, we have an approved example of Christians meeting together *as a church* of the Lord to worship God on the **first day of the week** (Acts 20:7). We know this assembly involved the partaking of the Lord’s Supper and preaching. And, the apostle Paul attended it, participated in it, and offered no rebuke of it. Second, we know we are to take up a collection for the Lord’s work on Sunday (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Some have, however, tried to soften the blow of this passage by claiming that this is to be done individually. But, Paul specifically says this command is to the “church” (16:1) and that he wanted “no collections” when he came (16:2). To fulfil this command the money from individual Christians had to be put into some sort of “church treasury,” seeing that if everyone collected their money individually, there would have to be a “collecting” of that money from the individuals when Paul came.

In addition to this, let me draw your attention to a couple of quotes from early followers of Christ often called the “church fathers.” Barnabas, who wrote between 70-79 A.D., states, “Wherefore also we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead.” Ignatius, who wrote between 110 and 117 A.D., states, “Those who are concerned with old things have come to a newness of confidence, no longer keeping Sabbaths, but living according to the Lord’s day, on which our life which was risen again through Him depends.” Thus, it was the practice of early Christians to meet on Sunday, the first day of the week, not the Sabbath.

The Sabbath and its Rules and Regulations

I must also reject Sunday as the “Christian Sabbath” because New Testament Christians are under no obligations on Sunday to follow the rules and regulations associated with keeping the Sabbath. For, the Sabbath required that no “work” be done (Ex. 31:15), no fire for heat to be kindled (Ex 35:3), to bear no burdens in or out of their house (Jer. 17:21-22), to buy no goods (Neh. 10:31; 13:15-22), to gather no fuel as in refueling the car (Num. 15:32ff.), and to offer sacrifices specifically connected to the weekly Sabbath (Lev. 24:5-9). These rules were directly connected to their Sabbath observance and to say that Christians are to “observe the Sabbath” would necessitate the observance of these rules as well. Yet, the law of Christ binds no such things on Christians and their Sunday worship.

The Sabbath Was Given to the Jewish Nation

The idea that Sunday is the Sabbath for Christians also finds itself in contradiction to the fact that the Sabbath was specifically given to the Jewish nation and no one else. In Exodus 31:13, 16-17 we read, “Speak also to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations...Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign

between me and the children of Israel forever...” There is no such statement connecting the Sabbath to anyone else.

The Sabbath Was a Shadow of Things to Come

Finally, to say that Sunday is the “Christian Sabbath” cannot be true because it and many other days of observance under Old Testament law were given only as a “shadow of things to come.” Paul told the Colossians: “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Colossians 2:16-17). In other words, the Sabbath gave way to the true day of worship, the first day of the week, the substance, once Christ died on the cross. So, my faithfulness to God can no more be judged by whether I keep the Sabbath than it can by whether I keep Old Testament laws concerning “food and drink,” “festivals,” or the “new moon.”

What we must be concerned about today are the words of Christ found in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 14:37; Jn. 12:48) that will be the standard by which we are judged by God. So, let me encourage you to put away the old ways of death associated with the Sabbath and the O.T. Law (2 Corinthians 3:3-14). Let us seek to serve Christ in newness of the Spirit in accordance with the new Covenant dedicated by His blood, while celebrating the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord on His day, Sunday, the first day of the week (Hebrews 9:13-17; Acts 20:7).