



Acts 20:6-12
The Christian Sabbath

6 But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days.

7 Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

8 There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together.

9 And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead.

10 But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him."

11 Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed.

12 And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.

As many of you will have noticed, we are departing briefly from our exposition of the gospel according to Matthew in order that I might preach a couple of topical sermons addressing two issues that people have been asking me questions about a lot over the past year, and they are the Christian Sabbath and Christian worship. Today we are going to be addressing the Christian Sabbath Question.

Now I'm going to split this into two parts, first addressing the day on which we observe the Sabbath, and then the manner in which we are to observe it. First, why do we as a church meet and worship on Sunday? I mean if we are observing the fourth commandment doesn't it say "*the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God*" Is it just a Christian tradition? Did we not want to get mistaken for Jews? Or perhaps there was a church council that met to decide the day should be moved? Well no, none of those were the reason, Sunday worship was not fixed by a church council and as William Perkins points out, "*The church, has no power to ordain a Sabbath.*" The only authority who can tell us when to worship is the true head of the church, Jesus Christ, and He has done that His word.

First, while it is still fresh in our memories, let's take a look at the example of worship in the Apostolic church that we read about in Acts 20. Here Paul sails with Luke, the author of Acts to Troas, a church

which he had planted, and stays for 7 days. Now Paul was there on Saturday, but that is not when Luke tells us the church worshipped. It was not their customary day. When was the day when the disciples came together to worship? We read in verse 7, it was first day of the week, and the first day of the week is NOT Monday. I hate that calendars are now printed Monday through Sunday, because the FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK IS??? SUNDAY! That is when they had their corporate worship including the Lord's Supper (that's what the reference to breaking of bread) and preaching, and a VERY long sermon, I might add.

But why had they made that change?

They had made the change because it was on the first day of the week that Jesus Christ had forever set that day apart from all the others by rising from the dead. From that point onwards Sunday became a memorial to the turning point in the history of redemption. The Sabbath day from the beginning was the Seventh Day, and hearkened back to the Creation, The original Sabbath pointed to God's creating work, but the Christian points us to God's Redeeming work. It marks the great transition in the bible from Redemption promised to Redemption accomplished.

As RC Sproul put it - ***"In Christian history the sacred time of the Sabbath has three distinct orientations. The first is the commemoration of God's work of creation. The second is the celebration of God's work of redemption. The third is the celebration of the future promise of the consummation of redemption when we enter our Sabbath rest in heaven. Thus the whole scope of redemptive history, from start to finish, is made sacred in the observance of the Sabbath."***

Jesus also marked that day by appearing to his disciples after his resurrection on successive Sundays in John 20:19 and John 20:26 and it was why they called that day the Lord's Day as John did in ***Revelation 1:10 – "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet"***

All the references in early Christian writings also make reference to Christian worship being held on the Lord's Day, for instance the Didache – which dates back to either the late 1st or early 2nd century states, ***"Chapter 14. Christian Assembly on the Lord's Day. But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure."***

Ignatius, the celebrated martyred bishop of Antioch, says, in his epistle to the Magnesians, written somewhere between 107-116 AD, that this is ***"the Lord's day, the day consecrated to the resurrection the queen and chief of all the days."***

Justin Martyr, who died about A. D. 160 says that the Christians ***"neither celebrated the Jewish festivals, nor observed their Sabbaths, nor practiced circumcision."*** And in another place, wrote that ***"they, both those who lived in the city and those who lived in the country, were all accustomed to meet on the day which is denominated Sunday, for the reading of the Scriptures, prayer, exhortation"***

and communion. The assembly met on Sunday, because this is the first day on which God, having changed the darkness and the elements, created the world; and because Jesus our Lord on this day rose from the dead.”

So Much for the Actual Day of the Week Upon which we celebrate the Christian Sabbath. How are we to keep it? God also explained that in his word in giving us the pattern of one Sabbath day in every Seven. Now where do we first see the Sabbath set apart by God? Many will say, the Ten Commandments, but actually the Sabbath was given by God long before that. Genesis 2:3 “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.” Like marriage the Sabbath was instituted at Creation, and it rests upon the Divine example, God did the work of creation for six days and rested on the seventh.

Now Almighty God, could have done the work of creation in one day, or in an instant, but he spread it over six in order to set a pattern for us. That one out of every seven days should be a day of rest and worship. That blessing to God's people did not pass away, even though during their time of slavery in Egypt they couldn't enjoy it, in fact as soon as they were released, from Egypt it was reinstated and in chapter 16 we read that Moses told the people: ***“This is what the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD.’*** He speaks of it like Manna as a gift that was given to them. This is before the Israelites even reached Sinai and received the Law.

Then when they did get to Sinai, the Sabbath commandment was #4 in the Ten Commandments:

Exodus 20:8 " Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your

son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.

11 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.

It is part of the Moral Law written in stone by the finger of God and not part of the ceremonial or judicial laws given separately. Now many Christians today will say yes it was very important back then, but it has passed away now, so we don't need to observe it anymore. Which is very odd, because we don't think any of the other laws in the Decalogue have passed away, we don't just have Nine Commandments do we? These laws are an abiding expression of the Holiness of God. We are told for instance, in the NEW TESTAMENT that part of the reason for the giving of the Moral Law was to convict men, all men – Gentiles and Jews alike of sin, but how could the fourth commandment be of use in convicting men of sin if it no longer possible to break it? Additionally, we don't tend to think that it is good for Christians not to observe the other commandments, so that lying, coveting, blaspheming, murder, adultery, idolatry, and dishonoring other commandments is not a big deal. Also,

if creation ordinances have disappeared we have a big problem, *because the other one was marriage!*

For centuries in Christendom the idea that the Lord's Day was to be a Sabbath, a day of rest and worship was a given. And not just with Presbyterians, but with Episcopalians, Baptists, Congregationalists, and even Unitarians. For instance The New Hampshire Baptist Confession of 1833 reads *"Of the Christian Sabbath - We believe that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath; and is to be kept sacred to religious purposes, by abstaining from all secular labor and sinful recreations; by the devout observance of all the means of grace, both private and public; and by preparation for that rest that remaineth for the people of God."* Which is exactly what we believe as well! Even in the civil sphere, the Sabbath was venerated. Washington issued a proclamation during the Revolution that that the Army of the Continental Congress must keep the Lord's Day Holy. One most contentious debates in American political history, going on for 20 years from 1810 to 1830 was over whether the US mail should move on Sunday. Men like Senator Frelinghuysen fought against that, introducing a bill saying: *"The Sabbath is justly regarded as a divine institution closely connected with individual and national prosperity--no legislation can rightfully reject its claims; and although Congress of the United States, from the peculiar and limited constitution of the General Government, cannot by law force its observance--yet; as they should not, by positive legislation, encroach upon the sacredness of this day, nor weaken its authority in the estimation of the people"* Eventually it was determined that because vital army and navy communications had to move on Sunday the mail would keep going all week, but because of that men like Stonewall Jackson wouldn't post a letter if he knew it would still be on transit on Sunday. And that wasn't just into the 19th century. If you are like me you can actually remember when as a child all the stores and everything except essential services was closed.

But today things have changed RADICALLY and not just in the culture, I would put it to you that most most modern evangelicals only have, at the most these days, nine commandments. Voddie Baucham in his section in Family Shepherds entitled **"CAN YOU GIVE GOD A DAY?"** where he encourages Sabbath observance notes – *"For most Christians in our culture, the idea of a Christian Sabbath is completely foreign. Chances are, unless you've been running in certain conservative Presbyterian or Reformed Baptist circles, you've never heard such a position espoused"* And to tell the truth, I'd never even heard anything taught on the Christian Sabbath until I got to seminary. The Sabbath is dying in American culture, and with it, church attendance and a myriad of other blessings are also disappearing. William Plumer rightly said *"No Sabbath, no church, is the rule laid down in scripture. It is a correct rule. Without that holy day, all true religion would soon vanish from the earth."* Brothers and Sisters, everytime you see a store or a business with a sign saying, "Now Open Sunday" you see an institution whose workers cannot attend Church in the morning. The Chik-Fil-As are few and far between these days. And remember, everytime you go out to lunch after church or go shopping, you're helping to kill the Sabbath.

Now most considerations of what we should do on the Sabbath, usually devolve into lists of "Don't do this" rather I'd encourage you to simply consider how can I use this day best. As Vodie Baucham asks:

“I do want you to consider the way you spend the Lord’s Day and whether it honors God. Does your life reflect the pattern God built into creation? Do you give sufficient attention to the day Jesus set apart by his resurrection from the dead (Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1)?”

1st Application, are you robbing yourself of a great blessing? What a delight the Sabbath really is! “God has appointed the Sabbath for this end. On this day the thoughts rise to heaven, the tongue speaks of God, and is as the pen of a ready writer, the eyes drop tears, and the soul burns in love! The heart, which all the week was frozen, on the Sabbath melts with the Word. The Sabbath is a friend to true religion; it files off the rust of our graces; it is a spiritual jubilee, wherein the soul is set to converse with its Maker.” - Watson

2) Are You Doing All You Can to Be Amongst the People of God? The Christians in Troas knew they needed a day of more than just private and family worship, they must keep up their communion with their brothers and sisters in Christ, they must partake of the Lord’s Supper, have fellowship and mutual prayer and hear the word preached both morning and evening, and they were willing to hear Paul preach till midnight (fear not I won’t go that long). I hear so often of people who view corporate worship as drudgery and I don’t understand it. To forsake the day of rest in order to work or play and to have just another day of the week? Not to meet with Christ. I’m always reminded of the woman in *Luke 13:10 Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.*

11 And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up.

12 But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity."

13 And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

Now certainly she could have said, I’m am too sick to go to worship on the Sabbath. I can’t even stand upright! Certainly she was more incapacitated than many, and yet what a BLESSING she would have missed if she hadn’t been there that day. To hear Jesus teach and be healed! What could be better than that?

3) Your Attitude towards the Sabbath is a Good Indicator of Your Spiritual Health: Derek Kidner put it very well when he said, “ A people’s or a person’s reaction to the gift of a day set apart for God was a fair indicator of their spiritual temperature; and it still is.” Question then as now is as John Mackay put it, “whether God or their own economic and personal interests were to be the ultimate determinant of their lifestyle.”

Hebrews 4:9 There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God;

On the Sabbath day we are practicing for heaven, and you really can tell by that test where a person’s treasure really is, here on earth, or in heaven. As JC Ryle said *“Let us never forget that our feelings about Sundays are sure tests of the state of our souls. The man who can find no pleasure in giving*

God one day in the week, is manifestly unfit for heaven. Heaven itself is nothing but an eternal Sabbath. If we cannot enjoy a few hours in God's service once a week in this world, it is plain that we could not enjoy an eternity in His service in the world to come. Happy are those who walk in the steps of her of whom we read today! They shall find Christ and a blessing while they live, and Christ and glory when they die."

4) What a great example Sabbath observance can be! – The example of Eric Liddel - People admired Eric's stand for the Lord's Day. And Eric was not slow to make clear his love for the Lord's Day and the day's Lord.

In the old book it says, 'He who honours me I will honour'. Wishing you the best of success always. That note encouraged him. It contained a quote from the Bible, from 1 Samuel 2:30 ('those who honour me, I will honour').

John Keddie wrote: *"The question of Lord's Day observance is an issue today. The principle is the same: the first day of the week is a Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath. It is a day for Him, for our good, for worship and for physical rest. Keeping it well is a vital testimony for a Christian believer. As much as anything it tells the world that he or she will obey God rather than men, whatever the cost. No doubt the cost will be great today for a young Christian involved in sports. There is so much Sunday sport and it is difficult to be involved in organised sport without confronting this issue. Yet the issue is to be confronted and Christians and churches should be concerned to discourage a careless use of Sundays for our own pleasures, sports, entertainments and not God's glory. ...*

The present writer was stirred in his heart as a nineteen-year-old to seek the Lord after reading the booklet written by D.P. Thomson. I was a keen sportsman with admittedly limited abilities. Eric's stand for the Lord's Day and willingness to turn his back on fame and fortune and devote himself to missionary service was a deeply impressive witness. It led to a re-evaluation of my life and what was really important and of eternal significance. It led to a reassessment of my relationship to God and the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ in my life. This led to coming to faith in Jesus as Saviour under the hearing of the faithful preaching of the Word. It was indirectly related to the influence of the life and witness of Eric Liddell. I never did compete again in sports on the Lord's Day, and I committed my life to the Lord, as Eric did in his day."