

### Exodus 20:8–11 (ESV)

**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 a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and 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.**

If I were to ask for a show of hands on this question, I think I know what would happen. If I were to ask, “Who believes that New Testament believers no longer need to concern themselves with the 10 commands?” , I believe I would get no adult hands. You never know what kids will do.

But my point is, we all believe the 10 commandments are important. All of us do. I think everyone in this room would agree with that.

We remember how Jesus told us that the **greatest commandment** is that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. The **second greatest** is that we love our neighbor as ourselves.

When God was giving the law to the Jewish people, he started with the 10 commandments. The first four refer to how to love God. The last 6 tell us how to love people. The 10 commandments are then divided down into the rest of the law.

So the 10 commandments are foundational.

Now if I were to ask you how **you keep** the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, how do **you** keep the Sabbath day holy, I am guessing I would get a bunch of different answers. Some would be solid theology. Some might not be. And some of us may not have given it a whole lot of study.

That is somewhat of a problem. We all believe that God gave us the 10 commandments as the summary of His law. So we ought **all** be very concerned about doing what God says.

Probably 30 years ago our church entered into a **group study** of the Sabbath day command. Many of you were too young to remember, or were not here at the time. It was such a **big issue** to us, and **potentially divisive**, that we all studied it together and then came together to discuss our findings. We did not want a church split due to different opinions about it. At the end of our study we agreed that there were **several positions** a **faithful Christian** could take. But we did not conclude we needed to change what we were doing.

You might wonder why we are entering into this study **again**. Glad you asked. Several of our current fellowship hold very strong convictions regarding the need to keep the Seventh Day Sabbath. And still others are questioning it. I regarded this current situation as the Lord's leading to **look into it again**. I honestly was not certain where the study would take me. I have learned over time that this is a **very serious topic**. We must **take it** very seriously. When God gives 10 specific commands to His people, we had better be sure we follow them.

At the end of the day, what we need to know is **what the Bible says**. We need to spend the **time** it takes, and the **effort** it takes, to understand **what it says**, and if it tells us **why** it says it, we should understand **why**. This stuff is God breathed so it is worth extra effort. And when we determine what it tells us **to do**, we must **do it**. There can be no negotiation at that point. Jesus said, if you love me, you will obey me. We want to find ourselves at every point obeying God. We are here because we have the shared goal of honoring Christ. So this is important.

If I were to ask you how you obey the commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy, I would guess I would get several answers. They are likely to line up something like this.

#### **First- Sunday is the new Saturday.**

I was raised believing that the New Testament somewhere said that **Sunday** replaced **Saturday**. I was told that is why we **worship** on Sunday and why we are to do no **normal work** on Sunday. For a long time in my parents home we did not go out to eat on Sundays because that would require someone to work. This was a big sacrifice for my mom. We also couldn't play sports or swim. Not real sure how that got included. But that is how I was taught from a young age to think about the Sabbath. I am guessing that is probably the most popular view. I still find myself applying it, even though I no longer believe it is necessary. I might just apply it because it gives me a good reason to take a nap.

#### **Second- The Sabbath is still the Sabbath and should be kept as such.**

This view comes from the fact that the **Sabbath is Saturday**. And God tells us in the Old Testament **how** to keep the Sabbath. Since there is no specific text in the New Testament that tells us that the Sabbath no longer needs to be kept, we should continue to keep it.

These folks normally do no normal required labor from sundown on Friday night to sundown on Saturday night. This is not a terribly popular view. Those

who hold it are normally Seventh Day Adventists or those influenced by Herbert W Armstrong's teachings, or some who just read the Bible for themselves and come to this conclusion on their own.

**Third- Christ IS our Sabbath rest.** These folks, (*largely based on a specific understanding of Hebrews 4*), believe that the Old Testament Sabbath keeping was not so much the **promised rest**, but it **pointed to the final rest** we would receive in Christ. It is the rest from needing to fulfill the laws requirements. So **every day** is a Sabbath rest in Christ. What work we choose **to do** or **not do** is not the significant thing. We wake up every day to **THIS day** which is the day of the Lord. And we rejoice in the rest we have in Christ.

What I just did is take away some of the punch lines for the rest of the four sermons it will take to cover everything I need to cover to give us a clear view of where we stand.

I will also tell you that currently, I believe the first view is unsupportable. The second view I respect. But the third view I hold. I mentioned earlier that I was uncertain where I would end up. But having studied what I studied, I am more **confident of my position** than I have ever been.

Now, I am going to do something different than what we usually do. I am going to go into great depth to present the second and third position compellingly. If I do my job well you will conclude that a faithful Christian could easily hold the second and third view. A believer may actually **carry out the first view as a preference** and even a personal legalism, but they would be hard pressed to teach other believers that they must keep a Sunday Sabbath day.

The reason this is so important to me, and I think to us, is that **unity** in the body of Christ is very important. But it must be unity that is in submission to all scripture. It must be **unity without doctrinal compromise**.

Now think about this. If I were to hold the view that God requires that all believers keep the seventh day Sabbath, it is very difficult to square that view with those who do not keep a Sabbath day at all. And it is not a matter of being legalistic, in the **bad sense**. If someone here was committing adultery, we would not view it as **legalistic** in a **bad sense** to tell that person that they must stop committing that sin or they cannot be a member of our church.

None of us would call that **legalistic**. Well, if a person believes that believers are **required** to keep the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment as a **seventh day sabbath**, it is sort of the **same thing**. They must view not keeping a seventh day sabbath as

a **direct disobedience** of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment. So there is a natural division that results from the two convictions. Instead of being a **peripheral** issue, it becomes a **core issue**. It is natural to the logic.

That is why it is so important to me to deal with this issue. I don't feel the need to convince anyone else to take the position. But it is exceedingly important that I prove that the third position is arrived at through **proper** and **thorough** Biblical interpretation. Even if I and those who agree with me are wrong, and I do not think we are, this view can be arrived at by taking the scriptures very seriously. And I believe that, rather than being guilty of disobedience to the fourth command by not keeping a 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath, the point can be made that those who **spiritualize** the fourth commandment believe that the fourth commandment points to a greater reality than the Jewish people to whom it was originally given could have ever contemplated. So you can see why my goal is to present what scripture says in an effort to **maintain unity and love**. The Sabbath keeping issue is often an issue that I believe separates people from fellowship who **could** and **should** have meaningful fellowship. I remember when we were doing our study 30 years ago that we had invited Seventh Day Adventists to present their views. I got the distinct impression that, while we could offer our hand of fellowship to **them, they** could not in good conscience **receive it**. That is what I am hoping to avoid.

OK, let's get started.

We will start with the position that **Sunday is the new Saturday**.

Well, the simplest thing to state is that scripture does not say this anywhere. Nowhere does it say in the New Testament that we are now to treat Sunday like the Jewish people treated Saturday.

Where did that idea come from?

Well historically we see three significant events that may have affected those who believe Sunday is now the Sabbath.

In AD 135 Emperor Hadrian destroyed Jerusalem, expelled the Jews, and forbade Sabbath keeping.

AD 321 Emperor Constantine decreed Sunday a public holiday in the Roman Empire.

Between 314-335 AD Pope Sylvester 1 decreed a transfer of the sabbath to Sunday.

Some make the point that the transition from a Saturday Sabbath to a Sunday Sabbath was primarily a desire to **escape persecution or felt pressure to conform to Catholic teaching**. But the historical records I am looking into are far more complicated. Much of what I am looking at is found in the Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles in 90 AD. This was not accepted as scripture but it shows us some historical information. The writers of this document were people that may have actually known some of the apostles. Didache means teaching. The authors were writing down how they believed things should be done in the church. I believe this was prior to the Catholic church really being what it is today.

**90AD DIDACHE: Be not careless of yourselves, neither deprive your Savior of His own members, neither divide His body nor disperse His members, neither prefer the occasions of this life to the word of God; but assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord's house: in the morning saying the sixty-second Psalm, and in the evening the hundred and fortieth, but principally on the Sabbath-day. And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent Him to us, and condescended to let Him suffer, and raised Him from the dead. Otherwise what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day to hear the saving word concerning the resurrection, on which we pray thrice standing in memory of Him who arose in three days, in which is performed the reading of the prophets, the preaching of the Gospel, the oblation of the sacrifice, the gift of the holy food? (Didache: The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Chapter XIV)**

In context of this document, the Lords day was not Saturday but Sunday. So this is not saying that they did not keep the Sabbath. In fact worship on the Sabbath was emphasized. But it is saying that as early as 90 AD they were worshipping on Sunday. So this was happening well before the edicts of the church fathers or the Catholic church in the second and third centuries.

There is also a Gospel of Barnabas. Again it is not scripture but it was likely providing some historical information. It says this.

**100 AD BARNABAS: Moreover God says to the Jews, 'Your new moons and Sabbaths 1 cannot endure.' You see how he says, 'The present Sabbaths are not acceptable to me, but the Sabbath which I have made in which, when I have rested [heaven: Heb 4] from all things, I will make the**

**beginning of the eighth day which is the beginning of another world.'  
Wherefore we Christians keep the eighth day for joy, on which also Jesus  
arose from the dead and when he appeared ascended into heaven. (15:8f,  
The Epistle of Barnabas, 100 AD, Ante-Nicene Fathers , vol. 1, pg. 147)**

This writing from a non biblical source certainly does not prove that it was the right thing to do. But it does seem to say that this is what at least some Christians were doing.

**150AD JUSTIN: ...those who have persecuted and do persecute Christ, if they do not repent, shall not inherit anything on the holy mountain. But the Gentiles, who have believed on Him, and have repented of the sins which they have committed, they shall receive the inheritance along with the patriarchs and the prophets, and the just men who are descended from Jacob, even although they neither keep the Sabbath, nor are circumcised, nor observe the feasts. Assuredly they shall receive the holy inheritance of God. (Dialogue With Trypho the Jew, 150-165 AD, Ante-Nicene Fathers , vol. 1, page 207)**

Again this is historical evidence that Gentile Christians were already not keeping the Sabbath.

I am not going to read all the sources but they continue like this throughout the third and fourth century.

DA Carson, who tends to be a very factual scholar, reports that in his study he found that the first century Christians who were in a highly Jewish environments kept the Sabbath. Those who weren't did not. He did not quote his sources so I can't either.

The point I am trying to make with all of this is that if someone says that all Christians were keeping the Sabbath at the time of Paul, they cannot prove it. There is at least equal evidence that it is not true as that it is true.

I would like to add here that when a Biblical position relies heavily on human history, we are in dangerous territory. The writing of history is not inerrant. It has mistakes. And we don't know where the mistakes are. So any theological position must be able to support itself in scripture alone. History is a secondary tool to help us better understand it.

So how does all this relate to Christians **in our day** viewing Sunday as being the new Sabbath?

The Catholic Church certainly has taught a first day Sabbath, but Augustine who was a Catholic preaching and teaching in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century was

teaching that the **Sabbath laws no longer apply like they used to**. He did not present the party line Catholic position. By that we understand that this was an issue **being wrestled with** by people who wanted to follow the Bible. It was in flux. What we are doing this morning is not unlike what has been happening since the first century church.

When we talk about the Catholic Church, we tend to lump all the church fathers as being Catholic. But at first, these leaders were doing their best to understand how to lead the church forward. They naturally thought that a hierarchical authority structure was the way to go. They did not **start** with an errant view of a pope who held authority to create inerrant decrees simply by holding the position. No it took **hundreds of years** to get to that error. At first the church fathers were doing what we are doing. And they got some things **wrong**. Treating Sunday like the Old Testament Saturday made a lot of sense to a lot of people. Not everyone who followed it did so because the Catholics taught it, then or now. We all have to do something with the fourth commandment. So they did what made sense to them based on how they understood scripture. And we still do, whether right or wrong.

Now, we need to stop here for a moment and clarify something. We need to draw a distinction between viewing **Sunday as a Sabbath** and viewing **Sunday as a day to worship God**. There is zero scripture that I know of telling us that we should view Sunday like the Jews regarded Saturday. Anyone who tells us that **there is no such command** is telling the truth. And it needs said. But it is a completely different thing to lump **keeping the Sabbath on a Sunday** and **worshipping on a Sunday** as one and the same. They are two completely different issues. The Sabbath is not Sunday. But that does not mean that Sunday is not to be a day of worship. Let's see what scripture says. There is much precedence for Sunday taking a special place in the Christian church. Christ was raised on a Sunday. **Matthew 28** makes that very clear. The following Sunday Christ showed up in their midst. **John 20:19, 20**  
**19 On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."** **20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord**

John MacArthur makes this point-

It is on a **Sunday** that they know He is alive from the dead. It is on a **Sunday** that they know the Old Testament is being fulfilled. It is on a **Sunday** that they

know the Father has affirmed His redemptive work on the cross. It is on a **Sunday** that He pledges to them that they will receive the Holy Spirit to be empowered for ministry in the future.

Now guess what else happened on a Sunday? **Pentecost.**

Leviticus 23:16 says the feast of weeks, Pentecost, was to happen 50 days after a Sabbath. 49 days would land on a Sabbath. But God saw fit to have the Holy Spirit's pouring out on a Sunday.

I like what John MacArthur says here:

**We just have the very obvious fact that God filled that day with the most significant events in the founding of the church, namely the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the arrival of the Spirit of God. The events of the resurrection, and the birth of the church, and the empowerment of the church, the completion of salvation, the coming of the Holy Spirit - these glorious foundational realities that are at the very heart of our redemption - these are the realities that replaced the shadows and the forms of the Sabbath.**

**They happen on a Sunday, and the Lord, then, has picked out His own day. And just as I told you this morning, when He appointed twelve apostles, He left the leaders of Israel behind. When our Lord established the first day, He left the seventh day behind.**

Now what John MacArthur does here is he takes descriptive passages and assigns great meaning to them. That is always tricky. We need more to our study to know if he is barking up the right tree. But we've got to admit that it is at least compelling. This is God initiating these foundational things for the church on a **Sunday**. Why does God chose **Sunday** for these significant events? Why does He not choose **Saturday** which already has obvious spiritual significance. Sunday has no spiritual significance to anyone. Does God just pick a day arbitrarily to do these dramatic acts? All of these events that are so significant to the beginning of the church just happen to be on Sunday? I don't think that is likely. I think God is showing intention here. He wants the first day of the week, what some refer to as the 8<sup>th</sup> day of creation, to stand out. It probably is meant to mean **something**.

Now nowhere do we get the idea that this is a switched Sabbath day. I believe it becomes simply a preferable, but not required, day to worship and to celebrate our salvation. And this all happened before the Catholic church



even existed. There are descriptive passages that tell us that people began worshipping on Sunday.

**[Act 20:7 ESV] 7 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, and he prolonged his speech until midnight.**

**[1Co 16:1-2 ESV] 1 Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2 On the first day of every 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.**

**[Rev 1:10 ESV] 10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet**

Now how do we know the Lord's day was Sunday? Mostly by the historical references in historical documents 30 years later. None of the things that I just mentioned are **proof** that the standard practice for the church was to gather on Sunday. They are only **evidence**. But they are not absolute **proof**. Just like mentions of NT Christians going to the Synagogue on the Sabbath were proof that the Gentile Christians were being taught that they must keep the Sabbath. Nothing would please the devil more than to have Christians divided on doctrines that are based on scriptural evidence but not on scriptural proof.

My point is primarily that God seemed to single out Sunday as a special day by how He treated it. And there is at least some evidence that first century Christians began meeting on it.

OK, in this first sermon on the Sabbath topic, we looked at how **many people** view the Sabbath in the New Testament. They believe that Sunday is the new Saturday.

This is what I hope was proven.

1. Sunday is not the new Saturday. There is no New Testament directive that tells us to keep Sunday like the Jews were to keep the Old Testament Sabbath.
2. There however **IS** a New Testament precedence initiated by God Himself where the most important events in the formation of the church happened on Sundays.
3. There is historical evidence from first century sources that shows that not all believing gentiles kept the Sabbath, even prior to both the Catholic Church and the Roman Government prohibiting worship on the Sabbath.

4. The historical and biblical evidence that the first century Christian Gentiles kept the Sabbath and were taught that they must is sketchy at best. The point simply cannot be proven one way or the other historically. I believe this means that our conclusions must be arrived at through the Biblical record.

Next week I hope to lay out a very convincing argument for **keeping the Seventh Day Sabbath**. I hope to do it in a way that does justice to those who hold the view. I will do my best not to set up any straw men arguments that I can easily destroy. That is dishonest and disrespectful to those who hold this view. The view is certainly one that we must reckon with.

When I started this study I expected the topic would require 2 sermons. It turns out it required 4. So my initial schedule for the Thursday night discussions of the topic have changed. I will make sure the schedule gets posted. But we will start the Thursday night discussions on this topic on the Thursday night following the fourth sermon. I challenge us all to study this topic between now and then. Also, if you believe any of the things I said are not accurate, please send me an email about it. I am likely to have time to seriously think about what you send me this following week.

I guess, in closing I would like to emphasize, our obedience to God's word is vital. It is important that we know what we believe about the fourth commandment and that we willingly obey that which we believe the commandment requires of us.