

## THE LORD'S DAY

Since about 1970 it seems that evangelicals no longer see the need for observing the Lord's Day as our spiritual forefathers did. Is it time to quit calling Sunday the Sabbath? If so, is it because of evolution, or are we smarter than they were? Was their interpretation private, or is ours? Was their interpretation faulty, or is ours? Are we the cloud of witnesses or are they? Do we break the commandment that says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness" when we say we believe in the ten commandments? Do we really only believe in nine commandments? Do we really need to change the custom of having weekends off? Would it be good to open our businesses on Sundays and force our employees to work so they cannot go to church? Where do we draw the line between greed and obedience?

In my window cleaning business, a client got mad at me and jumped all over me because I said I do not work on the Lord's day. He said, "According to whose interpretation is it wrong?" Good question. The other question is, "Where do we draw the line?"

I believe these two questions are easily answered. But first we must get rid of the lie that tells us we have a right to make a private interpretation.<sup>1</sup> It is not the "Bible alone" that is our guide. It is the proper interpretation of the Bible. A proper interpretation must allow for the testimony of the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. I believe we are in grave danger of destroying the Christian culture that has been handed down to us.

The pop interpretation now days is that every man can do that which is right in his own eyes. He can rest which ever day he arbitrarily chooses and thus fulfill the fourth commandment. The main two passages used to support this view are Romans 14:4-6 and Col. 2:16,17. Let us look at them.

ROM 14:4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

<sup>5</sup> One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.

<sup>6</sup> He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

COL 2:16 Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths,

<sup>17</sup> which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

### MATTHEW HENRY'S COMMENTARY

Now let us look at how our fathers interpreted these verses. Below is a quote from Matthew Henry's Commentary. He was a puritan who wrote in 1700. I think we will see from the

following proofs that the apostle was not referring to the Lord's Day, but to the traditional Jewish sabbaths which took place at new moon, on feast days, and on Saturday.

"Those who thought themselves still under some kind of obligation by the ceremonial law esteemed one day above another-kept up a respect to the times of the passover, pentecost, new moons, and feast of tabernacles; thought those days better than other days, and solemnized them accordingly with particular observances, binding themselves to some religious rest and exercise on those days. Those who knew that all these things were abolished and done away by Christ's coming esteemed every day alike. We must understand it with an exception of the Lord's day, which all Christians unanimously observed; but they made no account, took no notice, of those antiquated festivals of the Jews.<sup>2</sup>"

Sunday as the Lord's Day is the fulfillment of the Sabbath shadow. This is what Christians have always believed and practiced from the days of the apostles.

The DICTIONARY OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH says,

"In *Ep. ad Magn.*, attributed to Ignatius, we meet with an early admonition, emphasizing the distinction: 'Let us, therefore, no longer keep Sabbath after the Jewish manner...and rejoice in days of idleness...But let every one of you keep Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law' (ch 9). In the nature of things, the two days could not continue to be equally observed in the Christian Church. The Sabbath must needs give place to the Lord's Day: the seventh day of the week to the first. The legislation of Constantine (A.D. 321), which recognized Sunday as a feast day, must have been no small factor in the case; though, again, that would not have been enacted if the custom of keeping the Lord's Day had not already been predominant among Christians."

"But there is a clear distinction between the two; and for Christians the Lord's Day is paramount. The Fourth Commandment was still held to be binding; only Sunday was tacitly substituted for 'the seventh day.'...Great as the authority of the Sabbath is, the authority of the Lord's Day for all who accept the resurrection of our Lord is equally great or even greater. "

PELOUBET'S BIBLE DICTIONARY says,

"Christ's words do not remit the duty of keeping the Sabbath, but only deliver it from the false methods of keeping which prevented it from bestowing upon men the spiritual blessings it was ordained to confer. The almost total silence of the epistles in relation to keeping the Sabbath doubtless grew out of the fact that the early Christians kept the Sabbath, and that this period was one of change from the seventh to the first day of the week, and any definite rules would have been sure to be misunderstood. For many years both the first and the seventh days of the week were kept as Sabbaths; and gradually the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, took the place among Christians of the seventh day, and they had the fullest warrant for the change."

"The Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue is just as binding now as it ever was, or as any other of the Ten Commandments. Those who argue that God has abolished this Sabbath, but has written the Sabbath law in our very natures, must have strange ideas of the wisdom of a God who

abolishes a command he has made it necessary to keep. Christians in keeping the Lord's day keep the Fourth Commandment, as really as do those who keep what is every seventh day, only the counting starts from a different point. As to the method of keeping the Sabbath no rules are laid down; but no one can go far astray who holds to the principles laid down;-(1) *Rest*. Nothing is to be done in daily business, and no recreation taken which destroys the rest of others or takes from any the privileges of the Sabbath. (2) *Spiritual nurture*. One day in seven is to be set apart for the culture of the spiritual nature. These two principles of Sabbath-keeping will always go together. Only a religious Sabbath, which belongs to God, can be retained among men as a day of *rest*. If men can sport on the Sabbath, they will soon be made to work. Witness the large number of people who must minister to the sport of others. Also the fact that where the Sabbath is merely a day of pleasure the shops soon begin to stay open."

Justin Martyr (150 A.D.)<sup>2</sup> tells us that Sunday was the day that Christians had set apart instead of Saturday, because it was the resurrection day. How can we do this if we have to work?

Ignatius, who was a young man while the apostles were alive, said, "Those who lived according to the old order of things have come to a new hope, no longer keeping the sabbath, but the Lord's Day, in which our life is blessed by him and by his death."<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that the early Christians from the time of the apostles understood the Lord's Day to be the fulfillment of the Old Testament Sabbath shadow. It was a day set apart from all others for man and for the Lord. What arrogance it would be for me to think that I have a right as an individual to change that custom and set apart any day I choose. What ever happened to submission to authority?

Rick Godwin points out in his message on seven levels of authority, that *custom* is one of them.

Since this custom has changed since 1970, isn't that a little suspicious? In my father's day (1914-1935) the Christians rested from 6 P.M. Saturday until 6 P.M. Sunday. They all did. All denominations (except Adventists). The Adventists take a more legalistic approach. Many evangelicals react to the opposite extreme by spritualizing or ignoring the custom as kept by our fathers.

There are two elements that I observe that seem to have caused this change. (1) We believe we are smarter and wiser. I believe this belief is based on ignorance. Our Puritan fathers were better educated than we are. The pastors of the Scottish covenanters all spoke multiple languages. I know of one who spoke thirteen languages. Their theology was more thorough, their suffering was greater, and so was their faith.

Does anyone remember the movie CHARIOTS OF FIRE? It is a true story of a Church of Scotland covenanter who was expected to win first place in the 100 at the Olympic games. When he found out that he would have to run on Sunday, he told the leaders, including the king, that he could not do it. They were quite disappointed. As it turned out, he ran the 400 on another day, and won. This he did in spite of the fact that he had never trained for that race!

(2) The other cause of this change is the belief that we have the right to private interpretation. What ever happened to humility?

Where do we draw the line? The prophets Nehemiah and Jeremiah rebuked the people for carrying burdens on the Sabbath.

NEH 13:15 In those days I saw in Judah some people treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions.

JER 17:21 'Thus says the LORD: "Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem;

22 "nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day, as I commanded your fathers.

The Pharisees were so literalistic that they even went so far as to make it unlawful to carry their blankets. Jesus clearly did not agree with such legalism. Albert Barnes says, "This method he took to show them what the law of God really permitted on that day, and that works of necessity and mercy were lawful."

John 5:8 Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk."

9 And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.

:10 The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

11 He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.' "

### **Where do we draw the line?**

Where do we draw the line? We draw it where our spiritual fathers drew it. We abstain from gainful employment. We work and plan *six* days. We do not go to the extreme of legalism. Jesus made it clear that it is lawful to pull your ox out of the ditch on the Sabbath. There are some jobs that are necessary on Sunday, such as hospitals. It is not necessary to keep stores and restaurants open on Sunday.

I foresee a day when the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. In that day Christians will not work on Sunday except in those cases where it is necessary such as hospitals, etc. There will be no televised sports on the Lord's day. There will be no stores or restaurants open.

Should we go to restaurants and watch football on Sundays? I leave that for others to decide. At this point, I do not see that as violation. Those who work on that day and require their employees to work are definitely violating the Sabbath.

I was fired from a job for refusing to work Sundays. It was in 1972. I was 32 years old and had four children. I had just returned from the mission field, and was working two jobs (yea three) to make ends meet. After working there for two years, they decided to open on Sundays. I told them that I could not. They said, "Then we will have to fire you." After thinking it over, I almost gave in. But, as scared as I was, I decided to trust God. They fired me. In one month I was hired by the biggest advertiser in the world, and the company with the best benefits of any large company in the world. During that month, I did not lose a dime in income. I did some remodeling jobs. If we have the moral courage to trust God, we may suffer, but God will bless us and supply all our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus!

Sabbath breakers will suffer the sanctions of God. Those who wilfully (or ignorantly) break one of the ten commandments, will suffer the sanctions of God.