

The Lord's Day

As the Apostle John began his great work that brought the New Testament canon to a close, he declared in chapter one verse ten, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet" (NKJV).

For a moment let us consider the meaning of this phrase "the Lord's Day."

The Sabbath

When the Lord completed the creation of the world, Genesis 2:3 teaches us, **"Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made."** This "sanctification" did not involve any human observance of the seventh day as a holy day until hundreds of years latter when the children of Israel came out of Egypt. Exodus 16:1-36 tells of the miraculous manner by which God fed the Israelites, giving them "manna" from heaven. They were to gather it for six days (with a double portion on the 6th day). Yet on the seventh day they were not to gather it, nor do any work. Exodus 16:29 reads, **"See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you bread the sixth day for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day."**

Latter, when the Lord gave the Law to Moses the observance of the Sabbath was included within it. The fifth commandment stated, **"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy"**

(Exod. 20:8). Specific punishments were commanded for those who violated the Sabbath. Exodus 31:14 instructed, “**...Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people.**”

To Whom Did This Apply?

It is important to remember that this Sabbath regulation was given uniquely to the Israelites. There is no record of anyone observing a Sabbath rest in the book of Genesis, nor is there any indication that other nations were to observe it. Nehemiah 9:14 describes what God had done for the Israelites declaring, “**You made known to them Your holy Sabbath...**” At least one reason that God chose to give Israel this peculiar regulation was as a means of testing them. When the original instructions were given to them regarding the collection of “manna,” Exodus 16:4 relates, “**...And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not.**”

The Teachings Of Christ

When Jesus came to this world He brought to man a new covenant to be followed by all men. Galatians 6:2 refers to this as “**the Law of Christ.**” Many of the teachings that Jesus gave us are very similar to laws that were a part of the Law of Moses, but many are different. In the New Testament Jesus specifically restates all of the Ten Commandments except one—the Sabbath regulation. The apostles of Christ taught that observance of any particular day as holy is a matter of indifference (Romans 14:5-6) and that one cannot be judged regarding the observance of the Sabbath (Colossians 2:16,17). All of this makes it clear that the Sabbath is not a holy day of worship for Christians.

“On The First Day of the Week”

The New Testament records that first century Christians held another day as a special day of worship. Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1, and John 20:1 all tell us that the first day of the week was the day upon which Christ was raised. Concerning this day the Scriptures record three very important points for us:

- 1. It was on this day that Christ first met with His disciples (who were assembled together) after His resurrection* (John 20:19).
- 2. It was on this day that the church in Troas met to “break bread” and hear preaching* (Acts 20:7).
- 3. It was on this day that Paul instructed the churches of Galatia and the church in Corinth to “lay by in store”* (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

“Is This The Christian Sabbath?”

It has long been taught by many in the religious world that the Law of Christ in essence transformed the Jewish Sabbath (on the seventh day) into a “Christian Sabbath” (on the first day of the week). There is no evidence in Scripture that this was ever the case.

While Sunday was a special day for assembly and worship we do not see it given the same kind of solemn sanctity associated with the Jewish Sabbath.

In fact if it were, one would be hard pressed to then explain why capital punishment would not be required for its violation!

“Is Sunday the ‘Lord’s Day’?”

Although the Bible never specifically identifies the first day of the week as the “Lord’s Day” referred to by the apostle John, there is good reason to believe that it is. Two documents written by Christians in the second century show the special significance that was given to Sunday by early Christians. One work known as the *Didache* (or *Teachings of the Twelve*) instructs, “On the Lord’s day assemble and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins that your sacrifice may be pure” (14). Another written by a Christian named Justin was a letter addressed to the emperor Hadrian in defense of the Christian faith. He writes, in reference to the nature of their worship, “We all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the universe, and Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead on the same day. For they crucified him on the day before Saturday, and on the day after Saturday, he appeared to his apostles and disciples and taught them these things which I have passed on to you also for your serious consideration.” (*First Apology* 66).

Given the scriptural and historical evidence it seems reasonable to conclude that assembly on the first day of the week for study, prayer, singing, the Lord’s supper, and the collection for the saints was a binding approved apostolic example that must be followed by Christians in this age. While Christians can and should worship in every act of obedience of their lives and assemblies at other times are essential, if we are to follow the pattern of the early church and give the Lord the

reverence He deserves we must always be certain to set aside time on the Lord's Day to worship Him in truth.

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“The One of the Sabbaths”

The Greek phrase translated “first day of the week” is *mian sabbaton* (μίαν σαββάτων) meaning literally - “the one of the sabbaths”. Sabbath may mean either, “1. the seventh day of each week, which was a sacred festival on which the Israelites were required to abstain from all work” or “2. seven days, a week” (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 565-6).

It is generally accepted that this phrase is patterned after the Hebrew method of referring to a particular day of the sabbath week. Thus “the one of the sabbaths” refers to Sunday. Monday would be “the two of the sabbaths.” Mark 16:1-2 makes it clear that the phrase cannot refer to the Sabbath day itself.



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