

FROM SEVENTH TO FIRST

Why Christians Keep Sabbath on the First Day of the Week; Not on the Seventh

The Institution of the Sabbath

“And God rested (literally, *kept Sabbath*), on the seventh day,” following six days of work. “As for God, his way is perfect;” and, so far as revealed, His way constitutes a permanent example of procedure for man to follow. For, man was made to be like God. Clearly, the Sabbath is *God's rest; not the day of His rest*. For man, then, the Sabbath, intrinsically is not a day of the week, but an institution, a divine institution, to be observed on God's chosen day.

“And God *blessed* the seventh day and *sanctified* it, because in it he had kept Sabbath.” (Gen. 2:3.) “In six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore, Jehovah *blessed* the day of the Sabbath, and *hallowed it*.” (Ex. 20:11.) A comparison of these two texts (and many others that might be quoted) discloses that God blessed and sanctified the day, not because it was the seventh, but because it was the “*day of the Sabbath*” (the literal Hebrew designation). Therefore, by the Hebrew idiom, the day is the property of the institution; the day is depend-

ent on the Sabbath; the Sabbath is *not* dependent on the day.

By His EXAMPLE, by His BLESSING and by His SANCTIFICATION of the seventh day, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the "day of the Sabbath" for mankind, providing, from the very outset of their existence, the most blessed of all privileges, fellowship and communion with God.

Sin and Its Consequence

But man sinned against God. He ate the forbidden fruit, and so lost his highest privilege. For God had said, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." When the seventh day came around again *man was under the power of death*; "dead in trespasses and sins," "having no hope, and without God in the world." Instead of the blessing of the Sabbath, the *curse of sin* was upon him.

God's Promise of Redemption

Then, immediately, God, in the exceeding greatness of His love and mercy, began His most amazing work of Redemption. He gave His promise, already provided for in the eternal Covenant of Grace, that sinners should have a Saviour from sin and its curse. This promise offered hope that they could again have the joy of life in doing the will of God and keeping Sabbath with God. They were not allowed to forget the Sabbath. It was revealed that fulfillment would come through THE SACRI-

FICE, of which the animal sacrifice became the accepted type.

Later on, God's national redemption of Israel, from the bondage of Egypt into the rest of Canaan, became the historic type of the deliverance of all the covenant people of God from the thralldom of sin into the "Sabbath rest" that remaineth for them. (Heb. 4:9 RV.) Originally, the Sabbath had no need for the sacrifice, but now God ordered that its holy rest should include a "*holy convocation*" to which His people were to be called to worship Him THROUGH THE SACRIFICE. (Lv. 23:1-3; Nu. 28:9, 10.)

Fulfillment of the Promise

In the fulness of the time the Saviour came, and with His death THE SACRIFICE WAS FINISHED. "And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom." (Mt. 27:51.) This signified, in accord with Heb. 9:8 and 10:19, 20, that the way into the presence of God, which hitherto had not been made manifest, was now made manifest "by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us, through the veil, that is to say his flesh". He took that way Himself, and made it available to us by faith in Him.

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried. "*He continued under the power of death for a time.*" There may be some difference of opinion as to the

whole number of hours, but there can be no question as to the fact that THE BODY OF HIS HUMILIATION CONTINUED UNDER THE POWER OF DEATH THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE SEVENTH DAY OF HIS LAST WEEK ON EARTH. He bore for us the whole *curse of sin*; yes, specifically, as it related to the seventh day!

And *the next day was the first day of the week*. "And on the Sabbath they (the women) rested according to the commandment." But "when the Sabbath was past," "*on the first day of the week*, at early dawn, they came unto the tomb, . . . and found not the body of the Lord Jesus." Then they heard the angel say, "He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you that *the Son of Man must . . . be crucified, and the third day rise again. . . . Go, tell his disciples.*" (Lk. 23:56-24:7; Mk. 16:1-7.)

The First Day of the Week Appointed to Be the Day of the Sabbath

1. *By the Act of the Triune God*. The Scriptures attribute *the resurrection of Christ* to each Person of the Godhead, the Father, the Son Himself, and the Holy Spirit. Each concurred in completing that upon which depended the fulfillment of all the covenant promises—the manifestation of THE ACCEPTED SACRIFICE in life forevermore.

"This is Jehovah's doing;

"It is marvelous in our eyes."

(Ps. 118:22-24.)

It was done *on the first day of the week, before* the women came "at early dawn"; therefore, in effect, *immediately after the seventh day had passed*. It did not just happen so. God times His work with the utmost precision. Jesus Christ appeared, *not on the seventh, but on the first day of the week*.

"This is the day Jehovah made;

"We will rejoice and be glad in it."

2. *By the Personal Presence and Example of Christ*. The Lord Jesus finished His work of Redemption at the end of the seventh day of the week. "He saw of the travail of his soul and was satisfied." On the first day of the week He rested from the infinite burden and pain of His labor; He *kept Sabbath*; outwardly, by meeting with His disciples—with individual men and women; with two of them by the way; with the company of them where they were gathered together, "while he opened to them the Scriptures".

During the remainder of that week He withheld Himself; certainly not without design. His disciples could not meet with Him unless He met with them. Knowing Him to be alive they would be looking for Him. Surely, when the Sabbath comes, He will do "as his custom was". Not so. The seventh-day Sabbath came and passed, but the Lord did not appear. For, that current week had already enjoyed its Sabbath. **ITS SIX DAYS FOR WORK MUST ALSO BE FULFILLED.** As far as the record

goes, Christ gave no Sabbath recognition whatever to the seventh day *after His resurrection*. In a matter of so great importance what He *did not* do serves to clarify and emphasize what He *did*. On the morrow after the seventh-day Sabbath, or, counting from the resurrection day, "after eight days," that is, on the next first day of the week, HE DID APPEAR. and did meet with His assembled disciples. (Jn. 20:26-29.)

By giving His disciples visible, audible, and tangible evidence of His presence and fellowship with them on two successive first days of the week, and withholding such evidence on the intervening seventh day, Christ unmistakably designated the first day of the week for their assembled meeting *with Him*—WITH HIM, WITHOUT WHOM NO SINNER CAN HAVE ACCESS TO GOD. For, "NO MAN COMETH UNTO THE FATHER BUT BY ME". Thus, the Sabbath institution, with all its privilege and duty, was made good to believers, the risen Christ assuring them, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world".

Almost from the beginning of His public ministry, Christ, as Son of Man, had claimed the title and exercised the authority of "*Lord of the Sabbath*". (Mk. 2:28.) By virtue of His special authority, the appointment of the first day of the week to be the Christian Sabbath was officially confirmed. In other words,

the Lord of the Sabbath, by His own example, designated and fixed the first day of the week to be the Christian Sabbath from the day of His resurrection to the end of time.

3. *By the Blessing of God.* "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come they were all together in one place." That *this Pentecost* fell on the first day of the week is certain. For, (1) The prophecy of the Day of the First of the First Fruits had been fulfilled by the resurrection on the first day of the week. "Now is Christ risen and become the First Fruits of them that slept." "Christ, the First Fruits; then they that are Christ's at his coming." (1 Cor. 15:20, 23.) "Jesus Christ, the First-born from the dead." (Col. 1:18; Rv. 1:5.) (2) By the exact count of fifty days from the Day of the First of the First Fruits (Lv. 23:9-14), that is, in this instance, from the resurrection day, Pentecost could be nothing but the first day of the week.

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" poured out upon them in the fulness of His grace and power. Once for all, then, on the first day of the week, God gave His great promised blessing, making further provision for His people's realization of His presence with them by sending the Holy Spirit, "that", as Jesus had said, "he may be with you forever". (Jn. 14:16.) And, from that day to this, the blessings of God have been conspicuous and continuous as His people have

obediently kept the first day of the week.

4. *By the Sanctification of the Holy Spirit.* Three outstanding events followed quickly:

(1) *Preaching the Worldwide Gospel.* The apostles "began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance". A multitude from various parts of the earth having come together, every one heard them speaking in his own language the gospel of the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

(2) *Repentance unto Life.* "And when they heard they were *cut to the heart*, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, *Repent*, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." For Jesus had promised, "When he is come (to you) he will convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment". (Jn. 16:7, 8.)

(3) *Gathering into the Church.* "And there were added unto them on *that day* about three thousand souls." The new creation in Christ began to be revealed in corporate form, the Christian Church.

THUS THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK WAS SANCTIFIED, set apart for the service of God by the Holy Spirit in carrying forward, in the full light of Christ, the great work of saving and sanctifying men.

The first day of the week was set to be the Day of the Sabbath by the same authority, and by similar authoritative acts, GOD'S EXAMPLE, BLESSING, AND SANCTIFICATION, as the seventh day had been set at the beginning. No man, no ecclesiastical or political authority, had anything to do with the change but to accept it.

The Fourth Commandment Unchanged

When the Lord of the Sabbath ordained that the first day of the week was, thenceforth, to be the day of the Sabbath, no change in the wording of the Fourth Commandment was necessary. It had been framed to protect the institution. It reads, literally, (1) "*Remember the day of the Sabbath to keep it holy.*" Evidently, this applies to whatever day the Sabbath was appointed to fall upon. (2) "*Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work.*" This required no change because the first day of the week is preceded by six consecutive work days (just as the seventh had been). (3) "*But the seventh day is a Sabbath unto Jehcvah thy God: (in it) thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor . . .*" (any "*within thy gates*"). This required no change because the first day of the week preceded by six work days, is truly a "*seventh*" day in the sense of the original institution. Not one jot nor tittle has passed from this command. It remains in full force.

The Fourth Commandment is an essential

part of the Moral Law of worship to God. It is for all mankind. There is nothing merely Mosaic, Levitical, or Jewish in it. To render true spiritual worship we require a separated portion, or segment of time, free from distractions.

But the first day of the week is much more than a "seventh" day; it is a "first" day, the first day of a new era. It is the Sabbath Day of the new creation, in which a man, remembering that *by his sin* he was disqualified for companionship with God, and incapable of accomplishing anything good by his own efforts, may meet with Christ; receive righteousness and strength from Christ; then go forward saying, as Paul said, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me".

The Obedience of the Christian Church

The first disciples who formed the nucleus of the Christian church were Jews, deeply imbued by tradition, teaching, and habit with the idea that observance of the seventh day was one of the distinguishing marks of their righteousness. And they were slow to understand the Scriptures. Yet under the gracious and powerful influences of the Holy Spirit they were led to remember and follow the teaching and example of Christ.

That the Christians, from the beginning, had their own stated day for the holy convocation of the Sabbath is proven by Heb. 10:

25 RV. It would not have been expected that all could attend "*our own* assembling together" had there been no set time and place. See also 1 Cor. 11:17-20; 14:23-26.

That they assembled on the first day of the week is proven by Acts 20:7, "On the first day of the week, when we (disciples) were gathered together to break bread (i. e., to observe *the Lord's Supper*). Paul preached to them". Also by 1 Cor. 16:1, 2, where a general order is given relating to the worship of God by offerings for His treasury, on the first day of the week.

There is abundant proof in writings of the second and third centuries that the Christians continued to keep Sabbath on the first day of the week, which they called "*the Lord's Day*". (Rv. 1:20.) The distinctive names, "*Lord's Day*" and "*Christian Sabbath*" have borne witness through the years to the invariable practise of the church as a whole.

Faithful observance of the first day of the week is one of the vital defences of the Christian faith. Witness the words of Voltaire: "There is no hope of destroying the Christian religion as long as the Christian Sabbath is acknowledged and kept by men as a sacred day". But the Sabbath has many enemies; not Atheists and Secularists only, but Religionists, such as the modern Dispensationalists, who erroneously teach that the Law of God is not binding on the Christian; that the Sab-

bath has been abolished; thus leading others astray. Then there are the Seventh-Day sects which have reverted to the seventh day, and refuse to acknowledge the Christian Sabbath. These all raise the cry for "religious liberty", which they would use as license to violate the ordinance of God.

In the light of God's Word and of the great historic acts of His grace and power, it is evident that to observe the seventh day and refuse to keep Sabbath on the first day of the week is, in effect:

1. To presume that we can meet peaceably with God, although we refuse to keep the appointment He made to meet with us.
2. To obscure the full moral and spiritual meaning and obligation of the Fourth Commandment by a wilful formality.
3. To refuse the teaching and guidance of the Holy Spirit, who is here to declare the things of Christ, and to apply to believers the great Redemption.
4. To discredit one of the oldest and most convincing witnesses to the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, without which the Christian faith would be void.
5. To deny that the resurrection is the supreme epoch of Redemption, God's seal and pledge of pardon and acceptance in Jesus

Christ, without Whom the Sabbath institution can have no real value for sinners.

How perfectly it accords with the eternal fitness of things that the Lord's Day which has been specifically claimed for His own by Christ, who always and in all things is to have the pre-eminence, should itself have the pre-eminence among the days of the week.

