

Sunday Worship

There are Christian Sabbath keepers who suggest that Christian worship on Sunday is some kind of aberration or distortion introduced into the church by Emperor Constantine and complicit Christians in the fourth century. This is proven to be blatantly false as there is evidence that Christians worshipped on Sunday in Apostolic times. So, in the Acts of the Apostles, we read of the disciples coming together to break bread on the first day of the week; and in the Book of the Revelation, we read that St. John the Divine was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. The special Greek phrase translated as the Lord's Day is used by other writers from the first century to mean Sunday, the first day of the week.

There is also first century documented evidence of Sunday as the day of worship for Christians.

- Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who died about 115AD, says that Christians before his time attained unto newness of hope, no longer observing Sabbaths, but fashioning their lives after the Lord's Day, on which our life also arose.
- Justin Martyr in the second century says: "On the day called Sunday, there is an assembly in the same place of all who live in cities or in country districts. Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly."
- Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in France, in the second century says: "Abraham himself without circumcision, and without the observance of the Sabbath, believed God and he was called the friend of God."

Contrary to misinformation spread by Christian observers of the Sabbath, all Constantine did was to make Sunday a State holiday – the day which Christians had for centuries been celebrating in honour of Our Lord's resurrection.

A Spiritual Relationship

The lingering question remains, of what value is the Sabbath for the Christian today?

The Sabbath was made for man, that is, for man's physical and spiritual good; for rest of body so we can render efficient service for the week, and refreshment of soul, by worship; and this we do on one day out of every seven.

That is why our Lord says that the Sabbath was made for man's good. The particular day does not matter. If it were the day that matters, then man was made for the Sabbath,

and that means we are under Law. If, on the other hand, it is man's spiritual good that matters, then the Sabbath was made for man, and we are not under the Law but are the sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ. That is the teaching of Our Lord and of the Apostles.

The life that we now live; we live by faith in Jesus Christ. This is the principle that makes all the difference. It is a spiritual relationship with Jesus that matters, and so the New Covenant is a covenant of the Spirit, not of the letter.

We are buried with Christ in baptism, we receive His Holy Spirit in Confirmation; we feed on His sacrificial life in Holy Communion; we draw near to Him in prayer; and we refrain from evil, not because of Commandments or the Law, but because we are one with Christ, and evil has no place in the life of Christ nor in the life with Christ. This explains why the New Testament exhorts Christians to every kind of virtue and to refrain from every kind of evil, but not once does it encourage us to keep the Jewish Sabbath. Our relationship with Christ is expressed by our love, and that is the great principle of the Christian life.

To sum up, we worship on Sunday because once a week, we commemorate Our Lord's Resurrection. Our Lord rose again on the first day, and this is the day we keep, not in the oldness of the letter of the law but in the freedom of the Spirit.



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The Sabbath & Sunday Worship

Origins

The word Sabbath is derived from a root which means "to desist" and is seen to have Babylonian origins. In early Israelite faith, it came to represent a day of abstinence from normal business routine. It evolved to become a weekly observance marking the end of the seven day week, and involving complete withdrawal from any kind of work. It was subsequently linked with the creation stories of Genesis 2. The Sabbath gained importance within Judaism having been grounded in the Ten Commandments, and along with circumcision, it became the fundamental and distinguishing features of the Jews, giving them a unique character amongst non-Jews.

- The Sabbath is seen as God's (Exodus 20:10). It is a day blessed by Him, and an expression of his covenant with Israel (Exodus 31:14+). To profane the Sabbath, as is true of circumcision, is to be in breach of the covenant.

-The observance of the seventh day of the week is, certainly, not the only reference to the Sabbath. In addition, the law also required that every seventh year be observed in its entirety as a Sabbath Year (Leviticus 25:1-7 & 18-22) – a year of complete rest for the land. Sowing, pruning and reaping were all forbidden during that Sabbath Year.

-The term Sabbath also took on a more comprehensive and radical imperative with the observance of the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:8-17 & 25-55). After seven Sabbath years, that is, forty-nine years, the Fiftieth Year is declared 'A Sabbath of Sabbaths'. Beginning on the Day of Atonement (the tenth day of the seventh month), this 'Sabbath of Sabbaths' requires not only the usual rest period for the law but the freeing of all slaves, the cancellation of debts and the restoration of land to its ancestral families.

Defining the Sabbath

While the Ten Commandments are to be found in Exodus 20, there is yet another account in Deuteronomy 5 which gives a further moral imperative to the understanding of the Sabbath. The focus here, is not on rest and withdrawal from work, but on God's activity for the liberation of his people. This is what Deuteronomy says: ***"Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day"***. This command is least emphasized in the discussions on the seventh day.

Any attempt to define the Sabbath in terms of the seventh day is not adequate. **THE SEVENTH DAY IS A SMALL FRACTION OF WHAT THE SABBATH MEANT TO ANCIENT ISRAEL.** Apart from the fact that the seventh day was ordained (in the law) more for rest than for worship, it is neither practical nor honest to separate it from the vast complex of legislation that requires Sabbath keeping in the Old Testament. It is, therefore, unfaithful to the Scriptures to redefine the Sabbath and to present it as "the day of worship" exclusively.

Seventh Day Adventists

The most popular and widespread interpretation of the Sabbath, as we know it today, is that taught by the Seventh Day Adventist "Church" which was founded in 1863 A.D.

- A close examination will show that this Sabbath does not correspond with the various interpretations found in the Bible, but rather, that the Bible is being used to validate a religious and theological novelty invented by Mrs. Ellen G. White (1827-1915).
- The first clue to suggest the difference between the Biblical Sabbath and Mrs. White's, is that she begins with the assumption that the Sabbath is primarily a day of worship – and, in fact, the only right day of worship.
- In not one of the many texts relating to the Sabbath, is worship explicitly commanded. The idea of a weekly cycle of worship, in addition to the Festivals, was introduced much later as a Christian practice, independent of the Sabbath and centred on the first day of the week, Sunday.

- Christian Seventh Day observance does not arise out of any historical experience of the whole Covenant people, the Church universal, but out of the mind of certain individuals who were not integrally part of the wider Church. It is significant that all the changes in the life and teaching of the community of faith recorded in Scripture, were done out of love for the Covenant and the tradition, never out of hostility towards it, and those outside of it, as in this case.

Attempts by Christian Seventh Day observers to locate Ellen G. White and her companion, William Miller, among the ranks of the prophets of the 8th century and the exilic period, lack credibility, especially since they (Miller/White) have re-defined prophecy to mean speculations about future events (fortune telling). Besides, not one of those Biblical Prophets ever set up a sect, cult or "church" against the "Congregation of Israel".

The Old and New Covenants

We Anglicans, like all other Christians who have observed the historic faith since the days of the Apostles, worship on Sunday.

- We do so because, in the first place, we are not obliged to keep any day as the exclusive day of worship, neither is this required in order to be saved.
- Secondly, we celebrate our Lord's Resurrection by worshipping on the first day of the week.

Our Lord and his Apostles kept the Jewish Sabbath. In addition, they observed many other Jewish rites and ceremonies, including circumcision and the Feast of the Passover. They also attended the Temple and Synagogue worship. The Sabbath was a Jewish institution observed by faithful Jews and we Gentile Christians are not Jews.

The old Jewish Covenant had to do with laws, ceremonies and institutions. The Christian Covenant has to do with a Person.

- The old Covenant says: ***"See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today."***
- The New Covenant says: ***"Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."***

Bear this difference in mind, and the New Testament becomes quite plain. **Not once in the Gospels or Epistles are Christians urged to keep the Sabbath. Our Lord was frequently accused of breaking the Sabbath because He DID THINGS FORBIDDEN by the Jewish Rabbis as being against the Law.**

- St. Paul tells the Romans: ***"Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds."***
- He says to the Galatians who were depending on the Law for salvation. ***"You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years. I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted... Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian."***
- He says to the Colossians: ***"Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or Sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come."***

Faith, Not Laws

There is an essential difference between the Old Covenant and the New. The old Mosaic Law was only a preparation for the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ; and so the New Testament speaks of a change of Priesthood, a New Covenant and a change of the Law. We Christians are taught by the Bible not to look to the Law for salvation but to Jesus Christ himself. Jesus was born under the Law that he might redeem us from the curse of the Law. If we have to keep a host of laws in order to be saved, we are putting ourselves under the curse of the Law again.

According to the New Testament, Christians are not saved by observing laws. They are saved through faith in Jesus Christ. Nowhere do we read of Our Lord commanding his disciples to observe Saturdays.

It has been argued that the Fourth Commandment, the Sabbath commandment, was given at creation to all Mankind, and along with the other nine Commandments is binding upon all mankind. On the contrary, the other nine Commandments in their Jewish setting are not good enough for Christians. They are below the Christian ideal of life.

St. Paul says that the Covenant from Sinai bears children unto bondage. So, for example, we no longer believe that God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. Even Jeremiah and Ezekiel did not believe this, for they taught that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father. Nor do we accept that house, wife, servant; ox and ass belong to the head of the house as in the Old Testament. Our Lord makes it plain that the Ten Commandments are below His standard.

For example, He says: ***"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'... but I say to you..."*** The Christian law, if law it can be called, is love of God and love of one's neighbour, as St. Paul says: ***"Love is the fulfilment of the Law."***