

The Sabbath Day/Lord's Day Controversy. **By Nick Bibile**

The observance of the Sabbath Day/Lord's Day was not a controversy in the early church and the majority of the churches taught and observed in observing the Lord's Day. History proves. Philip Schaff the great church historian who wrote volumes of church history said,

"It is incorporated in the Decalogue [the Ten Commandments], the moral law, which Christ did not come to destroy, but to fulfill, and which cannot be robbed of one commandment without injury to all the rest." (Taken from the eight volume History of the Christian Church by Philip Schaff; volume 1, pages 476-480.) Also he said, " Next to the Church and the Bible, the Lord's Day is the chief pillar of Christian society."

If you look at the history Sabbath day of the Christian church the Sabbath day was called the Christian Sabbath and even in this country the stores were closed and everything was closed on Sunday except the hospitals, Pharmacies, police, fire dept and other essential departments, but things changed when Dispensationalism penetrated in the 1800's specially with Scoldfiled Bible and Darby's teachings.

The early Church throughout history did not believe that the fourth commandment is abolished. If Charles Spurgeon was alive today will he agree with the dispensational teaching on the fourth commandment? Yes, he will. Spurgeon too like all the reformers believed the moral law of the Sabbath Day still continues and this is what Spurgeon said on keeping the Lord's Day.

1. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days (Lev. 23:3), and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship (Ps. 92:1-2; Isa. 58:13-14), except so much as is taken up in the works of necessity and mercy (Matt. 12:11-12). (Taken from Charles Spurgeon's Catechism)

Let us see what John Bunyan said on the fourth commandment.

"Have a special care to sanctify the Lord's Day; for as thou keepest it, so it will be with thee all the weeklong. Make the Lord s day the market for thy soul; let the whole day be spent in prayer, repetitions, or meditations; lay aside the affairs of the other part of the week; let thy sermon thou hast heard be converted into prayer. Shall God allow thee six days, and wilt thou not afford him one? In the church be careful to serve God, for thou art in his eyes, and not in man's." (John Bunyan)

Arthur W. Pink said, on the fourth commandment, **"The lasting nature or perpetuity of this twofold Commandment is further evidenced by the fact that in the above reason given for its enforcement there was nothing which was peculiarly pertinent to the nation of Israel, but instead, that which speaks with clarion voice to the whole human race. Moreover, this statute was given a place not in the ceremonial law of Israel, which was to be done away when Christ fulfilled its types, but in the Moral Law, which was written by the finger of God Himself upon tables of stone, to signify to us its permanent nature."**

Thomas Watson (1620-1686) the famous puritan writer said, **"The thing I would have you now observe is, that the commandment of keeping the Sabbath was not abrogated with the ceremonial law, but is purely moral, and the observation of it is to be continued to the end of the world."**

The great theologian Charles Hodge (1797-1878) said, **" It is a strong argument in favour of this conclusion, that the law of the Sabbath was taken up and incorporated in the new dispensation by the Apostles, the infallible founders of the Christian Church. All the Mosaic laws founded on the permanent relations of men either to God or to their fellows, are in like manner adopted in the Christian Code. They are adopted, however, only as to their essential elements."**

The church fathers are those who were the disciples of the apostles and the early Christians would also disagree with the dispensational view on the fourth commandment as they too saw the moral law of the Sabbath Day. Let us see some of their quotations.

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, A.D. 101, says: **"Let every one that loves Christ keep holy the Lord's day--the queen of days, the resurrection day, the highest of all days."**

Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons, who also lived in the second century, and who was a disciple of Polycarp, who was a companion of apostle John, speaks of the Lord's Day as the Christian Sabbath. **"On the Lord's day," said he, "every one of us Christians keeps the Sabbath."**

Clement of Alexandria, of the same century, testifies: "A Christian, according to the command of the gospel, observes the Lord's day, thereby glorifying the resurrection of the Lord."

The meaning of Sabbath Day.

(Heb. verb shabbath, meaning "to rest from labour"), the day of rest. The sabbath was made for man, as a day of rest and refreshment for the body and of blessing to the soul.

Is it a Commandment?

Yes, it is the fourth commandment. Is the fourth commandment applicable to the church today? If the fourth commandment is abolished then there would be no 10 Commandments (**Decalogue**) but Nine Commandments. (**Ennealogue**) The 10 Commandments are the moral law of God. Jesus summarized the 10 commandments in the following.

Mt 22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Jesus did not say, "on these two commandments hangs all the law and the prophets except the fourth commandment."

What about the ceremonial part of the Fourth Commandment?

The ceremonial law was abolished by our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, but the substance, the moral side of the law still exists. The ceremonial law of the Sabbath is done away but the substance of the Sabbath still continues. John Calvin said:

"Early Christian writers are wont to call it typical, as containing the external observance of a day which was abolished with the other types on the advent of Christ. This is indeed true; but it leaves the half of the matter untouched." ((BOOK II CHAPTER 8 SECTION 29 THE SABBATH COMMANDMENT AS PROMISE)

What about Romans 14:5-6 and Col 2:16?

The majority of the churches interpret Romans 14:5-6 as it does not matter what day you worship the Lord. Remember always you need to interpret scripture in context.

Basically, there were two ethnic groups in the church. The Christian Jews and the Christian Gentiles.

The Jewish believers tried to impose the Jewish ceremonial laws into the church. Romans chapter 14, the context is the same. The Jewish believers did not eat meat with the Gentile believers, as they could have been unclean according to the Jewish law. Animals that were consecrated to the idols were forbidden to eat. Animals that were died in disease or killed by other animals were prohibited to eat. Then there were many various other restrictions. In the same context when we come to verse five and six, we see the Jewish believers wanted to impose certain Jewish holy days. The Passover, the Jews observed the feast of tabernacles, the Pentecost and the seventh day Sabbath. Again, they failed to realize these ceremonial laws were abolished in Christ Jesus on the cross. The Jewish Christians still observed the Seventh Day Sabbath, while the Gentile Christians were observing the first day of the week in honour of Christ's resurrection.

The worship was changed to Sunday. The disciples worshipped the Lord Jesus on the resurrection day, Sunday. The early church met on Sunday. (Acts 20:6) Offerings were collected on Sunday. (1 Cor 16:1) The book of Revelation was given on Sunday.

Matthew Henry in his commentary points out, ***"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. Those who knew that all these things were abolished by Christ's coming esteemed everyday alike. We must understand with the exception of the Lord's Day, which all Christians unanimously observed. The apostle seems willing to let the ceremonial law wither by degrees, and to let it have an honorable burial."***

The ceremonial laws were nailed to the cross and the substance of the Sabbath still continues, as the veil of the curtain is torn down now we can come boldly to his throne room without and any ceremonial laws.

Let us also see the context in Colossians chapter two on this subject. The Arminians would take verse 17, and say, "look the Sabbath day worship does not count anymore, so let us go to church and do what ever we want to." Again the majority of the churches fails to distinguish between the Jewish Sabbath and the Christian Sabbath and they fail to observe the Christian Sabbath saying it no longer valid. They throw the baby with the bathwater.

Col 2:14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

Verse 14, blotting out means in Greek cancelled, rub off, wipe off or erase. Now think carefully, what was cancelled? That which was contrary to us, against us. This law was against the Jews. And this is not the moral law but the ceremonial law.

Beloved, let me ask this question, how can the Jew and the Gentile, the two can become one? By abolishing the ceremonial law. The enmity between the Jew and the Gentile was the middle wall of partition. That middle wall was broken by Christ on the cross, now the two are reconciled together and in Christ, there is peace.

Eph 2:15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

Now in Colossians verse 16, Paul is making a plea for freedom as the ceremonial laws are abolished let us not pass judgments in these matters. Note, Paul speaks on Sabbaths plural or Sabbath days which clearly points to ceremonial. There was the Jubilee of Sabbath, the land of the Sabbath and the ceremonial of day of Sabbath. These outward ceremonies or the ceremonial laws were abolished.

These were just shadows, but the substance is of Christ, and the substance remains. The substance of the Sabbath, the Lord of the Sabbath is still alive, and the substance the worship of the Lord is changed to the Lord's Day and the substance of worship was never abolished.

Let us see Galatians 4:9-10.

Ga 4:9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

Now Paul is speaking to the Gentile Christians here. They came to know God through faith in Christ. The Gentile Christians were drawn into the spider web of Judaizers saying that you need to observe the seventh day of Sabbath and all the other days of the Old Testament. Then Paul objected the Gentiles as they took them as a means of salvation.

Why the Sabbath Day Important?

Jesus said; "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." (Mr 2:27)

This is a very important scripture where many of us overlook. The rest day was made for man. Which reminds us the first pages of the Bible.

Ge 2:3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

Sabbath was made for man to rest from his labors and make it holy, separate from our worldly things unto the Lord.

Then God incorporated to the 10 Commandments.

Ex 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Sabbath Day was observed in the Old Testament as God repeatedly speaks of keeping the Sabbath Day and the punishment was severe, the breaking of the Sabbath laws caused the children of Israel to be taken captive by the Babylonians. Then in the N.T there is not one scripture to show that Sabbath Day was abolished by Jesus.

Example of Jesus.

Lu 4:16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

The seventh day was a blessing to man, so Jesus was a blessing to man and he came to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance and give sight to the blind. He did most of his healings upon the sick on the Sabbath day; he did many miracles on the Sabbath day. He came to redeem us and to reconcile us back to God. He spoke these words on the Sabbath day and said, today this scripture is fulfilled. The Lord of the Sabbath is here. He is the holy one who can redeem us and sanctify us for his glory.

Jesus did not break a single law but fulfilled all of the law. The Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders misinterpreted the law out of context. They accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath and Jesus never said I am the Lord of the Sabbath therefore I can break the Sabbath, instead Jesus gave them the fuller meaning of the Sabbath.

It is not legalism.

When you speak on the Sabbath day to a dispensationalist they will brand you as a legalist. They are so ignorant of the word of God; they do not know how to distinguish between the ceremonial law and the moral law. In this lesson let us see very clearly see what is true legalism and how the Lord Jesus came against the legalist of his day, but yet how he did not break the Sabbath but observed the Sabbath day in the right content. He did not break one single law but fulfilled all the law

Mt 5:17 Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

Legalists Add to the Word of God.

Mt 12:1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were a hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.

2 But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.

3 But he said unto them, have ye not read what David did, when he was a hungred, and they that were with him;

4 How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests?

5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?

6 But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple.

This incident happened on the Sabbath Day. Here we see the disciples of the Lord were hungry and they plucked some ears of corn. They rubbed between their hands to get the husk out so they can eat the corn. According to Pharisaic interpretation, to rub an ear of corn is a kind of threshing, and, as it is very wrong to thresh on the Sabbath day. This is a kind of works, as work was prohibited, as per fourth commandment Even if you are hungry you cannot rub the ear of the corn. This was their version of the Sabbath law. The Pharisees were intent readers of the Law. But our Lord carried the war into the enemy's camp and asked, "Haven't you read?" The Pharisees were legalists. Legalism is adding man's laws to the law of God. It is an outwork of man's law, which God hates. Legalism has to do with man's traditions, which overrides the law of God and adds their traditions to the word of God.

Day changed to Sunday.

In the N.T the Sabbath Day was changed to the First Day of the week, the ceremonial law was nailed to the cross as Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day/Christian Sabbath was observed from that time to have fellowship. On Sunday Jesus appeared to his disciples five different occasions. Jesus appeared to his disciples when they were having fellowship. The Day of Pentecost fell on that year on Sunday, it was the Day the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples and it was the day Peter gave his sermon and souls were saved, people got baptized and 3000 souls were added to the church.

Common Fellowship of the Church. **Communion.**

The disciples had fellowship and communion on the first day of the week, Sunday. (Acts 20:7)

Gathering in one place.

1Co 11:18 For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.

Offerings were made when they were gathered together.

1Co 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

2 Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

Not to forsake.

Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Jews and Gentiles assembling together in one public place to worship God.

Why did God create man?

Ge 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Ge 2:3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

God made man in his own image so we can fellowship with him, worship him. (1 John 1:3; Rev 4:11) Some may say we worship God everyday. Yes it is true we worship God daily, yet we cannot worship God without distraction everyday when we are in the world, at work, at the grocery store, school, traveling, cooking, cleaning. God gave us six days for us to do all these work and yet one day concentrated for him, to be with the believers, to hear the word, praise him together, have communion together, serve together as a family in Christ Jesus.

God blessed this day of rest in his creation and sanctified. Jesus said, he is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Lord of Rest, we can rest in him as God in his creation blessed this day, the blessing centers on the redemption through Jesus Christ as on this Day we look back now and have Communion remembering the his death until he come.

Read Hebrews 4:4-11

The apostle reminds us the from Genesis the rest day where God rested from his work and blessed the rest day. Then he goes on to say of the disobedient Israelites who did not enter the land of Canaan. A type of a heavenly rest in God. Joshua was a type of Christ who being the leader conquered Canaan was able to go to the land of milk and honey.

Heb 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. The word rest in Greek here is *katapauo kat-ap-ow'-o* The word means to be still, rest.

9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

The word rest in Greek here is *sabbatismos sab-bat-is-mos'*

The word rest here means keeping the Sabbath, the rest day.

10 For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

The word rest in Greek here is *katapausis kat-ap'-ow-sis*

The word rest here means resting place.

11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief

The word rest in Greek is *katapausis kat-ap'-ow-sis*

Again word rest here means resting place.

The apostle deliberately paralleled the Sabbath Day of rest to a general rest day which will be eventually be in heaven, which is a heavenly rest from our labor.

Re 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

Keeping the Sabbath is a commandment.

As we saw previously although the ceremonial part of the Sabbath was abolished the moral, inward Sabbath rest still continues as a commandment. Then breaking that commandment or to be disobedience to that commandment is sinful act toward God. It is excused on emergencies and as acts of mercy.

The Lord's Day should be a day that is consecrated and kept holy to the Lord as every day is holy to the Lord, the other days are different as we are mixed with the world. There are too many worldly things that are crowded in our minds specially we are living in a fast pace world. But the Lord's Day is a day to worship and to be sanctified to the Lord. It is a day to refrain from entertainment, sports etc.,

Calvin's sermon on Deut. 5: "If we employ the Lord's day to make good cheer, to sport ourselves, to go to the games and pastime, shall God in this be honored? Is it not a mockery? Is not this an unhallowing of his name?"

Isa 58:13 If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words:

14 Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

The commandment is foretold in Isaiah 56 in our gospel times.

Here we see in verse 1 and verse 4, abolishing of the ceremonial law as righteousness and salvation of God is to be revealed even to the foreigner and the eunich, speaks but the inward Sabbath is not abolished, see verse 3 and 6. It is called a house of prayer in verse 7, reminds of Jesus cleaning up the temple. We present our bodies as a living sacrifice acceptable to God. (Rom 12:1)

It is not a legal ceremonial bondage, but rather a precious gift of grace, a privilege, a holy rest in God in the midst of the unrest of the world, a day of spiritual refreshing in communion with God and in the fellowship of the saints. <http://www.sounddoctrine.net/>