

**THE SABBATH QUESTION:
IS SUNDAY THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH?**

by

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Mark S. Camp, Th.D.

The Sabbath day of the fourth commandment was part of the covenant that God gave to Moses. The Ten Commandments, written on the two tablets of stone, formed the core or main part of the covenant. In Deuteronomy 9:15, Moses says, "So I turned and came down from the mountain...and the two tablets of the covenant were in my two hands."

The Sabbath day was given as a day of rest for the people of Israel. It was also the sign of the Mosaic covenant, just as the rainbow was the sign of the covenant made with Noah, and just as circumcision was the sign of the covenant made with Abraham. Since the Sabbath day was the sign of the covenant, it is proper that it is found right in the heart of the Ten Commandments, the core or nucleus of the covenant.

Most people will say that all of the Ten Commandments are God's "Moral Law." This is right in one sense. God gave these laws as a covenant and the people under that covenant were morally obligated to obey them. However, a perpetual or eternal moral law is one that cannot be broken under any circumstance without fear of punishment. Therefore, it is never right to kill someone in a rage of anger or just because you don't like them. (The commandment not to murder is not dealing with an act of self-defense.) It is never right to dishonor one's parents.

It is never right to take the Lord's name in vain. It is never right to commit adultery, to be jealous, or to steal. It is never right to worship another God. To break any of these "eternal" laws makes a person subject to punishment.

However, a ceremonial law could be broken if necessary. David could eat the bread of the presence because the hunger of his men outweighed the keeping of the ceremonial law. He would not be punished for breaking it for the right reason. The Sabbath could be broken when acts of mercy or necessity had to be performed. Therefore these types of laws are not moral in the sense that they can be broken if necessary without fear of punishment.

It is also important for us who are under the New Covenant to realize that things under the Old Covenant were set forth as types (examples) and shadows of better things which were to come. Failure to see this indicates a lack of understanding about the nature of God's progressive revelation and the history of redemption.

The culmination of the old covenant types and shadows is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Sabbath commandment assured the covenant people of a day of rest. (Keep in mind that the Sabbath institution was comprised of eight various Sabbaths, including the weekly Sabbath, the seventh year

releasing of debts, and the year of Jubilee. If we are to still observe a weekly Sabbath, why are we not also observing all the other types of Sabbaths?) Jesus was the Lord of the Sabbath. When he came, he promised rest to all who would come to him by faith. The shadows of the old covenant passed away - the substance or reality had come.

Under the New Covenant, a person keeps the Sabbath when he or she ceases his or her own efforts at righteousness, and finds “rest” through salvation in Christ. Every day that you are saved you are "keeping the Sabbath day" so to speak. You have ceased from your labors and are allowing God to provide for you. There is still a Sabbath-rest to come when the Lord returns and calls us to glory, ushering in an eternity of unbroken rest with him. Just as the trumpet sounded signifying the start of the Sabbath Jubilee year, so also one day the trumpet of the Lord shall sound signifying the start of the eternal Sabbath-rest of God.

My proposition is therefore, that Sunday IS NOT the Christian Sabbath. The Christian Sabbath is the day of one's salvation when rest is found in Jesus Christ, the reality of the shadow, the Lord of the Sabbath.

If Sunday is the Christian Sabbath, then I want to ask the following questions:

- Where in the New Covenant Scriptures is there any mention of what is proper and what is not proper for a believer to do on Sunday?
- Does the Bible prohibit recreation on the day of rest? After all, who determines what is rest and what is not? One person may get rest by sleeping all day, another may get rest by spending the day fishing, another by swimming, and so on.
- Some people say it is wrong to eat out on Sunday because it causes other people to work on the Sabbath day. I ask, why then does that same person use electricity or gas on Sunday? Why does that person make a telephone call just to talk casually with someone? Why does that person read the Sunday paper? Why does that person even drive on Sunday? After all, someone has to be at work to run the gas and electric company; someone has to be at work at the telephone company; someone has to be out policing the highways in case of an accident or traffic violation; someone is at the water company keeping the water going so that the dishes can be washed (couldn't they be washed on Monday?)
- Does the Scripture teach that believers are obligated to have both morning and evening services on Sunday? No, it does not. The Bible does say that we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. When the church meets, unless providentially hindered, the members should come together. But, if the church does not meet two or three times on Sunday, the believer ought not to feel guilty. We assemble for fellowship and worship, not to meet a quota. Some churches have so much going on Sunday, that it becomes anything but a day of rest!

You see, it boils down to this - Everyone who keeps Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, has his or her own set of rules for observing it. There is no one set way to do it. If you really were consistent about every minute thing you could or could not do, you would go insane trying to do or not do them.

In conclusion, I believe the Apostle was most correct when he wrote to the Colossians, "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or new moon or a Sabbath day - things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17).

The Apostle is also most correct when he writes to those in Rome saying, "One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind." (Romans 14:5)

If a person feels that by making Sunday a special day of observance to the Lord that is fine; he or she is at liberty to do so. But, that person has no Scriptural right whatsoever to impose his way of doing things onto other believers. We will all stand before our Master to give account for ourselves and to our Master we will each stand or fall.