**SHOULD CHRISTIANS OBSERVE THE SEVENTH DAY SABBATH?**

**THE CONFESSION OF A FORMER SABBATH OBSERVER**

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**Berean Baptist Church: June 23, 2019**

INTRODUCTION

Many years ago, at the conclusion of a paper I had written on the question of which day Christians should keep for their day of rest, I stated the following”

*“I Firmly adhere to the ideas stated on behalf of those who believe in the seventh day Sabbath, because I find this evidence to be overwhelmingly convincing….We must not close our minds to sound evidence, even if we have held a contrary opinion all of our lives. Remember, once light is shed upon a darkened area of our minds, we are responsible to obey that light….I would like to ask you a very pertinent question—“Do you keep the fourth commandment?”*

Various groups argue for the validity of seventh day observance. Some are cultists such as Seventh Day Adventists and followers of Herbert W. Armstrong; but some more mainstream groups have done so such as Seventh Day Baptists. I was the follower of a small group of earnest believers in western PA who were trained under an evangelist named E. Lowell Martin. Martin had undoubtedly been influenced by such persons as Armstrong and Seventh Day Baptists, but had morphed his doctrinal positions into his own unique system of beliefs.

First we will look at some arguments by the sabbatarians, then we will examine the Biblical and historical evidence to show that Sunday is indeed the day intended for Christians to observe.

1. ARGUMENTS FOR THE 7TH DAY SABBATH

* Some cults such as SDA base their position largely on extra-scriptural revelation; Ellen White claims a vision in 1847 wherein she was taken into the Holy of Holies and was shown the 10 commandments with a halo around the Sabbath commandment.
* The SDA argues that Rev. 14:9-12 depicts the wrath of God against apostasy in forsaking the commandments of God—especially the 4th—and following “the beast” into apostasy; the true saints remain faithful to the commandments (v. 12).

1. The sabbath was not merely a sign between God and Israel as seen in Ex. 31:12-17, but is intended as a sign between God and His people in all ages—proving their loyalty to the God of all creation.
2. The Sabbath has not been done away with in the fulfillment of the OT Law through the finished work of Christ; the Law may be divided into *sacrificial, ceremonial, civil, and* ***moral*** *elements*. Christ fulfilled the sacrificial and ceremonial parts of the Law, the civil aspects of the Law were only directly intended for Israel, but the moral Law will always be valid and endures forever—see Mt. 5:17, 19.
3. To argue that the Sabbath law was not given before Mt. Sinai when commanded to Israel overlooks the point that God set apart the 7th day at Creation (Gen. 2:3). He likely revealed this law to Adam, along with other moral laws and sacrificial rituals, and Adam would have passed these truths down to his descendants.
4. The Sabbath was made for “man” (Mk. 2:28), all men, not merely Israel.
5. Israel had forgotten about God and His commandments while in Egypt for over 400 years, so Yahweh needed to reveal Himself anew to them in Egypt and especially at Sinai.
6. The Sabbath will be observed in the kingdom age (Is. 66:23); thus it must have been meant for all ages—including this one.
7. Jesus said in reference to the moral laws that “whoever annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 5:19). John states that “he who says ‘I know Him,’ and keeps not His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him” (I Jn. 2:4). See I Jn. 5:3 also.
8. Jesus worshiped in synagogues on the Sabbath—not merely to please the Jews and because He was under the Law, but because He loved His Father and lived in obedience to all of His commandments. His life serves as an example to us.
9. Paul worshipped and preached in synagogues on the Sabbath not only to witness to unconverted Jews, but also as a personal act of obedience to God.
10. Nowhere in the Scriptures—either in the Old or in the New Testaments—does God change or alter the seventh day as the day of rest to be observed by all people. Nowhere does God command Christians to worship on the first day of the week.
11. Verses used to prove the first day of the week observance have better explanations:
12. Col. 2:14-17 does not deal with the seventh day Sabbath; Paul speaks of “sabbath days.” He likely refers to the special festival days (Lev. 23-25) turned into days of rest just like the weekly Sabbath day.
13. Christ did not rise on the first day of the week, but rather at the end of the Sabbath day, as “it began to dawn toward the first day of the week” (Mt. 28:1). Christ was buried late Wednesday afternoon and rose late Saturday afternoon—three days and three nights.
14. Acts 20:7 describes a meeting held after the Sabbath was over so that Paul and his other companions who were embarking on a long trip toward Israel could travel on the first day of the week and not on the Sabbath. The meeting was held in the evening of the first day of the week and the travel was during the daylight period of the first day.
15. In John 20:19 the disciples could hardly have been gathering to observe the resurrection, for they did not even believe that Jesus was risen! They were hiding from the Jewish authorities.
16. I Cor. 16:1-2 does not speak of a Sunday worship service, but rather of work to be done on the first day—after the Sabbath was over—by putting away money and supplies to be carried later to Jerusalem to provide for the poor Christians (II Cor. 9:1-5; etc.).
17. Rom. 14:5-6 does not give each person the right to determine whether or not to observe the Sabbath, but speaks of Jewish festival days etc. The same is true of Gal. 4:10-11.
18. ARGUMENTS FOR “THE LORD’S DAY”—SUNDAY, THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK
19. Reversing the sabbatarian argument, no NT commandment exists that endorses the observance of the Sabbath day; all of the other 10 commandments are supported by NT teaching, but the Sabbath is not. For example, compare Mt. 5:21-37—murder, adultery, and false witness.
20. Hebrews 4:1-9 shows that today the Sabbath represents the heavenly rest given to the people of God.
21. Jesus, living under the OT law, observed the Sabbath as any good Jew would do; Paul went into synagogues on the sabbath in order to preach to and to win Jews to Christ. Paul clearly states that he behaves as a Jew when with them in order to win them, as under the Law to those under the Law, yet himself not under the Law (I Cor. 9:19-20).
22. The earliest church fathers spoke of the observance of “the Lord’s day”—the first day of the week:
23. John the apostle in Rev. 1:10—could refer to “the Day of the Lord,” but this expression at the end of the 1st century and into the 2nd century clearly speaks of the First day of the week as the day Jesus arose and on which Christians met (see both *NASB Study Bible*, p. 1849 and *ESV Study Bible*, p. 2464).
24. *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, section 9 states: “If then those who had walked in ancient practices attained unto newness of hope, no longer observing Sabbaths, but fashioning their lives after the Lord’s Day, on which our life also arose through Him” (about 107 A.D.).
25. The *Epistle of Barnabas*, section 5: “Wherefore also we keep the 8th day [Sunday, next day after the 7th day] for rejoicing, in the while also Christ rose from the dead and having manifested Himself ascended into the heavens” (ca. 120-165 A.D.).
26. The *Didache*, section 14: “And on the Lord’s Day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks” (ca. 120-165 A.D.).
27. Justin Martyr’s *First Analogy*, chapter 67: “But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the First Day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day arose from the dead” (ca.155 A.D.).
28. Irenaeus: “The mystery of the Lord’s resurrection may not be celebrated on any other day than the Lord’s Day” (178 A.D.).
29. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 194) states: “The old Sabbath day has become no more than a working day.”
30. Contrary to SDA and many others, the Pope did not change the Sabbath to the First Day of the week; Mrs. White wrongly interpreted the changing of “times and laws” in Daniel 7:25 as a reference to the changing of the Sabbath observance.
31. Sabbatarians do not truly observe the Sabbath as in the OT, for many rituals were also connected with Sabbath observance such as specific animal sacrifices. The observance of the Sabbath was intricately connected with ceremonial and sacrificial observances. 35 of the 75 OT references to the Sabbath speak of ceremonial practices.
32. The Pharisees had added many rituals to the Sabbath not found in the OT, and Christ refused to be bound by their ritual additions; such led to conflicts between Him and them, and He declared Himself to be “Lord of the Sabbath” (Mk. 2:28).
33. Paul regularly preached on the Sabbath in synagogues, but did not “break bread with them” as he did when meeting with his disciples on the Lord’s Day.
34. Mk. 16:9 specifically states that the Lord arose “early on the first day of the week” (if part of the original text; at the very least the words convey accurate Christian teaching); the other Gospels all show that the tomb had been opened early on the first day and that it was empty.
35. The OT feast of “firstfruits” foreshadowed the resurrection of Christ, who is the “firstfruits” from the dead (I Cor. 15:20, 23; Lev. 23:10-11). This sheaf was offered during the week of the Passover on “the day after the Sabbath”—first day of the week.
36. Jesus deliberately met His disciples for the first time after His resurrection on a Sunday evening (Lk. 24:13-43—on the road to Emmaus and in the upper room). Note that He made these appointments, not the disciples who as yet did not understand the truth of the resurrection.
37. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to form the NT church on the day of Pentecost—the first day of the week (Acts 2:1-13). Note that 50 days from the day after the Sabbath when the sheaf of the firstfruits was offered would be another first day of the week (Lev. 23:15-16).
38. The first Christian sermon was also preached by Peter on the first day of the week, resulting in the conversion of 3,000 persons (Acts 2:14-41).
39. The initial rite of Christian baptism took place on the first day of the week (Acts 2:41).
40. The church met to worship and to observe the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Note that Luke speaks about their “gathering to break bread” as though it was the customary practice of believers. Also, the Roman day from midnight to midnight was surely being followed in Ephesus and the surrounding region, for when they departed in the morning Luke calls it “the next day.” Thus, the heavy travel was not taking place on the Lord’s Day.
41. Paul commanded that the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem be put aside by each believer in Corinth and saved for delivery by Paul and his company on each first day of the week (I Cor. 16:1-4). Now such instructions hardly make sense unless these believers were all free and available on this day to carry out such a task, and also to coordinate the task as a church body. There must have been some sort of central storage location so that Paul did not have to scout about gathering from each home.
42. The **vast majority of Christians in all ages** have acknowledged that the first day of the week is the Lord’s Day.
43. The Sabbath observance was given under the Law; the believer lives in the dispensation of grace (cf. Rom. 6:14-15; Rom. 10:4; compare “the ministry of death” with the ministry of the Spirit” in II Cor. 3:7-11; Gal. 3:24-25—“faith” has come and believers are no longer under the guardian of the Law; the believer’s position now is that of sonship, not slavery (Gal. 4:1-7); Heb. 8:9-13—in forming the “New Covenant” He makes the old one obsolete.
44. Paul speaks generally about Christians and special “days,” and is ambivalent as to whether the believer ought to observe them (Rom.14:5-7); each believer must determine before God what he should do. Surely the feast days are in view, but it is possible that Paul here includes the Sabbath. In Gal. 4:10-11 Paul specifically rebukes the Galatians for falling into the trap of feeling compelled to observe certain “days,” “months,” “seasons,” and “years.” “Months” may refer to the new moon celebrations, “seasons” to the festal seasons, “years” to the special 7th year of rest or even the year of Jubilee etc., and “days” could surely involve Sabbaths, the Day of Atonement, etc.
45. Acts 15:28-29 is a powerful witness to the fact that Sabbath keeping was never laid upon the Gentiles for their observance; the only recommendations for Gentiles to avoid offense to Jews were “things sacrificed to idols,” “blood,” “things strangled,” and “fornication.”
46. Paul’s strong argument against the necessity of circumcision for Gentiles in Gal. 5:2-6, 18 shows that any Law requirement thus laid upon Gentiles, including the Jewish sabbath that was such an integral part of their law system, would place NT believers under the yoke of the Law.

I have saved the strongest argument against the need to observe the Sabbath Day in this dispensation until last: Paul absolutely forbids making the Sabbath Day a requirement for believers in this dispensation of grace: Col. 2:16-17—“Let no man therefore judge you in meat [food], or in drink, or in respect to a holy-day [Jewish annual festivals], or of the new moon [monthly celebrations], or of the sabbath *days*: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” I used to argue that “Sabbaths,” the word is plural, speaks of Jewish festival Sabbaths. However, the verse absolutely demands a reference to the **weekly** Sabbath, since Paul orders the observances from annual, to monthly, to weekly.

CONCLUSION

Clearly then, anyone who demands Sabbath observance today is in disobedience to Scripture.

God does not require the observance of the Sabbath today, and keeping the Sabbath does not make one a better Christian!

Let no man judge you on issues about which God makes no demands.

We have enough to do in order to keep all of the expectations given us in the NT!

**Should Christians observe the Seventh Day Sabbath? NO, NO, NO!**

Let God be true, though every man be a liar.