

The Sabbath Answering Objections

As we look at various doctrines, it is easy to present the basis for a given doctrine. For the Sabbath, we point to the creation story and the tables of stone at Sinai. What could be simpler? But, as with the state of the dead, there are many texts which make reference to the Sabbath, and they do not all do so in simple didactic ways. At times it would seem as if God made things a bit difficult by allowing commentary at various points to seemingly say different things. Yet, as we study, we can find that there is in fact no contradiction. But as students, we will be challenged from time to time, and it is necessary for us to learn not only the simple facts, but also the arguments placed against those seemingly simple facts.

In this session, we will explore several of the most common objections raised against Sabbatarianism. These are raised by serious students of the Bible as well as simple critics. Therefore we must carefully examine both the arguments raised by the critics and the scriptural admonitions.

The first objection, and probably the most common one, is that the apostles and the early church observed Sunday from the earliest days as a memorial of the resurrection. The historical record on this is clear, and unequivocally states that that is not the case. But Sunday proponents will not readily accept the record of history, since it is so distant, and is controverted by some modern authorities. We must examine scripture. Acts 2 (Q1) is supposed to present the first Sunday gathering in memorial of the resurrection. Yet, the Pentecost account simply states that "they were all together in one place." No purpose for the assembly is given. In Acts 1, we find that the apostles convened to pick a replacement for Judas. In this immediately following passage, we should legitimately assume that the purpose of the assembly is the day: Pentecost. As we follow the story, when the apostles were anointed with the Holy Spirit, a multitude heard the wind-like noise which accompanied the anointing. They came to the source of the noise, and heard the disciples speak. About three thousand were converted. This requires a large place of assembly, and the only one of that size in Jerusalem was the Temple. Given these facts, the Acts 2 story represents an assembly by the apostles on Solomon's Porch (probably) of the Temple for the day of Pentecost ceremonies. It has no bearing on Sabbath/Sunday observance.

When we examine further the day of Pentecost (Q2), we find that it is determined by counting seven Sabbaths (or weeks) after the Wavesheaf offering, which was to be done on the first day of the week. Thus, because the language is not entirely clear, it may be that Pentecost fell on a Monday! The common conclusion of Pentecost on Sunday may be correct, but it is not certain. Finally, (Q3) we should note that the date of Pentecost cannot be determined without the Sabbath, so the Sabbath must still exist, based on the observation of Pentecost.

The story of Eutychus (Q4, Acts 20:7-12) is another place where Sunday proponents suggest that there is evidence of a Sunday gathering for worship. Yet, as we examine this story carefully, several problems arise for that view. The first is that the assembly was for the purpose of "breaking bread." Modern interpreters happily assume that this means a religious assembly such as the Lord's Supper. However, this is not necessarily true. In Jewish society, bread was the staple of the meal, and bread was never cut, it was broken by hand into pieces and passed around the table. "Breaking bread" is simply an expression for gathering to eat a meal (See Luke 24:29-35), similar to the expression "reclining at the table" (Matt 8:11, Luke 12:37-39; 14:10; 24:30). So this story is probably an account of the believers gathering for a last meal with Paul before he left the area.

The next element of the story is the time of the assembly. Sunday proponents argue that the gathering was on Sunday *as we reckon time today*. The account clearly states that the gathering was on the first day of the week, and was prolonged until midnight. That is, they continued until midnight of *the first day of the week*. Since the Jewish day began at sundown, this was *Saturday evening* by modern reckoning. In other words, the gathering was not on Sunday, and was probably not even a religious gathering! Paul spoke about his favorite topic, the gospel, and no one wished to leave, so the meeting continued to midnight. As can be seen, there is nothing in the story to suggest sanctity for Sunday.

Paul's admonition (Q5) for believers to set aside their offerings on Sunday (1 Cor 16:2) is often claimed to be a direction to keep Sunday instead of the Sabbath. Once again, when carefully examined, this does nothing of the sort. Paul begins by instructing the believers to examine their finances to then "lay by themselves" (KJV) whatever they could so that there would be no need to make the collection when he came. This was a personal act, not a gathering together. Also, it was a task of personal financial nature,

one which would not be permissible on a holy day, which Sunday would be under the proposal being considered. Therefore, far from supporting Sunday worship, this passage stands against it.

But the most critical problem this text presents arises from the original Greek (Q6). The phrase translated "on the first day of every week" is *kata mian sabbatou*. Even those who do not read Greek will recognize the Greek word for Sabbath. Paul is saying "every first after the Sabbath." In other words, unless Paul had taught the Sabbath to the Corinthian believers, they would have no way to understand his direction! They would have used "the day of the Sun" to describe Sunday, not the first after the Sabbath. Once again, careful examination shows that not only does this text not support Sunday observance, it contradicts it two different ways!

Rev 1:10 (Q7) describes John as being "in the spirit on the Lord's Day." Sunday proponents take this to be the first usage of the term "Lord's Day" for Sunday. Yet when examined, once again, this fails to support Sunday observance. The first issue is historical. The term "Lord's Day" did not actually come into use for Sunday until about a century after John wrote Revelation. This is inconsistent with the idea that the early church kept Sunday and called it the Lord's Day. Another problem is that Lord's Day is semantically identical to "the Day of the Lord," which is used many places in scripture. In every place where this phrase appears, it refers to the second coming, with its attendant judgments on the wicked. When we look at the rest of the Book of Revelation, it is clear that this is exactly what John is seeing. Therefore, the logical answer is that John is saying that he was taken in spirit into the Day of the Lord.

When we examine the pattern of the apostles' activities, it is clear that they kept the Sabbath (Q8). It is described as Paul's custom, and over 75 actual examples of Sabbath observance are recorded. This pattern of behavior was so well known that the entire city of Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:44) knew to come out on Sabbath to hear the apostles speak. There can be no doubt that the apostles kept the Sabbath. We may also note that the Jews were so opposed to the Christians that they brought a curse on Christians into the Sabbath synagogue services so that any Christian attending the synagogue would curse himself.

Finally, we need to look at the Biblical record regarding observances. There is only one (Q9) observance which is commanded which has any relationship to the crucifixion and resurrection. That is the Lord's Supper, which is a testimony regarding Jesus' death, not his resurrection. Not once do we find any evidence in scripture of a commemoration of the resurrection. It is an essential part of the plan of salvation (1 Cor 15:13), but is never memorialized. Thus, the entire "Resurrection Memorial" concept falls for complete lack of evidence.

Just to finish off the issue, we should note that most of the NT was written to non-Jewish audiences who would be accustomed to calling Sunday the day of the Sun. Not once in the NT do we find this term (Q10). Every passage which refers to days of the week uses the Jewish custom of numbered days until Friday, which is the preparation day. Then Sabbath follows and the week begins again. This would be foreign to most of the new converts, yet it is used. Only if the new Christians were taught the Sabbath does this allow the NT to be understandable. Therefore, the apostles both kept and taught the Sabbath. No other conclusion is tenable.

The second line of argument is the Old/New Covenant thesis. In this thesis, the Sabbath comes into being at Sinai as part of the old covenant. It is a limited institution which is done away with when Christ brings in the new covenant at the cross. This is a very convenient idea, since the Sabbath commandment is first recorded in full at Sinai. The law was given at Sinai, and then was fulfilled by Jesus. Once the law is fulfilled, it is no longer binding on the Christian. As we can readily see, the key to the schema is that the Sabbath came into being at Sinai. If this is not true, then the entire thesis falls apart.

When we examine scripture (Q11), we find a solid confirmation of the Edenic origin of the Sabbath. The creation account includes the creation of the Sabbath (implied in the Hebrew as an act of creation, not just a continuation). The Sabbath commandment begins with "Remember," then proceeds to tell us that we are to remember the Sabbath because it was established at creation. Mark's gospel records Jesus speaking of the *creation* of the Sabbath, using language which specifically points to Eden rather than Sinai. Mark specifically records that Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath because he *created* it. Finally, in Hebrews, the discussion of the Sabbath rest points directly at the creation account as the basis for the discussion. We should not leave Hebrews 4 without noting that Paul states in verse 9 that there remains a *sabbatizmos* for the people of God. While this term is commonly translated "Sabbath rest," its use in non-canonical writing clearly indicates that it should be translated "Sabbath-keeping." Thus Heb 4:9 should read "There remains therefore a *Sabbath-keeping* for the people of God."

These findings would be enough to discard the covenant argument out of hand, but there is far more evidence to consider. When we consider the story of the fall, without law, there would be no

justification for Adam and Eve being thrown out of the garden. Long before Sinai, Abraham is recorded as observing God's laws. We do not have a full record of what those laws are because Genesis is a book of history, not law, but it is clear that they existed. And in the wilderness before Sinai, the manna was not given on Sabbath as a test to see if the Jews "walked in God's laws." There can be no mistaking the fact that the Sabbath existed as a divine law before the ten commandments were handed down from Sinai.

The language of Ex 16:4 and 20:8 is instructive (Q13). As we just mentioned, the manna instructions imply pre-existing law regarding the Sabbath. The Sabbath commandment is even more direct. It instructs the Jews to "Remember" the Sabbath. That is, they are to bring it back to view. This cannot be if the Sabbath was new. The other nine commandments are in the form of direct instructions which stand alone in time. Eight say "thou shalt not" as their beginning, and one (the fifth) begins with "honor." Only the Sabbath starts with "Remember," implying the pre-existence of the command. This does not say that murder, adultery, and the like were acceptable before Sinai, since evidence exists that they were not. But it does clearly show that God was emphasizing the pre-existence of the Sabbath.

This of course, brings us back to the fundamental question of the old/new covenant argument (Q14). Since the old covenant proposed by this group of Sunday proponents begins with Sinai, their entire thesis evaporates. The Sabbath existed before Sinai, and is therefore not part of the old covenant. In fact, the Sabbath began in Eden, before there was sin, and cannot be a part of any covenant, not even the eternal covenant of Gen 3:15. Thus, the covenant argument falls.

A variant on the covenant argument is that Christ fulfilled the law so that it is no longer binding on the Christian (Q15). This, of course, leads to the logical idea that if the law is no longer binding we can murder, lie, steal, and commit adultery without concern, since those laws are now non-binding. This thought is horrible to any Christian, and Sunday proponents counter by saying that the other nine commandments were re-instituted in the NT. Yet they cannot point to any specific new commandment. All those references presuppose the existence of the commandments. In fact, this is what Jesus says. Not one part of the law will pass away until ALL is fulfilled. The word ALL used by a Jew has special import. This is not a modern "sort-of" all. This is a truly all-inclusive all. In other words, until sin is abolished and God's eternal kingdom has been set up, not one part of the law will be lost. It is also curious to consider that fact that Jesus died in AD31, and the earliest NT books were not written until about AD60. Are we to assume that no laws were binding for thirty years?

Another way of looking at the fulfillment argument (Q16) is to examine the Greek of the word translated fulfill. It is *pleroo*, a word which means "to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally." In other words, Jesus is not going to do something which makes the law go away, but will make the law more evident as the standard of behavior. He will "fill full" the law! And if we follow the discussion in the next few verses, we find that this is exactly what Jesus does. By way of several examples he shows that the law not only condemns the physical acts of murder, adultery, and so on; it also condemns the desire to do so. Jesus has filled the law full of meaning by showing that the law condemns not just the acts of the hands, but the acts of the heart, because the Lord looks on the heart (1 Sam 16:7). When Jesus filled the law full of meaning, he did not abolish it, he made it greater. And since the Sabbath is part of that greater law, the Sabbath is still in force.

We can conclude this section by observing Paul's comments in Eph 6 (Q17). Here Paul tells his readers to honor their parents. He does this by quoting the fifth commandment. But he does not stop there. His language implies the pre-existence of a binding commandment. But then he adds that this commandment is "the first commandment with a promise." Here is one place where God clearly wants us to use our logical powers. This language implies that the fifth commandment is in a list of commandments, occupies a specific place in that list, and that the list is in force as Paul is writing. Since the only places such a list appears are Ex 20 and Deut 5, we are left with only one possible conclusion: The ten commandments are all in force.

Not to be deterred, Sunday proponents take us to Col 2:16, and say that this passage releases us from any obligation to keep Sabbath (Q18). Once again, we must refer to the text to determine the intent. First, we may note that it does in fact have weekly sabbaths in view, since it uses "feasts, new moons, and sabbaths" as its description of the days being observed. This sequence of annual, monthly, and weekly is a common formula in Jewish writing designed to include all days of whatever recurrent interval. However, the list of potential proscriptions includes food and drink, so days are not all that is in view. Further, since drink does not appear in the Mosaic laws, the Mosaic laws are not in view. This disqualifies "sabbaths" as being the Sabbath commandment contained in the Torah. We may finally note that *nomos* or "law" does not even appear in the entire book of Colossians. So what is going on here?

The key appears in the phrase "let no man judge." God's law is not under consideration! Man's laws are. Therefore the Sabbath is not in view with regard to the need to observe it. The answer comes when we examine the word *krino*, to judge. This word is in the imperative mood, and describes the power of judges and governors to make regulations and laws. Paul is trying to tell us not to allow any man to make rules about how we handle dietary or religious observances. As we examine the next few verses, it becomes clear that there were religious leaders who were imposing various ascetic practices on the converts, and this was not to be allowed. The sanctity of the Sabbath is not even under consideration!

But Sunday proponents back up two verses to the statement that Jesus "nailed to the cross" the "decrees that were against us." This they say is the Mosaic law with the Sabbath. If it was nailed to the cross, it is no longer valid. But Col 2:14 says that the written verdict of a court (*chierographon ton dogmasin*) is what was nailed to the cross. In other words, our death sentence for sin is what Christ nailed to the cross. What a powerful statement of the gospel! Jesus never abrogated the perfect law. He perfectly satisfied the requirements of the law by paying our penalty for us.

Once again, Sunday proponents look to a text in Galatians which seems to say that we should not observe days (Q20). And once again, a careful look at the passage resolves the issue. Paul is rhetorically asking the Galatians why they want to become slaves to the planetary gods again by observing "days and months and seasons and years." This formulaic list encompasses all of the planetary gods' observances, and includes more than what is involved in the Mosaic law. So once again, the error does not involve the Sabbath, but in following the pagan religions that the converts were supposed to leave behind.

Rom 14:5 (Q21) is supposed to say that the Sabbath is a matter of personal choice. But context again destroys this error. Paul is telling the church that there are progressive levels of faith and practice. We know from history that some kept the Sabbath, and others tried to keep the entire week as a sort of Sabbath. Paul's point is not that we should judge one another on our own practices as long as we are trying to honor God. In fact, our responsibility is to God (verse 12). So once again, the fact of the Sabbath is not in view, but man's restrictions on it. We must remember that we are to obey the gospel (2 Thess 1:8, 1 Pet 4:17). We are not to try to find ways around God's law, but as loyal servants, we should seek to find every way to please him in obedience.

The Jerusalem council (Q22) was convened primarily to deal with the issue of circumcising Gentile converts and observation of the law of Moses. Sunday proponents suggest that when the council declined to explicitly require Sabbath-keeping, it abrogated the law, since they consider that the Sabbath was part of the law of Moses. We have dealt with this earlier, and will not repeat ourselves except to note that the Sabbath existed before the law of Moses, and is therefore not in view. The council sent a letter (Q23) to the churches saying that the converts should "abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication." These were the elements of the Mosaic law (note the duplication of fornication with the ten commandments) which were to remain. Paul later explains that eating of food sacrificed to idols constitutes idolatry (1 Cor 1:20). The prohibition on blood (duplicated in "things strangled") is an important dietary issue and associated with pagan food practices, and fornication was associated with pagan religions, which had temple prostitutes. In other words, the council basically addressed pagan practices which were being brought into the church.

It is curious to consider what the result of the council would have been if the Sunday proposal were true. If the Sabbath were done away with, so would the rest of the law. This would mean that all the other NT statements (Q24) which discuss various commandments as being in effect would be wrong. This would mean that the Bible is full of lies, and our hope of salvation is a vapor. In other words, the only possible answer is that the Sabbath was never discussed in the Jerusalem council because it was never in question. In fact, it would be impossible to remove the Sabbath without causing a huge uprising among the Jewish Christians, and there is no record whatever of such happening. Also, had the council eliminated the ten commandments, we would be free to rape, pillage, and kill without concern for salvation. Such an idea should be rejected out of hand. After all, what would there be to repent from? Every apostle calls for men to come to repentance.

Our final consideration (Q25) is just what Sunday proponents are doing. We may propose three camps.

The first is those honest Christians who simply have not yet seen the truth. We see them around the world, inspired by the Holy Spirit to study their Bibles and determine the truth for themselves. And when they do this, they uniformly come to the understanding that the Biblical Sabbath is still in force. More churches are coming to this conclusion daily.

The second group are those who cling to Sunday because they were taught Sunday, and trusted those who taught them. They resist the Sabbath because it would say that their cherished traditions, and their revered teachers, are wrong. We must pray for these people to be open to the Holy Spirit.

The final group are those who adamantly deny the truth of the Sabbath. They will not be convinced regardless of the amount of evidence shown. These are people who claim Christianity but are following a spirit other than the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches obedience to God's commands as the fundamental mark of the Christian. Those who resist God's commands are not his children. It is one thing to be careful to determine what God's commands are. It is another to insist that God's laws are what we want them to be, and to ignore the plain teaching of God's word. The saints will keep the commandments of God (Matt 19:17, John 14:15; 15:10, 1 John 2:2-4, Rev 12:17; 14:12). Those who resist God's commandments will be lost. We must pray that God will allow us to be used to bring these lost souls to repentance.

TEN COMMANDMENTS REFERENCES IN THE NT AFTER THE GOSPELS

³ "You shall have no other gods before Me. Ex 20:3
Quoted: not quoted
Referenced: 1 Cor 8:4,6; 10:9, James 4:12, Rev 19:10, 21:8; 22:9

⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an idol Ex 20:4a
Quoted: not quoted
Referenced: Rom 1:23-24; 2:22, 1 Cor 8:10-11; 10:7,14, Gal 5:20, Eph 5:5, Col 3:5, 1 John 5:21, Rev 9:20; 13:14-15; 14:9-11; 16:2; 21:8

⁷ "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain Ex 20:7a
Quoted: not quoted
Referenced: Rom 2:24

⁸ "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Ex 20:8
Quoted: Acts 4:24; 14:15, Rev 10:6 (all partial quotes)
Referenced: not directly referenced

¹² "Honor your father and your mother Ex 20:12a
Quoted: Eph 6:2-3
Referenced: Col 3:20, 2 Tim 3:2

¹³ "You shall not murder. Ex 20:13
Quoted: Rom 13:9, James 2:11
Referenced: 1 Cor 3:16-17, 1 Tim 1:9, Rev 21:8

¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery. Ex 20:14
Quoted: Rom 13:9, James 2:11
Referenced: Rom 2:22; 7:2-3, 1 Cor 10:8, Gal 5:19, Eph 5:3,5, Col 3:5, 1 Thess 4:3, 1 Tim 1:10; 3:2,12; 5:6, Titus 1:6, Heb 13:4, 1 Pet 2:11, James 4:4, Rev 21:8

¹⁵ "You shall not steal. Ex 20:15
Quoted: Rom 13:9
Referenced: Rom 2:21, 1 Cor 6:10, Eph 4:28, 1 Thess 4:6

¹⁶ "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Ex 20:16
Quoted: not quoted
Referenced: Acts 6:13, Rom 3:13, Eph 4:25,31, Col 3:8-9, 1 Tim 1:10, Titus 3:2, Heb 13:4, Rev 21:8

¹⁷ "You shall not covet Ex 20:17a
Quoted: Rom 7:7; 13:9
Referenced: 1 Cor 6:10, Gal 5:20, Eph 5:3,5, Col 3:5

Ten commandments equated to law.

Rom 2:21-23; 7:7; 13:9-10, 1 Tim 1:8-10, James 2:10-11