

## From Sabbath to Sunday

The RCC claims the right to change the Sabbath to Sunday. "The conference of bishops can abolish certain holy days of obligation or transfer them to a Sunday with prior approval of the Apostolic See." (Canon Law 1246 sec. 2, quoted in the RCC Catechism 2177 regarding "The Lord's Day") This is obviously an extra biblical authority claim, since no scripture in any way either rescinds the Sabbath commandment or grants any person or group of persons the right to change God's laws. Our interest in this study is not to prove the absence of such authority, but rather to trace the history of the change. We will briefly discuss the origin of the Sabbath, then move to the NT record.

Gen 2:2-3 (Q1) records that the last act of creation was the Sabbath. It is important that we observe the original Hebrew here, since many translations indicate that creation was ended at the sixth day, and the seventh was merely rest, but not part of creation. This is contradicted by Jesus' statement in Mark 2:27, where he states that "the Sabbath was created (Greek *ginomai*) for man". Similarly, the text of the fourth commandment repeats the Creation origin of the Sabbath, a fact repeated by the writer of Hebrews. (The creation origin of the Sabbath is important in discussing covenant theology theories of the abrogation of the Sabbath, a topic outside our present view.)

During Jesus' ministry (Q2), we find many times where Christ is challenged regarding His activities on the Sabbath. He first asserted His lordship over the Sabbath, indicating ownership and authority. After that, His typical response was, "Is it lawful?" Jesus showed a very careful attitude toward the Sabbath and its observance. In asserting the lawfulness of His activities, He in fact revisited His lordship, since not only was the Sabbath His property, the law which He established was a perfect representation of His character. He taught more about the Sabbath than any other single topic. Even in death (Q3), he respected the Sabbath by resting in the grave.

The apostles carried on the observance on the Sabbath. Luke records Paul's custom as being that of going to the synagogue on Sabbath, where he reasoned with both Jews and Greeks (Q4). To find Greeks in the synagogue on Sabbath requires that they had been converted AND were observing the Sabbath. Otherwise, he would have been reasoning with the Greeks in the marketplace (Acts 17:17). We are able from the record to identify at least 75 specific Sabbaths he observed in this manner (Acts 18:11). This should not be taken as saying that Paul only observed 75 Sabbaths, since Sabbath observance was "his custom", but rather that we can count that many that are recorded for specific reasons.

The common people understood that the apostles kept the Sabbath (Q5). Acts 13 records Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch, where there were both Jews (v42) and converted Gentiles (v43), meeting on Sabbath. The manner of description leads us to expect that this was a routine event. Further, in verse 44, we find that the entire city came the next Sabbath to hear the story. This would not have happened if Sunday observance were the case, since the next meeting would have been the next day if that were true. We can extend this line of thought further with Paul's visit to Philippi (northern Greece) in Acts 16 (Q6). There Paul went not to the synagogue (which probably did not exist, since this was not a Jewish area), but rather to the riverside to discover believers worshipping on Sabbath. The believers he found were Gentiles, not Jews.

Additional evidence can be found. In Eph 6:1-3 (Q7), Paul discusses the fifth commandment with an unusual qualifying phrase. He says that it is "the first commandment with a promise". This requires that it be in a list, and that it occupies a specific place in that list. The only such list is the Ten Commandments, and is found in Ex 20 and Deut 5. Because of the way Paul refers to the fifth commandment as being in force, he is also implying that the entire list is in force.

1 Cor 16:2 is another place where we find the apostle Paul teaching the Sabbath. This text is commonly translated as "first day of the week". But *kata mian sabbatou* actually means "every first after the Sabbath". Corinth is a city in Greece, where Roman law and the Roman calendar were the norm. If Paul had not taught them the Sabbath, this phrase would have been meaningless. Hebrews 4:4 is another place where a bit of detective work yields an answer not readily apparent from modern translations. The phrase "Sabbath rest" in this passage is a Greek word used nowhere else in the Bible. In the context of the passage, this seems to be a reasonable translation. But, in the patristic literature, *sabbatismos* is used, and it means a "Sabbathkeeping". The writer of Hebrews meant to say that a "Sabbathkeeping" remains for the people of God.

Our last piece of detective work revolves around the writing of Luke. We know that Luke was a Gentile, born and raised under Roman laws and calendars. We also know from archeological evidence

that he was a very careful historian. So when we examine the chronology Luke presents in Luke 3, a very curious problem arises. If we try to match up all the VIP's in Luke 3 with the historical record under the Roman calendar (spring to spring years), nothing matches! If, however, we match it with the Jewish calendar (fall to fall years) and Jewish counting of accession and regnal years, suddenly everything matches perfectly.

Why would Luke use the Jewish calendar? We know that there is no record of the apostolic church continuing with the various Mosaic festivals. While the eastern churches observed the Lord's Supper on Passover, it is noteworthy that they did not observe Passover. The only remaining reason for Luke to use the Jewish calendar is the Sabbath. Like all of the rest of his converts, Paul had taught Luke the Sabbath. This conclusion becomes even more important when we observe Luke's salutation in Luke 1. Luke begins by addressing his gospel to "most excellent Theophilus". The honorific he uses indicates that Theophilus was a man of some civil importance, such as a mayor or judge. Next, the name "Theophilus" tells us that this person is not a Jew. Finally, Luke identifies him as one who has been taught the word of God.

What would be the consequences of using a Jewish calendar for a new convert who not only knew the Roman calendar, but used it in his daily duties? If Theophilus had not been taught the Jewish calendar, particularly the Sabbath, the entire passage would not only have been useless, it would deny Luke's assertion that the account he was about to give was carefully researched. It would give the lie to the entire story of Christ.

The apostles had an attitude of obedience toward God (Q9). Every one of them identified himself as either a bond-servant or a bond-slave. Such a person has voluntarily bound himself to a master whose will the servant is not at liberty to question. The master's will is carried out without delay or hesitation. No effort is spent to try to find an "out". Willing obedience is the rule. This is to be our example. The Sabbath is part of the teaching of the apostles, given to them directly by God. We will be just as ready to observe all that God requires as the apostles were, including the Sabbath, if we are truly children of God.

This obedience is addressed directly (Q10) in a number of places. Rev 7:3 calls the saints "bond-servants." Rev 14:12 notes that the saints obey God's commandments. 2 Thess 1:6-8 tells of God's retribution on those who will not obey the gospel. James 2:10 cuts no one any slack, pointing out that violation of one part of the law is violation of the whole law. Finally, 1 John 5:3 wraps it all up by saying that it is the love of God that we should keep His commandments.

Our final question (Q11) points out Jesus' statement that "until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished." (Matt 5:18). This inclusive statement makes it clear that the law will remain fully in force at least until the second coming. No room is left to wiggle out. The law is in force, including the Sabbath. We should note that whether we consider the law to be the Torah (Pentateuch) or the ten commandments does not matter, since the ten commandments are within the Torah. The Sabbath, created in Eden, continues till heaven.

I will not recap the history of the change from Sabbath to Sunday here, since it has been set out at length in the class notes. However, we will pause for a moment to reflect on the motivations for the change. The first motivation was hatred for the Jews. This is clearly an unChristian attitude, since Christ taught us to love our neighbors and bless those who curse us (Luke 6:27-28). While it may be possible to understand such an attitude, we should condemn it and any effects of it.

The second motivation strikes a little closer to home. Christians who did not fully realize that God would not allow the devil to prevail against the church (Matt 16:18) began to stray from the law to save themselves. God does not require our assistance to prevail. Yet the thought of self-preservation led many to avoid a practice which, even though commanded by God, put them in conflict with civil authorities. To save their own skins, Christians began avoiding the Sabbath, and observing Sunday. The apostles would have been stunned to see the church they founded turning so clearly away from the truth. After all, every one of them was executed for his faith! (John died a natural death, after surviving Domitian's attempt to execute him by boiling him in oil.) Even Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna (who knew John) made no effort to resist his own execution for the faith. All of these men followed their Savior's example.

The Sabbath began in Eden, before the fall. It was created for our benefit. It was restated on tables of stone, written by God's own finger. It has never been revoked, and was taught as part of the message by the apostles. After the death of the apostles, the church drifted away from the truth, in part because of prejudice, in part because of lack of faith. This cowardice led to a grafting in of the pagan worship day of the sun, and loss of God's gift of the Sabbath. We now have the opportunity to restore this truth to God's people.