

## **Study Guide #19: Objections to the Sabbath**

### **Introduction**

Explorer II, Study Guides #16-#18 examine the issues concerning the Ten Commandments in general and the Sabbath Commandment in particular, including the most common objections to them. This Study Guide discusses the *additional* objections to the 7<sup>th</sup>-day Sabbath that weren't examined in the previous Study Guide.

### **Question #1: What's so important about which day of the week a person goes to church?**

**Answer:** *First*, the Sabbath is not only a day to go to church, but it's 24 hours of holy time (see Study Guide #18). *Second*, the Sabbath Commandment is the only one that starts with the word **"Remember"** (Exodus 20:8, NKJV). God must have used that word because He knew people would tend to forget it.



The Sabbath Commandment

*Third*, the Sabbath is a memorial of Creation and also a symbol that people belong to Him—that He has *sanctified* ("set apart") them (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12). All Christians are called *saints*, which means they are the set apart (or sanctified) ones (Acts 9:13; Romans 1:7; I Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 2:19). Thus, the Sabbath is a very appropriate sign of sanctification for God's people. We take issue with the characterization of the Sabbath as only being a matter of a *day*. It's so much more than that. Keeping the Sabbath shows a person's loyalty to Jesus as his Creator, Sanctifier, and Savior (see Explorer II, Study Guide #18). It also reveals that a believer has taken God's side in the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

### **Question #2: What objections did we discuss in previous Study Guides that apply specifically to the Sabbath objections?**

**Answer:** In Explorer II, Study Guide #16, we showed that the new covenant is the experience of God's people of having the Ten Commandments being written on the heart and resulting in obedience as an act of love—the same covenant experience that God wanted all along for Israel to have. In Explorer II, Study Guide #18, we showed that the Sabbath was given to all mankind at Creation week (Genesis 2:1-3), long before there was an Israelite or a Jew. Moreover, we also showed in Study Guide #17 that the Jerusalem Council didn't say anything about the Sabbath issue because there was no controversy concerning which day was the Sabbath.

### **Question #3: But didn't Jesus' manner of Sabbath observance signal that a change in the Sabbath was coming in the near future?**

**Answer:** The implication of this question completely misses the point of *how* Jesus kept the Sabbath. The Pharisees, with their Oral Torah (Oral Law), had added numerous specific rules for keeping the Sabbath that aren't part of the Sabbath Commandment or the Biblical instructions for how to keep it holy. When Jesus ignored their manmade traditions, they falsely accused Him of breaking the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6; Luke 6:1-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-15; 9:1-16). But Jesus kept the Sabbath in the spirit that it was intended to be kept. Therefore, His actions sent absolutely *no* signal that a change was coming in the day of worship.

### **Question #4: How did the idea originate that all that the Sabbath Commandment requires is that 1 day in 7 be set aside in some way for God?**

**Answer:** That theory was elevated to doctrinal status by Italian theologian Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), considered to be the greatest theologian of the Roman Catholic Church. He divided the Sabbath Commandment into 2 parts: (1) a moral or permanent part and (2) a ceremonial or temporary part. He identified the moral or permanent part of the commandment to be that 1 day in 7 should be set apart in some way for God each week. Then he said that the ceremonial or temporary part was that it was *the 7<sup>th</sup>* day.



Thomas  
Aquinas

Aquinas' division of the Sabbath Commandment forms the basis for both (a) the belief that Sunday replaced the Sabbath *only* as a day for public worship without viewing it as a Christian Sabbath, and (b) the belief that Sunday replaced the Sabbath as the new Christian Sabbath. This change is taught either as the result of what the apostles did in the New Testament (especially Lutherans) or as what the Church did on its own authority (especially Roman Catholics and other non-Protestants). It's often understood that Jesus fulfilled the meaning of the Sabbath when He made it possible for His followers to enter into the spiritual rest of the gospel, something that is entered into continually and not just once a week. Most Protestants come from traditions which view Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, and that the change was made by the New Testament. Despite this tradition, the large majority of such Protestants no longer keep Sunday as a holy rest day, especially since World War II.

### **Question #5: Is Thomas Aquinas' division of the Sabbath Commandment Biblical?**

**Answer:** No. Please note how the Sabbath Commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 reads:

**Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it (NKJV).**

The very reason that *the* seventh day of each week is given as the Sabbath in the commandment is because of what God did in resting, blessing, and sanctifying (hallowing) *the* seventh day of Creation week. To disconnect the seventh day from the Sabbath Commandment (and reducing it to any 1 day in 7) is to undermine the very reason for the Sabbath in the first place.

### **Question #6: Doesn't Romans 14 teach that it doesn't make any difference which day we observe as long as we observe it to the Lord?**

**Answer:** Romans 14:5-6 reads as follows:

**One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord, and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it (NKJV).**

In verse 1, Paul told the church at Rome to accept those who are weak in the faith and **“not to disputes over doubtful things”** (NKJV). *First*, Paul is discussing personal opinions, not matters of doctrine. If the issue had been over which day was the Christian Sabbath, and the Sabbath had been changed or abolished, Paul wouldn't have regarded the issue with such deference to one's personal opinions. Paul considered himself a **“strong”** Christian (Romans 15:1, NKJV), and there was no doubt that Paul kept the 7<sup>th</sup>-day Sabbath in the book of Acts (see Study Guide #18). *Second*, most of the chapter's verses concern eating (vv. 2, 3, 7, 14-15, 17, 20-21, 23) and only 2 verses with days (vv. 5-6). It should also be noted that the food issue wasn't over the Levitical laws regarding clean and unclean meat because the word for **“unclean”** in verse 14 isn't the same Greek word the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses for **“unclean”** in Leviticus 11 or Deuteronomy 14. Also, verse 2 identifies the issue as vegetarianism, with the weaker members apparently insisting on it. There's nothing in the Old Testament commanding vegetarianism. This suggests that the conflict over days was also *not* over anything commanded in the Old Testament. The juxtaposition of days with eating suggests that the conflict may have been over which day was better for fasting from meat, although we can't be certain of the precise nature of the dispute. But for the reasons outlined here, we don't believe that Romans 14:5-6 says anything at all about the Sabbath.

### **Question #7: Doesn't Galatians condemn the believers' return to the observance of days?**

**Answer:** Galatians 4:9-10 mentions the observance of **“days and months and seasons and years,”** which



Astrological Signs

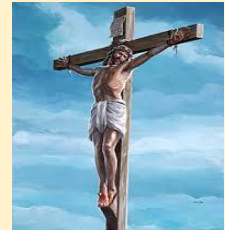
Paul declared were associated with **“the weak and beggarly elements”** (NKJV), particularly by those who teach justification by works (ch. 3, 4:21-31) and bondage to circumcision (5:1-6). In this context, since he's talking to believers who were former pagans (4:8), their return to these elements represents some pagan superstitions associated with **“days and months and seasons and years.”** Given the context of justification by works and circumcision in the book, the pagan overtones

may have been applied to Jewish feast days and to the weekly Sabbath. However, such paganism mingled with even Biblical celebrations would constitute a *perversion* of the truth. And a perversion of the truth

doesn't invalidate the truth. Therefore, this passage can't properly be used to teach that the Sabbath has been abolished.

### Question #8: Does Colossians 2 teach that the Sabbath is no longer valid?

**Answer:** In Colossians 2:16, the apostle Paul admonishes believers to **“let no one judge you in food or drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths”** (NKJV). Because the reference to times here moves from the annual to the monthly and to the weekly, the word **“Sabbaths”** is probably the weekly Sabbath. Often the interpretation is that Jesus nailed the Ten Commandments as a specific code of laws to the cross (v. 14) and that those things are only valid if they are individually repeated in the New Testament. See Explorer II, Study Guide #16 for the evidence that it was our spiritual *debt* that was nailed to the cross since Jesus paid that debt for us—and *not* any law (either moral or ceremonial).



Some defenders of the 7<sup>th</sup>-day Sabbath interpret the word **“Sabbaths”** as referring to the 6 annual ceremonial sabbaths in the Hebrew calendar (Leviticus 23:7-8, 24, 28, 35-36, 39), which they then interpret as shadows (or types) pointing to Jesus—shadows that no longer need to be kept because Jesus has already died for our sins (v. 17). However, (a) that view not only breaks the sequence of the annual, monthly, and weekly times, but (b) the Septuagint always uses the expression “Sabbath of Sabbaths” with regard to the annual ceremonial sabbaths. Therefore, the weekly Sabbath is probably what is referred to in verse 16.

The context is the key to understanding that this has nothing to do with actual *Biblical* keeping of the 7<sup>th</sup>-day Sabbath. See Explorer II, Study Guide #16 for the idea that Paul is condemning **“philosophy”** and **“empty deceit”** (v. 8, NKJV), **“the tradition of men”** (v. 8, NKJV), **“the basic principles of the world”** (vv. 9, 20, NKJV), and **“the commandments and doctrines of men”** (v. 22, NKJV). This means that the *regulations* of the false teachers at Colossae concerning those times were unnecessary shadows—that when you have Christ, you have it all (v. 10). Whatever the precise nature of the heresy at Colossae, Paul condemned a *perversion* of the truth. Once again, a perversion of the truth doesn't invalidate the truth itself.

### Question #9: Don't the gospels tell us that Sunday replaced the Sabbath?

**Answer:** The New Testament gospels mention Sunday as the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week only 6 times, and each occurrence refers to the very day of Jesus' resurrection (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19). Only John 20:19 also says that the apostles were together in one place on that evening (cf. v. 1). But they weren't there to inaugurate a new day of worship in honor of the resurrection because (1) they didn't know yet that Jesus had been resurrected; and (2) the text says they were assembled for **“fear of the Jews”** (NKJV). Now that their leader was dead, they were afraid the Jewish leaders might come for them next. So this text says nothing about Christians meeting for worship on Sundays.

## **Question #10: Doesn't Acts 20 suggest that Christians met regularly on Sundays for public worship?**

**Answer:** Acts 20:7 begins with a description of a church meeting at Troas by stating that **“on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...”** (NKJV). Most expositors interpret this text to mean that (a) Christians here were meeting on a Sunday morning, (b) that they regularly met on Sunday, and (c) that the breaking of bread refers to a Holy Communion service.

Although Luke was a Greek, the evidence from his gospel and the book of Acts shows that he used the Jewish (& Biblical) reckoning of time, which means that Sunday began at sunset on Saturday. Verse 8 tells us that there were **“many lamps”** in the meeting place and that Paul preached until daybreak (vv. 7, 11, NKJV). These facts combine to tell us that this meeting occurred on a Saturday night. It was probably a special meeting and lasted so long because Paul was getting ready to leave the city the next morning (v. 7).

In later times, the expression **“to break bread”** (v. 7, NKJV) did indeed mean to celebrate Holy Communion. However, in the New Testament the word “bread” is associated with the verb “to break” 14 times (excluding Acts 20:7). Five of those times refer to the Holy Communion service (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; I Corinthians 10:16; 11:20-34), while the other 9 times it simply refers to a regular meal (Matthew 14:19; 15:36; Mark 8:6, 19; Luke 24:30, 35; Acts 2:42, 46; 27:34-38).

To understand this text to mean that the early Church was regularly meeting on Sunday mornings requires that (1) Luke used the Roman reckoning of a day (midnight to midnight) and (2) that Paul began preaching on Sunday morning and continued until Monday morning, preaching on and off for about 24 hours, which is highly unlikely. Therefore, the weight of the evidence is that this was a special Saturday night farewell meeting for Paul, and this text says nothing about regularly worshiping on Sunday mornings.

## **Question #11: Doesn't I Corinthians 16:2 tell us that Christians met together regularly on Sunday?**

**Answer:** In that verse, Paul urged the church members at Corinth to lay something aside on **“the first day of the week”** for the financial assistance of the saints at Jerusalem (vv. 1, 3, NKJV; Romans 15:26-27; Galatians 2:1, 10). In this way, the church wouldn't have to take up a collection when he came to visit them (v. 2). The instruction directs church members to **“let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper”** (v. 2, NKJV). The literal Greek read, **“let each one of you lay by himself something aside.”** This underscores the idea that each individual did this by himself at home and that this wasn't something done in a meeting. Apparently, Paul urged members to do this each Sunday because, as the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week, it would set the budget for the entire week. Not only does this *not* imply regular Sunday worship, it's good evidence that the believers weren't meeting on Sunday for worship, or else Paul would have advised them to put their weekly contribution into the church at the Sunday morning worship service.





## Question #12: What about Revelation 1:10? Doesn't that text call Sunday "the Lord's Day"?

**Answer:** In the introduction to his vision, the apostle John wrote that **"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day..."** (NKJV). Most expositors interpret this as a reference to Sunday.

A few understand it to refer to the fact that John was in vision in "the day of the Lord," an expression particularly used in the Old Testament in association with God's end-time judgments and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus. *First*, however, the Greek doesn't say he was taken *to* "the day of the Lord" in vision. The natural way to understand this sentence is that John saw the vision on a particular day. *Second*, the vision in the book of Revelation includes much more than "the day of the Lord." That meaning would be totally inadequate to describe what he saw in vision.

But to what day of the week does this expression point? Scholars often cite (1) the fact that at some point in early Christian history, "the Lord's Day" became a euphemism for Sunday, and (2) two late 1<sup>st</sup> century or early 2<sup>nd</sup> century Christian writers as using that expression for Sunday. However, both of those early references omit the word for "day" altogether, and interpreters must supply the noun based on the context. The context in both references—*Didache* 14:1 and *Epistle to the Magnesians* 9:1—point to "doctrine/commandment" in the 1<sup>st</sup> and "life" in the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The earliest documented evidence for "the Lord's Day" as Sunday is found in the apocryphal book of *The Gospel According to Peter*, where verses 35 and 50, written in the very late 2<sup>nd</sup> century, are talking about the very day of Jesus' resurrection. This evidence indicates that "the Lord's Day" had become a common expression for Sunday sometime in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

But it's not good scholarship to assume that a *later* meaning of a term was its meaning in a significantly earlier occurrence of that same term. Therefore, we should look to the Scriptures to interpret this instead. Although the term "the Lord's Day" isn't found anywhere in Scripture outside of Revelation 1:10, there is a day in Scripture that's consistently said to belong to the Lord, and that's the 7<sup>th</sup>-day Sabbath. The Sabbath is called **"the Sabbath of the Lord your God"** (Exodus 20:10, NKJV), and **"My holy day and the holy day of the Lord"** (Isaiah 58:13, NKJV). Likewise, the New Testament teaches that Jesus is **"the Lord even of the Sabbath"** (Mark 12:8, NKJV; cf. Mark 2:28). Therefore, **"the Lord's Day"** refers to the 7<sup>th</sup>-day Sabbath as the day on which John received his vision. In the context of John's imprisonment for his faith for refusing to acknowledge Caesar as "lord" (according to strong Christian tradition), John appears to have used a play on words to express his defiance against Caesar as lord by declaring symbolically that *Jesus* is Lord and has a day dedicated to Him. Since it's almost universally believed that John wrote the book of Revelation in the A.D. 90s, this is strong evidence that the New Testament Church still regarded our Saturday as the Christian Sabbath.

### **Question #13: Do you have any concluding thoughts regarding this issue of the Christian Sabbath?**

**Answer:** The honest Christian who truly faces the question of the Sabbath finds himself in a conundrum. There's no doubt but that the 7<sup>th</sup>-day Sabbath is explicitly commanded in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11). To avoid concluding that Saturday is the Christian Sabbath, one must do one of 3 things: He must (1) find evidence that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding as a codified unit of laws for the Christian, (2) interpret the 7<sup>th</sup>-day part of that Commandment to have been only for the Jews, or (3) understand either the New Testament or the Church to have changed the Sabbath by either abolishing it or changing it from Saturday to Sunday.



The Ten  
Commandments

In Explorer II, Study Guide #16, we showed that the Ten Commandments are part of the new covenant experience that God wants for all His people and that they are a unified code of laws still applicable in the Christian Era. In this Study Guide (see Questions #4 and #5), we demonstrated that it's completely arbitrary and unbiblical to separate the Sabbath Commandment into a moral (permanent) and ceremonial (temporary) part. Finally, we have also seen that, upon closer inspection, there's no evidence that the New Testament made any change in the Sabbath Commandment. [NOTE: In Explorer I, Study Guide #14, we concluded that the Church is subject to the Bible and doesn't have the authority to change any of the Ten Commandments.]