

The Lord's Day Article VIII

The first day of the week is the Lord's Day. It is a Christian institution for regular observance. It commemorates the resurrection of Christ from the dead and should include exercises of worship and spiritual devotion, both public and private. Activities on the Lord's Day should be commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Exodus 20:8-11; Matthew 12:1-12; 28:1ff.; Mark 2:27-28; 16:1-7; Luke 24:1-3,33-36; John 4:21-24; 20:1,19-28; Acts 20:7; Romans 14:5-10; I Corinthians 16:1-2; Colossians 2:16; 3:16; Revelation 1:10.

Key Text:

Exodus 20:8-11: 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.

Matthew 12:8,12: For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

Mark 2:27-28: And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.”

Luke 24:1-3: Now on the first *day* of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain *other women* with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

John 20:19: Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “Peace *be* with you.”

Acts 20:7: Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

Romans 14:5-6a: 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*.

1 Corinthians 16:1-2: Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

Colossians 2:16: So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths.

Revelation 1:10: I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet.

Exposition:

Some Christians have erroneously called Sunday the Sabbath, but the Sabbath is, by definition, the seventh day of the week. Furthermore, some Christians suggest that the Bible teaches that Sunday has replaced Saturday and serves as a "Christian Sabbath." But admittedly, this is nowhere clearly taught in the Bible. Note carefully that the word "Sabbath" does not appear in the article.

Why do Christians then speak of "the Lord's Day" and worship on Sunday rather than on Saturday? The answer to this important question lies in several biblical principles and practices rather than in any clear teaching or mandate of Scripture.

First, Christians need to understand that the principle of a day of rest after six days of work is rooted not in the law of Moses, but in creation. God was not tired. He needed no rest, yet he rested on the seventh day to provide a model for mankind. Jesus verified this when he taught that the Sabbath is a gracious gift of God given for the benefit of man (Mark 2:27). Since a day of rest is taught in creation and by Jesus, Christians should embrace the principle and observe a day of rest each week.

Second, even though we should observe a day of rest, we are not bound by the legal qualifications of the Sabbath as given in the law of Moses. That law was for national Israel and included precise definitions of just how much work could be allowed. The ancient Jews debated such matters as whether they could eat an egg that was laid on the Sabbath, or whether they

could break a dead twig off a rose bush. Jesus ran up against this legalistic view of the Sabbath in his ministry.

Third, even though there is no clear teaching or command in Scripture that changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday, there is unambiguous evidence that the early church met to worship on the first day of the week. Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday, which was the first work day of the Jewish week, and almost immediately thereafter the Bible records the church meeting on the evening of the first day of the week (John 20:19; Acts 20:7). In his teaching on giving, Paul instructs the Corinthians to receive the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem on the first day of the week (1 Cor 16:2). Many scholars believe that John’s phrase, “the Lord’s Day,” in Revelation 1:10, refers to the first day of the week as well.

The *BF&M* defines the Lord’s Day as the first day of the week. This chronological definition is correct, but the term “Lord’s Day” possesses a richer theological significance. The term “Lord’s Day” only occurs once in Scripture (Rev. 1:10). John states, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day...”(*HCSB*). The term “Lord’s Day” means “day belonging to the Lord.” The Lord in this verse is a reference to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, rather than God the Father Almighty. All time, including the entirety of the week belongs to the Lord; yet, the Bible marks out one day as belonging to the Lord. What makes this day unique?

- 1) The *BF&M* declares the Lord’s Day “is a Christian institution”—that is a day based on Christian principles. The Lord’s Day, therefore, as previously noted, is not the same as the Jewish Sabbath. The *BFM* uplifts the Christian nature of the Lord’s Day by citing New Testament passages in support for this doctrine, except for one single citation from the Old Testament. Continuities and discontinuities exist between the Sabbath worship and Christian worship. For the Jews, the Sabbath was a celebration of life; the Lord’s Day celebrates resurrection life. The Sabbath commemorates creation of the cosmos (Ex. 20:8-11); Christian worship rejoices in the new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The Sabbath celebrates redemption from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:12-15); Christians worship celebrates the redemption of the individual Christian from slavery to sin

(Rom. 4:25; Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). The Jews on the Sabbath participated in corporate worship; the Christian on the Lord's Day participates in corporate worship. The Sabbath recalls the defeat of the armies of Pharaoh; Christian worship recalls the defeat of the last enemy death. The Sabbath highlighted rest; Christians enter divine rest in Christ—a joyful *sabbatismos*—through faith in Christ (Heb. 4:9-10).

- 2) The *BFM* declares the Lord's Day as a "commemoration of the resurrection of Christ from the dead." All four Gospels declare that the women encountered an empty tomb on the first day of the week (Matt. 28:1; Mk. 16: 2; Lk. 24:1; John 20:1). Further, Jesus appeared to His disciples on two successive Sunday nights. Every Sunday Christians joyfully celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from death to life. First day worship centers on the Trinity. On the first day, God created physical light. The Scriptures use the metaphor of light as a symbol for revelation. On the first day, Jesus rose from the dead. On the first day, Jesus poured out the Spirit at Pentecost.
- 3) The *BFM* correlates the Lord's Day with both public and private worship. John exemplified private worship: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day" (Rev. 1:10). Acts describes Christians worshipping together in the city of Troas on the first day of the week. Luke described the elements of the worship service as gathering together, breaking bread (perhaps a reference to the Lord's Supper), and preaching. Luke's comment of the day on which the worship took place indicates that first day worship was not abnormal. Moreover, Paul encouraged the Corinthian believers to set aside monies for an offering for Jerusalem believers "on the first day of the week" (1 Cor. 16:2).
- 4) The *BFM* limits Lord's Day activities to those "commensurate with the Christian's conscience under the Lordship of Christ. This last sentence of the *BFM 2000* represents a radical change from the *BFM 1925/1963* in which Christians observe the Lord's Day "by refraining from worldly amusements, and resting from secular employments, works of necessity and mercy only being excepted." No small debate took place when this was presented at the National Convention in June 2000. Many viewed this as a compromise and surrender to the increasing secularization of American culture and Christianity. The issue is one no serious Christian should take lightly. I

find helpful the comments of Al Mohler at this point, “sensitive and difficult questions relate to what Christians should and should not do on the Lord’s Day, and Christians sometimes disagree. Some argue that obedience to the Fourth Commandment requires that Christian avoid any labor or entertainment on the Lord’s Day. Others argue that the Fourth Commandment has been fulfilled in Christ and does not lay a burden on Christians about entertainment, necessary work, and other activities as long as time, priority, and full attention are given to the church gathered for worship.

This debate goes all the way back to the time of the apostles (see Rom. 14:5-6). The Jewish authorities had turned the Sabbath into a burden for God’s people. Rabbis were involved in pointless debates over what could and could not be done on the Sabbath. Jesus rebuked this kind of thinking when He told the Pharisees, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

Similarly, Christians can transform the Lord’s Day observance into acts of artificial legalism, thus missing the entire point of the day. The Lord’s Day is one of Christ’s gifts to His church. This good gift reminds us that true Christian worship is a celebration and that the Lord’s Day should be a day of great joy and peace.

Christians should strive to order their lives so that they do not neglect the priority of corporate worship on the Lord’s Day. Believers should find deep, uncompromised joy in such worship and should order their lives to best demonstrate that priority. The Christian’s conscience, informed by Scripture, yielded to Christ’s lordship, and accountable to the local congregation, must guide the believer’s decision making about how to observe the Lord’s Day.”

Authors utilized in this study include Al Mohler, Mark Rathel and Hershael York.