

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #45

Sabbath Keeping Comes to America

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Last week, I covered the state of “Sabbath-keeping” in the Church of God as the first half of the first millennium after the birth of our Savior came to an end. It was the time of the fall of the great Roman Empire. But, while the Empire fell out of existence, the Church of Rome did not. It went on to increase its dominance over the entire Christian Church.

However, it was a long and intense struggle. There were battles about authority, the very nature of God, the priesthood, the commandments and the means of worship...including the Sabbath and Feasts of the LORD which, of course, are my main focus.

The Church of Rome faced problems on many fronts. These included the need to:

- bring pagan people within the Empire into the Church
- confront barbarian nations who tried to establish their own religions
- control doctrine within the Church itself.

Unfortunately, these conflicts even engendered the spilling of blood. It was a period history recalls as the Dark Ages of human history. They left a bitter taste in the mouth of much of the world for Christianity itself at the time; and even to this very day. It is painful to acknowledge the truth of it all. But, how can we grow as disciples of Christ and learn God’s Truth about Christ’s church if we put our heads in the sand to avoid the “bad news” of man-led Church organizations while preaching the “good news” of Christ to individuals?

Let’s start with the last point, for it is truly mind boggling. The attempts to unify the Church under the papacy of Rome was resisted even in Italy! This resistance was centered around Milan. This is in the heart of the Roman Empire and in what might be called the Church of the West.

Milan, in northern Italy, was a connecting link between Celtic Christianity in the West and Syrian Christianity in the East. Christian churches in the valleys of the Alps, both in northern Italy and in south-western France, became known as the Waldenses. This is a word meaning “valleys.” The peoples referred to as Waldenses battled against the Church of Rome and were labeled as heretics by the papacy. But their views were held by Christian churches in Italy, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Albania, Spain, Ireland, Scotland, parts of England, Bohemia, Poland, Lithuania and more.

These Christian “Waldensian” pockets followed the apostolic church and defied the Church of Rome even into the second millennium, in the eleventh century. What was the cause of this animosity? Three things stand out. One was a resistance to the combination of church with state leading to the Imperial Christianity of the Roman Empire backed by the sword of the Empire’s legions of soldiers.

This is fascinating if you are an American. You know that our forefathers wisely and Biblically prohibited the establishment of a national religion or Church in the United States. Much of this was done because of the religious terror in the Roman and British Empires. Christ sent His disciples into the world to preach the “good news” and to baptize those who were called and would voluntarily receive it. Isn’t the teaching of so-called St. Augustine to “compel them to come in” by the sword an anti-Bible, even an anti-Christ spirit?

A second objection to the Church of Rome’s decrees was that they took precedence over the Bible. Few Christians know that the Roman Catholic Catechism actually changes the Ten Commandments written in stone by the very finger of God! It is in this context regarding the Fourth Commandment, to remember the Sabbath, that this teaching was rejected by Sabbath keepers.

Is there any doubt in your mind that following a Pope is antithetical to following Christ as Lord of the Sabbath? Let us pray that our God will have mercy on those who “know not what they do” and follow a mere man instead of the divine Good Shepherd of our soul.

A third point of contention was the required acceptance of the authority of the Church of Rome over all the Churches of the world. This is without precedence in scripture. The Council of Jerusalem held by the apostles proves it. Peter was not put in a position to rule all the other apostles or the churches they planted much less all the Christians around the world forever by succession. Jesus is head of His church. Any other construct is heretical.

Besides defiance in northern Italy and south-west France, the Church of Rome faced resistance from Churches in the western part of Europe and especially what we know as the British islands. While most people relate Ireland to St. Patrick, who led its conversion to Christianity, with the Roman Catholic Church, the truth is markedly different.

Patrick was NEVER a follower or promoter of Christianity under the Church of Rome. His beliefs coincided with the apostolic church, the churches founded by the Apostle Paul while in Asia Minor. They preached both the Ten Commandments and Sabbath-keeping. No where in the writings of Patrick does he appeal to the Church of Rome for the authorization of his mission to Ireland. In his writings and confessions, Patrick never mentions Pope Celestine or receiving a commission from him. Patrick gave no credit to any worldly authority but relied solely on the authority of the Bible.

Patrick saw the strength of Christianity founded upon the home and family. His Irish Church rejected the celibacy ordinance by the Church of Rome and permitted their priests to marry. Only centuries after the success of Patrick’s Church in Ireland, and its spread into Scotland and England, did the Church of Rome begin to rewrite history and invent traditions about Patrick as it continued to eradicate resistance to its world-ruling power.

Most of the Celtic Church of Ireland founded by Patrick used the earlier Latin Bible of Lucian and rejected the Vulgate of Rome as do Protestants of today. Most kept the original Ten Commandments including the seventh-day, twenty-four hour Sabbath of rest.

When we look at the Eastern Church, we get a picture similar to the Celtic Church. They are passionate seventh-day Sabbath keepers. They will not go along with the Church of Rome and its papal authority, its new commandments or its new holy days.

The apostles and disciples of Christ actually went further than the Great Roman Empire's boundaries. They went into ALL the world into places like China, India and Ethiopia. And when we look at those churches who followed Christ as their head, and who kept the teachings of the Bible and the apostles, we find the same calling card: they kept the seventh day Sabbath aloof from, or even in open opposition to, the Church of Rome.

With the Western Roman Empire broken up into ten different kingdoms toward the end of the fifth century, the power of the "state" was reduced. However, the power of the Church of Rome actually increased in the beginning of the sixth century. This was in part because the Emperor of the East, Justinian, officially accepted the bishop of Rome as the universal head of the church of God.

This religious union helped create a more universal church known as the Roman Catholic Church led by the supreme pontiff of Rome. With this came an increased emphasis on the "holiness" of Sunday as ITS proclaimed "Lord's day." It was not a sudden change like the decree of Emperor Constantine, but more and more of the world's kingdoms congealed on Sunday as preferable to what was more and more perceived as the "Jewish" Sabbath.

The conversion of the Lord's day to the "Christian Sabbath" would be a very gradual process. Such a concept was first expressed at the beginning of the twelfth century.

At the start of the sixth century, the Roman Catholic Church still allowed work on THEIR Lord's day when people were not commanded to be present at a public service of prayer, singing hymns, etc., supposedly in commemoration of Christ's resurrection. However, we see a tightening by the Council of Orleans in AD 538, by order of the King of France, where labor even in the country was prohibited on Sunday. By AD 590, a council at Narbonne, France forbade, "all persons of what country, or quality soever, to do any servile work on the Lord's day."

As the seventh century began, Pope Gregory I in AD 603 officially declared that when anti-Christ would come, he would keep Saturday as the Sabbath. I heartedly disagree. My guess is that when the man of sin does come, he will proclaim Sunday as the ONLY acceptable day of worship in the whole world for Christians or Jews. Thus he will deny Christ as Lord of the "True" Saturday Sabbath thereby deceiving the whole world.

In the seventh century, a new foe of the seventh-day Sabbath also arose in the person of Mahomet. Neither Saturday of the Jews nor Sunday of the Church would do for a holy

day for his followers. He selected Friday, the sixth day of the week, for Islam's holy day.

The attack on the Sabbath continued when at the twelfth council of Toledo in Spain in AD 681 forbade even Jews to keep their own festivals but to instead rest on the Lord's day. By AD 692, the king of the West Saxons in England ordered that any slave made to work on Sunday would be set free, or if he worked voluntarily, the slave would be beaten. In Constantinople at the end of the seventh century, it was decreed, "If any bishop or other clergyman, or any of the laity, absented himself from the church three Sundays together, except in cases of very general necessity, if a clergyman, he was to be deposed; if a layman, debarred the holy communion."

In the eighth century, a new devoted Christian leader emerged as a leader of the fragmented Western Roman Empire which we would now generally call Europe. He was officially Charles the Great whom we more likely know as Charlemagne. Born in what we would recognize today as West Germany, his father and grandfather had been kings over what was called the Frankish Empire covering most of the territory of Europe we would now see as France and Germany. Becoming king in AD 768, Charlemagne expanded his empire into Italy, Bavaria, Austria and even Spain.

Charlemagne showed a sincere concern for the common or peasant people (even in his conquered territories) and favored a universal rule of law so that reasonable order could be maintained in his empire. Charlemagne's devotion to Christianity and the love of God found him protecting the city of Rome and the Pope whenever it was attacked. In AD 800, on Christmas day, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne an emperor, the first to have that distinction since the Roman Empire fell some three hundred years earlier.

Charlemagne was especially admired for the work he did in establishing church schools, which educated not just the elite noblemen and priests, but the children of the poor as well. What Charlemagne ruled eventually became known as the Holy Roman Empire which many today see as the last prophesied world empire of the prophet Daniel to be revived at the end of the age before the Kingdom of God ruled by Christ will be established on the earth.

Charlemagne died in 814. One of his sons, King Louis I, continued but some twenty-nine years later, his empire was broken up. Europe was never so united again. Only in the last century did the seeds of a truly revived European Empire begin to spout under what we now call the European Union.

What history calls the "Holy Roman Empire" is somewhat misleading. In fact, it is somewhat a misnomer since it was really not "Holy," not "Roman" and not even an "Empire" in the strict sense of those words.

While "holy" was used to signify its unity with the Roman Catholic Church, with the Pope being its spiritual head, the truth is the emperors of many of its thirty or so nations were not friendly toward the Pope. The use of "Roman" was a reference to the prior great Roman Empire but the truth was that ancient empire covered far more than Europe.

It extended into Africa and encompassing the entire lands around the Mediterranean Sea. The Holy Roman Empire was led more out of Germany than Rome in Italy. And, the use of “Empire” was not really correct in that its nations remained largely independent of the “Emperor” chosen by the more powerful nations (like Germany and France). The Emperor served largely to help resolve disputes among its loosely aligned nations.

The first Holy Roman Emperor was Otto I, crowned by the Pope in AD 962 as the second millennium began. Otto was a descendant of the French King Charlemagne. By 1273, Rudolf of Hapsburg, was elected emperor and most emperors from that time on were elected from the German Hapsburg family. Though the Empire added northern territories such as Spain and the Scandinavian countries to its confederacy, they, France and Southern Italy paid little attention to its rule. In 1806, Emperor Francis I, officially gave up the title of Holy Roman Emperor, being acknowledged as only the Emperor of Austria.

What we see heading into the second millennium since Christ is a politically divided world with various camps attempting to rule its neighbors. We see major territorial conquerors like Mohamed in the past, the Mongols, the Holy Roman Empire, etc. And, most of these political movements brought their own religion such as Islam, Buddhism or Christianity with them by the sword so that wars covered a mix of political and religious ideology.

In all of this fury, the religious banner of the Western Nations was Christianity. The spiritual leader of the Christian Church was recognized as the Roman Catholic Church under the papacy. The far flung Christian Churches in China, India, Ethiopia, were largely ignored by, and remained independent of, the popery of the Roman Catholic Church and its doctrine. Many of these independent Churches were Sabbath-keepers although some held religious services on Sunday treating it as a sister day in New Testament Christianity.

No matter how many emperors, kings, popes and councils declared that Sunday was the new Christian Sabbath, it simply did not reform the many world pockets of Sabbath-keepers. They kept reading their Bibles and studying the writings, actions and legacy of the apostles. They could not be budged by the most persuasive arguments by the Church of Rome fathers to adopt Sunday as their Sabbath of the Fourth Commandment.

In the ninth century there had been reports at Church councils of miracles, actually catastrophes, which vexed Christians who worked on Sunday. Some were supposedly struck by lightening. Admonitions by priests and bishops were not convincing enough for the “Sabbatarians” to abandon the Bible for the teaching of the Church of Rome.

Secular laws with fines, imprisonment and even death for violating its Sunday work laws had not done the trick either. Threats of refusing communion or even excommunication by the Church of Rome by its local bishops and priests also had minimal lasting effect. Even linking Sunday worship to the consecration of the blessed virgin Mary, the Mother of God, at a council held at Clermont in 1095 still did not alter the sacredness of the

seventh day Sabbath for “Bible first” Christians. In fact it infuriated many Sabbatarian Christians who believed the Sabbath honored the Creator; not any person, even Mary.

In the middle of the twelfth century, the king of England reported an apparition from Saint Peter which charged him that upon Sundays, “there should be no buying or selling, and no servile work done.” This still did not qualify as a sufficient divine warrant for Sunday becoming the Sabbath for Christians.

One true story of an attempt to finally find a remedy is simply incredible. What if there was an authenticated heavenly sign that Sunday WAS the new Lord’s day for Christianity? That might solve this Sabbath issue once and for always. I never heard of this historic account, so perhaps you have not heard it either and will be similarly astonished at what man will do to have his way.

It involves Eustace, the abbot of Flaye in Normandy, who came to England in the year 1200 to preach the word of God in behalf of Sunday. Despite claimed miracles, local ministers rejected his Sunday change and he returned to Normandy. But, in the year 1201, Eustace again came to England claiming that the command for Christians to keep Sunday holy had come down from heaven! How? Hang on to your chairs; and watch your alters.

According to Eustace, a scroll was found on the alter of Saint Simeon, in Golgatha, in Jerusalem where Christ was crucified. It claimed to be from the Lord Himself and declared that Sunday was indeed the Lord’s day of His resurrection. This scroll, after being examined by the clergy in Jerusalem, was supposedly sent to the Pope for his judgment. After seeing it, the Pope immediately ordained heralds to take the “Epistle of the Lord” to all parts of the world. Eustace brought the scroll back to England along with the commission of the Pope for him to proclaim the mandate of the Lord Himself.

Eustace claimed that the Pope Innocent III received this scroll from those in Jerusalem who saw it fall from heaven! In the opinion of scholars, the pontificate of Innocent III was the most marked in the annals of Rome. This was the period of the highest power of the Roman See. Specifically, the Epistle of the Lord, commanded no one to do any work (unless it was good work) from the ninth hour on Saturday until sunrise on Monday.

Are you convinced? Do you wonder why the Lord of the Sabbath would not only change the holy day of the LORD written in stone to a day to honor Himself but would make it twenty-seven hours long ending at sunrise rather than at sunset as was His own custom? If you are not convicted, neither were the Sabbath-keepers. They were repulsed.

Despite its peak power, there was a huge rebellion forming against the Roman Catholic Church. It was not from pagans or competing emperors but from within itself. We know it as the Protestant Reformation. It changed Christianity dramatically. The impact remains with us today. Conflict between the Catholic and Protestant Churches and people are as real as the conflicts we see on our news between Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

Was the Sabbath part of this Protestant rebellion? Not really. Among the reformers were Sabbath keepers, but the main protestors had other bigger fish to fry. Leaders like Luther in 1517 tended toward the concept that the command for worship every seven days fulfilled the intent of the Fourth Commandment. In their eyes, if every Saturday worked for Jews, every Sunday worked for Christians. Others, like Calvin, viewed the Sabbath as fulfilled by Christ and only a shadow such that no new day like Sunday was even needed.

There were major reforms sought about what days Christians should celebrate as holy and how the Church should enforce its worship rules and laws regarding salvation. For example, most Protestants were willing to accept Sunday, Easter and Christmas as holy days because of their connection to Christ in scripture.

But, do you have any idea of the number of “holy days” similarly endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church which most of the Protestants rejected? On how many of these feast days do you rest from work and keep holy: St. Stephen, St. John, the Innocents, St. Sylvester, the circumcision of our Lord, the Epiphany, Ascension, Whitsunday, St. John the Baptist, feasts of the twelve apostles, festivities of Mary, St. Lawrence, St. Michael the Archangel, All Saints Day, St. Martin’s, and even more local days?

Such issues were even divisive among the reformers with the Episcopalians and Anglicans honoring many of them while the Protestants rejected most of them as “church festivals” and not holy days. Bible readers grew weary of the swarms of monks and nuns and holy-men who were propagating various processions, genuflections, prayer beads, amulets, images on the walls of churches, glorification of relics or statues and claims about works for purgatory by the laity by their own authority. This reminded the Protestants of the rules and traditions so decried by Jesus against the religious hierarchy of the Pharisees.

In England, in the reign of Elizabeth, in the sixteenth century there were “Sabbatarians” more generally referred to as “Seventh-day Baptists” or “Annabaptists.” While they were known for rejection of infant baptism or sprinkling converts, and for insistence on baptism by submersion, they also were strict seventh-day Sabbath-keepers for rest and worship.

In the seventeenth century, we see some shocking persecution of Sabbath keepers. There are hundreds of examples of imprisonments and torture for little more than Sabbath keeping in a Sunday keeping Church. The cases of those followers of the Lord of the Sabbath who gave their lives in the fires of their own brethren only for their day of worship is heartbreaking.

I will just share just one case with you. His name was John James. The place is London. The date is October 19, 1661, a Saturday. The time is 3:00 PM. John James is preaching to brethren assembled for worship on the Sabbath.

Justice Chard enters the meeting hall with Mr. Wood, a head borough. Wood commands

James to be silent having spoken treason against the king. James continues until Wood pulls him from the pulpit and with a strong guard takes him to the court where he is examined and committed to prison. At his trial a month later, James was sentenced to be hanged and quartered! Two petitions to King Charles II by his wife proclaiming his innocence with character witnesses were rejected with ridicule. James was hung, his heart removed and burned, his quarters affixed to the gates of the city and his head was set up on a pole in White Chapel opposite to his meeting house. James resisted not his condemners just like his Lord of the Sabbath showed him. He pleaded peacefully before his executioner, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit."

Sabbath-keeping immigrated to America primarily from England. The first formal Sabbatarian church in America was founded in Newport, Rhode Island in 1664. The founder was Stephen Mumford who left London just three years after the martyrdom of John James. Would freedom reign in America for Sabbath-keepers?

Like Luther wanting to stay in a reformed Catholic Church, the Sabbath keepers in Newport hoped to stay in its first Baptist Church. This mixing was not acceptable to the Church majority and the Sabbath-keepers were forced to leave it and even the Massachusetts. Small Seventh Day Baptist congregations and churches began to form. By 1707, a second official Seventh Day Baptist Church was founded in Piscataway, NJ.

A Seventh Day Baptist General Conference was eventually organized in 1802 with eight churches attending. In Pennsylvania, there existed a groups of German S. D. Baptists in several counties. In Ephrata, PA, they maintained a Sabbath school of education. The town's name is obviously from the Bethlehem birth place of the Lord of the Sabbath.

More prominent today is the Seventh Day Adventist Church which turned to Sabbath keeping in 1844 in New Hampshire. Still today, there are both major formal and informal groups of disciples of Jesus who see Him as their Lord of the Sabbath and keep the day He made for them.

I am one of them. In an hour I will leave for my weekly convocation. I often wonder whether should the time ever come when I have to choose between keeping the Sabbath holy or swinging from the gallows, will I have the moral courage of John James to follow and serve my Lord rather than men? I thank the LORD that I now still have the freedom to worship my Savior and Lord on His Sabbath day without persecution by the state or the church. Amen.