

Lord of the Sabbath

Program #25

Paul Never Refutes the Sabbath

Kenny Kitzke

LawstSheep Ministries

Last Sabbath, we went through the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. We reviewed how the eleven original apostles spread the good news of Jesus as our Savior in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria and finally to the ends of the earth in the Roman Empire. The church of God grew in numbers and in cities wherever the apostles went and found Jews and Gentiles who would listen to the word of God.

It is absolutely clear that these apostles ALL were and remained seventh-day Sabbath keepers as they witnessed for Jesus. Not one mention is made of a different “Day of the Lord” for Christians in the New Covenant to replace the Sabbath of the LORD of the Old Covenant. We found even the new Apostle to the Gentiles, Saul, whom we know as Paul, picked by Jesus Himself, preaching to assembled Gentiles on the Sabbath day.

If the day of rest and worship had changed because of the first coming of Jesus and His resurrection from the dead, it surely would have been an appropriate time for Paul who stayed in Antioch for over a year to let these new converted Gentile believers know about this major change in the will of God for His called-out people. You might say the silence on this “Commandment” is deafening to those with ears to hear.

But, there are many Christians who claim that the Bible teaches that either God’s sanctified day of rest and worship was done away and nailed to the crucifixion tree of Jesus, or that the day was changed to the first day of the week because of the resurrection of Jesus supposedly on Sunday.

It is worthwhile to review the main scriptures used by preachers who claim that either NO special day is to be kept by Christians or that the Day of the Lord has been changed to the first day of the week: Sunday. Let’s start with the second, less radical view; that the scriptural and historic seventh-day of rest and worship was changed for Christians to Sunday.

What Biblical evidence do we have that the disciples of Jesus were meeting together on the first day of the week? There are only three relevant verses in the New Testament. Let’s begin with the verse most cited as a proof that Sunday is the new day of worship for Christians. We find it in 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.

To some preachers of the word of God, what they imagine happened is that the disciples are meeting on a Sunday, as is their new Christian custom for worship, having a holy

communion ceremony and hearing a lengthy sermon from Paul that lasts until midnight.

But, how much of this scenario is clearly supported by this account in all its context? In my opinion, very little of that characterization is credible.

First, was it a Sunday morning when the disciples came together? Well, no hour of the day is given and nothing at all is said to indicate it was in the morning part of the day when they came together.

As we know, a Jew like Paul kept time differently than we do today. Each complete 24-hour day began at sunset, not at midnight. So, it is far more likely that rather than indicating a Sunday morning gathering, it would be that the Sabbath had ended at sunset, and the disciples were still together on what we would now call Saturday night. But, a Jew would properly call it the start of the first day of the week, what we now call Sunday.

So, it appears that sometime after sunset, sometime after about 6:00 PM, on the first day of the week, Paul is providing a sermon message to the disciples. We don't know exactly when he started speaking. It could have been between 6:00 PM and 9:00 PM. But, we know he continued speaking until midnight. That is a relatively long sermon of from three to six hours, but it is certainly more plausible than assuming he started on Sunday morning and spoke continually until Sunday midnight for more than twelve hours!

Second, is there any reason to believe from this verse that meeting on Sunday (actually, Saturday night) was a new custom or practice of the disciples of Jesus? No. I can't see that indicated at all. It can just as probably be a reference to a specific first day of the week when they were gathered without any regular pattern being implied. Further, if as I suspect, it is actually Saturday night, then it would be more likely the disciples kept the Sabbath together each week and were often still together after sunset as the first day of the week began. This is a common practice in Sabbath keeping fellowships even today.

Third, does the term "break bread" definitely indicate that a Lord's Supper or "holy communion" ceremony was a purpose of the disciples coming together whether for that particular day, or for every Sunday? We know that Jesus did break bread during the Lord's last supper with His apostles the night before His crucifixion. He certainly asked them to do that in remembrance of Him.

However, could it be simply a term for having a meal with others? Let's break bread together as we might say today intending that we should have lunch together. There are examples of both Jesus and His disciples "breaking" bread, or loaves of bread, to share it with others as they ate a common meal together to satisfy their hunger. I'll give just one example found in Acts 2: 46 concerning the disciples after Jesus had risen to heaven:

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, that ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.

Here we see the disciples meeting in the temple daily and breaking bread from house to

house eating their food with gladness. Obviously, breaking bread was something disciples did EACH day when they were together but it DID NOT mean they were celebrating the Lord's supper or breaking bread together ONLY on a Sunday.

As further evidence of the fallacy of assuming we are seeing a Sunday morning communion service by the church, notice that it was after midnight and after the sleeping Eutychus falls out of the third floor window that Paul returns to the upper room. Then HE breaks bread and eats and goes on preaching a long while, even till daybreak. There is no indication of even a shared meal by all much less a Lord's supper "communion" ceremony.

What I see in Acts 20 is a Sabbath assembly that continues past sunset on Saturday as the disciples come together to break bread and eat a meal and to hear Paul speak before he leaves the next morning (which would be Sunday morning).

The attempt to prove from this verse and account that the weekly, seventh-day Sabbath has been done away and Sunday has taken its place is simply ludicrous. All one has to do is look at what Paul was doing before and after this event in Troas to see how silly this assumption is. In the previous verse, Acts 20: 6, we find Paul sailing away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread. And, in Acts 20: 16, we find Paul hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost. Are you willing to claim that the weekly Sabbath has been done away and/or changed to Sunday by this example while in the very same chapter we find Paul still keeping the annual Sabbaths and Feasts of the LORD?

I have no problem with anyone assembling on Saturday night, or on Sunday morning, for group worship. But, I do have a problem if this is done INSTEAD of keeping the Sabbath holy from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. I think the Lord of the Sabbath would also have a problem with such worship contrary to His own custom and way of the LORD.

Well, if that verse does not prove that Christians are to meet for Sunday worship, how about the other verse often used as proof? Let us look at 1 Cor. 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 of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come,

Here we find many preachers teaching with glee that Christians in their Church should also lay something aside for a collection plate at their Sunday morning worship service. I can understand why, can't you? But, this seems to be a self-serving fabrication of what Paul is ordering the church at Corinth to do. There is not one word here of having this collection AT a congregational assembly on every Sunday.

Instead, Paul is instructing each believer individually to lay aside and store up his free will gift as he is able from his wages or earnings of the prior week on each Saturday night

(after the Sabbath is over). This is so that when Paul comes to them he will not have to have a fundraising collection on the Sabbath day in the synagogue which was his custom when traveling to a new city. As anyone familiar with the Sabbath ordinances knows, there were restrictions on buying and selling on the Sabbath day or exchanging money in God's house.

Many Sabbath keepers to this day will not buy anything on the Sabbath, including buying a meal at a restaurant even when away from their homes. I know some Sabbath keepers who even refuse to carry any money with them on the Sabbath. They would not use a toll road to drive to a Sabbath assembly to avoid handling money or throwing it into the collection hopper. Instead, they will take a slower, and perhaps longer, ride on free public road. I am sure the thought of having, handling or transferring money to a collection plate passed at a Sabbath service, or buying spiritual books or tapes on the Sabbath from a Church or its minister, would not be encouraged.

But, the bottom line here is that the individuals were to privately store up their appropriate gifts after the Sabbath, on the first day of the week, so that when Paul would come to them, it was already done and collected and would NOT have to be done on the Sabbath. This verse, in my opinion, teaches just the opposite from the people of God taking up a collection at every Sunday worship service.

More poignantly, this was a special collection for the needy in the church at Jerusalem because of the drought in Israel. Yet, we see the desire by some Christian translators to make it an "EVERY Sunday" worship issue. If you have a NIV Bible, you will see this verse translated, "On the first day of EVERY week, each one of you should set aside..." So strong is the desire to show that Sunday is the new day for worship and financial giving at your local Church that the translators apparently insert a word not in the original text, thereby adding to scripture.

Well, if these two verses have not proven a switch for Christians from the seventh-day Sabbath to the first-day of the week, Sunday, perhaps the last one in scripture will? We find it referenced in 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."

Now, when exactly did Jesus appear before the assembled disciples? A casual reading might indicate that it was Sunday evening. But, is that what the Apostle John actually wrote? Here again, we must be careful with the text.

When the Apostle John says the "same day," what does he mean? Looking to the prior scripture we see that it is the same day that Mary "went to the tomb, early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb." If you believe the visit of Mary to the tomb was early Sunday morning, the first day of the week, then it is Sunday evening when the disciples were assembled behind shut doors for fear of the Jews.

Here again, the evening of a day is at the end of a day, after sunset, when the new day in God's calendar begins. In other words, it was actually Sunday night, or the second day of the week, which on our modern Gregorian calendar is Monday, when the resurrected Jesus appears to His eleven apostles and breathes on them the Holy Spirit of God.

In addition, this is the first time that the apostles have seen the risen Christ. It makes no sense at all to try to argue that this verse shows the disciples meeting on Sunday for worship because Jesus rose on Sunday when at that time the apostles had no idea He had risen at all, much less on the first day of the week.

If someone wants to try to show from scripture that the Sabbath day for Christian worship was changed to a Sunday morning to reflect the time of Jesus resurrection, or the time of Jesus first appearing to His apostles on what the Bible calls the "first day of the week," the only three verses that are relevant suggest it was either Saturday night or Sunday night when the apostles were actually assembled together.

But, while the argument that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday by the apostles is unfounded, there are two other scriptures in Paul's letters to the churches of God that many Christians use to prove that the Sabbath has been done away altogether for Christians. This includes a belief that there is no special day for worship for Christians, NOT even Sunday!

The verse that leads people to that conclusion is found in Rom. 14: 5:

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.

This is a favorite response of Christians to those who still keep the seventh-day Sabbath as a very special, set apart, holy and sanctified Day to the LORD. But reading this chapter in its context shows that it is not AT ALL speaking about a day of rest and worship. It is in fact talking about a special day for fasting, of not eating, or at least not eating meat.

As a boy, being raised in a Roman Catholic home, my mother would never cook meat on Friday. Friday was a day for only fish. The Friday night fish fry was a way of life in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the 1950's. What Paul is teaching here is that there is no special day of the week for FASTING in God's eyes. Whatever day a man fasts, or does not fast, he is to be convinced in his own mind that he observes that day to the LORD. We are not to judge a man, or a brother in Christ, based on what day, if any, he decides to keep a fast from food or meat.

But, probably the most frequently cited scripture by Sunday-keeping Christians which supposedly proves that they are no longer under the Fourth Commandment is Col. 2: 16:

So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

If you want to see the effect of poor translation into your English Bible, this verse can provide a wealth of revelation. For, as written, it is easy to conclude that the old laws of God regarding clean food to eat, proper drinks, the Sabbaths, new moons or festivals given by God to Moses for His people have become unimportant shadows for Christians. Instead, with the coming of the Christ, He is the substance that had cast these shadows of the old covenant manner of living and worshipping.

A little study of the Greek and Aramaic texts will quickly reveal the confusion induced by the English translations we commonly read. Whether they are there by accident stemming from a lack of knowledge of the law of God or the Hebrew language as understood by Paul, or whether they are there to fortify the teachings and tradition of religious men, I surely cannot tell.

All, I can say is that the English words and the interpretation given to this verse seem to set the teaching of Paul upside down. Many would have you to conclude that no one should judge a person, especially a Gentile Christian, by what he drinks or eats or how and when they worship God. They would say that such things are old and unimportant shadows of things to come with the substance that truly matters being Christ.

Instead, I suggest a reading of this verse, in the context of Paul's teaching in this chapter and elsewhere, is meant to establish essentially the opposite. It was not just a warning to Christians in Colosse to not let the Jews judge them. What Paul is trying to communicate to the disciples of Jesus is to not let anyone in Colosse judge them regarding their food or drink or their worship practice regarding the appointed days, months and years of God.

We can get a pretty clear glimpse of this from Paul's words before and after this verse. In Chapter 1, and at the start of Chapter 2, in his letter to the Colossians, Paul is talking about a mystery of God concerning the Father and Christ who reveals the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God. God, through Christ, and through His apostle to the Gentiles, would now reveal the riches of the glory of God to the Gentiles.

In this sense, it becomes clear that things like the Sabbaths, new moons and festivals could now look forward to and reveal Christ. In the Old Testament, these laws and religious worship practices were mere shadows of the future and in substance looked back to the glory of God revealed to Israel, the original chosen people and nation of God.

Now, Jesus is revealed as the Lord of the Sabbath and the pre-existing Word of God. It was through Him and for Him ALL things were created and have a meaning in substance for the things that were TO COME in God's eternal plan of salvation.

Now we could see that Christ had already become our Lamb for the Passover Feast of Unleavened Bread. And, the Holy Spirit of God, beginning at the Feast of Weeks (called Pentecost from the Greek), could now be received by ALL men who would believe in

Jesus as the promised Messiah of Israel. Now, we could also have the hope of the return of Jesus as King over all the earth as pictured in the Feast of Tabernacles yet to come. Yes, indeed, these Sabbaths to the LORD, new moons and Feasts of the LORD were all given as a foreshadow of Christ to come. Praise the Lord for them!

But, now that Christ had come, was it Paul's teaching that the Sabbaths of the LORD, both the weekly Sabbath and the annual holy day Sabbaths were no longer to be observed by believers? God forbid! Paul continues through his life to keep the weekly Sabbath, teaching both Jews and Gentiles on the seventh-day Sabbath, and continues to keep the Feasts of the Lord, even going back to Jerusalem to keep them with the other Apostles that Christ had chosen.

Paul had never visited Colosse. But, Paul has heard about what was happening there from his fellow servant Epaphras, their faithful minister of Christ. Therefore, Paul writes this letter, or at least its salutation, to them with his own hand. Apparently, to other churches where Paul had visited personally, he often dictated a letter to be written by an associate as Paul's eyesight was not very good.

So, what is the point Paul is trying to make to these disciples? It is stated in Col 2: 4-8:

Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the traditions of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Now, seriously, have you any doubt that if these Colossians walked in Christ, they would refrain from certain foods and drinks? Do you doubt that if they walked in Christ, as they were taught by Epaphras to keep the Sabbath holy, and observe the new moons to know when to celebrate the Feasts of the LORD, that they would indeed stand in opposition to human philosophy and the traditions of men and the basic principles of the world rather than to reject what Christ did?

Christ had showed His disciples that it was the circumcision of their hearts and not just their foreskins that God wanted for His people who would now worship Him in spirit and in truth. Christ showed how the religious leaders of His day, using their principalities and powers, had subverted the intents of the Sabbaths and the holy days of the Feasts. That, while they observed them when they should, their hearts and intentions were amiss. The religious leaders looked for the glory for themselves at the Feasts by sitting in the preferred seats. They failed to do as Moses taught in keeping the Feasts of the LORD with a humble and contrite heart to the LORD.

So, Paul is warning these Colossians to not let no man, such as a Jewish religious ruler, or

a non-believing pagan governmental ruler in Colosse, to judge them AS they follow in Christ keeping the Law of God as taught to them also by Epaphras and now reaffirmed by Paul. Yes, it means the very opposite of what many Christians are taught about what is a shadow and what is of substance yet to come.

Jesus clearly taught Christians not to judge unbelievers. He would do so, and do it fairly. Jesus taught that Christians would be brought before counsels and rulers and be judged and even martyred for following Christ. When it came to what was lawful to eat and drink, or how to keep and observe the Sabbaths, new moons and feasts, it was only the believers in the body of Jesus, the church, who was to judge ITSELF against the word of God as given to Moses.

I certainly am judged by world government rulers, by Jewish religious rulers and by Christian rulers in the body of Christ, for my keeping of these same Sabbaths, new moons and feasts which Jesus and Paul kept faithfully to the very end of their lives. These rulers have invented their own commandments and doctrines regarding these things and they have an appearance of wisdom in their self-imposed religions, often with false humility and neglect of the body of believers as they indulge their own fleshly desires.

I count myself blessed for trying to follow Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath. Well, I had hoped to get further along into the events leading to the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and what transpired afterwards in the leadership of the church especially regarding worship. Next week, I will resume that walk through the history of the church and the remnant of Sabbath keepers who followed in the footsteps of the apostles. Until next Sabbath, this is brother Kenny praying that God will be gracious to you this week.