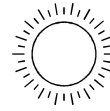


14. The Lord's Day



Introduction: Most of our months & days of the week are named after pagan gods, emperors, or the planets. August is for Augustus, July is for Julius, October is Octavos, Thursday is Thor's Day, Saturday is Saturn's day and Sunday is of course the Sun's Day (S-U-N). When the Bible refers to the day on which God's people met it usually refers to the day's numerical sequence. For instance, the Jewish day of rest, their Sabbath day, was to be on the "seventh" day (our Saturday). The day mentioned repeatedly as the church's meeting day is the "first" day of the week, referred to in Scripture not as Sunday but as the "Lord's Day."

As we look throughout church history, virtually every assembly of believers over the past two thousand years has chosen to hold their primary meeting on Sunday, the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. Oddly though, never in the New Covenant are we commanded to meet on *any* particular day. The Bible does not say that we should hold church on Sunday. Yet almost all Christians do this even unto this day. Why is that so?

In this session we want to examine why it is that the vast majority of all believers meet together in a special way on the first day of the week. Also, is there such a thing as a Christian Sabbath? Has the Saturday Sabbath rest of Moses been changed to a Sabbath rest on Sunday?

- 1. On which day of the week did the church at Troas come together, based on Acts 20:7?** More than an incidental description of on what day they just *happened* to meet, it is a statement that this was the day on which they *regularly* met. An inextricable link is implied between meeting together as a church and meeting together on Sunday. In fact, no different day of the week is ever given anywhere else in the New Testament as a day on which a church met.
- 2. What can be concluded from 1 Corinthians 16:1-4 about the day on which the Corinthian church regularly met?** That they were to pool their resources on the first day of the week obviously suggests that this was the day they regularly assembled together as a church.
- 3. What in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 indicates that it was not just the Corinthian church that met on the first day of the week?** Evidently all the churches of Galatia also meet together of the first day of the week because Paul instructed them to do the exact same thing he told the Corinthian church to do.

Note: Galatia was not a city, but rather was a large geographical area in which were numerous churches (Ga 1:1-2).

- 4. Based on Matthew 28:1-7, Mark 16:2ff, Luke 24:1ff & John 20:1ff, why might early believers have met on the first day of the week (Ac 20:7)?**
- 5. On what day did John receive a revelation from the Jesus (Revelation 1:9-11)?**

6. Why do you suppose John called this day the “Lord’s day” (Re 1:10) without any further explanation? See Matthew 28:1, Mark 16:2, Luke 24:1, John 20:1, 1 Corinthians 11:10. Referring to the first day as the “Lord’s Day” was evidently already an established custom when John wrote Revelation (since he uses the term without any explanation). The “Lord’s Day” is from a unique phrase in the Greek, *kuriakon hemeran*, which literally reads, “the day belonging to the Lord.” The words “belonging to the Lord” are from *kuriakos*, which occurs in the New Testament only here and in 1 Corinthians 11:20, where Paul uses it to refer to the “Lord’s Supper” or the “Supper belonging to the Lord” (*kuriakon deipnon*). The connection between these two uses must not be missed! Since the purpose of the weekly church meeting is to observe the Lord’s Supper, it only makes sense that this *supper* belonging to the Lord would be eaten on the *day* belonging to the Lord (the first day of the week). John’s revelation evidently thus occurred on the first day of the week, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead and the day on which the early church met to eat the Supper belonging to the Lord. The resurrection and the day and the supper all go together as a package deal!

Note: The eschatological phrase “the Day of the Lord” is translated from an entirely different Greek construction than is found in Revelation 1:10.

“We all make our assembly in common on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God changed the darkness and matter and made the world, and Jesus Christ our Savior arose from the dead on the same day. For they crucified him on the day before Saturn’s day, and on the day after (which is the day of the Sun) he appeared to his apostles and disciples . . .” (*First Apology*, Justin Martyr, a layman living in the second century).

7. The seventh day of the week (Saturday) was a Sabbath day (a day of rest) for the Israelites under the Sinai (Mosaic) Covenant (Ex 31:12-18). Is the first day of the week (Sunday, the Lord’s Day) now intended to be a Sabbath day of rest for people under the New Covenant? See Romans 14:5-8, Galatians 4:8-11, Colossians 2:16-19, Hebrews 4:1ff.

1) The seventh day Sabbath of the Sinai (Mosaic) Covenant is, according to **Hebrews 4:1-13**, a shadow or type of the rest we have in Christ from trying to earn salvation. **Romans 14:1ff** makes it clear that any Sabbath observance is absolutely optional (and indicates that those who do so have weak consciences). In **Galatians 4:8-11**, Paul cast doubt on the genuineness of the salvation of those in Galatia who felt obliged to keep religious special days. Then, **Colossians 2:16-19** warns not to let anyone judge us for not observing Sabbath days. Further, the Sabbath was the ceremonial sign of the Sinai (Mosaic) Covenant (**Ex 31:12-18**). This “first” covenant was made “obsolete” by the New Covenant (**Heb 8:13**). There has now been a “change of law” (**Heb 7:12**). The Mosaic law was “set aside” since it was “weak and useless” (**Heb 7:18-19**). We are now under the law of Christ. Once there has been a divorce, the wedding ring is no longer worn. Why would we want to keep the sign of an obsolete covenant? The sign of *our* covenant (the New Covenant) is the Lord’s Supper.

2) **1 Corinthians 11b** indicates that the Lord's Supper was held in the evening (*deipnon* means the main meal toward evening) and the exclusion of the poor from the meal only makes sense if their late arrival was due to employment constraints, while the wealthy were not so hindered. Thus we have another indication that the Lord's Day was not a Sabbath day in the early church.

3) Historical note: The Protestant Reformers, following the lead of Augustine and Aquinas, unanimously denied that the Lord's Day was also to be some sort of Sabbath day. They felt it would be as wrong to perpetuate the Sabbath as it would any of the other Sinai laws given through Moses. The notion that the Lord's Day should be a Sabbath day is a fairly recent development, promoted by the English Puritans of the 1600s (who saw themselves as Calvin's completers).

— Summary —

8. **Why should we meet together as a church on the first day of the week?** (*Explain the theological reasons*).

9. **Why should Sunday not be considered a "Christian Sabbath"?**

Optional Further Reading: 1) *From Sabbath to Lord's Day, A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation*, by D.A. Carson ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982. 2) See the on-line article about the Lord's Day at www.ntrf.org.

Next Lesson: E-mail the next set of discussion questions out to the class (or print them up and hand them out at the end of this lesson). Ask everyone to consider the issues, answer the questions and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting.

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