



"We have made the change from the seventh day to the first day, from Saturday to Sunday, on the authority of the one holy Catholic Church."

—Bishop Seymour

04-Jul-14

Did Christ's Resurrection Change the Day of Worship? (Part One)

In the Christian era, the [Sabbath](#) has been a point of controversy since at least the fourth century ^{AD}, when the Roman Catholic Church assumed the authority to change the day of worship from the seventh day to the first. In the years that followed, thousands of seventh-day Sabbath-keepers were imprisoned or killed for obeying the [fourth commandment](#).

When the Protestant Reformation took place centuries later, those opposed to the abuses and venality of the Catholic Church broke away in an attempt to set things straight. However, they continued to teach a number of corrupted doctrines, including the change to the Sabbath. Today, the vast majority of professing [Christians](#) hold the first day as the proper day of worship, even though the Bible is clear and consistent that only the seventh day was blessed, sanctified, and made holy ([Genesis 2:3](#); [Exodus 20:11](#)).

Catholic theologians are unashamed of the change that their church made, readily admitting that if one goes by the Bible alone, the seventh day is still the Sabbath. For them, the matter comes down to church leadership having

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the authority to modify such things. Protestants, on the other hand, are unwilling to concede Papal authority. Instead, they justify Sunday-worship—a tradition of men—by saying they are honoring the day on which Christ rose from the dead.

Does this tradition have merit? It is certainly a widespread assumption, one that seems plausible on the surface and to which few give a second thought. Even so, it is wrong for two reasons. First, there is no biblical record, implication, or hint of [God](#) removing the sanctification and [holiness](#) given to the seventh day and transferring it to another day. Second, as we will see in Part Two, the timing of Christ's resurrection has *nothing* to do with establishing which day is holy, and *everything* to do with proving that He was the Messiah.

Inherent within the assertion that the Sabbath has changed is the idea that the Creator Himself is changeable—that His character is variable, His standard of righteousness changes over time, and He is not serious about what He says. Yet, [James 1:17](#) reminds us that with God there is no variation or shadow of turning. He does not change—His fundamental character and approach to things are constant. [Hebrews 13:8](#) says that [Jesus Christ](#) is "the same yesterday, today, and forever," and the next verse says, "Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings" (ESV). From this, we can see that God's changelessness is a major defense we have against false teaching. Thus, any doctrine that involves God backtracking on what He said—such as changing the Sabbath command—should be seen for what it truly is: an affront to His perfect, constant nature.

The Sabbath is neither a minor detail nor an obsolete ritual. It was the capstone of the creation week and is a creation of its own ([Genesis 2:1-3](#)). Humanity, created on the sixth day, is the pinnacle of God's physical creation, yet He created one more thing—the Sabbath—because physical man is incomplete. The physical creation is complete, yet there is a spiritual creation still taking place. God is creating mankind in His spiritual image ([Genesis 1:26](#)), and He has set apart—sanctified—one day each week to allow us to further this creation through fellowship with Him without being distracted by ordinary labors and pursuits. This certainly does not mean we cannot fellowship with Him at other times—we can and should! But in setting aside the seventh day and making it holy, He has ensured that there

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will always be a space of time—a recurring memorial—to return our focus to the spiritual work God is doing.

The high regard that God gives to the seventh-day Sabbath is evident throughout Scripture. God began teaching Israel about the Sabbath even *before* He gave the Ten Commandments and made the covenant with Israel (see [Exodus 16:14-30](#); [20:8-11](#)). For forty years, Israel had a weekly lesson on which day God had set apart because no manna fell for them to gather on the seventh day—God had provided twice the amount the day before.

Not only was the Sabbath command in place before the Old Covenant was made, but God even made an additional, perpetual covenant just for the Sabbath ([Exodus 31:12-17](#)). The Old Covenant—that temporary agreement between God and Israel—was made obsolete with the coming of the New Covenant, but the Sabbath exists outside of that agreement. In addition, notice God's promise at the core of the New Covenant: "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts" ([Hebrews 8:10](#); [10:16](#); see [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)). While an agreement may be temporary, God is intent on writing His laws permanently on our hearts—and the Sabbath is one of the most important.

Time and again, ancient Israel was subjugated because of Sabbath-breaking and idolatry (see, for example, Ezekiel 20). God gives no indication that the Sabbath is temporary, that He intended to change it later, or that He is ambivalent about His command. In fact, the prophecies specifically show that the Sabbath will be kept after Christ returns and establishes His Kingdom ([Isaiah 66:22-23](#); [Ezekiel 44:24](#); [45:17](#); [46:3](#)).

[The gospel](#) writers also do not give any hint or suggestion that God's sanctification of the Sabbath would somehow be switched to the first day of the week. Jesus leaves no impression that the day of worship would change upon His death. Though He and the Pharisees were frequently at odds over the Sabbath, it is clear that the controversy was always over *how* the Sabbath should be kept, never *if* or *when*.

Jesus' teachings about the Sabbath are just as applicable for His followers today as the [Beatitudes](#) and the [parables](#) ([Matthew 12:1-12](#); [24:20](#); [Mark 2:23-28](#); [3:1-4](#); [Luke 6:1-9](#); [13:10-16](#); [14:1-5](#); [John 5:16-19](#); [7:21-24](#)). He

taught the *liberating intent* of the Sabbath—not the abolishment of it!—because Pharisaic tradition had turned the Sabbath into a burden rather than the "delight" that God intended ([Isaiah 58:13-14](#)). Not only did Jesus keep the Sabbath and teach others on it ([Mark 1:21](#); [6:2](#); [Luke 4:16](#)), but after His death the apostles and even Gentile believers also kept it ([Acts 13:14-15](#), 42-44; 15:1-2, 14-21; 16:12-15; 17:2; 18:1-11).

Thus, from creation through the Millennium—and including Christ's ministry and the New Covenant church—we see God's establishment and steadfast reinforcement of the seventh-day Sabbath. On top of this, there is no scriptural intimation that the day of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, or any other activity would modify the blessedness, sanctification, and holiness that He had already given to the seventh day.

Next time, we will look at the real significance of the day on which Jesus Christ was resurrected.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[The Fourth Commandment \(Part 1\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The Sabbath is the major means by which God protects His investment, the spiritual creation of His family. The Sabbath, far from being the least of the commandments, is a special creation, a very specific period of holy time (only God can set apart something as holy) given to all of mankind, reminding us that God does not stop creating, but elevates His attention to spiritual creation, providing us with unified instruction designed to free us from sin, celebrate life, develop a special relationship with Him, providing a major tool for our conversion, sanctification, and ultimate glorification. No other commandment so specifically defines God's purpose. Breaking the Sabbath is tantamount to idolatry.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Rome's Challenge \(Part 1\)](#)

by Staff

In 1893, the Catholic Mirror—the official organ of Cardinal Gibbons and the Vatican in the United States—ran a series of articles discussing the right of the Protestant churches to worship on Sunday. The articles stress that unless one was willing to accept the authority of the Catholic Church to designate the day of worship, Christians who wish to follow the Bible should observe the seventh-day Sabbath.

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