

THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST AND THE FIRST DAY SABBATH

Creation Ordinance

It is God's Creation ordinance that man begins his week by submitting to God and humbly listening to His Word. Before the Fall of Adam and Eve into sin, mankind was to start his week with a Sabbath rest and worship.

Fall

After the Fall, God commanded man to end his week with a Sabbath. The Paradise rest which God provided, and which was symbolised in the Sabbath, was forfeited by man's disobedience. This first day Sabbath would only be restored by the Second Adam's future obedience.

Redemption

In Christ the first day Sabbath is restored to its position at Creation and man can once again rest in God's finished work of Recreation and Redemption before he embarks on a week of obedience and service to the Lord.

Day Six

All of the days of God's Creation week are a model for man's worship, service, dominion and rest. The order of events on Day 6 were the Creation of land creatures (Genesis 1:24-25), the Creation of Adam (Gen 2:7), the Creation of the garden (Gen 2:8), instructions to man (Gen 2:15-17), the bringing of the animals before Adam to be named, and also to create in him a desire for his own partner (Gen 2:18-20), the Creation of Eve (Gen 2:21-25), further instructions (Gen 1:28-30), and the ending of the day with God's declaration that everything was "*Very good*" (Gen 1:31). Comparing Gen 1:29-31 with the time span of Gen 2:7-21 shows that Eve was created towards the end of Day 6, in time to hear God's blessings and commandments in Gen 1:28-31 and before the ushering in of the Sabbath.

Man's First Day Was the Sabbath

So mankind's first full day was God's Sabbath Day. Day 7 of God's week was mankind's first day, "*evening and morning*". God ended His week with rest, but God intended man to begin his week with worship and rest. From the very beginning God made clear the distinction between Creator and creature. Man must not attempt to play God by exercising dominion in his own strength and wisdom. God is our Creator and we must begin our week by bowing to Him and submitting to His instructions. It is only as we rest in God's finished work of Creation that we can be in any position to be effective in God-honouring dominion.

Rebellion

However, Adam and Eve rebelled against God's design. Mankind sought to begin his week independent of God rather than beginning with worship and dependence on God alone. Adam and Eve rebelled against God's purpose for both the Sabbath and their dominion work. They were seduced by Satan's sinful suggestion that they could be "*like God*". They chose to submit to a wisdom other than God's and they sought to take dominion independent of the Creator. By their actions, Adam and Eve undermined the whole purpose and character of the Sabbath.

Consequences of Sin

As a result, God judged the rebellion of Adam and Eve. The curse of sin includes frustration for the woman in her natural relationships within the home, painful labour in bearing children and subordination toward her husband. The man is frustrated in his activity to provide food, in toil, with

thorns and by the sweat of his face. Ultimately, they will experience that the wages of sin is death. The harmony, intimacy and partnership of the pre-Fall marriage relationship is corrupted by sin.

Promised Redemption

Yet even at this time of Judgement, God gave a promise of Redemption and new life through the coming Messiah: *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel.”* Genesis 3:15

Division

From the time of the Fall, humanity has been divided into two communities: the redeemed, who love God and the reprobate, who love self. This division was soon seen in the hostility of Cain against the righteous Abel.

Victory

The prophecy of Genesis 3:15 finds ultimate fulfillment in the triumph of the Second Adam, Christ (and the community united with Him), over the forces of sin, satan and death itself. The Seed of the woman, Christ, will suffer, but His Atonement will provide ultimate victory, symbolised in the crushing of satan’s head.

The Bondage of the Law

From the time of the Fall, God commanded man to end his week with a Sabbath rest. One of the many consequences of man’s sin was that instead of beginning the week in God’s grace and strength, man was placed under the burden of the Law, to enjoy a Sabbath rest only at the end of his work week. This pointed to the promised Messiah who would accomplish what the first Adam had failed to do. Man’s rest was cursed, just as his dominion was. Until the time of the Messiah, mankind was commanded to imitate God by completing his work week before being able to enjoy a Sabbath rest. So Cain and Abel brought their sacrifices before God at the end of the week. In Exodus 16, even before Israel arrived at Mount Sinai and before the Law was given, they observed the Sabbath on the seventh day. The New Testament speaks of this Sabbath imagery to illustrate the bondage symbolised in the pre-resurrection Sabbath observance and to point to the liberty and grace the Messiah would bring.

The Shadow and the Substance

Under the Old Covenant, the seventh day Sabbath was a reminder of man’s inability to fulfill God’s Law, but it also pointed to God’s gracious promise of what the Second Adam would accomplish. This helps to explain why the old Covenant Sabbath (along with all the Law of Moses), was seen as such a burden and curse. *“Now I say this lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words... as you 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 tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the Head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through Faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross, having disarmed principalities and powers, who made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. **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. Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking the light and false humility and worship of angels, intruding into***

those things in which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments grows with the increase that is from God. Therefore if you died with Christ, from the basic principles of this world, why as though living in the world do you subject yourself to regulations... these things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.” Colossians 2:4-23

A New Covenant

Our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled all the demands of the old Covenant: *“And for this reason He is the mediator of the new Covenant, by means of death, for the Redemption of the transgressions under the first Covenant, that those who are called may receive a promise of the eternal inheritance.”* Hebrews 9:15

A New Creation

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17

All Things Made New

Isaiah chapters 65 to 66 anticipates a time when all things would be made new as a result of the coming of the Messiah (Isa 66:7-9): a new Heaven and a new earth (Isa 65:17); changed people (Isa 65:18-19); changes in worship (Isa 66:1-4); changes in church government (Isa 66:18-21); when even priests would no longer be from the tribe of Levi, but even from among the Gentiles (Isa 66:21)! When even the Sabbath would be changed *“from one Sabbath to another”* (Isa 66:23).

Jubilee

This new Creation was anticipated by the Jubilee year which was the year after the seventh seven. Christ declared Himself to be the fulfillment of Jubilee (Luke 4:19). The Sabbath would be changed. Every Sunday is the day after the seventh – a Jubilee.

The Stone Which the Builders Rejected

The middle chapter of the Bible is Psalm 118. Addressing the Sanhedrin, the apostle Peter expounds on Psalm 118: *“Let it be known to you all and to all the people of Israel that by the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the stone which was rejected by your builders, which has become the chief Cornerstone. Nor is there salvation in any other. There is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* Acts 4:10-12

The Day That the Lord Has Made

That verse in Psalm 118 continues: *“This was the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it”* Psalm 118:23-24. This Psalm not only rejoices in the Resurrection of the Messiah, but in the making of a new day in weekly celebration. This is the Lord’s Day, an ongoing day for worship and celebration. *“You are My God, and I will praise You; You are My God, I will exalt You, O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”* Psalm 118:28-29

First Day and Eighth Day Sabbaths

The Law of God refers to a *“first day Sabbath”* as well as an *“eighth day Sabbath”* (Leviticus 23:39). In the Greek Septuagint, the title for Psalm 24 is: *“A Psalm of David on a First Day Sabbath”*.

A New Sabbath

In the Gospels, a new Sabbath is created. The third day of the Passover festival (also called *first-fruits*) is referred to as a Sabbath day in each of the 4 Gospels (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1;

John 20:1). In each Gospel account there was a bold declaration that something new had come, and that all things were to be made new.

“Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn” Matthew 28:1

“Now when the Jewish Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalaine, Mary, the mother of James and Salome brought spices so that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen.” Mark 16:1-2, 9

“Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning they came to the tomb” John 20:1

Paul Observed the First Day Sabbath

“Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul spoke to them.” Acts 20:7 Here, the Apostle Paul, arrived in Troas on a Monday (Acts 20:6) and delayed his hurried trip until the following Monday, so that he could worship with the church on Sunday (Acts 20:7). He was clearly delaying his rushed trip for an important purpose.

Instructions to the Church

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so must you 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.” 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

An Imperative for Believers

Notice the three imperatives: *“as I have given orders”*, *“so must you do also”*, and *“let each lay aside.”* This verse is in the present active imperative. It is a command and it is to be continuously observed. This is not just something the Corinthians must do, but something universally mandated for all churches. It is clearly speaking about an act of corporate worship in the community of believers, in the context of fellowship and worship. Sunday was the Lord’s Day, sanctified for collective worship and for the receiving of tithe and offerings.

The Lord’s Day

The Apostle John writes of being *“in the spirit on the Lord’s Day.”* Revelation 1:10. This is the same terminology used for the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20). The Lord Jesus Christ is *“Lord of the Sabbath”* (Matthew 12:8). He is the one who made the Day (Psalm 118:24), it is the Day that He has Risen from the dead. It is also the Day that He sent the Holy Spirit. The Church was born on Pentecost Sunday (Acts 2:1): *“They were all with one accord in one place”*.

Another Sabbath

“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered his rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.” Hebrews 4:7-10

Another Joshua

Here the writer of the Hebrews, quotes from the Psalm of David, speaking of the Day of Salvation which would come from the Messiah. This day was not the end of history. It was the day when the Messiah would be raised, given all authority in Heaven and on earth. This day is a different day from when Israel crossed the Jordan to enter the land. On that *“other day”* the Messiah Himself led His way into the Kingdom of God. Joshua led the way over the Jordan, but the Messiah is not only greater than Joshua leading the way into possessing the land of the Kingdom, but He also stands as our great High Priest, parting the waters of the Jordan, enabling his people to not only enter the Kingdom by Faith, but to conquer the land in such a way that multitudes of others would enter His Kingdom.

A Sign of the Covenant

Hebrews 4:9 tells us that there remains a Sabbath observance for the people of God. This is a sign of the everlasting Covenant. It is a promise that one day the new Heavens and the new earth will be brought in and we will be able to cease from our labours and our works will follow us. None of this can refer to our initial Salvation experience but can only refer to Heaven.

The Joshua Generation

We are called to be that Joshua generation which will seek to enter the rest. We cannot be like the unbelieving generation who wandered in the wilderness through lack of Faith and obedience. We are called to be the believing generation that will conquer the land for our Lord in terms of the Great Commission.

Changes

The other two signs of the Covenant have also been changed. Circumcision has now been replaced by Baptism. The Passover has been fulfilled in the Lord's Supper. In the same way the seventh day Sabbath is now transformed into the first day Sabbath, in keeping with God's original Creation purpose for Adam and Eve. Christ, our Second Adam, has redeemed for us what the first Adam lost through disobedience.

The Teaching of the Apostles

This has always been the teaching of the early church. In the *Didache - The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (the oldest book of the early Church), it is clearly stated: *"On the day of the Resurrection of the Lord, that is the Lord's Day, assemble yourselves together without fail, giving thanks to God and praising Him for those mercies God has bestowed upon you through Christ, and has delivered you from ignorance, error and bondage, that your sacrifice may be unspotted, and acceptable to God...But every Lord's Day, do ye gather yourselves together and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may pure."*

Do Not Fast on the Lord's Day

The *Didache* also taught: *"Every Lord's Day hold your solemn assemblies, and rejoice: For he will be guilty of sin who fasts on the Lord's Day, being the Day of the Resurrection..."*

"And on the Day of our Lord's Resurrection, which is the Lord's Day, meet more diligently... otherwise what apology will He make to God who does not assemble on that Day to hear the saving Word concerning the Resurrection...?"

Delivered From the Jewish Traditions

The early church father **Ignatius**, in 107AD, wrote: *"Be not deceived with strange doctrines, nor with old fables which are unprofitable. For if we still lived according to the Jewish law, we acknowledge that we have not received grace... if therefore those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also a life has sprung up again by Him and by His death... Let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the Resurrection Day, the Queen and Chief of all the days of the week. It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which is now come to an end. For where there is Christianity there cannot be Judaism..."*

Remember the Resurrection

Justin Martyr in his first *Apology* written in 150AD taught: *"But Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day of the week and Jesus our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. We are always together with one another and for all the things with which we*

are supplied we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit and on the day called Sunday there is a gathering together in the same place of all who live in the city or a rural district... since it is the first day, on which God changed the darkness and matter and made the world, and Jesus Christ arose from the dead on the same day. For they crucified Him on the day before Saturns day and on the day (which is the day of the Sun) He appeared to His Apostles and taught His disciples these things."

The Eighth Day

In his *Dialogue*, Justin wrote: *"Through the Resurrection from the dead on the first day of the week of Jesus Christ our Lord. For the first day of the week, although it is the first of all days, yet according to the number of days of the cycle is called the eighth (while still remaining the first)."*

Keep the Lord's Day

Clement of Alexandria in 190AD wrote: *"He does the Commandment according to the Gospel and keeps the Lord's Day, whenever he puts away an evil mind... glorifying the Lord's Resurrection in himself."* (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*)

Sunday Not Saturday

The church father **Tertullian** in 200AD wrote: *"We solemnise the day after Saturday in contradistinction to those who call this day their Sabbath."* (Tertullian's *Apology* chapter 16)

As with Circumcision

Tertullian also wrote in *An Answer to the Jews*: *"It follows, accordingly, that insofar as the abolition of carnal circumcision and of the old law is demonstrated as having been consummated at its specific times, so also the observance of the Sabbath is demonstrated to have been temporary."*

A Day of Joy

In *To the Nations*, Tertullian writes: *"It is well known that we regard Sunday as a day of joy."*

A New Day

The church father, **Origen** in his *Commentary on John* wrote: *"Hence it is not possible that the day of rest after the Sabbath should have come into existence from the seventh day of our God. On the contrary, it is our Saviour who, after the pattern of His own rest, caused us to be made in the likeness of His death and hence also of His Resurrection."*

Free From Worldly Distractions

In *Homil*, Origen wrote: *"On Sunday none of the actions of the world should be done. If then you abstain from all the works of this world and keep yourselves free for spiritual things, go to church and listen to the readings and divine homilies, meditate on Heavenly things."*

The Eighth Day

The church father, **Cyprian**, in 250AD wrote in his *Epistle* of *"The eighth day, that is the first day after the Sabbath and the Lord's Day."*

Christ Abolished the Jewish Sabbath

Victorinus in 300AD wrote in *The Creation of the World*: *"This sixth day is called parasceve, that is to say the preparation of the Kingdom... on this day also, on account of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ we make either a station to God or a fast. On the seventh day He rested from all His works and blessed it and sanctified it. On the former day we are accustomed to fast rigorously, that on the Lord's Day we may go forth to our bread with giving of thanks and let the parasceve become a rigorous fast, lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews... which Sabbath Christ in His body abolished."*

Sunday is the Christian Sabbath

Eusebius of Caesarea wrote in his *Ecclesiastical History*, in 300 AD: “They do not, therefore, regard circumcision, nor observe the Sabbath, neither do we; ... because such things as these do not belong to Christians.” In his *Proof of the Gospel*, Eusebius wrote: “The Day of His Resurrection from the dead ... the one and only truly Holy Day and the Lord’s Day is better than ... the days set apart by the Mosaic law for feasts, new moons and Sabbaths, which the Apostle Paul teaches are the shadow of days and not days in reality.”

New Covenant Sabbath

In 345AD **Athanasius** wrote in *On Sabbath and Circumcision*: “The Sabbath was the end of the first Creation, the Lord’s Day was the beginning of the second, in which He renewed and restored the old in the same way as He prescribed as they should formerly observe the Sabbath as a memorial of the end of the first things, so we honour the Lord’s Day as being the memorial of the new Creation.”

A Solemn Warning

In his *Catechetical Lectures* of 350AD, **Cyril of Jerusalem** warned: “Fall not away either into the sect of the Samaritans or into Judaism, for Jesus Christ has henceforth ransomed you. Stand aloof from all observations of Sabbaths and from calling any indifferent meats common or unclean.”

Beware the Pitfall

The famous preacher of St. Sophia in Constantinople, **John Chrysostom** in 387AD wrote: “You have put on Christ, you have become a member of the Lord and been enrolled in the Heavenly city, and you still grovel in the law of Moses? How is it possible for you to obtain the Kingdom? Listen to Paul’s words, that the observance of the law overthrows the Gospel and learn if you will how this comes to pass and tremble and shun this pitfall. Why do you keep the Sabbath and fast with the Jews? (Homilies on Galatians)

The Saturday Sabbath is Abolished Along with Circumcision

“The right of circumcision was venerable in the Jews’ account, forasmuch the Sabbath was less esteemed than circumcision. For that circumcision might be performed, the Sabbath was broken; but that the Sabbath might be kept, circumcision was never broken; and mark, I pray, the dispensation of God. This is found to be even more solemn than the Sabbath, as not being omitted at certain times. When then it is done away, much more is the Sabbath.” (Chrysostom’s Homilies on Philipians).

Diligently Observe the Lord’s Day

In the *Apostolic Constitution* it states: “And on the day of our Lord’s Resurrection, which is the Lord’s Day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent Him to us, and condescended to let Him suffer, and raised Him from the dead. Otherwise what apology will He make to God who does not assemble on that day?... in which is performed the reading of the prophets, the preaching of the Gospel, the oblation of the sacrifice, the gift of the holy food.”

The Sabbath for Gentile Believers

Clearly the Sabbath is a Creation ordinance (Genesis 2:3). Gentiles are commanded to keep the Sabbath (Isaiah 56:1-8; 66:23). “Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the Lord to serve Him and to love the Name of the Lord, to be a servant – everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My Covenant – even them I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer... For My house will be called **a house of prayer for all nations.**” Isaiah 56:6-7

From One Sabbath to Another

“And it shall come to pass that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the Lord.” Isaiah 66:23. The Scripture speaks of *“yet I will gather to Him others besides those who are gathered to Him.”*

The Authority of Christ

The Ascension is all about authority. Christ has *“gone into Heaven and is at God’s right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him”* 1 Peter 3:22

Disciple All Nations

“All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...” Matthew 28:18-20

The Lordship of Christ

The Ascension proclaims the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life. *“He will crush kings on the day of His wrath. He will judge nations, heaping up the dead and crushing the rulers of the whole earth.”* Psalm 110:5-6

The Victory of Christ

The Ascension proclaims the ultimate victory of Christ. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Those who refuse to bow to Christ as Saviour and Lord today, in the day of grace, when forgiveness is freely available, will one day be forced to bow to Christ as the eternal Judge.

“The Lord says to My Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet’”. Psalm 110:1

Call the Lord’s Day a Delight

“Those from among you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called the Repairer of the Breach, the Restorer of streets to dwell in. If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honourable, and shall honour it, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.” Isaiah 58:12-14

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