

## **“I WILL GIVE YOU REST”**

**By Pastor Martin Eldon Bledsoe**

Today there exists much confusion in the Christendom concerning the Sabbath, and this *‘sabbath confusion’* has caused many needless divisions in the body of Christ. There are literally millions of sincere Christians with honest questions concerning the ‘Sabbath Day’. Some of these include: What day is the Sabbath? Must a Christian observe it? If so, How should one observe it? What is lawful and unlawful on that day? And what relationship has the Sabbath with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This last question is the most important of them all. For we, as Christians, must consider all things through the lense of our New Covenant relationship with Christ. And if we understand the ‘Sabbath Day’ in this context, the confusion that surrounds it can be done away; and all the Saints of God can come into the glorious liberty that Christ has given us. And this is the reason this book is written, to clear away the clouds of confusion, and to show plainly the true meaning of the Sabbath Command; which will hopefully bring unity in the Body of Christ over this issue.

### **OUR GOD IS A COVENANT GOD**

To properly understand the Sabbath question one must understand the Covenantal aspect of God’s Nature. Jehovah, the God of Creation, and the God of the Bible is a Covenant God. All of his relations with mankind is based upon ‘Covenants’. All of his dealings with man, and his promises to man, are based upon Covenants. From the very beginning God has made certain covenants with men. Some covenants were universal, that is for all men. Other covenants God has

made with certain men in particular, or with certain nations peculiar. To understand the question of the Sabbath one MUST understand something about these covenants, and the Sabbath's role in these covenants. Let us begin with the Covenant that God made with Noah after the great flood.

## **THE NOAHIDE COVENANT**

One of the first covenants that God ever made with mankind is found in *Genesis 9:1-7*. There God made a Covenant with Noah and his Family, and his descendants. This Covenant has traditionally been called the Noahide Covenant, and the Commands are called the "Noahide Commandments". Since all of mankind has since sprung from the loins of Noah this Covenant has implications for every man on earth. In fact the true worshipers of God, from all generations forward were to keep the basic principles of this universal covenant.

In this Covenant there exists Seven General Laws, and these seven laws are traditionally subdivided into about thirty lesser ordinances. Which are as follows:.

### **1. Prohibition against idolatry**

No idolatry, Pray only to God  
Offer ritual sacrifices only to God

### **2. Prohibition against blasphemy**

Believe in the singularity of God  
No blasphemy, No idolatrous rituals, No divination  
No astrology, No following omens, No witchcraft  
No incantations  
No necromancy  
No mediums, Honor one's father and mother

### **3. Prohibition against murder**

No murder

No suicide

No Moloch worship (that is no infant sacrifice, this includes abortion)

### **4. Prohibition against theft**

No stealing

No kidnaping of persons

### **5. Prohibition against sexual immorality**

No adultery

Form legal marriages

No incest with close relatives

No Sodomy, No bestiality

Not to crossbreed animals, No castration

### **6. Prohibition against eating Blood**

Not to eat a limb torn from a creature while it is still living

Not to eat or drink blood, Not to eat carrion

### **7. Establish courts of justice**

To establish courts and a system of justice

No false oaths

As you the reader may notice a command to observe the Sabbath Day is strangely absent from this covenant that God made with Noah and his descendants. No where in the Book of Genesis is anyone commanded to observe a weekly Sabbath. Also it is important to realize that all of these Noahide laws can be found in both the New Testament and in the Mosaic Covenant which God made with the Nation of Israel; the reason being is that these laws are considered the general laws that govern all of mankind, the Noahide Covenant was an universal covenant for all nations.

## **ABRAHAMIC COVENANT**

Later God made a separate covenant with Abraham, while he was still under the Noahide covenant [*See Genesis 15*]. The Abrahamic covenant declared that because of Abraham's faith, God promised him a son in whom all nations would be blessed. Abraham believed God, as a gentile and his faith was "accounted as righteousness" . This occurred before the covenant of circumcision in the flesh and 430 years before the covenant of law which was given to the children of Jacob ( the children of Israel). Remember there is no Covenant of Moses at this time. No doubt the righteous requirements of the Noahide Covenant were included in the Covenant with Abraham.

Years later, God made another covenant with Abraham and his particular children for the rest of their generations. In this covenant all the males of Abraham's children [including their slaves] were commanded to be circumcised in the flesh [*See Genesis 17:10*]. In this covenant only those physical decedents from Abraham were to be circumcised in the flesh, it excluded the rest of the world. Circumcision was given as a "sign" between Abraham and "his seed" after him. From then on Abraham removed the foreskin of every male of his family and every servant of his family. This Covenant was only between God and Abraham's family, and thus we understand then that only Abraham's descendants were required to be circumcised.

## **THE MOSAIC COVENANT**

430 years later came the covenant at Mount Sinai. This covenant was made with the Children of Jacob (Israel). That is the physical descendants of Jacob only [1<sup>st</sup> Kings 8:9]. In this covenant God gave them all the laws of Moses, and the children of Israel agreed to keep the laws [Exodus 20-24].

This covenant was strictly between God and the children of Israel.

The gentiles [non-Jews] were never required to obey the laws of this covenant. As you read the Old Testament you will never see a Gentile condemned by God for breaking the terms of this Covenant. They are always condemned for breaking the laws that God gave to Noah and his decedents.

The sabbath, new moons, holy days, tithing, food laws, washing laws, sacrifices, offerings and hundreds of other laws, were all a part of the Old Covenant, that the gentiles were not expected to observe. These additional laws were a part of the special covenant between God and the children of Jacob only. The gentiles didn't agree to keep any of it and were not commanded to observe it. This Mosaic Covenant was to last until the promise of Abraham was fulfilled by the coming of Messiah, as seen in the following verse:

***Galatians 3:17-19** And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ [The Abrahamic Covenant], the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed [Jesus Christ] should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.*

## **THE NEW COVENANT**

When the Messiah, Jesus Christ [the promised seed of Abraham], came he made a New Covenant, and all the World is invited to enter it and be blessed [Luke 22:20]. The New Covenant was added to and thus fulfilled the Noahide

covenant and Abrahamic covenant, by which God promised to bless the entire world on the basis of righteousness by faith. The Old Covenant [Mosaic Covenant of Law] was completed by Christ, and it has since vanished away.

**Hebrews 8:13** *In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.*

Through the New Covenant all people on the basis of faith in God and his gracious provision for salvation are saved. They are saved apart from the covenant which was made at Mt. Sinai; Just as Abraham and Noah were saved by faith hundreds of years before Moses.

**Romans 3:21-22** *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:*

## **THE CHRISTIAN'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE SABBATH COMMAND.**

With this in mind I wish to speak of the New Covenant and its relationship to the Law of God and the Sabbath Command in particular. Some men will attempt to avoid the question by teaching that Christ broke the Sabbath and then abolished it. But Christ did not come to break his Father's law, nor to simply abolish that Law; he came rather to fulfill it. The Bible teaches that Christ was born "*Under the Law*" [Galatians 4:4], that is he was born a Jew, and thus the law had authority over him. If he would have broken any principle of the Mosaic law [including the Sabbath] he would

had sinned (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:4). And if he had sinned, we would not have a sinless Savior to die in our stead. How dreadful is such a doctrine that says Christ broke the Fourth Commandment! Christ said of himself, “I have kept my Father’s commandments”, and we should believe him. What Christ ignored was the man-made laws and traditions of the Pharisees that governed the Sabbath observance in Israel and this of course caused them to accuse him of being a “*sabbath breaker*”.

Irenaeus, an ancient Church Father, writing in 170 AD said that the only way Christ would have attempted to abolish the Sabbath was if he was of the devil.

"He [Jesus] was called “Lord of the Sabbath,” because He maintained the Sabbath as His own institution....Christ did not at all rescind the Sabbath.. He would have... if He belonged to the rival god...” (Irenaeus --Five books against Marcion, book 4).

So we see it is wrong to say that Christ broke the Sabbath and thus did away with it. What the Scriptures actually teaches is NOT that Christ abolished the Sabbath, but rather he fulfilled it, and he fulfilled it perfectly.

Now we move to the next point: If Christ kept the Sabbath and did not abolish it, but fulfilled it, what relationship does that day have for the New Covenant Christian? We shall explore that question in the next Chapter.

**HOW CHRIST’S NEW COVENANT FULFILLS THE**

## SABBATH COMMAND

**Hebrews 8:10-13** *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.*

As Christians we must realize that there is indeed a New Covenant [Hebrews 8:10-13]. This Covenant was prophesied to come in the Book of Jeremiah, which is quoted here in Hebrews. And if there is a New Covenant that has come, then the Old Covenant has passed away. And we are plainly told this through out the New Testament [**2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:8-13, Galatians 3:17-19**].

## THE HEART OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Ten Commandments, which were written upon two tables of stone, make up the very heart of the Old Covenant [See Exodus 34:28, Deuteronomy 4:13, 9:11, 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 8:9,21, Hebrews 9:4]. Now this Covenant which the writer of Hebrews called “Old” was made specifically with the Children of Israel and no one else [Malachi 4:4, Psalms 147:19-20]. For a Gentile to enter into this Covenant he had to become a Jew. He had to be circumcised, ceremonially washed, and then he had to agree, under oath, to follow the 613 laws of this covenant literally.



In Galatians Chapter Four Paul warned the Christians against attempting to put themselves under the Old Covenant, which he likened to bondage [Galatians 4:21-22, 30-31]. In fact Peter during the Jerusalem Council called this Old Covenant a “Yoke” of Bondage [Acts 15:10, Galatians 5:1] that even the Jews could not bear.

## **THE TERMS OF THE NEW COVENANT**

Now let us consider for a moment the terms of this New Covenant. **According to Hebrews 8:10-13:**

- #1. God promises that he will forgive and forget the iniquities of the people who enter this Covenant.
- #2. God promises to be a personal GOD to those who enter this Covenant, all that enter it shall know him personally.
- #3. God promises to write his Laws upon the hearts and minds of those who enter this Covenant with him.

Now we know that we Christians, who have entered this Covenant by faith in Christ, receive the forgiveness of sins through the Blood of Jesus. We also know that we enter into a personal relationship with GOD through the Spirit of Christ his Son, by which we are able to cry out, Abba Father. We also know that it is the Holy Spirit that writes upon our hearts the Law of GOD, and teaches us wrong from right.

You see in the Old Covenant the Finger of GOD, which is a synonym for the Spirit of GOD, wrote the Law of GOD on stone, and the law was given outwardly to the Children of Israel. Though the Law was holy, just and good; it served

only as a ministration of death under the Old Covenant, for it could only condemn the sinfulness of the people [*2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:7*].

But under the New Covenant God doesn't give tablets of Stone, he gives the Spirit of GOD, the finger of GOD, to those who believe upon Christ, and that Spirit writes upon our hearts the Law of GOD, and actually empowers the believer to obey it. This is explained well in Romans chapter eight.

**Romans 8:1-4** ¶ There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness [the righteous requirements] of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

“The Law” here does not refer only to the Ten Commandments, but includes every part of the ‘Law’ that deals with morality. Though the Christian is not under the “Old Covenant”, the righteous [moral] commands of the Law are written upon the hearts of the believer by the Spirit, and if he walks in the Spirit, that is if he puts himself under the control and influence of the Spirit he will fulfill the righteous requirements of the Old Law.

## **Now let me sum up what we have taught thus far.**

- #1. The Christian is under the New Covenant.
- #2. The Old Covenant is passed away.
- #3. Yet the Christian, if he walks in the Spirit will fulfill the Righteous Requirements of the Law.

## **THE LAW IS TO BE READ SPIRITUALLY**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:15-17** And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. **All scripture** is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

Now here is a point we must understand. Though the Law as a Covenant has been done away, the “Law” as Scripture remain. And as Scripture it is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correcting and instructing in righteousness. And as Paul elsewhere writes, these Scriptures were written for our “Admonition” and for our “Learning” [*see Romans 15:4, 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:11*].

Christians are commanded to search and study these Scriptures, but not in the carnal way as an unbelieving Jew would; but rather we are to be in search of Christ, and a better knowledge of him, for these Scriptures testify of Christ [*John 5:39*]. The Torah is Spiritual [*Romans 7:14*], it is spiritually written and it must be Spiritually discerned. The carnal Jew, or the carnal man in general cannot discern the true spiritual intent of the Law, because there is a veil

over their hearts, but that veil is taken away in Christ, by the Spirit [1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:13-14, 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:14].

## **THE SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS OF THE LAW**

When a Christian reads in the Law about the Passover Lamb being without spot and blemish, and its blood being applied to the door posts of the house so that the death angel passes over that household, what does he see? The Christian sees Jesus Christ, the one without sin, who became sin for us, and who shed his blood and suffered our death, so that the Justice of God might be satisfied, and that the wrath of GOD and damnation might Passover us! As Paul wrote, “*Jesus our Passover is sacrificed for us*” [1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5:7].

When a Christian reads the ordinances concerning the ancient priesthood, what does he see? He sees Christ. The Priesthood pictures Christ as our High Priest, the lone mediator between GOD and man, who ever lives to make intercession for us.

In the same way the Ark of the Covenant pictures Christ, in whose heart is the law of God, who is a priest forever after the order of Melchisedek. And who is the bread that came down from heaven to give life unto the world.

The Temple is a picture of the Body of Christ, where dwells the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And the divine services pictures Christ’s work in the heavenly places for his people.

## EXAMPLE OF CIRCUMCISION

Now I want to consider specifically the Command of Circumcision that was given in the Old Testament. Please read the following verses:

**Colossians 2:9-12** For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

And in another place Paul wrote:

**Romans 2:29** But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Here is a perfect example to help us understand the Spiritual intent of the Law. Circumcision was given to Abraham as a “sign” between him and GOD. It was a sign and ‘seal’ of the Abrahamic Covenant [Romans 4:11]. It was given 430 years before the Ten Commandments were given at Mount Sinai. The Command of Circumcision was then included in the Covenant that God made with Israel. All the Patriarchs and Prophets were circumcised. Jesus and his Apostles were all circumcised; because they were Jews who were born under the law.

But this carnal command that was a sign to the Jews of the Old Covenant, was in reality a shadow of Christ's work in the New Covenant. What does this sign teach us? It teaches the Christian that Jesus Christ, through his Spirit will circumcise the hearts of all who believe upon him. Believers in Christ receive a Spiritual Circumcision where the hardness of their hearts is removed, and they become obedient to the will of GOD.

You will also notice from the reading of the New Testament that the Christian is not to attempt to put himself under the yoke and burden of these 'laws'. The only ones who had to fulfill these 'signs' physically were those who were under this covenant [Galatians 5:2-3]. Jesus Christ fulfills these laws spiritually in the heart of the believer.

**Here is the principle that we learn from this.** Old Covenant 'signs' are in reality 'shadows' that teach us New Testament realities that are always fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The 'Sign Commands' are not without significance and purpose, for they speak to Christians about their experience in the reality of Christ.

## **THE SABBATH COMMAND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Now I want to turn our attention to the Sabbath Command found in the Decalogue and in other parts of the Old Covenant. I am not one of those who believes that Christ fulfills Nine of the Ten Commandments in the life of the Believer, but leaves the Fourth Commandment undone, as if it was insignificant. Christ did not come to do that, he came to fulfill the whole Law, and to cause us, by his Spirit, to

fulfill the righteous requirements of the law. The Ten Commandments are quoted through out the New Testament as an authoritative document [Ephesians 6:2]. The early Church had a great respect for the Ten Commandments and felt they were binding principles for the Christian. Here is one example:

**Irenaeus [170 AD]**“[During the Exodus] the Lord Himself did speak in His own person to all alike the words of the Decalogue; and therefore, in like manner, do they remain permanently with us... “From the beginning He had implanted in mankind, that is, by means of the Decalogue (which, if any one does not observe, he has no salvation)...” – Against Heresies

Yet we must remember that the Ten Commandments as the “Old Covenant” is done away; but as Scriptures, and righteous principles they remain; but they must be read with New Covenant eyes, that is they are to be Spiritually understood and spiritually applied to the believer. Here is an example: The Ten Commandments state: “*Thou shalt not commit Adultery*”. But Christ applied this Spiritually, even to the heart, when he said, “*He that looks upon a woman to lust after her commits adultery in his heart*”. You see how the Command and the Principle remains, but that it is magnified and applied spiritually to the follower of Christ? This is especially true of the Sabbath Commandment.

## THE SABBATH IS A SIGN

First we must realize that the Sabbath Command was given to the Nation of Israel as a ‘sign’ between them and God.

**Nehemiah 9:14** And [you God] madest known unto them [Israel] thy holy sabbath...

**Ezekiel 20:12** Moreover also I gave them [Israel] my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them.

**Exodus 31:13** Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you.

God never commanded anyone else to keep the Sabbath but the Jews. God never condemned any other nation for breaking the Sabbath, just as he never condemned a Gentile for not being circumcised. As far as we have record, no one was commanded to observe the Seventh Day Sabbath until Moses lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt [Exodus 16]. We must also remember that a ‘sign’ command cannot be a moral precept. God cannot tell a nation, “Thou shalt not murder... and that shall be a sign between me and you”. For he commands all nations to abstain from such wickedness. Signs are not moral laws, but rather are ritualistic commands that distinguishes one group of people from another.



## FROM SIGN TO SHADOW.

Now the principle we learned from our look at circumcision is that an Old Testament sign when studied spiritually becomes a shadow of Christ and his work in us. Many people find it hard to believe that the Sabbath Command was in reality a shadow of Jesus Christ and his Spiritual work in us. But here is positive proof:

**Colossians 2:16-17** Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

Paul plainly calls the Sabbath a “Shadow of things to come”. Some will argue that ‘sabbath days’ here does not refer to the Seventh Day Sabbath because it is plural [*sabbath days*], and thus must refer to the yearly feast days of the Jews; but this is not so. The exact Greek word [*sabbatwv*] is used eleven times in the New Testament and each time it refers specifically to the weekly Sabbath. [*Look at Acts 13:14 and Luke 4:16 for an example*].

Secondly, it should also be noted that any time Sabbaths and New Moons are mentioned together in the Bible the ‘Sabbaths’ are always in reference to the Seventh Day [*Ezekiel 45:17, Hosea 2:11, Nehemiah 10:33*].

Thirdly, Paul had already made reference to the “feast days” when he said, “holy day”, for in the Greek it literally means “feast days”, and it would had been redundant for him to repeat himself.

## THE BODY IS CHRIST

Thus we see that the Sabbath Command was a ‘sign’ for the Jew, and it is a shadow for us; but a shadow of what? We are told by Paul that the “Body is Christ”. That is Christ is the real substance that the shadow points to. Now I want to explain how the Sabbath is a shadow of Christ and Christ’s work in us.

**#1. Christ is our rest.** He invites all men saying: “*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. – Matthew 11:28* ” Christ gives them who come to him spiritual rest. He gives them peace in their conscience, ease of mind and tranquillity of soul through the application of his pardoning grace. He let’s them rest in salvation, and so that they can cease forever in trying to earn right standing with God, for their justification is freely given to them. Christ let’s men rest from their burden of sin, for he lifts it off of them, and places it upon his own shoulders.

**#2. Christ fulfills the Sabbath in us.** “*For we which have believed do enter into rest...*” – *Hebrews 4:3*. Christ taught [by word and by example] that the great principle of the Sabbath command was not idleness; but rather resting from evil and doing that which is good [*Matthew 12:12*]. Now consider how he fulfills the principle of the Sabbath in us.

**A.** The Christian who walks in the Spirit, being dead to sin in Christ, does not perform the works of the flesh. These are the works that God forbids every day [*Galatians 5:18-21*].

**B.** The Christian who walks in the Spirit ceases to speak his own sinful words, and ceases to do his own sinful pleasures;

and delights in holiness every day [Isaiah 58:13, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:10, Ephesians 4:24].

**C.** The Christian who walks in the Spirit worships God at his temple [*our Body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost*] every day [1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:19].

**D.** What ever work or labor that a Christian performs he does it to the glory of God as if he was working for Christ himself [1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:31, Ephesians 6:5].

This is how the Sabbath Command was interpreted by the early Church. Remember **Irenaeus** who so upheld the Decalogue? This is how he explained the Sabbath Command:

**Irenaeus 170 AD:** Moreover, we learn from the Scripture itself, that God gave circumcision, not as the completer of righteousness, but as a sign, that the race of Abraham might continue recognizable.... This same does Ezekiel the prophet say with regard to the Sabbaths... These things, then, were given for a sign; but the signs were not unsymbolical, that is, neither unmeaning nor to no purpose, inasmuch as they were given by a wise Artist... the Sabbaths taught that we should continue day by day in God's service. "For we have been counted," says the Apostle Paul, "all the day long as sheep for the slaughter;" that is, consecrated [to God], and ministering continually to our faith, and persevering in it, and abstaining from all avarice, and not acquiring or possessing treasures upon earth."

Irenaeus was not alone in this teaching, but the other prominent writers of his time taught the same doctrine; which we shall prove by the following quotes:

**Ignatius [107 AD]** – "Let us therefore no longer keep the Sabbath after the Jewish manner, and rejoice in days of idleness; But let every one of you keep the Sabbath after a spiritual manner, rejoicing in meditation on the law, not in relaxation of the body, admiring the workmanship of God, and not eating things prepared the day before, nor using lukewarm drinks, and walking within a prescribed space, nor finding delight in dancing and plaudits which have no sense in them." Ignatius - To the Magnesians chapter 9 (about 107 AD)

**150 AD Justin Martyr:** "The new law requires you to keep perpetual sabbath, and you, because you are idle for one day, suppose you are pious, not discerning why this has been commanded you: and if you eat unleavened bread, you say the will of God has been fulfilled. The Lord our God does not take pleasure in such observances: if there is any perjured person or a thief among you, let him cease to be so; if any adulterer, let him repent; then he has kept the sweet and true sabbaths of God. If any one has impure hands, let him wash and be pure...." – Justin against Trypho chapter 12 and 23

**Tertullian 220 AD:** "we (Christians) understand that we still more ought to observe a sabbath from all "servile work" always, and not only every seventh day, but through all time"

**#3. The Sabbath is a shadow of the Christian's eternal rest in Christ. *Hebrews 4:9 There remaineth therefore a rest [Sabbath rest] to the people of God.***

According to the Book of Hebrews the Sabbath also pictures

the future eternal rest for the Christian in the Kingdom of God. The Bible teaches that in the Eternal Kingdom there will be *“no night there”*, that the *“Sun shall no more go down”*, *“But it shall be one day”* [Revelation 22:5, Isaiah 60:20, Zechariah 14:7].

The Sabbath is a shadow of ‘Heaven’, our eternal rest in Christ, which is likened to an unending day, a wonderful/eternal Rest in Paradise. Where the Christian shall be free from all physical pain and suffering and toils. This again is the ancient view of the Church, as seen by the following quotes:

**Irenaeus 170 AD:** “Moreover, the Sabbath of God (requietio Dei), that is, the kingdom, was, as it were, indicated by created things; in which [kingdom], the man who shall have persevered in serving God (Deo assistere) shall, in a state of rest, partake of God’s table.... These are [to take place] in the times of the kingdom, that is, upon the seventh day, which has been sanctified, in which God rested from all the works which He created, which is the true Sabbath of the righteous, which they shall not be engaged in any earthly occupation; but shall have a table at hand prepared for them by God, supplying them with all sorts of dishes.”

**Hippolytus 210 AD** “For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they “shall reign with Christ,” when He comes from heaven, as John says in his Apocalypse: for “a day with the Lord is as a thousand years.” Since, then, in six days God made all things, it follows that 6,000 years must be fulfilled.””

## THE ORIGINAL SABBATH – REMEMBER.

**Hebrews 4:3-4** For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works.

According to this verse the “works of God” were finished from the foundation of the world, but men have refused to enter that rest. What does this mean? What was finished?

It should be noted that in Genesis Two we read of the original Sabbath. God worked for six days in creating the heavens and the earth and then rested the seventh day. Please notice that each previous day of creation ended with the saying, “And the evening and the morning...”. But the Seventh does not end this way. I suggest to you that the original Sabbath was not a twenty-four hour period, but was made to last for eternity. God intended it to be an unending day of bliss for man in paradise. It was ‘heaven on earth’. But man did not continue in this state, but rather he sinned and fell. That primordial Sabbath thus ended, and God began the work of redeeming fallen man. As Jesus said: **“Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” – John 5:17**

And so we see that the ancient Sabbath command served as a reminder to Israel of Paradise lost. But we Christians see it as symbolic of Paradise gained through Christ.

## **BUT IS IT BIBLICAL?**

*The Question Is:* Do we have a clear Biblical precedent that early Christians observed a perpetual Sabbath? That is, did they treat every day as holy, and thus regarded every day unto the Lord? We most certainly do. It is given in the following verse:

**Romans 14:5** One man regardeth one day to be above another: another regardeth every day alike. Let each man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Roman Church, which was a mixture of both Jewish and Gentile believers. Most of the Jewish believers continued to rest on the Seventh Day as were their custom, while the majority of Gentile believers treated every day alike, and holy unto the Lord.

The Apostle Paul condemns neither, but leaves every man free in his own mind. Now this should forever settle the question of a weekly holy day, be it Saturday or Sunday. For if the Christian was obligated to observe a certain day of the week above the other six, Paul could not had given men such freedom. He would have had to condemn the one who treated every day the same for breaking a clear Apostolic command. But there is no rebuke here, for there is no obligation on the Christian to observe a particular day and the passage cannot be understood any other way.

## **IS SUNDAY THE CHRISTIAN ‘SABBATH’?**

There is a popular doctrine in many Churches today that declares Sunday to be a “Christian Sabbath”. And men are very eager to impose all the restrictions that were associated with the ancient Sabbath upon the First Day of the Week. I assume that you, the reader, have heard how it is wrong to shop on Sunday and how it is wrong to mow your grass, or to labor on the job, or to work on your home on Sunday. I have personally heard a preacher say that the Christians who go to Wal-mart on Sunday are going to hell.

But we know from our previous study that this is absolutely unscriptural. This mentality is against the very principles of the New Covenant and the liberty that we have in Jesus Christ. We are plainly commanded not to judge or set at nought our brethren over the observance of days [*Romans 14, Colossians 2*], yet many are ready to do so every Sunday morning.

First we must realize men are never commanded in the Bible to rest on Sunday the first day of the week. I have found where, in the Old Testament, God actually commands men to work on that day, and there God calls Sunday a ‘working day’ [Ezekiel 46:1], but I cannot find a single verse in all of Holy Writ that condemns men for working on the first day of the week. Now if there is not a law in all the Bible that forbids men from working on Sunday. And if God has not forbade such work, then to work on that day is not sin. “*For where there is no law, there is no transgression*”- *Romans 4:15*.



I have often pointed this fact out to men and one of the most common responses I have received is the following: ***“But we set aside Sunday as the Sabbath!”***. I must ask, “Who is the ‘WE’ in your statement?” You and what other man set it aside? For God certainly did not. He commanded the Nation of Israel to rest on the Seventh Day which is Saturday, but he never commanded anyone to keep Sunday as the Sabbath. Don’t you think that if He gave such a command that he would have clearly written it in his Bible? And if there is no Divine Command to be idle on Sunday, then the command must be of human origin. If you wish to rest on Sunday that is your choice, you have such freedom in Christ; but you do not have the freedom to attempt to impose your personal convictions on another. Also, since when should Christians obey the traditions of men? My Bible tells me that we should obey God rather than man. Will you not agree that a Christian ought to obey God? Then if we are honest we should open up his Bible and see what he commands about Sunday. And then we should be sure not to add anything else to his word, unless we be found liars [Proverbs 30:6].

### **HOW DO WE KNOW THAT SUNDAY IS NOT THE SEVENTH DAY?**

This is a question that is often asked in sincerity by those who have been taught through out their life that “Sunday” is the Sabbath of the Bible. But remember, if Sunday is the Seventh Day, then we know from Scriptures that it was a shadow of Christ and has been fulfilled by him, and men are not bound to observe it. Yet we know that the ancient Sabbath fell upon the seventh day of the week [Genesis 2, Exodus 20]. Which day is the seventh day of the week? It has always been what we call Saturday. Amazingly in twenty-three ancient languages the Seventh Day [Saturday]

is called Sabbath. The very reason men keep a seven-day week is because God created the earth in six days and rested the seventh. You see our months are based upon the Lunar cycle, and our year is based upon the Solar cycle, but the seven day week is not based upon anything natural, but rather it originated in Genesis, when God worked six days and rested the Seventh. Also we are taught plainly that the Tomb of Christ was found empty on the first day of the week, which is now commonly called "Easter Sunday"; but we see that the day before Sunday was the day the Jewish believers rested [Luke 23:56, Luke 24:1-3]. Clearly Saturday is the Seventh Day, and the Seventh Day is the ancient Sabbath. This truth is admitted by all major denominations, here are a few examples:

### **Roman Catholic Confessions**

James Cardinal Gibbons, *The Faith of our Fathers*, 88th ed., pp. 89.

"But you may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify."

James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore (1877-1921), in a signed letter.

"Is Saturday the seventh day according to the Bible and the Ten Commandments? I answer *yes*. Is Sunday the first day of the week... I answer *yes*. Did Christ change the day? I answer *no!*

## **Anglican/Episcopal**

Canon Eyton, *The Ten Commandments* , pp. 52, 63, 65.

"There is no word, no hint, in the New Testament about abstaining from work on Sunday .... into the rest of Sunday no divine law enters.... The observance of Ash Wednesday or Lent stands exactly on the same footing as the observance of Sunday."

Bishop Seymour, *Why We Keep Sunday* .

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."

## **Baptist**

Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, a paper read before a New York ministers' conference, Nov. 13, 1893, reported in *New York Examiner* , Nov.16, 1893.

"There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but that Sabbath day was not Sunday. It will be said, however, and with some show of triumph, that the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week .... Where can the record of such a transaction be found? Not in the New Testament absolutely not.

"To me it seems unaccountable that Jesus, during three years' intercourse with His disciples, often conversing with them upon the Sabbath question . . . never alluded to any transference of the day; also, that during forty days of His resurrection life, no such thing was intimated.

"Of course, I quite well know that Sunday did come into use in early Christian history . . . . But what a pity it comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism!"

William Owen Carver, *The Lord's Day in Our Day*, p. 49.

"There was never any formal or authoritative change from the Jewish seventh-day Sabbath to the Christian first-day observance."

### **Congregationalist**

Dr. R. W. Dale, *The Ten Commandments* (New York: Eaton & Mains), p. 127-129.

". . . it is quite clear that however rigidly or devotedly we may spend Sunday, we are not keeping the Sabbath - . . . The Sabbath was founded on a specific Divine command. We can plead no such command for the obligation to observe Sunday .... There is not a single sentence in the New Testament to suggest that we incur any penalty by violating the supposed sanctity of Sunday."

### **Disciples of Christ**

Alexander Campbell, *The Christian Baptist*, Feb. 2, 1824, vol. 1. no. 7, p. 164.

"'But,' say some, 'it was changed from the seventh to the first day.' Where? when? and by whom? No man can tell. No; it never was changed, nor could it be,

unless creation was to be gone through again: for the reason assigned must be changed before the observance, or respect to the reason, can be changed! It is all old wives' fables to talk of the change of the Sabbath from the seventh to the first day. If it be changed, it was that august personage changed it who changes times and laws *ex officio* - I think his name is Doctor Antichrist.'

*First Day Observance* , pp. 17, 19.

"The first day of the week is commonly called the Sabbath. This is a mistake. The Sabbath of the Bible was the day just preceding the first day of the week. The first day of the week is never called the Sabbath anywhere in the entire Scriptures. It is also an error to talk about the change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. There is not in any place in the Bible any intimation of such a change."

## **Lutheran**

*The Sunday Problem* , a study book of the United Lutheran Church (1923), p. 36.

"We have seen how gradually the impression of the Jewish sabbath faded from the mind of the Christian Church, and how completely the newer thought underlying the observance of the first day took possession of the church. We have seen that the Christians of the first three centuries never confused one with the other, but for a time celebrated both."

Dr. Augustus Neander, *The History of the Christian Religion and Church* Henry John Rose, tr. (1843), p. 186.

"The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance, and it was far from the intentions of the apostles to establish a Divine command in this respect, far from them, and from the early apostolic Church, to transfer the laws of the Sabbath to Sunday."

### **Methodist**

Harris Franklin Rall, *Christian Advocate*, July 2, 1942, p.26.

"Take the matter of Sunday. There are indications in the New Testament as to how the church came to keep the first day of the week as its day of worship, but there is no passage telling Christians to keep that day, or to transfer the Jewish Sabbath to that day."

### **WHAT SUNDAY HAS BEEN HISTORICALLY TO THE CHURCH.**

Some will ask, "Then where did this ancient custom of keeping Sunday as the Christian Sabbath begin?" Well it should be first noted that it is not that ancient of a practice. The custom of going to Church on Sunday is indeed a very old Christian tradition. There is possible evidence of this even in the book of Acts chapter twenty, where we read that the Christians came together on the "first day of the week", which was actually what we would call a Saturday night service [*The ancient people reckoned the beginning of a day from sunset to sunset. This meeting was held after sunset, thus it had to be on a Saturday Night*]. The Apostle Paul also mentioned the first day of the week when he spoke of taking up a collection for the poor saints

in Jerusalem [1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 16:2].

We also know that Christian writers from the second century onward to the Fourth Century have spoken of Sunday as a “Festival Day”, the “Lord’s Day” or a day for “Common Assembly”, but it was never called the “Christian Sabbath”. To the early Church Sunday was a day that they gathered together to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But what we do not find is any confusion in the Bible or in the early centuries of the Church between Sabbath and Sunday. The early Christians made a clear distinction between these two days, and did not pretend that Sunday was the Sabbath. As you have already noticed the early Church Fathers were against being idle on any day of the week. To the early Church Sunday was a day to hold a common assembly to celebrate the resurrection of Christ. To the early Christians it was a festival, not a Sabbath; as seen by the following quotations:

“And after the observance of the Sabbath, let every friend of Christ keep the Lord’s Day as a festival” -  
107 AD Ignatius to the Magnesians

“But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly” – Justin Martyr 150 AD

“We make Sunday a day of festivity.” – Tertullian  
220 AD

What many people do not realize is the fact that many of

the early Christians continued to have Church on the ancient Sabbath also; of course not keeping the day as a Jew would, but assembling in honor of Christ, the Creator [Ephesians 3:9, John 1:1-3, Hebrews 1:1-3].

"The primitive Christians had a great veneration for the Sabbath, and spent the day in devotion and sermons. And it is not to be doubted but they derived this practice from the Apostles themselves, as appears by several scriptures to the purpose." – Dialogues on the Lord's Day, p. 189. London: 1701, By Dr. T.H. Morer (A Church of England divine).

“Christians, for a long time together, did keep their conventions upon the Sabbath, in which some portions of the law were read: and this continued till the time of the Laodicean council." "The Whole Works" of Jeremy Taylor, Vol. IX,p. 416 (R. Heber's Edition, Vol XII, p. 416).

**Socrates [439 AD] --:** "For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this." (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series, Vol. 2, p. 132.)

**Sozomen [460 A.D.] –** "The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria." (Ecc. History, Book 7,



chap. 19. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Second Series, Vol. 2, p. 390.)

The testimonies of Socrates and Sozomen are very important because these men lived in the fifth century, and had access to all the existing material, and yet they bear testimony to the fact that it was the almost universal custom of the church at that time to have services on both Sabbath and Sunday. Please also notice that the practice of having Church on Saturday was abandoned in both Rome and Alexandria. We know from history that this was mostly due to the rise of anti-semitism [hatred for the Jews] in these two cities.

### **MAN'S ATTEMPT TO MAKE SUNDAY THE SABBATH**

So we see from the Bible and Church history that the tradition of having Church on Sunday in honor of the Resurrection of Christ started very early. But we also see that there was no Divine Command for such attendance, nor did Sunday take the place of the Ancient Sabbath, or was it even considered a "Sabbath". It was a festival, a holiday, and men could do as they pleased, as long as it was righteous, on that day. But this 'tradition' soon took upon it a new meaning through the work of the Roman Church and Emperor Constantine.

### **ROME'S NEW SABBATH DAY**

In **321 AD** Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, who was considered both a pagan god and a Christian Saint, passed the first Sunday Law ordering those who dwelt in the cities to rest from their work. It should be remembered

that Constantine worshiped Mithra the Persian sun-god before his conversion, and worked to meld the two religions [*Mithraism and Christianity*] together. Sunday was of course the holy day of Mithra worshipers. Here is the actual Sunday Law passed by Constantine.

"On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in the cities rest, and let all workshops be closed" *Constantine, March 7, 321 A.D., Codex Justinianus lib. 3, tit. 12,3; trans. in Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. 3, pg. 380, note 1.*

This is the first time in the history of the Church that Sunday was considered a day of rest, as admitted by Pope John Paul II.

“For several centuries, Christians observed Sunday simply as a day of worship, without being able to give it the specific meaning of Sabbath rest. Only in the fourth century did the civil law of the Roman Empire recognize the weekly recurrence”*Apostolic Letter Dies Domini of Pope John Paul II*

It should be noted that the ministers who command men to observe Sunday as the Sabbath are not teaching the Commandments of GOD, but rather the very commandment of Constantine the Great, who was a wicked pagan murderer.

Finally in 364 AD, the Church of Rome through the Council of Laodicia ordered all Christians to cease in their

observance of the Biblical Sabbath, and commanded them to keep Sunday as a Sabbath. As you remember the Apostles commanded the Christians not to judge one another over the observance of the Sabbath and Days in general, but gave every man the freedom of conscience. As you see, freedom is a thing foreign to the Roman Church, for she seeks to control all that are under her. The following is an actual quote from the Council.

"Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday, but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day they shall especially honor, and, as being christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. IF, however, they are found Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ." *Oh. Y. Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church, Vol. 2, pg. 316.*

The Catholic Church freely admits that they are responsible for attempting to make Sunday 'the Sabbath'. The following is from the Roman Church's official Catechism.

**Q.** "Which is the Sabbath day?" **A.** Saturday is the Sabbath day.

**Q.** "Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?"

**A.** "We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic church, in the council of Laodicea (364 A.D.) transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday" *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine, by Rev. Peter Geirman, Second Edition,*

## **THE HERITAGE OF THE PURITANS.**

In the Seventeenth Century the Puritans picked up the tradition of the "Sunday Sabbath" from the Roman Church, and began to invoke strict laws against its violation. It was as if the very spirit of the ancient Pharisees had entered them, and they began to be the new guardians of the "Sabbath Day", though the day they called "Sabbath" was actually no Sabbath at all! From the Puritans other Protestant groups, especially in America have accepted 'Sunday' as the Sabbath, and they have worked to force men to observe it. Even calling upon the Governments of the world to pass laws to enforce its observation. By whose authority do they invoke such laws? Again, it is not a law of God, but a law of Rome. And it is an adulterous doctrine that attempts to marry the believer in Christ to the Old Covenant signs. Believers in Christ have died with Christ, and are thus free from these shadows. I urge the believers not to be brought under bondage to the laws and the traditions of men, just as the Reformer Martin Luther once wrote:

"If anywhere the day [Sabbath] is made holy for the mere day's sake, if anywhere any one sets up its observance on a Jewish foundation, then I order you to work on it, to ride on it, to dance on it, to feast on it, to do anything that shall remove this encroachment on Christian liberty" (Martin Luther, Table Talk, quoted in Bampton Lectures, p. 166, by Dr. Hesse).

## **SUMMARY OF THE FACTS**

We believe the Old Testament laws governing Sabbath observances are ceremonial, not moral, aspects of the law and have thus been fulfilled by Christ. The physical regulations concerning the signs and ceremonies of the Mosaic law were only binding upon those who were under the Old Covenant, and therefore Christians are not required to observe them. Here are Twelve Facts that supports this position:

**#1.** The Sabbath was the sign to Israel of the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 31:16-17; Ezekiel 20:12; Nehemiah 9:14). Since we are now under the New Covenant (Hebrews 8), we are no longer required to observe the sign of the Mosaic Covenant.

**#2.** In Colossians 2:16-17, Paul explicitly refers to the Sabbath as a shadow of Christ, which is no longer binding since the substance (Christ) has come. It is quite clear in those verses that the weekly Sabbath is in view. The phrase "a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day" refers to the annual, monthly, and weekly holy days of the Jewish calendar (cf. 1 Chronicles 23:31; 2 Chronicles 2:4; 31:3; Ezekiel 45:17; Hosea 2:11). If Paul were referring to special ceremonial dates of rest in that passage, why would he have used the word "Sabbath?" He had already mentioned the ceremonial dates when he spoke of festivals and new moons.

**#3.** The New Testament never commands Christians to observe the Sabbath. Or condemns them for breaking it.

**#4.** According to the Bible the ‘Law’ only speaks to them that are under it [Romans 3:19] And Christians are not under the law [Galatians 3:24-26, Romans 6:14].

**#5.** Nowhere in the Old Testament are the Gentile nations commanded to observe the Sabbath or condemned for failing to do so. That is certainly strange if Sabbath observance were meant to be an eternal moral principle.

**#6.** There is no evidence in the Bible of anyone keeping the Sabbath before the time of Moses, nor are there any commands in the Bible to keep the Sabbath before the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai [Exodus 16].

**#7.** When the Apostles met at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), they did not impose Sabbath keeping on the Gentile believers.

**#8.** The apostle Paul warned the Gentiles about many different sins in his epistles, but breaking the Sabbath was never one of them.

**#9.** In Galatians 4:10-11, Paul rebukes the Galatians for thinking God required them to observe the days set aside in the Old Covenant (including the Sabbath).

**#10** In Romans 14:5, Paul forbids those who observed one day of the week above the others to condemn those who treated every day alike.

**#11.** Every day to the believer is one of Sabbath rest, since we have ceased from our spiritual labor and are resting in the salvation of the Lord (Hebrews 4:9-11).

**#12** Sunday has not replaced Saturday as the Sabbath. Rather Sunday is a holiday that some believers set aside to commemorate Christ's resurrection, which occurred on the first day of the week. There are no laws in the Bible that govern or command the observance of Sunday.

## **CONCLUSION.**

**Romans 14:5,6, 10-13** One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard its... But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

Just as circumcision is fulfilled by Christ in the heart of the Believer, the Sabbath is also. Those who 'rest' in Christ, keep the Spiritual Sabbath, and fulfill the law of God. And cannot be judged as "Sabbath Breakers". What we should do is obey the doctrine of Paul and cease to condemn one another over the subject of 'days'. And we should never seek to enforce our convictions upon the conscience of our fellow believers. Those who are Christ's, are free men, and where the Spirit of the Lord resides there is liberty.

## AN INVITATION

Before I close this booklet I would like to ask the reader an important question: Do you know the rest of Jesus Christ? Have you the peace of God in your heart? Have you surrendered your sin and your life to Christ? Are you saved? God promises the sinners, “There is no rest for the wicked”; but to them who truly believes on his Son he promises perfect rest. If you don’t know the Lord, will you not call upon him, repenting of your sins, and trusting in his perfect work. Ask him to save you from your heart, and he will. This is his promise to you:

***“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; he that believes not shall be damned” - Mark 16:16***

Sincerely

Bro. Martin Eldon Bledsoe