

Commonly Raised Objections to 7th day Sabbath Observance

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.” Exodus 20:7-11.

A person showing interest in the seventh day Sabbath will be confronted with many reasons why they should not observe it and why Sunday, or any day they choose should remain their main day of rest, fellowship and/or worship. Many also advocate that we do not need a Sabbath day anymore because Jesus is our Sabbath-rest every day. Below is a sample of the many objections I have heard, many of which are given by pastors of Sunday churches today. I have known people who have actually been convicted to observe Sabbath in light of the ridiculous nature of many of these Sabbath objections. Perhaps you will be similarly convicted, or strengthened in your current conviction to observe Sabbath.

The Bible does not specifically say ‘seventh day’

A pastor may not give this reason, but I have heard others say this in an attempt to justify Sunday. Refer to Exodus 20:7-11 above in as many translations as you want. Certainly you will see that the Bible is specific as to the day being the seventh day.

Sunday is the seventh day

This is plainly false as well. Below are some definitions from reputable dictionaries.

Oxford English Dictionary: *Saturday* – the seventh day of the week. *Sunday* – the first day of the week observed by Christians as a day of rest and worship in commemoration of Christ’s resurrection. **Macquarie Dictionary:** *Saturday* – the seventh day of the week following Friday. *Sunday* – the first day of the week, the day of worship for most Christian denominations observed in commemoration of the resurrection of Christ.

Even without relying on dictionary definitions one can see that Sunday is regarded as the first day of the week in the Bible by looking at Matthew 28:1-6 which says that “*after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone ... and sat on it ... And the guards shook for fear of him ... But the angel answered and said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen as He said. Come and see the place where the Lord lay’*”. From this passage we see that the Bible recognizes that the first day, when the tomb of Jesus was found to be empty (commonly acknowledged to be Sunday), follows the Sabbath. Clearly then, Sunday cannot be the Sabbath.

We do not know which is the seventh day anymore

Some argue that due to calendar changes over the centuries it is no longer possible to determine which day is the seventh, so it doesn't really matter what day we rest and worship on. Several arguments are raised about the lack of continuity of the weekly cycle from creation to Christ. However, Luke 4:16 says that it was Jesus' custom to observe the Sabbath. He was obedient to His Father's commandments. Therefore it's hard to believe that Jesus did not know the correct day.

From Christ until now it is recognized that in 1582 the Julian calendar was replaced by the Gregorian calendar. Ten days of October 1582 were dropped to make the calendar coincide with the solar year. History shows however that the weekly cycle was not interrupted. The Catholic Encyclopedia (1910 Vol. 3 p740) states:

“It is to be noted that in the Christian period, the order of the days in the week has never been interrupted. Thus when Gregory XIII reformed the calendar in 1582, Thursday 4 October, was followed by Friday, 15 October. So in England Wednesday, 2 September, was followed by Thursday, 14 September.” (please order our free booklet ‘The Weekly Cycle’ which gives more detailed information on this topic).

Further, it is not logical to assume that people as devoted to the Sabbath, as the Jews were, would somehow mistakenly get their days muddled up, or would indeed even accept a man-made change if one was ever made. The clear conclusion is that time has not been lost or changed – we know that our sunset Friday to sunset Saturday is still the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath is for Jews/Israelites, not mankind in general

Genesis 2:1-3 gives the account of God resting on the 7th day, blessing it, and sanctifying it. This was a very long time before the Jews or Israelites came on the scene so how could it be just for them? Notice also that Jesus is quoted in Mark 2:27 as saying “The *Sabbath was made for man*, and not man for the Sabbath”. It was therefore supposed to be a blessing for all mankind, not just Israel.

Indeed, if we pause to reflect for a moment, Adam must have kept the Sabbath. It would seem incredible if he didn't. Would God not allow him the blessing of resting from all his labours and worshipping God undistracted on this day in the garden after having made it for man, sanctifying it (setting it apart as a holy day), putting a blessing in it and giving His own example of resting Himself? Wouldn't it strike you as very odd if God did all this with respect to the Sabbath day and then kept the Sabbath 'on ice' (so to speak) for thousands of years until Moses and the Israelites came into the wilderness? In the perfect state of Eden, before the fall into sin, surely a Sabbath rest was enjoyed by Adam and Eve. The Sabbath is not exclusively a 'Jewish' thing.

One day in seven is okay – God wouldn't care; He's not that particular

The big problem with this objection is that we have a very strong example of God showing that strict obedience does matter to Him. Obedience to His Sabbath command was so important to God that He even prescribed the punishment of death in the Law of Moses for breaking it (Exodus 31:15). It is in God's nature to be concerned about people

seeking to obey exactly what he says. Remember also how Moses did not enter the Promised Land because he struck the rock instead of speaking to it as he had been commanded.

The law is a 'nailed to the cross' shadow; let no one judge you over Sabbaths
(Colossians 2:11-17)

See Calvin Burrell's article 'Two Tough Texts' at the foot of this article which considers the objections raised on the basis of Romans 14 and Colossians 2:11-17. In considering these texts, something that is crucial, but usually forgotten, is the fact that history shows that the change from Sabbath to Sunday (or any day) had not occurred in the first century when Paul wrote these epistles. The Christians were still keeping Sabbath, not according to the strictness of the Pharisees, but in the way Christ demonstrated throughout His life. This gives extra weight to the attached explanation given by Calvin Burrell, because it confirms his conclusion that Romans 14 and Colossians 2 were providing instruction on controversial, doubtful and heretical things, not well established principles such as the kind of Sabbath observance of the 4th commandment which Jesus beautifully illustrated in His life. Please email cogaus@chariot.net.au if you want to receive booklets entitled 'The change from Sabbath to Sunday' and 'The first day of the week in the Bible'.

He who observes the day observes it to the Lord ... (Romans 14:5-7)

Jesus broke it

This is a serious allegation for those Pastors and others who use this objection. Jesus lived under the old covenant with all its laws, and according to scripture was without sin. He had to keep the law or He was a sinner, because the law defined sin (Romans 7:7). If He did sin He could not be the unblemished sacrificial Lamb of God who died to cover our sins. We would still be in our sins. Those who say Jesus broke the Sabbath look to the situations in the New Testament where the priests objected to Him performing healings etc on the Sabbath day. According to them Jesus broke the Sabbath by doing this. Jesus however corrected them by showing them rather that they had the intent of the Sabbath all wrong. He showed them, and us, that it is right to do good on the Sabbath. Remember also Luke 4:16 which says that it was Jesus' custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath. Jesus certainly questioned the way people were keeping Sabbath, but never questioned the need to keep it.

We don't have to keep Sabbath now because Jesus rose on Sunday

This is a tradition of man. You will not find, no matter how hard you search, any command in the Bible to keep Sunday as the Sabbath, or as a holy day. The Bible does not hint at Sunday being holy by reason of the resurrection. No such connections are made and why would there be? Do you think for one moment that the disciples would have thought they can make Sunday their own holy day because they were so happy about what happened on that day? Could Christians ever change a law of God for any reason? Given their strong attachment to Sabbath observance, by reason of their Jewish/Israelite heritage, don't you think the first Christians would need more than a vague philosophical thought to change their practice? Some people philosophize that Sunday is the eighth day and therefore holy, but that is all it is – man's philosophy.

The suggested link between a Sunday holy day and the resurrection of Christ comes well after the books of the Bible. Against Sunday becoming the new 'Sabbath' instead of the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, are also the many scriptures affirming the Ten Commandments for believers as a right standard for living. (For example consider Matthew 19:16-20, John 14:23-24, Romans 6:1-2 & 15 7:7,12,14 & 22, Hebrews 10:15-21, James 2:8-13, 1 John 5:3 & Revelation 12:17 & 14:12. Hebrews 10:15-21 says that God writes His law on our hearts in the new covenant. **Surely if any of laws of God are to be written on our hearts you'd expect the Ten Commandments, including the 4th, to be part of them?**

Keeping Sabbath is to seek to earn salvation by the works of the law which can't be done

Sabbath observers fully accept the truth that salvation is a free gift from God that can never be earned. Salvation is by grace through faith so no one can boast. It is not achieved by works, obedience, or through just being a good person. It is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9). This objection therefore makes no sense because Sabbath keepers are not trying to earn salvation by works. Further, why isn't this same objection used to stop Christians trying to obey any of the other commandments of God? It is inconsistent to treat the Sabbath command differently to the others.

Every day is the Sabbath, or Christ is our Sabbath rest

The obvious flaw with this objection is that it forgets that the Sabbath day was not only for our spiritual welfare, but also for our physical welfare. Our need to take physical rest will remain as long as we have this fleshly body to take care of.

The Sabbath is not an eternal moral precept of God, but rather a ceremonial law fulfilled in Christ

When we stop and just contemplate for a moment the many moral benefits of Sabbath observance this objection quickly fades away. Many people are prone to, or forced to, work too much. Many people are so busy that they do not get sufficient rest. People who do not get enough rest often get run down and suffer illness. Over-tired people are also more prone to make dangerous mistakes while driving or working, endangering themselves and others.

Further, given that many of us are so busy, often we fail to find the time to visit, encourage or help others as we should. The Sabbath provides many Christians with the opportunity to do more of these essential things. Of course we should be doing these things more than once a week, but the reality is that sometimes we lack the time or fail to make the time. Having the guaranteed free 24 hour time period of the Sabbath every week is certainly a great advantage. It provides us with a great opportunity each week to share with others and show them our love. The Sabbath surely is a moral command.

Also having a set day for rest, worship, moral/Christian teaching and fellowship is great morally for the family and the family of God. I think it would be a great strategy for Satan if he convinced us that we could all choose our own holy day, or that no day should

be set aside for God, and that if he could get us all having our days off at different times. This would make it very difficult for families and believers to get together regularly. In fact this is what has happened and the many moral benefits of togetherness and strength in unity have been greatly diminished. Every Christian has talents, gifts and love to share with the body of Christ. A set day for all provides a wonderful additional opportunity for this sharing and hence for the spiritual growth of all.

Conclusion

The moral benefits of Sabbath observance are indeed enormous. In the beginning God made the Sabbath day for man. He strongly revealed its moral nature by even ceasing from His own work. He also put a blessing in it (Genesis 2:3). If someone has side-tracked you from the blessings of the Sabbath, perhaps by one of the flawed objections above, or in any way, perhaps it is time to reconsider having your blessed Sabbath day's rest again

David Kidd

Two Tough Texts

By Calvin Burrell

A large majority of Christians give no serious thought to the claims we make for the seventh-day Sabbath of Scripture. For many, the weight of religious custom is great enough to prevent them from giving careful and critical consideration to the evidence. Others, however, have been persuaded against the Sabbath by two verses that appear at first reading to give a message opposite that of creation, commandments, and Christ. These two texts are Romans 14:5 **and** Colossians 2:16.

Romans 14:5

Paul the apostle wrote both these verses. When teaching on Christian duty rather than on the means to salvation, he also wrote that God's "law-is holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12) and that "keeping the commandments of God" was what mattered, not circumcision (1 Corinthians 7:19).

The entire fourteenth chapter of Romans was written about doubtful things, not about things that the Decalogue or other scriptures make abundantly clear. This passage refers primarily to fast days, the choice of whether to eat meat offered to idols, and eating vegetables only versus eating flesh. Considering the debate Paul encountered circumcision, it is hardly possible that he could have dismissed the entire Sabbath in Romans 14 without even mentioning the day itself, and without mentioning somewhere his certain confrontation with the Jews over his teaching on the subject.

Many believers affirm that all time is sacred based on verse 5 of this chapter, and that no day is more important than another. Although Scripture never hallows any day of the week except the Sabbath, we may grant that all time is sacred for discussion's sake because God is the

Creator of time generally. To conclude from such reasoning however, that God left regular moments for worship, fellowship, and rest unattached and undistinguished in time, is not sound. We are not apt to regard seriously all or any time as holy unless God sets some of it apart as uniquely so. If all days are equally holy, none are likely to be truly so. And eventually, all time will become equally unholy. We seldom do anything regularly without a regular time for doing it. That God would leave it up to every individual to dedicate time as holy as it pleased him is not in the character of God's usual dealing with man: "You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit" (Deuteronomy 12:8, NTV). Because we keep one day especially holy, God's presence and purposes are more easily retained for every day of our lives. The Sabbath serves as a guardian upon all our time. Keeping it holy in a biblical sense increases the likelihood that every day will be lived in the will of God. It is the blest day of God that leads us to the house of God with the people of God to believe the Son of God, receive the Spirit of God, and do the will of God according to His Word.

When Paul says, "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 15:4), we may logically ask, "Convinced by what?" By the "*declarations of men*" that all time is equally holy? Or by the declaration of God that He made the seventh day of the week holy for man?

Bible scholars agree that a doubtful portion of Scripture should not be used to oppose a clear one. Paul would be surprised to learn that one statement of his letters was isolated to abolish any part of the God-spoken and God-written decalogue.

Colossians 2:16

The Colossians 2 text is more complex than Romans 14. It, too, must be read in context. The second chapter of Colossians contains a series of warnings against a heresy threatening the congregation in Colosse. Verse 8, 16, and 18 all begin similarly: Let no one cheat/judge/spoil you . . . The items that follow these cautions are philosophy and man's traditions (v.8); eating, drinking, observing Jewish holy days (v.16); and false humility and angel worship (v.18).

Scholars now recognize that all these were early elements of a syncretistic brand of religion coming into existence when Paul wrote. Later called gnosticism, this belief blended astrological, angelic, philosophical, and ascetic elements, along with Christian and Judaistic influences. Paul objected to this perverted mixture of self-made religion, particularly as it was elevated in importance above Christ.

Note the emphasis Paul places on Christ throughout this passage:

- in Him are hidden all treasures (v. 3);
- in Him all the fullness of God lives (v. 9);
- we are complete in Christ (v. 10);
- He is the true circumciser (v. 11) and the true baptizer (v. 12);
- He has raised us (v.13), forgiven us (v. 14) and defeated our enemies (v.15);
- He is our head (v. 19).

Paul's primary burden in Colossians 2 is clearly to uphold the essential nature of faith in Christ, when compared with any other form of religious expression.

Not that all other religious expressions are wrong. Many of the elements to which Paul refers in Colossians 2 have their place in the life of faith: good philosophy, Christian baptism, wholesome eating and drinking, the fruit of self-control, and proper respect for the role of angels. It is not the use of philosophy, of meat and drink, or of self-discipline that Paul deplores in this chapter, but their misuse. How, then, can we employ the text to abolish the joyful observance of a weekly Sabbath kept in honor to Christ? The answer is clear: We must not force the text in that manner!

The message of Colossians is that none of these elements individually can substitute for Christ, nor can all of them, even when enticingly packaged with human philosophy, Paul is no more against the Sabbath in this text than he is against eating and drinking. He is against anything that effectively dislodges Christ from the preeminent position in our faith. (See Colossians 1:13-19; 2:2, 3, 9, 10, 17; 3:1, 11).

Paul is consistent in his support of the moral law of God as a standard for human conduct, but not as a method for personal salvation. In Colossians itself, he alludes to nine of Ten Commandments, and perhaps all ten if 4:16 is admitted as a meeting on the weekly Sabbath. When Romans 14:5 and Colossians 2:16 are understood in this way, they correlate perfectly with the many other references in Scripture. The endorsement of the Bible is unanimous: the Sabbath is God's gift for our benefit, designed for ceasing routine labor (employment) and practicing the presence and priority of God and His kingdom. Enjoy the gift!

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To see a problem as an opportunity is the battle half won.
To face it with God is the other half.