



# My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

## Lesson #15: "Sunday Keeping"

SCRIPTURE READING: MATTHEW 5:17-48

**Memory Verse: "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Matthew 15:9.**

Sunday is the first day of the week. Saturday is the seventh day of the week. The question in this lesson is who changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday? This is important because the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath is commanded by God in the fourth commandment of the Decalogue (*Exodus 20:8-11*). Did God give His sanction for the change from the seventh to the first day of the week?

### 1: IF THE CHANGE IS VALID, WHO AUTHORIZED IT?

Authority for the change should be found in the Bible. Since we are Bible Christians, this goes without saying that it is more authoritative with us than a dictionary is for spelling and definitions. Dictionaries change, but "the Word of our God shall stand for ever" (*Isaiah 40:8*).

Shall we build on the early Church Fathers? These are such men as Clement, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian. Some of them lived in the second century and some later. Some theologians try to prove doctrine by quoting these early Church Fathers.

Dr. Adam Clarke says in his commentary:

"But of these [the Fathers] we may safely state, that there is not a truth in the most orthodox creed that cannot be proved by their authority, nor a heresy that has disgraced the Romish Church, that may not challenge them as its authors. In points of doctrine their authority is, with me, nothing. The Word of God alone contains my creed" (*Comment on Proverbs 8*).

If the Bible gives no testimony, there is no light.

***Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them."***

### 2: COULD GOD CHANGE HIS OWN LAW?

The law of God is as sacred as the Lawgiver Himself. It is a revelation of His gracious will, a transcript of His character, the expression of His infinite love and wisdom. The death of Christ on Calvary to redeem us from the curse, or penalty, of the law forever proves that God could not change His law, not even to save His Son. The following facts prove that this is true:

#### 1. God does not change.

***Malachi 3:6: "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye Sons of Jacob are not consumed" (James 1: 17).***

**2. The Ten Commandments are God's own covenant.**

***Deuteronomy 4:13: "He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even Ten Commandments; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone."***

**3. God will not break His covenant or alter His words.**

***Psalm 89:34: "My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips."***

**4. He keeps His covenant for a thousand generations.**

***Deuteronomy 7:9: "Know therefore that the Lord thy God. He is God, the faithful God. which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations."***

**5. God's acts stand forever.**

***Ecclesiastes 3:14: "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before Him."***

**3: DID JESUS CHANGE THE LAW AND THE SABBATH?**

Since Jesus and His Father are one (*John 10:30*), and since Jesus came to do the will of His Father (*John 6:38*), it follows that He would do nothing of which His Father would not approve. So He could not have come to change God's eternal law, Christ is the active agent in God's plans, by whom God created all things.

***Ephesians 3:9: "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:6).***

Christ, as Creator, made the Sabbath in the beginning. So He would not have come to earth to destroy it.

***John 1:1-3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made."***

***John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth." page 3***

***Genesis 2:1-3: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all his work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made,"***

Keep in mind that it was Christ who gave the law at Mount Sinai. This is taught by the following two Scripture texts, when placed together:

***Nehemiah 9:12-13: "Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar. and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments."***

***1 Corinthians 10:4: "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."***

And, while He was on earth, Jesus walked in harmony with God's laws. Note these six vital facts:

### **1. He kept His Father's commandments.**

***John 15:10: "If ye keep My commandments. ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love."***

Jesus did no sin (1 Peter 2:22). "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Therefore, He could not have broken the Sabbath commandment, as some profanely say.

### **2. He came to fulfill (keep) the law, not to destroy it.**

***Matthew 5:17-19: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law. or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."***

### **3. He came to magnify the law.**

***Isaiah 42:21: "The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will magnify the law, and make it honourable." (Read Matthew 5:21-22,27-28.)***

### **4. He Himself kept the Sabbath.**

***Luke 4:16: "He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read."***

### **5. He openly ignored the Jewish Sabbath laws not found in the Bible. Read Luke 6:1-11.**

### **6. He indicated that the Sabbath would be sacred forty years after the cross.**

***Matthew 24:20: "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day."***

Jesus admonished His followers to pray that their flight from Jerusalem should not be on the Sabbath day (Matthew 24:20). Jesus knew that this flight (AD. 70) would occur some forty years after His return to heaven.

It is completely conclusive that the unholy deed of attempting to change God's everlasting, holy law cannot be charged to His holy Son, Jesus.

#### 4: DID PAUL CHANGE GOD'S LAW OR SABBATH?

Said the great apostle:

***Romans 3:31: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."***

We find Paul exclaiming about the established law. This he could not have done had it been abolished. The thought of abrogating the law was repulsive to the apostle. "God forbid!" he says.

The yearly sabbaths of Colossians 2:16 will be explained in the next study.

#### 5: DO MEN CLAIM THERE IS BIBLE PROOF FOR THE CHANGE?

##### **1. Catholics say there is absolutely no Bible proof.**

Cardinal Gibbons declared: "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."- *The Faith of Our Fathers* (110th ed.), p. 89.

"Sunday is a Catholic institution, and its claims to observance can be defended only on Catholic principles. . From the beginning to end of Scripture, there is not a single passage that warrants the transfer of weekly public worship from the last day of the week to the first. (*Catholic Press [Sydney, Australia], August 25, 1900*).

##### **2. Protestants say there is no Bible text.**

In an article about the Sabbath, Smith and Cheetham say:

"The notion of a formal substitution [of the first for the seventh day] and the transference to it, perhaps in a spiritualized form, of the sabbatical obligation established by . . . the fourth commandment, has no basis whatever, either in Holy Scripture or in Christian antiquity.. (*Smith and Cheetham's Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*).

Dr. R. W. Dale (Congregationalist) says:

"It is quite clear that however rigidly or devoutly we 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" (*The Ten Commandments, pages 100-101*).

Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, author of *The Baptist Manual*:

"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.. (*in a paper read before a New York Ministers' Conference held November 13, 1893*).

##### **3. Historians testify likewise.**

Article regarding the Sabbath, *Chamber's Encyclopedia* (1880): "Unquestionably the first law, either ecclesiastical or civil, by which the sabbatical observance of that day is known to have been ordained, is

## Lesson 15: Sunday Keeping

the edict of Constantine, A.D. 321." This Roman emperor had not yet professed Christianity at the time of this edict, and he speaks of Sunday as "the venerable day of the sun."

Augustus Neander, celebrated historian:

"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" (*The History of the Christian Religion and Church, Rose's translation, p. 186*).

If the Sabbath had been changed by God, surely the record of the change would be found in His Word.

### 6: DOES THE CHURCH OF ROME ADMIT SHE MADE THE CHANGE?

We return now to the prophecy of Daniel 7 where the little horn, or the papacy, was to "think to change" God's laws.

***Daniel 7:25: "He shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time."***

Through the prophet Daniel, God foretold the 1,260-year reign of the papacy and its determination to change times and laws. The change has been attempted. That we all know. Does the papacy acknowledge the act? First of all, we turn to the *Catholic Mirror of September 23, 1893*: 'The Catholic Church, for over one thousand years before the existence of a Protestant, by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday.'

Next we quote Peter Geiermann, *From Catholicism's 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 (A.D. 336), transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday" (*The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine, p. 50*).

*The American Sentinel (N.Y.), June 1, 1893, page 173*, quotes Thomas Enright, C.S.S.R., of Redemptorist College: "The Bible says, Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day. The Catholic Church says, No! By my divine power I abolish the Sabbath day, and command you to keep holy the first day of the week."

The above remarkable statement is an accurate statement of the attitude and objective of Rome toward the Bible Sabbath over the past 1,800 years.

Four facts now stand out in bold relief: (1) The change from Sabbath to Sunday is not authorized in the Bible. (2) God predicted that the papacy would "think to change" God's law. (3) The papacy openly declares that it has changed God's law. (4) The papacy thus exalts itself above God, as foretold by the apostle Paul (2 *Thessalonians* 2:3-4).

The worship of Mithra, the Persian sun god, was widespread in the Roman Empire in the early centuries after Christ. It had become the leading non-Christian religion; and Christian church leaders in Rome wanted to change the holy day to Sunday, so they could win more Mithraites to the faith.

The influence of Mithraism (sun worship), the existence of the heathen Sunday festival, the rising anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians, the fact that Christians had a tendency to think of the resurrection

## Lesson 15: Sunday Keeping

of Christ with a certain holy joy, the interest of Roman rulers in binding together all religious elements of the empire, and the gradual apostasy of the church, all combined to bring about a gradual change from the observance of God's holy Sabbath to the observance of Sunday.

Thus the Roman emperor, Constantine, passed the first known Sunday law in A.D. 321.

A number of years later, the apostatizing church at the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 336) voted to transfer the solemnity from Sabbath to Sunday as noted above. That council in Canon 29 decreed: "Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday [the Sabbath], but shall work on that day." This definitely indicates that Christians were still keeping the Sabbath more than three hundred years after Christ's ascension, as scholars have always known.

### 7: DO THE SCRIPTURES FORETELL A RESTORATION OF THE SABBATH?

The Creator of the universe, who made the seventh-day Sabbath a sign of His power and right to rule, certainly would not leave His Sabbath and to be trampled underfoot forever and His holy law to be mutilated by the mind and hand of man. Isaiah foretold a great call to Sabbath observance. And the teachers of the true Sabbath he called "The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in." Here are his words:

***Isaiah 58:12-14: "And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable; and shalt honour Him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."***

As Israel came out of Egypt in the Exodus movement and Christ especially emphasized the Sabbath, so in these last days, after the long dark ages of apostasy, Christ has a Christian movement reaching to the ends of the earth, gathering those who keep all His commandments (*Revelation 12:17; 14:6-15*).

We must here squarely face the issue. God's law is eternal. Even if it were a changeable law, only God, the Lawgiver, could change it, and His Word affords no such record or permission. A power professing to "hold on this earth the place of God Almighty" asserts that it has the power to change God's law; but Jesus said, "Howbeit in vain do they worship Me, teaching, for doctrines the commandments of men (*Mark 7:7*). Would you not rather be on the side of God and Christ and the eternal law that God has promised to write in the heart of every believer?