

The Lord's Day

Revelation 1:9-11 ⁹ I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹ saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

From time to time, I receive letters from people who hear the radio program on Radio Pulpit. Recently I received a hefty envelope, which contained a letter of at least twelve to thirteen pages. The particular listener was very upset with me for something I had said regarding the Law and the Sabbath. I had said that Christians are not under the Law, and that Christians do not have to keep the Sabbath. Well, that message had clearly got him steamed up enough to write thirteen pages of underlined verses from the Old Testament where God required Israel to keep the Sabbath.

He's not the first fellow to do that. On other occasions, I've received letters from people furiously defending the idea that Christians must keep the seventh-day Sabbath. In fact, for some groups, seventh day Sabbath observance is a mark of true Christianity, and neglect of the seventh day is a sign of what they call apostasy. Certain groups make Sabbath observance nearly equivalent with salvation.

Some in Messianic Judaism - a movement that tries to mix rabbinic Judaism with belief in Jesus as Messiah - strongly advocate Sabbath observance, again some taking it so far as to say that Sunday worship is pagan. So we have this modern-day Galatianism, trying to get the Law back into the church. And Christians need biblical answers to these ideas.

But on the other hand we have an opposite error. We find people today who think that the abolition of the Sabbath as a commandment for God's New Testament people means that no day is any different from any other. For them, Sunday is the same as Wednesday, Friday, or any other. Some of us are old enough to remember when everything was closed on Sundays – restaurants, malls, shops, businesses. You did your shopping Saturday morning, but Sunday was a day when everything would be closed. In the last twenty years that's changed radically, and people on this side of the debate applaud the changes. Great!, they say. Sunday is like Monday, or Tuesday. And so we have churches who now operate Saturday night services, so that people can have Sunday free to do their own thing. After all, one day is the same as another, right? Whether we meet on Tuesday, Saturday night, Thursday morning, it's all the same. And for some believers whose churches don't offer that handy convenience, their goal is to get their Sunday morning appointment over and done with so that they can do the things they really want to do – watch TV, sport, do more work or whatever they personally want to do with some 'free time'.

Churches with evening services typically have 30% of their Sunday morning attenders return for the evening service. Thirty percent. Seventy percent of the church apparently feels their job has been done when they punched their church card once on Sunday. This all comes from the same error – that Sunday really is no different from any other day. It's my day, not God's day. I'll give Him some time in the morning, but He doesn't need to be greedy.

But if someone holds this view, the pebble in the shoe that will keep irritating him is this little phrase we found here in Revelation 1:10 – the Lord's Day. If every day is the same as any other, then what is the Lord's Day?

If there is such a thing as the Lord's Day, what are we permitted to do on the Lord's Day? What is forbidden on the Lord's Day? What is required on the Lord's Day?

You and I need to know this, because we can't afford to dismiss this. If we're supposed to keep Sabbath, then even this church service today is an act of disobedience. If we are not supposed to keep Sabbath and we say other must, then we are bringing back the Law, that is a very serious error, that even threatens the gospel. If we treat the Lord's Day like any other when He expects us to treat it differently, we might end up dishonouring the Lord, warping our own view of worship, and hurting God's church. If you are a Christian, and you desire to please God, then we need to search out the biblical meaning of the Lord's Day.

To understand the Lord's Day, we need to do two things: we need to define the Lord's Day, and then we need to describe the Lord's Day. In other words, we need to know what the Lord's Day is, and what the Lord's Day is for.

Let's begin by defining the Lord's Day first by what it is not, and then by what it is.

I. The Lord's Day is Not The Sabbath

Whatever the Lord's Day is, we can be sure of one thing it is not: it is not the Sabbath. How do we know? Seven reasons for why the eighth day is not the Sabbath.

1) The Sabbath was a shadow. Colossians 2:16-17

Colossians 2:16-17 ¹⁶ So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷ which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Paul tells the Colossians that no one can bind their consciences, tell them something is required or forbidden with respect to Jewish dietary laws, Jewish festivals, and the Jewish weekly sabbath. And what does he say such things were? They were a shadow of things to come, but the substance is Christ. In other words, just like your shadow on the ground gives a general outline of your shape, but you are the substance, so all those festivals gave a general outline or shape of Messiah. But when He came, the substance had come.

2) The Sabbath was a sign. The Sabbath was a weekly symbol to Israel that they were under the Law, under the Mosaic Covenant.

Exodus 31:16-17 ¹⁶ 'Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. ¹⁷ 'It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; .

As the church, we are no longer under the Mosaic Covenant. We are under the New Covenant. The signs we use to show we are under the New Covenant are different – they are baptism and the Lord's Supper, not the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a very particular sign for the nation of Israel. Interestingly, nowhere in the Old Testament are any of the Gentile nations ever commanded to keep the Sabbath. And before the time of Moses, there are no commands given to Adam, Cain & Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or Joseph to keep the Sabbath day. Yes, God Himself rested on the seventh day, and set it apart as a day to remember His work as Creator, and curiously, the whole world observes a seven-day week, but nowhere outside of Israel did God command people to observe it as a Sabbath. The Sabbath was a symbol of a relationship between God and Israel, and just as you don't wear other people's wedding rings, so we don't have to keep the sign between Jehovah and Israel.

3) Paul frowned upon Christians who turned back to Sabbath observance.

Galatians 4:9-11 ⁹ But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? ¹⁰ You observe days

and months and seasons and years. ¹¹ I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain. \ Christians in the province of Galatia had been affected by some false teachers who had arrived and told them that they needed to not only believe in Christ, but essentially join the nation of Israel through circumcision, keeping of the days and feasts, and coming under the law – the covenant God made with Israel. For Paul, this is not progression, it is regression. This is not maturity, it is falling away from the gospel of grace into a system of works.

4) Paul commands Jewish believers in Rome, who still kept the Sabbath, not to condemn Gentile believers, who did not.

Romans 14:4-6 ⁴ Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. ⁵ One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*.

Romans 14:10 ¹⁰ But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

If the Lord's Day is the Sabbath, it is strange for Paul to say this. But if the Sabbath is something which some Jewish believers still kept, but was not binding on all Christians, then this makes perfect sense.

5) The New Testament never commands Christians to observe the Sabbath. Between Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and the writer of Hebrews, none of them ever commands believers to keep the Sabbath. Writers like Paul sometimes include lists of sins, but Sabbath-breaking is never among them. And in the book of Acts, we have an incident which proved that the apostles did not require Sabbath observance. In Acts 15, the apostles met at the church at Jerusalem to decide what they would recommend for Gentile believers to observe so as not to offend their Jewish brothers. Sabbath keeping was not one of those things. The New Testament never commands believers to observe the Sabbath.

6) When we read about early church worship in the New Testament, the church had begun to meet on the first day of the week.

Acts 20:7 ⁷ Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.

1 Corinthians 16:2 ² On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.

If the Lord's Day is the seventh-day Sabbath, then it doesn't make sense that they met on Sunday.

7) The Christians who lived right after the apostles taught that the Old Testament Sabbath was gone, and that Christians now met on the first day of the week.

Ignatius, pastor of Antioch, writing to the Magnesians in the year 105, "We have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day." *Epistle to the Magnesians 9, Ante-Nicene Fathers 1.62*

Justin Martyr, writing in the year 160, "But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God ... made the world. And Jesus Christ our Savior rose from the dead on that same day. - *First Apology, Ante-Nicene Fathers 1.186*

The Sabbath was a shadow, it was a sign, it was given to no one before Israel and not to Gentiles, it was not something Paul wanted Christians to re-introduce, it was not something he allowed Jewish believers to force on Gentiles, it was never commanded in the New Testament. The church started

meeting on the Sunday, as Scripture and early church history prove.

So this tells us what the Lord's Day is not. It is not the seventh-day Sabbath.

So, what is it? We've limited and restricted the meaning by saying what it cannot be, but we want to know what it is. Look back in Revelation 1:10.

Is there anything in the context that tells us what John meant? Not much. All John says is that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day. By the way, the Lord's Day is not the Day of the Lord. Those are totally different constructions in the Greek, and mean totally different things. The Day of the Lord is a time of final judgement followed by blessing. But John is not referring to that at all. He uses completely different constructions.

John uses the words as if they were familiar to his readers. Apparently, the seven churches that he wrote to knew and used the term. By the end of the first century, everyone knew what the Lord's Day was. And when taken in consideration what we've already seen about early church practice and the writings of the early church, it seems the Lord's Day was the day of Christ's resurrection. This was assumed knowledge. Sunday, the day on which He arose, and appeared, the day on which the Holy Spirit came – the day of Pentecost.

The Lord's Day is Sunday. I didn't say, the Lord's Day is the Sunday Sabbath. The Lord's Day is Sunday, but that doesn't mean we take what is true of the Saturday Sabbath and move it just one day forward. You cannot take what is true of the Sabbath – being a sign of God's covenant with Israel and a shadow of Christ, and just move it to Sunday. No, whatever the Lord's Day is, it is something different.

The Lord's Day is not the Sabbath. The Lord's Day is the first day of the week – Sunday. We've answered the legalists who want us to re-introduce the Sabbath, or even turn Sunday into the Christian equivalent of the Sabbath. But what we really want to know is what we are supposed to do on the Lord's Day.

John's words in Revelation do not seem to give us much information what we are supposed to do with the day. But there is one clue, found inside the original language. The particular form of the word *Lord* used here in Revelation 1:10 only occurs twice in all the New Testament. The one occurrence is here. I want you to see the other one, and see if it sheds some light on what the Lord's Day is.

1 Corinthians 11:20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

Here is the only other place where this special use of Lord is used. In Revelation it is the Lord's Day. Here in 1 Corinthians 11:20, it is the Lord's Supper. Now this begins to open some things up for us, because we do know many things about the Lord's Supper.

Let's ask some questions about the Lord's Supper.

Can I eat anything I want at the Lord's Supper?

Can I celebrate the Lord's Supper any way I want?

Can I celebrate the Lord's Supper anywhere I want?

Can I celebrate the Lord's Supper any time I want? We are going to answer each of these questions with a clear, "No".

Why? How is this supper different from other suppers? Doesn't Romans 14, which we just read, say,

“He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.” Doesn't 1 Timothy 4:4 say **1 Timothy 4:4** ⁴ For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving;

Yes, that's true, it's true of all suppers. But there is one supper that is not just our supper. It is the Lord's Supper.

When we eat the Lord's Supper, are there some things we should not do? Yes. Because it's not my supper, it's His. This unique construction in the Greek means belonging to the Lord. Of all suppers, this particular Supper is His, dedicated to Him, coming from Him. So even though all foods are clean in Christ, even though we are not bound to dietary laws, there is one Supper we must treat differently from all other Suppers.

Paul tells us that **1 Corinthians 11:27** Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.

Profaning. Profaning is when you take what is holy, and treat it as common. The word profane comes from two Latin words *pro fanum*, which meant in front of the temple. When worshippers came to their temple, they left their common, everyday objects in front of the temple, outside the temple, so as to treat the temple itself as holy, sacred, unique. Paul says, if you treat the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner you profane Christ's body and blood. You treat something unique as common. You can eat in a worthy manner, or an unworthy manner, because this is a unique supper.

The Lord's Supper. The Lord's Day. If these things were true of the Lord's Supper, let's ask them of the Lord's Day.

Can I do anything I want on the Lord's Day?

Can I spend the Lord's Day any way I want?

Can I spend the Lord's Day anywhere I want?

If you have made the connection, which the Bible seems to be making in its language, you will answer *no*. For the same reason that the Lord's Supper must not be treated like other suppers because it is His supper, so the Lord's Day must not be treated like other days because it is His day. I don't have permission to do what I want with it, because it is not mine. Yes, food is food is food, but when that food is set apart for the Lord, we treat it uniquely. Yes, a day is a day is a day, but when that day is set apart for the Lord, we treat it uniquely.

And that's leads us to a biblical description of the Lord's Day. If the definition of the Lord's Day is that it is not the Sabbath, but Sunday, then the description of the Lord's Day is just this:

II. The Lord's Day is A Day for the Lord

The Lord's Day is a day uniquely set apart for God. Just like the Lord's Supper is a supper entirely about the Lord, so the Lord's Day is a day entirely about the Lord. What you do and what you don't do is guided by this idea: this is the one day in seven that is dedicated to God.

So what would you do on a day that belongs to God? Well, here is where we extract the Sabbath principle from the Sabbath day. We are not Sabbatarians, but there was a principle in the Sabbath day which we saw last week, which remains valid. We ought to have time to stop what we do normally during the week, so as to worship. We rest, so as to worship, and in worship we enter into His rest.

If Sunday is the Lord's Day, then my first priority is worship. And unless you are providentially hindered, to do as you saw in Acts 20:7, to worship corporately with God's people. You can have

your own private quiet time any day of the week, but Sunday is uniquely the day to worship with God's people.

So if this day is the Lord's Day, my first priority is to be with the church that I have covenanted my love and devotion to, to together honour our risen Saviour. And if I have covenanted to worship with them, then I will do it as often and for as long as they do it on the Lord's Day.

This is the worship of adoration, We look directly at God, and we worship Him in prayer, in praise and in proclamation. It is the highlight of my week. It is the priority of my week.

But there is a second way we worship God. We can worship God not only by looking at God, but by looking away from Him at what He has made. When we look at God's creation, His works, the things He has done, we come to admire Him even more. The Lord's Day is uniquely a day to be able to stop and reflect. Look at creation as you go on a walk or enjoy your garden. Look at the story of redemption as you read. Look at the truths you heard at church and consider them. Look at the gifts He has showered you with. Look at the good food that decks your table. Reflect. Remember that on the seventh day the Lord stepped back and saw that it was very good. On the Lord's Day, worship Him by reflection.

Ask yourself, what usually crowds out reflection during the week? What is it that keeps you distracted? What activities prevent you from reflecting on the glory of God? If this is the Lord's Day, what should you rest from to be able to reflect?

There's a third way we worship God. We worship Him by serving Him. In serving His people, in doing what pleases Him, in building His church, in using our gifts to serve others, in encouraging others, we worship Him.

This is how we can spend the whole day. Worship is not something we switch on and switch off. It is not something we do and finish. We worship Him in corporate adoration with His church. When we leave, we continue to worship Him in reflection, and in service of others. In this way, we say, this is the Lord's Day. It is about Him. He is at the centre of it.

So what am I not allowed to do? There is no rule book. Stop activities that do not allow you to adore God with His people or serve God and His people. Stop the activities that prevent you from reflecting on Him. Stop doing what would prevent you from serving. Stop doing what would make the Lord's Day feel like Tuesday or Thursday or any other day. Just like you don't treat His Supper casually, flippantly, frivolously, don't treat His day that way either.

The Lord's Day. Don't believe the lie that there is no such thing as sacred times, set apart day. You find people who think that any mention of the idea of the sacred smacks of hypocrisy and mumbled chants and hocus pocus. They must make worship seem as 'real' as driving, eating, or walking through the mall. Pastors should dress like they are going to a picnic, we should sing what we hear on the radio, That way, they reason, no pretence exists in worship, it's transparent and real.

But in fact, such people turn out to be destroyers. They don't make worship seem more real, they make it seem more ordinary. They don't make engaging with God more transparent, they make it more mundane. Instead of filling the Christian church with sincerity, they fill it with what is common. Life does not become elevated and consecrated; worship becomes predictable, everyday and ordinary.

The same is true of Sunday. Treating Sunday like any other day does not make it seem more real, it

just makes it seem more common. The result is a loss of wonder. The result is a dullness and emptiness in worship. The result is that the rest you ought to have found in God on the Lord's Day escapes you, and you arrive on Monday as spiritually exhausted as when the week ended.

As a pastor, one of the things I hear very frequently from Christians is this: "I am so busy during the week, I don't have a moment to think about the Lord. I feel guilty for how completely occupied I am with work and appointments and the frantic pace of the day. When the day is over, I sometimes look back over the day, and ask, 'Did I even pray once? Did I even spare a thought for the Lord?'"

If you are that Christian, then see what a gift is the Lord's Day. Here is your oasis in the desert of non-stop busyness. Here is where you get to drink in the knowledge of the Lord. John Bunyan said that the way you keep the Lord's Day is the way it will be with you for the whole week.

No, it's not the Sabbath. But it is His day. As Bunyan said, Shall God give thee six days, and thou canst not afford Him one? It's a day that belongs to Him, that we give to Him in the worship of adoration, reflection and service.

May we love the weekly rest of worship. May we look forward to stopping regular activities to give God a focus we are not able to on other days.