

ACCEPTABLE CORPORATE WORSHIP

Lesson 10 Effective Use of the Lord's Day

Sunday was the first day in the Roman calendar week. It is not Sunday that is important. It is the Lord's Day that is important to Christians, and it just so happens that the first day of the week in the Roman calendar was Sunday, and it was on this day that Christ rose from the dead. Sunday was a pagan day and it was dedicated to the worship of the sun. Christians apparently reinterpreted the heathen name "Sunday" as applying to the "the Son of Righteousness" or "Sunday," referring it to Christ's day. Early Christians in Rome adapted their Christianity to their culture.

The Biblical basis for a special day of worship is all through the Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments. It is the goal of this lesson to demonstrate that true believers have always had a special day of worship and it is right to do so.

SABBATH – A CREATION ORDINANCE (Genesis 2:2-3)

“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”

The Seventh Day. God rested from His creative activity on the seventh day. He did not rest from physical labor because He was tired, for deity cannot tire. This means God ceased from creation activity on the seventh day. God blessed the seventh day (Saturday) and set it apart as a special day from the very beginning. While the word "Sabbath" is not in this verse, the principle of men ceasing physical labor one day a week can certainly be concluded from Genesis 2:1-3. It is part of God's moral law for one day in seven to be for rest from physical labor.

The Sabbath Until Moses. In the Bible, there are no direct references to the Sabbath observance from creation to Moses, and the first mention of the word "Sabbath" is in Exodus 16:23 which is in relation to the nation of Israel. However, from Romans 2:14-15, we can conclude the moral law existed before the Ten Commandments were ever written.

“Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them” (Rom. 2:14-15).

In ancient, secular Babylonian literature, we find traces of a week of seven to nine days, with the rest day or sabbath, which fell on the particular day. Perhaps this was an

ordinance by these unsaved Gentiles who had perverted the true religion as given to Noah and his family. Whatever, the idea of rest is in the creation ordinance and some may have practiced rest before the Mosaic Law was enacted.

THE SABBATH AND ISRAEL

Israel Received the Sabbath as a Sign. The word “Sabbath” means “to cease” or “to stop” with special reference to physical labor. The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week for the Jewish calendar and corresponds to our Saturday. The Sabbath as written law was officially instituted at Mount Sinai and was for the nation of Israel.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.

Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. For six days work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.”(Exo. 31:12-17)

The Sabbath was in integral part of the Mosaic Law and it was the possession of that law which distinguished Israel from all the other people of this earth. The Sabbath was a sign, which identified Israel as God’s covenant nation.

Israel was Commanded to Keep the Sabbath Holy and to Cease from Labor.

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exo. 20:8-11).

Israel was “to remember” the Sabbath and not forget it. They were to keep the Sabbath holy in that they were to separate this day unto the Lord God. Israel was to rest from all physical labor on the Sabbath, and it was apparently a day when public worship was carried out at the temple and later the synagogue. The ceasing from labor was based upon the creation ordinance of Genesis 2:1-3.

Israel Worshiped Their God on the Sabbath.

“There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD” (Lev. 23:3).

While Israel did go to the temple or the synagogue, the primary worship was at home with the family. The Sabbath was a day on which God expected families to enjoy a leisure time and to contemplate their relationship with God. The object of cessation from labor and coming together as families was to give man an opportunity to engage in such meaningful spiritual exercises as would quicken the soul and strengthen the spiritual life. This is apparently what the Lord meant when He said the Sabbath was made for man.

“Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath’” (Mk. 2:27).

Man was not made to be a slave to the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made to benefit man.

Israel was to be Blessed for Keeping the Sabbath.

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight . . .” (Isa. 58:13-14).

The keeping of the Sabbath was to be a delight and honorable to the Lord, and for keeping the Sabbath God would bless individual Israelites and the nation as a whole. In Israel there was great blessings for those who kept the Sabbath and severe penalties for those who did not. There was even death for those who did not repent of their sin of breaking the Sabbath. Jews were allowed to do works of piety, necessity and mercy on the Sabbath. Piety had to do with work connected with worship in the sanctuary by the priests (Matt. 12:5). Necessity had to do with works necessary for existence beyond the regular law (Matt. 12:2-4). Mercy had to do with special acts of kindness (Matt. 12:3-4).

THE SABBATH AND CHRIST

Christ Kept the Sabbath. Jesus Christ was a Jew and lived and died under the Mosaic Law. Christ kept the Sabbath and all the rule of the Law perfectly to the letter. Jesus Christ was a Sabbath keeper. However, He had a right understanding of the Mosaic Law. By the time Christ came into the world, the Jews had hundreds of years of religious tradition behind them. Their legalistic traditions were man-made rules and not part of the Mosaic Law at all. There were at least five hundred of those legalistic traditions in relation to the Sabbath. For instance, the Old Testament says a Jew could not carry a heavy load on the Sabbath or take a trip. The Jewish legalist said if a person had too many nails in his shoe he was carrying an excessive load and was a Sabbath breaker.

Another example of the ridiculous rule was a person could only travel a certain distance in his own house on the Sabbath and even the number of steps a person could take were limited. The Lord Jesus opposed these traditions, which men added to the

Law, but our Lord Himself kept the Sabbath. One of the frequent charges brought against the Lord Jesus by the Pharisees was that He was a Sabbath breaker. This charge was leveled against Him because He healed people on the Sabbath (act of mercy) and shucked corn on the Sabbath to feed His disciples (act of necessity).

Christ Fulfilled the Sabbath. Christ came not to abolish the Mosaic Law but to fulfill it.

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:17-18).

He kept the Law perfectly and He fulfilled all the types and shadows of the ceremonial aspects of the Law. The moral law is embodied in the Ten Commandments and the moral law is binding in every age. This includes the command to keep the Sabbath holy. However, there were many ceremonial aspects of the Sabbath, which were types and shadows and were fulfilled in Christ’s death.

“The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves”(Heb. 10:1).

The Jews in the Old Testament could not pick up sticks, light a fire, or recreate in any way on the Sabbath because these, being ceremonial, were designed to be a type or shadow of the completed work of Christ on the cross. It is assumed that Christ set aside the death penalty for Sabbath breaking based on the fact that in other instances, such as the woman of adultery in John 4, Christ did not recommend death for this woman’s sin. The Jew’s physical rest was completed in Christ’s spiritual rest. Christ in His death has fulfilled the type or shadow of the earthly Sabbath rest by bringing His people the spiritual rest of salvation.

“For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’ . . . There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his” (Heb. 4:4, 9-10).

Christ is Lord of the Sabbath. Mark 2:28 says, “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” As Lord of the Sabbath, Christ could and did change the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday in the new age of the completed church. Christ did not change the fact of a Sabbath but He did change the day and the emphasis of the Sabbath. In His death and resurrection, Christ positionally changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday, but it took the church time to make the complete transition from Judaism to full

blown Christianity. We are told in Luke 22:20 that Christ established the New Covenant which obviously takes the place of the Mosaic Covenant (Old Covenant).

“In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you’” (Luke 22:20).

Now the civil, dietary and ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law have been done away with for the believer under the New Covenant. However, the moral law as contained in the Ten Commandments still is binding on Christians. **“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Exo. 20:8).** However, the Ten Commandments must be filtered through the New Covenant for a new age. The fact of a Sabbath day is still blinding for Christians but this day has taken on New Covenant dimensions designed for a whole new age.

Christ Has a New Law. The New Covenant includes the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament, which is a reflection of the moral law of God. However, the Christian is not under the Mosaic Law (Old Covenant) as a way of life but is under the New Covenant. Christians are now under the Law of Christ, not the Law of Moses, and the Law of Christ is a higher and more liberating law.

“To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law” (I Cor. 9:20-21).

Christ’s Law Has a New Sabbath. All the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament except the command to keep the Sabbath. Dispensationalists assume this means there is no Sabbath for the church, but to do this one would have to say the Ten Commandments do not contain the essence of the moral law. This is contrary to the New Testament (Rom. 3:31; 7:12-13,16,22, 13-8-10).

“Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law” (Rom. 3:31).

“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12).

“For in my inner being I delight in God’s law” (Rom. 7:22).

“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom.

13:8-10).

Those in the Reformed camp believe the absence of any mention of the Sabbath in the New Testament may imply a Sabbath was an assumed fact. It is best to say that Christians in the Gospel Age have a new Sabbath day with a new emphasis for a new age based on a new covenant. The Christian Sabbath is New Covenant controlled and not Old Covenant controlled. The Sabbath in the New Covenant is a special day; it is the first day of the week, the day Christ rose from the dead and it has a special thrust for this age. The principle of one day in seven for rest from physical labor is still binding on Christians today.

THE LORD'S DAY AND THE CHURCH

Sabbath in the Book of Acts. In the Book of Acts, we have no mention of Christians observing the Old Covenant Sabbath. We read of Paul and others who went into the synagogue on the Sabbath to preach the gospel to the Jews but they did not worship on that day. At the Jerusalem Council no mention is made that Gentiles had to keep the Old Covenant Sabbath as it was designed for the completed church to function in every nation of the world. It would have been impossible for Gentiles to observe the Sabbath, as did the Jews because religious political and civic activities were structured in Israel so the Jewish nation could keep the Old Covenant Sabbath. Gentile believers could not keep the Old Covenant Sabbath but they could keep the new Sabbath New Covenant style. The Book of Acts tells of Christians getting together on the Lord's Day, the day Christ rose from the dead, the first day of the week.

“On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people . . .” (Acts 20:7).

Sabbath in the Epistles. In the Epistles, we are never told Christians met on the Old Covenant Sabbath (Saturday). We find Christians meeting on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week.

“Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatians churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made” (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

What we do find in the Epistles is the Apostle Paul exhorting Christians about getting all tied up in Jewish legalism when it comes to understanding the Sabbath. Christians according to Paul are not to get entangled in rituals, traditions and ceremonies of the Old Covenant, Jewish Sabbath worship.

“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Col. 2:16-17).

“But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts”(Gal. 4:9-10).

Sabbath and the Lord’s Day. When we come to the New Testament, we find Christians worshipping on the first day of the week, Sunday according to our calendar. This is the day of worship for the Christian.

“On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit . . .” (Rev. 1:10).

This was a significant day because Christ rose from the dead on that day (John 20:1). Christians, after the Day of Pentecost (which also fell on the first day of the week) that marked the beginning of the New Covenant church, met on Sunday rather than Saturday. The Lord’s Day is the New Covenant Sabbath. It is called the Lord’s Day marking a new age in the history of the church. The Lord’s Day has a new thrust, a new emphasis, and a new dimension. Christians are to remember the New Covenant Sabbath and keep it holy (separate) but now the thrust is different. We know that Jewish Christians at first continued to worship in the temple and went to the synagogue services on the Old Covenant Sabbath (Saturday), but at a very early date, the day of worship for Christians switched to Sunday from Saturday. This probably occurred when Christians were officially declared a Jewish cult and thrown out of the synagogues and the temple.

The early Jewish Christians at first observed the seventh day (Saturday) and the first day (Sunday), but the Gentile Christians kept only the Lord’s Day, the Christian Sabbath. The Jewish Christians, because of persecution and later the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., gave up any worship on the Old Covenant Sabbath. In the beginning this caused some trouble among Christians. Some wanted to observe the Old Covenant Sabbath and others the Lord’s Day, the New Covenant Sabbath, so Paul wrote to tell them of their Christian liberty in this area.

“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom. 14:4-5).

Early church history indicates that there was no keeping of the Old Covenant Sabbath after 200 A.D.

“Those who walked in the ancient practices attain unto newness of hope no longer observing Sabbaths, but fashioning their lives after the Lord’s Day, on which our life also rose through Him, that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ, our only teacher No longer keeping the Sabbath, but living according

to the Lord's Day, on which also our Light arose" (Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch – 110 A.D.)

"Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God having wrought a change in the darkness and matter made the world, and Jesus our Savior, on the same day, rose from the dead (Justin Martyr – 135 A.D.)

"The old Sabbath day has become nothing more than a working day (to Christians)" (Clement of Alexandria –194 A.D.).

Some have accused Christians of arbitrarily changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. They say this was done in the fourth century under Constantine when he made Christianity the religion of Rome. However, it must be noted that the Old Covenant Sabbath day has never been changed from Saturday to Sunday. Saturday is still Saturday. Actually a New Covenant Sabbath day has been substituted for the Old Covenant Sabbath day. It is not that the Sabbath day has changed (it is still Saturday) but the Christian has been changed because of his new position in Christ. The New Covenant Christian is operating under a new economy with a new Sabbath day for a new age. The day is called the Lord's Day (Sunday).

THE LORD'S DAY AND OBLIGATION

Commanded. In the New Covenant, which includes the Ten Commandments (moral law), the Christian is commanded to keep the Christian Sabbath. The Christian is commanded to meet on the Lord's Day for corporate worship with God's people in the church.

"And let us consider how w may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:24-25).

Christians are also to cease from labor whenever possible (Exo. 20:8-11). The slaves in New Testament times had to work on the Lord's Day and this is most likely the reason Gentile Christians met on Sunday nights.

When the Christian has performed his duty for public worship on the Lord's Day, then he is to rest. Whatever else rest may mean to some, it most certainly means we are to cease from the physical labors we do on the job the other five or six days. Once we have met our responsibility to worship, how we interpret rest is a matter of individual conscience.

Unregulated. Christians are commanded to worship and rest on the Lord's Day, but the Bible nowhere sets down any regulations regarding personal conduct on the Lord's Day. Christians should be very careful about setting up Sunday rules and

regulations for fellow believers, telling them what they can do and cannot do on Sunday. After one has worshiped and is ceasing from labor, how one keeps the Lord's Day is strictly a matter between him and God. No other person has a right to impose rules and regulations upon him, or judge his godliness by the way he conducts himself on the Lord's Day. We must be so careful not to be Pharisees, forcing legalistic rules on Christians to somehow prove spirituality.

The Westminster Confession says, "The Christian Sabbath is to be kept separate and uniquely the Lord's. With a careful preparation of priorities, providing for our common affairs beforehand, a holy rest is observed all day from works, words and thoughts of employment and recreation" (21:8). The Westminster Fathers based their understanding on Isaiah 58:13-14.

"If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honorable and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob" (Isa. 58:13-14).

They stressed the words "from doing as you please on my holy day." It seems as though this was ceremonial law fulfilled in Christ to teach us about our spiritual rest in Christ. Many Reformers, including John Calvin, did not give a strict interpretation to "doing as you please." It is quite probable that the Westminster Fathers were victims of their culture and overstated the Sabbath question as to recreation on the Lord's Day.

It is very easy to be legalistic over what one can and cannot do on the Lord's Day. Ultimately it comes down to one's individual conscience, and we are not to judge another brother or sister no matter what our position may be.

APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS ON THE LORD'S DAY

The Lord's Day is a Special Day of Rest. God wants us to take a break from our other six days of labor. We are to break the cycle of work. If we do business six days a week, we should not do it on the Lord's Day. If we are a student, we should try not to study on the Lord's Day. For health reasons, God wants us to break our routine. Christians may choose to take a nap on the Lord's Day, or take a hike, or go on a picnic with the family, spend time with family and friends, play a ball game or whatever if that is really rest.

The Lord's Day is a Special Day of Worship. Sunday is primarily a day given over to the corporate and private worship of Christ. After the Christian attends the services of the church, what he does the remainder of the day is between him and the Lord. However, the Christian must remember it is the Lord's Day. It belongs to Him.

The Lord's Day is a Special Day of Spiritual Activity. The Lord's Day may be used effectively to serve Jesus Christ by serving others in need – visiting the sick, relieving the poor, teaching the Bible, performing duties of piety, love and mercy.

The Lord's Day is a Special Day to Learn of Christ. We learn about Christ every day but the Lord's Day is a special day to learn God's Word and encounter Christ through corporate worship and the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

The Lord's Day is a Special Day with the Family. The Old Covenant Sabbath was a day when the family worshiped together in the privacy of the home, so the Lord's Day should be a time when the family does things together in worship to God, service for Christ and general recreation together.

The Lord's Day is a Special Day of Joy. Because of the resurrection of Christ and the New Covenant, the emphasis upon the Lord's Day is one of joy. There are some Christians who see the Christian Sabbath through the Old Covenant rather than the New Covenant. The result is that Sunday becomes a spiritually somber, gloomy, solemn day where nothing can be done that smacks of joy or pleasure. Yet, the New Covenant Christian Sabbath is one of joy, delight and gladness because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. The Lord's Day is literally a celebration so the Christian can shout, **“This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psa. 118:24).**

THE LORD'S DAY AND THE RIGHT DAY TO WORSHIP

Since the Bible teaches the Lord's Day is a special day of the week set aside to worship the living God, it becomes an issue as to whether it is Scriptural to have official public worship other days of the week. Many “seeker friendly” churches today are offering official corporate worship on Saturday and Monday nights. The Regulative Principle would not allow official worship on Monday. However, Saturday night worship may be allowable since the Old Testament Sabbath went from Friday at dark to Saturday at dark, although this might be stretching the point. Obviously if Christians are providentially hindered from worshipping on Sunday, then they should try to take their Sabbath some other day of the week to worship and rest. Ordinarily the day of official corporate worship for the church is the Lord's Day, and Christians should do everything possible to worship on Sunday.