

Doctrinal Outlines

2002/06/05
EAST MEET
(17)

WHICH DAY IS THE CHRISTIAN SABBATH?

I. Introduction

- A. Which day should a Christian observe as God's day of worship?
- B. Millions of Christians today -- indeed, most -- observe Sunday as the "Lord's day." But are they correct?
- C. These are important questions, for the Bible shows that God's Sabbath is a sign that identifies His people (Exodus 31:12-17).
- D. Hence those who keep the wrong day are not God's people, no matter how sincere they may be!

II. The Basic Doctrine

- A. The seventh-day Sabbath was ordained at creation and reconfirmed to ancient Israel.
- B. Christ and the apostles faithfully kept it, and it is binding upon us today.
- C. The Sabbath is a memorial of creation, a sign of God's people, a time of physical and spiritual rest and refreshment and a picture of the coming millennial rest in the Kingdom of God.

III. The Usual Teachings of This World

- A. The vast majority of Christians today, without thinking, accept Sunday as the day of worship. They would recoil at the suggestion they might be wrong.
- B. Yet different Christian denominations differ widely as to exactly why they observe Sunday, what they believe the day means and how it should be observed.
- C. But while Sunday keepers disagree about their reasons and methods, they all agree on one issue: They believe the Sabbath need not be kept.
- D. Therefore, the question here is whether the Bible proves we must keep the Sabbath.

IV. The Bible Teaching

- A. The place to start is Genesis 2:1-3. Here we see that God rested on the seventh day of creation. He "blessed the seventh day and sanctified it." Exodus 20:11 states that the day God sanctified was the Sabbath.
- B. Thus we see that the Sabbath did not originate with Israel or the Jews of the Old Covenant, as some maintain, but rather at creation itself.
- C. It hence is a memorial of creation and a reminder that the true God is Creator. And since the Sabbath began before the Old Covenant was ratified, it cannot somehow be negated by the Old Covenant's passing.
- D. Exodus 16:1-30 shows how God gave manna to the Israelites on six days each week, but not on the seventh. The purpose of the manna, as verse 29 shows, was not just to feed the people but to teach them to observe the Sabbath.
- E. This incident occurred before the terms of the Old Covenant were given. Therefore the Sabbath, though it was later made part of the Old Covenant, was not confined to it.
- F. The fact the Old Covenant is not now in force for true Christians does not disannul the requirement to keep God's Sabbath.
- G. The Ten Commandments are found in Exodus 20:1-17. Verses 8 to 11 comprise the Fourth Commandment, a resounding call by God to keep the Sabbath holy. We are also reminded here that the Sabbath is a rest day; indeed the word Sabbath means "rest."
- H. The fact that the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments is no small matter, for most Christians regard keeping the Ten Commandments to be among man's most fundamental obligations.
- I. Of course, some will say the Ten Commandments are done away, but can they seriously mean this? Is it now OK to have other gods before God, or to commit adultery, to lie, to steal or to covet? Of course not.
- J. Virtually all would concur that all the commandments should be kept -- all of them, that is, except the Fourth, which demands we keep the Sabbath holy! How illogical!
- K. Some who have seen this illogic but who wish to keep Sunday anyway will maintain that the verses mean we

must indeed keep a day holy, but that the day is now Sunday and not Saturday.

- L. But the idea that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday is even less logical, and is rejected by every respectable authority on the Bible and history.
- M. Next, Leviticus 23:1-3 lists the Sabbath as a feast day of God, not of the Jews. This passage further calls the Sabbath a holy convocation, and hence a day for a worship meeting.
- N. Any one of a number of verses could be cited to make the next point, but Ezekiel 20:1-26 is a good illustration.
 - 1. These verses show that one of the greatest reasons ancient Israel was sent into captivity was because they broke God's Sabbath law.
 - 2. Nehemiah 13:15-18 confirms that the Jews who returned from that captivity realized this fact.
- O. Can we not see from these verses how seriously God takes the Sabbath? Breaking the Sabbath demands the death penalty for sin (Romans 6:23). How can some conclude that they can take the Fourth Commandment lightly now, in the face of such evidence of God's desire for us to keep the Sabbath?
- P. The New Testament contains much powerful evidence for Sabbath observance as well.
 - 1. Paramount among this evidence is that Jesus Christ Himself kept the Sabbath, not Sunday. Luke 4:16 and other scriptures clearly show that this was His custom, or habit.
 - 2. In Mark 2:23-28, Christ confirmed that "the Sabbath was made for man" [not just for the Jews!], and that He was the "Lord of the Sabbath." He was thus qualified to state how it should be properly kept.
 - 3. He was the Lord of the Sabbath because He was the Creator God of the Old Testament (Colossians 1:15-16) -- and therefore the Creator of the Sabbath!
 - 4. He rested on the Sabbath at creation and He kept it when He came to the earth in human form as Jesus Christ!
- Q. Other verses show more proof.
 - 1. For one, New Testament Christians kept the Sabbath after Christ's death, and therefore after

everything that was "nailed to the cross" was nailed.

2. For example, Luke 23:55-56 shows that the women who wished to embalm Jesus' body rested on the Sabbath after His death, "according to the commandment."
 3. Verse after verse likewise confirms that the apostle Paul habitually preached in services on the Sabbath.
 - a. See Acts 13:14-15, 16:13, 17:2, 18:4.
 - b. And he preached not just to Jews, but to gentiles as well (Acts 13:42-44). This shows that Paul had one custom both for Jews and gentiles, not two separate customs.
 4. Also, see Acts 15, especially verse 21. James' statement here shows that he assumed the gentiles would continue to hear God's Word preached on the Sabbath.
 - a. This confirms that converted gentiles kept the Sabbath, and that they would continue to do so even though the decision in Acts 15 to not force circumcision upon gentiles freed them from some Old Testament requirements.
 - b. Clearly, it did not free them from the Sabbath command, as is sometimes wrongly alleged.
 5. Likewise, Hebrews 4:4-9 confirms the Sabbath is binding today. The final rest of God is yet future for us, in the coming Millennium.
 - a. The Sabbath pictures that rest.
 - b. That being so, does it not make sense that the Sabbath day, which pictures the ultimate rest, would continue in full force till the pictured rest arrives?
- R. Two more important points must be made.
1. The first is that the Sabbath will be kept in the world tomorrow, as can be seen from Isaiah 66:22-23. Does it make sense that the Sabbath was to be kept from creation, and by ancient Israel, and by Christ, and by the apostles, and in the future, but not now in this day?
 2. Finally, one more powerful Bible proof for the Sabbath is the very argument some cite against it. Some refuse to keep the Sabbath because the New

Testament does not command Sabbath observance with a direct command such as "You shall keep the Sabbath even in New Testament times. Thus says the Lord."

- a. But the lack of such a command shows that whether to keep the Sabbath was never an issue in the early Church!
- b. Had it been an issue, it certainly would have been addressed strongly one way or the other, as the less-important subject of circumcision was.
- c. The absence of such statements actually speaks quite loudly for the Sabbath. It shows that continued Sabbath observance was taken for granted by the early Church.

V. Key Verses

Here is a brief summary of important scriptures about the Sabbath.

- A. Genesis 2:1-3, Exodus 16:1-30 -- the Sabbath was instituted before the Old Covenant.
- B. Exodus 20:8-11 -- it is one of the Ten Commandments.
- C. Leviticus 23:1-3 -- the Sabbath is God's day, not just the Jews' or anyone else's day; it is a holy meeting day.
- D. Ezekiel 20:1-26 -- God sent Israel into captivity because of their Sabbath breaking.
- E. Luke 4:16 -- Christ kept the Sabbath.
- F. Acts 13:14-15, 42-44, 15:21 -- Paul kept it; so did the gentiles.
- G. Hebrews 4:1-10 -- the Sabbath pictures the coming millennial rest.
- H. Isaiah 66:22-23 -- the Sabbath will be kept in the world tomorrow.

VI. Conclusion

Which day is the proper day for a Christian to observe as holy to the Lord? If the Bible is to be our guide, the answer is clear -- the Sabbath!

