

How Sunday-Keeping Started

The observance of Sunday was not based on a divine edict as was the observance of the Sabbath--day the seventh day of the week. When people are asked why they observe the first day of the week instead of the seventh day, they usually tell you, "Because Christ rose from the dead on that day, and authorized the day to be observed in honour of His resurrection in place of the seventh-day Sabbath." When they are asked for a text to prove their assertion, they frankly admit that they cannot find a text in the Old or the New Testament where Christ commanded anyone to observe the first day of the week in honour of His resurrection.

After a failure to produce a text or divine commandment authorizing the observance of the first day of the week as holy time, they counter with another answer, saying that the apostles met on the first day of the week immediately following the resurrection of Christ, to honour His resurrection. Again they are perplexed when they are confronted with the Scriptural record by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John showing that they did not meet to honour His resurrection, because they did not believe He was risen. The record says :-

"The same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst." -- "But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." -- "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." -- "He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen." -- John 20: 19; Luke 24: 37; John 20: 9; Mark 16: 14.

Each of the gospel writers admits that when they were gathered together in the evening of the first day of the week that "they believed not" the report of those "who had seen Him after He was risen." How was it possible then for them to be gathered to honour His resurrection, when none of them believed that He had risen? Christ did not appear in their midst on the day of His resurrection to honour the first day of the week, but, as the Scriptures say, to raise up "witnesses" that He did, according to His promise, "rise from the dead on the third day." Christ had told them repeatedly that He would "rise from the dead on the third day."

Paul in his gospel says that Christ "died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." 1 Corinthians 15: 3, 4. Neither the day of His death nor the day of His resurrection are set apart in the Scriptures as holy days, or days to be observed in honour of these two important events. However, the Lord's supper is expressly set apart to be observed to "show the Lord's death till He come" (1Corinthians 11: 26), and likewise, baptism by immersion is expressly set apart to commemorate both His burial and His resurrection. As the Apostle Paul says: "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted [buried] together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." Romans 6: 4, 5.

Thus we learn from the Scriptures that the Lord Himself has not set aside a particular day to commemorate His death or His resurrection, but He has expressly ordained two separate memorials to honour these two important events. Being buried in and raised from a watery grave are similitude's of His burial and resurrection and no other memorials were set aside for these events.

Another argument presented in defense of Scriptural authority for Sunday observance is that the apostolic church after Christ's resurrection met on the first day of the week to break bread in honour of the resurrection day. There is only one recorded instance in the New Testament where the disciples came together to break bread on the first day of the week. But it was not to honour the resurrection day. (Acts 20: 7-11.) The Book of Acts shows that they met daily to break bread. (Acts 2:46, 47.) In fact, while Paul records in the Book of Acts only one meeting he held on the first day of the week, in the same book he records eight-five meetings he held on the seventh day of the week which he called the "Sabbath."

One more text is used in defense of Sunday-keeping by some who observe the first day of the week as sacred time. Let us carefully examine that text found in Rev. 1:10: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet." This text is as silent as the grave as to

which day of the week is "the Lord's day." It does not say it was the first day of the week. Since it does not define the term "Lord's day," we must look elsewhere in the Bible to find which day of the week the Lord claims as His day. None of the gospel writers ever called the first day of the week "the Lord's day." The Lord called the seventh-day weekly Sabbath "My holy day." Isaiah 58: 13. And when Jesus was upon the earth He told the people: "The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." Mark 2: 28.

It is therefore clear from the Scriptures that the only day that can be called "the Lord's day" is "the Sabbath day," which God says is "My holy day" ; and the Son of God says He is "Lord" of that day. Nowhere in all the Bible did Jesus say He was "Lord" of the first day of the week. John the revelator, at the close of the first century of the Christian era, recognized the Sabbath day as belonging distinctly to the Lord, and the Lord of the Sabbath placed a signal honour upon His own day in that He selected it as the one on which to give a revelation to John--the very day on which He promised to meet His people in worship.

Protestants profess to take the Bible as their only guide in religious matters. Mr. Dowling in his History of Romanism says: "The Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants! Nor is it of any account in the estimation of the genuine Protestant how early a doctrine originated, if it is not found in the Bible."

That there is no Scriptural evidence in favor of Sunday observance is acknowledged by historians and prominent church leaders of different religious persuasions. Let us examine the confessions and admissions of some of our Protestant theologians. Rev. Edward T. Hiscox, DD, author of The Baptist Manual, in an address before a Baptist convention of ministers, and reported in the New York Examiner, November 16, 1893, said : "There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but the 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, with all its duties, privileges, and sanctions. Earnestly desiring information on this subject, which I have studied for many years, I ask, Where can the record of such a transaction be found? Not in the New Testament, absolutely not. There is no Scriptural evidence of the change of the Sabbath institution from the seventh to the first day of the week. I wish to say that this Sabbath question, in this aspect of it, is the gravest and most perplexing question connected with Christian institutions which at present claims attention from Christian people."

How and when did people begin to observe Sunday in place of the seventh-day Sabbath? Sir William Domville, a noted historian of the Church of England, throws some light upon this subject. He says, "Centuries of the Christian era passed away before the Sunday was observed by the Christian church as a Sabbath. History does not furnish us with a single proof or indication that it was at any time so observed previous to the Sabbatical edict of Constantine in AD 321: "The Sabbath: or an Examination of the Six Tests," page 291.

Chambers' Encyclopedia says, "By none of the Fathers before the fourth century is it [Sunday] identified with the Sabbath, nor is the duty of observing it grounded by them, either on the fourth commandment, or on the precept by Christ or His apostles." -Article "Sabbath."

Dr. Neander, regarded as the leading church historian of the Christian era, says: "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. Perhaps at the end of the second century a false application of this kind had begun to take place; for men appear by that time to have considered laboring on Sunday as a sin." -The History of the Christian Religion and Church, Henry John Rose's translation, page 186.

Dr. Kitto, author of the Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature says: "Though in later times we find considerable reference to a sort of consecration of the day (Sunday), it does not seem at any period of the ancient church to have assumed the form of such an observance as some modern religious communities contend for. Nor do the writers in any instance pretend to allege any divine command, or even apostolic practice in support of it:- Article, "Lord's Day."

The Catholic Bishop Eusebius who presided in Constantinople in A.D.330, writes: "All things whatsoever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's day." -Cox's Sabbath Laws Vol. 1, page 361.

Dr. William Pryrine, who wrote a treatise in AD 1633, a Dissertation on the Lord's Day, says: "The seventh-day Sabbath was . . . solemnized by Christ, the apostles, and primitive Christians, till the Laodicean Council did in a manner quite abolish the observation of it. . . . The Council of Laodicea [about AD. 364] . . . first settled the observation of the Lord's day, and prohibited . . . the keeping of the Jewish Sabbath under an anathema." -Page 163.

Dr. Peter Heylyn, (Church of England) Bible commentator, declared that the first day of the week and its observance was based "on custom first, and voluntary consecration . . . and finally confirmed and ratified by Christian princes throughout their empires; . . . from the canons and decrees of councils, the decretals of popes and orders of particular prelates, when the sole managing of ecclesiastical affairs was committed to them." History of the Sabbath" part 2, chapter 3, section 12, pages 94, 95.

The Kansas City Catholic, a Roman Catholic church paper, expressly states: "The Catholic church of its own infallible authority created Sunday a holy day to take the place of the Sabbath."

Father C. Enright, C.S.S.R., of the Redemptorist College, Kansas City, Missouri, in June, 1893, published the following statement : "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 the first day of the week. And lo, the entire civilized world bows down in reverent obedience to the command of the holy Catholic Church!"

Cardinal Gibbons, in his official church paper the Catholic Mirror, Dec. 23, 1893, said: "Reason and common sense demand the acceptance of one or the other of these alternatives: either Protestantism and the keeping holy of Saturday, or Catholicity and the keeping of Sunday. Compromise is impossible."

The Catholic Virginian of October 3, 1947, makes this declaration : "Nowhere in the Bible do we find that Christ or the Apostles ordered that the Sabbath be changed from Saturday to Sunday. We have the commandment of God given to Moses to keep holy the Sabbath day, that is the seventh day of the week, Saturday. Today most Christians keep Sunday because it has been revealed to us by the church (Roman) outside the Bible."

It was predicted by the prophet Daniel that a religious power was to arise out of the Roman Empire after it was divided into ten kingdoms, which was to "speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws (of the Most High) : and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of times." Dan. 7: 25. Almost all Protestant Bible commentators are agreed that the "horn, before whom there were three of the first horns plucked up by the roots," (verse 8), and that was to think himself able to "change the times and laws" of the Most High, unmistakably refers to the papal power that rooted up and conquered three Arian powers in "the fourth kingdom," or the Roman Empire.

John the Revelator refers to this same power which was to arise out of the Roman Empire, and says of it : "Who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months." "A thousand two hundred and three score days." "And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." Revelation 13: 4-8; 12: 6.

The Apostle Paul also speaks of this same religious power, whom he calls "that man of sin, . . . who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." 2Thessalonians 2: 3, 4.

And Paul in writing to the church in Rome where this power, which he called "the mystery of iniquity," was to arise, says: "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" Romans 6: 16. Let us say with Joshua: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24: 15.