

Change of Day and Sleight of Hand

Change of day

Sabbatarians are convinced that in the new covenant the sabbath is still in force, but the day has changed from the seventh to the first. They also assume but do not, in my experience, mention – let alone try to justify – the change from Jewish timekeeping (sunset to sunset) to Roman (midnight to midnight). How and when were these major changes put into effect, and by whose authority? Make no mistake, it is a very serious business indeed to change the unchangeable law of God. Think of attempting the same with any other commandment of the decalogue. Did Christ, himself, directly change the sabbath? Were the apostles responsible for it? If not, who or what did it? If the sabbath has been changed so radically – not only the day of the week and the timing of the day, but by a massive change in the purpose of the day¹ – and since the sabbath is the fourth commandment in the unchangeable law of God, do sabbatarians not think we ought to have some clear scriptural statement to put this change beyond doubt? Why do they not give us this clear biblical

¹ As I have explained, the sabbath was a day of rest. The Jews had to cease (this is the meaning of ‘sabbath’) from work (see Ex. 16:14-36; 20:8-11; 34:21; 35:2-3; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:12-15; Neh. 10:31; 13:15-22; Jer. 17:21-27). That is what God commanded. The sabbath was not primarily a day of worship, but a day of rest. The pattern of weekly worship did not exist in the Old Testament law. The synagogue introduced it in the inter-testamental period. Even then, rest and sabbath were synonymous. While they were still under the old covenant, resting is precisely what the women did on the day after Christ was crucified: ‘And they rested on the sabbath according to the commandment’ (Luke 23:56). It is not said that they worshipped. As for Isa. 66:22-24; Ezek. 46:1-12; Zech. 14:16-21, I read all such as old-covenant prophecies of the new covenant. Pre-millennialists will probably expect them to be literally fulfilled in the millennium. I do not. But neither view has any bearing on Jewish observance of the sabbath in the old covenant. The sabbath was not designed to be a day of worship.

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statement? Has there been any other commandment of the unchangeable law of God that has been so altered, yet so-say keeping the command intact? I know of none. And why is this the only old-covenant shadow to come over into the new covenant? We don't circumcise, sacrifice, go to the temple, use a priest, have an altar, do we? In all such matters, we dwell on the spiritual fulfilment in Christ, and have nothing to do with the external shadow. So why not the same for the sabbath? Why is the sabbath unique? On what grounds is it unique? Who authorised all this?

Seeing Scripture never speaks of a change of the day or its use, there is really nothing more to say. All talk of a change of day is little more than speculation based on wished-for inference. In any case, since we are talking about the *unchangeable* law of God, there is no possibility of change. Christ did not change the law of God. He fulfilled it, brought it to its God-ordained end, and thus rendered it obsolete (Matt. 5:17-20; Rom. 10:4; Heb. 8:13; 10:18). *He did not change the unchangeable law of God.* Nor should we.

Sleight of hand

I am not trying to be offensive, but I can think of no other way of putting it; perhaps 'conjuring trick', 'begging the question', 'arguing in a circle', or 'glosses' might fit the bill. What am I talking about? I want to draw attention to sabbatarian use of phrases such as 'one day in seven', 'every seventh day', or the equivalent; the way they equate 'the law' and 'the ten commandments'; the way they repeatedly move from 'sabbath' to 'Lord's day'; the supposed threefold division of the law into moral, ceremonial (and judicial);² their talk of 'the ceremonial law' as though it were a scriptural phrase; their repeated assumption of, and talk of, 'man's continued obligation' to keep the sabbath; their claim that the sabbath was a time of public worship; and so on. Then again, since they use 'sabbath' and

² As before, the threefold division of the law is quite wrong. See my *Christ* pp100-104,392-400.

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'Lord's day' as interchangeable, they frequently talk of the Lord's day as 'the day of rest'.

All such glosses, conjuring tricks and sleight of hand, are fundamental to the sabbatarian case, judging by their ubiquitous use in their works on the subject. May we have all this established from Scripture?