

Sabbath Law, the Christian, and the Lord's Day

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on September 2, 2007

www.goldcountrybaptist.org

Is the Sabbath Commandment Required of Christians?

It is one thing to answer this question yes; it is quite another thing to actually apply the Sabbath *the way God's law requires*. For example, as we saw last week, the Fourth Commandment told God's people to work every Sunday through Friday, and to rest on the seventh day (Saturday). Few so-called Sabbatarians work on Sunday as commanded, fewer try to consistently begin Sabbath observance at Friday sunset as Leviticus 23 called for, none believe *all* the Sabbath laws are for today, especially the mandatory Sabbath sacrifices and stoning Sabbath breakers.

View #1: Strict Sabbatarian.

In recent centuries a number of groups within Christendom (broadly defined) have attempted to apply literal OT Sabbath laws at least somewhat consistently. The most notable Sabbatarian groups include:

- Seventh Day Adventists (SDA)¹
- Seventh Day Baptists²
- Worldwide Church of God (those who follow Armstrong)³
- Messianic Jewish Movement (many)⁴

SDA theology in the past had gone so far as to say that any who do not observe the seventh day have the mark of the beast, and they believe the Catholic Pope changed the day to Sunday as prophesied – so what we're doing here today on Sunday in worshipping would identify us with the antichrist to some hardcore SDAs.

If you want a good reply to Sabbatarianism, more than I can give today, I would refer you to *Sabbath in Christ* by Dale Ratzlaff. He withdrew from the SDA because of other teachings but still believed the Sabbath to be very important, so he did an inductive thorough study of the subject on his own – with no motive to argue against the Sabbath but just to study it free from outside pressures to conform to a particular statement of faith. The fruit of his study is one of the best works I can recommend to you.

¹ This group has roots in the mid-19th century, along with the teachings of Ellen G. White. Without question, the most influential scholarly writer of Sabbatarian persuasion is Samuele Bachiocchi.

² According to their official website, these Baptists are “evangelical” and “a covenant people ... [who] have presented the Sabbath as a sign of obedience in a covenant relationship with God and not as a condition of salvation. They have not condemned those who do not accept the Sabbath but are curious at the apparent inconsistency of those who claim to accept the Bible as their source of faith and practice, yet have followed traditions of the church instead. Seventh Day Baptists date their origin with the mid-17th century separatist movement in England” (<http://www.seventhdaybaptist.org/>). See also Oscar Burdick, “Sleuthing the Origins of English Seventh Day Baptists in the 1650's: A Bibliography.” *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 38/1 (1984): 134-45.

³ The group associated with Herbert Armstrong. In recent years, much of this church has given up its cultic teachings and become more orthodox, but I have encountered some who still hold to “Armstrongism” (cf. www.equip.org).

⁴ Some celebrate many or all the Jewish days and feasts, not just the weekly Sabbath, but there is wide variation, and many Jewish Christians hold other views,

Another former SDA Sabbatarian described his similar journey this way:

“But after keeping it twenty-eight years; after having persuaded more than a thousand others to keep it; after having read my Bible through verse by verse, more than twenty times; after having scrutinized, to the very best of my ability, every text, line and word in the Bible having the remotest bearing upon the Sabbath question; after having looked up all these, both in the original and in many translations; after having searched in lexicons, concordances, commentaries and dictionaries; after having read armfuls of books on both sides of the question; after having read every line in all the early church fathers upon this point; and having written several works in favor of the Seventh-Day, which were satisfactory to my brethren; after having debated the question for more than a dozen times; after seeing the fruits of keeping it, and weighing all the evidence in the fear of God, I am fully settled in my own mind and conscience that the evidence is against the keeping of the Seventh-Day.”⁵

View #2: Non-Sabbatarian. The majority of Christians through the ages have viewed Old Testament Sabbath law as not binding Christians in the church age.

The reason most Christians worship on the first day of the week is because the Lord rose on the day, not because they believe it is the Sabbath, and certainly not because of what any Pope did. Some call the day instead “The Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10), a title I prefer for Sunday.

There’s a wide spectrum within this view obviously, the majority have probably never seriously studied the subject but just follow tradition, some would disregard the Sabbath because they pretty much ignore the O.T. (ex: antinomian) – I much prefer the way the Reformers handled the Sabbath question, as we *do* need to do justice to the moral demands and intent of God’s Law.

There are differing convictions within this view, some would consider the Lord’s Day more important than others, but they do not believe it is the *Sabbath* from scripture, and they base Sunday practice from the N.T. and/or tradition rather than the Torah.⁵

All agree that the ceremonies and old covenant law were abolished, but some see the Sabbath’s moral internal principle as continuing in a weekly, daily, or lifetime rest and/or worship and/or ultimate fulfillment in Christ, salvation, and the eternal rest of heaven.⁶

It is admitted by even careful scholars of opposing viewpoints that non-Sabbatarian views were the virtually unanimous understanding in the first three centuries of the church,⁷ and continued to be the dominant conclusion of the Reformers.⁸

⁵ D. M. Canright. *Seventh-Day Adventists Renounced*. p. 185.

⁵ The primary modern scholarly writers of this view are D. A. Carson and Willy Rordorf.

⁶ Dale Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Christ* (Glendale, Ariz.: Life Assurance Ministries, 2003). Mr. Ratzlaff is a former Adventist who argues persuasively that the Sabbath issue is all about Christ and the fulfillment and true rest in Him; the focus is Christocentric, not about a debate over days or O.T. rules.

⁷ Some Adventists admit the evidence from church fathers, but do not believe the move away from the Sabbath has proper divinely sanctioned grounds. See Belcher, *Layman’s Guide to the Sabbath Question*, 34-35. The numerous Reformed Sunday Sabbatarians who also concede this point are cited on page 71.

⁸ ‘The view of Calvin and the Continental Reformers was that there is an eternal moral principle contained in the fourth commandment but there is also a ceremonial aspect of this law that was abolished under the New Covenant. And the specific O.T. Sabbath restrictions pertained to the ceremonial ordinances that were abolished and abrogated by Christ.’ -- Phil Johnson, “Keep the Sabbath,” audio sermon from www.swordandtrowel.org.

This view in various forms was held by Martin Luther,⁹ Ulrich Zwingli,¹⁰ John Calvin (see below), and their European successors throughout the continent.¹¹

R.L. Dabney, in his *Systematic Theology*, explains that Luther, Melancthon, and their followers believed

‘that the Sabbath, with its strict and enforced observances, was purely a Levitical institution. In the 28th article of the Augsburg Confession ... [it says] “the Holy Scripture has abolished the Sabbath, and it teaches that all ceremonies of the old law ... may be discontinued ... neither the observance of the Sabbath, nor of any other day, is indispensable.” (p. 452)

The Helvetic Confession (Chapter 24) summarizes the position of the Reformers:

‘we give no place to the Jewish observance of the day or to any superstitions. For we do not count one day to be holier than another, nor think that mere rest itself is acceptable to God. Besides, we do celebrate and keep the Lord’s Day, and not the Jewish Sabbath, and that with a free observance.’

Dabney concludes (p. 456):

‘On the whole, it may be said that the Protestant Churches of continental Europe have all occupied this ground, concerning the sanctification of the Lord’s day. These Churches, properly speaking, have never had the Sabbath ...’

Calvin writes:

‘[T]here can be no doubt, that, on the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ceremonial part of the commandment was abolished. He is the truth, at whose presence all the emblems vanish; the body, at the sight of which the shadows disappear. He, I say, is the true completion of the Sabbath ... Christians, therefore, should have nothing to do with a superstitious observance of days ... The sabbath being abrogated, there is still room among us, first, to assemble on stated days for the hearing of the Word, the breaking of the mystical bread, and public prayer ... The resurrection of our Lord being the end and accomplishment of that true rest which the ancient sabbath typified, this day, by which types were abolished serves to warn Christians against adhering to a shadowy ceremony ...’

[His summary / application]: ‘**First** that during our whole lives we may aim at a constant rest from our own works, in order that the Lord may work in us by his Spirit; **Secondly** that every individual, as he has opportunity, may diligently exercise himself in private, in pious meditation on the works of God, and, at the same time, that all may observe the legitimate order appointed by the Church, for the hearing of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and public prayer: **Thirdly**, that we may avoid oppressing those who are subject to us.’¹²

⁹ See for example, his treatise “Against the Sabbatarians,” *Works of Martin Luther*, Vol. 47, page 57-97.

¹⁰ Extensive quotes from all the Reformers show this clearly in A. H. Lewis, *A Critical History of the Sabbath and Sunday* (New York: American Sabbath Tract Society, 1886): 249 ff.

¹¹ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, (Simpsonville, SC: Christian Classics Foundation, 1985), 456: “On the whole, it may be said that the Protestant Churches of continental Europe have all occupied this ground, concerning the sanctification of the Lord’s day. These Churches, properly speaking, have never had the Sabbath ...”

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapter 8, sec. 31-34.

View #3: Sunday Sabbatarian.

This is technically a “Semi-Sabbatarian” view, in that it modifies the law and transfers the required day.¹³ Generally this group does not simply assert that Christians worship on Sunday *instead* of observing the Jewish Sabbath, this group says Sunday *is* the Sabbath, they call it a “Christian Sabbath.” The amount of modification varies widely, not all agree on the rules, which ones we should bring over from the O.T. and how to apply.¹⁴ But generally all agree that the Sabbath has been transferred to Sunday morning through evening, rather than Friday evening through Saturday evening.

Although the Continental Reformers did not share this view, it can be traced to the English-speaking Protestants in the Reformed tradition, especially the Puritans by the start of the 17th century.¹⁵ Philip Schaff in his *History of the Christian Church* (Vol. 5, p. 494), is favorable to the view but admits it is a peculiarly “anglo-American theory” originated in the U.K. and U.S.

This position includes many personal heroes and theologians of highest rank, and became dominant in the English-speaking Reformed tradition including those who came to America from that tradition. I love and read the Puritans and have many of their sets and books on my shelf, and hope many of you read their deep and wonderful works that exalt Christ.

¹³ The amount of modification varies widely, but generally all agree that the Sabbath has been *transferred* to Sunday morning through evening, rather than Friday evening through Saturday evening. “Sunday is the Sabbath of the New Testament ... a special day set aside for religious service ... Opinion regarding appropriate Sabbath behavior varies widely within this group. Some ... try to keep at least some of the biblical rules for Sabbath observance. We will refer to this group as holding the Transfer / Modification motif - *Transfer*, in that the Seventh-day Sabbath has been transferred to Sunday; *Modification*, in that the rules for Sabbath keeping have been modified.” Ratzlaff, *Sabbath in Christ*, 13-14.

¹⁴ A number of questions arise when asserting the Sabbath commands apply today:

- Does the rule of only baking or boiling the prior day (Ex. 16:23) allow for any cooking? What about “re-cooking” in a modern microwave, or turning on a crock-pot?
- Does the restriction against starting a fire (Ex. 35:3) prevent a housewife from turning on a stove pilot?
- Are families in very cold climates forbidden to heat their homes with fireplaces on Sabbaths in the winter still, or does this restriction only apply to climates as warm as Bible lands?
- If we are allowed to have fires going, how do we justify this when in God’s Law the death penalty was given to someone who would pick up sticks on the Sabbath?
- Can we justify work around the house when God’s Law makes very clear that no work was to be done?
- The Sabbath law focuses on rest in your dwellings as we saw last week – there is no command to travel to a big meeting place for corporate gatherings. Are we violating Sabbath law when we drive to a church beyond the traveling distance limit of 1,000 yards, which no faithful Jew would have done in O.T. times?
- If it was forbidden to load up one’s animal for transportation (Neh 13:15-18), what about loading one’s mini-van?
- Is it o.k. to buy food cooked by someone else on the day (restaurant or drive-thru), thus making them work, or do we have to go home and make our wives work instead?

These questions are not meant to be irreverent, but they illustrate some of the difficulties and issues that Sabbath-keepers have to wrestle with (not to mention the controversial extrabiblical questions of recreation, sports, etc.)

¹⁵ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 5:494, is favorable of Sunday Sabbaths but admits it is a peculiarly “anglo-American theory” originated in the U.K. and U.S.; also G. H. Watermann, “Sabbath,” *ZPEB*, 4:187; Dabney, 457, cites the origin of this view as from Nicholas Bound in 1595. An extensive bibliography of the development of Puritan Sabbath views is found in Ralph P. Martin, *A Guide to the Puritans* (Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997): 209-10.

I also greatly respect and read the Reformers, and they went a different route: value in worshipping on Sunday, and some saw a moral principle in the fourth commandment, but the Reformers saw the Old Covenant Sabbath law as mostly ceremonial in nature, so they did not share the Sabbatarian view of the later Puritans.

But the Sunday Sabbath view became more dominant in Reformed theology history through the confessions of faith that developed in England in the 17th century (Westminster, London Baptist). I greatly appreciate those traditions and would be in substantial agreement theologically, but this is one area where I don't believe the confessions are perfect, and not being bound to a confession, Scripture alone is our guide and creed. At this point in my study I am more persuaded by the view of John Calvin than the Puritans - I think he had a more biblical and balanced understanding here.

WHEN AND TO WHOM WAS THE SABBATH GIVEN?

I believe the answer is to the Jewish people through Moses

Read Nehemiah 9, noting chronology from creation in verse 6 and following: "You came down also *on Mount Sinai*, And spoke with them from heaven, And gave them just ordinances and true laws, Good statutes and commandments. *You made known to them Your holy Sabbath*, And commanded them precepts, statutes and laws, *By the hand of Moses Your servant*." (Nehemiah 9:13-14)

Therefore *I made them go out of the land of Egypt* and brought them into the wilderness. Moreover *I also gave them My Sabbaths*, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them. Yet the House of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness (Ezekiel 20:11-12)

Last week we noted that the word Sabbath is nowhere in Genesis, and I gave you several reasons why it doesn't seem Adam and Eve were given Sabbath rules and do's and don't in the garden. It seems that the Sabbath was given specifically to the Jewish people in the wilderness in Exodus, but even if it had been practiced before the time of Moses, that doesn't prove that the practice must continue after Christ, as I noted.

We see sacrifices taking place in Genesis 4 and from earliest time (ex: Job 1), we see circumcision as a requirement for Abraham, etc. These were not part of the Mosaic law, but that doesn't mean they automatically are required after the Mosaic covenant ended.

Genesis 1:29-30 does explicitly command vegetarianism as a "creation ordinance" if you will – this does not mean that all God's people must eat fruits and plants only until Jesus comes back, we have to let the rest of scripture come into play, so even if the Sabbath was a "creation ordinance" in Genesis 2 doesn't settle the question – we have to let Jesus and later revelation weigh in.

"Speak also to *the children of Israel*, saying: 'Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for *it is a sign between Me and you* throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you ... *it is a sign between me and the sons of Israel forever*" (Exodus 31:13, 17)

The Sabbath was not merely a part of the God's Law and covenant with Israel through Moses, it was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant. The sign of the Abrahamic Covenant was circumcision (Gen. 17), but it's no longer required for New Covenant believers, so why would the old covenant sign of the Sabbath be required?

What about the Gentiles and the Sabbath?

God does not in the O.T. pronounce non-Jewish nations guilty for not observing the Sabbath, while the prophets contain extensive rebukes on the nations for long lists of other sins. In Acts 15, there is a controversy about Gentiles coming to Christ, as some were saying in verse 5 "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the law of Moses."

In verses 6 and following Paul and the Jerusalem elders and the apostles are all there for this council about whether the law of Moses or Old Covenant signs like circumcision are to be required for Gentile converts. The council's decision:

Acts 15:19-21 (NASB95)

19 "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, 20 but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.

21 "For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

Notice that both circumcision and the Sabbath were mentioned in this chapter, the 2 defining signs and marks of Judaism, but neither were part of the basic requirements for Gentile Christians.

Verse 21 also makes it very clear that the N.T. Christians did not call the first day of the week "Sabbath" – this verse clearly refers to the Jewish seventh day Sabbath "from ancient generations"

This is a difficulty for those who hold the Christian Sabbath view arguing that Sunday became the Sabbath on the Resurrection.

WAS THE SABBATH MORALLY BINDING FOR ALL PEOPLE AND TIMES WITHOUT EXCEPTIONS?

There are a number of big assumptions in the Christian Sabbath view:

- N.T. Christians considered Sunday the Sabbath (we will discuss this more later)
- It was a creation ordinance for all people (our study last week and the verses above suggest it was not given to Adam but it was given to Israel through Moses)
- The Sabbath is moral law rather than ceremonial

But with other laws traditionally classified as “moral,”¹⁶ it is easy to demonstrate that they are never right under any circumstance, ex: shall not murder, commit adultery, blaspheme God, etc. Christians generally agree, however, that ceremonial, sacrificial, ritualistic, and external laws were part of the Old Covenant which was nailed to the cross, when God tore the curtain of the temple open on the whole system from top to bottom. In considering which category the Sabbath should be classified in, the typical definition of moral law is not as perfect a fit as many think:

- It is significant that when Jesus was confronted about his disciples allegedly violating Sabbath Law (Matt. 12:1-2, cf. Ex. 16:23-29, 34:21), Christ’s response is a defense based on David violating a *ceremonial law* about eating showbread reserved for the priestly system (Mt. 12:3-4). Scripture does not give David leeway with violating a moral law like adultery though with Bathsheba.
- Rather than arguing about their interpretation, or telling them the Sabbath law is moral and inviolable without exception, Jesus went on to cite other acceptable violations of the ceremonial law such as the priests breaking the Sabbath every week (v. 5), and the validity of laying aside the law if an animal needed help (v. 11).
- The prior context of Mark’s parallel (2:20-22) may be significant in the discussion of old and new wineskins, a reference to the Old vs. New Covenant. Here Jesus asserted His superiority over the temple system and His Lordship authority over the day (v. 6-8). He describes His presence and ministry as “greater than the temple” – something bigger and better than the ceremonies and O.T. laws is present – and notice He uses a Sabbath day for this, perhaps associating it with the temple and ceremonial law.
- In other Sabbath disputes, Jesus again responds by pointing out that the law was not morally binding in every circumstance, but could be superseded to loose an ox or donkey and take it to the water (Lk. 13:15), or to lift out the same that had fallen into a pit (14:5).
- In seven of the nine controversies, Jesus seems to intentionally perform the work of healing on the Sabbath to make a point, including showing the Sabbath was not an inviolable moral absolute: “on the Sabbath, a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken” (John 7:23). Circumcision is yet another exception to Sabbath law, and this ceremonial law could trump the other.
- It would be difficult to show other moral commands where God violates His own moral standard, but in John 5:16-17, Christ’s defense for the things He was doing on the Sabbath was basically that God the Father works on the Sabbath and so can God the Son: “My Father is working until now, and I myself am working ... He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but was calling God His own father” (NASB).¹⁷

The O.T. itself bears abundant testimony that complete Sabbath rest was not a moral absolute for every person without exception:

- Guards worked the Sabbath (2 Kings 11:4-9, Neh. 13:22)

¹⁶ D. A. Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, 91, points out the difficulty with using these terms where Scripture never does nor divides into categories, but often speaks of the law as a unit. This is not to deny the existence of unchangeable prescriptions of right and wrong vs. temporary civil or ceremonial, but he questions whether the N. T. writers use this distinction in proving continuity or discontinuity. If such distinctions are valid, he argues it would fall under ceremonial law. Cf. Belcher, 93.

¹⁷ Belcher, *Layman’s Guide to the Sabbath Controversy*, 89-96, provides a good summary of how the Lord’s Day view advocates have differently interpreted these difficult passages.

- The Kohathites prepared showbread for every Sabbath (1 Chron. 9:32)
- Solomon presented offerings on the Sabbath (2 Chron. 8:12-13)
- Apparently legal activities included military campaigns (Josh. 6:15; 1 Kings 20:29; 2 Kings 3:9), marriage feasts (Judges 14:12-18), dedication feasts (1 Kings 8:65; 2 Chron. 7:8), visiting a man of God (2 Kings 4:23), opening gates (Ezek. 46:1-3), duties of priests and Levites (2 Kings 11:5-9; cf. 2 Chron. 23:4, 8), playing musical instruments (cf. Psalm 92), and the abundant work priests had to do, including many offerings (Lev. 24:8, cf. Num. 28), etc.
- God Himself mentions the Sabbath in the same class with the other ceremonial observations in Isaiah 1:11-14, and Sabbath laws are also all over passages with other ceremonial laws.

Colossians 2:9 (NASB95)

9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

16 Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—

17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

‘It is quite clear in those verses that the weekly Sabbath is in view. The phrase "a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day" refers to the annual, monthly, and weekly holy days of the Jewish calendar (cf. 1 Chronicles 23:31; 2 Chronicles 2:4; 31:3; Ezekiel 45:17; Hosea 2:11). If Paul were referring to special ceremonial dates of rest in that passage, why would he have used the word "Sabbath?" He had already mentioned the ceremonial dates when he spoke of festivals and new moons.’¹⁸

Galatians 4:9-10 (NASB95)

9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.

It is also significant that of the Ten Commandments, all the other 9 are repeated or restated in the N.T., but the Sabbath command is not. The N.T. epistles warn believers against many sins, but Sabbath breaking is not one of them. The fact cannot be easily ignored or brushed aside that the New Testament gives detailed instructions on everything essential to the Christian life, but has no commands regarding the Sabbath (or Sunday for that matter).

¹⁸ <http://www.gty.org/resources.php?section=issues&aid=176380>

IS SUNDAY IMPORTANT? SHOULD WE WORSHIP ON IT? IS IT THE SABBATH?

I would answer yes to the first two questions, no to the third. We speak of Palm Sunday as a very significant day in the life of Christ, His triumphal entry. But it was really the next Sunday that appears to be the primary reason early Christians celebrated Sunday with worship.

Verse 1 makes clear that it was *after* the Sabbath, it was on the first day of the week before dawn that Jesus had risen. All four gospels say clearly Christ rose on the first day of week, and they distinguish it from the Sabbath

Luke 23:56 Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

24:1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.

2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb ...

*It's important to pause here, because the Christian Sabbath view maintains that early Christians considered Sunday the Sabbath because of the Resurrection of Christ. But we already saw in Acts 15, the first church council, halfway through the history of Acts, they reference the Sabbath as something of Judaism / synagogues. And here in the gospels, they go out of their way to make a clear distinction between the first day of the week and the Sabbath.

If such a dramatic change took place – first day is now the Sabbath – surely this would be the perfect place to mention it. There are numerous occasions where the gospel writers insert comments explaining things they understood later (ex: H.S., betrayal of Judas, resurrection, etc.) but no such comment about “Sabbath transfer” to the first day.

If this was the Christian practice and tradition, why do the N.T. writings written decades later give no hint of that? John's gospel may have been written as late as 90 A.D. but it still (like Acts and rest of the N.T.) only uses “Sabbath” for the Jewish seventh day.

The reason I don't call Sunday the Sabbath is because the Bible never does. And the early church never does for several centuries. The days are distinguished and never confused.

- The Catholic church in the middle ages did transfer Sabbath laws and believed they had the authority to do that with God's Word.
- History indicates that Sunday was a regular working day in the Roman empire, so Sunday could not be a day of rest in N.T. times (it appears that the 4th century was the first time rest from work was permitted on Sunday).

I don't call Sunday the Sabbath, but I do see it was important in the N.T.:

- All of the recorded appearances of Christ after His resurrection, that are mentioned by time, were on the first day
- He appears to several people on the first Sunday, then John 20:26 says He does not reappear until a week later (lit. “eight days later” - Jews counted any part of a day as a day, so this was their expression for a week later)
- *There is a pattern developing:*

Luke 24:13 – He shows up on the road to Emmaus on Sunday

v. 27 expounded the scriptures to them (v. 32 “opened the scriptures”) – morning message

v. 33-36 that same hour appears to apostles

v. 44-45 “evening sermon”
 v. 46-48 commissions the apostles on Sunday
 v. 49 promise of Holy Spirit on Sunday
 Acts 2:1 Church was born on a Sunday (Pentecost is 50 days after Sabbath, so it fell on a Sunday)
 v. 2-4 – H.S. comes and inaugurates New Covenant
 v. 14-40 – First Christian sermon
 v. 41 – First Christians baptized and added to church
 20:5-6 – joined in Troas on 1st day of week (see 6b)
 20:7-12 – first day of week meeting
 20:16 – Paul wanted greatly to be in Jerusalem on Pentecost Sunday
 21:4 – possible other stay with disciples Sunday to Sunday
 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 – offerings first day of the week
 Revelation 1:10 – final revelation of Jesus Christ, future of His church through the end of time, occurs on a Sunday

How do we know John isn't using “Lord's Day” for Sabbath, or end times “Day of the Lord”?

Ignatius, who was personally discipled by John and wrote within a decade of Revelation, gives us the closest historical glimpse of whether John and the early church considered the Lord's Day a Sabbath: “[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.”¹⁹

The Didache (around 100 A.D.) gives a glimpse of what the worship looked like: ‘On the Lord's Day come together, break bread, and hold Eucharist’ (Didache, 14.1)

Justin Martyr (A.D. 110-165), gives some of the most extended apologetics as to why Christians do not keep the Sabbath in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, arguing against the Jewish and Mosaic nature of the laws, and seeing New Covenant perpetual observance as turning from sin.²⁰

Tertullian (A.D. 145-220) concurred, “We have nothing to do with the Sabbaths or the other Jewish festivals,”²¹ and he develops further the idea of the Sabbath being figurative of rest from sin and typical of man's final rest in God.²²

In presenting the “Christian Sabbath” view, Belcher admits the following points as agreed by various Sunday-Sabbatarian writers in parenthesis below: Several facts are clear concerning Sabbath and Sunday in the post-Apostolic church. First, the word Sabbath was used exclusively of the seventh day (A.A. Hodge, 11). Second, the first equation of Sunday with the Sabbath did not come until the fourth century (Wesberry, 106). Third, the Jewish Sabbath almost disappears from recorded Christian practice after Christ's resurrection (Beckwith, 30-31) ... Also, the early church saw the Sabbath as a sign of the Mosaic covenant, which passed away with the coming of Christ. Thus the seventh day was no longer sacred to the Christian because it could express all that the New Covenant meant (Ibid., 52, 57).²³

¹⁹ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:62-63 [hereafter ANF].

²⁰ ANF 1:199-207.

²¹ ANF 3:70.

²² Ibid., 3:153-156, summarized by ZEPB, 4:187.

²³ Belcher, 71.

SABBATH	LORD'S DAY
Seventh day of the week	First Day of the week
Commemorates creation and the Exodus	Celebrates the resurrection of Christ
A day of rest from all work for Jews	A working day in the Roman empire
Original focus was <i>private rest</i> , in one's homes, for physical and spiritual benefit of individuals and whole households	Focus became <i>public worship</i> for spiritual benefit of entire church – this took place in evenings or early morning outside of work
Clearly based on Old Testament laws	No clear connection of this day to O.T. laws or Sabbath by N.T. or early church
Detailed rules and restrictions based on explicit precepts from the O.T.	No detailed rules and restrictions, just general pattern and principles from N.T.
Sign between Israel and God in the Old Covenant – implies set apart from the other nations that did not have the sign	New Covenant symbolized in Lord's Table and Baptism – Lord's Day worship spread to Christians of all nations
Christians in N.T. and early church continued to call it the "Sabbath" and only used this word of Jewish seventh day	Christians in N.T. and early church never called this day "Sabbath" (this developed in Middle Ages and esp. 17 th century)
Looks forward to Christ as a shadow	Looks back at Christ and finished redeeming work

Is the Lord's Day important and the best day to worship corporately? Yes. Is it the Sabbath? Not according to the Bible or the early church.

APPLICATION

I think "The Lord's Day" is a great title to use – I would love if you all spoke of the Lord's Day for Sunday, even to unbelievers. What a great testimony this is.

I think the biblical pattern clearly emphasizes the importance of making church and worship a priority. Don't get in the pattern of scheduling things that take away from gathering with believers. If you have to be away from GCBC on a Sunday, I would hope you still find a place to worship and remember our Lord's resurrection.

I think the best motive is not because you have to, but because you *want to* be with God's people, to fellowship, to worship with your brothers and sisters, and to be taught by God.

We can certainly learn from the Jewish pattern of beginning a day the night before – preparing even Saturday night for Sunday. And there's no question that physical rest is a great blessing to mankind, and we neglect weekly rest and refreshment to our peril. Those of us who have two days off a week have a tremendous privilege that did not exist in Bible times. On Saturday we can remember and appreciate God's work in creation, and the resurrection each Sunday.

Outside of church, I'm not going to give you a list of rules or laws about what you can and can't do on Sunday – but I think our focus needs to be on Christ and how can we best honor Him

Romans 14:5-10 (NASB95)

5 One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

6 He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God ... 10 But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.

Much appreciation goes out to brethren who seek to honor this day as unto the Lord, and in this writer's opinion, some over-emphasis or misunderstanding of Sunday or Saturday is not as bad as the flippant or non-reverential attitude many have toward worship or the church. While many half-heartedly give an hour or so to the Lord on Sunday morning, the biblical title "Lord's Day" certainly suggests far more.

The privilege of reflection and refreshment in God is as vital today as ever, and I have no quarrel with those who seek to set aside a whole day for such ends – it just seems better and more accurate biblically to call Sunday "the Lord's Day" rather than the "Sabbath."

I recognize far better men and women than myself may look at the same evidence and draw different conclusions. In the spirit of Colossians 2 and Romans 14 and in light of the difficulties involved, the hope is that different sides will better understand rather than judge others with different convictions or applications of these truths, but that each will be fully convinced in their own minds from Berean-minded study.

In the same way that Jesus and the apostles did not oppose the extrabiblical tradition of synagogue services on the Sabbath, it seems reasonable that Christian traditions and convictions about Sunday are similarly o.k. as long as we're not legalistic towards others who don't do things exactly the same way. Much care must be taken, however, not to develop lists of do's and don'ts like the Pharisees. May God give us both clarity and charity as believers seek to best honor the Lord and His Word.