

20th Century Bible Course

LESSON FIFTEEN

Dear Christian Friend:

Let me tell you about a consecrated young man whose experience is being repeated today in the lives of many young people. Like his classmates, this youth memorized the ten commandments in Sunday school. *Then one day he looked at the calendar and happened to notice that the seventh day of the week is Saturday, and that the first day is Sunday!* He recalled that the fourth commandment says, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God" (Exodus 20:10) So, since Saturday is the seventh day, Saturday must be the Sabbath of the fourth commandment, he reasoned.

He asked his mother about it. She could not explain it. She just had never thought about it.

Next he inquired of his Sunday school teacher, who said, "Oh, the Sabbath has been changed to the first day of the week." It seemed strange that the teacher had had his pupils memorize the seventh-day commandment if that was the case. So the young man wanted to know where to find the first-day commandment. The teacher was positive it was in the Bible, but said he would have to look it up.

Some weeks passed and his teacher had not yet been able to find the text he was looking for, so the young man visited the deacon. The deacon said, "Oh, the calendar has been changed. Time was lost way back there, and so we can't tell which is the seventh day. The seventh day is the Sabbath, all right, but we don't really know which is the seventh day." This was very confusing.

In desperation the young man went to see his pastor. Here he would surely get it straight, he thought. The kindly pastor said, "Don't let it worry you, son, because one day is just as good as another. All days are holy."

"Has the Sabbath been changed on the calendar?" queried the boy further.

"Oh, no," replied the pastor. "Calendar adjustments have nothing to do with the weekly cycle. Only uninformed people ever say that. Saturday is the seventh day and Sunday the first day of the week. No question about that."

The young man went away. His mother could give no help, and his teacher, the deacon, and the pastor gave him all these contradictory explanations. He decided to search it out for himself. After all, if the fourth commandment had been changed, then the statement about that change should be just as clear as the original command in the ten commandments, he reasoned. So he sought God for guidance and with a concordance read everything the Bible had to say about the Sabbath, about Sunday, or about any alleged change. Soon he reached his own conclusion. He became a minister who preached "the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Revelation 12:17). He lived to see this message that he had accepted from the testimony of the Scriptures reach out into some 800 languages and dialects of the world.

Yes, there has been a change, and in this lesson you will discover how, when, and why, but it comes from history, for the Word is utterly silent about any change. May God bless you as you study this subject.

Very sincerely yours,

Your Bible Instructor

LESSON 15

FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY

SCRIPTURE READING: 2 THESSALONIANS 2 (NT 182 [143])

If you had lived in the Middle Ages and asked someone what a spider was, he would have told you

that it was a "little animal which had six legs." Why? Because Aristotle, the great intellectual, said so. From generation to generation his pronouncements were accepted as the ultimate authority on every subject. Spiders had six legs because Aristotle said so! Then about 1400 A.D., almost 1700 years after his death, someone took a look at the lowly little spider and noticed that it has eight legs, not six! If only someone had checked before! But everyone accepted what other people believed!

When we study about God's holy day, the important thing is not what is happening now, or what other people may believe, but, What does God say? For 1700 years the world was fooled about spiders because no one bothered to investigate! What about God's day of worship? Could so many have been fooled for so long because they, too, failed to check into the matter? So we return to the question, What *did* happen? How was the Sabbath changed from Saturday to Sunday?

Part 1-- DID GOD CHANGE THE SABBATH?

1. What is one of God's characteristics? Malachi 3:6 _____

2. What promise has God made concerning His covenant? Psalm 89:34

3. What does God's covenant include? Deuteronomy 4:13

4. How long do God's acts stand? Ecclesiastes 3:14

5. How permanent is His blessing? 1 Chronicles 17:27

6. Did Christ change any of the ten commandments? Matthew 5:17-19 "Think not that I am come to _____ the law, or the prophets: I am _____ come to destroy, but to _____.... Till heaven and earth pass, one _____ till all be fulfilled."

Isaiah prophesied of Christ: "He will magnify the law and make it honourable" (Isaiah 42:21). Jesus said, "I have kept my Father's commandments" (John 15:10).

God could not change the Sabbath, for He does not change. Christ upheld all the commandments and gave us an example of keeping them. There is no record of the disciples changing the worship day in the years following Christ's ascension.

Many years ago a young Russian czar, while walking in the royal gardens, noticed a palace guard standing watch in a nearby field. He asked the young man what he was guarding. The soldier didn't know. The czar, his curiosity now fully aroused, checked the records. Sure enough, there was an order for a sentry to be stationed on that spot! Years earlier, Catherine the Great had opened the gates of her beautiful rose gardens to the public, but fearful that someone might damage her prize rose, she had stationed a sentry to guard it. The roses had long since disappeared, but the order had never been rescinded. A sentry had continued to protect the spot-now nothing but a patch of weeds!

Is it possible that we may be cherishing and guarding some things that are not sacred after all?

Part 2-- THE EARLY FATHERS AND THE SABBATH

As long as the apostles were alive, the purity of the early church was maintained. Untiringly Peter, John and Paul worked to keep error and tradition out of the infant church.

1. What did Paul note that caused him to alert the church to danger? 2 Thessalonians 2:3,4

After the steadying influence of the apostles had been silenced by death, the second generation of Christians, a little farther removed from the time of Christ, were more prone to the perils of popularity and compromise. Sensitivity to persecution and an inclination to fraternize with their pagan neighbors no

doubt also contributed to a tendency to apostatize. The first mention of Christians observing Sunday appears in the Epistle of Barnabas and in Justin Martyr's "First Apology," written about A.D. 150.

Two things contributed to this compromise with the Sabbath. First, Sunday was the day honored by the pagans, and in some areas the Christians, in addition to keeping the Sabbath, also commemorated the resurrection by an early morning Sunday service. Second, the Jewish revolt led by Bar Cocheba (A.D. 132-135) brought all Jews-and anything Jewish-into great disfavor with the Romans. Although the Christians took no part in this uprising, frequently they were caught up in the resulting persecution, for the Romans looked upon them as a Jewish sect. Naturally, the Christians went to great lengths to disassociate themselves with anything "Jewish." A tendency crept in to minimize the obligations of the Sabbath, which was, after all, their most obvious tie with the Jews!

This was most apparent in the Christian communities at Rome and Alexandria, where both days were observed side by side-Saturday as the Sabbath, Sunday as a holiday-for close to two centuries. At first Sunday was secondary, but as pagan practices increasingly filtered into the church, Sunday received more and more prominence and Sabbath less and less. Elsewhere the Sabbath was kept with varying degrees of faithfulness for more than a thousand years after Christ. In North Africa, in parts of the British Isles, and in the Alps, the seventh-day Sabbath was kept until nearly the time of the reformation.

When Constantine ascended the imperial throne, the stage was already set for Sunday legislation. Eager to unite his fractious subjects, he soon decreed (A.D. 321) that everything be closed on the first day of the week-the "venerable day of the sun." Later in that same century the church placed its seal of approval upon Sunday as the worship day: "Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday [Sabbath], but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day* [Sunday] they shall especially honor" (Canon 29 of the Council of Laodicea). This official action of the church completed the transition of Sabbath to Sunday worship. Henceforth emperors would come and go, civil statutes would change at the whim of every conqueror, but Sundaykeeping would become more and more entrenched.

* **NOTE:** Some have thought that John's reference to having a vision on the Lord's day (Revelation 1:10) shows that Sunday

observance was already common in his time, but historical records do not bear this out. The first authentic mention of

Sunday as the "Lord's day" does not appear until the last part of the second century.

Part 3--THE REFORMATION AND THE SABBATH

By the time of Martin Luther and the Reformation, tradition had been elevated to a position equal to and often above that of Scripture. So when Luther said, "The Bible and the Bible only is our rule of faith and practice," he threw a real bombshell into the thinking of his day. (By the word "tradition" is meant the accumulated decrees, actions, policies, and interpretations of the church-its pronouncements on both theology and moral values.) Then came the Council of Trent (1545-1563), perhaps the most important council in the history of the church. The question it faced was authority. Could tradition be successfully defended against the Reformation's stand for the Bible and the Bible only? Here is how Dr. H. J. Holtzmann, in *Canon and Tradition*, p. 263, has summarized it:

Finally ... on the eighteenth of January, 1562, all hesitation was set aside: the Archbishop of Reggio made a speech in

which he openly declared that tradition stood above Scripture. The authority of the Church could therefore not be bound to the

authority of the Scriptures, because the Church had changed . . . Sabbath into Sunday, not by the command of Christ, but by

its own authority.

What carried the day? The fact that the church had torn from the law of God one of its precepts-on the authority of tradition!

"Are we discovering what happened to the Sabbath? Evidently. Listen to this from the Augsburg Confession, written in 1530:

" 'They [the Catholics] allege the change of the Sabbath into the Lord's Day, contrary ... to the Decalogue; . . . They will needs have the Church's power to be very great, because it hath dispensed with a precept of the Decalogue.' -Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. 3, p. 64" (George E. Vandeman, *A Day to Remember*, p. 61).

Surely it was this, and perhaps much more, that the apostle Paul referred to when he foretold a "falling away" from the pure and simple doctrines of Jesus.

1. What would the man of sin (verse 3) do? 2 Thessalonians 2:4 "Who opposeth and

_____ above all that is called God. or that is worshipped; so that he
_____ sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that _____."

2. **What did Daniel say about this great apostasy? Daniel 7:25** "He shall speak
_____ the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and
_____ to change _____."

Men's laws are constantly being changed. Daniel could only be talking here of an attempt to tamper with God's law and with His Holy time-the Sabbath.

One shudders to think how insiduously tradition has crept into the church. Is it any wonder that today millions have never even thought to question about the day of rest at all? The terrible truth is that the Sabbath of the Lord Jesus Christ was sacrificed to the gods of popularity and compromise! And we have been caught sleeping-unwittingly guarding a day that holds no sacredness at all!

But, someone asks, Don't our great religious leaders know about this? Why isn't something being done about it? The first question will be considered in the next section; the last one remains a mystery. Could it be that the spirit of the reformation has grown so dim that the great bodies of Protestants must turn to the very tradition they reject in order to find authority for their day of worship? Such is the embarrassment of compromise.

Part 4--FRANK ADMISSIONS

Here are a few of the many available statements from theologians, most of which are contemporary.

Catholic: "You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday" (*The Faith of Our Fathers*, by James Cardinal Gibbons, p. 111).

"The Bible . . . tells us how God commanded the seventh day to be kept as a memorial of creation. It tells us how the command was repeated at Sinai. It tells how the Son of God Himself kept the seventh day. It says nowhere that Christians should keep a different day from the Jews, His chosen people" (*The Catholic Bulletin*, February 7, 1954).

"There is no place in the New Testament where it is distinctly stated that Christ changed the day of worship from Saturday to

Sunday. Yet, all Protestants, except the Seventh Day Adventists, observe the Sunday. . . . Protestants follow Tradition in observing the Sunday" (*Our Sunday Visitor*, June 11, 1950).

Baptist: "There is nothing in Scripture that requires us to keep Sunday rather than Saturday as a holy day" ("Consider the Case for Quiet Saturdays," by Harold Lindsell, editor, *Christianity Today*, November 5, 1976).

"There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but that 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. . . . Where can the record of such a transaction be found? Not in the New Testament, absolutely not" (Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, author of *The Baptist Manual*, in a paper read before a New York Ministers' Conference held November 13, 1893).

The Christian Church: "There is no direct scriptural authority for designating the first day the Lord's day" (Dr. D. H. Lucas, *Christian Oracle*, 1890).

Congregationalist: "The Christian Sabbath [Sunday] is not in the Scriptures, and was not by the primitive church called the Sabbath" (*Dwight's Theology*, Vol. 4, p. 401).

Episcopal: "The Bible commandment says on the seventh day thou shalt rest. That is Saturday. Nowhere in the Bible is it laid down that worship should be done on Sunday" (Philip Carrington, *Toronto Daily Star*, October 26, 1949).

Methodist: "The reason we observe the first day instead of the seventh is based on no positive command. One will search the Scriptures in vain for authority for changing from the seventh day to the first" (Clovis G. Chappell, *Ten Rules for Living*, p. 61).

Presbyterian: "The Sabbath is a part of the ... Ten Commandments. This alone settles the question as to the perpetuity of the institution. Until ... it can be shown that the whole moral law has been repealed, the Sabbath will stand.... The teaching of Christ confirms the perpetuity of the Sabbath" (T. C. Blake,

Theology Condensed, pp. 474, 475).

Miscellaneous: "English-speaking peoples have been the most consistent in perpetuating the *erroneous assumption* that the obligation of the fourth commandment has passed over to Sunday. . . . Sunday is frequently, but erroneously, spoken of as the Sabbath" (F. M. Setzler, Head Curator, Dept. of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institute, letter, Sept. 1, 1949).

Part 5-- A MATTER OF LOYALTY

Millions of sincere Christians have never thought to question the authenticity of the popular day of rest. But as history escalates its way to its final crisis, the question of allegiance will become more and more important.

1. **What did Christ say about those who reject His commands in order to keep the traditions of men? Matthew 15:9** _____

2. **What does Paul say obedience indicates? Romans 6:16** _____

3. **Why should we keep God's commandments? John 14:15** _____

Could it be that more is involved than we have ever dreamed? That whether we choose to obey God or accept the enemy's counterfeit actually becomes an issue of loyalty? As you see Jesus, the Man who died for you, standing with outstretched hands-hands that were nailed to the cross for you-and hear Him say, "If you love Me, keep My commandments," does popular opinion really matter so much? Does the will of the crowd matter? Or things? Or wealth? Or social acceptance? Or ties of friendship? Does anything really matter except loyalty to your Lord, placing yourself on His side, flying His flag, letting Him know you love Him enough to obey Him at any cost? ***Will you do this?***