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The Origin of Sunday Worship

Christianity is a spiritual experience based upon the worship of the true Creator-God of heaven. The act of worship on the part of the believer is the very substance of his experience and the power of his Christian life. Apart from this worship, there could be no right conception of God, nor could there be any real growth in grace and knowledge. Therefore, in the very heart of God's law, by which the Christian life is to be guided and governed, the proper manner of worship is set forth in such clear language that none need err in this very important manner: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work...For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." Exodus 20:8-10.

Here the Bible teaches that God's people are to keep holy the seventh day, or Saturday, as the Sabbath of the Lord. God specifically chose the seventh day for a very good and logical reason. It was on that day that He rested from His work of creating this planet, all its plant and animal life, and man. Therefore, the seventh day is declared holy. It is not just another day among days. The seventh day is a sanctified memorial of our creation and God's power as the Creator. See Genesis 2:2,3. "The sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27), as a day of rest and worship, to keep us in proper and sacred relation to our Maker.

With these thoughts before us, it is certain that sincere believers in Christ and the Bible will want to know where and how Sunday worship originated. Some historic facts and biblical enlightenment on this subject will be of great value to those who love Jesus and want to serve and worship Him according to the divine will.

Consistency is indeed the glorious jewel of the Bible. Although patriarchs lived before the prophets, and apostles and disciples came thousands of years later, every man followed the same line of doctrine. Of the patriarch Abraham, it is written that he "obeyed My voice, kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." Genesis 26:5. The prophet David wrote: O how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day." Psalm 119:97. It is written of the followers of our blessed Lord, that they "rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment." Luke 23:56. And of the great apostle Paul, it is written that he "reasoned...every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks." Acts 18:4.

In strange contrast with the consistent lives of those who kept the faith before us, sincere believers in the Bible are observing and have observed for centuries, Sunday, the first day of the week, as the day of rest and worship. But the Creator rested on the seventh day and hallowed it as the Sabbath, and this Sabbath was "made for man." The fourth commandment enjoins the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath. Yet, the majority of the Christian world observe Sunday, the first day of the week, and worship on

that day. We offer no condemnation for this inconsistency, but some education and encouragement.

Absolutely No Record of Change in the Bible: No change from the seventh-day to first-day worship is recorded in the Bible. If the change were catalogued there, it would cease to be so perplexing. But our Creator says, "I am the Lord, I change not." Malachi 3:6. The commandment must still stand; for the Saviour declares that "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." Luke 16:17. Since heaven and earth are still standing today, the fourth precept of God's law must still be obligatory. Jesus said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law;" and, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." Matthew 5:17; 19:17.

Notwithstanding all this, an attempt has been made to change the day of rest. The majority today are not keeping the day that Jesus kept. And the question is, Who changed the Sabbath day from the seventh to the first day of the week, and by what authority? Every Christian who desires to "enter into life" should be concerned about this. We ought to know how this change came about, and if the greater part of Christendom is right in observing Sunday instead of the Sabbath day.

Sun Worship in Ezekiel's Day: There is light on this question in the very origin of the word "Sunday." In early ages, mankind, forgetting the true Creator of the heavens and the earth, and being possessed, as all men are, with that inherent instinct which goes seeking after an object or being to worship, began to look about for such an object or being. Their choice rested on the biggest and brightest thing their eyes could see. They chose the sun as god. With its brightness and welcomed warmth, it caused earthly life to bud, blossom, and bring forth food; surely it must be the true god and the author of man's being. Thus we find in history many sun gods. They are pictured on temples and monuments of Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Persia, Greece, and Rome. Ra, Isis, Osiris, Baal, Mithras, Hercules, Apollo, and Jupiter are all heathen gods of the sun. Even in the Bible, sun worship is mentioned. In Job 31:26-28, we read: "If I beheld the sun when it shined...and my heart hath been secretly inticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above." In Ezekiel 8:16 we read: "At the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east."

The pagans had "gods many and lords many." Besides the sun, they worshipped the moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus, and Saturn. And they bestowed upon the days of the week the names of their gods. The sun, from which comes light and heat, being the biggest and brightest, was accorded first rank; and the first day of the week was given over to this foremost of all gods, and called the sun's day, or Sunday. The moon took second place and also the second day; hence Monday. Saturn held Saturday, the last day. So from antiquity, Sunday has been held as a day of worship.

Paganism Worshipped on Sunday: Paganism was worshipping the sun on Sunday when Christ came. When the gospel from Judea came to our own ancestors in Europe, it found them paying homage to the sun on the first day of the week. As the Spirit of God, manifested in Christ, began to work upon the hearts of men, many left the worship of Apollo, the sun god, and joined the

Christians.

After Christ's return to heaven, the great majority were still pagans worshipping the sun on Sunday, while the followers of Jesus worshipped God on the true Sabbath, or seventh day. With mighty manifestations of God's Spirit, Christianity mounted, and paganism began to wane. The Spirit-filled preaching of Paul in Asia, Macedonia, and Italy won thousands to the ranks of Christ. The church at that time was powerful, because of its zeal and earnestness and consecration. The worship of the true God and the following of His commandments spread over the whole world.

Before Paul laid down his life, however, he wrote to the Thessalonians: "Now we beseech you, brethren,...that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled,...as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise; for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God...For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work."
2Thessalonians 2:1-4,7.

Here is a warning of apostasy. Paul saw it working in the church. A "falling away" was to come "first," before the second coming of Christ. A "mystery of lawlessness," or a spirit of making void the law of God, was already at work. A "man of sin" was to be revealed sitting right in the church, "setting himself forth as God." It is quite evident that from this one source was to come the tendency to change the law of God. There can be little doubt that Paul was acquainted with the prophecy of Daniel 7:24,25, regarding that "little horn" power, which was to come up out of Rome, with eyes and a mouth like a man, verse 8, and "speak words against the Most High," and "wear out the saints of the Most High," and "think to change the times and the law."

Daniel had prophesied of a man of sin that was to "think" to change the law; and Paul, by the same Spirit, prophesied of the man of sin and the mystery of lawlessness. God who made eyes, is not blind; and through these two prophets, He made known to His people the fact that there was to come into the church a power that would "change the times and the law." And true to the prophecy, we find its fulfilment.

Soon after Paul was put to death, there swept over the church, in the midst of its prosperity, a sharp rivalry among the bishops of the leading churches as to who should be the greatest. They became thirsty for more power. They did almost anything to inflate their membership, increase their bishoprics, and add to their power. They lowered standards of truth to raise membership. Multitudes joined the church. The white horse of purity and simplicity that the church had ridden, "conquering and to conquer," was exchanged for the red horse of strife and worldliness. She traded her "gold tried in the fire" for the tinsel of popularity. Paganism stalked into the church without a change of heart or life. Scarcely a century after his death, Paul's prophecy was meeting its fulfilment. There was a "falling away" from purity, and an induction of pagan principles and philosophies into the church.

Constantine Combines Paganism and Christianity: In the early dawn of the fourth century, Constantine, a Roman general, ambitious for the throne, adopted Christianity as a matter of political advantage. He saw paganism declining. In reality, it was being

absorbed by the church. Merely as a measure of popularity, he proclaimed himself a Christian. The flattering bishops claimed him as their prize.

Constantine faced a difficult situation: More than half the people worshipped on Sunday, for they were pagans. The others observed the Sabbath, for they were professed Christians. He conceived the idea of cementing the two factions. Thou professing Christianity, he did not want to conflict with the prejudices of his pagan subjects. Artfully balancing himself between the two, he allayed the "fears of his subjects by publishing in the same year two edicts, the first of which enjoined the solemn observance of Sunday, and the second directed the regular consultation of the aurospices" - a pagan practise. (Gibbons "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," chapter 20.)

Here we are, then, face to face with the first law, human or divine, ever given for the purpose of making Sunday a day of sacred rest. And it is entirely a man-made law, uninspired by Divinity. On the seventh day of March, 321 A.D., Constantine established his Sunday law: "Let all the judges and town people and occupation of all trades rest on the venerable day of the sun (Dies Solis); but let those who are situated in the country, freely and at full liberty, attend to the business of agriculture; because it often happens that no other day is so fit for sowing corn and planting vines; lest the critical moment being let slip, men should lose the commodities granted by Heaven." Thus, we have the beginning of Sunday keeping among Christians.

Sunday is Only a Human Ordinance, Says the Historian: You will notice that Constantine did not forbid the desecration of the Sabbath or the Lord's day, but the day of the sun, Dies Solis. The gradual intake of paganism into the church had its effect. The new pagan converts brought in their new ceremonies and their new rest day. The Sabbath, loaded with Jewish traditions, was counted a burden. Sunday was a day of festivity. Neander says, "The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance, and it was far from the intention 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." Rose's translation, page 186. Encyclopedia Britannica says, "The earliest recognition of the observance of Sunday as a legal duty is a constitution of Constantine in 321 A.D., enacting that all courts of justice, inhabitants of towns, and workshops were to be at rest on Sunday (venerabili die solis), with the exception in favour of those engaged in agricultural labour." Article Sunday.

The Catholic church followed the leadership of Constantine, and in the year 364, at the council of Laodicea, passed a law requiring that Christians must "not Judaize by resting on Saturday." Eusebius, a noted bishop of that church, states, "All things whatsoever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's day (which they believed to be Sunday)." Here it is plain that a human hand, and not a divine, changed the Sabbath.

Finally, the Sabbath was crushed, and Sunday, the pagan holiday, was instituted. Henceforth it was espoused and supported by the church, as it is in our day. Doctor Eck, the astute lawyer and champion of the Roman Catholic Church in its controversy with Martin Luther, admits, "The church has changed the observance of the Sabbath to Sunday on its own authority, without Scripture, doubtless under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit." That same church admits today that the change was brought about by its own action, and not by Christ or the apostles.

The Roman Church Boasts the Change: "Doctrinal Catechism" of the Catholic Church, by Keenan, page 174, we read: "Question - Have you any other way of proving that the church has the power to institute festivals of precept?" "Answer - Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her, - she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday the first day of the week, for the observance of Saturday the seventh day, a change for which there is no Scriptural authority."

And still further, in her "Abridgment of Christian Doctrine," R.C. (Tuberville), page 58, we read:

"Question - How prove you that the church hath power to command feasts and holy days?"

"Answer - By the very act of changing the Sabbath into Sunday, which Protestants allow of; and therefore they fondly contradict themselves, by keeping Sunday strictly, and breaking most other feasts commanded by the same church."

Thus the Sabbath was superseded by the pagan Sunday, through human authority and not divine authority. The only part of Holy Writ that was written by God's own finger, the Ten Commandments, the law the psalmist says is perfect (Psalm 19:7), has been altered by man. True, we have long observed an error; but to have been a thousand years wrong will not make us right for a single hour. As Martin Luther said, "If the years should make wrong right, the devil would well deserve to be the most just one on earth, for he is now over five thousand years old."

There are two great contending powers on the earth in matters of religion - Christ and Satan. The whole world is divided in its allegiance to these two. We must place ourselves on one side or the other. Our faces are in the picture somewhere. Those who obey Christ are on His side.

Those who disobey Christ are on the side of the enemy. One of these powers, either Christ or Satan, changed the Sabbath. Clearly it was not our Christ. There is only the other alternative. The change must have been inspired by the enemy. Every loyal follower of the dear Lord Jesus, upon learning this, should reject this change, and say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

"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.

Dear friend, this is not a matter of legalism. It involves no effort to purchase salvation or win God's favour. It is a matter of loyalty and love, truth and righteousness. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." John 14:15. Do you love Him? He loves you, and has given His life to secure your happiness and eternal life. Hear His request with delight and a willing, child-like heart: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."