

ADDED NOTATIONS ON SABBATH OBSERVANCE

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Discussions with seventh-day Christians include five questions. (1) The first question asks for the scripture basis for “changing” Saturday to Sunday as the day of observance. That question miswords the issue. It “begs the question” by assuming that the issue involves a change from one day to the other. Our approach notes that Sabbath was a memorial of the exodus, a Jewish national holiday; so there is no basis for Sabbath observance outside the context of Jewish national life. There will be no “scripture basis” for “changing” from Sabbath to Sunday, because there was no “change.” The two items are not in series but in parallel. The two days have different meanings relative to different “nations” and different founding events. It is not a matter of one continuing entity changing one of its national holidays from one day to another. Since this matter relates to the change of covenants, consult the essay entitled “Old Testament Covenants and the Messianic Covenant.”

(2) How should we handle the texts that Sabbatarians cite? Responding to Sabbatarians’ arguments means observing that the texts they cite do not provide the evidence the issue needs. Passages that belong to the Jewish economy do not apply to the church age. The verses often cited were written within the framework of national Israel, including the word “forever.” Texts of importance are handled in other essays.

(3) What about the claim that the Catholic Church changed the day of worship from Sabbath to Sunday? That question comes from the records of meetings like the Council of Laodicea. The appropriate response is that the Roman church simply claims to have made that change. Neither the Church of Rome nor the Council of Laodicea was making such a change. Since we do not accept the claim, we need not defend the actions based on them. Not observing the Sabbath was an established practice in the apostolic period itself, not something unsettled and variously practiced prior to, say, the Council of Laodicea. The New Testament knows nothing of Gentile Sabbath-keeping, and Colossians 2:16-17 makes it clear that it was not a Christian practice: “*Do not let anyone judge you about food or drink or a feast day, new moon, or Sabbath.*”

(4) What testimony do writers provide in the sub-apostolic age? Information from the church fathers has no value in this topic. Their witness either is, or is about, unapproved precedent and falls out of the picture in a *sola scriptura* approach to Christian faith and practice.

(5) Is there any historical basis for one day over another? The New Testament draws attention to the pattern of gathering on the first day of the week. The character of that gathering, however, differs from that given for the Sabbath day in Judaism. The reason is that the character of the covenants themselves differs in which these observances exist. The latter is not a national covenant, so it must be transcultural. If transcultural, it must not contain things that presuppose the ability of Christ’s followers to perform them. Sunday observance on the analogy of Sabbath observance presupposes a church-state union, which is not the case. Without a civil-religious union, Christians could not enforce a no-work clause in a society that was structured in a way that prohibited it.

Paul clearly implies that considering one day above another or conceiving of every day alike is a matter of personal preference among Christians (Romans 14:5-6). So, neither Sabbath nor Sunday observance could regard the value of one day of the week above the others. If

Sabbath observance were true, Paul could not have said what he did here. The Sabbath would be the most likely day to esteem above others, especially by those of Jewish extraction.

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