

WHY Churches Observe Sunday

by Herbert W. Armstrong

When did the New Testament Lord's Day start? By what authority?

THE ANSWER is shocking. I was shocked 58 years ago—at age 34. I was challenged! I felt my marriage was in jeopardy. My wife announced she was going to start keeping the Sabbath—Saturday! To me, that was religious fanaticism!

“My wife turning to religious fanaticism!” I exclaimed. I could never stand for that! What would my business friends think?

“The Bible says Sunday is the day to keep,” I argued. “All the churches observe Sunday, and they get their religion from the Bible,” I contended.

“Do they?” she asked. “Show it to me in the Bible, and I'll go back to Sunday.”

I responded I didn't know much about the Bible, but to prove she was wrong I would go into an in-depth study of the Bible and of history on the subject.

Evidence from History

Checking history first, I went to the *Catholic Encyclopedia* and various writings. Here is what I found, to my amazement, from the book *Faith of Our Fathers* by Cardinal Gibbons, 11th edition, page 89:

“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, a day which we never sanctified.”

From the *Catholic Doctrinal Catechism*, taught members and children of members: “*Question*: Have you any other way of proving that the church has power to institute festivals or precept? *Answer*: Had she not such power, she should 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.

“*Question*: When Protestants do profane work upon Saturday, the seventh day of the week, do they follow the scripture as the only rule of their faith? Do they find this permission clearly laid down in the sacred volume? *Answer*: On the contrary, they have only the authority of tradition for this practice. In profaning Saturday, they violate one of God's commandments, which He has never abrogated, ‘Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day.’”

From the Council of Laodicea, A.D. 363, came this decree, quoted

from the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume XIV: “Christians must not Judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's day.”

When the Church found anyone keeping the Sabbath, that person was declared “anathema from Christ.” This caused the civil government to arrest and/or put to death the one so branded. Many Sabbath-keeping Christians were thus martyred.

For the acknowledgment of the Sabbath and what the Bible says about the first day of the week, here is what is found in the *Theological Dictionary* by Charles Buck, a Methodist minister: “Sabbath in the Hebrew language signifies rest, and is the seventh day of the week . . . and it must be confessed that there is no law in the New Testament concerning the first day.”

And what have the Presbyterians acknowledged? You find from “The Christian at Work,” April 19, 1883, and January 1884: “Some have tried to build the observance of Sunday upon Apostolic command, whereas the apostles gave no command on the matter at all . . . the truth is, as soon as we appeal to the literal writing of the Bible, the Sabbatarians have the best of the argument.”

The Church of England's *Plain Sermons on the Catechism* by

Isaac Williams, D.D., volume I, says the following: "And where are we told in scripture that we are to keep the first day at all? We are commanded to keep the seventh; but we are no where commanded to keep the first day... the reason why we keep the first day of the week instead of the seventh is for the same reason that we observe many other things, not because the Bible, but because the church has enjoined it."

All these documented historic admissions began to open my eyes with astonishment.

Evidence from the Bible

Then I found in the Bible, as I studied these verses, Matthew 12:38-40: "Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Traditional Christianity teaches that the resurrection of Jesus was on a Sunday morning, and that the crucifixion occurred on a Friday. Therefore the Friday preceding Easter is celebrated as "Good Friday." But a Friday evening burial and Sunday morning resurrection allows for only two nights and one day in the grave, or "the heart of the earth." Some argue that rising in three days could be construed to mean parts of three days—i.e. all day Saturday, plus Friday night until midnight, and Sunday morning between midnight and dawn. But that is certainly not three days and three nights.

In other passages, Jesus said he would rise "in three days." That has to mean within three days but not beyond. In another passage Jesus said he would rise "after three days." That means after the expiration of three whole days. Actually the resurrection occurred precisely at the expiration of three 24-hour days—after three whole days had expired, within but not later than three 24-hour days.

The book of Jonah says Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, and "out of the belly of hell [*sheol* in Hebrew, meaning the grave]" Jonah cried to God.

All these several passages coincide precisely and prove Jesus' body was in the sealed tomb three days and three nights.

Actually, the Sabbath day that was drawing on when Jesus was crucified was the annual Sabbath at Passover time (John 19:31). That Sabbath did occur on Thursday in A.D. 31, the year of the crucifixion. The crucifixion took place on a Wednesday afternoon, the burial just before sundown Wednesday. Jesus' body was in the tomb Wednesday, Thursday and Friday nights—three nights; and Thursday, Friday and Saturday—three

Jesus entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and preached. . . . But why did Jesus keep the Sabbath as a custom?

daylight periods or a total of three days and three nights. And he rose from the dead "in the end of the sabbath" (Saturday) as you read in Matthew 28:1, the Authorized Version.

This knowledge was shocking to me. It destroys the Easter Sunday tradition. Also the only argument for Sunday sacredness depends on a supposed Sunday morning resurrection. This truth destroys all false tradition of Sunday sacredness!

Yes, I was amazed at this truth 58 years ago. But I found much more.

The Lord's Day

In plainest language I found the Sabbath, not Sunday, is "the Lord's Day." In Mark 2:28, I read that "the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath." So the Sabbath, not Sunday, was and is "the Lord's Day."

Jesus kept the Sabbath, setting

us an example (Luke 4:16). He entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and preached.

The apostle Paul preached to gentiles on the Sabbath for one and a half years (Acts 18:4, 6-11).

In I Corinthians 11:1, Paul commanded the gentiles to keep the Sabbath, by following his example. Paul kept the Sabbath, "as his manner was" (Acts 17:2). In this he followed Jesus who observed it "as his custom was" (Luke 4:16).

But why did Jesus keep the Sabbath as a custom? Go back to the creation of man. "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made [creation week]; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Gen. 2:2-3). The Sabbath was created by God—not by work, but by resting in that day. It was GOD who commanded the Sabbath be kept (Ex. 20:8-11). It is one of the Ten Commandments. The Sabbath was made *for* man (Mark 2:27), and it was made *when* man was made.

I John 2:4 says that if any man claims to know the Lord and keeps not his commandments that man is a LIAR! Surely there are many liars among professing Christians today!

What *IS* sin? The Bible definition is: "Sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4). God's law is spiritual (Rom. 7:14), meaning the Ten Commandments.

How does one receive salvation—eternal life? Peter said repent, believe and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Jesus said, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5). Repent means turn *from* sin—turn *FROM* transgressing the law—the commandments, one of which is to keep the Sabbath holy.

The Sabbath is *HOLY* to God. To profane it is like slapping God in the face—treating him with contempt. If we love God, who loves us, we won't do that. I learned that lesson 58 years ago. Have YOU learned it today?

For further information, write for our booklet *Which Day Is the Christian Sabbath?* □