

Sabbath or Sunday?

Some religious organizations (Seventh-Day Adventists, Seventh-Day Baptists, and certain others) claim that Christians must not worship on Sunday but on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. They claim that, at some unnamed time after the apostolic age, the Church "changed" the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday.

However, passages of Scripture (see below) indicate that, even during New Testament times, the Sabbath is no longer binding and that Christians worshipped on the Lord's Day - Sunday - instead. This is because Sunday is the day Jesus rose from the dead and inaugurated a new creation in the order of grace (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The early Church Fathers compared the observance of the Sabbath to the observance of the rite of circumcision, and from that demonstrated that if the apostles abolished circumcision (Gal. 5:1-6), so also the observance of the Sabbath must have been abolished. The following quotations show that the first Christians understood this principle and gathered for worship on "the first day of the week" "the Lord's day," "the eighth day," which is Sunday.

Scripture

Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2,9; John 20:1,19 - the Gospel writers make a point of stating that Jesus' resurrection and appearances were on "the first day of the week" (Sunday), likely to highlight why Sunday was the most important day in the life of the Church.

Acts 20:7 - this text shows the apostolic tradition of gathering together to celebrate the Eucharist ("break bread") on the "first day of the week," which is Sunday.

1 Cor. 16:2 - Paul instructs the Corinthians to make contributions to the churches "on the first day of the week," likely because it was the day Christians gathered together to worship.

Col. 2:16-17 - Paul teaches that the Sabbath was only a shadow of what was fulfilled in Christ, and says "let no one pass judgment any more over a Sabbath."

2 Thess. 2:15 - we are to hold fast to apostolic tradition, whether oral or written. The constant tradition of the Church is that the apostles changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday.

Heb. 7:12 - when there is a change in the priesthood, there is a change in the law as well. Because we have a new Priest and a new sacrifice, we also have a new day of worship: Sunday.

Rev 1:10 - John specifically points out that he witnesses the heavenly liturgy on "the Lord's day," which is Sunday.

Matt. 16:19; 18:18 - whatever the Church binds on earth is bound in heaven. Since the resurrection, the principal day for the entire Christian community to celebrate Mass is Sunday.

Early Church Writers

The Didache: "But every Lord's day...gather yourselves together and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you, until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned" - *Didache*, AD 70.

The Letter of Barnabas: "We keep the eighth day [Sunday] with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead" - *Letter of Barnabas*, AD 74.

Ignatius of Antioch: "[T]hose who were brought up in the ancient order of things [i.e. Jews] have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's day, on which also our life has sprung up again by him and by his death" - *Letter to the Magnesians*, AD 110.

Justin Martyr: "But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead" - *First Apology*, AD 155.

The Didascalia: "The apostles further appointed: On the first day of the week let there be service, and the reading of the holy scriptures, and the oblation [sacrifice of the Mass], because on the first day of the week [i.e., Sunday] our Lord rose from the place of the dead, and on the first day of the week he arose upon the world, and on the first day of the week he ascended up to heaven, and on the first day of the week he will appear at last with the angels of heaven" - *Didascalia*, AD 225.

Source: Introduction and quotes from the early Church Fathers are from Catholic Answers. Biblical references and commentary are by John Salza from his "Scripture Catholic" website.