



LESSON 12: WHY DO THE MAJORITY WORSHIP ON SUNDAY?

Robert Whiteside, a community leader, prosperous business man and talented public speaker of the last century, faced a startling discovery. In a few days he must participate in a public debate about worship and his assignment was to defend Sunday-keeping. He had never doubted the authenticity of worship on the first day of the week. He felt sure there were texts about it because he'd always heard that Jesus changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. But when he began to study the subject, he could find nothing in the Bible to support his hitherto unquestioned belief!

Perhaps you can empathise with Robert Whiteside. Maybe you, too, have been startled to learn that the Bible teaches people to worship on the seventh day and you're wondering why so many people worship on Sunday? What has happened?

FIRST DAY TEXTS

There are eight texts in the New Testament that mention the first day of the week. You'll find six of them in the first four books of the New Testament. Perhaps you'd like to look them up:

Matthew 28:1
Mark 16:1-2
Mark 16:9
Luke 24:1
John 20:1
John 20:19

These six texts all speak of Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week but do not mention anything about worshipping on the first day.

The seventh New Testament text that mentions the first day of the week is found in Acts 20:7-8.

Why were people assembled on the first day of the week? Acts 20:7-8

"Luke (the writer of Acts) recorded 84 Sabbath services (after Christ's ascension) and only on first-day meeting, referred to in the text above."

(Arthur G. Lickey, *God Speaks to Modern Man*. Washington DC.: Review & Herald Publishing Assn., 1952, p 430)

This meeting was not a regular weekly worship service, but a meeting to bid Paul farewell. The fact that they “broke bread” didn’t make it a holy day, because in Acts 2:46, we read that believers were “breaking bread from house to house, daily.” 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 is the eighth and last of the first-day texts in the New Testament. What did Paul ask the people to do on the first day of the week? 1 Corinthians 16:1-2

The Revised Standard Version reads “Put something aside and save.” Paul was collecting money for the poor in Jerusalem and asked that people take a weekly inventory on the first day of each week, and save some of their earnings for this collection.

As you can see, none of these eight texts prove that the first day of the week had become the worship day for the apostles. In fact, nowhere in the Bible can you find authorisation for the sanctification of the first day of the week.

The apostles didn’t change the day of worship and neither did Jesus. What did He say about changing the Law? Matthew 5:17-18

Then where and how did the change from Sabbath-keeping to Sunday-keeping come about?

A BRIEF LOOK AT HISTORY

1. In the first century AD there is no evidence of Christians worshipping on Sunday. The New Testament says that Jesus and the apostles worshipped on the seventh day.
2. During the second century, some Christians in Rome and Alexandria began worshipping on Sunday along with Sabbath observance.
3. From the second to fifth centuries, Sabbath was still observed throughout the Roman empire, but gradually many Christians started worshipping on both Saturday and Sunday. Why?
 - a. Anti-Semitism, especially in Rome, caused Christians to distinguish themselves from Jews by discontinuing practices that looked “Jewish.”
 - b. The influence of sun worship among the pagan Romans contributed to the growing acceptance of Sunday as a day of worship.
4. The first known Sunday law was passed by the Roman emperor, Constantine in AD 321 and legislated that people rest on Sunday.
5. In AD 364, the Council of Trent issued the first ecclesiastical Sunday law. This law asked that people work on Saturday and rest on Sunday. By 535, and even more severe law concerning Sunday worship was passed by the church.

As you can see, the change was gradual and subtle and caused by many factors. The Catholic Church, however, claims the change from Sabbath to Sunday-keeping as one of the marks of her authority. The 1977 edition of The Convert’s Catechism says this:

Question:

Which is the Sabbath day?

Answer:

Saturday is the Sabbath day.

Question:

Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?

Answer:

We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic church, transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.

(Peter Geiermann, The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine; Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1977, p 50)

Centuries ago, God, through the prophet Daniel, predicted that a power would attempt to change God's laws. What was this prophecy? Daniel 7:25

Paul predicted a deception would take place before Christ returned the second time. What did he tell the Thessalonians? 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4

Behind the governments and powers of earth a "man of sin" has been at work trying to "change times and laws." This deceptive force is none other than Satan. What has been his goal? Isaiah 14:13-14 (especially last part of verse 14)

What was one of Satan's temptations to Jesus? Matthew 4:9

Satan wants to "be like the Most High." He desires worship. By substituting another day for God's true worship day, he has hoped to get worship and allegiance through deception. Jesus unmasked Satan's' deception. What was His answer? Matthew 4:10

Do you feel as startled by these findings as Robert Whiteside did more than a century ago? Robert struggled with the decision to change his life-time beliefs and habits, but finally he decided to follow God's word. He became a minister and preached Bible truths for more than half a century.

ASK YOURSELF

How will I respond to these new insights?
