



Conducted by
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“Why do Churches of Christ attach more importance to the first day of the week rather than the Sabbath Day (Saturday)? Surely there is more evidence for Sabbath Day Observance than there is for what you call ‘the Lord’s Day’.”

I am constantly amazed at the way questions such as this one keep recurring, but perhaps it is because of our unique plea, “we speak where the Bible speaks.” We have always insisted that there should be a critical analysis of the text and a correct reference to the context, but having done this, and exhorted others to do it, we are left with that other great imponderable “rightly dividing the Word of Truth”; this, seemingly, causes the greatest difficulty.

Is there one single, simple recipe for inducing someone to believe what another teaches? The mind is a wonderful instrument, but it is undoubtedly influenced greatly by previous ideas and teachings which have invaded it in the past. Can there be such a state when the mind can turn to a problem without bringing to bear on that problem some pre-conceived ideas. Can we, as often as we so often and fondly pray, “empty our minds” so that we can concentrate fully, and without pre-conception, on the problem at hand? If we can, then the teacher is encouraged to go ahead. If we

can't then the teacher is faced with the colossal task of removing a fixed barrier before he can even begin to impart new truth. I have gone to some length to say this because I consider it to be fundamental to understanding. If a question is valid, then it must be approached with an open mind; if this essential pre-requisite is missing, then the question becomes mere rhetoric (in the bad sense).

The Sabbath

It is undoubtedly true that Sabbath Day observance was commanded by God, *but not to everyone*. The word Sabbath is from the Greek word SABBATON and means, 'a complete cessation'. The idea is not of relaxation, but of a complete cessation of activity.

The observation of the Sabbath, therefore, was given as a 'sign' between God and His earthly people Israel. After six days of creative activity, God ceased from His activity on the seventh day, and decreed, "Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign *between me and the children of Israel* for ever: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed (Ex. 31:16, 17). One major point which we have to notice here is that the observation of the sabbath was a sign between God and the children of Israel. Nor should the word 'perpetual' trouble us overmuch; this is obviously modified by the phrase 'throughout their generations'. The sabbath was to be kept by the old Israel of God throughout *their* generations; its observance is not enjoined upon the new Israel of God, the Church, as revealed in the N.T. scriptures.

In Exodus 20:8-11 we find that the teaching relating to the Sabbath is part of what we know as the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments. These were given to Moses on Mount Sinai. You will remember, of course, that when Moses came down from the mount and saw the people worshipping the golden calf he was so angry that he smashed the two tablets of stone on which were written the Commandments. He was instructed by God to hew two more tablets like unto the first (Ex. 34:1), and then to ascend Sinai again. He did so, and he was in the mount with God forty days and forty nights while God delivered the Commandments again. After this, the Lord said to Moses, "Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel" (Ex. 34:27).

The Two Covenants

We must now turn our attention to the teaching given by Paul to the Christians in Galatia. Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, one by the bondmaid the other by the freewoman. Paul goes on, "for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all" (Gal. 4:22-26). The reader will notice, of course, that when Paul refers to Agar (Hagar) he is referring to the mountain and not to the bondmaid's name. However, the allegory that Paul uses is quite clear and precise. We have Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, the old covenant and the new covenant, the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem. The disposition of the women and their sons is made quite clear by Paul, "Nevertheless, what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free" (Gal. 4:30, 31).

But someone will say, what does all this mean? Well, I believe that the law given by God to Moses was the old covenant. It was rooted in Judaism and its earthly centre was the earthly Jerusalem. It was written on stone. This law was given to

Moses on Sinai (Agar), and as Paul put it, it was that 'which gendereth to bondage.'

We are taught that the children of Israel were unwilling to keep this covenant so God had to make another (new) covenant with them. Jeremiah prophesied that this new covenant would not be like the one made with their fathers when God brought them out of the land of Egypt; it would be written on the heart and not on tablets of stone; it would be of the Spirit. (Jer. 31: 31-34). Paul, commenting on this in his second letter to Corinth says, "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tablets of stone, but in the fleshy tablets of the heart" (2 Cor. 3:3). Paul then goes on, "But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?" (2 Cor. 3:7), but read the whole third chapter). Here Paul precisely identifies Sinai because if we read Exodus 34:29-35 we shall see that this is where the face of Moses shone, after that he had come down from the mount.

I have read that some people say that the old covenant was "the law of Moses" and not the Decalogue, but listen to what 1 Kings 8:9 says, "There was nothing in the ark (of the covenant) save the two tables of stone, which Moses put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the children of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt" (Read also Heb. 8:6-13).

From the foregoing we cannot but conclude,

- (a) the law of Moses was the Decalogue, and also the old covenant.
- (b) the law embodying the old covenant has been done away.
- (c) the law contained the commandment about Sabbath Day observance, therefore, this also is done away.

(Read also Gal. 5:4; Rom. 7:4; note also in Rom. 7:7 Paul says, "for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." Therefore, Paul again identifies 'the law' with the Decalogue).

The First Day of the Week.

It is absolutely right, of course, that the New Covenant scriptures should concern themselves with Jesus, the Christ; He is the central figure around which all else revolves. Consequently, Paul says to the Colossians, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or in the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body (or substance) is of Christ" (Col. 2:16). This is a reference to the age which started at Pentecost, when the shadows became substance in Christ. It seems to me to be quite logical that the early Christians should want to remember Christ on the day on which He rose from the dead. Undoubtedly, what the Church of Christ calls the 'Breaking of the Bread,' and what other religious groups call the Eucharist, was, from the early days, celebrated on the first day of the week, Sunday. Already in the first century A.D., and certainly at the beginning of the second, Sunday was the chief day of worship, and the reason given was that it was "the Lord's Day," the day that Christ had been raised from the dead (See Luke 24:1 ff; Mark 16:9). The choice of the first day of the week indicated that the early Christians had their faith firmly rooted in the risen Christ. It seems that the first service was held before dawn, with readings from the Scriptures, chants, homilies, and prayers. The Eucharist would follow in the early hours of the morning. One interesting and, we might say, onerous task of the deacons was to see that all occupied their proper places and that no one whispered, laughed, nodded or slept.

Also at this Meeting there would be a 'laying by' for the needy saints. This would be completely in line with the instructions given by Paul to the saints in Corinth (1 Cor. 16:1-3). There would also be preaching and teaching (See Acts 20:7-12). It

would also seem that the deacons here had not been too observant so far as Eutychus was concerned). Justin Martyr wrote in A.D. 140, "But Sunday is the day on which we hold our common assembly, because it is the first day — and Jesus, our Saviour, on the same day rose from the dead." Both Justin Martyr and the Didache affirm that the Eucharist (Breaking of Bread) was open only to immersed believers.

Well, there it is. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the early Christians, in line with New Testament teaching, worshipped quite simply upon the first day of the week. It is equally certain that it was the Judaisers, with their obsessive insistence on the 'dead' law, who campaigned for Sabbath Day observance. W. E. Vine states, 'For the first three centuries of the christian era the first day of the week was never confounded with the sabbath; the confusion of the Jewish and Christian institutions was due to declension for apostolic teaching' (Dictionary of N.T. Words). We in the Church of Christ would say Amen to that, and would further add that not only the teaching regarding the sabbath, but confusion over other teaching has been due to declension from apostolic teaching. Let those who have named the name of Christ be careful not to wilfully throw away our hope of life in the risen Christ, by adhering to the law, for, "the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."