

# Rebuttal of "Sabbath Keeping and the Church"

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## Arguments Against the Church Keeping Saturday as the Sabbath

Note: The present paper is a rebuttal of an anonymous document by the same name, which has been circulated by a church group for the purpose of refuting the bases for Christian Sabbath keeping. A copy of the document was brought to my attention by a friend who requested point by point comment. Below I respond to each major point, but have not tried to be exhaustive. FWH

**Argument #1: The Sabbath was given to the nation of Israel, not to the Church of Jesus Christ.**

*Adam and Eve are everyone's parents. The Sabbath was made holy at creation. There were no Jews then. It was given to everyone who can trace his or her descent from Adam.*

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. <sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Genesis 2:1)<sup>1</sup>

The Sabbath was made for all mankind without distinction. This is the meaning of the word "man" in the following passage. Again, no mention of Jews.

Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27)

There is another matter to consider. The ten commandment law begins, "And God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup> 'I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. <sup>3</sup> You shall have no other gods before me'" (Exodus 20:1-3). Verse 2 mentions the exodus from Egypt. So is the commandment against having other gods only for the nation of Israel? Only Jews can't worship multiple gods? Christians can? The writer of the above objection needs to reflect more on what he's saying. But my point here is that both the first commandment and the fourth come from the same law code and are on the same level. Keeping the right day helps us identify the right God, because the Sabbath reminds us that the Lord created all things.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise marked, English Bible quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

*The nation of Israel.* There is a question what the word "Israel" means. One can only exclude the church from participation in Israel by limiting the term to the level of genetics, but Paul denies that this is the right way to understand it.

A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.<sup>29</sup> No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:28)

Being a Jew inwardly means having a spiritual relationship with God. It means having faith. Jesus makes a similar point, but from a different direction, in the following exchange.

I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. . . . "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would do the things Abraham did. (John 8:37, 39)

Notice here the contrast between "I know you are" (i.e., you are) and "If you were" (i.e., you aren't). Jesus' accusers were "Abraham's descendants," but not "Abraham's children." How could this be? It seems inconsistent. But it is only inconsistent so long as we take both expressions on the same level. If we understand the first in a physical way and the second in a spiritual way, the contradiction vanishes. So who are "Abraham's children," if we accept the distinction Jesus is making here? Those who do what Abraham did. What did he do? "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (Romans 4:3). Today those who believe God and are held righteous, as Abraham was, are the church of Jesus Christ. When Paul says, "Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16), that is what he has in mind.

Notice that so far we have mentioned two distinctions – one asserted by the New Testament, the other denied. The distinction the New Testament asserts is between Abraham's descendants and Abraham's children. (Only the latter have faith.) The distinction the New Testament denies is between Jews and Gentiles. (Jews can have faith just as Gentiles can.) The contrast between the two distinctions is instructive, because in both cases the role of physical descent, or simple genetics, is minimized. Jesus says physical Jews can be on either side of a spiritual divide involving faith, and Paul says that people on either side of a physical divide involving ancestry can be one spiritually. The position I argue against in this paper rests crucially on collapsing the distinction Jesus introduces and on introducing the distinction Paul removes.

Perhaps that last point went by too quickly. Let me say it again. The writer I oppose takes every opportunity to focus on what is Jewish and what is not. Jew and Gentile are big categories for him. And yet both Jesus and Paul make the contrasting point that physical descent is irrelevant. "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63).

*The church of Jesus Christ.* The promises that Christians receive by faith are the promises given to Abraham and inherited on our behalf by Christ. We are co-heirs with Him of the promises God gave to Abraham. So if we don't want to be Abraham's children (if we don't want to be part of God's spiritual Israel, defined by spiritual descent from Abraham), that puts us in an awkward position. Consider, for example, what it means to be under the new covenant. Who is it for? With whom does God make this new covenant?

But God found fault with the people and said: "The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant **with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.**"<sup>9</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.<sup>10</sup> This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.<sup>11</sup> No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.<sup>12</sup> For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."<sup>13</sup> By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (Hebrews 8:8-13)

Again, we are speaking of spiritual things. The above passage doesn't mean that Christians must become Jews. That proposal was debated at the Jerusalem council and set aside in Acts 15. What the passage means is that, because of our faith in Jesus, we are already Israelites – without respect to physical ancestry. The church is a new Israel in Christ. There has always been more to Israel than what is earthly and physical. Jacob received the name "Israel," not when he was born, but when he struggled with God (see Gen 32:28).

**Argument #2: The Sabbath is part of the Old Testament Law which was blotted out at Christ's death on the cross.**

*Part of the Old Testament law.* It is true that the Sabbath is part of the Old Testament law, but when I say these words I might be emphasizing something different from what others mean when they say them. The Sabbath is only *one* part of the law. It's not the whole thing, but only a tenth. There are nine other commandments that come along with it and that can't be separated from it. What we're dealing with is a matched set. You take it all, or you reject it all. We can't pick and choose as we might wish.

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.<sup>11</sup> For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. (James 2:10)

*Blotted out at Christ's death on the cross.* First of all, it's only the Sabbath that people want to nail to the cross and blot out. The other commandments are OK. But let's assume that the writer meant it like he said it, i.e., that the whole law, including all ten of the commandments, was blotted out at Christ's death on the cross. We can hope it wasn't.

Those who teach the people to regard lightly the commandments of God sow disobedience to reap disobedience. Let the restraint imposed by the divine law be wholly cast aside, and human laws would soon be disregarded. Because God forbids dishonest practices, coveting, lying, and defrauding, men are ready to trample upon His statutes as a hindrance to their worldly prosperity; but the results of banishing these precepts would be such as they do not anticipate. If the law were not binding, why should any fear to transgress? Property would no longer be safe. Men would obtain their neighbor's possessions by violence, and the strongest would become richest. Life itself would not be respected. The marriage vow would no longer stand as a sacred bulwark to protect the family. He who had the power, would, if he desired, take his neighbor's wife by violence. The fifth commandment would be set aside with the fourth. Children would not shrink from taking the

life of their parents if by so doing they could obtain the desire of their corrupt hearts. The civilized world would become a horde of robbers and assassins; and peace, rest, and happiness would be banished from the earth. {GC 585.1}

A modern Christian writer wrote the above words, but tell me if they are not true. The things described above are happening now. We can verify them from any newspaper. One reason why they are happening – not the only reason but one reason – is that ministers of the gospel have told their congregations there is no longer any law. It was done away at the cross. Their congregations have believed them and society as a whole has believed them. Well, now we can see the result. This is not the work of the gospel. At least it is not the work of any gospel Jesus would recognize. The gospel contains an awareness that God made us and that we are responsible to Him.

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had **the eternal gospel** to proclaim to those who live on the earth– to every nation, tribe, language and people. <sup>7</sup> He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." (Revelation 14:6-7)

Notice three things here. The gospel this angel brings is "the eternal gospel," i.e., it is the gospel that has always been the gospel. So there's nothing new here. Second, this gospel includes within it a reference to "the hour of his judgment" (vs. 7). How can God judge people if He has no standard of behavior that could serve as a basis for judgment? But He does have a standard of behavior, and the present verse gives a clue that will help us identify what it is. The words, "Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water" (vs. 7), are drawn (freely, but recognizably) from the fourth of the ten commandments. His standard of behavior is the ten commandment law from which this clause is drawn. With the theory of evolution all around us as the accepted norm in society and in our schools, do we really need Christians telling people that the Sabbath is obsolete? That's the only commandment in the law that ties back to creation – reminding people that God is responsible for their existence and that they are still responsible to Him for their actions.

We have become so allergic to the concept of doing things (actions, deeds) that we think any requirement God presents is a plot to rob us of faith. But there's still ample room within a faith-filled Christian life for doing right things, even though they won't save us. Why should they have to? A person who really *is* saved by faith need not care that his deeds won't save him, because he no longer has the ulterior motive of trying to achieve salvation that way. In Christ he's already received it. So what's the issue? It is the person whose faith might be just a bit fragile that worries about avoiding the appearance of doing good things.

In any event, if what we need most under the gospel is to avoid works, the Sabbath is something we can freely embrace, because it has nothing to do with work or works. In the language it comes from the word "Sabbath" means cessation, or rest. What work is there in rest? Resting spiritually on the Sabbath demonstrates our assurance that God has done for us what we could never have done for ourselves. Correctly understood (you can do anything wrong) the Sabbath conveys this idea nicely. By contrast, what symbolism could there be in working through the seventh day – ignoring any significance it might have?

At the death of Christ the Law was put aside.

If we think the law is capable of being turned on or off we're viewing it on the level of arbitrary restrictions. Is it really just something to do – a code of human behavior? Or do God's words tell us something about who He is and what He is like? Whose attributes does the law describe? If they offer a reflection of the character of God, there is a reason why they say what they do. And if this is the case, there is nothing arbitrary about them.

Another reason for not thinking that the ten commandments can be put aside at will is that they are not ceremonies pertaining only to outer behavior. If they were, how would you perform them? For example, how would you perform the ceremony of not stealing? Or of not committing adultery? I submit the commandments could not conceivably be anything other than what they are, because they describe the holy attributes of the One who gave them. They are a self-revelation of God – a transcript of His character. We need to see Christ in the law, or we will never understand what it's about. When we do see Christ in the law, it will lead us to Him.

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)

The law can only lead us to Christ by showing us His character, which in turn shows us our character. By seeing how very different the two are from each other, we begin to realize our need. Do people still need Christ? If so, then they still need the law which reveals this fact to them. Otherwise, how would they know what their need is? We can say the cross. But without the law to show us why the cross was necessary, we come away saying, yes, He did this, but why? Only the law can answer that question, and in doing so "lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith."

Something really was done away at the cross, but it wasn't the ten commandments. Those principles are eternal because God is eternal. So what was done away at the cross? It was all the types and shadows and ceremonies that pointed forward to what Christ would do on the cross. When the reality comes, you no longer need the shadow. And so the shadow falls away. For example, animal sacrifices were no longer needed after the cross because every drop of sacrificial blood ever shed in the sanctuary, and later the temple, pointed forward to the fact that Jesus would one day offer Himself for our sins on the cross. When His blood was shed on Calvary, theirs was no longer necessary, because there was no longer anything for it to point forward to. The reality was already here. There were ceremonial sabbaths, celebrated on a monthly or yearly cycle, that pointed forward to what Jesus would do. When He actually came all the things that had pointed forward to Him ceased. They were done away at the cross, as stated in Colossians 2:16.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Colossians 2:16 looks back to Hosea 2:11. The structure of Hosea 2:11 is chiasmic in nature, i.e., it's like a mirror image. The sequence is "her feast days [A], her new moons [B], and her sabbaths [A]." The last term corresponds in some way to the first. The reason for this is that there were two types of feast days. One consisted of the so-called pilgrim feasts – which every male was required to attend, often involving travel. These included Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. The terms "sabbaths" is never used to describe these, but is used to describe the remaining annual feast days of Trumpets and Atonement. Atonement was not a festive occasion, but a solemn time of soul searching. So the pattern is A (joyous annual feasts), B (monthly feasts), A' (solemn annual feasts). Simplifying the sequence, what we have is annual (A), monthly (B), and annual (A'). See Ron du Preez, *Judging the Sabbath: Discovering What Can't Be Found in Colossians 2:16* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2008) for an exhaustive treatment of Colossians 2:16, its sources, and its significance. The pattern is not yearly, monthly, weekly.

The fourth commandment doesn't fall in this category, nor do any of the other nine, because the seventh-day weekly Sabbath doesn't look forward to anything. It looks back. The other nine commandments don't have any relationship with time. They are timeless. But as regards the Sabbath, that day has always had the past in view, never the future. Even in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, where the commandment is repeated in a sort of paraphrase<sup>3</sup> and Moses associates the Sabbath obligation with Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the deliverance Moses refers to was already an accomplished fact by the time he mentions it. It was in the past. In Exodus 20:8-11, on the other hand, what the Sabbath looks back to is the creation of the world. Again, this is in the past, not the future. If the seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment does not look forward to any future event, how could any future event remove its significance?

At creation God made the seventh day holy. In the fourth commandment He says, "Remember the Sabbath day to *keep* it holy" (vs. 8). People can't *make* the Sabbath holy by what they do. People can't make Sunday holy by what they do – any more than they can make themselves holy by what they do. Nor did Jesus make Sunday holy by rising then. Or if He did, He never said so. What I'm waiting for is a simple straightforward "thus saith the Lord." I haven't found it yet. The Bible does not say anything about making Sunday holy, but it does say – right at the beginning – that God made the Sabbath holy.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. <sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

<sup>3</sup> And God **ble**ssed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. (Genesis 2:1-3)

This much is pretty clear. Then years later God appeared on Sinai amid thunder and lightning commanding them to keep the Sabbath holy (see Exod 20:8). In regard to making Sunday holy, or transferring the sacredness of the Sabbath from the seventh day to the first, the discussion is pretty one-sided. I can't give you a verse for either of these things. Neither can anyone else.

The Sabbath of the fourth commandment was not nullified at the cross, or done away, or blotted out. The Sabbath is the birthday of the world, celebrated on a weekly cycle. What future event could nullify your birthday? I don't know how this could be done. In the same way, I don't know how anyone could ever nullify the fact of God's creatorship. That's what the Sabbath memorializes. No matter what happens in the future, it will always be true that God made us. Is this something we should remember?

### No law from Adam to Moses

Was there a law before Sinai? We puzzle over such questions, but there is a way to know. Paul says, "Where there is no law there is no transgression" (Romans 4:15). If there was no law before Sinai, there was no sin before Sinai. If sin is in people's hearts and minds, how could we know? Actually it's an easy hypothesis to test. The way to do this is to ask whether God punished anyone before Sinai. If He punished sin, there was sin to punish. If there was sin,

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<sup>3</sup> "Deuteronomy" means "Second Law," i.e., second giving of the law. The ten commandment law as it appears in Exodus 20 must be our starting point. What we find in Deuteronomy 5 is a repetition of that. "And God spoke all these words: . . ." (Exodus 20:1); "Moses summoned all Israel and said: . . ." (Deuteronomy 5:1). In the one chapter God is speaking; in the other Moses is speaking, even in vs. 5 where he quotes the earlier words of the Lord.

there was law. So I ask, Does bringing a worldwide flood on the earth to destroy all mankind constitute punishment? On one reading the people that perished in this way had done nothing wrong, because there was no standard of right and wrong by which to judge them. Under this same model, Cain did nothing wrong when he killed his brother. But again, if that were true, why did God punish him? There was sin before Sinai. Abel would say so if he could.

I grant that no law had been written on stone at this early time in history. But it doesn't matter where it was written. Writing the law down does not bring it into existence, nor does it change what the law says if we write it here as opposed to there. It can be written on the heart. In Cain's case it obviously wasn't. But that doesn't excuse what he did. I submit that the law existed before Sinai because God existed before Sinai. The law is a self-revelation of God. It is a description of His holy character. So the question whether there was a law before Sinai can be restated. We instead ask whether God existed before Sinai. (He did.) The requirement to keep the law is a requirement to be like the One who gave it, "for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:16; see Leviticus 19:2).

Argument #3: The early church worshipped on the Lord's day (Sunday), not the Sabbath.

It's not quite that neat and tidy. Early, yes, but we have to ask how early. If the claim is that right from the first the church went over to Sunday and Christians never kept the Sabbath after the cross, that just isn't true. Such a claim flies in the face of any number of historical facts. Christians kept the Sabbath through much of the first century – a period that coincides substantially with the lifetime of the apostles.

Consider the following: (1) In Acts 4:14 and 21 the Jewish leaders didn't know how to punish Peter and John. If these disciples had been Sabbath breakers, the leaders would have known how to punish them.<sup>4</sup> (2) In Acts 5:15 people put their sick out on the street where Peter and his companions were known to pass by so their shadow would fall on them and bring healing. The level of esteem in which the disciples were held can't be accounted for under the hypothesis that they or their flock had stopped keeping the Sabbath. (3) In Acts 6:7 "a large number of priests became obedient to the faith." There is no indication that they stopped being priests when they started being Christians. (4) The rapid growth of the church in general during the three and a half years or so between the cross and the death of Stephen unfolded in a solidly Jewish environment and argues against anything remotely resembling a change in the day of worship.

At his trial in Acts 7 notice that the council sat in silence while Stephen recounted the course of Jewish history, including the career of Moses and his role as a type of Christ (vss. 39-43). A turning point came when he said,

"You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! <sup>52</sup> Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him— <sup>53</sup> you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it." (Acts 7:51-53)

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.historicism.org/Documents/EndOfTheLaw.pdf>, pp. 3-5.

What was he saying here? Recall that in chap. 6 Stephen's accusers "produced false witnesses, who testified, 'This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law'" (Acts 6:13). Now the accused becomes the accuser. The "'law that was put into effect through angels'" (vs. 53) is a transparent reference to the ten commandments and now Stephen accuses the Jewish nation – prominently including its leaders seated before him – of disobedience and apostasy. It would be a mistake to place the above statement on the same level as his earlier references to Israel's apostasy in the wilderness. Mention of past failings could be tolerated. In saying what he does here, however, he is no longer describing past failings. He is addressing the court directly. In effect Stephen accuses his judges of being less faithful to the law than he was. They were trying him, but were more guilty than he. No one stood up at this point to say, You can't make that claim! It's unfair, because we keep the Sabbath but you don't. If such a charge had been possible, Stephen's trial would have come much sooner and been much shorter. The fact that he lived long enough to appear before the Sanhedrin is evidence that he was a Sabbath keeper.

In the three and a half years leading up to AD 34,<sup>5</sup> did Stephen have one rule of faith and practice and the apostles another? Perhaps he kept the Sabbath but they didn't? The apostles almost all died for their faith. They were anything but hypocrites. They were keeping the Sabbath holy, just like all the other Jewish people around them. The fact that all the leadership of the Jerusalem church lived until Stephen appeared before the Sanhedrin – and the fact that they did not appear with him – all these facts can only be accounted for under the assumption that Christians in Jerusalem were Sabbath keepers. A change did eventually occur, but that was later.

## Arguments Supporting Sabbath Keeping and Christian Rebuttal

Argument #1: Jesus kept the Sabbath. Shouldn't we also?

Only if you want to follow His example. We need to decide whether we're following Jesus or each other. Jesus was under law (see Galatians 4:4); we are not under law. Jesus obeyed God; we don't. Is this logic correct? It is true that Christians are not under the law but under grace (see Galatians 6:14, and with it vs. 15). No one's arguing the point. But what does it mean to be under grace? How does a person live when they're not under law? More specifically, does grace lead to disobedience? If that's the concept, I challenge it. That's not what grace is about. Grace does not have the function of allowing people to live as they always did, but now with impunity.

For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (Romans 6:14)

According to John, "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). The popular concept of grace come perilously close to lawlessness. When you're under grace you no longer keep the law. But of course if you don't keep the law, you break the law. If you break the law, you sin. So grace and lawlessness go hand in hand? No! Grace is not on this side of the equation. It's on the other side. It leads to righteousness, to holiness, to

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<sup>5</sup> F. F. Bruce proposes an even earlier date (c. 33) and suggests that the death of Stephen could not have occurred as late as 37 (*New Testament History* [Garden City: Anchor, 1972], pp. 294, 225).

obedience. A person under grace obeys God's law. Are we under grace? Yes. Does this lead to lawlessness and disobedience? No. Christ did not come to set us free from Himself.

Argument #2: The scripture teaches that the first Christians worshiped on Saturday in the synagogue.

The first Christians did worship on Saturday, i.e., on the seventh day of the week, but it is not true that they always did this in a synagogue.

On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. (Acts 16:13)

I've done enough traveling to know what Paul was doing on this long-ago Sabbath in Philippi. When you're a long way from home and no one around you believes as you do, you can go out under a tree on the Sabbath and have spiritual communion with God. That's what Paul was doing here. He didn't go out expecting to find a synagogue. He went out expecting to find "a place of prayer." Where did he find it? On a river bank.

Argument #3: Emperor Constantine changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Sunday worship is part of the apostate Roman Catholic system.

*Constantine.* It is true that Sunday keeping is part of the apostate Roman Catholic system, but Constantine did not change the Sabbath. For that matter, I don't know anyone who thinks he did. Under Diocletian the empire had been ruled by four men. Eventually they fought each other for supreme power and Constantine was the one who came out on top. Once in power it was not in his interest to be innovative and make Christians do some new thing. Instead he wanted to please them by making their existing custom official. Constantine wrote the first Sunday law, but did not change the Sabbath. It had already been changed by the time he came to power.

*Early Christian literature.* Early Christian literature is not all of the same kind. Writers such as Justin Martyr and Athanasius clearly opposed the idea of Christians keeping the Sabbath. Many others held similar views, especially in and after the second century, but not in the first century. The change from the Sabbath to Sunday was a gradual process.

In regard to the Didache, I challenge the idea that its use of the term "Lord's day" is anything other than a distinctive Christian way of referring to the Sabbath. The Didache has been dated variously, but recent scholarship has moved it back to the decades immediately following the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

In 1886, soon after the Didache's first modern publication, and some sixty years before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi Codices, Scottish Professor M. D. Riddle commented: "Bryennios and Harnack assign, as the date, between 120 and 160; Hilgenfeld, 160 and 190; English and American scholars vary between 80 and 120." In the 1940s to 1970s, some commentators argued for a date of effective origin, even if not in its present form, as early as around 70 or soon thereafter, and others as late as the later 2nd century or even the 3rd century. There is no question it was known by the third century.

Jonathan Draper writes: "Few scholars now date the text later than the end of the first century or the first few decades of the second." Similarly Michael W. Holmes concurs: "A date considerably closer to the end of the first century seems more probable." The 2005 edition of the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church comments: "Although in the past many English and American scholars tended to assign it to the late second century, most scholars now place at some point during the mid to late first century."<sup>6</sup>

If the Didache came from the second century, it would be easier to claim that its use of the term "Lord's day" in chap. 14 is a reference to Sunday. Coming, as it does, from "the mid to latter first century" such a position becomes more difficult to support. One reason why I say this has to do with history (as mentioned above), but another has to do with the contents of the Didache itself. The author is very much at home with the idea of obedience. In chap. 2 he mentions a number of specific commandments. Some are drawn from the ten commandments, while others are added.

And the second commandment of the Teaching; You shall not commit murder [#6], you shall not commit adultery [#7], Exodus 20:13-14 you shall not commit pederasty [cf. #7], you shall not commit fornication [cf. #7], you shall not steal [#8], Exodus 20:15 you shall not practice magic, you shall not practice witchcraft, you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is begotten [cf. #6]. You shall not covet the things of your neighbour [#10], Exodus 20:17 you shall not forswear yourself, Matthew 5:34 you shall not bear false witness [#9], Exodus 20:16 you shall not speak evil [cf. #9], you shall bear no grudge. You shall not be double-minded nor double-tongued; for to be double-tongued is a snare of death. Your speech shall not be false, nor empty, but fulfilled by deed. You shall not be covetous [cf. #10], nor rapacious, nor a hypocrite, nor evil disposed, nor haughty. You shall not take evil counsel against your neighbour. You shall not hate any man; but some you shall reprove, and concerning some you shall pray, and some you shall love more than your own life.

In this list we have commandment #6 (murder) and something that resembles #6 (abortion), #7 (adultery) and two things that resemble #7 (pederasty and fornication), #8 (stealing), #9 (lying) and something that resembles #9 (evil speaking), #10 (coveting) and something that resembles #10 (being covetous).

There is nothing here about allegorical interpretations or spiritualizing the thought behind the commandments to make them say something they don't. More than just meeting the commandments head on, the author adds some of his own for good measure, just to make sure people catch the point. We should bear these facts in mind when we come to the term "Lord's day" in chap. 14. The church's teaching on the Sabbath was only starting to shift when the Didache was written. As such, we can't automatically assume that "Lord's day" meant then what it means now, or even what it meant soon afterward in the second century.

## Summary and Conclusion

The author of the document I'm responding to here says, "We follow the historical and biblical example of the early church." This is partly true and partly false. By arguing against the

<sup>6</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didache>.

Sabbath he follows the historical example of the early church, though not the earliest church. That part is true. The biblical example, however, is entirely lacking. Paul was the New Testament's strongest proponent of grace, but he never uses it as a license for disobedience. "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" (Romans 6:15). Consider also the following words of Christ.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28)

The yoke of Christ is the law of God. It is the means by which we acknowledge our submission to His rule over our lives. Submitting ourselves to God is not a denial of faith, but an affirmation of it.