

# **The Early Christian Sabbath**

1947

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PACIFIC PRESS PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION

MOUNTAIN VIEW, CALIFORNIA

[www.CreationismOnline.com](http://www.CreationismOnline.com)

## **Preface**

The character and example of Jesus Christ should pervade and illumine everything in Christian life and practice. What He was, His church should be. What He did, His church should do. What He disapproved, His church should disapprove. He is the church's pattern, and to follow Him is the church's duty.

But Christ did not cut loose from His past. He made all things new (2 Corinthians 5: 17) by that creative and regenerating power He had within Himself, by which He removed the dross and restored the good. But He declared Himself the maintainer of all the permanent good of the past: a fulfiller, not a destroyer. Matthew 5:17, 18. He upheld the teachings of the Old Testament in the Sermon on the Mount. He beautified them, and intensified them, by getting to the heart of their meanings. He showed Himself to be the accomplishment of the hopes and longings of the inspired Old Testament writers. Luke 24:2,7,44.

But Christ condemned tradition. In this He did well, for tradition is in its very nature untrustworthy. Too often, as Jesus pointed out (Matthew 15:9, 13), it sets itself at variance with that which is eternally true, and negates what is of permanent value.

Tradition has done this with the Sabbath of which Jesus is Lord, and which He uniformly observed. It is the purpose of this book to show how tradition has sought to accomplish its unauthorized work upon the Sabbath of Jesus and the apostles.

FRANK H. YOST.

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# **1. Jesus and the Sabbath**

JESUS “broke the Sabbath!” John 5:18. Of this fact there are numerous instances. The Jewish leaders challenged the disciples, who, against the “traditions of the elders,” gathered and ate handfuls of grain on the Sabbath day. Jesus refused to rebuke His followers for this. Matthew 12:1-8. The Jews had a tradition that on their Sabbath day no sick might receive treatment. Again and again Jesus healed people on the seventh-day Sabbath, sometimes in the synagogues, sometimes in homes or at roadsides. It was on the Sabbath day that Jesus healed a paralytic, hopeless after years of suffering. It was on the Sabbath day that Jesus healed a man born blind. Neither of these men would have suffered augmented hurt had their healing been postponed one more day, but Jesus did not wait. He deliberately broke the Jewish Sabbath. And what He did made the Jewish traditionalists furious.

Tradition does things to people. It is the impact of a people's past habits and prejudices upon their current experiences, and it has all the weight and authority of antiquity and of custom. We all inherit attitudes and concepts from our forebears. We are usually what we are, politically, socially, and religiously, because of our past. Most of us belong to the particular political party in which we vote, attend the particular church in which we worship, and even study in the particular college we select, because it was the party, the church, or the school of our fathers.

This is in some respects a good thing. It tends to stabilize society. It keeps us from raveling out our associations and interests into a thousand diverting but untried paths. But this stabilization is too often inert. Our physics books define inertia as that property of matter by which it tends to remain in an existing state of rest, or of motion in the same direction, unless acted on by an external force. Unthinking adherence to tradition is too often merely inertia, spiritual or political or social. The resulting stabilization can be definitely harmful. It can block progress.

Worse yet, tradition may be spiritually or morally bad. Tradition can as well perpetuate a wrong concept or practice as a good one. It may thus put the stamp of its authority on what God has shown to be wrong, or it may pervert some principle or practice in religion which God has already established.

It was this sort of wrong and harmful religious tradition maintained by the Jews, which Jesus broke. “You made,” Jesus said, “the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.” Matthew 15:6. In vain they do worship Me,” He added, “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Verse 9. He condemned not only such man-made perversions of religious truth, but also the merely external adherence to a divine precept. This is plain in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus said repeatedly: “You have heard that it was said by them of old time: . . . but I say unto you.

This is why Jesus broke the Jewish Sabbath. He hated the externalism of the Jewish observances, and the traditional burdens which made the Sabbath hateful to the people. All this He rejected. As a matter of fact, this rejection had been divinely pronounced centuries before. God had said through the prophet Isaiah:

“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? Said the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When you come to appear before Me, who bath required this at your hand, to tread My courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto Me. The new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates: they are a trouble unto Me. I am weary to bear them. And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” Isaiah 1:11-17.

And through the prophet Hosea He had declared: “Therefore will I return, and take away My corn in the time thereof, and My Wine in the season thereof, and will recover My wool and My flax given to cover her nakedness. And now will I discover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and none shall deliver her out of Mine hand. I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her Sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts. And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit upon her the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them, and she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot Me, said the Lord.” Hosea 2:9-13.

In their Sabbath observance, whether of the unique and distinctive seventh-day Sabbath of the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), or of the annual Sabbaths of the Mosaic law (Leviticus 23:4-41) the Jews had brought not only a mere external respect, but also actual hypocrisy. Their lives were out of harmony with what the holy Sabbath was intended to mean. Said Jehovah: “Thou has made Me to serve with thy sins.” Isaiah 43:24. Such observance God rejected. The Sabbath which hypocrisy produced was repugnant to God, vain, and bad.

But He insisted on true Sabbath observance. The same Isaiah who spoke God's condemnation of mere externalism and hypocrisy in Sabbath keeping, promised:

If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy Pleasure on My holy day. And call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable. And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: then shall thou delight thyself in the Lord. And I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” Isaiah 58:13,14.

He promised that Gentiles would sometime become faithful observers of the Sabbath the Jews were desecrating (Isaiah 56:37), and declared that the people of God in the new earth (compare 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1) would be observing the

seventh day Sabbath (Isaiah 66:23). Jeremiah rebuked the Jews for Sabbath desecration (Jeremiah 17: 19-27), and Ezekiel, the prophet of conversion and of the new heart (Ezekiel 36:25-27), declared the Sabbath to be the sign of the sanctified life (Ezekiel 20: 12-20).

In His teaching and practice in respect to the Sabbath, Jesus was entirely consistent with His prophetic forebears. He broke the Jewish Sabbath of tradition in His life on earth as He had condemned it through His prophets in the centuries past; but He kept His own holy Sabbath, and He kept it rightly. Of this day He declared Himself the Lord (Mark 2:28), and for its proper and spiritual observance He set a right example. "The Sabbath," He said, "was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." It was not made for the Jew, but for all men (Mark 2:27) for their spiritual and physical benefit.

Jesus observed the seventh day Sabbath. He was definitely and consistently a Sabbath keeper. He worshiped on the Sabbath day. This habit Jesus Christ maintained from early in His public ministry, according to the Scriptures. On returning to Nazareth after one of His preaching tours, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, "as His custom was!" Luke 4:16. Men He was invited to speak, He took the sacred scroll, read from the prophet Isaiah, and applied the prophecy to Himself. Verses 17-21.

It is argued that on this occasion Jesus was in the synagogue because His mission sent Him to win the approval of the Jews. This is hardly a cogent argument, because on that very occasion He antagonized the Jews by what He taught. Verses 22-31. The distinguishing feature of the Sabbath keeping of Jesus was that it was positive rather than negative. He used the day for doing good. There is a world of significance in His statement: "Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days!" Matthew 12:12. A large proportion of Jesus' public speeches and acts were on the Sabbath day.

Why did Jesus insist upon keeping the age-old Sabbath, and keeping it correctly, in the face of the bitterest opposition from the people He sought to help? One reason is that He wished to point out what true spiritual living for God is like. This He exemplified in His life and emphasized in His teachings. Lest the Jews think that He intended to change anything of fundamental value in the religion they professed, He assured them: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." Matthew 5:17, 18. Christ's whole program of salvation was based upon the things of permanent value which the Old Testament revealed. His work was to clear away the deadwood of tradition, and to bring to the Jews a revelation of true heart religion.

There is another reason why He kept the seventh-day Sabbath. There was nothing else He could do. Again and again He repeated that He had come to do the will of the Father. The love of God so filled the heart of Jesus that He could do nothing else.

## **2. God Comes First**

WHEN a lawyer on one occasion asked Jesus, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus answered him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." Matthew 22:36,37. When Jesus laid down this first great fundamental principle of human living, He added also a second principle: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "On these two commandments," said Jesus, "hang all the law and the prophets." Verses 39, 40.

Here is a complete program for human living. Love—that deep, all-pervading, all-embracing respect and esteem, which in the case of man's attitude toward God includes reverence—is the characteristic which binds together everything in human experience. If it is a question of one's relationships with his fellow man, love makes possible the exercise of the golden rule: "All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them." Matthew 7:12. If it is a question of one's relationship to God, then we are told to love God supremely. He must come first.

God must come first, because all men belong to Him. He is the Creator. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, God the Father has made all things. There is nothing, from the giant suns that blaze as brilliant stars in the unclouded heavens to the infinitesimal, invisible atom, but has been made by God. Everything and everyone belong to God by right of creation. Since man is especially the product of the wise Creator's hand, he belongs especially to God. Furthermore, the deed of ownership which God holds over us is not subject to our recognition of that fact. It is a deed in absolute. All men belong to God, even those who fail to acknowledge His claim. We belong to God by virtue of His own act of creation, and also because everything that is needed to sustain life is the product of His creative hand.

Again and again God has set forth in the Scriptures His function of creator as the great distinguishing characteristic whereby He may be recognized as the one true God, in contrast to the many false gods which men have worshiped. "To whom then will you liken Me, or shall I be equal? Said the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that brings out their host by number: He calls them all by names by the greatness of His might, for that He is strong in power; not one fails." Isaiah 40:25, 26. The principal burden of the prophecy in Isaiah 43 to 46 is that the Creator is the only true God, and is the Lord of all.

Almost in the same breath with which Isaiah praised God as the Creator he described Him as the Redeemer of His people. "As for our Redeemer, the Lord of hosts is His name, the Holy One of Israel." Isaiah 47:4 Obviously the functions of Creator and of Redeemer are inseparable. Great is the power of God who can make from nothing all those things which exist; but also great is the power of that God who can take a man, fallen into sin, a captive in its grip, and redeem him and restore him to the family of God. This is the work of redemption. It is the work of the Creator God, who does His saving work for humanity through His Son Jesus Christ. How acceptable to us, then, is Paul's tribute of praise to Christ when he says:

"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Who is the image of the invisible God, the First-born of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or

dominions, or principalities, or powers. All things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." Colossians 1:13-17.

It is to this Christ, the Creator and the Redeemer, that man owes his full allegiance. No wonder Paul could say: "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ!" Philippians 3:8. To God and to His Christ is to be given nothing less than our best service and our most reverent worship. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service!" Romans 12:1. "Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters!" Revelation 14:7. The Sabbath of the Lord commemorates not only the original creation of the earth, but also the new creation of the spiritual man in Christ Jesus.

The creating and redeeming God, who rightly requires that He be served and worshiped, has not left us in darkness concerning His will. He has given us His word, the Holy Bible, which tells us how we are to worship and serve Him. He has set aside a day dedicated especially to His service and worship. This day, His holy Sabbath day, is an institution as old as creation.

God made the earth, says the Bible, in six days. To accomplish this miraculous creative act, God used six days. We do not know why He chose this period of time. We believe that He could have done everything in a single instant. Doubtless He could have consumed in this creative process millions of years had He so chosen. But we are told that He did it in six days. When the six days were past, He declared that everything that He had done was good. It was complete in its goodness. Then He did a remarkable thing. He set aside the next day, the seventh day of the week of creation, in a special way.

"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; 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." Genesis 2:1-3.

Thus the Creator laid down at the beginning of this world, not the principle of worshiping God one day in seven, but the keeping of the Sabbath, the specific seventh day of the week, as the holy time for worshiping the eternal, creating, and redeeming God.

God rested on the seventh day. That does not mean that He ceased His divine supervisory work over the universe. It does not mean that He ceased to look after the welfare of this earth. It means that He had ended His specific creative work for this earth and rested from it. He had been busy creating; now He ceased that work, and marked that one day of His ceasing as a rest day. He put into that special day the blessing of His own divine presence. In His divine way He set for all mankind an example of the privilege of rest from labor. He then dedicated that day to man's worship of Himself.

The unique position of this seventh-day Sabbath is that it is of God's appointment. He has established it and put His blessing upon it. If I wish, I may go to church on my birthday, and say to my heavenly Father: "Lord, I am grateful to Thee that Thou has allowed me to complete another Year of life, and so this morning I come to this sacred building to worship Thee!" God is gracious, and He accepts the worship which I thus tender to Him upon my birthday. But my coming to Him and worshiping Him upon my birthday is meeting Him upon a day, not of God's appointment, but of my own. I ask God to hear me and He does.

So on Thanksgiving Day I come before God and tell Him how grateful I am to Him for the goodness and mercy He has shown to me throughout the year. God has not asked me to do this, specifically. My forefathers, and their political successors, have appointed this day, and I enter into this excellent custom of corporate thanksgiving and join my fellows in expressing my gratitude to God. This, too, is a day of human appointment only, but God graciously accepts the worship and thanksgiving tendered to Him at that time.

It is the same with Sunday. For centuries millions of Christians have gathered to worship God on the first day of the week. Graciously He has accepted this worship. He has poured out His blessings upon Christian people as they have sought to serve Him. However, as one searches the Scriptures, he is forced to recognize that Sunday is not a day of God's appointment. Like Thanksgiving and many other worship days observed in Christendom, Sunday is a day of human appointment only. It has no foundation in Scripture, but has arisen entirely as a result of custom.

But the Sabbath, the seventh day, is a day of God's appointment. This is the day that He has set aside, and He promises to bless especially this day and those who observe it. This makes the day a peculiarly happy one. We meet with God upon this, the day of His own making. We walk with Him and find Him ready to bless us with a sweet fellowship and communion. "The Sabbath was made for man." Mark 2:27. It was made for man's physical rest and restoration, of course; but it was also made so that man could meet with God, walk with Christ, and commune with the Holy Spirit.

The Sabbath is to be a blessing to man, not a burden. Jesus condemned the Jews of His day who had loaded down the Sabbath with burdensome rules which defeated the divine purpose of rest and worship for which it was designed. Matthew 12:23; Mark 3; John 5.

But the Sabbath is not to be a day of freedom to do our own ways. Rather, "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on My holy day. And call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable. And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: then shall thou delight thyself in the Lord!" Isaiah 58:13,14.

God has embodied the Sabbath privilege in His holy law, the moral law, the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:8-11. This law is in a peculiar sense an expression of God's will for man. It is an expression of His character. Therefore it cannot be changed, since God does not change. I am the Lord, I change not." Malachi 3:6. "With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." James 1:17. This law, "holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7: 12), lies at the basis of the covenant of salvation which God has made with His people

through Christ (Exodus 24:3, 12; Jeremiah 31:32-34; Hebrews 10:14-20). This solemn basis of agreement God will not change nor alter. Psalm 89:34.

When in the strength of Jesus Christ, Christians obey these commandments, they are keeping His covenant. If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love." John 15:10. "Hereby we do know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." 1 John 2:3. Thus the obedient child of God finds himself walking with Christ, and basking in the smile of His approval.

### **3. The Apostles and the Sabbath**

JESUS was definitely and consistently a Sabbath keeper. He worshiped on the Sabbath day.

The apostles kept the Sabbath. That Jesus expected them to do so is distinctly pointed out in His remarkable sermon, recorded in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. With prophetic vision Jesus foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans, which took place in the year AD 70. He warned His disciples of this coming tragic event and that they would be compelled to flee from the city. He said to them: "Pray you that your flight be not be not in the winter or on the Sabbath day." Verse 20. This was said not because it would be wrong to flee from an enemy on the Sabbath, but because it would make impossible peaceful, joyful worship on the seventh day.

Therefore, Jesus told His little circle of Christian followers, forty years before the expected event, to pray that in this terrible time their Sabbath keeping Tight be quietly and reverently maintained.

The disciples followed the positive example of Jesus Christ Himself, when they also kept the Sabbath of the fourth commandment. This was strikingly illustrated at the time of the crucifixion.

The crucifixion took place on Friday, and it was a short time before sundown when Jesus died. Sundown marked for the people of God the beginning of a new day. This way of reckoning applied, of course, to the Sabbath. Leviticus 23:32; Mark 1:32. This custom of counting the day from sunset prevailed for centuries in the Christian church, as we shall see a little later, and lingers today in our way of speaking of "Halloween" and, "Christmas Eve."

At sundown the Sabbath begins. What did the disciples do on the sad week end of the crucifixion? The record tells us. They hastened to have the beloved body of Jesus placed in the tomb before the Sabbath, and "rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment! Luke 23:56.

How could they have done otherwise? Jesus had declared Himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath. Mark 2:28. He had kept it faithfully even in direct opposition to the un-Scriptural Sabbath traditions of the Jews. Christ had not abrogated the Sabbath. He had said not a word nor left a hint that He wished Sunday to be kept. Of course, they "rested the Sabbath day according to the commandment."

Paul kept the Sabbath. He kept the Sabbath at Antioch in Pisidia, on his first missionary journey, and used the first synagogue service which he attended there to tell the Jews of the crucified and risen Jesus whom He was so faithfully serving. The following Sabbath a large company of Gentiles came to the synagogue to hear Paul preach; and when the Jews at this time rejected Paul's message, he declared that from then on during his sojourn in Antioch he would give his time to preaching to the Gentiles. Acts 13:14- 16, 40-46. But with these Gentiles he made no first day appointment. There is not the least inference of any effort on his part to meet with them on the first day of the week.

At the council at Jerusalem, called to discuss the requirements which should be made of the Gentiles who were accepting the gospel, the Gentiles were declared to be exempt from the ancient Hebrew ordinances, which included circumcision, the offering of sacrifices and other details of the ceremonial law. Acts 15:24-29. It was to be required of them only that they not use food which had been offered to idols, or that in which the blood was still present. It was especially emphasized that fornication must absolutely be avoided, because this was an offense especially common among the pagans. Verse 20. What an excellent opportunity there was here for the apostles, if they were Sunday keepers, to point out that these Gentile Christians should observe the day of the sun! But this is not mentioned. There is no way of accounting for this silence except by the fact that the disciples were not observers of the first day of the week.

On Paul's second missionary journey he came to the city of Philippi. Here he heard of a family of worshipers of the true God who were accustomed to gather on the Sabbath on the riverbank outside the city. On the Sabbath day, therefore, Paul betook himself to this quiet spot and worshiped with these faithful ones. He taught them of Jesus, and they accepted the gospel. It was Paul's preaching to them on this Sabbath day which converted them. Acts 16:12-15. In Thessalonica, it is recorded of Paul (Acts 17:1-4), that he kept the Sabbath "as his manner was." When he went to Corinth, where, according to the Sacred Record (Acts 18:1-11), he spent a period of eighteen months, he met with the Jews and believers in the synagogue each Sabbath day. When the Jews expelled the Christians from the synagogue, as they presently did, it is evident that, having repaired to a private house for his worship and gospel ministration with the new Christians, Paul continued his Sabbath observance there. He did this not to please the Jews, for in every case he earned their disapproval and enmity, but to obey the commandments of God as Jesus had done.

The Master had said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in nowise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:17-19. Jesus fulfilled the law of God in His life; He kept the commandments; He observed the Sabbath.



So, as we have seen, did Paul. Paul knew that the cross had made unnecessary the keeping of the annual ceremonial feasts and Sabbaths, the use of circumcision, and similar practices. Colossians 2:13-17. Because of his teaching on these matters, Paul was called a "heretic" by the Jews. But he faithfully kept the law of God. "After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets." Acts 24:14. Paul could say sincerely then of, himself and his followers: "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." Romans 3:31.

Jesus kept the Sabbath, the disciples kept the Sabbath, and Paul kept the Sabbath, Hence we read in Hebrews 4:9, margin: "There remains therefore a keeping of a Sabbath to the people of God."

## **4. A Strange Omission**

THERE is no record of Sunday observance in the New Testament, no Sunday meetings planned for the purpose of worship. The word "Sunday" does not occur in the Bible, and nearly all the passages in the New Testament which use the expression "first day of the week" are simple historical references to the remarkable event of the resurrection. They give no inference at all concerning any sacredness or significance to be attached to the first day of the week as a memorial of the resurrection, or for any other reason. Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1.

But let us look briefly at what did happen during the hours of that resurrection day. We learn that Mary met Jesus before He had ascended to the Father (John 20:17), and again afterward (Matthew 28:18). Later, apparently that day, Peter saw Him. 1 Corinthians 15:5. Late in the day two of the disciples of Jesus, not of the twelve, were walking from Jerusalem back to their home village of Emmaus, about seven and a half miles from Jerusalem. As these men walked along, talking about Christ's death and the rumors concerning His "disappearance" from the tomb, they were joined by a third person, whom they did not then recognize. He discussed with them the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah. He pointed out from prophecy the kind of Messiah the Jews should have been expecting. Luke 24:25-27. Arriving at their home in Emmaus, the two disciples invited the stranger to have supper with them. As they sat down to eat, and the visitor offered thanks, they recognized Him as their risen Master. Immediately He withdrew from them. They set out at once to tell the disciples that they had actually been with the risen Jesus. They found their companions in an upper room, "assembled for fear of the Jews." John 20:19. By the time the two disciples arrived, it was evening, evidently after sundown of the first day of the week. Technically, according to current reckoning, it was the "eve," or beginning, of the second day of the week. To save confusion in the record, and in reference to the pressing events of the day just closing, it is called "the same day at evening, being the first day of the week!"

While these two men told of their conversation with Jesus, Christ Himself appeared in the midst of the disciples, and talked with them. It must be noted definitely that here was no divine appointment. It was not a meeting for worship. It was not an observance of the first day of the week; nor the institution of first-day sanctity. It furnishes no precedent for Sunday observance. The disciples were gathered there for fear of the Jews," not expecting to see Christ, and not even yet believing that He had risen. They were not yet ready to believe the glorious fact of the resurrection. In fact, a week later, when Jesus met with His disciples again, Thomas was still unready to admit his belief that Jesus had risen, and did not do so until Jesus addressed Himself to him individually and showed Thomas His wounded hands and side.

It was evidently for Thomas's sake that Jesus came to the disciples at this time. It certainly was not to make the day of the sun a sacred day. Jesus gave not the slightest intimation that it was His intention to set aside the first day of the week for special observance. What is more, and note this, John, who wrote this Gospel some sixty years after the event, when Christianity had already begun to spread and crystallize its observances, did not mention Sunday as in any way sacred. If the church were already keeping Sunday by the time of John's death, as some claim, how could he have written his Gospel late in life, as he did, and fail to mention, at this point, that this is why Sunday was kept? This he failed to do, and it is obvious why Sunday was not observed by the church when John wrote his Gospel. The silence is significant indeed.

We have mentioned that the Sacred Record in four separate places clearly describes Paul as keeping the Sabbath. He never kept Sunday, but let us see what he did do. While he was on his way to Jerusalem at the close of his third missionary journey, there occurred a meeting which is sometimes put forward as an example of Sunday keeping. The record is in Acts 20. Paul stopped at the town of Troas to meet with the believers there, and he spent a week with them. At the conclusion of this sojourn it was his plan to walk across country to the seaport to meet his companions who had gone around the point of the peninsula by ship, in order that he might proceed to Jerusalem to fulfill certain vows which he was to accomplish there. The record says that on the first day of the week he met with the church, celebrated the ordinances, preached until midnight, and after he had restored to life one of his hearers who had fallen from a window while asleep, he continued to talk to them until daybreak.

The record says that the lights were burning during this meeting. What day was this, then? As already emphasized, according to Jewish reckoning, the dark part, or evening, of the first day of the week would be what we today call Saturday night. The strong likelihood that the meeting was really on Saturday night, the evening of the Jewish first day of the week, is taken for granted by such commentators as Conybeare and Howson, in *The Life and*

*Epistles of Saint Paul*, and G. T. Stokes, in his comments on Acts in *The Expositor's Bible*.

But the real point is that in connection with this incident no authority whatever is given for the observance of Sunday. Whether it was on Saturday night or on Sunday afternoon and evening that the disciples met with Paul, the fact is that the meeting furnishes no divine authority, or even apostolic admonition, for a method or time of divine worship. If we wish to argue that here is an event which

later the church used as a support for a tradition, that is one thing. But if we are seeking to know what God wants, and then to worship Him according to His expressed will, and according to that only, then this incident in Acts 20 is of no authority whatever for the keeping of Sunday.

There is another reference to the first day of the week in the New Testament to which some turn as a basis for Sunday observance. It is 1 Corinthians 16:2. Paul here says: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." One need hardly pause a moment at this text. Paul is not here calling for any sort of meeting on the first day of the week. He is merely asking for the laying aside of money at home, which can later be collected as an offering, that he might take the accumulated fund to Palestine to help the Christian Jews who were victims of a famine. This did not involve any meeting. It was a matter of personal business, a transaction, although for charitable purposes. It appears that Paul's asking the Christians to do on the first day, at the week's beginning, that which he would not want them to do on the Sabbath. Namely, for each one to check over at home his budget of coming expenses and determine how much he might spare for those in need. Certainly this is no authorization nor example for the keeping holy of Sunday.

There remains one more text put forward as an excuse for the observance of Sunday as sacred. It is Revelation 1:10. We have John the revelator telling us that he "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day!" The exact expression is used nowhere else in Scripture. Indeed, we do not find the phrase in any authentic, unmodified, reliable Christian document for another hundred years after John. Examples of pagan expressions of the time, such as "emperor's day," can hardly be considered parallel, without clear evidence that John had such a thing in mind. What then does John mean? What day is the Lord's day of Scripture?

The Sabbath, the Bible answers. Again and again God is said in the Bible to call the Sabbath His holy day. Jesus said: 'The Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath!' Mark 2:28. The Bible knows no other Lord's day. Simply, because, one hundred years after John, such writers as Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian of Carthage deliberately appropriate the term "Lord's day," and with out authority from Scripture or history apply it to Sunday, this is no reason why we, against the current of history, should reflect the expression back into John's day and pretend that John meant Sunday. To do this seems to us to be neither good scholarship nor good Biblical exegesis. Yet there have been scholars who have attempted this very thing. To us this is an unworthy procedure.

While we are speaking of the successors to the apostles, let us point this out. A thorough search of the writings of all Christians prior to AD 300 reveals a striking fact: In no case do these Christian writers—all of them, as it happens, Sunday keepers—use any of the New Testament texts which we have just considered, as authority for Sunday keeping. They recognize that Jesus rose on the first day of the week. They frankly say that they are keeping

Sunday because He rose then. They use the texts from the Gospels which show that He did rise on the first day of the week; but in no case do they claim that Jesus ever authorized the keeping of Sunday, nor that the Apostles did so. The texts in John 20:19,26; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; and Revelation 1:10, which are nowadays quoted so emphatically as authorizing Sunday keeping, are never used by the writers of the Christian church before A. D. 300 to establish authority for the Sunday observance which they themselves had already come to practice. They frankly say that it was something that had grown up in the church by tradition. In short, the keeping of Sunday is entirely a matter of custom and has absolutely no basis in Scripture.

## **5. The Early "Lord's Day"**

It has frequently been said that there is an unbroken chain of references in the Fathers showing the early observance of Sunday, and connecting Revelation 1:10 with the Sunday "Lord's day" references of AD 200 and later. We shall now briefly examine every reference in the Fathers between John the revelator and Clement of Alexandria, who died about AD 200, which might in any way be supposed to refer to Sunday or its observance. These references will be considered in an order as nearly chronological as the dating of obscure sources like these permits.

The first early reference put forth by Sunday keepers is a statement by Pliny the Younger, a pagan Roman governor, in a letter to his emperor, Trajan, to be dated about A D 110- 112. The ninety-sixth letter in Pliny's tenth book of Letters states that the Christians he was persecuting met for the worship of Christ early in the morning of a "stated" or "fixed" day. See The Loeb Classical Library, Pliny, volume 2, Pages 402,403. Pliny gives no hint as to 9

which day of the week he understands this to be, probably because there was as yet in his day no official system of weeks of days among the Romans. The identification of this "stated day" can therefore be made only from reliable Christian documents of about this same time. The only Christian materials we have to use for this purpose, extant at this date, are the books of the New Testament. It has been demonstrated beyond question in chapters two and three that the only day of worship known to New Testament Christians is the seventh-day Sabbath of the Bible, observed by Christ, the disciples, and the apostle Paul. The "stated" day of Pliny is therefore the seventh-day Sabbath.

The second earliest reference used to bolster Sunday observance is one that is quoted so frequently that every student of the question is under ethical compulsion to examine it thoroughly and without bias. The statement referred to is in a letter by a man named Ignatius, called the overseer of the church in Antioch in Syria. According to late tradition, Ignatius was taken prisoner by the Roman police during a persecution inflicted by the emperor Trajan, and transported to Rome, where the story has him put to death sometime prior to the demise of that emperor, which occurred in the year A D 117.

A late tradition attributes to this martyr the writing of a series of epistles while on his way as a prisoner to Rome. They were supposedly written one after another, addressed to various churches, in a sort of primitive "Canterbury Tales" arrangement. The total

number of letters attributed to his authorship is fifteen, but all scholars now agree in branding eight of these as gross forgeries. The remaining seven are looked upon with serious suspicion by all scholars who do not need what this supposed Ignatius has to say, to support current positions in the church. Even these complacent students accept only a shortened form of these seven letters. Of these epistles of Ignatius, Dr. Philip Schaff, of the highest repute among church historians, says: "These oldest documents of the hierarchy soon became so interpolated, curtailed, and mutilated by pious fraud, that it is today almost impossible to discover with certainty the genuine Ignatius of history under the hyper- and pseudo-Ignatius of tradition." *History of the Christian Church, Second period*, par. 165, volume 2, page 660.

It is in the so-called Ignatian Epistle to the Magnesians, chapter 9, that there is found the statement pressed so hopefully by those who wish to find an early beginning for Sunday observance. Two scholars of high standing, Bishop Lightfoot of England and Dr. Kirsopp Lake in America, make Ignatius say: "No longer living for the Sabbath, but for the Lord's day."—The Loeb Classical Library, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, P. 205. The original Greek contains no word "day;" but to make their translation seem more consistent, they revise the original Greek so that it reads: "No longer Sabbath keeping, but living according to the Lord's [?]." This reading of the Greek makes necessary the adding of the word "day" to make sense.

But actually the Greek original, in every reliable manuscript, reads: "No longer Sabbatizing, but living according to the Lord's life."—Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, volume 5, column 669. The scholars referred to have omitted the word "life" in order to make possible the insertion of the word day. But the word "life" is there, and it makes good sense when properly translated, without bias, from the original Greek. The corrupting and misinterpreting of this sentence from the supposed Ignatian epistle is now being thoughtlessly followed by nearly all Sunday keeping scholars.

We make bold to criticize such procedure as unworthy of unprejudiced scholarship, and to raise this question: If scholarship is biased, what respect can it demand? The Greek of this sentence reads: "No longer Sabbath keeping, but living according to the Lord's life." The context shows that this passage, whether truly Ignatian or not, is dealing, not with the day of the resurrection, but with the divine life which, through the risen Lord, enables the Christian to live a life of faith, free from legalism, of which Jewish Sabbath keeping was all too illustrative. There exists a lengthy interpolation of this Magnesian letter, made perhaps between the years AD 300 and 400, which distorts this passage to make it apply to days of worship, and to advocate the observance of both the Sabbath and the Sunday. It is doubtless reading back through the murkiness of this late and false interpolation that has forced the idea of "day" into the early recension of this chapter.

There is, as a matter of fact, no reference to a day of worship in the Magnesian letter, or in any other of the early letters attributed to Ignatius.

The next reference to Sunday observance is doubtless genuine. It is one by Justin Martyr which will be quoted in the next chapter, in which he states that "on the day called Sunday" Christians gathered to worship Christ. (The First Apology of Justin, chapter 67, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, page 186.) That this is a result of second-century anti-Judaism, under the collateral pressure of contemporary sun worship, and not of first-century Christian practice, will be made very clear in succeeding pages.

The next, a supposed "Lord's day" reference, is from chapter 14 of an ancient document, datable about the middle of the second century, called *Teaching of the Apostles*, or *The Didache*. The sentence has been translated to read: "On the Lord's day of the Lord come together, break bread and hold Eucharist."—The Loeb Classical Library, *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, P. 331. The Greek text is obviously garbled and incomplete in sense, but it contains no word "day." It reads literally: "According to the Lord's [?] of the Lord, coming together break bread and hold Eucharist!" A number of words, appropriate both grammatically and in meaning, could be supplied at the point of our question mark, and make as good or better sense than "day;" for instance, the word "commandment." In any case, this is weak support indeed for the institution of Sunday, for which so much is claimed.

We turn next to the church historian Eusebius, an earnest, advocate of Sunday as a substitute for the Sabbath of the Bible, who wrote about the year A D 324. He was thoroughly committed to the priestly authority of the bishops of the fourth century, a defender of the union of church and state effected by the emperor Constantine, and a eulogizer of this yet pagan emperor. He makes two references which are often quoted as supporting early Sunday keeping. One is in a letter he quotes as going from Dionysius, the leader of the church of Corinth about the year AD 170, to Soter of Rome. The significant sentence is: "Today we have passed the Lord's holy day; in which we have read your epistle."—*The Church History of Eusebius*, book 4, chapter 23, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d Series, volume 1, page 201. Since there is no reference in the Bible, or in any other writing up to this time, showing that any other day than the Sabbath was established as the holy day of the Lord, there is no reason to apply this reference to Sunday observance, as some do. The day is not, as a matter of fact, identified in the letter.

The other reference from Eusebius (book 4, chapter 26) tells us that Melito, leader of the church of Sardis, wrote at about the year AD 175 a treatise whose title is usually translated *A Book Concerning the Lord's Day*. (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d Series, volume 1, Page 204) As a matter of fact, the Greek title as given by Eusebius simply reads *A Book Concerning the Lord's [?]*. The word "day" does not occur in the title, and there is no information given as to what the treatise actually dealt with.

There is also a forged second-century epistle which quotes Old Testament condemnations of hypocritical Sabbath keeping and pretends to make them an excuse for Sunday keeping. It seeks further to establish Sunday by setting it forth as the eighth day of the week, and forcing it into line as a continuance of the Jewish principle of the eighth-day circumcision. (*Epistle of Barnabas*, chapter 15, in *The Loeb Classical Library, The Apostolic Fathers*, volume 1, Page 395, 397.) The inconsistency and futility of this argument, often used thereafter, must be patent to all. It used a Jewish ceremonial requirement, occurring once in the lifetime of the Jew, as a basis for a supposed Christian festival, expected to occur weekly in the worship experience of the believer. For all this no divine or Scriptural authorization is claimed. The supposed author, Barnabas, cannot be the Barnabas of the Acts. The epistle is a superficial attempt at religious philosophy, gnostic and speculative in flavor, and should be looked upon as a part of the stream of anti-Scriptural apostasy already manifesting itself in the church.



It is not until about the year A D 180 that there is a datable reference in which Sunday is indisputably called "the Lord's day!" About that time there came into circulation a false Gospel According to Peter. No one today believes this document to be from the apostle Peter's hand or dictation, and even when it first appeared, it received little credence. But in this false epistle the day of Christ's resurrection is for the first time clearly called "the Lord's day." (Verses 35, 50, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 9, pp. 8, 27, 2q.) From this time on, in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and others, the term "Lord's day" is consistently applied to the Sunday. Sabbath continues to be the term for the Biblical seventh day of the week until Reformation times. After that, the Sunday is, frequently called both "Lord's day" and "Sabbath" interchangeably. There are other false "gospels," "acts," and "epistles" later than the so-called Gospel According to Peter which call Sunday the Lord's day, but these forgeries need not be considered further.

These are all the references there are for one hundred years after the apostle John which by any sort of jugglery, chicanery, or stretch of imagination or exaggeration of interpretation, could be thought to refer to Sunday. Out of them all only two give to Sunday any actual support. Justin Martyr stated clearly in his day, about the years AD 150- 160, that Christians were assembling on "the day of the sun." Some thirty years later the false Gospel According to Peter is calling the resurrection day the "Lord's day." There is nothing else.

Why are these garbled, badly translated, fancifully interpreted references used as they are by advocates of Sunday observance? Simply because there is nothing else; because evidence for primitive Sunday keeping is so badly needed to support a practice which has no actual basis except in tradition. Therefore the proponents of Sunday catch in vain at every straw. It is pathetic. Worse, it is spiritually and theologically dangerous.

It is historically bad. There are honest historians of the Sunday who believe that because Sunday is called "the Lord's day" at AD 200, 300, and 400 and on, one may then work back from these dates and force late meanings of the expression "Lord's day" into earlier usage. This is utterly unsound historically. Such a method leaves no room for changes in customs, or for deliberate perversions in religious practice. An illustration of this is seen in the way seventeenth-century translators of the Bible handled the Greek of Acts 12:4. It reads in the King James Version: Intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people! Actually the Greek word translated "Easter," which in the seventeenth century, as now, was the annual Sunday for celebrating Christ's resurrection, is Pascha, which means Passover, and indicates the Jewish festival simultaneous with, not the resurrection, but the crucifixion, of Jesus. The translators read back into an ancient term, used 1,600 years before, a late and quite different meaning. This is exactly what has happened in the minds of many honest students in interpreting Revelation 1:10, and the other references here cited from the Fathers. As a matter of fact, any term of historical interest must be understood at a given date by coming up upon it from its past, not by looking back upon it through usage future to it.

There is only tradition to support Sunday observance. The tradition is not apostolic, but later. To the Christian who is building his religious faith and life upon the Bible as the revelation of God, and upon this Bible only, such tradition is not enough.

## **6. Why the Sabbath Was Branded "Jewish"**

TRADITIONALISM, which lies at the basis of Sunday keeping, was exactly what Jesus condemned in the Jews. Jesus never lost an opportunity to point out to the Jews the fallacy of their traditions. He said: In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." "Every plant, which My heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." Matthew 15:9, 13. For all this the Jewish leaders hated Him and aroused the mobs against Him. He was killed because He insisted on teaching truth.

That Christ was an observer of the seventh-day Sabbath has already been emphasized. It is proved not only by His constant awareness of the Sabbath as an institution, but it is also definitely indicated in the accounts we have of His habitual attendance at public worship on the Sabbath. Matthew 12:1-15; Mark 1:21-34; Luke 4:16-44; 13:10-17. It has been said that He kept the Sabbath because He was a Jew. Humanly He was a Jew, but it is to be noted that He kept the Sabbath for a reason other and larger than any national one. He said that "the Son of man," meaning Himself, "is Lord also of the Sabbath!" Mark 2:28. This is a most important statement. Jesus Christ was then, and is today, Lord of the Sabbath institution-the rest day ordained by God. The Sabbath has come down to us through the ages from the day when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, completed the creation of the earth. It is not then a question whether Jesus, incarnated into a Jewish family, kept the Sabbath because of His immediate environment. Jesus Christ kept the Sabbath because He is Lord of it.

He manifested His lordship of the Sabbath by showing the Jews how wrong they were in their manner of keeping it. The Jews were observing it as a legalistic requirement. They had burdened down its observance with a great weight of traditional rules. On the Sabbath the Jew could walk only a limited distance, about seven miles. He could not carry any burden, no matter how small it might be. The sick might not be ministered to. There could be no gathering nor preparing of food. These rules Jesus broke, and He was therefore accused of breaking the Sabbath. John 5:18.

Actually Jesus was demonstrating to the Jewish leaders the correct way to keep the Sabbath; that is, by doing good. He healed the sick on the sacred day; He comforted the sorrowing; He taught in the synagogues and in the open air the pure truths of His gospel. He kept it truly as it should be kept, as a great spiritual institution for man's good. Thus He proved Himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath.

Because of His disregard of their traditional customs, the Jews hated Christ. They hated Him so that eventually they occasioned, at the hands of the Romans, His death upon the cross. Much of the Jews' hatred of Christ, and of His followers, was engendered by their fear that He intended to bring about great changes in the Jewish religion. It was to forestall and to allay these fears, as well as to declare Himself for eternity on the question, that He said, in the Sermon on the Mount: "Think not that I am come

to destroy the law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.” Matthew 5:17. Only the temporary and traditional did Jesus change.

There can be no question as to the attitude of Jesus toward the law of God itself. Again and again He expressed Himself as having come to do the will of the Father. On no occasion did He belittle the law of God, rather did He seek studiously in life and teaching to enhance its value. After Christ's ascension the disciples went forth to proclaim the gospel, and they met at once the stem opposition of the Jews. Almost every chapter of the book of Acts shows the Jews bitterly persecuting the Christians. When they could do so, the Jews themselves flogged and imprisoned them. In the case of Stephen they took the life of one whose arguments they could not gainsay. When they lacked the power to perform these evil deeds themselves, they pressed the Roman authorities to persecute the Christians for them; and on more than one occasion the disciples and their converts found themselves in trouble with the civil authorities because of the accusations of the Jews against them. Acts 17:5-9; 18:12-17; 21:27-40.

All the time, however, the Christians sought to convert the Jews to Christ. When Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, went forth on his great missionary tours, his efforts in every town he visited were first for the Jews. But these well-intentioned efforts, although crowned with considerable success in terms of proselytes for Christianity, met always with stern opposition from the Jewish leaders. Officially, the Jews repudiated Christianity and denied it 12

any recognition as a sect or party of Judaism. Since Judaism was already tolerated by the Romans, the Jews' rejection meant that the new faith had no standing with the government. It was from the beginning an illicit and outlawed cult.

Toward Paul, the chief agent of the Spirit of God in bringing the Gentiles to Christ, the Jews were particularly bitter. Paul was doing a bold but necessary thing when he taught the Gentile converts from paganism that they did not need to observe the Old Testament ordinances of sacrifice, nor keep the annual Sabbaths and feasts, nor practice circumcision, the rite which was peculiarly sacred to the Jews. Since Christ, the true Sacrifice, had come and offered Himself on the cross once for all for the sins of men, all temporary ordinances, those not included in the eternal law of God as expressed to men in the Ten Commandments, were done away. Colossians 2:14-17. This teaching of Paul the Jews resented furiously.

Even the Christian Jews opposed Paul's message of freedom from ritual ordinances through the gospel. Acts 15:1,2. Therefore in his writings, Paul took occasion again and again to condemn legalism and to cleanse Christianity of it. So emphatic was he in this that many of his statements are even at the present day misunderstood, because they seem to indicate that it is not necessary for Christians to live in compliance with the law of God. This he did not mean. Notice these words: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.” Romans 3:31.

This misunderstanding is not merely a modern one. It appeared within a century of Paul's death, and led the church of that time into some serious errors. (Compare 2 Peter 3:15,16) The misunderstanding of Paul's teachings concerning the law combined with the growing resentment on the part of the Christians against the Jews who troubled them. This caused the Christian church to turn away the more readily from the Sabbath which God had established, and which Jesus on earth, and His disciples, including Paul, had always kept.

In arguing, with the Jews that the obligation of the Old Testament typical and ceremonial requirements had ceased at the cross, Paul had a magnificent opportunity to point out that the seventh day Sabbath was no longer obligatory; but this he did not do. He disposed of the priesthood, of sacrifices, of washings, of ceremonial annual days, but never did he give basis for sweeping away the weekly Sabbath of the moral law.

It was anti-Judaism which caused some leaders in the early church, particularly in the West, where the influence of Rome, the capital of the empire, was strong, to confuse the issue of what was done away at the cross, and to brand observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as Jewish.

During the early centuries of the Christian Era the Jews had fallen into serious difficulties with the Roman authorities. There were local outbreaks by the Jews against the Romans even in the days of Christ and the apostles. The Jews considered themselves the chosen people of God, and bitterly resented their being under the domination of a pagan people, the Romans, who thought themselves in turn the favorite of their gods, and held the Jews in contempt.

At last, about AD 66, there broke out a serious rebellion of the Jews against the Romans. Roman armies were sent into Palestine. Eventually the Jewish capital, Jerusalem, was captured and the magnificent temple which Herod had built was destroyed. Thousands of Jews perished in this fearful war, which did not terminate until AD 70.

Even after this awful punishment the Jews were still restive under the Roman yoke. There were serious Jewish revolts about the year AD 115. About AD 132, the Jews engaged in another great rebellion. Again the Jewish forces were cut to pieces. The city of Jerusalem was taken and completely destroyed, and plows were dragged over its site. When the city was again rebuilt, it was restored as a Gentile city, renamed as such, and laws were passed forbidding any Jew to enter it.

Naturally this caused anything Jewish to be discredited among the people of the Roman Empire, especially in the West and in the city of Rome. The Jews were looked upon not only with contempt, but also with fear; and it was not well for one to be associated with them. Anti-Jewish feeling was widespread and deep. It seriously affected the attitude of Christians toward those elements of worship which they had properly inherited through the inspired Hebrew Scriptures. In turn, the misfortunes of the Jews caused them to feel bitter toward the Christians, whom they considered a semi pagan counterfeit of historic Judaism.

The Jews resented, too, the astonishingly rapid growth of the Christian church, and were unceasing in their efforts to discredit the Christians. To do this, they spread damaging reports concerning them. The Jewish people were forbidden to have any

communication with the Christians, who were called blasphemers and crazy fanatics. Justin, writing about AD 150, has Trypho, a Jew, speak, for his race:

“Our teachers laid down a law that we should have no intercourse with any of you [Christians], and that we should not have even any communication with you on these questions. For you utter many blasphemies.” - Dialogue With Trypho, chapter 38, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, volume 1, Page 213.

Justin writes, too, that the Jews cursed Christ in the synagogue:

“I hold that those of the seed of Abraham who live according to the law, and do not believe in this Christ before death, shall likewise not be saved, and especially those who have anathematized and do anathematize this very Christ in the synagogues, and everything by which they might obtain salvation and escape the vengeance of fire.” - Ibid., chapter 47, Page 218.

The complaints of Christians concerning Jewish libel and persecution became more emphatic. The church historian Eusebius tells us that when Polycarp was martyred, about AD 150, the Jews of Smyrna were especially active in the people's uprising against him, and in gathering fuel for the flames in which he lost his life. Origen states plainly that the Jews charged the Christians with cannibalism and adultery. (Against Celsus, book 6, chapter 27, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 4, P. 585.)

At about the same time, Tertullian expressed a grievance concerning the Jews. He tells of a Jew who carried around the city of Rome an effigy, pretending that it was the Christian's god. It “had ass's ears, and was dressed in a toga with a book, having a hoof on one of his feet. And the crowd believed this infamous Jew, For what other set of men is the seed plot of all the calumny against us?” - Ad Nationes, book 1, chapter 14, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, volume 3, Page 123.

Again, Tertullian calls the Jewish synagogues “fountains of persecution.” “Will you plant there [in heaven] both synagogues of the Jews-fountains of persecution-before which the apostles endured the scourge, and heathen assemblages with their own circus?” - Scorpiace, chapter 10, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, volume 3, Page 643.

Here is bitterness existing between Jew and Christian which inevitably left permanent scars. The situation was expressed officially by an emperor a century after Tertullian. When he advised the bishops that Easter must be celebrated always on the same day, that is, on Sunday, the emperor Constantine wrote in the year AD 325 the reason for the order. It was “an unworthy thing” to follow the practice of the Jews,” and Christians should “have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd.” Eusebius, The Life of Constantine, book 3, chapter 18, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2d Series, volume 1, Page 524.

Let us notice a coincidence. In the middle years of the second century, close to the time when the Jews were in fiercest conflict with the Romans, and when the Jews were most discredited in the Roman Empire, we find our first reference to Sunday observance by an authentic, un-tampered Christian writer. The Christians were then keeping the seventh day Sabbath, as will later be shown. Justin Martyr makes no mention of this, however, probably in order to escape Roman disapproval. But he shows the Christians keeping the day of the sun:

“On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read.” - The First Apology, chapter 67, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, volume 1, page 186.

From this time on we find increasingly numerous the references to the fact that Christians were celebrating the resurrection on the first day of the week. The services began to be more elaborate. The writers spoke frankly of Sabbath keeping, but by AD 200 the day of the sun was being called “the Lord's day!”

The effect of anti-Jewish feeling on the part of the Christians in producing this observance of Sunday became more and more clear as time went on. Writers of the fourth and fifth centuries warned their fellow Christians against “Judaizing” on the Sabbath. Both the Sabbath and Sunday were being kept by Christians, and it may have been that the bishops saw a danger that the hierarchy's creation, Sunday, might be eclipsed by Sabbath observance. So, although they did not have the courage to legislate the Sabbath out of the church, they, in a church council held in the city of Laodicea in Asia Minor, adopted canons which cast discredit upon it as “Jewish.”

First of all, they recognized public worship on the Sabbath by providing in canon 16 that – “on Saturday [the word used in the original is Sabbath], the Gospels and other portions of the Scripture shall be read aloud.” The Roman Catholic bishop Hefele -who records these actions for us-and the great German church historian Neander agree that this indicates that Sabbath services were being held regularly in Christian churches at this time.

Then, in canon 29, the church leaders seek to curtail Sabbath observance:

“Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday [Sabbath], but shall work on that day; but the Lord's day they shall especially, honor, and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no work on that day. If, however, they are found- Judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ.” - Charles Joseph Hefele, A History of the Councils of the Church. Volume 2, Pages 310, 311, 316.

Here is revealed the entire scheme of the fourth-century bishops. They did not dare legislate the Sabbath out of existence; but in almost the same breath that they provide for Sabbath worship, they order that the seventh day shall become a workday. Then they command that labor shall cease on the day of the sun, which they are now calling “the Lord's day.” Note that the reason assigned is the prevention of “Judaizing.”

Here is the same antagonism which had been already expressed by Justin Martyr, Origen, Tertullian, and the emperor Constantine. It now enters church law. Anti-Semitism is rampant in the ancient church. And the channel for its appearance is opposition to the Sabbath of God, the day which Christ and the apostles kept. Hatred has carried these bishops far. It has carried them far from the word of God and from the example of the Lord Christ, whom they professed to obey.

We can thus understand why Eusebius, church historian and theologian, writing some years before Laodicea, calls the Sabbath Jewish, and boasts:

“All things whatsoever that it was duty to do on the Sabbath, these we have transferred to the Lord's day, as more appropriately belonging to it, because it has a precedence and is first in rank, and more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath.” - Commentary on Psalm 92 (Roman Catholic version, Psalm 91), in Migne, Patrologia Graeca, volume w3, column I 170. (Italics ours.)

The Sabbath, then, no longer was considered the Sabbath of God, but the “Jewish” Sabbath. And who were the “we” who assumed so boldly the responsibility for this impertinent defiance of God? Certainly not the Lord Himself, or His apostles. It was the church, which had substituted its own tradition for the commandment of God. The change was accompanied by apostasy within the church, and was enforced by civil and ecclesiastical law.

## **7. Worldliness and Paganism in the Early Church**

SUNDAY observance, strengthened by an underpinning of anti-Judaism, was not the only un-Scriptural practice which came early into the Christian church. There were other strange ceremonies and beliefs which crept in. For this there are a number of reasons. Pagans who came in as converts brought into the church their old pagan religious attitudes and wrong ideas. Copies of the Scriptures were scarce, and since many Christians could not read, they were not fortified against error. Some were too careless regarding beliefs and worship. The result was apostasy, paganism, and the establishment of forms of belief and worship which were based, not on Scripture, but on tradition.

When Christ ascended to heaven, He left behind Him only a few hundred followers, under the leadership of the apostles. He left no writings of His own, but during the seventy years following His ascension the twenty-seven New Testament books were written. These books give us brief but sufficient information concerning the teachings and the activities of Jesus Christ and the apostles whom He commissioned to carry the gospel. Along with the Old Testament writings, these are the only inspired books from which we draw authority for what we are to believe and how we are to worship and serve God.

These books were read and used in the infant church. They taught a simplicity of faith and worship quite in contrast to much that public Christian worship offers today. But copies of the Scriptures, which had in that distant day to be made by hand, were few. The influence of a pagan world was strong. Apostolic simplicity was not retained. The apostles had frankly warned their hearers that apostasy would arise within the church. Paul said to the elders of the church of Ephesus: “I know this, that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears.” Acts 20:29-31. He warned Timothy of the dangers of apostasy (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:1-15), and in his second letter to the Thessalonians (2:1-12) spoke plainly of the coming of the “man of sin,” who would be the personification of wickedness, pretending to take the place of God and receiving the worship of men in God's stead.

Writing near the end of the first century, the apostle John warned of heresies already appearing in his day: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world!” 1 John 4:1. There is only one standard by which to “try the spirits;” the Bible is that standard. Isaiah 8:19,20. Therefore, some of the earliest heretics who troubled the church, particularly the Gnostics, finding it impossible to refute the plain teachings of the Bible which were contrary to their beliefs, actually taught that some parts of both the Old and New Testaments should be set aside. The chief harm which they accomplished, however, lay in the example they set of substituting for Bible truth false and fanciful interpretations.

One result of these various dangerous influences was the appearance of writings deliberately forged. Documents were written, with the names of apostles signed to them, which contradicted the inspired writings of the apostles. An instance of this kind is very clearly referred to by Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 2, verse 2., in which he warns the believers in Thessalonica against a forged letter which they might receive. Such documents, of course, led to confusion of ideas. Then, too, a great deal in the writings of Christians of the second century who assumed leadership after the apostles, and who are mistakenly given the name “apostolic fathers,” stands discredited in the presence of pure, straightforward teachings of the New Testament. In these “fathers” there are set forth fanciful and superstitious ideas quite unworthy of the high calling of the gospel, and clearly out of harmony with the Scriptures.

Perhaps worse than this, the writings of Christians of influence were badly interpolated and falsified. We 15 have the complaint of Dionysius, a leader of the church in Corinth about AD 175:

“As the brethren desired me to write epistles, I wrote. And these epistles the apostles of the devil have filled with tares, cutting out some things and adding others. For them a woe is reserved. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at if some have attempted to adulterate the Lord's writings also, since they have formed designs even against writings which are of less account.”-The Church History of Eusebius, book 4, chapter 23, paragraph 12, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, volume 1, pages 201, 202.

We can better understand from this the warning contained in the last chapter of the book of the Revelation, verses 18, and 19: “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the Holy City, and from the things which are written in this book.”



Tides of worldliness swept into the early church in an amazing flood. By the year AD 250, Cyprian, a leader of the church in North Africa, was complaining:

"Each one was desirous of increasing his estate; and forgetful of what believers had either done before in the times of the apostles, or always ought to do, they, with the insatiable ardor of covetousness, devoted themselves to the increase of their property. Among the priests there was no devotedness of religion; among the ministers there was no sound faith: in their works there was no mercy; in their manners there was no discipline. In men, their beards were defaced; in women, their complexion was dyed: the eyes were falsified from what God's hand had made them; their hair was stained with a falsehood. Crafty frauds were used to deceive the hearts of the simple, subtle meanings for circumventing the brethren. They united in the bond of marriage with unbelievers; they prostituted the members of Christ to the Gentiles. They would swear not only rashly, but even more, would swear falsely. Would despise those set over them with haughty swelling, would speak evil of one another with envenomed tongue, would quarrel with one another with obstinate hatred." - Treatise 3, "On the Lapsed," par. 6, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, P. 438.

Furious persecutions which swept the church in Cyprian's day purified it somewhat, but after about fifty years of comparative peace for the church, we find the church historian Eusebius saying:

"On account of the abundant freedom, we fell into laxity and sloth, and envied and reviled each other, and were almost, as it were, taking up arms against one another, rulers assailing rulers with words like spears, and people forming parties against people, and monstrous hypocrisy and dissimulation rising to the greatest height of wickedness, the divine judgment with forbearance, as is its pleasure, while the multitudes yet continued to assemble, gently and moderately harassed the episcopacy. This persecution began with the brethren in the army. But as if without sensibility, we were not eager to make the Deity favorable and propitious: and some, like atheists, thought that our affairs were unheeded and ungoverned; and thus we added one wickedness to another. And those esteemed our shepherds, casting aside the bond of piety, were excited to conflicts with one another, and did nothing else than heap up strife and threats and jealousy and enmity and hatred toward each other, like tyrants eagerly endeavoring to assert their power." - *The Church History of Eusebius*, b. 8, chapter 1, paragraphs 7, 8, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, volume 1, Pages 323, 324.

False shepherds were not content with bringing in false teachings and leading Christian people into evil living. Church leaders began to show presently an amazing indifference concerning apostolic forms of beliefs and worship. For instance, the Scriptural form of baptism by immersion was virtually denied in a document written as early as the year AD 150 or 175. This treatise is called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. The title is false, for the contents of this brief essay are out of harmony with much of the New Testament. Its authorship is unknown, but it was probably written in Syria. In chapter 7 of this curious document we read:

"Concerning baptism, thus baptize you. Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living [running] water. But if thou have not living water, baptize into other water; and if thou cannot not in cold, in warm. But if thou have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whatever others can; but thou shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before." - *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 7, Page 379.

Here are not only unauthorized additions to the ceremony of baptism, but approval of departures from immersion, the only mode of baptism presented in Scripture. How this could come to pass is plainly shown in the writings of Tertullian, a priest and writer of the church in North Africa, who in the latter years of his life was a member of a reforming sect known as the Montanists. He died about AD 235. We feel a doubt of his reforming zeal when we read his discussion of baptism, and of other ceremonies in his day. Illustrative of the corrupted practices, based only on tradition, which already in his day prevailed in the church, are the following quotations from Tertullian's *De Corona* (*The Chaplet*), chapters 3, 4, as they appear in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 3, pages 94, 95:

"When we are going to enter the water, but a little before in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels. Hereupon we are thrice immersed, making a somewhat ampler pledge than the Lord has appointed in the gospel. Then, when we are taken up (as newborn children), we taste first of all a mixture of milk and honey, and from that day we refrain from the daily bath for a whole week. We take also in congregations before daybreak, and from the hand of none but the presidents, the sacrament of the eucharist, which the Lord both commanded to be eaten at mealtimes, and enjoined to be taken by all alike!"

Veneration of the saints was not far distant in the third century, for Tertullian adds: "As often as the anniversary comes round, we make offerings for the dead as birthday honors."

The name "Lord's day" Tertullian usurps and applies to Sunday, the observance of which tradition had then begun to dictate: "We count fasting or kneeling in worship on the Lord's day to be unlawful. We rejoice in the same privilege also from Easter to Whitsunday!"

Directly in company with the directions for keeping Sunday, this writer tells us of the constant use of the sign of the cross. "At every forward step and movement, at every going in and out, when we put on our clothes and shoes, when we bathe, when we sit at table, when we light the lamps, on couch, on seat, in all the ordinary actions of daily life, we trace upon the forehead the sign."

How far the church has moved by AD 200! And by what authority have come these changes in baptism, the emphasis upon Sunday, and the making of the sign of the cross? Tertullian tells us: "If, for these and other such rules, you insist upon having positive Scripture injunction, you will find none. Tradition will be held forth to you as the originator of them, custom as their strengthener, and faith as their observer!"

Here by the beginning of the third century is truly a strange situation. Tradition has reshaped, indeed mis-shaped, apostolic Christianity. The results could not be otherwise than evil. Tradition could not produce unity of right doctrine. Instead, the acceptance of tradition merely produced a fixing, under ecclesiastical compulsion, of a set of anti-Scriptural practices in the church, the result of Christian apostasy and borrowings from paganism. No wonder that Faustus, a Manichaean living about AD 400, was able to make

against the Christian church a serious charge. Bishop Augustine of Hippo in North Africa was called upon to refute the charges of this pseudo philosopher Faustus, and, because in so doing he quotes Faustus, we are permitted to know the frank accusation that was made. The Christians had allowed to creep into their worship a great many things which they borrowed from the pagans. Faustus said:

“You [Christians] appease the shades of the departed with wine and food. You keep the same holidays as the Gentiles; for examples, the calends and the solstices. In your way of living you have made no change. Plainly you are a mere schism; for the only difference from the original is that you meet separately.” - Augustine, Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon, book 20, paragraph 4, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Volume 4, Page 253.

Apostasy and tradition, two handmaidens of error, thus permitted many sad departures from Scripture. Baptism by immersion was given up. Sunday was observed and called wrongly “the Lord's day!” The influence of sun worship added its weight to strengthen Sunday observance.

## **8. Sun Worship and Sunday**

IT is no accident that the first day of the week was named “the day of the sun!” The week, like the Sabbath day which terminates the week, had only one origin: it originated at creation. Genesis 2:1-3. There is no other way to account for the existence of the week. It has no connection with the apparent motions of the sun or moon through the heavens, nor with the astronomical calendar. It is a monument to the fact that the Lord God made the earth and all things therein, and rested on the seventh day. The fact that the seventh day has been observed as the Sabbath ever since, is the only way that we can account for the existence of the week. There were among ancient pagan nations recognized periods of days, but they did not correspond with the week of the Hebrews. The later Jews, and finally the Christians maintained the week without confusion or loss of days.

However, about the time the young Christian movement was making its start in the world, another kind of week was making its appearance. This week grew out of the superstitions of astrologers, who taught that the heavenly bodies represented gods, and that these gods intruded themselves into men's affairs. The sun was thought to be the embodiment of the Sun god, the moon of the moon-goddess. Each of the planets was named for a god: Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, and Saturn.

In the practice of some, each hour of each day was dedicated to one of the planets in turn. The first hour of one of the days of the week was dedicated to the sun, the second hour to the moon, and so on through the hours of the day. The first hour of the next day was dedicated to the moon, the second to Mars. The first hour of the third day was dedicated to Mars, the second hour to Mercury, and on through the week. Any enterprise carried on during a given hour of the day was supposed to be favored by the god to whom that hour was dedicated. Eventually,, of course, the day came to be named for the god whose hour introduced the day. The day whose first hour belonged to the sun corresponded to the first day of the Biblical week, and was called the “day of the sun.”

But it must have been more than a coincidence that the astrologers' Sun-day came to be timed with the first day of the week of the Bible. The Bible week was then well known. Josephus, the Jewish historian who died about the year AD 100, tells us that in his day the Sabbath was being kept all over the known world, not only by the Jews, but also by Gentiles. He says:

“It will be found that throughout the whole of that period not merely have our laws stood the test of our own use, but they have to an ever-increasing extent excited the emulation of the world at large. The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observance. And there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fast and the lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed.” - Against Apion, book 2, Chapter 39, 40. In The Loeb Classical Library, Josephus, volume 1, Pages 404-407.

The Jews followed the Hebrew method of numbering the days of the week; that is, the first day of the week was called the “first” of the Sabbaths,” the second was named the “second of the Sabbaths,” and so through the week. It is interesting, therefore, to note that the day of the astrological week which was named after the sun fell on the same day as the first day of the Jewish week.

The astrological week was adopted only very gradually by the people of the Roman Empire, but by the second century of the Christian Era it had entered into the terminology of the Christian church. We have seen that Justin Martyr, writing soon after AD 150, called the first day of the week “the day of the sun,” and mentioned that Christians were engaging in public worship on that day in honor of Christ's resurrection, a practice not authorized in the Bible.

Pope Sylvester I, a contemporary of Emperor Constantine the Great, did not like it that the days of the week were named after heathen gods, and decreed that the days should be numbered according to the Bible method of counting the days. Says The Venerable Bede, the famous Anglo-Saxon scholar, in his essay *De Ratione Computi* (Concerning the Method of Computation), chapter 5:

“The first day, because both light was made in the beginning and the resurrection of Christ was celebrated, he [Pope Sylvester] called the Lord's Day. Then the second festival [day], the third and the fourth and the fifth and the sixth he counted from it. The Sabbath he retained from the ancient Scriptures!” - In Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, volume 90, column 584.

In the meantime, a sect of sun worshipers had been making great progress in the Roman Empire. A peculiar form of the cult of the sun was introduced from Persia by Roman soldiery who had, in the century before Christ, been campaigning in the east. This form of worship is called Mithraism, and its deity was Sol Invictus, or the unconquerable sun. According to archaeological evidence, the Mithraists used Sunday, the first day of the week, as their day for doing special honor to the sun. Franz Cumont, the great French authority on Mithraism, in his book, *The Mysteries of Mithra*, page 191, says that the Mithraists “held Sunday sacred and celebrated the birth of the Sun on the twenty-fifth of December.”

However, sun worship in the Roman Empire was not by any manner of means dependent for its continuance upon the Mithraists. In fact, sun worship has always been a characteristic of heathen religions everywhere and at all times, and Roman

religion was by no means an exception. Again and again the Roman emperors showed their great interest in sun worship. For instance, Bassianus, who under the name of Heliogabalus (the sun god) was emperor of the Roman Empire (AD 218-222), had been a priest of sun worship in the eastern city of Emesa before he was placed by the soldiery on the imperial throne. The emperor Aurelian (AD 270-275) enriched the old, magnificent temple of the sun in Rome with gifts and embellishments amounting to several millions of dollars in value.

Constantius, the father of Emperor Constantine the Great, saw in sun worship a type of monotheism which pleased him. Through Christian associates, such for instance as his concubine, the mother of Constantine, he was aware of Christianity; and it is probable that he saw similarities in the two kinds of worship. However that may be, his son Constantine, who had the title of emperor from the year 306, and was sole emperor from 323 to 337, when he died, was devoted to the worship of the sun. We read this description:

“His liberality restored and enriched the temples of the gods; the medals which issued from his imperial mint are impressed with the figures and attributes of Jupiter and Apollo, of Mars and Hercules; and his filial piety increased the council of Olympus by the solemn apotheosis of his father Constantius. But the devotion of Constantine was more peculiarly directed to the genius of the Sun, the Apollo of Greek and Roman mythology; and he was pleased to be represented with the symbols of the God of Light and Poetry. The unerring shafts of that idol, the brightness of his eyes, his laurel wreath, immortal beauty, and elegant accomplishments seem to point him out as the patron of a young hero. The altars of Apollo were crowned with the votive offerings of Constantine; and the credulous multitude were taught to believe that the emperor was permitted to behold with mortal eyes the visible majesty of their Solar deity. And that, either waking or in a vision, he was blessed with the auspicious omens of a long and victorious reign. The Sun was universally celebrated as the invincible guide and protector of Constantine.” - Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chapter 20, paragraph 3.

John C. L. Gieseler, the careful German scholar and church historian, makes this comment concerning Constantine's religious expectations:

“With regard to the history of Constantine's religious development, till the time when he fully embraced Christianity [he was baptized just before his death in the year 337], we have only isolated intimations and hints. His first religious sentiments like those of his father, were essentially the new platonic. He acknowledged one supreme god who had revealed himself in many ways among men, and honored Apollo in particular, as the revealer of this Being. As this idea of Apollo and the Christian idea of Christ were obviously similar, so Constantine may have thought that he found in it very soon a point of union between Christianity and paganism.” - *A Compendium of Ecclesiastical History*, First period, division 3, chapter 1, paragraph 56.

Sun worship, then, was a characteristic of Roman religion, and there is not lacking evidence of the use of Sunday for sun worship by the heathen. Sunday was the day of the sun in more than name. In his work *Praeparatio Evangelica* (Preparation of the Gospel), book 5, chapter 14, Eusebius states that Sunday was a day for worshipping the sun. He quotes a heathen admonition thus:

“Remember to invoke in private prayers at the same time Mercury and the sun on the day sacred to the sun, and the moon when her well-known day will have come, and then Saturn, and the one born of Dione [Venus].” - Cologne ed., 1699, volume 1, page 202. Tertullian in his essay *Ad Nationes* (To the Gentiles), book 1, chapter 13, shows that Christians, because they kept Sunday, were considered sun worshippers:

“Others, with greater regard to good manners, it must be confessed, suppose that the sun is the god of the Christians, because it is a well-known fact that we pray towards the east, or because we make Sunday a day of festivity. What then? Do you do less than this? Do not many among you, with an affectation of sometimes worshipping the heavenly bodies likewise, move your lips in the direction of the sunrise? It is you, at all events, who have even admitted the sun into the calendar of the week. And you have selected its day, in preference to the preceding day, as the most suitable in the week for either an entire abstinence from the bath or for its postponement until the evening, or for taking rest and for banqueting.” - *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 3, Page 123.

The popes of Rome, who have always emphasized the use of Sunday for Christian worship, themselves point out that Sunday was used by the pagans for the worship of the sun. Pope Miltiades “decreed that no one of the faithful should in anywise keep fast upon the Lord's day or upon the fifth day of the week, because the pagans celebrated those days as a sacred fast.” *Book Of the Popes*, trans. of L. R. Loomis, chapter 33, Page 40. In a letter to the bishop Turribius, in Spain, Pope Leo the Great remarked that the Manichaeans, a semi pagan sect of the fourth and fifth century, whom Leo accuses of absorbing all kinds of false and pagan errors”

“As our examination has disclosed and brought home to them, they drag out in mournful fasting the Lord's day which for us is hallowed by the resurrection of our Savior: devoting this abstinence, as the explanation goes, to the worship of the sun.” Letter 15, par. 5 (4), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d Series, volume 12, Page 22.

Augustine of Hippo, who refuted accusations which Faustus, a Manichaean, leveled against the Christians, points out also that the Manichaeans used Sunday for sun worship:

“We are not afraid to meet your scoff at the Sabbath, when you call it the fetters of Saturn. It is a silly and unmeaning expression, which occurred to you only because you are in the habit of worshipping the sun on what you call Sunday. What you call Sunday we call the Lord's day, and on it we do not worship the sun, but the Lord's resurrection.” - Reply to Faustus the Manichaean, book 18, paragraph 5, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, volume 4, Page 238.

Again Pope Leo, in Sermon 42, says: “Be not infected with the error of those [the Manichaeans] who are corrupted merely by their own ordinances, 'serving the creature rather than the Creator,' and offering a foolish abstinence to the service of the lights of heaven. Seeing that they have chosen to fast on the first and second days of the week in honor of the sun and moon, proving themselves in this one instance of their perverseness twice disloyal to God, twice blasphemous, by setting up their fast not only in

worship of the stars but also in contempt of the Lord's resurrection." - Paragraph 5, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, volume 12. Pages 157, 158.

The Christians prayed toward the east as early as the beginning of the third century. This is perfectly clear 19

from Clement of Alexandria. (The Stromata, or Miscellanies, book 7, chapter 7, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 2, Page 535.) It is also seen in the so called Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, (b. 2, section 7, chapter 57, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, volume 7, Page 421.) A fourth-century leader of the Eastern Church, Basil, admits this:

"Thus we all look to the east at our prayers," and then defends the practice by saying: "But few of us know that we are seeking our own old country, Paradise, which God planted in Eden in the east."-On the Spirit, chapter 27, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2d Series, volume 8, Page 42. The explanation of Basil is ingenious, but Tertullian who preceded him is franker when he shows that the east meant the place of the sun. He says in his essay Against the Valentinians:

"Of our dove, however, how simple is the very home!-always in high and open places, and facing the light! As the symbol of the Holy Spirit, it loves the (radiant) east, that figure of Christ." - Chapter 3, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 3, P. 504.

Mosheim, noted church historian of the eighteenth century, says in his Institutes of Ecclesiastical History:

"Nearly all the people of the East, before the Christian Era, were accustomed to worship with their faces directed towards the sun rising. For they all believed that God, whom they supposed to resemble light, or rather to be light, and whom they included within certain bounds, had His residence in that part of the heavens where the sun rises. Those of them, indeed, who became Christians rejected this error, but the custom that originated from it, which was very ancient and universally prevalent, they retained." - Book 1, century 2, part 2, chapter 4, paragraph 7, in the Stubbs's edition of 1863, volume 1, Page 134.

It was inevitable, therefore, that Christians should thus become involved in the practices and ideas of the sun worshipers around them. Although ecclesiastical writers denied that the Christians had become infected with sun worship, the similarities were so close that the pagans felt free to accuse them of worshipping the sun. The fact that Christians were making more and more of the sun-day did not help their defense. Notice Tertullian again:

"Others, again, certainly with more information and greater verisimilitude, believe that the sun is our god. We shall be counted Persians perhaps, though we do not worship the orb of day painted on a piece of linen cloth, having himself everywhere in his own disk. The idea no doubt has originated from our being known to turn to the east in prayer. But you, many of you [the pagans], also under pretense sometimes of worshipping the heavenly bodies, move your lips in the direction of the sunrise. In the same way, if we devote Sun-day to rejoicing, from a far different reason than Sun worship, we have some resemblance to those of you who devote the day of Saturn to ease and luxury." - Apology, chapter 16, in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3, Page 31.

Thus we find a strange combination of influences establishing the observance of the day of the sun: Christian custom; the activities of the astrologers. The fanatical worship of the sun by the Mithraists, who used the first day of the week especially for sun worship. And the worship of the sun by Roman emperors and people. This combination of pressures came to a climax in the opening years of the fourth century.

The emperor of that time, Constantine, wished to establish religious unity in the empire. He sought to achieve it, apparently by centering the belief of his people around the sun god, the Apollo of the Romans and the Mithra of the Mithraists. He was also watching with interest the progress of Christianity and evidently wished to identify Christ and Apollo, and to bring together the astrologers, the sun worshipers, the Mithraists, and the Christians in a common worship of the composite Christ-Apollo, Mithra.

This, it seems evident, accounts for a law which Constantine issued in AD 321, calling for cessation of labor on "the venerable day of the sun." This was not a religious law, but a civil law, ordaining simply that there should not be common labor performed on the day of the sun, except what was necessary to avoid serious loss or inconvenience, especially in regard to agriculture.

However, it marked a new departure in the development of Sunday. Prior to this time the Sabbath, as we shall see in a succeeding chapter, was being kept as a religious day, upon which Christians went to church. Some of these kept the day very strictly, others much less so. Sunday was, on the other hand, a festival day. People went to church in the morning, and after that pursued their own work or pleasure.

Now for the first time we have a prohibition of labor on the day of the sun. There is in the law no mention of God or Christ, or any other god. There is no mention of Christianity. This must therefore have been a deliberate effort on the part of the emperor to unify Roman religion around some form of worship agreeable to all. The day of the sun, the first day of the week, called also by that time the day of the Lord, a term which a member of any cult could use without irritation, offered itself as this point of agreement.

Of this situation, Dean Arthur P. Stanley, the able nineteenth century Church of England scholar, says:

"Tenacious adherence to the ancient God of light has left its trace, even to our own time, on one of the most sacred and universal of Christian institutions. The retention of the old pagan name of 'Dies Solis,' or 'Sunday,' for the weekly Christian festival, is, in great measure, owing to the union of pagan and Christian sentiment with which the first day of the week was recommended by Constantine to his subjects pagan and Christian alike, as the 'venerable day of the sun.' His decree, regulating its observance, has been justly called 'a new era in the history of the Lord's day.' It was his mode of harmonizing the discordant religions of the empire under one common institution." - Lectures on the History of the Eastern Church, Scribner's printing of 1884, page 184.

Here, then, is a most curious background for Sunday, the so called Christian holy day. It is the result of custom, with no authoritative basis in Scripture. It is perfectly evident, indeed, that the keeping of Sunday has grown up as the result of the pressure of



anti-Jewish bitterness, of unauthorized tradition, and of paganized apostasy. The honoring of the sun on the first day of the astrological week has expedited the process. Constantine legalized and made official this development. Easter observance under the sponsorship of the Church of Rome, added its pressure.

## **9. Why Easter Is Always on Sunday**

AMONG the earliest traditional, un-Scriptural practices which came into the church were two related observances: the keeping of Sunday as a day of worship for Christians, and the observance of Easter in annual celebration of the resurrection of Christ. No authentic, factual, reliable document gives evidence that Sunday was kept by Christians earlier than about AD 150. Justin Martyr, who was martyred during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, wrote two apologies not long before he died. In chapter 67 of *The First Apology* of Justin this description is found:

“On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. 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. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday). And on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.” - In *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 2, Page 186.

For this meeting of Christians on the day of the sun, the first day of the week, there is no Scriptural basis, and it is to be noted that Justin Martyr claims none. In fact, as mentioned in a previous chapter, a careful examination of all the writers of the Christian church still extant, up to the year AD 325, reveals that none of them claims any foundation in any Scriptural text for the keeping of Sunday. It has no basis except what Tertullian acknowledged; namely, tradition.

How, then, did the keeping of Sunday happen to grow so rapidly? Because it was deliberately fostered by the bishop of Rome. This is illustrated in his efforts on behalf of Easter.

It is a well-known fact that Christ was crucified during the Jewish Passover season. He arose at the beginning of the Jewish Feast of Unleavened Bread, which followed the Passover -supper. Therefore, to know when to observe the annual spring festival, it was necessary for Christians to follow the Jewish calendar. In doing so, the anniversary of Christ's crucifixion and of the resurrection would of course fall on different days of the week each year, in keeping with Jewish reckoning. This method of dating the spring feast was maintained without question in the East.

Between the years AD 50 and 200, the Roman government had a great deal of trouble with Jewish riots and revolts, and in the politically charged atmosphere centering at Rome the feeling against Jews was very bitter, both officially and in the popular mind. The church in the West felt irked at having to depend on Jewish reckoning for a church celebration. This feeling had not abated in the time of Emperor Constantine; for, in writing concerning the Easter festival, he says, in a letter quoted by Eusebius in *The Life of Constantine*, book 3, chapter 18. “It appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin. Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd.” - *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, volume 1, Page 524.

But long before Constantine's day the bishop of Rome, seated at the center of the Roman world and feeling pride of place in the setting of earthly pomp, used the infant Easter festival as a means of usurping authority in the church, and of establishing at the same time the observance of Sunday.

In the second century it was determined at Rome that the Easter celebration should take place, not on any day of the week that the Jewish reckoning should call for, but always and only on a Sunday. This change the church at Rome under Pius I sought to make authentic by the authority of a vision, doubtless imagined. In a document called the *Book of the Popes*, which was written in the fifth century, we read.

“While he [Pope Pius I] was bishop, his brother Hermas wrote a book in which he set forth the commandment which the angel of the Lord delivered to him, coming to him in the garb of a shepherd and commanding that the holy feast of Easter be observed upon the Lord's day.” - Chapter 11, in the Loomis translation, page 14,15. However doubtful may be the authenticity of this incident ' it is an authentic fact that at about the year AD 150 the church at Rome began to use determined pressure to establish the institution of Sunday, through the celebration of Easter Sunday.

When Polycarp, from Asia Minor, visited Rome about AD 150, he and Anicetus, the leader of the church of Rome at that time, discussed the matter of the proper day for the celebration of Easter; and, according to a letter of Irenaeus, Polycarp took pains to point out that in the East the churches celebrated annually the day of the crucifixion, corresponding to the Old Testament Passover day, and paid no attention to Sunday.

“Neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe what he had always observed with John the disciple of our Lord, and the other apostles with whom he had associated; neither could Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe it, as he said that he ought to follow the customs of the presbyters that had preceded him.” - *The Church History of Eusebius*, book 5, chapter 24, paragraph 17, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, volume 1, Page 244.

In spite of their differences, Anicetus fellowshiped with Polycarp, but later successors of Anicetus were not so complacent. Victor, the bishop of Rome from about AD 195 to 200, sought to compel all the Eastern bishops to keep the annual Easter festival in celebration of the resurrection, and on Sunday only. The bishops protested, insisting that they had ancient precedent for the celebration rather of the Lord's crucifixion, on the fourteenth of the month Nisan. But Victor would not suffer this, and “immediately attempted to

cut off from the common unity the parishes of all Asia, with the churches that agreed with them, as heterodox; and he wrote letters and declared all the brethren there wholly excommunicate.”

But this attempted papal usurpation did not succeed. Other churchmen opposed Victor. This was not only because of his efforts to establish Sunday; there was resentment because he overreached his authority in excommunicating fellow bishops who refused his demands.

“Among them was Irenaeus, who, sending letters in the name of the brethren in Gaul [France] over whom he presided, maintained that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be observed only on the Lord's day. He fittingly admonishes Victor that he should not cut off whole churches of God which observed the tradition of an ancient custom.” - The Church History of Eusebius, book 5, chapter 24, paragraph 11, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, volume 1, Page 242, 243.

In making this bold attack upon the independence of his fellow bishops, Victor of Rome was interested in elevating the power of his own see. He was interested also in bringing in, through an assumption of authority, unity in worship. He was seeking to remove the church yet farther from Jewish influence. But it must be recognized that here is a plain effort on the part of the bishop of Rome to emphasize the observance of Sunday.

This was by no means the end, but rather the beginning, of efforts along this line. The Easter controversy continued to thrive, and was a concern of the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. Here it was decided that, first, Easter should be celebrated in the early spring, following the vernal equinox, instead of the mid spring of the Jewish reckoning; and, secondly, that Easter should always be celebrated on a Sunday, dated to escape coincidence with the Jewish Passover celebration. The Roman government under the emperor Constantine then proceeded to enforce Sunday observance through the Easter feast. See Letter of Constantine, in Eusebius' Life of Constantine, book 3, chapters 17-20, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, volume 1, Pages 524, 525.

How much the bishop of Rome had to do with this decision may be supposed, and the extent of his influence estimated, from a ruling handed down at this same time by the pope of Rome, Sylvester 1, at a council in Rome held the same year as the Council of Nicaea:

“Let it be required of all bishops and presbyters, that they observe the Easter festival from the fourteenth day until the twenty first, so that the Lord's day may shine forth.” - Jean Hardouin, *Acta Conciliorum*, volume 1, column 527. (Italics ours.)

At about the same time, this bishop of Rome issued a ukase which, while it specified that the days of the week should not be named after heathen gods, ordered that Sunday be called “the Lord's day.” This information is given to us by the Anglo-Saxon writer, The Venerable Bede, in chapter 4 of his *Book Concerning Times*:

“The week consists of seven days, and the eighth day is the same as the first; to which it returns and in which the week begins again. The Gentiles applied to these, names from the planets, believing that they had from the sun a soul, from the moon a body, from Mars blood, from Mercury mentality and speech, from Jove moderation, from Venus lust, from Saturn slowness. But the holy Sylvester ordered them called festivals [*feriae*], calling the first the Lord's day; in imitation of the Hebrews, who called them [the days] the first of the Sabbath, the second of the Sabbath, and thus the others by number.” - In Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, volume 90, column 281.

From this time on the popes were open and vigorous in their urging of Sunday observance. We have already seen that it was not considered proper in Western Christendom to kneel or to fast on Sunday, so that worship might be made relaxed and pleasant. To carry this out in practice, Bishop Innocent 1 of Rome (AD 400) reminded his churches that the apostles (so he claimed) had fasted on the Sabbath while Jesus was in the grave, and therefore Christians should do the same:

“We observe the image of this same [resurrection] day, and we fast on the sixth day on account of the suffering of the Lord; we ought not to make the Sabbath prominent, because it is seen enclosed between the sadness and joy of that season. For assuredly it is evident that the apostles were for those two days in grief, and had hidden themselves for fear of the Jews. Therefore it is not to be doubted, that inasmuch as they fasted on that memorable two-day period, as the tradition of the church has it, on these two days the sacraments ought to be sincerely celebrated. Which plan is to be followed during each week, because the celebration of that day [Sunday] is always to be kept.” - Jean Hardouin, *Acta Conciliorum*, volume 1, column 997. (Translation and italics ours.)

The tradition is repeated that the apostles fasted on the Sabbath while the Lord was in the grave; Christians are commanded to fast in imitation of the apostles; and Sunday is held forth as the day to be kept, while the Sabbath is put in the background.

Leo 1, surnamed the Great, who was pope of Rome AD 440-461, commanded in Letter 9, chapter 2, and again in Letter 10, chapter 4, that ordinations should take place only on Sunday, and preferably at Eastertide. In fact, in numerous letters and decrees, Pope Leo lifted Sunday to the highest honor it had yet attained.

## **10. Rome and the Sabbath**

IN spite of Rome's efforts to make Sunday the church's great day, the important fact must be pointed out that all this time the seventh-day Sabbath was being kept by Christians. It is our intention to present these facts in a later chapter, but let it suffice now to refer to the church historian Socrates, who died about AD 440. He said:

“Although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this.” - Ecclesiastical History, book 5, chapter 22, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 2, Page 132. (Italics ours.)

This is truly remarkable. Sunday was being observed in AD 440 in spite of the lack of Biblical foundation for it; but the Sabbath, the true rest day of God and of Christ, was also being observed, and had been from the days of Jesus and His apostles. It was kept everywhere in Christendom, except in Rome and Alexandria. We can understand why Rome had ceased to keep .Sabbath, since for two hundred years it had been emphasizing the keeping of Sunday. We can understand, too, the Alexandrian church's failure to obey God, for that church from its infancy had been under the influence of Gnostic and speculative philosophy.

But we can better understand the agreement of the two great centers of decadent Christianity, Rome and Alexandria, when we turn again to Pope Leo's letters. Here is a revealing sentence in Leo's letter to Bishop Dioscorus of Alexandria:

"Fatherly and brotherly conference, therefore, ought to be most grateful to you, holy brother, and received by you in the same spirit as you know it is offered by us. For you and we ought to be at one in thought and act, so that as we read, in us also there may be proved to be one heart and one mind."-Letter9,.pt. i, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2d Series, vol. 12, Page 7.

Their agreement was well illustrated in their mutual suppression of Sabbath keeping. It remained for a pope of Rome to denounce as anti-Christian those keeping the Sabbath commandment of God. Gregory 1, named the Great, bishop of Rome from AD 590 to 604, declared Sabbath keepers to be preachers of antichrist. He wrote:

"Gregory, bishop by the grace of God to his well-beloved sons, the Roman citizens: It has come to me that certain men of perverse spirit have disseminated among you things depraved and opposed to the holy faith, so that they forbid anything to be done on the day of the Sabbath. What shall I call them except preachers of antichrist?" - Epistles, book 13: 1, in Labbe and Cossart, Sacrosancta Concilia, volume 5, column 1511.

Who was it that suppressed the Sabbath and emphasized Sunday observance? As we review the evidence, we answer. The Church of Rome. It is not surprising therefore to find catechism after catechism of the Roman Catholic Church admitting frankly, indeed claiming, that to the Church of Rome must go the credit for the elimination of the true Sabbath and the establishment of Sunday observance. This shift became effective during the fifth and sixth centuries, at the very period when the popes were consolidating their enormous ecclesiastical power.

As the centuries rolled by, Sunday observance became increasingly a symbol of the ecclesiastical power of the Roman Church. It was used by Rome as a challenge to the Protestant leaders of the Reformation. Eck, the noted Catholic debater against Luther, had in the Leipzig disputation of 1519 forced the Protestant leader to concur in the "heresies" of the great Bohemian reformer, Huss, who had been burned at the stake in 1415. In 1533, writing further against Luther, Eck used Sunday observance as an evidence of the authority of the Roman Church in matters of faith and religious practice. He wrote:

"The Scripture teaches: Remember that you sanctify the Sabbath day; you will labor six days, and do all your work, but on the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God, etc., etc. Nevertheless the church has changed the Sabbath to the Lord's day by its own authority, concerning which you have no Scripture." John Eck, Enchiridion Locorum Communium adversus Lutheranos (Handbook of Commonplaces Against the Lutherans), printing of 1533, pages 4a, 5. (Translation by the author.)

But the full force of this Catholic claim is clearly seen in the Council of Trent itself. On Sunday, January 18, 1562, Which opened the last session of that important council, the archbishop of Reggia, Caspar del Fossa, delivered a sermon in which he based the whole structure of the authority of the Catholic Church upon the fact that "the Sabbath, the most glorious day in the law, has been changed into the Lord's day." - Labbe and Cossart, Sacrosancta Concilia, volume 14, columns 1253, 1254.

Commenting upon this, Heinrich Julius Holtzmann, German scholar and outstanding authority on the question of ecclesiastical tradition, says of the significance of Del Fossa's position:

"At last at the final opening [of the council] on January 18, 1562, they rid themselves of all hesitation; the archbishop of Reggia made an address in which he declared openly that tradition was elevated above the Scripture. On this account the authority of the Church could not at all [the archbishop maintained] be tied to the authority of Scripture, because the former had, not according to the ordinance of Christ, but on its own authority, changed circumcision into baptism, and the Sabbath into Sunday. With this the last illusion was dispelled and clarified, that tradition represented not antiquity, but continuing inspiration." - Kanon und Tradition, 1859 ed., p. 263. (Translation by the author.) This was made authentic in the Catechism of the Council of Trent, for Parish Priests, a catechism authorized by that sixteenth century council, first published in 1566, and used ever since by priests in instructing their people. We read in this catechism:

"The Church of God has thought it well to transfer the celebration and observance of the Sabbath to Sunday!" - Page 402, Second revised edition (English), 1937.

Again, in A Doctrinal Catechism, by the priest Stephen Keenan, in the Kenedy reprint of the Edinburgh edition of 1846, we read:

"Q Have you any other way of proving that the Church has power to institute festivals of precept?

"A. Had she not such power, she could 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." - Page 174.

Further, in The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine of the priest Peter Geiermann, we find this statement:

"Q Why did the Catholic Church substitute Sunday for Saturday?

"A. The Church substituted Sunday for Saturday, because Christ rose from the dead on a Sunday, and the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles on a Sunday.

"Q. By what authority did the Church substitute Sunday for Saturday?

“A. The Church substituted Sunday for Saturday by the plenitude of that divine power which Jesus Christ bestowed upon her!” -Page 50, printing of 1923.

Again in *The Catechism Simply Explained*, by the Catholic canon, H. Cafferata, printing of 1932, is this declaration:

“The Church, by the power our Lord gave her, changed the observance of Saturday to Sunday.” -Page 89.

Here is the record. The Sabbath is the Lord's day, the Biblical day of rest and worship. The church began early to keep Sunday. But it was the Catholic Church centering in Rome which suppressed Sabbath observance and established Sunday keeping in its place. This change it claims to have made on its own ecclesiastical authority and not on the authority of Scripture. Tradition is the means whereby it has done it. Tradition is, in turn, they claim, established by the fact that Sunday is now being kept.

Civil law now enforced what tradition, borrowed paganism, and ecclesiastical authority had set up.

## **11. The Earliest “Blue” Laws**

THE first Sunday law was issued in AD 321 by the emperor Constantine. This emperor was recognized by the Christian church of his day in terms almost of divinity, even before he had acknowledged himself as a member of the church. In A. D. 326, when Constantine was celebrating his twentieth year as emperor, Eusebius, the church historian, says of the glory of his reign. “One might have thought that a picture of Christ's kingdom was thus shadowed forth, and a dream rather than reality.” - *The Life of Constantine*, book 3, chapter 15, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, volume 1, Page 524.

Again when Constantine had taken with him into the government his three sons as Caesars, Eusebius says:

“Invested as he is with a semblance of heavenly sovereignty, he directs his gaze above, and frames his earthly government according to the pattern of that divine original, feeling strength in its conformity to the monarchy of God.” Oration in Praise of Constantine, chapter 3, paragraph 5, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, volume 1, page 584.

It is this emperor, so highly praised by a leading churchman of his day. Yet still a pagan, who in pi issued the first “blue” law:

“All judges and city people and the craftsmen shall rest upon the venerable Day of the Sun. Country people, however, may freely attend to the cultivation of the fields, because it frequently happens that no other days are better adapted for planting the grain in the furrows or the vines in trenches. So that the advantage given by heavenly providence may not for the occasion of a short time perish.”-Code of Justinian, b. 3, title 12, 3; trans. In *Ayer's Source Book for Ancient Church History*, item 59 (9). Of this and a later law, the church historian Sozomen, writing about A. D. 440, says:

“He also enjoined the observance of the day termed the Lord's day, which the Jews call the first day of the week, and which the pagans dedicate to the sun, as likewise the day before the seventh [Friday], and commanded that no judicial or other business should be transacted on those days, but that God should be served with prayers and supplications.” - *Ecclesiastical History*, book 1, chapter 8, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, volume 2, Page 245.

Constantine's laws of worship applied also in the Roman army: “Accordingly he enjoined on all the subjects of the Roman Empire to observe the Lord's day, as a day of rest, and also to honor the day which precedes the Sabbath. In memory, I suppose, of what the Savior of mankind is recorded to have achieved on that day [the crucifixion]. And since his desire was to teach his whole army zealously to honor the Savior's day (which derives its name from light, and from the sun), he freely granted to those among them who were partakers of the divine faith, leisure for attendance on the services of the Church of God, in order that they might be able, without impediment, to perform their religious worship.” Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine*, book 4, chapter 18, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, volume 1, Pages 544, 545.

Constantine also prohibited litigation on Sunday, but did allow the freeing of slaves by both magistrates and bishops on the newly legalized worship day. This provision was repeated in the years 386 and 389, when Christianity was becoming the exclusive religion in the empire. In the meantime the emperor Valentinian 1 in the year 365 had decreed that Sunday be kept by Christians as a holiday. A few years later he decreed that on the day of the sun -there should be no theatrical displays or horse racing. Constantine did permit markets to be held on Sunday, but even this liberty was revoked by the emperor Leo 1. This same emperor decreed about the year 460 that the Lord's day should be free from lawsuits, executions, pleadings, theatrical displays, and unrestrained indulgence in pleasure. The punishment for trespass was, for a military man, loss of his commission; for any other person, the confiscation of property.

When Constantine was issuing his Sunday laws; was he a consistent Christian? Hardly. As previously noted, he was at that very time embellishing the temple of the sun, and in the same year that he promulgated his first “blue” law, he made definite provision for continuing the old pagan auspices. The old Roman priests in these superstitious performances decided the most important questions of state by watching the flight of birds, by examining the entrails of chickens, or by similar superstitions. This Constantine legalized.

The most casual observer must notice that the Sunday legislation put forth by a still paganized government, requiring the observance for purposes of political expediency of an essentially pagan institution, marks a new turn in the history of Sunday. The honoring of the day of the sun by Christians antedates, it is true, these “Blue” laws; but in the year 313 Constantine had, by the Edict of Milan, suddenly legalized Christianity. The church forthwith became the handmaiden of the state. Church and state signaled their union by their official patronage of the legalized Sunday.

It will be remembered that Pope Sylvester I of Rome, a contemporary of Constantine, decreed that Sunday should be called, not the day of the sun, but the Lord's day. Constantine and his successors, as we have seen, with the aid of church officials, required the attendance of Christians in the churches on Sunday. The Council of Sardica, in about 343, made official a rule that laymen should not absent themselves from church services more than three Sundays in succession, under pain of excommunication.



It is needless to list the large number of regulations the bishops devised to establish Sunday. However, a few should be mentioned. The church was not willing to allow farmers to tend their crops on Sunday, and a provincial council in the West forbade it. This set a precedent for similar laws of both church and state. A council which met in the city of Orleans in Gaul (ancient France) in the year 538 not only forbade Sunday labor in the kingdom of Burgundy, but also defined what the church meant by "Judaizing":

"It is a Jewish superstition that it is unlawful to ride or drive on Sunday, or do anything for the decoration of house or person. But field labors are forbidden, so that people may be able to come to church and worship. If anyone acts otherwise, he is to be punished, not by the laity [the civil authorities], but by the bishop." - Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, volume 4, page 208, 209.

At a council at Auxerre, in France, about 578, it was expressly forbidden that oxen be yoked or other work pursued on "the Lord's day." A council at Macon in 581 required faithful church attendance on Sunday, and the bishops assembled four years later in the same city forbade Sunday amusements, litigation, and agricultural labor. Rather, they insisted, the day should be spent in the singing of hymns and praises to God. King Guntram confirmed by law the action of this council concerning Sunday labor.

A remarkable civil decree was issued in the year 554 by King Childebert 1 of ancient France. In it he listed a large number of evils afflicting his kingdom. Among other things, he pointed out how serious it was that certain pagan practices still continued among the people. Pagan worship he definitely forbade, and also commanded that drunkenness, rascality, festive chanting, and wandering about aimlessly on "the Lord's day" and on annual religious feast days be stopped. We can readily imagine how, on the old day of the sun, heathen practices could easily be revived among surviving heathen, and among Christians only half-converted from pagan ways. Had the true Sabbath of God's word been maintained among Christians of that day, there would unquestionably have been less trouble with remnants of paganism, and with the other evils as well.

In the kingdom of the Visigoths in Spain similar actions were taken during this period. In the year 589 a council met in the city of Narbonne, then a part of the Visigothic kingdom. It decreed:

"Every man, as well a freeman as a servant, whether Goth, Roman, Syrian, Greek, or Jew, shall do no work on the Lord's day, nor shall an ox be yoked, except if necessity require it in moving. If anyone should presume to do this, if he is a freeman, let him pay to the count of the city six shillings: if a servant, let him receive a hundred strokes of the whip." - Jean Hardouin, *Acta Conciliorum*, volume 3, column 492. (Author's translation.) (A shilling was worth at that time far more than the modern English shilling.)

Next, Pope Gregory I, surnamed the Great, declared himself. Sometime during the last decade of the sixth century he issued an epistle, numbered 1 of book 13, addressed "to his most beloved sons the Roman citizens," in which he said that he had learned that "certain men of perverse spirit" had thought to prohibit labor on the Sabbath day. "What else can I call these but preachers of antichrist," says Gregory, "who, when he comes, will cause the Sabbath day as well as the Lord's day to be kept free from all work. For, because he pretends to die and rise again, he [antichrist] wishes the Lord's day to be had in reverence. And, because he compels the people to Judaize that he may bring back the outward rite of the law, and subject the perfidy of the Jews to himself, he wishes the Sabbath to be observed." - In *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, volume 13, Page 92.

It was blasphemous to call it the work of antichrist to urge Sabbath keeping. It seems hardly less so, that Pope Gregory then proceeds to spiritualize away completely the admonitions of Scripture which he quotes concerning the Sabbath. He adds:

"On the Lord's day, however, there should be a cessation of labor and attention given in every way to prayers, so that if anything is done negligently during the six days, it may be expiated by supplications on the day of the Lord's resurrection." - Labbe and Cossart, *Sacrosancta Concilia*, volume 5, column 1511.

In Gaul, under the Franks, many more Sunday laws were passed. Decrees were issued, too, against the Jews, compelling them to become Christians. However, this was carried to a much greater extent in Spain under the Visigoths. The Visigothic king Ervig is said to have issued some twenty laws against the Jews. At a council held in Toledo in the year 681, with a number of nobles in attendance, as well as bishops, these laws against the Jews were confirmed. Among other things, these regulations forbade the Jews from celebrating the seventh day Sabbath or the Jewish feasts, and commanded them to abstain from labor on the Lord's day. (Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church*, volume 5, pages 210, 211)

The Anglo-Saxon regulations concerning Sunday observance were very definite. The Angles and Saxons had become Roman Catholic during the seventh century, and Sunday observance was emphasized by both state and church. About the year 690 a church council, summoned by King Ina of the kingdom of Wessex and composed of both bishops and noblemen, declared:

"If a slave works on Sunday, by command of his master, then the slave goes free, and the master is fined thirty solidi [shillings]. If the slave works on Sunday without the master's command, he must be scourged or pay quit money for his skin. If a freeman works on Sunday, he must lose his liberty or pay thirty solidi; a priest double."-Ibid., volume 5, Page 243.

This appears to be the earliest mention of Sunday keeping in English law. A few years later another council provided:

"If a servant, by command of his master, works between the (first) vespers of Sunday [sunset Saturday night] and that of Monday (i. e. between Saturday evening and Sunday evening), the master must expiate this by a payment of fifty solidi. If the slave does it voluntarily, he must pay his master six solidi, or be flogged. If a freeman works at the forbidden time, he is to be put in the pillory."-Ibid., volume 5, Page 249.

Charlemagne had hardly been crowned king of the Franks in 768 until we find being adopted a long sequence of Sunday legislation. The laws were contained for the most part in the instructions he issued to the counts and bishops whom he sent out as inspectors through his kingdom, and, after he became emperor through the entire western empire under his rule. Here are some of his regulations for Sunday observance:

All must attend church on “the Lord's day!” There must be no servile work on “the Lord's day.” “The Lord's day” shall be celebrated from evening to evening (that is from sunset to sunset, which is the Biblical way of counting the days and is an application of Leviticus 23:32). Markets may not be held on “the Lord's day!” No Jew shall join with Christians working on “the Lord's day,” under threat of punishment, “so that others will not dare to do servile work on the Lord's day!” There shall be no public trials on “the Lord's day,” or any gatherings except in church.

Church councils of the period adopted similar regulations, so that the co-operation between church and state in promulgating and enforcing these blue laws is obvious. Obvious, too, is what was being attempted. The very bishops and rulers who hated the Jews and sought the suppression of Sabbath observance assumed the identical legalistic attitude toward the Sunday which Jesus condemned when He found it in relation to the Sabbath among the Jews. The church rejected a “legalized” Sabbath, calling it “Judaizing.” Then it enforced a legal Sunday, and compelled Christians to “legalize” on the day of their own making.

Thus appears an extraordinary spectacle. Church and state have united, king after king, church council after church council, pope after pope, to compel the keeping of a day for which there is, as is admitted by all candid students of the subject, no Scriptural foundation either by command of God, by example of Christ or His apostles, or by admonition because of the Lord's resurrection. There is no hint in the Scriptures that the resurrection was to be honored by any day specifically set aside for it, either annually or weekly. Nor is there any to support the keeping of a day frequently honored in Christianity's great rival, paganism, and named for the sun.

A religious observance which has had to be bolstered up through the centuries with a constant repetition of blue laws of the sternest type must be recognized as of only human origin. It should therefore command no consideration on the part of Christians who are concerned with the will of God as expressed in Holy Writ. It were bad enough, were this long succession of laws passed in the interests of a Biblical institution or a commandment of God; bad, because the commandments pertaining to the worship of God do not need, and should not have, any enforcement by commandments of men. In this case, however, we find human laws suppressing that which God has expressly commanded, the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath. We find men putting in its place a day for which God has made no provision whatever at any

Time. Namely, the day of the sun. Surely here we have a mark, an evidence, of the desire of willful men to set up their own wishes against the wishes of God, and to establish their own traditions instead of the things which God has commanded.

The Sunday stands therefore in a most unfortunate situation, and the Sabbath, although it has for centuries been flouted, still remains the rest day of God, the day of which Christ Himself is Lord and Master.

## **12. Sunday Supported by Superstition**

WE do not know what were the feelings of the common people of the early centuries of the Christian Era concerning the observance of Sunday. The constant repetition, for hundreds of years, of Sunday blue laws indicates that it was accepted reluctantly. This entirely human institution, forced upon the people by ecclesiastical and civil authorities, evidently met with resistance, probably stubborn in many places. However, the pressure of laws by church and state governing the keeping of Sunday had effect. The substitution of the Sunday for the Sabbath was, in the main, accomplished by the tenth century after Christ.

In the West, where Rome wielded its most direct influence, the Sabbath was more readily disregarded than in the East. On the other hand, the ritual of the Creek Orthodox Church shows that throughout the medieval centuries worship on the Sabbath was provided in the churches.

Since the blue laws proved difficult to enforce, another method of Sunday emphasis was developed. Superstition was brought to its aid. We know of this through stories of people supposedly crippled for desecrating Sunday. An eager chronicler of this sort of thing was a man named Gregory, a sixth-century bishop of the city of Tours in France.

Two hundred years before Gregory's day, the bishop of Tours had been a man by the name of Martin, important in the history of early Christianity. Because Martin was so highly regarded he became a patron saint of France, the church over which he presided, and where he was buried, became a shrine, patronized by those who believed in intercession of the spirits of dead saints. To Tours came people from all over France to worship and pray, to seek protection from their enemies, and to be healed of their infirmities.

Gregory of Tours felt highly honored in being made bishop of a church once presided over by so great a churchman and saint as Martin, and went to great lengths to show St. Martin's power in caring for those who sought his aid. In presenting the record, Bishop Gregory describes, among other cases, the healing of people who, he would have us believe, were crippled for working on Sunday, and then, we are told, successfully solicited St. Martin for healing. Here are a few cases from Gregory's writings.

In the spring of 591, in the city of Limoges, “many were consumed by fire from heaven,” because they had outraged “the Lord's day” by working publicly. For, says Gregory, “this day is holy, which in the beginning first saw light created and spring forth, and was made a witness of the resurrection of the Lord. Therefore it ought in all faith to be observed by Christians, so that in it no work is publicly done.”

There was a farmer who did not reverence “the Lord's day.” When he had gathered his harvest, he put the grain in a mill and began to grind it. When the task was finished, the hand which held the mill handle would not open, but, hurting severely, kept its grip. When the man saw that he could not let go, he cut off the handle and came thus burdened to St. Martin's church. “After he had offered prayers and performed vigils, his fingers were loosed and his hand restored to its former condition.” But another year he undertook, on this day which the church was making sacred, the same work on account of which he had been seemingly rebuked by God, “and again the handle stuck to his hand. Crying aloud with pain, he hastened to the saint's church.” But, according to his deserts he was not heard immediately, and still carried about with him the mill stick. Not until two years later, at St. Martin's festival, was he liberated from the burden of the stick. Another man, a senator of the town of Angers, “because he made a key on the Lord's day, had the fingers of both

hands contracted so that the nails were forced into the palms. He who had wished to open his door could not open his hands.” For the space of four months, “with the fingernails piercing the flesh and his palms putrefying, he petitioned the help of the confessor.” At the end of that period, having spent four days in prayer and fasting he was healed and returned home, praising the powers of the dead St. Martin. Thereafter “he kept admonishing everyone not to attempt what he had presumed to do.”

A woman was crippled because after “the Sabbath day when the sun had set and the night of the Lord’s resurrection” had begun, she put a loaf of bread into the oven. Immediately her arm was filled with pain, and “when she put in a second and a third loaf, her hand began involuntarily to stick to the wood she was holding. The woman realized that she was under the condemnation of divine power, and quickly threw away the stick. But she could not avoid her punishment. Her hand was drawn up with pain and the fingernails cut into the palm. No physician could heal her of this affliction,” and she hastened to the church of St. Martin. After she had prayed there earnestly, she went away with her hand straightened, and she vowed that each month thereafter she would give one week’s faithful service in the saint’s church. She kept her promise for one year, then skipped a week and did not come to the church. While she was sitting in her house, her eyes began to ache, and she suffered severe pain. Within an hour she was blind. Immediately she fled to St. Martin’s church, where she confessed her sin, “poured out her prayers in supplication, and did penance for her neglect. On the eighth day blood poured from her eyes, and she saw the light of day.”

A man named Leodulf of the city of Bourges, when he had mowed his grain, feared lest a chance rain might ruin it. “So early in the morning of the Lord’s day he yoked his oxen, led them to the meadow, and began to pile the grain upon the wagon.” Soon his foot began to bum as if on fire, and he went back to his house. After he had celebrated mass, he yoked the oxen again, hastened to the fields, and again filled his wagon with grain. Immediately 28

his eyes felt as though they were punctured with thorns. “He suffered the greatest pain, and when he closed his eyes he was not able to open them again. He remained thus for a whole year in blindness,” but when the feast of St. Martin came, he went to the church, and three days later the sight which he had lost was restored.

“The Lord’s day” was also honored by a supposed “miracle.” A resident of the town of Angers was stricken with disease. For days, sick with fever, he lay insensible, and lost both voice and hearing. After a few days he recovered from the fever, but remained deaf and speechless. Taking advantage of his condition, his brothers, “not thinking of God,” cut him off from his share of the family property and cast him out of the house. But although “the man was bereft of his faculties, he retained his good sense.” So he went about with his writing tablets in his hand, and by striking them together attracted people’s attention while he begged. By this means he made his way to the city of Tours, where he joined himself to other beggars asking alms. For six years this pauper “kept feeding from the riches of the holy chapel. But it happened that on one Lord’s day night, while he was lying at the door of his house, the place was suddenly filled with a great light, and behold, he was terrified, and prostrated with fear. And immediately it seemed to him that a certain man dressed in priestly garb touched him and, placing the cross of Christ on his forehead, said: ‘The Lord has made you well. Arise and hasten to the church and give, thanks to God.’ Whereupon the man raised his voice in thanksgiving and filled the neighborhood with his shouts.”

This is the sort of stories which were put into circulation on behalf of Sunday. We can only guess as to what extent the bishops instigated them. Without doubt, churchmen were entirely willing to take advantage of the credulity of the people to accomplish their purposes.

In what company has Sunday arisen! Born of tradition, popularized by sun worship, clothed in anti-Semitism, enforced by law, sanctified by superstition! All these means have been necessary because of a lack of divine authorization in even one smallest passage of Scripture.

But all this accumulated human effort has been only partially successful. The true Sabbath of God is still observed.

### **13. The Survival of the Sabbath**

IT is really an astonishing thing that the Sabbath survived at all in the experience of the Christian church. Christians had begun early to keep the Sunday, and, although it was unauthorized in Scripture, it constituted eventually a competitor of the Sabbath.

Because of the intense animosity between Christians and Jews, churchmen put the Sabbath purposively in a Jewish setting and led their people away from its observance. And when the church began to use the first day of the week, the day of the sun, for worship, it appealed particularly to those converted, or partially converted, from heathen sun worship.

As soon as the church became a legal institution in the Roman Empire, the leaders of the church, particularly the bishop of Rome, combined with the state to make Sunday the legal day of worship. This was done, not only to unite both pagans and Christians around one generally acceptable day, but it was also deliberately fostered by the Church of Rome, which saw here an opportunity to make the Sunday a vehicle for the assertion of its authority. As if these efforts were not enough, at a time when both education and spirituality were on a decline, the superstition of the common people was imposed upon to make of Sunday a sacred day.

It is extraordinary that under these conditions Sabbath observance survived in the Christian church. But it did survive. Its observance can be traced through the early centuries and into the Middle Ages. It is found in Reformation times and through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Again in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there has been a renewed and powerful emphasis upon observance of the seventh day, the Bible Sabbath. In the early centuries, in spite of pressure from churchmen in such great centers as Rome and Alexandria, all Christians kept the Sabbath. We shall examine evidences for this from Christian writers of the period, but first let us take testimony from some Sunday keeping scholars concerning Sabbath observance.

Joseph Bingham was one of the most industrious and careful scholars that the Church of England ever produced. He lived in the eighteenth century. Let us notice what he, a Sunday keeper, said concerning early Sabbath keeping. In his book, *Origines Ecclesiasticae*; or, the *Antiquities of the Christian Church*, book 20, chapter 3, section 1, he wrote: "Next to the Lord's day, the ancient Christians were very careful in the observation of Saturday, or the seventh day, which was the ancient Jewish Sabbath. Some observed it as a fast, others as a festival; but all unanimously agreed in keeping it as a more solemn day of religious worship and adoration. In the Eastern church it 29

was ever observed as a festival, one only Sabbath excepted, which was called 'the Great Sabbath,' between Good Friday and Easter Day, when our Savior lay buried in the grave; upon which account it was kept as a fast throughout the whole church. But, setting aside that one Sabbath, all the rest were kept as festivals in the Oriental Church!"

This is an interesting testimony from one who had carefully examined all the sources in the original tongues. Of course Mr. Bingham recognized the keeping of Sunday. It was kept. But it is a noteworthy thing that the Sabbath also was kept by Christians. Sabbath observance was unique in that it was continuous from the time of Christ and the apostles.

It must be noted, too, that in the East it was kept as a festival; that is, it was a day of religious happiness, when Christian folk went to church, engaged in joyful worship, and brought into the day the spirit of true Christian fellowship. It was in the West, under the influence of the Church of Rome, that the Sabbath was put in an unhappy light by making it a solemn day of fasting.

Let us take another scholarly testimony. John C. L. Gieseler was certainly one of the most careful and scholarly church historians that Germany has produced. He lived in the nineteenth century. In *A Compendium of Ecclesiastical History*, period 1, division 2, chapter 3, paragraph 53, we read:

"Sunday and the Sabbath were observed as festivals; the latter, however, without Jewish superstition."

Mr. Gieseler recognized that the Sabbath was kept, and pointed out that the early Christians sought to escape loading down their Sabbath observance with the Jewish legalism which Christ had so vigorously condemned.

But what do early Christians themselves have to say? In examining these statements, we must remember that these testimonies from the early centuries are from men who themselves were Sunday keepers. They were not at all interested in emphasizing Sabbath observance. They took Sunday keeping for granted, and only casually mentioned that the seventh day Sabbath was being observed. Their testimony is therefore so much the more valuable.

We have already read from Justin Martyr his statement, the earliest we have in the Fathers, concerning Sunday keeping, that on the "day of the sun" Christians had religious worship. In this testimony addressed to the emperor, he carefully avoided mentioning the fact that any Christians were keeping the Sabbath. This is doubtless because he did not wish the emperor to make too close an identification of Christians- with the hated Jews.

But Justin Martyr, a Syrian writing in Rome, did recognize that Christians were keeping the Sabbath, when writing against a Jew by the name of Trypho who had attacked the Christians. Justin did not like the Jews. He did not like Trypho. He did not like Sabbath keeping. But in chapter 47 of his *Dialogue With Trypho*, a Jew, Justin tried to be "broadminded" in his attitude toward Christian Sabbath keepers. He made this concession: "I hold that we ought to join ourselves to such [Sabbath keepers], and associate with them in all things as kinsmen and brethren." - *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, page 218. Because this is so grudging a testimony to Christian Sabbath keeping, it is the more conclusive.

We will now consider another witness in the West, who was under influences similar to those which led the Church of Rome .to attempt to destroy Sabbath keeping. Tertullian was a noted Christian writer of North Africa. He died about AD 235. He was deeply interested in Sunday keeping, and held that Sunday should be kept as a day of joy in commemoration of the happy event of Christ's resurrection. It was his wish that there be no fasting, or any kneeling in prayer, on Sunday. He was displeased to find Sabbath keeping Christians insisting that they should not have to kneel in prayer on the Sabbath day. Here is what he wrote in his essay *On Prayer*, chapter 23:

"In the matter of kneeling also prayer is subject to diversity of observance, through the act of some few who abstain from kneeling on the Sabbath. And since this dissension is particularly on its trial before the churches, the Lord will give His grace that the dissentients may either yield, or else indulge their opinion without offense to others." - *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 3, p. 689.

With a great effort Tertullian sought to be considerate toward the Sabbath keepers who desired the Sabbath to be a day of joyful, unhampered worship. He said that, out of consideration for others, they should kneel in public prayer on the Sabbath, as the Sunday keeping Christians were doing. He made it plain that Sunday keeping Christians were not kneeling on Sunday, but it is equally plain that the Sunday keepers were going to the churches and kneeling in worship on the Sabbath. Virtually all Christians, it is evident, were worshipping, one way or another, on the Sabbath day.

A contemporary of Tertullian, a teacher of Alexandria named Origen, though himself a Sunday keeper, is in no doubt as to the virtue of Sabbath observance, and tells just how Christians should observe it. He meant to place this observance of the seventh day by Christians in contrast to Jewish practices, when he said:

"After the festival of the unceasing sacrifice [the crucifixion] is put the second festival of the Sabbath, and it is fitting for whoever is righteous among the saints to keep also the festival of the Sabbath. Which is, indeed, the festival of the Sabbath, except that concerning which the Apostle said, 'There remains therefore a Sabbath, that is, 'a keeping of the Sabbath, to the people of God [Hebrews 4:9]' Forsaking therefore the Judaic observance of the Sabbath, let us see what sort of observance of the Sabbath is expected of the Christian? - On the day of the Sabbath nothing of worldly acts ought to be performed. If therefore you cease from all worldly works, do nothing mundane, but are free for spiritual works, you come to the church, offer the ear for divine readings and discussions, and thoughts of heavenly things, give attention to the future life, keep before your eyes the coming judgment, do not regard present and visible things, but the invisible and the future: this is the observance of the Christian Sabbath."-Homily on Numbers 23, paragraph 4, in *Migne, Patrologia Graeca*, volume 12, columns 749, 750. (Translation by the author.)



An unknown contemporary of Origen, living not far from Alexandria, was also deeply concerned about Sabbath keeping. A papyrus found in Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, in the latter years of the nineteenth century, and dating from about AD 200 or 250, quoted in favor of the Sabbath a supposed saying of Jesus. Although we know Jesus was a Sabbath keeper, and never anything else, we have no record in Scripture of Jesus saying what is attributed to Him in the papyrus. The Saying attributed to Jesus is: "Except you make the Sabbath a real Sabbath ["sabbatize the Sabbath," Creek], you shall not see the Father." - Bernard P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, part 17, Page 3, Logion 2, verso 4-11 (London: Offices of the Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898).

There were evidently Sabbath keeping Christians in Egypt in the third century, who believed that this was really a Saying of Jesus.

There is another early document which describes Christian Sabbath keeping. It is called the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*. This document was not written by the apostles. Everyone recognizes that it was probably composed during the third and fourth centuries. It was evidently a product of writers in the Eastern Church. Its authorship is unknown. The most casual reading of it reveals that in the early centuries both the seventh day Sabbath, and Sunday, the first day of the week, were being observed by Christians.

It stresses Sabbath keeping in book 2, section 5, chapter 36: "Thou shall observe the Sabbath, on account of Him who ceased from His work of creation, but ceased not from His work of providence. It is a rest for meditation of the law, not for idleness of the hands." - *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 7, Page 413.

The *Constitutions* makes provision for Christians to worship God in His house every day, but emphasizes the need of worshipping Him, not only on Sunday, "but principally on the Sabbath day."

"Assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord's house: in the morning saying the sixty-second psalm, and in the evening the hundred and fortieth, but principally on the Sabbath day. And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent Him to us, and condescended to let Him suffer, and raised Him from the dead."-*Ibid.*, book 2, section 7, chapter 59, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 7, Page 423.

In this interesting document is a prayer dedicated to God, which emphasizes both Sabbath and Sunday observance. "O Lord Almighty, Thou has created the world by Christ, and has appointed the Sabbath in memory thereof, because that on that day Thou has made us rest from our works, for the meditation upon Thy laws. He suffered for us by Thy permission, and died, and rose again by Thy power: on which account we solemnly assemble to celebrate the feast of the resurrection on the Lord's day, and rejoice on account of Him who has conquered death, and has brought life and immortality to light. Thou did give them the law or Ten Commandments, which was pronounced by Thy voice and written with Thy hand. Thou did enjoin the observation of the [seventh-day] Sabbath, not affording them an occasion of idleness, but an opportunity of piety, for their knowledge of Thy power, and the prohibition of evils. Having limited them as within an holy circuit for the sake of doctrine, for the rejoicing upon the seventh period." - *Ibid.*, book 7, section 3, chapter 36, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 7, Page 474.

At least one of the contributors to this document, who pretended falsely to write in the name of Peter and Paul, would have felt much at home with a modern five-day week. - He says:

"I Peter and Paul do make the following constitutions. Let the slaves work five days; but on the Sabbath day and the Lord's day let them have leisure to go to church for instruction in, piety. We have said that the Sabbath is on account of the creation, and the Lord's day of the resurrection."-*Ibid.*, book 8, section 4, chapter 33, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 7, Page 495.

Evidently the writers of the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* believed in Sabbath keeping. They kept the Sunday, but they did believe in keeping the Sabbath, and they advocated it.

The Council of Laodicea provided very distinctly, in Canon 16, as previously pointed out, for regular public Sabbath worship. Basil, who is accounted one of the great fathers of the Eastern Church, made the Sabbath day one of the days of the week upon which he celebrated the communion. He says:

"I, indeed, communicate four times a week, on the Lord's day, on Wednesday, on Friday, and on the Sabbath, and on the other days if there is a commemoration of any saint." - Letter 93, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, volume 8, page 179.

Sabbath observance was also common around AD 400 among the monks of the church, especially in the 31

East. There was a man by the name of John Cassian, who traveled extensively among the Eastern monasteries, then moved to France and while in a monastery there wrote two important essays on monastic life. In discussing the way of living followed by the monks, he tells us they observed the Sabbath. He says:

"Wherefore, except Vespers and Nocturns, there are no public services among them in the day except on Saturday [Sabbath] and Sunday, when they meet together at the third hour [nine o'clock] for the purpose of Holy communion." - *Institutes*, book 3, chapter 2, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d Series, volume 11, Page 213.

"On those days, -i. e., on Saturday, [Sabbath] and Sunday, and on holy days, on which it is usual for both dinner and supper to be provided for the brethren, a Psalm is not said in the evening. But they simply make a plain prayer and come to supper, and again, when they rise from it, conclude with prayer alone." - *Ibid.*, book 3, chapter 12, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d Series, Volume 11, Page 218.

Cassian also tells of a hermit whose religious customs show how Sabbath was still being kept:

"He constantly put off taking food until on Saturday [Sabbath] and Sunday he went to church for service and found some stranger whom he brought home at once to his cell." - *Ibid.*, book 5, chapter 26, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series,

volume 11, Page 243. Although Rome sought to establish a contempt for the Sabbath in the West, it was not completely successful in doing this. One of the great bishops of the Western Church was a man by the name of Ambrose, bishop of the church of Milan, in northern Italy, in the latter part of the fourth century. Ambrose was a Sunday keeper, but he ignored Rome's demand that fasting should be practiced on the Sabbath day. Ambrose's biographer, Paulinus, says, in his *Life of St. Ambrose*, chapter 38: "He was constant at prayer day and night: he slept little, and fasted every day, except on the Sabbath and Sunday, on which days only he dined."

Ambrose's disciple Augustine, the great bishop of the church of Hippo in North Africa, who died in the year 430, followed Ambrose's practice in this respect, and did not wish to drive every Christian to fast on Sabbath in compliance with Rome. This is shown in a letter which Augustine wrote to Jerome. It is Letter 82 of his collection, in paragraph 14 of which Augustine says:

"I would esteem it a favor to be informed by your Sincerity, whether any saint, coming from the East to Rome, would be guilty of dissimulation if he fasted on the seventh day of each week, excepting the Saturday [Sabbath] before Easter. For if we say that it is wrong to fast on the seventh day, we shall condemn not only the Church of Rome, but also many other churches, both neighboring and more remote, in which the same custom continues to be observed. If, on the other hand, we pronounce it wrong not to fast on the seventh day, how great is our presumption in censuring so many churches in the East, and by far the greater part of the Christian world!" - In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Volume 1, Page 353, 354.*

Augustine shows here that the Sabbath was observed in his day "in the greater part of the Christian world," and his testimony in this respect is all the more valuable because he himself was an earnest and consistent Sunday keeper. A more remarkable testimony, however, concerning the observance of the Sabbath in the fifth century is that borne by two church historians, Socrates and Sozomen, who died sometime before the year 450. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, book 5, chapter 22, Socrates says:

"For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do, this." - In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2d Series, Volume 2, Page 132.*

A contemporary of his, Sozomen, bears in his *Ecclesiastical History*, book 7, chapter 19, a similar witness:

"The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed at Rome or at Alexandria. There are several cities and villages in Egypt where, contrary to the usage established elsewhere, the people meet together on Sabbath evenings, and, although they have dined previously, partake of the mysteries." - In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, Volume 2, Page 390.* These are revealing statements. Practically all over Christendom Christian people were still, assembling, as late as AD 450, in the churches on the seventh day of the week.

There were two marked exceptions to this. Two churches had once observed the Sabbath, but, under pressure of tradition, had ceased to do so. Alexandria was one. Here the philosophizing teachers had once presided, and through allegorizing interpretation of Scripture, these men had emphasized the keeping of Sunday, as their writings clearly indicate. We see in the defeat of Sabbath keeping a result of their influence, which led the people of Alexandria away from the simplicity of Bible truth.

Rome also, say Socrates and Sozomen, set aside the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath. This was exactly in line with the attitude of Rome toward the commandments of God, and particularly toward the Sabbath. This church has always been consistent in substituting for the commandments of God the precepts of men. It has done the very thing for which Christ condemned so severely the Pharisees of His day. Matthew 15:9, 13. In these two churches the people were led astray from keeping the Sabbath. In almost all other churches the Sabbath was still 32

observed.

How displeasing it must have been then to Pope Gregory of Rome to find in his own territory those who were keeping the Sabbath! In book 13 of his *Epistles*, Letter 1, he says, in great bitterness of soul. It has come to my ears that certain men of perverse spirit have sown among you some things that are wrong and opposed to the holy faith, so as to forbid any work being done on the Sabbath day. What else can I call these but preachers of antichrist?" We can answer Pope Gregory. These were not preachers of antichrist. They were preachers who would obey the commandments of God and serve Christ, who is the Lord of the Sabbath. In emphasizing the Sabbath, they were not preaching a depraved faith, but the very truth of Scripture.

But Gregory was consistent with what Rome was attempting throughout the early centuries and has continued ever since to carry out. Here was the very spirit of the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8,25, which, we are told, shall "think to change times and laws." The revival of true Sabbath observance, which began in the sixteenth century, has been renewed earnestly and determinedly in the last hundred years. The prophecy of Revelation 14:12 speaking of the time of Christ's second advent, says of faithful Christians of that time: "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Today Sabbath keeping people all over the world are fulfilling this scripture in obedience to Christ.

This does not mean keeping some of the commandments, or a few of the commandments, or those commandments one may wish to keep, or the keeping of them in any way one may wish. It means keeping all ten of them, including the fourth, in the way God wants them kept. And there is a people, serving Christ earnestly, successfully, militantly, all over the world, who in the strength of Christ, are doing this. The Sabbath has survived through the centuries because it is the will of God that it should do so.