



## Whose Day is It?

Dynamic 'Body Life' is one of the blessings enjoyed by a biblical local church. And accompanying this is the helpful tensions that sometimes arise. As disagreements surface concerning doctrines and practices we can mature together as we work through the issues, with open Bibles before us, with two open ears standing sentinel over *one* mouth (we should pay attention to God's wise design of the human body — can you imagine if we had two mouths and one ear?!), and with opened hearts to receive one another. This article is an attempt to help us with what is often an ongoing tension in a growing church, the question concerning the responsibilities of the Christian when it comes to the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment and its practical application to the Lord's Day. This has been a major point of discussion this week and so I thought that I would add my two cents worth.

The apostle John '*was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day*' and he received a marvellous revelation of the rule and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev 1:10). We call this the book of 'The Revelation.'

A handful of interpreters (including Ken Gentry) identify this phrase as John speaking in 'the Day of the Lord'. For them the phrase 'the Lord's Day' is a reference to the day of the Lord's judgment (regardless of when they identify this). But the traditional view is most likely correct, that is, the 'Lord's Day' is Sunday, the first day of the week. And so John is informing his readers that he received this revelation which God gave to him concerning Jesus Christ on *Sunday*. John was Spirit filled and Spirit prepared and Spirit privileged to receive this vision on a Sunday. In this verse Sunday is identified as the day which uniquely belongs to the Lord.

A parallel phrase is found in 1 Corinthians 11:20 where what is commonly referred to as 'Communion' is identified as the 'Lord's Supper.' As with the 'Day', so the 'Supper' is the unique property of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus instituted this meal and it is uniquely His. He gets to make the rules for how it is to be observed; likewise with the Lord's Day. It is His day (Hebrews 4:9) and so He gets to make the rules concerning how we are to honour it. Before getting into this it needs to be stated that the revelation of this term ('Lord's Day') is in the context of a book emphasising Christ's Lordship. Since He rules over all we should take care how we treat His Day.

As I have taught for many, many years I have every confidence that the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment (the so called 'Sabbath commandment') is valid for new covenant believers. Jesus did not come to abolish the Law but rather to fulfil it. So I think anyone is very hard-pressed to prove that since the Incarnation somehow there are only 9 commandments left standing. I have read and heard *ad nauseum* that Jesus repeated all of the commandments except the 4<sup>th</sup>. That is unfathomable in the face of the facts. In fact Jesus addressed the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment more than any other commandment! But leaving that aside it is clear that in Hebrews 4 the author is encouraging the new covenant believer that just as the Father entered His rest upon completion of His work thereby instituting a weekly day of rest for His people (4:1-5), so under the new covenant dispensation the Son has entered His rest upon completion of His work. Therefore Christ's people also have a weekly 'day of rest' (4:6-9). I don't know how this can possibly be made any clearer. The 4<sup>th</sup> commandment — thank God! — is ours as well. What a privilege! And what a responsibility.

Before asking the proverbial question, 'What may or may I not do on Sunday?' We must ask a more important one: "How can I make the most of this day?"

If you are looking for 'rules' then you are reading the wrong article. Not that establishing a helpful framework of parameters is either unimportant or unhelpful; it's just not the pressing issue that I want to emphasize.

What is most important is to grasp the main principles that we should respect and practice concerning the Lord's Day. We can sum these up in two words: *Rest* and *Reverence*.

Whether under the old or new covenant, *reverent-rest* is at the heart of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment. The 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, lived out by restful observance on the Lord's Day, is for the purpose of strengthening our experience of spiritual rest in Christ. And so as we enjoy the privilege of physical rest from normal labours we are in a better frame of mind to reflect on the gospel rest of freedom from the guilt of sin. In other words, a proper observance of the Lord's Day enhances the liberty that is ours in Christ.

But rest is not the only principle to keep before us when it comes to the Lord's Day and the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment. *Reverence* is a particularly important issue. In fact I believe that a strong grasping of this principle will help us to wisely make choices concerning how we observe and honour the Lord's Day.

As I mentioned earlier, Sunday is the unique possession of the Lord Jesus. It is *His* Day.

In a dispute about the observance of the Sabbath Jesus claimed His Lordship over it when He said, '*The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath*' (Mark 2:28). Upon His resurrection He rightfully claimed absolute Lordship (Matt 28:18). And one way that He demonstrated this was to claim the day of His resurrection, the first day of the week as uniquely *His*. It is for this reason that the Psalmist wrote, '*This is the day* (the day of Jesus' resurrection) *that the Lord has made and we will rejoice and be glad in it*' (Psalm 118:21-24).

If we properly 'connect the interpretive dots' we see that Revelation 1:10 makes the claim that Sunday belongs to Christ in a very uniquely 'possessive' way. Therefore we are to treat it accordingly.

Again, this revelation concerning Sunday is in the context of a book that more than any other exerts and exults the Lordship of Jesus over all. One of the 'take aways' from this buffet of truth is that we must never treat common what Christ has called special. Sunday is special. *Finis* and *klaar*.

It is for this reason that the Christian should take care to not add to the world's attempt at the secularizing of this day. Generally speaking (for now let's not press the 'exceptions') when we participate in activities on this day that should and could be scheduled for another day, then we are not honouring the Lordship of Christ. However unwittingly, we are contributing to our culture's disregard for the Lordship of Jesus. Adding a prayer and Bible verse or a 'Cross' to a sports or entertainment event on Sunday does not a 'worship experience make.' We should be careful. And before you start hurling epithets like 'legalist!' you might want to ask yourself why a desire to guard the honouring of Christ is necessarily a mischievous and pharisaic quest?

But one more thing is worth mentioning. We should not be aiding others to ignore the Lordship of Christ, at any time, including the Lord's Day. For example as much as I would like an egg and sausage McMuffin on Sunday mornings on my way to church I more so want to be thoughtful. If people did not frequent shops and restaurants on a Sunday then the workers would have no reason to work that day. Is this some iron clad rule that we should all follow? I would answer by another question, do you want others to honour the Lordship of Jesus Christ? How we answer that question may have some interesting economic implications for the Lord's Day.

In conclusion, the next time you need to make a decision concerning what you will or will not do in order to honour the Lord Jesus Christ on *His* Day ask yourself two questions: 1) Will this aid my rest and subsequent reflection on Christ?, and 2) will it promote reverence towards the Lordship of Jesus? Then, before the Lord, either *do* or *don't* do to your hearts content.

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