



WHAT'S REALLY THE
ISSUE
WITH THE
DAY OF
WORSHIP?

UGOCHUKWU ELEMS

What's Really the Issue with the Day of Worship?

The issue of the day of worship is a central theme in the cosmic struggle between God and Satan, righteousness and sin, darkness and light, good and evil. Satan desires to take the place of God in our lives and become the supreme object of our lives. His ultimate plan is to become God (which is eternally impossible) and receive absolute homage/worship from us (2 Thess 2:3-4). To accomplish this goal of usurping God's dominion and rightful place in our hearts, he has made effort change times and laws and confuse the human mind over worship of God (Dan 7:25; 8:9-14).

And because he unlawfully covets our worship, he has been attacking the Sabbath—the day that God has set aside for the human race to worship Him (Mark 2:27). He has set confusion over the day of

worship in so much that even among believers in Christ (Christians) there is dichotomy—some worship on the 7th day (Saturday, the Sabbath), while others worship on the 1st day (Sunday). But the question remains, does it matter to God which day we worship?

We notice something special about the 7th day (Saturday or Sabbath) at creation. After God had created from the 1st (Sunday) day to the 6th day (Friday), He (God) did three special things on the 7th day: He rested, He blessed it, He sanctified it (Genesis 2:1-3). He calls us to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy like He did at creation (Exodus 20:8-11) and to be careful not to do things of our own pleasure and interest on His Sabbath days (Isaiah 58:13). Consequently, God sanctifies us

when we observe the Sabbath according to His command (Ezekiel 20:12).

The Scripture reveals to us that Jesus kept the Sabbath because in Matthew 5:17-19 Jesus declared: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” ESV) Thus, Jesus affirmed the validity and the eternal nature of the law of God (of which the 4th calls us to keep the Sabbath). It was also Jesus’

custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). In fact, Jesus Himself declared that He is the Lord of the Sabbath—the Giver of the Sabbath and Sabbath-keeper per excellence (Mark 2:28).

Jesus also taught His disciples to keep the Sabbath. As they listened to Jesus' teaching about the love of God, the worship of such a loving Father was a natural response of gratitude to Him. But they also observed Jesus by His lifestyle demonstrating all that He taught them including keeping the Sabbath day holy and especially devoting the entire hours of the Sabbath to the worship of God (Luke 4:16-18).

The disciples of Christ followed the example of their Master, Jesus Christ in observing the Sabbath. A typical

demonstration of this conviction was revealed in the manner in which they handled the body of Christ after the crucifixion. Luke 23:50-56 reads: “Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their decision and action; and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud and laid him in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how his body was laid. Then they returned and prepared spices and ointments. *On the Sabbath they*

rested according to the commandment.” (ESV). Observe that Luke says that after they had dressed the body of Christ and put it in the tomb, they all left and rested on the Sabbath “according to the commandment.” As important as Jesus Christ was to His disciples, they would not violate the Sabbath to honor Him, instead, they all left His body in the tomb to observe the Sabbath because Jesus had taught them to value the word of God above all other things in life. This is what Jesus meant in Matthew 6:33 when He said, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (ESV). God’s word, His commands, must always take the first priority in our lives.

After Jesus’ death and ascension into heaven, the Apostles of Christ and the

Early Church (including the believers from Gentile nations) continued to keep the Sabbath. (Acts 13:14-16, 27, 42, 44; Acts 16:13). Luke reports in Acts 17:2, that it was the custom of Apostle Paul to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath like Jesus Christ (Luke 4:16). The Apostles of Christ were careful to observe the Lord's day, the Sabbath as Jesus Himself declared in Mark 2:28. It is no surprise then that even while banished to the isle of Patmos, John was careful to still observe the Lord's day as he reports: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day..." (ESV) Revelation 1:10.

And you may ask, which day of the week is really the Sabbath day? The Bible simply tells us that the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week (Saturday). Dictionaries and Encyclopedia alike affirm that Saturday is the seventh day of the

week. Two historical events (the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ) which are also recorded in the Bible further affirm this fact. History affirms that Jesus was crucified on a Friday, which is celebrated to this day as Good Friday. The Bible calls it the preparation day preceding the Sabbath (Luke 23:50-56). It was for this reason that the disciples of Christ left His body in the tomb so that they would observe the Sabbath according to the commandment of God. And the day following Friday is Saturday. It is also a historical fact that Jesus rose on Sunday, which is also celebrated to this day as Easter Sunday and the Bible calls it the first day of the week (Luke 24:1; Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; John 20:1). And if Sunday is the first day of the week, then Saturday is the seventh day (Sunday, Monday,

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday) of the week.

And when does the Sabbath begin? In Genesis 1, the Bible informs us that the counting of the day begins from evening to morning, thus the phrase “evening and morning” were the first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth day respectively keeps recurring (Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Consequently, according to God’s reckoning, the Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. This is the reason the Apostles of Christ left His body in the tomb on the Friday evening of His death to observe the Sabbath according to the commandment (Luke 23:50-56). Leviticus 23:32 reads: “... from evening to evening shall you keep your Sabbath.”

Another question that may arise in your mind is how do I really keep the Sabbath? One general principle for observing the Sabbath is found in Isaiah 58:13, “If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the Lord honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly” (ESV). Here, the rule is not seeking after or doing things of our pleasure. Another general principle for observing the Sabbath is found in Matthew 12:12, “...So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” (ESV). Christ taught us to do good (such as healing, acts of kindness that bring joy and hope to others) works on the Sabbath day (John 9:14; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 14:1-6). In practical terms, keeping the Sabbath will

include but not limited to avoiding going to do our regular personal businesses or means of livelihood on the Sabbath, going to school on the Sabbath, seeking personal gains and/or amusement, etc.

To achieve this, it certainly calls for preparation. Again, we return to Luke 23:50-56 where the Bible refers to Friday as the preparation day. God requires us to prepare in advance for the Sabbath so that we will enjoy uninterrupted communion with Him during the special hours of the Sabbath. Even in the wilderness, on their way from Egypt to Canaan, God taught Israel lessons on the need for preparation for the Sabbath. When God fed them with manna from heaven, they were instructed to gather only enough for each day. Some people disobeyed and gathered twice to cover for two days but by the next day, the

extra was rotten. However, on Friday, they were instructed to gather twice the quantity to cover for the Sabbath day to avoid going to gather on the Sabbath. However, some people also disobeyed and gathered only for one day and then went back on the Sabbath to gather some manna but found nothing. Interestingly, those who obeyed and gathered twice to cover for the Sabbath had their manna in good condition for food throughout the Sabbath (Exodus 16). Therefore, preparation for the Sabbath is important and necessary.

But does it really matter whether I keep the Sabbath? Obviously YES, because if it did not matter then God Himself would not have instituted it (Gen 2:1-3) and even enshrined it in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). Moreover, in the final messages of the

three angels of Revelation 14:6-12, the first angel calls us to fear, glorify and worship the Creator God who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and springs of water. This message of the first angel alludes to creation and reminds us of how God Himself rested from all His work to mark the Sabbath. The second angel followed and proclaimed the fall of Babylon which represented all false worship. The third angel sounded warning of God's judgement against those who join in the false worship of Babylon and their ultimate destruction. So, it matters that we worship God and it matters that worship Him on the day that He designated from the beginning.

The issue of observing the Sabbath is not a matter of choice, it is a command from God, enshrined as number four in the Ten Commandments: "Remember the

Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” ESV (Exodus 20:8-11). But the Sabbath is also a gift from God to the human race (Ezekiel 20:12; Mark 2:27), to be cherished and enjoyed. It affords us not only a spiritual rest and renewal, but also a physical rejuvenation of strength. And how dearly we need the

Sabbath in this present age of restlessness and stress.

Good news! There are blessings for keeping the Sabbath. These blessings include:

1. To “ride on the heights of the earth” (Isaiah 58:14).
2. To be fed “with the heritage of Jacob your father (Isaiah 58:14).
3. To be sanctified by God (Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12).
4. The Lord Almighty will be your God (Ezekiel 20:20).
5. You and your household, including visitors/strangers will be refreshed (Exodus 23:12).

God is particular about the Sabbath; He does not only require our worship on this sacred day, but demands that our worship must be in spirit and in truth (John

4:23-24). You may have been worshipping God in ignorance of this command to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. There is hope for you; the Scripture reiterates: “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed” (ESV) Acts 17:30-31.

Beloved, there is hope for you even if you had not been remembering the Sabbath to keep it holy; that was in your time of ignorance and God is merciful to forgive you. But now, He calls you to take a step of faith by deciding through the power of the Holy Spirit to keep the Sabbath holy from this moment. Sincerely ask God to forgive you of all your past sins (including not observing the Sabbath

which is the fourth commandment) and prayerfully invite Him into your life as your LORD and personal Savior. Ask for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to be manifested in your life. Perhaps, you have never done this before and wondering how and where to begin. Just begin right where you are. God is present and waiting for you. No special preparation or form is needed, just talk to Him by faith (believing He is) as you would to a friend, and you're already on the way into a journey of everlasting joy and fulfillment. Please, do not procrastinate, **DO IT NOW** and be blessed for the rest of your life.