

The Sabbath – A Commandment for Everybody?

At all times, when God was working in a special way on earth through His Spirit, the desire arose in the hearts of His children to live according to the Word of God and to do everything that He commanded. The Spirit of God awakens this longing in the people through the seriousness of the proclamation of the Word. Almost every time the same biblical questions came up, but the opinions about them differed greatly.

In this examination, we show forth the *biblical* standpoint in regard to the Sabbath and not the viewpoint and doctrine of a particular denomination. Therefore, we adhere solely to what is written in the collective testimony of the Bible. First of all, we have to consider when, for whom, and for what purpose God gave a doctrine or a commandment. It is also absolutely essential to take preferably all of the Scriptures that belong to a subject into consideration.

After completing the work of creation, God rested on the seventh day. *“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.”* (Gen. 2:3).

Despite of the emphasis which was placed on the seventh day, a time period of about two thousand and five hundred years passed from Adam (via Enoch, Noah, Abraham) until the law was given, and that entire time the Sabbath was not mentioned at all.

Only in the law the LORD God declared the Sabbath as a commandment: *“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: **But the seventh day is the sabbath** of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, ... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”* (Exo. 20:8-11).

In Exo. 31:12-17, the Church of Israel is told three times about its obligation to the Sabbath. *“**Verily my sab-***

baths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you ... Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever ...” As we can see, the LORD has obligated His covenant people Israel in a special way in regard to the Sabbath.

So, unto His people Israel, the LORD God decreed **the seventh day** of the week as the day of rest, which has to be sanctified. HE also assigned the seventh year as a “Sabbath year” – a year of rest for Israel: “*And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: **But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat ...***” (Exo. 23:10-11). Likewise, God decreed the fiftieth year as a year of jubilee for His covenant people Israel. **Seven times seven years** should pass and after that followed the year of jubilee. On the day of atonement, the trumpets were to proclaim it: “*And thou shalt **number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.***” (Lev. 25:8-11). The seventh day, the seventh year, and then the year of jubilee were of special significance for Israel.

As we have seen, the LORD God has obligated His covenant people of the Old Testament to the keeping of the Sabbath in a very special way. The LORD Jesus seized every opportunity to speak to those who had gathered to worship on the Sabbath day. HE Himself kept the Sabbath and sanctified it, yet He also saved and healed on the Sabbath, for “... *the Son of man is LORD also of the*

sabbath.” (Lk. 6:5). “*The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath ...*” (Mk. 2:27-28). Therefore, it was permitted to pull out an ox or sheep that had fallen into the well (Lk. 14:5). Also the apostles made use of every opportunity to preach the Word on the Sabbath (Acts 17:2; 18:4).

Shabbat means “rest,” just as shalom means “peace.” God rested after completing the work of creation; and after finishing the work of redemption, He leads His Own into His rest, namely into the peace with God through Jesus Christ, our LORD.

Sadly, the people of Israel to whom the law and the promises actually applied (Rom. 9:4) did not recognize the spiritual meaning that the seventh day foreshadowed. Thus saith the LORD: “*It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways: Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into **my rest.***” (Ps. 95:10-11).

The following reprimand had to be given to all the people of Israel who faithfully kept the Sabbath: “*But they rebelled, and vexed his holy Spirit: therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.*” (Isa. 63:10). To the minority, however, who did not remain in unbelief and disobedience, this Scripture applies: “*As a beast goeth down into the valley, **the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest ...***” (v. 14).

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, ample attention was given to this subject about the true Sabbath rest in chapters 3 and 4, and this in reference to Ps. 95 and in comparison to the covenant people of the Old Testament. We quote in view of the New Testament: “*Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts ... They do always err in their heart ...*” (Heb. 3:7+10). Because of their unbelief and disobedience, they could not enter into God’s rest, even though they kept the Sabbath. Therefore, it is written in chapter 4: “*Let us therefore fear, **lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, ... For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said ...***”

Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, ... Again, he limiteth a certain day – “the day of salvation” (Isa. 49:8; 2. Cor. 6:2), saying in David, **To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.**” (Heb. 4:1-10). Here it does not speak of a “rest on a Sabbath day,” but of a “Sabbath rest,” and that is the rest in God. For just as God rested from His work of creation, so do all children of God rest in Him after the finished work of redemption.

In Heb. 8:7 we read: “*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.*” And it is also written: “*For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, (the law) can never ... make ... perfect.*” (Heb. 10:1). Jesus, our Redeemer, was the answer; only through Him Alone can we reach the goal.

HE calls unto everyone: “*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*” (Mat. 11:28-29).

At the beginning of the New Testament Church, brothers who came to the faith wanted to still live according to the statutes of the law, even in the time of grace. The question arose about what was to be imposed upon the believers from the nations concerning the observance of the law. In this regard, we read in Acts 15:19-20: “*... that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from **pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.***” In verse 28 it becomes evident that this decision was not the opinion of the apostles and elders, but instead, as it is written, “*... it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things ...*”

Paul wrote this in Rom. 14:5: “*One man esteemeth one*

day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.” If it would have been necessary for the believers from the nations, the apostles would have appointed a certain day. However, Paul left it to each one individually and continued: *“He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the LORD ...”* (Rom. 14:6). And whoever does it for the LORD leaves all the others in peace!

It is quite evident that in the doctrine of the apostles (Acts 2:42) nothing was implemented about the keeping of a day. Although Jewish and Gentile believers read the Epistles of Paul in that time, he did not insist on keeping the Sabbath. For the Jews it was a matter of course anyway. Also the feasts retained their significance for them, even in the New Testament. Therefore, Paul hastened to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16).

So, in the New Testament it is no longer about a day of the week, but about the lasting peace with God and eternal rest in God. We are not only close to God and consecrated unto Him on one day, but forever. He dwells in us and has accomplished His work of grace in us. Thus, we have come to rest from our own works and are always resting in the living God. Therefore, it is a “Sabbath rest” and not a “rest on the Sabbath day.” In the first covenant, man needed physical rest on one day; in the New Covenant, he found spiritual rest for the soul on every day. Since the establishment of the Sabbath, everybody could enter into the rest on the Sabbath day. It is, however, about the true rest and peace in God through Jesus Christ, our LORD.

After the founding of the New Testament Church, there is not one indication that the apostles commanded the keeping of the Sabbath in the old way. On the contrary: Led by the Spirit, Paul wrote the following words of admonition: *“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the **sabbath** days ...”* (Col. 2:16-18). This text is very enlightening, in particular the term “judge.” Is it not the case that those who make salvation conditional

on keeping the Sabbath are actually passing judgment? They are denying others the full salvation in Christ and are even classifying them as antichrist. However, according to the Scripture, neither circumcision (Gal. 6:15-16; a. o.) nor the keeping of the Sabbath may be imposed upon the believers from the nations.

It is well-known that the LORD Jesus Christ taught and preached the kingdom of God in the synagogues and in temple on the Sabbath day. Also the apostles, in particular Paul, made use of every opportunity to preach the Word of God to the people on the day of meeting. In Ephesus, Paul preached for two years, at first in the synagogue, but then also in a public lecture hall (Acts 19:8-9). The gospel can be preached on the Sabbath day as well as on a Sunday and on any other day of the week.

When this time period of grace for the New Testament Church runs out, a new epoch begins in connection with Israel; therein, the statutes given by God in reference to the millennial reign of the King are valid on earth. In Isa. 66:23 it therefore states: *“And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the LORD.”* And likewise: *“And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.”* (Zec. 14:16).

All that the LORD God has predetermined for the epoch of the Millennium will also be fulfilled, for it is written: *“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”* (Mat. 5:18).

The Sunday

In the New Testament, there is no explicit commandment to celebrate the Sunday or to set it in place of the Sabbath. Furthermore, in the Bible we only find the designation for the seventh day of the week, which is the Sabbath day. There is no other day mentioned by name. It merely states: *“The first day of the week ...”* (Jn. 20:1). The naming of the days of the week with the various names is of pagan origin, also the “day of the sun” – the Sunday. However, here we are solely interested in the divine significance of the “last” and of the “first day” of the week according to the Holy Scripture; everything else we leave unto the One Who will judge justly.

The gospels testify in unison of the resurrection of the LORD Jesus on the first day of the week, namely the day after the Sabbath: *“Now when Jesus was risen early **the first day of the week ...**”* (Mk. 16:9). Through the resurrection of the LORD, the “first” day of the week obtained its significance, which had already been foreshadowed in the Old Testament. On the same day, the risen One revealed Himself to His Own: *“And, behold, two of them went **that same day** to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs.”* (Lk. 24:13).

With them He had a Bible class that included the entire Old Testament – the law of Moses, the Psalms and Prophets – and gave them the understanding for the Scriptures. On the first day of the week took place: the resurrection; the walk with the two disciples to Emmaus; the entering into the house; the breaking of bread whereby they recognised Him (Lk. 24:13-35); and in the evening the risen One visited His disciples: “Then **the same day** at evening, being **the first day of the week**, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.” (Jn. 20:19).

It is further written: *“And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them ...”* (Jn. 20:26). Why exactly one week later? Why not after three

or five days? What a privilege that we are not taught by men, but by the Word of God! Not only the disciples were led by God in such a way to gather on the first day of the week, but also Paul, for it is written: **“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread ...”** (Acts 20:7). It is so wonderful to look at the Scriptures while being led by the Holy Spirit! Paul was breaking bread with the saints on the day after the Sabbath; by that he followed the example of the LORD, Who broke the bread after the resurrection in Emmaus for the first time on the first day of the week. And we celebrate it during the worship service, be it on a Saturday or on a Sunday, until He comes (1. Cor. 11:26).

Since Paul was led by the Holy Spirit to emphasize that they should assemble on the first day after the Sabbath, then this has a specific significance. He could have simply written: “We gathered for the breaking of bread,” without mentioning the first day of the week. Also herein the wisdom of God is justified in His children. When we now assemble on the first day after the Sabbath for observing the Word, for fellowship, for prayer, and for the breaking of the bread, then it is most certainly in accordance with the practice of the LORD and of the apostles and thus in the Will of God. By the way, the fire of the Spirit was burning so mightily in the first Christians and the Spirit revived them that they made every day a meeting day: **“And *daily* in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”** (Acts 5:42).

We can also see that Paul particularly emphasized the first day of the week by his instruction that the collection for the saints was to be taken on that day: **“*Upon the first day of the week* let every one of you lay by him in store ...”** (1. Cor. 16:2). We cannot help but believe as the Scripture says, namely that every matter shall be founded upon two or three witnesses. The faithful LORD has provided for His people in this regard as well. HE gave the instructions for this day already in the Old Testament. In Lev. 23:7 it is written: **“*In the first day* ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile**

work therein.” In verse 10 it states: “... *and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a **sheaf of the firstfruits** of your harvest unto the priest ... **on the morrow after the sabbath** the priest shall wave it.” (vv. 10-11). The sheaf of the firstfruit was weaved by the priest on the day after the Sabbath. What a mighty indication that is for the harvest of souls of the New Testament flock of the first-born!*

The priest had to weave the sheaf before the LORD on the first day of the week. It is easy to understand what is meant by the term “weave”: The individual blades were intertwined and thus produced something whole – a sheaf (Ps. 126:5-6). Jesus Christ is the “first-born,” and the Church of the New Testament are the “first-born,” namely His body. All members are joined together by the head and with one another. HE was the grain of wheat (Jn. 12:24) that fell into the ground, and His Own are the ripe wheat that is harvested and gathered into the heavenly garner (Mat. 3:12).

In the Old Testament it was the priest who weaved the natural sheaf. In the New Testament it is Jesus Christ, the High Priest of our confession, who weaves the first-born as a sheaf of the firstfruit purchased from the earth – in Him we live and are and have our being (Acts 17:28).

The significance of the “first day” shines forth for all those who truly want to see it. “*And ye shall count unto you from the **morrow after the sabbath**, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave-offering; seven sabbaths **shall be completed: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath** ...” (Lev. 23:15-16). In these words the precise calculation for the infilling of the first-born with the Holy Spirit is described. Seven times seven – forty-nine days were to pass; the following day is the day of Pentecost, namely the fiftieth day. Exactly on the fiftieth day after Christ victoriously rose from the dead as the firstfruit, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit took place. It happened on the day that followed the 7. Sabbath. Thus the resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit were appointed by God Himself already*

in the Old Testament to be on the first day of the week.

Not only the resurrection, but also the outpouring of the Holy Spirit happened according to the Scriptures on the day after the Sabbath. Who would object against such clear and true statements of the Scripture? Whoever does not believe every Word the way it is written and instead tries to make the statements of the Scripture fit his own opinions has not understood the language of God. Anyone who goes against the collective testimony of the Scripture does not believe what the Word says, but rather his own interpretation.

The Mark of the Beast

In some denominations there is the doctrine which claims that all those who have their worship services on Sunday and not on the Sabbath, as required by the law, are part of the antichrist system. They refer to Rev. 14:6-13 and declare, “Whoever holds services on Sundays has the mark of the beast and will be tormented for all eternity.” This is a terrible, arbitrary interpretation, not only because it is false – for there it does not say anything about Sunday – but because it distracts from what it is really all about. When the subject is as crucial as the one about the mark of the beast, namely about the direct sign of the antichrist, then that is all the more reason to consult all of the Scriptures which address that matter and thus produce an absolute, biblical denominator. Any private interpretation of a Scripture is the work of the enemy. The revelation of the true meaning is a necessity; it emerges only from the collectiveness of all the Scriptures that pertain to it.

Rev. 13:11-18 provides the information about end-time events and also that the mark of the beast is “the number of a man,” not the number of a day. The number of the “superman” was even calculated for us: 666. Since the reformation, it has been identified as VICARIUS FILII DEI and directly applied to the papacy.

There is not a single Scripture which states that some-

one who preaches on a Sunday or takes part in a service has the mark of the beast. And there is not a single passage which in any way insinuates that all those who keep the Sabbath have the seal of God, as some people claim. These are teachings of men and, in fact, entirely unbiblical. According to the Scriptures, the seal of God is placed on the true believers by the Holy Ghost (2. Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13; Eph. 4:30).

The alleged basis of the argument is the Word from Dan. 7, verse 25. However, it is taken out of context, for it refers to the predetermined end time in which the people of Israel are delivered unto the antichrist for three and half years after breaking the covenant (Dan. 9:27). *“And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think **to change times and laws**: and they shall be given into his hand until **a time and times and the dividing of time**.”* Daniel did not see what concerns the Church, but what would take place with Israel (Dan. 10:14).

One has to read every Bible text in its entirety and leave it in the context in which it actually belongs. For instance, when one reads Dan. 7:23-27, he can clearly see that it is about the last time period of the 3 ½ years of the tribulation, after which the millennial reign starts: *“And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High ...”* (v. 27). In reference to the time span for Israel, during which it is also about the mark of the beast, it states: *“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the LORD from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”* (Rev. 14:12-13).

The assertion that the Sunday was established by the Catholic Church is incorrect. The first day of the week was already the meeting day of our risen LORD, the apostles, and of the believers in the early church.

The designation “day of the sun,” however, is of pagan origin; therefore, the name chosen for the first day is indeed unbiblical, but not the day itself. True is that the hatred against the Jews by the developing state church in the third century was getting so strong that they finally cursed them as murderers of Christ and rejected them together with the Sabbath. In the year 321, even before the state church existed as an organisation, the emperor Constantine issued the decree wherein he forbade the Jews to keep the Sabbath and imposed the Sunday as the day of worship for them also. For all citizens in the Roman Empire, the Sunday was introduced as the obligatory day of worship. That is how God’s Old Testament people had their Sabbath taken away, which had been chosen for them by God Himself, thus leaving them with a moral dilemma and exposing them to persecution, banishment, and even death. This decree, however, goes back to the instigation by men of the church and is absolutely condemnable. On the other hand, nobody has the right to cause a moral dilemma for the Church from the nations for the sake of the Sabbath. We were not obligated to the Sabbath nor to the Sunday, but were pardoned and are living in the liberty of the children of God.

Furthermore, whoever declares the Sunday to be the “day of the LORD” is spiritually blind. Throughout the entire Old Testament and New Testament, “the day of the LORD” is described manifold (Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20; a. o.). It states that the sun shall turn into darkness and the moon into blood before “the day of the LORD” comes. “The day of the LORD” will come as a thief in the night (1. Ths. 5:1-3; a. o.). Rev. 1:10 also refers to it, and not to the Sunday. On the isle of Patmos, John did not see what would happen on a Sunday, but what would take place on the “day of the LORD,” as described in the subsequent chapters.

It is very noteworthy that God did not want to bring forth Messianic Jews from the nations, but children of God who are led by the Spirit of God. Certainly, nobody should try to have Jews become Gentile Christians either. Actually, there are neither “Messianic Jews”

nor “Gentile Christians” – there are only Jewish and Gentile believers of the Bible who are born again and have become children of God. Everything has to be left in the divine order.

Although those who celebrate the Sabbath as the seventh day appointed by God do so seriously and sincerely, they thereby have only the letter of the law, but not the revelation about the entering into the rest that was given to God’s people by His grace.

There is nothing else left but to hope that everybody understands what was shown forth here in a few words. Not many should become teachers (Jas. 3:1). God Himself has set into His Church apostles, prophets, and teachers (1. Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11) who today teach exactly what was taught in the original Christianity. Every biblical subject was sufficiently dealt with in the Scripture. Paul could say of himself that he was set as a teacher (1. Tim. 2:7; 2. Tim. 1:11). Likewise we know that all true servants of God preached the doctrine of the apostles according to the Scriptures, just as it was decreed for the New Testament Church. Everybody should hold fast to what was left unto us clear and true in the Scriptures and should forget every interpretation. Blessed is the preacher who applies the Word of truth correctly and all who rightly believe it!

There was a time without a Sabbath until the law was given. There was the time of Israel with the Sabbath. Now we are in the time span of the Church; thereafter comes the millennial reign with the King in the Millennium. May the LORD God give grace that only he teaches who was taught by God and only he speaks to whom the LORD has spoken through His Word, which alone gives clarity. May all hear only what the Spirit of God says through the Word of God.

When the Bible speaks so clearly about a subject, the letter is nevertheless insufficient; everything always has to be revealed by the Spirit. It does not make sense at all to waste time with arguments and discussions. Whoever does not allow himself be taught by the Word

is unteachable. We can only say: “May Israel as God’s people of the Old Covenant do what God said to them. And may God’s people of the New Covenant do what was left unto us in the Word since the founding of the New Testament Church.” Blessed be the people of Israel and blessed be the Church of God from all nations in the Name of the LORD Jesus Christ!

Let us respect the divine order for the New Testament Church in faith and practice as set forth by the Apostles of the LORD. “*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*” (Acts 2:42). Amen.

*

If you are interested in receiving our literature, you may write to the address below:

Mission Center
P.O. Box 100707
47707 Krefeld
Germany

You can also tune in on the Internet for our monthly meetings on the first weekend of each month: on Saturday evening at 19:30 h (Central European Time), on Sunday morning at 10:00 h (Central European Time). The sermons can be heard in twelve different languages worldwide. The Zurich meetings can be accessed online on the last Sunday of every month at 14:00 h (Central European Time) and are available in German and French. Have part in what God is presently doing according to His Plan of Salvation!

Homepage: <http://www.freie-volksmission.de>

E-mail: volksmission@gmx.de or
E.Frank@freie-volksmission.de

Phone: +49-2151/545151
Fax: +49-2151/951293

© by the author and publisher E. Frank
