

## **Jesus and the Sabbath Controversy (John 5:16-23)**

**By Pastor Jeff Alexander (3/1/2015)**

### **Introduction**

1. The occasion: The healing of the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda (vv. 1-15)
2. The problem: Jesus healed this man on the Sabbath (vv. 9, 16), I believe, to provoke the Jews (Matt. 12:5; Luke 13:14; and others).

### **I. Jesus' Response**

“Jesus answered them, ‘My Father [has been and is still] working until now, and I am working’” (v. 17) .

- a. A strange response? Answers why Jesus healed the lame man.

This statement is set in contrast to the Sabbath: “The seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work” (Exodus 20:10).

- b. Turning the Tables: Jesus did not justify or explain His reasons for violating the Jewish Sabbath rules. Instead, Jesus was informing the Jews that not only were they not in charge of enforcing Sabbath rules, they were not qualified to judge (John 5:38; comp. v. 24).

### **II. The Lord of the Sabbath**

1. Jesus alone had authority to speak and act concerning the Sabbath.

Matt. 12:8; Mark 2:28; and Luke 6:5 reveal that “the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.” They would come into His judgment (v. 22; note v. 45).

2. Jesus alone has authority to judge disobedience with respect to the Sabbath (v. 27; Son of Man is a reference to Daniel 7:13, 14).
3. Jesus expects All people to obey Him. Jesus is the one who gave Moses the commandment that reads, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”
4. Jesus indicted the Jews with five reasons why they, not He, were in the wrong (vv. 30-47).

(1) They rejected the witness of truth; (2) They gave evidence that they were not the Father's (v. 42, “But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.) This is a reference to God's elective love. (3) They received only those that came in their own name; (4) They sought approval from each other, not God. Loving obedience to God did not drive their conduct but they lived for the approval they got from each other (5) They were accused and condemned by Moses, on whom they set their hope. Moses wrote of Jesus and since they refused Jesus, they were guilty of rejecting Moses also.

### **III. Three Questions**

1. Why do Christians worship on Sunday (the first day) and not Saturday (the last day)?

The early church gave the Lord's Day the same duty that was given to the Sabbath Day. Sunday is the Christian Sabbath.

What makes Sunday the Lord's Day? Two instances of *the Lord's*—the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20) and the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10). Christ owns the supper by virtue of His death and He owns the Sabbath by virtue of His resurrection.

As the Old Covenant Sabbath pointed back to the creation and God's resting on His finished work, the New Covenant Sabbath points forward to the New Creation resting on Christ's finished work. The Sabbath is the eschatological pledge of the eternal state that began with Jesus' resurrection.

2. Why do Christians believe that it is no longer necessary to observe a Sabbath day?

Many modern evangelical protestants show disdain for belief in a Christian Sabbath. They present many arguments against it. I believe that we still have Ten Commandments, not nine (note Isaiah 11:10; 56:1-7).

Is the Lord's Day the New Covenant Sabbath? I believe that it is. As Eusebius declared, "All things whatsoever that it was the duty to do on the Sabbath we have transferred to the Lord's Day." Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. If the Sabbath was to be abrogated, why would Jesus declare His authority over it?

3. Why do most Christians tend to treat Sunday as just another day?

They see Sabbath observance as legalistic and not gracious. Contrary, the Sabbath is a love issue, not for rule keeping (note Exodus 20:6 and *hesed*, elective covenant love).

Sabbath observance interferes too much with self. It is simply asking too much that we give one day each week to serious devotion to God. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8). That day was given to us in order that "you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you" (Ex. 31:13).

The writer warned, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts". The weekly Sabbath-rest points to that eternal rest that believers' have "now, but not yet." Read; Failing to reach God's rest is not a failure of doing. It is a failure of relating to Christ, of knowing Him, walking with Him, loving Him, worshipping Him, serving Him, and growing to be like Him. As the Israelites hardened their hearts in rebellion, provoking God by straying from His will for them, let us not do the same (Hebrews 3:7-11; 4:1, 9,10). Let us honor the Son" (John 5:23; 14:15).

### Conclusion

The 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, chapter 22, paragraphs 7, 8.

The following is a chart to simply illustrate the difference between Old and New Covenant Sabbaths:

