

Tradition vs: Truth

What Do You Really Believe?

By Wesley White
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History tells us that the Soviet government, as it ruled Russia for over 60 years, did everything in its power to repress religion. And while it is almost universally agreed that this state-imposed attempt at national atheism epitomized all the wrongs of government oppression, few are aware of how unbiblically pathetic the state of religion was in Russia **before** the Communists took over that country.

W. Bruce Lincoln has written in considerable detail about life in Russia before the Revolution of 1917. One of his books on this subject, *In War's Dark Shadow*, points out many of the incredibly ignorant beliefs held by that Orthodox nation's citizens.

The common Russian in the early 1900's didn't believe that the God of the Bible was the only supernatural being who needed to be acknowledged and accommodated. Most peasants also believed in *vodianye*, water sprites who lived in rivers; *leshnie*, woods goblins who made travelers lose their way; and *domovoi*, little demons who lived inside a housewife's oven and caused her pies to burn and her bread not to rise.

"To protect themselves and their families against cholera...peasant women were known to assemble in the dead of night and parade half-naked around the outskirts of their village...in an effort to keep [out] the demons who bore the disease...Most could not recite the Lord's Prayer...and were equally ignorant about all other aspects of Christian doctrine." A favorite expression among the people was, "Light a candle to God, but light one to the Devil too. You never know" (page 62).

True understanding of God's written Word was uncommon because superstition and ignorance reigned among the masses.

And what about the Russian nobility and intelligentsia? Were their beliefs any more in line with the Bible? Not really. A large part of the upper classes sought divine truth in mysticism, séances, Ouija boards, and witchcraft. Religious ignorance was one of the reasons a “holy man” named Gregory Rasputin was able to dominate Tsar Nicholas II and his wife, the empress Alexandra.

At first glance, a Christian today might look back at such beliefs with amazement and disdain. Surely, the blending of such obvious paganism with Bible teachings is repugnant to one who follows Jesus of Nazareth. But how correct are the beliefs of those who profess to be Christian today? Is it possible that many teachings and actions of contemporary religious people are just as erroneous as those held by Russian peasants, nobles, and rulers who lived in the early part of the twentieth century?

Let’s Examine the Weekly Sabbath

One subject that should be examined by all professing Christians is the Sabbath. Many erroneously assume that Sunday is the Christian day of rest simply because this is the day that most churches assemble to worship. Others claim there is no particular day of worship because we should have Jesus in our hearts seven days a week.

But is this what the Bible teaches? Is it possible to separate the teachings of men from what God’s Word says? Some seem not to be capable of making this distinction. Others won’t even try to determine if their beliefs are synonymous with the Bible. After all, such an endeavor requires effort and too many are unwilling to search the Scriptures for understanding.

How about you? Are you willing to take the challenge? Will you look into this subject with an open mind and with no preconceived notions? Are you able to ignore tradition and rely solely on the Bible? Let’s give it a try.

We begin our study by going to the first mention of the Sabbath in the Bible.

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 2:2-3).

Notice that God blessed the seventh day. Some might say, “God blessed only that particular seventh day—the one that was right at the end of Creation week. He didn’t bless every seventh day afterward.” But this goes against what was written by Moses not long after the Israelites left Egypt so they could become God’s obedient people. They were instructed to do the following:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all they 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 (Exodus 20:8-11).

These two Scriptures clearly show that that Sabbath was not a mere one-time event in the very first days of the earth's existence. Also, these two Scriptures show that Sabbath observance was not some law only for ancient Israel. No, the Sabbath was instituted for *all* mankind for *all* times.

Is this hard for you to accept? If so, how about this fact? Jesus kept the Sabbath!

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read (Luke 4:16).

Did Jesus Do Away With the Sabbath?

Many erroneously believe that Jesus' disagreements with the Pharisees were due to His attempts to do away with the Sabbath. Nothing could be further from the truth. When Jesus debated the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath, it was always over what *men had added to the Law regarding the Sabbath*. Jesus never claimed that the Sabbath command itself had been done away or would soon be done away.

Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Jesus instructed a man to pick up a bed roll (similar to a sleeping bag) on the Sabbath. He told His disciples to distribute servings of grain on the Sabbath. None of this was contrary to any part of the Old Testament or New Testament. It was only contrary to the traditions of the Pharisees.

Jesus showed reverence for the Sabbath. He talked of it in a positive way. And He proclaimed Himself to be Lord of the Sabbath.

And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; Therefore the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28)

When Jesus said that the Sabbath was made for man and not vice versa, He was telling us that the Sabbath should be a joy for us—that we shouldn't add burdensome restrictions to it. God instructs us to abstain from working on the Sabbath so we can rest and be refreshed. He wants us to delight in the Sabbath. But the Pharisees wanted to dictate their will to others by going into great detail about

what could and couldn't be done on the Sabbath. They established strict rules on Sabbath observance. Their list of rules went on for many, many pages. These rules were extra-biblical and Jesus' point of disagreement with the Pharisees was their unnecessary and harsh rules.

Jesus showed that we should have compassion on people as well as animals when it comes to the Sabbath.

And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days (Matthew 12:11-12).

Jesus also talked about the Sabbath in the future tense. He knew that His true followers would not abandon Sabbath day observance after His death and resurrection. He told His followers that there would come a day when Jerusalem would be attacked by outside armies. This took place in 70 A.D. just as Jesus had predicted.

But pray that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day (Matthew 24:20).

Jesus knew that those who accepted and truly obeyed Him after His death would not accept another day of worship, but would instead keep the Sabbath day as instructed throughout Scripture.

Did the Apostles Change the Sabbath?

But what about the apostles? Didn't they change the Sabbath to the first day of the week? Absolutely not!

Paul preached on the Sabbath to Jews and Gentiles "as his manner was" (Acts 17:2; 18:4). Paul and Barnabus taught as a team on the Sabbath (Acts 13:14-15). And, as if this was not enough, they returned the next Sabbath to preach to this group. Only this time, the whole city came to hear them (verse 44).

In Acts 18:3-4 once again we find Paul teaching both Jews and Gentiles on the Sabbath. Not Sunday, but the Sabbath.

Many have tried to use Bible verses to demonstrate that the Sabbath got changed to the first day of the week. Not so. In the New Testament, there are eight instances where the phrase "first day of the week" is used. But none of these Scriptures states that the first day of the week had replaced the seventh day Sabbath. Here are those eight Scriptures:

Matthew 28:1
Mark 16:2
Mark 16:9
Luke 24:1
John 20:1
John 20:19
Acts 20:7
I Corinthians 16:2

So how did the professing Christian churches end up keeping the first day of the week instead of the Sabbath?

This change did not happen overnight. We clearly see in the New Testament that the early church kept the seventh day Sabbath. But anti-Semitism in the Roman world began to influence various churches. Some started believing that Christians should not follow the examples of the Jews in areas such as Sabbath-keeping. Keeping the Sabbath was no easy thing in the Roman Empire because, from time-to-time, many things considered Jewish were outlawed--observances such as Sabbath keeping, circumcision, and animal sacrifices.

As a result, many Christians (especially in the areas near Rome) tried to clearly demonstrate that they were not Jewish to the secular authorities. The best way a Christian could convince Roman rulers that he was not Jewish was to work on the Sabbath. Subsequently, these professing Christians found it convenient to worship on Sunday, which was already a day of worship for many in the Roman Empire.

Finally, in the fourth century, the Roman emperor, Constantine, proclaimed Christianity as the official religion of the state. He also proclaimed the first day of the week to be the day of weekly observance for all Christians. Did Constantine have the authority to make this proclamation on behalf of Christianity? No.

And did future Christians reject Constantine's unbiblical proclamation? Unfortunately, very few did. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches blindly accepted Constantine's wrong doctrine. Following the Reformation, most Protestant churches have done the same thing. This is why the law of man, so contrary to the Word of God, is so widely accepted in the churches of this world today.

One of God's admonitions to the Israelites was to not be swayed by the teachings of the heathen nations around them. He instructed them to not become curious about how other gods were worshipped. And they were told emphatically not to embrace any of those non-biblical ways. (Deuteronomy 12:30). Jesus warned us that it is quite possible to worship Him in vain (Matthew 7:21; Mark 7:7-8; I John 2:4; I John 5:2).

Important Questions

Let us continue with our challenge to you. Listed below are some questions for you to answer. After you answer each question, go to the Scripture listed next to the question to see if your answer was correct. Does the Bible say...

- 1) God blessed the Sabbath or Sunday? (Genesis 2:3)
- 2) God hallowed the Sabbath or Sunday? (Exodus 20:11)
- 3) God commands Sabbath keeping or Sunday keeping? (Exodus 20:8-11)
- 4) God rested on the Sabbath or Sunday? (Exodus 20:11)
- 5) God calls the Sabbath or Sunday a holy day? (Isaiah 58:13)
- 6) God offers a reward for Sabbath keeping or Sunday keeping? (Isaiah 58:13-14)
- 7) Will the Sabbath or Sunday be kept in the Millennium? (Isaiah 66:23)
- 8) Was it Jesus' custom to keep the Sabbath or Sunday? (Luke 4:16)
- 9) Was it Paul's manner to worship on the Sabbath or Sunday? (Acts 16:13; 17:2)

Finally, let's challenge you with the following: Where can you find a Scripture which says...

- 1) The Ten Commandments are abolished.
- 2) The Fourth Commandment is abolished.
- 3) The Sabbath was changed from the seventh day of the week to the first day of the week.
- 4) We are to keep the first day of the week in honor of the resurrection of Jesus.
- 5) The first day of the week was sanctified and hallowed as a day of rest.
- 6) The first day of the week is called holy.

If you search the entirety of your Bible, you will find that **there are no such Scriptures to support any of the above six statements because no such verses exist!**

Admissions of Sunday-Keeping Churches!

Finally, now that we have studied what the Bible really says about the seventh-day Sabbath, let's see what the churches of this world say about why they refuse to obey God and observe his Sabbath.

The Bible Sabbath Association of Fairfield, Oklahoma, has researched this subject and come up with the following fascinating quotes. These admissions are from several major Christian denominations. Read for yourself their own words as to why they refuse to observe the seventh-day Sabbath and instead keep Sunday.

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Baptist

"There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day, but that Sabbath day was not Sunday...It will be said, however, and with some show of triumph, that the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week...Where can the record of such a transaction be found? Not in the New Testament--absolutely not. There is no scriptural evidence of the change of the Sabbath institution from the seventh to the first day of the week.

"To me it seems unaccountable that Jesus, during three years' intercourse with His disciples, often conversing with them upon the Sabbath question...never alluded to any transference of the day; also, that during forty days of His resurrection life, no such thing was intimated.

"Of course, I quite well know that Sunday did come into use in early Christian history as a religious day, as we learn from the Christian Fathers and other sources. But what a pity that it comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, when adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy in protestantism." Dr. Edward T. Hiscox, The Baptist Manual.

Lutheran

"But they err in teaching that Sunday has taken the place of the Old Testament Sabbath and therefore must be kept as the seventh day had to be kept by the children of Israel. In other words, they insist that Sunday is the divinely appointed New Testament Sabbath, and so they endeavor to enforce the sabbatical observance of Sunday by so-called blue laws...These churches err in their teaching, for scripture has in no way ordained the first day of the week in place of the Sabbath.

There is simply no law in the New Testament to that effect." John T. Mueller, Sabbath or Sunday.

"The festival of Sunday, like all other festivals, was always only a human ordinance." Augustus Neander, History of the Christian Religion and Church.

Methodist

"Take the matter of Sunday. There are indications in the New Testament as to how the church came to keep the first day of the week as its day of worship, but there is no passage telling Christians to keep that day, or to transfer the Jewish Sabbath to that day." Harris Franklin Rall, Christian Advocate.

"The reason we observe the first day instead of the seventh is based on no positive command. One will search the Scriptures in vain for authority for changing from the seventh day to the first. The early Christian began to worship on the first day of the week because Jesus rose from the dead on that day. By and by, this day of worship was made also a day of rest, a legal holiday. This took place in the year 321.

"Our Christian Sabbath, therefore, is not a matter of positive command. It is a gift of the church." Clovis G. Chappell, Ten Rules For Living.

Mormon

"...It cannot be made out clearly and positively that Jesus or the apostles by direct, official action authorized the observance of the first day of the week as a day of public worship, dedicated to the service of God, and designed to take the place of the Jewish Sabbath. The most that can be claimed for the evidence here adduced--and it is the strongest if not all that can be marshaled in support of the proposition--is that it is PROBABLE that such a change was instituted." Brigham H. Roberts, The Lord's Day.

Episcopal

"Is there any command in the New Testament to change the day of weekly rest from Saturday to Sunday? None." Manual of Christian Doctrine.

"Where are we told in Scripture that we are to keep the first day at all? We are commanded to keep the seventh; but we are nowhere commanded to keep the

first day...The reason why we keep the first day of the week holy instead of the seventh is for the same reason that we observe many other things, not because the Bible, but because the church has enjoined it. "We have made the change from the seventh day to the first day...on the authority of the one holy Catholic Church." Isaac Williams, Plain Sermons on the Catechism.

Catholic

"We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church, in the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 336), transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday." Peter Geiermann, The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine.

"From this same Catholic Church you have accepted your Sunday, and that Sunday, as the Lord's day, she has handed down as a tradition; and the entire Protestant world has accepted it as tradition, for you have not an iota of Scripture to establish it. Therefore that which you have accepted as your rule of faith, inadequate as it of course is, as well as your Sunday, you have accepted on the authority of the Roman Catholic Church." D. B. Ray, The Papal Controversy.

Non-Denominational

"Eight times we hear in Acts of what happened on the seventh day Sabbath, but only once of the day that supposedly eclipses it in importance...Luke's description of the church at Jerusalem speaks of the apostles' teaching, the Lord's supper, fellowship of goods, temple worship, the growth of the church in numbers, the miracles that were worked, the praying that was done, and even of the joy that was experienced (2:42-47), but in all this there is not the barest hint of the inauguration or observance of Sunday!...We must conclude that it is barely imaginable that first-day Sabbath observance commenced before the Jerusalem council. Nor can we stop there; we must go on to maintain that first-day Sabbath observance cannot easily be understood as a phenomenon of the apostolic age or of apostolic authority at all." M. Max B. Turner, "The Sabbath, Sunday, and the Law in Luke/Acts," From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation.

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So, how have you done with this challenge? Are you willing to disregard the teachings of men and instead obey what God has inspired to be written in His Scriptures?

Beyond a Shadow of Doubt

1,500 years ago, people believed *beyond a shadow of a doubt* that the sun revolved around the earth. We now know better.

500 years ago, people believed *beyond a shadow of a doubt* that the earth was flat. We now know better.

30 minutes ago, you probably believed *beyond a shadow of a doubt* that the Sabbath was done away with and replaced by the Lord's Day. **You now know better!** What are you going to do with God's truth that has been given to you?

It is our hope that you will prayerfully study God's Word so you can worship Him in spirit and in truth. Let's eliminate superstition, ignorance, and the teachings of men from our lives. Praise God for His precious Scriptures and for His Son who died for our sins.

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