

# Proper Lord's Day Observance

Susquehanna Valley Mennonite Church  
December 20, 2020

The purpose of this study is to help us find out what kind of Sunday activities we as Christians should engage in to please our Heavenly Father. As disciples of Jesus, we know that we have been called to deny ourselves and take up our cross to follow Christ. How does that look on a Sunday morning, afternoon, and evening?

We can no longer look for direction to the culture around us. Historically North America (Western culture) had a history of enacting Blue Laws, or laws about what is and what is not allowed to do on Sunday. But new laws have been made, largely reversing earlier laws of the land. This year (2020), in Pennsylvania, hunters are now given liberty to go hunting on three Sundays. (Nov. 15 for archery deer hunting, Nov. 22 for bear, and Nov. 29 for deer with rifle.) This changes a long-standing tradition of regarding Sunday to be a special day with normal activities to be forbidden. (See the display for a sample of Ontario "Blue Laws" from 1911.)

Another challenge comes from those who insist that giving regard to Sunday is a sign of apostasy, or even

**SUNDAY LAWS**  
In Force in the Province of Ontario

**PROHIBIT**

1. **LABOR.** With certain exceptions this includes:  
(a) THE WORK OF LABORERS, MECHANICS and MANUFACTURERS.  
(b) ALL FARM WORK, such as SEEDING, HARVESTING, FENCING, DITCHING.  
(c) WORK ON RAILWAYS, such as BUILDING and CONSTRUCTION, and also REPAIR WORK, except in emergencies, and TRAFFIC, excepting the forwarding of PASSENGER and CERTAIN FREIGHT TRAINS.  
(d) ALL BUILDING, TEAMING, DRIVING FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES, THE WORK OF BAKERS and BARBERS, Etc.  
(e) THE WORK OF MUSICIANS and PAID PERFORMERS of ANY KIND. Works of necessity and mercy excepted.

2. **BUSINESS.** It is unlawful to MAKE CONTRACTS or to BUY, SELL or DELIVER ANYTHING on Sunday, including LIQUORS, CIGARS, NEWSPAPERS, Etc. Generally speaking the only exceptions are DELIVERING PASSENGERS' BAGGAGE, MILK for domestic use, and SUPPLYING MEALS and MEDICINES.

3. **ALL GAMES, RACES OR OTHER SPORTS FOR MONEY OR PRIZES,** or which are noisy, or at which a fee is charged, and the business of AMUSEMENT or ENTERTAINMENT.

4. **ALL EXCURSIONS** for hire and with the object of pleasure, by TRAIN, STEAMER or OTHER CONVEYANCE.

5. **ADVERTISING** in Canada, unlawful things to take place on Sunday, either in Canada or across the line.

6. **IMPORTING, SELLING or DISTRIBUTING FOREIGN NEWSPAPERS** on Sunday.

7. **ALL GAMBLING, TIPPLING, USING PROFANE LANGUAGE,** and all other acts which disturb the public quiet.

8. **ALL PUBLIC MEETINGS,** except in Churches.

9. **HUNTING, SHOOTING, FISHING;** also **BATHING** in any public place or in sight of a place of public worship, or private residence.

THE PENALTY IS FROM \$1.00 TO \$500.00

**THE GAME LAW**

Of the Province makes Sunday a CLOSE SEASON for all GAME and HUNTING and SHOOTING UNLAWFUL on that day.

THE PENALTY IS FROM \$5.00 TO \$25.00

accepting the mark of the beast. Why have we shifted from worship on the Sabbath to the first day of the week?

These are all questions we'd like to answer in this little treatise, using the outline of 1. The Creation of the Sabbath, 2. The Change from Sabbath to Lord's Day and 3. The Consistent Commemoration of the Lord's Day.

## I. The Creation of the Sabbath.

In the Biblical account of Creation, we find why the Sabbath is special to our Creator and why it should be special to us. In each of the following verses, a different aspect of our Creator and His plan for us is brought out.

- Genesis 2:1-3 On this day God "ended" His work, nothing more created after this. "He rested from all His work..." and then He blessed (to hold in reverence or honor) the day and sanctified (to set apart or to hallow) it. In the word "rested" we get the idea of repose and reflection or meditation, a very important element for our mental, emotional and spiritual health.
- Exodus 31:12-17 As a part of the law covenant that God made with the Children of Israel, God instituted a strict observance of this day. He declared it "holy" and "everyone that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people." This was to be "...throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant..." as "a perpetual sign between me and the children of Israel forever..." In honor of this principle, God sent manna in the wilderness every other day, but sent none on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:25-30)
- Deuteronomy 5:12-15 links the strong observance of the Sabbath day to the miraculous deliverance God brought in delivering Israel from Egypt.
- Nehemiah 13:15-22 shows the revival effort of the returned captives under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra. The strong observance of the laws of Shabbat today reveals the continuation of their vision.

Observant Jews today cease to do any form of labor. Their testimony is "On Shabbat we also strive to bring God's presence into this world. We remove ourselves from creating in order to reaffirm that we do not have mastery over our lives. Someone else is in charge."

## II. The Change from Sabbath to Lord's Day

First, let us affirm that this change is not because of pagan influence or because of the authoritarianism of the Catholic popery. The early church did not go from apostolic purity into paganism immediately. But the early church did immediately transition into gatherings for worship on the first day of the week. Let's go back and consider the transition from the Mosaic covenant to the Covenant of Grace in Christ.

We do need to answer the question, "What changed as we have moved from the Old Testament into the New?" Some things from the Old Testament remain, some have changed.

- The covenants God made with Noah (Genesis 9:1-17) Abraham (Genesis 17:1-8 and Romans 11) and David (2 Samuel 7:12-17) have not changed.
- The history of God's work with His people has not changed. These things are "written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4) and the things that God's people went through "happened unto them for ensamples and they are written for our admonition..." (1

Corinthians 10:11)

- The prophecies given by the Old Testament prophets have not changed. They are a “more sure word” (2 Peter 1:19) than personal revelation or vision. We are to “be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets...” (3:2)

But **the law has been done away with**. 2 Corinthians 3 instructs us that even the ten commandments written and engraven in stones is done away (v7-11). The message of the book of Galatians is that if we endeavor to enforce any of the law’s commands we make the entire work of Christ of none effect. (Galatians 2:21; 3:10; 4:9-11; 5:1-5) Not only is the covenant through keeping the law replaced, but there is also danger in making any of those regulations binding for us today.

So where do institutions such as Sabbath stand? Issues such as a day of worship and tithing predate the giving of the law. Even though the way they were regulated under Moses’ law is taken away, the institutions themselves remain valid today.

Even while Jesus lived on the earth He constantly confronted the Pharisees and their practice of the Sabbath. Ultimately this confrontation led to His crucifixion. In Matthew 12:1-13 He defended His disciples picking wheat to eat as they passed through the wheatfield. He claimed that as the Son of Man He was Lord, even of the Sabbath. He healed a man with a withered hand right in the synagogue in the middle of their worship service. His declaration that echoes down through time is that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28) In this setting the scriptures record that Jesus “looked on them with anger” when the Pharisees set this trap for Him. (Mark 3:5)

As Jesus moved away from a Pharisee approach to a day of rest, it is no surprise that Jesus chose the first day of the week for His resurrection (Mark 16:9); that all of his dated appearances to the disciples were on the first day of the week (John 20:19); and that He sent the Holy Spirit to them on the day we know as Sunday (Acts 2:1). It is also no surprise that recorded gatherings of disciples for worship were all on this day (Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2).

### III. The Consistent Commemoration of the Lord’s Day

Let us sum up what we have learned. The principle of one day in seven being holy unto the Lord is established from Creation. The rigid observance of the Sabbath is part of the Mosaic covenant that is done away with. How then can we honor our Lord Jesus on the day He has made special for us?

One of the Old Testament passages that shows us the heart of God is Isaiah 58. In this teaching, we discover the heart of God is not the rigid observance of laws so we can earn credits to get our way, but rather to have a heart that is full of love for Him that spills over into blessing relationships with our fellow man.

In this chapter, the prophet Isaiah calls us to use the Sabbath to:

- turn away from doing our pleasure on God’s holy day,
- to call the Sabbath a delight
- to honor our Lord with this day
- to avoid speaking our own ways on this day.

The fact of the matter is the New Testament does not tell us what we shall or shall not do on this day. God knew His people would find themselves in climates where the sun does not rise and set in a way that makes sunset to sunset a well defined day. He knew the gospel would go to cultures where it is well nigh impossible to take Sunday off. We thank God we are given this freedom yet in our culture.

But the guiding question is, how can I honor God with His holy day? What activities will steal the day from God? How can I show Him that I treasure and honor Him? Did God know what the Jews did with their day in Isaiah’s time? Of course He did. And He knows where our hearts are too.

We know how to honor fellow human beings. If you work for a boss who likes a clean floor, but you’d rather be pulling wrenches, you choose to keep the floor clean to honor the boss! You have a child with a birthday and you want to honor him, you will not serve olives at his birthday supper if he despises olives! Rather you will choose foods that please his taste buds. If you wish to honor a family with a fellowship meal who is about to serve a term in the foreign field, you will not take your projector and set it up to show slides of your last vacation.

No, in both of these situations you ask yourself, “What service could we yield that would hold them up in honor? What activities could we be involved in that would please them?”

Now, let’s think about what makes our Lord Jesus happy on the “Lord’s day?” What can we do that honors Him? We honor our Lord Jesus:

1. By choosing to worship at His house on Sunday. As we gather into the house of the Lord to study His Word and to listen to His messengers preach His Truth, it is almost like recreating the Garden of Eden. Jesus says He will be in our midst and we enjoy our fellowship with Him. Let’s choose to visit other congregations on Sunday evening too.
2. By endeavoring to avoid unnecessary spending on the Lord’s day.
3. By limiting our work to only necessary activities.
  - What about visiting tourist attractions that charge entrance fees?
  - What about reading secular magazines? Buying on Amazon? What about researching for personal business?
  - What about doing extra study for personal advancement?
  - What about renting equipment to a neighbor for his use on the Lord’s Day?
4. By resting and meditating on the Lord’s day.
  - What about family play activities?
  - Vigorous youth play? Ice skating? Swimming? Scouting the woods for hunting? Fishing? 4-wheeling? Snowmobiling?
5. By serving humanity with their spiritual and physical needs on this day.
6. By following Jesus’ example. “How much of my Sunday is the Lord’s? Is it really the Lord’s day? Or is it really ‘my day’?”

What I choose to do on Sunday reveals my attitude toward my Creator and my Savior. The religious world of our day has adopted the view that God is some distant grandfather figure who is quite permissive in overlooking sin and selfishness. That is not the God of the Bible! The God our Bible describes is a jealous God, who craves the loyalty and affection of all His subjects. Let’s make this a day centered on honoring Him.

H. Stephen Ebersole