First Century Fellowship Ministry

A Biblical Church of God

The Fourth Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work, you nor your son, nor your daughter, your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your livestock, nor the stranger within your gates; for in six days the Lord made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and sanctified it.
(Exodus 20; 8-11)

Keep the Sabbath day to sanctify it as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work, you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your livestock, nor your stranger within your gates, so that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you. And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.
(Deuteronomy 5: 12-15)

Then the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the hosts of them. And by the beginning of the seventh day God finished 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 on it He rested from all His work which God had created and made. (Genesis 2: 1-3).

As we can see by these verses from Genesis 2 the weekly Sabbath was created by God from the very beginning of creation. There were no Jews or Catholics or Protestants or Muslims. Just the God family, Adam and Eve and the created animals. We can say with all authority that God instituted the seventh day Sabbath at creation and, as we see in His inspired word, the Holy Bible, Old and New Testament, He has not changed it nor granted ANY person OR human institution the authority to change it.

The Sabbath command is so important to our God that some 2500 years later He codified it by telling the children of Israel, all twelve tribes, and then writing it as the fourth of the Ten Commandments onto tablets. (He etched them in stone for all eternity).

The weekly seventh day Sabbath (Shabbat) is the covenant sign between God and his children forever. It identifies His people. During their captivity in Egypt the children of Israel forgot their ways of worship. After they left Egypt, God through Moses began to renew their holy ways. Exodus 16 shows God introducing Sabbath keeping to the children of Israel. He, God, had heard their murmurings against Moses and Aaron. The congregation had accused them of taking the whole congregation out of Egypt into the wilderness to starve them.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from the heavens for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain amount every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall come to pass on the sixth day, they shall prepare what they bring in. And it shall be twice as much as they gather day by day." (Exodus 16: 4-5). This set the stage for the Sabbath. They were to gather and prepare on the sixth day an amount that would allow them to rest on the seventh day.

In Exodus 31: 12-18 Moses was on Mt. Sanai conferring with the Lord Who said, "Speak also to the children of Israel, saying, 'Truly you shall keep my Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and

you throughout your generations to know that I am the Lord Who sanctifies you. You shall keep the Sabbath therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone that defiles it shall surely be put to death, for whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested, and was refreshed.'" And He gave to Moses, when He had made an end of speaking with him upon Mount Sanai, two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God. God told Moses, to speak unto the children of Israel (again, this included all 12 tribes and not all were Jews) telling them, in verse 16, to keep God's Sabbaths because it was to be a sign between God and them throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. (See also, Isaiah 58:13-14).

From the beginning the days were numbered, 1 through 7. Naming of the days did not come until many centuries later when they were named after pagan gods. From Genesis forward the seventh day Sabbath was always on the seventh day. (Gen 2:23; Exodus 31:12-17; Lev 23:3). Nowhere in the Bible does it change this OR grant any man or church the authority to do so. Neither does it teach to keep any other day of the seven holy. No one has that divine authority except God.

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until the heaven and the earth shall pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no way pass from the Law until everything has been fulfilled." (Mathew 5:17-18).

The seventh day is to be observed as the Sabbath day of rest. Not the sixth day, Friday or the first day, Sunday, regardless of the human reasoning behind it. These are days decided by and

set aside by man, not God. Mark 2:27-28, 6:2; John 9:14; Acts 16:13, 17:2, 18:4; Heb 4:4, all New Testament verses, speak of the Sabbath as observed by Jesus and the disciples. Jesus observed the seventh day Sabbath, as was his custom. Jesus started His ministry on a Sabbath, Luke 4:16-21. Paul also taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath, Acts 17:1-2, 18:4.

In the New Testament the Pharisees challenged Jesus on the Sabbath keeping of Him and the apostle's saying what they were doing was not lawful, "And He said to 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; Matthew 12:8).

The true church of God led by His apostles, the one He formed on Pentecost after His resurrection (Acts 2), kept and taught the seventh day Sabbath, and all of God's annual Sabbaths, to Jew and Gentile alike. (Acts 13:42).

As time went on we saw aspects of pagan sun worship and pagan holidays were combined with the worship of God of the Bible. Jesus told His disciples to beware of these things. In the Olivet Prophecy, Matthew 24, verses 3-5 "... His disciples came to Him alone, saying, "Tell us when these things shall be? And what shall be the sign of Your coming, and the completion of the age?" Jesus' first comment to them was, "Be on guard, so that no one deceives you. For many shall come in My name, saying 'I am the Christ'; and they shall deceive many." Earlier, in Matthew 7:15-16, Jesus warned, "But beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, for within they are ravening wolves. You shall know them by their fruits." They will proclaim their authority and falsely claim it is from Christ.

Sunday Worship Replaces True Sabbath

By the third century the way of worshipping the God of the Bible was quite unlike that practiced in the first century by Jesus and the Apostles. By the beginning of the fourth century what

was called Christianity was far from the original Christianity and faith practiced by the disciples of Christ described in the Bible. They had almost completely abandoned the original ways of the true Christian worship handed down by the Apostles.

In the beginning of the fourth century the most notable of these was Constantine the Great. Although Emperor Constantine is said to be the first Christian Emperor of the Roman Empire he made a political decision to unify the Empire by implementing his form of Christianity. Not long after taking power in 306 A.D. open worship of all gods was allowed. Because of this Christian's could again openly worship. Most of the empire was pagan and worshipped a number of pagan gods. Constantine had worshipped the sun god Apollo, most of his life. It also made the transition easier because much of the empire had pagan roots and worshipped sun gods. He blended the worship of the God of the Bible with the existing leading pagan Roman sun god, Sol Invictus, who was brought to prominence in Rome by Emperor Aurelian (270-275 A.D.) This was the all-inclusive title of the sun gods Mithra and Apollo, among others, who had been worshipped throughout the Middle East and Egypt for centuries before Christ.

In 321 AD Constantine, by decree, ordered that Sunday would be the day of rest in the empire. No longer would Christians be allowed to rest or celebrate Sabbath on the seventh day. They, and all the empire had to observe the first day, Sunday, as the day of rest and no one was allowed to rest on Saturday, the true seventh day Sabbath. The pagan Romans had little problem with this because they were already worshipping on *Sun*day, the day of the sun. *Christianizing* a pagan day of worship and calling it the Sabbath and requiring all to obey and keep it.

Constantine had assembled a council of Christian bishops who were of his choosing. Most came from areas of the empire that had been mixing Christianity and paganism for years. The group would expand the practice to *Christianize* other pagan holy days.

In 325 AD the Council of Nicaea, presided over by Constantine, declared Passover would be observed on the first

Sunday after the full moon, on or after the Vernal Equinox. He, a man, therefore changed the memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ. He declared it was to be always on a Sunday and to be called Easter. This would work to honor another pagan goddess, the fertility god, Astarte/Ishtar. There are no records that show the first century church ever celebrating Easter. He changed it to man's time, not Gods. These, and the institution of Christmas, December 25th, the birthday of Sol Invictus, the pagan sun god, as the day to celebrate the birth of Christ, are some of the early universal churches "achievements". The church that Constantine "founded" was called the universal (Catholic) church. Later known as the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Church. (Note: Above information taken from, The History of the Church, by Eusebius; The History of the Christian Church, by Phillip Schaff; Time is the Ally of Deceit, by Richard Rives; and The Holy Bible In Its Original Order, a Faithful Version, by Fred R. Coulter).

In February 1893 the Seventh-day Adventists filed papers that condemned the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court for invading the rights of the people by closing the World's Fair on Sunday. As a result, the Catholic Mirror of Baltimore, MD published a 4 part series on the Sabbath. The Catholic Mirror was the official organ of James Cardinal Gibbons and the Papacy of the United States.

The series began on September 2, 1893 and ran on successive Saturdays, 9th, 16th and 23rd. Their main argument was that the Seventh-day Adventist kept the Biblical Sabbath of the seventh day, as did the Jews. In the first installment they felt, "(t)he Christian world is, morally speaking, united on the question and practice of worshipping God on the *first day of the week*." They then went on to state, "The Protestant world has been, from its infancy, in the sixteenth century, in thorough accord with the Catholic Church, in keeping "holy", not Saturday, but Sunday.

Both the Protestants and the Seventh-day Adventists had as part of their belief systems the Bible as the "infallible" teacher.

This appeared to be the spark that would allow the Catholic Church to go after the 300 year old question that was raised by Martin Luther, among others. The Catholic Mirror stated, "No Protestant living today has ever yet obeyed that command, preferring to follow the apostate church referred to than his teacher the Bible, which from Genesis to Revelation, *teaches no other doctrine,* should the Israelites and Seventh-day Adventists be correct."

The Catholic Mirror went on in the next two issues, September 9th and 16th, 1893 stating the same message, there is no Biblical authority in the Old or New Testament that does away with the seventh day as the God ordained day of rest. They stated in the September 9th edition, "In the Old Testament, reference is made one hundred and twenty-six times to the Sabbath, and all these texts conspire harmoniously in voicing the will of God commanding the seventh day to be kept, because God Himself *first kept it,* making it obligatory on all as "*perpetual covenant*." Nor can we imagine any one foolhardy enough to question the identity of Saturday with the Sabbath or seventh day, seeing that the people of Israel have been keeping the Saturday from the giving of the law, A.M. 2514 to A.D. 1893, a period of 3383 years. (Note: Coming up to our time it is 3506 years).

The Catholic Mirror is stating that if you are in fact a Bible following Christian, you should be keeping the seventh day Sabbath. They acknowledge there is no scriptural authority, given or found, to change it. The Old Testament chosen people kept it. Jesus and the apostle's kept it and gave no indication through their actions it had changed.

In the September 16th edition shows a couple of references to Sunday. One was the gathering together of the apostles in Jerusalem on Sunday after Jesus was resurrected, Luke 24:33-40, and in John 20:19 when, later that same evening Jesus appeared to them. The Catholic Mirror gives theses verses no other credence except to say some may try to use this as a

reason for departing from the old Sabbath, by keeping holy the new day, Sunday.

In the September 23rd, and final edition on this matter, the Catholic Mirror refers to, "the Day of the Lord" or "Lord's Day". Again they site the end time scriptures and are scripturally correct when they describe these days as when the Lord returns, the second coming of Christ. They do list the original fourth commandment as their third because they deleted the true third commandment dealing with graven images. The section titled, Conclusion, gives a summary of all the issues they have so accurately detailed in the previous three editions.

The next heading in the Catholic Mirror article is,

Sunday As Day of Worship Is Catholic Creation

"Before closing this series of articles, we beg to call the attention of our readers once more to our caption, introductory of each; viz., 1. The Christian Sabbath (Catholic Sunday), [is] the genuine offspring of the union of the Holy Spirit with the Catholic Church His spouse. 2. The claim of Protestantism to any part therein proved to be groundless, self-contradictory, and suicidal.

The first proposition needs little proof. The Catholic Church for over one thousand years before the existence of a Protestant, by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday. We say by virtue of her divine mission, because He who called Himself the "Lord of the Sabbath", endowed her with His own power to teach, "he that heareth you, heareth Me"; commanded all who believe in Him to hear her, under penalty of being placed with the "heathen and publican"; and promised to be with her to the end of the world. She holds her charter as teacher from Him-a charter as infallible as perpetual." I will tell you, there is also no scriptural foundation for this claim. None. God never gave any human or human institution the ability to alter His Supreme Law.

How Do We Worship In Spirit and Truth?

Now that we have the history out of the way, let's find out how we are to devote time to the spiritual issues of our lives. We never seem to have enough time to pray, let alone worship for any length of time.

As you probably surmised from the history section how and when we are to worship has become quite confusing. The way we approach this commandment and how we implement it in our lives is a powerful factor in bringing us closer to our Creator God, His blessings and guidance.

The fourth commandment seems to be the one of the ten that man try's his best to justify not keeping as God intended and commanded. Many treat it as the least of the commandments. They try to ignore it and treat it as irrelevant. They feel it has been replaced by Sunday. Look at what we have already learned.

Notice how God starts this commandment, "*remember".* He started this way to remind us that it had already been revealed. It has been with us since creation as we saw in Genesis 2: 1-3. Also remember how days are reckoned in the Bible, sunset to sunset. The Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday evening and ends at sunset on Saturday evening.

The Sabbath day was set aside to remind us that our Creator God is the one true God. It sets aside a specific day, the seventh, so we may commune with Him on a regular basis. It shapes the way we perceive Him and worship Him. His command is simple, remember the Sabbath by formally acknowledging and worshipping Him on the day He commands.

This time is perfect for developing and refining our spiritual relationship with Him. Even though the commandment states it is a day of rest from our normal activities, it is not a day to do nothing. God intends it to be a productive and delightful period where we will draw closer to Him. "If you turn your foot away from the Sabbath, from doing your own desires on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable; and shall

honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor pursuing your own desires, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; and I will cause you to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed you with the inheritance of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it." (Isaiah 58:13-14). Think of this, stop our labor and normal, hectic lifestyles for a specific, commanded period of time and delight ourselves in the Lord. The Pharisees had compiled 1,521 regulations to cover every aspect of Sabbath conduct making it far from the delight it was intended to be. Keeping the Sabbath allows us time to know our Creator God and devote our attention to Him. It is a constant reminder to us that we are His creation, in His image, and He is the Creator of all things. "By faith we understand that the worlds were created by the word of God, so that the things that are seen were made from things that are invisible." (Hebrews 11:3).

God rested from the physical part of creation but He never rests from the spiritual part. He is continuing to shape and mold us and move us closer to His divine character.

It is a time when His true follower's fellowship with and grow closer to one another. "And let us be concerned about one another, and be stirring up one another unto love and good works; Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, even as some are accustomed to do; but rather, encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24-25).

We, as believers, carry God's purpose to the rest of the world by our example. Our witness to the world is demonstrated by how we live our lives. By the example we set. This is nurtured by our continued observance of the weekly Sabbath. It keeps us focused and in tune with our Creator. Jesus refers to the Sabbath in a very specific way, it is **the** Sabbath, not a Sabbath. It was a gift to all of us, all of mankind. It was set at creation as a blessing for mankind as a physical and spiritual rest. "…, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; Therefore, the Son of man is the Lord of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27-28).

God did four things on the first Sabbath, He ended His work; He rested from physical creation; He blessed the seventh day; He sanctified the seventh day. Jesus and God the Father continue to work although in a different sense. Now it is spiritual, creating us in their image. When the Pharisees became enraged at Jesus for the way He kept the Sabbath, "Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I work." (John 5:17). The spiritual aspect began with the creation of the Sabbath and continues on. The Sabbath being a special time of spiritual activity that God uses to prepare His children for His Kingdom.

On the Sabbath we are blessed and empowered by God with the Holy Spirit to follow His way. "It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever; for in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed." (Exodus 31:17). So we also see that the weekly Sabbath is a covenant sign between God and His people. Remember, this was given to the children of Israel and as part of the New Covenant we are part of spiritual Israel. It is the bond that unites all of God's people and sanctifies them from everyone else.

Notice above that the Deuteronomy 5 reading of the fourth commandment is a little different than that in Exodus 20. (It's underlined, above). "And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." (Deuteronomy 5:15). He is reminding us we were slaves and are now free. This is another aspect of keeping the Sabbath, we are reminded of our Creator God and how He loves and protects us when we obey His commandments, the law of liberty.

Our example in Sabbath keeping is Jesus Christ. He is Lord of the Sabbath and, was present with God the Father at creation, John 1:1-10. We are told to keep the Sabbath holy but not much else is specifically given. This is where the example of Jesus comes in. "For I have given you an example, to show that you also

should do exactly as I have done to you." (John 13:15). He has given us a foundation, a starting point, to judge our Sabbath activity. He has given us broad principles and wants us to consider how we should apply them.

Think of the New Covenant in which Jesus "magnified" the law. We are no longer held to the letter of the law but are now to be aware of the spirit of the law. It serves as a constant renewal of our spiritual heritage from God and of our subsequent release from sin.

Jesus had been challenged by the Jewish authorities, specifically the Pharisees, about the way and the manner in which He conducted Himself on the Sabbath. In almost every instance Jesus was healing someone. They asked, "…, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbaths? So that they might accuse Him. But He said to them, "What man is there among you who, if he has one sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?" (Matthew 12:11-12). The Pharisees were attempting to judge Jesus by their burdensome regulations. Jesus was not attempting to do away with or change the Sabbath, He was trying to steer it back to His original intent by breaking their misinterpretation of the intent.

He expands this in Mark 3:3-4, "Then He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Stand up here in the center." And He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbaths or to do evil? To save life, or to kill?" But they were silent."

God gave us the Sabbath to free us from chronic problems of human nature. He wants us to remember we were slaves to sin and are now free. He wants us to do good on the Sabbath when we can and not to fail to do good when the situation arises. If we fail, we are not keeping the spirit of the law.

Also included in the spirit is to show compassion towards and help those in need. He showed us that He was freeing people from their burdens, infirmities, and expects us to do the same. Remember the second great command, love your neighbor as yourself. God works on the Sabbath. He is continually doing

spiritual work. He is working towards His final purpose, the ultimate salvation of mankind. He is healing, forgiving, and loosening burdens all in the realm of His goal. The Sabbath is a day to work for the salvation of ourselves and our fellow man, spiritually and physically.

God intends that His Law ensures life and relieves burdens. If we have to do something on a Sabbath that would not be normally accepted, what is our intent? If we can lawfully keep it in the same light as Jesus, our example, we will be alright. Intent over letter. This does not mean that every week we find something else to do on the Sabbath, but it does allow for that unforeseen circumstance.

Situations will arise from time to time where we will need guidance. Faithful Sabbath keeping and growing in the knowledge of the scriptures will end up being our best guide.