

**A RESPONSE TO THE FORMER POPE, BENEDICT'S XV1 CALL FOR SUNDAY THE  
LORD'S DAY TO BE A DAY OF REST FOR THE FAMILY**

**A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE**

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## Introduction:

I agree with the former Pope Benedict XVI's call for "the family to have a day of rest and an opportunity to strengthen family ties." Albeit I have my reservations and doubts with it being associated with 'The Lords Day', and that day officially being Sunday. The question is which day is the "Lord's Day"? The aim of this critical response is to establish from a Biblical perspective the basis for this argument. It is my desire to present the information in an open and forthright manner, so that a correct Biblical explanation can be ascertained regarding this important topic. I intend to **discuss** Revelation 1:10 in the context of varied Biblical interpretations; and seek also to **give** a brief historical account of why Sunday is being acknowledged as the Lord's Day; to **define** key questions such as, "how do we know which day is the Lord's Day?"; to **state what** is the purpose of the Lord's Day; **and finally** conclude by evaluating the evidence.

## Which Day is the Lord's Day?

My starting point is to attribute the Biblical understanding of God as Creator of the universe... our God is unique and His uniqueness makes Him invincible. This uniqueness<sup>1</sup> of God not only involved the fact that He is our Creator and we are His creatures, but that Creation is the first divine act revealed to humanity, without which any meaningful point of view can be known about God (Genesis 1:1). Therefore the Lord's Day begins with God and creation. Since God is Creator He is also "Holy." This distinguishes Him from His creatures and consequently points to His uniqueness. He calls His creatures to holiness (Leviticus 19:2), this includes ethical and moral regeneration. Since He also desires to have fellowship with us, He sanctified a specific time (the Seventh-day Sabbath) the Lord's Day for fellowship and holiness. It is within this framework of Biblical explanations that I will discuss several points about the topic.

Scriptural evidence confirms that God has a **Day**. From the beginning of the world, at the time of creation, when God created every living thing and filled the earth (**including humans**), after six days He saw that it was good. He established the Seventh day Sabbath as a memorial of His creation. God blessed the Seventh day Sabbath and rested from all His work; He sanctified it and made it holy (See Genesis 2:1-3; KJV).

In Mark 2: 27-28 (NIV) Jesus Christ declared that, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." According to St. John Chapter 1, the Word was with God from the beginning. "All things were made by Him" (John 1:1-3, KJV). Thus way back in Eden before the fall of Adam and Eve, and certainly before the Jewish nation, the Sabbath had been established and kept, **thereby dispelling** the myth that the Sabbath was made only for the Jews. God the Son was the active agent. He created all things including the Sabbath. Therefore, He was saying that **He is** Lord even of the Sabbath. For that reason, the Sabbath **must be** the Lord's Day. In Revelation 1:10, the apostle John declared "I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet." John being exiled from his fellow brethren and almost from the world recognised the he was not exiled from God, or the Holy Spirit. **He acknowledged** that he was in the presence of a Holy God and had communion with Him. When he expressed that "he was in the spirit" this **seemingly denoted** a higher status of spiritual elevation to which a person can aspire to by the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

**When** he was speaking about the Lord's Day, that day was the Sabbath or the Lord's Day. In Isaiah 58:13, God declared "it's my holy day." Smith (1897) in his work on Daniel and Revelation argues that four explanations were given for the "Lord's Day."

The first suggested that the Lord's Day had no specific twenty four hour day meaning, but covered the whole gospel dispensation. However if this was the case, then the writer John exiled on the Island of Patmos, having the experience of being in the spirit on the Lord's Day, did not have a real existence, but a symbolic or mystical one, and this is not admissible.

The second interpretation made reference to the Lord's Day as the day of judgement **or** the "future day of the Lord" (Ibid.p.185), which has so often been referred to in the scriptures. According to Maxwell et. al. (1985) this second claim has been disproved, for while John might have had a vision concerning the day of judgement, he could not have had one on that day when it is yet in the future. Very confusing I know, but it's a contradiction of the language used, making it to mean "concerning", instead of "on", at which time anything takes place.

**The third** and most popular explanation given for the Lord's Day is the first day of the week, a day which many in Christendom acknowledge as their day of communal worship. What is the evidence for this claim? The text in Revelation 1:10 did not define the Lord's Day as the first day of the week, and there is no Biblical evidence to support this claim. **The** first day of the week was mentioned only eight times in Scripture. Inspired writers like Matthew, Mark, Luke and Paul<sup>2</sup> who spoke of the first day of the week, never distinguished it above the other days but simply as "the first day of the week."<sup>3</sup> The first six references all alluded to events connected with Christ's resurrection. While Acts 20:8 reported a special meeting held by the apostle Paul at Troas and this was a night meeting, as the day begun at sunset, according to biblical sources (Lev. 23:32; Mark 1:32 KJV). This meeting was on what we call Saturday night. Paul walked nineteen miles to Assos the next day which was Sunday. A collection for the poor brethren was to be kept by at home and had no reference to any public meeting. None of these scripture references attributed any sacredness to any other day except the Seventh day Sabbath.

The three positions already examined having been disproved, the fourth - that by the Lord's Day is meant the Sabbath of the Lord - now demands attention. This will be discussed under the next question heading; How do we know which day is the Lord's Day? Before I do this, it is important to give a brief historical account of why Sunday is being acknowledged as the Lord's Day.

### **A Brief Historical Account of Sunday Observance.**

Is Sunday the Lord's Day? How did Sunday observance come into being? Who changed the day of worship from Saturday the Seventh day of the week to Sunday the first day of the week? We have seen from scriptural evidence that Sunday is not the Lord's Day. Sunday is not even mentioned in the Bible. There is no Biblical justification for observing Sunday as the day of rest and worship. Significant evidence was unearthed for Sunday observance, following the turn of the first century. This change was gradual and continued along with the observance of the Seventh Day Sabbath.

Several factors prompted this change, but the three most prominent are anti-Judaism, sun worship and the influence of the church in Rome.<sup>4</sup>

During the early years of Christianity, many Christians were persecuted for their faith; to escape religious persecution many would worship under the canopy of "Judaism" in order to exist. However, after the second rebellion in A.D. 135<sup>4</sup> Hadrian, the emperor at the time made Jerusalem a colony of Rome, excluding all Christians and Jews operating under the Jewish faith. He outlawed "Judaism" practices altogether and especially Sabbath keeping throughout the empire. What's more, Christian agitators began a theology of separation and contempt towards the Jews, producing anti-Jewish literature about many Jewish customs such as circumcision and observance of the Jewish Sabbath. Earliest records of such literature was found in ancient documents called the "Epistle to the Magnesians" written by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch. Sometime in the first century A.D. he wrote;

"If we are still practising Judaism, we admit that we have not received God's favour."<sup>5</sup>

The Epistle of Barnabas, written in Alexandria in A.D. 130-138 talks of the observance of the "eighth day" a useful and popular interpretation for the first day of the week. The author's main argument for the observance of the "eighth day" was opposition to Judaism; in this the Jews were classified as "*wretched people whom God abandoned because they killed His prophets and crucified Christ.*"<sup>4</sup> Justin Martyr another influential Christian who lived in Rome around the second century A.D. also endorsed observance of the first day of the week and opposed observance of the Jewish Sabbath; this was encouraged by his bitter hatred for the Jews.<sup>4</sup> Above all the socio-political and religious upheaval at that time, would also explain why many Christians worshipping under the umbrella of Judaism, began to change their mode of worship. It did not explain why a number of Christians began to observe Sunday as the day of worship, rather than another day such as Friday, the day of Christ's crucifixion. The most plausible explanation given for this change was the influence of sun worship or "Sun Day". At that time the sun was often used as a symbol to represent Christ. The cult of 'Sol Invictus' the "Invincible Sun" became the dominant factor in Rome and other parts of the empire during the early half of the second century A.D.<sup>4</sup>

A number of Christians adopted sun's day as the day of worship, demonstrating to pagan Rome their acceptance of Roman practices and their rejection of the Jewish Sabbath. Whatever their motives the leaders of the early church used the "motif of light and the sun to justify their observance of Sunday; they argued that on this day the light of the world appeared, and on this day the sun of Justice (Jesus Christ) has risen."<sup>4</sup> For these reasons they argued, a valid substitution was provided for the Sabbath, above all it provided them with *raison d'être* for Biblical mysteries by means of symbols familiar to the pagan mind. Equally the Church of Rome changed the basic functions of the Jewish Sabbath feasting day to a day of fasting so that all Christians may express sorrow for Christ's death, and to show contempt for the Jews and their Sabbath feasting.<sup>4</sup> There is no doubt that Sunday observance originated in Rome in the early part of second century A.D.135. In Daniel 7:25 the text establishes the fact that this power would "think to change times and laws."<sup>6</sup>

The pagan church was already worshiping the sun or Sunday. The church leaders compromised by changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday hoping it would encourage the pagans to go to church and worship with the Christians on the same day, and thus it would separate them from the Jews and their Sabbath observance. It worked, the pagans came by the thousand, and Satan's plan of compromise was working. The people were told that they were worshiping on Sunday because it was a day for celebrating Jesus resurrection from the dead. Even though there was no Biblical evidence to support the change, that's what the people were told. This process of change was gradual, although many of the faithful Christians were alarmed. The changes were initiated by the Church of Rome. The following declarations were made by church administrators and are outlined as follows:

*"Question- Have you any other way of proving that the church (Roman Catholic) has power to institute festivals of precept."*

*"Answer- Had she not such power, she could not have done that in which all modern religionists agree with her- she could not have substituted the observance of Sunday the first day of the week from Saturday the seventh day, a change for which there is no scriptural authority." (A Doctrinal Catechism, by Stephen Keenan, pg 174).*

This is incredible; *"The Catholic church declared Cardinal Gibbons, by virtue of her divine mission changes the day from Saturday to Sunday" (Marcussen, National Sunday Law, 1983).*

Again these questions were asked of the church;

*"Question – Which is the Sabbath day?"*

*"Answer – Saturday is the Sabbath day"*

*"Question – Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday?"*

*"Answer – We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church in the council of Laodicea (A.D.364) transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday" (the Converts Catechism of Catholic Doctrine, pg 50, third edition).*

This is amazing; there is no biblical justification for observing Sunday the first day of the week as the day of rest and worship. Again Cardinal Gibbons declared, *"You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday."*<sup>7</sup> In the council of ~Trent (1545 A.D.) the church leaders believed that "tradition was as great an authority as the Bible." They argued that "God gave them the authority to change the Bible in any way they wished;" by 'tradition' they meant human teachings (Marcussen, National Sunday Law, 1983; pg, 34, 1983). But the scripture declares in Matthew 15:9 "in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." What the text establishes here is that, only God is and apart from Him there is nothing else. The choice is do we obey God's fourth commandment which says "Remember the Sabbath day the Lord's Day to keep it holy" or do we obey Satan's compromise?

You see Satan was not finished with his compromising plans, and he was ready to pull off his biggest counterfeit yet to fool many in Christendom, that he was authentic, but God saw through all of his deception, and predicted that 'he would think to change times and laws'.

It was 321 AD around the time of Constantine's conversion to Christianity that the new world order of worship had been established and became the dominant influence. The first Sunday law was passed and is documented as follows:

*Let all the judges and town people, and the occupation of the trades rest on the venerable day of the sun' (Edict of March 7, 321 A.D. Corpus Julius Civilus Cod lib.3, tit 12, Lex 3).*

As Sunday Observance became more established as the states' order of worship, Pagans, Christians and church authorities alike flocked into churches. However, the faithful Christians who would not compromise and dishonour God, found themselves in trouble with the authorities. As a result there was a Christian revolt, which destabilized the Roman government. In consultation with the church administrators and the Council of Rome, Constantine decided with the authorities advice to pass a Sunday law, forcing the people to stop working on Sunday in honour of the Lord's Day. This was the perfect solution they thought. Christians were forbidden to read their Bibles, and the authorities engaged every effort to encourage the people to forget everything about the Lord's Sabbath. However despite the new Sunday law and the penalties imposed on them, many Bible-believing Christians continued to honour and keep holy the Seventh-day Sabbath their Saviour kept. But Satan was not finished with the genesis of God's law. In the progression of time, the church Council held pagan festivals which were designed to suppress the Lord's Day... the seventh day Sabbath, given to the human race as a memorial of His creation, and thus would be exalting Sunday as the Lord's Day. Is Sunday really the Lord's Day, or could it be that many in Christendom have been misled, and if so, how do we know which day is the Lord's Day?

### **How do we know which day is the Lord's Day?**

The fourth commandment - the Sabbath of the Lord - now demands attention. **This** of itself is susceptible to the clearest proof, and the most authentic proof given is the bible. In Genesis Chapter one we read, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth..." "All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made" (St. John 1:3). As already indicated, from the beginning, way back in Eden at creation after God had finished creating the world in six days, He added the Seventh day Sabbath as a day of rest (Genesis 2:2-3) and He did something special to this day. He blessed the Sabbath, sanctified and made it holy, setting it aside and giving it to mankind as a special day of rest and worship. Jesus himself declares with His Father that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath clearly then is the Lord's day because it is the day that He made and He never changed His law. (Matthew 5; 17-19). God set aside this one full day for the really important things in our lives. Our loving Creator knew that we needed a break form our mundane busy lives, not only to rest but to have time for family renewal, a vital component of a healthy balanced life; also to worship, reflect and remember what He has done for us.

The Sabbath is embedded in the Ten Commandments which is God's own law. The fourth commandment says that we must "Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy" (Exodus 20:8), "the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God" (v.10). This tells us that God is Holy, and one of the ways we are to respect His holiness is by being obedient to His commands. However, there are those who question whether the seventh day is Saturday or Sunday. It was because of their erroneous interpretations of the scriptures, because of human customs and traditions presented and urged upon them, that their minds had become confused and were hardened to the truth. Additionally a change in the calendar may have also influenced their thinking. The recognized calendar, internationally, is the Gregorian Calendar introduced by

Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. It is essentially a modification of the Julian calendar introduced by Julius Caesar, 45 BC.<sup>8</sup> Today many countries and businesses have altered the calendar to suit their own agendas, making Monday the first day of the week and Sunday the seventh. Thus the seventh day Sabbath concept has become so blurred in people's thinking that they don't know which day it is. However, while the names of the days of the week have varied through the ages; the seven day week cycle has continually been maintained since the establishment of ancient cultures. Saturday is still the seventh day of the week, therefore making it the Biblical Sabbath or Lord's Day.

Some people mistakenly assume that when the apostle John wrote that "he was in the spirit on the Lords Day" in Revelation 1:10, that he was worshiping on Sunday and experienced the vision on that day. But nowhere in the Bible defines the first day of the week as the Lord's Day. There is no scriptural evidence to support this Sunday theory as the Lord's Day. If this were referring to a day of the week, we would have to conclude that John meant the seventh day, since God calls that day "His Holy Day... the Holy Day of the Lord" (Isaiah 58:13). Jesus Christ said He is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2: 28), not some other day of the week. What's more, people today are ignorant on this topic because religious leaders are making every effort to keep the facts away from them. This is been perpetuated for generations. That is why individuals today have not understood what God's word teaches about His seventh day Sabbath. Nevertheless, God's words are breaking through the barriers of time. There is hope, for many today are studying the Bible for themselves and learning these amazing truths about God's true Sabbath.

As the truth penetrates their hearts, then their eyes are open and they are beginning to understand, and are keeping the seventh day Sabbath holy in loving obedience to God's commandments. Jesus is our example. It was Jesus's custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. Luke 4:16 says that "Jesus went home to Nazareth where He grew up, and on the Sabbath day as His custom was, He went into the synagogue and He stood up to read." Jesus kept the Sabbath and He is inviting His creation to come unto Him and find rest. The word Sabbath means "rest". In Genesis chapter one the day is defined as "evening" and "morning" and as such the Sabbath begins from sunset on the sixth day (Friday) to sunset on the seventh day (Saturday) as a day of rest from all our normal labours. Celebrating the seventh day Sabbath as God ordained back in Eden brings meaning and purpose to our lives.

### **What is the purpose of the Lord's Day?**

If we then believe that the Seventh day Sabbath is indeed the Lord's Day as discussed above, the purpose of the Lord's day is to serve as a memorial of creation to all humanity; it is the day all humanity should worship the Creator God. The Lord's Day is for celebration and for reflection. It helps us to reflect on our beginnings, and where we have gone wrong. It is a focal point for getting us back on track. The Sabbath is a day of human blessing not an excuse to prolong human suffering. It was blessed and sanctified by God since Eden, long before any Jews existed, thus discrediting the notion that the Sabbath is for the Jews alone. God himself on this day rested from all the work He had done, after He took six days to create the world and said it was good. What is this rest? Is it a prohibitive sanction that restricts our every move, or is it credence given by God to relieve human suffering and do good...and what then do we believe is doing good on the Sabbath? This rest is not only rest from our mundane busy lives, but rest in the abundant salvation provided in Jesus Christ; rest in the unconditional love of God.

It also provides an opportunity to celebrate love with family and friends. This is when Seventh-day Adventist Christian families meet together, as the sun sets on Friday evening, in celebration and thanksgiving, pledging their allegiance, adoration and praise to the Creator God who is worthy (Revelation 14:7) of our adoration. It represents the Sabbath blessings that still echo from creation; these rich blessings God intended for us on the Sabbath have not diminished since He blessed the first Sabbath in Eden. In fact, in celebration of the Sabbath we can experience new dimensions of Sabbath joy; rejoicing in the delicate art of Sabbath keeping will help us become more aware of the goodness and beauty of the Lord. The family celebration of the Sabbath sets the mood for the Sabbath and crowds out the weekday burdens, drawing each one towards the Creator and each other. Family ties are strengthened and cherished. "Yes Sabbath is for love,"<sup>9</sup> it is a day to experience God's love for the human family, and a day to share our love of God with one another.

### **Evaluating the Evidence**

I began this discussion by looking at the Biblical understanding of God as Creator. As already noted, He created the Sabbath as His holy day, He sanctified and made it holy for He is holy. Among all the Biblical evidences examined, one stands above all others as containing some of the most significant truths relating to God's creative plan; He who created the Lord's Day (Sabbath) did not alter it but preserved it, because He desires to have fellowship with His creatures. When I looked at the evidence, it became clear to me that God has already provided a day of rest and time to strengthen family ties, and that day is the seventh day Sabbath the "Lord's day." As discussed above, back in Eden at the end of creation week, when God ended all His work, by example He rested on the Seventh day Sabbath and He sanctified and made it holy. God blessed the Sabbath day, and gave it as a gift, a rest day to the human race. The facts are quite simple, the Bible declares that the seventh day Sabbath is the Lord's Day created and ordained by Him and He did not change it. So now that we have established that Jesus did not change the Lords day, who did?

To get this into context, if we accept that the first day of the week is Sunday, then we are also accepting that the seventh day of the week is Saturday. Why is this important you may ask? Many Christians firmly believe that Sunday is the Seventh day Sabbath as referred to in Exodus 20:10, not knowing that it was changed by the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church themselves acknowledged that the seventh day is indeed Sabbath, the 'Lord's day'. However, they changed the solemnity of it to Sunday based on the Laodicean Council of AD 364 as is recorded in the catechism, and openly accept that there was no scriptural authority for them to do so (Marcussen. Jan A. National Sunday Law; 1983).

I refute Pope Benedict XVI's call for Sunday to be the official Lord's Day of rest and time to strengthen family ties; and I call for the Seventh day Sabbath, the Lord's Day, to be observed as a day of rest and worship and time to strengthen family ties. As Sabbath believing Christians we must be obedient to God's commandments. We must stand firm on the platform of truth, standing as faithful sentinels by His authority. It is all about choices..., do we choose to obey God or Church tradition? We are assured that Christ's power will sustain us through difficult times. "...for when the enemy should come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord would have lifted up a standard against him" (Isaiah 59:19).

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