

# The Early Church Fathers on Sabbath or Sunday

It is true that the early Church changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday. And they were well within their rights to do so. Christians live under the New Covenant and not the Old. The Church in its God given authority (Matthew 16:15-19), made the change in honor of the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Scripture records the early Church meeting on the first day of the week (Sunday). For instance, in Acts 20:7 we read the following: "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them..." The term "to break bread" refers to the Eucharistic celebration which has been the center of Christian worship for the last two thousand years. We also see that money was collected for the needs of the Church on Sunday (1 Corinthians 16:2). And finally, Paul tells us Christians are not to be judged for failing to observe the Jewish Sabbath (Colossians 2:14-16).

## The Didache

But every Lord's Day . . . gather yourselves together and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one that is at variance with his fellow come together with you until they be reconciled, that your sacrifice may not be profaned (14 [A.D. 70]).

## Letter of Barnabas

Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day [a reference to Sunday] with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead. And when He had manifested Himself, He ascended into the heavens (15 [A.D. 74]).

## Ignatius of Antioch

[T]hose who were brought up in the ancient order of things [i.e., Jews] have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord's Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by him and by his death (*Letter to the Magnesians* 8 [A.D. 110]).

## Justin Martyr

On the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen (*First Apology* 67 [A.D. 151]).

## The Didascalía

The apostles further appointed; On the first day of the week let there be service, and the reading of the holy scriptures, and the oblation [sacrifice of the Mass], because on the first day of the week [Sunday] our Lord rose from the place of the dead, and on the first day of the week he arose upon the world, and on the first day of the week he ascended up to heaven, and on the first day of the week he will appear at last with the angels of heaven (*Didascalía* 2 [A.D. 225]).

## Victorinus

The sixth day [Friday] is called parasceve, that is to say, the preparation of the kingdom. . . . On this day also, on account of the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ, we make either a station to God or a fast. On the seventh day he rested from all his works, and blessed it, and sanctified it. On the former day we are accustomed to fast rigorously, that on the Lord's Day we may go forth to our bread with giving of thanks. Let the parasceve become a rigorous fast, lest we should appear to observe any Sabbath with the Jews . . . which Sabbath he [Christ] in his body abolished (*The Creation of the World* [A.D. 300]).

## Eusebius

They [the early saints of the Old Testament] did not care about circumcision of the body, neither do we [Christians]. They did not care about observing Sabbaths, nor do we. They did not avoid certain kinds of food, neither did they regard the other distinctions which Moses first delivered to their posterity to be observed as symbols; nor do Christians of the present day do such things (*Church History* 1:4:8 [A.D. 325]).

[T]he day of his [Christ's] light . . . was the day of his resurrection from the dead, which they say, as being the one and only truly holy day and the Lord's day, is better than any number of days as we ordinarily understand them, and better than the days set apart by the Mosaic Law for feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths, which the Apostle [Paul] teaches are the shadow of days and not days in reality (*Proof of the Gospel* 4:16:186 [A.D. 319]).

#### **Athanasius**

The Sabbath was the end of the first creation, the Lord's Day was the beginning of the second, in which he renewed and restored the old in the same way as he prescribed that they should formerly observe the Sabbath as a memorial of the end of the first things, so we honor the Lord's Day as being the memorial of the new creation (*On Sabbath and Circumcision* 3 [A.D. 345]).

#### **Cyril of Jerusalem**

Fall not away either into the sect of the Samaritans or into Judaism, for Jesus Christ has ransomed you. Stand aloof from all observance of Sabbaths and from calling indifferent meats common or unclean (*Catechetical Lectures* 4:37 [A.D. 350]).

#### **Council of Laodicea**

Christians should not Judaize and should not be idle on the Sabbath, but should work on that day; they should, however, particularly reverence the Lord's Day and, if possible, not work on it, because they were Christians (canon 29 [A.D. 360]).

#### **John Chrysostom**

When he said, "You shall not kill" . . . he did not add "because murder is a wicked thing." The reason was that conscience had taught this beforehand, and he speaks thus, as to those who know and understand the point. Wherefore when he speaks to us of another commandment, not known to us by the dictate of conscience, he not only prohibits, but adds the reason. When, for instance, he gave commandment concerning the Sabbath — "On the seventh day you shall do no work"— he subjoined also the reason for this cessation. What was this? "Because on the seventh day God rested from all his works which he had begun to make" [Ex. 20:10]. And again: "Because you were a servant in the land of Egypt" [Deut. 21:18]. For what purpose then, I ask, did he add a reason respecting the Sabbath, but did no such thing in regard to murder? Because this commandment was not one of the leading ones. It was not one of those which were accurately defined of our conscience, but a kind of partial and temporary one, and for this reason it was abolished afterward. But those which are necessary and uphold our life are the following: "You shall not kill... You shall not commit adultery... You shall not steal." On this account he adds no reason in this case, nor enters into any instruction on the matter, but is content with the bare prohibition (*Homilies on the Statues* 12:9 [A.D. 387]).

You have put on Christ, you have become a member of the Lord and been enrolled in the heavenly city, and you still grovel in the Law [of Moses]? How is it possible for you to obtain the kingdom? Listen to Paul's words, that the observance of the Law overthrows the gospel, and learn, if you will, how this comes to pass, and tremble, and shun this pitfall. Why do you keep the Sabbath and fast with the Jews? (*Homilies on Galatians* 2:17 [A.D. 395]).

#### **Apostolic Constitutions**

And on the day of our Lord's resurrection, which is the Lord's Day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent him to us, and condescended to let him suffer, and raised him from the dead. Otherwise, what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day . . . in which is performed the reading of the prophets, the preaching of the gospel, the oblation of the sacrifice, the gift of the holy food (*Apostolic Constitutions* 2:7:60 [A.D. 400]).