

## Sabbath Observance

### A FOOLISH FIXATION ABOUT OBSERVING DAYS

An article by Howard B Rand is a sad example of bad logic and legalism. He tries to argue, against “Sabbatarians” that Christians should observe Sunday, not Saturday as a day of worship. He argues, in effect, that the long day at the time of Joshua (Js 10:12-14) meant that God in advance shifted the Sabbath from the Sunday. He takes the extra ten degrees at the time of Ahaz (Isa 38:8) with it to make an additional exact twenty-four hours. He says, “God caused an astronomical event to so renumber the days of the week that Saturday would become the seventh day according to 24 hours per day, while Sunday became the seventh day according to sunrises and sunsets.” At one point he even seems to suggest that God made the adjustment by “restricting the girth of our globe”! Without tidal waves or earthquakes or everything falling flat?

Wait a minute! Though Joshua records that there was no day like the one in his time, he still calls it a “day.” They didn’t have clocks like ours, and went by dawns and sunsets. The week in Joshua’s time still had seven days, not six. It still had seven dawns and seven sunsets. The longer day didn’t shift Saturday to Sunday. Besides, if God shifted the Sabbath to the Sunday at the time of Joshua so early after Sinai, poor Israelites! In that case they were observing the wrong day for the greater part of the Old Testament! They simply had a longer seven-day week, at the time of Joshua, not a week of six days!

Rand shoots himself in the foot by arguing about crossing the International Date Line and finding oneself one day short or long for a Sabbath.

He tries to get mileage from the fact that the word for “sabbath” in the New Testament is sometimes plural. In fact it is used about equally in singular or plural, with no difference in meaning, probably because many singular Aramaic words ended in “a”, and the Greek plural of “sabbaton” is sabbata.” He tries to get the Saturday after Christ died and the next day, Sunday, both reckoned as sabbaths, one going by hours, and one by sunsets. This is ludicrous.

However, his chief fallacy is that he argues that God shifted the Old Testament Sabbath to the Sunday for Christians of the New Testament. Wrong! Sunday is not our Sabbath. Our Sabbath is the rest that Jesus Himself has brought us, and the rest to come in eternal life. The command to observe the Seventh Day was for the Jews of the Old Testament, a shadow that pointed forward to Christ. When the Reality came, the shadows were no longer of any consequence, like the new moons and festival days and food laws, the temple sacrifices and Aaronic priesthood. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, mentions the Sabbath only once, to say that it is not necessary to keep it. Colossians 2: 16-17 “Therefore let no one judge you in what you eat or drink or with regard to a feast day, or a New Moon, or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come, but the reality is that of Christ.”

Though God sanctified the seventh day at the beginning, He did not command Adam and Eve to keep it. The Sabbath was a special reminder to the Israelites of God’s rest after His six-day creation (Ex 20:11) and of God’s rescue of them from Egypt (Deut 5: 15).

We are no longer under the “guardian slave” of the Law. Look at the words like “until” and “before” and “now that” in Galatians 3:13-25: “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us, for the Scriptures have said, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.’ The result is that the blessing of Abraham has come upon the nations in Christ Jesus, that we may receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Fellow Christians, I am speaking in an ordinary human way. After a testament has been ratified, even if it is only a human one, no one sets it aside or adds to it. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his Descendant. Scripture does not say: “And to your descendants,” as if referring to many people, but as referring to one Person: “And to your Descendant,” who is Christ. What I mean is this: The Law, which came four hundred and thirty years after the covenant that had previously been ratified by God does not cancel it, so as to make the then was the Law given? It was added because of trespasses until the Descendant came to whom the promise had been made. And it was ordered through angels by the hand of a mediator. A mediator does not deal with only one, but God is one. Therefore is the Law opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could have made people alive, then certainly righteousness would have come by law. But the Scripture has imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise may be given through faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. Before the faith came, we were being imprisoned by the Law, locked up until the faith came, which was about to be revealed. Therefore the Law was our guardian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. For you are all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, because all of you who were baptised into, Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew

nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female\_ for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham' s descendants and heirs, according to the promise.”

Faith in Christ makes us children of God, removes the distinctions between Jew and Greek, and should take away the idea that salvation depends on what we do or don't do.

The chief problem is the thinking that our salvation depends on what we do, in the observance of particular days. In criticising the “Sabbatarians” he is simply continuing their fallacy. There isn't much difference between a Saturday Sabbatarian and a Sunday Sabbatarian. In Galatians Paul says this: “You are observing days, months, seasons, and years! I am afraid for you, that the hard work I have been doing for you has somehow been wasted.” The Lord has not commanded the people of God in the New Testament to observe any particular day. Certainly Christians began worshipping on the first day of the week because Jesus rose from the dead then, and on several occasions appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week. It meant so much to them that they made a radical change in their worship routine. However, there was no command. We certainly find it convenient that most of us take the same day off for worship each week, that the Lord may serve us together with His word and Sacrament, and that we may encourage one another, and in this way follow the Lord's direction not to forsake assembling ourselves together (Hb 10:25).

The Gospel tells us that Jesus Christ has observed the commandments, including the Jewish Sabbath commandment, for us to redeem us. Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4-5: “But when the time had fully come, God sent out His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as His sons.” The result is that we have freedom.

So what is important? Not the day, but the Word of God. That we dare not neglect. Jesus said to the Jews, “He who is of God listens to God's words. The reason why you do not listen is that you are not of God.”