

Is Sunday Worship in the New Testament?

The word "Sunday" does not appear any place in the Bible, but the phrase "first day of the week" is found in the New Testament. It occurs in exactly eight places. Examining these eight texts will prove insightful.

If the day was changed by Bible authority—if Christians are to find any biblical authorization whatsoever for observing Sunday as the "Lord's Day" today—then we must find that authority in one of these eight texts!

Since the Bible clearly establishes the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath up to the time of the crucifixion, there can be no biblical authority for Sunday observance unless we find it clearly and plainly stated in one of these eight New Testament passages. We should examine them carefully, honestly, prayerfully.

1. **Matthew 28:1**: "Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb." Matthew wrote these words, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, several years after the New Testament church came into being.

This scripture tells us plainly that three days and three nights after all that was done away had been securely "nailed to the cross," the Sabbath was still the day before the first day of the week—still the seventh day of the week.

One point is here plainly proved. Many tell us that the Sabbath command is merely for "one day in seven"—that it does not have to be the seventh day of the week, but merely the seventh part of time. They argue that Sunday, being one day out of seven, fulfills the command. But this passage states in plain language that, three days after all abolished things had been done away, the Sabbath still existed and that it was the seventh day of the week. But was the day changed later?

2. **Mark 16:2**: "Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen." This first day of the week was, according to verse 1, "when the Sabbath was past." This text, then, proves the same thing as Matthew 28:1. The Sabbath was still the seventh day of the week.

3. **Mark 16:9**: "Now when He rose [was risen, KJV] early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons." This text, poorly translated, speaks of Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene later the same day (see "The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday" and/or "After Three Days" for a better translation).

Nothing here calls the first day of the week the Christian Sabbath. Nothing here calls it "the Lord's Day." Nothing here hallows Sunday or says God made it holy. Nothing here commands us to observe it. Nothing here sets it apart as a memorial of the resurrection, or for any purpose. It contains no command or example of rest on this day—no authority for observing Sunday.

4. **Luke 24:1**: "Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared." This text reiterates the same event recorded by Matthew and Mark. It also shows that on the first day of the week these women came to do the work of a common

weekday, after having rested the Sabbath day "according to the commandment" (Luke 23:56).

The Holy Spirit inspired this statement. God knew the Sabbath was not abolished, and had Luke write this approximately thirty years after the establishing of the New Testament church! God inspired Luke to say that the "rest" these women took on the Sabbath day was "according to the commandment"—a statement that would not be possible had the commandment been abolished.

This text, then, establishes Sunday as a common workday, and that, at the time of its writing, the command to keep the Sabbath had not been abolished.

5. **John 20:1**: "On the first day of the week Mary Magdalene came to the tomb early, while it was still dark. . . ." This, written more than sixty years after the crucifixion, is merely John's version, describing the same visit to the tomb. It confirms the facts above.

6. **John 20:19**: "Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" Let us examine this carefully, for some claim this was a religious service called to celebrate the resurrection.

Notice this is the same first day of the week that followed the Sabbath. It was Jesus' first opportunity to appear to His disciples. For three and a half years, He had been constantly with them, on all days of the week. His meeting with them, of itself, could not establish any day as a Sabbath.

Were they meeting together to celebrate the resurrection, thus establishing Sunday as the Christian Sabbath in honor of the resurrection? The text gives the reason they were together: "for fear of the Jews"! The Jews had just taken, tried, and handed their Master over to the Romans for crucifixion. They were afraid! The doors were shut and probably bolted because of their fear. In addition, they were there because they all lived together in this upper room (Acts 1:13). Finally—and conclusively—they did not assemble to celebrate the resurrection because they did not believe Jesus was risen (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:37, 39, 41).

Nothing in this text calls this day the "Sabbath," the "Lord's Day," or any sacred title. Nothing here sets it apart or makes it holy. Scripture gives no authority here for changing a command of God!

7. **Acts 20:7**: "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight."

Here, at last, we find a religious meeting on the first day of the week, but it was not a "Sunday meeting," that is, a church service. . Notice, Paul continued his speech until midnight, and verse 8 says, "There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together." It indeed occurred after sunset, before midnight, thus on the first day of the week. This meeting and Paul's preaching—at most, it was what we would call a Bible study today—took place during the hours we now call Saturday night.

However, it is clear from subsequent verses that Paul and his companions treated this first day of the week, beginning at sundown, as a normal workday. Paul's companions sailed around a peninsula from Troas to Assos (verse 13)—a distance of fifty or sixty miles—

while Paul, afoot, walked overland more than 19 miles (verses 11, 14). His companions were engaged in the labor of rowing and sailing a boat while Paul was preaching that Saturday night. Then, at the break of day Sunday morning, he set out to walk from Troas to Assos—a good hard day's work! He would not do this except on a common workday!

Does this text not say, as many claim, that the disciples always held communion every first day of the week? Not at all! This scripture says nothing about anything being done weekly or customarily. It simply relates the events of this one particular first day of the week. The first-century church kept the Lord's Supper once each year on the Passover (I Corinthians 11:24).

That "the disciples came together to break bread" means merely that they gathered to eat a meal. This expression was commonly used to designate a meal in past times (see Luke 24:30; Acts 2:46; 27:35 for further examples of "breaking bread"). Scripture interprets it only as eating a meal, not as a Communion service.

8. **I Corinthians 16:2**: "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper that there be no collections when I come." Often we see this text printed on the little offering envelopes in the pews of churches, and many preach that this text sets Sunday as the time for taking up the church collection for doing God's work and paying the minister and church expenses.

This verse says nothing of the sort!

Verse 1 tells us what kind of collection is being made: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also." First, it is a collection—not for the preacher, evangelism, or church expenses—but "for the saints." The members of the church in Jerusalem were suffering from drought and famine. They needed, not money, but food.

Notice that Paul had given similar instruction to other churches. He tells the Romans:

But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia [where Corinth is located] to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are at Jerusalem. . . . Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain. (Romans 15:25-28)

It was not money, but fruit that was being prepared for shipment to the poor saints at Jerusalem! The Greek word can also refer to grain, wine, and other produce that can be stored a long time without spoiling.

In I Corinthians 16:2, does Paul say they should give money at a church service? Not at all! He says, "Let each one of you lay something aside, storing up. . . ." Note this! He is telling them to put something aside for a special use, to store it—at home! Why? Because Paul did not want there be any collecting done when he arrived. He wanted this gift for the Jerusalem church to be ready for shipment.

"And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they [more than one] will go with me" (verses 3-4). Apparently it was going to require several men to carry this collection, gathered and stored up, to Jerusalem. If it were a tithe or offering for the minister or to spread the gospel, Paul could have carried the money alone.

Thus, once again, the first day of the week is a workday, a day for gathering fruit and food out of the orchards, fields, and gardens, and for storing it up. This labor was to be done on the first day as soon as the Sabbath was past!

Upon honest examination, not one of the texts speaking about "the first day of the week" sets it apart as a rest day. Not one makes it holy, calls it the Sabbath or by any other sacred title. In every case, the first day of the week was a common workday. In none of them was there a religious meeting and preaching service being held on the hours we now call Sunday. In none of them can we find a single shred of Bible authority for Sunday observance!