

Questions About Why Protestant Reformers Still Worshipped on Sunday

By Pastor Ed Anderson

Why was Sunday observed during the Protestant Reformation (by the reformers)?

Answers:

Sunday observance during the **Protestant Reformation** is one of the great ironies in Christian history. While the Reformers boldly reclaimed the authority of Scripture over tradition, they **largely retained the Roman Catholic practice of Sunday worship**, despite its lack of direct biblical command.

Here's a breakdown of **why** this happened, **what some Reformers said**, and **how the Sabbath question has been addressed historically and biblically**.

1. The Reformers Were Focused on Salvation, Not Worship Days

During the 1500s, the key battlefronts of the Protestant Reformation were:

- *Justification by faith alone* (sola fide)
- *Authority of Scripture* over church tradition (sola scriptura)
- The rejection of indulgences, papal supremacy, and the mass as a sacrifice.

In that theological storm, **Sabbath reform** was not their central concern. Sunday worship was so deeply entrenched in Christian society that it was taken for granted — even by those calling the Roman Church the “Antichrist.”

2. The Reformers Admitted Sunday Was Based on Tradition

Many Protestant Reformers **openly admitted** that **Sunday observance was not commanded by Scripture**, but was a tradition inherited from the Catholic Church. Some examples:

Martin Luther

Luther recognized that Sunday was not biblically commanded:

“They allege the Sabbath changed into Sunday, the Lord’s day, contrary to the Decalogue... Neither is there any example more boasted of than the changing of the Sabbath day. Great, say they, is the power and authority of the church, since it dispensed with one of the Ten Commandments.”

— *Martin Luther, Augsburg Confession, Article 28*

John Calvin

Calvin taught that the **Sabbath commandment was ceremonial**, not moral (a view not fully consistent with the Decalogue’s structure). He acknowledged the **apostolic church had no divine command** to change the day:

“The ancients have not without good cause substituted what we call the Lord’s Day for the Sabbath... yet it was not without reason that the old Christian writers substituted the Lord’s Day.”

— *Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book 2, Chapter 8*

The Westminster Confession (1646)

Though written by Puritans who emphasized Sunday as the “Christian Sabbath,” even it acknowledges:

“From the resurrection of Christ, the Sabbath was changed into the first day of the week... not by a new commandment, but by the example of the apostles.”

They shifted the day based on **tradition and inference**, not direct biblical instruction.

3. Sunday Worship Originated in the Roman Church

The actual **change from Sabbath to Sunday** was **not made by Jesus or the apostles**, but was a gradual shift influenced by:

- **Anti-Jewish sentiment** in the early church (especially after A.D. 70 and the Bar Kokhba revolt in A.D. 135).
- The desire to separate Christianity from Judaism.
- Pagan Roman sun worship (Sunday = *dies Solis*, Day of the Sun).

- **Constantine's Sunday law in A.D. 321**, which mandated Sunday rest for civil reasons.
- Catholic Councils (e.g., Laodicea in A.D. 364) which formally discouraged Sabbath-keeping.

The Catholic Church claims this change as a mark of her authority:

“Sunday is our mark of authority. The Church is above the Bible, and this transference of Sabbath observance is proof of that fact.”

— *Catholic Record of London, Ontario, September 1, 1923*

4. What the Bible Actually Says About the Sabbath

The **seventh-day Sabbath (Saturday)** is:

- Instituted at **Creation** (Genesis 2:2–3)
- Made part of the **Ten Commandments** (Exodus 20:8–11)
- Called a **sign between God and His people forever** (Exodus 31:16–17)
- Kept by **Jesus** and the apostles (Luke 4:16; Acts 17:2)
- Observed by the **end-time remnant** (Revelation 14:12)

There is **no command** in the New Testament changing the Sabbath to Sunday. The few references to the “first day of the week” (e.g., Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2) never speak of it as a holy day of rest.

5. A Final Thought: Tradition vs. Truth

The Reformers made great strides — but they **did not go far enough**.

Many **retained Sunday** out of tradition, convenience, or fear of public backlash.

But God continues to call His people forward:



“Come out of her, My people, lest you share in her sins...”

— *Revelation 18:4*

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.”

— *John 14:15*

Summary Table

 Question	 Answer
Did the Reformers change the Sabbath to Sunday?	No — they inherited Sunday from the Roman Catholic Church.
Did they admit this change wasn't biblical?	Yes — many did. They appealed to tradition or apostolic practice.
Why didn't they restore the 7th-day Sabbath?	It was not their focus, and the tradition was deeply embedded.
Is the Sabbath still binding?	Yes — it is part of God's eternal law (Exodus 20:8–11, Isaiah 66:22–23).