

# A Christian bishop's confession: we changed God's Sabbath

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In 365 AD, the Council of Laodicea issued an edict that should unsettle every serious Bible reader. Responding to pressure from the Roman Emperor Constantine — who wanted to unify pagan sun-worshippers and Christians under one imperial religion — the Church decreed:

*“Christians must not Judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord’s Day. But if any shall be found to be Judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.”*

Any Christian who rested on Saturday — the day God Himself sanctified at creation — was to be cut off from the Church and from Christ.

That edict reveals something important: church leaders would never have needed to threaten excommunication over a rest day unless large numbers of Christians were actually keeping it. The decree wasn't addressed to pagans. It was addressed to Christians who knew the Fourth Commandment and were living by it. What Constantine and the Council of Laodicea did, under the banner of Christianity, was weaponize antisemitism to bury a commandment God called eternal. Sixteen hundred years later, most Christians have never thought about any of this. That may be changing.

**God's Gift to Man from the First Week**

The Sabbath didn't begin at Mount Sinai. It began in the Garden of Eden.

After six days of creation, we are told: "God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it" (Genesis 2:2-3). That first full day Adam spent on earth was a Sabbath — spent in the presence of his Creator. God was establishing a rhythm for human life: six days of work, one day of sacred rest and renewed relationship. Two great covenants were given to mankind in that garden — the Sabbath and marriage. Both were designed to sustain the family, and neither was addressed only to Jews.

This is why the Fourth Commandment, unlike any of the other nine, opens with a single striking word: "*Remember* the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). *Remember* — because it already existed. God wasn't introducing something new at Sinai. He was calling His people back to something they had abandoned.

### **The Objections**

Christians have offered several reasons for setting aside the Sabbath. They deserve honest examination — and it's worth saying upfront that Sunday worship is not the problem. Gathering to honor the risen Christ on Sunday reflects genuine faith and devotion. What the historical record shows is something different: not that Sunday was added, but that Saturday rest was actively *forbidden* — on pain of excommunication. That's a different argument entirely.

*"The Sabbath is a Jewish institution."*

The Sabbath predates the Jewish people by thousands of years. It was given to all mankind at creation. The Jewish people deserve enormous credit for preserving and honoring this day across nearly four millennia — we have them to thank for showing the world what Sabbath observance looks like in practice — but the day itself belongs to the whole human family.

*"The Sabbath isn't affirmed in the New Testament."*

It is. The letter to the Hebrews addresses it directly: "If Joshua had given them rest, then he would not have afterwards spoken of another day. Therefore, there remains a rest for the people of God. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest" (Hebrews 4:8, 11). The writer is not describing eternal rest in heaven as a substitute for the weekly

Sabbath. He is arguing that the Sabbath rest established at creation was never abolished.

*“John mentions ‘the Lord’s Day’ — that’s Sunday.”*

There is only one day Jesus claimed as His own: “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8). He didn’t claim Sunday. He claimed the Sabbath. And He warned clearly against using tradition to override God’s commands: “You make the word of God of no effect through your tradition” (Mark 7:13).

*“The apostles changed the day of worship to Sunday.”*

This argument rests on a single passage in Acts, where “on the first day of the week” Paul’s disciples gathered to break bread before his departure (Acts 20:7-8). But in the biblical reckoning of time, a day runs from sunset to sunset — placing this gathering on what we would call Saturday night. Paul was holding a farewell meeting before a journey. He was not inaugurating a new weekly worship practice. Throughout the book of Acts, the apostles consistently gathered with both Jews and Gentiles on the Sabbath (Acts 13:42-44; 18:4). There is no record anywhere of them announcing a change in the day of worship.

What changed the day was not apostolic authority. It was imperial politics. Constantine’s edict in 321 AD mandated Sunday observance across his empire. The Council of Laodicea, under that pressure, issued the threat of excommunication. The Church had no authority to alter a commandment God placed in stone — and the history shows it knew the edict would be resisted, which is precisely why the threat was necessary.

### **What the Prophets Saw Coming**

The biblical prophets anticipated that God’s people would rediscover the Sabbath in the last days.

Isaiah wrote: “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15). The book of Revelation describes the saints of the final age as those who “keep the Commandments of God” (Revelation 14:12) — as distinct from those who receive the mark of the Beast.

The sign by which God marks His own is not left undefined. Ezekiel records it plainly: “I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign

between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them” (Ezekiel 20:12).

The angel in Revelation 14:7, calling all nations to “worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water,” is quoting almost verbatim from the Fourth Commandment. The great end-times call to return to the Creator is simultaneously a call back to the Sabbath — His mark embedded in the structure of creation itself. And Isaiah’s final prophecy makes clear this will not end with the current age: “From one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me, says the Lord” (Isaiah 66:23). God did not replace the Sabbath with Sunday only to restore it in eternity. He never replaced it at all.

### **The Fire That Was Hidden**

The Hebrew word for Sabbath — *Shabbat* — contains within its three letters a remarkable picture. The *shin* represents consuming fire; the *bet* means house; the *tav* means covenant. Together, the word spells out: *the consuming fire in the house of the covenant*.

If the fire of God feels distant in your worship, it may be that the covenant He established before any religion existed — before Sinai, before the Temple, before the Church — is waiting to be recovered. The Sabbath is not a Jewish tradition that Christians borrowed and then discarded. It is a gift God wove into the first week of history. The Council of Laodicea didn’t have the authority to cancel it. Constantine didn’t have the authority to replace it. And that weekly fire — the consuming presence of God in the house of His covenant — is still waiting for those willing to return to it.

For those who want to explore what authentic Sabbath observance actually looks like when lived from the inside, Rabbi Elie Mischel’s *Shabbat Revolution: A Practical Guide to Weekly Renewal* is one of the most honest and practical guides available for Christian readers taking these questions seriously.

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