



A Sunday Sabbath in 1 Cor. 16:2

An Example of eisegesis

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I am amazed at the extent to which some Christians will go in their misguided efforts to justify using Sunday worship as a substitute for the Biblical 7th-day Sabbath. Some Christians point to 1 Corinthians 16:2 to confirm their erroneous belief that Jesus or the Apostles changed the Sabbath from Saturday, the seventh day of the week, to Sunday, the first day of the week: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come."

Seeing a Sunday Sabbath in this verse is a perfect example of what is called eisegesis, as opposed to exegesis. The difference between these two words is best understood by noting the differing prefixes, eis- ("into") and ex- ("out of"). Exegesis is the act of drawing the true meaning out of a Bible text. Eisegesis is reading some idea that is not actually there into the text. Eisegesis generally happens when the reader looks at a text through the eyeglasses of his own habits and surroundings rather than by putting himself in the shoes of the original readers to whom the text was addressed. Christians who have been in the long habit of going to church on the first day of the week and seeing the collection plate passed every Sunday think that in 1 Corinthians 16:2 Paul was telling the Corinthians to take up a collection at church every Sunday. After all, Paul and the Corinthians were Christians just like us, weren't they?

A close look at this verse shows that this is not at all what Paul had in mind. Paul was not telling the Corinthians to take up a public offering at church every Sunday. On the contrary, he was telling them to individually and privately set aside an amount of money at the beginning of each week, so that they would have some savings accumulated by the time he arrived. That way there would be no need to take up collections after Paul arrived. The funds that were being raised to help the poor saints in Jerusalem would be collected and ready to send as soon as Paul arrived. The following verse makes it very clear that this is what Paul had in mind: "And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality [gift] unto Jerusalem."

Anyone who still thinks that Paul might be talking about a public collection on Sunday can look at a Greek interlinear Bible. Jay P. Green's Interlinear New Testament shows that the phrase translated "every one of you" (or "each [one] of you," NASB, NIV, TEV, et. al.) literally says "each of you by himself" (ekastoV umwn par eautw). Although I do not usually care for the NIV Bible, the NIV does make the meaning clear in this verse: "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made."

Why on the first day of the week? Wasn't payday on Fridays? As a seventh-day Sabbath-keeper, I can understand the benefit of using the first day of the week to do my financial planning for the coming week. Monday through Friday I go to the post office each day to get the mail. If there are checks that come in from readers, I write thank-you notes and set the checks aside. I do not go to the post office on Sabbath, but I go after Sabbath is over, either Saturday night or Sunday morning. Then on Sunday, the first day of the week, I begin my weekly financial chores. I record the week's donations in the books and in a card file; I endorse the checks, total them, and get the deposit ready for my weekly trip to the bank on Monday. (If I could, I would complete the task by making the deposit on Sunday, but of course the bank is closed that day.) At the same time, I also look at my own personal expenses for the coming week and figure how much money I will need to deposit in my personal account to cover bills, and how much cash I will need for the week.

Because I am in the habit of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath and doing my weekly financial chores on the first day of the week, 1 Corinthians 16:2 makes perfect sense to me. If I were to receive a letter from the Apostle Paul with these instructions, I would understand what he was telling me to do. And I guarantee one thing: I would not imagine that Paul was telling me to put my offerings into a public collection plate each week at a Sunday Sabbath service.

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