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# WHEN WE WORSHIP

## INTRODUCTION

Westminster Confession of Faith 7. As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

8. This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

## WHEN DO WE WORSHIP CORPORATELY?

The people of God did not always worship on Sunday. From the creation of the world to the resurrection of Christ, they worshiped on Saturday. In his book, *Welcome to a Reformed Church*, Danny Hyde sketches the following reasons for worship on a particular day:

- God created all things and then rested on the seventh day (Gen 2:2; Exod 20:11; 31:17). As image-bearers, we are called to follow God's pattern of work and rest.
- After God brought his people out of Egypt, the Sabbath further signified that God had redeemed his people (Deut 5:12–15). Significant days of worship, including the Day of Atonement, were on the Sabbath (Lev 16:30–31).
- When Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, he changed the eschatological significance of the days of the week. Christ is the second and last Adam. He finished the work Adam failed to do (Rom 5:12–19; John 19:30).
  - Under the New Covenant, we worship on the first day of the week rather than the last, because Christ finished his work. We do not look forward to the coming of the Messiah; we look back upon his finished work, and we worship accordingly.
  - This is a foretaste of our heavenly rest (Rev 21–22).
  - Just as on the first day of creation God made light and separated it from the darkness, we gather on the first day of the week to celebrate the light of the gospel in Jesus Christ, who has separated us from the world of the darkness of sin ([John 1:5, 9; 3:19; 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:1-6](#)).
  - Worshiping on Sunday was the practice of the early church. It is called “the Lord's Day” (Rev 1:10; 1 Cor 16:2).

## WHAT TIME AND HOW OFTEN?

In the regulative principle of worship, we distinguish among elements, forms, and circumstances. Other than the day, time is a *circumstance* of worship. Whether we worship at 9:30am or 10am is a matter of wisdom for the session of the church to determine with a view to the care and edification of the congregation.

DPW A.4.b It is highly advisable that a congregation assemble for public worship at the beginning and the ending of the Lord's Day. God established this pattern for his Old Testament people when he commanded morning and evening sacrifice and incense burning. Moreover, he sanctifies the entire Lord's Day to himself and gives his people in it a foretaste of their eternal enjoyment of him and his people.

## WORSHIP INVOLVES SANCTIFYING THE *WHOLE* DAY

Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 116. *What is required in the fourth commandment?*

A. The fourth commandment requireth of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian sabbath, and in the New Testament called *The Lord's Day*.

Q. 117. *How is the sabbath or the Lord's day to be sanctified?*

A. The sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.

## CAN CORPORATE WORSHIP ONLY TAKE PLACE ON SUNDAY?

*Directory for Public Worship*, Chapter V—Under the gospel, we are commanded to keep no other particular day holy, except the Lord's Day. Nevertheless, God's people may observe special occasions as the dispensations of God's providence administer cause and opportunity. Such observance is both consonant with Scripture and pastorally appropriate.

## DID CHRIST SUM UP THE SABBATH? AN ETHIC OF WORSHIP FROM THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

- God's people are pilgrim's striving to enter their eternal rest.
- We live and walk by faith in Christ. While we look back upon his finished work, we are compelled to move forward to the heavenly Mt. Zion, the New Jerusalem.
- To arrive safely as pilgrims, we look to Christ and gather together in worship, encouraging one another, and fighting against the "root of bitterness" within us that would cause us to waiver from our heavenly trajectory and turn back.