

# Worship

Let me share with you some words of a Magazine article which I read last year.

“Some churches have become engaged in ambitious experiments to accommodate themselves to the market-driven expectations of the world. The principle seems to be that if you want to get your share of the audience you must offer them something they want. The church can be popular if its prepared to trivialise preaching, and some think it is a price worth paying....

It is all being done in the name of progress...

Are evangelical churches reaching the point where methodology is displacing theology as the arena of competence over which a pastor must have expert control? Romans 10:17 tells us. ‘Faith comes by hearing the message ...,

We would do well to remember that there is a message that must be told, and a method ordained by God for that purpose. Paul’s instruction to Timothy applies to us and has not been rescinded. ‘Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season..’” (2 Tim 4:2) We find ourselves in a very changing church scene. The whole article alerts us to sweeping changes that are taking place in Christian churches!

Experimentation in contemporary Christian worship is taking place on an unprecedented scale and with unprecedented speed. The Christian worship being offered today is not unlike a smorgasbord. You choose the worship style that suits your preference. Are all these styles equally commendable?

How are we to evaluate such experimentation? Should we even attempt to evaluate it? Is there objective criteria by which we can attempt such an evaluation?

What is Christian worship? It is a crucial question for Christians.

As we explore this subject of Christian worship, let me refer firstly to

## 1. It’s Obligation

As we consider the obligation of worship let me begin at the beginning.

The opening words of Genesis 1:1 are familiar to all, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. (Gen 1:1)

And in the beginning, after God has finished His work of creating the Universe, we read in Genesis 2:1-3

1 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.

3 And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

What does the text mean when the writer informs us that God “hallowed” or ‘made holy’ the seventh day?

The answer to that question is not clarified for us until God gives His Law to the people of Israel. The familiar words of the fourth Commandment are an elaboration of the creation ordinance to “hallow” the seventh day.

Let me read the fourth Commandment.

8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.  
9 Six days you shall labour and do all your work,  
10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.  
11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

How does the Commandment begin? Remember! The word "remember" is God's appeal to remind them (and us) of an ordinance/law which had its inception in the days of creation itself! The Commandment harks back to the echoes of a previous command that has reverberated across the centuries since the very days of creation itself! Remember .. to keep the Sabbath day holy; to "hallow" it! What was this "hallowing" of this seventh day to mean for the people of Israel?

The Commandment spells out that it will mean ceasing from work: ie., the kind of work of the previous six days. It will also mean, as the subsequent chapters of Exodus reveal, the institution of an elaborate ceremonial system embracing the corporate gathering of people for very specific purposes.

The primary nature of that purpose is spelled out clearly in the First/ and Second Commandments. Exodus 20:1-6 says,  
20:1 And God spoke all these words:

2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. Israel was not to 'worship' (bow down) to any other god.

Implicit in these commandments is the fact that Israel is to 'worship' the only God; the God who delivered them from Egypt. Worship is to corporately demonstrate the utter worthiness of God to receive the homage that is due to Him; to bow down before His attributes; to serve Him alone. Stephen Charnock describes biblical worship in these words,

"Worship is an act of the understanding ,applying itself to the knowledge of the excellency of God, and actual thoughts of His majesty ... It is an act of the will, whereby the soul adores and reverences His majesty, is ravished with His amiableness, embraces His goodness, enters itself into an intimate communion with this most lovely object, and pitches all his/her affections upon Him." J.Packer

In Exodus 31 we see the serious nature of the obligation of Israel to hallow the seventh day; to keep it holy.

Exod 31:14-17says, 14 "Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off

from his people. 15 For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death.

16 The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant.

17 It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested."

Is the Christian Church today under the same obligation to keep the seventh day holy? In seeking to answer that question let me refer firstly to the

(i) explanation of Jesus

In Matthew 5:17-20 Jesus says,

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them.

18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

What did Jesus mean when He said He had not come to destroy the law/prophets but to fulfil it?

To be succinct in reply, let me refer to Jesus words in response to the lawyer in Matthew 22:35-40

35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:

36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'

38 This is the first and greatest commandment.

39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

It is clear that in "fulfilling" the law, Jesus completed its ceremonial or sacrificial intention (to provide a forgiveness that was unobtainable under the law). But apart from this ceremonial aspect, the Old Testament law's intention is summarised by Jesus in our supreme love for God and love for ones neighbour.

So, to be succinct and summarise, Jesus did not abrogate or lay aside the Old Testament Moral Law. He embraced it and endorsed it by encompassing in two Commandments the complete Ten. Jesus declared that man was still obligated to love to God/man; in these two commandments lay the intention/fulfilment of the law!

Having referred to the explanation of Jesus let me refer secondly to the

(ii) example of the Apostles                      How did The Church demonstrate its love for God with respect to the command of the seventh day?

It is obvious from the pages of the New Testament that the church did not initially form a distinct body that was separate from the Temple/Jewish synagogues. Initially, the worship of the early church was within the confines of the walls of Jewish worship patterns.

In summary those worship patterns embraced three main elements; the elements of praise, extensive prayer and instruction/preaching from the Jewish Scriptures. However, it is also very clear that differences/distinctions began to emerge that would ultimately place a distinct demarcation between Christianity and Judaism.

Let me read John 20:19-20

19 On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

In Acts 20:7 we read On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.

In 1 Cor 16:1-2 we read

16:1 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do.

2 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.

Sunday, the day on which Jesus rose from the dead, the first day of the week, gradually became the day of Christian worship.

The day of resurrection; the day that made possible the institution of the Church, became the day that was ultimately to sever Christianity from Judaism.

How, in the light of these facts, is the Christian Church today in its corporate identity to demonstrate its love for God? Corporately it must demonstrate its supreme love for the God. It must 'bow down' declaring God's worthiness to be praised and served.

It was the Creation ordinance that established man's obligation to 'hallow' the seventh day. The Fourth Commandment, transcribed in Stone, referred specifically to that 'Creation Ordinance'. Connected to this Fourth Commandment the elaboration of God's commands in Exodus reinforced and gave specific direction as to the manner of that worship.

The Church is to continue that obligation; not in the specific requirements of the Old Testament, but in the manner specified in the New Testament.

Whatever else we do on Sunday, the Lord's Day, we must not neglect corporate worship.

This is the obligation we owe to the God who is both our creator and Redeemer!

It is in the 'assembly' (the corporate meeting) that we possess the assurance of His presence.

This is the 'New Temple' composed of 'living stones'!

David Clarkson says that public worship is,

“the nearest resemblance of heaven” that earth knows: for “in heaven so far as Scripture describes it to us, ... all the worship of that glorious company is public .... They make one glorious congregation and so jointly sing the praises of Him that sits on the throne, and the praises of the Lamb, and continued employed in this public worship to eternity.” J. Packer

To neglect this obligation is to deny the Lord we profess; our ‘neglect’ shows that we despise the new structure (church) for which He sacrificed His blood!

Although the Christian’s Lord’s Day / Sunday broke with the Jewish Sabbath Day in its ceremonial content, it did not break the ‘intention’ of a regular pattern of gathered praise, prayer and instruction in God’s revelation.

“Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together” is the call of the New Testament Church to honour the intention of the original ‘Creation Ordinance’: to rest, and rejoice in God and revel in His revelation.