

Worshipping twice on the Lord's Day

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Worshipping twice on the Lord's Day has a long tradition. All churches have this practice, or at least had it up until recent times. However, it may be asked whether this common long-standing practice is just a man-made tradition – albeit a good one, or whether there is more to it?

The first thing we notice is the fact that both morning and afternoon worship is a pattern that is found right throughout the Bible. The tabernacle/temple was commanded to have both morning and afternoon sacrificial services (Num. 28:3-4). The synagogue services mirrored this pattern on sabbath days for those not able to attend the temple (by reason of distance).¹ The churches in the New Testament mirrored the pattern of two synagogue services. In the first century, the afternoon service was a Lord's Supper celebration with a complete meal.²

Time and again Christ's church is likened to a gathering of sheep under the Great Shepherd Christ himself (cf. John 10). The elders of the local church are therefore too called 'shepherds'. In Acts 20:28 we read in Paul's farewell address to the elders of the church in Ephesus:

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

A worship service is therefore a mustering of the sheep by the shepherds. The sheep come to worship because they heed the call of the great Shepherd (Christ) who summons his sheep by means of his under-shepherds (the elders). This sheep-muster is not a *voluntary* association, but a sign of the 'obedience of faith' (Rom. 1:5). We don't come to worship because we feel the need to 'fuel-up' on our spirituality. We come because Christ – the person who loved us so much that he died for us on the cross – summons us. If we are united to Christ by faith, we will do everything in our power to heed that call. His Spirit drives us to please him before all else. And we know that for God – to whom we are reconciled in Christ – the assembling of his people for praise is of enormous importance. He describes himself as "enthroned upon the praises" of his people (cf. Ps. 22:3). What kind of spirituality says in its heart, 'I don't feel like it this afternoon'? Surely, that of a thankless person who has never really understood what *grace* is all about. Isn't it worse than the person who decided to turn up to the wedding feast, but couldn't be bothered to clothe himself appropriately? You might say that he *at least* turned up! We all know what happened to him though. He was removed by God himself (Matt. 22:11-13). Yes, we can all have moments when we need to motivate ourselves, but this is the point. The self-sacrificing love of our Lord on the cross ought always to be sufficient motivation to impel ourselves back to communal praise together with his people.

We need to ask ourselves, if we struggle with a lack of enthusiasm in church attendance, whether this may also be related to a low view of the day of worship being a day of rest.³ Right from the beginning God set a pattern of six days work and one day rest dedicated to *him*. If we see the day on which we communally gather together to praise our Lord as a day of rest *belonging to his service*, graciously granted for *our benefit*, this will put the worship services into perspective. The two worship services ought merely to be high-points in a day that is set aside for resting *in our Lord*.

In the end, it is a matter of the heart. Again, we need to ask ourselves whether we truly are engaged in a life that loves the Lord our God with *all* our heart, mind and soul. We all have areas that we can improve upon. The heart, in which a *living* faith dwells, will make real attempts to engage those improvements, expecting our Lord's blessing as we strive to live a life pleasing to him. After all, we are all looking forward to that truly *restored* life when Christ returns and we can live on a renewed heaven and earth, without the effects of sin, in a way that God meant it to be in the first place! We sacrifice ourselves willingly in this life, knowing that a better life has been guaranteed us in Jesus Christ! Let us say with the apostle Paul:

1 The principle of coming together every sabbath regardless whether one lives close to the temple is enshrined in Lev. 23:3.

2 See 'Excursus: One or Two Worship Services in Corinth?' in my *1 Corinthians: Creating order in a new urban church* (Western Australia: Pro Ecclesia, 2017) 147-49.

3 See my article 'Experiencing the Day of Rest in the First Century' to be found at <http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/pdfs/restday.pdf>

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, ... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:8-11)