

## WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH XXI: 7-8

*(Reading: Ex.16:1-30; Mt.12:1-14)*

### Why Today We Worship!

We are deeply disturbed by the way our nation and indeed the whole western world has lurched into immorality. Within a generation there is no-fault divorce, abortions made legal and free to minors, prostitution legitimised, and now elected representatives of this nation are trying to endorse homosexual marriage. While one may say it's not all of our MP's, for all intents and purposes it's on its way through!

And haven't we wondered how it came to such a state of affairs? Because while we know history, and we read of how it's been like this before, we still want to know where the rot actually began setting in during our time.

Now I'm not addressing here the ideology behind it. Any basic study of world-views shows the antithesis through the ages - that constant battle between the prince of this world and the King over all worlds. At which point, however, did that ideology start attacking?

Allow me to suggest a key time behind all this. It's a point many may never ever have thought about. And even when I tell it to you now, you may well not see how it could be an influence at all. But I want you to hold your judgment. And I want you have in mind that saying you've all heard and which is tucked away in your mind: "When one commandment is broken every one of them is broken."

So, what's the occasion I'm raising here for our society's tragic demise? It is simply this: It was when we let the Christian Sabbath Day go. It was the period when we became so wrapped up in doing what we want - in enjoying the increasing material wealth this world has - we failed to obey the fourth commandment.

How did that happen? Well, like with so many of the commandments the church failed to preach and teach the reasons why we did it. When the Sabbath Day was challenged by sports codes and seven day trading, people didn't really see why not. It had become a tradition. And when something has been a tradition for a long time it can easily be wiped out when people don't believe in what's behind the tradition any more. In fact, the strongest voice against losing the Sunday was the Trade Union movement who could see how it would drastically affect the family life of the workers they represent.

From the failure to keep the Sabbath Day, it wasn't long and God's word against divorce was watered down, too. With it came the dismissal of capital punishment. Soon a life sentence for murder was shorter than it took to gain a PhD degrees. That's what some of those prisoners even do!

And here we are wondering what's happened? Well, nothing's happened - at least little has happened within the wider body of Christendom.

Much as we conservative Christians have become open targets for being dismissed as narrow-minded, bigoted, fundamentalist extremists, yet we know what keeping God's commands brings us. Don't you? I mean, hasn't faithfully obeying God's commandments blessed you?

### One Day A Week Is A Special Day

In the first place, then, let's see that ONE DAY A WEEK IS A SPECIAL DAY. And it is. Everyone will agree that you can't work every day. We have to have a break. No matter what

kind of work hours you have there has to be time off. We need to rest physically. And that has to apply spiritually also. It has to be outside and inside.

Now, that hasn't stopped men trying to eliminate this. The French and Russian Revolutions at one stage tried to introduce a ten day working week. It didn't work. And when it's Christians who try to eliminate the fourth commandment as an abiding obligation it doesn't work either, because for all their harping on about the Sabbath being a Jewish thing it's actually a creation thing. Genesis 2, verses 2 and 3, are quite clear that it was there way before Moses.

To deny this in our lives is to go against God's will for our lives. And we've very much seen the consequences of this, haven't we? For to go against God's order in creation, especially since we have been recreated by faith in Jesus Christ, is like deliberately adopting an unhealthy lifestyle. And I challenge you on this by putting to you how different you would be if you did do this – if you followed God's Word in this.

Or perhaps you already do! Then you know. From a situation of being enslaved to the world's timetable - to its false freedom - you become free to worship and serve the Lord. Then the Sabbath does indeed become a delight, as Isaiah 58 verse 13 calls it.

But not only is this about where we come from - it's also about where you're going to! The Sabbath is not only a memorial day for past work - such as creation or the deliverance out of Egypt - it also points to creation's purpose and goal. And that is all about entering into the destiny of God's "rest". That's what the tree of life in the Garden of Eden is all about. Man is made for more than work - he's made for God. That purpose and future gives his work its true meaning. Now we know that the Sabbath became a special part of Israel's life. We see that in Exodus chapter 16. Then the people's selfishness in trying to collect manna on the seventh day meant they missed out. Rightly so! They had been told what to do. And so have we!

Jesus kept the Sabbath. We read that it was His custom on the Sabbath to go into the synagogue. Luke 4 verse 16 is one example of this. And then see what He did do on the Sabbath. He certainly proved how it had been created for man's good. Because what does He do but good on the Sabbath?

That's what we read further on in Luke chapter 6. There we have the Pharisees and teachers of the law carefully following Jesus. They who believed man was made for the Sabbath and made lots of rules to go with that. And just as He was about to heal a man on the Sabbath Jesus says to them in verse 9, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"

They couldn't answer Him. He did good that Sabbath Day - He healed that man. And so we have works of mercy and necessity that must be done today.

But there's still another aspect to this first point. For when Jesus said in Mark 2 verse 27, that, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," he went on to say, "So the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

Jesus goes further than freeing the Sabbath from Pharisaic abuses. He says that He is the One who has the right to judge anything in connection with it! And He as the God-man was definitely the One who would know what's best for man.

That's what Jesus meant in Matthew 12 verse 6 when he said that one greater than the temple was here. The priests were carrying out God's work in offering the sacrifices but Jesus, the true Servant of the Lord, had now come. And because He's come and set up the new covenant age we

actually go back to the pre-Fall age. For now we have that rest forever in Christ while looking forward to its consummation when we enter the heavenly rest.

### **The First Day Of The Week Is A Special Day**

ONE DAY A WEEK IN SEVEN IS A SPECIAL DAY. But now we have moved to seeing, in the second place, that THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK IS THE LORD'S DAY.

Jesus Christ rose on the first day of the week. It happened very early on that day. It was the day after the Sabbath day.

The symbolism is very rich in this. For when Christ is said in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15 verse 20 to be "the first-fruits" of those who have fallen asleep, we are reminded of the first sheaf of the harvest which was to be presented the day after the Saturday Sabbath at the close of the Passover.

Leviticus 23 the verses 9 till 14 describes this.

So looking at the pattern Christ had with his resurrection and after we see that on the resurrection day He appeared to His disciples, and the same a week later. Who can forget the account in John 20 about this, especially the most convicting proof this was to Thomas that second time, in verse 26 there?

Then when Jesus poured out His Spirit upon the Church, ten days after His ascension into heaven, it was again on a Sunday. That was the Day of Pentecost - Pentecost which is otherwise known as the feast of first-fruits. How meaningful that day is as the time when the outpouring of the Spirit marks the beginning of the harvest of which Christ, the first-fruits, is the guarantee.

There is another point we need to consider too as to why THE FIRST DAY IN THE WEEK IS THE LORD'S DAY. Some of us may know Seventh-Day Adventists. They take this commandment very seriously and they take us to task for not doing so. They challenge us by saying, "Don't you keep the Sabbath day?"

Well, actually we do. The fourth commandment says "keep the sabbath day" not "keep the seventh day as the sabbath day".

G. I. Williamson writes that this difference is "The distinction between proportion and order." He says that, "When the commandment specifies that six of our days are for one duty, and the remaining portion of the week, one seventh to be exact, for another duty, it avoids precisely what the Seventh-Day Adventist position requires. It avoids commanding us to remember the seventh day in order of time, that it might command us to observe the seventh day in proportion of time. Since the Fourth Commandment directs us to observe the seventh part of our time as a sabbath, there is nothing in this commandment that doesn't apply with full force to the first day of the week."

As it was Christ Himself who honoured the first day of the week, we see that as important as the divine word in Genesis 2. In fact, it has become the divine word for us today.

There is still another reason as to why THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK IS THE LORD'S DAY. This is what we read of in Hebrews 3 and 4. For what we see there is the picture painted of what we look forward to in the next world.

So then the Christian Sabbath is a foretaste of what's to come. It is not the thing that's yet to come - that couldn't be. But like the Lord's Supper it points us to what will yet be and so encourages us to look to that great and coming Day right now - today!

## **This Is The Day God Gives For All Days**

In this way the end of Article 7 flows into Article 8. For seeing that THE FIRST DAY IN THE WEEK IS THE LORD'S DAY means living like THIS IS THE DAY GOD GIVES FOR ALL DAYS.

Article 8 helps us to see that THIS IS THE DAY GOD GIVES FOR ALL DAYS in two ways. The first of these is by pointing us to how every day must be a preparing for this day. The Confession speaks about "a due preparing" of our hearts and the "ordering" of our "common affairs beforehand."

You look forward to Sunday. It's the day when you are yourself in a special way. This is what we find throughout Scripture. In Isaiah 58 verse 13 we are told to "call the Sabbath a delight". And in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9 verse 7 we are told that what we put in the offerings on Sunday is what we have decided in our hearts to put in.

So you've thought about it in the week ahead of it. No stopping at the ATM machine on the way to church to get out your offering. Mind you, the Lord's glad you did stop at that ATM machine. He's even more upset when you come empty-handed. But He would much rather have your thoughts toward Him before it comes to Sunday.

This first aspect of every day preparing for this day also means praying for it. John MacArthur writes about this. He says, "If you get bored in church, may I suggest to you that it's not a commentary on the sermon - it's a commentary on your heart! Even if the sermon isn't particularly worth listening to, the chance to pick up some truth about God that come through, and then to meditate on them, should be the most exhilarating time of your life.

You see, if you go to church thinking, "I hope the preacher's got something to say that will get me into a worship mood," you've missed it. By the time Sunday rolls around, you should be so eager to worship with the assembly of believers that you can hardly wait to get into the place to get started.

Why? Because you should be in the process of meditating over what you discovered in the Word of God throughout the week. As you study the Word of God, commune with Him in prayer, discover truth about Him, and meditate on those truths, the joy of worship will appear.

C.H. Spurgeon said, 'Why is it that some people are often in a place of worship and yet they not holy? It is because they neglect to pray. They love the wheat, but they don't grind it. They want to have corn, but they won't go into the fields to gather it. The fruit hangs on the tree, but they won't pick it. The water flows at their feet, but they won't stoop to drink of it.'

Friend, you won't get anything out of this unless you've put something in. It's a principle true of everything else in life so why do we ignore it now?

This applies to everything that you do on the Lord's Day. For having planned what we going to do today you begin to see how what you do today starts to influence all your other days. Take, for example, your view towards television. There are those who don't watch it today. They switch off the world for a day.

There are others, though, who might watch a suitable movie on VCR or DVD today. Or perhaps they'll have a look at that interesting video in the church library. You see, that cuts out the commercials. And that rests us physically and spiritually.

The second aspect of how THIS IS THE DAY GOD GIVES FOR ALL DAYS is that it's this day which makes every day. It makes sense doesn't it? Like someone once said, "If you don't take the break God gives you no one else is going to give it to you!"

And they won't either. Especially you yourself! One commentator suggested that if you put as many hours into specifically worshipping and praying and meditating and studying today as you do doing your job on any other day, you have an idea of what this 8th Article is about.

I put that same concept to a catechism class once. I got them to add up the hours they were involved in going to church and catechism and cadets and youth club and family worship.

It adds up. And it adds up to a healthy influence spiritually on our lives.

So imagine then what an impact setting today aside can do? Or perhaps that's what it's already doing for you?

I mean, look at what the sects and cults do to their people. They force them into this regime where they are constantly indoctrinated by heresy. So what a contrast that we may freely participate in all these things? We don't do it to build up brownie points with God. And if you are doing that this is the day you've got to stop it. Because it cannot be the outside moulding the inside.

Instead, it's what we are in Jesus Christ, which has to come out from the inside. And that's what you should be thinking about today, because it is His Day - the Lord's Day. It's His Day so that you are re-created to keep going His way. There's no better way.

This is a fact we don't often realise in church history. The proper observance of the Lord's Day comes at the crucial points in reformation. For example, the Pilgrim Fathers, left England, first for Holland, and then for America, for "freedom to worship God." But freedom to have a day of rest and worship was one of the chief motives of their migration. King James had decreed that Sunday was a day for sports and issued his Sports Book. The Pilgrim Fathers knew they had to build their families, and their civilisation, upon another basis. Hence they came to America. From the very beginning, in all the colonies, observance of the Sabbath was part of the law of the land.

There was no doubt, either, that their observance of this day made a powerful contribution to the moral stamina and spiritual well-being of the nation, as well as to its material and economic prosperity. The Sabbath gave people the opportunity to know the Bible. They drank from the fountain which pours out the noblest streams of influence in the religion, education, and politics of the nation.

May the Lord grant His blessing on our observance of His day in our age, too. But, regardless of what this world does, let's keep looking to the world that is to come. That's the paradise of which Sunday is now the first day. For this is the first day of the rest of your life.