

Day of the Lord: Day of Worship

*Address Delivered at the Annual Meeting of Canadian Lord's
Day Association, Alberta Auxiliary,
Held in the Calvin Christian School at Monarch
On January 20, 2005 A.D.,
By Rev. D. Kranendonk
Of Mitchell, Ontario.*

The Lord's Day. We all have a routine for that day, don't we? What do you do on the Lord's Day? You wake up; you have breakfast; you get ready for church; you go to church; you come home; you have coffee; you have lunch. Then what do you do? Maybe you have a nap, read, or talk. You get ready to go to church again; you sit in church again; you come home again; and eventually you go to bed. You have a routine.

If I were to ask you, children, "How do you keep the Lord's Day?" then you would tell me exactly what you all do: you don't do this, and you do do that. You do go to church; you don't go shopping; and your dad doesn't go to work. If I were to ask you, "Who doesn't keep the Lord's Day?" then you would point at those people you see as you are driving along to church -those who are working, driving in their trucks, or shopping.

At the end of our Lord's Day routine, do we ever ask ourselves, "Have I kept the Lord's Day today? Have I even begun to keep that day?" "Begun?" you say, "well, we don't work, and we don't. ... "Yet the question: "Have we even begun to keep the Lord's Day?" is a very real one because the Lord's Day is about positively dedicating it to the Lord. It is the day of the Lord. It is a day for the Lord, a day for His worship and for His honour, a day in which He is to be exalted.

A routine is very important, very good, and very commendable, but if it is only a routine, and we end the day satisfied with that, then there is something wrong, because then we do not realize that the sentence sounds from heaven: "Guilty of not worshiping Me."

The word "worship" captures what the Lord's Day is about. That day is to be sanctified. If something is sanctified, then it is dedicated or devoted to God. Devotion to God is expressed in worship. Worship is what focuses on God and desires to exalt God for Who He is and what He does.

If you read the aims of the Lord's Day Association, one of them is to cooperate with all persons and churches holding Scriptural principles in suitable effort to secure the sanctity of the Lord's Day, for the worship and service of God, strengthening of spiritual life, works of mercy, rest from labours, and all secular pursuits.

Another aim is to educate public opinion and organize Christian effort toward securing regular family attendance at the public worship of God, throughout that holy day.

You will notice that in both of these aims the word, "worship" surfaces.

When we turn to the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of the Fourth Commandment, we do not come across the word "worship," but if we go to the Westminster Confession of Faith, which was written by the Puritans in the 1640's and which is subscribed to by Presbyterian churches, we read:

"This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after due preparation of their hearts and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day, but also are taken up the whole time in public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy." That is why that same Westminster Assembly, which wrote this Confession of Faith, also wrote a Directory for Public Worship, outlining what the worship services should involve, as well a Directory for Private Worship, which addresses how the Lord's Day is to be observed in the home.

In this address this evening, I would like to deal with two questions: First, what does worship look like outwardly? Second, what is worship inwardly?

What does worship look like outwardly?

The focus of all worship is the God who has revealed Himself in His Word. The God, who is to be worshiped, has revealed Himself in His Word, and, therefore, all worship must focus on that Word. That makes going to the services of public worship in God's house such a great privilege. That we, who are sinful creatures of the dust, may come into the presence of the Lord in His house is an inestimable privilege. That we, who do not deserve to be spoken to, may come to hear His Word is a wonder. God's mercy calls us and brings us into His house.

Every Lord's Day, when you see other people busy working, shopping, or whatever else, while you go to church, you have no reason to become proud and think: "We go to church, but those bad people...." You have reason to be humbled. Why does the Lord bring me to church, when so many others do not have His Word? That is a wonder of God's goodness!

We call our services, "worship services." So quickly a term can become simply a term. But think of that term. It means we are to come to church for the purpose of worship. The purpose of the service is that God would be exalted, sinners would be humbled, and He would receive honour. That's why there is a service twice on Sunday. That's also why in the centre of the service is the Word of God. God speaks through His Word, and in the preaching He reveals Himself in His majesty, His glory, His holiness, and also in His mercy and love. He reveals who He is willing to be in His Son and what He works by His Holy Spirit. In the service, His call goes out, "Today, if ye hear his voice, harden not your heart" (Ps. 95:7b-8a). Think of that! The ever blessed God, who has need of no one, condescends to come and to speak in the worship service. What amazement ought to fill us.

In the worship service, another aspect of worship is to call on the name of the Lord. The minister publicly prays. When the minister prays, we are not to listen simply to a man pray aloud, or worse yet, doze off since our eyes are closed anyways. Public prayer is the time when the whole congregation is to be in prayer with the minister. The minister may then be the mouthpiece of the congregation.

When he lays the needs of the congregation before the Lord in prayer, he engages in an act of worship, because such petitions confess that there is help in God alone and nowhere else. When he confesses the sin of the congregation, he engages in worship, because he is acknowledging Who God is as the holy and good-doing God. When he gives thanks for the goodness God has shown, then his thanksgiving is also to the honour of God.

Another element in the worship is singing. Again, that singing is not just to fill the time in the worship service. We may never think: "After all, it's just the sermon that really counts." No, the Singing is also very important, because in that singing we are taking the Word of God and placing it on our lips and singing it back to God on high. In the Psalms, we are called to sing with understanding. Paul speaks of Singing with grace in our hearts "as unto the Lord." That is worship.

Whether the psalms ascribe justice to God with the words: "in Thy judgments Thou art just", or whether they contain the words: "God, my God, my boundless joy," the psalms are focused on the honour of God. Whether His justice or His mercy be in focus, God is exalted. That makes the Psalms so beautiful. They so exalt God, while speaking to the hearts of God's people.

As he contemplated the worship of God, the Psalmist sang, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Ps. 122: 1). Is that your song? Is that your desire as well? If it is, then worship services are not something that you "have to go to." Then you do not make them simply part of your routine which you go through out of custom. Then you long to be in church, because you need the One who reveals Himself there. You desire that He would be exalted in His own strength. If it is well, then children will also see in parents a desire to go to church and to be in God's house.

If there is that desire, then it will also affect the rest of the Lord's Day as well. Even if that desire is lacking, God's Word still speaks about how we are to conduct ourselves in the rest of the day as well. That is why the Westminster Confession speaks not only of public worship in God's house, but also private worship in our homes.

When does that begin? When you wake up Sunday morning! When you open your eyes and realize it is the Lord's Day, then private worship begins with a prayer in your heart, "O Lord, that I might sanctify Thy day!" Another important aspect is preparation for the worship service. Do not simply rush off to church without realizing where you are going, but prepare by praying that that the Lord would prepare your heart for the service, and that He would speak, and that He would apply His Word, and that He would get glory to Himself. Pray not only for yourself, but also for the minister and congregation in general.

Private worship involves preparation for the service, but also occupies the time after the service. When we walk out of church, when we drive home, when we come home, do we just speak about work, about what we are going to buy or what we need, about what we are all going to do or what we did? Or do we speak about God's Word?

Private worship means speaking to your children at home, asking them what they heard and learned in church, and taking even the small amount that they gathered from the sermon and expanding on it and applying it to them. In the process, you may open a commentary and read about the passage which was

preached on in church or read some other material you have may come across. The important thing is that as families we speak about God's word, including that portion of it we heard in church. Then children learn that listening in church is important and going to church means something.

Private worship involves speaking about the Word and cause of God. Maybe you say, "Who am I to speak?" Maybe you feel so unqualified to speak about the sermon and the Word of God. That can be understood. Yet, when you stood before God with your child in your arms at baptism, did you not say that you would instruct them in the doctrine of the church to the utmost of your ability? That was a promise given to God, and the Lord's Day is a wonderful opportunity to fulfill it by instructing your children. If you do not have children, the Lord's Day is an opportunity to speak together, and to learn from each other.

There are also other profitable activities, such as reading good books. I hope we all have good books on our shelves. Having them is very good; but reading them is far better. Praising old writers is good; but prayerfully studying their writings is far better. The Lord has given us such a wealth of material, from old writers and others. He has made many books available to us, and, again, the Lord's Day is a wonderful opportunity to pick up a book, open it, and read it.

Not only what parents read, but also what children read is important. Do they simply disappear into their rooms and do their own thing? Do you think, "As long as they are quiet, then let them be"? Or are you involved with them and do you encourage them to read something profitable? Something which teaches them about the doctrines of the church? Something about the history of the church and what God has done? Maybe a biography or some other book? It is so important that already at a young age we know what they are reading and have them read something worthwhile.

Another activity is singing. The Westminster Confession speaks of singing not only in church, but also in the home. Maybe some of us think their voices are not so good. But that doesn't matter. The issue is not whether you have a good voice or not, but whether you want to sing or not. Singing is not in the first place for others to hear but for the Lord to hear, because it is an act of worship. At the same time, the Lord is able to bless singing by applying His word sung to our hearts (Col. 3:16).

Finally, there is what the Westminster Confession calls, "secret worship." As the name suggests, Secret worship is in secret -all alone.

The Confession says: "It is most necessary that everyone apart and by themselves be given to prayer and meditation." The things that we already mentioned could be done with others, but there is also that worship which is all alone: that prayer, meditation, and opening of God's Word on your own. Alone you are not distracted by others, not interrupted by others, not restricted by others, but you may bring all your needs before the Lord, tell the Lord your whole situation and condition, confess everything that is wrong, and seek His grace personally. Alone you may quietly meditate upon the word you have heard. Private worship is an important part of Sabbath worship.

If this is what public, private, and secret worship involves, then the Lord's Day is no longer just about not doing this, not doing that, and not doing the other thing, but the about positively being active in the things of the Lord.

Often children are concerned about whether they can do why they can't do that. But so often the desires behind these questions are wrong. They want to know exactly how much of their own pleasures they can do on the Lord's Day. If that is how we approach the Lord's Day, we have never seen or known what it is to worship the Lord. In Isaiah 58 we read, "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words, but delight thy self in the Lord" That is what the Lord's Day is about. It is about setting aside all legitimate work and setting aside pleasures that are legitimate on other days. Why? Not simply as an end in itself, but so that positively we might be busy with the things of the Lord. The Lord promises that those who do that will delight themselves in the Lord.

If the Lord has set aside this day for worship, then this day is not a day of idleness, but a day of attendance of the worship service, prayer, reading, singing, conversation, and family instruction.

By now, someone may wonder: "If I do all these things, is that really worship? Is it simply enough to drive to church, open my mouth to sing, fold my hands to pray, and use my lips to speak about God's Word? Is it enough to sit with ears that listen? Is that all that God requires? Is that all that God gives?"

We may think of Isaiah 1, where we find people performing all their religious activities and all their right acts of worship. When you read that chapter, you read of the multitude of sacrifices and burnt offerings of rams. You read of how they appear before the Lord and tread God's courts. The Lord says, "They offer Me incense, and they keep My Sabbaths, and they make many prayers." These were all good things in themselves -things which ought to be done. Yet, we read, "I delight not in the blood of bullocks ... your appointed feasts my soul hateth" (Isa. 1.11, 14)! Outwardly, they did all these things, and yet God was displeased with them all. Why? If you see people who are going to church, and reading and speaking and singing and praying and..., is that

not good? Very good! But there can be something fundamental lacking, because Scripture goes deeper than outward actions. Scripture goes to the heart, when it speaks of worship. That is why we must now see, not simply at what worship looks like on the outside, but what it is in the heart.

What is worship inwardly?

If you had asked a Jew of 2000 years ago, "Who worship God?" Well, he would have pointed to that Pharisee standing on the street corner. He would point to the others who are in the temple. But the Lord Jesus says of them, "Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me" (Mar. 7:6). Their heart was not in it and, therefore, it was vain.

Often we want to bring the law of God down to a level that we can obey in our own strength. Especially the Lord's Day, we want to bring down to the level of a list of do's and don'ts, which we can obey with

some discipline. Then at the end of the day we can look back and not worry about our keeping of the Sabbath, because we have done all those good things. But as good and necessary as these things are, they are empty if they do not flow out of a heart that has been changed by the Word and Spirit of God!

True worship flows from the heart of one who has met God. The source of all worship is God's opening of one's eyes to see something of who God is. He opens the eyes of the blind to see something of His greatness, as the One clothed with majesty and girded with strength; the One who is the Almighty God from everlasting to everlasting; the One with whom no one can be compared; the Creator above everything else; the One who, in His long suffering goodness and patience, provides day by day, and who also comes with His Word time after time; the One who is righteous in all that He does and He says, in all His threatenings, judgments, and hatred for sin; the One who is all-glorious! God reveals Himself to sinners. He opens their eyes to see Who He is. Then He becomes a reality to them. When He does so, you must respond with Job, "Behold, I am vile Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 40:4; 42:6). When Job saw the greatness of God, that was his response. When God reveals His glory, then all that is left is the cry for sheer, mere, undeserved mercy.

In Isaiah 6, we read of Isaiah saying, "I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up Above it stood the seraphims ... And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts." Isaiah saw the Lord in His holiness! What was his response? "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." Was that worship? It was, because he adored God for who He was and saw himself in the light of who God was.

Yet, it did not end there, because, remember how the angel came with that coal from the altar and touched his lips and said, "Lo,... thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." That altar and that coal pointed to the sacrifice and merits of Christ. For the sake of His sacrifice, Isaiah's iniquity could be purged and taken away. Isaiah saw the grace of God in Christ.

When you may see something of the riches of Christ, then your one desire is to ascribe honour to God. God reveals Himself, not only as a holy God, but also as a God of salvation in Christ.

How can God be worshipped by those who abhor themselves? How can they give Him honour? Is that your question? Only through Christ. For Christ's sake, God opens the eyes of the blind to see something of Himself and themselves. For Christ's sake, He changes hearts from being indifferent, hard, and rebellious to being soft and to long and thirst after the living God. For His sake, He fills hearts with awe, amazement, and adoration. When Christ reveals Himself, God is exalted in worship.

That is why Wilhelms áBrakel says in his *Christian's Reasonable Service*, "Worship occurs, when while viewing and acknowledging the perfections of God, we reverently bow ourselves before the Lord and render Him honour and glory. And we speak the glorious honour of Thy majesty and of Thy wondrous works." Again, notice here how the focus is on the perfections of God: who God is. Worship is seeing something of them and adoring them, and in that way exalting Him. That is the worship which God is worthy to receive on His Day. He has set aside His day for that worship.

Bound up in that worship is a reverence for and fear of God. In 2 Kings 17 we read, "the Lord shall ye fear, and Him shall ye worship." "Worship and fear" are bound together. The psalmist's desire was: "in thy fear will I worship" (Ps. 5:7). If the One you worship is so great, there cannot but be reverence for Him. You are but a creature of the dust before Him.

Worship also involves humility. It cannot be otherwise. How often does Scripture not speak of "falling down before Him"? Actually, the word in the New Testament for "worship" is literally "to fall upon your knees," with your face in the dust. That is humble worship. Like Psalm 95 says, "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker." Humility flows from an awareness of who I am not only as a creature, but a sinful creature in His sight: one who is vile, who is unworthy of any grace or of any favour, and who cannot stand before God. Therefore, when God is exalted, the result is humility before Him.

Another element of worship is love. Worship adores and esteems the God and the Christ who is exalted over all. If He is the beauty of holiness itself, if He is so full of love, and if I have tasted even a drop of His love, then I must love Him in return. As John says, "we love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). If you worship Him for His love, then you love Him. Worship is the heart's desire for God. It is the cry of the Psalmist: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee,' because to Thee is all my desire and my love" Worship says: "He is altogether lovely."

Worship involves love, humility, and reverence. Worship does not focus on itself and think: "now I am worshipping." No, in worship self falls away, and God becomes great. You have good and high thoughts of God!

The experience may vary. God's children may not despise the day of small things. They must acknowledge God's grace whenever there is the "smallest" blessing on His Day, the weakest desires after Him, the slightest Godly sorrow, the smallest taste of goodness, and the least stirring of wonder. All these things are the work of God's Spirit and are given for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Even the smallest good thought of God is something to be thankful for. At the same time the smallest taste is the encouragement to seek for more, desire more, and pray for more.

His grace is the source of all worship, and that is why that worship is possible for everyone. That is why the Lord is also able to give more to His people. He gives it, and when He gives it, the Sabbath becomes a delight.

This evening we meet as a Canadian Lord's Day Association in a day in which we see Lord's Day observance declining because it is seen as a burden. People do not want to go twice to church, but would rather go on family outings, play their sports, work to support their family, or go shopping, because a strict observance of the Lord's Day is an intolerable burden to them. They consider Lord's Day observance to be legalistic and puritanical. As a result, the Lord's Day eventually means nothing to them, even if they still think they are Christians.

When that is the case, it says more about the person than the day. The problem is not the day, but the person who does not have a heart that has been made to desire God's honour. The problem is the

person's blindness and sin. Therefore, as a Lord's Day Association, we must tell what the Lord forbids and requires on the day of worship, but also what He is able to work and the delightfulness of the Sabbath to those who worship in truth.

Sometime ago there was a man to whom the Lord revealed Himself in His mercy and love. He said that he wished every day was the Lord's Day. He wished that there were services every day, because he found it such a blessing to be in God's house. When God's grace is experienced, the Sabbath becomes a delight. The Lord's Day becomes the best day of the week. God's house becomes the best place to be. Don't we sing of that in Psalm 84, "One day spent in Thy house of praise is better than a thousand days spent in the realm of earthly pleasure"?

When the Lord works, all those outward elements of worship that we mentioned earlier become a delight. Your heart already sings. Your heart would burst if it could not vent itself in prayer. Reading God's Word and other books becomes the most delightful thing. Regarding speaking to others, what else would you like to speak of than Him? Then all these things are not burdens and restrictions that we have to do, but are the desire of your heart. That is worship. That is why the Lord has given us His day.

In light of that, we have to examine ourselves, don't we? I know this is not a sermon, and yet, the question comes, "Have we been made to worship in spirit and in truth?" How do our Lord's days look in light of the fact God calls them to be days of worship? Can we still look back upon them and be quite satisfied with our Lord's Day routine? Or do we have to look back and confess that sin stains every Lord's Day? We cannot end one of them saying that we have kept the Sabbath.

Shall we then stop going to church, and stop reading God's Word and stop singing and stop praying if it is not from the heart? No! First of all, God requires them. You and I do have hands which we can fold, mouths which we can use to sing, eyes which we can use to read, and ears which we can use to hear the Word. We are called to use them.

But secondly, these things are means of grace. They are not only expressions of worship, but also what God is pleased to use by His Spirit to make people worshippers. He uses the foolishness of preaching to create worshipers. He leads indifferent ones to worship Him. He makes people, who complain about how hard their hearts are, longing for Him! In His time, He leads them to exalt Him! God uses the preaching, and God uses the reading of His Word, and God uses the reading of good books and the singing of His Word to bring sinners to Himself and enliven those to whom He has shown grace so that they again see something of His greatness and mercy, and themselves in light of who He is.

Therefore, our lack should only stir us up to be the more diligent in the use of these means, with the prayer that God would use them for us. God uses them to bring honour to Himself. That truth is the great encouragement. When you and I see our inability to worship Him aright, then we may plead upon this fact that God is honoured in true Sabbath worship. Therefore, you may cry to the Lord, confessing that you have robbed Him of His honour and worship, Lord's Day after Lord's Day, but also pleading, "O Lord, work in me what I cannot work in myself!" Our lack ought to lead us not to just talk about our need, but to come before the Lord with our need and cry out to Him for His grace and Spirit!

The Lord Jesus says, "the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). They shall worship Him. Why? Because the Father seeketh such! He is still seeing such, also in Canada. He is seeking! He is seeking and He shall find! He shall find and He shall make them worship! By His Spirit, He shall draw to His Son, He shall reveal Himself, He shall continue to do so to the end of time.

That is why the Lord's Day is not a dying cause; the Lord's Day has the future -an eternal future in which all God's people shall praise and exalt Him. Then all their coldness and deadness, all their blindness and backwardness will be gone. They shall worship Him forever in the eternal Sabbath.

Do not say that future cannot be for you. Do not say that is only for others. The Lord is still seeking worshippers. Whether you are young or old, you may cry out unto Him, "O Lord, here I am with all my blindness and hardness! Seek me! Make me a worshiper in spirit and in truth!"

How blessed to know that grace. We sing of that in Psalter 48:

O Lord, Thy goodness makes me raise
Amid Thy people songs of praise;
Before all them that fear Thee, now
I worship Thee and pay my vow,
I worship Thee and pay my vow.

For all the meek Thou wilt provide,
They shall be fed and satisfied;
All they that seek the Lord shall live
And neverending praises give,
And neverending praises give.

The ends of all the earth shall hear
And turn unto the Lord in fear;
All kindreds of the earth shall own
And worship Him as God alone,
And worship Him as God alone.