

Worship On The Lord's Day

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Acts 20:1-16

The church of the Lord Jesus meets on the first day of the week for regular solemn worship. At that time we eat the Lord's Supper in memory of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is also a time for exhorting and teaching God's word, singing and praying to God, and contributing some of what we have earned toward the needs of God's work.

The Lord's church meets on Sundays for some very special reasons.

Why worship on Sunday?

First, the church worships on Sundays because some special events happened on that day.

Jesus rose on the first day of the week.

Mark 16:9, *"Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils."*

The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles that day.

Acts 2:1-4, *"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."*

This day of "Pentecost" literally means "fifty days." It was a special feast of the Jewish Law which was to be observed fifty days after their Passover Feast.

Lev. 23:11, 15, *"And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. ... And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete."*

It is to be *"on the morrow, after the sabbath."*

So, the day on which the apostles received the Holy Spirit was on a Sunday.

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ began on that day.

Acts 2:37-42, *“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”*

They were added together in fellowship and began to evangelize throughout the world. From this moment on in the New Testament, one can see a change, for the church of the Lord was now in existence.

The church met on Sunday to remember, in a special meal of worship, the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 20:7, *“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.”*

The churches of Christ continued to meet throughout the years on Sundays, and were given additional instructions about other things.

They were told to “lay by in store” on this first day. 1 Cor. 16:1-2, *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”*

They were also to use this time for “exhorting one another.” Heb. 10:25-26, *“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,”*

Bible scholars state that the actual meaning of assembling on the first day of the week in the Greek is actually assembling on the first day of every week.

The early Christians did not observe the Lord’s Supper on any other day than the first day of the week.

The reference to daily breaking bread at home in the 2nd chapter of Acts was not a reference to observing the Lord’s Supper, but that the

early Christians met often and shared meals together. “*Breaking bread*” was a common term for eating a meal. The command to observe the Lord’s Supper was on the first day of the week.

Paul was in haste to get back to Jerusalem in time for the day of Pentecost. He arrived at Troas on a Tuesday, but did not continue his travel until the next Monday because he wanted to meet with the brethren there on the first day of the week when they assembled to break bread. He had much to say to the entire assembly so he spoke to midnight when they took a break; then he continued his speech until dawn on Monday before he continued his journey to Jerusalem.

Paul did not call to have this special assembly in the middle of the week. To do so would have been adding to the Lord’s command to meet upon the first day of the week to observe the communion.

- Acts 20:6-7, “*And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.*”
- Acts 20:16, “*For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.*”

The early Christians did meet daily, but that was in smaller groups when they went out by twos and threes to preach the gospel at people’s homes. When they did this they also had meals at these homes, but it was not the Lord’s Supper.

There was a daily gathering in the Jewish temple for learning the Jewish law, but the commandments concerning the sabbath were not applied in those assemblies.

We can have daily gatherings today, but not for the purpose of observing the Lord’s Supper.

Second, the churches of Christ worship on Sundays because of a very important principle.

Jesus said when his disciples went into all the world, they were to teach the disciples “... *to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*” (Matt. 28:20).

Now, when one sees the early churches observing the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, it follows that the apostles taught them to do so. If the apostles taught them to eat the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, it was done in order to follow the commandments of Jesus. So, the example of the churches in the New Testament is very important, as they were being taught personally by the apostles.

Third, the evidence of historians is overwhelming that the churches met on Sundays for worship in honor of Christ.

Ignatius of Antioch, reputable historian, lived between 37 A.D. and 108 A.D. He wrote, "Let every friend of Christ keep the Lord's Day as a festival, the resurrection day, the queen and chief of all days (of the week)."

Justin Martyr lived between 100 and 165 A.D. He wrote, "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in the cities and the country gather together to one place ... bread and (fruit of the vine) are brought ... there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given ... Sun is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the day Jesus Christ our Saviour rose from the dead." Justin shows the practices of the early church continuing into the second century.

The Old Testament Sabbath

Exo. 20:8, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."

This covenant was one given to the Israelites only. It was a sign between God and Israel.

Exo. 31:17, "*It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.*"

It was the seventh day, a day on which the Jews were to rest.

Exo. 20:9-10, "*Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.*"

Christians are to keep the first day of the week holy.

- Heb. 10:25-26, "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,*"

- Heb. 10:27-29, *“But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”*

The punishment for any Jew not observing the Sabbath was stoning.

The warning to Christians in the Hebrew letter is the Christian who takes the assembly on the first day of the week lightly is placing himself in danger of a much sorer punishment. Paul indicates in his letter that this is a serious matter.

Christians need to seriously consider these things when that first day of the week approaches.

