



WILLINGDON
CHURCH



Celebrating the Lord's Day

• Willingdon Church Position Papers



Celebrating the Lord's Day

Willingdon Church Elders
(Reaffirmed February 15, 2012)

A. INTRODUCTION

Willingdon Church has worship services both on Sunday morning and Saturday night. Believers will typically make a decision around which day they choose to worship. Multiple worship opportunities assure that in a world of diverse and conflicting schedules, we can all find a time for worship every week.

But this opens a number of questions that committed Christians need to address. Are we free to worship on any day we choose, or does God mandate which day he shall be worshipped? Are we free to tack on a worship service at the end of a busy day or does God have specific commands around how we worship? Is the 4th commandment, which demands that we observe the Sabbath and keep it holy, still valid for New Testament believers? Are there specific instructions from Scripture that tell Christians how to structure their week, and how to make God our first priority?

B. WHAT DOES THE 4TH COMMANDMENT SAY?

The 4th commandment teaches us two very important things. First, it teaches us that God wants one day each week to be holy, that is, it is to be different than all other days. It is for that reason we

stress that one day each week is to be dedicated to worship. We are not free to ignore this command. Secondly it teaches that we are to refrain from work one day each week. God wants us to rest. He commands that we take one day when we simply refuse to work.

C. IS THE 4TH COMMANDMENT STILL VALID FOR NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS?

Yes! The same principles that were laid out in the 4th commandment are valid today. God has not reduced the Ten Commandments to the Nine Commandments. But the way that Christians celebrate the 4th command is different from the way it was celebrated in the Old Testament.

The book of Acts records believers observing Sabbath, which of course was held on Saturday. But gradually the inevitable separation between Judaism and the Christian faith occurred. Believers were persecuted and were no longer welcome in the Temple and Synagogues. The New Testament records that believers began to worship on Sunday. Acts 20:7 says, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread."

In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, the apostle Paul commands the Corinthian church regarding the practice of collecting an

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

A similar pattern can be seen in John's statement about the visions he saw, described in the book of Revelation 1:9-10: "I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit..." This passage shows that early Christians began to use the phrase, "The Lord's Day," rather than the word "Sabbath," and worshipped on Sunday rather than Saturday.

Historically, and with only a few exceptions, the entire church of Jesus Christ has followed the tradition of the early church to make Sunday rather than Saturday our day of worship and rest. We remember that even while God rested on the 7th day after his work of creation, that Jesus rose on the 1st day, indicating the beginning of a new creation. The 4th command is then interpreted as an opportunity for rest, fellowship and worship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

D. ARE WE FREE TO MAKE ANY DAY OUR DAY OF REST, WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP?

Yes! Colossians 2:16-17 says, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ." The New Testament warns about an improper, legalistic interpretation of the fourth commandment. Jesus spent a great portion of his ministry warning about

the attitude of the Pharisees toward the Sabbath. Their rules around the day had become contrived and were filled with rules that formed an external religion. It was keeping the 4th command without dealing with the heart. The point is not that we should abandon any thought of making one day a week as the day of worship. We should rather beware of the legalistic traditions of the Pharisees. We also are no longer required to keep it in a Jewish way, nor is it necessary that it must be on Saturday, or for that matter on Sunday. What is necessary is that believers learn the principles of worship, rest and fellowship with Christ at the center.

E. WHY DID GOD GIVE THE COMMANDMENT ABOUT REST AND WORSHIP?

Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (Mark 2:27) In other words, the purpose of Sabbath was to provide us with a benefit, not to test our ability to keep rules. Tremendous benefits come to us from keeping a weekly pattern of work and rest. Taking a day of worship and rest allows us to be refreshed, to consider our lives, to stay focused on God, and to remember the things that matter most. It keeps our hearts and minds stayed on obedience, faith and love for Christ.

F. WHAT PRINCIPLES AROUND THE LORD'S DAY ARE HELPFUL TO BELIEVERS?

We must be wary about legalism when it comes to practicing a day of worship and rest. We counsel believers to use the Lord's Day as a way of helping them reorient their lives and give priority to the kingdom of God. Here are some of the principles that we believe are helpful in observing the Lord's Day so as to make it a priority in our lives.

1 Make sure that a weekly time of worship is a priority.

Do not miss worship. Make it a way of telling the Lord that you value relationship with him more than all other things. This then becomes a test of priorities and value.

2 Make sure that a weekly time of worship and rest lasts for a full day.

If at all possible, set aside a 24-hour period of time. Do not deviate from this pattern. There will be enough time for work during the other 6 days. In many ways, this becomes a test of our faith. We believe that honouring God by not working for 24 hours will not handicap us, but will allow us to grow in grace and holiness.

3 Keep all work to acts of charity or matters of necessity.

4 Exercise freedom on this day.

Some believers will not shop on this day. Others keep from business discussions. Many decide not to mow lawns, or even housework. Some decide to make this a day for fellowship with believers. Others choose to use this day to be alone. All these things are matters of conscience. We counsel all believers who are serious about following Christ, to search their hearts as to how to best honour God on this day. The Lord's Day should be pursued out of love and devotion to Christ. It should inspire holiness and faith. It should not be used as a way of judging the behaviour of others, or becoming legalistic. Jesus wanted us to have a benefit from this day. We encourage believers to share with each other how the keeping of the Lord's Day has been a benefit to them, and so encourage each other.