

## A THEOLOGY OF SUNDAY WORSHIP

Pastor Duane Smets

### I. Old Testament Weekly Worship

- A. In the Old Testament (a.k.a. “Old Covenant”) the “church” (often translated as “congregation” or “assembly”) weekly gathered together as God’s people to worship God. What occurs at that gathering is classically called “liturgy”.
  - 1. *Exodus 20:8 - “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”*
- B. Worship services were once a week on the SABBATH. Sabbath (“rest”) is a day of rest after six days of work. Based on the creation account (Exodus 20:6) the Sabbath was the last day of the week, Saturday.
  - 1. *Exodus 20:8 - “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”*
- C. Worship services included a CALL TO WORSHIP (a.k.a. “epiclesis”).
  - 1. *Psalm 95:6 - “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!”*
- D. Worship services included SINGING with human voices and other musical instruments.
  - 1. *Psalm 66:1-2 - “To the choirmaster. Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!”*
  - 2. *Psalm 105:1-4 - “Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness! Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!”*
- E. Worship services included PREACHING from the Bible.
  - 1. *Nehemiah 8:4-6,8 - “Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground... They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”*
- F. Worship services included blood SACRIFICES.
  - 1. *Psalm 107:22 - “Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!”*

G. Worship services included OFFERINGS of goods and/or money.

1. *Exodus 20:24 - "An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings."*

H. Worship services included a BENEDICTION sending God's people out with His blessing.

1. *Numbers 6:22-27 - "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.'"*

## **II. New Testament Weekly Worship**

A. In the New Testament (a.k.a. "New Covenant"), the church weekly gathered together as God's people to worship God.

B. Worship services were once a week on the first day of the week on SUNDAY. The day of worship changed from Saturday to Sunday because Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 21:1; John 20:1).

1. *Acts 20:7 - "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together..."*

C. The New Testament has limited descriptions of its weekly worship services. Only three specific commands are given concerning this weekly gathering.

1. Hold weekly services every week.

- a) *Hebrews 10:25 - "(Do) not neglect(ing) to meet together, as is the habit of some."*

2. Preach from the Bible.

- a) *2 Timothy 4:2 - "Preach the Word."*

3. Receive the Lord's Supper (a.k.a. "Communion" and "Eucharist").

- a) *1 Corinthians 11:23-26 - "I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*

D. Due to the lack of specific instructions in the New Testament concerning weekly worship services, Christian churches have historically embraced the liturgy of the Old Testament.

1. Epiclesis - Call to Worship
2. Oratorio - Singing with Musical Instrumentation
3. Sermon - Preaching from the Bible
4. Eucharist - Giving & Receiving the Sacrifice of the Lord's Supper
5. Offering - Giving & Receiving of Money
6. Benediction - Send out blessing

### **III. Practical Applications of The Resolved Church Weekly Worship**

A. Sunday Practices<sup>1</sup> - The Resolved Church follows all six of the traditional practices of Sunday worship with the following emphasis:

1. Epiclesis (Call To Worship) Emphasis
  - a) We practice this as a petition for the people to worship God *and* a plea to God to manifest His felt presence among us in our worship service time.
2. Oratorio (Song) Emphasis
  - a) We follow a band model which means we have different and rotating bands who play different styles of music each week. This is an expression of our unity and love for one another and our different musical preferences.
  - b) We believe the human voice and other musical instruments are pleasing to God when they are coming out of hearts which are worshipping in Spirit and in Truth.
3. Sermon (Preaching) Emphasis
  - a) We preach expository and exegetical sermons. Our normal *modus operandi* is to go through books of the Bible (exceptions are: guest preachers, specific need of the church to address or seasonal series such as Advent) chapter by chapter, verse by verse, word by word.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Resolved Church follows a soft form of what is known as the “regulative principle.” Namely, that Sunday worship services should follow what is commanded (regulated) by God. The contrasting view is known as the “normative principle” which believes anything not forbidden is allowable (mimes, interpretative dances, holy ghost laps etc.).

4. Eucharist (Lord's Supper) Emphasis
    - a) We believe every sermon ought to end in the Gospel with a response to it. The Lord's Supper provides the opportunity for this each week.<sup>2</sup>
  5. Offering (Money) Emphasis
    - a) We understand financial giving to be an act of worship, structured by God to be stewarded by the church members.
  6. Benediction (Blessing) Emphasis
    - a) We see the end of the service blessing as a call and empowerment for God's people to go out into the week living for Him and being on mission for Him to win others to Jesus.
- B. Jesus The Head Pastor - We believe Jesus is the only Head Pastor of the Church (universal, global etc.) and any church (visible, local etc.). We believe Jesus leads His Church by His Word.<sup>3</sup> We apply this principle in the following ways:
1. Plural Eldership - Multiple pastors under the head pastorship of Jesus (1 Peter 5:1-4). We regularly acknowledge this leadership principle in our sermons, member meetings, and other church activities and operations.
  2. Bible Sermons - We aim to deliver gospel-centered, expository, exegetical sermons every week at The Resolved Church because we believe Jesus leads us best and most clearly by His written Word.
  3. R | KIDS Lessons - The children of The Resolved Church learn the same text and basic content of the sermon being giving every Sunday during the sermon portion of our service.
  4. Community Groups - All the mid-week Community Groups of The Resolved Church do weekly discussion questions based on the text of the previous Sunday's sermon.<sup>4</sup>
  5. Preparation - Every week, a preview of the coming Sunday's text and sermon is posted on The Resolved Church blog and sent out in our email to help our people prepare to receive from God's Word.
  6. PostScript - Every week, a follow-up blog from either a theologian or a person in our church is posted on The Resolved Church blog in order to help us process the content of the previous week's text and sermon from God's Word.

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information on the history and theology of "fencing the table" and how The Resolved Church practices this principle see: <http://theresolved.com/blog/fencing-the-table>

<sup>3</sup> Historically, this is categorically summarized in Reformed circles as "word and sacrament".

<sup>4</sup> Exceptions include missional nights, seasonal specific studies and redemption community groups.

- C. Peak of the Week - We see Sunday as the peak of our week. We look forward to it with much excitement and anticipation.
1. Uniqueness - There is something unique about God's varied people (from different tribes (gender, ages, personalities, socio-economic classes and other various cultural groupings) and tongues (languages and races) gathered together to worship on a Sunday.
    - a) Song - The cacophony of untrained voiced melted together in united song creates a beautiful sound.
    - b) Spirit - The mutual indwelling of God's Holy Spirit in His people is experientially felt when we are physically present together.
    - c) Submission - The act of sitting under leadership in the gathered setting, including the listening of an extended sermon from the Bible is an expression of obedience and teachability before God.
    - d) Service - The many ministries which happen on a Sunday function as a service both unto God and His people.
  2. Community Groups - We view our community groups as undergirding supports or strengths upon which the Sunday service sits. This means we are a Sunday first church, operating with Sunday as our front foot forward.<sup>5</sup>
  3. Missional - We believe our Sunday worship service ought to be both sensitive and hospitable to outsiders (1 Corinthians 14:16; 1 Timothy 1:3,7) in hopes of them believing the Gospel and/or joining our church.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> In contrast to this model the "community" or "service" first methodology which may or may not result in a Sunday worship service.

<sup>6</sup> The gospel is our goal, thus we do not practice this at the expense of speaking of gospel truths such as sin, death, and hell.