

TEN REASONS WHY WE HAVE AN EVENING WORSHIP SERVICE

& Ten Reasons Why I Should Attend It

Why did the Lord Jesus suffer and die? We can have little doubt that it is not just to redeem a people to enjoy heaven. It is, instead, that He might redeem a people to worship God in union with Him. Thus, after twenty-one verses describing His intense suffering on the cross in Psalm 22, He exclaims to the Father: “I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee” (Ps 22:22). The apostle to the Hebrews picks up on this point to highlight that the Lord Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brethren, saying, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the

church will I sing praise unto thee” (Heb 2:12). The apostle Peter, no doubt, has the same thought when he suggests that we are “lively stones” making up “a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices” and indicating that Jesus Christ is the “chief cornerstone” of the house (1 Pet 2:5-6)!

It is no wonder that the Lord, twice—once at the beginning of His ministry (Jn 2:13ff) and once at the end of his ministry (Mt 21:ff, etc.) went into the temple courtyard to cleanse it of merchants and money changers. “Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise,” He demanded (Jn 2:16). Worship in the temple was an Old Covenant shadow of the worship He came to procure. “Destroy this

temple, and in three days I will raise it up,” He exclaimed (Jn 2:19). Ultimately, He and the “lively stones” that He came to redeem is the substance of the temple.

Now, it should be evident that the one temple Christ came to build is the “great congregation” (Ps 22:25) that comprises all the elect through the ages that will worship with Him as their head and the object of their adoration for all eternity. But it should also be quite apparent that while this great congregation is being gathered, God’s people must gather in local assemblies to worship God together in and through Christ in preparation. Thus, we are earnestly exhorted by the apostle to the Hebrews not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Heb 10:25).

Thus, the vast majority of Christians throughout the world and throughout the ages have gathered together for public worship on the Lord's Day. Indeed, until relatively recently, many, if not most, Christians worship publicly at least twice on the Lord's Day.

Worship was important to believers. But today, sadly, relatively few churches even maintain an evening service. Many shuttered their evening worship because too few were willing to attend it.

Much may be said about this change of attitude, but that goes beyond the scope of this tract. What I hope to do, instead, is to impress upon your mind why we have evening worship, and as a corollary, why you should attend the evening worship. Here are ten reasons.

1.

The Fourth Commandment Requires Us to Keep the Whole Day Holy

Our *Shorter Catechism* reminds us, “The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy” (*WSC* 60).

It is clear—contrary to popular thinking today—that the fourth commandment is not kept just by attending one worship service in the morning. It is primarily intended to be a day of worship, for it is a day that is sanctified by the Lord. If we have only one worship service on the Lord’s Day, we

will be easily tempted to misuse a significant part of the day. Having two services near the two ends of the day gives us a valuable structure to recognise and organise the whole day as a holy day for the glory of God.

2.

It Is a Biblical Pattern to Worship Morning and Evening

Under the Old Covenant, a lamb was offered to the LORD in the temple every morning and every evening (see Num 28:1-8; 1 Chr 16:40). On the sabbaths, however, two additional lambs and other sacrifices were made (see Num 28:9; 2 Chr 2:4). Sabbath worship is an intensification of daily worship. Though the old covenant laws have been

abrogated, does it not behove us—who are redeemed by the blood of Christ and joined unto God’s Israel—to imitate the zeal of our fathers of old?

Thus, many Reformed families seek to have family worship both in the morning and the evening. If that is so for each day of the week, how much more should the church family gather for public worship both morning and evening on the Lord’s Day!

3.

God Is More Pleased with Public Worship than Family Worship

Some have argued that it is too tiring to attend two services and that they could make up for the

deficiency by having family worship in the evening. But the psalmist says, "The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (Ps 87:2). Matthew Henry is undoubtedly correct when he says:

"God has a love for the dwellings of Jacob, has a gracious regard to religious families and accepts their family-worship. Yet he loves the gates of Zion better, not only better than any, but better than all, of the dwellings of Jacob. God was worshipped in the dwellings of Jacob, and family-worship is family-duty, which must by no means be neglected; yet, when they come in competition, public worship (*caeteris paribus* - other things being equal) is to be preferred before private."

4.

The Evening Service Provides Additional Opportunities for Hearing God's Word

The apostle Paul makes it clear that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:18). Preaching by ministers of the gospels—which are called to minister to us specifically—is the ordinary means that God has appointed for us to hear His word by (cf. Rom 10:15).

Thus, every opportunity to hear God's word preached in corporate worship strengthens our faith more than reading or listening to recorded sermons. Covenant parents ought especially to be mindful of the needs of their children in this regard. Neglecting to bring the children for

evening worship deprives them of necessary food for their souls and sends a signal that God is not so important. H.P. McCracken cogently reflects upon this in his excellent article, “The Blessing of Evening Worship,” published in the June 2020 issue of *Tabletalk*:

“Reflecting on that during a time while in a church without evening worship, it struck me that my kids were hearing no more than *half* the sermons I heard growing up. They were experiencing no more than *half* the worship that the church historically has always experienced. Here is an immense opportunity to include our children in seeking the kingdom of God first, to further set an example and a countercultural pattern of priority for them.

The church, if it has a historical and biblical perspective on how we order the Lord's Day and worship, should be reluctant to so dramatically reorder the priorities we are setting for our kids and families over against both the historical and biblical patterns. Our children are growing up in what is now characterised as the 'information age', an age in which we are daily bombarded by information from numerous inputs, willingly and unwillingly, knowingly and unknowingly, being trained unconsciously (in the words of the late Neil Postman) in 'amusing ourselves to death.' It seems to me an especially dangerous time to *cut in half* God's means of grace in corporate worship for our instruction and growth."

5.

Faithful Attendance of Public Worship Fortifies Against Apostasy

The apostle to the Hebrews is undoubtedly spot on when he suggests that a failure to assemble with the saints can be a harbinger of apostasy (see Heb 10:25-27). If this is the case, an additional service that is faithfully attended will surely do much good for our perseverance. Conversely, it has been observed that in churches with an evening service, backsliding, which may lead to apostasy, often begins with non-attendance of the additional service.

Therefore, members of churches which have an evening service ought to be grateful to the Lord

for the provision and, at the same time, take heed to the admonishment of Calvin:

“The Word, sacraments, public prayers, and other helps of the same kind, cannot be neglected, without a wicked contempt of God, who manifests himself to us in these ordinances, as in a mirror or image” (*Comm. on Ps 27:4*)

6.

The Best Reformed Churches Have Evening Services

I was converted in a denomination which generally did not see the need for an evening service. However, one godly pastor started an evening service, calling it “Sunset Gospel Hour.”

There is some historical basis for that, as we shall see later. But many of us understood it simply as an alternative service. We either attended our morning service or that evening service. If we could not make it to the morning service, and our conscience gave us no rest, we could go to that service.

It was, therefore, somewhat surprising for me to learn—while researching for my Master of Divinity thesis on the Christian Sabbath—that having only one service on the Lord's Day is quite a recent phenomenon. For almost two thousand years, almost all churches, not only those that are Reformed, had a morning service and an evening service or an evening prayer! The practice slowly died out everywhere for various reasons,

including the lure of work and sports. Interestingly, the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619 dealt with the issue of dwindling attendance at the evening (or afternoon) worship. It eventually declared that in every parish, there should be two services every Lord's Day, and that pastors should still go ahead with the additional service even if "they brought to the Church none but their own Family." Furthermore, "if any pastor neglected to perform this Duty, he should be subject to Ecclesiastical Censure!"¹

We are thankful that the practice of having evening worship persisted in the best of the

¹ John Hales, *Golden Remains of the Ever Memorable Mr. John Hales of Eton College* (London : Printed for Tim. Garthwait, 1659), p. 373. The details cited are from Dr Hales' letter from the Synod where he was representative from England. See <http://archive.org/details/goldenremainsofe00hale>.

Presbyterian and Reformed churches in Scotland, Wales, England, Netherlands, the United States, Australia and elsewhere. Surely, we are not being overly zealous by maintaining and attending the evening service! We thank God for the sense of the communion of saints we enjoy with godly saints through the ages when we do so.

7.

The Evening Service Provides for a Variation of Ministry Focus

While the recommendations of the Synod of Dort mentioned above are not so widely known, most churches that have adopted the Three Forms of Unity would know how the Synod decreed that there be an afternoon (or evening) service during

which the Heidelberg Catechism is to be preached. Though we do not subscribe to the same subordinate standard, we certainly agree with the rationale behind the prescription.

The Bible is like a vast garden with sixty-six flower plots. We can familiarise ourselves with the garden by going from one plot to another, or we can systematically gather the same or similar flowers from each plot. If we have only one service, we are bound to one method, and are more likely to neglect the whole counsel of the word of God.

The evening service allows us an alternate approach to weekly serial expository preaching. The Dutch churches have chosen catechetical preaching. Many English and Welsh churches

have made their evening service expressly evangelistic. Members are encouraged to bring their unbelieving friends for the evening service.

PCC started with this idea, but lost our way when it became clear that evening worship is such a strange idea to most Singaporean Christians that not only are few attending it, but those who attend find it hard to persuade non-Christians to come. We began to use it for catechetical preaching and topical studies. Restoring a more focussed use of the evening service will be good. But either way, having the evening service will provide us with this flexibility—provided we attend it faithfully.

8.

The Evening Service Provides Us with More Opportunities for Fellowship

It is a sad reality that many Christians today are closer to their colleagues at work or their classmates in school. We can debate why this is the case and even try to assign blame here or there, but I think none will disagree that a large part of it has to do with the fact that we spend many more hours with our colleagues and schoolmates.

Since many of us in PCC did not come from church cultures that honour the Christian Sabbath, our founders deliberately sought to keep our Saturdays free from church activities. This is so our families could spend time together in privacy

on Saturdays and then with the church community on the Sabbaths. The evening service became an essential means of providing an additional avenue of fellowship. The service itself is an avenue of spiritual communion. Are we not doing that when we sing the psalms to “teaching and admonishing one another” (Col 3:16)? It is a remarkable observation by many who attend the evening service that the singing is generally more robust and inspiring for some unknown reason. Additionally, after the service, many of us had the opportunity to enjoy one another’s company over dinner together. This was, of course, before the pandemic disrupted our good intentions.

Things have started to return to what they were before the pandemic as far as external pressures

are concerned. But unless we make an effort to use all the opportunities to fellowship together, including the evening worship, we shall never attain the close bond of love we desire.

9.

The Evening Service Provides an Alternative Service

The evening service ought not to be an alternative service. As we have seen thus far, every Christian should attend the evening service. This is why we do not repeat the morning sermon in the evening. Nevertheless, we recognise that some of us may have legitimate reasons for attending only one service. We think of those working in essential services or hospitals that may require them to

spend half a day at necessary work. We also think of couples looking after sickly elderly parents or children. In such circumstances, the husband and wife often have to take turns attending public worship.

No, attending services, or worse, watching services via the internet, should not be taken as a legitimate alternative to physical worship. It should only be used when there are no other options available. We are called to assemble together body and soul so that we may consciously worship together in union with Christ. How can others assemble with you when you are not present? How do we provoke one another “unto love and to good works” (Heb 10:25) when we are not there for each other?

10.

With the Evening Service, We Can Read and Sing Through the Scriptures More Rapidly

The *Westminster Directory of Public Worship* recommends that the Old and New Testaments be read serially at every service. We live in a different time. Many of us are sleep-deprived, and our attention span is short. As a result, we decided from our founding days as a congregation to read from one Testament in the morning and the other in the evening. Over the last two decades, we finished reading the New Testament quite a few times in our evening worship. We recently finished reading the Old Testament during our morning worship and continued with

the New Testament. We have started reading the Old Testament in our evening worship. Those who attend both services regularly would have had the opportunity to hear the whole Bible read and briefly expounded within two decades.

We have also been singing through the Psalms portion by portion at every service, with a brief explanation. Since we have been singing a different portion at our morning and evening services, we have been able to sing through the Psalms quite a few times. The Psalms provides us with a window into the inner life of our Saviour and is the anatomy of our soul. Surely, it is good for us to sing through them regularly with the whole congregation.

Conclusion

The apostle Paul had warned that in the last days, there would be periods of perilous times when many professing believers will be “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” (2 Tim 3:4). I think very few of us will deny that we live in such a time. But many of us may not realise that we have all been infected with the same disease of pleasure-seeking, idolatry of convenience, tyranny of busyness and minimal commitment. As a result, worship has been pushed to the sidelines, except where it has mutated into entertainment.

After more than two decades of pastoral ministry, I am so convinced that this is happening in our days that I have a very low expectation that this

article will do much change. Indeed, I fear that it may be tossed aside as censorious and offensive. But beloved, I am persuaded better things of you, though I thus speak. I want to encourage you to thoughtfully and prayerfully consider beginning or returning to attend evening worship.

I am aware that it may be challenging for many of us. Public transport can be exhausting for many of us. Some of us have young children, making it even more difficult. Some of us have struggled to stay awake during the service. Some of us feel that we can benefit better by simply going online. But I want to encourage you to take serious steps to seek first God's kingdom and to seek to encourage others to do the same by being present at the evening service (Heb 10:25).

The Lord will bless you and help you and your family if you set your heart to doing what is right. Our church will not make it compulsory for every one of us to attend evening worship. Doing so will inevitably promote externalism and hypocrisy, not to mention resentment. But will you not resolve to make the evening worship an indispensable component of your life—for the glory of Christ, for your own good, for the good of your family, and for the good of the church? Ω

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Pilgrim Covenant Church

203B Henderson Road #07-07

Singapore 159546

www.pilgrim-covenant.com

info@pilgrim-covenant.com