

4th. The Second Service (part 2)

Defended by Clark in *Recovering the Reformed Confession* (292-342)

3A. Clark's conclusions

For discussion on 1-24-10

Church attendance in America is on the decline; things are worse for the 2nd service for less than fifty percent of those who attend the morning service also attend the evening service.

So, reform "the second service is a countercultural act of defiance against the antinomian spirit of the age. It is also a statement about the centrality of the Word...a testimony that Christ's people have been redeemed...to a community...a confession of that God the Spirit uses divinely ordained means to save and sanctify...not easy...not popular, but it is Reformed...worth the effort, and it is the way of the Christian life" (340).

Thus, reform is challenging: "we must be prepared to recover gradually, through instruction, prayer, and discipline, to lead our congregations toward reformation" (341). How then do we recover Reformed theology, piety, and practice? "Historically, the 2nd service was a primary instrument" so "we must be moving our congregations in a Reformed direction" by "reinstating Reformed practice" (341) and to do so we must "set aside one day in seven for worship, rest, and renewal" and apply a healthy Reformed theology of the means of grace (342).

4A. Evaluation

1) The historical argument

a) We ought to learn from reformation history. It is vital for perspective and better grasp of Scripture.

b) However, though a call for a 2nd service is present in much of the history since Calvin, the history also shows times in which the 2nd service was not uniformly practiced (Clark stated that that took about a 100 years after Calvin, 294). This argument is hardly conclusive.

2) Sabbath + means + Reformed history argument

Notably, Clark's references to "ordained means" such as reading, singing, and preaching disappear regarding the 2nd service. But believing the "plusses" might lead us to a 2nd service and we might place some value on it without believing that God requires it. This reminds me of the Mathison argument for the frequency of communion, namely, the more you value it, the more you will practice it, so why not practice weekly communion? You will have it if you value it. However, for neither gathered worship nor for communion, does this argue how often God requires gathering and participation in communion. If so, then Christian liberty applies.

3) The "biblical references argument" is weak indeed. Clark admits the figurative application of Gen. 1 (on the evening) and the Psalms (on evening sacrifices). To then say that they give us "some continuing place" is just as "scanty" as is the evidence from the NT. In this light the evidence from the synagogue and early post-apostolic Christianity are even weaker (338).

5A. Lessons/implications/applications

1) The evening service is surely valuable but optional

Sabbath keeping and emphasis on the means of grace are both important and they ought to be cultivated in earnest in the fullest biblical way we can determine: that ought to be how we define Reformed practice! What is historically of consensus among the Reformed may not be Scriptural. Surely, this applies to theology, piety, and practice (or piety-practice).

Note: the Bible study at WRC meets most of the goals Clark states for the 2nd service such as striking a balance between expository preaching and exposition of reformed confessions, (294), or better, an exposition of Scripture using the catechism (321). Our "second service" has the goal of hearty instruction as a context for preaching primarily from the NT by studies on every book of the OT (and NT) and by study of the Ten Commandments.

6A. Final thoughts on Sabbath keeping on "Delight Day" (Isa. 58)

The spirit of Sabbath keeping in its practice does not require worship, either privately or publicly, as its primary thrust for the whole day.

1) What does it mean to keep the day holy? It means to set it apart in a way that is distinct from how we conduct our lives on the six days of the six-one pattern.

2) What is the difference between fellowship and golf on Sunday? If a person takes his golf seriously, he will concentrate all his powers of mind and body on each swing (as I try to do in my tennis). In fellowship our concentration is presumably on the things of God in relation to all the things of life, with no sacred-secular compartmentalization. The difference is in the mind-set at the least.

3) What does pleasure mean in Isa 58? Your pleasure contrasts with my holy day; it means that we are not simply to do as we please on His day. On the six days, do as you please, i.e. the Lord does not command that you be a bricklayer or x or y; choose what you will, do as you please (of course righteously by the commandments as they apply). On the six days, in your work and life choices, there is a proper focus on what is yours but that is not the case on the Lord's Day. He claims it as His and we should see it in a different light. We break the Sabbath with our feet if we simply do what pleases us *like we do every other day*. We break it if we forget that this day belongs to the Lord in a distinct and exclusive way. But importantly, accent is not on the negative (what not to do) but on the positive: do what pleases God, namely, call the day a delight, honor Christ as Sabbath king by the resurrection, etc:

[Isaiah 58:13-14 ¹³ "If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honorable; if you honor it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; ¹⁴ then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."]

4) What seems to be the major mistake of the Westminster formulators regarding the Sabbath that shows up in their emphasis on the whole day (cf. Vos and Gaffin)?

XXI. 8. This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations, but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

WSC 60: 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.

WLC 117 How is the sabbath or the Lord's day to be sanctified? A. The sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy in the public and private exercises of God's worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.