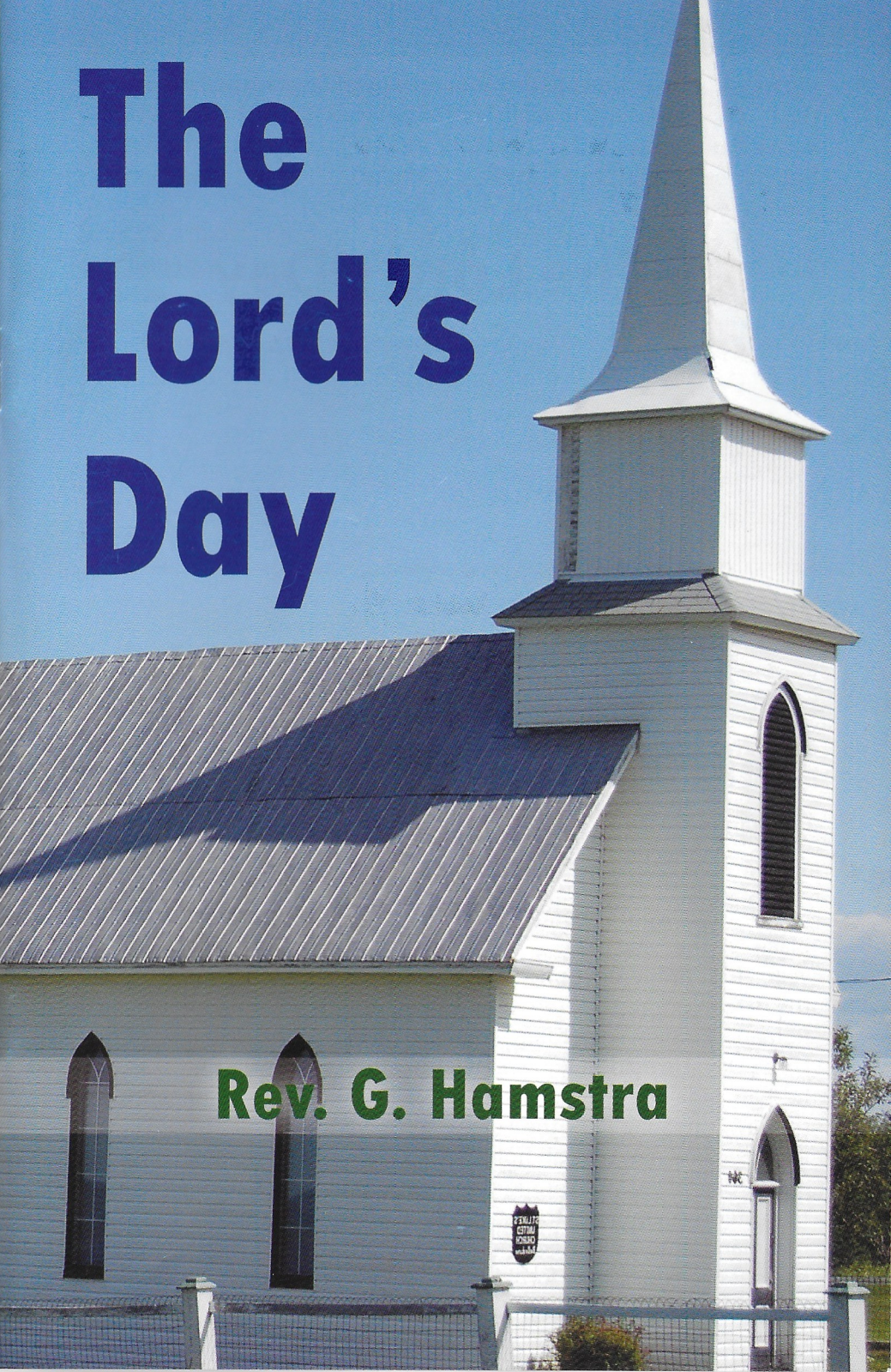


The Lord's Day

Rev. G. Hamstra



An address to the Annual General Meeting of the
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on April 10, 2009,
by Rev. G. Hamstra.

The Lord's Day

It is my intention this evening to speak about the principles of the Lord's Day Association. These should be so well known that we can all can all speak about them at home and pass them on to others who are in need of the instruction. As we meditate on this subject, we wish to consider five matters.

1. The Origin of the Lord's Day
2. The Sabbath in the Old Testament Days
3. The Sabbath in the New Testament Days
4. The Observance of the Lord's Day and
5. Three Very Special Sabbath Days

1. The Origin of the Lord's Day

Constantine's Law

In connection with the observance of the Lord's Day, a rather significant change took place in the year 321. In that year, the Emperor Constantine the Great addressed the entire Roman Empire regarding the Lord's Day. He made it known that he had ordained a new law. By this law, the Sunday or the Lord's Day became an official holiday and a day of rest all throughout the extensive empire. Stores were commanded to be closed and all business activities were forbidden

on the Lord's Day. The only man that was allowed to work on the Sabbath Day was the farmer. This new law was a great relief for many Christians, especially so for those believers who refused to work on the Sabbath Day. Many Christians of that day would rather be without work and honour God by obeying the fourth commandment than to give in to the demands of their heathen employers.

Thus in connection with the observance of the Lord's Day, the law of Constantine the Great brought about a radical and significant change in the entire Roman Empire. The Roman Empire of that day was an

extensive domain. It consisted of many present European, Asian and African countries such as Italy, France, Spain, England, Scotland, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium, Israel, Turkey, Egypt and Ethiopia. Thus it concerned a rather impressive and sizable territory.

What was the reaction to this imperial law regarding the Lord's Day? Generally speaking, this new law was obeyed. The people knew that the emperor was a powerful ruler, who required that the laws of his empire should be faithfully observed. The emperor, a man of great authority, rigidly enforced every law he made. Constantine's law on the Lord's Day was and remained indeed influential also during the time of the emperor's successors.

Now our first concern this evening is, why do we really observe the Lord's Day? When we answer this question we do not point you to great men like Constantine and others. We do not direct you to earthly rulers of kingdoms and empires. Not to state governments, neither to church councils must we look for the origin of the Lord's Day.

Heavenly Origin

The Sabbath or the Lord's Day is not a human invention. No, this institution has a far more exalted origin. The Sabbath or the Lord's Day is of heavenly origin. When

God made this world, He made everything in harmony with Himself. God created impressive objects. God created the sun and the moon; He created the millions and millions of stars.

Sabbath Part of Creation

We see a star as a little tiny glowing speck or spark, but scientists tell us there are stars far more powerful than the glorious sun. The splendour of the universe can never be fully measured. God created the entire marvellous universe. He created sun, moon and stars. God created all the numerous trees in the woods of the earth and all the beautiful flowers in every garden. God created all the animals that inhabit this earth. He made all the various kinds of birds that fly in the sky. Whatever God created, He examined and He saw that it was good. The most important creature in the divinely created universe was man. Man in the image of God was the climax of the entire creation. God's greatest achievement was made in the likeness of his Maker. God took care of man in a perfect manner. This earth was created with a heavenly perfection, yet God made a special home for man in harmony with man's spiritual, physical and emotional needs. The Garden of Eden was the most delightful home ever. Adam and Eve found their deepest enjoyment in God their heavenly

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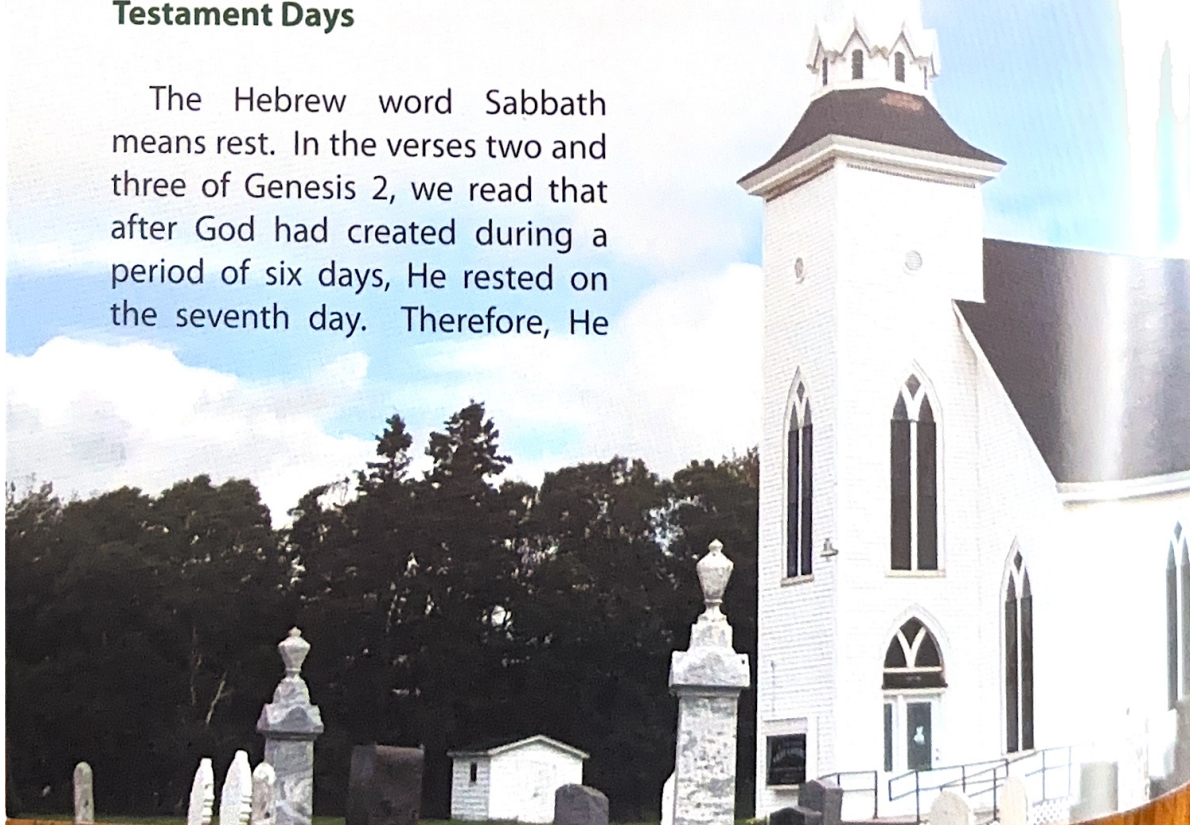
Maker and Provider. The most ardent desire of their hearts was to glorify the Lord. This filled their inmost beings, their souls, with a profound sense of joy. Adam and Eve loved each other with a perfect love; they found a deep enjoyment in each other, but far deeper was their enjoyment in God. At the completion of the magnificent creation, when God discontinued His marvellous creative activities, He provided another special blessing for Adam and Eve. For His own glory and the good of mankind, God provided the seventh day as a sabbatical festival, the Sabbath Day.

Now we come to our second consideration the Sabbath in the Old Testament Days,

2. The Sabbath in the Old Testament Days

The Hebrew word Sabbath means rest. In the verses two and three of Genesis 2, we read that after God had created during a period of six days, He rested on the seventh day. Therefore, He

sanctified the seventh day. Now as God rested on the seventh day, so He commanded Adam and Eve to rest on the seventh day. What does this mean for us? When we are weary and tired, we long for a time of relaxation and rest. However, God is never weary or tired. God never slumbers nor sleeps. He is a most glorious Being. He was not even weary after He had accomplished the marvellous creation of the universe. Why then did He rest? First of all, He ceased from creating new things. However, He did not stop working, for He is also the God of providence. Nothing could come into being without God and nothing could continue to be without God's wisdom, power and will. Secondly, we read six times in



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the creation account,

"and God saw that it was good,"

and once, after the creation of man, "and it was very good." So God looked at what He had been creating, at His own work, and this gave Him a certain divine satisfaction and joy.

A Great Work of Art

You may compare it with an artist, who has accomplished a great work of art. For instance, think about Rembrandt. After he had completed one of his paintings, he would rest and look at it for some time. He would examine to see whether all the details were well taken care of and whether the colouring was to his liking. When

he found everything the way he thought it should be, that gave him a certain satisfaction. This is only a small comparison to what God did. Seven times He looked at His own accomplishments and He was fully satisfied. He rested. He delighted in His own work. This was especially true regarding the most important of all His creatures, man, who was created in the image of God. God could commune with Adam and Eve and they with God. They were created in God's own likeness. When God told Adam and Eve to rest, they were called to join Him in admiring His wonderful creation. This was a special privilege for them. At times, when Rembrandt was viewing his paintings, he would invite certain friends. They had the privilege of coming to his home to view his art work with him. Man had the privilege on the Sabbath Day to admire the great works of God.

How great are the works of God. His thoughts are very deep. Much in creation speaks about God's infinite glory. Think of the flowers of the fields and the trees in the



woods.

Think of the marvellous glory of the sun. How many lights does the human race produce in our day? Take all these lights together and they are nothing in comparison to the sun. The glory of the sun is of heavenly origin. Even though the sun is as old as the universe, it has never lost its strength. It will shine as long as it pleases God. It is good to see God's hand in nature and to glorify Him for it.

A Memorial of Redemption

The Sabbath in the Old Testament was not only a memorial of creation, but it became also a memorial of redemption. Where do we read this? The first intimation of this we find in the preface of the Ten Commandments.

"I am the Lord, thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"(Exodus 20:2).

Here is a reference of the redemption out of Egypt. More light on this truth is provided in the Deuteronomy account of the Ten Commandments. In Deuteronomy 5:15, we read

"and remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm, therefore the Lord commanded thee

to keep the Sabbath."

The exodus out of Egypt was most important to the people of Israel. This was the climactic hour of the Old Testament. It was the birth of Israel as a nation.

What is the significance of this for us? The redemption out of Egypt is an anticipation of the redemption in Christ. This redemption in Christ is far more glorious. The first is a temporary redemption, while the other is an eternal redemption. Thus the Sabbath is also a memorial of redemption.

We now come to our third consideration

3. The Sabbath During the New Testament Days

In the Old Testament we have the promise of redemption. In the New Testament we see the marvellous fulfillment of this promise of redemption in Christ Jesus. It is good to marvel at all the great works of God. He can help us when we are helpless. He can give us hope when we are hopeless. He can save us when we think it is impossible. All God's works are great. However, there is no work of God that is as great and glorious as the most amazing work of God in redemption. Redemption is the most glorious work of God. God's works, both

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in creation and in providence are marvellous, but redemption is by far God's greatest work. The grace of God revealed in Christ is the most marvellous of all wonders.

When God created the world, He could do it with a certain divine ease. It cost Him nothing. God said, "Let there be light and there was light." God spoke, and it was done. He commanded, and it stood fast. However, it was not so in redemption! God could not say, "Let there be salvation, and there was salvation." God in His eternal wisdom and power could not devise a remedy for sin, without an amazing heavenly sacrifice. God, the God of truth, could not redeem from satanic deceit without honouring His own sacred truth. God, the Fountain of Justice, could not deliver from the guilt of sin without satisfying the demands of His sublime justice.

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4b).

Commemoration of Redemption

God in His eternal wisdom designed a perfect way of deliverance from sin. This way, the way of divine mercy, was and is fully in harmony with truth and justice and magnified all the divine perfections to the highest degree.

In marvellous grace and wisdom, God sent His Son to this earth. God, the second Person of

the Holy Trinity, humbled Himself to such a low degree as to assume a human nature. He lay in the lowly manger of Bethlehem and lived a life of perfect obedience to His Father's will. Christ was without sin, and He took the place of sinners. He suffered for enemies.

"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8b).

He died for enemies of the truth, of His Father, of Himself, and of grace. There is no good in those for whom He died. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Man is utterly unable to deliver himself. Christ wrought a righteousness by His life of perfect obedience and by His atoning death. This most amazing righteousness is graciously imputed to true believers. Sinners can only be saved in harmony with God's truth and justice. This was perfectly accomplished in the atoning death of Christ.

The redemption in Christ is remembered by the New Testament Church, not as a redemption that is coming but as a redemption that has been accomplished. Christ atoned for sin; He reconciled His people by His blood. This is the glory of the living Church. When the Father raised Christ from the grave, the Father gave His approval upon the work of His Son. The righteousness of Christ is the

Father's delight. It is also the delight of poor and needy sinners who by grace have fled to Christ for refuge. In the righteousness of Christ is their only hope; they cannot trust in their own works or accomplishments. It is Christ and Christ alone.

*I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.*

Now we come to our fourth consideration.

4. The Observance of the Lord's Day

Thomas Boston once said, "The King of heaven has made the Sabbath the queen of days. Therefore it should be our question, what shall be done to that day the King delights to honour?"

How can and must we observe and sanctify the Lord's Day? It seems best that we follow the divine instructions given to us in God's own Word. The Bible teaches us first of all what we ought not to do and secondly what we ought to do.

What is Forbidden

In the fourth commandment, God forbids us to work and to do business on the day of rest. Only works of necessity and mercy are permitted. Unnecessary travel and

worldly pleasures are not allowed on the Lord's Day. Everything is forbidden that is not in harmony with the design of the day which is to worship God in private and in public and to promote our own and our family's spiritual interests.

What is Commanded

Public worship is a divine ordinance of the utmost importance. Sincere worshippers have always come together on the Sabbath Day to pray to God, to praise His holy name and to be instructed in the truth relating to God and His service. In the book of the Psalms, we find many references to the public worship of God. The Psalms abound with expressions declaring a warm and wholehearted interest in visiting the house of God. In Psalm 122:1, we read,

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD."

The poet of psalm 84 esteemed one day in the house of the Lord better than a thousand elsewhere.

"For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness"

Prayer

Family prayer is also important

every day of the week but especially on the Lord's Day.

We need to teach our children so that they may learn the great truths needed for salvation.

In private prayer, we seek to be alone with God. This is likewise needed. Every one needs an inner room or prayer closet. We may and we must pour out our hearts before God and pray for the unconverted and for the Lord's special guidance.

Now we come to our fifth and last consideration

5. Three Very Special Sabbath Days

The Resurrection of Christ

The first special Lord's Day is the day of the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ was a triumphant victory over death. It was a miracle of the first magnitude. Christ was raised from the grave. He was alive and He was alive for evermore! The resurrection was a vindication of Christ's righteousness. It was a definite proof that Christ was God. The resurrection is a demonstration that the blessed work of redemption has been accomplished. It is a guarantee of the believer's present forgiveness and justification. It is the foundation of the believer's hope of eternal life in Christ.

The Old Testament Sabbath

Day provided a special promise of hope. It promised that "SABBATH", that is, "REST" would come. The New Testament Sabbath Day tells us this "REST" has come. Therefore, the Day of Rest was no longer celebrated on the seventh or last day of the week, but on the first day of the week.

In the four gospels, we read that on the day of Christ's resurrection, He appeared five times to His followers. He appeared to Mary Magdalene, the women, Peter, the two travellers on the way to Emmaus and then the eleven at night. In gospel according to Mark, we read that they all mourned and wept, for they were a missing people. They had known Christ and experienced His sweet communion, but now they were missing Him. They sought, but could not find Him.

What did the risen Lord do? Did He immediately ascend into heaven so that the angels could worship Him for that great work He had accomplished? No, He visited His sorrowing, missing people that could not do without Him. Their sighs were music in His ears. He loves to see and visit His needy people who cannot do without Him.

He heard a weeping Mary Magdalene. He saw Peter, a man who had lost all rights for he had denied Him. Christ visited him too. Then there were the two lonely travellers on the way to



Emmaus. They needed to be taught by Christ. What a glory there is in the way the risen Lord deals with His needy followers. How lovingly did He comfort them! He knew exactly what they needed. Think also of this. To whom did He come first? To Mary Magdalene. Why? She was missing Him most and that is where He always comes first. Where the sorrow and the affliction are the greatest, He comes and will not tarry. A week later, Christ visits Thomas, a man who was so unbelieving and yet a true believer. Christ also knew how to deal with him. What a glorious, what a loving Saviour He is!

The Day of Pentecost

A second very special Lord's Day was the Day of Pentecost, the day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Then the praying followers of Christ were all filled with the Holy Ghost. On that day, Peter preached and explained that the wondrous and sacred occurrences of that day were according to the promises of the Old Testament. Peter, who had denied his Lord, now stands strong in the faith. It was grace that changed his heart and made him so fearless and strong. Peter was honest with his hearers. He told them that they had crucified Israel's Redeemer! The conclusion of the sermon was "that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36b). The one whom they had hated and crucified was loved and exalted by God. This was very serious

preaching indeed! The message was not flattering at all. They were guilty of crucifying the Lord of glory! What was the result of this solemn sermon? Three thousand of the hearers were pricked in their hearts. They saw their sin and guilt. Their hearts were deeply wounded. Who made this blessed change? Christ did through the wondrous grace of His Holy Spirit. He changed enemies into friends. This should be a special encouragement to those who are still strangers to God and His grace. The Lord is a God of wonders. All true conversion has its origin in God, in Christ and in the Holy Spirit. Enemies are reconciled to God. Christ died for enemies. We cannot comprehend it. The cry that a preacher loves to hear is the one Peter and Paul heard, "What must I do to be saved?" A broken and a contrite heart always cries this prayer... There are no impossibilities with Christ! We must see sin as God sees sin. The only way God can have dealings of mercy with us is when He views us in Christ. Then He can do it in harmony with truth and justice. What happened on the Day of Pentecost is the most powerful fruit of Christ's redeeming love revealed at Calvary. This Sabbath shows us that God is a God of infinite wonders.

The Eternal Sabbath

The third very remarkable

Sabbath Day is still coming. It is the eternal Sabbath Day that awaits the people of God. That day is a day of infinite glory for the living church of Christ. Then the rest of God's people will be complete and perfect. Then, there will be no sin, no sorrow, no weakness, no pain and no corruption. On that great day, all will be joy and peace. The future of God's people will be one of infinite bliss. They are a truly blessed people. Our fervent desire should be that we may belong to that people. They have riches that no man can take away from them. They have in Christ a well founded hope for the great eternity. But if we continue to neglect so great salvation we shall not go in and enjoy this eternal Sabbath Day. An eternity of night and despair awaits us then. Our prayer should be, "Remember me Lord with that love which Thou to Thine dost bear. With Thy salvation oh my God to visit me draw near." See Psalm 106:4

What a wonder it is that we may still come together on the Lord's Day in God's house to worship and to seek His grace for ourselves and for our dear loved ones.

"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord"(Psalm 27:4).



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