

Sunday – a day of rest

Have you ever wondered where the idea of “a week” comes from? Why is it defined as a period of 7 days? There is no astronomical reason for this as there is for a “day” (the time it takes our planet to rotate once about its axis), a “month” (the time it takes the moon to orbit our planet) or a “year” (the time it takes our planet to orbit the sun).

Why 7 days? Why not 5 or 10? France tried a 10 day week in the revolution. Russia tried a 5 day week in the 1930's. In both cases the plan was to increase productivity and wealth. And in both cases the plan failed – spectacularly. Family life and machinery broken down as people were unable to spend time together and machinery was not maintained, and each country returned to a 7 day week. We learn two things from this. It would seem that we not only need to rest from our labours (physical and mental) in order to function to the best of our ability, but that the best rhythm is one day off in every seven. And it works!

William Wilberforce laboured in parliament for 30 years in order to stop the slave trade and then to abolish slavery. It was a herculean task. He wrote:

“I attribute my own power of endurance to a regular observance of the Lord’s Day.”

Winston Church commented:

“Sunday is a divine and priceless institution, the necessary pause in the national life. It is the birth-right of every British subject, our responsibility, privilege and duty to hand on...”

The film “Chariots of Fire” is about the life of Eric Liddell – the British athlete who would not compete on a Sunday. He was due to represent England in the 100m at the Paris Olympics in 1924 and was expected to win. When he discovered that the 100m final was to be on a Sunday he turned his attention to the 400m instead. He competed in that and won gold.

In our own day Mark Mitchel runs the Lexus, Mazda & Skoda car dealership at Ellesmere Port. On the door of the showroom you read the following under “Opening Hours”:

“Sunday – Closed. At home with family”

All these are Christian men who believe that God created the world in 6 days and rested the 7th. They believe that God knows how we are made, how we function and what is best to keep us healthy. They live(d) by the fourth commandment which states:

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work...

One of our problems as people is that we generally do not like to be told what to do, especially when our weaknesses are highlighted. In this case we think we can live our lives at our pace, working in a pattern we prefer. Often this means we neglect our regular day of rest. Sadly, many of us realise too late, that we did not know best. One doctor recently said:

“We doctors in the treatment of nervous disorders are compelled to provide periods of rest. Some of these periods are, I think, only Sundays in arrears!”

Could we each try taking a day off each week – a day different to all the others? If we allowed time for our body and mind to rest we could test if God’s wisdom really is good wisdom. This is not an excuse for laziness of course. We do need to work hard on the other 6 days of the week! But I’m convinced no-one loses by taking this day off.

January 2019