

Sunday to many is a time to have a Sabbath experience, or to feel guilty because he doesn't. Let us look together at this very matter.

Going to a Sunday Meeting is not necessarily a Sabbath experience, which a person may have at any time during the week. A person may attend his church or synagogue on the designated day, yet still not have a Sabbath experience. The word "sabbath" has been thought of as the day of rest, yet in no way does the Hebrew word "sabbatum" mean rest. It means rather to sever, to put an end to, to desist. It actually meant to desist from sin, thus it pointed to a day of propitiation, a day of atonement. The religious observance of the Day of Atonement goes back to the early customs of man, predating the practice of the Israelites. It was a time in which man attempted to wash away his sins, usually with the blood of a sacrifice. It was a time of appeasement to the gods.

Christianity took the concept of washing away sins with sacrifice and took up the idea of vicarious atonement. This is to me a most hideous doctrine...God sought to save the world, so He sacrificed His own son on the altar as a sacrificial lamb, thus freeing vicariously all men from sin if they accepted him. The word "atonement" has marked one of the major misrepresentations of the Judeo-Christian concepts. Sin has been presented as an affront to God; we have taught our children that God is offended when we sin.

But, you cannot offend God. Sin does not insult God who knows nothing of sins. Sin is a perversion in our own consciousness; it is a concealment of the good in us. It is our feeling of separation, the ignorance of our own essential divinity. When you make a mistake in addition, you do not offend the principle of mathematics. You make the error, and you are inconvenienced to the degree that the mistake has confused your experiences. The principle is not touched, and all you have to do is stop making the same mistake and the problem is solved. By realizing the mistake and growing through it, you experience at-one-ment. The only absolution for sin is the realization of at-one-ment with God.

The purpose of true religion is to unite God and man, to help man to know his essential unity. This may be obscured but it is never broken. The word "religion" is derived from the Latin word meaning "to bind together." Man's problems in life come essentially because he falls away from God, from reality, from the inner flow of spiritual energy. He becomes disoriented and thus does not express his inner potential. We are one, as Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, with each other and with God because that is the nature of our being. We are in spiritual unity with God; we are God expressing himself as us. Every problem to which the flesh is heir...sickness, discord, inharmony, and lack, are all but the effects of a cause relating to a sense of separation, a prodigal state of mind in which we dwell at the circumference of life, consciously unrelated to the source. So, as the story of the Prodigal Son puts it, "We come to know want." We must then come to ourselves. We must know ourselves in spiritual unity. We must have a sabbath experience of at-one-ment.

Man has the sense of guilt, which is understandable. He feels he must atone for his past, and so he must, but he does not have to obtain an atonement from God. The atonement is waking up to know his changeless at-one-ment. The only sacrifice that is necessary is that of our pre-conceived theories, our mistakes, our errors of judgment. Letting go of our ignorance, in other words. We have always been one with God, and we will always be one with God. If at any time we are not conscious of it, it is our misfortune; if we do not realize our at-one-ment, it is a pity. Once we begin to realize it, and to the degree of realization of it, we begin to live in accordance with our oneness.

The idea of the vicarious atonement totally disregards the command of Jesus that those who follow him must work out their salvation individually by taking up

their own cross and following in his footsteps of overcoming, thus bringing about their complete transformation through individual demonstration. The doctrine of vicarious atonement attempts to encourage man to shirk his individual responsibility and to shift his lack of demonstration of sovereignty on one who long ago showed us how we can and must do our own work. Jesus taught that salvation is a do-it-yourself program. The Sabbath is not simply a collective service of worship on Sunday morning, but it is a persistent attempt on the part of the individual to find his own innate sense of oneness with God.

The Sabbath, or day of Atonement, has nothing to do with a particular day of the week or a season of the year. Time is an invention of man; Sabbath is a state of mind, a state that man enters into or acquires when he goes into the silence of his own soul, into the realm of spirit. There he finds true rest and true peace, through at-one-ment. The true Sabbath, then, is a state of mind in which we turn from outer thought and involvements and give ourselves up to meditation or the study of things spiritual. We can at any time observe a Sabbath, or a Day of At-One-Ment, even many times in one day.

Man's problem has been that he has thought of that seventh day simply as a day of rest, physical rest. He has tried at times not too seriously to fit a Sabbath experience into the day of rest, but rest to him has been most important. The modern interpretation has been sleeping late, doing something different from the tasks of the workweek. This is both a blessing and a curse; a blessing because it is good to rest and get change occasionally into one's life, recreation and re-creation, leading to good physical and mental health; on the other hand, it is a curse because we have thought of it purely in physical, temporal terms.

Some insist that Sunday is God's day and the only day in which to experience a Sabbath, but this is not realistic; every day is God's day. But, every day we have the need to plug into our inner power. It is conceivable to me that in the years to come churches will change from Sunday to some other day of the week for the Sabbath experience in order to accomodate to the changing times. It is logical to assume that if the person retains his Sabbath times morning and evening, if he works constantly in prayer-consciousness, commits himself to finding God within himself, then he does not really need his church. Indeed, if the church is doing its job well, then I believe that the individual should become progressively less dependent on it.

Sunday is a good time to take a weekly sabbatical, to engage in a weekly refresher program of prayer and study. Sunday meetings such as we hold at Unity are of vital help. You do not have to travel to a certain location to find God; unless you bring God with you, you will not find Him in any house of worship. There are, of course, side effects from a Sunday experience such as we hold at Unity--there is the group consciousness in which we help each other. In a way beyond human understanding, the total power achieved in a group is greater than that of the individual experience; the whole is greater than its parts. Perhaps, it is the mystic "where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst." A cumulative consciousness is generated in the assembly of people on the Day of At-One-Ment, or the Sabbath, to which every person gives and from which every person receives. The group consciousness that is generated in the assembling of a Sabbath experience is transcendental, even to the message of the service, helpful as that may be. The Sabbath experience becomes a light that makes its contribution to the world.

Jesus says, "I, if I be lifted up shall draw all men unto me," and as we lift ourselves together, we draw more and more persons into a higher, greater energy of spirituality. Perhaps, then the world becomes a little more secure because a group gathers together and has its Sabbath experience en masse.