

“Improving Our Participation in the Lord’s Day”

Various Scriptures

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Jordan: All right. So while that’s going around I’ll just mention a couple things as an introduction, and then we’ll pray before we start. As some of you recall I was up here about a month ago. And our topic at that time was “Improving Our Participation in the Lord’s Supper.”

And I think that maybe this is just a personality trait of mine; I like the idea of continuous improvement—not being status quo, not just doing things because they’ve always been done. And I think that’s a good reminder of what the Christian life should be as well. The Christian life is one of faith and repentance, repentance being putting off and putting on. So we should be continuing to try to sanctify ourselves in our Christian lives. And I think that an area—and this is just as much for me as it is for all of us and in our society today—is how we sanctify ourselves with regard to the Lord’s Day. So that’s what we’re going to talk about today.

I’m going to caution you right off the bat. This is going to be a hard conversation for us. And the reason for that is that our culture is fighting against the Lord’s Day today. And it’s making it very difficult for us to honor the Lord’s Day as I believe it was intended to be honored. And so my hope would be that going through this that we’re not focusing so much on the theological components of the Lord’s Day—what it means, what it doesn’t mean—but that we would be focusing on where our hearts are today. Are our hearts for God, or are our hearts after self-love, self-pleasure? Are we doing the things that please us on the Lord’s Day as opposed to the things that please the Lord?

So that being said, why don’t I pray for us? Heavenly Father, we thank You for this day that You’ve given us. We thank You for this morning that we have together as brothers in Christ. I pray that You would bless our time. We acknowledge, Lord, that this is going to be a hard conversation for us. And so we pray that You would open our ears to Your Scripture. And even more so, Lord, we pray that You would soften our hearts to it. And so as we consider these things, Lord, we pray that it would be a foothold for the Spirit in our lives to continue to sanctify us, that we would be humbled where we need to be, and with a sense of repentance, Lord, that we would put off the things in this world that we need to, and more and more to put on Christ. So we ask that You’d bless our time, for I ask it in Your Son’s name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jordan: Okay. So as I started out last time, if you weren’t here I have some ground rules for when I talk: the first one being that I am not a theologian, as I mentioned before.

Don Maurer: Yes you are; I disagree with you.

Roger Myers: R. C. Sproul says that everyone is a theologian.

Jordan: So the second rule is that you are welcome to ask questions. But remember the first one: I am no Jeff Stivason. (*Laughter*) So I may not have answers to all of your questions, but I certainly encourage conversation and discussion.

The third one—and probably the most important—is that with the things we’re going to talk about, I would encourage you to be a Berean, as we’re told in Acts, and to study these things for yourselves. So we’re going to look at the Word. But don’t just take my word for it. I would encourage you to go back and study these things on your own to see, as the Bereans did, whether these things are so in Scripture.

And then fourthly—and this goes back to the Bickelism—challenge yourself. Wisdom is the application of knowledge. Hopefully we’re going to learn things today. But just learning things

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doesn’t really mean anything if we don’t apply it to our lives. So I would encourage you to challenge yourself.

And I mentioned that this is a hard topic. I mentioned that our culture is swimming against us. And so I thought where it would make sense to start is with our culture. So I’m not sure if any of you know Evil Sam from “The Muppets.” He’s a very patriotic figure with them. *(Laughter)* When my family and I were very recently in Disney World there was a Muppet show there. And the show basically has a salute to all nations, but mostly America. *(Laughter)* And he claims that it’s a glorious three-hour finale. And then Kermit reminds him that he has two-and-a-half minutes. *(Laughter)*

So we are going to start with looking at the Sabbath Day in our culture. And I’m just going to go through it century by century, essentially since our culture really began in America. And so if we start in the 17th century, in the 1600s, we’ve got the colonization of the United States and the first Virginia General Assembly.

And basically at this point there were laws that were addressed in America for Sunday activities and public behavior. Among the seventy laws passed by the assembly was the mandate requiring attendance by all colonists at both morning and afternoon worship services on Sundays. And similar laws of keeping the Sabbath holy and regulating morals were soon adopted throughout the colonies. And so what we have at the very outset of our country were not just Biblical laws, but social laws requiring the attendance of worship all day and prohibiting other activities.

If we were to head to the 18th century, this concept continues. But it has changed a little bit: they’re starting to be called “blue laws.” And that might be a word that you’re familiar with today. There are still some states that have this concept of “blue laws” today; I think Delaware is one of them.

And the first example of the phrase “blue laws” was in print in March 1755, in which the writer imagines a future newspaper praising that culture and their time for their revival of the old blue laws. And in a 1781 book by the Rev. Samuel Peters the phrase “blue laws” was used to describe the numerous laws adopted by Puritans that prohibited various activities on Sunday, both recreational and commercial.

Now I don’t know if you caught this. But there’s a difference between what the first General Assembly said, in requiring them to worship and the prohibiting of certain activities and blue laws and prohibiting of activities. They lost the requirement to worship at that time. Yes?

Brave Man: This is a silly question. Why did they call them “blue laws?”

Jordan: So I read into this. And I think they said that they gave a couple reasons. It kind of goes back to England. Some of them thought it was related to that and to the high nature of it. I don’t have a great answer for it. But it is something to go back to. I think it was something joined with “white laws” in England at the time.

Okay, so let’s move ahead to the 19th century. With these next few I’m actually going to bring them a little closer to home because these happened in Pittsburgh. So in the 19th century—1871—there was a synod of the denomination, of the church that I go to today—the Reformed Presbyterian Church In North America. This is over a hundred years after the blue laws in the 18th century. And I want you to hear what this synod had sworn and subscribed to on this date in 1871.

“We acknowledge with shame the remissness in the duties of the closet, the family, the prayer meeting and the sanctuary. We have not hallowed the Sabbath by observing it with the care and sacredness required by the divine commandment.” They are acknowledging in 1871 their failure to hallow the Sabbath. It was 200 years after these laws had been enacted, and an acknowledgment that we don’t do what we’re supposed to be doing.

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I’m going to continue here, because there’s a lot of really good stuff in what this synod said at that time. *“We mourn that religion has not been cultivated and practiced in our homes as it should have been. Parents have not felt in any adequate measure their responsibility for the salvation of their children. And in consequence family worship, reading the Scriptures in the household, instructed in accepted manuals of the faith in the Christian church, and pleading the covenant and the promise of God on behalf of our children, are mournfully neglected. We humble ourselves in the sight of the just and holy One, in view of the many and great iniquities of the land in which we live. The nation refuses to own its responsibility to God and to the Mediator, and to recognize the supremacy of the Bible in national affairs, and to countenance and encourage the true Christian religion.”*

When I read that it felt to me that there was no way they were talking about 1871. That feels to me like that should be said right now. And it makes me wonder how many of us are feeling that way today.

They go on to say in this that *“Sabbath desecration has become a common and ordinary sin in our culture.”* 1871!

Let’s move on to the 20th century. So it was in 1871 when this statement was made. In 1902 Sunday baseball games were legalized in Chicago, St. Louis and Cincinnati. Thirty years later we went from blue laws which prohibited activities to now where certain activities are okay on Sundays.

In 1911 Philadelphia expressed a desire for their team to play on Sunday. The main driving force behind this was to earn money. The vice-president of the team said they could make \$20,000 for each Sunday game played.

In 1931 the Pennsylvania legislature started introducing bills to liberalize blue laws. So in 1931 in the state of Pennsylvania blue laws still existed. And at that time the state said, “Why don’t we leave it up to the cities to determine for themselves what blue laws they want?”

In April of 1933 the Pa. governor at the time, Gifford Pinchot, enacted that law so that cities would be able to choose whether games could be played on Sundays. That was April 1933. Three months later Art Rooney founded the Steelers. As soon as blue laws allowed teams to play on Sundays, the Steelers became a football team.

Art Rooney faced opposition, as the city’s blue laws at the time prevented him from holding NFL games on Sundays. He learned of upcoming protests, and so he went to City Hall to get answers about being able to play on Sundays. And he was told at City Hall that only two people had the authority to stop the game from being played on Sundays: he himself because he was the owner; he could choose not to, and the chief of police.

So he went to the chief of police—Franklin McQuaid at the time—and he gave him tickets to sit at the 50-yard line. *(Laughter)* McQuaid accepted the offer. And from that point forward the Steelers were able to play games on Sundays.

Less than forty years later we start seeing stores follow suit. In 1969 J. C. Penny planned to keep a number of its stores open on Sunday, joining a growing trend among the nation’s retailers. And less than ten years after that, in the 1970s, state courts started to declare blue laws unconstitutional.

We went from a time in our country from where you were required to worship on Sundays and prohibited from certain recreational activities to a time where none of that was required. If anything, it was deemed as something that was oppressive, and I think that’s something. And that’s why I say that our culture is fighting against us. It wasn’t always this way.

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But is this a uniquely American problem? I don’t think that it is. And I think Scripture would prove to us that it is not. So why don’t we take a look at some examples of how Sabbaths were being honored throughout the Old Testament, before Christ?

I have a number of references here on the slide. I’ll call these out as well as we go through them. But I also wanted to let you know that in the handouts that you have I’ve printed most of these verses. So you’re welcome to follow me there so you won’t have to be flipping through your Bibles. I will mention that all of these came from the ESV translation.

Don Maurer: We’ll forgive you. *(Laughter)*

Jordan: And I also know that there are some here who like to mention that this is the word of the Lord after these are read. So given that there are a lot in here, is there a preference on how I respectfully allow us to do that? *(Laughter)*

Don Maurer: After the first Scripture reading you can say it.

Jordan: Okay, sounds good. All right. So let’s start with the fifth century B.C. Take these dates with a grain of salt; I’m also not a historian. So these are the closest dates, but they give you an idea.

So in the fifth century B.C. we’re talking about Nehemiah. Nehemiah is not a prophet. Nehemiah is not a priest. He was a high official in the Persian court after the Babylonian exile. And he was responsible for rebuilding Jerusalem. And as part of that let’s first look at Nehemiah 10, verses 29-31, where he says: *“Observe to do all the commandments of the LORD our God, and His rules and statutes. And if the peoples of the land bring in any goods or any grain on the Sabbath Day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day.”* This is the word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Jordan: And so you can see that after the return from exile they’re starting to re-establish these commandments that they had, which included not buying and selling on the Sabbath Day.

Now if we go forward three chapters into Nehemiah chapter 13, this is what he says. *“In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loaves, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath Day. And I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, ‘What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath Day? Did not your fathers act in this way? And did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.’”* Sorry for some of the typos in here, but you get the idea.

And so again they have returned from exile. You’d think that this would be a time where they would say, “Thanks be to God! Let’s honor Him; let’s glorify Him.” And even these people were profaning the Sabbath not long after they were given these commands. Nehemiah mentions, *“Did not your fathers act in this way?”* So let’s look at their fathers.

Now let’s look at the eighth century and some examples from Isaiah. And so with Isaiah we’re now talking about before the Babylonian exile. Isaiah was one of the Major Prophets to Judah at the time. And here we have two verses. We’ll start with Isaiah 56.

*“Everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,
and holds fast to My covenant,
These I will bring to My holy mountain,
And make them joyful in My house of prayer.
Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
Will be accepted on My altar;
For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”*

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I want you to remember that last line: *“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”* You’ll probably recognize that. And we’re going to come to that in a New Testament passage where Jesus quotes that. But what I want you to particularly pay attention to is that this is being mentioned in reference to keeping the Sabbath, okay?

We’re going to move on to Isaiah 58 verse 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,
Then you shall take delight in the LORD.”*

Now what is particularly interesting with this passage is the context that comes before it. In verse 3 of that same chapter Isaiah is responding to the people of Israel who asked this question:

*“Why have we fasted, and You do not see it?
Why have we humbled ourselves, and You take no knowledge of it?”*

They’re basically asking God, “We’re doing the things You said we’re supposed to do. How come You’re not acknowledging that we’re doing those things?”

And this is Isaiah’s response from God. *“Behold, in the days of your fast you seek your own pleasure.”* Just because you do the thing that’s said to be done, if you’re not doing it as unto God, you might as well not be doing it. You’re seeking your own pleasure.

So again, let’s think about that as we talk about the Sabbath. If we continue even further, let’s look at some more of the fathers of Israel and how they honored the Sabbath. We’re going to go to Exodus.

Now we’re not going to read Exodus 20:8-11. That is the Fourth Commandment; I think that is something you are all familiar with.

Transcriber’s Note: Exodus 20:8-11, ESV. *“Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor 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: you or your son or your daughter, your male servant or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath Day and made it holy.”*

Jordan: What I want to focus on is what comes before that Fourth Commandment. And this is Exodus 16, verses 23-30. This is where the Israelites have been brought out of Egypt. They’ve been instructed to collect manna. And the Lord tells them that “on six days you shall go out and collect. On the seventh day you shall rest, and there will be none.”

“And so Moses said to them: ‘This is what the LORD has commanded. Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none.’

“On the Sabbath Day some of the people went out to gather. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long will you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws? See, the LORD has given you the Sabbath.’”

Now remember, this is before the Ten Commandments have been delivered to Moses. God is referring to the Sabbath as a commandment, as a law, and as something that has been given to us. This precedes just the Ten Commandments.

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And if that’s the case let’s look back even further at Genesis 26. This is the time of Isaac, around the 19th century. God is speaking to Isaac; He’s giving promises to Isaac. And in Genesis 26 verse 5 He says: *“Because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws,”* He is making these promises to Isaac. Again we have this concept of commandments, statutes, laws—before the Ten Commandments, before Moses, dating back even to Abraham. And we’re seeing here that the promises that are being made to Isaac are because Abraham has kept these laws.

And so with all that being said then, the question becomes: well when was the Sabbath given to us? And the answer to that is at creation: Genesis 2, verses 2-3. *“God finished His work that He had done. And He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.”*

And so as we go as far back in history as we can, we see that the Sabbath Day was ordained by God as part of creation. He gives us this example of resting Himself and He makes the day holy. And it was intended from the beginning of creation to be a day when humans can share in the rest of their Creator and devote the day to Him.

Now because we have this divine ordinance it signifies three things. #1. It signifies God’s grace to us; He sanctifies us as His people. Secondly it shows us God’s holiness, because the day is devoted to Him, set apart from other things. And thirdly it shows us God’s authority by giving us a command that must be obeyed.

All three of these things are seen in Exodus 31, as Moses is reminding the people of this. And this is on your handout as well, and I’ll read it. It’s found in Exodus 31, verses 12-17.

“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep My Sabbaths. And this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between Me and the people of Israel, that in six days the LORD made the heaven and the earth. On the seventh day He rested and was refreshed.’”

Every celebration of the Sabbath was to remind the believer that God had created a covenant with Him, and that the fulfillment and obligations of that covenant was our responsibility. And to break the Sabbath, which was the sign of the covenant, meant to violate that relationship. And for rejecting the spiritual renewal of that covenant there was the penalty of death.

I have a note here, that the Sabbath is both vertical and horizontal: horizontal meaning what we do here in our relationships on earth. But I think we often forget that it’s also supposed to be vertical; it’s a day devoted to God. It’s not just about not doing things here on our level; it’s about devoting the day to God.

I’m going to just pause for a moment to say, how are we all feeling with this so far? Any questions? It’s humbling for me. I mean, I’ll tell you that I started preparing this weeks ago. I’ve spent days reading hundreds of pages, online articles, resources, talking with my pastor, talking with others about this. And it has been very convicting for me.

And I said at the beginning that this was going to be hard. And my hope is that you’re feeling hard about it. Yes?

Zach Jarvis: When I first said why I’m here, I said that I wanted to put something into my schedule. And I’ve been talking to some people that I know . They told me that worship is expected.

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And I said, “As it should be.” And so that’s how it sticks with me. Even as I walk in the door here, it’s something that strengthens me.

Jordan: Okay. I’m going to continue because I’ve got a lot more to get through. But I guess I just wanted to pause and do a health check at this point. So I’m going to kind of quickly outline where in the New Testament we see some references to the Sabbath. And I think what’s important here is that in the New Testament what we see is that Christ is not abolishing the Sabbath.

At this point, in Mark 2:28 Christ Himself tells us that He is “*Lord of the Sabbath.*” Again, He had an opportunity to say, “Oh, the Sabbath is not something that we do anymore.” But no; He says, “I am the Lord of the Sabbath..”

And in Matthew 5:17 Christ Himself tells us that He has not come “*to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them.*” In Matthew 21, verses 12-13 Christ Himself cleanses the temple of all those who bought and sold and changed money. Now this is that reference I mentioned before from Isaiah 56. “*He declared: ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer;’*” going back to that reference in Isaiah 56 where it talks about honoring the Sabbath.

In Luke 23:56, (this is after Christ has been crucified; this is after He has been buried.) Luke tells us that His followers “*rested on the Sabbath, according to the commandment.*” So even after Christ was crucified and buried His followers still rested on the Sabbath, according to the commandment.

And this is where if you have questions I’ll take a stab at them. But I don’t want to spend most of our time here with the question of why then—Go ahead.

Jim Hamilton: Is the Sabbath the first or the last day of the week?

Jordan: All right; that was the question I was expecting. If we look at the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, I have that in your resources as well. It tells us that “*from the beginning of the world until the resurrection of Christ*” it was the last day of the week. And with the resurrection of Christ the Christian Sabbath is now the first day of the week.

We can get really sidetracked on this. And I will admit that this is where a lot of my study over the past weeks has gone, into this particular topic. And I’ll summarize it by saying that I think the best argument that I’ve heard for this is that the Lord sets apart one day in seven. It’s not so much a particular day, but one day in seven should be set apart to Him. And I think we see in some of the letters from the apostle Paul that he indicates that certain days are not holier than others just because the day itself is the day. But we are still to be setting apart one day in seven. And because of Christ’s resurrection Christians celebrate that day as that one day in seven.

I’ve put together something that I thought would be helpful for this. I had it prepped just in case this question came up, so I’m going to read it. If it’s helpful to you, great. If it’s not helpful to you, this is where you would go and be the Berean yourself and look more into it.

So why Sunday? “*Christ’s resurrection took place on Sunday. Therefore Sunday is the preferred day for the Christian Sabbath. Hence, it was on Sunday, the Day of Resurrection, that our Lord met with His disciples assembled together. Hence, it is on Sunday the week following that He met them again assembled together. Hence, it was on the Sunday called Pentecost that the Spirit descended in a miraculous and glorious manner upon the apostles. Hence, it was on Sunday that the disciples were wont to assemble and to break bread, and to give charitable contributions to suffering brethren. Hence it was that the apostle John in the book of Revelation styles this day ‘The Lord’s Day.’ And hence it is too that God perpetually and gloriously annexed His blessing to the Christian Sabbath. Wherever throughout the Christian world Sunday has been observed as the Sabbath Day, it has been followed by all the blessings God has pronounced upon a proper observance of His day. And it would be hard to find a more invincible proof of the actual resurrection of our Lord than that the*

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church from the beginning selected Sunday, the day commemorating it, as the Sabbath Day.” And I’ll leave it at that, if that’s all right.

Jim: Yes.

Jordan: Okay. But examples of where we see this transition from Saturday to Sunday in the New Testament would be the references I have here: Revelation 1¹⁰, which is the reference from the apostle John where he styles it *“The Lord’s Day.”* In Acts 20 verse 7 we see the disciples gathered together on the first day of the week. And in 1 Corinthians 16, verses 1-2 we see Paul giving instructions to be setting aside a collection on the first day of the week.

Transcriber’s Note: Revelation 1:10, ESV. *“I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day.”*

Acts 20:7. *“On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day.”*

1 Corinthians 16:1-2: *“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also ought to do. On the first day of every week each of you is to put something aside to store it up as you may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.”*

Jordan: And there is an assumption there that they are meeting and assembling as the new Sabbath. We could spend a lot of time there. But for the sake of getting through I hope to get through this today. I’m going to keep going, if that’s okay.

Okay. So what are some objections to the Sabbath being something that we should be honoring today? I think there are three primary arguments where people would say that we shouldn’t be treating the Sabbath the same way that it was talked about in the Old Testament, and I’m going to respond to those.

The first objection is that the Sabbath restrictions were meant as a shadow of things to come. And now that Christ has come we no longer need to be constrained by those restrictions. That’s the argument that some make.

Another argument is that the Sabbath was only meant for the Jews. It was a sign of the covenant between them and God, and as such it doesn’t apply to Gentile believers.

And a third argument is from those who say, “I have freedom in Christ and I’m no longer under the law. So I don’t have to do these things because I’m not under the law.”

I’m going to respond to those not individually, but over all with what I think are extremely convincing arguments. And those arguments are basically going to show that in my opinion the Scripture declares the Sabbath as a divine institution that has a permanent and universal obligation. So it wasn’t temporary, and it didn’t only apply to certain people.

And the first of those three Scripture proofs relates to the nature and date of its origin. We’ve already talked about the fact that this isn’t just one of the Ten Commandments. It was given before them. We see that there are laws and statutes given before Moses, dating back to Abraham. And we went ultimately all the way back to see that this was ordained as part of creation; this is a creation ordinance and it was made by God. And because God made it no man has a right to unmake it.

Keep in mind that because it was a creation ordinance it was also made before sin entered the world, which means it was given to us as something that was good. And because it was instituted at the beginning it was given to all mankind, not just the Hebrews. That’s the first response.

Secondly is its inclusion in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. The fact that it’s included in the Ten Commandments starts to give those who claim that it no longer applies to us today some shaky legs to stand on, because can they make the same claim of any of the other nine commandments? Would you say, “Well, the First Commandment doesn’t apply to me today?” Or “the eighth commandment doesn’t apply to me today?” No. It is included with all the other

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commandments. They were spoken by the mouth of God, etched in stone with His finger, a symbol of its perpetuity.

Notice also that the Fourth Commandment begins with the word “Remember.” No other commandment begins with “remember.” No other law in the Bible begins with the word “remember.” It is the only commandment that begins with the word “remember.”

Why is that? It’s a remarkable word to put there. Why is that? Because God established the Sabbath in the beginning, and we are prone to forget it.

There’s something that I want to read to you, a resource that I had found about this which I think is helpful. *“The Fourth Commandment is the keystone of the arch. Take that away, and all the others will soon fall to the ground. How long would men remember the First Commandment: to have no other gods before Jehovah, or the Second—not to worship idol images—or the Third—not to profane the holy name—if one day in seven were not set apart for them to learn of God and to worship Him? Even as it is, how ignorant and careless men become in their relations and their duties to God? Or how long would it be before men ceased to honor and obey their parents and fall into crime if this day were abolished? Take away the Fourth Commandment and you will break down all the others.*

“Do you doubt this? See then the atheism, the vice, the crime, the lack of filial honor, the weakening of family ties, the robberies, the murders, the rapes multiplying on every side of us, at the very time men are being taught that the Sabbath is no longer a divine obligation. In the history of our country there has never been the amount of criminality of every sort that exists now. In the history of our country there has never been a time when the Sabbath has been so neglected and ignored. Do you not see how the two things go together?” It goes on to say that *“the corruption of morals usually follows the profaning of the Sabbath.”*

And then lastly we have Christ’s authentication of this. And again this goes back to the Gospel of Mark where Christ declares that He is *“Lord of the Sabbath.”* And He is doing this in response to the Pharisees who have perverted it. They have put on it additional laws and additional requirements, trying to make it so that they can do what they want within the bounds of the laws they have created. And Christ is basically chastising them for this and reminds them that no; He is the Lord of the Sabbath. It has been created a certain way, and they are not treating it the way that they should. And so in this He confirms and strengthens it. And He restores it to its original purpose, free from the perversion of the Pharisees or from others.

So those are my replies to those objections. I think they are pretty convincing arguments that would basically take on any of those. And you know, I think that at any point where you’re feeling defensive: “No, I should be able to do this on the Sabbath; I should be able to do that,” I think my first challenge would be this. Is your reason for feeling that way Scripturally based, or is it self-love? Are we trying to make excuses like the Pharisees? Yes, I want to do these things. And so I’m making loopholes in the commandments to be able to do them.

I mentioned in my previous topic about the Lord’s Supper that it shouldn’t be treated as a “check the box” exercise. This is no different. The Sabbath Day should not be a “check the box” exercise. It’s not about “I showed up at church; check. I did my obligation.” And so with that being said, let’s talk about some available helps. What does this mean for us today? And if you thought it was hard up until this point, it’s only going to get harder when we talk about what this means for us—the application of what we’ve been talking about.

I’m going to read a few more things here because I think some others have said this better than I could have. And I think this is probably the most important thing that we’re going to talk about today. So if you take nothing else away, listen to these words.

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“The great need of our time is to have a sense of the sacredness of the day revived in the hearts of Christian people. It is useless to talk about the manner in which the Sabbath should be observed unless you are convinced of its sacred character. And if you are convinced of its sacred character, it will be easy for you to understand how it should be observed. The point that demands to be emphasized is that the Sabbath Day is a sanctified day, set apart by God to be sacred and holy. This is what is being lost to the consciousness of Christian people; this is what we must labor to restore. You must impress upon yourself the divinity of the day, that it is divinely appointed, and that in dishonoring it you are dishonoring a distinct ordinance of God. You cannot allow yourself to believe or feel that it is a mere institution of formality. If you feel that way, the tide of worldly business and pleasure will sweep away the Sabbath from the church.

“There are only two alternatives. Either the Sabbath is set apart by divine authority, or no Sabbath at all. We must work hard to train the sacredness of the day into the minds of believers both old and young. Otherwise we will do pretty much as we please on the Sabbath. I will travel on the Sabbath. I will entertain socially on the Sabbath. I will read novels and newspapers and magazines. I’m careless about the requirements of public worship. And we will let our attentions run upon business, sports, politics, fashion and other worldly things.”

It is a heart matter. It is not just doing things because we’re told to do them. This goes back to Isaiah 58. The people said, “I’m fasting; how come You don’t acknowledge it? I’m sacrificing; how come You don’t acknowledge it?” And Isaiah responds to them: “Because you’re not doing it with your heart.” And if we don’t get that part right the rest of it doesn’t matter.

And I think that importantly this is the other thing too. The Sabbath was not given to be a burden. If you’re going into it saying, “Oh, I have to do these on this day, and I can’t do this on that day,” if you’re viewing it as a burden, that’s not what it was meant for. It was meant as a day of rest and a day of delight! Christ tells us that His burden is easy and His yoke is light. He’s not trying to burden us in the way that the Pharisees were burdening the people with these extra laws and these extra requirements. It is supposed to be something that is a rest. It rejuvenates us; it renews us; it’s a delight to us.

But it has to start in the heart. If it doesn’t start there, the rest of it is not going to matter.

So we’ve talked a lot, but we haven’t talked practically yet. So let’s talk practically. What can be done to improve our participation in the Lord’s Day? I’m going to give you my suggestions here. These come from the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, question 117, which is included in your handout.

What I would say is that the first thing that can be done to improve it is that *we prepare to sanctify the day*. You can’t just show up on the day and expect that you’re going to do it. You need to prepare to sanctify the day.

And by “prepare” the things I’m talking about here are getting your other activities out of the way. If you normally run errands on Sunday because that’s when you have time, do them another day of the week. If you normally do yard work on Sundays because you’re busy other days of the week, you need to do it another day of the week. If you are truly going to set this day aside, if you are truly going to sanctify it, get your other activities out of the way.

On top of that, *prepare your heart to sanctify the Lord’s Day*. Pray; ask for the Lord’s help. This is hard; I’m not saying this is easy. I need this just as much as all of us do. We need to be asking the Lord for His help in our hearts to come into His Lord’s Day, to set it aside. I think that’s the first thing. I think that if we do a better job preparing, 2 and 3 become a lot easier.

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For #2, I recommend that you attend every worship activity your church offers: Lord’s Day morning and evening. To give an example, at our church we start with a worship service at 9:30 in the morning. After that we have a Sabbath school or Sunday school for adults and children. Sometimes we have fellowship meals after that. We then have an evening worship service at 6:00. And after that evening worship service we have a prayer time. And after that we sometimes fellowship with hot dog roasts and marshmallows.

That is a full day. But do you know what? It’s a full day dedicated to the Lord. And when I was younger—I’m still young!—but when I was younger I viewed Sunday is going to morning worship service and I’m done. We didn’t stick around for the Sunday school. We didn’t go back to evening service. We didn’t stick around for the prayer time. We rarely stuck around for the fellowship meals. We did the morning service and that was it.

I started feeling more convicted about that. And we started adding on. We’ll do the morning and the evening worship service. We won’t stick around for prayer; that’s getting kind of late. We won’t stick around for the fellowship afterwards; that’s getting kind of late; we’ve got other things to do.

And then it dawned on me. What else do you have to be doing this day? What else do you have to do this day? This day is for the Lord!

And I’ll tell you what. When we started getting rid of our other activities and that desire to do other activities, this day has become a delight for us. I look forward to Sundays now more than any other day of the week because I’m resting. I don’t have to worry about all those other things—running errands, yard work, catching up on things. It doesn’t get done today. It’s a restful day; it’s an enjoyable day. It doesn’t bother me that we’re there for six hours, eight hours, whatever it may be on certain Sundays, because I have nothing else to do. I’m enjoying the fellowship; I’m enjoying the worship. I’m enjoying learning, hearing the preaching, singing, praying.

It has become a delight, and that’s what Isaiah 58 tells us. If you turn your foot from your pleasure, the day will become a delight to you.

With this offer I don’t know what your church’s activities are on Sundays. If your church doesn’t have an evening service, come to mine. We would happily have you, at 6 p.m.

Don Maurer: Or mine.

Jordan: Yeah. But I would say to look for those things. And I’m not necessarily saying that I would encourage you to go cold turkey. If you can, rip the Band-Aid off and say, “Hey, we’re going to start this Sunday,” and not do anything else. I know that’s hard. I think what I’m mostly asking is that you come before the Lord. You pray and repent, and you just continue to improve. We didn’t get there overnight with our family; we’re still not there now.

#3 is the hard one. Doing the things that people do on Sunday with activities that you can attend, that’s easy, because they’ve set it up for you. Oh, I just have to attend. #3., to devote the rest of the day to the reading of the Word, praying, resting, singing, the fellowship of believers, acts of mercy and needs. I mentioned that sometimes we might not get back from our church service until 1:30 and then go back at six. That’s a tough four hours. I’m on my own.

The final rounds of the Masters is on. The Steelers are playing; it’s an important game. It is hard for me not to want to see how those things are going. #3 is hard, to set apart the rest of the day. But that’s what we’re called to do.

So these are things that I recommend that you should be doing. But what about things where we can improve in our resting? Resting from worldly media entertainment—TV shows, movies, YouTube, Steelers games, sports games? We should be resting from those things.

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I must admit that I love sports. One of the things I’ve tried to get better at is that I have a service that allows me to record sporting events. I record them. I try to watch them Monday morning and generally find out between then what the score was and say, “I screw it!”

But do you know what? I’d rather do that knowing what I know now than sit down on the couch for four hours watching a sporting event, getting upset because they’re throwing interceptions and not tackling. I’m allowing myself to be distracted by worldly things instead of spending time reading the Word and praying, those types of things.

We should be resting from our errands—shopping, eating out—not only from those things that we see throughout Scripture—treading winepresses, going out to collect the mail on those days—things that are lawful. They’re good, just not on the Sabbath Day.

Not only that, but in this case you’re causing others to work. That’s the Fourth Commandment: not just you should be resting, but your sons, your daughters, your servants; everybody should be resting. You are not only hurting yourself; you’re causing others not to obey as well.

Under 3.: worldly activities and recreations. You know, we got our daughter into soccer recently. She’s now at the age where the only time they play is on Sundays. And we’ve told her that we can’t do that. We can’t play soccer on Sundays. I play in a softball league. I have friends that say, “Hey, we’ve got a game on Sunday. Do you want to join us?” I can’t play on Sundays.

I know that a lot of you like golf and other activities. We should not be doing those activities on the Lord’s Day. If we’re devoting the day and setting it aside, it needs to be different from the other six days of the week. We should not be doing these things on the Lord’s Day.

And then fourthly—and kind of a given, but I feel like this has to be said, and we’re probably better with this than others,—is resting from your actual work. If you have a job, you should not be doing the work from that job on Sunday. I see our time, so we’ll probably have time for questions or comments. But what I leave you with is again just a reminder from Isaiah 58:

*“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,
Then you shall take delight in the LORD.”*

That’s all I have. Comments or questions?

Michael Rush: Am I allowed to heal people on the Sabbath? Just a joke. *(Laughter)*

Jordan: Yes?

Brave Man: (Unclear) The week has 168 hours. If you take away the time for sleeping, 17 hours a week are devoted to God, ten percent, which is a Biblically holy number. Ten percent of your resources are devoted to God.

Jordan: Yes. And I do think it’s still important that one day in seven is set aside. I’m not saying we don’t have to sleep, and so forth.

Brave Man: I think the days just make it easier for us to recognize that.

Jordan: Yes. But I also think that’s what the command is, right? One day in seven is set apart to the Lord. And again, just to re-emphasize, we shouldn’t be trying to use the Sabbath as a check list where I can do these things over here and I can’t do these things over here. The idea should be that you want to be worshiping God, spending that day devoted to God. That should be your primary motive. And I think that if that’s your primary motive, the rest of the things fort of fall into place.

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Again, for us the example is our daughter and soccer. Soccer is not played on Sunday. I don’t want to do that. It’s not that I can’t do that, per se. It’s that I don’t want to do that, because I want to dedicate the day to God. I would rather do this instead. I think that can be helpful. Yeah, Don?

Don Maurer: Okay. I have several questions. You’re talking to someone who agrees with you.

Jordan: Okay.

Don: But I guess my first thing is that I wrestle with this. For example I can testify to the blessing of a morning and evening service. I listen to preaching a lot on Sundays. Of course I use the computer and electricity to do that. Those people are working to ensure that I have that. It can get a little bit sticky and legalistic if you’re not careful.

I guess the second question I have is where Paul in the New Testament in Colossians 2 says, “Let no one judge you in regard to a New Moon, a festival or a Sabbath day.” Is he talking about the Lord’s Day there, or is he talking about Old Testament ceremonies?

Jordan: Yes. So I’m going to answer the second one first.

Don: Okay.

Jordan: From what I’ve read and understand in Colossians 2 Paul is addressing asceticism in Colossae, which is basically that people at that time were trying to merge multiple forms of religion into one. You’ll also notice, I believe, that it talks about worshiping angels in that passage. So I think what he’s trying to do is protect the true believers in Colossae from those who were trying to merge these different forms of religion, judging them. “Hey, you should be doing this and this and this.” He’s saying, “Don’t allow those people to judge you on what to do.” That’s how I’ve been led to understand that Colossians 2 passage. He’s not talking so much specifically to believers about the Sabbath Day. He’s responding to the pressure from others in Colossae about how they are judging believers on non-issue kind of things. And if that’s not a satisfactory answer, time to look for one. (Laughter)

For your first question about the legalism I totally agree with you. That’s what the Pharisees were trying to do. I oppose legalism, and I don’t think that’s what we should be after. I would say that it’s not my place to also judge anybody on how they go about the Sabbath Day. I think the Spirit and your conscience should be your guide and convict you. And I would hope that the Spirit would be convicting all of us in ways that we need to be. So if for you, if using electricity is something you’re convicted of and you say, “I can’t do this,” then I’m not going to say yes or no to you on that. But I’m also not going to say “Thou shalt not” to somebody else who doesn’t believe that.

Don: Well, I’m not convicted.

Jordan: Sure. I’m just saying that—

Don: Yes. But as far as recreation—

Jordan: Yes.

Don: I’m on the Credentials Committee of my denomination and my presbytery. And for example, when we examine some people as far as their views of the Confession and any exceptions, they’ll often cite what it says about recreations—worldly thoughts and recreations—in the Westminster Confession about the Sabbath, because, for example, they take a walk on the Sabbath, as I do. Or they’ll play ball with their sons in the yard, or something like that. I’m not sure that I would say that those things are wrong.

Jordan: Yeah; I don’t disagree with you. And clearly we see that Christ takes walks on the Sabbath, right? On the Sabbath He goes through the fields.

Don: Yes.

Jordan: His disciples were picking grain, and so forth.

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Don: Yes.

Jordan: So again that’s where I think I was trying to say before that I think that the most important thing for us is to start with the heart. Why is it that you’re doing that recreation on that day? If it’s a game where I’m doing this because it brings me pleasure—playing a round of golf, playing a softball game or soccer, whatever it may be—I would say that I think you may be going about that with a heart issue.

But if it’s hey, I’m enjoying my rest today, and I’m spending that time enjoying God’s creation, I’m spending the time fellowshiping with my family, with my son, my daughter, whatever it may be, I think that if you’re going into it with a desire to still be honoring God with what you’re doing, I would say that I think that’s okay. But I think there’s always a caution to say, “Are you truly doing it for that sense? Or are you doing it for yourself because it’s something you enjoy doing?”

Don: That is a hard thing; it’s not always easy.

Jordan: Yeah.

Don: I could go into more things, but I don’t want to hog up the whole thing.

Jordan: Is there a question back there?

Don Bishop: And I think it’s important too to concentrate and to try to focus our attention on the delightfulness of the Sabbath.

Jordan: Sure.

Don: We can get so caught up in what we’re doing and what might be wrong with that. When we were young a couple of us college students had a session with George Scipione, a pastor in Philipsburg, N.J. One friend was asking, “Can I throw a basketball on Sunday?”

He said, “Sunday is a joyful celebration!”

Jordan: Yeah.

Don: And that’s your focus.

Jordan: Yeah.

Don: I think that in some services it can get very downward. Repentance is important, but we’re forgetting about the joyfulness.

Jordan: Yes, you’re spot on. It should not be a burden. It should not be a thing where oh, you have to come and do this. It should be a delight, a joy, right? And I think about something you touched on, but also something that Don mentioned. Again I’ll just say that at our church, when Sunday school gets out, kids go out into the yard and they play basketball with each other. They kick the soccer ball around. It’s not like oh, we can’t do these things! But they’re doing it in fellowship with each other and enjoying that fellowship and that time spent together. Even we don’t necessarily say, “Oh, you can’t do anything. You just have to sit in the church pew. You’re just going to read and pray.” That’s not what I’m trying to get across.

But again, I think that what I am trying to get across is, with the things that you are doing on Sunday, what’s your motivation for doing them? I think that’s kind of the important thing.

All right, so why don’t I pray for us? As part of my prayer I’m going to include something. Some of you may have heard of this book: *The Valley of Vision*. It’s a collection of Puritan prayers. And they have one in here on the Lord’s Day which I thought was really helpful. So I’m going to include this as we close.

Heavenly Father, we do thank You again for the time that You’ve given us today. Again we pray, Lord, that Your Spirit would help us as we consider these things. Draw us closer to You and continue to sanctify us. And Lord, we ask that “You would sprinkle all our past Sabbaths with the cleansing blood of Jesus. And may this day witness deep improvement in us. Give us in rich abundance the

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blessings the Lord’s Day was designed to impart. And may our hearts be fast bound against worldly thoughts or cares.” Help us, Lord, as we approach Your Lord’s Day later this week, to prepare ourselves for it, that we may honor You. We pray this in Your Son’s name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. (*Applause*)