

Rethinking Sabbath

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- [0 : 0 0] Very good morning to all of you. It's a pleasure and a privilege to be here. It's also a pleasure to be part of your daughter church, St. Peter's Fireside downtown.
- I'm extremely excited about that. Yay, indeed. So I want to talk to you a bit about Sabbath this morning. I've been thinking about this subject for a few years now.
- It was the focus of my master's research at Regent College. The project that was that master's thesis actually came out of discussions I was having in the church that I was working for over the last two years before coming to St. Peter's.
- And in our small groups, we were working through the Gospel of Mark. And some of the most heated exchanges that Jesus has are about Sabbath. And so as a group, we began to think, what's this about? What's Sabbath about?
- And so that's what sort of spurred me to do some research in the area of doctrinal or systematic theology on the question of Sabbath. And I'd like to share some of what I learned along the way with you this morning.
- [1 : 1 4] It's an abbreviated version of my thesis research. You can't squeeze it all in in an hour. And if I did, it would be miserable for all of you.
- If I tried to do that, it would be miserable for all of you. Sabbath, of course, is no stranger to controversy. You don't have to go past the last 100 years or so to see that.
- In 1896, a state law in Georgia, just south of my home state, South Carolina, was challenged by a businessman who wanted to move some freight on the railroad tracks of Georgia on Sunday.
- But that was against the law. It was part of the state's Sabbath honoring code. And so he challenged that law, and he lost the case. The Supreme Court held that the Sabbath law was valid there in Georgia.
- No work, no commerce on Sunday. The National Baseball League in the United States initially banned games on Sunday in order to honor the Sabbath traditions of American culture.
- [2 : 1 7] Some teams attempted to schedule games on Sunday anyway, and they were thrown out of the league. There was a lot of religious dissent when teams began to schedule games on Sunday, and the baseball culture became more accepting of that.
- And one very well-known evangelical preacher called Sam Jones touted that baseball was the most corrupting thing this side of hell. Sabbath has also had enemies in Soviet Russia.
- When they were seeking to advance the communist agenda there earlier in the 20th century, they made a concerted effort to suppress religious holidays. They tried to create work schedules that conflicted with every Christian holiday or the holidays of other religions.
- They also, in order to get rid of Sabbath, turned the week from seven days into six days for a while. No Sabbath there. So as you can see, Sabbath is no stranger to controversy.
- But alas, by and large, it's also fair to say that in our culture today, Sabbath is largely forgotten. There's not much public consciousness of the fourth commandment.

[3 : 26] The concerns of Sabbath that are voiced by Christians from time to time, like Richard Gaffin, a theologian, are seen as worries and concerns of a bygone error, just a historical curiosity.

There's a lot of reasons for that, some theological, but probably also historical events, like the Second World War, which disrupted the Sabbath culture of Europe. At the same time, we do see pockets of renewed interest in Sabbath.

You go to the Jubilee Center at Cambridge University, which has done some magnificent public campaigns in England. One of them called Keep Sunday Special Campaign, which sought to delimit the amount of commerce that could transpire on the Sabbath.

The Jubilee Center sees Sabbath as a sign of God's plan for all people. They don't want to impose their views of Sabbath, but they want to promote these views in society at large.

And they see the recovery of Sabbath as a great resource for combating some of the destructive economic norms of Western society. So as we think about these types of events that litter the last century, it raises the same questions that I began to ask in my small group a few years ago.

[4 : 41] What is Sabbath? What does it signify? What's it about? How should it shape the life of the church? How should it shape the witness of the church? How should it shape the church?

It's presented by maxims like Sola Scriptura and Adphons. So under the word of God, going back to the sources, allowing our doctrinal inheritance to be recalibrated, adjusted, improved in light of biblical testimony.

And I want to have this conversation today about what Sabbath means with the Reformed theological tradition in particular. I speak with humility and provisionality, given one of our illustrious theologians here in the audience.

But that's the tradition I want to be in conversation with, the Reformed tradition. And I want to survey and look at how Sabbath has been treated in Reformed thought. In particular, I want to look at the thought of John Calvin, the fountainhead of Reformed theology.

And then I want to look at the English Puritans to kind of get a sense of how they understood Sabbath. Because the Puritans as a group and the legacy of John Calvin are both very important in shaping the Reformed theological inheritance.

[6 : 22] The project that I submitted for Regent College actually included a pretty thorough examination of Karl Barth's views on Sabbath, which are fascinating and nourishing.

But I'm not going to be discussing those today because of time. And then after we look at Calvin and the Puritans, we're going to go back to Scripture in the spirit of Sola Scriptura and Adfons.

And we're going to look at what the Bible says about Sabbath. There's lots in the Bible about Sabbath, so I've had to be selective here. Again, we're going to look at a few texts from the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, to see what they say about Sabbath.

And then we're going to look at some of the things that Jesus says about Sabbath. And then we'll hold the tradition up against the testimony of Scripture and see how well it comports. But that's the game plan for this morning, as it were.

Now, as to the origins of Christian Sabbath Sunday, there's lots and lots of vexing questions that surround any attempt to kind of trace that.

[7 : 24] And if you were to go out and look for some books or articles on that subject, you'd find a whole plethora of them. And we're going to skip past the moments of the early church, 1,500 years, right to the Reformation.

And we're going to go here now to John Calvin. Now, when you come to Calvin, Richard Gaffin, who's a well-known scholar on Calvin, notes that there's a widespread disagreement has persisted about what Calvin meant when he talked about Sabbath.

So pinning down his views can be a bit tricky at times, but perhaps not as tricky as some would suggest. Calvin talks about Sabbath in the second book of the Institutes, number 8, 2.8, if you want to look it up.

And he sees the fourth commandment, which is what he's focusing on there, as being somewhat different from the other commandments. And in his discussion of the fourth commandment, commandment to keep Sabbath, he identifies three cases in which the observance of the commandment consists.

First off, Calvin says the fourth commandment is concerned with spiritual rest. Believers ceasing in their own works to find rest in God. He says it's also an occasion for believers to hear the law.

[8 : 34] This was in ancient Israel, for the people of Israel to hear the law of God. They stopped from their work so they can go and hear the law. And then it's also got humanitarian concerns, providing rest for servants and those who labored in ancient Israelite society.

Calvin says the spiritual rest is the most important aspect, the fourth commandment. Now, as Calvin reflects on what it means to be a fourth commandment-keeping people in the church, he wants to differentiate that between the Jewish customs of ancient Israel for keeping the fourth commandment.

He makes certain conclusions there. He says Jesus Christ, for example, fulfilled certain ceremonial aspects of the fourth commandment. And so those aspects no longer have to be kept or maintained by the church.

Now, when he talks about ceremonial aspects of the fourth commandment, he's referring to certain Sabbath ordinances, feasts or festivals, new moons, things like that, that were part of Sabbath-keeping practice in ancient Israel.

So he says that stuff is no longer necessary for the church. He even goes so far as saying Christians should have nothing to do with the observance of superstitious days. And he's probably reacting against certain customs in the Jewish inheritance, as well as certain ways that the Roman Catholic Church urged the keeping of Sabbath.

[10 : 00] Calvin does, however, maintain the importance of keeping Sabbath in some way in every age. The fourth commandment can't be abolished or forgotten. But he's very careful.

He says, I don't want to embrace any sort of Jewish legalism about Sabbath-keeping. But he does look to the New Testament, and he sees there that there is basis for the church maintaining a Sabbath practice with weekly worship.

But that church's Sabbath practice in the New Testament has been emptied of any superstition or ceremony. And so he says this offers a way forward as we think about how to keep Sabbath.

So in short, you might say that Calvin's view of Sabbath centers upon rest for worship. You rest from your labors, your work, your vocation, right, so that you can, your particular vocation, so that you can worship God on Sunday.

And he says this is the general doctrine of Sabbath as it's found in the Bible. Calvin also says that any restrictions that are imposed by the church for Sabbath-keeping should simply aim to aid humans in worshiping God with purity, right?

[11 : 07] So Sabbath regulations should all promote worship on Sunday. Calvin talks also about Sabbath in a series of sermons he gave on the Ten Commandments, and the view that he espouses there is quite similar to the one you'll find in the Institutes.

Now, as is ever the case, Calvin's views have received some critique, okay? Some people say, for example, that he doesn't say enough about the actual content of Sabbath-keeping.

He should say more, right? Some people say his views are too, they're not hard and fast enough. They're too nuanced, and so they're at risk of being co-opted and misused by people who are anti-Sabbatarian, as indeed they were at certain moments in history.

They say Calvin's view of Sabbath is too moderate. I think a more important critique attends to the lack of redemptive focus in Calvin's theology of Sabbath.

He doesn't situate the doctrine in a broader framework of biblical theology, how Sabbath perhaps has certain insights of an eschatological nature about the end of time, the culmination of time, and God's redemptive purposes.

[12 : 15] And then a last critique, though not a serious one, is that Calvin didn't sufficiently root his theology of Sabbath in creation. It was based more in covenant.

So he looks to the law of Israel, the Mosaic Code, and the Ten Commandments. So that's a bit about Calvin's thought. Again, this is a bird's-eye view, okay? Let's look to the English Puritans.

And here I speak with a special modesty and provisionality, given that Professor Packer is in the audience. But if there's a need for correction, then by all means, please do.

Classifying the Puritan view is a bit tricky because it evolved and changed over time. So what I want to do is look at a few exponents of a Puritan theology of Sabbath and just kind of discuss what they had to say about it.

Strict observance of the Lord's Day, as you all probably know, became a distinctive feature of English and Scottish society in the 17th century. And this had a lot to do with the imprint of Puritan thought on English and Scottish society.

[13 : 19] And Sabbath, at that time, entered in as a central tenet of Puritan theology. The Puritans helped create the English Sunday, as my friend Mark Jones, who's just released a wonderful book on Puritan theology, noted.

Why was that? Why did Sabbath become so important in Puritan thought? Well, among other things, probably because the Old Testament was being taken more seriously by the church and the Puritan church at that time. And so you've got now the Old Testament as a substantial conversation partner in theology.

That's one reason among others. Now, some people have suggested that the Puritans imposed, the Puritans themselves imposed Sabbath on English society. I think that's slightly inaccurate because if you go back and do a little bit of historical homework, you'll find that there were others in society beyond the borders of the Puritan communities that were equally as concerned about Sabbath.

Hooker, for example, a number of bishops in the church at that time. And if you look at the Hampton Court Conference of 1604, you'll see that there's a common concern for Sabbath keeping and Sabbath maintenance among the church and broader society in England at that moment in history.

The more notorious tensions pertaining to Sabbath between the Puritans and others beyond the boundaries of their community tend to come in the later 1630s and during the Laudan controversies.

[14 : 37] So Puritan exponent number one, if we want to get a sense of what the Puritans thought about Sabbath. The first fellow that I've chosen to look at is Nicholas Bound. He published a very famous book on Sabbath in 1595.

Nicholas Bound believed that Sabbath was of the utmost importance for the church. He also believed that Sabbath had been changed, apostolic imperative in the New Testament, from the seventh day to the first day.

But he said besides that change, everything else is pretty much the same. It's, quote, manner of observance was still seen in the Old Testament and should be maintained by the church just on the first day instead of the seventh.

So he wrote a book in 1595 on Sabbath, and I had enjoyed reading through that when I was doing this research. And in that book, he sees that Sabbath is a God-ordained institution that entails a total cessation from work so that you can worship.

And Sabbath also entails a ban on frivolous recreation. And articulating his view, Bound does not want to seem that he is innovative or new.

[15 : 47] So he makes a concerted effort to appeal to people before him in the Christian tradition and historical theology so as to substantiate the claim that what he's offering is not new.

It's just a recovery of some older things. He's not the first person to think this way about Sabbath, as it were. Now, the interesting thing is that Bound's book, about half of that book, is devoted to precise and very detailed instructions on how to keep Sabbath.

So where Calvin didn't say enough, Bound had a whole lot to say about the specifics, the nuts and bolts of Sabbath keeping, which would probably intimidate and indict most of us if we were to read it together this morning.

But Bound is clear that worship is the center of Sabbath. Worship is the center of Sabbath. Now, Bound is very careful to root Sabbath in creation.

Remember, Calvin's focus was on covenant. Bound really underscores Sabbath's basis in creation. It's an institution of creation, so therefore it has universal binding on everybody, all nations.

[16 : 48] Bound's influence in disseminating these views about Sabbath was quite notable. And his book had a big impact in engendering a solemn and strict observation of the Lord's Day throughout England.

Another Puritan who had something to say about Sabbath is John Owen, probably more well-known to some of you. John Owen also centered worship at the center of Sabbath.

He wrote a sizable tract defending Sabbath and urging strict Sabbatarianism in broader society. Owen, like Bound, really roots Sabbath in creation and offers a very interesting natural law argument for Sabbath, which is developed in his tract.

In fact, Sabbath is something that humans should have a sense of. The need to keep Sabbath is sort of innate, the light of nature. And because everyone should have a sense of that, it should be binding upon everyone.

But for Owen, Sabbath is not just rooted in creation and natural law. It's also got a basis in covenant. He says that Sabbath has a basis in moral positive law. He's referring to the covenant, the Ten Commandments there, as the Sabbath was commanded by Yahweh to the people of Israel, number fourth commandment.

[18 : 00] And then a third Puritan who had something to say about Sabbath is Richard Baxter. Baxter showed a particular concern for the humanitarian emphasis of Sabbath and spent time campaigning on behalf of workers' rights with the well-being of those who labor in society.

He was somewhat unrelenting and berating harsh masters for refusing to protect and provide Sabbath for those who worked for them. Now, these Puritan views of Sabbath get enshrined in the Westminster Standards.

If you go and read chapter 21, you'll see a statement there, which is one of the longest chapters in the Standards about Sabbath. And the Westminster Standards, which reflects Puritan theology, says that men are required to take a holy rest from their words, their works, and their thoughts about all worldly employments and recreations.

It's the recreation principle. And the day is to be taken up in private and public worship. There is a sort of a statement at the end that says people can also be involved in duties of necessity and mercy, but it's almost an afterthought.

The main focus is ceasing from worldly works and recreations for public and private worship. You see a similar view in the Heidelberg Catechism, which is also reformed.

[19 : 20] Again, in both of these catechisms, there are exceptions for humanitarian undertakings, reflecting the humanitarian concerns of Sabbath, but sort of pinned on as an afterthought, not a prominent feature of the theology of Sabbath there.

So convergences and disparities between Calvin's understanding of Sabbath and the English Puritan Reformed view of Sabbath. Some people really underscore the disparity between these two views of Sabbath.

Certainly strict Sabbatarianism of the Puritan variety was unique to the English. It doesn't seem to have made significant inroads onto the continent. And in fact, the strict Sabbatarian ethos of English Puritanism was actually rejected by the Dutch Reformed Christians at the Senate of Dort in 1619.

Why was that the case? Why was this kind of Puritan strict Sabbatarianism not received well on the continent? Probably because strict Sabbatarianism in the mind of continental Calvinists was associated with the unreformed Catholic Church that also had a tendency to promote a highly regulated mode of Sabbath keeping.

And so some scholars speculate that they rejected the strict Sabbatarianism of the Puritans as an evil, papistical, referring to the Pope invention.

[20 : 42] So some differences there. Now, what did the Puritan view of Sabbath, what did it mean on the ground in society? This is just sort of a brief aside of interest.

Well, the folks who were part of those circles wanted to ensure that Sabbath was really protected for worship, personal and private worship.

And so they did a lot of activities were banned, just like Nicholas Bowne's book has a long list of regulations. And you ended up with sort of codes of Sabbath keeping, casuistic codes linked to the Puritan penchant for casuistry that can be quite detailed.

Some scholars compare them to the mission of the mission codes for Sabbath keeping, which existed in an oral form at the time of Jesus, with which Jesus was often in opposition. The mission of code at the time, you know, as it was written a few, not too long after the life of Jesus, had about 1,500 Sabbath regulations.

I don't know if the Puritans had that many, but they did have a lot. And that trend of kind of a regulated Sabbath, what you can and can't do on this day in order to focus people to the task of worship, reflects the general Puritan penchant for casuistry.

[22 : 01] There were a number of comical caricatures of bad Sabbath keeping that were developed and used by preachers to sort of incentivize people to good, right Sabbath keeping.

So you had preachers who would talk about the donkey's Sabbath or the devil's Sabbath or the sensual Sabbath, these sort of humorous anecdotes as a way of incentivizing people to holy Sabbath keeping.

And those are quite funny to read. So there we have a bit about the Puritan Sabbath. We've got a bit about Calvin's ideas of Sabbath. And so let's hold those in our minds and let's dip into the Old Testament and a bit of the New Testament for a few minutes and see what we find there, right?

So we have a good sense of the hallmarks of Sabbath as it's been understood in the Reformed tradition. You see that there's a focus on Sabbath as a creation ordinance and then there's a focus on Sabbath as a weekly institution enshrined by the Fourth Commandment, right?

So the theology is certainly attentive. It's listening to certain features of testimony from the Bible. But is that all the Bible says, right?

[23 : 05] That's the question. I wish to suggest to you that no, it's not. The word itself, the etymology of Sabbath, Hebrew, Shabbat, right, is a tricky word to understand.

It basically means to cease, okay? And the Old Testament seems to assume that the reason for seventh-day Sabbath, as it was instituted by Yahweh at creation, was divine fiat.

God saw fit to do this, right? Now, if you read Genesis 1 and 2 in the context of the ancient Near Eastern world, certain insights about Israel's Sabbath get teased out, right?

If you study the text in comparison with other norms of the ancient Near Eastern world. Sabbath is certainly conferred as a blessing. But the interesting thing is this. In the Old Testament, blessings are generally only given to humans.

But in the case of Sabbath, a blessing is given to a day, right? To a day. And this is one of the few occasions, if not the only occasion, actually, where that happens. And so it suggests that this day in and of itself is supposed to have a fruitfulness.

[24 : 11] It's supposed to contain blessing. Those who take this day seriously should see blessing and fruitfulness. And if you look at the institution of Sabbath in Israel, again, compared to other cultures, you'll see that it certainly makes Yahweh, the God of Israel, seem much more merciful and compassionate, much less demanding divine landlord than the deities of neighboring lands, right?

Who weren't necessarily concerned with offering rest and refreshment to the people that worship them, right? So it's quite distinct in that sense. In fact, one scholar says that Yahweh's Sabbath, the Sabbath that's introduced in Genesis 1 and 2, Sabbath that became an absolute distinct feature of Israelite life, is unparalleled in the ancient world.

So Sabbath keeping in Israel. Let's now move from creation to the covenant, right? Let's look at some of the prohibitions that we find in Torah, right? God's law, the wisdom of God about Sabbath.

There are a lot of prohibitions. I would suggest to you that the prohibitions are not of innate value themselves. Their value stems from the way that they direct Israel to participation in worship of the true God in a way that's pleasing to that God.

So if Sabbath in Israel did indeed ensure rest from labor, it did that so that worship could transpire. The gravitas of this concern, which is reflected in the Old Testament law or Torah, is underscored by a regulation in Exodus 31.

[25 : 48] Refusal to keep Sabbath or a breach of the Sabbath commandment was punishable by death, which is quite startling, really.

So, pardon? Yes, right, we'd all be in big trouble now, wouldn't we? So you see, Sabbath plays a very core role in the covenant, right?

It's a very core role. It's at the center of covenant maintenance, right? God gives Israel this institution as a gift. Israel honors that gift, right, and worships God in response.

So Sabbath, as it's laid out in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, it finds two expressions because the Ten Commandments are listed in both Exodus and Deuteronomy in slightly different form.

The first is in Exodus, right? In the Fourth Commandment, there is the longest command, right? And the chief concern, as is indicated by the type of Hebrew verb that's used there, is hallowing the weekly Sabbath, right?

[26 : 49] Hallowing that. The basis for keeping this weekly Sabbath, as it's explained in Exodus in the Fourth Commandment account there, is creation. This is something that God instituted and ordained at the point of creation, and that's why it's part of Israel's covenant life, right?

So Israel's basically exhorted to the importance of keeping Sabbath is tied to remembering the way that the world was created by God, right? That's the rationale there. And you might say that Moses is beginning to work out the implications of this creation ordinance.

On the seventh day, God rested. So that's what you find there in Exodus. Now, when you go to Deuteronomy and read the Fourth Commandment, it's interesting. The commandment's the same, but the rationale is different.

The reason for keeping Sabbath is different, right? And you see it broadening out. You see an extension taking place here in Israel's understanding of the Sabbath. In Deuteronomy, Sabbath keeping is tied to liberation from Egypt.

It's tied to the Exodus event, right? That's the event that's in the background, right? Sabbath is an expression of freedom. Gordon McConville, a very well-known Old Testament scholar, says that Sabbath, as it's revealed and unpacked in the Fourth Commandment of Deuteronomy, has an eschatological thrust, right?

[28 : 10] It's pushing Israel to a vision of an ideal society under the rule of God, right? And that's why you see Sabbath naturally, later in the Pentateuch, undergirding institutions like Jubilee, right?

The ideal society of God, the restoration of humanity and human society to its ideal God, God's original vision, state of being, right? So a little bit of different rationale there.

But then Sabbath gets even further expanded as you keep reading in the Pentateuch, right? You have to understand the significance of Sabbath by looking at how Sabbath is featured in later literature.

And if you go on into later in Exodus and into Leviticus, you'll see that there are two institutions which are particularly important, I would argue, in understanding what Sabbath's all about.

Sabbath year and Jubilee, right? Some wonderful Old Testament scholarship out right now is really emphasizing that there are multiple connections between weekly Sabbath, Sabbath year, and Jubilee, which is the seventh, seventh Sabbath, the 49th year, right?

[29 : 35] In fact, one scholar suggests that Jubilee is one of the fullest expressions of Sabbath logic, right? So Sabbath year, you read about this in Exodus 23.

It's a year of release of the seventh year, right? From agricultural produce. It's also described in Leviticus chapter 25, a Hebrew text that has close links with Genesis 1 and Exodus 16, if you study the Hebrew there.

And so you might say that just as weekly Sabbath, represented in the fourth commandment, is to provide rest or life, life for the poor, so too with the Sabbath year, right?

There's a special concern for the resident alien, which is Hebrew shorthand for working poor, right? To see life breathed into the men and women, right, who are the laborers, the resident aliens.

And the Hebrew word there literally means like breathing wind into the nefesh, the soul, you know, the sort of essence of a person. You see a tie, one tie is quite self-evident between Sabbath year and weekly Sabbath, right?

[30 : 44] The mandate for cessation of individual work, right, once a week is transferred to broader society once every seven years, right? So there's a tie there, so there's to be a halt.

So the humanitarian concerns of Sabbath become quite clear and focused when you look at Sabbath year rationale, right? Sabbath year and weekly Sabbath, which both tell us about Sabbath, what Sabbath is all about, are conjoined by a passion for social justice rooted in Israel's identity as liberated slaves, right?

They reflect Yahweh's determination to be a champion for oppressed people, right? They're re-actualizing the exodus event in different ways in society, which is event marked by themes of liberation and release, right?

And let's talk last about the Jubilee, right? Now, Jubilee was the seventh, seventh, so it would happen on the 49th year, and it involved things like debt relief and slave manumission and returning of property that had been lost through financially adverse circumstances, debt.

Jubilee was not an unknown institution in the ancient world or something like it. If you comparative study, you'll see that other local potentates would, from time to time, implement in their societies, perhaps as a celebratory gesture, they would implement something like a Jubilee where slaves would be freed and property would be sent back, right?

[32 : 08] But it was quite arbitrary, quite whimsical. It was at the whim of the king. Not so in Israel, right? In the covenant, this institution is regularized. It becomes a recurring feature of shared life of God's people, right?

Jubilee was aimed not to be a welfare net, right? But rather to redress broad economic trends that undermine families over time.

And that's why some people have gone so far to say it's not charity, it's almost revolutionary, right? But in a peaceable way, right? Now, if you look at Leviticus 25, where Jubilee is discussed, you'll see that it's explicitly tied to Sabbath, right?

This tells us that the ethical concerns of Sabbath year and Jubilee exhibit something about the moral vision at the heart of the Bible's Sabbath traditions, right?

So by looking at Jubilee, just as like looking at Sabbath year, we're beginning to get a full-orbed understanding of what Sabbath is all about, right? It certainly is about rest, but you might say it's about active rest, right?

[33 : 17] It takes work to keep Sabbath, right? It's a working rest, and the concern is a vision of society, right? That's beginning to be unveiled through the teachings of Sabbath year and Jubilee, right?

A vision that anticipates and celebrates and wants to have a foretaste of a redeemed world. Those who struggle immensely can have some comfort in this present age. It's an enduring sign, an emblem of hope that the poor will see justice and the distraught will find peace, right?

So now we're beginning to get a sense of what should be the doctrinal DNA of Sabbath, right? Saying the common ends and purposes for which Sabbath was instituted as we look at the way that Sabbath is unpacked in various institutions that were part of Israel's civil life.

I think all of this is buttressed by attention to the New Testament, right? Where you see the perennial authority and the essential purposes of Sabbath, as they've been hitherto discussed, fortified by attention to Jesus' treatment of Sabbath, right?

In fact, the rationale developed through the various discussions of Jesus on Sabbath links the honoring of the Sabbath day weekly to the larger agenda of Jubilee and Sabbath economics that's at the heart of the Gospels.

[34 : 34] So what does it mean to hallow Sabbath according to Jesus? Well, careful attention to the New Testament indicates that for Jesus, Sabbath concerns good news for the poor and the wholeness and integrity of life, right?

It's perfectly valid. It's even natural to let Sabbath texts in the New Testament attune us, attune the reading Christian to the Sabbath year and Jubilee traditions of the Old Testament, right?

Jesus is often having heated discussions about Sabbath, and what he's doing there is, according to D.A. Carson, I think who has a good take on this, he's coming into conflict with the Halakha traditions that were prevalent at the time when he was on earth.

Those traditions were concerned to help people obey the great commands of Torah, but what they did was they sort of added on to them a bit, kind of put a fence around Torah. And Jesus seems to be challenging some of those because along the way, well-intended as they might have been, they actually misdirected people.

They led them away from the things with which God's law in its core form in the Old Testament is actually concerned. So Jesus is constantly challenging that. And in Mark chapter 2, Jesus says that he's the Lord of the Sabbath, right?

[35 : 46] So his authority to speak about Sabbath vastly overshadows and exceeds any of the Halakha traditions that were extant in Israel at that time. Right? And when you go and you begin to look through the text that deal with Sabbath and Jesus, what you'll see is that Jesus' Sabbath teaching and Sabbath action readily reveal its messianic overtones and its themes of restoration.

These are a core part of what Sabbath is all about, right? Jesus is, some people might say he's bringing in new teaching of the Sabbath. I think it's more accurate to say he's reviving teaching about the Sabbath that had been overshadowed or lost.

To quote Tolkien in the Lord of the Rings, some things that should not have been forgotten were lost. Jesus is here to remind what that's all about, right? And you see that if you look at the Lord's Prayer. You can actually see undertones of Jubilee and Sabbath year there.

You see it in the Sermon on the Mount. You see it in the parable of the rich fool in Luke chapter 12. Man who had good fortune, a sign of Sabbath, a double bounty on the Sabbath year, right?

Yet who chose to hoard instead. Sabbath even lies at the center of some of the passion narratives, as some recent exegetes have suggested. So in sum all of this, Sabbath emerges, as we gauge what its significance and meaning is from Jesus' teaching and actions, as a sign of economic justice and social solidarity.

[37 : 10] It's an observance that's a celebration of a new era of God's superabundant grace, especially towards those on the margin. Sabbath is a vital sign of God's kingdom, right?

And in reclaiming Sabbath, Jesus is taking a symbol that's at the heart of the Jewish symbolic order, right? And he's sort of redefining it, vesting it with new meaning or recovering old meaning and putting it back into it.

So we think about what we've learned as we've considered Sabbath in the Bible, and then we think about the Reformed inheritance. I don't think I have to make the case to you that the former seems a bit small and truncated compared to the latter, right?

The Reformed inheritance on Sabbath concerns, you know, taking a day off on Sunday so you can go to church, right? But when you look at the Old Testament teaching on Sabbath and what Sabbath's all about, and we look at Jesus' handling of Sabbath, it seems that there are other concerns that are very, very important that don't get quite as much attention in our conventional thinking and in our doctrine as the church, right?

What's the reason for that? There's probably various reasons. I want to suggest one reason for you today. In the Reformed tradition, we've tended to read, we've tended to interpret and handle the text, the law text, the Mosaic Code, Torah.

[38 : 32] We've handled those texts by putting them in a three-fold schematic. That's the sort of grid that we've used to interpret them. So we've said that there's different types of law. Some are moral, some are civil, some are ceremonial, right?

And we've elevated the moral laws as sort of being perennially binding, and we've relativized the civil and the ceremonial laws as not really having much to say to the church.

But there are substantial problems with this methodological maneuver, right? Old Testament scholars will say that that distinction, moral, civil, ceremony, is a bit arbitrary and haphazard.

That's not the way that the Bible was interpreted by the rabbis. It's not the way that the law of Moses is treated in the New Testament, right? It's not a self-evident way of reading the law. Sometimes it can be quite tricky to differentiate between moral, civil, and ceremonial laws.

But the crude effect of that mode of interpretation is that texts that help us to understand what Sabbath is all about get very little attention, right?

[39 : 36] We focus only on the Fourth Commandment. And even there, there's vacillation within the church because the Ten Commandments are supposed to be all moral, but then you have the Sabbath Commandment, which doesn't seem to fit well with the rest of them.

It's kind of ceremonial. It's kind of moral, sort of civil, right? It's a perfect case study for the problem with this interpretive methodology. And that interpretive methodology, which I think is flawed, it's not capable of revealing certain truths that we need to be able to see and take to heart, has adverse theological ramifications, right?

It suggests that all the teaching of the Old Testament, apart from the moral law, at least within the Mosaic Code, doesn't have much to teach us about God, right? And only the moral law tells us about sort of God's perennial concerns.

These other things are particular to a certain moment in history, and they don't really teach us that much about God or what God may have ordained Sabbath to do, right? And so I think to begin to remedy this problem, we need to deal with that methodological problem so that we don't find ourselves in a position of being a church.

This accusation has been raised by a number of Old Testament scholars. A church who adheres to a certain doctrine, which generates a certain mode and practice of Sabbath keeping, that promotes patterns and modes of being Christians that actually undermine the real aims of Sabbath, right?

[41 : 03] And there's some good case studies where this has happened. We don't have time to go through them this morning, right? We don't want, as one scholar says, to let certain conventional, perhaps impoverished, doctrinal sentiments about Sabbath with the practices they generate to lead to a mode of Sabbath keeping, which unwittingly colludes with aspects of modern life that are otherwise standing in ardent opposition to those things which are represented by the biblical depiction of Sabbath.

Has Sabbath been taken captive by impoverished doctrine of Sabbath? That's the question I'll put before you, and I think the answer may be yes in some situations.

So, I'm going to leave it at that. And by way of summary, we see that we've got the Reformed inheritance. We've got the biblical data, which I think is challenging the doctrinal kind of norm here, as it's part of the inheritance of the Reformed Church, which is calling us to go back and say, actually, maybe the doctrine's got some things right.

Maybe our, you know, the understanding of Sabbath as part of our doctrine, as part of our catechesis, has got some things right, but maybe we need to say more. Maybe we're missing out on certain essential themes of Sabbath.

Sabbath's all about what God has ordained Sabbath for, right? That need to be added into our doctrine. So, there's a place for some ongoing constructive theology here. We can say more, we can enhance our understanding, and through that, we can equip the church to be a people that better embody everything that God says that Sabbath is concerned with.

[42 : 44] So, and I gather we'll have a few minutes for questions now. Thank you. From Matthew 11, I know I will give you rest. I can privatize that.

That's the moment coming into my heart, which I think it is. But is that a Sabbath text as well? Do you agree that is a Sabbath invitation? I don't. I'd have to go and sort of work on that text a bit before I can answer that.

So, I don't know offhand, though. But it may be. There's a line seemingly drawn between the old covenant and the new covenant.

So, the new covenant says to suggest that things are an affair of the heart, even the Sabbath. But as soon as you put a frame around Sabbath, you're dragged back into the Old Testament attitudes towards rules and regulations.

But the new covenant, surely we're taking Sabbaths all the time. This morning, my wife and I broke off.

[44 : 00] Even though we're in a hurry to get here this morning, breaking the Sabbath, of course. You're not allowed to hurry, are you? That's right. We took a break to discuss the troubles of a Christian friend and how it should be handled and so forth like that.

But we took a Sabbath, in a sense, because our affairs, our troubles, were placed to one side as we were, I'm not saying we're wonderfully spiritual people or anything like that.

I'm just saying that there was a gap between everything going on, our hurry, we knew the top clock was ticking to get here to hear you, and so we broke the Sabbath in that sense to be in a hurry.

But it's an affair of the heart. And when God in Genesis said he saw that everything was good, he really didn't give us rest, I don't think.

Because worship isn't rest, is it? Is it? Is it? I would answer no. It isn't rest. So the word rest is misunderstood.

[45 : 21] And for us to keep out of the trouble and not do the Sabbath Day Adventist thing is to, at my age I keep letting things slip, wonderful ideas slip by, but it's an affair in the heart.

And we take Sabbaths all the time. And it may build up to 24 hours, but who's going to sit down and count it? But you mentioned it turns into years, Sabbath year.

So there's the flexibility we have. Take a Sabbath within an hour, seven minutes, or something like that. So 1 Corinthians 13 really sets the scene.

It sets the scene. It doesn't set that for one day. It sets it for life. It sets it for life. So I haven't explained or said anything really.

But I rushed to the protection of the new covenant. And I don't know how you spent so many years studying it. Two.

[46 : 36] Studying what? How many years you spent studying the Sabbath. Was it a waste of time? Oh, no, no. Yeah. No. Are you sure? I'm sure.

Yeah. Yeah. Well, you're still smiling anyway. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I love John Calvin.

I was at the Beth Israel synagogue with my friend. And the rabbi comes up. What's your name? John. My friend said, what's your name? Calvin. And he went, John.

Calvin, his eyeballs rolled. My ancestors are Calvinists from France. And I found something in the central library. And it said that Calvin had an anti-Semitic streak.

That must have been what triggered off the rabbis. There must be something about Calvin's outlook. That this guy's face.

[47 : 32] One of the people at my church is an artist here. She's a painting of the rabbi. But Calvin, I read it at the Calvin Institute. I think one of the priests here recommended it.

And I said, that's pretty heavy reading. He says, well, that's because it's systematic theology. And I'm a lay person. I'm not a theologian. But Calvin, what was his attitude?

Why would the rabbi be so upset about John Calvin? I think you may have already identified the reason for that with what you just said.

Oh, I haven't read anything about what Calvin said is anti-Semitic. But his reputation from people that he pretends him must be sadly. He's no stranger to controversy, that's for sure.

Oh, I see. You set me to thinking about all of the commandment. And I didn't have a Bible in my hand, so I have to go on memory.

[48 : 35] But if I remember right, we have two positive commandments and eight negative commandments. And the two positive commandments sit side by side.

Remember the Sabbath day, and honor thy father and mother. Would you care to go a little further with that? Well, they're both positive.

I think they're both commandments that contain blessing or the potential for blessing. Again, that reflects the blessedness that God assigned to Sabbath, that creation.

And the same, of course, with that shall honor thy mother and thy father. And also the earlier commandments center on God. And the later commandments center on, I think, what you referred to as civil interest.

Yeah, domestic, civil, yeah. You have this kind of hand in the middle. Which I think you see, again, summarized in Jesus' statement of the two great commandments, right?

[49 : 42] You shall love the Lord your God, though your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. You won't do the second if you don't do the first. And if you're not doing the second, you're not really doing the first. And that's actually just to chime back in to your question about Sabbath as an affair of the heart.

It is an affair of the heart, right? Sabbath creates a space for us to renew our adoration of God, our affection for God, our intimacy with God. But the tendency that we face in our culture is to allow our spirituality to become hyper-privatized.

And I think that's one of the great, great reasons why it's important to be continually going back to the Old Testament, which pushes against that radically. If it's an affair of the heart, it will take an outward expression.

And that outward expression will be expressed in the institutions and the things that humans are involved with, economics, politics, domestic life, right? That's one thing that's made clear through the Old Testament law.

If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, then these are the implications of that. These are the corollaries of that. And we may have the first part of that right with our sort of conventional mode of Sabbath keeping.

[50 : 53] Let's all stop for a day and go and worship and be renewed in the fear and adoration of the Lord, right? But it needs to have these, it needs to give rise to other things, concrete practices that are of benefit for our neighbor in order to be holistic in a way that corresponds to what Jesus said as a summation of everything the Old Testament says.

So, yeah. Yes, ma'am? Yeah, I like what you said at the beginning about, you know, Sabbath day is not special anymore. And neither is marriage.

So many things are not special, sadly. It's become very mundane. But when businesses are open on a Sunday, then people who are not strong in their beliefs, whatever their beliefs might be, you know, their religious beliefs, will maybe cave in.

And, you know, if they have to go to the mall, they go to the mall, they have to be pressured into working on a Sunday and not stand up and say, no, I can't work Sunday. Things like that.

It's just, everything's flatlined. It's all the same, Sunday through Sunday. Nothing special. So, like, it's just become more like that. So I like that, that we should keep it special. Yeah, Jubilee Center campaign.

[52 : 04] Keep it special. And, you know, in a free country, it's relatively easy to do. Mm-hmm. The shops are open six days a week, some of them 12 hours and more a day.

Yeah, yeah. You don't have to shop Sunday. Right. Et cetera, et cetera. We're not in the desert. We've got shops everywhere. They're open for any hours a day. So it doesn't require a lot of effort.

And I think if you speak up and say, I can't work Sunday, unless you're the doctor, there's an exception. But I just think we have to stand firm and say, you know, it's a special day. Mm-hmm. And I think the key to reclaiming Sabbath and receiving the blessing of that is, you know, we don't live in a society that's equivalent to the one the Puritans found themselves in, with the ties between the church and the civil order are as substantial.

But the place to start, I think, for the church would be to think how we, as God's people, can be a Sabbath people, right? And allow the Old Testament to inspire our imaginations about that.

Yes, ma'am. I wouldn't be the only one in a group like this that has had contact with people that have a very puritanical, legalistic view of what the church requires of us.

[53 : 19] I, myself, have a Presbyterian grandmother who always peeled the vegetables for the Sunday meal the night before. I failed to see the distinction between peeling vegetables and cooking them.

But, you know, she was not going to let Margie go back. And the alternative seemed to be throwing out babies with the bath water, you know. Right. Eaton department stores used to close their grapes on a Sunday because Timothy Eaton was trying to demonstrate his faith.

And we've gone the gamut of activities, as Margaret has suggested. Now, as a church, if you could put it into context of us or our climate church, how do we avoid these swings of extremism?

How do we chart a course that is biblical and true to our Lord and at the same time doesn't lead us in the direction of rules and strictness that eventually comes to signify nothing except separation from the rest of humanity?

Yeah, it's a great question. You know, what does it look like to be a Sabbath people in very practical ways, embodied ways? I'm disappointed that I wasn't able, just with myself, that there wasn't enough time to share with you some of Karl Barth's thought on Sabbath.

[54 : 48] Because I think, actually, he's a tremendous resource for helping the church, you know, get a clearer sense of what Sabbath's all about. Well, Barth likes to stay away from too many rules, the sort of Puritan impulse for casuistry or the type of stuff that Jesus was combating with the halakha teachings at his time.

And so, with you, I think it's probably best to stay away from that because if we go down that road, Jesus says no. You know, we don't want to over-regulate it. And I don't, you know, being legalistic, I don't think necessarily we shouldn't do any work on Sabbath.

It's just perhaps taking a break from our normal pursuits. And it depends on what type of work it is, right? Is it a work of mercy and compassion? That seems to be a major theme of what Sabbath is about, liberation and helping the oppressed.

So maybe, you know, it would be good for the church to think about how to incorporate that into what it does on the Sabbath. I think in, you know, emphasizing the importance of Sabbath being a day where we, you know, just get reminded of who God is and who God is for us and what God does for us.

So that we fall back into awe and admiration and worship and adoration of God. You know, being replenished in that sense. I think a good way to start would simply be to, you know, in the teaching office to try to teach, you know, preach on what Sabbath is about.

[56 : 21] You know, how did Israel seek to be a Sabbath people? And we can't do it the exact same way, but let's look at certain core principles, right, that were in their sort of way of life as they shared life together.

And can we appropriate any of that? Just getting familiar, I think, with a lot of the material that's in the Bible, which we're often embarrassingly unfamiliar with as a church.

You know, what does it actually say? Maybe if we open it and read it, we'd find that God's ready to inspire us. And so just in terms of a start, that's maybe where I would start.

Yes, sir. Yes, Moses, a private tutor, didn't he? An atheist, always on the Sabbath when he worked in his garden, wore a tie. Moses, he couldn't get the Sabbath out of a Scotsman.

He'd lost his name. He'd really hang around for a long time. Yeah. Because you don't want it to be, again, like Calvin said, right, if there are restrictions around Sabbath, they're only put in place to point people to Christ.

[57 : 28] And you don't ever want Sabbath to become, what's Sabbath known for? Is it known for being the day where you have all these rules that you don't have to bother with on the other six days? If it's known for that, then you've gone in the wrong direction.

You've ended up at a place where you don't want to be. You want it to be known as a day to, I like the first of the Westminster Confession, for enjoying God, right, glorifying God. And realizing that in glorifying God, there's a direct corollary, which means loving your neighbor.

Yes, ma'am. A lot of different things have come to my mind. And just what you said now, I think that what I take from this out of is that God desires our time.

He desires attention because he cares for us. He wants to have a community. And we, in a sense, need that time, too. We need to stop, learn how to rest, and to bring that into our daily lives.

And I think that the scripture that Harvey just brought to our attention earlier about Jesus, saying, come into me and rest. We need to learn how to do that.

[58 : 41] Cessation is a powerful reminder that the world goes on without us. And I think that's a very important Sabbath implication in our society, where we work a lot, we get busy.

Our civil customs no longer honor Sabbath. Everything runs 24-7. And don't think that we can exist in that pot of hot water and not get warm, right, because it will shape our own thinking.

And the way of life. Yes, ma'am. There does seem to be something very special about the Sabbath. Because it seems to be a Judeo-Christian concept. I remember teaching in the ESL class when we were looking at the Gospel of Mark, and I said to the class, and they had, like, Hindus, Muslims, a sect of the Japanese.

I said, is there anything like this in your country? And they said, no. The Muslims said, we go to the mosque on Friday, and then we go to work. So there was no other concept of, like, a complete day of rest.

And it seems that in our culture, Sabbath has become sort of the weekend. And most of the rest of the world didn't have a concept of the weekend. And we're becoming more like that.

[59 : 56] But somehow we need to reclaim that concept of the Sabbath as opposed to just having a good time. Yeah. Yes, right. Something hallowed about that day.

Yes, sir. I think I did say that the Puritans believed that they shouldn't be doing, we shouldn't be doing anything frivolous on a Sunday, on the Sabbath. Yeah, the recreation principle.

Some Puritans did adhere to that. And, you know, do you regard baseball as a frivolous? I don't, but I think they would have. Yeah. The other thing is that I think the English sort of pre-entered that by calling it Ramblers instead of...

I read an account of a kid who grew up in Europe during the time of the Second World War.

And so Sabbath was a prominent, established cultural institution. And then it was severely disrupted by the war. Probably one of the major historical events that led Europe away from being a Sabbath society.

[61 : 04] But in this kid's imagination, heaven was a place of a thousand Sabbaths. No, they didn't stop bombing on the Sabbath. Didn't stop bombing. But I think that would be a good way to, you know, if we're thinking about Sabbath in that sense, right?

We look forward to it. Because if you were the average Israelite, you would have absolutely looked forward to the weekly Sabbath. You would look forward to the seventh year Sabbath, the Jubilee. This is a festival, a celebration, conviviality.

And so that should be an important part of our understanding of what it means to be a Sabbath people as well. With Sabbath things, the Orthodox Jews, they have a Seder supper on Friday.

And it's quite a lot of rituals. And then there's a dividing wall. And then the women must pray separately. And it's a very ordered, structured thing. And they read their prayer books from the back to the front.

One guy, I complete honestly, I could take it home. But I didn't do that to read it. And then they go on Saturday. Someone's saying the Muslims, they go to the mosque on Friday. The Jews go to the synagogue on Friday.

[62 : 04] And then the Sabbath, Saturday. So it's Friday night, Saturday day for the Jews. Was there another? Yes, ma'am.

I had briefly a name and work for a Jewish family in Manchester. And she would do all of the shopping on Friday.

And all of the cooking, I believe it was too. So she'd run around practically all children. And anyway, and then, so Saturday was the Sabbath for them.

But I also heard about some Jewish Orthodox person who wouldn't even put the stove on a Saturday. But you would just think, well, what if you were sick, right? You need to boil some water. You know what?

It becomes ridiculous if you're so sick. Well, the light switch, right. Yeah. Yeah. That's the regulated, highly regulated Sabbath. Yeah. Get your gentle friend to come over and turn the switch.

[63 : 00] You have to break it. One of my particular interests, which I'll be focusing on as I extend this research over the next two years. This was just the theological groundwork. I have a friend who's doing his PhD in economics at UBC.

He's one of the best economics departments around. And he was in the Bible study a few years ago when we were reading Mark's Gospel. All these heated discussions, you know, about whether our society should be an Anglo-American market economy or whether we should be more regulated or socialist, right, which is a bad word if you're from south of the border.

Well, at least from south of the border where I'm from, probably not in Washington State. But I think the church, one of the church's key jobs in participating in culture and humanizing culture is to put other options on the table, right?

Do we have to think just in, you know, in this sort of binary way of thinking? And one of the things I'm hoping to do with this friend as an economist is to look at the biblical teaching on Sabbath, especially the economic implications, and see what sort of lessons we might draw and, you know, allow that to equip us to put some creative third options on the table.

You know, so are you a capitalist? Are you a socialist? And I'm a Sabbath, you know, economics, right? Something like this, right? And following the legacy of the Jubilee Center, which seeks to do this type of work.

[64 : 18] So that's the particular interest as well, which I hope to extend. But it's 10 after. I know you all have to go, and I've got to zip downtown. But thank you so much for your time. Thank you.