

Sabbath - Rest

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Bible Text: Hebrews 3:12-4:13

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Our Scripture reading for this morning to which I invite you to turn with me at this time is found in the New Testament book of Hebrews beginning in the third chapter. We begin reading, brothers and sisters, in the 12th verse of the third chapter of the book of Hebrews. We read through the 13th verse of the fourth chapter, but I draw your special attention to verses eight through 11. Verses eight through 11 of chapter four will constitute our text for today. Hebrews three beginning in verse 12. Hear, then, the Word of the Lord.

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?

So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith.

Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere

he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: "And on the seventh day God rested from all his work."

And again in the passage above he says, "They shall never enter my rest." It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his.

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one will fall by following their example of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.¹

Thus far the reading of God's holy Word.

As always, brothers and sisters, I ask and urge you to keep your Bibles open and handy as we look to God's Word together on this Lord's Day.

Dear congregation of Jesus Christ, a man may work from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done, or so the saying goes.

Do you think that is true? Do you think that is true? Well, to whatever degree you may or may not agree with that particular statement, I am sure, brothers and sisters that we would all agree with the sentiment that we are all too busy in life, that we are all too busy in life.

Indeed, multiplied modern conveniences such as washing machines and dryers and dishwashers and automobiles and power mowers and all of the technological advances accompanying the computer age simply have not delivered on their promise to give us more down time, time to recreate, time to relax, time to more faithfully and fervently and fruitfully enjoy our friendships and our interpersonal family relationships.

And part of the result of this fast paced consumer driven, the city never sleeps society has been an incredible increase in personal health problems, an incredible increase in

¹ Hebrews 3:12-4:13.

dysfunctional families, an incredible increase in the corruption of our culture and an incredible increase in the spiritual stagnation of the saint.

And, friends, the fact of the matter is that to an incredibly and increasingly large degree, such a harried and hectic pace of life with all of the accompanying symptoms which I have just mentioned is largely due to the desecration of the Lord's Day. It is largely due to the desecration of the Lord's Day.

In fact, in his very excellent little booklet entitled *Call the Sabbath a Delight*, Pastor Walter Chantry writes as follows. And I ask you to please listen carefully as I read.

He says, "You can recall how brothers in the Lord argued that the sabbath law was not intended for the Christian era. It was meant only for the Jews. These noble theological physicians justify one's spending a meager hour in church followed by an eager rush to join the world in all of its pursuits of business and pleasure. We do not wonder that attendance at Sunday evening services is diminishing rapidly.

"Some good evangelicals who attend large churches with multiple services can get their worship out of the way by 9:30 AM and be off sooner to the main business of the day.

"Roman Catholics have begun to go to mass Saturday night. And I might add so have some of our evangelical brethren in some of our local evangelical churches. This was not because they believe that one should worship on the seventh day. They just want nothing to interfere with Sunday's entire day at the beach or on the golf course.

"As you drive home it is as you expected. Shopping malls are doing brisk business. Restaurants are jammed with Christian and non Christian alike. Now the roadways are quite full. It is the great day of Hedonism in our western world.

"A few cars carrying believers home from church are lost in a sea of frantic pursuit of pleasure and wealth.

"Is it practicable to worship God for one whole day in each seven? Can you be right about the Fourth Commandment and even your evangelical friends be mistaken? Such a thought quickly passes. There can be no other answer to straighten out our crooked generation, nothing but a weekly day of worship will begin to touch the ignorance which has gripped humanity. This alone under God can save families, churches, schools and governments from total moral collapse."

And finally this. He writes, "In their pride men have dismissed God's perfect law. His Decalogue requires the habit, the steady routine practice, the discipline of a day of worship and service to God. It is such habit, routine and discipline that will give men both a knowledge of God and moral standards by which to live. It is just such a sabbath day that will strengthen families and social institutions. No wonder the Church herself is devotionally, doctrinally and morally weak. Even Christians will not devote a day each

week to their Lord. Even Christians will not devote a day each week to their Lord.” End of quote.

And, brothers and sisters in the Lord, that is true. What Walter Chantry has here written is certainly true.

But, you see, that is why as we turn to the study of our text for today, as recorded for us in Hebrews chapter four verses eight through 11. We find ourselves being both instructed and inspired by the fact that even though Joshua did not accomplish God’s promised rest for his people by bringing them physically into the Promised Land, he brought in a subsequent younger generation of Israelites who were the children of their fathers who had died in the desert due to their disobedience and unbelief.

Even so, still and all, the Bible says that there does, indeed, remain a sabbath rest for God’s people, a sabbath rest, brothers and sisters, which the sacred Scriptures tell us endures for ever, a sabbath rest, the sacred Scriptures tell us which is entered into only by faith. It is entered into only by faith assuming that unlike the disobedient Israelites of old, we escape a fall, we escape a fall.

Now, then, as we consider this critically important subject of sabbath rest, that which Walter Chantry refers to as “a critical moral topic for our greatly corrupt generation,” let us consider, first of all, the fact that our text for today teaches us that such a sabbath rest endures for ever. Such a sabbath rest endures forever.

For example, look at verse eight of our Scripture reading in Hebrews four with me if you would, please.

Here we read, “For if Joshua...”² If you have a King James Version I believe your translation says, “For if Jesus...”³ Why so? Well, because Jesus is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua. But because the context here clearly is talking about the Old Testament, it is clearly talking about the Old Testament people of God, it is clearly talking about the Old Testament Jesus, meaning Joshua, whose name along with Jesus means savior or Jehovah is salvation, the New King James Version, I believe, and these other modern translations put in the name Joshua so that there would be no misunderstanding. But literally we read then, “For if Joshua had given them rest...”⁴ Who is the “them” being referred to? The “them” being referred to is that Old Testament generation of Israelites who were born of those who died in the desert and were, in fact, brought physically and safely into the Promised Land.

“For if Joshua had given them rest,”⁵ the people who actually occupied the Promised Land, “If Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another

² Hebrews 4:8.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

day.”⁶ But, as we have just read, God did, indeed, speak later about another day. In fact, he spoke later about another day some several hundred years later through the psalmist David. And it was the psalmist David who is being repeatedly quoted here in the words of our Scripture reading.

He spoke about another day, Psalm 95 is repeatedly quoted.

For example, let’s go back to Hebrews four verses six through seven where we read, “It still remains that some will enter that rest.”⁷ That word “remaining” is in the present tense. It has a sense of continuous action. It still remains and will remain, “that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience,”⁸ the fathers of those Israelites.

“Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before.”⁹ And here is the quote from Psalm 95, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”¹⁰

In other words, David was implying that that promised rest in the physical Promised Land was not the rest God was ultimately talking about. It was but a shadow. It was but a type. It was but a figure of a much fuller rest that God would ultimately give to his people.

“For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains then,”¹¹ and stay with me, “a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.”¹²

Friends, if you have got your own Bible, underscore that word, that phrase, that title, “Sabbath-rest.” Why so? Because it is the only place in the entire New Testament where that particular term is used in the original language. I have it written on your household study sheet. It is the Greek term σαββατισμος (sab-bat-is-mos’). It is almost as if under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the author to the Hebrew was trying to coin a particular term which would convey the kind of rest which God was giving to his people.

There’s about 11 or so other mentions of the term rest in this passage which we have read. And the King James, unfortunately, translates this particular term σαββατισμος (sab-bat-is-mos’) also just as rest. But all those other terms are a different Greek word. And I think I have got that one on your sheet as well. καταπαυσις (kat-ap’-ow-sis) means rest from our physical labor, rest, a cessation of wearisome toil.

σαββατισμος (sab-bat-is-mos’), on the other hand, this word used only here in the New Testament in verse nine, literally refers to a keeping of the sabbath. It literally refers to a

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Hebrews 4:6.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Hebrews 4:7.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hebrews 4:8-9.

¹² Ibid.

sabbath observance for the people of God. And it refers to a cessation or ceasing of work because a task has been completed, a job has been well done. It is what is being referred to in Genesis 2:1-2 when it says, “And God rested from the work of creating that he had done.”¹³ He was rejoicing in, reflecting upon the glorious creation that he had made, stopping from his work of creating. That is what σαββατισμος (sab-bat-is-mos’) means.

And that becomes the pattern, brothers and sisters, for you and I in our celebration of the sabbath day. There is a New Testament sabbath. There is a new covenant sabbath. There is a sabbath rest for the New Testament child of God.

And, friends, such a celebration of sabbath rest is oh so graciously given by God to us to enjoy Lord’s Day by Lord’s Day by Lord’s Day as a fulfillment of and obedience to the Fourth Commandment of his holy Law in this life and this sabbath day is but a foretaste. It is but a figure. It is but a foreshadowing of a much fuller, more complete blessed enjoyment of our sabbath rest in the afterlife.

In fact, turn to Revelation if you would, please, just for a moment. It is near the end of the Bible, Revelation chapter 14 verse 13. In Revelation chapter 14 verse 13 John writes, “Then I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’”¹⁴

Why so?

“‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.’”¹⁵

And, again, in verses eight and nine of our text we read:

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God.¹⁶

Indeed, brothers and sisters, a sabbath rest, the Bible says, which endures forever. It endures forever.

Now, secondly, our text teaches us that this sabbath rest is entered by faith. It is entered by faith. Look at verse nine of our Scripture reading with me if you would and stay with me once again. Here we read, notice very carefully verse nine. “There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest,”¹⁷ a σαββατισμος (sab-bat-is-mos’), “for the people of God.”¹⁸ Now stay with me. It gets a little tricky here.

¹³ See Genesis 2:2.

¹⁴ Revelation 14:13.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Hebrews 4:8-9.

¹⁷ Hebrews 4:9.

¹⁸ Ibid.

“For anyone...”¹⁹ Literally, this is very important. Literally the Greek says, “For he,” singular or for the one, “who entered,” past tense, stay with me. “For he who entered,” and then the literal Greek says not “God’s rest,” but “His rest...” “For he who entered his rest also,” not rests, present tense, but rested, past tense, “from his own work just as God did from his.”²⁰

Now, why did I go to such pains to point out the literal translation of the pronouns and the tenses of those verbs in that particular text? Why did I bother doing that? For this reason. If we don’t give such specific detail to such specific terminology in the Scriptures, we could easily come to erroneous conclusions, theology, doctrine, interpretation and application.

And, friends, with all due respect to the NIV translators, I think that is precisely what they have done by translating the word “anyone” referring to anyone when literally it says he or the one. It is referring to a particular person, not just to anyone.

Now stay with me.

In the words of Walter Chantry, “English translations of these words are quite diverse and often misleading. Translators have felt that it was necessary to clarify what the apostle meant by altering exactly what he said. This certainly is understandable from the complexity of the context,” end of quote.

And I might add, understandable, yes, helpful, no.

Because, you see, brothers and sisters, again, I strongly believe that it is not anyone who is the subject matter of verse 10. But I believe the subject matter is a very specific person. Look with me at verse 10 again as I read as it literally should be translated.

“For he who entered his rest also rested from his own work just as God did from his.”²¹

I believe that the specific person being referred to here is none other than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It was his work that was accomplished once and for all on Calvary. It is because of Christ that we can ultimately find rest. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who after God his heavenly Father, also rested from his own work and entered into his rest just as God did from his.

In fact, turn with me, if you would, please, to the Old Testament, to the prophecy of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 11 verse 10.

Some 800 years before Jesus was even born we read this messianic prophecy, a prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah 11 verse 10 we read, “In that day the Root

¹⁹ Hebrews 4:10.

²⁰ See Hebrews 4:10.

²¹ Ibid.

of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.”²²

We read in our call to worship a few minutes ago from Matthew chapter 11 verses 28 through 30. Our Lord Jesus saying this:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light²³

And that is also why, finally on this score, in Hebrews chapter 10—just go over a couple of pages with me, please. In Hebrews chapter 10 verse 11 through 14 we read:

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.²⁴

Speaking of Christ’s ascension into heaven which we just celebrated and his session at the right hand of God, his rule and his reign.

Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.²⁵

Now, friends, when we put all of that together and compare what we just read with what we find, for example in Hebrews three verse 18 and 19—look with me, please. There we read:

And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? we see that they were not able to enter, because....²⁶

They were not able to enter because of their unbelief.

So, too, chapter four.

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they

²² Isaiah 11:10.

²³ Matthew 11:28-30.

²⁴ Hebrews 10:11-12.

²⁵ Hebrews 10:13-14.

²⁶ Hebrews 3:18-19.

heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest.²⁷

The point, brothers and sisters, is that the only way in which to enter God's sabbath rest is not by feverishly and futilely trying to adhere to some random list of dos and don'ts, there by earning our salvation or entering into our promised rest. Rather, the only way to enter into our sabbath rest is by the grace of God only through faith in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who completed his work on Calvary, who entered into his rest and rested from his labors, reflected upon his labors, rejoiced in the salvation he had brought to his saints just as God rested from his work of creating in Genesis two one and two.

And that is what the sabbath day is all about. We rest in the finished work of Christ. We are portraying literally by the fact that we cease from our daily work and labors, saved as the Westminster Catechisms teach us, save for works of necessity such as being a policeman or mercy such as being a nurse. We cease from our daily labors, powerfully portraying to the world that we are not saved by our works. We are not saved by our works. We are not saved by our adherence to the law. We are saved by the grace of God through faith in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ alone.

And what a day, brothers and sisters, in which to rest and reflect and rejoice in the fact that it is in Christ and in Christ alone that our sins are forgiven, that in Christ and in Christ alone our oppressive guilt is removed, that in Christ and in Christ alone we are brought back into a blessed relationship with the God who created us who in Christ has become our loving heavenly Father.

What a day of rejoicing this ought to be.

We sang a few moments ago the hymn by John Newton,

Day of all the week the best,
Emblem of eternal rest

A sabbath rest which is, indeed, enduring forever. And a sabbath rest which is entered into only by faith, only by faith.

Ah, but notice, but notice, that having been said, thirdly and finally our text teaches us that such will be the case, that if we will, in fact, enter the sabbath rest by faith only if we escape a fall, only if we escape a fall.

For example, look at verse 11 of Hebrews four with me if you would, please. There we read, "Let us, therefore,"²⁸ you and me, the body of Christ corporately, "Let us, therefore, make every effort."²⁹ The King James says, "Let us labor."³⁰ The New American Standard, New King James says, "Let us be diligent."³¹

²⁷ Hebrews 4:1-3.

²⁸ Hebrews 4:11.

²⁹ Ibid.

In other words, brothers and sisters, effort must be exuded. Effort must be exuded.

The reformed commentator William Hendrickson writes, and I quote, “This eagerness ought to be the hallmark of every believer and the password of the Church,” end of quote.

“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest,”³² that rest which Christ has earned for us and accomplished for us on Calvary. That rest which was typified by the Lord resting from his labors at Creation as is set forth for us in Exodus chapter 20.

Ceasing of our labor, we can’t earn our salvation. We are saved by grace, all of that.

“Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one,”³³ not a single one of the congregation of our Lord, so that no one, “will fall by following their,”³⁴ literally by following the same, “example of disobedience.”³⁵

Writes Matthew Henry, and I quote, “Such disobedience and unbelief causes us to forfeit the rest of grace here and the rest of glory hereafter,” end of quote.

Now think about that. Think about that. Friends, what would you say if the essence of the disobedience which characterized that generation of Israelites who died in the desert? What was that the essence of their disobedience and unbelief?

Well, let’s allow the Word of God itself to teach us. Turn with me, please, in the Old Testament to Ezekiel chapter 20. Skim over the first 26 verses with me if you would please. Here in Ezekiel 20 God is talking about the fact... well, it is interesting. First of all, the elders of Israel come to inquire of the Lord and he says, “I am not going to talk to you. You listen to me.” That is what it says if you look up at those first few verses.

They had rebelled against him. He wouldn’t even listen to them.

“I am going to talk to you,” he said. “You listen.”

And he talks about the fact that he had promised to deliver them from Egypt, to bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey if you will skim over those first several verses.

Verse eight. “But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me.”³⁶

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ezekiel 20:8.

And God wanted to wipe them all out. He was just going to destroy them. But he was concerned for the profaning of his name among the nations, that he was a God who could not do what he had promised that he would do, that he couldn't deliver. So he spared them in his grace and in his mercy.

And then in verse 10 it says:

Therefore I led them out of Egypt and brought them into the desert. I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. Also I gave them my Sabbaths as a sign between us.³⁷

Brothers and sisters, the sabbath day was almost the sign, the essence of the covenant. Sometime the sabbath is referred to as the covenant.

“So they would know that I the LORD made them holy.”³⁸

Verse 13. “Yet the people of Israel rebelled against me in the desert. They did not follow my decrees but rejected my laws— although the man who obeys them will live by them—and they utterly desecrated my Sabbaths.”³⁹

Drop down to verse 15. “Also with uplifted hand I swore to them in the desert that I would not bring them into the land.”⁴⁰ He let them die in the desert. “A land flowing with milk and honey, most beautiful of all lands—because...”⁴¹ Here is the reason. “They rejected my laws and did not follow my decrees and desecrated my Sabbaths. For their hearts were devoted to their idols. For their hearts were devoted to their idols.”⁴²

Brothers and sisters, I ask you this question. Is this not the precisely the sin which is becoming increasingly prevalent among God's people today? Is this not precisely the sin which is becoming more prevalent among God's people today, namely, the desecration of the sabbath day, desecration of the sabbath day?

Now, please do not misunderstand. In the words of Walter Chantry, and I quote. Listen carefully, “In the end a heavy handed legalism will do more to drive people away from sabbath observance than it will do to preserve the day. Our weekly sabbaths are intended to be joyful in the Lord and good for us, body and soul,” end quote.

That is also why in his very excellent commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism entitled, *Our Only Comfort* Dr. Fred Kloster writes and, again, I quote, “Keeping the sabbath as a celebration of joy and praise and not as a day of dos and don'ts makes it a day for

³⁷ Ezekiel 20:10-12.

³⁸ Ezekiel 20:12.

³⁹ Ezekiel 20:13.

⁴⁰ Ezekiel 20:15.

⁴¹ Ezekiel 20:15-16.

⁴² Ezekiel 20:16.

everyone to anticipate with the attitude God intended. Adults and children alike will be happy to know that Sunday is coming. This means it should be a day of seeking pleasure in the Lord, in blessed communion with God and the blessed community of believers and resting from the business and worldly distractions of every other day activities,” end of quote.

So, again, if you would turn with me, please, to the back of our Psalters to page 52, question and answer 103 on page 52 of the catechism asks: What is God’s will for us in the Fourth Commandment? And we read here, first, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained.

Now, brothers and sisters, think about that. That means that we need to be asking ourselves: Are my Lord’s Days spent in supporting the going forth of the gospel and education for it by preparing myself and my family for worship and supporting gospel education by attendance at Sunday school, engaging in Sunday outreaches such as nursing home ministry and participation in operation neighbor and the fellowship and education of our household ministries and the like? That is one of the questions we need to be asking, first, of the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained.

But I also mention the need to prepare for such a day, to prepare for such a day.

Just honestly with all love and respect, 8:15 is an early hour to worship in. But many Lord’s Days, brothers and sisters, many of us look incredibly tired. In fact, I say this also to you with much love and respect and humility, but this is just between us. There are times where some of you yawn so dramatically I think to myself, it looks like feeding time at zoo. It just... it is...

And just, again, between us in love and respect there are other times where there are these great flourishes of watch looking.

The pastor and Ike and I see this stuff. We see that. But I don’t share that with you simply because it is distracting to us. I share this with because it is dishonoring to God.

In fact, turn to Nehemiah two with me just for a moment. In Nehemiah two verses one and two we read about Nehemiah who was cupbearer to the king. And in Nehemiah two verses one and two we read:

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart."⁴³

Notice” I was very much afraid.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Nehemiah 2:1-2.

⁴⁴ Nehemiah 2:2.

The king says, “You look sad.”

Then we read Nehemiah says, “And I was very much afraid.”

Why? Because to come into the presence of a king looking tired or sad could literally cost you your life. He could literally do away with you.

Think about it.

And, brothers and sisters, I have been wrestling in my own heart with the question. What does it mean to God when you or I—I am including myself in this—when you or I rush into his presence and then look tired or bored, yawning and looking at our watches, can’t wait to run out of his presence to get on with what we consider to be the really important business of the day, you see?

Think about that.

And so, brothers and sisters, while we may not need to go to the lengths which our forefathers and foremothers did peeling potatoes on Saturday, right? Peeling potatoes on Saturday so that they could minimize their work on Sunday. Let us seek to begin afresh. Let us seek to do all that we can on Saturday to prepare our hearts by consecration of the entire day, the Lord’s Day unto him, you see.

Another comment, if I may. It speaks here about the gospel ministry and education for it to be maintained. Now, when I am scheduled to preach morning services I often go home between services and I have tea with honey for my voice and I pray and reflect and study. If I am not preaching, I am teaching up in the ministry center our 11th and 12th grade catechism class. My point is, I am not generally here in this building during Sunday school hour.

But I hear from the elders and others that during Sunday school there are so many people in the narthex or the lower lobby or outside or in the kitchen that it is almost hard for the teacher to teach and the students to hear. Just speaking honestly with you.

And at times I will ask some of these brothers and sisters who are apparently part of that crowd, “Well, why aren’t you in Sunday school?”

I often get the same answer. They say, “It’s the only time we have during the week to see our friends and to talk about our jobs and our families and our hobbies and fishing and all the rest.”

And I said, “And no it is not, no it is not.”

Brothers and sisters, God has given you and me six other days that he says are yours. Talk all you want. Meet all you want. Fish all you want. Golf all you want. Eat all you

want. Do everything you want. On my day please don't usurp the one hour of Christian education for ourselves and our children by talking about things you could talk about other times during the day, in fact, or any other day during the week.

It is on my heart. Do you understand? It is on my heart.

Several years ago I was challenging one of our church members to be more faithful in morning worship attendance. And they said to me, "Well, you don't understand. It is the only day I have to sleep in."

And I said, "No, it's not. You could sleep in on Saturday."

He said, "Oh, no. I can't. I work on Saturday. My boss would have a fit."

Think about that.

I said to myself, "Well, apparently they are more concerned about pleasing their boss than they are about pleasing the Lord."

I was speaking to someone else not too long ago encouraging them to be found more faithful in their evening worship attendance. And I said, "You know, after all, in 2 Chronicles two verse four, for example, it talks about regularly bringing before the Lord the morning and evening sacrifice."

And in the New Testament we repeatedly read of the disciples and the members of the early church gathering in the evening of the Lord's Day to hear God's Word and to celebrate the sacraments. In fact, jot down Acts 20 verses seven and 12. We read the account of a young man named Eutychus who was sitting in a third story window. And because Paul preached till midnight and the room was packed and probably the oil lamps made him dozy, he fell asleep. He fell out the window and he was killed.

Now, praise be to God that God empowered Paul to raise him back to life. But I share that instance with you because our evening services do not last till midnight. They go about, you know, with all respect, an hour if pastor Dale is preaching, about an hour and a half if I am preaching. But not three hours, not till midnight. It is not that long a time and it certainly isn't what our brothers and sisters in countries like Africa and India are doing, worshipping two, three, four times as long as we do, sitting on cement floors in hot brick buildings without the comfort and the air conditioning and the padded pews that we have.

Do you understand what I am saying and what I am burdened by?

The catechism says, first, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained and that especially on the festive day of rest, not only on the festive day of rest. There's other days to worship like national days of prayer and Ascension Day and Good Friday and Thanksgiving and Christmas, whenever the elders of this church or a church call God's

people to worship, God's people should be there unless providentially prevented, especially on the festive day of rest.

I regularly attend the assembly of God's people to learn what God's Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly and to bring Christian offerings to the poor. And, brothers and sisters, notice here all the holy activity in which God's people are to be engaged on the Lord's Day.

In other words, the person who most honors and remembers the Lord's Day is not the person who sleeps the longest in the day, the person who snores the loudest, the people who remain the most immobile through the day. It is not a day of holy inactivity, but of holy activity.

Oh, yes, we need our rest physically and spiritually. I understand that. But look at all these things in which God's people are supposed to participate. As we consecrate this entire day unto God and support the gospel ministry and see to that education for it be maintained.

In fact, it is also interesting. While, indeed, in the book of Genesis and repeated in Exodus 20 God rested from his work of creating, please note that in John 5:17 in response to the criticism and persecution of the Jews for healing an invalid on the sabbath Jesus said, "My Father is always at his work to this very day,"⁴⁵ to this very day, "and I, too, am working."⁴⁶

And so it is a whole day, one whole day out of seven we are supposed to consecrate to the Lord in worship and service to his holy name. It involves attending the worship of God's people, hearing his Word preached, celebrating the sacraments, praying to God, giving our gifts.

Second, that every day of my life, especially on the Lord's Day, but every day of my life I rest from my evil, that is, by availing ourselves of the means of grace, the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, the fellowship of believers, prayer and so on simply so that we can stop sinning more and more, that we can stop sinning.

That I rest from my evil ways. Let the Lord work in me through his Spirit and so begin already in this life the eternal sabbath.

And why is this so important? Why is this such an excellent biblical commentary? The reason, brothers and sisters, is found in Hebrews chapter four verse 11 where again we read, "Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no-one will fall by following their example of disobedience."⁴⁷ That's why. That's why.

⁴⁵ John 5:17.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Hebrews 4:11.

Now, a few moments ago I read from Ezekiel 20 verse 16 where God says of the disobedient, “They rejected my laws and did not follow my decrees and desecrated my Sabbaths. For their hearts were devoted to their idols.”⁴⁸

Now, while some, perhaps, would desire for me or pastor Van Dyke or one of our elders to sort of play the role of the rabbi in *Fiddler on the Roof* and give very specific answers, succinct answers to a myriad of questions and problems and difficult matters of conscience concerning the sabbath day, we are not going to do that. It is not our role. It is not for your profit, in fact.

Galatians four says that New Testament Christians are not children. They don't need a school master. They don't need a trustee. They don't need a guardian. Do this, don't do that. Galatians four says that is not where we are as New Testament Christians.

But, brothers and sisters, God has given us his Holy Spirit inspired Word. He has given us his eternal moral binding law. He has given us a myriad of biblical principles which you and I must read and reflect and meditate upon. And with a clear conscience before God and sanctified common sense put them into practice.

In our application of the Lord's Day observance, even as we beware, listen, even as we beware legalistically judging a brother or another the way in which the Pharisees repeatedly judged Jesus and his disciples the observance of the sabbath day. We need to beware of that.

However, that having been said, there is one particular idol which I believe has increasingly been so exalted in our land, it is increasingly being so worshipped by the people of God at the expense of their honoring of the sabbath day that I feel in my heart before God it must be addressed. It has to be addressed. And that idol, friends, is the idol of sports on the sabbath.

You know, history records the fact that for many months a Scotsman by the name of Eric Liddel trained for the 1924 Olympics in Paris. He was a specialist in the 100 meter race. And many sports writers were sure that he was going to win the race. But then Eric Liddel found out that his race was scheduled for a Sunday, the Lord's Day and he said he wouldn't compete.

Those who had formerly praised him thought he was out of his mind. They called him a fool. He was mocked and derided throughout Scotland and, indeed, his stand made international headlines, but Eric Liddel stood firm.

Reportedly drawing at least some of his inspiration from 1 Samuel two verse 30 which reads, “Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained.”⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ezekiel 20:16.

⁴⁹ 1 Samuel 2:30.

Well, all of the sudden another runner dropped out of the 400 meter race, a race that was scheduled for a weekday. And Eric Liddel said, "I'll take his place," even though that race was four times longer than the race he had trained for.

Many of us may know that Eric Liddel ran the 400 meters and he won a gold medal by setting a world record of 47.6 seconds. "Those who honour me I will honour."⁵⁰

Many of us may also know that Eric went on to serve as a missionary in China. He served faithfully for many years even to the point of failing health. Many of us may know he died in a prison camp in China in the year 1945 and many of us may also know that the story of Eric Liddel and his conviction and his commitment to his Christian faith concerning the sabbath day was told to the world in the movie *Chariots of Fire*.

Friends, if your family is wrestling with whether or not to participate and to play, to watch sports on Sunday, please remember the inspirational example of Eric Liddel. And please also know that I am not simply trying to talk to you a talk, but me and my family are also trying to walk before you a walk. We know what the pressures are. We know the temptations. All glory be to God, several of our kids were athletes. Several of them made all star teams and played on traveling teams, but we always said, "That's fine." But the coaches knew it is not on Sunday. We don't care if they can only play in half the games for your team. They are not playing on Sunday.

Some of us may also recall—and I say this again with humility of heart—in the year 2000 our son Ben was on the 12 year old little league team in [?] township that won the state championship and it looked like that was a team heading for Williamsport. And through it all Ben had never played on Sunday.

When we were going up to the districts in Connecticut the coaches said, "Rich and Margaret, come on, get real. The kid is our catcher. He has got to play on Sunday."

We said, "No. Remember the sabbath by keeping it holy. He is not going to play on Sunday."

And it was such a novelty that a reporter from the *Herald News* interviewed Ben, a kid 12 years old, front page of the *Herald News*.

Why won't you play on Sunday?

And in his 12 year old way Ben said, "Because we are Christians. We try to honor the sabbath day."

And one of the coaches said to us in response to that article, "Rich and Margaret, you see, it is not really Sunday it is fun day. Fun day. He can play."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Friends, whether you are wrestling with the idol of sports or going to the shore or shopping or working or playing golf or NASCAR racing or whatever your particular temptation or idol may be, because of the seduction of Satan and because of the subtle sinfulness in our own deceitful, wicked hearts, let us by the grace and mercy of God through faith in the name of Jesus, seek to make sure that we escape that fall, a fall which could well prevent us from entering in to our sabbath rest.

And at the same time let us all hear and heed these blessed words penned by the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 58:13 and 14 where we read:

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s holy day honorable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” The mouth of the LORD has spoken.⁵¹

Amen.

Let’s bow our heads and our hearts in prayer together.

Our mighty God and most merciful and every faithful heavenly Father, in the midst of the pressure and pace of our modern day, I would suppose that most of us gathered here in worship today could well identify with the words of the psalmist David when in Psalm 55 verse six he said, “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove. I would fly away and be at rest.” And yet, Father, as Saint Augustine once said, “Thou hast made us for thyself and our souls are restless until they find their rest in thee.” And so convict us, heavenly Father, for the ways in which in one way or another to one degree or another we may have made Sunday fun day for us. Thank you for giving us fill today and the promise of our sabbath rest, a rest that endures forever, a rest that must be entered by faith and a rest which we will, in fact, enter only if unlike the Israelites of old we escape a fall. Therefore, enable and empower each and every one of us, we pray, according to the Fourth Commandment of they holy law to remember the sabbath day in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

⁵¹ Isaiah 53:13-14.