



Christ Reformed Community Church

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“The Pitfall of Church-Centered Idolatry, #2”

So, last week we started to look at what I wanted to call, or I am calling: “The Pitfall of Church-Centered Idolatry,” “The Pitfall of Church-Centered Idolatry.” This is not me trying to work my way out of a job, so I just want to be clear about that. We love the local church. We love the local church because it is the bride of Christ, but there are streams within Christianity that have an unbalanced view of the local church. And you see this all around, particularly in the church planting movement, for example, where usually pastors or people that think they’re pastors who have some sort of business skill and are innovative, go into a community to plant a church according to carnal methods, and it’s their way to sort of build their own little kingdom. It’s their way to sort of make money, and we see that all in our community all the time. I’ve shared with the church that when we first started the church seven years ago that we received in the mail a flashy brochure that said if you sent in a certain amount of money, you could become an elder of this particular church plant that was less than a mile down the road from where we met at the school. So, there’s all sorts of charlatans and hucksters out there, but there are also sort of pietistic, devotional, vanilla churches. They’re not really confessional and they sort of preach in a devotional sort of a style, a pietistic style, and they have church three or four times a week, and really they’re virtually useless outside of the church. They’re useless in their vocation. They’re useless at home with their family. They’re useless in the community because they don’t want to be stained by the world. They have an unbiblical understanding of what Scripture says, and Scripture says that we are in the world but we are not to be of the world, but we can’t be taken out of the world. And to try to take ourselves out of the world is to go directly against the creation mandate or the cultural mandate in Genesis chapter 1 to “*be fruitful and multiple and fill the earth and subdue*” God’s creation. It is a subversion of exactly what the whole point of the new creation, the new covenant is, which is Habakkuk 2:14, that God promised that “*the knowledge of the glory of the LORD*” will cover the earth “*as the waters cover the sea.*”

So, why in the world would we keep the church isolated? Why in the world would we want to be isolated from unbelievers? If we are indwelt by the Spirit of God, we trust that He’s going to sanctify us. We trust that as we proclaim the gospel as the church of Jesus Christ, the elect will be drawn in, but they need someone to tell them about Christ. They need somebody to announce the kingdom of God to them. They don’t need Pharisaical Christians or those who think they’re Christians who have Jesus as just the Lord of their sweet little hearts, but there’s really no application outside of the church. So, that’s what I’m talking about when I’m talking about the

pitfall of church-centered idolatry. Here’s a definition, and this is my definition: Church-centered idolatry is viewing your local church and your membership in your local church as your only participation and responsibility in Christ’s kingdom as you pursue individual sanctification and spiritual growth by serving the church and using your spiritual gifts in the local church. So, we want to avoid that; and in an effort to avoid that, I sought to do three things last week. Two of them we touched upon entirely, and the third one I just introduced.

First, we wanted to deconstruct or dismantle assumptions about the church, and I gave you the simple analogy. Do you think that when you come into this building, the four walls of this church, that you’re entering the kingdom of God, and do you think that when you leave the four walls of this church, you’re exiting the kingdom of God? If that is your understanding of the church, then you’ve confused the kingdom of God with the church. The church is obviously part of the kingdom of God, but it is only one part of the kingdom of God. It is not the whole. Abraham Kuyper said, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign overall, does not cry, ‘Mine!’” Ephesians 1 is clear. Ephesians 2 is clear, that “*all things are under [Jesus’] feet.*” That is now, in this age as well as in the age to come. So, we don’t want to confuse the church for the kingdom or the kingdom for the church. The kingdom of God has several spheres of authority. The church has its own sphere of authority, the elders over the people of God. The home has another sphere of authority; the father is over the home. He’s the head of the home, the husband. The sphere of the state or society has magistrates who have authority over that sphere. But Jesus is King over all of those spheres, right? It’s not like the state has power over Christ, or the Father has power over Christ, or elders have power over Christ. Christ is not just the head over the church; He is King of the world.

So, we don’t want to absolutize the family. Then we separate ourselves from church and society, and that’s a sort of a distorted patriarchalism, and you see it all the time in the home school movement where fathers think they’re the final authority on everything, and they come into the church, and they blow churches up because they want to take the authority away from the elders. If you absolutize the state, you have what we have today, which is magistrates passing laws to control our lives. You don’t want that. You certainly don’t want the church controlling everything, elders snooping around your house and following you everywhere you go in some sort of legalistic Pharisaical philosophy of trying to nail someone on something so they can discipline them out of the church. There’s all sorts of abusive types of authority. The pitfall of church-centered idolatry places the church as the primary and most important sphere of your life, and what I’m saying is when you read the Bible that is not what the Bible teaches. In fact, the family is fundamentally more important than the church because the family represents Christ’s relationship to the church, and by being fruitful and multiplying and bringing children into the world and then baptizing them in the covenant of the church you’re bringing them into the church and then you’re raising them to go out into society to advance God’s kingdom. So, it all begins with the family. So, we want to dismantle or deconstruct wrong assumptions about the church.

Secondly, we want to distinguish different aspects of the church, and here I’m not going to spend a lot of time, but we mentioned that there are several aspects of the church. There’s the invisible worldwide church that transcends all points in human history; that is, all true believers for all time. There’s secondly, the historical visible church. This is the church as we see it with the warts of

apostasy and the wonders of Reformation—all of it, the good and the bad combined together. Then third, there’s the actual church in the present, which today there are local churches all around the world worshipping God. That is the church in the present. Then fourth, there’s the local church. That would be our church as an example, and then there are parts of a local church if you have fellowship with each other outside of the four walls of this church. The whole church is not gathered, but there are parts of that local church there.

We want to not say that our membership at Christ Reformed is more important than our marriage or more important than our parenting or more important than our responsibilities at work. We want to say that Christ Reformed Community Church is not the end-all of the end-all. The kingdom of God is much larger because the church of God is much larger. So, your commitment to your local church is not more important than your commitment to manifest the rule and the reign of Christ in every sphere of your life, in every aspect of your life. Paul, when he wrote to the local church, wrote about these different spheres. He wrote about the importance of the family, the husband’s being the head of the home, the wife submitting to the husband, raising the children in “*the nurture and admonition of the Lord*,” children obeying parents. He wrote about submission to government. So did Peter. He wrote about masters treating slaves properly, slaves submitting to their masters, which would translate practically into the employer/employee relationship. So, we’re arguing not to fall into the pit of church-centered idolatry, and the only way we can do that is by deconstructing false assumptions about the church. We don’t want to confuse the kingdom with the church.

Secondly, by distinguishing aspects of the church. Even when you say that the kingdom is separate from the church, when you speak about the church, you have to then break that down. What do you mean by the church? Well, the church is much larger than us. If we believe this was all that the church was, that would be pretty discouraging, and that would be pretty cultic. So, we understand this sort of biblical, general recognition that the church is bigger than us. The church is bigger than our local church, and even the church as big as it is, the kingdom of God is much bigger, right? Because all the spheres—the church, the family, the state—all fit underneath the kingdom of God. So, we deconstruct assumptions about the church, we distinguish aspects of the church, and then third, I touched upon this last week, we determine application for the church. So, what does all this mean? And what I said was there are two theological categories that place us on the path of understanding what I’m trying to get through to you. First of all is our understanding of the nature of the kingdom; and secondly, the purpose of the Sabbath.

So, what is the nature of the kingdom? Well, it’s what I’ve been saying. The word *kingdom* is *basileía*. The word for *church* is *ekklesia*. Jesus speaks about the church two times in the gospels, but He speaks about the kingdom over and over and over again. Why? Because He’s emphasizing the kingdom is bigger than the church. It’s not the same thing. And we also said last week that the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus is not the same thing as Old Testament theocratic Israel because in the kingdom of Jesus, the one He inaugurated with the new covenant, Jews and gentiles have been brought together, Ephesians chapter 2, right? The dividing wall of hostility has been broken down. We’ve been given the Great Commission to go out into all the world and preach the gospel, and the confidence of knowing that when we do that, God will be faithful to draw in the elect.

In Matthew chapter 21, Jesus really speaks about this. He says, *“Therefore I tell you,”* verse 43, *“the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.”* He’s talking to Old Testament theocratic Israel, and He’s saying, *“The kingdom of God is going to be taken away from you. I’m going to do something different through My death and My resurrection. It’s going to go to a people that will produce fruits.”* Israel was meant to be a nation of priests, Isaiah 61:6. They failed in that. So, Jesus came. He is the true Israel. He is the true prophet, priest, and King. He is the true temple: *“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.”* It’s exactly what happened. He inaugurated the new covenant. The veil in the temple was torn in two. So, now you have something new occurring. Scripture is not flat. There is a progression, and the death, burial and resurrection of Christ are the most important events in the history of the world. It literally changed the world to begin bringing about this new creation where now the kingdom of God has been established. It’s been inaugurated. Christ has ascended. Christ is enthroned, and now the gospel is going out to the far reaches of the world. It is producing fruit. The fruit of the kingdom is the conversion of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation, and that Great Commission, Matthew 28, is the new covenant version of Genesis 1:28, the cultural creation mandate to *“be fruitful and multiply.”*

How do we fulfill the dominion or creation mandate by ignoring our equal duty that we have to raise our children in *“the nurture and admonition of the Lord,”* to be an influencer in society through the vocation God has given us, the gifts He has given us, to try to Christianize the different spheres of art and business and everything in culture? We can’t be pietistic and devotional and introspective and separated from the world. That is not a biblical approach. That is a violation of Genesis 1:28, and it is a violation of Matthew 28, the Great Commission, where the church is clearly seen as an outpost of evangelism. And having this understanding helps us give proper place to our role in the local church. As participants we come each Lord’s Day to sit under the means of grace to hear Christ in the preaching of the Word, to see Christ in the administration of the sacraments, and it also helps us see the calling of the Christian in the world itself. Here’s what Joe Boot—he is a Reformed guy who’s part of the Ezra Institute, which is essentially a Reformed think tank. The guy is a genius. He says this:

A kingdom vision frees us from misguided ecclesiastical domination, and it liberates the believer’s entire life in all its aspects...to be concretely subject to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and His Word—making the totality of the Christian’s life in all [its] spheres an instrument of the kingdom of God.

He’s saying we don’t want to be controlled by the church. That’s what the Roman Catholic Church did. The church controlled society, controlled the state. The Reformers were not for that. Geerhardus Vos, who I quoted last week, says:

The kingship of God, as his recognized and applied supremacy, is intended to pervade and control the whole of human life in all its forms of existence. This is the parable of the leaven [being worked out, he says]. These various forms of human life have each their own sphere in which the work and embody themselves. There is a sphere of science, a sphere of art, a sphere of the family, a sphere of the state, a sphere of commerce and industry. Whenever one of these spheres comes under the controlling principle of the divine supremacy and glory, and this outwardly reveals itself, there we can truly say that the kingdom of God has become manifest.

Talking about the kingdom of God. We don't want to be controlled by the church in what we believe. We don't want to be controlled by the church and our schedules and our lifestyles. We don't want the church to have a corner on our spiritual gifts. We use it in the context of the local church to edify the people of God one day a week, and then we go out the other six days and we minister the gospel to the world. Vos again says, “It was not Christ's intention that this result should be reached by making our lives in all its spheres subject to the visible church.” That was the concern of the Reformers. We don't want to be subject to the visible church. We are subject to Christ; not subject to a pope. We're subject to Christ. That helps us understand the nature of the kingdom. It's distinct from the church. We have a responsibility outside the four walls of this church, and in one sense you could say, a bigger responsibility. What we do each Lord's Day is easy compared to what we're to do the other six days of the week.

So, understanding the nature of the kingdom helps us get to a practical application of all of this, but I think understanding the purpose of the Sabbath also helps us understand what we're speaking about. So, for example, take your Bibles and turn with me to Exodus chapter 20. Let's look at the Sabbath principle as it is given to the nation of Israel, Exodus chapter 20, beginning in verse 8:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days,” notice this, verse 22, *“the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

So, the reason that Moses gives as he writes under divine inspiration, that the Sabbath was the fourth commandment of God among the ten, among the ten main principles of God's Law, is creational, verse 11. The reason you are to rest on the Sabbath is because, verse 11, *“For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.”* God created the world. He rested on the seventh day. As His image bearers, there is a creational principle which tells us that honoring the Sabbath is a good thing, it is a lawful thing to do. But turn with me over to Deuteronomy chapter 5. Deuteronomy is a repeating of the Law of God. Deuteronomy 5, there's a different reason given for the Sabbath. Verse 12:

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember [here it is] that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore, [on the basis of that] the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

So, there's a progression to the Sabbath. When God originally gave it, He said, “This is a creational principle. Obey it.” Once Israel was delivered from Egypt He said, “Now there's a second reason you celebrate the Sabbath, and it has to do with the redemptive purposes of God.” The redemptive

purposes of God—what is that all about? Well, it’s what Jesus spoke about in Mark chapter 2. Turn over to Mark chapter 2. The Pharisees accused Jesus of violating the Sabbath because He and His disciples—well, we don’t know if He was actually doing it, but *“His disciples,”* verse 23 says, *“began to pluck heads of grain”* on the Sabbath. So, the Pharisees who had been following Him tried to trap Him, *“And [Jesus] said to them,”* verse 27, *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”* He said to them, *“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”*

In other words, Jesus is saying the day was made for man’s good. It was made for him. The day was made for man. The man was not made for the sake of the day itself. Quit being a slave to a day. That’s not what this is about, and He says, *“I am Lord of the Sabbath,”* which is another way of saying, *“I’m the one that gave the law of the Sabbath. I think I know what I’m talking about when I say that “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”* I’m the one that made it. There’s a creational ordinance, creational law element to it, but there’s a redemptive element to it that the Son of Man is bringing out. There is this idea of resting in Christ, resting in the gospel, resting in His finished work. There is this idea that there is an eternal Sabbath rest with the new creation of heaven and earth. So, when we get to Hebrews chapter 4, we see the author of Hebrews bringing that out. He says, verse 9, *“So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.”* Here’s that redemptive element of the Sabbath. He says, *“There remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.”* The flag should go up in our minds and say, *“Okay, there’s something different that’s taking place with the Sabbath now that the new covenant is come. There remains a sort of Sabbath rest for the people of God that wasn’t really emphasized in the old covenant. What is it? “For whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.”* So, just as God rested after creating the world in six days, so too has Jesus Christ rested from His work of redemption. He has ascended to the right hand of God where He is enthroned. And so, as we place faith in Christ and as we focus on Christ, He becomes our Sabbath rest. He becomes our Sabbath rest.

You even have this idea at least hinted at in the old covenant in Isaiah chapter 66. Isaiah speaks about the Sabbath. You don’t have to turn there, but verse 22: *“For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD.”* This is a prediction of the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth, when Jews and gentiles come to worship God, and that language is *“from new moon to new moon.”* That’s language of Sabbath. *“And from Sabbath to Sabbath.”* There’s a Sabbath in the old covenant, a Sabbath in the new covenant, and under the Sabbath in the new covenant there are two dimensions. There is the dimension where we rest in Christ, and then there is the dimension that brings out that principle of the creational ordinance that one day in seven we rest. It’s a different day, Sunday, the day the Lord resurrected, the day that Jesus was vindicated, the approval of God the Father by raising Him from the dead to say that the work of redemption is finished. Jesus is our Sabbath rest. And so, you have the apostles, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Acts 20:7, Revelation 1:5 seeing Sunday, the first day of the week, as the Lord’s Day. So that as Adam worked and then rested, we rest and then work in the new covenant. We rest one day out of seven, and then we work.

Now, what did Calvin say about all of this? It may surprise you. Calvin says that the early church viewed the Sabbath as shadowy. In other words, Calvin saw the Sabbath as being fulfilled in Christ, and Calvin, the Reformer of all Reformers, viewed the Sabbath as fitting under the ceremonial aspect of the law. It was shadowy. He says this: “The aim of this commandment,” the commandment of the Sabbath, “is to show that being dead to our own desires and works, we should meditate on the kingdom of God, and that to help us in our meditation we should apply the means which he has ordained.”

So, he says that the main thing is we apply the means He’s ordained. That’s the means of grace. Well, where does that take place? It takes place at the church on the Lord’s Day. So, he wasn’t saying there shouldn’t be one day out of seven. That principle carries over. But what he’s saying is the application of the Sabbath to Old Testament Israel with all the detailed regulations and the penalty of death has been abolished. There is no record in the entire history of the church in the new covenant where Christians were put to death for violating the Sabbath. It’s because it was abolished, but the creational principle is carried over.

So, Calvin lists three purposes of the Sabbath. First, he says, “By Sabbath rest the Lord sought to signify to his people spiritual rest from their works and to allow God to work in them.” That was the point of the Sabbath: to rest in the salvation of God. Secondly, he wished there to be fixed day on which they should come together to hear the law and have access to his ceremonies. Third, he desired to give one day’s rest to servants and to workers under another’s authority so that they might have some respite from their labors. But then he goes on to say, “However, the Sabbath as we see from many passages, is the image of spiritual rest as the first priority.” And I’m drawing this largely from the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as he describes the fourth commandment. He then quotes Hebrews 4 to say that “Christ has fulfilled the Sabbath.” We just read that. And then he goes, and he launches into the number seven: why the seventh day in the old covenant? He says, “Number one, seven stands for completion, to show that God ended the good work of creation.” And secondly, seven also shows believers that we can never completely rest until the last day.

So, the Sabbath principle is not a reason to be lazy or idle. There are six other days in the week in which we are to work for the kingdom of God. There’s this eschatological rest. There’s this rest in eternity that Calvin speaks about. And then what he says might surprise you. Now, this is not simply a matter of one day. It affects our entire life, the Sabbath does, to the point where dying to self, we are filled with the life of God. “Hence, it follows that Christians should pay no attention to the superstitious observance of days.” As a matter of fact, Calvin said, “I would not quibble or squabble if the church decided to meet on another day of the week as long as the principle of one day in seven remained intact.” And he said, “It’s better to meet on Sunday because that’s the pattern of the apostles. It’s better to meet on Sunday because, 1 Corinthians 14, Paul says that we’re to do all things in order and decency.” But Calvin stopped short of saying that the exact application of the Sabbath as it pertained to Old Testament Israel carries over in the new covenant. It is not the same. He says, “The daily assembly of the church is not wrong, but if the weakness of many makes a daily assembly impossible, and if love forbids us pressing the people of God further, why do we lay more burdens on them? It’s better to follow the pattern of the apostles, one day in

seven. Observed to honor the lord, observed to focus on Christ.” Calvin says, “but not out of strict religious scruples; rather so as to maintain good order in the church.”

What is Calvin arguing against? Well, he quotes, for example, Galatians 4. Turn over there to Galatian 4 with me, verse 10. Paul says to the Galatians who were fraught with false teachers called the Judaizers, right? What did the Judaizers place on the conscience of gentiles converts? Circumcision and keeping the Sabbath. Paul says, “*You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.*” In other words, “I’m scared that you have missed the gospel because you don’t understand that the Sabbath is about resting in Christ as a primary principle.” It’s not about one day. That is a very narrowminded view. Colossians 2, he presses this home. Colossians 2:16, Paul says, “*Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.*” What do all the ceremonial laws points to? Christ, right? What did the lamb sacrifice point to? Christ. It was ceremonial. Sacrifices are done away. What about food and drink? Ceremonial, right? They’ve all passed away. They’re shadowy. The substance belongs to Christ. And he includes in the food and the drink festivals and new moons, or a Sabbath, any Sabbath—the weekly Sabbath, the Year of Jubilee every forty-nine years, all of those feasts Israel practiced which were Sabbath weeks, the Feast of the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Pentecost—all of that. Paul says that’s been subsumed in Christ. He’s the substance. And Paul says, “By the way, if you want to focus on one day, you can do that.” Romans 14:5: “*One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.*” If you want to be strict about your observance of the Sabbath and treat it as Old Testament Israel treated it, Paul says that’s fine, you can do that. That’s on your conscience, but don’t place it on the conscience of others. This is what Calvin is getting to.

So, he makes three practical points. He says, “Worshipping on Sunday allows for reflection of an eternal rest in Christ so that we are reminded to rest from our works and to rest in the gospel. So that God works in us by the Spirit to avoid fleshly legalism.” So, what Calvin is saying is when people overburden the church with legalistic Sabbath regulations, what they’re doing is they’re causing people to start to live out a works righteousness, which is the exact opposite of what Sabbath rest is to teach us. It is to teach us to rest in Christ. Calvin says, number two, “We are to go to worship longing to hear Christ and the preaching, to see Him in the sacraments.” And number three, “We should not place excessive burdens on those who are under our authority.” He’s talking to church leaders. It’s not your responsibility to police their lives. And he says, “We should guard against false teachers who try to keep in force burdensome Sabbath restrictions, and surpassing the Jews in their carnal beliefs about the Sabbath so that the reproofs which we find in Isaiah apply more to them than to the people the prophet was rebuking in his own day, where the prophet speaks on behalf of God and says, ‘Give up the Sabbath, give up your sacrifices because in my nostrils it stinks.’ It’s just a ritual. That’s all it is. You are just trying to work your way. You’re trying to earn favor with me. So, stop it. I don’t even want you to observe the Sabbath because you’re observing it wrongly.” That’s what the prophet said. Calvin says that rest and worship are the creational principles that are carried over into the new covenant.

There’s a really interesting book. I would encourage you to get it. It is a very academic work, but it’s entitled *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*. It’s edited by D.A. Carson, and essentially all of these New Testament scholars trace the history. It’s the most comprehensive book ever written in the history of the church on the Sabbath, and they trace this thing historically, and they conclude this. They say, “There was a difference not in principle but certainly in application between the Continental Reformers—that is Calvin and Luther—and then the Puritans.” Secondly, they say, “The Jewish church in Palestine practiced a strict observance of Saturday and the Sabbath.” So, Jewish Christians in Palestine said, “We need to circumcise our children, and we need to baptize our children, and we need to honor the Sabbath—that is Saturday—and we need to come together on the Lord’s Day, the first day of the week.” They were trying to live the old covenant and the new covenant, and so you know why the church, the apostles, switched the Christian Sabbath to Sunday? To show that they were diametrically opposed to the application of those old covenant regulations. “We’re just going to change the day. This is the day the Lord resurrected anyway.” So, we changed the day, and it became a custom to counter the legalism. This is the history of the church. These writers also say just sort of a third summary principle. The book is about 450 pages, but third summary principle: “The Judaizers claimed circumcision and strict Sabbath observance on gentile converts, and that is exactly what Paul was rebuking in Colossians 2 and Galatians 4.” Fourth, “The medieval church became strictly Sabbatarian going back to Constantine when he made it a holy day.”

Our English word *holiday* comes from the idea of a holy day. And so, these historians and theologians say that this very strict legalistic Sabbatarian principle came about in the medieval era under the Roman Church. And then finally, sort of a fifth summary point, “The Reformation was a reformation of the right understanding of the Sabbath from Roman superstition.” What was the Roman superstition? Well, let me give you an example. We talked about Calvin. What about Luther? Luther so opposed Roman superstition that his close associate, Karlstadt, who became a radical Reformer—I mean radical, almost Anabaptist—he opposed Karlstadt to his face because he believed that Karlstadt was extreme in the application of Mosaic law specifically regarding the Sabbath. So, you know Luther, right? He’s going to always exaggerate things, so you’ve got to understand that, but I love this quote. Luther’s argument was for Christian liberty, and this is what he said: “If anywhere the day is made holy for the mere day’s sake—if anywhere anyone sets up its observance on a Jewish, Mosaic law foundation, then I order you to work on that day, the Sabbath. I order you to ride your horse on that day. I order you to dance on that day. I order you to feast on that day. I order you to do anything that shall remove this encroachment on Christian liberty.”

Wow! You say, “Well did he not value Sunday?” Of course. He saw it as the Lord’s Day. He saw it as the day the Lord resurrected. It’s when the church gathers. It’s when the church is reminded of our Sabbath rest in Christ. There’s still the principle of one day in seven. It’s still a distinct day, but not according to Roman superstition that’s built off a misapplication of Mosaic law. That was Martin Luther. I mean, how much more Reformed can you get? Calvin said this—another quote from Calvin. He said, “I answer, that we do not by any means observe days, as though there were any sacredness in holidays, or as though it were not lawful to labor on them...respect is paid to...order—not to days.” So, for Calvin, it was the ordering of your week. The priority of your week was Sunday, the Lord’s Day. But to get into squabbles about what that meant in terms of

application, Calvin says that “is now stepping on the conscience of others.” You have to be extremely careful.

By the way, let me just make a sidenote on this. The Jewish people did not follow the calendar we follow today. The Sabbath was not always on Saturday in terms of the weekly celebration of it. It could be any day of the week. It’s like Christmas. Christmas is on the 25th of December, right? But it could be a Monday or a Tuesday or a Wednesday. It changes every year. That’s how the Sabbath was for Israel. In addition to the fact that they didn’t just have one day a week, they had feasts, whole weeks where there was a Sabbath rest, whole years, the Year of Jubilee. One scholar, R.J. Bauckham, says that Calvin saw one day in seven, that principle from creation, as carrying over into the new covenant, and he also saw the importance of resting on that day carrying over. Attending Lord’s Day worship, all of that carried over. And then Bauckham said this. This is startling. “These two points do not quite make Calvin a Sabbatarian since he does not regard the Christian observance of a weekly day of rest for worship as directly commanded by the fourth commandment.” Now, he sees there’s a principle there, but the practical result is not a legalistic application by going back to the Old Testament and looking at everything Israel did and trying to translate that and transfer that into the new covenant. That’s a very dangerous thing, and it’s unfortunate that the church has done that. The church has done that even in Reformed circles where there’s all sorts of different views on the Sabbath. You don’t have anyone that has an identical view on it because the Continental Reformers were vastly different than the Puritans.

The Puritans read Calvin, and they read his understanding of the way Lord’s Day worship was observed, and there would be police throughout Geneva that would go and arrest people if they didn’t go to church on Sunday. So, in some sense, Calvin was inconsistent. He said that the Sabbath was fulfilled in Christ, and yet he applied it in a legalistic way. And so, you had the Puritans that even built upon that even more in this sort of really legalistic manner which, I would say, is unfortunate. Now, why all this talk? I have five minutes to wrap this up. Why all of this talk about the Sabbath? Well, for one, I think we need to be reminded of a very important principle, Ecclesiastes 7:16: “*Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise.*” “*Be not overly righteous.*” What is that about? Well, that’s exactly what Isaiah the prophet said Israel’s problem was. Turn back with me to Isaiah chapter 58. Isaiah 58, God says: “*Cry aloud; do not hold back, lift up your voice.*” Verse 2: “*Yet they seek me daily and delight to know my ways as if they were a nation that did righteousness.*” The point is, they weren’t. Verse 3: “*Why have we fasted, and you see it not?*” That’s the people of God.

*Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it?
Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure,
and oppress all your workers.
Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.
Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on high.
Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?”*

In other words, all of your religious rituals, your fasting, your inappropriate keeping of the Sabbath, I don't even recognize that because it's hypocrisy. Verse 9:

*Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.'
If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness,*

They're judging each other. They're acting wickedly, God says, "I'm not going to hear your prayers until you straighten up." Back in verse 8: "*Then shall your light break forth like the dawn.*" "When you humble yourself, you become naked before me," verse 7. And when that happens, verse 11:

*And the Lord will guide you continually
and satisfy your desire in scorched places
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters do not fail.*

*And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;*

Anytime the Scriptures speak about a garden, we should automatically think of Eden. The prophet is saying, "Look, you don't honor the Sabbath. You don't honor the Sabbath properly, and until you do, you won't be like a well-watered garden." He's calling back to the language of Eden. Verse 13:

*If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath,
from doing your pleasure on my holy day,
and call the Sabbath a delight
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;
if you honor it, not going your own ways,
or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;
then you shall take delight in the Lord,
and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth;
I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

He's saying to them, "Look, you have not honored the Sabbath Day, but if you delight in it, then I'll make all your work a blessing to the world." What was the creation mandate in Genesis 1? It was to: "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it,*" extend the garden of God, right? There were four rivers and tributaries that sort of ran out of that, and those rivers led then to the outer reaches beyond the garden. It was sort of Adam's navigation system to know where to go and to build. He saw what was in the garden, what God had planted, and then he would go and

then extend it. And, of course, the fall came, and the curse occurred, and none of that happened so Jesus had to come, the true Israel, the last Adam, to make a new creation, to redeem us so that our Sabbath rest is in Him. God is telling Israel, “Delight in the Sabbath, and then your work will be blessed.” So, you see, the Sabbath is not so much about one day; it’s more about the other six days, the work that we do in the kingdom of God. The harder we work for the kingdom of God, not just in the church but all the other spheres that I’m talking about, the more tired we’ll be one day out of seven, right? It is interesting. God created the world in six days. Man was created on the sixth day, right? God gives Adam the creation mandate: “*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.*” Adam goes to sleep on the sixth night and he wakes up on the seventh day, and God says “We’re not working today.” Adam’s first full day was a day of rest. I think that that is pointing forward to the new covenant.

We worship on Sunday, the Lord’s Day. You can call it the Christian Sabbath. That is the priority of our week under the preaching of the Word, seeing the administration of the sacraments, seeing Christ and the bread and the cup and the water of baptism, and then we get to work Monday through Saturday, from our rest, just like Adam. He rested and then he worked. From our rest, we rest in Christ on the Lord’s Day. We rest from our good works. We rest. We don’t try to be legalistic about that day because that is to go against what we’re trying to do that day, which is spiritually resting, even as we physically rest, and we use that day as a holy day, sanctified by God, sanctified by Scripture, not to be overburdensome, but to actually rest to say, “You know what? All this work God has called me to do, I can’t do it without Him. I can’t do it without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He is the Lord God. He is the Creator of heaven and earth. Jesus is ruling and reigning in all things. I’m going to rest this day. I’m going to focus on Christ, and whatever duties God gives me Monday through Saturday, He’ll empower me to do them because I’m taking time this day to remind myself what this is all about.” But that’s one day out of seven, one day out of seven. It matters greatly to God what we do the other six days. That’s the point.

The pitfall of church-centered idolatry places the church above the kingdom of God and confuses it with the kingdom of God. Just two more quotes. Abraham Kuyper says, “It is impossible, Bible in hand, to limit Christ’s Church to one’s own little community.” The church is everywhere in all parts of the world. And then he says this. He says, “Lutheranism restricted itself to an exclusively ecclesiastical and theological character, while Calvinism put its impress in and outside of the church upon every aspect of human life.” Maybe an overstatement, but the point should be clear, and that is Calvin saw the Sabbath really about all of life. It’s really about the other six days more than it is about the one day because, yes, we come here on the Lord’s Day. We come here on Sunday, but this isn’t the majority of our lives. We come here to be fed the Word of God. “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*” Sunday is the market day of the soul, but we come to be refreshed and restored and rejuvenated, so now we go out into the world and work. We don’t separate ourselves from the world. And so churches need to be very, very careful not to over-ecclesiastize the lives of people to prevent them from being everything that they are to be in the world for the glory of God. And Paul even said, “I have become all things to all people that I may win them to Christ.” The fault is when we confuse the church for the kingdom. And by the way, that leads to an arrogant sort of leadership in the church. You see it all the time. I see it all the time. “This church is my little kingdom, and I’m going to control the people that are here, and I’m going to tell them what to do. I’m going to tell them how to live, and

this is a way to puff me up and have a platform,” and pastors do that. Elders do that. Lay people do that. They’re nothing in their workplace, so that they try to become everything at church. They have no respect from their wives at home, so they try to come into the church and dominate. I mean, this stuff happens throughout the church. So, we have to understand the significance of where God has placed the church in the larger kingdom of God and have a balanced perspective. It’s one sphere of many in which we are to honor the Lord.

So, I hope that’s helpful. I hope that’s helpful if you are seeking to join this church. I hope that’s helpful if you’re already a member of this church to sort of understand a little bit of the philosophy of why we do what we do. Lord’s Day worship is a priority, but Monday through Saturday we want you to be in the world ministering the gospel to the world, being an influence for Christ until *“the knowledge of the glory of the LORD”* covers the earth *“as the waters cover the sea,”* Habakkuk 2:14.

Father, we thank You for the Scriptures. They are holy and pure and true. Seal these truths to our hearts. Prepare us now for worship. We ask these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.