

What About the Sabbath? - 44

An Exposition of Colossians

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Well, in our preaching series through Colossians, we come today to Colossians 2:16 and 17 and it says,

16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

This has become in the last, I suppose, I don't know, three or four centuries, one of the most controversial texts in the book of Colossians. I don't think that it was always that way but it is in the development of the Christian church over the centuries, at least that's true among conservative Bible-believing Christians who take the Bible seriously. I doubt that it is much concern at all to those who call themselves Christians but are not particularly bound by the word of God. But the question that arises out of this text is this: is the weekly sabbath a requirement for New Testament believers? Is the weekly sabbath a requirement for New Testament believers? And some answer that question with a resounding yes, and others answer that same question with a resounding no, and here we are, left to deal with these differences of opinion and the debate can, at times, become exceedingly heated, I can tell you by experience, and I can also tell you that there are very wonderful, good and godly Christians on both sides of the issue which makes it, in some respects, I suppose, tempting to skip this verse but I'm committed to not doing that, as you know. We don't just take the ones that we like, we take all of them. We don't just take the non-controversial ones, we wrestle with all of the texts in the word of God and that is one of the advantages of consecutive expository preaching, it doesn't let you skip over the difficult texts; it requires you to dig in and do the best you can in understanding and explaining them.

Now I must say that for some of you who have never confronted this debate, the whole question might seem a little bit like much ado about nothing, but I assure you it's not, and if you haven't been confronted with this yet, you are going to if you live, if you die today or tomorrow, you might avoid it, but if you live very long as a Christian, you are going to run into this. So even if it doesn't seem especially pertinent to you, and it will seem very very pertinent to many of you, I know, because you have wrestled with it before, but for those of you to whom this may not seem particularly pertinent, I would encourage you to

listen, to learn; there really is a great deal to be drawn from this text today regardless of how you come to understand it.

So today we are, first of all, going to examine the text; secondly, consider the sabbath controversy; and thirdly, look at some observations regarding the Lord's day which are my own personal observations, and we'll try to do all of that quickly and get it all into our morning worship today.

First of all, examining the text, and you'll notice that it does connect with what has gone before indicated in my translation by that word "So." Many translations translate that Greek word "therefore." It's a very strong connection with what has gone before. Having given us a great deal of teaching, the apostle by the Spirit of God, now comes to a conclusion and he says, "On the basis of what I have said, so, therefore, let no one judge you in food or in drink," and so forth, and I think the connection has to go back at least as far as verse 8, and let me just summarize what has been said leading up to our text today. In verse 8, Paul by the Spirit of God told us to beware of the deceptions of man-made traditions. In verses 9 and 10, he said remember that you are complete in Christ Jesus. In verse 11, he says in Christ you have been spiritually circumcised. And in verse 12, in Christ you have been spiritually baptized. Then verse 13, in Christ you have been given spiritual life. And also in verse 13, in Christ you have been forgiven all of your sins. And in verse 14, he says in Christ you have your debt to God canceled. Verse 15 tells us that you who are believers in Jesus Christ have triumphed over Satan and all his hosts and therefore, Paul says in verse 16, do not allow yourself to be brought back into the bondage of man-made religion. The exhortation specifically is do not submit to erroneous judgments, the judgments that others would impose upon you. "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths."

The exhortation is not addressed to those who are in the church. Paul does not say to members of the church, "Do not judge," because the reference is obviously to those who are outside the church who were passing judgment upon members of the church to whom Paul is writing, and so the exhortation is, "Do not allow them to judge you," which, of course, in a sense, is impossible because we can't control what others do, but what he really means by that is, "Do not submit to unbiblical judgments. Do not allow yourself to be pressured by erroneous judgments that are not sound teaching from the word of truth. Do not allow yourself to be pressed into somebody else's mold of man-made teachings, of man-made traditions. Do not submit to unbiblical judgments."

And there are two categories of false teaching that Paul specifically deals with here which obviously were abroad in the city of Colossae by these false teachers who had not yet been able to infiltrate the church, they were still outside the church but trying to gain entrance into it, and the Jewish influence of whatever this heresy was is very clear here. There are certainly strong Jewish strains in what is being erroneously taught but the two categories are, number 1, to abstain from food and drink, and number 2, to require, to submit yourself to regulations regarding feast days, various holy days. So in other words, the first category was a prohibition: you must not do this, you must not partake of this.

And the second category of false teaching was a requirement: you must do this, something that was not predicated upon the clear teaching of God's word.

Category number 1: abstain from food and drink. "Let no one judge you in food or in drink." These are extrabiblical prohibitions. These are evidently, very clearly references to the Old Testament Jewish dietary laws. The second category, I think, makes that abundantly clear that that's where the false teachers were drawing this from and so the reference to food and drink is to the Old Testament dietary laws but obviously with additions and corruptions that had been made by these false teachers. They were requiring the people of God who would listen to them, to abstain from certain foods and apparently alcoholic beverages, that is likely what the reference to the drink is.

Now it is true that in the Old Testament Scriptures, in the Mosaic regulations, there were prohibitions regarding certain animals in regard to food and in regard to other content. In other words, there were clean animals and there were unclean animals and the Jews in the Old Testament were allowed to, encouraged actually, to eat those animals, the flesh of the animals that were in the category of clean animals but were forbidden to eat those that were in the category of unclean.

In regard to beverages, the Old Testament restrictions on wine and strong drink are very minimal. They basically fall into three statements, I think. 1. There was a prohibition for priests when they were ministering in the tabernacle or temple not to partake of wine. During that time, they were to abstain. And secondly, there was a Nazarite vow which, for most people, was a temporary commitment to God and during the time of the Nazarite vow, however long that might be, it could be a matter of a week or two or a month or a month or two, it varied from person to person depending on how they made this commitment to God, but during the time of the Nazarite vow they were prohibited from drinking wine, in fact, even fresh grape juice or even fresh grapes, they were not permitted to touch the vine or any product of the vine in any way. And throughout the Old Testament, there are a number of times where in regard to alcoholic beverages, temperance is strongly enjoined, and in temperance is strongly prohibited, in other words, no drunkenness.

But that's the extent of the Old Testament prohibitions in regard to alcoholic beverages but what appears to be before us in Colossians, and we're always forced, at times, to read between the lines because Paul deals with his teaching and assumes that his readers know what the false teachers were saying, but we're not there and we don't always know in every detail but we can figure a lot of this out by looking carefully at what he says, and it seems likely, therefore, that the false teachers had gathered up these Mosaic regulations and had turned them into general prohibitions that applied to everybody at all times.

In regard to meat, they weren't satisfied just to require no partaking of unclean animals but apparently they were requiring a vegetarian diet as a matter of religious principle. No meat. And likewise in regard to wine, they were requiring no participation whatsoever, not even temperate, by anyone. They expanded the Old Testament teaching and added to it and made what were carefully prescribed prohibitions into broad general prohibitions

far larger, far greater than had ever been intended or stipulated in the Mosaic law. They had become very much like the Essenes in the first century in the days of Christ and the apostles, a group that is not mentioned in the Bible because they had withdrawn themselves and lived in a community far away from the rest of the Jewish nation, and they imposed a very strong ascetic lifestyle and they prohibited the eating of any meat or the drinking of any wine or any strong drink, very much like these false teachers appear to have been doing. Strong asceticism, strong, strict regulations.

Then in addition to this abstaining from food and drink, there was also the requirement to observe certain religious holy days. Again, verse 16, "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding," number 1, "a festival," number 2, "a new moon," and number 3, "sabbaths," or sabbath days. The requirement that Christians must observe these three categories of holy days, they are required to observe the festivals. This refers to the Old Testament annual religious feasts: Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, the pilgrim feasts. And in addition to the annual holy days or feast days, they required them to observe the monthly ones: the new moon, the first day of every month was considered a special holy day unto the Lord, trumpets were blown, no labor was observed, it became another sabbath, a monthly sabbath in addition to the weekly sabbaths, as did the annual feast days become sabbaths. Sabbath means rest, rest from labor. So on the new moon, the first day of every month, it was a sabbath, no labor. And there were additional sacrifices that were made in addition to the ones that were prescribed for every day. Just like on the sabbath day, the Jewish seventh day, there were additional sacrifices to the daily ones that were offered Sunday through Friday, so on the new moon there were additional sacrifices on top of those that were offered on the daily schedule. And the new moon became a day for feasting for the people of God to gather together and to observe this new moon day as a feast, that is, to eat and to enjoy one another's company, and also a day of religious instruction and Paul says, "Don't let anybody judge you in regard to annual feast days, monthly religious feast days, and," he says, "sabbaths, weekly religious feast days."

The sabbath day, the weekly holy day for the Jews, the day of rest, the very word sabbath means rest or cessation, and he explains why we must not submit ourselves to these kinds of judgments in verse 17, because, he says, these are, "which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." All of these things that were mentioned in verse 16, the dietary regulations, when they were accurate as well as when they were distorted, and the celebration of the stipulated feast days, again when they were accurately observed, all of these things as given by God to Moses and to the Old Testament people of God we are told are a shadow of things to come, that is, things to come from the Old Testament point of view. In other words, all of these things were given looking forward to the coming of Christ. They were things to come when they were given. Now in the New Testament era that Christ has come, they have already come. They have now come now that Christ has come, and the indistinct indication of the future coming of Christ, the shadow, has now become the greater reality, Christ has come, and that is even more emphatically emphasized by the last part of verse 17, "but the substance is of Christ."

The substance is of Christ, literally, the body is of Christ, the soma, but it obviously is referring not to Christ's literal physical body, the Incarnation body, or of the church, it's

talking about the substance of which the shadow was a shadow. A shadow is not a body but a shadow is produced by a body. The body is not produced by the shadow but the shadow is produced by the body when the light conditions are in the right place. Therefore the shadow is an indicator of some body that is near the shadow that is present. We see the shadow, that tells us that connected to the shadow there has to be a body and we start looking for the body perhaps, depending on the situations in regard to the shadow. Certainly in regard to these shadows, these Old Testament ceremonies were types, they were symbols pointing to a greater reality, a greater substance. The shadow is an indicator, the body is the reality. When Christ came, the reality arrived and the shadow faded away and, therefore, God's people no longer regard the shadow, now they regard the substance which is Christ. The shadow is temporary, the body is permanent. The shadow belongs to Moses, the substance belongs to Christ. The shadow is promised and Christ is the fulfillment. That's what verse 17 indicates.

Now that's a rather quick exposition of verses 16 and 17, quicker than I usually do but in order to deal with this specifically, I have to now move to a more topical consideration of the sabbath controversy. Question 1 very much pertains to our text and the question is: does this verse refer to the weekly sabbath when it tells us in verse 16, "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths." Now I have heard and read occasionally some who say, no, the use of the word sabbath here in verse 16 doesn't apply to the weekly sabbath. Sabbath was a word that sometimes applied to the monthly festival and to the annual festivals, they were called sabbaths as well as I've already pointed out, days when the people of God ceased from their labor, and so this is not talking about the weekly sabbath, it's talking about the monthly sabbaths and the annual sabbaths, the other feast days in the Old Testament economy. It cannot mean the weekly sabbath, some say, and you ask, why is that? And their answer usually is because it can't. It can't. It contradicts our theology. It can't.

I must say to you that anyone who says that this verse, verse 16 of Colossians 2, does not refer to the weekly sabbath finds himself in an extremely minor position among commentators. I carefully studied 14 commentaries on this text and made detailed notes on 13 of the 14, the only one I didn't was on John Calvin, I just read what he had to say. But made detailed notes on all the other 13, most of which are Reformed commentaries and I can tell you after doing this over a period of two weeks, that not one of those commentaries suggested that the word sabbath in verse 16 does not refer to the weekly sabbath. It's so clear that it has to, the context makes that clear. If it hadn't spelled them out, the annual feast days, the new moon, the monthly feast day, and then the sabbaths, if it hadn't spelled them out in this way, perhaps that would be a valid interpretation but in the context the way it's laid out, it really requires quite a bit of exegetical gymnastics to say that the word sabbath in verse 16 does not refer to the weekly sabbath. It clearly and obviously does.

Paul has laid out three categories of Mosaic holy days: the annual ones, the monthly ones, and the weekly ones, the festivals, the new moon or the sabbath. However, that doesn't mean that none of the commentaries that I consulted believe in and support the concept of a Christian sabbath. Some of them did, but they were at least honest enough to say that

this verse is talking about the weekly sabbath. But what is the support for the Christian sabbath position, that's generally what it is called, the day of worship for Christians? The first day of the week is generally called the Christian sabbath by those who take the position that it is, in essence, a continuation of the Old Testament sabbath, and there are more arguments than I would have time for in several sermons, actually, and so I'm just going to have to highlight some of the strongest ones quickly.

1. It's pointed out as being vitally important and I think it has to be considered very carefully that the sabbath regulation is included in the Decalogue, the 10 Commandments, and all the other nine commandments are obviously continued into the new covenant economy. You can find virtually all of them repeated, some almost exactly word-for-word, others that are more paraphrased according to the meaning, but you can find all of the other nine commandments reiterated and applied to the New Testament people of God in the New Testament Scriptures. That is very true and, therefore, since this one, this fourth commandment, remember the sabbath day to keep it holy, is included in the Decalogue and along with all of these other commandments which are obviously abiding, it is therefore thought to be an irrefutable argument that the fourth commandment in regard to the sabbath day must be an abiding regulation as well.

Furthermore, it is pointed out, and accurately so, that the sabbath goes clear back to creation. It goes back to creation order. And that is true. We read in Genesis 2:1, "Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." This sabbath day, the seventh day, the day of rest, began with creation and God, who needs no rest, nevertheless appointed a day of rest and he, himself, observed rest on that day and that is highly significant. It has to be.

And therefore based upon this and other considerations that we could mention but don't really have time for, the conclusion by many of God's people, serious, godly Christians, is that sabbath observance remains on into the new covenant, only the day has changed. In the old covenant, going back preceding Moses all the way back to creation, it was the seventh day. Now with the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the first day, the day has changed from the seventh day to the first day of the week but the general observance remains. However, there are other concerns that can be put forward that might cause one to arrive at a different conclusion. For example, you can search the 27 books of the New Testament carefully in vain to find one exhortation for the new covenant people of God to observe the sabbath and you won't find it. In fact, that in itself, I think, and I'm tipping my hat here a little bit, but that in itself, I think, makes us look more carefully at this question of the fourth commandment, the sabbath requirement included in the 10 Commandments, because it's clear that all the other nine are reiterated in the New Testament Scriptures. One is conspicuously omitted. It is not mentioned in regard to an exhortation. You can find, of course, some historical incidents out of the life of Christ and the Pharisees in regard to sabbath, and a few statements by Christ, but there is no

exhortation anywhere in all the New Testament Scriptures for Christians to observe the sabbath. You will look and look and look for that in vain.

Furthermore, as you look at the Old Testament Scriptures, you will realize that there are several statements in Scripture that relate sabbath observance to national Israel. I'll just cite two of these, one in Deuteronomy 5:15, "And remember," wrote Moses by the Spirit of God, "that you," Israel, "were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day." You are commanded to keep the sabbath day because of you were being brought out of Egypt, the time when the descendants, the physical descendants of Abraham were constituted a nation.

And you find similar language, for example, in Ezekiel 20. We read, "Therefore I made them go out of the land of Egypt," verse 10, "and brought them into the wilderness. And I gave them My statutes and showed them My judgments, 'which, if a man does, he shall live by them.' Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments," and so forth, "They greatly defiled My Sabbaths." But there are these indications that the sabbath had a particular relationship to national Israel.

A third concern regarding a Christian sabbath is that, frankly, no one knows what its regulations are supposed to be. You can go to the Old Testament and find what the regulations for the Mosaic sabbath were, but if you come to the New Testament and say, "All right, I will accept the concept of a Christian sabbath. Now how is that sabbath to be observed?" And there really are no regulations except a couple of things that I will mention in a moment that apply to the Lord's day, and therefore sabbath regulations, how it should be observed, turn out to be very widely varied and arbitrary, extremely arbitrary from one Christian to another, from one teacher to another, from one group to another.

Now when I say these things, I'm going to reiterate this several times, I want you to understand that I have wonderful, godly friends that I respect and admire who take the Christian sabbath position, a number of whom I have invited to preach from this pulpit, so this is not an issue of war with me, you understand that. You would have a difficult time, I'm sure, telling which of the men who have preached in this pulpit did believe in the Christian sabbath and which do not, some of you maybe could figure that out. I never ask. Sometimes it comes out in conversation but I don't think I've ever asked a man what his position is in regard to the sabbath before inviting him to preach. But I remember many years ago now, I had invited a man to come and preach for us on a Sunday night and I said to him afterwards, "Your wife and I, and my wife and I, we'll go out to a restaurant for a bite to eat and some fellowship," and he said, "Oh no, no, no, no. I observe the sabbath." He said, "But I'd be happy to come to your house and eat and fellowship there but not in a restaurant." And I thought that was a bit...well, I understand his reasoning but I don't understand why it would be a terrible violation to eat in a restaurant and, of course, the idea is that by that you make your servant labor on the sabbath, going back to the regulations in Exodus 20 and so forth, but he wouldn't mind

my wife laboring and fixing a meal at home. Just don't make those people who are not slaves and are not forced to do this but who have voluntarily done it, don't make them do it. To me, that seems a bit inconsistent and it highlights what I'm talking about, the regulations many times are very arbitrary and are certainly not consistent across the board.

I remember having someone relate to me one time that they went to a youth conference and had a wonderful time, heard wonderful messages, and on Sunday night after the last message, some of the boys went outside in beautiful weather and they went to the basketball court and there was lights and they were going to play basketball, and one of the young men who wasn't familiar with all of the stipulations started to shoot a basket. "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no! It's 10 minutes until midnight. You've got to wait. At midnight we can play basketball. That's when the sabbath is over. Don't you dare shoot a basket before midnight."

Now these are the sort of things that grow up around sabbath regulation, and yet as I say, they vary widely from church to church and person to person, very widely so that you probably, in most cases, will hardly find two people whose understanding of the requirements of the sabbath are alike. But it will come as a great surprise to some people who have been schooled to believe that the Reformed position is a sabbatarian position, a Christian sabbath, first day sabbath, it will come as a great surprise to many of these people to find out that there are many Reformed Christians who do not support that concept. What has come to us is a strong Christian sabbath position from the English Puritans, from the Scottish Presbyterians and the English Puritans who have had a strong influence on American Christianity, but what you will learn is that the Reformation on the continent of Europe took the exact opposite position. John Calvin, Martin Luther, did not take the Christian sabbath position at all.

I would encourage any of you who want to check this out to get a copy of Calvin's "Institutes" and read what he says on the fourth commandment and I have it here and I'm only going to read two or three statements out of about five or six pages of rather small print, but all of it is well worth reading. But I'm going to read a few sentences. Here's one. "Early Christian writers are wont to call it," that is, the Christian sabbath, "typical," or the sabbath rather typical. "Early Christian writers are wont to call it typical," that is, it was a type, "as containing the external observance of a day which was abolished with the other types in the advent of Christ. This is indeed true." Now do you understand what he's saying? This is highly significant. He says early Christian writers considered the sabbath a type, not a moral law but a ceremony, a type. Early Christian writers considered it a type which was fulfilled when Christ came, and Calvin's opinion, many others would disagree with him on this, but Calvin's opinion is this is indeed true.

I read in another place several paragraphs later. He says, "still there can be no doubt that on the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ceremonial part of the commandment was abolished." Now he argues for a continuation of a day of rest, one day out of seven which, according to him, it doesn't really matter what day it is, and particularly a day in

which you relieve your servants from having to work, you don't make them work on endlessly day-after-day but one day out of seven you give them rest.

Then he has some pretty strong things to say, I mean, surprisingly strong. I wish he wouldn't be so strong in his statements about those who hold a Christian sabbath but, of course, he wrote before the controversy developed, and in those days a lot of people said a lot of things that we would not think is gracious language for people of God. Luther was a lot worse than Calvin on this. But here's what he says, he says, "In this way we get quit of the trifling of the false prophets who in the later times instilled Jewish ideas into the people, alleging that nothing was abrogated but what was ceremonial in the commandment while the moral part remains, the observance of one day in seven. But this is nothing else than an insult to the Jews by changing the day and yet mentally attributing to it the same sanctity, thus retaining the same typical distinction of days as had place among the Jews." And he goes on to call that sabbatism and he is opposed to that.

John Calvin did not believe in the Christian sabbath and had some pretty strong words to denounce those who so taught. It may come as a surprise to many to learn that our Baptist forefathers in America who adopted the Philadelphia Baptist Confession also did not believe in a Christian sabbath. You say, "But it's in the Confession." Indeed it is but they didn't believe in it. As I say, surprise surprise.

I'm holding in my hand a circular letter from the Philadelphia Baptist Association entitled "Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day" penned by the Reverend David Jones in 1798. Now the Philadelphia Baptist Association was a group of Baptist churches in the north that subscribed to the Second London Baptist Confession and added two articles to it, but otherwise they adopted it in whole. And from time-to-time they would write what they called circular letters to go out to their churches to address particular questions which arose. They would get their delegates together and talk things out and arrive at a position and then write a circular letter so that it could go to all the churches, not dissimilar to what happens in Acts 15 in the New Testament.

So I have several pages of the circular letter and, again, I'm just going to read a couple of statements. It says, "The subject to which we shall call your attentions this year is, 'Religious worship and the Sabbath day,' being Chapter XXII. of our Confession of faith." And indeed it is. I'm holding in my hand the Second London Baptist Confession, the 1689 Confession, and you turn to chapter 22 and you find "Religious Worship and the Lord's Day," and it takes, there's quite a few paragraphs here and it lays out the Christian sabbath position. It's all clearly stipulated there. And that was their Confession, chapter 22 of our Confession of faith.

They say this, "We are taught that God is a Spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and that we should pray without ceasing; yet it is necessary to have, in the churches, fixed times for public worship." So they're establishing that we ought to have a day for public worship for the assembly of the saints. But they go on to say, "The compilers of our Confession of faith were desirous to use the same language with other Christians, as far as was thought consistent with a good conscience; and it may be, on this

subject, they conformed more than can be supported by the Holy Scriptures, or any arguments justly drawn from them. Should we express ourselves in a manner different from them, we are in hopes it will give no offence to any of our brethren; and we are rather persuaded the manner in which we shall treat this subject, will be generally acceptable, if the arguments are calmly considered."

Then he goes on to say, "We shall inquire into two points relative to the subject." Number 1, "Whether the fourth command was moral or ceremonial?" And number 2, "By what authority Christians observe the first day of the week as a day of worship?" Now I'm not going to deal with the second one. I'm assuming that you agree with me that the New Testament is clear that the first day is the day of worship for the people of God but the big question is whether the fourth commandment in the Decalogue was moral, and a moral law is one that we are required to keep such as, "Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. Thou shalt not bear false witness." These are moral laws and they're abiding for all times, we all understand that. Or was it a ceremonial law that only had to do with a particular time in history and for a particular purpose? In fact, they go on to define moral and ceremonial when this letter says and I quote, "It is not pretended that the word moral is used either in the Old or New Testament. By it, we understand those obligations, which in their nature are unalterable," that's what a moral law means, regulations which are unalterable, "and binding on all men; and by ceremonial, we are to understand such commands as were types or shadows of spiritual things, which might be abolished by the will of the legislator." Moral law is one which is unalterable and may never be changed. A ceremonial law is one that is given by the legislator, in other words, God, and may be withdrawn by God according to his will.

He says, "Having premised these things, we proceed to show that the fourth command was not moral, notwithstanding it is sometimes placed with moral commands." Yes, it is in the Decalogue but that doesn't mean that it is a moral law.

It says, this circular letter, "but it may suffice to say that a ceremonial command is an institution of God to bring to mind some events past, or to come. Such was the passover, and such was the Jewish Sabbath. It brought to mind the finishing of the creation in six days, and God's resting the seventh," so it looked backward to creation and was a reminder of that, "as well as the deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt," so it looked back to that, "and it alludes to that rest which a soul enjoys when enabled to believe in Christ."

Now here's the crux of their argument that it is ceremonial and not moral, and here it is and I must read this paragraph. Please excuse me for reading so much but this is vitally important. Please listen carefully. "The answer of our blessed Lord to the Pharisees, accusing his disciples of breaking the Sabbath, plainly proves that he considered the Sabbath as a ceremonial command. We shall transcribe the passage and make a few remarks." And they're going to quote now from Mark 2. "'And he said unto them,'" Jesus said to the Pharisees, "'Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungred, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar, the high priest, and did eat the show bread, which is not lawful to eat,

but for the priests, and gave also to them that were with him? And he said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath; therefore, the Son of man is Lord also of the Sabbath." That's the end of the quotation of the text and then here's their comment on it. "This passage affords an unanswerable proof in what light Christ considered the Sabbath; for had the Sabbath been a moral command, there would have been no propriety in quoting the breach of a ceremonial command as a parallel case." I'm going to read that sentence again because that's the crux of the whole thing. "This passage affords an unanswerable proof in what light Christ considered the Sabbath; for had the Sabbath been a moral command, there would have been no propriety in quoting the breach of a ceremonial command as a parallel case."

The Pharisees accused Christ's disciples of breaking the sabbath when they ate grain on the sabbath, they plucked it from the fields and ate it and they violated the sabbath as the Pharisees understood it. Christ said, "No, they didn't. Didn't you ever read what David did? He went into the tabernacle and ate the showbread off the table which was only allowed for priests to eat, and he gave it to others and that was not considered wrong, it was not considered sin. Therefore it's not sinful for my apostles, my disciples, to do a little harvesting and eating on the sabbath day." And what was he doing? He laid what is obviously a ceremonial law pertaining to the showbread as parallel to the command regarding the sabbath day and he said, "This one which is a ceremonial law shows that what the disciples did in regard to the sabbath was not wrong." He made one obviously ceremonial regulation exactly parallel to the sabbath day regulation.

That's their argument and basically they go on to say, "But we don't want to make this a matter of contention and we're happy to adopt the 1689 Confession," which they did. And by the way, our church has adopted the London Second Baptist Confession, the 1689 Confession as an auxiliary Confession and we have done that as an auxiliary Confession just to make clear that we are in substantial agreement with what is written herein. It is a marvelous marvelous treatment of sound theology but there are some things, such as this, in which we have a different opinion, and so to make that clear, we have adopted it as an auxiliary Confession.

So coming now to the question: is the Lord's day a continuation of the Mosaic sabbath? I think you know by now how I believe I must answer that question before God and my answer is, no, the Lord's day is not a continuation of the Mosaic sabbath anymore than water baptism is a continuation of circumcision, or anymore than the Lord's Supper is a continuation of Passover. All of these are new commands with new instructions. The new has replaced the old. There are some similarities and parallels in all of these, there are certain similarities between water baptism and Mosaic circumcision but one is not the continuation of the other. One has faded away and something new has been brought in its place and we know how to participate in the new by the instructions that are found in the new covenant. That's how we know how baptism is to be applied because the instructions are there for this new ordinance that is not the same as circumcision, and likewise the Lord's Table is not the same as Passover. There are some parallels, some things that are similar and we could draw some similarities, but we understand Passover was the shadow that pointed to Christ, it's faded away, it's gone. The Lord's Table is a new ordinance for

the new covenant people of God and we observe it according to the regulations that are given to us by Christ and the apostles in the new covenant Scriptures, and likewise with the Lord's day. The Lord's day is not a continuation of the Old Testament sabbath. That was a type and a shadow that's faded away, we have something new in its place, and how we should observe that is to be determined by what Christ and the apostles taught us about the Lord's day.

So that brings me now to my regulations regarding the Lord's day, my observations, my personal considerations regarding the Lord's day. And first of all, I want to say this again, I've already said it, but godly Christians differ about this question and will, and I therefore admonish you to respect those who differ and regard them as sincere brothers in Christ. We don't need to be calling each other names and having all kinds of ugliness over this question. It truly is a challenging question and godly people come to differing opinions and we should respect that. Some of you believe in the Christian sabbath and I respect that, and I may not alter your thinking one bit by this message today and that's fine. I have no problem with that. None whatsoever.

I would also say please avoid offending the consciences of others whenever possible. If you find someone who has a differing position from yourself on this, don't trample all over their conscience regarding it. Show some maturity, some grace, some love. Don't offend them. That's what the Scripture teaches us.

I would, thirdly, point out that the actual practice of how we observe the Lord's day often differs less than doctrinal positions. I have learned by observation and experience that many times those who hold to a Christian sabbath and those who do not hold to a Christian sabbath but hold to the Lord's day, when you get down to, "Well, what do you do on the Lord's day? How do you observe the Lord's day?" It turns out in some cases to be virtually identical with how those who hold to a Christian sabbath observe the Christian sabbath. Some take it to more of an extreme and become more legalistic but many do not, and you will find that the observances sometimes are far more alike than the doctrinal position that underlies them which may be very opposite.

But I must say on the basis of our text, and now we're coming back to Colossians 2:16 and 17, that we must humbly resist those who would require of us extrabiblical regulations. We must humbly resist those who would require of us extrabiblical regulations even if they're convinced that they're not extrabiblical. They think they're biblical. But if we, in our conscience, are convinced that they are not, we must not allow ourselves to be judged by them. We must not allow ourselves to be brought into bondage by them. We must humbly and graciously say, "I have been taught differently. I understand the Scriptures differently. I will walk with my conscience before the Lord, endeavoring to please Him in all things, but I will not be brought into subjection to your regulations."

"Let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths." Now what do the Scriptures teach in regard to the Lord's day? I'm going to quote from our own church Confession of Faith which is a minor adaptation from the

New Hampshire Confession of Faith, and here's what we say in Article 15 of the Lord's day. "We believe that the first day of the week is the Lord's day, the day appointed for the regular assemblies of the church. We believe that Christians should meet with the church on the Lord's day for public worship, fellowship, instruction, and observance of the ordinances, and that it should be utilized to cultivate personal spiritual growth and as a testimony before the world." We think all of those things are reasonably borne out in Scripture but to go beyond that goes farther than Scripture allows us to go.

So what do the Scriptures teach? 1. The New Testament believers assembled for public worship on the first day of the week. There's a whole trail of Scriptures that support that that I don't have time to get into now. I hope you have found those and agree with me on that. 2. That this first day became known in the passing of time as the Lord's day. We find that reference in Revelation 1:10 where John says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet," and so forth.

And so this first day of Christian worship, which is no longer the sabbath, has been given a New Testament name, it is called the Lord's day. Because it has become known as the Lord's day, that automatically means, and think of this for a moment, that this day is set apart from other days in some way. We all know that in a literal sense every day is the Lord's day, they all belong to him and we belong to him on every day of the week, but if the Scripture sets one day in seven apart and calls it the Lord's day, then by that very act, by that very name that's applied to it, it does, in some way, set that day apart from the other six. The Lord's day isn't exactly like every other day, though in what ways it differs from other days, that may be another question entirely, but at least it's clear that the Lord's day is not exactly like the other six days. It is a special day. It is the Lord's day.

We can go that far and still be on solid scriptural ground. It is a day that should be given particularly to the worship of God and to things eternal. It's helpful to us in that manner. Furthermore, the Scripture tells us that regular assembly is required of God's people. Hebrews 10:24 and 25 says, "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." Forsaking the assembly of the saints is a sin and it has dire spiritual consequences for those who do it, and therefore since Christians obviously in the New Testament assembled on the first day and that has been called in the New Testament the Lord's day, we are under obligation to assemble with the people of God on the first day, the Lord's day, and we should assemble as regularly as we are able. We should avoid purposefully scheduling conflicting activities. We may be required to work and if we do that's not sin, but if we're volunteering to work and don't need to and that causes us to regularly fail to assemble with the people of God, then that very well may be sin. Sometimes only God knows the heart and what's going on here. "I've got to work." Do you have to work because your employer required it of you, or do you have to work because you volunteered to work and didn't really have to? Are you forsaking the assembly of the saints? You'll need to answer these questions in your own heart. But we should assemble as regularly as we are able, we should avoid purposefully scheduling conflicting activities.

We should work only as required and we should be prudent with other activities. Why? Because we don't want to schedule ourselves in such a way that the assembly of the saints on the Lord's day ministers to us very little benefit because we are so distracted, because we are so tired, because we have made no preparation for the assembly of the saints and for the benefit that God has for us thereby. There are some practical things, some prudent things that we would do well to take into account for the good of our souls and for our families, for our children, as well as the testimony aspect of it. Many people in the world who are unconverted do believe that the Lord's day is like the sabbath day. They don't know the difference and they know that Christians are to honor the Lord on that day and if they see you claiming to be a Christian treating it just like any other day and ignoring church, you go to church when you don't have anything else to do, you go to church when you don't have company and when you don't have a ballgame and when you don't have this and you don't have that, and you basically treat church as a matter of occasional convenience and everything and anything can crowd out the assembly of the saints on the Lord's day, that not only is a violation of Hebrews 10 and therefore a sin, it not only is not beneficial to your soul, not wise for your own spiritual health but it's a bad testimony in the community and to others, your family, your children, that you are trying to influence for the things of God.

Well, I've got to conclude. All of this, I think, should remind us that there is a danger of both adding or subtracting from God's word and we have to learn that and it's not easy. There's also the danger of harsh treatment of godly brothers and we shouldn't do that either just because we differ on some things. But I would conclude by saying we need to understand the significance of the sabbath day, the Old Testament sabbath, as a shadow, as a type, what did it point to? Rest in Christ. Rest from our labors, that is, the labors of endeavoring to work to please God. For salvation. It is a recognition that Christ has done the work and we don't work, number 1, because we couldn't, we couldn't do enough work to qualify for salvation, but number 2, it's a recognition that Christ has done this work that is required and therefore we gladly rest in him. We rest. We cease from all those frantic labors that we're involved with trying to earn merit with God. We rest. We observe a lifelong sabbath, in fact, we'll observe an eternal sabbath and so I conclude by asking you: are you resting in Christ? I pray that you are.

Let's pray.

Father, help us in regard to our soul's salvation. Help us to be resting in Christ and Him alone. And help us, O Lord, in regard to our godliness, to truly desire to please the Lord in everything, to be more concerned about pleasing Christ than ourselves, and being a gracious and godly influence upon others more than our own desires. O Lord, teach us godliness, spirituality, maturity, graciousness and clear understanding from Your word as we ask it now in Jesus' name. Amen.