

February 16, 2020

—The Gospel Changes Everything—

The Sabbath and Your Conscience

Romans 14:1-9

The highest, best and final good of our lives

If you are new to us this morning, we are in the middle of a series on *the Sabbath*. Our basic claim throughout this series is that the Sabbath shows us the chief end of man. That the highest, best, and final good of our lives—the very reason for which we were created—was so that we could dwell with God. That’s the idea behind Sabbath.

The three-fold use of *Sabbath*

As we have seen, there is a three-fold use of the term *Sabbath* in the Bible. **First**, there is a *temporal use*—meaning from the beginning God has graciously given us one day in seven in order to rest from our works and come into His presence (**Genesis 2:1-3**). **Second**, there is a *spiritual use* of the term Sabbath—meaning Christ has become our Sabbath, because through His death and resurrection, He has brought us peace with God. Jesus said “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you *rest*...” (**Matthew 11:28**). **Third**, there is a *eternal use* of the term Sabbath. **Hebrews 4:9** says “There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” This is our future Sabbath, where as the Heidelberg catechism puts it we will truly know and love Him and to live with Him in everlasting happiness, all to His praise and glory? (Q.6)

The treasure map

Now if you have missed any of these messages, please go back and listen. We have been building an argument—an argument of delight, and if you miss a part, it’s like vital corner of a treasure map. Without that piece, you might not find the treasure.

The Sabbath and your conscience

This morning we are addressing the idea of the Sabbath and your conscience. Your conscience is one of the most precious gifts that God has given you. And the Scripture says that your conscience has the power to make you as bold as a lion or to flee when no one is chasing you (**Proverbs 28:1**). In other words, there is nothing better than to have a clean conscience, and nothing worse than to have one that haunts you.

And therein lies the issue with the when talking about the Sabbath. Many of us are going to have different convictions regarding the Sabbath. Some of you will have a *strong conscience*—you're fully convinced in your own mind as to what God desires on the Lord's Day; some of you will have a *weak conscience*—so that you're natural tendency is to be constantly doubting; some of you will have a very *broad conscience* where you think everything is permitted (tending toward the error of antinomianism); while some of you will have a very *narrow conscience* where you think virtually nothing is permitted (tending toward the error of legalism). And this is a recipe not only for individual unrest, but of corporate unrest. How will we as a church get along when many of us have so many different ideas about what the Lord's Day ought to look like? That's what I pray and hope the Word of God and the Holy Spirit will answer for us this morning.

The Big Idea...

Jesus Christ *alone* is the Lord of your conscience and He will uphold you in your standing and your falling on the Sabbath

- ☆ The Problem of Conscience
- ☆ The Primacy of Conscience
- ☆ The Purpose of Conscience

I. The Problem of Conscience

The context of conscience

Let's look at v.1-2 in our passage. "As for the one who is *weak in faith*, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the *weak person* eats only vegetables." The issue here is that meat that was being sacrificed to pagan deities was then being sold at market. As R.C. Sproul says "Some Christians took advantage of the discount prices of that meat and ate it. Other members of the church were horrified by this and wondered how they could eat meat after it had been used in pagan religious ceremonies. These people had a strong scruple against eating such meat."¹ Paul's main argument in **1 Corinthians 8**, where he deals with this same issue is that "an idol has no real existence" and that "there is no God but one" (v.4). So Christians can eat meat that was sacrificed to idols. *But* Paul says in v.7 "However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their *conscience*, being *weak*, is defiled." Now that's the connection to our passage. The *weak in faith* are those that have a *weak conscience*. Their conscience informed them that they are only allowed to eat vegetables, but those that are strong in conscience believe they can eat meat.²

¹ R.C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust, 2019), pg. 449

² The problem underneath the problem

Why is the apostle even dealing with this? Doesn't Paul have more important issues to deal with than with meat and potatoes? Well there are three significant problems underneath this issue of food. **First**, these Christians in Rome were no longer walking with each other in love. **v. 15** "For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love..." **Second**, because some were flaunting their Christian liberty in public they were allowing true Christian liberty to be spoken about as if it were evil in itself. **v.16** "So do not let what you regard as good be spoken about as evil." **Third**, the gospel itself was being obscured. When the issue of food became *the thing* that was being quarreled about, the gospel stopped being the main thing. **v. 17** "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Paul is dealing with this issue because the entire peace and unity of the church is at stake.

What is the conscience?

Alright then, what is the conscience? It comes from a combination of two Latin words *con* meaning *with*, and *scientia* meaning *knowledge*—conscience literally means *with knowledge*. When God knitted you together, your soul came equipped *with knowledge*—a certain type of knowledge. Some people think that the conscience is the same thing as God’s law. It’s not. Please turn to **Romans 2:15**. Paul says here “They (the Gentiles) show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience *also bears witness...*” Stop there. Paul is saying that everyone has two things implanted in their souls. First he says “the work of the law written on their hearts...” Secondly he says “will their conscience also bears witness...” Do you see the word *also*? That means the conscience is a different thing than the law. God’s law is in your heart and *also* your conscience bears witness. So your conscience is not equivalent to God’s law. But it does work along side of God’s law. Your conscience is a witness. Paul says “it bears witness.” What does it bear witness to? Everything. As Herman Bavinck says here: your “...conscience renders judgment; not merely about [your] actions but also about [your] being and state and thoughts.”³ In other words, there is nothing that your conscience doesn’t judge about you—everything in your past, everything in your present, and everything in your future. It is the supreme court of your heart. That’s how Paul finishes this verse, he says “They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, *and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them...*” It works like a syllogism.

- P1. (God’s law says) All sins against God deserve judgment
- P2. (Your conscience says) You have sinned against God
- ∴ You deserve judgment

That witness of conscience and that judgment of your thoughts, words and actions is happening all the time. You don’t choose it. It simply speaks.

³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics: Created, Fallen and Converted Humanity*, Ed. John Bolt, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Academic, 2019), pg. 201

The problem with a sinner's conscience

Now here is the problem with conscience: it is not always right. Because it is not the same thing as God's law it is not infallible. And even as redeemed born again believers, our consciences are not 100% reliable. Yes it's true that Jesus Christ has *objectively* once-for-all *purified* our consciences through the cross. **Hebrews 9:14** says "Christ...offered himself without blemish to God, [to] purify our *conscience* from dead works to serve the living God."⁴ But our consciences are not *subjectively* or immediately perfected. In fact, Christians can have very unhealthy consciences. All of our consciences are darkened by remaining sin — "...all of us have abnormal consciences."⁵

Pt.1: Welcome those with a weak conscience!

And this is the problem in **Romans 14**, please turn back there. These Christians who are weak in faith won't eat meat *because* their hearts have not yet been set completely free from pagan superstition.⁶ They have not reached spiritual maturity. But look how the Apostle instructed the church to respond. He gives a two-part command in **v.1** The first part is this: "As for the one who is weak in faith, *welcome him...*" This is a robust command! In the Greek it means to take ahold of that person and bring them to yourself, to make them your companion, to grant them access to your heart.⁷

⁴ And it's true that if we walk in obedience to God's law, our conscience will be at rest within us. That's why Paul could say in **2 Timothy 1:3** "I thank God whom I serve...with a *clear conscience...*"

⁵ Bavinck, pg. 167

⁶ "A weak conscience has been improved by faith, but, nonetheless, still depends on someone other than God and something other than his Word." Bavinck, pg. 211 "Christ must liberate our consciences from every external authority and make it acknowledge God's will as the only valid authority." Bavinck, pg. 212

⁷ Source: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G4355&t=KJV>
Accessed February 15, 2020

Illustrations of this kind of "welcoming" are seen in Acts 28:2 and Philemon 1:17

Pt. 2: But not to quarrel over *adiaphora*⁸

But the second part is equally important: “...welcome him *but not to quarrel over opinions.*” Clearly Paul means something very specific by *opinions*. Paul was willing to go to war over things. In **1 Corinthians 5:5**, he excommunicated the man who was sleeping with his stepmom. In **2 Timothy 2:16-17** he told Timothy to avoid Hymenaeus and Philetus because they were teaching damnable heresy. This isn’t a blanket command to never argue over doctrine. Paul means that we would not quarrel over those things that do no violate God’s moral law, or things that are not essential to our salvation. Some teachers call these things matters of indifference.⁹ That doesn’t mean these things are important, *nor* does it mean that we can’t ever talk about them. It just means we should never break our Christian unity over these things.

The Calvinistic Methodist Father of Wales

I’ve been reading a history of the Welsh Fathers during first Great Awakening. John Morgan Jones records: “In the original Dissenting churches, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists and Paedobaptists were found side by side. For some time, no great weight was attached to these differences; the great issue was the securing of the preaching of the essential truths of the gospel in their purity, and the cruel persecutions suffered tended to unite every congregation, notwithstanding the differences of opinion existing between individuals. But after the passing of the Toleration Act in 1689 with the consequent ending of the persecution, more attention was given to their differing opinions and the church experienced much agitation as a result.”¹⁰ In other

⁸ Sproul, pg. 449

⁹ Martyn-Lloyd Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 14:1-17 Liberty and Conscience*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2011), pg. 3

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Experimental Questions: Are you able to tell the difference between serious matters and non-serious matters? Are you able to know which things you should go to the stake for and which ones you shouldn’t?

¹⁰ John Morgan Jones & William Morgan, *The Calvinistic Methodist Fathers of Wales Vol. 1*, Trans. John Aaron, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2016), pg.20-21

words, when the outside persecution *ended* the inside persecute began. They began to quarrel over their opinions—over matters of indifference. What outside persecution failed to do—*namely* to destroy their unity with each other—they were able to do on their own. The greatest threat to the peace and unity of the church is you. It's me.

Watch *yourself* whether you are weak or strong!

It's not just one group—the weak or the strong—that threaten the peace and unity of the church, it's both groups. Look how Paul identifies the particular temptation of both groups in v.3 “Let not the one who eats *despise* the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains *pass judgment* on the one who eats...” Stop there. What is Paul saying? The strong brother will be tempted to self-righteousness (despise): “Oh look at that poor weak minded Christian—He doesn't know the liberty we have in Christ.” And the weak brother will be tempted towards condemning others who don't practice like him (pass judgment): “Oh look at those liberals—those antinomian hypocrites, God is not pleased!” Dear congregation, everyone of us is *either* the weak brother *or* the strong brother on any given issue.¹¹ Which means that no matter what you believe on any issue, your temptation will be to look down your nose at others who don't agree with you.

“...For God has welcomed him.”

So then *how* do we welcome others who we disagree with? How do we avoid quarreling and despising and passing judgment on him who we disagree with? Paul tells us at the end of v.3: We *welcome him*—we take him as our companion, we grant him access to our heart “...*for* God has welcomed him.” Do you see how simple and profound his reasoning is? Paul is arguing from the greater to the lesser. If the God—who perfectly holds the right position on every single doctrinal matter—can welcome children into his fellowship and grant

¹¹ Who are the weak and who are the strong? I would venture to say that all of us want to think of us as the stronger brother. But it matters little. Both groups threaten the unity of the church.

them access to His heart though they are still very flawed then *surely* you can.¹² Don't you see? *If* we refuse to welcome each other—to take ahold, to bring near, to open our hearts to each other, *then* we have forgotten *how* we became a Christian.

Christ did not wait for us to be *strong* to welcome us.

Romans 5:6 says “For while we were still *weak*...”

Christ did not wait for us to be *righteous* to welcome us.

Romans 5:8 says “God shows his love for us in that while we were still *sinner*s”

Christ did not wait for us to *love* Him to welcome us.

Romans 5:9 says “...while we were *enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...”

Beloved, Christ welcomed you at your worst.¹³ How can we not welcome one another when we disagree on things that won't matter 100 years from now?

That's our **first point**. The problem of conscience means is that we will always have disagreements. But God has welcomed each one of us *in spite of all our failures*, therefore we must welcome one another.

¹² More than that, how many of your practices are still childish and uninformed? How many doctrines do you still see *as if* through a glass darkly?

¹³ That's why Paul says at the end of this section in **Romans 15:7** “Therefore welcome one another as Christ welcomed you.”

II. The Primacy of Conscience

Is the Sabbath up for grabs?

Let's look at v.5. "One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike." Let's stop there. Here we see Paul's method. He brings up *another* example. The first issue was meat but now he brings this second issue up: days. But you must understand that these are just two examples that Paul is trotting out. There are a vast number of issues the church could apply this to. But for now, the issue at hand is that of days. And this is vital for our discussion of the Sabbath. Is Paul applying this saying to the Sabbath, to the 4th Commandment, to the Lord's Day, *as if* he's saying 'One person esteems the Lord's Day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike?' Meaning, you can take the Lord's Day or leave it? No. As we have already shown in previous messages, the Sabbath command is part of the Ten Commandments—God's unchanging moral law. We are not free to ignore the Lord's day in the same way we are not free to commit adultery or steal or blaspheme or lie. Furthermore, Paul would be contradicting **Hebrews 10:25** which tells us *not* to forsake the gathering of ourselves together for public worship *if* he's saying that that one day is no different than any other day in an absolute sense.¹⁴ No Christian could be compelled to come to public worship if Paul means the Lord's day is no different than any other day, because they could simply say: 'You esteem that day, but I don't.'

An important footnote on Bahrain

Now let me add an important footnote here. One of our members is currently serving in the military on the island of Bahrain which is a Muslim dominated country. The Christians gather to worship on Friday because that's the religious day that the rest of the country meets. Are they violating the Lord's

¹⁴ "...If all observation of days is absolutely and simply condemned, it would not be lawful now to observe any day at all devoted to the worship of God. Nor could Paul have enjoined it upon Christians to come together upon the first day of each week and make collections (1 Cor. 16:2)." Turretin, pg. 90

Day? No. From what I can tell they do it out of necessity. The public exercise of worship just cannot be performed when they would prefer. So they aren't arbitrarily or capriciously deciding to meet on another day, they are doing it from necessity.¹⁵ The church is still honoring the Lord's Day—through the preaching of the word, through sacrament and church discipline—albeit on a different day.

The ceremonial distinction of days

Alright, so then *what is* Paul getting at here in v.5 when he says “One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike.” Well there is actually three places like this in the NT: **Colossians 2:16-17**,¹⁶ **Galatians 4:10** and here in **Romans 14:5**. In each one of them Paul is teaching that the old requirement to keep the all the religious days under the old ceremonial law—the festival days—is no longer a requirement. Here, he's simply pointing out that some Jewish Christians are still keeping some of those days. In other words, ‘one Christian esteems this Jewish festival day better than an ordinary day, while another esteems all days alike.’ That's all he's saying.

Why not just settle these issues?

Now the important question we must ask at this juncture is this: why doesn't Paul just settle these matters *right now*? These are issues that the NT speaks authoritatively and clearly on. The issue of meat had already been settled by Jesus Himself. He said in **Mark 7:18-19** “...whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him...Thus he declared all foods clean.” In other

¹⁵ “Now although we readily grant that if he pleases God (who is the Lord of the Sabbath) can change this first day into any other of the seven, still we do not think that this is lawful for any mortal, after so constant and general an observation of this day. Nor if cases can be granted, in which the public exercises of piety cannot be performed on this day, does it follow that this observance is only temporal and mutable; for this is not done spontaneously, but from necessity (which has no law).” Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology Vol. 2*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 1994), pg. 97

¹⁶ Francis Turretin does a much more extensive treatment on this passage on pg. 85, 87, 90, and 96. Also cf. MLJ, pg. 87ff

words, these weaker brothers were objectively wrong—meat was ok to eat! Also regarding these Jewish festival days that belonged to the ceremonial law, Paul had no problem making the argument to the Colossian church that Jewish festivals were shadows and but Christ was the substance so that they were no longer required (**Colossians 2:16-17**). Why didn't Paul trot out these argument here? He could have shown that in the case of foods *and* days, that these weaker Christians were objectively wrong. Why didn't he do that? Because he is showing us that *sometimes* there is something more important than *merely* being right.

Hurry up and get it!?

Remember these weaker brothers were *convicted* of their practice. They were acting according to their conscience. Should they be instructed? Of course. But let me ask you: what if they don't get it the first time, or the second time, or the third time? Should we then start quarreling with them to hurry up and get it? No. And that is precisely what Paul is getting at. What do you do when someone is obeying their conscience and they disagree with you? Is one of you wrong? Absolutely. Wherever there is a difference, someone must be wrong.

Sinning while doing the "right thing"

But Paul is showing us that to disobey your conscience and do the "right thing" is a greater sin than to obey your conscience and be in error. Look at the end of v.5, he says "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind." Being full convicted is more important than *merely* being right. Why? Because if you go against your conviction, then even though the action is not sinful considered *in itself*, then it is sin for you. Imagine if you were taught from a very early age that alcohol is always sinful to drink *without exception*. For decades you were taught that. But then you realize the Scripture doesn't forbid drink, only drunkenness. But whenever you try to raise a glass of wine to your lips, your conscience condemns you. What should you do? Don't drink. Because to you

it is sin. Look down at v.14 “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.” And then again at v.23 “But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” If you disobey your conscience, the it is telling you that you are sinning against God, and in that case, you really are sinning against God.¹⁷ According to Paul is better to be in error than to disobey your conscience.¹⁸

Here I Stand

In 1521, Martin Luther arrived in the town of Worms. He was summoned by the Roman Catholic Church to “recant his teaching of justification by faith alone.”¹⁹ How did he answer? He said “Unless I am convinced by sacred Scripture or by...plain reason, I cannot recant, because my conscience is held captive by the Word of God. Thus I cannot and will not repent for going against my conscience is neither safe nor right. I can do no other. Here I stand. God help me. Amen.” Luther understood how vital the conscience was. My conscience is held captive. It is not safe or right to disobey it, because in doing so, we sin against God.

That’s our **second point**. The primacy of conscience means it is the supreme judge on earth under God, therefore we all must obey our own and allow others to obey their own.

¹⁷ The rule of conscience: “When you doubt, do not act,” Bavinck pg. 210

¹⁸ Bavinck brings up the fascinating dilemma on pg. 209: “If an erroneous conscience does so bind that we may neither follow, nor not follow it without sin, then there lies a kind of necessity of sinning...” He works out this dilemma essentially by counseling the person in such a dilemma to consider the “greatness of sin according to the quality of the thing to be done or omitted.”

¹⁹ Sproul, pg. 447

III. The Purpose of Conscience

It's all about worship!

Now what you must see here is that Paul arrives at the pinnacle of his argument. Yes we must welcome those who have a different convictions. Yes we must be fully convinced in our own mind. But those things are not ultimately *why* God gave us a conscience. Please look with me at **v.6** “The one who observes the day, observes it in *honor of the Lord*. The one who eats, eats in *honor of the Lord*, since he gives *thanks to God*, while the one who abstains, abstains in *honor of the Lord* and gives *thanks to God*.” Notice that Paul still hasn’t told us who is right on these issues. He has *purposely* avoided it. Why? Because he has a far greater concern: worship. The honor of the Lord. The giving of thanks to God. Notice how he keeps repeating and emphasizing this in **v.6**: this one observes the day in *honor of the Lord*, this one eats in *honor of the Lord*, this one abstains in *honor of the Lord*.²⁰

The danger of Christianity

Beloved, this is the danger that we must pray to avoid. We must not forget that these doctrines and these practices are not toys—they are not neat theoretical positions. No, in all of these things we are dealing with the Living God. That’s what Paul wants us to see: God’s honor is more important than our own liberty—more important than the precise rightness of our position. Paul makes this clear by showing us that these Christians in **v.6** are all disagreeing about particular matters. But what are they agreeing on? That God must be honored. That God must be thanked. All of them are concerned with practicing their faith unto the Lord, for His sake, for His glory. That is infinitely more important than being right on these matters. Don’t you remember the letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2. What did they have

²⁰ Jesus is LORD over strong & weak consciences & He accepts our worship even when it’s incorrect. If Christ only accepted sinless worship, then none of our worship can ever be accepted by God. Illustrate: I have a Green Goblin & Batgirl drawing in my office that my son drew, and though they are imperfect, I love them because my son gave them to me.

right? Their doctrine. But what did they have tragically wrong? Jesus said “I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first” (**Rev. 2:4**). You left Me! You forgot that you were dealing with Me. Christianity is not a collection of cold philosophical rationalistic positions. It’s not a way to improve your morals. Christianity is knowing, loving, and living with Jesus Christ. “This is eternal life, *that they know you*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (**John 17:3**).

No one lives to himself

Paul strengthens his position in **v.7 & 8** by the use of the word “for.” It means *because*. **v.6** in essence is saying that all our activity is to be done the Lord’s honor, **v.7** *for* or *because* “...none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. **For** if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”

Now it’s vital that you don’t misinterpret Paul. The “us” and the “we” here are not referring to all of humanity “as if he were saying, ‘Whether you like it or not, we are all in God’s hands.’”²¹ Though that’s true, that’s not his point here. The “us” and the “we” are still referring only to believers. Since the beginning of the chapter, Paul has only been talking about Christians. And in **v. 6**, the only people who are doing these things for *the honor of the Lord* are Christians. Non-Christians do nothing for *the honor of the Lord*. Why do I emphasize that? Why is important to see that? Because when Paul says “None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself,” he means ‘no one who believes in Christ—none of us—should live life on our own terms, all of our living and all of our dying is for the benefit of Another.’ You see every other person lives for themselves—they live to please themselves and are ruled by their own ideas and their own thoughts. But the Christian exists in an entirely different realm, they now live for the Lord.

²¹ MLJ, pg. 100

No one dies to himself²²

But Paul doesn't stop at life, he extends it to even to our death. We don't die to ourselves. What does that mean? It means that we don't get to decide *when* or *how* we die. This is so relevant today as suicide is increasing like a plague and euthanasia is becoming increasingly legal nearly everywhere. Suicide should be unthinkable to a Christian not *merely* because it's self-murder, but because it's re-asserting the old way of thinking, it's taking the decision of our death out of the hands of the Lord. But we are to even die to the Lord. It's entirely His decision, because He *alone* is able to bring us through that valley of the shadow for His honor and glory.

This is *why* Christ died and rose!

Paul then ties everything together in v.9 "For *to this end* Christ died and lived again, *that* he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." What a profound statement! Christian, how is it that you came to this other realm? You once lived for yourself, you were self-centered, self-absorbed, self-concerned, you worshipped yourself, your ideas, and your intellect and your main concern was only yourself. But something happened that changed everything. What was it? Christ died and lived again. The Son of God left the invisible realm of Heaven into the visible realm, and He put on flesh. Then He was crucified and rose from the dead three days later. What did this accomplish? It of course accomplished the unspeakable gift of the forgiveness of our sins, and the gift of imputed righteousness. *But* it's not just that our legal status has changed. "*For to this end*," v.9 says "Christ died and lived again *that* he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." In other words, the main purpose of Christ coming into the world was so that He would be your Lord, your Master, your King, your God, your life, your breath, your everything. "The Lord is Lord of the totality of our being."

²² Much help from this section and the previous from MLJ, pg. 100-101

Three examples in the life of the Apostle Paul

What does this look like? Three examples from the life of the Apostle Paul. **First** at his conversion. In **Acts 9**, he was breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord. He hated Jesus. He believed he was to do everything in his power to destroy this way. But what happened? As he was traveling on the road to Damascus, Jesus spoke to him “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” And he said, “Who are you Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city and you will be told what you are to do.” (v.4-6) Isn’t that amazing? Jesus didn’t ask if Paul was willing to make Him Lord. No Jesus simply asserted His authority. Rise, go, you will be told what to do.

The **second** example is how we find Paul addressing himself for the rest of his life. As he opens his letters, what does he say? “Paul, a *servant*, of Christ Jesus...” (**Romans 1:1**). The Greek word for servant is bond-slave. Paul saw himself as a *slave* of Jesus Christ. Dear congregation, that is what conversion *is*. It is the undoing of what happened at the fall. You see we were all born believing the same lie, that we could be just like God—that we could be our own god, call our own shots, determine our own fate. But Christ died and rose again in order to bring you under His Lordship. Christ made you His property.

The **third** example is perhaps the most beautiful verse in the New Testament. Paul says in **Galatians 2:20** “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” The Christians says my life is not mine to live. I belong—body and soul, both in life and death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ who with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins.²³

The purpose of your conscience

What this means for your conscience is that God gave it to you *not mainly* so you could exercise your Christian liberty. But God gave you your conscience

²³ Heidelberg Q.1

so that you could offer your all to Christ. That not just the visible part of your existence, but that your invisible part would all serve Christ. That's the purpose of your conscience.

Application

How does all of this apply to the Sabbath? Let's consider three points of application that mirror the three points of the message.

1. The problem with the Sabbath

The problem that we are going to face is this: our consciences might not agree on how to practice the Lord's Day. Which means we will face the temptation of judging others for practicing it differently. This will especially be the case when we launch our Sunday night service. Perhaps some of you fear you will be judged if you don't come. Dear congregation, the pastors—by God's grace—are not going to judge you for not coming to Sunday nights. But we are going to encourage you to come and we will continue to make a case for coming, just like I'm going to encourage you to baptize your babies and will continue to make a case for it from Scripture. But making a case for something is not the same thing as judging you. We love all of you—whether you are Calvinist or Arminian, Baptist or Paedo-Baptist, Dispensational or Covenantal et. al. We are all called to welcome each other regardless if our specific practices look different.

2. The primacy of the Sabbath

Some of the questions that I have been getting via email have been dealing with specifics: like shopping, or eating out, or supporting businesses on the Lord's Day. Or how do we handle recreation? Let's start with the biggest thing first. If you are convinced that all of these things are fine to do, then be assured that *none* of these things are things that would call for church discipline. Now it

would be different if you decided you were going to stop coming on Sunday morning so that you could watch the game at the pub with your friends. The pastors would be giving you a call for that. Coming to public worship is not a matter of conscience, God commands it of us. But what about these other things? Well first just consider how the fourth commandment begins. It begins with the word: “*Remember...Remember* the Sabbath day.” When you remember something, what do you do? You take action. Dear congregation, remember the Sabbath before it comes so that you can order your life accordingly. Be Sunday-centric in your weekly calendar. The Jews had a day of preparation in which they prepared for their Sabbath observance. That is an important principle to consider. And everybody does it with all the important stuff in their lives. If you were going on a vacation, you would prepare for it ahead of time. You wouldn’t wait for the morning of and then buy your plane tickets. If we never think about *preparing* for the Lord’s Day, it shows our unbelief about what God promises on this day. We saw this last week, that God promises that we will find joy and happiness and delight in the Lord if we honor the Sabbath. If you don’t experience that, perhaps it’s because you don’t at all prepare your soul to be addressed by God. You’ve crammed your day so full of things that you are distracted from the best thing. Remember what Jesus told Martha: “...you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:41-42).

3. The purpose of the Sabbath

When we have talked through these things as elders, Pastor Arlan asked a simple but profound question. In every activity that we are considering, we ought to ask “Is this activity worthy of the Lord’s Day?” Think about that. It’s not about what activities you engage in or don’t engage in, what matters most is the Lord. Are you honoring Him with this activity? We should be provoked to think about what we are doing on the Lord’s Day. Some of you don’t feel any conviction about anything you are doing on the Lord’s Day. But that doesn’t

mean what you are doing is right. Paul said in **1 Corinthians 4:4** “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.” Does Christ feel honored in how you treat His Day?²⁴ Have you seriously studied these issues? Is Christ worth your study about how you should honor Him on this day?

On the other hand, some of you are so anxious about not wanting to do anything wrong that perhaps you have become fearful: what should I do? what should I avoid? I need a list! Dear loved one, a list will never do. Because it is not the outward activity that is mainly in view, but the inward state of the heart. Consider this example: “Perhaps one family will have children who are so attached to bicycle-riding on six days of the week, that they will tell their children, ‘No bicycle-riding on Sunday.’ They intend to make the day special by filling it with a different activity on the Lord’s Day.” But then along comes “...a Christian neighbor with his children—all riding bicycles! His motive may have been to give his young children necessary exercise so that they can still be at evening worship.”²⁵ The point is not whether to ride bikes or not. The point is, Is my Lord the Lord of this activity or no? God is looking at the heart.

He will hold you fast

But that is the problem isn’t it? If God sees everyone of our activities on the Sabbath and He is searching our hearts, He’s going to find so much at fault. I have struggled and do struggle with these things. I think that in some of these questions, I have a weaker conscience than some. I might be wrong on some of my Sabbath application. But beloved consider v.4 of our passage this morning. “It is before [our] own master that [we will] stand or fall. And [we] will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make [us] stand.” Beloved, your safety is not in your perfectly informed conscience. Your safety is not in our Sabbath practices.

²⁴ “It is quite possible that the VCR was providentially invented for the express purpose of allowing Christian sports fans to enjoy the game later.” (Horton “Where in the World is the Church” pg. 155)

²⁵ Walter Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth, 2017), pg. 106

Your safety is in the Lord of the Sabbath Jesus Christ. He promises that He will uphold us.

When I fear my faith will fail
 Christ will hold me fast
 When the tempter would prevail
 He will hold me fast

He'll not let my soul be lost
 His promises shall last
 Bought by Him at such a cost
 He will hold me fast

He will hold me fast
 He will hold me fast
 For my Savior loves me so
 He will hold me fast

To those who have never kept the Sabbath

Perhaps you're here this morning, and all this talk of the conscience has made you realize that your conscience is defiled. You realize not only have you never kept the Lord's Day, but you are far from the Lord. You've never prayed to Him truly, you've never embraced Him as your Savior. Friend, what will you do on your death bed when your conscience and the devil are accusing you moments before your last breath? Where will you find comfort? There is nothing in this world—no money, not ingenuity, no wisdom, no person—that can clean your conscience. Only Jesus can clean your conscience. The Scripture promises that the blood of Christ can cleanse you from all sin. And that blood is yours this morning simply by receiving Christ. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

