

faith in **focus**

Magazine of the
Reformed Churches
of New Zealand

VOLUME 40/2 MARCH 2013



The Lord's Day – burden or joy?

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Copy Deadline:

Six weeks preceding the month of publication.
Church and family notices are free, subject to
sufficient space and editorial acceptance.

All correspondence regarding distribution and
payment of subscriptions to:

The Secretary:

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Subscription per volume:

\$40.00 (eleven issues)
Bulk Rate: \$35.00
Overseas: \$60.00
Electronically Mailed (overseas only): \$40

Production Staff:

Distribution: M. & D. van der Zwaag
Design & Layout: Matrix Typography
Printed by: Flying Colours

Editorial

When we talk about the Lord's Day or the Christian Sabbath, it becomes pretty evident that not all minds think alike. Even amongst reformed folk there seem to be differences when it comes to the Fourth Commandment and its application to a day of worship and rest and what can be done and cannot be done on that day. Our theme this month is how Reformed folk see the Lord's Day.

You have probably heard the saying: "When it rains in the world, it drips in the church". How true in so many respects.

Unbelievers have no respect for the Lord's Day. To them it is just another day in which to do their thing. Although some might consider it a day for family time due to some traditions handed down from their forebears

However, we believe that the Lord's Day was given by the Lord for our blessing, right? And, yet it seems that in so many ways, it is just another day to some Reformed Christians and so watching TV, playing Playstation, Xbox or computer games and travelling is quite a common practice. It would seem that the Lord's Day is not quite what it used to be for the Christian.

Yet, the Scriptures continue to challenge us as to how we use the Lord's Day and why. Regardless of the practices that exist among us, the Lord still continues to call us to worship and rest and to rejoice in His great and mighty acts.

Our contributors have provided thought-provoking articles drawing on some of their own experiences for our edification. At first glance, some of the articles might appear rather long, in fact longer than usual. Please read them in their entirety and don't be put off by their length.

Mr Everett A Henes, an OPC pastor, heads up our articles by investigating peoples' responses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Mr Peter Moelker asks whether the Lord's Day is a day of rest and gladness or a sorrowful burden.

Mr John Haverland gives an overview of how the Lord's Day has gone from holy day to holiday in New Zealand.

Mr Andre Holtslag looks at the hard questions of how we should spend the Lord's Day, with some personal reflections.

Mr Paul Archbald deals with seeming differences between the continental Lord's Day and the Westminster Sabbath.

Mrs Sally Davey writes about a rare and precious quality – steadfastness.

Mr John Leenders writes personally about the communion of the saints.

Miss Rosalyn Kieft looks at a practice of some young and not-so-young people finding a more "attractive" church and offers some sound advice.

Mr Allen D. Curry reviews *Popologetics: Popular Culture In Christian Perspective*, by Ted Turnau. Mr David Harr reviews *William The Baptist: A Classic Story Of A Man's Journey To Understanding Baptism*, by James M. Chaney

CBI makes an appearance with some further news.

Mrs Harriet Haverland again gives us the news of the day in the Gleanings.

"Were it not for the grace of God there would be no such thing as a Christian."

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not to be considered the official position of the Reformed Churches of NZ unless they expound the Biblical system of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, or the Westminster Confession of Faith, or reflect the successive Acts of Synod of the Reformed Churches of NZ. On the other hand, care is taken to ensure that articles and opinions do not directly contradict the official position of the Reformed Churches as contained in the above sources without attention being called to that fact.

Responses to the Resurrection

Everett A Henes

There are plenty of issues within the church over which we can disagree. The doctrine of the Resurrection, however, is not one of those issues. The historicity of the resurrection of Jesus is essential to Christianity.

Addressing this question, J. Gresham Machen writes, "The great weapon with which the disciples of Jesus set out to conquer the world was not a mere comprehension of eternal principles; it was an historical message, an account of something that had recently happened, it was the message, 'He is risen'" (*Christianity and Liberalism*, pp. 28-29).

The historical Resurrection, Machen explains, makes all the difference. The disciples were not merely convinced that Jesus had risen in their hearts. He had actually risen from the dead and had appeared to them as proof. For that reason, they were called to be reliable witnesses to this fact (Acts 1:8).

Of course, Machen is not alone in putting such an emphasis upon the historicity of the Resurrection. The apostle Paul declares to the church at Corinth, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). It is not merely a matter of personal opinion, then, whether or not Jesus physically rose from the grave. For Christians, it is something that we confess as absolute truth.

This does not mean, however, that everyone has believed the story of the Resurrection. It is often thought that miracles were accepted in the days before science supposedly disproved such things. C. S. Lewis spoke of this as *chronological snobbery*. This is the view that previous generations were more superstitious and less intelligent than our own. However, our age is not the

first to doubt the occurrence of miracles, particularly the resurrection of Christ.

When we turn to the Bible, we find that reactions to Christ's resurrection are varied. What they all have in common is initial surprise and misunderstanding, and sometimes there was even outright doubt. This was for the simple reason that, contrary to modern sceptics, people in the first century did not believe that people rose from the dead. This sort of response to the Resurrection is seen in several instances. We can examine an example of each: surprise, misunderstanding, and doubt.

Surprise

It was early on that Resurrection Day when Mary Magdalene and other women brought spices to anoint Jesus' body. They had been there, near the cross, when he died. They had even followed those who took him to the tomb, so they would know where to go to do this (Luke 23:55). Jesus had died

on a Friday, and they could not come to anoint his body on the Sabbath, so they waited until early Sunday morning to make the journey.

As they approached the tomb, discussing who would roll the stone away so they could get in, they came upon a startling scene. There was a young man (whom they didn't know to be an angel) dressed in a white robe and sitting by the tomb. Mark tells us that the women were alarmed. Who could have done such a thing to their Lord's burial place? The angel told them not to be alarmed, because Jesus had risen. He then instructed them to go and tell the disciples about what had taken place. Mark 16:8 gives us their response: "And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Despite the Old Testament promises of the Resurrection and despite Jesus' own testimony to his disciples that he



would rise from the dead, they did not grasp at this time what had taken place. Instead, they were filled with fear and trembling. This was hardly the response of an ancient superstitious people. On the contrary, their response is understandable, given what they had expected to find at the tomb. Their surprise and fear, though, turned to joy when the Lord himself appeared to them (Matt. 28:9-10).

Misunderstanding

The picture of the disciples misunderstanding what had taken place comes from Luke 24 and the disciples on the road to Emmaus. There we learn that two disciples were walking together and talking about what had taken place in the preceding days (the trial, conviction, and death of Jesus). Without their knowing who he was, Jesus himself joined them in their walk and asked them what they were talking about and why they were

No-Excuse Sunday

"To make it possible for everyone to attend church next Sunday, cots will be placed in the foyer for those who say, 'Sunday is my only day to sleep in.' We will have steel helmets for those who say, 'The roof would fall in if I came to church!' Blankets will be furnished for those who think that church is too cold, and fans for those who say it is too hot.

We will have hearing aids for those who say, 'The priest speaks too softly,' and cotton wool for those who say he preaches too loudly. Score cards will be available for those who wish to list the hypocrites present. Some relatives will be present for those who like to go visiting on Sunday. There will be TV dinners for those who can't go to church and cook dinner also.

One section of the church will be done up with trees and grass for those who like to see God in nature. Finally the sanctuary will be decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies, for those who have never seen the church without them."

From the bulletin of St John the Baptist Church, New Haven, Indiana

so sad. Dismayed at the stranger's question, Cleopas responded, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" (v. 18).

Upon further questioning by Jesus, the disciples explained how they "had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (v. 21). But now that Jesus was dead, even though his body was missing from the tomb, they felt that hope was gone. They misunderstood so much about what needed to take place. So Jesus told them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (vv. 25-26).

In Luke's gospel, the word "necessary" is an important one that often occurs when Jesus speaks of the works that he must accomplish. It was necessary, he said as a child, for him to be in his Father's house (Luke 2:49). Later he would declare that it was necessary for him to preach the good news of the kingdom of God (4:43). Just as it was necessary in those situations, so it was also necessary for Jesus to die. The disciples misunderstood because they believed that the death of Jesus meant the end of everything he had promised. The opposite, though, was true. The death and resurrection of Jesus meant that everything God had promised, from the very beginning, would come to pass. Once their eyes were opened, Jesus vanished. They ran to tell the others, and it was there that Jesus appeared to the majority of the disciples.

Doubt

A final example of reacting to the Resurrection is found in John 20:24-29. This is the famous incident with "Doubting Thomas." The other disciples had already seen the risen Christ. They had already believed in the Resurrection. The exception to this, we learn in verse 24, was Thomas, who was also called Didymus. He had not been with them when Jesus previously appeared. They assured him that Jesus had risen from the dead, but Thomas responded, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (v. 25). Thomas, we can say, was an empiricist when it came to validating the resurrection of Jesus. The others had reported to him that they had seen the risen Lord with their own eyes. But Thomas wanted more. He wanted

to touch the wounds that Jesus sustained through the course of the crucifixion. His position could not be stronger: "Unless I see ... I will never believe."

As the meeting in that room continued, Jesus appeared and stood among them. He turned to Thomas and said, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe" (v. 27). Jesus offered him the very thing that he requested. It wasn't because Thomas had lacked the evidence; rather, it had more to do with his own unbelief.

However, Thomas's response was surprising. We would expect him to walk up to the Lord and examine all of the wounds he had sustained, to make certain it was him. After all, that's what he said he wanted. He needed to see and touch. But there, in the presence of the risen Christ, his eyes were opened in a different way. Instead, Thomas responded, "My Lord and my God!" (v. 28). He no longer doubted, but believed that Jesus had risen from the dead.

These accounts are not stories that we set aside as fables or myths, like many do. They are evidences of the Resurrection itself. But they are evidences that only work within the framework of Christianity itself. One must believe that God has created the world and that he upholds, sustains, and governs all things by his powerful word. Moreover, one must also believe that Jesus is the one sent by the Father to redeem a people for himself (Eph. 1). He is the Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8 kjv).

Our final example provides us with the Bible's own reasoning for including these accounts. John writes: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). Luke writes something similar at the beginning of his gospel (Luke 1:1-4).

The accounts that we have reviewed confront us with an absolute claim: Christ has risen from the dead. Without this reality, there is no forgiveness of sins. The question that remains is: How will we respond?

The author is pastor of Hillsdale OPC in Hillsdale, Mich. Unless otherwise indicated, he quotes the ESV. Reprinted from New Horizons, April 2012.

The Lord's Day – burden or joy? (1)

O Day of Rest and Gladness Burden and Sorrow?

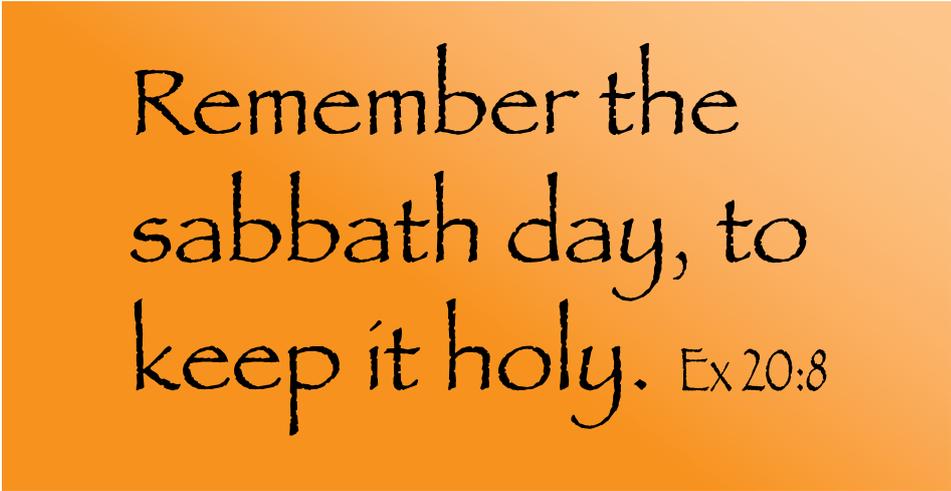
Peter Moelker

You don't actually sing it that way, I know, but it's what you often feel in your heart isn't it? It's Sunday morning. You are exhausted ... again. Children need to be dressed. Teeth need to be brushed. Hair needs to be combed. Money needs to be gathered. Peppermints (for some of us) need to be counted. Time is running out and we don't want to be late. It's that day of the week ... again. O ... joy? What is Sunday to you and to your family? Imagine for a moment that a small mp3 recorder has been secretly taped into your brain, recording your waking thoughts every Sunday morning for the past year. Would you want it to be played for your children, your parents, your elders, your pastor? Can you sing the great hymn by Christopher Wordsworth¹ and really mean it? "O day of rest and gladness, O day of joy and light, O balm of care and sadness, most beautiful, most bright." Or instead, as you argue with your wife on the way to worship, give the children one last warning before you enter the sanctuary, and secretly hope that the minister will have a shorter sermon *this* week, are you muttering under your breath something more akin to "O day of burden and sorrow, O day of boredom and duty, O opportunity for sleep I can't get tomorrow, most trying when I am so moody?"

The issue of Sabbath keeping and Lord's Day observance was before successive synodical meetings of our churches from 1961 through 1971. Originally, the request for the formation of a Sabbath observance committee in 1961 expressed a desire for a committee of Synod "to draw up a scriptural statement concerning Sabbath observance and to take up contact with the Westminster Fellowship of N.Z. and the Lutheran Church of N.Z. for the formation of a Lord's Day Observance Society of N.Z."² In the Lord's providence, this

original desire to seek co-operation with other churches toward the formation of a Lord's Day Observance Society became transformed into a discussion over several years regarding the nature of subscription to our confessional standards, a discussion which revolved particularly around the binding nature of subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith ch.XXI.7-8 regarding the Sabbath Day.³ Most interesting are the grounds given with the original request for the formation of such a committee, one of which might seem to convey an objectionable tone for a

arising out of the fact that the Opera Troupe at present performing in this place, assisted by amateurs, placarded the walls of the city with the announcement that on Sunday, July 27, there would be given in the Opera House a 'sacred' concert. All was proceeding smoothly and evenly, until Superintendent Thomson sounded the notes of warning The thanks of the whole community ... are due to Superintendent Thomson for the action he has taken in the matter, and we trust that the great mass of the people, who are interested



Remember the
sabbath day, to
keep it holy. Ex 20:8

Synod to adopt towards the members of the church! "This request comes from a desire of the Synodical Committee to draw attention to the manner in which many of our own Church members are lazily[sic] observing the Sabbath. Also that a Scriptural voice may be raised in the Sabbath-desecrating society of New Zealand."⁴ Strong words! Lazy observation of the Sabbath by church members and a Sabbath-desecrating society. And this was 1961! 52 years later, how are we doing?

Well, before we can look at the present, let's take one step further into the past. "There has been no small degree of excitement lately in this city,

in the proper observance of the day of rest, will not dance to the piping of the Opera Troupe For this is a question of the people and for the people, who, if they allow any to defraud them of this boon to man, the weekly day of rest, will bitterly regret it."⁵ This word of warning came from an Auckland minister in 1884. It was a call to reflection and a call to action. He believed something vital was at stake for the people of God and for the great mass of people. But is there a weekly day of rest mandated in Scripture? If so, is it really a "boon"⁶ to man? And will I really regret it if I am defrauded, by myself or by anybody else, of this day? The purpose of this article

is to attempt to sketch out the biblical origin, purpose, and importance of the Lord's Day⁷ for those who are interested, as the Rev. MacFarlane put it, in the proper observance of the day of rest and who themselves might wonder at the propriety of "dancing to the piping of the Opera Troupe" in whatever modern form it might take!

Grateful for the gift

In any discussion of the Lord's Day and its relationship to God's rest in Genesis 2 and to the 4th commandment in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15, besides general considerations of the unity and continuity of biblical revelation regarding the Sabbath, Mark 2:27-28 must have first importance.

“It is God's intention in creating and giving this day to mankind that should be determinative for our understanding.”

The verbal form of the word *Sabbath* in Hebrew means "to cease" or "to bring to a stop."⁸ Sabbath as a noun thus means a time of rest or cessation, it being understood from biblical revelation and particularly from the details of the 4th commandment that a cessation of the work which occupied us during the other 6 days of the week is specifically in view. But does the Sabbath pre-date the giving of the Law to the people of Israel? In Mark 2, we have the clear teaching of Jesus and a New Testament perspective on the Sabbath. "And He was saying to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Consequently, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'"⁹ Notice that this passage does not say that the Sabbath was made for the 'Israelites,' but for 'man' in general. The generic use of 'man' points to this gift of the Sabbath being given to mankind in general, not to the people of Israel in particular. The fact that God "blessed," "sanctified," and "rested" on the seventh day¹⁰ serves as the ground, motive, and example for the fourth commandment which calls us to "remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a

Sabbath of the Lord your God."¹¹ The Sabbath has its origin at creation and is therefore understood as a creation-ordinance. Much like marriage, which God intended as a blessing for all mankind as the union between one man and one woman, the day of rest was established at creation as a blessing and gift for all mankind as Jesus explains in Mark 2.

There is no question but that the Sabbath has been a blessing to mankind. That various nations and political leaders have sought to remove this gift from the people only to return to it in time is a further demonstration that this rest is a "boon" not easily removed or denied.¹² However, not all have experienced this day as a day of rest and blessing. In a study of "Sunday-law battles" in America,

Warren Johns surveys 350 years in which various battles over Lord's Day observance have been fought and discusses the legal questions that have been debated in America regarding state involvement in the enforcing of Sunday laws. His conclusion is anything but favourable. Johns reminds us for instance of the crime of a Connecticut man who was deemed guilty of "scandalously kissing" his wife on the Lord's Day and the near-arrest of a man riding his horse to worship on the Lord's Day morning. The latter close call was all the more disturbing in that the man who escaped prison on that day in 1789 would be the first president under the new Constitution of the United States.¹³

But despite any individual's personal experience of the Lord's Day, it is God's intention in creating and giving this day to mankind that should be determinative for our understanding. Arthur W. Pink sums it up well: "The more diligent and faithful we are in performing the duties of the six days, the more shall we value the rest of the seventh. It will thus be seen that the appointing of the Sabbath was not an arbitrary restriction upon man's freedom, but a merciful provision for his good: that it is designed as a day

of gladness and not of gloom. It is the Creator's gracious exempting us from our life of mundane toil one day in seven, granting us a foretaste of that future and better life for which the present is but a probation, when we may turn wholly from that which is material to that which is spiritual, and thereby be equipped for taking hold with new consecration and renewed energies upon the work of the coming days."¹⁴ We should be grateful for such a gift!

Plenty of purpose

Growing up, however, it was not my experience that I was grateful for the gift of the Lord's Day. No doubt my ingratitude was related to a lack of understanding of where the day came from (a gift from a gracious God), but it was also related to my lack of understanding of the purpose for which the day was given. Dr. Joseph Pipa writes, "when I have taught on the beauty of the Lord's day, I have been approached afterwards by a person who said that, having been raised in a home that strictly observed the Christian Sabbath, he would never submit his children to such torture. As I enquired about the practices of his home, I learned that Sunday observance consisted of morning and evening church services, family worship, and a list of things the children could not do. For these children Sunday was only a form of dreary punishment."¹⁵ Torture? Dreary punishment? Why would anyone describe the Lord's Day in that way? For myself, as a youngster, I understood the Lord's Day to be a negative day. It was a day where the most common word around our house was "no." In answer to most questions that began with "can I ... can we ..." my dad or mum's response would invariably be "no." As I think about it, though I grew up with a robust understanding of the myriad of things that I was *not* to be doing on the Lord's Day, I wasn't really sure what I *should* be doing on the Lord's Day. Has that been your experience? Is that the experience of your children? If so, let's remind ourselves of the biblical purposes of the Lord's Day which should blow through any stagnant Lord's Day experience like a fresh breeze blows through a stagnant summer day.

The Sabbath finds its origin at creation, was practised before the giving of the Law to Israel,¹⁶ and is further explained and given redemptive focus at Mount Sinai. This is seen particularly in the second reference to the Sabbath

command in Deuteronomy 5:15 where, rather than grounding the fourth commandment in creation, the people of God are specifically called to *remember their redemption*. “Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm.” For God’s people, the Sabbath is not only a day of rest or ceasing from daily work, but a day of rejoicing in the redemption of God. For the people of God in the Old Testament, this redemption still had a forward-looking aspect, even as their resting had a forward-looking aspect. In other words, the Old Testament Sabbath was a day of rest and remembrance but also a day where full rest (in Christ) and full salvation (in Christ) could not be fully experienced and enjoyed. For the people of God living post-resurrection, the day of rest and remembrance is also a day of celebration in a rest and redemption fully accomplished in Christ and yet to be fully experienced in glory (see Hebrews 4).

What then is the purpose of the Lord’s Day? For believers in Old and New Testament alike, it has always been a day to joyfully cease from our usual six-day-a-week labours *in order to* celebrate and remember the redemption of God. We confess this day to be “the festive day of rest.”¹⁷ Before the Fall, Genesis 2:2-3 tells us that God ceased from His work of creation, but He did not become idle. He was enjoying the “very good” creation He had brought into being. He was continuing His work of providence, without which all of creation would have ceased to exist (Col.1:17). Exodus 20:11 tells us that the purpose of the Sabbath, which is patterned after God’s rest at creation, is that six days will be devoted to our labour and work, but the seventh day will be holy. It is a day set apart from all the others, but it is specifically set apart *for* another purpose. Lev.23:3 explains that this day of rest is a Sabbath “to the Lord.” It is a day of “complete rest” and a “holy convocation.” It is a day of resting from our usual labour *in order that* we may assemble with God’s people to worship and praise Him.¹⁸ Deut.5:15 reminds us that such praise and worship should have at its heart the remembrance of our deliverance from slavery and bondage through the gracious working of the mighty hand of God. The purpose of this day is that our hearts and minds might be filled with delight in the ways of the Lord and, in particular, delight in the Lord

Himself.¹⁹ The Sabbath is described as a day “to the Lord”(Lev.23:3), “My holy day”(Is.58:13), and “the holy day of the Lord”(Is.58:13). It should perhaps be no surprise to us then, that in the New Testament, the specific term “of the Lord” is used in only two instances: the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor.11:20) and the Lord’s Day (Rev.1:10).²⁰ Both the Old Testament Sabbath and the New Testament Lord’s Day are holy “to the Lord.”

Over a hundred years ago, at least one Auckland minister likened the disappearance of a sense of purpose on the Lord’s Day to an attack on the Christian life, which attack was not being countered. “I much mistake the temper of Christian people, no matter how much they may differ on minor points, if they do not resent most vehemently these attempts to defraud them of their rights and liberties. When the foe menaces the citadel every man ought to be at his post, with his weapons furbished and ready for battle. And working men and women cannot remain idle spectators of the fray Sunday is a halting place in the march of life, and brings in its hand sweet rest ... and higher and more lasting blessings for those who are willing to embrace them. Well did Sir Matthew Hale say – ‘A Sabbath well spent brings a week of content, and health for the toils of the morrow; But a Sabbath profaned, whate’er may be gained, is a certain forerunner of sorrow.’”²¹

But what should I not do?

The articles by Pastors Haverland and Holtslag later in this issue will deal with specific changes to our practice of observing the Lord’s Day over the years and current areas where we need to be challenged in our thinking about how to remember and observe the Lord’s Day in a way that pleases the Lord. The recurring question for believers, however, will always be – but what should I *not* do? Or what *should* I do? First of all, that is the wrong way to think of this question. To phrase the question as a simple matter of *external* obedience is to be tempting ourselves to fall into the error of Pharisaic legalism – setting up man-made regulations which require only external conformity²² at the expense of the command of God, which demands both external *and internal* conformity. A much better question might be: “how I am enjoying rest from my labours, remembering God’s mighty acts of redemption, and rejoicing in the holiness of this day?” Or it might be good to ask yourself: “how

am I taking delight in the Lord?”²³ Or perhaps: “what would bring God pleasure on this day?”²⁴ To ask specific and careful questions about how to please the Lord on the Lord’s holy day is not to be legalistic but rather demonstrates a heart that desires to take delight in delighting the One who is delightful! As John Murray once said, “how distorted our conception of the Christian ethic and of the demands of holiness has become if we associate concern for the details of integrity with pharisaism and legalism.”²⁵ Here, two biblical principles come to mind.

The first is **the faith principle** of Romans 14. This principle comes in the context of judging one another with regard to our conscientious convictions before God in those areas where there is disagreement among brethren (may I suggest that this is a chapter of the Bible that might be highly relevant to this area of discussion?). The principle is: “whatever is not from faith is sin.”²⁶ While recognising that our conscience itself (whether weak or strong) needs to be continually formed and corrected by God’s Word and is itself not infallible, we are nevertheless commanded to “let each man be fully convinced in his own mind.” If you believe that riding a bicycle on the Lord’s Day is a violation of the 4th commandment and a sin against God, don’t do it! If you believe that the Lord has called you to worship twice on the Lord’s Day through the instrumentality and leadership of your elders, then do it! If you believe that watching television on the Lord’s Day is a sin then don’t do it! If you believe that playing and walking with your children outdoors and enjoying God’s creation is filled with spiritual blessing, then do it! Whatever you do or do not do on the Lord’s Day, *unless it is a decision based on faith and trust in the living God*, His provision for you in Christ, and His calling for you to keep His commandments as a child of the King, it is either a sin of commission or omission. The question is: have you searched the Scriptures to find out what pleases the Lord (not simply what pleases yourself) and are you observing the day in faith?

The second biblical principle is found in 1 Corinthians 4 – also, interestingly, in the context of judging one another. I am purposefully pointing out the context here in the conviction that Lord’s Day observance is one of those areas of the Christian life where we are most prone to be eagle-eyed observers respecting

the potentially sinful behaviour of others, but conveniently blind-as-bats regarding the state of our own hearts before God. We could call this principle **the humility principle**. 1 Corinthians 4:4-6 says, "For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other." The point here is that it is possible for all of us, both when it comes to judging our own behaviour, but especially in judging the behaviour of others, to "exceed what is written."²⁷

After all, exceeding what is written, going beyond what the Scripture actually says, is natural to the sinful human heart. It was natural for Satan in the Garden to "exceed" what God had actually said. It was natural for the Pharisees to "exceed" what was written in the Law and add their own stipulations which were clung to more tightly than the actual commands of God (see Mark 7:6-8). The humility principle means that we should cling

tenaciously to the clear commandments of God and hold our applications of those principles more loosely, recognising that those applications might need to change, could be better, and are still plagued by our limited understanding, a weak or misinformed conscience, etc.. But this principle calls for especially great humility in any consideration of the actions/behaviour of others on the Lord's Day. Perhaps we could ask difficult and challenging questions like – what has God actually commanded for this day, and what have I added to that command? Do my children understand that what we do on the Lord's Day is rooted in the clear teaching of Scripture? Could I show them the principle? Have I done so?

Those who are in bondage to man-made regulations regarding the Lord's Day are in danger of falling into the error of those who rebuked a man for carrying his mattress home after being healed by Jesus, despite the fact that Jesus Himself had commanded him to do so (John 5:8-10)! Those who become fixated on their man-made "traditions" are always in danger of being blind to their own disobedience to God's commands – love for God and love for neighbour out of gratitude and thankfulness for such a great salvation. J. Douma, in his helpful work, *The Ten Commandments*, comments on this incident in John 5: "Those Pharisees who forbade

that activity were destroying the festivity of the Sabbath. Their attitude robbed the Sabbath of its characteristic gratitude for liberation. Gratitude had to make way for precisionist obedience, freedom was replaced with new bondage, and relaxation was ruined by a perpetually plagued conscience."²⁸

Does it really matter?

Is the Sabbath really that important? Does it make any difference if we keep the fourth commandment? Does rejoicing in God-given rest and God-wrought redemption have any impact on our lives? If we look around us, it doesn't seem that mankind in general is all that concerned with rest, but all we need to do is look a little under the surface (or surf through the internet!) to see what is really happening. Hear the message of Workaholics Anonymous which proclaims on its website that they are "a fellowship of individuals who share their experience, strength, and hope with each other that they may solve their common problems and help others to recover from workaholism. The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop working compulsively W.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stop working compulsively and to carry the message of recovery to workaholics who still suffer."²⁹ People in our world do work compulsively and are looking for hope. Is there no rest?

On 22 September, 2011, the question of the Lord's Day and the stuff of real life made the headline on BBC Sports online: "Rugby World Cup 2011: Devout Euan Murray questions Sunday matches."³⁰ The article went on to summarise what was at stake: "Devout Christian Euan Murray has questioned the need for Rugby World Cup matches to be played on Sundays. The Glasgow-born prop, 31, has chosen to prioritise his faith this weekend, meaning he will miss Scotland's Pool B clash with Argentina on Sunday. 'I don't see why there have to be games on Sundays,' said Murray. 'I hope things will change in future' Back in 2008, Murray did play on a Sunday when Scotland took on France in the Six Nations. But, after his faith deepened, he announced a year later that he would no longer be available for selection on Sundays. At the time he said: 'It's basically all or



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nothing, following Jesus. I don't believe in pick 'n' mix Christianity. I believe the Bible is the word of God, so who am I to ignore something from it? I might as well tear out that page then keep tearing out pages as and when it suits me. If I started out like that there would soon be nothing left. I want to live my life believing and doing the things God wants and the Sabbath day is a full day."³¹ Euan Murray testifies, as his fellow Scottish rugby player Eric Liddell testified as a runner in the 1924 Olympics, that following Jesus and "believing and doing the things God wants" is more important, more blessed, and more delightful than anything else. Redemption makes a difference!

Instead of gaining materially on the Lord's Day, we should be seeking to gain spiritually. As Wordsworth expressed it, "new graces ever gaining from this our day of rest." Or better yet, the apostle Peter encourages us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."³² What are the "graces" that we gain from this day of rest? How important is it? Marva Dawn has reflected on the nature of Sabbath-keeping and how it holds out to God's people an abundance of spiritual blessing. Perhaps it would be fitting to close this article with her reminder that "all the great motifs of our Christian faith are underscored in our Sabbath-keeping. Its Ceasing deepens our repentance for the many ways that we fail to trust God and try to create our own future. Its Resting strengthens our faith in the totality of his grace. Its Embracing invites us to take the truths of our faith and apply them practically in our values and lifestyles. Its Feasting heightens our sense of eschatological hope – the Joy of our present experience of God's love and its foretaste of the Joy to come."³³ And so, may we rejoice in God's gracious gift of rest, fulfil the purpose of finding pleasure in pleasing the Lord on this day, keep the day holy in faith and humility, and experience the blessing of calling the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's Holy Day honourable.

Notes

- 1 Christopher Wordsworth was a Church of England minister at Stafford-in-the-Vale in Berkshire from 1850 to 1869. *O Day of Rest and Gladness* was published in 1862 and is Hymn # 321 in the Blue Psalter Hymnal.
- 2 Report 4, *Acts of Synod 1971 of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand*, section 4, p.9.
- 3 This discussion eventually produced our current *Guidelines to the Form of Subscription*, appended to the Form of Subscription in 1977 but included

- in Report 4, Acts of Synod 1971.
- 4 *ibid.*, Section 4, p.9.
- 5 Rev. S. MacFarlane, *New Zealand Herald*, Volume XXI, Issue 7086, 2 August 1884, Page 4.
- 6 Lest I be accused of an unexplained archaism, *boon* means something extremely useful, helpful, or beneficial.
- 7 I will use the titles *the Lord's Day, Christian Sabbath, Sabbath*, and *Sunday* interchangeably in this article. In all instances, what is being referred to is the Lord's appointed day of rest and celebration, whether that be the seventh day of the week in the Old Testament or the first day of the week in the New Testament.
- 8 Ernst Jenni & Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), p.1297.
- 9 All Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, AMG Publishers, 1990.
- 10 Genesis 2:3
- 11 Exodus 20:8-10
- 12 Simon Kistemaker, in an article entitled *The History of the Lord's Day*, refers to two such instances in history: France under Napoleon, which attempted a day of rest "every tenth day" and communist Russia under Stalin. See the helpful collection of articles in *The Sabbath-Sunday Problem: A Symposium*, G. Van Groningen, ed., Hilltop Press, Geelong, Vic., Australia, 1968. The above reference is on p.74.
- 13 George Washington was the offending rider in question. The book is *Dateline Sunday, U.S.A.* (Warren L. Johns, Pacific Press, 1967).
- 14 Arthur W. Pink, *The Ten Commandments* (Reiner Publications, Swengel, PA, 1974), pg.29.
- 15 Joseph A. Pipa, *The Lord's Day* (Christian Focus, 2001), p. 184. Chapter 12 of this book, "Making It a Delight" is particularly helpful for those struggling in this area. Often, such views of the Sabbath are thought to be rooted in the teaching of the Puritans of the 16th and 17th centuries. For a helpful correction to such a view and a good summary of the Puritan view of the Sabbath, see James T. Dennison, Jr., *The Market Day of the Soul* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), where Dennison writes, "for the Puritan mind and heart, the Sabbath was first and foremost a theological, exegetical, and hermeneutical matter. At no other time in the history of the church has the Sabbath received so thorough an examination than under the prayerful hands (and pens) of the English Puritans" (p. vii). Perhaps our caricatured view of the Puritans is more attributable to our anti-theological cultural setting rather than to biblical conviction.
- 16 Exodus 16:22-24
- 17 Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 38, Q&A 103.
- 18 See Psalm 92 for instance, a *Song for the Sabbath day*.
- 19 Isaiah 58:13-14. Notice in this passage the contrast between the repeated use of the phrase "your own" as opposed to the call to delight ourselves in someone else, namely, the Lord! This is also the emphasis of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 21.8 which contrasts resting from our "own works, words, and thoughts" and being "taken up" in "His worship."
- 20 Though we do not have space here to discuss the issue of the change from the seventh day to the first day of the week as the day of rest for God's people, which was inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Christ, several things should be noted here: 1) Whereas the Old Testament Sabbath was a day to celebrate the rest and redemption which was yet to come in its fullness and therefore was a rest to which the week of labour looked forward, the New Testament Lord's Day is a day to celebrate the rest and redemption which has been accomplished in Christ and therefore is a rest from the which the week of labour which follows. 2) The biblical evidence for the change of the day of rest is as follows: A) The fourth commandment does not state that the Sabbath is to be the seventh day of the week,

but simply, *the seventh day*. Similarly, Numbers 19:12 refers to the "third day" and the "seventh day," not of the week, but of the time period of uncleanness. Likewise, Jesus was raised on "the third day," but no one argues that this means Jesus rose on Tuesday! The pattern established in the commandment is six days of work and one day of rest. B) This pattern of 1 in 7 is the biblical principle which was applied differently in the Old Testament as the seventh day of the week and in the New Testament as the first day of the week (John 20:19, Acts 20:7). C) In Christ's post-resurrection interaction with Thomas, it is clear that Jesus Himself appeared to the disciples on the first day of the week and then purposefully re-appeared to the disciples on the following first day of the week even though He could have appeared to Thomas earlier, therefore highlighting the special significance of the first day. D) Passages such as Romans 14:5, Galatians 4:9-10, and Colossians 2:16-17 are not condemning the observance of the Sabbath provision itself, but rather the Pharaisaical observance and misinterpretation of the Sabbath. Likewise, the Lord condemns *heartless* and *faithless* sacrifices, assemblies, and sabbaths in the Old Testament (Isaiah 1:13-14, Amos 5:21), but no one would suggest that the proper keeping of the Sabbath, proper sacrifices, and proper assemblies were done away with! E) The "Lord's Day" of Rev. 1:10 is a clear indication that before the Canon was closed, there was already a consciousness within the New Testament church that there was a particular day of the week which, like the Old Testament Sabbath, was "holy" to the Lord. This day of the week was the day of Christ's resurrection. See also Westminster Confession of Faith 21.7 where we confess that God's appointed Sabbath "from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath."

- 21 See MacFarlane above. p.4.
- 22 See for instance Matthew 23:25
- 23 Isaiah 58:14
- 24 Ephesians 5:10
- 25 John Murray, as quoted by G.I. Williamson in *The Sabbath-Sunday Problem*, see above, p.111.
- 26 Romans 14:23
- 27 For a helpful book on this matter which provides some potentially provocative areas where further Christian thinking is required, see the book by Dave Swavelly, *Who Are You to Judge?* (Presbyterian and Reformed), 2005.
- 28 J. Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, translated 1996 by Nelson Kloosterman (Presbyterian and Reformed), pp.118-119.
- 29 <http://www.workaholics-anonymous.org/page.php?page=home>
- 30 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/rugby-union/15016776>
- 31 What did Euan Murray do instead of play World Cup Rugby on the Lord's Day? He found a local church family to worship with, encouraged boys in the congregation who asked for his autograph by giving his signature as well as a note to memorise Psalm 1, and spent the day in fellowship at the home of the pastor. What church you ask? The Reformed Church of Wainuiomata.
- 32 2 Peter 3:18
- 33 Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly*, Eerdmans, 1989, pg.203.

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The Lord's Day – burden or joy? (2)

From Holy Day to holiday

John A Haverland

New Zealand has never been a thoroughly Christian country, certainly not in the sense that the majority of New Zealanders were committed Christians. Historical records show that regular church attendance has never exceeded 30% of the population, and we can assume that this percentage, even in its peak years, included those who were believers, unbelievers, nominal Christians and hypocrites. Having said this, for a long time New Zealanders had enough Christian memory to regard the Sunday as a holy day, a day set apart for church services,

or at least as a family day. This is no longer the case. The attitude of most New Zealanders to the Sunday has changed from regarding it as a holy day to using it as a holiday.

How the Sunday has changed

This dramatic change has taken place in my lifetime. In 1956, the year before I was born, Dudley Wills, a noted figure in physical education, described the New Zealand Sunday as a “monument to utter boredom”. Someone else said that on a Sunday you could fire a rifle up Queen Street in Central Auckland with perfect safety because there was

no one there to hit – shops, restaurants and picture theatres were all closed.¹ As a young boy in the 1960s I remember that all the shops in the city centre of Christchurch were closed for business; you could go window shopping but you could not buy anything. (Large shopping malls did not exist back then – hard to believe, but true – but if they did they too would not have been trading.) If a member of our family became ill on a Sunday and had to see a doctor there was only one pharmacy open in the central city to present and collect your prescription. Similarly, if you were getting low on petrol there were only a few stations open in the city. We drove past one the way to church and I remember seeing the taxis refuelling there.

Since those quiet (boring!?) Sundays secularists have been doing their very best to make the first day of the week just like every other day. How successful have they been?

In 1952, despite some protests, the Barbarians Rugby Club played an Auckland club's fifteen at Waikaraka Park on a Sunday in July.² Now, 60 years on, depending on the season, sports of all kinds are played at all levels on Sundays in sports grounds and parks all through the country. Motorcars race on Sundays; we can hear them on the Pukekohe racetrack, especially when the V-8 Supercar competition is held, and that runs for the entire weekend. Competitions for rugby, football, tennis, cricket and golf, to name but a few, are all held on Sundays. This means that young people in our churches often have to drop out of the top levels of competitive sports.

Saturday trading for shops became established in the 1980s. Between 1980 and 1987 exemptions were granted to 2700 small businesses allowing them to open on Sunday and those with shops in tourist centres were permitted to trade seven days of the week.³ In the late 80s there were moves to open up Sunday trading to more retailers. On my desk I have a letter I wrote in March 1988, on behalf of the Reformed Presbyterian

“Unbelievers have no respect for the Sunday as a day of rest and worship and these aspects of Sunday observance are also declining amongst Christians!”



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Church of Bucklands Beach, to Maurice Williamson, the Member of Parliament for Pakuranga at the time. The letter outlined our objections to Sunday trading with our biblical, historical and social reasons. Sadly, we also lost this battle.

The movie theatres also do well on the first day of the week. For more than a year now Pukekohe has had its own cinema. Getting it was quite a process; a group of business people and developers worked at it for some time. At the end of 2010 there was a hearing before an independent commissioner; 249 people entered submissions in favour of the cinema and 64 people put in submissions against it. The commissioner gave approval for the cinema and also for Sunday trading. Some of those opposed to the cinema objected on the basis that Sunday was a day of rest, "but the hearing commissioner found no evidence to show that Sunday carried any specific significance."⁴

This is where we are in New Zealand at the present time with respect to the Sunday; for most people it has *no specific significance*, it is not a special day, and certainly not a holy day. For many people Sunday has become the main day for sports and/or for shopping. For many retailers this is their busiest day. Christian commentators have rightly pointed out that the shopping malls are the cathedrals of the post-modern age; these are the places people go to worship the god of materialism!

How Sunday worship has changed

We have considered how the Sunday has changed for non-Christians; it has become a day for sport, recreation, gardening and shopping. However, the *Christian* observance of the Lord's Day has also changed.

Travel on Sunday

You may have heard it said that *when it rains in the world it drips in the church*. This is a great danger with regard to our use of the Lord's Day; we are inclined to adopt the attitudes of the world. Unbelievers have no respect for the Sunday as a day of rest and worship and these aspects of Sunday observance are also declining amongst Christians. Andre Holt-slag makes some pertinent applications about this in his article, but I can't resist reinforcing one point he makes. Some years ago I remember reading an article in *Trowel and Sword* with the title, *See you at the airport on Sunday*. We could well reprint that article today. Travel by

plane – both domestic and international – on the Sunday, is becoming more and more common among us. I ask you, as readers; Is this a good use of the Lord's Day? Is this how God wants us to occupy our time on this holy day? Does this allow us to gather with God's people to worship him with a mind that is focused and undistracted by the activities of the rest of the week?

Worship on Sunday

Attitudes to worship have also changed. Fifty years ago most denominations had two services on the Lord's Day, one in the morning and one in the evening. It was expected that all church members who were physically capable of doing

choice for morning services but it is rare to find a church that has a second service. Presumably the attendance at a second service would be so small that it would not be viable or edifying.

In the cities of New Zealand most churches have more than one service on the Sunday. A typical Sunday programme would be: 9.30 am Traditional Service; 11 am Family Worship; 7pm Youth Service. The Traditional Service will be just that – traditional and conservative, singing hymns and attended mainly by elderly people. The Family Worship service will have the same sermon as the early service but the format of the service will be more contemporary, with modern songs led by a band, and at-

"I love the church that Jesus bought
And know that it is right;
I go there Sunday morning,
But not on Sunday night.

I love to sing the songs of God,
Such worship must be right;
This I do on Sunday morn,
But not on Sunday night.

I love to hear the gospel too,
It gives me pure delight;
To hear it Sunday morning,
But not on Sunday night.

God bless our forward-moving church,
And give it power and might;
And let it march on Sunday morning,
But not on Sunday night."

Author Unknown

so, and who were not providentially hindered, would attend both of these. This is still the expectation in our own denomination, although most of our churches have moved the evening service to the late afternoon to allow the whole family to attend. Regular attendance at both services is not the expectation in most of the other denominations. Allow me to explain some of the variations on this theme.

When my wife and I are on holiday in or near some of the small towns of our country we look around the town on Saturday to see where we will worship the next day. There is usually some

tended by families with younger children. The Youth Service will be loud and lively and attended only by young people. The expectation is that each member will attend only one of these services.

There are at least two problems with this programme. One is that it divides the church along generational lines with the elderly, families and youth all attending separate services. The members of the church are no longer worshipping as the covenant community of God's people across all ages, from infants to the oldest member. This is a great loss for all members. Contrast this segregated worship with the covenant renewal

of God with his people at Mount Ebal where Joshua read all the words of the law; "There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the aliens who lived among them."⁵

The other problem with this programme of worship is that it provides only one opportunity for members to worship the Lord. In the Old Testament temple there was a morning and evening sacrifice. What a fitting way to begin and end the day. That is surely true of our worship of God on the Lord's Day. God has given us one day in seven to rest from our usual work so that we may worship him. Surely this requires that we devote more than just one hour in a morning service? Attending both services helps frame the day and helps us maintain our focus on God's word and worship throughout the day.

Worship on Saturday!

Some years ago I had the privilege of spending one month studying at Westminster Theological Seminary in Escon-

dido, California. As you know, California has a warm climate with lots of sunshine. The residents of this state enjoy their outdoor recreation and water sports. A number of churches held services on Saturday evening so that the worship service did not impinge on their leisure activities on the Sunday; instead church members could spend the entire Sunday enjoying the sunny Californian weather. Another church only has a Thursday night service so that those who crave uninterrupted recreation can have the entire weekend free without having to be inconvenienced by attending services on Saturday or Sunday! One writer described this as the "McSabbath ...worship services that are quick, easy, convenient, and user friendly. No muss, no fuss. Little or no sacrifice required." The writer asked; "Am I Lord of the Sabbath and therefore free to do whatever I please or is the Son of Man? Is it my day or his?"⁶ All this recalls the rebuke of the Lord through Isaiah the prophet to the people of Judah when he described them as "breaking the Sabbath" and "doing as you please on my holy day"

and "going your own way".⁷

The purpose of my article is descriptive rather than prescriptive; I was asked to describe how we have reached the current situation with respect to the Lord's Day in New Zealand. To do so I have reviewed the changing attitudes of both unbelievers and believers to the Sunday as a day of rest and worship, all of which ought to give us great cause for concern. In the next article the Rev. Andre Holtslag examines the biblical teaching on the Lord's Day and develops many helpful applications. Please keep reading!

1 The vanishing New Zealand Sabbath, NZ Herald, Weekend Magazine, Saturday June 6, 1987, page 1

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Franklin County News, 2 Nov 2010, p. 1

5 Joshua 8:35

6 Welcome to McSabbath. (I think the article was written by Charles Colson)

7 Isaiah 58:13f

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The Lord's Day – burden or joy? (3)

Jesus – Lord of the Sabbath

Andre Holtslag

The date was October 23, 2011. The event was the World Cup final. The time was approximately 10:20 at night. The moment was the full-time whistle that signalled the All-Blacks had won. The day was Sunday – The Lord's Day. Were you watching? On the Lord's Day!??

"Oh, come on!" you say, "It was my duty as a Kiwi! Everyone was watching! I didn't miss church to watch! What's wrong with that?"

Now, some of you already have an opinion about questions like this one. Some will be hoping that this article rules such behaviour out completely, as not in keeping with true godliness. Others will be cringing and hoping that 'Christian liberty' wins the day. Our in-

attention with this article, however, is to consider some relevant biblical principles to help us deal with matters of Lord's Day observance like work, sports, shopping, travel, entertainment and leisure.

And hopefully, as we go, we will avoid the polar extremes that often afflict such discussions:

1. The first extreme is that of antinomianism (being against the law). It is the view that describes things like Lord's Day observance as not relevant for the NT believer because it is part of OT law. But here is the problem with that view: It is a truth universally accepted (or ought to be, at least) that we do not drift toward holiness. Our natural inclination is toward spiritual laziness. So we need to guard against the attitude that flavoured the days of the Judges: "Every man did what

was right in his own eyes." The idea that we are NT Christians whose only use for the OT is as a good source of cute Bible stories (like Daniel in the Lion's Den and Noah's Rainbow) will not do. If all we can say in relation to this matter is that 'we are not under law but under grace,' then we deserve to have our mouths smacked by the Apostle Paul because we have completely misunderstood what he said (Romans 6:11-14). And in addition, Jesus' Sabbath words/activity and a chapter like Hebrews 4 make it clear that the matter of Lord's Day observance is equally a NT 'thing.'

2. The other polar extreme, however, is that of legalism. For it is also true that if you scratch below the skin of a Christian, you will find a Pharisee bursting to get out. We just love rules

and regulations, oftentimes as a corrective for spiritual laziness. We find rules comforting for ourselves and vital for others. For then we have boxes that can be ticked and that warm sense of having kept God happy. But each of us should know that Jesus reserved His strongest words for this type of pharisaical godliness (Matthew 12 & 23).

And in this connection, it may be helpful at this point for us to consider some of the Pharisaical regulations that existed in relation to the Sabbath. For they show where such a discussion has often led in the past. The Talmud, which is a kind of Jewish commentary on the Law, has 24 chapters of Sabbath laws.

- From Acts 1:12, for instance, we learn that there was a prescribed distance for what was a permissible Sabbath Day's walk. It was equal to 2.7km. However, if on the day before the Sabbath, you placed a meal at the 2.7km mark, when you arrived there on the Sabbath, the meal made it part of your home, thus allowing you to travel a further 2.7km. Alternatively, you could place a strip of wood or wire between two walls of a narrow alley. This created a doorway; an extension of your home, and allowed a further 2.7km walk.
- If you threw something in the air with the left hand and caught it with the right hand, that was illegal work. Catch it with your right, however, and that was fine.
- You could not take a bath on the Sabbath, lest some of the water spill over the edge of the bath. For that water splash would then be a form of washing the floor – hence, illegal.
- It was also dangerous to move a chair, because if the legs made grooves in the dirt, that was a form of ploughing = work = illegal.
- In fact, the Pharisees had a list of thirty-nine occupations that were inappropriate for the Torah-observant Jew because of the Sabbath. And each of these thirty-nine had multiple sub-divisions.

It's not surprising, then, that Jesus had a number of run-ins with the Pharisees over Sabbath observance. Indeed, these types of 'rules' were what led Jesus to say what are undoubtedly His best-known words on the subject, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is

Lord even of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28)." Now, note carefully, Jesus was *not in favour* of Sabbath-breaking. In fact, never before has there been one who kept the Sabbath as carefully and fully as He did. What Jesus objected to was the man-made fences that the Pharisees put up to aid believers in regard to this commandment. Very simplistically, and by way of illustration, if a command forbade drunkenness, their 'rule' was no alcohol, at all, in order to prevent even the possibility of drunkenness. And the result was that people spent their energy on and were focused on not God's commands but the man-made rules. Thus, this practice taught believers that the law was unclear and that people like

of the law, and the fulfiller of the law, I will not let you Pharisees hide its gospel purpose!

How sad it is then that many have seized on these words of Jesus in order to do away with any concept of a Sabbath day for the NT believer. For Jesus' purpose here is precisely the opposite. As the Prince of Rest; the One who came to secure eternal rest for God's people, with these words He re-establishes the principle of spiritual rest. Mixing Mark 2 with Matthew 11:28-29, we could say that Jesus has come to those who must work hard for six days and who struggle with the burden of sin's guilt, to give us rest. And His gift to us is one special day a week where we

“Everything we do on the Lord's Day needs to be examined in the light of these purposes. How do our actions and activities promote the purposes of this Day?”

the Pharisees were needed to help them keep the law.

As a result of this, the Pharisees had turned the Sabbath Day into a burden and yoke. The day was a tyranny that oppressed the believer with man-made restrictions. So Jesus rebuked the Pharisees with an astonishingly clear point – man was made first, then the Sabbath. The Sabbath was instituted to be a blessing for man. Remember, Adam was created on the sixth day, and the very next day was the Sabbath. God did not have Adam work for a week so that he could earn his rest. No, God created Adam and gave him a rest *straightaway*. Even before he began his work, Adam was given a day to join in God's rest; a day "to keep him healthy, to make him helpful, hence happy, to render him holy, so that he might calmly meditate on the works of his Maker, might 'delight himself in Jehovah' (Isaiah 58:13,14)."¹ This is the God of *grace* that we serve!

And the Lord of Grace, King Jesus, comes to reclaim this gracious gift to God's people. This law is mine, He says. And as the giver of the law, the keeper

can delight in that rest! As the Lord of the Sabbath, therefore, He tears down the fences that the Pharisees, and many since them, erect around it.

Well, before we seek further application from these magnificent words of our Saviour, let's briefly delve into an Old Testament passage that reveals these same truths. Twice, in Isaiah 56, God says that the man who keeps Sabbath is blessed. The first of these times, He speaks to the Jews. But the second time, His words are addressed to Gentiles. And the context reveals that the time of Pentecost is ultimately in view. Indeed, the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 is cited as an explicit fulfilment of this passage. There is already much in these verses that demonstrates that there is no Old Testament 'time limit' placed on the notion of Sabbath keeping/blessing. But at the end of Ch. 58, and to a people currently living in rebellion to God's covenant, we read these words of gracious command, "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honourable, and if you

honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob." The mouth of the LORD has spoken (Isaiah 58:13-14)." And these words very beautifully convey what Jesus reminded the people of in Mark 7. The Sabbath is not intended to bind and weigh down and inconvenience. The purpose of the Sabbath is to help us find "joy in the Lord." But note also what brings this joy – not going *our* own way and not doing as we please.

So, back to Mark 2. And you may



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remember here that the Pharisees have chewed Jesus' ear over letting His disciples pick heads of grain on the Sabbath. Obviously, this contravened Talmud 23.486 section (a) – Article 71.d – sub clause xxxiv!! The Command? Do not work on the Sabbath. Application in relation to grain? Harvesting a field on the Sabbath is unnecessary work. The Talmud rule? Picking a few heads of grain is really just a simple form of harvesting – hence, illegal. Jesus responds, though, by recalling a story from the life of David. According to the law, the temple bread was for the exclusive use of the priests. However, because of hunger, David entered the temple and took some of the bread for himself and his men and ate. And in the space of around two dozen words Jesus makes a number of basic and vital Sabbath/Lord's Day principles here. He equates Himself with David

as the Lord's anointed one. And since David could 'violate' a ceremonial law, because he was, as the Lord's anointed, on the Lord's business, Jesus' is saying, in effect, *how much more* can I, as THE Lord's Anointed, 'violate' one of your man-made rules when on the Lord's business? **The first principle Jesus teaches in these words then is that on the Lord's Day we may do those things that strengthen us for the Lord's work.** And from the parallel passage in Matthew 12, Jesus also points to the priests and their Sabbath work in the temple. All agreed that it was legitimate for priests to work on the Sabbath. Well, Jesus is the greater temple. And He and

His disciples are busy with the work of preaching and teaching. **The second principle then is that the work of worship and evangelism and preaching is appropriate Lord's Day work.**²

Tying all of this together then, we still worship a God of 10 Commandments. He hasn't lopped one off! And as with all of His commandments, they exist for His glory and for our good. The Lord's Day is God's gracious gift to man whereby we cease from our ordinary work and recreation so that we might instead focus on and delight in and be refreshed by the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and look ahead to the perfect rest that He has secured for us. We thus devote ourselves to public worship and private worship, to Christian fellowship, and to deeds of kindness.

Hence, everything we do on the Lord's Day needs to be examined in

the light of these purposes. How do our actions and activities promote the purposes of this Day?

What would I like to do? What feels restful? What is fun? Surely, so long as I don't miss the worship services it is OK to do or to join in with? If they do it, why can't I? All these are the wrong questions. God knows what I need. He wants me to find my rest in His salvation. He has given me a special day to immerse myself in Him and His kingdom in a way that I cannot on the other six days. So how do my actions and activities promote the purposes of this day?

Well, here are some obvious applications:

- A preacher will have to work on the Lord's Day – His activity promotes the purposes of the Day.
- It is the same with Sunday School teachers and whoever opens the church building or puts the numbers on the hymn-board or accompanies us or serves coffee after the service and does the dishes. Their works of service promote Lord's Day activity.
- Evangelistic work – in keeping with the Lord's Day.
- Essential services like the supply and maintenance of electricity and water require some to work on the Lord's Day. Their work is necessary. But they also promote the purposes of this day by keeping the church well lit and power supplied to the organ, sound system, and heat/air system, and toilets and taps operational. After all, how could a preacher cope without a glass of water? And the electrical fault or burst pipe in the church generally cannot wait until Monday to be fixed. Thus, electricians and plumbers, etc, who respond to emergencies like these are also promoting the purposes of this day.

Jesus also taught us (Matthew 12:9-14) that works of necessity and mercy are entirely in keeping with the Lord's Day. Those things that preserve life and/or promote the wellbeing of neighbour are appropriate and also permissible on the Lord's Day:

- And so, because fires need to be put out immediately, accident victims can't be left until Monday to be picked up and patched up, illness doesn't take a day off, acute dental pain comes when it comes, armies don't and criminals don't rest on the Sabbath or look after themselves in prison, emergency services and defence force activity is

necessary work on the Lord's Day.

- Animals on the farm need feeding and have not yet learned to avoid getting distressed on the Lord's Day. Thus, the farmer's work (while able to be minimised) cannot cease on the Lord's Day.
- Delivering a care package to an elderly church member or neighbour, and replacing the broken lightbulb in their living room while you are there; work like this is in keeping with the purposes of the Lord's Day.

And yet, even within the area of necessity, there is flexibility. As a doctor, for instance, I could perform surgery all day and every day, and the surgery would be beneficial. However, limiting surgery on the Lord's Day to life-saving or emergency-only surgery promotes the ability of the doctor and the medical staff and the patients to be engaged in Lord's Day activity.

But what about the question that we began this article with – watching the World Cup final on Sunday? What about the Sunday afternoon nap or a dip in a swimming pool or a kick around with the guys? What about those other areas that often distinguish us from other believers: Sunday travel, sports, shopping, eating out, and entertainment? And while all of those principles stated above might be fine in a simple farming community of 2000 years ago, what about today and our high-tech, 24/7, industrial complex?

Well, let's start with the nap/dip/kick-around question. Why are you taking a nap or dip, or having a kick-around in the park? Is it because you can't be bothered reading a Christian book, for example, or visiting some elderly folk at the local rest-home? Is it just because you enjoy it? Or, is it in order to be refreshed and alert for the purposes of the Day? And also, what *proportion* of the Lord's Day will that activity take? Is that what you do every Sunday or are you equally zealous to devote regular time to works of kindness? And one last question here: Will it mean your kids have to occupy themselves? I know some folk whose memories of Sundays were of Dad sleeping and them having to be quiet. And these were not fond memories that filled them with a love for the Lord's Day.

And what about sports, shopping, coffee at a café, and entertainment? Well, God has given us 86% of each week in which to pursue and enjoy our work and play. But He requires us to cease from

those things for 14% of the week. He wants us to cease doing what we *have* to do and what *we* please, in order to delight in the rest that He has earned for us by the work of His Son, Jesus. And He wants us to avoid doing things that require others to violate His Day. And while each of the activities listed above might be appropriate for Mon-Sat, they either do not suit the character or the purposes of the Lord's Day or they require others to violate the Day. And this is not God's *burden* for believers but God's *gracious gift* to believers

"But I ran out of milk and there are visitors coming over. I need milk," you say. Do you? Really? You were careless. You didn't check to see if you had enough milk on Saturday. That's true. But do you *need* milk? Is getting milk necessary for the purposes of the Lord's Day? The coffee might be darker than it would have otherwise been, or it may be just water and Fanta with your guests, but the absence of milk will not keep you from engaging in the purposes of the Lord's Day.

And then there's travel on Sunday:

- \$39 Grab-a-seat fare on Sunday evening, \$89 on Monday morning. Aren't I supposed to be a good steward of my money?
- 7am appointment on Monday morning. If I leave on Saturday evening I will have to stay at a hotel or at someone's place and I will not be with my family on the Lord's Day.
- If I travel home on Sunday afternoon, I can still go to church in the morning and I won't have to use any annual leave.
- But here we deal with competing 'delights.'
- Objection 1 – my money is my delight.
- Objection 2 – my convenience is my delight.
- Objection 3 – my annual leave is my delight.

God's response? "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD's holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD."

And let us consider this quote from Dr. Joseph Pipa's book, *The Lord's Day*, in connection with the necessity, or not,

of working in a factory that runs 24/7. His encouragement is that we answer questions like this from relevant biblical principles and narratives.

One principle is that when by nature an activity cannot be ceased without affecting the work and livelihood of the other six days, it may continue [And he derives this principle from the fact that Israel's kings had fleets of ships, which could not be left to sail themselves or clean themselves on the Lord's Day]. In applying the principle we need to ask, 'Is the work necessary for the good or well-being of our neighbour and the continuance of his or our lawful calling?' Thus, the operation of a factory that cannot be shutdown without affecting its work for the remainder of the week is a deed of necessity, falling into the same category as an electrical generating plant, a hospital [boiler] room, or a [university] cafeteria. By employee rotation, no-one should have to work every Sunday and each ought to be able to attend morning or evening worship on the Lord's Day.

Finally then, confession time. On October 23rd, last year, I watched the World Cup final. I enjoyed it, immensely. I felt like I had fulfilled my Lord's Day obligations. After all, kick off was late in the evening. But at that moment, I have to acknowledge that I was little different than the Israelites in that 'I did what was right in my own eyes'; I did as the 'Canaanites' around me did. But the God who sent His Son to earth to die for our sins deserves better. He has chosen us "to be holy and blameless (Eph 1:4)." He wants what we do on that Day to be in keeping with the purpose of that Day. He calls us to cease from *our* things and to 'practise' for the worship-work of eternity. He wants us to know the *blessing* of observing the Day of Christ's resurrection.

The Lord of the Sabbath has secured our salvation and given us the Lord's Day. May He help us to receive His gift and to know its joy as we rest in Him.

Notes

- 1 Hendriksen – NT commentary on Mark – p. 108
- 2 I acknowledge Dr. Joseph Pipa's material in his book, *The Lord's Day*, especially in relation to the comments on Mark 2. I have, in effect, summarised his explanation here.

Mr Andre Holtslag is the minister of the Reformed Church of Dovedale.

The Lord's Day – burden or joy? (4)

Continental Lord's Day versus Westminster Sabbath

Paul Archbald

The application of the fourth commandment has been hotly debated for many centuries. Today, there is still a tension between the "Continental" view of the Lord's Day and the "Sabbatarian" view. The Continental view is along the lines that we order our affairs as we do on the Lord's Day so as to engage in worship – since the church has chosen in her freedom (in God's providence) to worship on the Lord's Day. The Sabbatarian view sees a stronger connection between the fourth commandment, as a day of rest – a "Christian Sabbath" – and the Lord's Day. The Continental view emphasises that every day is equally holy, while the Sabbatarian view insists that God has appointed as a perpetual, moral commandment, one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy to Him. Supporters of the Continental view often cite the Heidelberg Catechism to back their position, while Sabbatarians appeal to the Westminster Standards. Thus the "Three Forms of Unity" and the Westminster Standards are set in opposition by many.

No opposition

Are these respective confessions really offering opposing views of the fourth commandment? In my opinion, they are not essentially opposed – though there are certainly differences. Perhaps the key similarity is that both make a strong connection between the following ideas: fourth commandment, Sabbath/rest and the Lord's Day. Some who hold the Continental view see only a weak connection between these realities, arguing that the Lord's Day is not an application of the fourth commandment, or a day of rest, or a Christian Sabbath. Note, however, the connection between question and answer in the Heidelberg, Lord's Day 38: "What is God's will for us in the fourth

commandment?" "That ... especially on the festive day of rest" I worship etc. The catechism does not relegate "rest" to the OT: "What is God's will" present tense. It sees "the festive day of rest" as an application of the fourth commandment, which was about the Sabbath Day. In this context, "THE festive day" can only be referring to the Lord's Day.

Some have tried to weaken the force of this connection by arguing that the words "day of rest" are not in the original German or Latin – only the words "feast day(s)." However, in both languages "feast days," carried also the idea of a holiday in which one could rest from one's normal work. So these words were ideal for bringing together both the idea of rest and the idea of joyous celebration – a combination found, for example, in Isaiah 58:13-14. The German word is singular, referring in this context specifically to the Sunday. The Latin is plural, perhaps referring to the fact that the church may worship on other days in addition to Sunday. G. Williard's translation of the Latin in Ursinus' *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, puts it this way: "Especially on the Sabbath, the day of rest" (p. 560). The older Dutch text of the *Catechism* also uses the word for "Sabbath" in its answer at this point. But in any case, the original author's intent in a confession is not so critical as the church's current intent – as the interpretation of the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into hell" demonstrates.

Parallel and complementary

Looking more broadly at Lord's Day 38 and WCF 21:7-8, we can see that both have the following emphases: worship (learning from God's Word and sacrament and responding in worship); works of mercy; and the pursuit of sanctification. However, the Westminster also has some distinctive parts: the importance of preparation for the Sabbath; the need

to rest from recreations as well as employments; and the statement that God has particularly appointed one day in seven to be kept holy to Him, as a perpetual Sabbath binding all men in all ages. This is identified with the last day of the week in the OT, and the first (Lord's Day) after Christ's resurrection. The Heidelberg's unique contribution is on the joy of this day; on supporting the "schools" to educate for the Gospel ministry; and on beginning already the eternal Sabbath. As I see it, these various points are in no way contradictory. They are parallel and complementary.

Just how much the Heidelberg agrees with the Westminster can be seen when we look at Ursinus' own explanation of it. In his *Commentary* on LD 38, he concludes that the pattern of six day's work and one day rest means that on the Lord's Day servile work, as well as other works which men might perform on other days, must give way to public and private worship. The WCF's example of avoiding our worldly recreations would fit quite neatly into Ursinus' "all other works" that we perform on other days.

Appealing to the Reformers

No doubt many will continue to see these respective confessions as contradictory, especially on the issue of a moral commandment setting aside one day in seven to be kept holy. On this point, appeal is often made to Calvin and other Reformers – including Ursinus. In *Institutes* 2.8.33, Calvin is adamant that it is superstitious to distinguish one day from another (citing Romans 14:5; Colossians 2: 16-17; and Galatians 4:10-11). He criticises the view that the only ceremonial aspect of the OT Sabbath that has been abrogated is the day – which has been changed to the first day of the week; he criticises those who say that the moral aspect that remains is that one day in seven is holy. Similarly, Bull-

inger in the *Second Helvetic Confession* (chapter 24), states that “we celebrate the Lord’s Day and not the Sabbath as a free observance.” It is not hard to find in such statements support for the Continental position.

Nevertheless, I would urge caution at this point. The Reformers were not always free from overstatement. To get a balanced picture, one needs to consider more than just a few extreme comments reacting against the Pharisaic legalism that was common at the time. For the Reformers did regard the fourth commandment as having both a perpetual, moral aspect and a temporary, ceremonial aspect. Understanding what they meant by “ceremonial” and what they regarded as included in that category, requires a comprehensive study. In *Institutes* 2.8.32, Calvin insists that not all is relegated to ancient shadows by Christ fulfilling the OT Sabbath. Two points are equally applicable to every age: to assemble on the stated days for hearing God’s Word etc; and to give rest from labour to servants and workmen. He adds that if we’re under the same necessity, for the same reason as the Jews with their Sabbath, let no one allege that this (commandment) has nothing to do with us. Moreover, in his *Commentary on Genesis 2:2-3*, Calvin asserts that Christ’s fulfilment of the Jewish Sabbath does not alter what belongs to the perpetual government of human life, as established in this creation order: that from then until the end of the world, men might employ themselves in the worship of God; and that while they should do that every day, they need one day to keep them from becoming less attentive. Similar thoughts are expressed in Ursinus’ *Commentary* on LD 38. The Reformers were not saying that the fourth commandment places upon us no moral obligation to rest on the Lord’s Day. They were warning against viewing the Lord’s Day as the one holy day of the week – as if the only thing that changed from OT to NT was *which day* was holy. They insisted on the freedom to hold public worship any day, rather than on one, special holy day. But they also saw the need for setting aside one day – in God’s providence, the first day of the week – for the sake of good order, to serve the peace of Christian fellowship and to prevent men from neglecting the Lord. Moreover, they acknowledged the continuity between this practice and the Creation Ordinance and the Jewish Sabbath. Ursinus, in his *Commentary* on

LD 38, says that the moral aspect of the fourth commandment – the part that does not have respect to any particular time – “binds all men from the beginning to the end of the world, to observe some Sabbath” (p. 557).

Holy rest

Although many have objected to the WCF 21 statement about a perpetual moral commandment appointing one day in seven to be kept holy, I wonder if this is really so different than what the Continental Reformers were saying. Clearly, the latter were opposed to the view that the Lord’s Day was holy, set apart *in the same manner* as God appointed just the last day of the week in the OT. But I have tried to show that they were not averse to seeing the Lord’s Day as a day set apart according to the moral requirements of the fourth commandment and the original creation ordinance. Hence the *Second Helvetic Confession* (chapter 24) can speak of the church having “set aside” the Lord’s Day for a “holy rest.” The word “holy” most basically means, “set apart for special use to the Lord.” Not everything set aside for the Lord’s use has the same use. One may say that every day is equally set apart for the use of honouring the Lord, pursuing sanctification etc; but also that *one day only* in the OT was set apart for directing our hearts to that general service to the Lord – the holy Sabbath; and that now, while any day could be used for

that purpose, for all days are sanctified by Christ, the Lord in His Providence has guided the church to set apart the Lord’s Day for that holy purpose of preventing our tendency to let slip our attention to Him. Seen in that sense, I can fully agree with the WCF when it speaks of a perpetual, moral Sabbath commandment, regarding one day in seven. I do not see that the Heidelberg Catechism, or Ursinus in his explanation of it, as saying anything to contradict that. I would like to suggest that the alleged contradiction between the Heidelberg and the Westminster might stem in part from a failure to recognise that the word “holy” is not always as loaded as it is when we speak of OT holy days; and that there is no necessary conflict between saying that all days are now equally holy, but one day is set aside (holy) to help us see that.

If we take that emphasis of the Reformers seriously, it will be a strong reminder against “Sunday Christianity.” We should make every effort to use the Day of Rest and Worship for what it is intended: to treat every day as holy, sanctified by Christ. That means making the effort to apply what we learn from God’s Word to the other days as well. It also means making every effort to continue the joyful response of worship on the other days of the week as well.

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The feminine virtue of steadfastness

Few things in life endure; and fewer people have the power of endurance. Fewer still are those who endure, patiently, in the face of strong temptations to do otherwise. Students get bored and drop out; friends drift away; employees resign; marriages break up; business relationships sour. People, it seems, are not very good at lasting the distance when the race becomes difficult.

And yet – we all like it when people do. Which one of us isn't relieved that "family" still loves her when she's behaved badly? Who doesn't want a friend who'll stick by her when she's become unpopular and everyone else seems to have fled? Don't we value the staff member who stays and stays with our business through years when skilled people are in short supply?

Lots of things conspire to break down faithfulness and continuity. The spirit of the age even encourages change; it applauds a chuck-out-the-old and let's-start-again mentality. But God has made us differently. Yes, we may live in a faithless age, but deep down we all crave faithfulness. Especially in others, in their behaviour towards us. What we're really after is that rare, precious quality – steadfastness.

A steadfast person is a strong person; yet one who endures patiently. She is reliable, faithful, true to the end. Her inner moral compass is firmly fixed, immovable, not prone to change. She is loyal.¹ Her steadfastness is considered, tried and true. It is not a quality that she acquired passively, by default. She is not steadfast because it's the easiest option. She did not learn steadfastness by following the crowd or trying to be popular. One becomes steadfast by learning from God.

Our God is the eternally steadfast One. His goodness to us never fails. Yet ever since that dreadful moment in the Garden when Adam and Eve first sinned, he has had every provocation to give up on humankind. But his steadfastness lies at the heart of his covenant relationship with us. He has promised that he will

never forsake those who walk with him in faith. As the prophet Jeremiah wrote in Lamentations 3: "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."² That is the kind of father – of friend – God is.

God the Son also stands by his people. His whole life was one of faithful friendship. In his death he gave himself for those he loved; millions of worthless sinners like me and you. The gospels record the kind of opposition, of down-right despising and rejection he encountered. He came to his own, but his own did not receive him. And yet he did not let that opposition tempt him to falter – his purpose was fixed, and he stuck by us. I love that brief statement of Luke's – a simple narrative comment that evokes all that is wonderful about the kind of friend Jesus is: "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." And again, two verses later, "his face was set toward Jerusalem."³ These words move me because of what they say about Jesus' commitment to us. He was determined to walk towards the city where he would face false accusation, terrible suffering and the mocking of mindless people. All for our sakes. There was tremendous fixity of purpose conveyed in the setting of his face – nothing could deflect him from his course. Luke is probably writing with Isaiah 50:7 in mind; part of the passage describing God's faithful servant: "I have set my face like a flint, and I know I shall not be put to shame."

The lesson is there for those of us who want to resemble Christ in our character: set your face steadfastly. Be such a friend. Be such a wife. Be such a mother, nurse, teacher, doctor, employer, church member and neighbour. Carry on until the task is finished, the day is gone, your labours cease – and God calls you home.

God has also drawn us a picture of steadfastness in female form. During the

400-year history of the Judges, Israel was in poor shape as a nation. Disobedient and oppressed by her neighbours, her agricultural economy was often disrupted and famine resulted. During one of these famines Elimelech and his family left for Moab. There, he and his sons died and his widow, Naomi, destitute and lonely, decided to return to her people. She tried to get her Moabite daughters-in-law to stay with their people. They certainly had good reason to do that. Why should they leave for an unknown place where they would be outcasts? But Ruth so loved Naomi, and was so committed to looking after her that she "clung to her" with those famous words: "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go..." Ruth returned to Bethlehem with Naomi. She gleaned grain to support her; she followed all her directions as a dutiful daughter would – with the ultimate result that she married Boaz, gave birth to Obed and became the great-grandmother of King David and ancestress of the Lord Jesus Christ. Her steadfastness made her part of the Saviour's family tree.

Steadfastness, as I've already suggested, does not come easily. It is most often the hard option, frequently requiring that we give up self for the sake of pleasing God or serving others. Because of that, we often need strong motivations to do the right thing. God has provided these, too. He does not simply say: "Do this because I tell you" – though he could have. One of these motivations is the fact of the resurrection. The amazing truth that Jesus rose from the grave, conquering sin and death, galvanises us for lifetimes of extraordinary, productive, rock-solid and steadfast labours for his sake. If it were not true we would be a pitiable people. But because it is, we can go on and on and on in his name: *Therefore, [Paul writes] be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.* (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Daily steadfastness

We tend to think of qualities like steadfastness in terms of the big choices in life – the serious, weighty, sacrificial things. But we also need to be steadfast in the small things. In fact, it is probably more important to stand firm in small things since it is in making those choices habitual that we prepare ourselves for the big things. Consider the matters of Bible reading and prayer – and how easy it is to let those slide. Steadfastness resists the pull of the internet, television, sleeping in longer, the leisurely breakfast – whatever it is that keeps us from Scripture intake and prayer.

Steadfastness in relationships consists of loyalty and forgiveness, forbearance and humility, year in and year out, all our days in this life. There are so many ways that giving up, walking away, ignoring and neglect are easier than persevering with people. This tendency is surely what the apostle Paul had in mind when he summed up his description of love by stressing that it “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:7)

It’s worth considering some of the things that weaken our will to be steadfast these days. Perhaps at the top of the list is our love of novelty. We live in a restless age that chafes at tradition, well-worn habits – anything that might seem out of date or merely the preference of an earlier generation. Of course there is little reason to stick with patterns of behaviour that have no particular intrinsic merit. But we should be careful to examine what’s behind cultural habits before we toss them out in favour of something that I – the younger generation – prefers right now.

Part of the reason for this is that, when properly analysed, older habits have often been found to be based on motives of service to others, consideration, respect – or downright, simple unselfishness. Too often these days we desire change because it frees me up to do what I want. Most of the social changes we have seen pushed for since the 1960s have stemmed from the desire to do whatever sin I want without facing the consequences. Preserving social constraints on selfishness, and encouraging commitment, are strong reasons to be steadfast and immovable in opposing legislation taking New Zealand the wrong way. It is well worth studying the past to rediscover the good traditions which preserved social life in particularly troubling times (eg war and economic

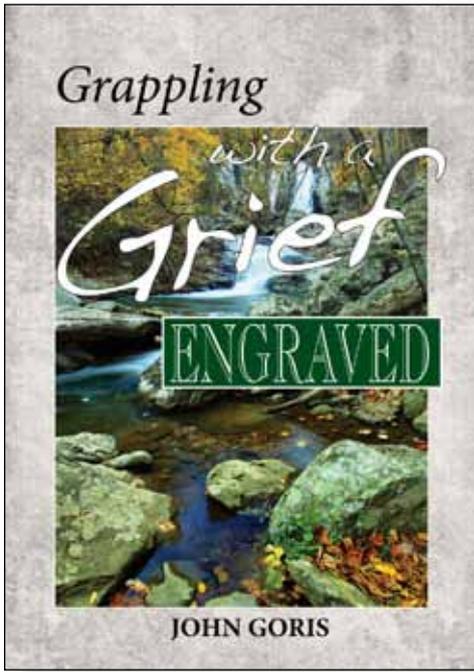
misery). As Old Testament scholar and commentary writer Dale Ralph Davis has wisely written:

*We stand in the present but dwell on the past in order that we can be steadfast for the future.*⁴

Of course, the call to be steadfast can simply be a good excuse for stubbornness. Some of us are particularly prone to be stubborn when challenged about our pet preferences. If that be the case, it’s always salutary to begin some soul-

searching. Why do I think this ought to be done a certain way? Is there good biblical reason behind it? Can I explain that reason clearly to a person of the younger generation or different church background? Or to that unbeliever who has no clue about biblical reasoning? If the answer is no, perhaps it’s time to reconsider my preference or to begin some serious research so I can give the biblical defence needed.

And secondly, steadfastness never pre-



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cludes the need to listen to others. While the apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthians to be steadfast and immovable, he was also a great advocate of the teachable spirit. None of us is ever beyond learning from our brothers and sisters in Christ, and steadfastness is always kept fresher and made more potent and gracious when it's exposed to the input of our friends.

So – does God love steadfastness? Yes. Is it easy? No. It may fly in the face of what everyone around us is like; and at times it might seem like being a foolish eccentric. But in the end, if the way of Christ is truth, then there is neither choice nor alternative. It is the way of righteousness; and at its end is great reward.

Notes

- 1 *Holman Bible Dictionary*, quoted online at <http://www.studydrive.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T6016>. Accessed on 22nd January 2013 and adapted by me for the purposes of this application.
- 2 Lamentations 3:22-3
- 3 Luke 9:51; 53 (Authorised Version)
- 4 Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking at the Heart* (Christian Focus, 2009), p. 78

Communion of the Saints

John Leenders

Sometimes things happen in our lives that give us a whole new perspective on things. For me it was the need to have an operation for an aneurism of the aorta. That operation had a silver lining and one that I still enjoy more than a year later. The silver lining that I am referring to is the “Communion of the Saints”.

In our congregational prayer our pastor prayed that the operation might be successful and many people in our congregation personally said: “Brother, we will pray for you”, and not just the oldies would say that (of which I am one) but also teenagers. Yes, a cross section of our congregation expressed care and concern. Also, the visits, prayers and cards etc., gave me the distinct feeling

of belonging to something far greater than a rugby or a senior citizen's club. The words of Psalm 133 state: “How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity”! After the operation, the meaning of brothers and sisters took on a “deeper significance” than ever before. To be among God's people is such a rich blessing. This for me was the silver lining and I am immensely thankful for that experience which is a gift from God.

Because of our church life, God has given us some perks and one of these I believe is the Communion of the Saints. Despite being saints, the Bible tells us in Romans 3:23 that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. It is so easy to view some church members with a critical eye, because they do not think as you do and you put them in a

somewhat different category as far as the Communion of the Saints is concerned. Worst of all would be if you feel no communion with them at all. However, the very fact that they are in the church and are sitting with you at the Lord Supper table, makes them your brother and sister in the Lord. Does that then mean that all church members are the same to you? Would you not be selective in whom you would invite to come on holiday with you for a fortnight? I would be. Our interests can play a role as to whom we would choose as our special friends. However, that should in no way alter the fact that we feel a strong and powerful bond with our fellow believer in the church.

This bond is often seen on special days, like weddings and funerals etc. On these special occasions the church is often full, yes sometimes full to the point of overflowing. God's people come to rejoice with those who rejoice. And they also mourn with those who mourn. These occasions are beautiful to experience. When we see these things, the text which comes to mind is Mark 3:32-34, where the Disciples say to Jesus: “behold your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you,” and Jesus responds: “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And he looked around Him and saw those who were sitting there and He said: “Behold my mother and my brothers.” A more meaningful illustration of the communion of the saints, would be hard to find. And the people sitting around Jesus were in no way different than those that sit around you and I in church on Sunday – we all need to be



Arrival of worshippers. (*Trust and Obey*, p313)

washed in His blood. There is a saying: "Some mothers do have them". To put it nicely, some brothers and sisters, are a pain in the neck at times. They are difficult to get along with, rebellious and unloving at times. One might ask, are they my brother and sister, where do they fit into the concept of the "Communion of the Saints"? – which I happen to agree with. Its not always easy.

What about ourselves? How often have we been unloving, difficult, rebellious? When I got older, my eyes got older too. I needed glasses to see clearer. Sometimes it would be so nice, if we also could buy spiritual glasses, because there are times when my bad eyes see the splinter in my fellow church member's eye far clearer than the beam in my own. This shows us that we are all dependant on the Grace of God. When the Bible "speaks" of the "Communion of the Saints" it is nearly always tied in with unity in Christ Jesus. The text of Psalm 133, "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity", does bring this out clearly. Mark 3:25 states, "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand". Phil. 2:2: Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit. These verses clearly teach us that the communion of the saints and the unity among God's people are tied together and that when the Scriptures speak of the communion of the saints, it almost always links it with unity. Mark 3:35 sums it up in a beautiful way: "or whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." Therefore unity is a must in order to enjoy the fellowship of the saints. How do we see and experience unity? Must we always agree with each other? The Rev. Barry James, our previous Minister, could formulate things so nicely at times in his native English language. He used to say: "Diversity of necessity does not have to create disunity"¹. The question however remains how much diversity can we tolerate, before it results in disunity? I would like to thank our pastors and our New Zealand elders of our Reformed Churches but especially the pastors.

Several times in my 48 years in our Reformed Churches, pastors had the courage not to sustain candidate's for ministry. I do not always know the reasons, but I strongly believe, that by your actions you have avoided disunity. It is my belief that the pastors have on the whole kept our churches on

the straight and narrow by faithful, biblical and confessional preaching, the most powerful tool to combat disunity. However, foremost of all, our heavenly Father is to be glorified for this. In some cases, we have had to sever our sister-church relationship with churches, who called themselves reformed, but have left the truth of the Scriptures. Our Reformed churches have a message for our members, based on the truth of Scripture and not a man made gospel. We are a multicultural church made up of many backgrounds as far as denominations are concerned. Despite our varying backgrounds and small numbers; I believe that by God's grace we may say: "We have kept the faith".

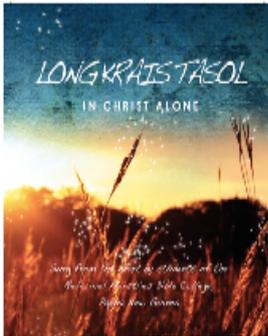
How do we practise unity? How do you and I deal with each other? One thing is sure, pure unity will only be achieved in heaven. Let us use 2 Peter 3:8 as an example; "We must be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly and kind hearted"; we must strive for unity to the best of our ability.

To achieve this I believe we must strive to apply God's Word. Must we always fully agree with each other, which is not always possible? How do we deal with those who we do not fully agree with? Can we have fellowship with them? It is my belief that we can. 1 Cor. 10:17 states: "Since there is one bread, we who are many, are one body, for we are all partakers of the same bread." Those who are sitting with me at the Lord's Table are my brothers and sisters in Christ and all of us should treat one another

as such, even when we may differ on some matters. The communion of the saints could also mean that we must at times encourage, rebuke and admonish one another and this should always be done lovingly and firmly. We must and should be able to build each other up in our most precious faith, always being honest with each other. This is often a hard thing to do and needs much prayer.

In many reformed churches around the world there are saints that do not commune anymore by not attending the second worship service. It is a great privilege for God's people to worship Him. For many years God's people would go to church twice, when the session called them for worship. Sadly, there is a growing trend in many reformed denominations that people only worship once on the Lord's Day and the result is often that their children go once as well, and may eventually quit altogether. I believe this practice is a blueprint for spiritual disaster. Many justify themselves with arguments like: "where in the Bible does it say that you must go twice to church?" or, "God has revealed himself in His written word and in nature, so I go to church in the morning and for a walk in the afternoon," or, "The Sunday is a day of rest so I go to church in the morning and have a rest in the afternoon."

What a wonderful thing it would be if all God's people could say "Amen" to Isaiah 58:13-14 "If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your own pleasure on My holy day, And



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call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honourable, And honour it, desisting from your own ways, From seeking your own pleasure And speaking your own word, Then you will take delight in the LORD, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; And I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

However, if God’s people do not delight in His holy day and decide to skip the second service and seek their own pleasure on the Lord’s Day, they shouldn’t be surprised that their children do the same and even go a step further. Dear reader, I have witnessed this personally, where parents have done this, and in many instances their children have left the church altogether. We should be encouraging one another with the words of Hebrews 10-24 and 25: “and let us consider how to stimulate one another, to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day draw near”.

Therefore, let us be faithful and serve our Lord in the beauty of holiness. I would like to close with something positive.

Forty years ago visitors would come to New Zealand for holidays. In their churches, they had to deal with problems like: liberalising of the first 3 chapters of Genesis, homosexuality, church discipline, women in office, etc. These things would come up for discussion – sometimes heated and often they would say, “you people in N.Z. are running 5 to 10 years behind. You just wait and these things will come to you as well. Thanks be to God, this did not happen. Why not? Because in His wisdom the Lord spared us from all that. And how did He spare us? There is no doubt in my mind that God has used faithful preaching. Preaching that is based on Scripture. I believe God’s grace has not departed from our churches and that we are stronger in our Reformed interpretation of the Scriptures and working out the will of God than 40 years ago. The road was not always easy and we had to sever ties with churches that were once

our sisters, but again by God’s grace it was done when it was deemed to be necessary. In spite of our weaknesses and stubbornness at times, I believe the RCNZ is a Church spelt with a capital C and its members are my brothers and my sisters and through them, we all may experience the communion of the saints. To God be the Glory!

¹ I cannot remember any such ‘quote’ (verbatim), but I know that I have referred to Ephes. 4:3-13 in such terms: it is clear here that amidst the given oneness (vv.3,4) there is indeed a great diversity (vv.7,11) with the result of a certain ‘oneness’ (vv.13,16); the same truth may be seen in Paul’s analogy of the body – 1 Cor.12:4ff. As far as I can recall I may have pointed this out to Session at one time or another – when the desire was to only have elders that were going to dot one another’s ‘I’s’ and cross one another’s ‘T’s’ !! As far as I am concerned, a proper diversity makes for a greater real unity, as long as that diversity is aligned with cardinal biblical truth. (Rev. Barry S James Emeritus)

Mr John Leenders is a member of the Reformed Church of Silverstream and has served as an elder on several occasions.

What if another church is suddenly more attractive than mine?

Rosalyn Kieft

It seems that in our modern age of questioning and self-indulgence an increasing number of our fellow Christian youth are exiting the doors of Reformed buildings to attend other churches. This has been an issue throughout our parents’ and grandparents’ generations, but the culture we live in today encourages this sort of personal journey and the concept of finding what works for you. Right now you can probably think of a handful of friends or family members you know who have engaged in this sort of journey. Perhaps they have found a different church and you have lost contact with them, or maybe they begrudgingly stayed in the church where they were raised. Remember how you could not fathom what would cause them to even consider leaving?

But what happens if now that’s you? What if your dissatisfaction with your church is too heavy to ignore? Many Reformed youth find themselves at this difficult crossroad, wondering how to approach their desire to question and discover answers.

Hard questions

To begin, Jesus never said that following him would be an easy or simple task. He told his disciples over and over again that the cost of following him was great; consider Luke 9:57-63, where he bluntly spoke of the costs being as painful as leaving family or being without a home. Francis Chan, in his book *Crazy Love*, illustrates this point well: “God doesn’t call us to be comfortable. He calls us to trust him so completely that we are unafraid to put ourselves in situations where we will be in trouble if he doesn’t

come through.” You will face hard questions and while it can be painful to deal with them, it is important to face them head on.

Never be afraid to live out the words of 1 John 4:1, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” How solid are your beliefs if you have never been challenged to explain them? Catechism classes create a space to discover the doctrine of your own church and how it aligns with the truth of the gospel. Likewise, it is also important to consider the truth and falsehood of the practices and beliefs of other churches.

Be reminded of 1 Peter 3:15, when Peter says “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that

you have.” Has anyone ever asked you why you are a member of your specific Reformed church denomination? Or more importantly, would you have an answer to give them? In our culture of post-modernism which embraces the idea that everything is equally good, it is difficult for people to understand why you would choose one specific church in which to worship and fellowship for all of your days here on earth! You must have good reasons for doing so.

Consider the source

Consider the source of your attraction. Do you feel a sense of belonging when someone shakes your hand as you walk in and welcomes you? Do you feel more comfortable in your jeans, fellowshiping with a coffee in your hand? Do you feel more alive when you sing along with the guitar and drums to worship music instead of Genevan tunes? Or do you find yourself questioning the doctrines of infant baptism, divine election, or salvation by grace alone?

It is crucial to distinguish whether your attraction stems from doctrinal or practical issues. Doctrinal issues can only be proved or disproved by the true Word of God – only issues as strong as these should be motivation to pack up and leave the church you have been raised in. Rejecting the Reformed church because you don't enjoy organ or piano music is not legitimate. Consider if your attraction to a different church stems from your desire for belonging or to be heard. Paul instructs young Timothy to “[f]lee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels” (2 Tim 2:22-23).

Does your attraction stem from the fact that people seem to have more zeal, more fire, more passion for God in the church you are visiting? Maybe your Reformed church needs a kick-start of zealous love for Jesus, a radical lifestyle that honours God in every single aspect. Does your attraction come from liking anonymity or noting the absence of “Dutch bingo”? Maybe the Reformed church does need to lay aside its tendency to gossip about relatives or family members. Please note that leaving a church because of the people is never a good reason. Church is about Jesus; it is about your relationship with Christ which translates into love for your fellow

brothers and sisters. Sometimes there is a severe issue with this translation of love in our churches, but that is where you come in.

You get what you give. Often youth will notice that the reason they so enjoy worshipping in a different church is because there they are more into their worship, whether they are happier, more willing to worship, or even more desirous to create relationships with their fellow Christians. This begs the question: how active are you in your own church? Many youth claim to feel more alive or closer to God while worshipping in another church but are these youth the ones who stumble into their own church begrudgingly, look around with a critical gaze, and slip into the pew to catch up on an extra hour of sleep?

I'll say it again: in a church, you get what you give. If you are actively involved in a Bible study and the ongoing events of your church, you will reap the reward of your commitment. If you invest

questioning where “your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8).

Above all, trust God's plan. The fact of the matter is that God has placed you in your church for a reason; you have been raised there for a purpose. Please note that if you have already made a commitment to your church through your profession of faith, you must consider even more carefully the act of breaking that promise. Whether or not you have, you must consider your place in your own church. It could be that your desire to have radically zealous worship is something that will benefit your home church. It could be that your longing to be surrounded by sincerely devoted believers would be irreplaceably valuable in a position as youth leader or youth mentor. If you feel a strong disgust for the gossip and judgment that you may witness, be the person to stop it and preach against it. Paul instructs young Timothy with these words: “Don't let

“The culture we live in today encourages the concept of finding what works for you.”

hours of love and prayer, and cultivate personal relationships with your fellow Reformed churchgoers, you will discover that oh-so-important feeling of belonging. If you find yourself willing to commit time and energy into a different church, ask yourself why you haven't done so in your own church. What's stopping you?

Consider your place

If you decide that visiting or considering another church is necessary for you to fully seek the truth, do so in a wary manner and surround yourself with friends and family members who will engage with you in the doctrine, strengths, and weaknesses of the Reformed churches. Ground yourself with people who are willing to discuss your questions with you, because it is easy to lose yourself if you are searching for something that feels better. It is also important to “[p]ut on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes” (Eph 6:11). Prepare yourself mentally and spiritually as you enter into the realm of spiritual

anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Tim 4:12).

Conclusion

No church is perfect; no church will ever be free from hypocrisy, gossip, lazy believers, or stubborn traditions because no church is free from sinful people. This is the sad reality that Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 5:7-9, Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

We will always be longing for that day when we will worship God in perfect unity, harmony, and perfect zeal.

Do you have questions about your church? Find answers for those questions and supplement your search with fervent prayer and devoted time with

“Ground yourself with people who are willing to discuss your questions with you, because it is easy to lose yourself if you are searching for something that feels better.”

God’s Word for you. Seek his direction in everything, always bringing your decisions to his Word for validation. Do not be afraid to speak, even when, like Jeremiah, we might say, “Ah, Sovereign Lord! I do not know how to speak; I

am only a child.” God replies to you with “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you” (Jer 1:6-7).

Make your decisions advised by the truth of God’s Word and motivated by the greatest commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind (Matt 22:37). And in all your searching, questioning, and journeying, consider carefully the words of Ecclesiastes 11:9, “Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment.”

Miss Rosalyn Kieft is a member of the Canadian Reformed Church from Waterdown, ON, Canada.

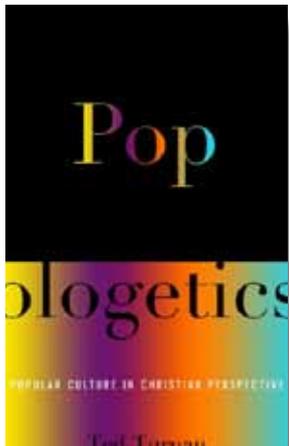
First appeared in the Clarion (Vol 61, No 24, Nov 2012, Roadside Assistance, the magazine for Reformed young people). Reprinted with permission.

Books in focus

Popologetics: Popular Culture In Christian Perspective

Ted Turnau

Reviewed by: Allen D. Curry



There is a touch of irony in a retired grandfather reviewing a book on popular culture – especially one who needs his grandchildren to explain much of it. Ted Turnau’s thesis in *Popologetics* is that all Christians should be ready to engage popular culture critically. Perhaps a grandfather is the ideal reader to test his thesis.

Turnau argues that “Christians who want to reach out to their non-Christian friends and neighbours need a world-

view-oriented approach, an approach that deals with popular culture in all its complicated, messed up glory” (p. xvii). He provides a resource for understanding and reaching contemporary non-Christians steeped in popular culture.

The author first offers some basis or grounding for understanding pop culture. He then proceeds to analyse some opposing approaches to the subject. He concludes with a workshop designed to provide tools to grasp and engage popular culture.

Turnau contends that one cannot live in contemporary society and avoid the influences of pop culture. It is pervasive and represents a worldview that clearly does not conform to a Christian view of the world.

Culture, including popular culture, should be understood “in terms of three categories of creation, fall, and redemption” (p. 44). Turnau explains how theological concepts like general revelation, the image of God, and common grace play a role in a Christian understanding of culture. The author does a good job of introducing how a social scientist integrates the Christian religion into an analysis of a contemporary worldview.

In presenting his disagreements with those who take a different view of

pop culture, Turnau sees much more positive in it than I do. For example, in addressing those who uncritically embrace pop culture, Turnau cautions about its idolatrous character. Yet he encourages more than a cautious look at what the unbelieving world adopts. I wish he had examined how the Bible not only condemns idolatry but also warns against any engagement with it. In my mind, he must do more with Deuteronomy 13 than suggest that words as well as images can lead one astray. I grant it is difficult to critically engage while ignorant. Yet I fear the consequences of the type of appreciation for modern culture that Turnau encourages. I wish he had shown the same kind of insightful sensitivity he did in treating the question of holiness and the temptations to sin that are prevalent in pop culture.

The book ends with a series of examples of how to apply the material in it. Although he uses concrete examples to show how to implement his approach, I fear some readers will be unfamiliar with his examples.

Turnau does a good job of critically examining pop culture for those who are unaware or even antagonistic to it. I benefited from his analysis and critique. Yet I am not ready to embrace it in

the same way he does. If he wants to change the mind of this grandfather, he should address the role of Christian liberty in appreciating different cultural expressions.

Reprinted from the OPC website, January 2013

William The Baptist: A Classic Story Of A Man's Journey To Understanding Baptism

James M. Chaney

Reviewed by: David Harr

If a Christian is new to the Reformed faith, the most difficult doctrine to accept is typically the Presbyterian understanding of baptism. In an evangelical world that is largely baptistic, most find it hard to understand how a minister could claim to believe the Bible and yet stand at the front of the church and sprinkle a baby. Ronald Evans has therefore done the church a great service by updating James Chaney's classic, nineteenth-century book on baptism.

William the Baptist is presented in the form of a dialogue between William, a passionate Baptist, and Rev. Cowan, a Presbyterian pastor. The result is a readable and appealing book that is very instructive.

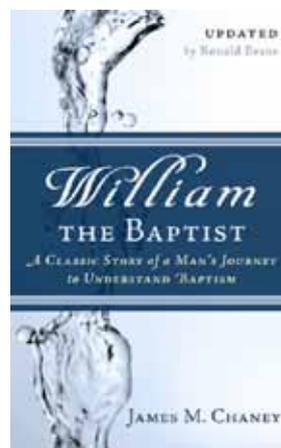
The dialogue begins with the issue of the proper mode of baptism. William

insists that in order to be baptised, one must be fully immersed in water; anything less is not a baptism. Rev. Cowan takes William to the Scriptures. He begins by showing that in the Bible the Greek word baptizo ("to baptise") does not mean "to immerse." He shows his friend how baptism is a sign of the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit, work that the Scriptures describe as both pouring and sprinkling. The actual baptisms recorded in the New Testament are examined.

Later in the book, the discussion turns to the subject of infant baptism. Rev. Cowan instructs William on the unity of the covenant of grace and the biblical command for children of believers to receive the sign of the covenant.

But there are some aspects of Chaney's work that are problematic. For example, he presents a truncated view of baptism by connecting it exclusively to the work of the Spirit. In trying to combat the burial theory of our baptistic brothers, he dismisses and downplays any connection of baptism to the believer's union with Christ (contrary to Romans 6, Colossians 2, and WCF 28.1).

Chaney argues that sprinkling (which he considers virtually synonymous with pouring) and sprinkling alone is the biblical mode of baptism. This view goes beyond historic Reformed belief as represented by its prominent theologians and confessions. The Reformed tradition has



historically held that all three modes are acceptable, while often giving preference to sprinkling or pouring.

Despite these flaws, the book retains value as a readable source of biblical teaching on a topic that is misunderstood by many Christians.

In order to give the book a final test, this reviewer passed it along to a Baptist friend. After reading the book along with his wife, he described how their old assumptions about baptism were challenged from the ground up. They are now preparing to have their younger children sprinkled with the sign of the covenant!

Reprinted from the OPC website, January 2013



CBI NEW ZEALAND NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2013

Let us begin this New Year 2013 praising our Lord for the amazing work He is doing in the lives of those in prison

as they study the Word of God.

When a CBI student has completed the Tier 1 Courses (Great Truths of the Bible and Survey of the Bible) and desires to continue on the Tier 2 Courses they are required to complete an application form part of which asks them to give their testimony. I have received permission from this student to share his testimony with you.

May this testimony inspire and encourage our hearts, stirring us with both a passion and energy to continue to serve the Lord in this ministry.

"Firstly, Do I know Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour? Yes I do know He is my Saviour. I would very much like a more personal relationship with my Saviour and with your help this will build my personal relationship with Him.

I gave my life to Christ in October 2010. I was at the lowest point ever in my life. I had failed at being a good

husband, a good father and a good provider. When I got arrested I tried to take my life in the cells. I told God that I was weak and Satan had won let him have my soul. I tried and tried I would not bleed. I cried out to God to let me go. I was a failure. Then I felt something inside of me say "he is weak, but I am strong". Then the police came in, got a doctor to cover my wounds and left. Then another policeman came in. He sat with me and talked then he prayed over me. I couldn't believe he was doing this for me. I cried. This was the start of my new life. About one month later I gave myself to the Lord. I came to prison, but the Lord set me free. He put a light in my heart and it has grown stronger and stronger every day. I am very thankful for all the blessings that our Lord has given me and continues to show me each day.

With the help of 'Crossroads' I have been able to set up a routine of study and an almost daily reading of the

Bible. Tier 1 offered me the 'milk' that I needed and helped me to put to rest the questions and doubts that I had. To be honest, I sometimes think I missed the point of some of the roadmap verses and their common links but I had the help of Leaders and Instructors positive feedback. The roadmaps also helped me do daily reading and 'think' about Jesus Christ and my daily walk. It also encouraged me to read books of the Bible and to think about how others before me have walked and put up with doubts that others put on them.

Here in prison I have promised myself to become educated and gain as much knowledge as I can. My Bible studies are at the forefront of this 'hikoi'. I desire to learn more and I am committed to seek

more knowledge so I may grow and be able to share with others and with my family most of all. I am where I am now because of the Crossroad Bible Institute, and all the staff of volunteers, Instructors and Leaders and most of all because of God! And his covenant to me! I am very thankful that He never gave up on me. He was always by my side and now I seek Him with all my heart.

I am very thankful to Crossroads you have encouraged me and supported me throughout these last 20 months through Tier 1. You were there to answer my questions and doubts. Your prayers and support have had a profound effect on me and I thank God for giving me the opportunity to spend time with you all. I would love to continue this relationship

through Tier 2. The Lord has waited for me to come around. I am now 44 years old and have only just opened my eyes to Him. I ask that he forgives me. I'm here now and want to follow His direction. He gives me what I need and Crossroads is part of His food for life. Amen.

PS Please forgive me for not replying immediately. It's been days that I have had to think about my reply. A future without the Lord will only lead to destruction for me and my family. This is a road I no longer want to follow so here I write this reply. Thank you for all your encouragement and prayers and gifts.

Let me share this with you. Over the past 6 months the TV I have has been playing up, not receiving all the channels and snowy. The news on the TV is mostly bad. I've been thinking about sending it home. I talked to my wife about it. She suggested I keep it but I spent less and less time watching it only turning it on to watch the news. Then turning it off to sleep or read. Last week you sent me my Certificate of Achievement. Thank you. Along with that, you sent a card with a verse from John 3:16. Before starting this letter I was reading this verse, thinking where I might place it. Then I found that it fits over my TV screen with about 1cm around to spare. It's an almost perfect fit. Now I have the clearest picture I've ever had and it's the best news I've ever had. Thank you for this awesome Christmas present.

Best wishes to all at C.B.I. and all the best for next year. Also I hope we may continue to build our relationship next year through Tier 2. And I hope that one day I may return to you what you have shared with me.

With much love and kindness,
God bless you all

(This student was approved by head office to do the Tier 2 Courses and is doing really well)

Please continue to pray for the ministry of CBI in the prisons and for those involved with the work of CBI in NZ.

If you would like further information about Crossroad Bible Institute you can contact us at cbi.nz@xtra.co.nz or write to Crossroad Bible Institute, P.O. Box 11005 HASTINGS 4158

"Let us regard the Sabbath as an institution of primary importance to man's soul, and contend earnestly for its preservation amongst us in all its integrity. It is good for body, mind and soul. It is good for the nation which observes it, and for the church which gives it honour. It is but a few steps from "no Sabbath" to "no God". The man who would make the Sabbath a day for business and pleasure, is an enemy to the best interests of his fellow creatures. The man who supposes that a believer ought to be so spiritual as not to need the separation of one day in the week from the rest, can know but little of the human heart, or the requirements of our position in an ensnaring and evil world."

J C Ryle – Luke Volume 2 page 488



"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."
Prov 1:7

Teaching Principal and/or Teacher

The Silverstream Christian School is a Christian school set up to provide Christian education to our covenant children. Our aim is to develop a biblically consistent world and life view in our students based on the Reformed faith. We believe this Reformed faith to be the most accurate expression of biblical Christianity. Applicants must be committed to the Reformed faith and to Reformed Christian education. This is an exciting opportunity to be part of a vibrant covenant community, and we look forward to your application. If you have any questions or would like more information please do not hesitate to contact us. Please forward your C.V. with 3 referees to:

Contact details:

Dirk den Harder
Email: dirk39@xtra.co.nz Ph +64 4 528 8066

Focus on home

Harriet Haverland

Gleanings from our bulletins...

MINISTERS AND CHURCH WORKERS

Hastings: On the 6th January 2013 we said farewell to **Ant & Petra Lagas, Elske, Hannah & Jack** prior to their departure for the Solomon Islands. We had a Coffee Morning after the service.

Hastings: Sunday 20th January 2013 was the final Sunday that **Rev Norm & Mrs Wilma de Jong** were in our midst so we had a special Coffee Morning to say our farewells.

North Shore: Language Assisted Bible Studies – an outreach for people with English as a second language. Planning for this is going well and we hope to begin early in the New Year. At our Special General Meeting on 11th June, 2012, we passed a motion authorising Session to seek and find a man, ordained or unordained, part or fulltime, to help us with the work of evangelism. In accordance with this planning and this decision, Session has asked Martyn Bradley to give a day per week to implementing the LABS programme and he has agreed to this.

Palmerston North: It was good to hear from the Couperus family at Mid America recently, especially with the news that Albert was able to pass his end of semester exams well. We can give thanks for further confirmation as Albert continues his preparation for the pastoral ministry. Next semester starts at the end of January; in the meantime Albert is busy with an "Advanced Hebrew Intensive". Do keep Albert and his family in your prayers.

CHURCH BUILDINGS

Bishopdale: The building project continues to progress well on both the exterior and interior of the building. During the construction process a number of unforeseen costs have arisen due largely to extra work required to the existing building to bring it up to current industry standards and building toleranc-

es required by the Building Code. The work has been vetted by the Building Committee and accepted as both unforeseeable and necessary to enable the building work to proceed in accordance with current building standards.

We are looking forward to a congregational working bee in February to lay pavers and do some general tidying around the property. We give thanks and praise to God that the work continues to progress smoothly, and continue to pray that the project will be successfully completed and that the building will be used powerfully as a tool to further our Heavenly Father's Kingdom work here.

Wanganui: The congregation that worships at Wanganui have recently had to change the place where they worship. They are now worshipping at Wanganui East School, Patapu Street.

CRCA: The Future of **Trowel and Sword** (T&S): The Trowel & Sword magazine, a magazine shared across the ditch for 50-years, was last printed in December 2010. The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) at their May 2012 Synod confirmed there will be no hard copy of the magazine and no new committee to take the magazine in its previous form forward online. However the Synod 2012 recommitted to having T&S

as the flagship of the CRCA and has mandated a new workgroup to look into the entire online presence of the CRCA and how best to project the CRCA's presence on the internet. This workgroup will also be responsible for finding a new T&S editorial team. Refer <http://www.trowelandsword.org.au/News.htm>. In the meantime a new online quarterly newsletter – CRCA Catalyst – has been established. You can access the Catalyst on <http://crcacatalyst.com/downloads/>

MISSIONS

Silverstream: Brs. Tim Fransen, Matt Saathof, Ed Leenders and Dave Kaijser went to PNG to do building/maintenance work for the Bible College at "14 Mile". The main task was to help with the construction of a new student cabin there. Additional projects included converting the Resource Room into a sit-in library; building a pump-house for the new well/bore; and a cupboard or two for Classroom One.

CAMPS & CONFERENCES

Youth Group Labour Weekend Camp: The Mainland Regional Youth Committee (MRYC) hosted the annual camp. The theme for our studies this year was Guidance – Determin-

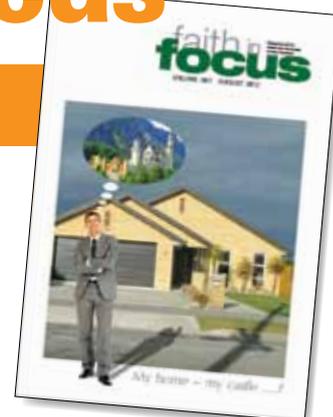
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Some conditions will apply.



ing God's will for the Maze of Life, which were led by Pastor Daniel Wilson from the Nelson congregation. It was held in an exciting new venue, the YMCA Wainui Heights just before Akaroa.

ACTIVITIES

Christchurch: Lord willing on 10th March 2013 we will celebrate 60 years as a congregation. Plans are being considered to celebrate this.

Hastings: Tongariro Crossing Trip. The

youth met together on the Friday night, all 28 of us, and headed off to stay at a Backpacker's in Turangi, ready for our big tramp the next day. The forecast was looking dodgy at best, but we woke on Saturday morning to clear skies and no wind! We were on the track by 8:00am and had a great time trekking through the most amazing landscapes. There was still snow on the track in some places and we even got a light dusting of snow on the way home! The half way mark was the emerald lakes which were the most incredible colour! We had to return the way we came because the track was closed due to the recent eruption. It was great to see everyone up for the challenge, enjoying each other's company while experiencing a remarkable slice of God's creation.

Palmerston North: Friday Fellowship *FIESTA! Ola Amigos! INVITACION* – We will have a "Spanish Fiesta" here in the church. We will start with pizza and salad and progress to some Bull-fighting, a Dance Competition and Serenade Singing. Finishing with Dessert/Supper. *!Todos bienvenidos!* It will be fun! Come dressed in your best Spanish attire [if you wish] and be ready for a few laughs. *Hasta luego!*

Silverstream: First Aid Workshop – The Ladies Fellowship together with the Deacons have organised a St John Child First Aid Training Workshop. This is specifically for the ladies in the congregation who are on the creche roster and GEMS Counsellors as it will include how to do CPR on infants and children.

You are invited to the
19th Hamilton Easter Convention
 29th- 30th March 2013

Theme:

Seeking the Glory of God Among the Nations

Speaker:

Dr. Phillip Scheepers

Convention Venue:

Hamilton Reformed Church
 11 Aberdeen Drive
 Dinsdale, Hamilton

Meeting Times:

Fri 3.00 & 7.00 pm
 Sat 10.30 am, 1.00 pm & 3.00 pm

Convention addresses:

Friday

3.00pm

**Commissioned and
Sent to the Nations**

(Acts 1:6-11)

7.00pm

Courageous Community

(Acts 2:42-47)

Saturday

10.30am

From Church to Churches

(Acts 13:1-14:28)

1.00pm

**Eternal Word,
Changing Worlds**

(Acts 17:16-34)

3.00pm

**Speaking Across the Divide:
Sharing the Gospel with
Followers of Other Religions**

*Posters and pamphlets will
be distributed*



Our guest speaker this year is

Dr Phillip Scheepers

*Lecturer in Missions and Church History
at the Reformed Theological College in
Geelong, Victoria*

Phillip joined the College in 2010 bringing a wealth of experience in missions and church-based training.

He is originally from South Africa where he studied for the ministry and obtained his DTh. from the University of the Free State.

After initial mission work in South Africa he moved to London where he worked for Veritas College for 8 years, establishing training ministries for local church leaders in the Arab world. That work eventually led him to Australia in 2007 to secure accreditation for the Veritas training in the Australian vocational training sector.

This has made him ideally suitable for the tasks to which he is called as a lecturer in missions and church history; and as coordinator of the RTC's ministry training pathway, TASK3, that interfaces campus study with church-based training.

Phillip is married to Chanel and they have two young boys.

A bookstall will operate
on Friday and Saturday

Subject to timely bookings light meals are
available on Friday evening and Saturday
lunchtime

Inquiries: Pieter van der Wel

Ph. 07-849 6401

E-mail ecma2013@gmail.com

Bookings:

<http://easterconvention.rcnz.org.nz>

Do you have a story to tell?

Did you immigrate to New Zealand in the 1950s? Have you got a story to tell about why you came to NZ and what you found, and the life you experienced? Then why don't you let the rest of the readers hear about your story. I am sure that there are many anecdotes, humorous or serious, which would be interesting for the readership. I look forward to hearing from you. Just remember to try to keep your story to about 1400 words.