

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 22 DECEMBER 2013 EVENING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 18:1

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: 66:1, 2

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 25:2

Scripture reading: Ephesians 2

Scripture text: Ephesians 2:11-22; Catechism Sunday 38

11Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands
12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace,

16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.

18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.
19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,
20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,
21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord,
22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.
 (Ephesians 2:11-22)

There are a number of controversial questions relating to the Sabbath which are not cleared up by the Catechism. The Catechism simply remains silent about them. Not even the commandment about keeping the Sabbath is explained. It only sets out how the believing Christian should keep the New Testament Sabbath.

In this respect the Catechism is incomplete, because it does not even mention that the Sabbath is a Creation Ordainment.

- A "Creation Ordainment" means that the Sabbath is included to the Creation because it is part of what God did or brought to being during the days of creation.
- On the seventh day the Lord rested from His labors.
- And the act of Creation was only completed when the Lord took His rest.

Throughout the entire Old Testament there is a veil drawn over the Sabbath.

- To the Jews of the Old Testament the Sabbath was the sign of rest and also the symbol of deliverance.
- One day a day of eternal rest would come, just as the Sabbath is a day of rest. But how this would happen, they did not know precisely.

Then the New Testament begins. Christ comes, and the shadows are illuminated.

- To us, who live in the New Covenant, Jesus Christ is the God of the Sabbath,
 - because He accomplishes our redemption,
 - and He makes it clear what the eternal Sabbath will be: life eternal with the Lord in heaven.
- This is different to how it was in the Old Testament.
 - The Jews lived under the compulsion of the law.
 - They had to rest on the seventh day.
 - Specifically on the seventh day, because God rested on the seventh day after the Creation.
- But we no longer live under the law of the Old Testament.
 - We live under the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
 - who fulfilled this law of the Old Testament for us.

For that reason the Christian Church had to adapt to the new dispensation.

- We had to move the Sabbath to the first day, to recognize and accommodate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- That is one reason why we celebrate Sunday on the first day of the week and not on the seventh day.

Our Sabbath also has a different significance:

- Our Sabbath gives us rest in Christ.
- In the Old Testament work preceded rest, as with the act of Creation.
- But with Christ we first rest, and then work, because He has accomplished all the work required.

In Matthew 11:28 we read of the rest offered by Christ:

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

(Matthew 11:28)

In Ephesians 2:18 it is written: For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

- We can gain admission to heaven only through the work of the Holy Spirit, who has been sent to us as a result of the work of Christ.
- In other words, the day of the Father will also only be celebrated correctly if this Spirit teaches us through the grace of God how to rest on that day.
- The Holy Spirit must guide us to celebrate the Sabbath in holiness in the power of the Lord Jesus, who fulfilled the law and overcame death.

The order is now reversed:

- In the Old Covenant the Jews were required to work before resting.
- We have the privilege by the grace of the Lord Jesus to be able to rest before working.
 - We already have the rest attendant upon the victory over sin.
 - This Christ accomplished for us.

For that reason we do not work to deserve our rest, as the people in the Old Testament did. We have it already, and so we can do our work in a spirit of gratitude, free from the compulsion and tensions brought by the law.

- On our Sunday we celebrate the eternal life which we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We celebrate it on the first day because we wish to commemorate the fact that death is no longer absolute.
- Jesus Christ grants us life.
 - And He rose from the dead on the first day of the week.
 - That is what the Sabbath of the New Testament signifies.
- The Sabbath is a day of special significance for us.
 - Just as my body needs to rest after hard work,
 - so also my soul needs to be brought to rest.

How do we rest spiritually? In this way:

- We are now freed from all the compulsions of the law. But not so that we are given free rein to indulge in licentiousness!

- But specifically so that we can evince spontaneous obedience to our Lord, free from external compulsion.
- For that reason we must honour the Lord on His day.
 - Honour Him in the manner He wishes,
 - and not as we might on occasion capriciously prefer!

The first way in which we must serve the Lord on His day, is naturally by worshipping Him.

- In other words, we must be in personal contact with Him. We must have and attend church services. Have services in honour of the Lord. Because a church service is a meeting between God and His elect.
- Church and worship services school us to move closer to the Lord.
 - This makes it possible for us to truly know the Lord and to love Him.
 - During the service we hear the Word of the Lord.
 - In the service the Lord speaks to us personally.
 - He instructs us.
 - He teaches us His grace.
 - He teaches us to trust in Him.
 - But He also teaches us that His patience with us has limits. That we will have His wrath to deal with if we hate Him. And that we will be the losers if we face the Lord's judgement because we have been negligent or willful.

The Lord calls us through the preaching of the Word. **Through the preaching of the Word, faith and repentance are accomplished in our hearts.**

- It is written in Revelation that Christ walks among the lampstands of the church (Rev. 2:1). These lampstands are the congregations: We.
- And if we want our lampstand to stand beside Christ one day, then we must gather together on the day of the Lord, so that we may show that we are already with Him, as we will one day be.
- And also so that we may hear His Word and promise, and provide the proof that Christ also walks by this lampstand of ours.

For precisely this same reason the Sacraments are celebrated on the Sabbath. They affirm the meritorious accomplishment of Christ and strengthen our faith.

- Administering and using the sacraments is another way of worshipping the Lord with a living faith.
- All this makes us a praying congregation. That is what we must at all costs be and remain!

The Sabbath is naturally in itself also a sermon. It teaches that time itself is in the process of fulfillment.

- There will be a time, and that will be in heaven, in which there will be no more days
- There will be only one day, because the glory of the Lord will provide unending light. One eternal day with God, in which we will honour and glorify Him.
- It will be a Sabbath day, because we will have rest from the struggle. It will be a time of perfect rest.
 - We will have rest from sorrows. There will be no tears or complaints about work

- We will be clad in festive dress, because being with the Lord is a festive occasion
- There we will enjoy glory such as no eye has ever seen, and such as no ear has heard, and which has never entered the heart of man
- This is the imperishable wreath of honour Paul mentioned

How do we keep the Sabbath holy? Is our keeping of the Sabbath characterized by restfulness and a seeking after God? Does our keeping of the Sabbath testify to it that we have longed for a week to have fellowship with the Lord again?

- Throughout the week we are busy with our professional work, and Sunday is then merely the day which we set aside for all the little odd jobs awaiting attention.
- Often unnecessary work is created for Sundays, work which could quite easily have waited or remained undone.
- There are people who just do not rest from work on the Sunday. Many just continue as if it is just another ordinary day.

Yet we must, in a sense, work on Sundays.

- We must seek the Lord and worship Him. This is not physical work, but spiritual.
- We have six days per week for all our physical obligations. But one day of the week we must use to school our soul in the things relating to the Lord and His kingdom.
- The way in which we keep the Sabbath must point towards the day when the eternal feast with God begins. We must rest in the manner in which we will one-day rest in heaven.
- Sunday is a day of meditation.
 - That is the day on which we examine our lives.
 - To test ourselves, to see whether our standards and principles measure up to God's requirements.
 - It is a day to think about our mistakes and to decide to try to avoid the same mistakes in the future.
- Let us call the Sabbath on earth a day on which to practice ourselves in vigilance. Guarding against sin. Schooling in the knowledge of God and holiness, so that we may strive all the more strongly against sin.
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Do we actually attend to all these matters on the Sabbath? Our faith and how seriously we value our religion can, in a sense, be evaluated by the manner in which we celebrate Sundays.

- A lazy, indolent Sunday testifies to physical rest, but also to an empty soul. A soul which has been blunted and no longer longs for fellowship with God.
- In just the same way a Sabbath set aside for all the other odd jobs, or, even worse, on which we simply continue working as on all the other days of the week, testifies that we no longer know God at all.
- It also signifies that we will be in our eternal rest without God, because our lives already testify to our being without the Lord God in our rest.

Beloved, let us then keep to the best of our ability the commandment with regard to celebrating the Sabbath.

Let us now read Catechism Sunday 38 together.

Sunday 38

103. Q. What does God require in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained^[1] and that, especially on the day of rest, I diligently attend the church of God^[2] to hear God's Word,^[3] to use the sacraments,^[4] to call publicly upon the LORD,^[5] and to give Christian offerings for the poor.^[6] Second, that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, let the LORD work in me through His Holy Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal sabbath.^[7]

[1] Deut. 6:4-9; 20-25; I Cor. 9:13, 14; II Tim. 2:2; 3:13-17; Tit. 1:5. [2] Deut. 12:5-12; Ps. 40:9, 10; 68:26; Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25. [3] Rom. 10:14-17; I Cor. 14:26-33; I Tim. 4:13. [4] I Cor. 11:23, 24. [5] Col. 3:16; I Tim. 2:1. [6] Ps. 50:14; I Cor. 16:2; II Cor. 8 and 9. [7] Is. 66:23; Heb. 4:9-11.

Amen.

Closing prayer.

Closing Song: Scripture Versification 10-2:1

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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 Scripture Modern King James Version