

“Our Undivided Attention”
(Isaiah 58:13-14)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. Last week, we considered,
 - a. That the fourth commandment requires that we don't work on the Lord's Day.
 - b. That love for our neighbor requires that we don't make them work either.
 - c. And how difficult this is to do because we live in a culture that is geared to tempt us to do otherwise.
 - d. But I hope we understand that the world will always challenge us with regard to morality – because that is its nature – and that we must always stand on principle, rather than on what is practical at the moment.
 - e. We need to understand what Jesus meant when He said, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).
 - e. Do what is right, not what is popular – honor God and obey Him, rather than man – and He will bless you.

2. We also saw exceptions to this command.
 - a. We may do the things that must be done on the Lord's Day, that can't be done any other time, things that are necessary, such as,
 - (i) Getting dressed, personal hygiene, fixing your meals.
 - (ii) Or taking care of emergencies, such as putting out a fire in your house or putting the spare tire on your car if you get a flat.

 - b. And we may do things that are merciful:
 - (i) Putting out a fire in your neighbor's house, or helping him to change to flat.
 - (ii) Helping someone in need, feeding the poor.
 - (iii) Bringing the Gospel to someone who is lost.

 - c. There are even different types of employment we are authorized to do along these lines:
 - (i) Certainly as the priest had to work on the Sabbath, so also ministers may work, because they need to as part of what's required for the whole church to do on this day.
 - (ii) Doctors, nurses, police, firemen, certain utility workers, tow truck drivers do work that is necessary and merciful, and so they must work.
 - (iii) We need to remember, though, that we are not to use every Lord's Day, nor the whole of this day, for these purposes, if we can avoid it.
 - (iv) The rule is to rest and worship together with the people of God (Heb. 10:25), not work.

- (v) But when compassion dictates otherwise, we must work. Jesus says, “I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice” (Matt. 12:7).

B. Preview.

1. But work is just one of the things that might keep us from rest and worship. There are other things:
 - a. The opposite of work is play – can we rest and play at the same time? Would the Lord be pleased with that?
 - b. What about the things that occupy our minds during this day? Should we be thinking and talking about the things we shouldn’t be doing? Didn’t Jesus tell us that His commandments can be broken in our hearts as well as in our actions?
 - c. The Puritans were aware that the Sabbath might be violated in these ways, which is why they spelled it out in the *Confession*.
 - (i) “This Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs beforehand, do not only observe an holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy” (21.8).
 - (ii) Was their goal to make life difficult for the believer? Of course not.
 - (iii) They wanted God’s blessing on their people by showing them what God wanted in this commandment: namely, our undivided attention.
2. This evening, let’s consider two further things regarding the Lord’s Day:
 - a. The first is that on the Lord’s Day, we are to set aside the kind of recreation that takes our minds off of God.
 - b. The second is, that on the Lord’s Day, we are to keep ourselves from thinking and speaking about our work and recreations.
 - c. In this way, our minds, as well as our bodies, will be free to worship the Lord.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, let’s consider that we are to set aside the kind of recreation that takes our minds off of God.
 1. Reason teaches us as much.
 - a. Just as you can’t work and rest, or work and worship, at the same time; neither can you play and rest, or play and worship at the same time.
 - b. We should easily be able to see how this contradicts the whole purpose of the Lord’s Day, especially when we consider that we are to separate ourselves from the world in order to spend time with God – to give Him our undistracted attention.
 - c. Earthly recreations divide our attention.
 2. But we have more than reason: we have the Scriptures.

- a. Consider our passage: “If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, and honor 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” (Isa. 58:13-14).
 - b. Part of honoring the Lord on the Sabbath is turning “your foot from doing your own pleasure . . . from seeking your own pleasure” (v. 13).
 - c. We can’t spend the time with God as He requires, and spend it on something else at the same time that takes us away from God.
 - d. Our Confession calls these things worldly recreations:
 - (i) It doesn’t mean that they’re sinful.
 - (ii) It just means that they are tied to this world and distracting from God.
 - (iii) King James required that the *Book of Sports* be read from the pulpits of England, and that his subjects be encouraged to engage in those sports the king believed suitable for the Christian Sabbath, so that his people might be fit in case of war, that he might condemn the Catholics – since they could only participate in them if they went to the services beforehand – and that he might rebuke the Puritans for their strong stand on a holy Sabbath. The Puritans, of course, refused.
 - (iv) It’s not that the activities were wrong altogether, but they were wrong to do on the Lord’s Day.
 - (v) I could list all of the recreations that “Christians” engage in on the Lord’s Day that are wrong, but that would take a long time, and I think the principle is clear enough for each of us to figure out what’s right and what’s wrong.
 - (vi) We are to separate ourselves from the world – both from work and play – and spend the whole day with Him.
3. But there are exceptions.
- a. There are recreations that aren’t worldly, that won’t distract your mind and devotion from the Lord.
 - b. What might not be true of most sports, is certainly not true of a walk in the outdoors, or, in a very qualified sense, as long as it doesn’t keep us from attending worship and make us work too hard, a picnic. The Puritans used to take their horses riding in the woods, but took it very easy on their animals so as not to overtax them.
 - c. There are certain things we can let our children do that fall under necessity.
 - (i) Most of us as adults remember how hard it was to sit still as children, especially in church, because of all our pent up energy.
 - (ii) Necessity and mercy requires that we let our children release some of that energy in physical activity, as long as they don’t wear themselves out.
 - (iii) This is not meant to open the door to organized sports on the Lord’s Day, which would again defeat its purpose for the whole family.

- (iv) It's simply an acknowledgement that children need to let off some energy between services.
 - d. Adults, on the other hand, might need some activity to keep them awake. In this case, it's not wrong to get some exercise to be alert in worship.
 - e. As long as the activity is re-creative (not exhausting) and doesn't violate the spirit of the day, the rule of no work, and doesn't interfere with worship, then it is appropriate.
- B. Second, let's consider that if we are to keep the Lord's Day holy, we must also keep ourselves from thinking and speaking about our work and recreations.
1. If it's wrong to do something, it's also wrong to think about it or talk about it.
 - a. We know this is true with regard to the rest of the Ten Commandments:
 - (i) If it's wrong to commit adultery, it's also wrong to think about committing it and to talk about committing it.
 - (ii) If it's wrong to steal, it's also wrong to think about stealing or talk about stealing.
 - (iii) If it's wrong to murder, it's also wrong to think about it and talk about it, and so on.
 - b. The same thing is true of the Sabbath:
 - (i) If it's wrong to work on the Sabbath, it's also wrong to think about working and talk about working.
 - (ii) If it's wrong to play on the Sabbath, it's also wrong to think about playing and to talk about it.
 - (iii) Sometimes it might not seem like it is because the things we aren't to think or talk about aren't sinful in themselves, as the things in the other commandments are, but they are sinful on the Sabbath – that's what makes them wrong.
 2. But again, this is precisely what our text tells us: “If because of the Sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the LORD honorable, and honor 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” (Isa. 58:13-14).
 - a. Thinking about our work and recreations on the Lord's Day is more often than not for our own pleasure, and it divides our attention from the Lord.
 - b. Talking about them, more often than not, distracts others from keeping their thoughts focused on the Lord.
 - c. The Lord tells us not to seek our own pleasure – at least apart from God – but His pleasure.
 - d. He tells us not to speak our own word, but we are to speak those words that glorify Him.
 - e. He wants us to give Him our undivided attention.

3. Now again, there are exceptions that fall under the rule of necessity and mercy.
 - a. When someone new comes into the fellowship, it's alright to ask them about their lives, what they do for a living, what they enjoy doing with their free time, to get to know them, to know better how to minister to them.
 - b. It's also alright to share our work burdens with others so that they can pray for us: Jesus says, "I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice." It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.
 - c. We just need to be careful not to justify everything we might want to talk about under this category:
 - (i) Our goal is to spend the time with the Lord and to help others do the same.
 - (ii) The Lord will be far more pleased with a conversation about Him, His Word, His will, His worship, than our complaints about work or our comments on last week's game.
4. We have a few more things to consider with regard to the Sabbath that we'll look at next Lord's Day. But for now, let's continue to consider what we've seen, look at how we have been observing the Lord's Day Sabbath, and determine whether our observance shows the Lord we love Him by giving Him our undivided attention. Amen.