

The Sabbath

Matthew 12:1-14

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This morning I'd like to speak to you on a longstanding issue that has fueled controversy for thousands of years. It's a teaching that has been misconstrued and misinterpreted. It's a teaching that has led to the formation of many denominations and it has brought about denominational pride, it has brought about ugly debates. But I'm not here today to settle a debate. I doubt that a lay preacher from Gregory Hills can solve the puzzle of the Sabbath that has been running around for the past 2000 years. So my aim is not to settle the debate but more so to teach you what the Bible says about the Sabbath and how this teaching has been both a hot controversial topic but also a blessing in revealing God's character and the future rest highlighted at the core of this doctrine.

So from the outset, I will tell you that I don't believe the Jewish Sabbath is binding on the New Testament Church today, neither do I think it's binding on the believer. But I do believe the Sabbath teaching transcends beyond its physical shell of a weekly observance to highlight the greater, more significant truth that Christ is our Sabbath rest, that Christ is our eternal rest. So in this sense, the Sabbath day represented or foreshadowed the coming rest found in Jesus Christ by faith.

So there are a few denominations out there that stress the observance of the Sabbath with such strictness and loyalty that it becomes their distinguishing banner from all else, and there are other churches that hold it quite loosely. Some denominations like the Seventh-day Adventists and Seventh-day Baptists are a few that continually observe the Sabbath on Saturday as a continuation of the Old Testament practices specifically given to the Jews. Now for those of you who are unfamiliar with the Sabbath, I'll briefly define it for you now based on what the Scriptures teach.

So the Sabbath is a day of rest instituted by God for the Israelite people to observe, to observe by law. It was to be observed on the seventh day of the week, which was from Friday evening to Saturday evening. The idea behind the Sabbath was that the children of Israel would rest from work on the seventh day and remember God's creation of the world and His redemptive work from saving them from slavery in Egypt. Now the word Sabbath

comes from the Hebrew word "Shabbat," which means to cease. And to illustrate this for us, it's like God owns the land and He issues a legal document known as a cease and desist order to the Israelites every week. The order is a legally enforceable order that formally requires a person or an organization to stop activities considered harmful, defamatory, and illegal.

And so the Sabbath is a holy day set apart by God for the Israelites to religiously and ceremonially observe in the reverence and worship of God. But before we get into the deeper issues surrounding this teaching, I'd like to point to you what Genesis 2 teaches us about the Sabbath. So if I could get you to turn to Genesis chapter 2, what we will see is a reference or a blueprint of the Sabbath outlined by God. So Genesis chapter 2 verses 1 to 3 says this:

"Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God has created and made."

Here in these verses, we have the account of God's rest from creation. Now the word Sabbath is not explicitly mentioned in this passage, but the teaching itself is built upon the truth of creation. And what we see here is the principle of rest that is highlighted. But what does this rest signify? Well, we know that God cannot be exhausted, neither can He be tired nor can He be weary. So what does this rest mean? Well, the only way to interpret it is that God stopped or ceased from work. This rest was not to recover but to stand back in awe and aberration of His creation.

So Psalm 121:4 says, "Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep." Isaiah 40:28 says, "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable." So these two verses tell us God does not slack in effort, neither does He lack energy. He does not tire. He does not weary. And so the interpretation of rest in Genesis 2 cannot be that of physical rest or mental recovery, but rather that God stopped creating. Everything was good and perfect. So God ceased from work. And so the seventh day in Genesis 2 is vastly different from all other days. It is unique. It is special. But why is the seventh day unique and special?

You look with me in verse 1, it says, "Heaven and earth are complete. Creation is finished." Picture a marathon runner who's running a marathon and perhaps he's trained for it all year, for many years actually. And he finishes that race. He crosses that white line. Does he need to keep run-

ning? No, he's finished. He's perfected his race. He's trained all year for it. He's standing on the podium receiving first place. You can't improve upon perfection. You look at verse 2, it says God rested on the seventh day or ceased work because the world was in its perfect state. There was no improvement needed by the creative genius of God because perfection cannot be improved upon.

So the idea of rest can only be that God ceased from working because everything was already perfect. And then we have verse 3, it says God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it or set it apart. And He made it holy, a day for Himself. But what you do know is that in these verses, or even in the Genesis account, Adam and Eve are not commanded to observe the Sabbath at all. In fact, the Sabbath is for God. God instituted that day for Himself and for no one else. And so the purpose of the first Sabbath, if we could call it that, was a rest that was mandated by holy perfection and a ceasing of the creative work by the hand of God. This rest was specifically for the person of God. Adam and Eve are already in a perfect state of rest. They enjoy God, they enjoy fellowship with Him, and so the idea of rest is already being realized by them. Sin had not entered the world, and everything was in a perfect state.

It wasn't until the fall in Genesis 3 that things changed. Adam and Eve are excommunicated from the garden and each receive their curses. And the nature of the world changes from perfection to corruption. And so the world is marred by sin. Now we will see now how sin changes the way the Sabbath is observed. We've gone from the Sabbath where God enjoyed His perfect creation to a Sabbath that is now a remembrance of what used to be perfect. Mankind, being culpable for the corruption of the world through sin, changed the way God interacts with His creation.

In the Old Testament, the Jews, who are God's elect people, are legally and morally required to observe the Sabbath under the leadership of Moses in the wilderness. So I'll get you to turn to Exodus chapter 20. Here we have the formal giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, but our focus will be on the fourth commandment in verse 8. And it says:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

Embedded in the Ten Commandments is the lawful observance of the Sab-

bath. This is a moral and legal requirement given to a specific people, with severe penalties should any disobey. Can anyone tell me what the penalty was for those who disobeyed and broke the fourth commandment? Death. It was death.

But in these verses, there is a call to remember the Sabbath. Verse 8, "remember the Sabbath day." But one cannot remember unless one has previously been taught it. In fact, for the Israelites, this is not the first mention of the Sabbath at all. Exodus 16, if you want to turn a few pages back, records for us the Sabbath when God miraculously provides quail and manna from heaven. The Lord says to them to take a double portion of the produce on the sixth day, for on the seventh day is the Sabbath, which is holy to the Lord. Look with me in verse 26, it says, "Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none."

Now it happened that some people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the Lord said to Moses, look at this question, "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?" "How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?" See, for the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore, He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day.

Although Exodus 20 recounts the formal giving of the 10 commandments or the law, Exodus 16 tells us that the Jews already received the law. Verse 28, the Israelites are very much aware of God's commandments and laws. In verse 29, the Lord has given them the Sabbath to observe already.

As we read through the Old Testament, we find out a lot about the Sabbath, what was prohibited, what was permissive. And I'd just like to go through some of the things that the Old Testament and even some other Jewish books highlight. So in the Bible, things that were forbidden on the Sabbath were number one, kindling a fire. We know to the person that went to grab sticks in Exodus, what happened to him? He was stoned to death. Then we have gathering manna, which is forbidden on the Sabbath. We have selling goods, which is forbidden on the Sabbath. And an interesting one is bearing burdens in Jeremiah. This is forbidden on the Sabbath. What does that mean, bearing burdens? Well, that is to not let the cares of this world overtake you because your mind, your whole being, should be focused on God on the Sabbath day.

Now, there is a Jewish history book known as the Book of Jubilees, which retells the story of creation up until the time of Moses. Now it gives direction on observing the Sabbath by stating things that should not be done, and I'll give you a list of those things. The Book of Jubilees prohibits work

on the Sabbath. It prohibits fasting on the Sabbath because the Sabbath day should be a day of feasting, should be a day of festivities, not a day of fasting. And the Book of Jubilees also highlights that you are not allowed to have sexual relations with your wife on the Sabbath day.

I should note that this book also emphasizes that even angels observe the Sabbath because the Sabbath, according to them, is eternal and that it was established in heaven long before it was established on earth. On the other hand, in the Bible, we are able to locate things that are permissible on the Sabbath. So things that are permitted on the Sabbath include military campaigns, marriage feasts, dedication feasts, visiting a man of God or a prophet, changing temple guards, preparing showbread and putting it out—we're going to focus on this later—offering sacrifices, and even the duties of priests and Levites were permitted on the Sabbath.

Then we have sacred communities who rigorously upheld the Sabbath and interpreted their own beliefs and traditions into the teaching. Now these injunctions were introduced to enhance, as it were, the sanctity of the Sabbath itself. Obviously, they were well-intentioned, but it was a serious mistake adding to God's law. And Matthew Henry, the great commentator, states that their minds were corrupted through zeal and ritual, trying to put in their own interpretations and explanations on the Sabbath.

Now one of the communities that rigorously upheld the Sabbath was the Qumran community, and they were strict observers of the law. They were more strict than the Pharisees themselves. Now much of their teachings are preserved in the ancient text known as the Damascus Document, and one of the Sabbath laws stated:

Now Jesus exposes this manmade law of not helping an animal falling into a pit on the Sabbath day. He shows them that works of necessity and works of mercy are actually lawful on the Sabbath day. Jesus challenges this idea in Matthew 12 if you want to turn there. Matthew 12 verses 11 to 12 by saying, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

When Jesus proceeds to heal a man with a withered hand, and much like the Pharisees, communities were influential as pillars of holiness and separation during the biblical times. Now in Qumran specifically, you were not allowed to talk about work or labor on the Sabbath. They believed that your mouth and your mind must be fixated on God. You weren't allowed to talk about work or labor. You could not walk more than 600 meters from your house. For you to walk on the Sabbath would indicate that you're doing

business or you're exerting physical effort, which was forbidden. You could not draw water from a vessel on the Sabbath. If you were bathing in, say, a pool, you could drink from the water there, but you could not physically grab a utensil or a vessel and scoop water and drink. That was forbidden. You could not save a human life unless you only used your bare hands. You could not use a rope or some manmade aid to help you save a person. You could only use your bare hands. And you could not assist an animal giving birth on the Sabbath.

Now the questions that come from this is, why are rules and regulations added to the teaching of the Sabbath? Well, one theory suggests that the teaching of the Sabbath was too obscure and confusing. What better way to explain the unclear than to say that the teaching of the Sabbath was too obscure and confusing? What better way to explain the unclear with thoughts from the wise and religious? So their interpretations of the Sabbath over time become popular. They become tradition, then they become law, and then they become binding. Their ideas become popular, they become tradition, they become law, and then they become binding. Jubilees, Qumran, the Mishnah all legalize the Sabbath by layering this holy teaching with rules and laws that take away from the true essence of what the Sabbath is all about. The Sabbath is about resting in the Lord, but they forgot mercy. They forgot justice. They forgot faith. Instead, they put regulations. They replaced the awe of God with a mindset fixed on an anxious awareness of what they must not do on the Sabbath.

Sadly, the teaching of the Sabbath had been hijacked by legalism, much like circumcision. God tells us in Exodus that the Sabbath was a sign of the Mosaic covenant. Exodus 31:13 says, "You shall keep My Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you." The Sabbath was a sign. Circumcision was a sign of the Abrahamic covenant. A sign brings distinction. A sign foreshadows a greater truth that then takes its place. The Israelites were to be circumcised as a sign they were God's people. And much like the Sabbath, the Jews were to observe the Sabbath because they were testifying that they were God's people.

Now the thing is, signs are temporary markers which point to or foreshadow a future expectation. In this case, the Sabbath foreshadowed a future eternal rest in Christ. Regarding circumcision, there is no binding requirement for a Christian to be circumcised. Paul goes to great lengths in Galatians to tell us the true essence of circumcision should not be the physical act itself but the circumcision of the heart. That is, one who trusts in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now the Talmud, which is another Jewish religious text, devotes 24 chap-

ters to the teaching of the Sabbath. For instance, it forbids 39 occupations on the Sabbath. If we look in Exodus, it forbids works such as planting and harvesting. However, in the Talmud, they interpreted harvesting to be picking corn. And for you to rub it between your fingers, that was threshing. That was also forbidden. But what we have in Matthew 12, if you can turn there, is the disciples are picking corn and they're eating from it. The big issue was that the disciples had offended the traditions of the Pharisees and not the actual commandment itself. They broke Jewish tradition and not the law of God.

Now some may think that Jesus and His disciples are stealing corn from someone else's cornfield. But God told the Jews to leave the corners of their fields unharvested for the poor and for strangers. Leviticus 19 says, "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God." This command in Leviticus was a command, or an expression rather, of loving your neighbor. It was an expression of mercy, of compassion. It was inside the scope of law for them to take and eat. They weren't really harvesting.

In the New Testament, there are seven events recorded of Jesus healing on the Sabbath. Five of those events are challenged harshly and disputed by His enemies, who accuse Him of breaking the Sabbath. But the heart of the Sabbath, as Jesus understood it, was that deeds of mercy and compassion are lawful on the Sabbath. They were necessary. They were obligatory. Now what Jesus was advocating for was a Sabbath reform. Because the Jews had corrupted the true significance of the Sabbath and why it was implemented in the first place. They made it about rules. They made it about traditions. But Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, the one who invented the Sabbath, has to reform what man has corrupted.

When we look in the Old Testament, what do you think Israel was judged more frequently for? It wasn't for failing to keep the dietary laws. It wasn't even for failing to keep the Sabbath. They were judged harshly for idolatry. That was one of them. But the other thing was Israel's chronic failure to keep the Sabbath. They were judged harshly for idolatry. That was one of them. But the other thing was Israel's chronic failure to show justice and mercy, specifically towards the widows, the orphans, and the poor.

In Matthew 23:23, Jesus strongly denounces the religious leaders for neglecting the more weightier matters of the law. The leaders disregarded justice, mercy, faithfulness, and the law. To correct their errors, Jesus led His people and often commanded His followers to love one another. In Romans 13:8, it led Paul to say, "Owe no one anything except to love one

another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law."

Now when the Pharisees came to Jesus in Matthew 12, if you want to turn there now, if you're not there already, they were disgusted with He and His disciples. They harvested the corn because they were hungry, and the Pharisees accused them of breaking the Sabbath laws. Now Jesus responds to their claims in two ways. Firstly, Jesus refers to the specific event of David eating the showbread in the tabernacle. That event is found in 1 Samuel 21. And secondly, Jesus refers to the general idea of priests breaking the Sabbath, yet they're considered blameless because they're doing the work of God.

Now let me focus on the first claim or the first reason Jesus offers with the showbread. Now when David ate the showbread on the Sabbath, he was on the run from Saul. He was tired, he was hungry, he was asking for food. Now the showbread that David ate was 12 loaves of bread, each representing the 12 tribes of Israel. And they were divided into two piles of six on a golden table before the presence of God in the tabernacle. Now the showbread was considered a perpetual meal offering to the Lord. And every Sabbath day, the bread would be exchanged. A fresh batch would come in, and the old bread would go out. But the thing was, only a priest could eat the bread. Now David's not a priest, but he's eating the bread. But he's eating the bread.

Now Ahimelech, who's the priest at the time, he gives David the bread, asks him one question before he gives him the bread. He asks him, like, basically, are you in a pure state? Are you undefiled? And David says yes. And Ahimelech, he gives him the bread to eat.

Now considering the circumstances, Ahimelech, the priest at the time, decides to show mercy and compassion by giving David this bread. It was not lawful for David to eat this bread, yet he was given the bread. But Jesus actually approves of this. Jesus shares this story to say that these leaders are so over-literal in their thinking and interpretation of the law that they are missing the whole point.

Now secondly, the priests work to offer sacrifices and fulfill their religious duties on the Sabbath day. But they're considered blameless because temple service takes precedence over the Sabbath. Now this is a work of necessity. The priests must remove the showbread weekly on the Sabbath; they must keep the fires lit as they offer animal sacrifices, and they must perform the temple work, the usual stuff. Now the Pharisees rescinded any judgment upon temple workers because they were working tirelessly, not simply to offer sacrifices, but to accommodate the glory and prestige of the temple. That's all they cared about. Jesus pinpoints their hypocrisy and

blindness.

Jesus rebuked them for laying aside the commandment of God to follow the traditions, like washing pitchers and cups. They valued material things and failed to see the spiritual significance of their teachings.

Now Jesus ends the conversation by talking about the temple. He says there's one greater than the temple standing right in front of you. He says, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath."

Now in response to another miracle on the Sabbath, Jesus says in John 5:17, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working." Now let me ask you, after reading that verse, is the Sabbath a day of work or a day of rest? In Matthew 12:7, Jesus then refers to the scripture in Hosea 6:6 of unrepentant Israel and Judah who had lacked covenant faithfulness and had sinned against God continually. God said, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice."

The religious elite, in some ways, had turned the Sabbath day into a day of work, not sacrifice. The religious elite, in some ways, had turned the Sabbath day into a day of pride when really it was to be a day of rejoicing, a day of mercy, a day of festivity. It's a day you show compassion; it was a day of liberation, a day you reflect upon the grace of God, what He has done for you redemptively, a day of gratitude and worship. Sabbath work that truly pleases God is characterized by unselfishness.

Now the Westminster Larger Catechism has much to say about the Sabbath for the Christian. It is a Presbyterian document, much aligned to ours, the London Baptist Confession of Faith. It's very similar. It is pro-Sabbath in teaching and practice, although I disagree with its application for the New Testament church. I do, however, agree with the understanding of how the Sabbath is defined in the document. It looks at the Sabbath through both a negative and positive lens. In a negative sense, holy resting involves resting from sinful works, from worldly employment, and from worldly recreation. The positive aspect involves us doing our religious duties on the Sabbath, what they term the Sabbath or the Lord's Day. And that is works of mercy and works of necessity, like attending church. Now that is a good understanding into the heart of the law.

But one of the issues I will share is, I think the Old Testament Sabbath on Saturday is vastly different from the Lord's Day on Sunday. They are two completely different days. Now those who espouse Christian Sabbatarianism, like those who hold to the Larger Catechism, they conflate the two days. They say the Sabbath is now the Sunday or the Lord's Day. They're both intertwined. I actually disagree with that because to me, the Bible

shares no clear link between the Sabbath observance on Saturday being changed to Sunday. In fact, Christian Sabbatarianism shifts the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day of the week. Now I believe the Sabbath is Saturday; it has always been Saturday in the Bible, though there is no command to observe it for the Christian at all in the Bible.

What we do find is a blueprint for the Lord's Day, where there is worship, where there is gathering on a Sunday. Now many of the early Christians, the early Christian Sabbath, was not transferred over to Sunday. Now many of the early Church Fathers believe the Sabbath did not transfer over to Sunday. When I talk about the early Church Fathers, I'm talking about believers who existed within 500 years after Christ was born. They believed that the Sabbath was vastly different from the Lord's Day. They believed that people or Christians who observed the Sabbath were Judaizing. They distinguished between the Sabbath being a day of rest on Saturday and Sunday being a day of worship known as the Lord's Day. They believed the Sabbath celebrated the end of God's creation, while the Lord's Day celebrated the beginning of new creation, much like us here today.

Now Athanasius says the Sabbath was the end of the first creation, and the Lord's Day was the beginning of the new creation. That's his quote. Justin Martyr believed the Sabbath was not to be observed literally by the Christian. Ignatius of Antioch referred to those who came out of Judaism as now possessing a new hope and no longer observing the Sabbath but living to observe the Lord's Day. They put that behind. The Council of Laodicea in 363 stated Christians must not Judaize by resting on the Sabbath but must work on that day, rather honoring the Lord's Day, and if they can, resting then as Christians. That's a Christian document.

However, centuries later, the Catholics endorsed Saturday Sabbath rest to be Sunday worship too. So we have the Catholics who have merged the days together, nearly a thousand years later. They basically merged the two days together, and this was done under the influence of Catholic scholars and philosophers known to us as Alcuin and Thomas Aquinas, and it became an influential practice to which some Protestants now hold. Sabbatarian teaching picked up immensely under Puritan theology and influence. And so many Puritans were Sabbatarians, and Sunday became known as the Christian Sabbath.

Now turn with me to Colossians chapter 2, verse 16 to 17. Verse 16 to 17. Verse 16 says, "So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths, which are shadows of things to come, but the substance is of Christ." Now in these few verses, Paul speaks about food and drink. He speaks about festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths, all Jewish. But they stem from dietary and ceremonial laws given by God.

But festivals and days are shadows of Christ. Shadows are reflections or images cast from an object under light. If you look around this room, you can see many shadows, but they emanate from a particular object. The Sabbath, in the same way, is projecting Christ. It's a sign, it's a shadow, it's temporary, it's pointing to Christ.

When Paul speaks of shadows, what he means is that these specific festivals and days are sketches or images coming from an object, or the substance, as Paul says, which is Jesus Christ. The shadow points to Christ. Hebrews 4:9 says, "There remains therefore a rest for the people of God." So the Sabbath rest spoken here refers to Christ being the ultimate rest for the believers. You have ceased from your own efforts of self-salvation, self-dependence, disobedience, and you've entered into the rest offered by Jesus Christ. All these Old Testament elements and allusions foreshadow the coming of Christ, who fulfills all. Christ is our Sabbath. When we look at Hebrews 4, we see a picture of the complete rest offered through Christ. Now the rest goes beyond the observance of a special day because true rest is found in a person. It's found in Jesus Christ.

So in conclusion, I want to end this sermon in all fairness and encourage you to exercise your own personal soul liberty on this matter, to believe as you wish and as you are convinced on this matter, because in my opinion, it's a secondary matter. But it then becomes an issue if you do believe that this is a requirement for salvation to observe the Sabbath. I've got no problems with Christian Sabbatarians. I think what they do is up to them. If they believe it's relevant for them, that's awesome. One brother should not look at the other and despise him because he holds to a Sabbath or he doesn't.

Romans 14:5-6 emphasizes that the observance of days is a matter of conscience. The days mentioned by Paul refer to the ceremonial days that the Jews observed, bearing in mind that they were no salvific substance in holding these days. Jewish feast days, new moons, Sabbaths have no binding relationship upon the believer at all. As I close, I will emphasize what the Bible does show, in summary, about the Sabbath, specifically in the New Testament.

Number one, the Sabbath is both a sign and a shadow of a greater object. Much like physical circumcision, the Sabbath has no connection to the believer's salvation. Number two, there is no New Testament command for us to observe the Sabbath. Number three, all 10 commandments are repeated except the Sabbath. The Sabbath is observed; it's never quoted. Number four, there are no Sabbath prescriptions or rules anywhere in the New Covenant for the believer. Number five, there is no New Testament instruction for how one is to behave on the Sabbath for the believer in the

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New Testament. The Jerusalem church in Acts 15 did not require Gentile believers to observe the Sabbath. They did not require Gentile believers to observe the Sabbath. Number seven, the apostles and teachers offer no warning or chastisement to people who do not observe the Sabbath. We need to think about these carefully.

So I hope this sermon today perhaps shed some light on the teaching on the Sabbath. Perhaps it's caused you to think about changes, or perhaps it's confirmed your faith in what you already believed. Whatever it is, we should maintain a spirit of unity to those who believe differently on secondary matters, maintaining mercy and grace, peace and love to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.

All right, let's pray.