

Celebrating or Not Celebrating Christmas with a Clear Conscience – Part 2

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Okay, we got another handout going around. Yeah, that's right, we're full of handouts today. And this will be for later in our study because I mentioned last week that We, we, we will look at not only the biblical justification, and we'll continue what we started last week, which was dealing with this issue of whether or not it's a sin or idolatry to celebrate Christmas or any other Christian holidays.

And my argument has been that it's not a sin. So long as what you're doing is not sinful, but it's not so it's also not obligatory. That it's really should be a matter of liberty left up to the person, left up to the individual churches to determine, to decide what they choose to do in such times.

And so last week we began looking at The biblical justification for observing or commemorating events great events in the history of redemption. And so we looked at some examples from the Old Testament. And today what we're going to do is look at a couple of passages from the New Testament that deal with this issue and trying to understand exactly what they're talking about there.

And then also I wanted to end with just a brief survey of kind of the history of interpretation. In terms of faithful, sound, expositors, pastors, theologians, especially in the Reformed tradition what was the consensus or what did others believe about this topic? Not that we should build our whole case upon that.

This can be helpful because if we are adopting a position that is peculiar or unique, that no one else has ever held to, then that typically is not a good sign, right? It's not something good and it is helpful to look. And see what to have others who have proven themselves to be sound, to be faithful, not perfect men.

Of course, there are no perfect men and there are no perfect pastors who have perfect theology. However, those who are sound and have a good reputation among us, what did they think about these topics and kind of see some of those issues as well. So that's what our plan is today. And so with that, we'll go ahead and continue on in our study.

But before we do, let's pray and commend ourselves to the Lord. Commit our time to the Lord and pray for his blessing throughout our study. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we come to you now, Lord, as we are seeking to Lord put our minds at ease concerning these issues that came into our focus, Lord, even about a year ago at this time Lord, and there may have been some unsettlement in our own minds and in our own consciences concerning such things.

But Lord, we want to have clarity. Lord, we want to have good reason for the things that we do. Lord, we don't want to live blindly or aimlessly. Just assuming that everything that we do and practice as a culture, Lord, as a church, as families, in our own individual lives, Lord, that none of it needs reflection or that we don't need to weigh it in light of Scripture.

Yet, Lord, at the same time, we don't want to just adopt positions simply because someone has told us to Lord without there being some good biblical justification, nor do we want to upset our families or adopt some procure or obscure position just so that we can be different from other people.

But Lord, we want everything that we do to be founded upon your word and we want to have a good and clear understanding. So, Lord, we pray that you would help us in these things and Lord, especially in topics like this one and Lord, others such as it, Lord, we pray that we would always be very patient with one another, Lord, that we would pursue peace and charity and Lord love toward the brethren that we would seek unity and Lord, wherever there is room for there to be liberty, Lord, we pray that we would grant that to one another.

And Lord, not have a condemning and judgmental attitude toward each other. So, Lord, we desire peace and harmony in our church and in our families, but we want that peace and harmony to be established on the truth. And so, Lord, we pray that you would help us and guide us into all truth, Lord, so that we might do those things that are pleasing to you.

So be with us today, Lord, and help us. And it is in Christ in that we pray. Amen. All right. So a couple of passages I want us to look at. We'll begin with Galatians chapter four. And it is important for us to understand, I think, the context of what is taking place in the book of Galatians, but also in the larger body of Christ during the time of the apostles, right?

And what is going on? There is a transition that takes place from the old covenant to the new covenant. We understand that the old covenant that was made at Mount Sinai, and we'll deal a lot of these things in the book of Hebrews, because Hebrews is dealing with this relationship between the two covenants, between the old and between the new.

But the old covenant that was established with Israel at Mount Sinai was a covenant that was given to the Jewish people or to the nation of Israel. And we know and understand that salvation from that time until the time of Christ was almost exclusively amongst the Jewish people, right? Salvation was of the Jews, right?

This is what the Bible. Clearly teaches us in Romans three and also Romans nine and Romans chapter 10 as well. This was their advantage. This was their blessing This was what was their benefit is the true knowledge of God Existed in those people and it was entrusted to them and not to the nation's during that time the nation's For the most part lived in darkness.

They did not have knowledge of God. They were without God, without peace, without hope in this present world. And the knowledge of God was confined there amongst the Jewish people. And the true worship of God was there found among them. Not that there was never a Gentile who became a believer in the Old Covenant.

We know that that's not the case, such as Ruth, such as Naaman. There were others as well who became believers, but when they did that, they had to assimilate and become a part of

the people of Israel, right? They had to become a part of them, and there was not this mandate. To take the gospel to the ends of the earth and for the nations to be brought in, into the body of Christ, there was still this dividing wall of separation that existed between Jew and Gentile, but with the coming of Christ, what happens to that wall of separation?

It is obliterated. It is torn down. And now the two peoples, the two groups, Jew and Gentile are being brought into one body and made into one temple or one household, right? One people of God through faith in Jesus Christ. And that's what's happening during the writing of the New Testament. And a lot of what the New Testament is dealing with is how is this relationship between Jewish Christians and between Gentile Christians?

How do they exist, coexist in the same body of Christ? Because they come from very different backgrounds. And yet now they are united together in one body. And yet there are these issues that were rising up. That was a result of this former distinction that existed in the Old Covenant. And there's a transition that is taking place in the church as the Gentiles are being brought in.

What do we expect of the Gentiles, the Gentile Christians, now that they are a part of the kingdom of God? And then what do we expect of Jewish Christians that are now, and how do these two groups relate to one another? Right, and this is a major point. of emphasis, a major question, a major topic that rises in the very early days of the church.

As soon as the Gentiles are being grafted in and incorporated in, what are we to do with him? And what is the relationship of the law of Moses and the old covenant to these new Gentile believers? Are they under obligation to keep the law of Moses, to keep the old covenant? To be circumcised, to keep the festivals, all of these rituals and ordinances that were associated with that covenant.

And again, this is what Hebrews is dealing with from cover to cover, right? And we'll talk about a lot of these things that when there is the change of priesthood, there's also a change of law and these ordinances are passing away and they're ready to be done away with so that the worship. Transformed in the new covenant not according to the substance, but according to the outward forms There is a transformation that takes place in those things and also in more significant matters as well We know that the book of Galatians is written addressing this topic in Galatians the chief concern is that a group of people of false teachers Who are claiming to be Christians, these Judaizers are coming in and insisting and enforcing that the Gentile Christians, in order for them to be saved, that they must be circumcised.

That circumcision is a requirement in order for them to be a partaker of Jesus Christ. And the apostle Paul is obliterating this argument and saying, no, you cannot let these people judge you and insist that you submit to this yoke of slavery. Because if you submit to this, then you are obligated to not only be circumcised, but what else are you obligated to do?

You have to keep the whole law once you admit circumcision as necessary this act that a man does on his body as Necessary for justification. We're not dealing with justification by

faith anymore. Now. We're dealing with justification According to works of the law and if you're going to be justified by works of the law Then you are obligated to keep the whole law, but who can keep the whole law Nobody, only our Lord Jesus Christ, but he provides justification, not by works of the law, but by faith in him, right?

Faith in him. So that's the issue he's dealing with in Galatians. Faith in Christ, justification by faith versus justification by works of the law. And whenever these old covenant rituals are brought up as a basis for one's justification, the Apostle Paul will not give them any ground. And he says, no, that this is under this will bring about your judgment, your condemnation, and those who are unsettling them.

He says, I wish that they would emasculate themselves, that they would be mutilated because of what they're doing to you. Okay, well, in this context, he addresses days, right? Days in the obligation to keep feast days in this context. Galatians 4 verses 8 to 11 says, however, at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you that perhaps I've labored over you in vain.

Here they are. They've come to know God. They didn't know God. They were by nature slaves of those things that are not God's, but now they've come to know God. And how did they come to know God through faith in Christ, right? That is how they came to know God. This is the same as he talks about when he says, how is it that you receive the spirit?

Was it by works of the law or the hearing of faith? How is it that God does miracles among you? Was it by works of the law or was it by the hearing of faith? Well, it was not by your works of the law that you received the spirit, but through faith in Christ. This is the basis of our standing and of our justification before God.

Faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. Not through circumcision, not through keeping the festivals of the old covenant, but can a man observe those things? And if he observes them meticulously and does that throughout the course of his life, Can he present his circumcision as the basis for his admittance into the kingdom of God?

Can he present his meticulous keeping of the feast days of the Old Covenant as the basis for his standing before God and why he should be admitted into the kingdom of God? No, of course not. And that's what they're doing. They're going back to this mixture between faith in Christ, but also doing these things.

And these things are what is commending them to God, giving them their approval before God. And whenever we start admitting something other than faith in Christ as the basis for

our standing before God, then we are adding. Works, we're adding something to what Christ has done, right? It must be by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

These are some of the principles upon which the entire Protestant Reformation was founded. Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone. This is the way that a man is. Saved not faith plus circumcision, not faith plus keeping holy days, right? This cannot be what commends a man to God, but this is what they are doing. They are admitting as necessary for their justification and for their salvation, these aspects of the old covenant system of worship, the circumcision of the body, the keeping of feast days, the observance of days and months and seasons and years, and that if you don't do these things.

Then you cannot be saved. And they are submitting to this yoke of slavery again. But what of their fathers were ever saved by this yoke? Zero of them. So he's saying, why are you again going back to these elemental things that cannot produce salvation? Okay. Then also Colossians, Colossians chapter two, verses 16 to 23,

Colossians two, 16 to 23.

And notice here. I think a very important word in verse 16, therefore, no one is to act as your judge, right? That word as your judge, as someone who is judging you in relationship to these things, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day, things which are a mere shadow of what is to come.

But the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen inflated without cause by his fleshly mind and not holding fast to the head from whom the entire body being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments grows with a growth, which is from God.

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit to the decrees such as? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, which all refer to things destined to perish with use in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men.

These are matters which have to be sure the appearance of wisdom in self made religion and self abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. Here again, it's, I believe he's dealing with the same issue. There are these people who are unsettling the church and who are insisting that the Gentile Christians, that they observe and they keep these aspects and components of the old covenant system of worship.

And that they are letting men judge them on the basis of their adherence to these things. So that if they're not keeping them, these men are condemning them. They're judging them.

They're passing judgment and condemnation upon them. That's why he says, don't let anyone be your judge in relationship to these things.

Because on what basis are they judging you? They have no authority to judge you on this basis anymore. Are the Gentiles required to abstain from pork? Are they required to keep the dietary laws of the old covenant? Those things have passed away. So why are you submitting yourself to those who are judging you on the basis of these things?

Do not handle, do not touch, do not taste. This has the appearance of wisdom, right? That when people do these things and practice these things. People think, oh, they're very serious and they're very committed in their Christian religion. They don't eat this. They don't eat meat. They have a very strict diet.

Look at how they treat their body. Asceticism and severe treatment of the body. But can those things save a man? Can a person meticulously follow the food laws of the old covenant, and so long as he never puts any unclean meat in his body, can he present that to God on the day of judgment as the basis for his admittance into the kingdom of God?

No. It does not do anything. Can the Lack of pork in the body Overcome the indulgences of the flesh. Can it change the heart of man? Can circumcising the body circumcise the heart? No, none of those things can happen How is a man justified by faith in Jesus Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit of God?

Those things those components they had a time in a season They were there as stewards or as tutors until the coming of Christ. But now that Christ has come, there's no longer a need for these things in terms of an obligation or a requirement. They are expecting the Gentiles to do these things because they're judging them.

It's not a matter of freedom and liberty. It's a matter of obligation, of necessity, that you must do these things. And if you don't do these things, then you cannot be saved. You cannot be a part of the people of God. And he's saying, why are you allowing these people to create these rules and enforce them on you?

And you're submitting to them as if your salvation is based upon such things. He says, don't do that, right? Don't do that. And rather you have to see what is going on. Now see this also in relation to Acts 15, Acts 15

verses one. And then we'll read verse five and then we'll read verses 10 and 11. This is what's going on in Galatians four and in Colossians chapter two. In relationship to circumcision in relationship to food laws in relationship to feast days, right? These are the things that are taking place Acts 15 1 some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses.

You cannot be saved Now here they are teaching salvation justification by what by circumcision right by works So, even if they say, yes, you have to believe in Christ, but you

also have to be circumcised, right? When you add circumcision into it, when something takes its place alongside of Jesus Christ, then it's no longer salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

Now it is salvation by your circumcision. And they're teaching that unless someone is circumcised, he cannot be saved, right? Which is. Contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now, in relation to our present topic, what person is saying, unless you observe Christmas, you cannot be saved? Is anyone teaching or saying that thing?

No, absolutely. I mean, I don't know of anyone. Maybe a Roman Catholic is. But what evangelical have you ever met that says that faith in Christ plus celebrating Christmas is going to save me, and that's the ticket I have that guarantees me a spot in heaven? No one is talking about those things, yet this context of unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved.

This is what is going on in relationship to circumcision in Acts 15 in relationship to circumcision in Galatians chapter three, but also in relationship to keeping feast days in Galatians four and also in Colossians chapter two, Acts chapter 15, verse five, verse five. But some of the sect of the Pharisees Who had believed stood up saying it is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the law of Moses There it's necessary.

They're not saying it's optional. It's a matter of Liberty a matter of conscience None of those things are being said It is a, what a necessity and obligation. You must be circumcised in order to be saved. And also you must observe the law of Moses. You must keep the feast of booths. You must keep the day of atonement.

You must keep the fast over the Passover, whatever other elements of their worship were there. You must keep these things. In order to be saved. This is what this sect of the Pharisees that was there in the body of Christ, right? These are not outsiders the outsiders Pharisees were saying we're going to kill you all These are those who are in the body that are amongst the brothers Who have believed in a sense, but either the implications of the new covenant and faith in Christ have not been fully formed in their mind.

So they are in error or they're false brothers, right? It could be one or the other. Then what is the conclusion in verse 10 and 11, acts 15, 10 and 11. This is Peter. He says, now, therefore, why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke, which neither our fathers nor we. We have been able to bear, but we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus in the same way as they also are.

And their conclusion is they don't need to be baptized. They don't need to be circumcised in order to be saved. And you're putting a burden on them that none of our fathers were able to keep. And none of us have ever been able to keep right. None of us Jews who were under this old covenant. This burden was never able to deliver any of us from our sins.

So now, why are you putting it on the Gentiles when God has opened up the way in which a man may be justified in the sight of God through faith in Christ? And yet now you are insisting. That they do these things. So here you're dealing with people who are insisting that Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians after the coming of Christ, after his death, resurrection and his ascension, after the new covenant has been inaugurated or ratified in the blood of Christ, this major change has taken place in the history of redemption.

Right? There is an old covenant and there is a new covenant. These are not one in the same covenants, right? If they were the same, then they would just be one covenant. But there is a clear distinction in the Bible between the old and between the new. And what is the event that takes place that separates these two covenants?

What brings a transition from the old into the new? It is the ratifying of the new covenant in the blood of Christ. This is why we take the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is called the new covenant in my blood. It is that blood of Christ, the shedding of his blood that inaugurates or ratifies the new covenant so that it is the ruling force over the church, over the people of God from that time.

And yet they are going back to this old covenant system and letting people insist that you must keep these aspects of the old covenant in order to be saved, in order to be justified. And on that, they will not budge an inch. There's no room for that because if they allow circumcision as an addition to the work of Christ, what do you no longer have?

You have no gospel. There's no salvation. Now it's dependent upon us. And we cannot budge an inch with people like this who are insisting that there are things that we must do rituals that we must keep in order to bring about our salvation. Okay, now, with this in mind, Romans chapter 14, Romans chapter 14, and here we're dealing with a different issue because in Romans 14, we're talking about food and we're talking about days again.

So, those issues are still there, but in this case, there isn't the insistence that one do these things for the sake of their salvation. But now we're dealing with how do we Gentiles relate to our Jewish brothers whose consciences are still bothered and they can't bring themselves to violate the food laws.

Though they know that those laws are no longer in force, and they're not insisting that the Gentiles keep these laws. But they themselves, because of their lifelong practice, cannot bring themselves to eat pork or to eat this kind of meat that they've considered unclean for their whole life, right? And was that a big issue for the Jews, even after the coming of Christ?

How many times did Jesus have to tell Peter to arise, eat, and kill for him to do it? Three times he had to tell him in order for him to overcome this because Peter says I've never eaten anything unclean Well, you have all of these Jewish Christians who have never eaten anything unclean and their bought their conscience is still bothered by this Though they know that food cannot corrupt a person that it cannot make one unclean, that there is the liberty to eat these things, yet their conscience still can't bring them to do this.

You have this group of people who have observed. These days throughout the course of their life and it's hard for them to just set those things aside and to make this clear break and say, okay, that's all in the past and now we're pressing on to something else, but they're not insisting that the Gentiles observe these things.

They just are keeping it as a matter of. Private practice, right? The faith that they have, they're keeping between themselves and God. They're not insisting it on others. Now, how does the Apostle Paul tell them to relate to one another? Romans chapter 14. Romans 14, we'll pick up in verse 1. Now, except the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions.

One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls, and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

Here, in regards to food, one person can eat meat, he eats all things, and the other one only eats vegetables. And he eats only vegetables, not as a matter of just diet, bro, because he wants to be healthy or he doesn't want to eat anything good because meat, that's where all the good stuff that, but he's doing this as a matter of conscience, right?

As a matter in his own mind, he can't bring himself to do these things. And what is his judgment in relationship to these things in the church? Don't pass judgment on one another and don't treat each other with contempt. Because he has a different opinion than you, because his practice is different than yours.

You're eating meat, he's eating vegetables. If you eat meat, don't have contempt on the one who eats vegetables. And if you eat only vegetables, don't pass judgment on the one who is eating meat, as if this is something that commends you to God. But rather, what? If you want to eat vegetables, eat vegetables.

And if you want to eat meat, eat meat. And get along because the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Don't make it an issue that causes division and strife and conflict in the church. Leave people alone and live in harmony and peace and love one another and don't be passing judgment and having contempt and disdain for one another.

Now, verse 5, the same thing, but now in relationship to days. One person regards one day above another, and another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord. And he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God.

And he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself. But if we live, we live for the Lord, and if

we die, we die for the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end, Christ died and lived again, then He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

But you, why do you judge your brother, or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, for it is written, As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me and every tongue shall give praise to God. So, then, each one of us will give an account of himself to God.

Therefore, let us not judge one another any more, but rather determine this. Not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in the brother's way. So here, in regards to days, and I think it has to have at least reference, in part, to these days of feasting or these festival days that were a part of the worship of God in the Old Covenant.

In this transition that is taking place, the one person still observes the day. It's been a part of their culture, it's been a part of their practice, it's been a part of their family. Since their, since their childhood, from their infancy, they have always done these things. And when they do it, they're focusing on God, they're thinking about the things of God.

It's drawing their mind now, even more clearly, to the gospel of Christ. And if He says you want to observe those things, and it's edifying to you and to your family, and it brings glory to God, then observe the day. But if someone doesn't want to observe the day, then don't observe the day. It doesn't matter, right?

It's a matter of indifference. And if you observe the day, then don't pass judgment on the one who doesn't observe the day. And if you don't observe the day, don't look at contempt at the one who observes it. But rather, what should they pursue in the body? Unity. Love. Don't put a stumbling block. If, if what you're doing in your own conscience is clean And you don't have a problem with it, but what you're doing is putting a stumbling block in front of another.

Then don't do that thing, right? You need to look out for the mutual interest of one another. Love each other and live at peace and live at harmony with one another. And don't cause unnecessary stumbling blocks. And don't get into unnecessary fights and squabbles over things that are indifferent, right?

That are indifferent. Now, to me, this issue of Christmas or other Christian holidays is to me, I think really a separate issue because no one that I know of is insisting on these things as a matter of righteousness. No one that I know of believes that it is obligatory, that it is commanded by God for a person to observe Christmas.

These are just anniversary days or days of commemoration. But if in this case, in Romans 14, the apostle teaches liberty. He teaches charity, he teaches unity, he says, leave it alone and don't cause a ruckus in the church in relationship to actual holy days that were a part of the old covenant that have now been done away with in Christ.

So long as in your keeping of these things, you're not passing judgment on others and you're not insisting that other people do these things. Then how much more are we to practice liberty charity and unity when we're not even dealing with holy days We're just dealing with setting a day aside to commemorate and to meditate upon the birth of Christ the death of Christ the resurrection Of Christ the ascension of Christ the day of Pentecost But these are not matters if he says it's not worth fighting over in relationship to actual holy days that have been abolished in Christ Then how much more ought we to live at harmony with one another, so long as what we're doing is not sinful?

One other passage, 1st Corinthians 10. 1st Corinthians chapter 10. Now this in relationship to the Gentile side. Right? And, and, and food sacrificed to idols, right? The idolatry that was still prevalent in their own culture. Them coming out of this idolatry. Now, how are they supposed to relate to these things, especially when you're dealing with food that has been sacrificed to idols?

First Corinthians 10 23, all things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor here again, when there's something lawful that is not in and of itself a sin, then the course that we must pursue is, does it edify one another?

Does it edify others? Not a course of personal gratification. It's where I'm only consumed and concerned about myself. And in this case, is it lawful to eat meat sacrificed to an idol? Meat that you buy at the meat market and the meat was previously sacrificed to an idol. Yes. That's the conclusion he says.

It is lawful to eat that meat. However, if in the eating of that meat, you're not edifying, but you're destroying the one for whom Christ died, what should you do? Don't eat the meat. I won't eat meat or drink wine or do anything. The apostle says that causes another to stumble in Romans chapter 14. What should be the principle or rule that governs the life of the church in relationship to things that are matters of indifference.

Is edification, mutual love and the edifying of the body of Christ, not seeking our own good, but that of neighbor. Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience sake. For the earth is the Lord's and all that it contains. If one of the unbelievers invites you and you want to go eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience sake.

So if you go to the meat market and there's a piece of. Ribeye, there's a big ribeye steak right there and you want to buy it, just buy it and don't even ask, Hey, where did this ribeye come from? Don't ask. Just buy it. It's meat. And who created that meat? The Lord did. Who gave it to you? The Lord. The whole earth belongs to him.

If an unbeliever invites you over to their house for ribeye steaks and you go over and they set a good juicy one in front of you, don't ask him, where did this come from? Just eat it, right? Why are you asking all these questions all the time? Just eat the food, be thankful, be

grateful to God. But verse 28, but if anyone says to you, this meat is sacrificed to idols, do not eat it for the sake of the one who informed you and for conscience sake.

Now, if someone tells you, you go to the unbeliever's house, he sets it in front of you and he tells you, hey, this meat was sacrificed to idol, to idols. Likely, this is not being told to you just as a matter of information, but as a matter of significance, right? If he's relating this information to you and he himself is an idolater, then it has some religious, spiritual connotation to him.

Now, you know that the idol is nothing and that this meat belongs to the Lord. But because he sees it as something significant spiritually and religiously, then he says, don't eat it, right? Not for your conscience, but for who's for his. Right, because his conscience is being guided by a rotten ill principle, namely in this false God that he worships and that this meat is somehow sacred and it's going to give him some blessing because he offered it to his false God.

And now he's telling you these things and you're going to get the blessing as well. I don't want the blessing, right? He says, don't eat it for the sake of the one who informed you. And for conscience sake, I mean, not your conscience. But the other man's for why is my freedom judged by another's conscience?

If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? Not your conscience. He says his conscience is free. His conscience is clean. He knows that an idol is nothing He knows that the earth is the Lord and all that it contains But for the sake of the other one the sake of the unbeliever that who is invited you over And then he says here, why is my freedom judged by another man's conscience?

There may be people who celebrate Christmas and in their celebration of Christmas, they do things that are sinful, that are idolatrous. But why is my freedom being judged by what they do? Why am I being judged in what I do because of what unbelievers are doing? Why am I being bound according to their conscience and according to their practices?

If I partake with thankfulness, why am I being slandered as an idolater when what I'm doing is holy and pure and I'm giving thanks to God in the things that I do, right? This is the problem that we run into in relationship to these kinds of things. Are there people who corrupt the Lord's day? Well, of course there are.

The largest church in the world, the Roman Catholic church, corrupts every Lord's day. Does that mean we're corrupting the Lord's day? What we do? No. Now, if we do what they do, we are. But if what we're doing is good and right and biblical, then why should I be judged because of what they do? Why should I forsake the Lord's day and say, I'm not going to go because I'm afraid people might associate me with Roman Catholicism and with the taking of Mass and the idolatry that goes on there?

I'm not going to let them judge me and what I do, my freedom in Christ, but rather I'm going to live according to what is good and right. Now, if my freedom becomes a stumbling block for a brother, then I'll set my freedom aside. If my freedom is, is causing him to stumble, then I won't partake of those things in relationship to food and to drink and to days and to those kinds of things.

So again, here in again, Romans chapter 10. The specific issue here is food sacrificed to idols. But are there principles that are applicable in a more broad or a more general way that apply to other issues? And it has to be the case. Otherwise, this passage has literally no significance for us today. Have any of you ever eaten meat, gone to a meat market where the food, the meat was sacrificed to an idol?

That has literally happened to none of us today. So, if this only has bearing on this one very specific issue, then it has no application and it has no significance for any of us Christians today. But if it applies to broader issues, to principles that apply more broadly, then there are many issues from which this can go out and inform us and help us think about these things in a biblical way.

And we've seen in these passages that food and drink and days, these are often coupled together. Right in Romans 14 food and days in Colossians chapter 2 food and drink and days, right? These things are often brought in together now If there was a person who became a believer who came out of a Roman Catholic background and in that Roman Catholic background There was the keeping of holy days, and he did believe that going to mass on Christmas Day at a certain chapel or a certain place gave him merits before God, and he still connects that system of theology with these kinds of days.

Then by all means he should not observe those days. He shouldn't do those things, right? If his conscience is still misinformed regarding those things But if that isn't a person's case and that's not his background and it's not a stumbling block to others Then why is his freedom? Why should our freedom be constrained by another man's judgments?

And why should we be slandered as idolaters? When that is not what's taking place at all. So I do think these passages that we've looked at both this week and the ones that we looked at last week, Joshua 22, John chapter 10, Esther chapter 9, that those passages do give justification for if the church desires to set aside a day of commemoration or an anniversary day where the church celebrates significant events in our salvation.

The birth of Christ, the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the ascension of Christ, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, right, as matters of free observance, not, not mandatory, not obligatory, right, not to earn salvation, not to gain merits, but to meditate upon the works of God and to give thanks to God and to worship Him for what He has done for us.

Doing that, I don't see a problem with those types of things. Also, this practice. of commemoration of establishing memorials or setting things aside as reminders of what God has done. It's literally all over the Bible, right? There are many examples in the Bible where

either God does this or someone else does these things that are put in our, our view objects by which we learn and we are reminded of certain spiritual truths.

We do it every week, right, when we take the Lord's Supper. It is a physical symbol, an object, that has been given to us by God as a reminder of the body and the blood of Christ. And every time we participated, we are proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes. The Lord did this in Genesis nine with the rainbow, that the rainbow is set as a symbol in the sky of a reminder of God's judgment upon the world of his promise to never judge the world with water again, and of his promise to judge it with fire one day.

And when we see a rainbow, is it sinful for us to be thinking about those things? No, that's the purpose of it is so that we might think and consider these things. Jacob, he set up a monument or a pillar whenever he had the vision of the Lord in Bethel. He set up a monument there as a reminder, as a memorial that God visited him there.

Not as a place to commit idolatry, not as a place to set up a shrine to a false God, but as a place to be reminded of the promise of God given to him. When the children of Israel crossed the Jordan, Joshua instructed them to take stones, one from each tribe, from the Jordan River, and what did they do with those stones?

They built a monument as a memorial so that every time they saw it, they were reminded who is the one that brought them miraculously into the promised land. It was the Lord who did so we read last week from Joshua 22 where the tribes on the east side of the Jordan built this altar as a memorial or a monument to remind them to worship the true God in the West side.

Gideon had his ephod. Samuel had his Ebenezer stone. There were the feast days of the Old Covenant. There were circumcision. In the New Covenant, we have baptism, which is a symbol. We have the Lord's Supper, which is a symbol. In our church, we promote or encourage head coverings for the women. Is that not a symbol of the authority of the man and the role of the man and the woman?

It is a visible symbol. Now, apart from the spiritual, is it of any benefit at all? No. But with it, it is of great value, and it can serve as a reminder of these things. So the idea of using a symbol or an object to remind men of the great works of God, this is not some concept that is foreign or new or novel or outside the Bible.

It's literally all over the Bible, and it's part of the fact that we're human beings, right? And we are fleshly, right? We do have a physical component to us. So there is then this use of these types of things as reminders of these things, and we still practice it today. Now, in terms of proliferation, certainly divinely instituted symbols are more common in the old covenant, but it's not that they're completely obliterated in the new covenant.

There are still divinely instituted symbols in the new covenant, such as the Lord's Supper, such as baptism. Again, our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 is with head coverings would

serve in the same kind of way. And if the church or if men establish such things like this, not as divine institutions, not as obligations or expectations or commandments, But as free exercises and those things that they establish serve a good purpose, then I believe that there is the freedom and liberty to do such and to do it with a clean conscience.

And actually, every married person here is probably doing it right now because most married people wear a wedding ring as a sign, a symbol of their marriage. And what passage in the Bible tells us to wear a ring as a sign of our marital status? What prophet or apostle commanded us to do that? So where did it come from?

It came from a man. It's a tradition established by men. But is it an evil thing? Does it contradict the commandment of God? No. So long as it's a symbol of our marital status and a reminder to us that I have a wife and I need to be faithful and true to her, then it's a good thing. Now, if I wear a wedding ring and I'm not faithful and true to my wife, then what's the point of it, right?

It's of no good at all. Now, can I, as a Christian minister Demand and command every man in here to wear a wedding ring. Can I command every woman to wear a wedding ring? No, I can't do such things. We don't have the authority to do so because we don't have an explicit command in God. But can I get up and forbid it and say that if you do this you're committing idolatry because you're establishing a symbol and a sign without the authority of a prophet or an apostle and God did not tell you to do so.

This is where you end up going to if you admit and receive these kinds of arguments. There's literally no room to live. You're constantly breathing down people's necks in these types of things. Wearing the wedding ring, it would be a matter of indifference. If you want to, do. If you don't want to, that's fine.

If you want to wear something else as a sign and symbol, as a reminder, then that's fine. If you work in the oil field like my dad and you can't wear a wedding ring because you don't want your finger to get ripped off, then don't wear a wedding ring. And he also has giant knuckles because he's hit his hand so many times with a hammer and it makes it difficult for him to do such.

But the main thing is that he be faithful to his wife, which he has. If the ring can help that, then that's good and fine, but if not, then that's fine as well. I would put Christmas and other holidays in this category as a matter of indifference. Tools that can be helpful to the church so that we remember the significant events in the history of redemption.

And I don't see a problem with a church having a yearly service at Christmastime to focus on the incarnation and its significance. I don't see the problem with the church having a yearly service on Good Friday or on Resurrection Sunday or on the day of Ascension if we want to, or the day of Pentecost in order to remember what God has done for us.

So long as when we gather together in those services, what we do with our families is not sinful. We are free to observe, and if we like, we are free to refrain. Whatever we choose to do. What we practice in those times must be regulated by scripture. We cannot introduce new forms or elements to our worship.

If we meet for a Good Friday service, and our service consists in reading scripture, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, reading and preaching the word of God, offering prayers and thanksgiving to God, fellowshiping and edifying one another together. Is that not what we do every Sunday? That's what we do every time that we meet together.

We're not introducing new elements into worship. Now, if I say, okay, for this service we're going to all run around like a bunch of maniacs, and run into the wall, and that is going to bring glory to God. Well, I don't have the right to do that, to institute some new element of worship. But if what we're doing is what we're always doing, and all of those things are founded in Scripture, then we're still keeping the regulative principle, the Bible is still serving as our guide and as our rule for our worship.

We're just choosing to meet together at this time to focus on and commemorate this one significant event. In terms of individual families. So long as our family, traditions, and activities are not sinful, then I don't see a problem with it. Spending time with your friends and family, sharing meals together, giving gifts, if one so chooses, to their children or to their friends or to those that they love, decorating your house, reading scripture together, singing Christmas hymns.

These things are not, in and of themselves, sinful. Now, if our Christmas tradition involves everyone getting drunk, well then that would be a sin. Not because we're doing it at Christmas, but because it's a sin to get drunk, whether we do it at Christmas or whether we do it on the 4th of July or whether we do it randomly on November 5th, whatever day that we get drunk on, we know that it is a sin to do so because it's a sin to get drunk.

If we are praying to the dead, if we're burning incense to our Christmas trees. If we're communicating to our deceased loved ones through a Christmas ornament, worshipping a statue of Santa Claus, or the Virgin Mary, or baby Jesus, then that's a sin. That is a big problem, and we should not do those things, and you should get it out of your house.

But those would be sins not just at Christmas, those would be sins any time of the year, that anyone is doing such things. And in all my years, I've never met one Christmas observer who worshipped a Christmas tree. Who would put food under the tree at night so that the God could come and eat that food and would bring blessing to his house.

Most people are doing it just, it's just a decoration that beautifies the home. And that they enjoy looking at and makes everyone happy. That, that, just like we beautify the home all of the time with decorations. And many of those decorations have to do with the seasons of the year. So in fall, what do people do?

They put up fall colors, you know. I don't know. Oranges and yellows and kind of muted colors like that. But then in the summertime, spring, they want flowers and springy colors. And then during the summer, you got your red, white and blue. And this is the way people do because we don't live in a communist country where everything is brown and drab and miserable and yucky all the time.

It's good to beautify your home in that way. Right. And if these are the things that we are doing, then there ought to be freedom. Right. We cannot mandate that everyone celebrate Christmas. Nor should we accuse those of sinning who do observe the holiday. We cannot even mandate what everyone does for Christmas.

One family may do one thing and another family may do another thing. So long as what we are doing is not in and of itself sinful, then we should practice liberty, unity, and charity toward one another. And there may be a diversity of practice, right? The one who observes. Should not disdain the one who abstains, and the one who abstains should not pass judgment on the one who observes.

And it's free and fine if people want to talk about what they do. If a person does not celebrate or doesn't observe and someone asks them, Why do you do this? They should have the freedom to be able to explain their convictions and why they do the things that they do. And if someone else does, and they say, well, why do you do this?

Then they should have the freedom to explain why they do what they do. But it shouldn't come to blows. And it shouldn't be a matter of separation. And a matter of church discipline. And a matter of condemning and saying you're a heretic and a son of the devil because of these things. And that has been my position from the very beginning of this debacle.

That this is a matter of indifference. If someone doesn't want to observe Christmas, I don't care. That's fine. They have the freedom to not do those things. If someone does, so long as what they're doing isn't sinful, then I don't care. Right? It's fine. They have the freedom to do so. And it should not be a matter worth fighting over, or destroying a church, or ruining friendships, or separating over these types of things.

But rather we should pursue peace, and love, and edification, and harmony within the church. Okay, historical justification. I gave you a handout because I find when people read long articles or long quotes, it's very difficult for me to follow if I don't have it in front of me. So I provided those, and I'll read little snippets from that, and that way you have it in front of you and it will make it easier for you to follow along.

So that's why I provided those. You can keep it, you can throw it away, whatever, okay, afterwards, but it's for your benefit right now. Now, the reason why we would bring up this section or this part is because it is very arrogant for us to think that we are the sole proprietors of truth and righteousness.

That we've got everything figured out and no one else in the history of the church knew anything. Typically, the ones who say that are very cult like, right, who believe that they are the ones who have got it all figured out. Typically, they say that they go back to the early church, but everything in between, the apostles, up to this present day, corrupted and lost everything, and then we've gone back and we've reestablished it.

We don't believe in those kinds of things. We do believe that there are, there is a history of faithful interpretation and interpreters of the Bible. Not that these were perfect men, but that there were men who were sound, who were sober minded, who were doing the best that they could to read the Bible, and to practice the Bible, and to understand it.

And certainly we, as Protestants, come out of the Protestant Reformation, and the Protestant Reformation was an attempt to re establish the church in biblical practices, to submit our beliefs and our practices, not to the authority of the Pope or the Roman Catholics, but to the authority of God found in His Word.

And then within the Protestant Reformation, we would find ourselves squarely in that vein of the, of Reformed thinking, the Reformed churches. Typically, what was coming out of Geneva and Zurich and later in Westminster and, and some of those other traditions with Calvin and his successors. And so, I thought it would be good to see what did, what did some of them say about these issues?

Because these topics and these issues are not unique to our own day and our own generation. This has been a source of conflict and a debate that has gone on since the very beginning and in the early days. And it was a part of, during the time of the Reformation, it was a hot topic because of the corruptions of Roman Catholicism.

So what, what do some other people say in terms of the history of interpretation? Now, I will say at the beginning. That again, it is not a uniform position that there are some who I would consider good, faithful, significant pastor theologians in the history of the church who would not agree with me, who would say that this is a matter of idolatry.

Probably the one I like the most would be William Ames who was a Puritan pastor. He wrote the Merril of Theology. It was the chief textbook that was used in, at Harvard here in the new world until it all became liberal. Very, very good, very sound and a very good wise man. And, and he would not agree with, with my position on this.

So there are those who take that position and I'm fine with that. However, what we'll see is it's not like it's 99 percent who are against it and there's 1 percent of real weirdos who are for it. Actually, the greater body is that the majority of the reformers held my position. Which is, it's a matter of indifference and it's not worth fighting over it, so leave it alone.

And I think that was the proper course to take from the very beginning. Okay, so there were some Scots and there were some English Puritans and American Puritans who held a different view. So I would, I will say that at the beginning. Okay, the first one. Okay. Now the

reason I went back to origin is because one of the Things that was said during this debate was that without the influence of Roman Catholicism No one reading the Bible and no one reading the New Testament would ever conclude that the church should establish festivals or feast days In relationship to Christ and to his life and what he has done So, without the influence of Roman Catholicism, no one would ever believe that we should have Christian holidays, that we should celebrate Christmas, or Resurrection, or Good Friday, or any of these other holidays.

Well, whenever I hear that, my initial thought is, well, what did the Church Fathers say? Because the Church Fathers predate Roman Catholicism. The Roman Catholic Church did not exist during the days of Origen. So, what did Origen, what did other Church Fathers, Did they have anything to say about festivals or feast days or holidays?

Did they observe these things or did they not and I thought that that would be a good Course of study to pursue and to see what others say because this is before Roman Catholicism and there are other examples from the early church Such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Dionysus, Cyprian of Carthage Augustine talks about these things as well.

Augustine is the most significant early father who talked about the issue of Christmas. And why it is that they celebrated Christmas on December 25th. So he had he talked about that and wrote about why it is that they chose December 25th. And he himself had no problem with commemorating certain festivals or feast days in doing those kinds of things.

So that was there. So here is from Origen. And this is a book against a man named Celsus. Who was a pagan that was arguing for the need to keep pagan festivals and basically saying That you Christians are inconsistent because you won't keep our festivals, but you keep your own festivals But, and Origen is saying that there's a vast difference between what you're doing at your festivals and what we're doing at our festivals.

But in this, it's very clear that Origen, and those that were with him, had no problem in commemorating and celebrating. And they were doing something in observance. To some of these festivals. Okay, so this is from a book called Against or Contra Celsus. This is book eight, chapter 22, and chapter 23 is what I include here, which are really just paragraphs.

Okay. And we'll read a little bit of 22 and a little bit of 23. Okay. He says, if it be objected, objected to us on this subject that we ourselves are accustomed. To observe certain days, as for example, the Lord's day, the preparation, the Passover or Pentecost. I have to answer that to the perfect Christian who is ever in his thoughts, words and deeds serving his natural Lord, God the Word, all of his days are the Lord's and he's always keeping the Lord's day.

He also, who is unceasingly preparing himself for the true life and abstaining from the pleasures of this life, which lead many astray. Who is not indulging in the lust of the flesh, but keeping under his body and bringing it into subjection, such a one is always keeping preparation day. Again, he who considers that Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us and that it is his duty to keep the feast by eating the flesh of the word never ceases to keep the Paschal feast for the Pascha means a Passover and he is ever striving in all of his thoughts,

words and deeds to pass over from the things of this life to God and is hastening towards the city of God.

And finally, he who can truly say we are risen with Christ and he has exalted us and made us sit with him in heavenly places in Christ is always living in the season of Pentecost. And most of all, when going up to the upper chamber, like the apostles of Jesus, he gives himself to supplication and prayer that he may become worthy of receiving the mighty wind rushing from heaven, which is powerful to destroy sin and its fruits among men and worthy of having some share of the tongue of fire, which God sends.

But, the majority of those who are accounted believers are not of this advanced class. But from being either unable or unwilling to keep every day in this manner, they require some sensible memorials to prevent spiritual things from passing altogether away from their minds. It is to this practice of setting apart some days distinct from others.

And by these words, he indicates that a life in accordance with the divine word consists not in a part of the feast, but in one entire and never ceasing festival. Again, compare the festivals observed among us as these that have been described above with the public feast of Celsus and the heathen, and say if the former are not much more sacred observances than those feasts in which the lust of the flesh runs riot and leads to drunkenness and debauchery.

So there, he says basically, for a perfect Christian. Yeah, of course, these things are unnecessary, but we're not perfect people. And he says to have sensible reminders of these things. This is why the church set aside certain days. to remind us of these things, because it is very easy for us to forget. And then he says, consider the difference between our festivals and what we're doing versus what they're doing.

Getting drunk, committing immorality, whereas in theirs, they're gathering together, worshiping God, reading scripture, offering prayers to God. Okay, the next one is John Calvin. John Calvin. This is a letter, Calvin dealt with this subject two times in two letters or the only time that he really talked about it and Calvin's argument was it's not worth fighting over so don't make a big deal about it but he pursued a course of moderation and we know that if this was a matter of idolatry if it was a matter of faith then he would not have compromised one iota because in all many other matters Calvin was unwilling to budge an inch.

But on this issue, he said, don't fight about it, right? Leave it alone. And he pursued a moderate course in the churches under his influence. Okay, Calvin, he says, this isn't a letter to another pastor. And there's been a rift between the churches that are under the rule of Geneva because of this abolition of feast days.

He says, 'Besides the abolition of feast days, here has given grievous offense to some of your people, and it is likely enough that much unpleasant talk has been circulating among you. I am pretty certain also that I get the credit of being the author of the whole matter, both among the malevolent and the ignorant.

See, Calvin's saying, you all are blaming me for this because I didn't have anything to do with it. Right? That's the point he's making here. But, as I can solemnly testify that it was accomplished without my knowledge and without my desire, so I resolved from the first rather to weaken malice by silence than to be over solicitous about my defense.

Before I ever entered the city, there were no festivals but the Lord's Day. Those celebrated by you were approved of the same public decree by which Pharrell and I were expelled. Calvin and his buddy Pharrell, who were the heads of the Reformation in Geneva, they were kicked out of the city for a time.

And when they were expelled, at the same time of their expulsion, there, the city council came with a new rule, and before they had abolished feast days, Then they reestablished him at the same time that he was kicked out. Okay, he says, And it was rather extorted by the tumultuous violence of the ungodly than decreed according to the order of law.

Since my recall, I have pursued the moderate course of keeping Christ's birthday as you are wont to do. But there were extraordinary occasions of public prayer on other days. The shops were shut in the morning and everyone returned to his several calling after dinner. There were, however, in the meanwhile, certain inflexible individuals who did not comply with the common custom, but from some perverse malice or other.

Diversity would not be tolerated in a rightly constituted church. Even for citizens not to live on good terms with one another would beget mistrust among strangers. I exhorted the Senate to remove this disagreement in future by proper remedy. And indeed, I lauded at the same time in express terms, the moderation, which they had hitherto exercised.

I afterwards heard of the abrogation, just as a perfect stranger would, would they had acted less ambitiously on former occasions. And then at the end, the last sentence, he says, there's no reason why men should be so much provoked if we use our liberty as the edification of the church demands, just as on the contrary, it is not fair to take prejudice against our custom.

So he says moderation. Moderation in relation to these things. And he was not the one who abolished these. It happened without him, and he didn't think that it was a good course of action. Then the other is a letter to this church in this city, and there he says, Respecting ceremonies, because they are things indifferent, the churches have a certain latitude of diversity, and when one has well weighed the matter, it may be sometimes considered useful not to have too rigid a uniformity respecting them.

In order to show that faith and Christianity do not consist in that. Nevertheless, those who have informed you that from curiosity or other motives I have introduced a new mode have not made a correct statement. My brother, Master William Farrell, is present here, who can moreover bear witness that before my arrival at Geneva, the manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper, baptism, marriage, and the festivals was such as it is at present, without my having changed anything, so that it is impossible on these points to attribute to me anything that has originated with me.

Continuing on, he says, As to festival days, they were abolished at Geneva before I left France. And those who have procured their abolition were actuated by no spirit of contention or spite, but solely by the desire of abolishing the superstition which had been so prevalent in potpourri. For which reason, Monsieur, you should not feel offended, as if that measure has tended to sow discord between your churches and that of Geneva.

Though for the innovation, I personally am irresponsible. For the rest, my writings bear witness to my sentiments on these points. For in them, I declare that a church is not to be despised or condemned because it observes more festival days than the others. From this recent abolition of feast days, here's what has resulted.

Not a year has passed without some quarrel and bickering because the people were divided into such a degree as to draw swords. Meanwhile, we have done what we ought to appease these trouble. The most feasible means. That could be devised for that purpose seemed to be to keep the holy day in the morning and open the shops in the afternoon.

Though this plan did not much remedy the evil for several thoughtless persons failed not to fall foul of one another, so that for the last time in treating and exhorting the counsel of the 200 to redress this abuse, I begged them among other things to be pleased to conform as much as possible to the order established among you for the purpose of keeping up.

Good understanding. Judged then of my astonishment when I learned what had been decided in the general counsel. Without my knowledge, Without my knowing that such a question had been entertained by it. Of that I can produce a goodly number of competent witnesses. So there, he clearly says, a church is not to be despised or condemned.

Because it observes more festivals and others, and that all that has come about from this abolition is constant bickering and fighting to the point, he says that men are even drawing swords. And so what was Calvin's conclusion? Leave it alone. It's not worth fighting over and killing one another over these kinds of things.

Now, he's not saying go back to Rome and go back to Roman Catholicism and go keep mass. What they're doing has to be moderate, it has to be biblical, as long as it's ruled by those things. Okay, next, Francis Turretin. Francis Turretin is a pastor theologian in Geneva after Calvin's time. Maybe about 70, 80 years after him.

And he is considered, during his time, his generation, the greatest defender of the reformed faith in Europe during this period. Okay, and a very close successor to Calvin. He was in Geneva, which is where Calvin was, and he was the head theologian in that city, not the immediate generation after Calvin, but the one after.

So he's very close to him and would have been greatly influenced by Calvin's thought as well. Okay. Here's what he says. The question is not whether anniversary days may be selected on which either the nativity or circumcision or passion or ascension of Christ and

similar mysteries of redemption may be commemorated or even on which the memory of some remarkable blessing may be celebrated.

For this, the Orthodox think should be left to the liberty of the church. Hence some devote certain days to such festivity, not from necessity of faith, but from the council of prudence. To excite more to piety and devotion. However, others, using their liberty, retain the Lord's day only, and in it, at stated times, celebrate the memory of the mysteries of Christ.

We deny that those days are in themselves more holy than others. Rather, all are equal. If any sanctity is attributed to the it does not belong to the time and the day, but to the divine worship. Thus, the observance of them among those who retain it is only of a positive right in ecclesiastical appointment, not, however, necessary from a divine precept.

Hence, we cannot approve of the rigid judgment of those who charge such churches with idolatry, in which those days are still kept in the name of the saint being retained, since they agree with us in doctrine concerning the worship of God alone and detest the idolatry of the papist. So there, Turretin is very clear, and I think sensible.

He's saying that these are not matters of faith, they're not matters of necessity, they're just matters of prudence. And if a church chooses to set aside a time to commemorate these things, and it's free from superstition, then that's fine. But if they don't want to, and they want to just focus on those things on the Lord's Day, then he says, that's fine as well.

And to accuse one or the other of idolatry, he says, this is too rigid of a judgment. Okay, Helvetic Confession. This is Heinrich Bollinger, who was also one of the early reformers. He was the successor to Zwingli in Zurich. And he also was the chief architect of the Helvetic Confession, which was the confession used by the Swiss Reformed churches over in Switzerland.

We'll jump down you can, you have all of it there, but we'll just read the part where it says, the festivals of Christ and the saints. It says, Moreover, if in Christian liberty, the churches religiously celebrate the memory of the Lord's nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, and of his ascension into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit upon his disciples, we approve of it highly, but we do not approve of feasts instituted for men and for saints.

Holy days have to do with the first table of the law and belong to God alone. Finally, holy days, which have been instituted for the saints in which we have abolished Have much that is absurd and useless and are not to be tolerated. In the meantime, we confess that the remembrance of saints at a suitable time and place is to be profitably commended to the people in sermons and the holy example of the saints set before them to be imitated by all.

So there he says it's a matter of liberty, but he highly encourages it. He approves of it highly, but not holy days to saints or to men only to celebrate the works of God. And if you want to commemorate a saint or some great figure in the history of the church, then do it in a

sermon. Use him as an illustration, as an example of faith, of godliness, and those kinds of things.

Okay, then one, I think there's two more. The next one is Ursinus, which is from the Heidelberg Catechism, which we've been doing on Saturdays. And this is from his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism. And it's concerning ceremonies. In his exposition of the fourth commandment. And we'll jump down to number three.

Okay. I included the entire section, but we'll just read how many kinds of ceremonies are there. He says, there are two kinds of ceremonies, some that are commanded by God himself and others that are instituted by men ceremonies, which have been instituted by God are such as constitute his worship. And can only be changed by God himself.

Sacrifices by which we offer and render obedience to God are ceremonies of this sort being divinely instituted. So the sacraments by which God testifies and bestows his benefits upon us are also divinely instituted. Ceremonies instituted by the church are not the worship of God and may be changed by the advice of the church if there are sufficient causes to demand a change.

So he makes a distinction between ceremonies instituted by God, which have to be followed precisely and then ceremonies that are instituted by the church that are a matter of prudence, right? A matter of prudence and wisdom of when we meet, when we gather, and that's subject to change according to what is deemed best for the church.

So in terms of the Lord's Supper, this is a ceremony instituted by God. We don't have a right to change the elements from wine to Dr. Pepper, or from bread to Doritos. There are people that do that. We don't have the right to do that. If we did, we would be committing a gross sin against God, because this is a divinely instituted ceremony by the Lord.

But other things, such as when we meet what time the occasions, and then he would place also these feast days or holidays where we commemorate these things. If the church wants to, they can, but if they don't want to, that's fine as well. And if the church sees that these things are not helpful, then they can do away with these things.

Okay. Then on the next, my last page, he says, ceremonies, the church may not to institute certain ceremonies in as much as the moral worship of God cannot be observed without defining and fixing the various circumstances connected with it. We may, therefore, say that it is proper for the church to institute ceremonies when the following conditions are observed.

They must not be unholy, but such as are agreeable to the word of God. They must not be superstitious, such as may easily lead men astray, so as to attach to them worship merit or necessity, in which may occasion offense when observed. They must not be too numerous, so as to be oppressive and burdensome.

They must not be empty, insignificant, and unprofitable, but tend to edification. So, those are the rules by which he governs or gives guidelines for these things. And then lastly, the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 21, Paragraph 5, on religious worship and the Sabbath day. The reading of scripture with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscientious hearing of the word, in obedience unto God with understanding, faith, and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart.

As also the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God. Besides religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions, which are in their several times and seasons to be used in a holy and religious manner.

And then the proof text for thanksgiving on special occasions. Esther chapter 9 verse 22, the establishment of the Feast of Purim. So that will be just a brief survey of some historical evidence there. And just in summary, on this issue, my judgment or my thoughts on this in conclusion is that this should be a matter of liberty in the churches, free observance, so long as it's not sinful, free to observe and free to abstain.

And that we ought to encourage patient, gentle, kind dialogue in our conversations about it. And we should encourage reflection. If you are going to celebrate Christmas or observe it in some way, then think about what you do. Think about it, reflect upon it. Is it useful? Is it beneficial? Is it edifying?

Right, so that we're not wandering around aimlessly. And then we ought to promote peace and harmony in the church. Not everyone may have the same conviction on these kinds of issues, but it's not worth separating over. We're not going to bring people under church discipline if they celebrate Christmas.

And we're not going to expect you to write letters to your families telling them that they're all committing idolatry if they celebrate Christmas. And not to invite you to their house, and if you bought gifts for their children, to take them back. We're not going to do that, right? And I don't think we have the authority to do such things.

But instead, we ought to practice love and patience with one another, and edify one another in those ways. Okay? Well, that's the end of that, and we're putting it to rest. And so with that, let's pray, and then we will be dismissed. Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord, for your word. And Lord, we do know that there are times and issues.

Lord, that are difficult for us to discern and to understand and Lord to know exactly what we ought to do, Lord, on some of these topics, the Bible is very clear concerning the person and work of Christ and the gospel and our salvation, Lord, in terms of the way that we should live and morality, Lord, we know what the Bible says.

Lord, it's very clear, but we know that there are other things that have been points of conflict and debate and confusion, Lord, for many, many years. And so, Lord, we want to be

humble. Lord, we want to have discernment, but Lord, we also want to be gentle and patient with one another. And Lord, we don't want to do anything that destroys or upsets the unity and the harmony of the church.

So, Father, we pray that in these kinds of topics and issues, things that typically people get very bent out of shape about, we pray that we would pursue a more moderate course. Lord one of humility, Lord one with love, Lord with unity, Lord, and that we would give liberty to one another and Lord not insist that everyone do things exactly the way that we do.

Lord, may we not pass judgment on one another, and Lord, may we not have contempt for one another, but rather we pray that we would live in harmony within the body of Christ and that we might seek the mutual edification of one another. So Lord, we pray that you might preserve us in these things, Lord, as well.

The dissonance and the division that has resulted from last year, Lord, we pray that there might be unity restored. Lord, one of these days, Lord, if you see fit that we might be able to join together again in fellowship with those that we've lost fellowship with. But Lord, we pray that going forward, you might preserve and protect us from such frivolous and Lord, useless fights and debates and that we might pursue a course of unity and love.

So Lord, be with us and bless us and all that we do. And it's in Christ and that we pray.
Amen.