

The Doctrine of the Sabbath with a Particular look at its Application in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church

By Benjamin P. Glaser

In his introductory address to the 2015 Associate Reformed Presbyterian General Synod the newly elected Moderator,¹ Rev. Dr. Jaime Hunt, declared that his theme for the Synod meeting and the coming year would be based around the words of the prophet Jeremiah from chapter 6, verse 16 which says:

Thus says the Lord: "Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls."²

From this foundation each subsequent edition of the ARP magazine has included a particular point of emphasis which develops this refrain. The November/December printing contained an article by the Rev. Stuart Fowler concerning the Christian Sabbath, its biblical definition, and what obedience to it should look like today.³ His essay comes at an interesting time in the

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1. *Minutes of the 211th Stated Meeting of the ARP General Synod* (Greenville, SC: ARP Central Services, 2015), 8.

2. Unless otherwise noted all scripture references in this paper will be from the New King James Version.

3. Rev. Stuart Fowler, "Insight into the Sabbath Rest" *The ARP* (November/December 2015), 3–5.

4. Examples abound in the popular and academic literature. See especially the work of Dr. John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, ch. 30 (c.f. <http://49ft7fdv9kp7kqhm12yk1d17.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/John-Frame-Doctrine-of-the-Christian-Life-Excerpt.pdf>), and Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr., "Defining the Debate," *Tabletalk Magazine* (June 1, 2011). <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/defining-debate/> (accessed February 10, 2016).

5. Patronage was the process whereby local landowners would select ministers for the local Church of Scotland parish.

6. William Vandoedewaard, *The Marrow Controversy and the Seceder Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 113.

7. Robert Lathan, *History of the Associate Reformed Synod of the South* (Charlotte: Washburn Press, 1979), 7.

life of the church. It is the case that from several directions the confessional and biblical understanding of the Lord's Day is under heavy attack, even in our own Presbyterian circles.⁴ It is the thesis of Rev. Fowler's work that a new look at the old paths of our forefathers concerning Sabbath observance would do wonders for the spiritual health and welfare of the people of God, not just in the ARP, but in the whole of the body of Christ.

The purpose of this paper is not only to give a ye and amen to Rev. Fowler's point, but also to provide a brief survey of the history, up to, and including the current application of the Fourth Commandment, in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church from its founding in 1783 to present. We will also examine how a reexamination of our former enthusiastic and blessed love of this portion of Christ's holy law will lead to God's favor, as Jeremiah was instructed to tell the Israelites in contrast to their disobedience, in the hope that we shall see our Church resting upon the sufficient command of our Lord Jesus once again.

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY OF THE ARP CHURCH

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church is a descendant of the Associate Presbytery, which was formed out of the secession of ministers Ebenezer Erskine, James Fisher, Alexander Moncrieff, and William Wilson from the established Church of Scotland due to the patronage issue⁵ as well as other troubles concerning their doctrine,⁶ and the Reformed Presbytery containing those who demurred from the Revolution Settlement born out of the end of the wars of succession in the kingdoms of England and Scotland towards the end of the seventeenth century.⁷ It did not take long for these particular presbyteries to send representatives to the American colonies to either establish churches or

bring together sympathetic settlers for God's purposes. Once the successful organization of the colonies into a separate national identity in the form of these United States of America was accomplished the ties to the originating churches in Scotland were no longer necessary or wanted. In the house of William Richards in Philadelphia on November 1, 1782 the Associate Presbytery and the Reformed Presbytery joined together to officially organize the newly formed Associate Reformed Synod (Lathan, 179). The body took as its confession the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and with some modifications (mostly centering on the role of the civil magistrate, none touching the doctrines under consideration in this paper) this was re-affirmed in 1799. The current ARP Church is the continuation of the Synod of the South, which departed, amicably, from the Synods of Pennsylvania, New York, and Scioto in 1822 (Lathan, 344).

There has been little change in the makeup of the denomination from these humble beginnings. Even to this day despite having congregations in Canada, New York, and Pennsylvania the ARP still is largely based in the Carolina's and Georgia, with its western Mississippi Valley Presbytery still sitting on the frontier, as it has for 200 years. In the following sections we will survey the history of Sabbath observance, teaching, and controversy in the ARP through the history of the denomination. Each portion will provide ample demonstration of the slow slide into the contemporary situation in the ARP where the Sabbath is largely unknown and forgotten. At the end of this examination there will be some pointed questions which will be asked about the future of this doctrine seeking to give a positive defense as to why a re-acclimation to regular Sabbath observance would be both a blessing and a necessity for the contemporary ARP.

EARLY YEARS OF THE ASSOCIATE REFORMED SYNOD AND THE WORKS OF DR. JOHN M. MASON

The Christian Sabbath has always been a source of dispute within the Presbyterian churches and the early nineteenth century was no different. Rev. Dr. John M. Mason was born as a son of the manse in New York City on March 19, 1770. He was the pastor of an ARP congregation in New York City for many years, Provost of Columbia College, and for a short time before his early death on December 26, 1829 he served as President of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.⁸ Dr. Mason was very well-known in his day and his son, Rev. Ebenezer Mason, produced a four volume work containing

his father's many articles, sermons, and publications.⁹ The opening section will deal exclusively with Dr. Mason's writings so as to give us a good foundational understanding as to what the ARP Synod believed from its chief early theologian.

This will be the first of four quotations from Dr. Mason that will highlight his views on the Lord's Day and provide an example of where the ARP was in its infancy concerning the doctrine of the fourth commandment. It is in the midst of a sermon entitled *Divine Judgments* from Habakkuk 2:3¹⁰ that Dr. Mason brings forth a lament concerning the lack of seriousness to which the Sabbath is taken in his day and then warns soberly against its violation:

In what manner is the SABBATH observed? 'Remember,' is the divine injunction, remember 'the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.' Is it, indeed kept holy? Do men, indeed, 'call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable?' Do they, 'honor him, not doing their own ways, nor finding their own pleasure, nor speaking their own words?' Do not many waste the day in idleness? Are not some so indolent or carnal, or both, that they will not wait upon God, that day, in the ordinances of his grace? Or that they too frequently allow their seats to be vacant at least one half of the day? Or esteem any pretext weight enough to excuse their absence from the sanctuary? Let none hope to palliate their conduct by pretending that they improve themselves at home. It is altogether incredible, that he who will not sanctify the Sabbath in God's house, will sanctify it in his own. This profanation of the Sabbath is truly deplorable; but in not a few instances the profanation is still more gross. Do not some make it a day of business? Others a day of feasting? And others a day of visiting and amusement?... Whatever be the opinions of men, the Lord God will not suffer this iniquity to pass unpunished; for He has sworn, 'if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath day,—then will I kindle a fire in your gates, and it shall devour your palaces' (Jeremiah 17:27).¹¹

As is obvious from this excerpt the Lord's Day was anything but regularly honored in the parish of Dr.

8. William Sprague, D.D., *Annals of the American Pulpit*, Vol. IV (New York City: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859), 1–9.

9. *The Complete Works of John M. Mason, D.D. in Four Volumes*, ed. Ebenezer Mason (New York City: Baker and Scribner, 1849).

10. "For the vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, It will not tarry." Habakkuk 2:3.

11. Mason, *Works*, 2. 62–63.

Mason.¹² A couple of points that the author makes are worth a second comment. First of all notice what he says about the particular violation of “leaving their seats to be vacant at least one half day?” What this points to is the fact the evening service was often missed for the sake of questionable personal reasons. As Dr. Danny Hyde has said concerning the fourth commandment, it is the Lord’s Day, not the Lord’s Hour.¹³ Dr. Mason notices this problem and calls it out for what it is, a partial respect to the command is really no compliance at all. Second, see what the author explains will be the effect of this disobedience, that God will bring judgment upon the land for this lack of observance. We do not like to talk about God’s active hand in the negative providence of the day, either in an individual sense or a corporate one. The reaction to any mention that this might be the case in popular culture and the quick reversal by the Church makes this clear.¹⁴ However, what Dr. Mason says about God’s reaction to our church’s refusal to recognize His law should give us all pause.

Another example of Dr. Mason’s views on the

12. As an aside it is somewhat relevant to note that in his day Dr. Mason was considered by many other Associates as being a bit of a liberal when it came to doctrines such as exclusive psalmody, close communion, and other aspects of the Presbyterian faith. For more, see Rev. John Anderson’s *Alexander and Rufus*. However on this portion of orthopraxy Dr. Mason is quite orthodox.

13. Rev. Danny Hyde, “The Lord’s Day is a Gift From God.” <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/lords-day-gift-god/> (Accessed: Dec. 17, 2015).

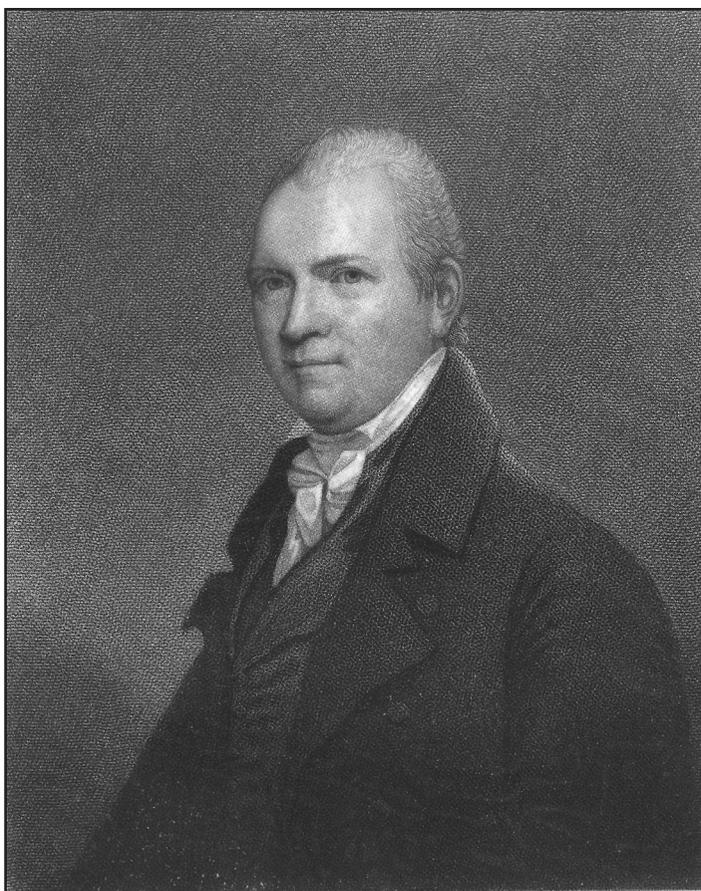
14. This is obviously a subject for another paper, one which in this author’s opinion needs to be written.

Christian Sabbath can be taken from some essays on the Church that he published over several decades. These three quotations will show that his thoughts on the present subject not only did not change, but if anything they became more certain. Something to pay attention to is the kind of things the author directs as being of a similar class, both positive and negative

as the case may be, with the Lord’s Day.

The first quotation is taken from an essay titled “Visible Unity,” which is itself from a larger portion of essays which focus upon the work and purpose of the Church:

“The reader has been more attentive than it would be fair to suspect of any who shall peruse these sheets, if he has not remarked, that all the means of salvation are external. The scriptures, the Sabbath, the solemn assembly, the sacraments, the ministry; in a word, the whole system of instituted worship is visible.” *Works*, 2.288.



Dr. John Mitchell Mason (1770–1829). ARP minister in New York City, Provost of Columbia College, and President of Dickinson College

The Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 120 likewise places the Sabbath in the same category. Dr. Mason’s point in making the Sabbath of equal value as the other aspects of the visible means of salvation is that God’s purpose in the Lord’s Day is more than just a simple remembrance of the resurrection and the creation rest, but in itself is a means that God uses to show His mercy and grace. You can see a further example of what Dr. Mason is doing in the above by what he says later in this same volume about the open violation of the Lord’s Day. The second in this set of quotations is from an essay on the uses of the Church of God:

“Would it be better that [a man] should blaspheme the name of God, than that he should treat it with external reverence? Better, to set before his children or companions an example of hideous profligacy, than an example of decorum! To teach them to swear, steal, lie, profane the Sabbath, deride their bible, mock the ordinances of religion, than to inculcate upon them lessons of truth, of probity, or respect to the name, the day, the word, and the worship of God!” *Works*, 2:394–395.

The context of this quote is Dr. Mason arguing for the blessing of having the visible Church be an open and positive influence on the society around it.¹⁵ In his opinion the Church providing for a common morality is not only more honoring to God, but regardless of the individuals intention (notice his use of external reverence) it provides for a more pleasurable humanity. Again see where Dr. Mason places the Sabbath; in the same category as stealing (8th Commandment), blasphemy (1st Commandment), swearing (3rd Commandment), lying (9th Commandment), and violating the worship of God (2nd Commandment) among others. There is no sense where the violation of the 4th Commandment is of any lesser value or sinfulness than the ones mentioned.

To supplement this we will look at a final quotation from Dr. Mason. This is taken from the last essay of this volume dealing again with the Church and in this portion with the results of forgetting the Sabbath. In this section Dr. Mason is addressing the children of believers and their responsibilities and privileges as well as the sad reality of those who do not come to faith.

“Furthermore. It arises out of the very nature of the case, that if the most High God condescends to offer eternal life, in His dear Son, to sinners whom He might justly shut up under an irreversible sentence of death, they cannot slight His offer without the most flagrant ingratitude, and the most aggravated guilt. His *commandment* to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, as His ‘unspeakable gift,’ is peremptory: and disobedience to it an act of direct rebellion. To say then, ‘I will not profess the name of Christ,’ is to say, ‘I will neither submit to the authority of God, nor accept the gift of His grace.’ With the very same propriety might [the child] say, I will pay no respect to the moral law—I will go after strange Gods: I will bow to graven images—I will swear and blaspheme—I will not keep holy the Sabbath day—I will not obey my parents—I will murder, and commit adultery, and steal, and lie, and covet; I will do nothing which God has required; and I will do every thing He has forbidden! Does the youthful reader start and

tremble? Why? The same God who has said, Thou shalt not kill—thou shalt not commit adultery—thou shalt not steal—thou shalt not lie; has said, *Believe the Lord Jesus Christ*. Mason, *Works*, 2:437–438.

As is plain from this spellbinding application from Dr. Mason there is no question that the Sabbath Day for him not only continues in force in the new covenant, but the denial thereof is of the same class as violating any of the other portions of the moral law, even the command to believe in Christ as Lord and Savior. This position was not one that would change in the official statements of the early years of the Associate Reformed Church or even into its near future.

ARP SYNOD OF THE SOUTH AT THE START OF HER SECOND CENTURY AND THE SUMMARY OF DOCTRINES

When the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church became its own separate Synod and officially broke from its brothers in the North in 1822 it seemed as if new life was injected into the denomination.¹⁶ While the northern synods were readily moving in a direction that would soon see some of them assist in founding a new denomination in 1858 (the United Presbyterian Church of America), and the rest absorbed into the mainline PC(USA), it was the case that the ARP Synod of the South maintained her distinctives as in the days of old (Reed, 333, 335–336). At least for a time.

The writings of men such as John T. Pressley, W.M. Grier, and others illustrate the consistency of the official position of the ARP Synod concerning the doctrine of the Sabbath throughout the rest of the 19th Century.¹⁷ There would be little change in the practice of the Church throughout this era. This would culminate in the reaffirmation of the doctrinal positions of the ARP, in Presbyteries and General Synod proclamations (Lethan, 408).

The perfect example of this occurred in 1871 when the Synod, after years of patient deliberation, decided to reaffirm several doctrines in thirty-five articles ranging from their position on Holy Scripture, to Justification by Faith Alone, the Law of God, and the Sacraments (Lathan, 408–417). Also attached to this summary was a

15. Dr. Mason is not arguing here for establishment, but a kind of proto-Kuyperian idea of the Church influencing Culture.

16. R.C. Reed, D.D., *History of the Presbyterian Churches of the World* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1905), 334.

17. Lowry Ware and James W. Gettys, *The Second Century: A History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterians 1882–1982* (Greenville, SC: ARP Center, 1982), 304, 149.

newly worded form of government which included the Church and Its Order, the Duties Expected of Church Members, On Psalmody, and On Communion (Lathan, 414–416). It is to the second of these that we will spend a short time examining.

In the section concerning the Duties Expected of Church Members one of the things marked out explicitly for observance is “keeping holy the Sabbath.”¹⁸ As a part of the work going on in this covenant renewal there is much focus on discipline for violations. However, as a matter of historical record this seems to have been more a desire than a reality (Ware and Gettys, 143), though there are examples of fines being issued for Sabbath desecration in the town of Due West, the location of the denominational college and seminary (Ware and Gettys, 124). All these things being the case it is important to note the place that Sabbath Keeping is given in a confessional statement, especially one which has as its genesis the intention of restating the vital and central parts of denominational identity.

It may seem out of place to illustrate what this renewed covenant says about the nature of the moral law, but as much of the confusion surrounding the Sabbath is centered around how we understand the role of the Ten Commandments and their continued application it is worthwhile to at least make mention of it. In section XXIX the covenant says, “But as a rule of duty, it is of universal and perpetual obligation” (Lathan, 413). As we see there was no change in the ARP Synod’s understanding of the continuing duty of the whole of the moral law for the life of the believer.

In closing and to give us an awareness of where Lathan discerned the situation in the ARP church it is also worthy to note his comments on the Covenant of 1871 and his ending thoughts on the *History of the Associate Reformed Synod of the South* (printed in 1882):

The Associate Reformed people in connection with the Synod of the South have ever clung with an ardent devotion to the Bible and the Westminster Confession of Faith. With them the Bible is first, and the Confession of Faith second. They are slow to give up old principles and practices, and always regard with a degree of suspicion those who either ignore or remove the ancient land-marks of religion (Lathan, 418).

18. It is interesting as a point of information that at the end of these principles it says, “This we hold in common with the Presbyterians and most of Reformed churches.” Lathan, 415, 416.

19. Synod of the ARP Church, *The Centennial History of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church: 1803–1903* (Charleston, S.C.: Walker, Evans, and Cogswell Co., 1905), 716.

As we will see as we next consider the ARP’s 20th and 21st centuries this movement away from the landmarks will be slow, steady, and ultimately lead to a scarce observance of the Sabbath.

THE CHANGES FROM THE COVENANT OF 1871 TO THE NEW CENTURY AND THE CENTENNIAL OF 1903

In a book devoted to collating a number of addresses which were given at the observance of the first centennial of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian church and containing a look at the history, life, and work of the ARP Church the question of Sabbath observance comes up regularly. We will now look at a couple of these lectures to give us an idea of where the ARP found itself at the turn of the 20th century.

In his centennial address in 1903 the Rev. D.G. Phillips speaks of the great testimony of the fathers in the faith and of the legacy they have left for the ARP.¹⁹ The seriousness with which Rev. Phillips understands the Sabbath command can be summarized in this quotation, “A man’s attitude toward the Sabbath is a fair test of his spiritual character” (*Centennial History*, 723). He ends his section on the Sabbath tradition by warning about how quickly this doctrine can be lost to the world. He notes:

You hallow it in your heart as God’s own holiday, on which we are not to do our own work nor find our own pleasures nor speak our own words nor think our own thoughts, or you lose reverence for it altogether. And the transition is not slow. Twenty years ago Christian people would have been horrified if someone had prophesied that the theaters would be in full blast and great crowds would flock to see baseball games in all our cities on the Sabbath. But that is what has come to pass.... Our fathers were right. They saw the danger. They knew the tendency. They taught us to stand like a stone wall against even the slightest infringement of the spirit of the Sabbath. They stood so in their day, thereby leaving us a blessed Sabbath ... only so can we transmit a holy Sabbath to our children (*Centennial History*, 724).

As one can hear in the pleading of Rev. Phillips the loosening had already begun to take hold in the ARP. Later in this same work we hear Rev. Phillips bemoan the situation:

The Sabbath is fearfully imperiled. The ‘Sunday’ papers, the ‘Sunday’ train, and the ‘Sunday’ amusement companies have well nigh walked away with it. Unless some

force sets up a strong counter current, before many years the quiet, peaceful, worshipful Sabbath of our fathers will only be a memory (*Centennial History*, 731).

In the next section you will see this slow decline become more and more pronounced. But first let us look at another address which touches on this issue.

The Rev. William Moffat presents a stirring sermon titled *What the Associate Reformed Church Stands For*. In this work, after having gone through a number of issues, including the Westminster Standards, Calvinism, and the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures he goes into another area using a phrase we have heard before in this paper. Rev. Moffat writes:

Taking such a stand, the Associate Reformed Church is a marked conservative force among the churches and in society. It asks for the old paths. It makes haste to go slow. It wastes little time upon what is known as "Higher Criticism." It stands for simplicity in life and worship as in the days of the fathers; for truth and honesty in dealings; for sacred regard for the Sabbath day; and for opposition to worldly amusements (*Centennial History*, 695).

In closing, in both the words of Rev. Phillips and Moffat we see the already present slipping away of not only the culture, but the practice of the ARP in regards to the Sabbath Day. In the next section we will look at this further decline and the steps which lead to its common place being replaced by the kind of worldly amusements that Rev. Moffat spoke against.

THE 20TH CENTURY AND THE DEPARTURE FROM THE OLD WAYS

In the histories of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church there are five things often mentioned as being unique to the ARP of the 19th Century: 1) Close Communion, 2) Acapella Worship, 3) Exclusive Psalmody, 4) Anti-revivalism, and 5) Sabbath Keeping (Ware and Gettys, 61–78). By the turn of the 20th Century all but Exclusive Psalmody and Sabbath Keeping would be a thing of the past.²⁰

Lowry Ware and James W. Gettys in their bicentennial history examining the second century (1882–1982) of the ARP printed in the 1980's have eighteen mentions of the Sabbath (Ware and Gettys, 539). In a chapter entitled *Last to Lay the Old Aside* they begin a section on the history of Sabbath Observance by saying, "Another feature which ARP's saw as marking themselves off from

even other Presbyterians was their strict regard for the Sabbath" (Ibid., 76). And this ends with the lament of the Rev. J. Meek White in 1912 that there had been a steady decline in Sabbath observance (Ibid, 78).

The relaxation of the Sabbath command would be one that would lead from Rev. White's lamentation to Rev. R.M. Stevenson remarking in the 1930's, according to Ware and Gettys, that, "one Scottish belief was the 'Sabbath Sanctity' though he admitted that the American environment impinged on this principle to cause 'relaxation'" (Ware and Gettys, 265–266). Rev. Stevenson considered Sabbath keeping to be a basic aspect of the ARP which marked out the denomination as being against the liberalizing tendencies not only of the world, but of the wider church (Ibid., 284). This would move Rev. Stevenson to comment that the weakening conception of the Sabbath day by the ARP was what was leading to congregations and their members having little interest in other church activities and contributing to the feebleness of the preaching of their ministers (Ibid., 268). Though not all of the ARP was in agreement with this emphasis on Sabbath keeping it remained a majority position and part of the central identity of the ARP church through pre and immediate post-WWII years.²¹

A continuing depreciation of the Sabbath would be the case through the 1970's as Ware and Gettys mention, "In the next forty years the church would have significantly more 'relaxation' on 'Sabbath Sanctity' so that is was no longer different from the other Presbyterian bodies" (Ware and Gettys, 266). By the 1960's recognition came that there were significant disagreements within the ARP, when a committee formed by the General Synod in 1966 conceded this was the case (Ibid., 342–343). Ware and Gettys in their history provide a long discussion on this that space does not allow to express fully, but we will look at a couple examples of the radical change that took place in regards to Sabbath observance from the 1950's to the 1980's.

Ware and Gettys spend a number of pages in *Second Century* detailing a number of changes in the theology and practice of the ARP church in the middle decades of the 20th Century. Between the disappearance of a temperance movement, the changing attitudes towards divorce, and other rising social issues, this period marked a change in tempo and temperament in the ARP. Nowhere was this seen more clearly than

20. Even the former of these was already seeing a weakening with the introduction of paraphrases that would ultimately lead to the cooperative UPCNA 1912 Psalter. Exclusive Psalmody would officially be abandoned in 1946.

21. Cf. Ware and Gettys, 329, 331, and 341.

in the abandonment of Sabbatarianism throughout the church. Ware and Gettys quoted Rev. C.B. Williams' saying:

'The disillusioning truth is that there is at present little if any difference between us and the general run of church people in this regard....' Williams noted that ARP church members took weekend trips, made purchases of household items, and even did household chores on the Sabbath.... The average churchman followed the practice of the Roman Catholic Church in that he considered morning worship as sufficient and treated the remainder of the day as a holiday (Ware and Gettys, 348).

Finally, though this may seem to be a minor thing to most observers, an editorial change at the denominational magazine and official publications illustrates this change. Not only did the magazine end its annual Sabbath issue, but the Synod minutes changed the statistical table from "Sabbath Schools" to "Church Schools" (Ware and Gettys, 349). These seemingly trivial alterations were simply the culmination of a decade's long movement away from the old paths of the forefathers of the ARP.

THE CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE SABBATH DAY IN THE ARP CHURCH

As we continue to move down the path from the days of John Mason through the Covenant of 1871 and the battles of the post-WWII protestant church, it is time to consider the contemporary milieu in the ARP. In doing so we will display the writings of a representation of some of the most important theologians and pastors in the denomination today to give a better idea to where we stand. Already in the opening of this paper mention was made of the intention of the current Moderator of Synod to return back to the "old paths" and the article

22. Ryan M. McGraw, "Jay E. Adams, Keeping the Sabbath Today?" *Puritan Reformed Journal* 1 no. 2 (July 2009): 275.

23. Rev. Dr. R.J. Gore, Jr, "Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle" (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), specifically 80-83.

24. Rev. Dr. William B. Evans, "Things Which Become Sound Doctrine: Part I," <https://theecclesiacalvinist.wordpress.com/2013/05/20/things-which-become-sound-doctrine-associate-reformed-presbyterian-confessional-and-theological-identity-in-the-20th-century-part-1/> (accessed: January 6, 2015). For more by Dr. Evans on the history of the ARP and contemporary issues the reader is encouraged to read Dr. Evans two further articles on the subject. Rev. Dr. William B. Evans, "Whither or Wither," <http://www.reformation21.org/articles/whither-or-wither.php>, and "In the Throes of Ecclesiological

of Rev. Fowler illustrates what the moderator has in mind. However, this conception of the Lord's Day is not shared by the majority of the ARP Synod. To illustrate this we will look at three examples from the theological leaders in the denomination.

The first is the work of Dr. Jay E. Adams. Dr. Adams, most well-known for his groundbreaking work in Nouthetic Counseling, authored a book titled, *Keeping the Sabbath Today?* In this book Dr. Adams shows real disagreement with the Westminster understanding of the Lord's Day and posits what he calls a Continental view of the Sabbath. Ryan McGraw in a review of this work notes, "Every chapter of this book departs from the traditional Reformed understanding of the Sabbath and of the law of God."²²

The Second is a book on the larger theme of worship by Rev. Dr. R.J. Gore, Jr., a professor at Erskine Seminary and longtime Army chaplain. Dr. Gore, like Dr. Adams, demurs from the Puritan conception of the Sabbath and he uses John Calvin in this work to question the confessional view.²³ After discussing issues like the clothing of the minister and the use of set prayers Dr. Gore then moves on to the question of the Sabbath (Gore, 80). Dr. Gore says, "Calvin was not a Sabbatarian, and therefore did not consider Sunday observance, the Lord's Day, to require the strict regulation that the Puritans later held so dear" (Gore, 81). Dr. Gore then goes on to cite Calvin's Institutes, most specifically 2.8.34. One last quotation from the work further clarifies Dr. Gore's position on Sabbath via Calvin:

In addition, Calvin recognizes that in the fourth commandment there is a moral element that continues, namely that 'we must learn to empty ourselves of all our will, of all our thoughts and affections (*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, trans. and ed. Benjamin W. Farley, pg. 110)'. Sunday observance is intended, as a most pointed example, to call to mind the fact that we are always to worship the Lord. In due time, this view was rejected by the Puritans. By the time of the Westminster Assembly, Sabbath keeping had become identified with Puritanism and was, confessionally, an article of faith (Gore, 81).

Lastly, Rev. Dr. William B. Evans, professor at Erskine College, offers a more nuanced view on this subject. We will look at two particular examples. The first is simply to point to a paper Dr. Evans gave at an ARP historical conference in 2003 where some of the material we have already covered is mentioned.²⁴ In a second and more important piece Dr. Evans, in an article published

by *The Aquila Report*, makes several comments that are relevant to the question at hand.²⁵ Dr. Evans begins his piece by pointing to two recent essays on the Sabbath, one by an English pastor by the name of Rev. John Stevens and another by Scottish minister Rev. Iain Campbell. He uses these two articles as a launching point to describe his own views on the Sabbath question and the state of the contemporary discussion. After dealing with issues brought up by Rev. Stevens and Campbell (especially Romans 14 and Colossians 2, as Dr. Evans rightly notes these are often the bones of contention between the two parties) he goes to the larger question of confessional usage. For our purposes here two things are worth mentioning. First of all there is the bifurcation between “Continental” and “Puritan” Sabbaths as seen in the works of both Dr. Adams and Dr. Gore and the concern regarding the rigorousness of the Westminster application, as Dr. Evans wryly says, “So much for a day of rest!” This concern about the danger of too severe a restriction to Christian Liberty plays itself out in these two quotations. First, “Another problem here has to do with the fact that attempts to apply and enforce the sabbatarianism of the Westminster Standards have led to frequent conflict and disagreement among Presbyterians.” And then:

Today, it is my distinct impression that even the most ardent of Presbyterian sabbatarians do not observe the Sabbath with anything like the rigor demanded by WLC QQ. 115-121, but no theological explanation or justification for this has been forthcoming. To his credit, Mr. Campbell decries those who are “overly prescriptive and legalistic in their approach” to the Sabbath, but he gives us little help as to how we may arrive at a more sensible approach. All this suggests that it is not enough simply to trot out the Confessional materials as some sort of trump card. They must be interpreted.

Both of these quotations give us a sense of where Dr. Evans sits on this issue. While sympathetic to the doctrinal and practical needs of the Christian Sabbath as traditionally understood, he closes out his comments with this:

By recognizing this twofold creational/redemptive significance of the Sabbath, we can affirm the truth in both Reformational positions. As a creation ordinance the Sabbath has continuing relevance. It is indeed a wonderful blessing to human beings. As a redemptive ordinance, it is to a great extent fulfilled in the work of Christ (Colossians 2:16-17), though we continue to look

forward to our eternal Sabbath rest (see Hebrews 4). Thus, as Christians we should observe the Sabbath, but we need not do so with the rigorous exactitude of the Mosaic Law’s provisions, for these are fulfilled in Christ. In the current discussions two important questions are often conflated: whether the Sabbath is relevant for Christians today and how the Sabbath is to be observed. Both are important, and proper attention to the finding of the fourth commandment in the two versions of the Ten Commandments helps us to do justice to both of these questions.

In this final section we have looked at the teaching of three members of the current Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. From the beginning of this paper and the words of John Mason down to the present day there has been certainly a change not only in emphasis, but practice in the denomination. Now we will close with some thoughts on where we have been and where we are going.

CONCLUSION

In closing, this paper has put forth the thesis that there has been a sure and steady change within the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church from its founding to present concerning the doctrine of the Christian Sabbath. From the warnings of John Mason in the early 19th Century to the affirmations of D.G. Phillips and the lamentation of Rev. Stevenson we have seen the way this blessing has gone from necessary and unquestioned by the fathers of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church to a questionable, maybe even legalistic, but certainly unnecessary portion of the obedience of the covenant people of God to His Word. There is little question that the change from the old paths to the new practice presents the ARP with a conundrum of sorts. What is the way forward? A return to our former manner of life or a pressing on into the new and unique expressions of our common faith in the risen Christ? This closing section will seek to answer those questions and present a brief positive case for a return to biblical orthopraxy.

Church historian Jaroslav Pelikan is famous for saying, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such

Crisis,” <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2011/05/in-the-throes-of-ecclesiology.php>. (Accessed January 6, 2016).

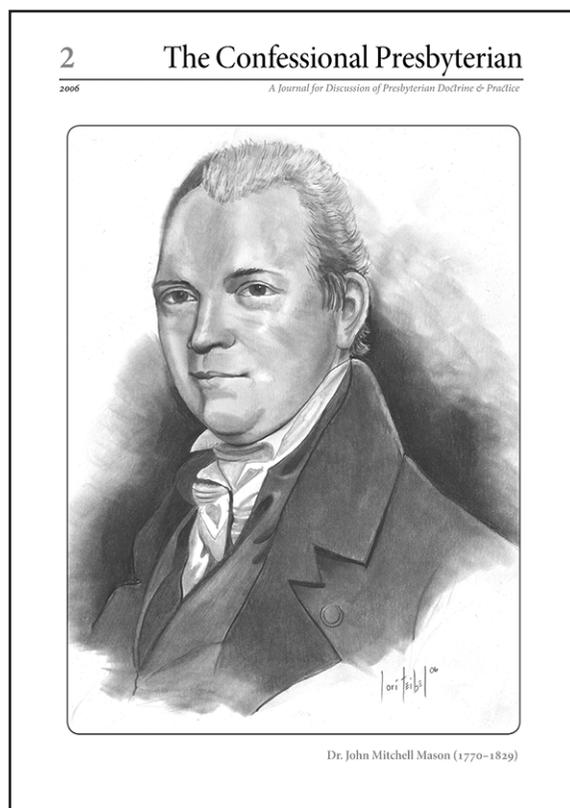
25. Rev. Dr. William B. Evans, “*Why I Am (Sort of) a Sabbatarian*,” <http://theaquilareport.com/why-i-am-sort-of-a-sabbatarian/> (accessed: January 6, 2015).

a bad name.”²⁶ As we have considered these things in light of the attitudes of our forefathers it must not be the case that we readopt older positions merely for the sake of ‘well we used to do that therefore it necessarily is good.’ There is an unhealthy brashness among some in the confessionally Reformed world who adopt previously held beliefs for contrarian and counter-cultural reasons. We must find our footing, not upon the shifting winds of faddish behavior, but upon the Word of God.

At the beginning of this paper the current Moderator of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church was quoted as pointing toward Jeremiah 6:16 and the pleading of the prophet. The people of God had sold their birthright for a mess of worldly porridge. Making the Sabbath the central focus of your week will give you a whole new perspective on the earthshattering work of Jesus Christ who not only was raised from the dead on first day of the week, but through His sovereign work as King has called us to no longer worship on the last day of the week in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, but rather to come on the first day of the week in celebration of the consummation of the life, death and resurrection of the risen Christ, looking forward to His Second Coming in faith and the eternal rest, of which the Sabbath is a sweet, temporary reward in the midst of this sinful world.

As was noted by a number of the men quoted in this paper the Christian Sabbath is a blessing for the people of God. We live in a day where there is much (necessary) time and energy being spent looking back at the early church, their practices and life. Likewise it is good for us to consider the warnings and teachings of our forefathers in the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church as a way to seek counsel against the temptations to water down and excuse the more counter-cultural aspects of our faith. The Fourth Commandment understood as the blessing of resting on the Lord’s Day and putting out of the way the labors of this life in order to focus upon the gift of Christ’s birth, life, death and resurrection is a glorious mercy to the Christian. It is a shame that this positive and simple expression of the love of God for the believer has become so disdained by the worshipping body of Jesus Christ. The Sabbath day should be the highlight of the Christian week and everything in life should be organized around the foretaste of the glory that awaits for us in the heavenly places. So what benefit is it to arranging things in order so that the vast majority of the Lord’s Day can be spent in the service of God in spiritual sacrifice? It is a strange thing that there is so much push back against this concept, especially when you consider how much work people do during

the week to get things ready to serve their earthly employer. They will iron clothes, ready the children’s outfits for the next day, do the dishes, and myriads of other things, yet will bristle at doing the same to ensure that when they arise on the Lord’s Day they can go to Sabbath School or morning worship in plenty of time. How much time is spent on an average Sunday morning doing things that could have been done the night before and cause people to be late for the fellowship with the saints? A gracious and merciful understanding of the Christian Sabbath is exactly what our church needs at this time. An altering of priorities that places the world last, and Christ first, is our calling today. ■



Dr. John Mitchell Mason (1770–1829), Cover subject for the second issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian* journal (2006).

26. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.