



The Lord of the Sabbath

Matthew 12:1-8

Mark 2:23-28

Unpopular Positions

- Bible can be *understood* (**Ephesians 3:3-5; 5:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17**).
- *Responsible* for misunderstanding (**2 Peter 3:16-18**).
- *Stand* for the truth (**Titus 1:9-11; Jude 3**).
- Prohibits full *fellowship* with world (**2 Corinthians 6:12-17**).
- Leads to *division* in church (**1 Corinthians 5:4-13**).
- Causes divisions even in *families* (**Matthew 10:21-42**).

Excused to Disobey

In an article entitled "The Exception-Making God," brother Michael Hall writes, "The hunger of David and his men, the need of Jesus and His 12-member staff, the need of the physically maimed who sought to be healed on the Sabbath (Luke 13:11-17), etc., are all examples of human need that necessitated an exception to some rule God is flexible about His rules because he does care about men. That's why the Bible is not a legal document, but a book of principles . . . everything is not as cut and dry as you might think!" (Michael Hall, "The Exception-Making God", *Ensign*, January 1978, pp. 14,13).

"In other words, human need is a higher law than religious rules and regulations. Or, to put it more exactly, love is the highest law in the universe and supersedes all other regulations. And love demands that human need must be met, even if some legal technicalities have to be laid aside in the process. ... It is obvious that this concept of true religion as consisting of a right attitude rather than ritual acts was central to Jesus' thinking." (Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol. 6, pp. 120, 121)

Mercy over Obedience

"The plain fact is that love is an imperious law unto itself. It will not share its authority with any other laws, either natural or supernatural. Love is even capable of desecrating the Holy of Holies, the very tabernacle of the altar, if human hunger cries for help. ... The periscope Matt. 12:1-8 ... left no doubt about Jesus' willingness to follow the radical decisions of love. He puts his stamp of approval on the translegality of David's ... act" (Joseph Fletch, *Situation Ethics*, p. 85)

"This is a case where not the letter but the real spirit behind the letter was observed in careful conformity to God's intention and will" (Harold Fowler, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 610)

"The conclusion places mercy above ritual, and love above law . . . Jesus showed us that human need takes precedence over rites, codes, or cultural taboos." (*The Communicators Commentary*, Vol. 1, p.152)

Slippery Slope

- ... is a slippery slope.
- If hunger justifies breaking God's word, then ...
- Martyrdom?
- Persecution?
- Lie?
- Deny Jesus?

*“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in *that* day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21-23)*

Hunger Trumps Sin?

And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:2-4)

Break Least of Commandments?

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:17-19)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” (Matthew 23:23)

Excused to Disobey?

Now it happened that He went through the grainfields on the Sabbath; and as they went His disciples began to pluck the heads of grain. And the Pharisees said to Him, “Look, why do they do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” But He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry, he and those with him: how he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the showbread, which is not lawful to eat, except for the priests, and also gave some to those who were with him?” And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:23-28)

Excused to Disobey?

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!” But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” (Matthew 12:1-8)

Guilty Disciples?

- Of what law were the disciples guilty? Establishes the context.
- God's Law *prohibited*:
 - Plowing and harvesting (**Exodus 34:21**).
 - Gathering sticks (**Numbers 15:32-36**).
 - Kindling a fire (**Exodus 35:3**).
 - Cooking (baking and boiling, **Exodus 16:23**).
 - Selling, loading, harvesting, treading (**Nehemiah 13:15-22**).

Guiltless Disciples!

- God's Law *permitted*:
 - Holy assembly (**Leviticus 23:3; Ezekiel 46:3; Luke 4:16-30**).
 - Levitical ministry of the temple and worship (**Numbers 28:9-10; Leviticus 24:6-8**).
 - Circumcision (**John 7:22-23**).
- *“When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain.”* (Deuteronomy 23:25)
- The only “law” that the disciples broke was the tradition of the Jews (**Matthew 15:1-14**).
- *“... you would not have condemned the guiltless”* (Matt. 12:8)

Example of David Proves?

- Jesus states David broke the law - in context law of the Jews, Pharisees (**Matt. 12:4; Mark 2:26**).
- David *also* broke the law of Moses (**Leviticus 24:5-9**).
- Is Jesus approving breaking of God's law?
- Did Jesus on occasion use imperfect subjects to make a point (**Luke 16:1-13; 18:1-8**)?
- "Jesus expressly admits that what David did was unlawful; and some have supposed that he here intends to justify it on the ground of necessity, and then to argue that his disciples, though guilty of violating the law of the Sabbath, are justifiable on the same ground. ... Now the real argument of Jesus is this: David, when hungry, ate the show-bread, which it was confessedly unlawful for him to eat, yet you justify him: my disciples pluck grain and eat it on the Sabbath, an act which the law does not forbid, and yet you condemn them" (McGarvey, *Matthew Commentary*, p. 104)
- "it is the 'argumentum ad hominem' - the argument based upon that which the opponent accepts. The Jews did not criticize David for eating the shewbread under such trying circumstances, why criticize the disciples when they were but breaking the Pharisees interpretation of the Sabbath law?" (R.C. Foster, *Studies in the Life of Christ*, p. 457).
- In short, the Pharisees' reluctance to condemn David while condemning Jesus' apostles for less exposed their inconsistency and hypocrisy.

Priests Profane the Sabbath?

“Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?” (Matthew 12:5)

- How could the priests simultaneously both profane the Sabbath and blameless?
- God’s law authorized their actions (**Num. 28:9-10; Leviticus 24:6-8**).
- Necessitates two different laws, opposed to each other?
- Does God’s law contradict itself (**Titus 1:2; Galatians 3:17; John 17:17; 1 Corinthians 14:33**).
- Again, shows the condemnation is not only the Pharisees, but also their tradition! Their law was in opposition to God’s (**Matthew 15:1-9**).
- Jesus uses an approved example to prove that His disciples were guiltless - just like the priests!

One Greater than the Temple?

“Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple.”

(Matthew 12:5-6)

- If resting was the general rule for the Sabbath, God made an exception for the priests. Why? ...
- Clearly, their service toward the temple was “*greater*” more important than their rest on the Sabbath? Why? ...
- Regardless, Jesus was the “*One greater than the temple*”.
- If the priests were excepted by God, how much more Jesus’ disciples serving Him?
- Personal conflict; Authority - Jesus versus Pharisees (**12:14**).

Mercy over Sacrifice?

“But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.’”

(Matthew 12:7)

- Notice, apostles are not excused, justified - guiltless, innocent.

Mercy and Sacrifice!

O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, And like the early dew it goes away. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth; And your judgments are like light that goes forth. For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But like men they transgressed the covenant; There they dealt treacherously with Me. Gilead is a city of evildoers, And defiled with blood. As bands of robbers lie in wait for a man, So the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem; Surely they commit lewdness. I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: There is the harlotry of Ephraim; Israel is defiled. Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you, When I return the captives of My people. (Hosea 6:4-11)

Mercy and Sacrifice!

“But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.”

(Matthew 12:7)

- Notice, apostles are not excused, justified - guiltless, innocent.
- Ritual obedience to some law is worthless if omitting *“weightier matters”* (Matthew 23:23).
- Like the Jews of Hosea’s day, these Pharisees were like priests committing spiritual murder.
- Hypocrisy was their doom and occasion for judgment - an appointed *“harvest”*.

Sabbath Made for Man

And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27)

- God’s commands were designed to help man, not hurt him (**Deuteronomy 6:24; Matthew 11:28-30; 1 John 5:3**).
- Did God fail? Overlook something?
- Likewise, Sabbath was designed to help man (**Leviticus 23:3; Ezekiel 46:3; Luke 4:16-30**).
- In their jealousy, Pharisees lost sight of mercy, intent of the Sabbath and saw only occasion to destroy Jesus (**Matthew 12:14; 27:18; John 11:48-57**).
- They twisted the Sabbath into a tool to hurt men - rather than help them, which Jesus properly understood.
- Does not give anyone right to dismiss God’s law, but it makes their faulty condemnation worse.

Lord of the Sabbath?

And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27-28)

- Is Jesus asserting His right to change the law regarding the Sabbath however He sees fit?
- No! Recall: **Matthew 7:21-23; 4:2-4; 5:17-19; 23:23; Titus 1:2; Galatians 3:17; John 17:17; 1 Corinthians 14:33**
- Remember, Jesus knew no sin (**1 Peter 1:22**)
- He asserts His mastery of the subject - not as supplanter - but Lawgiver - His equality with God (**James 4:11-12; Romans 7:1-4**).

“But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.’ Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.” (John 5:17-18)

Mental Gymnastics



Stand Strong

These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen. (Jude 16-25)