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“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

MARK 2

²³Once on a Sabbath day, Jesus was passing through the grain fields, and his disciples began to pick heads of grain as they walked along. ²⁴The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?”

²⁵He replied to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry (he and his companions)? ²⁶He entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the Bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for anyone to eat, except for the priests. He also gave some to his companions.”

²⁷Then Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. ²⁸So the Son of Man is the Lord even of the Sabbath.”



The Gospel Of Jesus Christ Versus Extra Rules

Of all the issues the experts had with Jesus, His activities on the Sabbath day seem to bother them the most. There are several recorded miracles on the Sabbath, all of them involving healing. Today in our sermon text the experts were upset at the hungry disciples, and really Jesus, for their Sabbath snack.

The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, Saturday, the day of worship and rest. God Himself had established this day after creating the world. He spent six days creating, and on the seventh day He rested. When God put together His covenant with the Hebrews of the Old Testament, He kept His people from doing any and all work on Saturday, the Sabbath.

So that is why these sworn enemies of Jesus were so upset. It all depended on how one defines work. When the disciples of Jesus grabbed little stalks of grain, rubbed them together, and ate them, the experts considered them to be doing work on the Sabbath.

This activity was allowed under the old Law, “*When you come into a field of standing grain belonging to your neighbor and you pluck the heads of grain with your hand, you are [just] not allowed to use a sickle to cut his standing grain*” (Dt. 23:25). But to the experts, doing this on the Sabbath amounted to threshing or milling grain on a minute scale, and these disciples required a sin offering.

Rabbinic law surrounding the Sabbath was getting ridiculous. Sabbath teaching, more than any other Old Testament teaching, was incredibly detailed. They had added so many extra rules, and by “extra” we mean artificial rules—impossible rules. Some forbade it on the Sabbath to plug a leaking container or even to wipe a wound. One Jewish group (the Essenes) taught that it was wrong to cover your feet in any way on the Sabbath. The experts added so much ‘extra’ that the Sabbath had lost its original purpose.

Proof positive of this is that the priests and Levites were ordered to bake twelve loaves of bread for the Holy Place ... when? On the Sabbath... every Sabbath. So there were certainly activities on Sabbath that God did not really consider to be “work.” How much less a grainy snack in the fields?

This can happen with God’s Law. We can follow it with drudgery. We can kick and scream the whole way. But God does not give us laws in order to fill the world with rules, rules, and more rules. He knows what is best for us and is trying to protect us from hurt and pain.

So it becomes very important to know the difference between the moral and ceremonial Law. One was binding for a time; the other is right and valid for all time. One was good when it pointed the people to the coming Savior; the other is always good. The moral Law was always more important than the ceremonial Law, because it served man. If the ceremonial Law did not serve people’s health and well-being, it wasn’t serving the moral Law, so it wasn’t serving its purpose.

This comes up from time to time when people want to say all Christian principles are old and outdated. They say, “So you follow the Bible? So do you still think it’s wrong to eat shellfish?” The answer is of course, “No.” But that’s not because all of God’s Law is outdated. The Ten Commandments and biblical moral truths never went away. But the ceremonial things, like Sabbath work and dietary laws, have served their purpose. They showed the people of Israel they would always fail; they hedged the people of Israel from other nations; and they were a shadow to point to the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ.

So a regular worship life will still benefit us greatly. That is the kernel of truth in keeping the Sabbath. But if we set up all kinds of challenges and artificial, impossible 'extra' rules, and beat ourselves up with these obstacles to God, we have missed the point of the better Law.

Jesus states that better Law when He says, *"The Sabbath was made for man; not man for the Sabbath"* (27).

Be wise in setting up extra rules. Should we set up extra church policies and customs? If we set up that which is impossible to keep, we set ourselves up for failure. It may result in wounding the conscience.

- *"Better that you do not vow, than that you do make a vow and do not fulfill it"* (Eccl. 5:5).
- *"For why is my freedom judged by someone else's conscience? If I eat the food with thankfulness, why am I criticized for something for which I give thanks?"* (1 Cor. 10:29-30).
- *"'Do not handle!' 'Do not taste!' 'Do not touch!' All of these rules end in destruction when they are used, because they are in accord with human commands and teachings."* (Col. 2:21-22).

When I played college football, we had what we called "training rules." No alcohol or tobacco was allowed during the season. Training rules worked; I really don't think anyone smoked or drank during the season, because we liked to win. We were very competitive and had winning seasons every year I was there. To help each other keep training rules, we went by the maxim, "Love your brother." If we saw a teammate feeling tempted to drink or smoke during the season, we fostered a culture where that teammate understood you were loving him by telling him to stop. "Love your brother."

Well, my senior year we had a new coach, and he asked us, "Do you guys want the same training rules as before?" To his credit, the reason he asked was that he didn't want to make a rule that we couldn't realistically follow. So we voted to keep those "training rules." We figured the rules made us healthier as a team, and it kept us from compromising our physical condition to play football. But I appreciated the ask.

So we must be able to tell the difference between God's Law and our extra rules. If we rely more on our extra rules, then we have not only missed the point of God's Law; we have missed the purpose of Jesus Christ and His Gospel. The Son of Man is, above all men, Lord of the Sabbath. The Son of Man knew better than the Pharisees did what the Sabbath stood for, what it implied, what it forbade, what it permitted. The Pharisees hedged the Law and hung it as a burden on the necks of the Jews. The Law was good; their interpretation was bad.

"So do not give others a reason to speak evil about what you consider good. For the kingdom of God does not consist of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:16-17).

Have you set up artificial, impossible rules for yourself? Have you found it hard to break free of the 'extra'? Some of you are working so hard. Some of you are carrying around such burdens, so much weight, and so much guilt. You are killing yourselves to stay on top of it all. Sometimes we talk about goals that are just not realistic, measurable, or attainable. They only leads to guilt and frustration. These rules should have been made to serve you; because God sure didn't make you just to follow extra rules.

I am here today to say that one very nice thing about Jesus is that He is Lord of all our extra little rules, even as He is Lord of His own Sabbath rest. You can know that your broken extra rules do not need to be on your conscience. Jesus is Lord of our conscience, for He has freed it. He went to the death for our conscience, because He paid the price for every one of His own rules. He shouldered and kept each rule in our place; even as He laid down His life under that burden. Then He became not only Lord of the Sabbath, but Lord of Easter Sunday, by rising again from those rules. Just as He is Lord of all our extra little rules, now, by redeeming us, He is Lord of our destiny; in His name, Amen.