

## When Man Made Rules Get In The Way of God's Gracious Plans

### Mark 2:23-28

**Introduction:** 1) Few things are more destructive and seductive and deceptive to a true and vital relationship with God than the deadly poison called "legalism."

- It is destructive because it breeds death rather than life.
- It is seductive because it has a natural allurements for the flesh that causes us to look to ourselves rather than Christ for our spiritual status before God.
- It is deceptive because it makes us think we are the spiritual elite when actually, we are spiritual slaves.

2) Legalism defined: 1) "Raising to the level of biblical mandate and command what God has neither commanded or prohibited in His Word." 2) It is taking our traditions and preferences and imposing them on others as an act of spiritual superiority even though the Bible says nothing of the sort.

3) Characteristics of legalism: 1) It looks for the short-comings in others rather than oneself. 2) It looks for what is wrong in someone's life in order to criticize and condemn them rather than what is right in order to commend and encourage them. 3) It reinforces feelings of spiritual superiority and elitism that is man-centered, rather than Christ-centered. 4) It focuses on external behavior rather than the internal issues of the heart! 5) It is the "I don't/you don't" form of religion!

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| - I don't dance.            | - I don't do drugs.         |
| - I don't go to the movies. | - I don't have immoral sex. |
| - I don't cuss.             | - I don't smoke.            |
| - I don't drink.            | - I don't chew.             |

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- You don't use the right Bible translation.    - You don't wear a coat and tie.

- You don't sing the right kind of music.
- You don't tithe (or tithe off of the gross rather than the net).
- You don't use a hymnal.
- You don't properly honor and respect the Lord's Day.

\* And I am sure we all could add to the list!

4) It is this last "don't" that caused the Pharisees so much heartburn with Jesus. He did not conduct Himself properly on the Sabbath, the Jewish day of worship, as outlined and detailed by the religious establishment thru their traditions. It is to this accusation that Jesus will respond in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> religious controversies packaged in Mark 2:1-3:6. In both he will set the record straight: 1) The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (2:27). 2) It is always right to do good, even (especially!) on the Sabbath (3:4).

**Transition:** We shall address the first of these 2 events here in 2:23-38 and in the process, glean 3 important spiritual lessons that contrast man made rules with the plans and purposes of God.

**I. Do not let man made rules make you a spiritual slave. 2:23-24**

- \* This is the 4<sup>th</sup> of 5 controversies with the religious leaders (2:1-3:6).
  - 1) He claimed to be God and forgive sins (2:1-12).
  - 2) He consorted with sinners (2:13-17).
  - 3) He did not fast according to religious traditions (2:18-22).
- \* Now, He does not honor the Sabbath (2:23-28 and 3:1-6).

The Sabbath ran from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset.

It was a day distinctively honored by the Jews!

- Islam may honor Mecca and the Koran.
- Hindus may honor the Ganges River.
- Jews may honor Jerusalem and the temple, but it was the Sabbath which they honored above all as it proclaimed Yahweh as Lord of Creation and Time, and set them apart as a distinctively unique people.

- \* The 4<sup>th</sup> commandment, the longest of the 10, addressed the Sabbath in Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. It was viewed as a special sign between Israel and Yahweh (Ex 31:13-17), and Jews were to abstain from every kind of work since God Himself rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day. However, the 4<sup>th</sup> command is not precise in details and so the Jews built an elaborate “wall of tradition” to fence it in so as to assure that it would not be violated.
- \* The general rule was “do no work that is not absolutely necessary;” which meant life threatening. Jesus and His disciples were guilty of a double violation in the eyes of the Pharisees:
  - 1) Traveling: walking more than 1,999 paces was considered a journey and hence a violation (though they do not mention this one).
  - 2) Reaping: Deuteronomy 23:25 says, “If you go into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor’s standing grain.” So far so good. But Exodus 34:21 says, “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.” Plucking was reaping or harvesting in the eyes of the Pharisees. Thus we have the rationale for their rebuke in v. 24. Eat but don’t reap they would say.
- \* Jesus, as far as they were concerned, was responsible for the sinful actions of His disciples, compounding His offense. This is why they addressed Jesus with a question in the form of a rebuke!
- \* Better to go hungry than break our rules they thought! Break our laws and the religious police will be quick to ticket you with a violation.

- \* Filled, perhaps with good intentions, the Pharisees had constructed a man made mountain of rules and regulations that enslaved, that no one could or should try and live up to.
- \* In a reversal of Genesis 50:20, what God had meant for good they had turned to evil. In a sense, the clash is not over the rules, but who makes the rules! Jesus will gladly honor the law when it conforms to God's intentions. When it doesn't, you can expect Him to turn things on their head and challenge the status quo!

**Transition:** Do not let man made religious rules make you a spiritual slave.

## **II. Remember that the Lord's day is to be a blessing not a burden. 2:25-27**

- \* Jesus' response to their question is fascinating. He completely ignores the Sabbath and turns to an event in the life of King David! Note His is an appeal to Scriptural principle. It is also Christological and Messianic!
- \* Jesus points to 1 Samuel 21:1-6 in vs. 25-26 and draws a principle in v. 27.
- \* Read 1 Samuel 21:1-6
- \* A textual issue: Jesus says "in the time of Abiathar the high priest", when actually, as we just read, Abimelech his father was the high priest. Did Jesus err? Not at all! The ancient Hebrew Bible had neither chapter nor verse divisions. They did not even separate words! Jesus simply cites the section or area of Scripture where the story can be found and does so by referencing the more prominent figure in that portion of Scripture: Abiathar. He would become high priest shortly after Abimelech and proved to be the more important. It would be like saying, in this section of the Samuel scroll you will find this story.

- \* Now the point of the analogy: 1) David and his men were in need and hungry and he went into the house of God and ate “the bread of the Presence,” the consecrated bread (*HCSB*, “sacred bread”), the 12 loaves of unleavened bread placed in the holy place which represented Israel’s 12 tribes.
- \* While it was not normal or lawful, indeed it was quite exceptional, for David and his men to eat the showbread, it was even more the case that God did not want them to starve. Scripture nowhere condemns their actions. Godly men on both occasions did the right thing!
- \* And the point of appealing to David? Jesus is inviting a comparison between David and Himself! Between the lesser David and His greater Son! This is the first, but not the last, of such allusions.
- \* Jesus therefore concludes with the principle that should have guided Jewish observance of the Sabbath all along:  
“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.”  
“The Sabbath was made to bless man, not man to bless the Sabbath.”  
“The Sabbath was made for man’s enjoyment, not man for the Sabbath’s.”
- \* Jesus had a liberating vision of the Sabbath that frees us, not one that binds us with unbearable burdens.
- \* Colossians 2:16-17 brings clarity to all of this for us today who live under the New Covenant inaugurated through the death and resurrection of King Jesus; “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.”

- \* The Lord's day, indeed every day, is to be a blessing that lifts us up, not a burden that weighs us down. It is to help us grow in grace and maturity, not strangle us with rules and regulations.

### **III. Let the Lordship of Jesus Christ be your anchor and guide. 2:28**

- \* Modern readers in the western context cannot easily grasp the striking and breathtaking declaration of v. 28. Jesus weds the "Son of Man" title to that of "Lord of the Sabbath and declares He is both." This, like 2:10, is nothing less than a declaration of deity and divine rights! The divine man of Daniel 7:13-14, whom demons recognize as the Holy One of God (1:24), and the Son of God (3:11) also is Lord of the Sabbath.
- \* Jesus, once more (2:10), puts Himself in the place of and with the authority of God. Interestingly, this story began with what the Pharisees said in v. 24, but it ends with what Jesus, the Son of Man and Lord of the Sabbath says in v. 28.
  - He determines what is lawful and unlawful.
  - He determines what is permissible and impermissible.
  - He determines what is right and what is wrong.
- \* He makes the call! And His Word is final!
 

There is no court of appeal. There is no higher authority! With one bold declaration He silences His adversaries and opposition.

#### **Application:**

- \* He is our anchor of spiritual authority. "Jesus says..." settles all issues!  
He is our guide in spiritual actions. (cf. 1 Cor. 11:1)  
He is Lord of the Sabbath as God!

Is He Lord of your life and your God?

**Conclusion:** In 1 Corinthians 6:12-13:13 Paul provides what I call “God’s Guidelines for the Gray Areas of Life.” Perhaps another way of stating these principles are “Gospel-centered Responses to the Grace of God Shown to Me in Jesus!” Stating them in positive affirmations, I believe they lead us in the way of affirming what “we are for” as those who have experienced God’s grace and now live under His gracious Lordship. Man made rules they are not. Divine principles for godly living they most certainly are.

- 1) I will pursue that which builds me up in service to Christ (6:12; 10:23).
- 2) I will pursue that which frees me rather than enslaves me (6:12).
- 3) I will pursue that which encourages my brothers and sisters in Christ (8:13; 10:24, 32).
- 4) I will pursue that which helps my gospel witness (9:12, 19-23; 10:32-33).
- 5) I will pursue that which magnifies my new life in Christ (6:9-11, 19).
- 6) I will pursue that which is consistent with my redeemed conscience (10:25-29).
- 7) I will pursue that which exemplifies Jesus (11:1).
- 8) I will pursue that which shows love to others (13:1-13).
- 9) I will pursue that which honors my body which now belongs to God (6:19-20).
- 10) I will pursue that which glorifies the God who saved me (10:31).

Here are rules given by God and not man!

Here are rules that set us free and do not enslave!