

While each Sunday we take on a paragraph at a time in God's Word and try to milk its richness, we must not lose the flow of the tension that is building between Jesus and the conventional religious expectations. Kent Hughes expresses it so well. *These initial head-on collisions with the religious establishment produced brilliant sparks which illuminated the character of Christ and the heart of God.*ⁱ I will review a few of those brilliant sparks Hughes was referring to. Jesus dealt with a paralytic by first addressing his most important need, the forgiveness of sins (2:5ⁱⁱ). Then He proves His divine authority to do so by fulfilling the prophecy about the coming Messiah by healing his body. The lame shall leap as a deer (Isaiah 35:6ⁱⁱⁱ). The sparks from this confrontation showed our need for forgiveness is a priority above our physical needs, and that Jesus is the divine One who can forgive us (Acts 4:12^{iv}).

Then He called the most despised man in the town, Matthew, to be a disciple, and dined with all Matthew's low life friends (2:14,15^v). He explains to the accusatory Pharisees that it is the sick who need a physician, not those who are well. He came for sinners, not the righteous. Surely the Pharisees knew the psalmist's words, "*There is none righteous, no not one!*" Psalm 14:3^{vi} Here the sparks illuminated the fact that no one is too far fallen for Jesus to make them a new creation. He sees the heart and invites us to have a relationship with Him.

Perhaps it was while Jesus was feasting with the tax collectors that the people asked if Pharisees and John's disciple fast, why Jesus and the disciples do not fast. The Pharisees fasted every Monday and Thursday and encouraged others to do the same. They would look as miserable as possible on those days so everyone could see how righteous they were (Matthew 6:16^{vii}). Jesus gave the rich analogy of a groom with his wedding guests. The Pharisees knew that during a weeklong wedding celebration no religious duty was to interfere with the joy of the occasion. They also knew that groom in the Scriptures was the LORD and the bride was Israel, but then according to Ezekiel 16, she became a whore. It was a reminder of their failure in the past to be faithful to God. But He promised an everlasting covenant would be made when He would atone for our sins (Ezekiel 16:62,63^{viii}). By using this analogy Jesus was in essence saying He is God and has come to atone for His bride.

It was then that Jesus explained that the old cannot contain the new. Their old religious routines and manmade rules could not hold Jesus' revelation. Their sad religious life of making oneself miserable has no place in the new covenant. Joy is the second fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22^{ix}). The days of the Messiah were predicted to be a joyful celebration (Genesis 49:11^x; Zechariah 9:9^{xi}). And that leads us into our text for today and next week in which the religious establishment will again clash with Jesus' teaching producing brilliant sparks which illuminate the character of Christ and the heart of God.

²³ *One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.* Mark 2:23 The Law allowed for the hungry to hand pluck the grain heads as long as a sickle was not used (Deuteronomy 23:25^{xii}). When the grain is almost ripe you can lightly squeeze and pull on the grain head and the grains fill your hand. Then you rub your hands together and the chaff comes loose. Then you can blow the chaff off. You pop kernels in your mouth and chew and chew. If there is labor it is more in the chewing of it as it becomes like chewing gum. This was one way

the poor could survive. The problem is not taking the grain from someone's field, nor is it even the interpretation of what it means to labor on the Sabbath. It is the Pharisees priority of legalism over the needs of man. The Pharisees would interpret the disciples' actions as harvesting, winnowing, and preparing food. That is like saying open heart surgery is the same as applying a Band-Aid. Jesus saw their actions as simply meeting the human need for sustenance.

²⁴ *And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"* Mark 2:24 The Law forbade work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10^{xiii}). A rabbi was responsible for their disciples' behavior. The Pharisees had numerous oral laws about the extent one might labor on the Sabbath. Much of the oral law came about during the exile though many claimed it came from Moses. The Jews knew they went into exile because they did not honor God's laws given to them through Moses. The Law even foretold that they would go into exile if they were disobedient (Deuteronomy 28:36^{xiv}). To keep from having a repeat, they made explanations of how to keep from breaking the laws. If they were not to work on the Sabbath, they made definitions of what work meant. You could only walk a certain distance. You could only pick up a certain weight. You certainly could not harvest grain, but what did harvesting consist of? They took it to mean taking any grain in any manner.

Guzik explains some of the absurdity of the oral traditions. "*At this time, Rabbis filled Judaism with elaborate rituals related to the Sabbath and the observance of other laws. Ancient Rabbis taught that on the Sabbath, a man could not carry something in his right hand or in his left hand, across his chest or on his shoulder. But you could carry something with the back of your hand, with your foot, with your elbow, or in your ear, your hair, or the hem of your shirt, or your shoe or your sandal. Or on the Sabbath, you were forbidden to tie a knot—except a woman could tie a knot in her girdle. So, if a bucket of water had to be raised from a well, you could not tie a rope to the bucket, but a woman could tie her girdle to the bucket.*"^{xv}

At the same time, the Law allowed for those who were hungry to do what they were doing, and some rabbis did consider exceptions for human need. The written Laws of Moses did not specifically say they could not do so on the Sabbath. It did not define work. The strict interpretations of the Sabbath law usurped the very reason the law was given. This particular law of being free to take grain from the edge of a field showed God's heart for those who were hungry. As it was the Sabbath, they were probably on the way to the synagogue and had nothing to eat where they were staying. Jesus' disciples may have not even have been aware of the strict interpretation of work. Even if they were, Jesus did not stop them. The Pharisees were obviously watching Jesus and His disciples closely. Jealous of the crowds that followed Him, they wanted to call Him out as a false prophet.

Christianity has its own Pharisees. We are free from the Laws of Moses because Jesus fulfilled them for us (Romans 8:2-4^{xvi}). We are under the law of love. Some branches of Christianity forbid playing cards, dancing, drinking wine, watching an R rated film, or even using musical instruments. It is the same type of judgmental legalism. We are led by the Spirit, and while you may be free to enjoy a glass of wine, I am not at the same Spirit's leading. I might be able to watch the R rated The Passion film while you are not led to do so. Paul gives an example in Romans 14. ¹ *As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.* ² *One person believes he may eat*

anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.³ Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.⁴ Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. Romans 14:1-4 Augustine's maxim sums this up. **In necessary things, unity, in things doubtful, liberty, in all things, charity.**

We must set aside our freedoms not to stumble our brother who is weak (Romans 13:21^{xvii}). I will set aside my freedom in the presence of a new believer if it might cause him or her to violate their conscience. Be very careful about judging a fellow believer for questionable actions (Romans 14:13^{xviii}). If it is clearly a sin according to the law of love then Paul tells us to gently instruct them with humility lest you be tempted to commit the same sin (Galatians 6:1^{xix}).

²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?"

Mark 2:25,26 Jesus answers their question with Scripture. He starts His response to the Pharisees with the expression, "have you never read." We see the same phrase twice in Matthew and once in Luke. It is like saying, "Have you not applied the lesson you read in Scripture to this situation." The situation was the disciples meeting their need for nourishment on the Sabbath by doing something that was considered to be against the laws of Moses.

Where do we see that in Scripture? It is found in 1 Samuel 21. An evil spirit had come upon Saul and roused his jealousy against David. He tried to kill David with a javelin. David fled and met with Jonathan, Saul's son, affirming their friendship. Jonathan told David that he knew David would one day be king. Perhaps Jonathan knew the prophecy that the scepter would not depart from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10^{xx}).

Because David fled in such haste, he did not have food or a weapon. He went to the priest Ahimelech, son of the high priest Abiathar, to ask for Goliath's sword and for food for the men. The only food the priest had was the bread of the Presence. This bread came from the tabernacle and the law prescribed that it only be eaten by the priests (Leviticus 24:8,9^{xxi}). Ahimelech made an exception. This act was clearly forbidden in the Law, but the disciples act of plucking grain was merely an oral teaching regarding the law. No one condemned David for eating the holy bread. *Casey is also able to point out examples from early Judaism which assume that David's eating of the showbread did indeed transpire on a Sabbath.*^{xxii} Jesus was using a rabbinical argument of the greater to the lesser. If God allowed David to do that more serious act, why were they whining about a lesser act?

Some commentators believe this is when David entered a salt covenant with the Lord (2 Chronicles 13:5^{xxiii}). Salt is a preservative. A covenant of salt is meant to be an enduring agreement. When two parties eat salted bread together they were making a lifelong agreement of friendship. In this case with David and God, it was that the house of David would reign forever.

Why did Jesus choose this passage to answer the Pharisees accusation? He was greater than David (Psalm 110:1^{xxiv}). The Pharisees were acting like jealous Saul. The grain on the edges of the field were dedicated to the poor, just as the bread of the

Presence was dedicated to the priests. Jesus was from the line of David but greater than David. His mission was greater than David's. His disciples needed food just as David's followers did. But there was a warning in the analogy. Saul would die at the hand of his enemies, but David would go on to reign. Jesus will die at the hand of His enemies and yet He will go on to reign in the hearts of His followers and will one day reign over the whole earth (Revelation 11:15^{xxv}). The Pharisees accusing Jesus would live out their lives, but in just 40 years there would be no more Pharisees. The temple would be destroyed. The analogy answered their question, but I do not think that they understood all the implications.

²⁷ And he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.

Mark 2:27 Jesus then made the argument that some other rabbis may also have made.

“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” When God finished creation, He rested on the seventh day. Many Jews believe we are still in the seventh day because it was not followed by the expression, “the evening and the morning were the seventh day” as was the case with all the other days. In giving the Law to Moses God told man to rest on the seventh day of the week and keep it holy by not working. It turns out that we are more productive when we take a day of rest each week.

Japanese had a problem with middle aged men dropping dead for no apparent reason. They were trying to get ahead in the company by working every day and never taking time off. When companies insisted that their employees take a day off each week, they found that productivity went up. Even some species of birds will take one day out of seven to rest during their migrations.

God knew we needed occasional rest. He gave us the gift of Sabbath to take some down time. There have been attempts to make a ten-day week, but people always revert to the seven-day week. The routines of life can keep us from enjoying God and meditating on His goodness. The down time allows us to do that. It is good for our body, soul, and spirit. That is why God commanded it.

In a previous sermon I elaborated on why we gather on Sunday instead of Saturday, the first day rather than the last. Jesus is our Sabbath rest. We cease from our labors to be justified to God and rest in Jesus' finished work. What day you do that is up to your conviction but recognize that God gave us a day of physical rest for the health of our body and soul.

²⁸ So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath. Mark 2:28 If the Sabbath is made for man and as the Messiah is lord over man, then He is lord even of the Sabbath. Jesus is not lord over the moral laws for He is the Word made flesh (John 1:14^{xxvi}). They are one. He will not violate the moral laws because they are based on His very nature. But the Sabbath law was made for man. All the laws of God are for our good, but many also have a moral foundation and therefore are one with the Word made flesh, unchanging, and eternal. Worship laws, however, are under the lordship of the Son of Man who can direct them as He wills. We cannot offer a sacrifice in the temple because it was destroyed and Jesus is the Lamb of God (John 1:29^{xxvii}), the final sacrifice for our sins. Now we worship in spirit and in truth (John 4:23^{xxviii}).

Put another way, loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves fulfills all the requirements of God (Matthew 22:37-40^{xxix}). That is the Spirit behind all the laws of God. Jesus as Lord over His creation, the pinnacle of which is mankind, can permit man to do a minimal amount of labor on the Sabbath, or for

David to eat the bread of the Presence, or any other act that is loving toward God and our neighbor. **God is merciful and considers our needs over the minutia of legal details.**

The Pharisees had made the Sabbath rules lord over mankind, making man to be made for it. Some rabbi even suggested that man was made to honor the Sabbath. We might refuse to help a person in need on Sunday because we think we must go to church. That misses the whole reason for the Sabbath rest.

Jesus is referring to Himself as the Son of Man. Though He does not say it directly, it was a title that could be taken for the Messiah, which is how I believe He is using it here. It was also used as a term of humility, which is the case in Ezekiel. His expression was understood as mankind is the priority of the Sabbath. One extra-biblical book (2 Baruch 14:18) states, *“And you said that you would make for your world a son of man as the manager of your works, to make it clear that he was not made for the world, but the world was made for him.”*^{xxx} While not inspired Scripture, the expression shows us the view of some Jews even before Christ that the world was made for man.

In Daniel the prophet, the title Son of Man is used of the One who is worshiped forever (Daniel 7:14^{xxxii}). Jesus as the Messiah is Lord over the requirements of the Sabbath. In that case, *he was clearly claiming to be equal with God, who had instituted the Sabbath. Once again Mark raises the question of who the Son of Man is and, indeed, of who Jesus is. This question becomes more urgent all the time.*^{xxxiii}

The more we respond to truth, the more we will be able to grasp it. The less we respond to truth (by ignoring it or closing our eyes to it), the less we will be able to grasp it. This is a fundamental truth found in the parables of Jesus.^{xxxiv}

The Lord of the Sabbath has the right to interpret what the Sabbath should consist of and what rest means. That is why He invites us who are weary and burdened to come and take His yoke upon us so that we will find rest for our souls (Matthew 11:28-30^{xxxv}). If the Lord of the Sabbath is living in your heart, life is not a burden. Every day we rest in Him. We trust in Him and His love for us. That is why the Apostle Paul tells us that some honor one day above another and some honor every day alike (Romans 14:5^{xxxvi}). They live in the seventh day in the One who has finished the work (Hebrews 4:3^{xxxvii}). His directions are not work because He does the work through us. The omnipotent One does not find it to be work at all.

This passage challenges us to see ourselves as the bride of Christ living in the marriage week, free from the burdens of the law, continually finding our daily rest in our Groom. His Spirit leads us in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake (Psalm 23:3^{xxxviii}).

Questions:

- 1 Describe the building tension in the preceding passages.
- 2 What was the real underlying issue?
- 3 Why were the Pharisees watching Jesus?
- 4 Why did they make up all these rules?
- 5 What does Romans 14 teach us about things doubtful?
- 6 How did Jesus’ OT example relate to the situation?
- 7 How did it relate to the issue?
- 8 How did the Pharisees miss the main issue?
- 9 What are the two interpretations of the last half of verse 28?

10 Which do you think Jesus meant?

ⁱ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 76.

ⁱⁱ **Mark 2:5 (ESV)**

⁵ And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

ⁱⁱⁱ **Isaiah 35:6 (ESV)**

⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;

^{iv} **Acts 4:12 (ESV)**

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

^v **Mark 2:14-15 (ESV)**

¹⁴ And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. ¹⁵ And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

^{vi} **Psalm 14:3 (ESV)**

³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

^{vii} **Matthew 6:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

^{viii} **Ezekiel 16:62-63 (ESV)**

⁶² I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, ⁶³ that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I atone for you for all that you have done, declares the Lord GOD.”

^{ix} **Galatians 5:22 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

^x **Genesis 49:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes.

^{xi} **Zechariah 9:9 (ESV)**

⁹ Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

^{xii} **Deuteronomy 23:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ 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.

^{xiii} **Exodus 20:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.

^{xiv} **Deuteronomy 28:36 (ESV)**

³⁶ “The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone.

^{xv} David Guzik, *Mark*, David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Mk 2:23–24.

^{xvi} **Romans 8:2-4 (ESV)** ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

^{xvii} **Romans 14:21 (ESV)**

²¹ It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

^{xviii} **Romans 14:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

^{xix} **Galatians 6:1 (ESV)**

¹ Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

xx Genesis 49:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

xxi Leviticus 24:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ Every Sabbath day Aaron shall arrange it before the LORD regularly; it is from the people of Israel as a covenant forever. ⁹ And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the LORD's food offerings, a perpetual due."

^{xxii} ¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 130

xxiii 2 Chronicles 13:5 (ESV)

⁵ Ought you not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingship over Israel forever to David and his sons by a covenant of salt?

xxiv Psalm 110:1 (ESV)

¹ The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."

xxv Revelation 11:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."

xxvi John 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

xxvii John 1:29 (ESV)

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

xxviii John 4:23 (ESV)

²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

xxix Matthew 22:37-40 (ESV)

³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

^{xxx} Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 131

xxxi Daniel 7:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

^{xxxii} R. Alan Cole, "Mark," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 955.

^{xxxiii} *ibid*

xxxiv Matthew 11:28-30 (ESV)

²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

xxxv Romans 14:5 (ESV)

⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind.

xxxvi Hebrews 4:3 (ESV)

³ For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest,'" although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

xxxvii Psalm 23:3 (ESV)

³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.