

WHEN TRADITIONS INTERFERE WITH GOD'S PLANS

MARK 2:23-28

23 One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" 25And 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: 26how 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?" 27And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath." ESV

Introduction

God gave the children of Israel the Law through His servant Moses on Mt. Sinai. They referred to it as the *Law* or the *Law of Moses* or the *Pentateuch* or the *Torah*.

They also have a book of writings called the Mishnah. The Mishnah is the oral law of the Jewish people, it means "repetition." The Mishnah is a list of rulings gathered from studying the Law and are held in the same way as the Law of Moses.

The Torah is the *Written Law* and the Mishnah is the *Oral Law*. It is this Oral Law that Jesus preached so hard against. The laws of man had become as important as the Law that God handed down to Moses. Therein, is the problem.

Few things are more destructive, seductive, and deceptive to a relationship with God than the deadly poison of legalism. Legalism is "false Christianity." It uses religious language and biblical terms. It sounds Christian, looks Christian, but it is an unholy counterfeit of the Grace of God. Legalism is a stench in the nostrils of God. Legalism is anything that says salvation is Jesus + something. It can be "Jesus + baptism" or "Jesus + works" or "Jesus + evidence of the filling of the Holy Spirit." It can be found in "Jesus + circumcision" or "Jesus + traditions."

Legalism will rear its head slowly, like allergies. We are fine one day and the next we are sniffing, sneezing and our eyes are red. That is how legalism creeps its way into the body of Christ.

Legalism is *destructive* because it breeds death rather than life. The churches in Galatia began as a congregation of believers on fire for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul received word that legalism was creeping into the churches and he responded with his epistle to the Galatians.

It is *seductive* because it has a natural allurements for the flesh that causes us to look to ourselves rather than to Christ for our spiritual status before God. Legalism is the opposite of Grace...Grace is the free gift from God to fallen man. Legalism on the other hand puts man on the same level as God concerning salvation...It is rife with "God does His part and man must do his part in order for salvation to be received. The Jewish Christians tried to force their new converts to following the Law instead of following Grace. Acts 15 contains the great "church business meeting" to discuss this very subject. In the end they accepted Grace rather than works.

It is *deceptive* because it makes us think we are the spiritual elite when actually we are spiritual slaves.

One of these legalisms that plagued Jesus ministry was wrapped in the blanket of the Sabbath. The root word for Sabbath is "to cease." God declared on Mount Sinai "*Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.*" (Exodus 20:8). Holy is another way of saying "*Remember the last day of the week as a day to cease work accomplished on the other six days. Keep this day separated from the other days by resting from your work. Therefore, set it apart as a holy day.*"

However, by the time of Jesus, the Law concerning the Sabbath had changed. The Mishnah describes 39 activities that were forbidden to be accomplished on the Sabbath.

These can be divided into four main groups:

The Order of Bread:

Sowing, Plowing, ***Reaping***, Binding sheaves, Threshing, Winnowing, Selecting, Grinding, Sifting, Kneading, Baking,

The Order of Garments

Shearing wool, Washing wool, Beating wool, Dyeing wool, Spinning, Weaving, Making two loops, Weaving two threads, Separating two threads, Tying, Untying, Sewing stitches, Tearing, Rapping

The Order of Hides

Slaughtering, flaying, tanning, scraping hide, marking hides, cutting hide to shape,

The Order of Construction

Writing two or more letters, erasing two or more letters Building, demolishing, extinguishing a fire, kindling a fire, putting finishing touch on an object, transporting an object between a private domain and the public domain, or for a distance of 4 cubits within the public domain

There are some caveats, for example the saving of human life; “In the event that a human life is in danger, a Jew is not only allowed, but required, to violate any Shabbat law that stands in the way of saving that person.

The term, “Sabbath Day’s Journey” is only found Acts 1:12, where it designates the distance from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives. Historically, this term comes from the rabbinical teaching of the distance one could travel on the Sabbath without transgressing the Law, that implied that travel is included as work being done (see Exodus 16:27-30).

Therefore the rabbis set a limit of travel on the Sabbath, calling it a “Sabbath day's journey.” It was set as 2,000 cubits (18” x 2000 = 3,000 feet or little more than a half a mile). Down through time they found a way around this by simply putting some food at the 2,000 cubit limit and calling it a “temporary domicile.”

Problems the Traditions of the Sabbath against Jesus

The Pharisees, Sadducees and the Scribes were constantly attacking Jesus on His actions on the Sabbath as that was very visible and easily chargeable, and according to the Oral Law, was a stoning offence.

Matthew 12:10 – They asked “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days?”

John 5:1-13 – Jesus healing the man with an infirmity for 38 years.

John 6:6-11 – Jesus heals the man with the withered hand.

Luke 13:10-17 – Jesus heals the woman with an infirmity for 18 years

Luke 14:1-6 – Jesus heals the man with dropsy

Do Not Let Man-Made Rules and Traditions Make You a Spiritual Slave (Mark 2:23–24)

23 One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. 24 And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

On the Sabbath, Jesus and His disciples were walking through grain fields. As they did some of the disciples began to pick a few heads of grain in order to eat as they were hungry (Matthew 12:1). In the Gospel of Luke we are told, "...his disciples plucked and some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands."

In the eyes of the Pharisees, they were guilty of *reaping and winnowing*.

The Oral law, man-made list of rules actually enslaved the Jews. In truth the mountain of rules were a heavy burden that no one could follow them. Rules were just piled upon rules and these were held in the same authority as God's Law.

What God had meant for good, the oral laws turned to bondage. The clash is not over the rules, but over who makes the rules.

Remember That the Lord's Day Is to Be a Blessing, Not a Burden (Mark 2:25–27)

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

In His usual way of confronting those that oppose Him, He does not answer their question, instead Jesus completely ignores the Sabbath question and turns to an event in the life of King David. Jesus's point is simple.

While it was not normal or lawful for David and his men to eat the showbread, it was even more the case that God did not want them to starve. He was primarily concerned with protection and provision for His servant David, the anointed king of Israel. God could have struck them all dead for this breaking of the Law. Instead, God shows His approval by doing nothing.

Jesus concludes with the principle that should have guided Jewish observance of the Sabbath all along: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (v. 27). Jesus had a liberating

vision of the Sabbath that frees us from legalistic constraints instead of binding us with unbearable burdens.

Let the Lordship of Jesus Christ Be Your Anchor and Guide (Mark 2:28)

28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

With these 11 words, Jesus turns the hearers on their ears, so to speak. You would almost expect Jesus to say, “Verily, verily, the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.” Jewish writers would use a dual word pronouncement to gain the attention of the hearers. It is difficult for 21st century man to fully grasp what Jesus is saying to His attackers. He combines the use of “Son of Man” with that of “Lord of the Sabbath.” He is declaring that He has the authority of God. Jesus often referred to himself as “Son of Man” and now adds that He is also the “Master of the Sabbath.”

As the Lord of the Sabbath, He determines what is lawful and unlawful on the Sabbath day. He makes the call, and His Word is final! With one bold declaration, He silences His adversaries and all opposition.

Conclusion

The religious Jews, under the leadership of the Pharisees relied on their teachings and the traditions for guidance, and in doing so, they missed the Messiah.

I have a long-sleeve t shirt that says, “Christianity is Not a Religion. Religion is man’s attempt to work his way to God. Christianity is God coming to men and women through a relationship with Jesus Christ. For Christians, Jesus Christ is our anchor for spiritual authority in all things.

The question is, have you surrendered to Him as your God and the Lord of your life? Man-made rules will never get you to God! Only the Lord of the Sabbath, the Son of God, will get you there. Trust in His work and not your own.

Bob Crowder