

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
XLI. Christ's Defense Of His Sabbath Action To Legalists
(Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5)

I. Introduction

- A. After Jesus healed the paralytic on the Sabbath in John 5:1-9, the religious leaders had critiqued Him for healing that day, but Jesus then directed the conversation to His deity and answered His critics on that claim.
- B. Thus, the combative, legalistic religious leaders returned to trying to condemn Jesus on what they held was His violation of the Sabbath prohibition when He let His disciples pick and eat grain on another Sabbath Day.
- C. Christ then defended His actions on that Sabbath in Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28 and Luke 6:1-5 with a great lesson on religious legalism. We study this event for our insight, application and edification:

II. Christ's Defense Of His Sabbath Action To Legalists, Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5.

- A. One Sabbath Day, Jesus went through a grain field, and His disciples, who were hungry, began to pick some heads of grain and eat them, Matthew 12:1. The Mosaic Law at Deuteronomy 23:25 let one pick grain from another man's field to satisfy his immediate hunger if he did not use a sickle to harvest a lot of it!
- B. However, the Pharisees thought that this activity that day violated the Sabbath prohibition of working, so they charged Jesus with letting His disciples violate the Sabbath, a capital offense, Matthew 12:2 with Exodus 35:2.
- C. The Pharisees were actually the ones who had violated God's intent behind His institution of the Sabbath:
 - 1. In Genesis 2:1-3, God had sanctified and blessed the Sabbath, for in it He rested from His creation work.
 - 2. However, when the mankind turned against God after the Noahic flood, pagan man distorted the seventh day and his view of deity, thinking the Sabbath as an unlucky day where one was to avoid all pleasure, and he saw himself as a slave to despotic, fickle gods. (Bruce K. Waltke, Creation and Chaos, 1974, p. 64-65).
 - 3. To critique these pagan views, when God gave the Mosaic Law, He instituted the Sabbath observance as a testimony to the world through Israel that He was a God of grace Who gave man refreshing rest that day.
 - 4. However, Israel's religious leaders had reversed the Sabbath back into being an oppressive day as in ancient paganism, making God look despotic, what Christ desired to correct in His ministry on the earth.
- D. Thus, Christ gave a five-fold defense of His Sabbath action to His legalistic critics in Matthew 12:3-8 that reflected His initial intent of the Sabbath observance to be a day of rest and refreshment from a gracious God:
 - 1. First, Jesus used an Old Testament precedent to claim that addressing livelihood needs took precedence over the technical obedience of the Mosaic Law, Matthew 12:3-4:
 - a. Jesus referred to 1 Samuel 21:1-6 where David and his men entered the tabernacle and ate the shewbread, capital offenses in technical violation of the Law, Matthew 12:3-4 with Numbers 1:51; Leviticus 24:5-9.
 - b. David and his men needed that bread to survive in their flight from Saul, so it was right for them to eat it.
 - 2. Second, Jesus used an Old Testament precedent to teach that performing God's ministry assignments took precedence over the technical obedience of the Mosaic Law, Matthew 12:5:
 - a. The priests performed their servile work of performing regular as well as extra sacrifices at the temple altar on Sabbath days as required by the Law in technical conflict with the Sabbath prohibition, Num. 28:1-10.
 - b. Since God's ministries needed to be performed on the Sabbath, it was right for the priests to do so.
 - 3. Third, Jesus taught that something, namely, the kingdom of God that He had come to offer Israel, was greater than the temple where the priests technically violated the Sabbath day by working on the Sabbaths to provide worship for Israel, Matthew 12:6. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Matt. 12:6)
 - 4. Fourth, Jesus used an Old Testament precedent in Hosea 6:6 to teach that showing mercy superseded even the sacrifices the priests performed in technically violating the Sabbath, and showing mercy to His hungry disciples so they could pick and eat grain on the Sabbath superseded keeping the Sabbath, Matthew 12:7.
 - 5. Fifth, Jesus taught that He as the prophesied God Incarnate "Son of Man" of Daniel 7:13-14 is Lord of the Sabbath, that He had full authority to dictate what was lawful to do on the Sabbath, Matthew 12:8.

Lesson: *When Israel's religious leaders critiqued Jesus for letting His disciples pick and eat grain on the Sabbath, Christ reflected God's initial intent in instituting the Sabbath observance of having Israel testify to pagan Gentiles that He, the One, True God, was gracious, and had given the Sabbath as a gracious rest for man. Thus, the oppressive rules that Israel's religious leaders had added to the Sabbath law had only violated God's initial intent in His institution of the Sabbath rest, so Jesus corrected the oppression of the religious leaders with God's grace.*

Application: *May we adhere to the intent behind God's Biblical directives to us and uphold the grace of God.*