

LORD OF THE SABBATH

(Matt. 12:7-8)

The legalistic Pharisees put rules over mercy! Jesus corrected them, showing from the Scriptures that even under the Law, there was a place where mercy takes precedence. And so He says...

Matthew 12:7 (NKJV)

7 But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless.

Here was the “heart” of the problem (pun intended). Legalism tends to be merciless. It shows no grace. That is not like God. Even the law of Moses had a place for mercy. Legalism doesn’t!

The quote here is from Hosea 6:6.

Hosea 6:6 (NKJV)

6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

This is now the second time Jesus has quoted Hosea 6:6 to the Pharisees. The first time was in Matthew 9:13. The word “mercy” in Hosea 6:6 is the Hebrew word “hesed” often translated as “lovingkindness”. God is concerned about compassion over ritual. God is interested in the HEART of people – not just religious exercises and rituals (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22-23). The rabbis had succeeded in turning the Sabbath into a burden instead of the blessing God intended it to be.

Mercy takes into account the motives behind what is happening and not merely cold legalistic rules.

“The quotation of Hos. 6:6 (7) is the denial of the right to judgment until the motives behind an act are known.”— ***New International Bible***

Commentary

Obviously, as seen in Jesus’ instruction, God takes into account the motives of what is happening. God is not just a “legalist” but considers whether an action is just defiant or not. And there is a “mercy rule” with God.

“Jesus taught that Sabbath law was overridden by priorities such as (1) genuine human need (1 Sam 21:1-6); (2) worship (Num. 28:9-10); and (3) acts of kindness (Hos. 6:6).” - ***Holman Christian Standard Bible***

Matthew 12:8 (NKJV)

8 For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Here is the bottom-line issue in the whole matter. It's all about AUTHORITY! Who has authority over the Sabbath? Who gets to decide on the fine nuances of what violates the Sabbath and what doesn't? Well, Jesus, as the Son of Man, is Lord even of the Sabbath.

“**Son of Man**” is a Messianic title going back to Daniel 7:13-14. Son of Man was Christ's favorite designation of Himself as recorded in the gospels appearing about 80 times. Son of Man presents the Messiah as the great representative of humanity and yet He has divine characteristics such as having dominion over all and an everlasting kingdom. This is no normal “man”, rather He is the “Son of Man”.

As the “Son of Man” Jesus is of the order of Man. As the “Son of God” Jesus is of the order of God. He is both in ONE person. He is the God-Man! This is the essence of the Messiah!

“Lord” means Master – One Who has authority over. As the Son of Man Jesus is the MASTER over the Sabbath. That is a statement of deity because only God Himself has absolute authority over the Sabbath. God created the Sabbath; God ordained the Sabbath. God gave the law of the Sabbath.

As Lord of the Sabbath no one is more qualified to interpret the TRUE meaning of the Sabbath! When Jesus says human need does not violate the Sabbath – that settles it.

When Jesus says sacred duty does not violate the Sabbath – that settles it. He is Lord even of the Sabbath! That was a powerful statement of absolute authority – of the authority of God!

“Jesus does not challenge the Sabbath law itself but rather the Pharisee's interpretation of it. As Messiah Jesus authoritatively interprets every aspect of the law (cf. 5:17-48) and here points out the Pharisees' blindness to the actual intent of the Sabbath – to bring rest and well-being.” – ***ESV Study Bible***

It is the Son of Man Who rules the Sabbath – not the Sabbath that rules over the Son of Man. Jesus is totally in charge of the Sabbath. He determines the rules and He lived completely consistent with what He has ordained. It was the Pharisees who were inconsistent!

At the end of the day it wasn't even so much Christ's violation of the Sabbath that greatly offended the Pharisees, rather it was His claim to have authority over it – it was His claim of absolute LORDSHIP! In the end this is the great issue the religious leaders could not tolerate.

The Sabbath in the OT was only a picture as it anticipated the REST that is found ultimate in Christ and His completed work on the cross (cf. Jn. 17:4; 19:30). In the New Covenant our REST is found in the PERSON of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 4:9–10 (NKJV)

9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

We now REST in the completed work of Christ. He is Lord of the Sabbath rest, and He is Lord of the salvation rest that the people of God enjoy. And note that those who enter into HIS REST have ceased from any and all works of trying to save themselves. We REST in His finished work, not in ours. We rest in His rest which He has accomplished for us!

Rest in His REST because there is no other rest!