

DEFENCE 1: THE MESSIAH IS GREATER THAN RELIGION

MATHEW 12:01–08

Mathew 12:01–50 DIVISION OVERVIEW

Note that Chapter 12 deals with the rising opposition to Christ both from the religionists (Mt. 12:1-45) and from his own family (Mt. 12:46-50). Christ confronted attack after attack, vindicating His Messiahship against each one.

Suspicion, rejection, and fear of Christ were growing at a rapid pace. He could not allow such to go unchecked lest it destroy those who were hanging on to the truth. He had to confront the arguments and denials against His Messiahship. He had to face those who did not believe and were opposed to Him. He had to continue to proclaim the truth for the sake of every generation, for He was the true Messiah, the Saviour of all who would believe and surrender to God.

Mathew 12:01–08 Introduction: Importance of Religion, Law of Sabbath, Tradition, Ritual and Opposition to Jesus Christ

The disciples were not stealing the corn. A hungry traveler was permitted by law to eat a few ears of corn when passing a field (Deu. 23:25). The crime was that the disciples *worked*, plucking the ears of corn *on the Sabbath day*.

This was a serious matter to the orthodox Jew. Just how serious it was can be seen in the strict demands governing the Sabbath. Law after law was written to govern all activity on the Sabbath. A person could not travel, fast, cook, buy, sell, draw water, walk beyond a certain distance, lift anything, fight in a war or heal on the Sabbath unless life was at stake. A person was not to contemplate any kind of work or activity on the Sabbath. A good example of the people's loyalty to the law is seen in the women who witnessed Jesus' crucifixion. They would not even walk to His tomb to prepare the body for burial until the Sabbath was over (Mk. 16:1f; Mt. 28:1f). It was a serious matter to break the Sabbath law. A person was condemned, and if the offense were serious enough, the person was to die.

This may seem harsh to some, but when dealing with the Jewish nation, one must remember that *it was their religion* that held them together as a nation through centuries and centuries of exile. Their religion (in particular their beliefs about God's call to their nation, the temple, and the Sabbath) became the *binding force* that kept Jews together and maintained their distinctiveness as a people. It protected them from alien beliefs and from being swallowed up by other people through intermarriage. No matter where they were, they met to worship together and held on to their beliefs. A picture of this can be seen in the insistence of Nehemiah when he led some Jews back to Jerusalem (Neh.13:15-22; see Jer. 17:19-27; Eze. 46:1-7).

All the above explains to some degree why the religionists opposed Jesus with such hostility. Their problem was this: they had allowed religion and ritual, ceremony and liturgy (and in some cases position, security, and recognition) to become more important than the basic essentials of human life: personal need and compassion, and the true worship and mercy of God. (See *Religionists*, Mt. 12:10.)

Christ used this opportunity to show that He Himself was the Messiah and that both He and man were greater than the Sabbath or religion.

- I. A questionable act and Jesus' defence: his progressive arguments (vv. 1-3).
- II. Argument 1: meeting needs is more important than tradition and ritual (vv. 3-4).
- III. Argument 2: doing necessary work has precedence over the Sabbath, that is, over religion (v. 5).
- IV. Argument 3: He (the Messiah) is greater than the temple (v. 6).
- V. Argument 4: He will have a religion of mercy and not sacrifice (v. 7).
- VI. Argument 5: He is Lord of the Sabbath and of religion (v. 8).

I. *Mathew 12:01–03 Sabbath, Religion, Ritual*

A questionable act — breaking the Sabbath law. The disciples were hungry. As they walked along the footpath that ran alongside a corn field, they plucked some corn to eat. By law a traveller was allowed to do this. It was not stealing, but there was a problem. It was the Sabbath, and the law prohibited work (plucking corn) on the Sabbath. Note two things.

1. The religionists immediately accused Jesus, condemning Him for letting His disciples break the religious rule (see *Sabbath, Sunday*, Mt. 12:1).

Thought 1. The religionists (Jewish teachers) corrupted God's Word (Rev. 22:18-19; Prov. 30:6).

- 1) A person corrupts God's Word by taking away from the words of Scripture. A person takes away from God's Word...
 - by denying sections that he does not like or understand.
 - by neglecting to live the whole counsel of God.
 - by interpreting some commandments too loosely.
- 2) A person corrupts God's Word by adding to the words of Scripture. A person adds to God's Word by interpreting and living too strictly. Such exalts the flesh and is nothing more than extreme discipline and self-control. Of course, both discipline and self-control are commendable and are qualities demanded by God's Word, but they are not an end in themselves.

God's Word is practical and leads to an abundant life, to real living. It is not cold, harsh, restrictive, monastic, unrealistic and impractical. God did not give His Word

for a select group (clergy); He gave it for the common man. “His commands are not burdensome” (1 Jn. 5:3).

The Sadducees were especially guilty of taking away from God’s Word. The Pharisees and Scribes were especially guilty of adding to God’s Word (see *Pharisees*, Acts 23:8; *Scribes*, Lk. 6:2).

Thought 2. Note two things.

- 1) There are beliefs, religious practices and traditions that are not of God. Men do add to God’s Word, putting restrictions upon people that God never intended.
 - 2) There is a judgmental and censoring spirit in the heart of religionists when their beliefs are broken.
2. Jesus defended Himself and His disciples. Jesus used the questioning of the religionists to do two primary things.
 - a. To teach that human need and necessary work have precedence over the Sabbath and religion. Religious ritual and tradition are not as important as people, not to God.
 - b. To proclaim His Messiahship, His right to set straight the man-made beliefs surrounding God’s Word and the *unscriptural restrictions* placed upon man.

MATHEW 12: 01 SABBATH, SUNDAY

The word means rest, cessation of labour. The Sabbath is the seventh day of each week (Saturday). It was the day Israel celebrated by resting and doing absolutely no work. It was based upon the seventh day when God rested following His six days of creation (Gen. 2:2-3).

So far as is known, there was no Sabbath from creation until Moses. The Sabbath was first instituted under Moses’ leadership (Exo. 16:23; Neh. 9:13-14), thereafter it became a part of Israel’s law (Exo. 20:8-11).

The Sabbath was kept as a sign to distinguish Israel as God’s peculiar people. It was never a day of worship or religious service. It was simply a day of complete rest for man and beast. Christ is accused of violating man-made rules encrusted around the Sabbath.

There is a difference between the Sabbath as observed by the Jews and others and Sunday as observed by Christian believers. The Sabbath is the last day of the week. It was a day when Jesus the Messiah was in the tomb, a day of great sadness for the Christian. However, Sunday is the first day of the week. It is a day of great joy, for it was the day of Jesus’ resurrection, the day that He triumphed over death. It is called the *Lord’s Day* and is celebrated as a day of rest and joy, a glorious day for searching the soul and meditating upon God. It is the day of worship and of Christian fellowship celebrated by believers worldwide (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).

- => It was Jesus' custom to worship on the Sabbath (Lk. 4:16).
- => It was Paul's custom to worship on Sunday (Acts 17:2).
- => God's people are not to neglect worship (Heb. 10:25; see Acts 16:13).
- => God's people are to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (Exo. 20:8; 31:14; 34:21).
- => God's people are promised a special blessing for keeping the Sabbath day holy (Isa. 56:2; 58:13-14).
- => Polluting the Sabbath will bring the judgment of God upon a people (Eze. 20:13; 22:8, 15; see Num.15:32-35; Jer.17:27; Eze. 22).
- => Buying and selling are not to take place on the Sabbath (Neh. 10:31; 13:15).
- => Helping the needy is lawful on the Sabbath (Mt. 12:12; see Jn. 7:23; 9:14).
- => Early believers worshipped on the day that Christ arose from the dead, that is, on Sunday, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). □

ACTS 23: 08 PHARISEES

The word means *the separated ones*. The Pharisees were strict religionists. Their religious sect arose about B.C. 175. A Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes, tried to stamp out the Jewish religion and replace it with Greek customs and practices. A number of Jewish men opposed this threat and determined among themselves to save the Jewish religion. They refused to practice Greek customs and dedicated themselves to practicing the Jewish law in the strictest sense. They felt that by carrying out every little detail of the Jewish law and by teaching others to do the same, they could save the Jewish religion and nation and keep it from dying out.

Several things should be noted.

1. They were the orthodox of their day — a sect or school of religious thought. They were organized solely for preserving the law and the Jewish religion. Thereby, they were to save the Jewish nation.
2. They were strict literalists. The Jewish law was expanded into thousands and thousands of little rules and regulations by the Scribes. These rules and regulations were known as the Scribal or Oral Law. More than fifty volumes or books were eventually needed to hold the regulations.
3. The Pharisees were a body of the most zealous religionists.
4. There were never many Pharisees — never more than 6,000. The strictness and demands of the sect were too hard for the common people.
5. They were in dead earnest — dedicated and zealous, self-denying, and moral. No man could give his life to so desperate and restrictive a task unless he was totally genuine.

6. They were self-righteous, heartless, and hypocritical (Lk. 18:9). They lacked any sense of need or sin (Lk. 7:39).

7. They were bitterly opposed to the Sadducees, hating and despising them, feeling that the Sadducees were traitors to the nation.

However, the Pharisees were forced to quietly cooperate with the Sadducees because the Sadducees were the primary ruling party of the nation.

8. They were the main opponents of Jesus Christ and were unsparing in their denunciation of Him. Their savage attacks were primarily for two reasons. First, He was not a graduate of any of their rabbinical schools, nor a member of any of their religious sects. Second, He attacked their rules and regulations which had been added to God's law. □

LUKE 06:02 TEACHERS OF THE LAW, SCRIBES, SCRIBAL LAW, PHARISEES

These Pharisees were probably Scribes, the teachers of the law. The Scribes were a profession of men sometimes called lawyers (Mt. 22:35). They were some of the most devoted and committed men to religion in all of history and were of the sect known as the Pharisees. However, every Pharisee was not a Scribe. A Scribe was more of a scholar, more highly trained than the average Pharisee. They had two primary functions.

1. The Scribes copied the written law, the Old Testament Scriptures. In their copying function, they were strict copiers, meticulously keeping count of every letter in every word. This exactness was necessary, for God Himself had given the written law to the Jewish nation. Therefore, the law was not only the very Word of God, it was the greatest thing in the life of the Jewish nation. It was considered the most precious possession in all the world; consequently, the Jewish nation was committed to the preservation of the law (Neh. 8:1-8). A young Jew could enter no greater profession than the profession of Scribes.

2. The Scribes studied, classified, and taught the moral law. This function brought about the Oral or Scribal Law that was so common in Jesus' day. It was the law of rules and regulations. There were, in fact, so many regulations that over fifty large volumes were required when they were finally put into writing. The great tragedy was that through the centuries, the Jews began to place the Oral law over the written law.

The Scribes felt that the law was God's final word. Everything God wanted man to do could be deduced from it; therefore, they drew out of the law every possible rule they could and insisted that life was to be lived in conformity to these rules. Rules

were to be a way of life, the preoccupation of a man's thoughts. At first these rules and regulations were taught by word of mouth; however, in the third century after Christ, they were put into certain writings.

The Halachoth: rules that were to govern the ritual of worship.

The Talmud, made up of two parts.

=> The Mishnah: sixty-three discussions of various subjects of the law.

=> Gemara: the sacred legends of the people.

Midrashim: the commentaries on the writings.

Hagadci: thoughts on the commentaries. □

II. *Mathew 12:03–04 Man's Need is Greater than Religion*

The first step in Christ's argument is that need has precedence over religion and its tradition and ritual. This truth is illustrated by David's eating the consecrated bread in the tabernacle when he was hungry (see *Consecrated Bread*, Mt. 12:3-4). David ate the consecrated bread. The priest gave it to him despite the religious law, and David was held blameless (1 Sam. 21:1-6). Why? Because he had need. Human need took precedence over religious tradition and ritual.

Thought 1. Note two things.

- 1) David broke the law not to indulge a lust but to meet a genuine need. We are to meet the genuine needs of men. God's call and concern is to meet human need, not *religion* and religious beliefs, not religious practices and ritual and ceremony and rules and regulations.
- 2) The law which was broken to meet David's need still stood. It was a needed law for men to practice, yet it was broken to meet human need. Human need and compassion took precedence over the law.

Thought 2. There is a criterion to determine if a religious belief, law, custom, ritual, ceremony, or rule should be broken: Is it being broken to indulge a lust or to meet a genuine need? An honest answer to this question will tell a person what to do. (See civil law. Speed limits are broken by ambulance drivers to rush a critical patient to the hospital or by policemen to meet *emergencies*.)

Mat 20:28 "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Rom 15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Gal 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

MATHEW 12:03–04 CONSECRATED BREAD

The word means *the bread of the face* or *the bread of the Presence* (see Exo. 25:30). It symbolized the presence of God who is the Bread of Life. The consecrated bread was twelve loaves of bread that were brought to the house of God as a symbolic offering to God. It was a thanksgiving offering to God for sustaining food.

The loaves were to be taken to the Holy Place by the Priest and placed on the table before the Lord. The loaves symbolized an everlasting covenant between God and His people: that He would always see to it that His people had whatever food was necessary to sustain them (see Mt. 6:25-34). The loaves were to be changed every week. The old loaves became food for the priests and were to be eaten by them alone. □

III. *Mathew 12:05 Necessary Work on Sabbath*

The second step in Christ's argument is that necessary work has precedence over the Sabbath, that is, over religion. There was always work to be done in the temple: the handling of animals, the offering of sacrifices, the handling of people, the leading of worship. The *worship of God* and *necessary work* always took precedence over rules and regulations of religion, and the religious workers were always held blameless.

The Sabbath or Sunday has two purposes: rest and worship (see *Sunday*, Mt. 12:1). Some work is necessary to carry on the functions of rest and worship. Note two things.

1. Necessary work is any work that is needed to sustain life and worship and meditate upon God. (See *Sabbath, Sunday*, Mt. 12:12.)
2. Sabbath or Sunday rest is not to hinder the worship of God but to give time for it and to encourage it.

Mat 12:12 "How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Heb 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Exo 20:8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Neh 10:31 "When the neighbouring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts." (see Neh 13:15)

MATHEW 12:12 SABBATH, SUNDAY

The Sabbath or Sunday, is for rest and worship (see Mt. 12:5). What is allowed on the Sabbath or Sunday, the day set aside for rest and worship? God's Son says, "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath"; that is, it is lawful to *truly* help a person who has a *real* need. □

IV. *Mathew 12:06 Messiahship*

The third step in Christ's argument is that the Messiah is greater than the temple (see 2 Chr. 6:18; Isa. 66:1-2). The priests were allowed to work on the Sabbath because it was done for the temple. Christ was saying that His disciples were allowed to work (pluck the ears of corn) because it was done for Him (to meet His hunger). This was a unique opportunity for Christ to proclaim that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, the great source and object of the temple, its founder and the subject of its worship.

Note that Christ was standing in the corn field when He said, "I tell you that one greater than the temple is here." There is no question what He was doing. He was proclaiming that He is the Messiah.

Thought 1. The temple possessed only the *symbolic* presence of God. Christ possessed "all the fullness of the deity" (Col. 2:9).

Mat 12:6 "I tell you that one greater than the temple is here."

Luke 11:31 "The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here."

John 3:31 "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all."

Phil 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.

Phil 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the first-born from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Heb 1:4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

Heb 3:3 Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honour than the house itself.

V. *Mathew 12:07 Religion of Mercy, not Sacrifice*

The fourth step in Christ's argument is that the Messiah will have a religion of mercy and not sacrifice (see 1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6). The supreme law is love, not religious sacrifice — a love that reaches out to any person in need. Religious practices and rituals may help, but the first thing is love and mercy.

Thought 1. These religionists were guilty of the most serious offense.

- 1) They did not have a merciful heart; they were not compassionate and understanding of human need. How much mercy and compassion are needed in all our dealings!
- 2) They did not understand "what these words mean," did not know the true meaning of God's heart and Word. They knew God's Word but did not know its meaning. What a message to us!
- 3) They judged and censored others because they did not know the meaning of God's heart and Word. God's heart and Word never allows censoring anyone.

Mat 7:1-5 *"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*

Rom 2:1 *You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.*

Rom 14:4 *Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.*

Rom 14:13 *Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.*

1 Cor 4:5 *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.*

James 4:12 *There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you — who are you to judge your neighbour?*

VI. *Mathew 12:08 Jesus Christ, Deity*

The fifth step in Christ's argument is that the Messiah is Lord of the Sabbath and of religion. As Lord, He is the One who determines what true religion is:

=> It is loving God by believing on the name of His Son Jesus Christ (1 Jn. 1:3).

=> it is loving our neighbours as ourselves — ministering to them and caring for them.

Man should not try to add to or take away from God's heart and Word. Taking away denies Him and adding to God's Word misrepresents Him, and both dethrone Him and exalt man as Lord.

***Mat 28:18** Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."*

***Acts 2:36** "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

***Acts 5:31** God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.*

***1 Cor 8:6** Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.*

***1 Pet 3:22** Who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. ■*