

## Truth Vs. Tradition

**Text:** Mark 2:18-28

### Introduction:

1. Christ's conflict with the religious leaders intensifies in chapter 2 & 3. In this chapter (2), the religious leaders raise 4 objections/challenges to the Lordship of Jesus Christ:
  - His power to forgive sin (Vs. 7, 10)
  - His compassion sinners (Vs. 16-17)
  - His apparent disregard for fasting (Vs. 18)
  - His alleged disobedience to Sabbath regulation (Vs. 24)
2. In this message, we will look at the last two objections above.
3. The central issue is Divine truth Vs. human tradition; salvation by grace Vs. salvation by works. In these verses Christ slams into their false, works based system of salvation, exposing it for the sham it was.
4. We will consider the text before us under 3 divisions:

### I. Christ Vs. Man-Made Standards (Vs. 18-20)

#### A. The Criticism (Vs. 18)

1. The practice (Vs. 18a)
  - a. "used to fast" = question concerns the practice of fasting
  - b. In Matthew 6:16-18, Christ denounced hypocritical fasting that was motivated by a desire to be admired by others.
  - c. Christ was not against fasting itself and even encouraged it as a sometimes-necessary companion to victorious praying (Matt. 17:21; Mark 9:29). Fasting is also cast in a favorable light on numerous occasions in the O.T. (e.g. Esther, Daniel etc...)
2. The people (Vs. 18b)
  - a. John's disciples – motive behind question hard to determine. It may have been one of ignorance. John ministered to vast multitudes and Paul even came across a group of John's disciples approx. 30 years after Jesus' baptism who still didn't know that Christ was the one to whom John's ministry pointed (Acts 19:1-7). Motive may have even been one of envy on account of Christ's popularity (See John 3:26). If this was the case, they failed to heed the message of John, the very man they claimed to follow.
  - b. The Pharisees – clearly the motive for their question was one of outright animosity and opposition to Christ and His ministry. The Pharisees had added their own manufactured traditions to the law of God (Matt. 15:9). They would fast twice in a week (Luke 18:12) on Monday's and Thursdays.

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3. The point (Vs. 18c)
  - a. The question came from a process of comparison. They were comparing themselves with Christ's disciples.
  - b. Context is feast at Matthew's house. Could be that this feast day fell on one of the days of fasting the Pharisees required.

### **B. The Counter question (Vs. 19-20)**

1. Interesting that Christ used the illustration of a bridegroom, one to which John the Baptist himself had alluded – *“He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled.”* (John 3:29)
2. Just as it would be inappropriate for a groom's attendants to fast at a wedding feast, so it would be inappropriate for the disciples to fast and mourn when Christ was then present with them.
3. “days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them” = allusion to the coming crucifixion
4. Central point: They had failed to discern the time. While they were focusing on man-made traditions, they missed the fact that the Messiah, the truth incarnate, was standing right before them! How many people miss out on Christ on account of their focus on religious ritual.

## **II. Christ Vs. a Man-Made System (Vs. 21-22)**

Christ further enlarges on the truth He has just expounded, dealing with the deeper issue of their reliance upon a works system rather than salvation by grace. To achieve this, Christ employs three pictures/parables:

### **A. New Vs. Old Cloth (Vs. 21)**

1. “new cloth” = “refers to the fuller's trade in which a new piece of cloth is made usable by a process of cleansing, shrinking, and thickening, through the use of moisture, heat and pressure. The point is that unfulled cloth would shrink when used to patch fulled cloth, and thus tear away from the later.” (Wuest)
2. The new cloth represents the truth of salvation by grace (new covenant) and the old garment represents Pharisaic Judaism. Christ's Gospel of repentance and forgiveness from sin (remember context) could not be patched in to the legalistic traditionalism of the Pharisees (JM). The truth of the Gospel was incompatible with their false system of works righteousness.

### **B. New Vs. Old Wineskins (Vs. 22)**

1. Second analogy re-affirmed the same essential point. As a piece of new cloth would destroy an old garment, new wine would destroy old wineskins.

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2. Wine was stored in ancient Israel in containers made from animal skin (Josh. 9:4, 13). “A wineskin was a goatskin that was removed without slitting it; the openings at the feet and the tail were closed, leaving the neck as well as the mouth. In Palestine and in Damascus we saw these skins still being used by water-carriers. When it is fresh the skin stretched considerably, but when it is old it becomes stiff and bursts under pressure. People, therefore, never put new wine, which still ferments and causes pressure, into old and dried-out skins. The result would be disastrous, for the skins would burst, and both skins and wine would be lost.” (Lenski)
3. The truth of salvation by grace could not be contained within their system of legalism.
4. The Bible makes it clear that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone!
  - a. Eph. 2:8-9 *“For by grace are ye saved...”*
  - b. Titus 3:5 *“Not by works of righteousness...”*
  - c. Rom. 4:4-5 *“Now to him that worketh is the reward...”*
  - d. Rom. 11:6 *“And if by grace, then it is no more of works...”*

### C. New Vs. Old Wine (Luke 5:39)

1. This final analogy depicted the lost condition of the Pharisees. They were deceived into thinking their own false system of worship was superior to the truth Christ offered.
2. They chose the old, stale wine of religious legalism rather than drinking the pure wine of salvation by grace (Psalm 34:8; 1 Peter 2:3)
3. How often people refuse to drink of the water of life, believing their own religious system is superior.

## III. Christ Vs. Man-Made Sabbaths (Vs. 23-28)

### A. The Disciple’s Actions (Vs. 23)

1. Luke’s account adds “and did eat, rubbing them in their hands.” (Lk. 6:1)
2. The disciples taking of the corn during travel was allowed under the O.T. Law (Deut. 23:25)

### B. The Pharisees’ Accusation (Vs. 24)

1. For the Pharisees, the observance of the Sabbath Day was the pinnacle of their self-righteousness system of works. They eagerly pounce on what they believe is an infraction of Sabbath Law – ‘behold’! Their judgment of Christ and the disciples was not based on the O.T. law but on their own traditions. *“But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”* (Matt. 15:9) See also Matt. 23:23

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2. The Talmud, which is the central text of rabbinic Judaism, contains no less than 24 chapters on Sabbath Day regulations.
3. Description of Sabbath Day regulations in MacArthur's N.T. Commentary:

Almost no area of life was spared from the fastidious Sabbath regulations of the rabbis, which were designed to gain God's favor...carrying anything heavier than a dried fig was forbidden; and if the object in question had been picked up in a public place, it could only be set down in a private place. If the object were tossed into the air, it had to be caught with the same hand. To catch it with the other hand would constitute work and therefore be a violation of the Sabbath...No bathing was allowed, since water might spill onto the floor and accidentally wash it. No furniture could be moved inside the house, since it might create ruts in the dirt floor and thereby constitute plowing...a radish could not be left in salt because it would become a pickle, and pickling constituted work...it was not even permissible for women to look in a mirror, since they might be tempted to pull out any gray hairs they spotted. Nor were they allowed to wear jewelry, since jewelry weighs more than a dried fig.

4. The Pharisees regarded the plucking of the heads as reaping, the rubbing out of the grain as threshing, and perhaps the blowing away of the chaff as winnowing! (Hiebert)
5. All of these regulations made the Sabbath Day a day of burdensome toil and bondage. *"For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders..."* (Matt. 23:4)
6. Religion puts men and women in bondage but the truth in Christ sets them free.

### C. The Lord's Answer (Vs. 25-28)

Their objection was refuted by our Lord's two-part answer:

1. An illustration from Scripture (Vs. 25-26)
  - a. Reference is to 1 Samuel 21:1-6
  - b. In this account, God allowed a ceremonial law to be violated in order to address an urgent need. Reveals that even under the dispensation of law, there was grace.
2. The position of the Saviour (Vs. 27-28)
  - a. "the Sabbath was made for man" = God had created the Sabbath Day to be a blessing to man; to give him a day of rest from labor and an opportunity to focus on the worship of God. The Pharisees had turned it into a day of burden and bondage!
  - b. "the Son of man is Lord" = Christ again uses the Messianic title from Dan. 7:13-14. The title emphasizes His authority and Lordship. Christ claims sovereignty over the Sabbath Day. 'Lord' means "he to whom a person or thing belongs, the owner, possessor." (Wuest)

**Conclusion:** Have you received God's gift of salvation by grace through faith or are you, like the Pharisees of old, still clinging to your own works system in the hope that you can earn salvation?