

6/3/2018

## “Living by the Spirit of the Law”

Scripture: Mark 2:23-3:6

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Theme: Here as elsewhere, Jesus says and shows that the Sabbath was made for people, and not people for the Sabbath. Jesus encourages us to live by the Spirit of God’s Law, which is love.**

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Let me ask you – What were you allowed to do or not allowed to do on Sundays when you were a child? Why or why not?

When I was a child, growing up in Pennsylvania, I remember learning of the so-called “Blue Laws”, which vary from state to state, restricting certain activities on Sundays (the Lord’s Day), in part “to prevent secular and commercial interests from hampering freedom of worship and from exploiting workers.” (Wikipedia; Fahlbusch, Erwin; Bromiley, Geoffrey William (2005). *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. p. 787.)

For example, in PA: there was no organized sports competition allowed until 1931; some restrictions on sale of alcoholic beverages (not allowed in “state stores” until April 2015); hunting is still prohibited on Sundays, with the exception of foxes, crows and coyotes; and car dealerships are also closed on Sunday. (Wikipedia.com)

I wonder if that’s putting car dealers in the same category as foxes, crows and coyotes? No offense to any of those.

How, if at all, has your understanding and practice of some of these activities changed over the years? Why or why not? And, maybe, you aren’t really old enough to have known anything, but what has been common practice the past twenty years or so.

Since about the fourth century of the common era (A.D.), the Sabbath, or day of rest, for Christians, has been Sunday. It was originally called the Lord’s Day, because it was the first day of the week on which our Lord Jesus was resurrected.

For Jesus and his first disciples, and other Jews to this day, the Sabbath day of rest is from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. It is the end of the week in accordance with God’s commandment to Moses and the people of Israel (Exodus 34:21) to rest, even as God rested on the seventh day of creation.

The Jews in Jesus’ time, especially the scribes and Pharisees, had interpreted and expanded many of the Sabbath laws against doing any work . . . as with breaking other laws; such infractions were punishable, perhaps even by death.

Today’s reading from the gospel according to Mark continues with Jesus saying and doing things, which countered the teachings of some of the Pharisees who were considered especially devout and strict in observing the biblical Law.

Mark tells us . . .

23 One sabbath while Jesus was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked some heads of grain, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. 24 But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful on the sabbath?"

And what was Jesus' answer?

<sup>25</sup> He said, "Have you not read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? <sup>26</sup> He entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and gave some to his companions?" <sup>27</sup> Then he said to them, "**The sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the sabbath.**"

Here again, Jesus uses the messianic title "Son of Man" of himself. And, as I've said before, perhaps, he is also speaking about mortal human beings in general, as the term is also used by God to address the prophet Ezekiel.

† **You see, the spirit of the Law is life and love.**

Partaking of the food dedicated to God meant life for David and his men. And, giving life is what God's love is about.

**The Sabbath was made so that humans could have a day of rest, to renew their body and soul, while they spent time connecting with God in worship and other ways.**

And, while journeying in the wilderness from Egypt for forty years, God provided enough manna for two days on the sixth day of every week, so that they would not have to gather it on the Sabbath.

So, for Jesus' disciples, who apparently could not gather enough for two days as they traveled before the Sabbath, simply "plucked some heads of grain (in a nearby field), rubbed them in their hands, and ate them." That was ordinarily the right of a sojourner or traveler.

But, we also know that Jesus said, "**One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**" (Matthew 4:4 NRSV)

For Jesus, the day of rest was much more than a day off to do other work or even just have a good time alone or with family and friends. It was experiencing and thanking God for God's presence and goodness. It's about loving God and others.

**I believe that's truly living by the spirit of the Law.**

Mark continues on this theme as he goes on to record the following story. . .

<sup>1</sup> Again he (Jesus) entered the synagogue (as was his custom; Luke 4:16), and a man was there who had a withered hand. <sup>2</sup> They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. <sup>3</sup> And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward."

<sup>4</sup> Then he said to them, "**Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?**" But they were silent. <sup>5</sup> He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand

was restored. <sup>6</sup> *The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.* (Mark 3:1-6)

† Some of **the scribes and Pharisees**, who sought so diligently to observe the letter of the Law, failed to see and live by the spirit of the Law. They **apparently had forgotten that the Law was given by God to the people, so that all might live and prosper from God's love and other blessings**.

Now, they were just using it as a way to find something by which to judge people.

Perhaps, the same could be said of how some people use the biblical law to judge others with regards to some issues of life and faith today. Some could well say that God is calling us to live by the spirit of the law when it comes to all human relationships. That spirit is love and life.

It is lawful to do good and save life, on the Sabbath or any day, for that is the spirit of the Law!

### **That is living by the spirit of the Law!!**

Let me share a more recent story, from Matthew L. Reger of Ohio (UR, 2/25/15)

“We were headed to church one Sunday morning when my dad made a turn in the opposite direction. I asked where we were going, and he told me we were going to worship God in a different way that day. Always up for something new, I was excited about this adventure. He explained that we were on our way to visit his friend's grandmother. Since his friend had moved away there was really no family to visit with her. For the next hour we sat in a small apartment that had a distinct musty odor, spending time with a deeply appreciative and lonely woman. When the visit was over, we left with a promise from my dad to return.

“That happened over 30 years ago. After that initial visit, my dad continued to regularly visit this woman. He would converse with her, fix small things, and sometimes help with grocery shopping, if needed.

“My dad showed me another among many ways to worship God and taught me that worship does not have to be limited to a church service. Worship in church is important because it is done in a community that loves God and wants to express that love. That is exactly what my father and I did when we visited this woman. We shared God's love with her. It is the same lesson that Christ demonstrated; helping those in need is always a good option.”

### **That's living by the spirit of the law.**

We have some graduates with us today. Let me just say to you and any others who may be taking a step forward in life, with greater freedoms and greater responsibilities: remember God is always with you. Remember and appreciate all that you have been given and entrusted with – love, knowledge, wisdom, provision, opportunity and more. And, remember to take time to “rest” from your day to day work routine and cultivate your relationship with God. Remember to live in the Spirit and by the spirit of the Law.

>> **Let me ask all of you, in what ways do you live by the spirit of the law, which is love and life?**

**I invite and challenge you to find ways to rest, renew and revive your soul each Sabbath, and**

**to share the love and life of Jesus Christ with others!**

**And may you experience and ever know the love of God Eternal! Amen!**