

The Sabbath was Made for Man

Many times Jesus Christ Himself “broke” the Sabbath day: “Wherefore **it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days**. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* forth; and **it was restored whole, like as the other**” (Mat 12:12-13); “And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that **Jesus had healed on the sabbath day**” (Luk 13:14); “**Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?** And they held their peace. And he took *him*, and **healed him**, and let him go” (Luk 14:2-4); “And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because **he had done these things on the sabbath day**” (Jhn 5:16); “This man is not of God, because **he keepeth not the sabbath day**” (Jhn 9:16).

Christ also directed others to break the Sabbath day as well: “At that time **Jesus went on the sabbath day** through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said unto him, **Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.**” (Mat 12:1-2); “Jesus saith unto him, **Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.** And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and **on the same day was the sabbath.**” (Jhn 5:8-9).

Christ also pointed out times when His enemies broke the Sabbath day: “*Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?*” (Luk 13:15); “Which of you shall have **an ass or an ox fallen into a pit**, and will not straightway **pull him out on the sabbath day?**” (Luk 14:5); “and ye **on the sabbath day circumcise a man**” (Jhn 7:22). They broke the Sabbath to help animals, while He broke the Sabbath to help people. They broke the Sabbath to cut flesh, while He broke the Sabbath to heal flesh.

Of course Christ never sinned. That He broke the Sabbath day to uphold a greater moral good indicates that Sabbath keeping isn’t moral in nature. When questioned about it once, He appealed to David and his men eating the showbread, “How he entered into the house of God, and **did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful** for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but **only for the priests?**” (Mat 12:4). That He put the Sabbath day on the same level as priestly duties which weren’t moral in nature, indicates that Sabbath keeping isn’t either. Furthermore, He also argued “and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man” (Jhn 7:22). The

priests circumcised male babies on the eighth day from birth even if it fell on the Sabbath day. If circumcision was deemed superior to the Sabbath day, and circumcision isn’t required of Christians, why then would Sabbath keeping?

The concept of the Sabbath day is quite simple but we complicate it. Christ said “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mar 2:27). God imposed labor upon man, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Gen 3:19), and could very well have required daily work without any rest. It was His mercy to give His people a day of rest which began when manna came down from heaven, “Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, *which is* the sabbath, in it there shall be none ... So the people rested on the seventh day” (Exo 16:26,30). It wasn’t a duty, “not man for the Sabbath,” but a mercy.

The Sabbath day was given, not for rulers to be sure and give themselves a day of rest but “that thy manservant and thy maidservant **may rest as well as thou**” (Deu 5:14). When the Law was given, God’s people were told to “**Remember** the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exo 20:8). And 40 years later it was explained, “And **remember** that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt” (Deu 5:15). They hadn’t been given a day of rest when they were servants in Egypt. Reminding themselves what it had been like as servants themselves would prompt them to be merciful to their own households. And Moses stated that as its purpose, “therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day” (Deu 5:15). Commanding everyone to rest for a day ensured everyone got a day of rest.

The Decalogue, including the Fourth Commandment “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exo 20:8), was the law of the Old Covenant, and God’s people are now under the New—the Lord’s commandments. When Paul wrote “One man esteemeth **one day above another**: another esteemeth **every day alike**” (Rom 14:5), it was toward the Lord, “He that **regardeth the day**, regardeth *it unto the Lord*; and he that **regardeth not the day, to the Lord** he doth not regard *it*” (Rom 14:6). Christ commanding “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Mat 7:1), concerned these very issues, “Who art thou that **judgest another man’s servant?**” (v. 4), “But why dost thou **judge thy brother?**” (v. 10), “Let us **not therefore judge one another** any more” (v. 13). It’s because the Lord *didn’t* command the Sabbath day that He *did* command us to not judge. We’re all striving to be faithful to our Lord, “for whatsoever *is* not of faith [*faithfulness*] is sin” (v. 23).