

# CHRIST AND THE SABBATH

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The Pharisees opposed Christ's teachings and works on many occasions during his ministry. Their beliefs and teachings about the observance of the Sabbath was a frequent source of their ire against him, because he and his disciples did not follow their traditions. Jesus said in Matthew 12:12 that it was "lawful to do well on the sabbath days." Let us examine a couple of the times Jesus was wrongly condemned for doing God's will on the Sabbath.

## **Plucking and eating grain**

Jesus and his disciples were constantly traveling from place to place preaching the kingdom of God (Luke 4:42-44; 8:1). On one such occasion, they were walking through a field and were hungry (Matt 12:1). Since they were not in a position to be able to eat in their homes, picking and eating the grain was the best way for them to get food at this time. Eating is necessary to live. The purpose of eating should be to gain physical strength (Eccl 10:17), and that strength should be used for serving God. Therefore, to pick grain on the Sabbath for the purpose of eating in order to have strength to preach the word of God was in accordance with God's will and was not wrong. When the Sabbath law came into conflict with other laws, the other laws superseded the Sabbath law. For example, the laws for the priests and their service in the temple took precedence over the Sabbath (Matt 12:5). The law of circumcision also took precedence over the Sabbath law (John 7:21-24). Similarly, man's physical needs came ahead of the Sabbath. To put the Sabbath ahead of what man needed to survive was completely backwards and unmerciful. Jesus told the Pharisees that he and his disciples were guiltless because the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (Matt 12:1-7; Mark 2:23-28). Jesus was Lord even of the Sabbath day and he told the Pharisees to go and learn about mercy (Matt 12:1-8; Hos 6:6). Jesus also used David as an example (Luke 6:3-4). David and his men ate the showbread (1 Sam 21:1-6), which was only meant for the priests to eat (Lev 24:5-9; Luke 6:4). David was the actual king at that time according to God (1 Sam 15-16), but

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Saul was not giving up the kingdom to him. Instead, David and his men were running for their lives from Saul. David “had *need*” and was hungry (Mark 2:25-26). The physical needs and survival of David and his men who were doing God’s will ranked ahead of the usual purpose for the old showbread. David and his men were guiltless and even the Pharisees knew that.

## **Healing the sick on the Sabbath**

The Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful to heal a man on the Sabbath day, trying to find something to accuse him of (Luke 6:6-7). Even the hypocritical Pharisees would show mercy and rescue a sheep that was fallen into a pit on the Sabbath day (Matt 12:11). Jesus asked them in Matthew 12:12, “How much then is a man better than a sheep?” That is when he said, “Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.” To do “well” is to do God’s will (Matt 19:16-21). The basic issue in this situation was stated as a question by Jesus in Luke 6:9: “I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?” The Pharisees did not answer, but Jesus knew their thoughts and the hardness of their hearts (Mark 3:5; Luke 6:8). Their position was that doing good works such as healing was wrong on the Sabbath. But Jesus was right. To show mercy and heal someone was certainly not a violation of the Sabbath. Jesus was proven to be right by the fact that God gave him the power to heal the man with the withered right hand (Luke 6:6-10). Had Jesus’ doctrine about doing good works on the Sabbath been false, his efforts to heal on the Sabbath would have failed. Even though God Himself clearly testified by the miracle that Jesus was right, the Pharisees rejected God’s witness, the equivalent of calling God a liar (1 John 5:9-10). The Pharisees were “filled with madness” (Luke 6:11), and “went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him” (Mark 3:6). They began to plot to kill the man who was right and had proven them wrong.