

Freedom from Legalism

4 proofs that Jesus's authority brings liberty from legalism

Submitting to Christ's authority delivers you from religious legalism

Introduction

Jerry bridges in his book the transforming power of the gospel makes the following observation.

He states” Because we are performance orientated by nature and our culture enforces that orientation, we want to somehow relate to God everyday on the basis of perceived performance.

If we've been good, as we define goodness, we feel reasonably secure in our relationship with God.

If we had a bad day spiritually, we tend to feel insecure.

In fact that insecurity may cause us to live in denial of how bad our bad days really are.

But we cannot grow spiritually if we do not see our need to grow.

And if our insecurity about our day to day relationship with God causes us to live in denial of our sin, we will not grow.

This is the reason we need the gospel every day.

It helps us move from a performance relationship with God to one based on the sinless life and sin bearing death of Jesus Christ.

It daily reminds us that from Gods point of view our relationship with him is not based on how good or bad we have been but upon the perfect goodness and death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel frees us to honestly face our sin, knowing that because of Christ death and resurrection, God no longer counts that sin against us.”

Historical Background

Mark addresses believers in Rome facing severe persecution, that need the assurance that Jesus is indeed Lord over every aspect of life and death.

Our passage introduces a rising opposition to Christ because of the legalist

Pharisees setting themselves up as masters of the Sabbath and their legalistically traditions as the standards by which they judged others.

This culminated into the Pharisees in 3:6 holding counsel together to kill Christ. Knowing that Jesus truly is Lord even over the things like the Sabbath would have brought them comfort and freedom from the legalist demands of observance.

Leading up to the passage Mark reveals a number of truths and titles about Christ.

- 1:1 Christ the Son of God
- 1:3 He's Identified as Lord
- 1:7 The one that baptizes with the HS
- 1:11 He is called the beloved Son
- 1:14 He is the one who offers the gospel of the Kingdom
- 1:24 He is the Holy On of God.

By ch 2 we see that He demonstrates authority:

- over Satan and Temptation 1:12-13,
- Over demons and demon possessions 1:25-26
- Sickness and diseases 1:29-34
- Sin and its effects 2:5-12
- Social stigmas of 1st century Judaism (2:13-17)

His works validate that He truly is the Son of God and worthy of these Titles.

In Mark 2:23-28 were introduce to another Title He is Lord of the Sabbath.

This title sets him up in direct conflict to the hypocritical religious leadership of Judaism who had set up a system based on merit, works righteousness, legalistic traditions which had its focal point in the Sabbath.

Read

Mark 2:23-28

Proposition

4 proofs that Jesus's authority brings liberty from legalism

- **Controversial action**
- **Condemning accusation**

- Comparative illustration
- Corrective interpretation

1. Controversial action

²³ *One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. Mark 2:23 (ESV)*

Explanation

One Sabbath (Do a tangent)

Two observances defined the Jews from the nations: **Circumcision & the Sabbath**.

The Sabbath extended from sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday

The Sabbath has its origins in God.

*2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. 3 So **God blessed the seventh day and made it holy**, because on it God **rested from all his work** that he had done in creation. Genesis 2:2–3 (ESV)*

- God created the **world in six days** and He **rested from the** work He had done.
- God did not rest **because He was tired**
- God rested to **set a pattern for man** kind and for the **benefit of mankind**.
- God rested on the 7th day to set this day as holy, to **set it apart** (Holy) from other days.

⁸ *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Exodus 20:8–11 (ESV)*

- God commanded Israel to keep the Sabbath as a day specifically dedicated to the Lord vs 10
- Both people and livestock were required to rest.
- Lord blessed the day
- In the same way you and I today need to have a day set apart so as to rest from business labours to focus on the Lord.

¹³ ***“You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. ¹⁴ You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵ Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. ¹⁶ Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. ¹⁷ It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.’ ”***
Exodus 31:13–17 (ESV)

- The Sabbath was sign between Israel and God :
 - That God would sanctify them (set them apart as a nation as Holy) (Ex 19:4-5)
 - That God created everything in 6 days and then rested and was refreshed.
- The Sabbath was the sign for the mosaic covenant.
- It was also part of their laws which had capital punishment for anyone who broke the Sabbath.
- For believers Sunday would be the day which we would set apart for the Lord:
 - To restore the soul.
 - To be sanctified by God’s word

¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. Deuteronomy 5:12–15 (ESV)

- The sabbath was also to a reminder of **God's deliverance of Israel** out of Egypt. (Dt 5:15)
- Just as we are reminded **Sunday after Sunday of Gods provision of deliverance through Christ death on the cross.**

The **Church is not** commanded to **keep the Sabbath:**

Instead it encourages **to come together:**

²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:22–25 (ESV)

- To might come with a **true heart Heb** 10:22
- To might come **holding fast** to our confession of hope vs 23
- To might **think carefully about one another**
 - Into **stir up or provoke** into **love and good** deeds
 - By **not forsaking** to assemble
 - But **exhorting, comforting** more

¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Colossians 2:16–17 (ESV)

- Colossians teaches us that the OT Sabbath was a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.
- The Sabbath was now replaced with a day in which Christ became the central focus.

The early church set aside Sunday, the 1st day of the week(Sunday), because this was the day that Christ rose from the dead to gather for worship, teaching fellowship and communion and outreach.(Acts 2:42-47)

⁷ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Acts 20:7 (ESV)

⁵ One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. Romans 14:5–6 (ESV)

So, we see that the NT practice for believers included setting apart a day of the week:

- To honor the Lord
- To encourage love and good works
- To be instructed by God's word, to worship, to be sanctified, and our hearts dealt with
- To remember Christ deliverance for sinners on the cross
- To affirm and hold fast to the confession of our Hope, which is Christ and the gospel to be refreshed, refocused on the Lord, to him in worship

In Summary

The OT Sabbath was intended as a Day separate from others, dedicated to God, for sanctification, for refreshing, for remembering God's deliverance of Israel, and that God created everything in 6 days.

The NT taught that Believers don't need to keep the Sabbath but encourages believers to set a day apart to rest, to be refreshed in the Lord, to encourage one another in good works and love and gather for worship, teaching, fellowship and prayer.

Furthermore it was a **day to honor Christ**, to **be sanctified by His word**, to deal with the **heart problems**, to remember **Christ 's salvation**, to **hold fast to confession** of hope.

The church **acted as a pillar and protector of the truth** and was the platform for practicing the one another's.

The pattern by the early church was to **gather on a Sunday** for that purpose.

It was **not a legalistic requirement** for salvation but intended for the **benefit of** man, to **refresh, sanctify, refocus on God'** His salvation.

Back to our passage

23 One Sabbath he was going through the grainfields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. Mark 2:23 (ESV)

Roads in 1st century were scarce and so people often walked on pathways next to fields and pastures.

They would **walk alongside crops** that **would have lined both sides** and God had **prescribed a provision** for his people.

25 If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain. Deuteronomy 23:25 (ESV)

It reveals a loving **God caring for His people**.

Travelers were allowed **to pluck a few the heads** of grain, grind it in their hands and eat it.

Yielding a sickle was not allowed.

So Jesus Disciples were **doing exactly what was permitted** by the OT.

They were hungry, and God's law had made provision for such a need and so they ate.

Principle

We see the freedom **provided for the followers of Christ**, as God's laws on the **Sabbath and eating was for the befit** of people, to **refresh them** here we see physically, and obviously spiritually.

This practical freedom experienced by the disciple testify to the Freedom found from following Christ who is the ultimate authority.

Application

What we see with the first verse is simply this.

There is freedom for the followers of Christ.

To set apart a day for the Lord is good for you.

To be refreshed spiritually, but even physically.

People do need to rest from their day to day labors, and set a part a day to focus on God, to be refreshed spiritually and physically.

But legalism changes everything.

2. Condemning accusation

²⁴ And the Pharisees were saying to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" Mark 2:24 (ESV)

Explanation

The Pharisees had changed the regulations for the Sabbath.

They had created a system of extra biblical rules.

The Sabbath had become the stage for showcasing Pharisaic legalism and obedience to their traditions.

They had created a salvation by works.

God had established a day of reverence, but they transformed it into a day of stifling regulations.

The day of weekly worship had changed into a day of rigorous burden and tradition keeping.

The Mishnah and The Talmud lists(24 chapters) 39 classes of work that profane the sabbath. Including:

- Regulations about not carrying anything heavier than a dried fig
- Tossing an object in the air had to be caught with the same hand.
- You were not allowed to kill an insect.
- You could not light a candle or extinguish it

- **NO bathing** was allowed, because of the danger of spilling the water and you it and accidently wash it
- Any treatment of **medically sick to improve** their condition was considered work and prohibited
- You could not set a dislocated foot on a sabbath, You could not or repair a fallen roof.
- Women **could not look in** a mirror, might see a grey hair and be tempted to pluck it
- No **plowing, hunting, butchering**
- No **tying or loosening of knots**, sewing, writing a letter
- You could not walk more than 3000 feet from your home.

Jesus and His disciples **were thus breaking 2 categories** of rabbinical law, that of working and that of traveling.

Jesus and His disciples had **not transgressed** any Biblical law.

Curiously we notice that the **pharisees make no mention** of the travel regulations because they were themselves **breaking that rule.**

The Pharisees had elevated their man-made traditions over Scripture.

⁶ **...’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. Matthew 15:6 (ESV)**

They had established **themselves as the authority** over the Sabbath day observances.

They had usurped the rightful position of the only true Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ..

Principle

In essence it changed the purpose of the Sabbath as for the benefit to man to man being burdened and made for the sabbath

That is what legalism does, it sets you up as the law maker or law giver and not God Legalism in essence usurps God and places man and His standards as the ultimate standard of what is right and wrong.

It sets itself up as judge jury and executioner of others.

The proof that Christ has authority to bring liberty is the opposite reality that legalist produce a burden and not freedom.

Illustration

We see examples of this when we set ourselves up as the standard for right and wrong.

We set ourselves the king of the universe and not God.

We up as the ultimate authority and not God.

Application

How do we know if we have become legalist?

1. If we judge people based on how well they pray or not, how much they read the scriptures or not.
2. We compare ourselves with others and make statements in our hearts like: Thank goodness I am not like that person
3. Or at least I come to church, attend bible study, study God's word, and pray but those people don't even do that.
4. We condemn other people because they sin, but forget how sinful we ourselves are.
5. We add regulation to Gods word or restrictions to God's word that are not restricted by God's word.
6. We think that if we obey some kind of rule or disobey the rule we may lose our salvation or gain salvation.

3. Comparative illustration

²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: ²⁶ how he entered the house of God, in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" Mark 2:25–26 (ESV)

Explanation

²⁵ And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did

The rhetorical question simply exposes the inexcusable ignorance of the self-proclaimed experts of the Scriptures called the Pharisees.

Examples mt 19:4,21:42,22:31, Mr 12:10

¹⁰ ***Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? John 3:10 (ESV)***

Jesus was in fact asking them: **If your such students** of the Scriptures, why don't you **know what it says?**

Jesus refers to the account in 1 Sam 21 in which David while fleeing from Saul came to **the tabernacle in Nob**, about a mile from Jerusalem **hungry without proper provisions.**

He asked **Ahimelech the priest** for bread.

The only bread that was available was the bread of the presence which was consecrated bread for ceremonial use.

Every Sabbath 12 loaves were baked and set on the gold table in the Holy place. After a week the priest were allowed to eat the bread. (Lev 24:9)

Ahimelech **showed compassion** for David's and his men and made an exception giving them the bread.

God did not punish Ahimelech or David for His actions.

He allowed ceremonial law to be violated for meeting an urgent human need.

The only person we read that was offended by this event was King Saul (1 Sam 22:11-18)

Note that Jesus does not use Ahimelech to refer to the passage but abiathar:

1. Biblical times they had no chapters to refer to and so Jesus uses His name to refer to that section. (Possibility)
2. But 2ndly is that Abiathar was the only priest who survived when Saul slayed the priest of Nob because they helped David . Abiathar then became the man who would reveal God's will to David.

In the same way as the Pharisees were seeking to slay Christ and His disciples, Jesus himself was revealing what God's will was for His children.(Mark may have been hinting towards this in using Abiathar as his reference)

Here we see the principle illustrated that human need takes priority over ceremonial law.

Jesus's point was simply this: If it was permissible for Ahimelech, a human priest to make an exception to God's ceremonial law to aid David and it s men, surely it would be appropriate for the son of God to **disregard unbiblical rabbinical** traditions in order **meet the needs of His disciples**.

They were more concerned about preserving their own authority, and their own traditions than the needs of others.

Principle

The OT Scripture illustrates that human needs take precedence (Preference, priority) over ceremonial laws

Christ use of Scripture validates or proves His point that He would later make, that He is lord even over the Sabbath

Application

How often are we more concerend about **protecting our own authority**, our own **positions**, our **own rules than** seeing the needs of another.

So, we become demanding.

How often do we think that our **preferences, expectations, personality** expectations, social expectations, ways of doing things **are God's laws** when in fact we have **created our own set of rabbinical** laws.

The human **heart wants to set self-up as God on its throne** and wants to measure **other people by its own sets** of rules and standards.

Instead you and I are encouraged to **look carefully at the Scriptures** and learn there what it means to **follow Christ on the basis** of the gospel.

1. Legalism is in essence an **attempt to do something or refrain** from doing something to either **maintain your salvation or obtain salvation**.

We create these legalistic laws and expect others to follow them.

The Gospel sets you free from doing this.

2. Maybe as a parent you think that being **a godly parent is** required for salvation or maintaining it, then you're missing the gospel implications.

3. Maybe you think that you need to act in a certain way or dress in a certain way or think in a certain way or feel in a certain way to maintain your salvation with God, then you have missed the gospel implications
4. If you are a young person thinking that you need to obey your parents to be saved, you miss the gospel
5. Or if you think you need to obey your parents to stay saved, then you have missed the gospel.
6. You will never be good enough, Christ was infinitely good enough and Holy enough.

Jesus Christ death and resurrection is sufficient.

His infinite righteousness is credited to the believers account through repentance and faith in Him.

That's our position permanently before God as a believer.

So, when we think we must do some work to be saved, then we replace the gospel with a works-based gospel. We make ourselves the saviour, the standard of what saves me and what maintains my salvation.

4. Corrective interpretation

27 And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."
Mark 2:27–28 (ESV)

Explanation

Mark concludes this passage with 2 sayings that clarifies the relationship between human life and the Sabbath.

(The 1st statement) corrects the Pharisees obscuring the purpose of the Sabbath.

27 And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath

Gods purpose for the Sabbath was for the benefit of man: rest, refreshing, refocusing on God, restoration of the heart, sanctification and remembering His salvation for them out of Egypt.

It was a merciful day of spiritual reflection, blessing and physical recuperation and enhancing man's wellbeing.

In contrast the Pharisees had turned it into a day of burdensome regulations and restrictive observances, obscuring its purposes, changing it from benefit to legalism, from freedom to enslavement, from serving man to man serving the Sabbath.

With this statement: “**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath**” Jesus recovers its original intent to aid human life. Mark provides a 2nd statement

²⁸ ***So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath***

So in the Greek is a term which can be translated therefor. Its a way of making an inference, conclusion or deduction.

Jesus was in effect making a conclusion for his statements

Which followed like this.

1. Since Jesus and His disciples were practicing their freedom from traditions yet following God’s commands
2. Since the Biblical example shows David’s needs were met in breaking ceremonial laws showing God prioritizing mans needs over ceremonial law
3. Since the Biblical example lines up with Christ statement that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath
4. You would conclude that Jesus (the Son of Man) is Lord even of the Sabbath.

The Pharisees were not Lord of the Sabbath

Man was not made for the Sabbath= Man was not made for the legalistically traditions set up by the Pharisees.

Instead **Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath** and since Jesus is God, **the Sabbath was for man’s benefit not to burden him.**

You the readers are invited to conclude that **Since Christ is Lord**, since all **authority is found** in Him, since both His practice and words match up to the Scriptures, freedom from legalism is found in **Jesus and His gospel.**

In the Greek, Mark places emphasis on the term Lord by placing it in the beginning of the sentence.

Mark was emphasizing that the **Son of Man is LORD!!!** Not the legalist, not their

legalistic traditions.

The Son of Man has the authority even over the Sabbath.

1. To overcome legalism, you and I need to acknowledge **Jesus as the one in authority** not I.
2. You overcome legalism when you lay hold of the truth that being in Christ, means that His infinite **holiness and righteousness is credited to your account** through the gospel.
Your **positionally and legally before God your righteous.**
You can **never be more or less** holy and righteous by your actions because God looks at the **work of Christ and not your works.**
3. The believer relates to God because they have repented and believe in Christ death and resurrection and trust they are forgiven and credited with Christ righteousness
Stop trying to perform to maintain your relationship with God. Jesus did it all.
4. Live **in that reality will set you free from legalism**

Principle

God's commands **are beneficial and not burdensome** for man therefore the Son of man is Lord brings freedom not legalism

Application

- The human heart wants to be **the divine lawmaker**
- The human **heart wants to make the standards** of what is acceptable
- The **human heart wants to rule the lives** of others according to our own set of rules
- The **human heart wants to be in authority**
At its core it is self-centered
- The human **heart is also a fearful heart** and so (just as the Pharisees felt that their traditions protected people from breaking God's law,) they felt that it was dangerous to do so. (Their hearts were governed by the fear of change, of not being in control, of not having it their way.)

What should we do?

1. Preach to your heart that **all authority in heaven and** earth belongs to Christ (Mt 28:18) and not you
2. Remind your heart that if God's commands and your practices **are intended for our benefit** as they are true, they warn and they reward.

⁹ *the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are **true, and righteous altogether.*** ¹⁰ *More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.* ¹¹ *Moreover, by them is your servant **warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*** Psalm 19:9–11 (ESV)

3. Preach to your heart that the basis for relating with God is the gospel of Jesus Christ and not **human regulations.**

Mark in essence contrasts the Christian liberty (Freedom) that is found in Christ vs the burdensome legalism found in the legalists.

He concludes that since Scriptural examples about the Sabbath lines up the practices of Christ and His disciples and the words of Christ that the Son of man is indeed Lord ...even of the Sabbath

Conclusion

4 proofs that Jesus's authority brings liberty from legalism

- Controversial action of Jesus and His disciple reveals a freedom from legalism
- Condemning accusation of the legalists show a **contrasting burden of legalism for those not** following Christ
- Comparative illustration of the Scriptures reveal that God prioritizes the needs of man over legalistically traditions or ceremonial laws. The Scriptures line up with the **freedom of practice** of Christ and His followers
- Corrective interpretation reveals that Christ is Lord and not the legalist and that God's **commands are of benefit** to man, not to Burdon man.

¹ *For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Galatians 5:1 (ESV)*