

G R A C E

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ♦ Deo ♦ Gloria

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

The Feast of Tabernacles, part 3

John 7:19-24

July 10, 2005

Verse 19

- In the original Greek, the question, “Did not Moses give you the Law” anticipates a positive response and is, basically, as statement: “Moses has indeed given you the law.”
- The purpose of Jesus mentioning the Law is to elaborate further on the “will of God” [see Verse 17]. The will of God is, simply put, **obedience** – obeying the Law. This is why the Jews did not recognize the truthfulness of Jesus’ words [Verse 17], and, therefore, sought to kill Him. It was because they did not keep the Law [Verse 19]; therefore, they did not do His will.
 - The Psalmist, David, writes, “**I delight to do Your will, O my God; / Your Law is within my heart.**” Psalm 40:8
 - How does one discern the will of God? By _____ on _____.
- Jews took great pride in the fact that they had received the law [Read Romans 2:17; 9:4].
- The Pharisees even viewed themselves as disciples of Moses [Read John 9:28].
- However, simply possessing the Law saved/saves no one. Actually, the Law condemns rather than saves.
 - Read Romans 2:25-29.
 - Here, the Apostle Paul points out that “if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision.” In other words, circumcision is only valid when one keeps the Law.

- This is why Paul states, “But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.” (Verse 29)
- On one level, Jesus is pointing to man’s need for a Savior, as the Law condemns man because of our general sinfulness.
- On another level, Jesus is pointing to a **specific sin**, a specific breach of the Law – murder.
 - This is why Jesus states, “Why do you seek to kill Me?”
 - “The Jews” prided themselves in their ability to keep the Law, all the while they were plotting to murder Jesus, the fulfillment of the Law!

Verse 20

- “The crowd” here, as opposed to “the Jews,” strongly reacts to Jesus’ words.
- “The crowd’s” response reveals that they know nothing of the plot to kill Jesus.
- I cannot help but believe that some of the Jewish authorities [i.e. “the Jews”] are in “the crowd” and are some of those stating, “You have a demon! Who seeks to kill You?”

Verse 21

- Jesus replies, “I did one deed [literally, “one work”], and you marvel.”
- Here, it is most likely that Jesus is referring to His healing of the man, on the Sabbath, who had been ill for thirty-eight (38) years [Chapter 5].
- The “marveling” or “astonishment” that Jesus is referring to, here in Verse 21, is NOT a positive reaction; but, rather, an astonishment at the “audacity” of anyone to so blatantly disregard and disobey the established traditions of Sabbath-keeping.
 - Recall, in Chapter 5, Verse 17, Jesus responds to the Jewish accusations [of Jesus breaking the Sabbath] by stating, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.”
 - John then states, “For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.”

Verse 22

- **Circumcision** was the Covenantal Sign of the **Abrahamic Covenant**.
 - “Genesis 17:9-14 says that circumcision was the covenant sign for the people of God, and that refusal to take on the covenant sign would result in being cut off from the people of God. Moreover, Genesis 17:13 specifies that this covenant is an ‘everlasting’ one. Therefore, the Judaizers probably concluded from Genesis 17 (see also Exodus 4:24-26; Leviticus 12:3; Joshua 5:2-9) that circumcision was an indispensable sign of the covenant, and thus they taught that ‘unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’ (Acts 15:1)...In Paul’s thinking circumcision and the Law are intertwined...Those who think they can be righteous before God by receiving circumcision (Galatians 5:26; Philippians 3:2-11) – that is, by doing the works of the Law – are deceived. No one can be justified by the works of the Law (Galatians 3:1-5, 10-14), for no one can perform perfectly the works required by the Law.” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*
- **The Sabbath** was the Covenantal Sign of the **Mosaic Covenant**.
 - “The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week in which God ceased from His work of creation and declared the day blessed and holy (Genesis 2:1-3). Through the episode of the manna (Exodus 16), the sacred nature of the day was stressed to the Israelites. It was to be a ‘sabbath of the Lord,’ a day set apart for God and for rest. The Decalogue [The Ten Commandments] forbids work on the Sabbath, both for Israelites and for their servants and guests (Exodus 20:8-11). Deuteronomy 5:12-15 implies that there is a humanitarian motive in the Sabbath concept. In God’s sight, no man or animal should be required to work seven days a week and to be enslaved as the Israelites were in Egypt. The Sabbath is therefore a direct indication of God’s consecration of Israel, as well as of his creation. Violating the Sabbath was a serious offense, and the person who worked on the Sabbath was to be ‘cut off from his people’ (Exodus 31:14). During their wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites brought to trial a man found gathering wood on the Sabbath. He was stoned to death according to the commandment of the Lord for profaning the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36). A fire was not to be kindled on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:3), and admonitions to reverence the day are linked to reverence toward parents (Leviticus 19:3) and reverence toward the Lord’s sanctuary (19:30; 26:2). The Sabbath terminated a week of work and was to be a complete rest unto the Lord, a distinguishing mark of God’s choosing the Jewish people.” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*
- They were legalistic in the development and adherence to **Rabbinical (extra-biblical) Law** (recorded in the Mishnah)



Hedge;
Oral Tradition;
Rabbinic Tradition

- Example of the Law vs. the Rabbinical Tradition
 - Law: **Remember the Sabbath and Keep it Holy.**
 - Rabbinical Tradition: **Is it lawful to eat an egg laid on the Sabbath?**

- The leaders of the Jews obeyed the Law as far **as appearances were concerned**; however, their hearts were far from God
 - See Isaiah 1
 - Read Matthew 23:23

- **To ensure that the Sabbath Law was not broken, Jewish rabbis defined thirty-nine types of work that were prohibited on the Sabbath:**

“The main classes of work are forty save one (39); sowing, ploughing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing, cleansing crops, grinding, sifting, kneading, baking, shearing wool, washing or beating or dyeing wool, spinning, weaving, making two loops, weaving two threads, separating two threads, tying [a knot], loosening [a knot], sewing two stitches, tearing in order to sew two stitches, hunting a gazelle, slaughtering or flaying or salting it or curing its skin, scraping it or cutting it up, writing two letters, erasing in order to write two letters, building, pulling down, putting out a fire, lighting a fire, striking with a hammer and taking out aught from one domain to another. These are the main classes of work: forty save one (39). (*Sabbat* 7:2).”

 - Also, “(On the Sabbath) a man may borrow of his fellow jars of wine or jars of oil, provided that he does not say to him, ‘Lend me them.’” (*Shab.* 23:1). This would imply a transaction, and a transaction might involve writing, and writing was work and therefore forbidden.
 - Since the Sabbath was the Covenantal Sign of the Mosaic Covenant, it was as though to break the Sabbath was to trespass the entire Mosaic Law.
 - Unfortunately, many of us today have our own “hedges,” although they are much more subtle than the Pharisees’.
 - This calls into question, not the inerrancy of Scripture [as the Pharisees would have affirmed this point], but the **SUFFICIENCY** of Scripture.
 - This year, at the SBC Annual Meeting in Nashville, Tennessee, Evangelist Voddie Baucham stated, “There are a lot of us who believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, but some of us preach like we don’t believe in the sufficiency of Scripture.”
 - God does not need our help in saving or discipling anyone! His Word is sufficient. God is not impressed with our creative methodologies and entertaining activities. He calls us to

know and teach His word. Period. The question always on our lips should be, “**Yes, but what does the BIBLE say about it?**”

- The Pharisees weren’t satisfied with God’s Word alone. So they added to it. Unfortunately, the modern church is often guilty of the same thing.
- Read **1 Kings 8:9-18**. NOTE: I, personally, know of few, if any, more clear examples of worship in all of Scripture than when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the Temple and it was dedicated.
- It is often said that worship should be fun. However, if we had the opportunity to interview any of the elders of Israel, the Levites, or King Solomon himself, and ask them, “Describe the worship that you had the privilege to participate in”...Do you believe any of them would use the word “fun” [or “boring” either]?
- All they had was “the two tablets” [The Law – the Word of God], and the glory of the LORD. And they worshipped. And they were, no doubt, changed.

- Jesus states, “For this reason Moses has given you circumcision (not because it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a man.”
 - First of all, Jesus states, “*For this reason...*” It is likely that, here, Jesus is referring to the “one deed” He has just spoken of in Verse 21, that is, the “restoration to full health”, the complete healing of the man ill for thirty-eight (38) years. This will become clearer in the next Verse.
 - “Jesus is saying that the reason for Moses’ prescribing of circumcision on the Sabbath was to give a precedent for such Sabbath activities as he had just engaged in. Alternatively, the words may mean that the circumcision Moses enjoined foreshadows the perfecting of ‘the whole man’ that Jesus accomplishes.”
Leon Morris
 - “If circumcision, which attaches to one only of the two hundred and forty-eight members of the human body, suspends the Sabbath, how much more shall (the saving of) the whole body suspend the Sabbath!” (Yoma 85b, Soncino edn., p. 421).
 - Secondly, Jesus says, “Moses has given you circumcision [and John (possibly Jesus) comments that circumcision was from the fathers].”
 - It is correct that circumcision was instituted with the fathers...specifically, with Abraham in Genesis 17; however, it was formalized at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 12:44.

- Thirdly, Jesus reveals an **apparent contradiction** in the Mosaic Law: **Circumcision on the Sabbath**.
 - If a male Jewish baby was born on the Sabbath, then the **eighth day** would fall on **the next Sabbath** [assuming the day of the child’s birth was considered Day 1].
 - The question then arises, what Law takes precedent: (1) The Law that all Jewish males were to be circumcised on the eighth day; or (2) The Law forbidding work on the Sabbath?
- Fourthly, Jesus states the “solution” to the apparent contradiction: **“on the Sabbath you circumcise a man.”**
 - There are at least two reasons why this is the case, but given the context of this Verse, it appears that one of the reasons why circumcision takes precedence over Sabbath-keeping is because it was **instituted first**.

Verse 23

- Viewed in light of the previous two Verses, Jesus points out that “the Jews” often “worked” on the Sabbath by circumcising eight-day-old Jewish males; however, Jesus only performed one work, one miracle, and they are angry with Him.
- Read Matthew 12:1-14.
 - “If rulings about Sabbath observance are to be made, it is not the Pharisees but ‘the Son of Man,’ as ‘Lord of the Sabbath,’ who has authority to say how to observe properly the day of rest.” Filson
 - “It must immediately be added that in the context this does not mean simply that Jesus has the authority to relax harsh restrictions [as He is bounded by **His** Word]. He, the Lord of the Sabbath, shows what the observing of the Sabbath really means; He determines how the principle of Sabbath observance is to be worked out. He makes the point that Sabbath observance means mercy.” Leon Morris
 - “Jesus stood before them and claimed He was greater than God’s Temple and greater than God’s Sabbath. He was [and is] God, the Son of Man, the divine Messiah whom the Temple honored and the Sabbath served.” John MacArthur
- Concerning the precedence of circumcision [over the Sabbath], Rabbi Yose b. Halafta (ca. A.D. 140-165) stated, **“Great is circumcision which overrides even the rigor of the Sabbath”** (*m. Ned.* 3.11; cf. *m. Sabb.* 18.3; 19.1-3; the midrash *Tanhuma* 19b).

- Jewish leaders of Jesus' day stated that, because of the precedence of circumcision over Sabbath observance, **“any necessary act of mercy could be lawfully performed on the Sabbath.”**
- J.C. Ryle stated [that Jesus was essentially stating], “Is it then just and fair to be angry with Me, because I have done a far greater work to a man on the Sabbath, than the work of circumcision? I have not wounded his body by circumcision, but made him perfectly whole. I have not done a purifying work to one particular part of him, but have restored his whole body to health and strength. I have not done a work of necessity to one single member only, but a work of necessity and benefit to the whole man.”
- The Pharisees only saw the letter of the Law; however, they were blind to the truth and the deeper meaning behind the Mosaic Law...**that is, that it revealed the character and holy nature of Yahweh...and that it was fulfilled in the Person of Jesus Christ.**
 - **Read John 5:39**
- It was as though Jesus was not only the fulfillment of the Sabbath, but the work of Jesus [i.e. the healing of the “whole man” in John 5] reveals the true meaning of circumcision.
- How would “the Jews” likely have responded to these truths? Given their actions thus far, they possibly would have said to Jesus, **“A man who has been ill for thirty-eight years can wait to be healed just one more day [i.e. the day after the Sabbath]; however, circumcision cannot wait [it must be performed on the eighth day].”**

Verse 24

- Read Deuteronomy 16:18-19; Isaiah 11:3-4; Zechariah 7:9
- If “the Jews” had “willingly” [Verse 17] judged righteously [as opposed to according to appearance] then they would have realized that Jesus Christ was not breaking the Sabbath, but rather, He was perfectly fulfilling the institution, as well as circumcision.
- Also it is impossible to judge [or do anything, for that matter] “righteously” apart from Jesus Christ, as the Apostle Paul states [Romans 3:10], “there is none righteous, not even one.” However, when we are saved by grace through faith, we are justified [by faith], and we are imputed with Christ’s righteousness.
- Unlike other passages on “judging” [i.e. Matthew 7:1], this passage refers to spiritual **discernment**.