

“Merciful and Necessary Works”  
(Matthew 12:1-12)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. We’ve seen that we are to keep the Lord’s Day holy. Last week, we began looking at how we are to do this.
  - a. We’ve seen that:
    - (i) The Lord has given us six days to get all of our work done, so that,
    - (ii) On the seventh day, we won’t have to do any work: “Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work.”
  - b. Not only are we not to work on this day, but we are not to cause others to work either.
    - (i) Love to our neighbor dictates that we shouldn’t make them work: if it’s sin for us to work, it’s also sin for them.
    - (ii) Love to God dictates that we shouldn’t make them work: if we love Him, we should want everyone to love and honor Him. When anyone breaks the Sabbath, God isn’t honored.
    - (iii) But this is also what the Lord tells us in the commandment: “*in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you” (Ex. 20:10).
2. The world has made it difficult to do this – just about every business is open, tempting you to work, tempting you to make others work.
  - a. It’s difficult to stand your ground with virtually the whole world thinking this day belongs to them, and most of the church as well.
  - b. But remember, the world is not your standard; other believers are not your standard; the Word of God is your standard.
  - c. We need to do what God says – period – remembering not only that this honors the One who loved us and sent His Son for us, but that it’s also good for us: we need rest, we need the worship, we need the Lord’s blessing, and this is what He promises us if we will keep His Sabbath holy, if we will spend the day with Him.

B. Preview.

1. What we’ll want to consider this evening are the exceptions to this rule.
  - a. It’s true that we are not to work on the Sabbath Day; that is the ideal.
  - b. But there are cases when it would be a sin not to work.
2. These exceptions fall under two main categories: works of necessity and works of mercy.

- a. We must work on the Sabbath when it's necessary.
- b. And we must work on the Lord's Day when mercy requires that we do.

## II. Sermon.

- A. First, we *must* work on the Lord's Day when some necessity requires that we do.
  - 1. The ideal is, and what we would hope would normally be the case is, that we would not work at all on the Sabbath, that we would be able to rest the whole day and spend the whole day with our blessed Lord and Savior.
  - 2. But there are times when we must work, when it would be sinful for us not to work.
    - a. Our Lord gives us one obvious example: In the Old Covenant, the priests had to work on the Sabbath: "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?" (Matt. 12:5).
      - (i) Jesus tells us that they actually broke the Sabbath – they worked – but they were not guilty of any sin.
      - (ii) The priest had animals to prepare and offer to the Lord, as well as conduct other aspects of worship. It was not a day of rest for them.
      - (iii) The same is true of ministers today, who also need to work on the Christian Sabbath, teaching, preaching, leading in worship. It's not a day of rest for them. They break the Sabbath, but they are not guilty.
      - (iv) What about the necessity of getting the Gospel out?
        - (a) If time and energy allows, things can be done on the Lord's Day to promote this work.
        - (b) If our brother Geoff Cox or other brothers at the Open Air Mission set up their easels on the sidewalks of London and present the Gospel on the Lord's Day, is the Lord going to discipline them for that?
        - (b) If you went to the nursing home and witnessed there, will He censure you for that? No.
        - (c) People need to hear the Gospel, and so you may witness and evangelize on the Lord's Day, as long as it doesn't interfere with your worship and as long as you don't need the rest.
- b. There are other kinds of work that are necessary to do on the Sabbath.
  - (i) We need to get dressed, prepare food, take care of our personal hygiene on the Sabbath.
  - (ii) There are certain kinds of crops that must be harvested and transported on the Sabbath, or the loss would be too severe.
  - (iii) There are certain businesses that have some facets that must continue on the Lord's Day: utilities, foundries, illustration: Gerstner.
- c. Emergencies happen on the Lord's Day that create work that must be done.
  - (i) If your house caught on fire, or your neighbor's house, on the Sabbath, would it be sin for you to put it out? Of course not.
  - (ii) If a water pipe broke and was flooding your house, should you wait until the next day to turn the water off?

- (iii) If you get a flat tire on the freeway, is it alright to put on the spare? Yes, especially if by doing so, you're preserving your life and the lives of those with you – we'll look at that more in a minute.
  - (iv) When there is the possibility of significant loss of life or property, it's lawful to do something about it on the Lord's Day.
  - (v) Jesus tells us in our passage, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out?" (12:11).
    - (a) A sheep was a unit of wealth. If your sheep died, you would suffer loss.
    - (b) But the Lord tells us that it's alright to preserve it on the Sabbath, and so also other property that might otherwise be lost.
- d. There are times when we must work on the Sabbath; but we need to remember at the same time that the Lord doesn't allow us to break the Sabbath for any reason.
- (i) We may not do our regular work on this day.
  - (ii) Work doesn't become necessary because our employer tells us we must work or we'll lose our job.
  - (iii) The work itself must actually be necessary.
  - (iv) Again, we wouldn't commit adultery to keep our jobs, neither would we murder or steal; should we then break the Sabbath?
  - (v) But when we must because it's the only day that work can be done, or we must because it is an emergency, then we may break the Sabbath without sinning.
- B. By far the majority of exceptions fall into the second category: works of mercy.
1. Jesus speaks of works of mercy in our passage:
    - a. He defended His disciples right to pick grain to feed themselves on the Sabbath when the Pharisees accused them of breaking it (Matt. 12:1ff).
      - (i) He pointed them to another exception in the Law "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone?" (vv. 3-4).
      - (ii) By law, only the priests were allowed to eat the showbread. But mercy dictated that this law be broken to preserve life.
      - (iii) The same was true with regard to His disciples.
    - b. He also defended His own right to heal a man on the Sabbath.
      - (i) "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (vv. 11-12).
      - (ii) The Lord desires compassion, and not a sacrifice (v. 7).

- (iii) Jesus healed a woman who was doubled over for 18 years (Luke 13:15, 16), a man with dropsy (swollen arms and legs, 14:2-6), a lame man by the pool of Bethesda (John 5:8-10), and a man born blind (9:14) on the Sabbath.
- (iv) It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath – to perform acts of mercy.

2. Are there vocations that require work that would fall into this category?
  - a. What about firemen and policemen, doctors and nurses? Who would argue that their work isn't both necessary and merciful to preserve life?
    - (i) Firemen need to be ready to put out fires and this means being at their station on the alert on the Lord's Day.
    - (ii) Police need to be on duty since criminals don't take the Lord's Day off.
    - (iii) Doctors and nurses need to care for patients. Sometimes emergency surgery needs to be done. If all the doctors and nurses stopped working on the Sabbath, people might die.
  - b. Along the same lines, if you or your children get sick on the Lord's Day and you need to get something from the store to relieve your pain or suffering, that's allowable; although, it's still better to make sure you have a supply of those kinds of things on hand at all times.
  - c. Tow truck drivers need to be available to help remove cars from the roadways if they break down on the Sabbath.
  - d. Those who maintain power plants need to work, as well as some utility workers, in case power lines or phone lines go down.
  - e. *Let's not forget that though it's lawful to do this kind of work on the Lord's Day, you should never be in a position where you do this every week. We are also commanded not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together to worship and fellowship (Heb. 10:25). You can't do that if you're working.*
  - f. Those who are travelling need to stay in hotels, if they can't be back home before the Sabbath. There are those who need to work to take care of their needs.
    - (i) Those traveling need to eat; restaurants many legitimately feed them. Ex: Netherlands.
    - (ii) At home, it's better to cook your large meals on other days, and then heat your leftovers for the Lord's Day, since it will cut down on the work.
    - (iii) When we have our refreshments following the morning service, most, if not all, of the ladies prepare their food in advance and put it in the refrigerator, so all they need to do is reheat it.
    - (iv) It's good to see the ladies of the church, and some of the men, pitch in to help with clean up and reduce the workload for those serving.
    - (v) Cooking and serving others on the Lord's Day can be an act of mercy and something of a necessity, since all of us need to eat on the Lord's Day.
    - (vi) The early church appears to have observed a love feast on the Lord's Day (Jude 1:12).

- g. It would be difficult to cover every possible scenario of what is lawful and what isn't on the Lord's Day. But let these two things be your guide:
- (i) Is it necessary to preserve life or property?
  - (ii) Is it an act of mercy to someone in need?
  - (iii) If something can be put off until the next day with nothing lost, then it should be put off.
  - (iv) But if it must be done this day, then do it.
  - (v) But remember to preserve as much of the day as you can for worship, fellowship and rest.
  - (vi) Next time, we'll consider further how we are to sanctify the Sabbath.  
Amen.

<http://www.graceopcmoesto.org>