

Matthew 12:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

Pharisees accuse: 'Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day' (ιδου οι μαθηται σου ποιουσιν ο ουκ εξεστιν ποιειν εν σαββατω). They charge Jesus with tolerating Sabbath violation. 'Not lawful' (ουκ εξεστιν) refers to their tradition, not Torah. Mosaic law didn't prohibit what the disciples did; Pharisaic tradition did. This reveals legalism's method: elevate human tradition to divine status (Mark 7:8-9), then condemn those violating it. The accusation targets Jesus' leadership—He permits unlawful behavior. Jesus will respond by appealing to Scripture itself (12:3-8), showing Pharisees violate Scripture's spirit while obsessing over traditional details.

Historical Context

Pharisees held significant religious authority in first-century Judaism. Their interpretations, though not binding like Scripture, carried community weight. Violating Pharisaic tradition brought social and religious consequences: exclusion from synagogue, loss of status, ostracism. Jesus' persistent defiance of their traditions while upholding Scripture challenged their authority structure. This conflict would escalate to crucifixion. Early church faced similar pressure: Judaizers insisted Gentile Christians adopt Jewish traditions (Acts 15). Paul fought this legalism vigorously (Galatians).

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How do we distinguish between God's commands and human traditions?
2. What dangers arise when religious traditions gain authority equal to Scripture?
3. How should we respond to accusations of breaking rules that aren't actually biblical?

Interlinear Text

οἱ	δὲ	Φαρισαῖοι	ἰδόντες	εἶπον	αὐτῷ	Ἴδού,	οἱ
G3588	But	when the Pharisees	saw	it they said	unto him	Behold	G3588
	G1161	G5330	G1492	G2036	G846	G2400	
μαθηταί	σου	ποιεῖν	ὃ	οὐκ	ἔξεστιν	ποιεῖν	ἐν
disciples	thy	do	that which	not	is	do	upon
G3101	G4675	G4160	G3739	G3756	G1832	G4160	G1722
σαββάτῳ							
the sabbath day							
G4521							

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 12:10 (Word): And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.

Luke 14:3 (Word): And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?

