

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME ONE

STUDY NINE

Battles Worth Fighting

Mark 2:18–28

You will stay free only as long as you're willing to fight for your freedom.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IF we give them an inch, they'll take a mile. If we let them in the front door, they'll take over the whole house!

Bullies resort to any means necessary to invade our lives and undermine our freedom. Their arsenal includes verbal attacks, emotional manipulation, and even physical strength. We need to courageously take our stand against them, or else they will bind us in their chains. We must have the guts to say, “STOP!”—because some battles are worth fighting.

Likewise, legalists can bully their way into a church if we let them. They come to “spy on us,” Paul said, and to “take away the freedom we have in Christ” (Galatians 2:4). How can we spot them?

Listen for their verbal lashing as they criticize how we express our faith. Sense their intimidation when they pressure us to look like them, talk like them, and act like them. And watch for their grim faces as these self-appointed judges frown whenever you laugh and are simply enjoying life.

The legalists in Jesus' day—the Pharisees—took every opportunity to bully Jesus and His disciples. Jesus, however, never cowered in fear or yielded to their tyranny.

Jesus preached a message of grace to those in need. He healed the sick, welcomed the outcast, and showed compassion. But He never gave an inch to the Pharisees. He stood up to them each time they attempted to smother His expressions of grace and steal His freedom.

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll see Jesus hold His ground against the Pharisees. Let the Holy Spirit use how Jesus handled the legalists to imbue your spiritual limbs with courage to stand for grace and fight for freedom.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

*I will walk in freedom,
for I have devoted myself to your commandments.* (Psalm 119:45)

In a prayer, echo the psalmist's intent to live a life devoted to God's will so that you can walk in freedom and ask the Father to draw you near to Jesus as you study His life in Mark's gospel.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The Pharisees were a prominent sect of Judaism in the first century. The term *pharisee* most likely means “separated one.” They were obsessed with every minute detail of the Hebrew Scriptures—“You tithe mint and dill and cumin,” Jesus said (Matthew 23:23 NASB). Meticulously applying the Mosaic law to every aspect of daily life, “they [crushed] people with unbearable religious demands” (23:4 NLT)—particularly regarding onerous rules for observing the Sabbath.

According to Pastor Chuck in his commentary, *Insights on Mark*, the Pharisees' Sabbath rules weren't about freeing people to rest but enslaving them with insufferable restrictions.

So that everyone would know how to apply the Law and to “rest” as they should, the Pharisaic rabbis added a long list of prohibitions. Later, this oral tradition of the Pharisees was preserved in a document called the Mishnah, which contains no fewer than twenty-four chapters *just on how to keep the Sabbath!*¹

These legalists made life miserable for everyone, except Jesus!



Observation: Strong Conflicts Between Pharisees and Jesus

The initial step of the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, observation, is foundational to understanding the meaning of the text, correlating it with other passages, and applying it to our lives.² Observe [Mark 2:18–28](#) by reading it slowly and thoughtfully, as if you were reading it for the first time.

Battles Worth Fighting

Mark 2:18–28

Fasting and Feasting—Mark 2:18–20

Mark had just featured Jesus enjoying a dinner party, “along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners” (Mark 2:15). While Jesus ate freely, John’s disciples and the Pharisees’ disciples fasted regularly. The people asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples fast like John’s disciples and the Pharisees do?” (2:18). No doubt, the Pharisees were behind this questioning.

How did Jesus respond in 2:19–20? What further questions do you think Jesus’ answer raised in their minds?

Old Wineskins and New Wine—Mark 2:21–22

Jesus elaborated His answer with analogies involving cloth and wineskins in Mark 2:21–22. We’ll look closer at their meaning in interpretation. For now, note the details of the analogies. What was Jesus saying?

Please observe the silence of the Pharisees. They have no answer. It’s hard for them to imagine anything fresh related to religious things.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Letter of the Law and Spirit of the Law—Mark 2:23–28

Picture the next scene on a Sabbath day soon afterward, when Jesus and His disciples were traveling through a field of ripe grain. What happened as His disciples walked along? What did the Pharisees tell Jesus? What was His response?

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They were turning what ought to be for people's benefit into a ball and chain. First, there was man—created, living, having families. And then came the Sabbath. It wasn't the other way. The Sabbath came for our benefit.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Spiritual Battles Worth the Fight

Now, look deeper into the meaning of [Mark 2:18–28](#) through the step of interpretation by using your Bible-study resources such as dictionaries and commentaries.

In 2:18, people asked Jesus why His disciples were not fasting like the Pharisees and John's disciples. Briefly overview the subject of fasting in the article “[Fast, Fasting](#)” in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at [biblegateway.com](#). Jesus did fast—in the wilderness, for example. But He didn't fast twice per week for show, like the Pharisees did ([Matthew 6:16–18](#); [Luke 18:11–12](#)). Why do you think the people were shocked that Jesus and His disciples weren't fasting?

This group of Pharisees wanted to know, “Why aren't you getting into line along with the rest of our followers?” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus did not back down! Joy was worth fighting for. Read His response in [Mark 2:19–20](#) in The Message and J. B. Phillips translations. What is the meaning and significance? Who are the “bride” and “groom”? What was Jesus talking about when He said that the bridegroom “will be taken away”?

It's important for you to understand the background of it because even though weddings today certainly are times of great joy, weddings in those days were extended periods of great joy. So, Jesus confronts them with this, and He addresses their lack of joy. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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In Mark 2:21–22, Jesus gave two analogies to further illustrate His point. For help with the interpretation, look up these verses in Pastor Chuck’s commentary, [Insights on Mark](#), available for purchase at [insight.org/store](#), or in the online commentary, [Constable’s Notes](#), at [netbible.org](#). How would you summarize Jesus’ message? What do the new cloth and the new wineskins represent?

I’m coming with a fresh message, and you’re trying to hold what I’m teaching into the old brittle bag of your traditional Judaism. No wonder it’s bursting.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

When the Pharisees complained that Jesus’ disciples were plucking the ears of wheat on a Sabbath day, Jesus cited the incident in [1 Samuel 21:1–6](#) when the fugitive David and his men ate bread only priests were to eat. Look up Mark 2:23–28 in [Constable’s Notes](#) at [netbible.org](#). Explain the meaning of “the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!”

“Yes, I am,” says Jesus, “and don’t you forget it.” We’re not surprised that shortly thereafter, the Pharisees began a conspiracy on how they might destroy Him. A legalist is a grace killer and a freedom thief. “If You don’t get in line, we’re going to get rid of You.” I’m telling you folks: this is a battle worth fighting. This is freedom. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Standing for Our Freedom in Christ

All believers should “keep standing firm” in the freedom Christ has given to us, lest we allow ourselves to be burdened again by “a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1 NASB). Compare [Mark 2:18–20](#); [John 15:1–11](#); [Galatians 5:1–23](#); and [Philippians 4:4](#). What can we learn from these passages about the necessity to walk in freedom? How do they emphasize the importance of joy?

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I'll tell you there is nothing that should characterize the body of Christ like joy. The church ought to be the place where there is the loudest laughter and the freest opportunity for joy and pleasure and delight in one another.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What do passages such as [Mark 2:23–28](#) with [Romans 14:1–5](#) and [Colossians 2:13–17](#) teach about the Sabbath and our freedom in Christ? How should we believers use our freedom?

Don't give up your freedom. And that's where you're going to need grace, joy, and flexibility. This is all about values that are worth fighting for.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Fight the Battles Worth Fighting

When legalists try to enslave you in their chains of negativity, rigidity, and rule-keeping, stand by the freedoms that Jesus modeled in our passage: *joy, flexibility, and grace*.

Think of some practical ways you can fight with God's help. How can you experience the freedom of joy?

Part of being free is being free to laugh. Even laugh at yourself, laugh at life, and help your family know how to laugh. One of the responsibilities of every parent is to help their children know the joy of laughter—the fun of living.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Sometimes as we age, we become more set in our ways and rigid in our attitudes. What spiritual insights can you nurture in your heart so your life can be that supple new wineskin that flexes with the fresh work of the Spirit?

You stay flexible. You stay open. You're listening, you're learning, you're growing.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Jesus not only lived in the freedom of joy, flexibility, and grace, but He also offers this freedom to you right now. You don't need to wait for life's storms to settle. Draw near to Jesus in this moment and experience His life-giving presence. Once you've experienced His joy, you'll never settle for anything less!



A FINAL PRAYER

Gracious Father, You know my tendency to back off and let people steal my freedom in Christ. Forgive me because Your precious Son died to set me free. Thank You for imbuing my spiritual limbs with courage to stand up to anyone who wants to lord it over my life. May I get guts as I grow in grace. Give me thick skin and a soft heart to fight the battles worth fighting. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Mark*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 70.
2. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](https://www.insight.org/how-does-pastor-chuck-swindoll-study-the-bible)" at [insight.org](https://www.insight.org).

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2010, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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