And He said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." Mark 2:27, NKJV.

When accused of Sabbathbreaking at Bethesda, Jesus defended Himself by affirming His Sonship to God, and declaring that He worked in harmony with the Father. Now that the disciples are attacked, He cites His accusers to examples from the Old Testament, acts performed on the Sabbath by those who were in the service of God.

The Jewish teachers prided themselves on their knowledge of the Scriptures, and in the Savior's answer there was an implied rebuke for their ignorance of the Sacred Writings. "Have ye not read so much as this," He said, "what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him; how he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread ...; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone?" (Luke 6:3, 4). "And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). "Have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple" (Matthew 12:5, 6). "The Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath" (Mark 2:28)....

Jesus did not let the matter pass without administering a rebuke to His enemies. He declared that in their blindness they had mistaken the object of the Sabbath. He said, "If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless" (Matthew 12:7). Their many heartless rites could not supply the lack of that truthful integrity and tender love which will ever characterize the true worshiper of God....

It is the service of love that God values. When this is lacking, the mere round of ceremony is an offense to Him. So with the Sabbath. It was designed to bring men and women into communion with God; but when the mind was absorbed with wearisome rites, the object of the Sabbath was thwarted. Its mere outward observance was a mockery.--The Desire of Ages, 284-286.