

Luke

*Lord of the Sabbath
Luke 6:1-5*

With Study Questions

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Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grainfields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate *them*, rubbing *them* in *their* hands. ² And some of the Pharisees said to them, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?" ³ But Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴ how he went into the house of God, took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?" ⁵ And He said to them, "The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath" (Luke 6:1-5).

Introduction

A former elder of our church once that when he was a child, the parking lot of the local mall was so empty on Sundays that he could ride his go-cart in it without fear of collision. There was a time when blue laws (so named because they were printed on blue paper) prohibited commercial activities on Sundays. Obviously, the practice has gone the way of all the earth. But why?

There are various reasons why the Lord's Day has lost its impact in the current west, even in churches. For one, the predominant theological conviction of modern western evangelicalism (a system known as Dispensationalism) reads the Bible in such a way as to view the Lord's Day, or Christian Sabbath, as abolished.

This theological model/grid reads their Bibles in such a way that if it is not repeated in the New Testament, it is no longer binding on God's people, or any people for that matter. The argument asserts that, unlike the other nine commandments, the New Testament does not repeat the fourth commandment, therefore we needn't observe it.

It is debatable whether or not the New Testament repeats the fourth commandment. In this very passage, Jesus says He is "**Lord of the Sabbath.**" As Dr. Bahnsen asked, 'is He the Lord of something that no longer exists?' But even if it is not repeated, it is incorrect to read our Bibles in such a way as

to assume a lack of continuity between the Old Testament and New. We should conclude that the things God says in the Old Testament still apply, unless the New indicates otherwise (which it often does, and for good reasons).

All to say that we should see that the Lord's Day or Christian Sabbath, in some sense is still to be observed. I write in 'some sense' because there are some (e.g., John Calvin) who would teach that the day itself (along with many of its Old Covenant observances) has been abrogated, but there should still be one day in seven set apart for worship and holy activities.¹

As a church that has come to embrace the Lord's Day as something that should still be observed, we had no small problem handling what that actually looked like. Some members feared we were going to be overly micro-managerial; that if we saw a member wielding a cup of Starbucks on the Lord's Day the disciplinary action would rapidly follow. Others felt we were complicit in the sin of sabbath breaking if we didn't discipline those coffee drinkers.

I am not, at this point, going to address the details of what biblical sabbath keeping looks like. I am merely observing that there are few commandments in the Bible that can tempt us to be like the Pharisees more than what is, or is not, appropriate on the Lord's Day. And this is nothing new. During the time of Christ...

...the rabbis had prescriptions to interpret the law down to the finest detail. They had about a thousand laws which regulated what could and could not be done on the Sabbath day. ²

Due to this mixture of man-made rules with divinely given law, sabbath-breaking was the perfect commandment, so they thought, to trap Jesus and His followers.

Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grainfields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate *them*, rubbing *them* in *their* hands. ² And some of the Pharisees said to them, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath" (Luke 6:1, 2)?

¹ Institutes II, viii, 28-34.

² Sproul, R. C. (1999). *A Walk with God: An Exposition of Luke* (p. 100). Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications.

Jesus, the Law Breaker

Luke has been recording the powerful and ministerial works of Christ in the previous two chapters. But the critics of Christ have been unmoved. All they can offer are accusations. Jesus is accused due of poor choices in the company He keeps. He and His followers are accused for their apparently weak disciplines when it came to prayer and fasting. Here, the accusations move into deeper waters.

It's not merely that Jesus and His followers aren't very good following religious disciplines, they're actual lawbreakers! They are publicly and unabashedly in violation of the Sabbath. What is the nature of this sin?

It is not that they are stealing. The law of God made provision for the hungry.

If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain (Deuteronomy 23:25).

You were allowed to eat, but not harvest, someone else's field or vineyard. What they were doing was permitted, but only six days a week. It wasn't stealing. It was Sabbath breaking (or so the accusation goes)!

It wasn't as if there was a table of ready-to-eat grain. He mentions that they were "**rubbing them in their hands**" indicating there was some work involved. It wasn't as if the religious climate of the day was merely majoring in the minors and minoring in the majors. Although they were certainly doing that.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23).

But it went beyond a mere failure in priorities. They had logs in their eyes and were seeking to remove specks out of the eyes of others (Matthew 7:3-5). If you have a log in your eye, it's not that you merely have poor

eyesight. You're blind. The Pharisees were not in need of reading glasses. They were "**blind guides**" (Matthew 15:14).

When we talk about removing the log from your eye before seeking to correct someone else, we're not just talking about Christians who have bigger struggles than others seeking to correct other Christians with smaller struggles. These are difficult, often uncomfortable, acts of love. Besides, those would be difficult calculations to make. How righteous does one have to be before they can seek to help another person caught up in some sin?

This is not at all what's going on in this passage. This was not loving, brotherly correction. This is an attempt at a trap. What we have here are evil people seeking to justify their own behavior by going on the attack. We see this type of thing on a common basis. Whether it's the insecurities, weaknesses or outright evil in our interpersonal relationships or in public, political maneuvering that dominates the campaigns.

It is one thing to be corrected. The Scriptures encourage painful encounters over destructive approval.

Faithful *are* the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy *are* deceitful (Proverbs 27:6).

It is a different thing altogether to be attacked. So, how does Jesus respond?

But Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴ how he went into the house of God, took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat" (Luke 6:3, 4)?

Have You Not Read?

Jesus immediately appeals to an authoritative resource, the word of God. It is difficult to convey how insulting this must have felt to His listeners. They reckoned themselves experts in God's word. But the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who use the things of God in an evil way. It has become so common today to see men and women, donning religious robes, standing in pulpits, seeking to sanction the most ungodly systems of morals, culture and politics imaginable.

Had they not read? Certainly, they had read. But they read amiss. They don't read with humility. They viewed their own cultural traditions equal, or even superior to what they read.

He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition (Mark 7:9).

Traditions aren't necessarily bad. But we need to continually evaluate the resources of our traditions.

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Whatever traditions we embrace, they should always fall under the wisdom, majesty and beauty found in God's word.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

What David Did

Having established the authority, Jesus now appeals to an event in the Old Testament that applies to the current situation. The event is found in 1 Samuel 21. David is on the run from Saul and appeals to Ahimelech, the priest for food. But the only food available is "**the showbread**" or the bread of the presence. This bread was ceremonially placed on a gold-laden table in the Holy Place (Exodus 25:23-30) and was only to be eaten by the priests (Exodus 29:33).

Though it would normally not be lawful for anyone else to eat it, for some reason it was appropriate for David and those with him. There are a couple of possible reasons for this. First, acts of necessity and mercy take precedence over ceremony. We need to seek God's wisdom when it comes to prioritizing. There seems to be a little debate among Christians as to whether certain sins are bigger than others. The answer, like so many, is that it depends on what we're talking about. In one respect, when it comes to guilt

before God, one is as bad as the other. The Westminster Confession 15, 4 says it well:

As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.

But in another sense, there is a significant discrepancy between sins. Proverbs 6:16-19 records sin that are particularly reprehensible to God. And even as we read earlier in this message, Jesus chastised the Pharisees because they were good at tithing, but **“neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23).**

Allowing men to starve while there is bread, even showbread, on the table, would have been a mistake. But Jesus then takes it to another level.

And He said to them, “The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath” (Luke 6:5).

Lord of the Sabbath

Just in case His listeners were offended that Jesus would compare Himself to David, Jesus pushes it further. These are two very significant designations He gives Himself. As **“the Son of Man”** Jesus identifies Himself as the One prophesied in the Old Testament who would be...

...given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom *the one* Which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:14).

And if that isn't enough, He then makes a statement that many understand as a claim to deity. Not only is He not breaking the Sabbath, He is Lord of the Sabbath. He is the Master of the Sabbath. We must recognize the Sabbath as a creation mandate. On the seventh day, God rested and we are called to rest on the seventh as well (Exodus 20:8-11). When Jesus claims lordship over the Sabbath, He is identifying Himself as the Lord and Maker of all things.

This is a soul-lifting message. When our hearts begin to perceive and appreciate just who it is we worship on this hallowed day, we should gain a new and fresh appreciation when we learn what Mark records in this encounter.

And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27).

Questions for Study

1. Why do you suppose we, as a culture, no longer observe the Sabbath (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is it about the Sabbath that tempts us to be Pharisaical (page 3)?
3. Discuss the nature of the accusation made against Jesus and His followers (pages 4, 5).
4. How does Jesus answer this accusation (pages 5-7)?
5. Are all sins the same? Explain (pages 6, 7).
6. What conclusions can we draw by the titles Jesus gives Himself (page 7)?