

Luke 6:1-11
November 11, 2018

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you hear the word “sabbath,” what comes to mind? [Let people engage, e.g. one of the 10 commandments, “should” rest on the seventh day.]

Q: Are we to observe the Sabbath? If yes, what does that look like? [Let people engage]

Transition: There still seems to be some confusion about whether Christians should observe the Sabbath. Some groups today, such as the Seventh-day Adventists, teach that keeping the seventh-day Sabbath is a perpetual moral law meant for all people, and that not keeping it is a sign of apostasy and disloyalty to God. They base their belief on Genesis 2:1–3, which tells of God resting after His creative work and then sanctifying the Sabbath day, and on the fourth commandment. They also argue that the New Testament teaches the continuity of seventh-day Sabbath observance by Christ’s followers, even after Christ’s death.

These beliefs, however, are misguided. **There is no universal moral obligation given in Genesis 2 to keep the Sabbath. Christ’s finished work on the cross, moreover, abrogated the Mosaic law, and thus the fourth commandment no longer applies to Christians. Paul made this clear in his epistles, primarily in Romans, Galatians, and Colossians. The New Testament church practice in Acts also confirms it.** To be under the Jewish law, furthermore, brings its curse, for one cannot choose just a part of the law — he or she must obey every precept of it (Gal. 3:10).

Bottom Line: The Jews kept the Sabbath, but **after Christ’s resurrection no biblical data suggests that Christians kept the Sabbath. They instead kept the Lord’s Day, which historically has been the first day of the week (Sunday). Every day is for worship, not just the Sabbath. Sabbath keeping may have some good purposes, but it is not an obligation for believers today, nor is it a sign of apostasy or disloyalty to God not to observe the Sabbath.**

As we go through today’s study, let’s watch how Jesus deals with the Pharisees on the topic of observing Sabbath. Then at the end, let’s process how we are to live in light of this text. Let’s begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V V.1:

- One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels.

V.2:

- Some of the Pharisees asked, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

V.3:

- Jesus answered them, “**Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?**”

V.4:

- He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.”

V.5:

- Then Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.1: On a scale of 1-10 (10 is vitally important), how important was the sanctity of the Sabbath to the Jewish faith? [10]

Q: Why was it so important? [It’s one of the Ten Commandments! “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.” God gave Israel the Sabbath law at Sinai (Neh. 9:13–14) and made it a sign between Him and the nation (Ex. 20:8–11; 31:12–17). The word *Sabbath* means “rest” and is linked with God’s cessation of work after the six days of Creation (Gen. 2:2–3). Some of the rabbis taught that Messiah could not come until Israel had perfectly kept the Sabbath, so obeying this law was very important both personally and nationally.]

Q V.2: Because the Pharisees were always alert for something to criticize, they found an angle to challenge Jesus. What do they ask Him? [“Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?]

Q: What specifically were the Pharisees observing that they thought was unlawful? [They saw Jesus’s disciples picking up heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands and eating the kernels.]

Q: What’s unlawful about that? [From the Pharisees perspective, it was work because they were harvesting, winnowing and preparing food!]

Fun Fact: It was lawful for a Jew to eat from a neighbor’s vineyard, orchard, or field, provided he did not fill a container or use a harvesting tool. (Deut 23:24-25)

Q V.3-5: How does Jesus respond? [Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”]

Q: Jesus brings up an illustration of something that actually happened during the days of King David. Why was David able to get away with that if it was “unlawful?” [Because what Jew would condemn Israel’s great king? He was God’s anointed one! *But that was exactly what Jesus claimed for Himself* (Luke 4:18).

Q: Jesus says, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.” What does He mean by that? [Jesus is proclaiming that He is the One who exercises authority even over the rules and regulations that govern the Sabbath day. Accordingly, He is free to do *on* it and *with* it whatever He pleases. The Pharisees did not miss His meaning, you can be sure.]

Truth: The Pharisees had instituted a complex and confusing system of Sabbath laws of their own that was oppressive and legalistic. They had set up strict laws regarding how to observe the Sabbath, which included 39 categories of forbidden activities. In essence, these religious leaders had made themselves lords of the Sabbath, thus making themselves lords over the people.

Q: What do we learn about God in this storyline? [God is more concerned about meeting human needs than He is about protecting religious rules. It was more important for David and his men to receive sustenance and gain strength to serve God than to perish for the sake of a law. God desires mercy, not sacrifice.]

[Read Luke 6:6-11]

V.6:

- On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled.

V.7:

- The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.

V.8:

- But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Get up and stand in front of everyone.” So he got up and stood there.

V.9:

- Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”

V.10:

- He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He did so, and his hand was completely restored.

V.11:

- But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.6-7: Let’s set the scene. Where are we? What day is it? Who are the characters in this passage? [It’s Sabbath and Jesus is in the synagogue teaching. We have a man with a shriveled right hand, and we have Pharisees and teachers of the law]

Q: What was motivating the Pharisees to come hear Jesus on the Sabbath? [They were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched Him closely to see if he would heal on Sabbath.]

Q: I find it interesting that the Pharisees watched to see if Jesus would “heal” on Sabbath. Do you think the Pharisees knew the handicapped man would be there? Did they “plant” him there?

Q V.8: As usual, Jesus knew what they were thinking, so what does He do next? [He asks the man with a shriveled hand to get up and stand in front of everyone. The man is getting ready to become an object lesson!]

Q V.9: Who is “them?” [The Pharisees]

Q: What test question does Jesus give them? [Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?]

Q: If you were a Pharisee, how eager would you be to answer?! After all, they are considered the experts regarding the Law. [Let people engage.]

Observation: So after Jesus made eye contact with all of them, he healed the man's withered hand and everyone saw immediately that his hand was restored.

Q V.11: How did the Pharisees respond to Jesus's healing? [They were furious and began to discuss what they might do to Jesus.]

Q: Why is Jesus's question so hard to the Pharisees? Shouldn't the answer be obvious? [Let people engage.]

LOOK:

Because Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, he is over any rules and regulations. He offers us spiritual rest in Him. Because the gospel is grace-based, we are given the liberty to apply the sabbath as the Spirit leads us, without being caught up in legalism. He also encourages us to do good, whether it's on Sabbath or not. The Lord desires mercy, not sacrifice!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 189–191). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

A New Sabbath (Luke 6:1–11)

The sanctity of the seventh day was a distinctive part of the Jewish faith. God gave Israel the Sabbath law at Sinai (Neh. 9:13–14) and made it a sign between Him and the nation (Ex. 20:8–11; 31:12–17). The word *Sabbath* means “rest” and is linked with God’s cessation of work after the six days of Creation (Gen. 2:2–3). Some of the rabbis taught that Messiah could not come until Israel had perfectly kept the Sabbath, so obeying this law was very important both personally and nationally.

To call Sunday “the Sabbath” is to confuse the first day and the seventh day and what each signifies. The Sabbath is a reminder of the completion of “the old Creation,” while the Lord’s Day is a reminder of our Lord’s finished work in “the new Creation” (2 Cor. 5:21; Eph. 2:10; 4:24). The Sabbath speaks of rest *after* work and relates to the Law, while the Lord’s Day speaks of rest *before* work and relates to grace. The Lord’s Day commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as well as the coming of the Holy Spirit and the “birthday” of the church (Acts 2).

The early church met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1–2). However, some Jewish believers kept the Sabbath, and this sometimes led to division. Paul addressed this problem in Romans 14:1–15:13 where he gave principles to promote both liberty and unity in the church. But Paul always made it clear that *observing special days had nothing to do with salvation* (Gal. 4:1–11; Col. 2:8–17). We are not saved from sin by faith in Christ *plus* keeping the Sabbath. We are saved by faith in Christ alone.

By their strict and oppressive rules, the Pharisees and scribes had turned the Sabbath Day into a burden instead of the blessing God meant it to be, and Jesus challenged both their doctrine and their authority. He had announced a new “Year of Jubilee” (Luke 4:19), and now He would declare a new Sabbath. He had already healed a lame man on the Sabbath, and the religious leaders had determined to kill Him (John 5:18; also note John 5:16). Now He was to violate their Sabbath laws on two more occasions.

In the field (vv. 1–5). It was lawful for a Jew to eat from a neighbor’s vineyard, orchard, or field, provided he did not fill a container or use a harvesting implement (Deut. 23:24–25). The disciples were hungry, so they picked the heads of wheat, rubbed them in their hands, and ate them. But in so doing, according to the rabbis, they broke the Sabbath law, because they were harvesting, winnowing, and preparing food!

Always alert for something to criticize, some of the Pharisees asked Jesus why He permitted His disciples to violate the Sabbath laws. This was His second offense, and they were sure they had a case against Him. How tragic that their slavish devotion to religious rules blinded them to the true ministry of the Law as well as the very presence of the Lord who gave them the Law.

Jesus did not argue with them; instead, He took them right to the Word of God (1 Sam. 21:1–6). The “showbread” was comprised of twelve loaves, one for each tribe in Israel; and it stood on the table in the holy place in the tabernacle and then in the temple (Ex. 25:23–30; Lev. 24:5–9). Fresh bread was put on the table each Sabbath, and only the priests were allowed to eat the loaves.

But David and his men ate the loaves, and what Jew would condemn Israel’s great king? “He was God’s anointed!” they might argue, *but that was exactly what Jesus claimed for Himself* (Luke 4:18). Not only was He God’s Anointed, but He was also the Lord of the Sabbath! When Jesus made that statement, He was claiming to be Jehovah God, because it was the Lord who established

the Sabbath. If Jesus Christ is indeed Lord of the Sabbath, then He is free to do *on* it and *with* it whatever He pleases. The Pharisees did not miss His meaning, you can be sure.

God is more concerned about meeting human needs than He is about protecting religious rules. Better that David and his men receive strength to serve God than that they perish only for the sake of a temporary law. God desires compassion, not sacrifice (Matt. 12:7, quoting Hosea 6:6). The Pharisees, of course, had a different view of the Law (Matt. 23:23).

In the synagogue (vv. 6–11). The Pharisees knew that it was our Lord’s practice to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath, so they were there to watch Him and to gather more evidence against Him. Did they know that the handicapped man would also be there? Did they “plant” him there? We do not know, and Jesus probably did not care. His compassionate heart responded to the man’s need, and He healed him. Jesus could have waited a few hours until the Sabbath was over, or He could have healed the man in private, but He did it openly and immediately. It was a deliberate violation of the Sabbath traditions.

Our Lord’s defense in the field was based on the Old Testament Scriptures, but His defense in the synagogue was based on *the nature of God’s Sabbath law*. God gave that law to help people, not to hurt them. “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Every man in the synagogue would rescue a sheep on the Sabbath, so why not rescue a man made in the image of God? (Matt. 12:11–12) The scribes and Pharisees had turned God’s gift into a heavy yoke that nobody could bear (Acts 15:10; Gal. 5:1).

This miracle illustrates the power of faith in God’s Word. Jesus commanded the man to do the very thing he could not do, and yet *he did it!* “For no word from God shall be void of power” (Luke 1:37). God’s commandments are always God’s enablements.

The scribes and Pharisees were filled with fury. It certainly did not do them any good to worship God in the synagogue that morning. So angry were they that they even joined forces with the Herodians (the Jews who supported Herod) in a plot to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6). Jesus knew their thoughts (Matt. 12:15; Luke 6:8); so He merely withdrew to the Sea of Galilee, ministered to the multitudes, and then went up to a mountain alone to pray.

Jesus gives a spiritual “Sabbath rest” that is in the heart all the time (Matt. 11:28–30). Unlike the galling yoke of the Law, the yoke that Jesus gives is “well-fitting,” and His “burden is light.” When the sinner trusts the Savior, he has peace with God because his sins are forgiven, and he is reconciled to God (Rom. 5:1–11). As the believer yields to Christ in daily experience, he enjoys “the peace of God” in his heart and mind (Phil. 4:6–7).

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 218-219)

5. JESUS’S DEMONSTRATION OF HIS AUTHORITY OVER THE SABBATH (6:1–11)

In 6:1–11 Luke recorded two incidents that occurred on the Sabbath: “One Sabbath” (v. 1) and “On another Sabbath” (v. 6). Luke’s point in bringing the accounts together to form a unit was to show that Jesus had authority over the Sabbath.

a. The disciples’ picking of grain on the Sabbath (6:1–5) (Matt. 12:1–8; Mark 2:23–28).

6:1–5. Jesus’ **disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands, and eat.** God allowed people to pick grain from a neighbor’s field as they passed through (Deut. 23:25). But **the Pharisees**, interpreting the Law strictly, held that rubbing the heads together in order to

eat the grain constituted threshing, which was not allowed **on the Sabbath**. **Jesus** responded to the Pharisees' objection by referring to 1 Samuel 21:1–9. **David** had approached the priests at Nob and asked for bread. The only food available at the moment was the **consecrated bread** that **only the priests** were allowed **to eat**. David was given the bread, and **he** and **his companions** ate it. The parallel in Jesus' teaching was clear. In the interest of survival David and his companions were allowed to be above the Law with the priest's blessing. Christ and His companions were also above the man-made law which the Pharisees proclaimed. Another parallel implicit in Jesus' teaching should not be missed. David, as God's anointed, was being hounded by the forces of a dying dynasty—the dynasty of Saul. Jesus was God's new Anointed One who was being hounded by the forces of a dying dynasty (cf. Luke 5:39). The ultimate conclusion was that Jesus **is Lord of the Sabbath**, that is, He has authority even over matters of the Law.

b. Jesus' healing of a man on the Sabbath (6:6–11) (Matt. 12:9–14; Mark 3:1–6).

6:6–11. This second contention about the **Sabbath** (cf. the first one in vv. 1–5) seems to have been brought about purposely by **the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law**. As Jesus **was teaching in the synagogue**, He encountered **a man ... whose right hand was shriveled**. The religious leaders were observing Jesus because they **were looking for a reason to accuse Him**. As was the case when He was opposed previously by religious leaders, **Jesus knew what they were thinking** (5:22). He used the situation to show that He has authority over **the Sabbath**. **Jesus said ... I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?** By this question He showed that refusing to do good on the Sabbath was tantamount to doing evil. If suffering is not alleviated, then one is doing evil to the sufferer.

As the man stretched out his **hand** at Jesus' command, **it was completely restored**. Jesus performed no "work" on the Sabbath—He simply spoke a few words and a hand was completely restored. He humiliated the religious leaders and healed the man all at the same time without even breaking the Pharisees' law. It is no wonder that the religious establishment was **furious** and sought a way to get rid of Him.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 1523). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

6:1 Were the disciples stealing grain? No, the disciples were not stealing, as the Pharisees had accused them of doing. In fact, Dt 23:25 permitted the casual plucking of grain in a field, as this incident shows.

Stein, R. H. (1992). *Luke* (Vol. 24, pp. 187–190). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Context

In the first pericope (6:1–5), Jesus claimed that he, as the Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath. In the second (6:6–11) he manifested this authority by healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath must have been a continual issue of contention as seen by these two accounts.

Comments

6:1 Began to pick some heads of grain. The picking of grain from someone else's field was permissible according to Deut 23:24–25, so that the issue was not picking the grain but doing so on the Sabbath, as the next verse makes clear.

Rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. Luke added this to explain that the disciples were picking grain on the Sabbath because of their hunger.

6:2 Some of the Pharisees asked. Luke qualified his source by adding “some.” He may have done this in order to avoid condemning all the Pharisees. He knew of some good (Luke 13:31; Acts 5:34–39) and even Christian Pharisees (Acts 15:5). For the same Lukan qualification, see comments on 13:31 and 19:39.

Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath? In Matthew and Mark, Jesus was attacked indirectly through the actions of his disciples. Luke, however, sought to show that the attack was ultimately directed against Jesus, for a teacher could be called into account for the behavior of his disciples. Thus the “you,” which is plural, included Jesus along with his disciples. The reverence for the Sabbath among Jews can be seen in such writings as 1 Macc 2:32–41; 2 Macc 15:1–5; Jubilees 2:19ff; Fragments of a Zadokite Work 13:22–27; 11:13ff. The Pharisaic interpretation of plucking grain as work may be reflected in *Šabbat* 7:2. Whether or not this was a valid interpretation of the OT teachings is not pursued in the account (although note Matt 12:5–7) because the issue for Luke was not hermeneutical but Christological.

6:3 Jesus answered them. Luke's use of the verbal form “answering said” indicates that Jesus assumed the responsibility of his disciples' behavior in answering the criticism of the previous verse.

Have you never read? Jesus used a counter question in his answer. See comments on 5:23.

What David did? Jesus recalled an event in David's life when due to hunger he and his men ate the consecrated sanctuary bread, i.e., the bread of the presence. The account in 1 Sam 21:1–6 does not mention that this took place on a Sabbath, but the issue was not so much the day or the need but Jesus' authority, which extends over even the Sabbath. If David was free of the restraints of the law on that occasion, how much more is the Son of Man.

6:4 He entered the house of God. This is not the Solomonic temple but rather the tabernacle. Luke, as Matthew did, omitted the reference to Abiathar's being high priest. He may have done this to shorten his account, but he may also have done it because of the difficulty associated with this reference.

He ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. Compare Lev 24:5–9. Luke added “only” to his account in order to emphasize David's violation of the commandment. This ultimately then heightens the authority of the One greater than David, i.e., the Lord of the Sabbath.

6:5 The Son of Man. See comments on 5:24. Clearly this is a title in our present passage and not a statement about Jesus' humanity in general. Luke and Matthew differ from Mark 2:27a, which heightens the Christological sense of this passage. If David could in certain instances of overriding need dispense with this OT regulation, then how much more can the Son of Man who is greater than David do so.

Is Lord of the Sabbath. It is thus the Son of Man, not the Pharisees by means of their regulations, who ruled and properly interpreted the Sabbath. Whereas there might be some ground for arguing that this statement in Mark 2:28 is an editorial comment by the Evangelist, both here and in the Matthean parallel this is not possible. Matthew and Luke understood Mark 2:28 as a saying of Jesus.

6:6 On another Sabbath. Luke, by adding this to the account, tied the present incident even more closely to the preceding one than in Mark.

He went into the synagogue and was teaching. Luke pointed out that Jesus' purpose for being in the synagogue was to teach. No doubt he deduced this from Jesus' normal synagogue activity (cf. Luke 4:15, 16–30, 31–38).

And a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. Luke accentuated the man's physical woes by pointing out that the hand affected was the most important one, i.e., the right hand. In 22:50 Luke also became more specific and added "right," but in 6:29 he omitted "right." "Shriveled" refers here either to paralysis or atrophy.

6:7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. Jesus' opponents did not doubt Jesus' ability to heal. This is granted. The issue for them was whether Jesus' healing power was divine or demonic (11:14–20). Although the Pharisaic tradition knew of exceptions when the Sabbath could be broken, e.g., for life-threatening situations (*Yoma* 8:6), the healing of a shriveled hand did not qualify as such an exception (cf. Luke 13:14). By now, due to 4:31–41; 6:1–5, Jesus' attitude toward the Sabbath was well-known, so that his opponents were observing his Sabbath behavior to see if they could catch him profaning the Sabbath. The term "to accuse" refers to finding a legal accusation that could be used in court against Jesus.

6:8 But Jesus knew what they were thinking. Luke was not seeking here to indicate that Jesus possessed a great understanding of human nature. Rather he indicated Jesus possessed a prophetic awareness of human thoughts.

Get up and stand in front of everyone. Jesus was in charge of the situation and confronted his opponents.

6:9 Jesus challenged the thought of his opponents. The ultimate issue for him was not doing good versus doing nothing but rather doing good versus doing evil, for failure to do good in such instances is in effect to do evil (cf. Jas 4:17).

6:10 Jesus' opponents were not able to respond. Compare Luke 13:17; 14:6. Luke in abbreviating the Markan account did not include the statement that Jesus looked around in anger and was deeply distressed (Mark 3:5).

He did so, and his hand was completely restored. Jesus' healing on the Sabbath is evidence that he is indeed Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:5).

6:11 But they were furious. "Were furious" is literally *filled with madness* or *folly*.

What they might do to Jesus. This serves as the conclusion of both 6:1–5 and 6:6–11.

The Lukan Message

Although both passages center around Jesus' activity on the Sabbath and the conflict this brought with "some" Pharisees, the main Lukan emphasis does not focus on hermeneutics or seek to defend Christian behavior with respect to the Sabbath. Whatever value these accounts had apologetically to explain the Christian attitude toward the Sabbath is overshadowed by the Evangelist's desire to continue his Christological teaching. Building on what had already been said about Jesus' "power" in 4:14, 36; 5:17 and his "authority" in 4:32, 36; 5:24, Luke then revealed that Jesus, as the Son of Man, is also Lord of the Sabbath. All the commandments and veneration centering on this day are subject to Jesus' teaching, for he is Master of the Sabbath. One greater than David has come who is not controlled by Sabbath regulations but instead controls the Sabbath itself. This authority is demonstrated by his healing on the Sabbath. Jesus' knowledge of his opponent's thoughts (6:8) is also best understood as supporting his prophetic-divine authority. This passage had apologetical significance with regard to the life-style of the early church, for it pointed out that the Christian attitude toward the Sabbath was determined by the example and teachings of

Jesus, the Lord. The basic Lukan teaching in this passage, however, involves Jesus' lordship over the Sabbath.

© 2018 Lee Ann Penick