



Reigns

Jesus prioritizes meeting people's needs over keeping rituals.

LUKE 6:1-11

A man decided to paint his house a very bright color. When confronted by the homeowners' association, he retorted, "I have the right to do what I want with what's mine!" He quickly found out that the covenants in his deed subordinated some of his rights, including changing his home's external appearance. It's interesting how we feel offended when our desires are curtailed, yet we fail to recognize the desires of the One who reigns over everything.

How do people respond when God's will comes into conflict with their desires?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

LUKE 5:33–6:16

As Luke noted in chapters 5–6 of his Gospel, Jesus’ conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees continued to mount. They accused Him of blasphemy when He forgave the sins of a paralytic who had come to Him for healing (Luke 5:17-26), and they questioned why He would associate with sinners after He called Levi to be His disciple (5:27-32).

The religious leaders became upset because Jesus ignored the accepted order of the day. He overturned their spiritual apple cart regularly, and they reacted with indignation. For example, their followers fasted on a regular basis, but Jesus’ disciples rarely did. When they pressed Him for an explanation, Jesus essentially told them the timing wasn’t right (5:33-39). It was more important for them to focus on what they were learning from Him than to observe a prescribed fast.

One of the biggest points of contention related to how Jesus observed—or, in their minds, violated—Sabbath laws. On one occasion, they observed Jesus and His followers picking grain and eating it on the Sabbath (6:1-5). According to the leaders’ interpretation of the law, that amounted to harvesting a crop and working on the Sabbath. Jesus told them they misunderstood the purpose of the Sabbath. He also claimed that His authority over the Sabbath superseded their authority as teachers of the law. When Jesus challenged common beliefs about healing on the Sabbath, the leaders became furious. But Jesus demonstrated concern for the person, not just a set of rules (6:6-11).

Luke then recorded Jesus’ calling of the twelve to serve as His apostles (6:12-16). These individuals were selected to learn from Him and to extend His mission after He returned to heaven. The list began with Peter, one of Jesus’ closest followers, and ended with Judas, the one who betrayed Him.

Read Luke 6:1-11, looking for words and phrases that define Jesus’ motives. How did the needs of a person motivate Jesus to take action?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

WORK ON THE SABBATH? (LUKE 6:1-2)

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. ² Some of the Pharisees asked, “Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”

VERSES 1-2

Traveling to their next destination, Jesus and His disciples came across some fields of grain. According to the law of Moses, it was permissible for travelers to pick grain to eat from someone’s field (Deut. 23:24-25). Being hungry, they helped themselves to what was growing in the fields. They removed the husks by taking the heads of grain and then began to **rub them in their hands**. This allowed them to get to the edible kernel of the grain. This is significant because Luke wanted his readers to understand that the disciples were simply trying to get something to eat, not disregard the law as the religious elite would claim.

On any other day of the week, no one would have given the disciples’ actions a second thought. But this was the **Sabbath**, so the **Pharisees**, who held to a strict interpretation of the Old Testament law, saw a problem. The disciples were violating Sabbath law.

While God had commanded a Sabbath day of rest for His people, the Pharisees had worked to “protect” that law over the years. They did this by adding oral traditions to the law itself so people wouldn’t accidentally do something wrong. In time, they began to see their traditions as equal in authority to God’s law.

DID YOU KNOW?

The *Mishnah*, a written collection of Jewish oral tradition (200 BC–AD 200), includes a section entitled “Shabbath” (Sabbath). The Sabbath section alone has twenty-four chapters and enumerates thirty-nine activities that were forbidden on the Sabbath.

By picking the heads of grain and rubbing them in their hands, the disciples were harvesting a crop—according to the Pharisees’ traditions. The disciples’ actions were *unlawful*, so the Pharisees called them out.

In reality, the Pharisees were attacking Jesus more than His disciples. In that day, a teacher was responsible for the actions of his students. The plural *you* in verse 2 indicates they considered Jesus just as guilty of breaking the Sabbath as His disciples.

What human rules and rituals might people treat today as if God Himself had spoken them?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare and contrast passages related to the same subject.*

Review the following passages, and record what they say about observing the Sabbath: Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23:3; 2 Kings 11:4-8; Nehemiah 10:31; 13:15-22. Compare these passages to New Testament examples: Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 7:22-24; Acts 17:2-4; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Colossians 2:16; Revelation 1:10. What does a comparison of these passages reveal? Summarize your understanding of the principle and purpose of the Sabbath.

LORD OF THE SABBATH (LUKE 6:3-5)

³ Jesus answered them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? 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.”⁵ Then Jesus said to them, “The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

VERSES 3-4

The Pharisees believed they understood the Sabbath laws, but really they understood only their own interpretations of what those laws meant. In contrast, the Son of God knew exactly what the Father intended. While they focused on their rituals and traditions, Jesus emphasized God’s perspective.

Jesus used an incident from the life of **David**. In 1 Samuel 21, as David was running for his life from Saul, he sought help from a priest named Ahimelech. David needed food for himself and his band of followers. The only food the priest had to offer was **the consecrated bread**. This included twelve loaves that were changed out in the tabernacle every Sabbath day (Lev. 24:5-9). The priests would then eat the old bread for themselves. Here, though, David took the old bread.

As Jesus noted, it was **lawful only for priests to eat** the bread. In one sense David was God’s anointed, but he **also gave some to his companions**. Technically that was a violation. Therefore, if the Pharisees were going to condemn Jesus, they would also need to condemn David—something God did not do.

Ahimelech’s actions were unorthodox but merciful. Rather than getting caught up in a web of rules and regulations, the priest looked at the situation and acted as he believed God would act. He showed compassion and demonstrated respect for the intent of the law.

Rules and traditions have their place and should be honored but should never get in the way of doing right. The example of David and Ahimelech provided a precedent that Jesus used to make His point. If David was freed from the legal restrictions in his situation, Jesus certainly had the power to act as He did and allow His followers to meet a basic need of life.

What are some rituals we observe that draw people closer to Christ? Which ones might push people farther away from Him?

VERSE 5

Jesus returned to the subject of the Sabbath. He plainly stated that He, the ***Son of Man***, held authority over the Sabbath and its laws. *Son of Man* was a familiar Messianic title that Jesus often used for Himself. In addition to being a claim of special authority, it also carried a claim of deity. Jesus wasn't just saying that He was the long-awaited One *from* God; He was also letting people know that He *is* God. It was a statement of deity and a claim to be greater than the Mosaic law itself.

Because He is equal to God the Father in every way, He also is ***Lord of the Sabbath***. As such, He has the authority to interpret the law correctly—even if that interpretation ran contrary to the traditions of the religious leaders.

Jesus' claim left everyone with a choice. They could either stick with interpretations of the law designed by man, or they could choose to follow the meaning designed by the Creator and Sustainer of the law.

DO GOOD ON THE SABBATH? (LUKE 6:6-11)

⁶ On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled.

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. 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. 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?" 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. ¹¹ But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

VERSES 6-7

After the confrontation in the grain field, Jesus' relationship with the religious leaders continued on a downward spiral. He kept doing God's will, and their suspicions kept growing. This led to another battle on ***another Sabbath***.

At first, things appeared normal. As was His habit, Jesus visited the local synagogue and taught about the kingdom of God. Luke noted

the presence of a man whose hand was **shriveled**. It is not clear if the man was born with the infirmity, if it was caused by an accident, if his hand was paralyzed, or if he suffered from some kind of atrophy. Whatever the nature of his infirmity, the man's presence gave Jesus another opportunity to share God's perspective on the Sabbath.

This time, the **Pharisees** were joined by some **scribes**—experts in the law of Moses. These leaders were paying close attention to Jesus. One might expect them to be listening carefully to His teaching and judging His words. Luke emphasized they were **watching him closely**. They wanted to see if He was going to violate Sabbath law again.

The presence of the disabled man raised the possibility that Jesus would perform a healing miracle. They knew Jesus would probably have compassion on the man and that would give them another opportunity to find **a reason to accuse Jesus**. The accusation they sought was a legal claim to be used in court.

The leaders were eager to turn Jesus' own mercy and grace against Him. If He healed the man, He would be practicing medicine on the Sabbath. According to the leaders' rules, that was not allowed.

It should be noted that Jesus' enemies never doubted His ability to heal the man. Their only question was whether He would heal on the Sabbath. If He did, they would view that as a validation of their beliefs that His power was demonic rather than divine since no godly prophet would profane the Sabbath.

How does the situation faced by Jesus compare to ways believers are critiqued by non-believers today?

VERSES 8-11

Their scheme did not catch Jesus by surprise because he **knew what they were thinking**. Luke was likely making a reference to Jesus' deity and omniscience. As the Son of God, Jesus could discern the motivations and hearts of individuals.

It's possible that the scribes and Pharisees had arranged for the man to be present as part of their scheme—something Jesus would have recognized. If so, He was willing to play along with their plan. Jesus was

not falling into a trap set by His enemies; He was in complete control of the situation. He turned their evil idea into a teachable moment.

Jesus directed His next comments to the leaders. Instead of immediately healing the man, He asked them a simple question: ***which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?*** The religious leaders were so wrapped up in keeping the law that they missed the person at the center of their “test.” In contrast, Jesus saw an opportunity to do good for someone in need. Doing nothing was the equivalent of doing evil.

Of course, Jesus knew the answer to His question. The scribes and Pharisees had already proven they cared more about their rules than the person. Any attempt on Jesus’ part to help the man on that day would violate the religious leader’s definition of the Sabbath.

Luke pointed out that Jesus looked around at the leaders. He may have been waiting for a response, but He also was letting the truth of His question sink into the hearts of whoever would receive it. Mark’s Gospel notes that Jesus was angered by the leaders’ lack of compassion (Mark 3:5). When He got no response, Jesus proved that He is Lord of the Sabbath by restoring the man’s hand.

Ironically, Jesus never did any work; He simply told the man what to do. But Jesus refused to be bound by the religious leaders’ misguided ideas about the Sabbath. He saw a man in need and met the need. Ministering to those who were hurting fulfilled His commission as the Messiah (Isa. 61:1-2).

The scribes and Pharisees were ***furious***. Instead of being happy for the man who had been healed, they were furious at Jesus for questioning—and violating—their ideas about the Sabbath. Jesus had crossed a line in the minds of the religious leaders. As a result, they ***began to discuss with one another*** what they needed to do next. Specifically, they took their first steps toward plotting against Jesus’ life (Mark 3:6).

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Christian and Social Order*

Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love (1 Thess. 3:12).

APPLY THE TEXT

- Some people place keeping a religious ritual above all else.
- Jesus is Lord over all of His creation.
- Believers must place human needs above ritual practices.

What religious practices and rituals do you need to evaluate in light of today's study? What action should you take in light of that evaluation?

**What serves as the standard for your rituals and traditions?
How can your rituals and traditions reflect to a greater degree
Jesus' lordship over His creation?**

**What can you and the members of your Bible study group do to make
sure you are putting the needs of others above rituals and traditions?
What changes do you need to make in your group?**

PRAYER NEEDS
