

LUKE 6: THE WAY OF LOVE AS THE HEART OF OUR OBEDIENCE

1. Two Incidents Showing Opposition to Jesus Over Perceived Violations of Sabbath Regulations

A. Jesus Is Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:1-5):

What did the Pharisees think was unlawful about what Jesus' disciples were doing?

- (1) The principle goes back to **Lev. 19:9-11a, 18; Deut. 23:24-25**. We see in these verses God's concern for social justice, for the vulnerable (i.e., the poor, widows, orphans, aliens, etc.).
- (2) As for the disciples in our passage, the Pharisees would say that what they're doing constitutes harvesting – and worse, harvesting (working!) on the Sabbath.
- (3) It seems silly to us that they would consider the disciples' eating in this way "harvesting," and we might conclude that Jesus is intending to show us that the Sabbath, and Sabbath observance, doesn't really matter all that much. But that's not the case at all.
 - (a) We are called to remember the Sabbath day and to keep it holy per the fourth commandment (**Ex. 20:8-11**). The moral law, summarily contained in the Ten Commandments, is still binding on Christians today.
 - (b) The Sabbath, **first**, is the one day each week when it is our duty and privilege to acknowledge, worship, and glorify God as our Creator and Redeemer; **second**, is God's gift of mandated rest, for us, for our spiritual recharge and renewal – a beautiful and beneficial pattern built into the fabric of creation itself; and **third**, is the foundation of a just social order, as we consider that the fourth commandment is the pivot commandment, i.e., the last one expressing our duty to God, and at the same time the first one expressing our duty to one another. The first principle of God's people for how they are to love one another is that they are to *not* treat one another like they were treated in Egypt, as slaves who were given no rest, but rather, that everyone without exception (even the cattle!) will be given a day of rest for rest, recharge, renewal, and worship of the Living and True God. This still matters!
- (4) So Jesus is not abolishing the principle of Sabbath observance, but rather is directing us to the wise and God-glorifying way of Sabbath observance, which attends to **the weightier matters of the law**, and which shifts us away from scrupulosity in observance of rules and regulations, toward adherence to the principles of the thing.
- (5) In his answer to the Pharisees' complaint, Jesus cites biblical precedent for his disciples' actions. (See **1 Sam. 21:1-6**).
- (6) The Pharisees understood that it is lawful to override Sabbath regulations in order to save and preserve life (see **Luke 14:5-6**; surgery, the Yom Kippur War, etc.). These are works of necessity. But was it really *necessary* that the disciples eat? And Jesus' answer: Is it not the weightier matter that they should eat and be restored? Thus, Jesus' words in **Mark 2:27**: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." (See also **John 7:22-24**.)
- (7) Thus, it is not just **works of necessity**, but also **works of mercy**, that are permitted on the Sabbath – indeed, not just permitted, but specially called for and encouraged as a way of glorifying God by loving one's neighbor. Right Sabbath observance consists less in scrupulosity in resting for myself, and still less in devising legalistic workarounds to get a lot of stuff done while claiming to rest; but rather *in bringing that rest to others* as we are able, and then resting, together, in the presence of Almighty God.
- (8) There remains one still deeper principle here. In raising the example of David and his men, this wasn't just some ordinary person, but the anointed king of Israel. So too with Jesus, and far more so! Jesus is the King, the anointed one, the Christ, and he is traveling with his warband, his disciples, who will give their lives in the service of the Kingdom.

- (9) He is the King whose very life and example reveals the deep and right observance of the law! Thus, **Luke 6:5**: “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

B. A Man with a Withered Hand (Luke 6:6-11):

- (1) The Pharisees’ objection was simple: the man’s hand would still be withered tomorrow! You could have waited one day, Jesus, without breaking any rules. Then we’d be just fine. Strictly speaking, healing him today wasn’t necessary, and therefore doesn’t qualify as a work of necessity.
- (2) But Jesus demonstrates that on the Sabbath it IS lawful to do good, to save life, to restore and bring wholeness and healing.
- (3) Thus, we are to conform ourselves to the principles of the law and to attend carefully to the weightier matters of the law. As we’ve seen, in the case of the Sabbath, this means that we are called to bring rest to others where and when we are able to do so, and to then share that rest, in joyful fellowship with God and one another.
- (4) The Pharisees’ response to this healing – this restoration of a man’s life – is not joy, but fury. Jesus here shows us how rightly to love our neighbor; the Pharisees definitively do not. (See **Rom. 13:8-10**.)

2. Jesus Calls the Twelve Apostles (Luke 6:12-16):

- (1) Jesus going out to the mountain all night to pray. God the Son praying to God the Father!
- (2) The Twelve (symbolizing Israel, ALL Israel, all the children of Abraham, the Israel of God).

3. Jesus Ministers to a Great Multitude (Luke 6:17-19):

Note where the crowds are coming from: among other places, from Tyre and Sidon. Jesus’ power and message is being received by Jews and Gentiles alike.

4. The Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20-49):

When we speak of living by principles rather than by rules, what’s to keep us from going off the rails? What is the guiding principle, if you will, to guide us in our conforming to the principles of God’s word? Jesus gives us the answer to that question in the Sermon on the Plain.

My view: this is a different occasion from the Sermon on the Mount (**Matt. 5-7**) – although very similar in content, like a stump speech, and delivered during the same period of early ministry in Galilee, nevertheless with significantly different emphases. In other words, the Sermon on the Plain is important in its own right. It’s not just the short, incomplete version of the Sermon on the Mount!

A. Blessings and Woes (Luke 6:20-26):

This serves as the introduction, teaching us that God’s evaluation of our circumstances are definitively different than that of the world. It is a jolting reorientation of our perspective, calling us to consider things not from the vantage of worldliness, which equates wealth and well-fed-ness with blessing, but from that of God, in which suffering in a fallen world is in fact sometimes a powerful mark of faithfulness and blessing! (See **James 1:3-4**; **Rev. 2:9**; and **Rev. 3:17**.)

B. Love Your Enemies (Luke 6:27-36):

OR: How to be like God the Father: Love your enemies – that is his work, and ours!)

We are called to be like our heavenly Father, who is gracious to send rain on the righteous and the unrighteous alike, who is merciful, whose kindness is a patience that leads to repentance. Christian ethics consist in imaging the love and character of the Father. (See **Matt. 5:14, 16**).

In the same manner that Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, revealed the deeper implications of full obedience to the sixth and seventh commandments (i.e., the linkage of anger with murder and of lust with adultery), so in this passage, Jesus reveals the deeper implications of full obedience to the Greatest Commandment. We know that are to love the LORD our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. But how? What does that mean? Answer: we are to love like God the Father.

This is not a matter of warm and fuzzy feelings. Nor are we called to be unwise as to the sinful motives of sinful people. Nor is it a call to pacifism, or passivity in the face of abuse or injustice. It is love as a verb not a noun, a thing that is done, rooted in the will. It is an intentional determination to respond to life in this fallen world as Christ did, not as the world does, with wise love, HOLY love, gracious, merciful love, rooted in the fact of our being loved BY God the Father and called to love LIKE God the Father. (See **1 Pet. 2:21-24; 3:9; 4:19.**)

C. Judging Others, and a Tree and Its Fruit (Luke 6:37-45):

OR: How NOT to be like God the Father: Do not judge others – that’s his work, *not ours!*

One of the most misapplied passages in Scripture. Used against Christians for showing any discernment with regard to sin at all. Of course, we must still be on guard against the ever-present threat of legalism – the sin of adding to God’s word what God himself didn’t add, and in this way, presuming to be more holy than God – holiness without love. But I would argue that the greatest crisis of our era, both within and without the church, is the threat of license – the sin of subtracting from God’s word, of presuming to be more loving than God himself – of love without holiness.

We are to judge within the church, and we are clearly to distinguish between what is sin and what is not sin. BUT! We are not to presume to act as God and exclude anyone from the hope of salvation in Christ while they have life and breath.

We are people who attend to our own logs before addressing the specks in the eyes of others. That is, we are to be people cognizant of our own sinfulness and need. And be warned: “out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.” We are sinners. But we are saved by a mighty Savior, faithful to save. Look to him, and rest in him alone for your salvation. And remembering our own need of grace keeps us humble as we consider the sinful unworthiness of others.

D. Build Your House on the Rock (Luke 6:46-49):

OR: We are to be like God the Father by being like God the Son!

We are to image God the Father by imaging God the Son, conforming our lives to the pattern of his Word and way, looking to what he did and said, and striving to do likewise. As we become more like the Master, we more and more faithfully reflect the love of the Father, for glory and blessing.

We are called to trust in the Word of God, even more than our own feelings. We are called to found our very life and hope in it, trusting that God who created us and redeemed us, who daily equips and restores us, knows our needs and loves us even more than we ourselves do.

Amen!