

Christ vs. the Pharisees on Keeping the Sabbath #2

Luke 6:6-11; Psalm 17:6-7

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Has Jesus appointed our weekly Sabbath to be a day of INACTIVITY? Is the rest to which we are called to observe each Lord's Day, a rest of IDLENESS or LAZINESS, doing nothing or sleeping the day away? Hardly! The Lord's Day is for the Christian to be the most exciting day of the week (not a day of boring inactivity)—but the day in which we gather with our brothers and sisters in Christ to meet with our great and glorious God in order to exalt Him. We are to be very active in our praise, in our worship, in being instructed in His truth. We are to be very active in our joy and also in our mercy shown to others (as we shall see today).

Last Lord's Day, we saw from God's Word that we are called by the Lord to rest from our recreations, amusements, buying and selling, and all unnecessary work that we might be active in deeds of worship, deeds of necessity, and deeds of mercy ("not doing our own ways, nor finding our own pleasure, nor speaking our own words" Isaiah 58:13). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (21:8) summarizes our duty to the Lord in these words:

This sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord, when men, after a due preparing of their hearts, and ordering of their common affairs before-hand, do not only observe an holy rest all the day from their own works, words, and thoughts about their worldly employments and recreations; but also are taken up the whole time in the publick and private exercises of his worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy.

Let us consider today yet another false interpretation of the Sabbath that led the Pharisees to add their tradition to God's commandment ("Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy" Exodus 20:8). The main points from our text this Lord's Day are the following: (1) Jesus Shows Mercy on the Sabbath (Luke 6:6); (2) The Pharisees Object to Showing Mercy on the Sabbath (Luke 6:7-9); and (3) The Outcome of Showing Mercy on the Sabbath (Luke 6:10-11).

I. Jesus Shows Mercy on the Sabbath (Luke 6:6).

A. Jesus did not keep the Sabbath by merely attending worship and then doing whatever He wanted to do the rest of the day. He filled His Sabbath days with acts of necessity (such as eating to satisfy the needs of the body as we saw last Lord's Day, cf. Luke 6:1-5), with acts of piety and worship (such as meeting publicly to worship God cf. Luke 6:6), and with acts of mercy (such as healing those in need, cf. Luke 6:6-11). Although the Sabbath rest was not a day wherein He was employed in recreation, entertainment, buying and selling, or unnecessary work, yet it was a day filled with holy activity in worship, instruction, fellowship, and mercy. If this sounds boring, why do you want to go to heaven? Just to escape hell? Or do you want to glorify and enjoy God? Be taught of Him and commune with Jesus and with all God's people for all eternity?

B. One Sabbath day, Jesus entered the synagogue to teach the people concerning God's kingdom as was His custom (Luke 4:16). There in attendance was a poor, helpless man whose hand was completely withered (literally, dried up, shriveled up). He was not looking for a reason to avoid worship and stay at home. His body may have been deformed, but his soul desired to be with the Lord and God's people.

1. Whether his withered hand was due to some form of paralysis, a severe case of arthritis, or some injury he had sustained, the Scripture does not say. Beside the pain he experienced, it was no doubt an unsightly, contorted infirmity upon which to look. The net effect of this condition was that he had no use of his hand, and to make matters worse, it was his "right hand" that was withered (Luke 6:6). The right hand was

considered the hand of strength (Exodus 15:6; Psalm 89:13).

2. At this time in history in which nearly all work involved manual labor, he was unable to work in order to support himself or his family (if he had one). Without the use of his hand, he was consigned to a life of begging and being supported by others. He might as well have had no hand at all, for his hand was a dead member—it was lifeless.

3. But the mercy of the Lord found this desperately needy man. And the mercy of the Lord found this desperately needy man on the Sabbath. Was this poor, helpless man to be ignored because it was the Sabbath, or was the mercy of God to be poured out freely upon this man in all of its richness because it was the Sabbath? After all, Jesus could have made an appointment to heal him the following day (to avoid conflict with the Pharisees). Why would the Pharisees object?

II. The Pharisees Object to Showing Mercy on the Sabbath (Luke 6:7-9).

A. Just as the Pharisees had objected to the disciples taking an ear of corn from a stalk and eating it on the Sabbath (in violation of their man-made laws which they imposed upon others without biblical warrant), so the Pharisees likewise object here in Luke 6:7 to Christ healing on the Sabbath (claiming it was an unnecessary work that could wait until the Sabbath had passed).

1. The elders of the Pharisees had established various man-made regulations in which they defined what types of medical services might be rendered on the Sabbath to those who were ill. These laws were established by mere tradition of the elders, not by God in Scripture.

2. For example, a fractured bone could not be splinted on the Sabbath; however, cold water could be poured on a sprained hand or foot. A cut finger might be bandaged with a plain bandage, but no healing ointment could be applied. One who had a sore throat could not gargle with oil on the Sabbath, but he may swallow the same oil as a part of his meal on the Sabbath, and if that cured the sore throat, it was lawful. If the life of one was in danger, medical help could be administered, but for anything less, it must wait until the Sabbath was over.

3. Thus, because the healing of a man with a withered hand was not deemed to be a life and death situation, it was unlawful to heal this man on the Sabbath (according to the Pharisees). Their position in regard to showing mercy on the Sabbath is summarized in the words of the ruler of the synagogue in Luke 13:14. The Sabbath according to the Pharisees was NOT a day to show mercy to your neighbor.

4. Jesus condemns the Pharisees, but why? They had added their own man-made regulations and had imposed them upon others, which had the effect of destroying the true purpose of the Sabbath: (1) to glorify and enjoy God in worship, and (2) to show mercy to others through help and fellowship. They were destroying the joy of the Lord on the Sabbath by adding to the commandments of God their own man-made regulations.

B. When Jesus walked into the synagogue on that Sabbath day, a group of Pharisees were seated there and had come with the specific design of catching Him in some error or violation of their laws (Luke 6:7).

1. They had not come to be taught by Jesus, but had come looking for some offense in Christ to justify their own unbelief.

2. Dear ones, why have you come this Lord's Day? I pray you have come not to take offense at the truth preached. I pray you have not come to be a mere observer, but that you have come this Sabbath to worship the Lord God in all of His power, wisdom, righteousness, love, mercy, and truth. The Sabbath for the Pharisees was about them and their man-made regulations. However, the biblical Sabbath is all about the greatness of God and the littleness of man. The Sabbath is all about exalting God, not you or me. The gospel of Jesus Christ reveals not man's greatness and glory (but rather our sin, shame, and helplessness), and reveals God mercy to undeserving sinners (like you and me).

C. Here was this poor man with the withered hand who was not in peril of dying, and could have waited until the following day to be healed. What should be done with him on the Sabbath?

1. Jesus commands the man to stand, though he had not even asked to be healed. He stood up for all to see his desperate and needy condition. As he does so, Jesus asks the Pharisees these questions that we find in Luke 6:9. Here the Lord defines acts of mercy on the Sabbath as being “good” and as “saving life”, whereas He defines the not doing of acts of mercy on the Sabbath to be “evil” and “to destroy” life. In other words, to omit such acts of mercy on the Sabbath is not neutral; it is evil and destructive of life. To care for those in need on the Sabbath is a mercy that Jesus loves to see in you—a true need (not a desire for help to do yard work or remodel a house—which is unnecessary work—as opposed to a broken water pipe or a trip to pick up a prescription).

2. Matthew’s Gospel (Matthew 12:11-12) gives to us further words that the Lord spoke to the Pharisees at this point (read them). The Lord says in effect, “You hypocrites, you show more mercy to your animals on the Sabbath than to your neighbor in need.”

3. Christ was condemning the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and double standard. They loved their animals more than this poor man whose need was great (cf. Jonah cared more for a plant that God gave to him for shade than for the souls of the entire city of Nineveh).

4. The Pharisees took offense at the truth, and yet Jesus spoke it and performed the healing anyway. Dear ones, we cannot allow the truth to suffer even if others are offended by it. To speak the truth in love and live it in love is in itself both faithfulness to Jesus and a mercy to those who hear it. Who knows how the Lord will use His truth in the lives of others. Whatever comes our way by way of persecution, we cannot sacrifice the truth of God’s Word for our own convenience or comfort—the souls of others are at stake (2 Timothy 2:10).

III. The Outcome of Showing Mercy on the Sabbath (Luke 6:10-11).

A. Jesus would not allow the offense taken by the Pharisees, an offense which had been so soundly answered, to restrain Him from showing mercy to this needy man. Listen to His words spoken to this poor man: Luke 6:10. Acts of mercy are always lawful to perform on any day of the week, but especially on the Sabbath day. Why? Because the Sabbath is that day of the week in which we particularly remember the mercy of God toward us in sending Jesus to be our Savior. We celebrate the mercy of Jesus in rescuing us from our hopeless estate of sin each Sabbath, for Christ’s resurrection demonstrates that He is the Son of God and that His sacrifice for the sins of His people was accepted by the Father (otherwise He would have remained in the grave).

B. What acts of mercy ought you to be exercising on the Sabbath? Words of encouragement to the discouraged, notes of love and comfort to the oppressed, meals for those who are ill, helping hands for those who are in need of assistance along the road (a need that is out of someone’s control), helping feet for those who must get to a doctor, who are facing hardships and trials, invitations to fellowship with or to meet with the lonely, the bedridden, the prisoner, and opportunities to take the gospel of salvation to family and friends.

C. In conclusion, here we see so clearly our helpless estate to rescue ourselves from the infirmity of sin that disables us before God.

1. Just as this infirmed man was helpless to work for himself because his right hand (the hand of power) was withered, so likewise are you unable to work and present before the Lord anything that He would accept as righteous. It was Jesus that sought out this man with the withered hand. It is Jesus that comes to rescue and save the sinner, and not the sinner that seeks out Jesus. You cannot even reach out to receive by faith that gift of salvation with that withered hand until God grants you faith and heals your

withered hand to receive His free gift. What you and I need is God's mercy. Without mercy, we are lost and condemned.

2. You will never be rescued by Jesus until you see yourself as spiritually having a withered hand that is helpless to rescue yourself by your own works. You must look to the almighty right hand of God alone who is mighty to save as your only hope of eternal salvation (Psalm 17:6-7). The Lord's Day speaks of God's mercy to us. Let it likewise be a day in which we show mercy to others who are in need.

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