

CONTROVERSIES REGARDING THE SABBATH

TEXT: LUKE 6:1-11

Introduction:

1. One of the big issues in the Christian life is the issue of Sabbath-keeping. Groups such as the Seventh Day Adventists insist that we are to keep the fourth commandment – “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex. 20:8). To them this means keeping the Saturday sabbath.
2. Most Orthodox Jews are very punctilious in their Sabbath-observance. Some of the more pushy ones have intimidated and bullied shopkeepers (even Gentile ones) in my neighborhood to close down on Saturdays.
3. A few weeks ago, seven Orthodox Jewish children were killed in a fire in their Brooklyn home. The fire was sparked by a hot plate that was kept on all weekend because Orthodox Jews are not allowed to cook on the stove or turn appliances on or off on the sabbath.
4. Our Lord dealt with the sabbath issue head-on, and the Pharisees hated Him for it (Luke 6:2, 7, 11).
5. Our Lord rebuked the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and spiritual blindness, and He declared that He is “Lord also of the sabbath” (Luke 6:5; cf. John 5:18).
6. Our Lord was declaring Himself God, because God had established the sabbath way back in Genesis 2.
7. Before we study this text tonight, let me state that I firmly believe that the Saturday sabbath was for the Jews and is not for the church age.
8. Revelation 1:10 refers to “the Lord’s Day.” The Lord’s Day is not the Jewish sabbath. The Lord’s Day is the first day of the week, the day our Lord rose from the dead.

I. UNDERSTANDING THE SABBATH PRINCIPLE

1. On this particular sabbath day, our Lord and His disciples were passing through some cornfields, and His disciples started plucking some corn (Luke 6:1).
2. Since they were not using a sickle, they were not violating the law. Deuteronomy 23:25 says, “When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour’s standing corn.”
3. But it was the sabbath day and so the Pharisees accused them of “unlawful” behaviour – i.e., working on the sabbath day (6:2).

4. Before we examine our Lord's response to their accusation, it would help if we considered the sabbath principle. Our Lord said, in Mark 2:27, "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath."
5. The principle here is that God gave man the sabbath for man's benefit, and for man's blessing, not for his bondage.
6. Is the Lord's Day a blessing for you or is it a burden? If it is not a blessing, then you better examine yourself spiritually. The Lord's Day is a foretaste and a prototype of heaven.
7. The sabbath principle goes all the way back to Genesis 2:2, where the Bible says: "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made."
8. So the sabbath day was a day of rest. Our Lord said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).
9. Benjamin Disraeli, the great British statesman, said: "Of all divine institutions, the most divine is that which secures a day of rest for man. I hold it to be the most valuable blessing conceded to man."
10. The sabbath was never intended to prohibit works of necessity or mercy (cf. Luke 13:14-16; 14:5, 6).
11. This principle applies to the Lord's Day. Some people (e.g. policemen, firemen, doctors, nurses, etc.) must work on Sunday.
12. Personally, I do not think Christian policemen, doctors, and nurses should work on Sunday. There are enough unsaved, worldly policemen, doctors and nurses around to cover things so the Christian ones can go to church and enjoy their Lord's Day.
13. I mentioned before that the sabbath was for the nation Israel (Ex. 31:12-17). If you search the New Testament carefully you will not find any instructions for Christians to observe the sabbath day.
14. However, the sabbath principle certainly applies to the church. Scofield says, "The Christian first day perpetuates in the dispensation of grace the principle that one-seventh of the time is especially sacred" (p. 1011).
15. I agree here with Dr. Scofield – "one-seventh" – not just an hour or two but all day Sunday is the Lord's Day.
16. Many of the old-time Christians (and even some today) referred to Sunday as the Christian sabbath. For example, Spurgeon (who got much of his theology from the Puritans) frequently preached against those who defiled the sabbath (Sunday) day. But I think it

is more Scriptural to call Sunday the Lord's Day. We should be careful not to blur the clear lines of distinction between Israel and the church.

17. Interestingly, nine of the ten commandments are repeated throughout the New Testament, but the fourth commandment is not. "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8-11).
18. The application for us today is to keep the Lord's Day holy. I realize that as Christians every day is holy unto the Lord, but the Lord's Day should be uniquely set apart as a day devoted entirely to the things of God. The principle: God created us and He knows we need a day for rest and worship (Gen. 2:3; Deut. 5:14).
19. Genesis 2:3 says, "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made."
20. "God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it," and He has now blessed and sanctified the first day, the day Christ arose from the dead.

II. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND ALL THE COUNSEL OF GOD

1. Let us look at the words of our Saviour in response to His hostile opponents, "Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him..." (Luke 6:3).
2. Our Lord took an event in the life of David, and applied it to His situation. But many Christians today are incapable of applying Scripture to every day life.
3. And this is a common problem among those that are religious but lost – they do not really understand the Bible. There has always been a problem with Biblical illiteracy, but it is getting worse and worse.
4. The prophet Hosea declared, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).
5. Jesus said, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matt. 22:29).
6. So our Lord reminded the Pharisees about an incident in the life of David, recorded in I Samuel 21. David made his share of mistakes and blunders, but in this case our Lord says he was completely justified in eating the shewbread (Luke 6:3-5).

7. God did not rebuke David because at that time things were not right in Israel. David had already been anointed King (I Sam. 16:13), but he was being hunted down like a criminal by Saul.
8. And so he was forced to take the shewbread in order to feed his men and himself (I Sam. 21:1-6).
9. It is interesting that our Lord uses this as an illustration – things were not right in David’s day because he was the King but was rejected and persecuted by Saul. And things were not right in our Lord’s day because He was the King but was rejected and persecuted by the Pharisees.
10. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said unto him, "Thou sayest" (Matt. 27:11).
11. Pilate said to the angry mob, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15).
12. "And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written" (John 19:19-22).
13. Again, I would like to quote Scofield: “Jesus here is not so much the rejected *Saviour* as the rejected *King*; hence the reference to David” (p. 1012).

III. RITUAL IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR REGENERATION.

1. The Pharisees were unregenerate religionists, and therefore they could not understand spiritual things. It is very easy for people to get caught up in rituals and traditions. Many of you recall the story about the two Roman Catholics who robbed a bank. During the robbery they shot and killed one of the bank tellers. They drove away and after driving for a couple of hours, they finally stopped at a restaurant to get a bite to eat. One of the crooks ordered a steak and the second crook rebuked him: “Hey, what are you doing? It’s Friday, you can’t eat meat!”
2. I recall working with a dirty-mouthed RC who went out at lunch time to get ashes put on his head. When I commented on the smudge on his forehead, he was "filled with madness" (6:11).

3. Albert Barnes said, They "were filled with madness. Probably -- 1st. Because He had shown His power to work a miracle. 2nd. Because He had shown His power to do it contrary to what they thought was right. 3rd. Because by doing it he had shown that He was from God, and that they were therefore wrong in their views of the Sabbath. And, 4th. Because He had shown no respect to their views of what the law of God demanded. Pride, obstinacy, malice, and disappointed self-confidence were all combined, therefore, in producing madness."
4. A.T. Robertson said, "Here is rage that is kin to insanity" (*Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament*).
5. Sinners are all filled with madness, because only a madman would want to go to hell!
6. Many people prefer ritual as a substitute for regeneration. It is rather easy to get caught up in religious ritual (e.g. RCC, JW's, SDA, Orthodox Jews, Greek Orthodox, et al), but God looks at the heart of man. The Pharisees emphasized external religion, but our Lord looks at things much differently (Luke 6:6-11).
7. The Lord instituted the sabbath day; therefore He is the Lord of the sabbath day (Luke 6:5). Our Lord instituted the law; therefore He is the most qualified to interpret the true meaning of the law.

CONCLUSION:

1. One of the big problems we face today is many Christians are desecrating the Lord's Day. They go shopping, they play golf, they go fishing, they skip church, etc.
2. We often complain about the stores and the malls being open on the Lord's Day, but this would never have happened if Christians were living right. When Christians are weak and worldly and carnal and backslidden, then Satan advances.
3. During the Revolutionary War, George Washington insisted that his troops get some rest and go to church on the Lord's Day.
4. President Lincoln followed the same policy during the Civil War and so did President Wilson during WWI.
5. The president of France invited President Ulysses S. Grant to the horse races when he was visiting Paris but President Grant refused to go to a horse race on the Lord's Day.
6. President Teddy Roosevelt never missed attending church on Sunday. When he was going out of town on official business he always called his

pastor to let him know he wouldn't be there that Sunday but would attend some other church.

7. Let me point out a few contrasts between the Lord's Day and the sabbath day that might help you to better appreciate the Lord's Day.
8. The sabbath day is linked with the first creation. Genesis 2:2 says, "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made."
9. But the Lord's Day is linked with the new creation.
10. The sabbath day was a day of responsibility; but the Lord's Day is a day of privilege.
11. In the Old Testament, Jews were stoned to death for violating the sabbath (cf. Num. 15:32-36). In the New Testament, Christians are not punished for missing Sunday School or church but they miss out on a tremendous blessing.