

## Luke 6:1-19 • The Authority of Christ

### Introduction

When studying the Gospels it is very important to keep in mind that everything actually dovetails together. What comes before and after an event or teaching is nearly always related to it. Often a sign or wonder is actually an extension of the teaching that comes before and/or after it, and likewise a teaching or parable builds upon the sign or event coming before and/or after. Throughout this chapter we are presented with the contrast of those who reject Christ's authority versus those more accepting. But it is important to note that one of the most important underlying differences is in the way they treat God's Word. One of the chief characteristics which even to this day distinguish the difference between an authentic and false believer is how they apply or misapply God's Word, the very expression of His authority.

<sup>1</sup>Now it happened that He was passing through some grainfields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating the grain. <sup>2</sup>But some of the Pharisees said, "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"

<sup>3</sup>And Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him, <sup>4</sup>how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?" <sup>5</sup>And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

### [Read v.1-5: Jesus the Ruler]

#### Q: Was it illegal for the disciples to do what they did?

A: No. In fact, the Torah actually specifies that this could take place. The only thing the Law specifically prohibits is the use of a sickle. (Deut. 23:25)

#### Q: Then why do the Pharisees claim "it is not lawful"?

A: If we look carefully at what they said, their actual accusation is that it "is not lawful **on the Sabbath**". They are not upset about **WHAT** is taking place by **WHEN** it is taking place.

**Background:** By Jesus' day the religious authorities had created more than 2,000 rules in their attempt to define what could and could not be done on the Sabbath in order not to break the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment. Rather than being simple guidelines or suggestions, these were eventually given the full force of the Law as if they were mandated from God instead of created by man. Jesus refers to these as "traditions".

#### Q: Why do you suppose Jesus answered them in this way? Why doesn't He just quote the Law and be done with it?

A: He is addressing the greater issue of how to apply God's Word the right way and he takes a parallel example from Scripture itself which mirrors the real-life situation taking place.

**Application:** There are 8 categories of God's Word, each expounded upon in Psalm 119: "commandments" ("mitzvah"), "law" ("torah"), "ordinances/judgments" ("mishpat"), "precepts" ("piqqud"), "statutes" ("choq"), "testimonies" ("edah"), "ways" ("derek"), and "word" ("dabar"). When something was not specifically spelled out in God's Word, it was supposed to be handled by an "ordinance" or "judgment", which is the practical application of the Law. They were not to simply make up more laws. Someone seeking to obey God from the heart will earnestly seek to apply the spirit of the Law; those seeking to conform to a religion will pile up rule upon rule in order to avoid dealing with how it should actually be applied and the first casualty is almost always personal relationships.

#### Q: Did David break any laws?

A: There were legal limits on travel during a given Sabbath and the bread was supposed to be consumed by the priests alone, so there is most certainly violations of the written Law. But there are other additional rules or "traditions" associated with this which are intimated to have been violated, such as the fact that the bread was only supposed to be consumed at a certain time on that Sabbath day. Jesus actually shows them that the ultimate example of David was in violation of both.

**Q: What might be suggested by this example of priests doing work on the Sabbath?**

A: In the parallel account of this event in Matthew is included Christ's admonition, "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent?" (Mt. 12:5) It is another example of the difference between the letter of the Law and the spirit of the Law intended to show them they were missing the point.

**Q: But what is actually the far greater statement Jesus is making about Himself in offering, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath"?**

A: Jesus is affirming that He is the Messiah, someone greater than David to begin with.

**Point:** Jewish interpretation of the Law grants that He who has made the Law can abrogate the Law as He desires. For instance, in the battle of Jericho it would have been impossible to march around the city for seven consecutive days without violating the Sabbath, yet Hebrew scholars grant that since it was done so at God's command, no violation of God's Law was experienced. Jesus is actually making a very powerful statement here about His place in the Godhead.

**Application:** How does the following apply not just to this specific teaching but to your life in particular?

*When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.*

— Colossians 2:13–17

<sup>6</sup>On another Sabbath He entered the synagogue and was teaching; and there was a man there whose right hand was withered. <sup>7</sup>The scribes and the Pharisees were watching Him closely to see if He healed on the Sabbath, so that they might find reason to accuse Him. <sup>8</sup>But He knew what they were thinking, and He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And he got up and came forward. <sup>9</sup>And Jesus said to them, "I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?" <sup>10</sup>After looking around at them all, He said to him, "Stretch out your hand!" And he did so; and his hand was restored.

<sup>11</sup>But they themselves were filled with rage, and discussed together what they might do to Jesus.

**[Read v.6-11: Jesus the Healer]**

**Q: Right from the outset, what is wrong with the scribes and the Pharisees in this particular situation?**

1. They seem to have come to this Sabbath synagogue service not so much to worship God as to spy on Jesus. This shows a problem with their heart when it comes to obeying the commandments of the First Tablet summarized as loving God with all one's heart.
2. They acknowledge the plight of the crippled man but are willing to try and use God's Word to prevent him from being healed. This shows a problem with their heart when it comes to obeying the commandments of the Second Tablet summarized as loving neighbors as one's self.
3. They were trying to hold Jesus accountable to their own traditions instead of seeking the proper application of the actual written Word of God. It is really a battle for authority.

**Q: What is similar in the way Jesus chose to respond to the authorities both here and as he did in the previous account of a dispute on a Sabbath? Why doesn't Jesus just say, "You're wrong!" and be done with it?**

A: He is addressing the greater issue of how to apply God's Word the right way. Instead of asking if this might be a violation of the Sabbath

Law which would lead to a legalistic kind of interpretation, Jesus phrases the question so that it must be considered from a spiritual perspective: “*Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to destroy it?*” It goes to the heart of the real issue of whether one loves his neighbor or not, the greater requirement of the Law.

**Q: What is the greater teaching behind Jesus’ question? What does it teach in terms of the application of God’s Word?**

A: Neglecting an opportunity to do good – even on the Sabbath – is to actually do evil.

**Point:** Jesus turns the tables to show that by healing the man **He** is the one keeping the Law and by their opposition to it that **they** are the one’s actually breaking the Law.

**Application:** This miracle is actually an extension of a teaching which began in the grainfields. Both of the original tablets of the Law were supposed to be equally obeyed, to love God and to love others. But when someone begins to over-realize the love of God and make it the priority, they begin re-interpreting God’s Word in ways they think relieves them of this responsibility. Likewise those who over-realize the love of others develop a toothless social gospel that de-emphasizes the person and deity of Christ and ultimately the work of the cross. Our interpretation of God’s Word must hold these two great truths in equal tension to each other in order to properly effect biblical love.

**Q: They just witnessed Jesus performing an undisputed miracle before their very eyes. Why did this not change them and prove to them that they were wrong and Jesus was right?**

A: Signs and wonders work for renewal in hearts which are set on loving God; they work for judgment on hearts which are not. Their response confirms that it is not God’s Truth they are interested in, but defending their own traditions.

**Application:** These two Sabbath disputes combine to provide an example of what Christ teaches at the end of the Sermon of the Mount, the difference between hearers of the Law and doers. Have you noticed how “hearers” are most often revealed as those who can quote God’s Word, but are seldom seen putting it into practice?

<sup>12</sup>It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. <sup>13</sup>And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: <sup>14</sup>Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; <sup>15</sup>and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; <sup>16</sup>Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

**[Read v.12-16: Jesus the Master]**

**Q: What exactly is an “apostle”?**

A: The Greek word literally means “to send” and describes someone sent with a commission to perform a special task. It may best be summed up in the duties of an ambassador, someone sent to a people or nation to represent the interests of their king or leader.

*for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

— Ephesians 6:20

*“As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*

— John 17:18

**Q: Consider for a moment the context of this sequence of events, and the possibility that what is occurring here is related to the events leading up to it. Given the context, what might be the greater spiritual meaning of what is taking place?**

A: Those who were called by God as His Chosen People have so misapplied His Word that they not only are incapable of recognizing the Messiah when He comes, they actually become His enemies. Christ the Master now starts over by commissioning people He will train in the proper handling of God's Word to go forth and do the job at which Israel has so miserably failed. This is really the milestone for the beginning of the New Testament church.

**Application:** *Have you considered that if we fail to do what God has called us to do, that He will find someone else to complete the task in our place? Consider this in light of what was said through Isaiah...*

*So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth;  
It will not return to Me empty,  
Without accomplishing what I desire,  
And without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.  
— Isaiah 55:11*

<sup>17</sup>Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; and there was a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, <sup>18</sup>who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured. <sup>19</sup>And all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all.

**[Read v.17-19: Jesus the Example]**

**Q: Again, given the context of what Luke has written about to this point, what is so important about what Jesus is doing here?**

A: Jesus shows the Apostles by example the application of the Law by ministering to the people and addressing their needs, both physical and spiritual. It is the ultimate example of what James means when he says, "Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." (Ja. 2:17)

**Application:** *The religious authorities of the day claimed to have faith but institutionalized it to the degree that it constricted that part of the Law requiring love for others. Having taken the Gospel to and been rejected by them, Jesus takes it to those who will not only accept it, but apply the spirit of the Law as it was intended.*

### **Overall Application**

*Through these events Jesus revealed in very practical terms His authority confirming Him as the expected Messiah to come.*

- *Whereas the earthly leaders used their authority to rule at the expense of loving others, our Heavenly Leader used His authority as an example of how to fulfill the Law to love others.*
- *Whereas the earthly leaders could witness signs and wonders and remain unchanged by them because tradition meant more to them than truth, those willing to put the truth into practice experienced miracles and were transformed by them both physically and spiritually.*
- *When the earthly leaders so miserably failed at keeping the Law that they actually became a hindrance, Christ raised others who would properly apply God's Word in their place.*

*The authority of Christ as it applies to us is affirmed to the degree that we put the whole Word of God into practice, fulfilling the commandment...*

#### **Luke 6:1-19 • The Authority of Christ, Page 4 of 5**



*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another,  
even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.  
— John 13:34*

**Luke 6:1-19 • The Authority of Christ, Page 5 of 5**