

Reigns
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Luke 6:1-11 (also put a marker at Matthew 12:1)

Let me begin with a statement some might find shocking: Jesus was a deliberate rule-breaker! *“Whoa, hold on (you might say), Jesus was sinless.”* I didn’t say He sinned, I said He was a rule-breaker. He deliberately broke ritualistic religious rules made by overzealous, self-righteous men. We’ll see in this text that Jesus deliberately challenged the legalists of His day. He did this in order to declare that He is Lord and following Him isn’t about man-made rules, rituals, or customs, it’s about living out the commands of scripture to love God and love other people.

Let me challenge all of us with some questions:

Is our view of what it means to be a follower of Christ too small in Jesus’ eyes? Let me clarify the question: Is our view of what a Christian should or should not be or do more restrictive than Jesus’ perspective? When we have concerns (finding fault) about what we observe in other professing followers of Christ, are those concerns scriptural or cultural? Would Jesus be as offended as we are?

Big Idea: Jesus said He desires mercy over religious rituals (Mt. 12:7.) Because He is Lord, His followers should imitate Him by being concerned about the needs of people instead of obsessing over man-made ideas about “religion.”

¹ On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grainfields, his disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. ² But some of the Pharisees said, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?” ³ And Jesus answered them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?” ⁵ And he said to them, “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.” ⁶ On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was withered. ⁷ And the scribes and the Pharisees watched him, to see whether he would heal on the Sabbath, so that they might find a reason to accuse him. ⁸ But he knew their thoughts, and he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come and stand here.” And he rose and stood there. ⁹ And Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?” ¹⁰ And after looking around at them all he said to him, “Stretch out your hand.” And he did so, and his hand was restored. ¹¹ But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

- God’s gift of the Sabbath to His people is not up for debate, it’s in the “top 10” commandments given to Moses. God knows us better than we know ourselves so He knew His creation needed one day a week for rest.

- There is no indication in scripture that Jesus and His disciples were violating the commandment about the Sabbath or breaking any other commandment for that matter.
- The problem was that religious people had turned the Sabbath into a burden by adding 39 extra restrictions God never gave Moses.
- Jesus deliberately challenged the Pharisees regarding their Sabbath rules in order to declare His Lordship and deity as the Son of God.
- Remember, we've already seen that the Pharisees complained that He had no authority to forgive sin and He hung out with tax collectors and sinners. In fairness, *"[T]hey thought they were demonstrating faithfulness to God when, in fact, they misunderstood God's intentions regarding the Mosaic teachings...[their] arguments revealed their self-righteousness and lack of true spiritual understanding."*ⁱ
- What was so bad about the disciples eating some corn?
- *"It was not illegal for a hungry person to take some of his neighbor's fruit or grain, provided he did not fill a vessel or use a harvesting implement (Deut. 23:24–25). However, that was not what upset the Pharisees. What upset them was that the disciples had worked on the Sabbath Day!"*ⁱⁱ
- Jesus responded with the story of King David and his hungry men eating the "bread of presence" in the "house of God." David wasn't sinning.
- If you turn to Matthew's account in Matthew 12, Jesus threw in another argument and made a bold and important statement:

Matthew 12:5–8 (ESV)

⁵ Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? ⁶ I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. ⁷ And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

- Something greater than man-made religious rules had shown up! Jesus had arrived as Messiah and He values "mercy" over rituals (Hos. 6:6.)
- Another great Old Testament passage about this is Micah 6:6-8:

Micah 6:6–8 (ESV)

⁶ "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high...⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams...rivers of oil...my firstborn...⁸ He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

- Here's the real point: "The Son of Man (Jesus) is Lord of the Sabbath."
- Life Application Study Bible: *"When Jesus said that he was Lord of the Sabbath, he meant that he had the authority to overrule the Pharisees' traditions and regulations because he had created the Sabbath. The Creator is always greater than the creation."*ⁱⁱⁱ
- The Pharisees said, *"There he goes again claiming to be God!"* Indeed.

- Back to Luke 6 it's another Sabbath day as Jesus enters the synagogue.
- Some scholars speculate the man with the deformed hand was "planted" there by the Pharisees to try to trap Jesus, but He was on to them.
- Jesus had a question that would again twist them up: (V.9) *"I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?"* Flip back to Matthew 12:11 and 12: ¹¹ ...*"Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out?"*
- *"Some rabbis taught that, in life and death circumstances, it was permissible to work on the Sabbath (see the rabbinic work, the Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 148b).^{IV}*
- *Jesus said, "Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! [Then He answered their question] So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*
- Then to illustrate the concept of mercy over ritual Jesus healed the man.
- The Pharisees were foiled again and they were enraged again!
- Luke 6:1 says, they were "filled with fury."
- Matthew 12:14 says, they "called a meeting to plot how to kill Jesus."
- Apparently plotting murder in the synagogue was NOT one of the 39 things you couldn't do on the Sabbath.
- Warren Wiersbe writes: *"Any religious law that is contrary to mercy and the care of nature should be looked on with suspicion. God wants mercy, not religious sacrifice. He wants love, not legalism. The Pharisees who sacrificed to obey their Sabbath laws thought they were serving God. When they accused Christ and His disciples, they thought they were defending God. How like religious legalists today!"^V*
- *"Love, not legalism"* is a great line! Today's religious legalists think they are doing God's work when often it's not His agenda of love but their own agenda of sanctimonious condemnation of other Christ-followers.
- We can slip into this mindset if we aren't on guard about our attitudes.
- A funny, innocent illustration. My dear Mother loved everyone and was no legalist but she struggled with some of the changes in her church. She was upset when they stopped using the "Christian instruments (piano and organ.) When I spoke at her funeral I told her pastor that she had forgiven him for removing the "pulpit furniture" from the platform!" ☺
- That's a mild example of getting focused on culture rather than scripture.
- Here's what legalism usually looks like: *"Well I don't think a real Christian would dress like that, or go to that place, or go to THAT church!"* Is that based on scripture or culture?
- Over lunch one day I had a well-known preacher ask me with a snarl, *"Is that church 'seeker sensitive?'"* He looked like he smelled something bad. In fairness I think his concern was whether they taught the whole counsel of God about sin and holiness. Still, his attitude was interesting.
- Darrell Bock writes, *"Jesus in effect charges the Pharisees with legalism—that is, overapplying the law to such an extent that people are crushed or ignored. The sovereignty of a rigid rule becomes a yoke too*

great to bear (cf. Acts 15:10). Even today sometimes, in our efforts to defend the law, we break it...All too often when we discuss issues of form or style, we concentrate on legalism rather than matters involving explicit moral choices or correct theology. We must learn toleration and deference in such “neutral” topics, for each side is responsible before God for their actions and for pursuing a clear conscience before him (Rom. 14–15).^{vii}

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- The Life Application Study Bible poses a fair question for Christ-followers: *“Which would an objective observer say is more characteristic of your Christianity—the positives or the negatives? Are you more concerned about what people shouldn’t be doing than you are about advancing God’s kingdom? Is your way of being a Christian the only way? And what about your church? The Pharisees thought their religious system had all the answers. They could not accept Jesus because he did not fit into their system. Beware of thinking that you or your church has all the answers. No religious system is big enough to contain Christ completely or to fulfill perfectly all his desires for the world.”^{vii}*
- To be clear, legalism isn’t about how we look at unsaved people. We shouldn’t expect a pagan to act like a Christ-follower. This lesson is about our view of others who profess to be a believer.
- As I said at the beginning, we need to ask: Is my view of what a Christian should or should not be or do more restrictive than Jesus’ perspective?
- The Pharisees quoted their 39 rules and Jesus quoted scripture.
- When I have concerns (or begin finding fault) about what I observe in other professing followers of Christ, I need to ask myself, are those concerns scriptural or cultural? Would Jesus be as offended as I am?
- To be clear, this isn’t a call to give every professing believer a free pass on grossly sinful behavior. Refer to Matthew 18:15-17, Galatians 6:1-3, and 1 Corinthians 5:1–13 for examples of how believers should appropriately hold other believers accountable (scriptural not cultural.)
- When we are tempted to be offended by things other believers do that are not a violation of scripture, we need to remember what Jesus taught the Pharisees: *“...there is one here who is even greater than the Temple! ...[Y]ou would not have condemned my innocent disciples if you knew the meaning of this Scripture: ‘I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.’^{viii}*
- Jesus desires mercy over religious rituals. Because He is Lord, His followers should imitate Him by being concerned about the needs of people instead of obsessing over man-made ideas about “religion.”

ⁱ Explore the Bible Leaders Guide – Lifeway 2021

ⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 118). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

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- ⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 118). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Location 163877). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.
- ^{iv} Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [*Faithlife Study Bible*](#) (Mt 12:11). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- ^v Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 1, p. 42). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ^{vi} Bock, Darrell L.. Luke: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life (p. 181). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.
- ^{vii} Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 163883-163887). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.
- ^{viii} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#) (Mt 12:6–7). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.