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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“LAW AND GOSPEL”

Luke 6:1-11; 13:10-17

● The Lord Jesus said, {Lk 5:37-38} **“People do not pour new wine into old wineskins.”**

I did. I poured the new wine of the Gospel into my old wineskin of legalism. I professed to trust in God’s grace, but I acted as though salvation hinged on my obedience to certain rules and moral standards.

But, like new wine, life in Christ swells and expands. If we are not new and flexible to grow with it our souls will be torn apart and his life will **“run out of us.”**

○ Trying to earn forgiveness and eternal life nearly killed me. When I could strive no longer I cast myself on God’s mercy and kindness. I {Ro 7:4} **“died to the law through the body of Christ, that”** he might make me know and fill me with life.

We are saved by receiving grace through faith. We are not saved by obedience to the law.

○ But have you, as a Believer, tried living apart from the law? Have you ever {Gal 5:13, 18-21} **“[used] your freedom to indulge the sinful nature”**? Knowing **“you are not under the law”** have you ever misused your freedom to gratify desires that are contrary to the Holy Spirit: **“impurity... discord, jealousy... selfish ambition, dissensions...envy...and the like”**?

○ I have done so, and I am here to give witness that it is a recipe for emptiness and defeat. One cannot

disregard God’s commandments and, at the same time, follow Christ in any meaningful, fruitful, satisfying way. In the words of Galatians 5:21, **“those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”**

We need the law of God. {Pr 13:14} **“The [law]... is a foundation of life, turning a person from the snares of death.”**

We are saved by God’s grace, not by his law. Apart from God’s law, we are not saved.

What does this mean? How do we live between these two poles?

□ **Luke** chapters 6 and 13 record three scenes of conflict. On the surface these disputes are all about what is right and wrong to do on the Sabbath; digging deeper these conflicts concern the relationship of law to grace.

■ Scene 1 is Luke 6:1-5. The disciples are hungry, and as they pass with Jesus through a field they eat a little grain. Some Pharisees observe them and ask, **“Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?”**

The Pharisees are not protesting the disciples’ presence in the field. The word “trespass,” as it relates to property rights, appears nowhere in the written or the oral Law.

○ Nor are the Pharisees contesting the act of eating someone else’s grain. Deuteronomy 23:25 stipulates that **“If you enter your neighbor’s grain-field, you may pick kernels with your hands...”** The disciples are welcome to take as much as they need to satisfy their immediate hunger.

What the Pharisees are objecting to is the *timing* of the deed. The disciples “**pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands, and eat the kernels**” *on the Sabbath* and this, in the eyes of the Pharisees, is a flagrant violation of the Law.

? *What does Scripture say?*

○ The fourth great commandment instructs us to {Ex 20:8-11} “**Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work....**”

God’s Word forbids Sabbath labor. But did anyone hear the prohibition against what the disciples did? No. It is not to be heard in Exodus 20 or any other Scripture.

We do hear it in the *Mishnah*. This is a collection of statutes designed by the Pharisees to protect, clarify, and expand the application of biblical law.

Scripture provides us with a few broad Sabbath principles that require a degree of flexibility in interpretation and application. What is work? In what ways can I keep the Sabbath holy? Two equally devoted, equally reflective God-fearers might answer those questions somewhat differently.

In contrast, the *Mishnah* dispenses dozens of precisely defined Sabbath directives which leave little room for flexibility. One is, for the most part, either in submission to the *Mishnah* or not.

The chapter devoted to Sabbath law includes twenty-one pages of small, single-spaced type, and there are scores of additional Sabbath references scattered

throughout the book. The verse that pertains most directly to our text is *Shabbath 7:2*: “**The main classes of work are forty save one** [that is, 39]: **sowing [seed], plowing, reaping, binding sheaves, threshing, winnowing ...**” and the verse goes on to list 34 more classes of work.

In Luke 6 the disciples “**pick some heads of grain**” and this, the *Mishnah* calls reaping; they “**rub [the grain] in their hands**” and this is construed as threshing; they toss aside the husks of grain, and this is winnowing; finally, they “**eat the kernels**” and this is construed as food preparation, which the *Mishnah* forbids on the Sabbath. Hence the Pharisees ask, “**Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?**”!

Christ Jesus reminds them that when David was hungry he took “**the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat.**” He is not saying the law is wrong, much less is he authorizing us to desecrate holy things. He is affirming that the law is given to glorify God and benefit humankind, and since eating the sacred bread saved David, and David’s salvation glorified God, the act was in harmony with the underlying spirit of the law.

Then, in verse 5 he says: “**The Son of Man**” is **Lord of the Sabbath**” and, by extension, Sabbath law. His claim has enormous implications.

✍ Keep in mind that he cautions elsewhere {Mt 5:17}: “**Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish**

them but to fulfill them.” Messiah has come, not to end Sabbath law, but to guarantee that it fulfills its purpose.

✎ That purpose is wrapped up in *αγαπε* love. How does Messiah reply when a man asks, {Mt 22:36-40} **“which is the greatest commandment?”** **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all our mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”** The foundation and objective of the law is love for God and neighbor.

¶ As Jesus teaches in Mark 2:27, **“The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”**

Under the lordship of Christ Jesus, Sabbath law is restored to its proper role. It is put back into service to grace. Once again it is a blessing, not a burden.

□ The second and third scenes are similar, and we will take them together.

■ Scene 2 is in Luke 6:6-11. The Lord is teaching in a synagogue, and there is a man whose right hand is shriveled. Jesus says to some Pharisees there who are **“looking for a reason to accuse”** him: **“I ask you which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”** and then he restores the man’s hand.

The Pharisees should praise God. They should be amazed at Christ’s power. They should be happy for the man who has been healed. Instead they **“[begin] to discuss... what they might do to Jesus.”**

■ Scene 3 is Luke 13:10-17:

Jesus [is] teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman [is] there who [has] been crippled ... for eighteen years. She [is] bent over and [cannot] straighten up at all. Jesus... [says]... “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” ...he [puts] his hands on her, and immediately she [straightens] up and [praises] God.

There is no law against miraculous healings. But six verses in the *Mishnah* {*Shabbath* 8:1; 9:7, 10:1, 14:3-4; 22:6} ban every deliberate action to treat an illness or a disability on the Sabbath, unless it is to save a life.

The synagogue ruler is indignant. **“There are six days for work,”** he says to the congregation, **“So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.”**

Jesus corrects him: **“Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?”**

● This echoes his first recorded sermon at the synagogue in Nazareth {Lk 4:18-19}:

**“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom
for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”**

✎ There is a direct connection between Sabbath law and Messiah's kingdom mission of provision, liberation, healing and justice.

Jesus strikes down the Pharisee's legalistic application of the law, even as he affirms the commandment not to work on the Sabbath.

✎✎ Messiah has come, not to end the law, but to guarantee that it fulfills its purpose.

✎✎ The purpose of the law is wrapped up in love for God and for others.

✎✎ The law cannot be severed from Messiah's kingdom mission.

We are saved by grace; yet apart from God's law we are not saved. When the law is understood and enacted under the lordship of Christ Jesus, it is a potent means of his undeserved mercy and kindness.

When we obey God's law, not in an effort to earn salvation but as a response of discipleship, then we are pouring the new wine into new wineskins.