



# CAPITOL COMMISSION

## Jesus Interprets the Law (Luke 6:1-5)

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In our previous study in Luke, Jesus uses the illustration of new wine and old wineskins to show that the gospel is incompatible with any other religion or worldview. This means, we are not permitted to take the parts of Christianity we find acceptable and tack them onto our existing belief structure and assume this honors God. The religious leaders who confronted Jesus measured all that he said and all that he and his disciples did against the framework of their religious system, and found the son of God lacking. This is truly a sad reality, as the Gospel of John states, “*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him* (John 1:11).” We must ask ourselves, who defines what is acceptable from God’s perspective? Is it the laws of the land or the ethos of the culture which makes this determination? For the Christian, truth is defined by Jesus. He came to bear witness to it, and proclaimed in John 14:6 that he is the way, and the truth, and the life. What is acceptable, what is true, and what is true life is found only in Jesus. In our relative and pluralistic society this claim might seem extreme. Yet this is the Jesus of the Scriptures, the Jesus we are confronted within our text; and the one who declares himself Lord of the Sabbath.

*Luke 6:1-5 - (1) On a Sabbath, while he was going through the grain fields, 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.”*

### DISCIPLES CHARGED WITH UNLAWFUL ACTIONS

*His disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands* – Once again, the actions of Jesus’ disciples are at the center of the Pharisee’s criticism. However, we find the charge raised against the disciples in this incident was more severe. In their previous encounter, the disciples and Jesus were enjoying table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners. While the behavior was certainly frowned upon because of the likelihood of becoming ceremonially unclean due to possible contact with sinners, it does not carry with it the weight of breaking a command of the Law of Moses. So what was this violation of the Law with which Jesus’ disciples were charged? In the Mosaic Law it was permissible for wayfarers to glean from the edges of the field to satisfy their hunger. This provision is found in Deuteronomy 23:25, so the objection was not against the action of gleaning itself. However, as Luke details in his account, the actions would have violated the Sabbath regulations of the Mishnah (an ancient Jewish rule book) in four specific areas: reaping, threshing, winnowing, and preparing

food.<sup>1</sup> The plucking of the ears would be consider reaping, the rubbing in their hands was threshing, the throwing of the husks away was winnowing, while eating showed that they had prepared food on the Sabbath.

*Some of the Pharisees said,* – The gospel writer makes it clear, only “some” of the Pharisees make this charge against Jesus and his disciples. While it appears there were many keeping a watchful eye on Jesus, we must remember, not all of the Pharisees were opposed to him. Luke most likely uses this language because he knew of some good Pharisees (Luke 13:31; Acts 5:34–39) and even Christian Pharisees (Acts 15:5).<sup>2</sup> Those who belonged to the Pharisees were not predisposed to reject Jesus and his claims, just as being a disciple of John did not guarantee the transfer of their allegiance to Jesus. Each one would be confronted with the claims of Jesus and be forced to decide what they believed for themselves.

*“Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?”* – While this charge is directed at the disciple’s actions, Luke makes it clear this attack was focused at Jesus. In the ancient near-eastern culture, a teacher could be called into account for the behavior of his disciples. The “you” in the Greek is plural; this charge then includes Jesus because he allowed his disciples to act in a manner that they deemed in violation to the Sabbath law. The word “lawful” in the Greek is *exestin*; it carries with it the thought of doing what is legally allowed. The Pharisees make the charge that the disciples plucking and eating of grain was a matter of breaking the Mosaic Law, in this Jesus was also culpable in this offense. In their estimation, the meal time preparation should have been completed ahead of time to be ready on the Sabbath. To us the whole thing might seem outlandish, yet for the strict Pharisee this was a deadly sin, rules and regulations were broken. This was a matter of life and death and Jesus must be held accountable.

### APPLICATION:

What is it from the Pharisaical perspective that keeps them from comprehending the truth? Why are they so thoroughly convinced that their perception is reality, even when in the midst of God in the flesh? When we consider all that Jesus did and said, it seems obvious who he claimed to be. Yet due to their self-righteousness, they had become their own savior and lord and hence, they did not have eyes that could see. From their perspective, they were superior to all other men because of their knowledge of the Scripture, their performance, and good works. Following Jesus means we see our need for him; we come to him on his terms, and see things from his perspective. He defines reality and we become people who do what he would have us do, and think the way he would have us think. We “*take every thought captive to obey Christ* (2 Corinthians 10:5).”

### BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS AT 8:00AM, ROOM 100 RYAN BUILDING

# *Pennsylvania*

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### THE PHARISEES INSIGHT QUESTIONED

*Have you not read* – The answer to Jesus’ question is fairly obvious. Of course they have read the account from 1 Samuel 21:1-6. This was not something that would have missed their attention. Yet, they were unable to correctly interpret this account and apply it to the situation that faced them. It was a hermeneutical problem they encountered. How should they correctly interpret the Scriptures? This comes back to our understanding of truth? It is possible to read meticulously, to know the Bible from cover to cover and yet completely miss the real meaning of the text. This is what happened to the Pharisee, they knew the passage that Jesus was referencing, yet they did not understand its implications. The only way to understand the Scriptures is to see them through the light of Jesus. The grid through which we frame our biblical interpretation must be the gospel message. It is the dying of Jesus on the cross through which he paid the price for our sins. And his burial and resurrection from the dead, which not only secured for us our salvation, but also changed history, for now heaven is his throne and the earth is his footstool (Acts 7:49).

*Took and ate the bread of the Presence* – Jesus does not seek to address this charge directly. He is not interested in getting into a discussion about their understanding of the Mosaic Law. Jesus treats this question as irrelevant to the actions of his disciples; but calls into question their understanding of the Scriptures. His inquiry centers on the time when David was given the bread of the Presence from the Tabernacle. On his flight from Saul, David arrived by himself at the Tabernacle at Nob, he told the priest he was on a mission for the king. He asked for whatever was available and the priest gave him the twelve loaves of showbread, which was normally eaten only by the priests. The only condition was that his men were ritually pure, which David assured him that they were.

Luke states plainly that this action was in violation to the Mosaic Law, for “only” the priest is permitted to eat this bread. The point for Jesus is Christological, if “David had the authority to act as he did, then Jesus has the same right, but in a higher degree, to reinterpret the law.”<sup>3</sup> This ultimately heightens the authority of Jesus because he shows himself to be the one greater than David. If David was free of the restraints of the law on that occasion, how much more is the Son of Man?

### APPLICATION:

Jesus moves away from addressing the behavior of his disciples and places the focus clearly on himself. For Jesus it was not about what the disciples had done, but who the disciples were with, and who they were following. If

the Pharisees were able to excuse the behavior of David and the actions of his men who ate the bread of the Presence, why are they unable to see the inconsistency of their own thinking? The Pharisees had been made aware of Jesus’ claims and seen many convincing proofs of divine power. Even with Jesus in their midst, there were those who were unable to believe due to the hardness of their heart. We must not be discouraged by the opposition we face for being associated with Jesus. We, like the disciples, are full of faults and failures, yet Jesus speaks for us. This should bring comfort to our soul and courage to our hearts as we seek to walk with him.

### JESUS, LORD OF THE SABBATH

*The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath* - Jesus has already built the case for his authority to interpret the Law. Thus, he takes it a step further and claims lordship over the Sabbath. He concludes that the disciples have not violated the Sabbath, as they had been accused by the Pharisees. Rather, the Son of Man who has authority over the Sabbath has permitted them to pluck and eat on the Sabbath.<sup>4</sup> Things have change, it is no longer the Pharisees, by means of their regulations, who ruled and properly interpret the Sabbath. Jesus is showing that he is God’s designated agent, and he has the authority to determine what is appropriate in these matters.

### APPLICATION:

This passage comes down to the authority of Jesus. In the end the correctness or error of what Jesus does with his disciples rests on his claims. Is he the Son of Man, is he the Lord of the Sabbath? If so, then his application of the Mosaic Law is authoritative. He stands alone as the one who provides a proper interpretation. The Pharisees do not believe Jesus had the authority to say what he was teaching. Today people still challenge Jesus’ authority. However, if he is the interpreter of the Law, he must be heard because he is the one who speaks truth, and the one who reveals the way to God.

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1 – Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984). 171.

2 – Robert H. Stein, Luke, electronic ed., Logos Library System; *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001). 188.

3 - G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007). 294.

4 - Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997). 228.