

The Law of Grace

Luke 5:33-6:11

Introduction

Judges: Why do judges exist if we have laws? Shouldn't the laws themselves be enough? Laws can easily be misinterpreted, misapplied, and misunderstood (no vehicle parking sign doesn't apply to the stroller on the sidewalk even though *technically...*). Judges are needed to interpret and apply laws fairly.

Law: The first five books of the Bible (e.g., Pentateuch), the *Torah* (often translated as "law" but lit. Heb. "instruction" or "teaching"). These first five books (Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, Deut) are the *Torah* but also contain *torah*.

- Over time some came to view these books not as the story of God's salvation of and promise for his people (i.e., prophetic narrative) but as a law code. **Rabbis** later identified **613 commandments** (*mitzvot*). These Rabbis are actually the ideological descendants of the NT **Pharisees**. After the destruction of the temple, their *interpretation* laid the foundation for modern Judaism. **Pharisees > Rabbis > Judaism**.
 - These oral traditions, opinions, and interpretations were formulated and collated in the centuries following Jesus and ultimately codified in Rabbinic writings.¹

Debate: At the time of Jesus, the conversation was ongoing about the Torah and how it should be read and interpreted. It might seem like this is a debate for other people at another time and not for us. But this is precisely for us!

- Understanding the Pentateuch is crucial as it's the **most quoted** in the NT and **foundational for Christian doctrines** like sin, salvation, redemption, atonement, etc. It's essential for grasping the full narrative and teachings of Jesus. It's **the Bible of Jesus** and the apostles. But we have to understand it correctly! Jesus explicitly tells us that he has come to fulfill the law. 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 (Matt 5:17). You can't fully appreciate who Jesus is and what he came to do if you do not understand this.

Jesus defines, interprets, and fulfills the law. Unfortunately, in three scenarios, the Pharisees elevate their limited understanding of the law, man-made traditions, and misguided interpretations. Rather than the law guiding them to Jesus, they miss him. And, if we're not careful, we can miss him too.

1. Scene 1: Signs Over Substance (vv. 33-39)

³³ And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink." ³⁴ And Jesus said to them, "Can you make

¹ *Mishnah* (ca. 3rd c.). That wasn't fully clear, so rabbinical analyses and commentary on the Mishnah were collected in the Gemara. The Mishnah and Gemara comprise the Talmud (Babylonian 500 CE; Palestinian 400 CE).

wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? ³⁵ The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.” ³⁶ He also told them a parable: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. ³⁷ And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. ³⁸ But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. ³⁹ And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good.’”²

Different: The disciples of John and the Pharisees are lumped together in **contrast** to Jesus’ disciples. On the one hand, this shows that despite how good John the Baptist is, he is not the one to follow. It also points out, maybe, how not bad the Pharisees are.

- Notice that Jesus is most harsh against those that are closest (e.g., John, disciples, Pharisees). The Pharisees want to **obey God**. They want to **avoid sin**. They want to **be holy**. Why is Jesus harshest toward the most religious and lenient toward the most sinful? Rejecting Jesus makes it clear the difference between the gospel and the world (e.g., why I am harshest toward those claiming Christ). Hypocrisy is worse than rebellion! When you are *close*, you fool yourself into thinking you’re right and confuse those who listen to your message and follow your example.
- Both the Pharisees and John’s disciples are so engrossed in their rituals that they miss the one to whom the rituals point!

Fasting: Fasting is good. The faithful fast before making important decisions (Acts 13:2-3). Fasting is a sign of repentance in Jonah (Jon 3:5-10). Fasting shows dependence on God more than physical food (2 Chron 20, Matt 4, Lk 4). Moses, Daniel, Jesus, the early church, and more **all fast!** **But fasting is not the goal.** The goal of fasting is God! The purpose of fasting is to experience God more deeply. Fasting is good, godly, and helpful *if* it helps you depend on God and see God. The point of the fast is to *long* for God to come and satisfy. Jesus is right there! God has come!

- That’s why Jesus uses this wedding illustration to show why *his* followers aren’t currently fasting. **You don’t fast at the wedding, you celebrate!** E.g., dieting to look good on your wedding, then wearing athleisure or skip the meal.
- There will be a day when we will stop fasting, missions, funerals, marriage, evangelism, tears, etc. There will be a day when we will be forever in Jesus’s unobstructed presence and our faith will be made sight. Until that day, we continue to fast and pray for the kingdom to come.
- In this story of the Gospels, we see a moment when that future reality breaks through into the present situation.
- The Pharisees continue to fast because they fail to see the identity of Jesus. **They love the sign more than the one the sign points to.** Continuing to fast in the presence of Jesus is like going to chemotherapy for fun after the cancer is gone.

² cf. Mk 2:18-22, Matt 9:14-17. Mark puts the conversation in the mouth of “people” (i.e., the crowd), Matthew from John’s followers, and Luke is ambiguous.

Disordered Traditions: Another metaphor Jesus uses is taking a new piece of cloth and sewing it onto an old piece (other Gospels describe it as an “unshrunk piece of cloth”). When the new piece shrinks, it will tear away from the original garment. They are incompatible. Jesus's new way is incompatible with the religious traditions represented by John's disciples and the Pharisees.

- Jesus can't just be patched into the Pharisaical way of doing things. They tried to patch the holes in their righteousness with religious activity, but it only made the hole worse. The more they try to fit Jesus into their paradigm, the more the “hole” in their righteousness rips and is exposed.

Nu Thang: Jesus is on a metaphor spree, this time using wine. Putting new wine (more actively fermenting) into old wineskins will cause these brittle containers to burst when the fermentation gasses are produced. In their misunderstanding of the purpose and plan of God, these Pharisees are trying to stuff Jesus into something he was never meant for and, in the process, bursting the “wineskin” and “spilling the wine.” Jesus didn't come to abolish the law (i.e., “burst it”) but to fulfill it. Jesus preserves the promises of the Old Covenant by fulfilling them.

- The temporary righteousness of the Old is made permanent by the New.
- If we are ever to have perfect, permanent, forever righteousness, holiness, and forgiveness, then we need something new to happen. How do I know this? Not just from Jesus but **from the very words of the Old Testament.**
- ³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah... I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:31, 33).
- Old car (e.g., Lola the Corolla, Li'l Red). I can fix it up, paint it, and swap out parts, but it'll never be new. The Pharisees have been swapping parts, and trying new routines, but they can't make their hearts new. Only God can make them new.
- The administration of the previous covenant intentionally pointed to its fulfillment in the new. The old covenant, which had a temporary nature (built-in obsolescence), anticipated the final, permanent, and new thing coming in Christ.

2. Scene 2: Rest Over Rest Giver (vv. 1-5)

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.”

Gotcha Moment: Pharisees are the worst, nosy neighbors. They are watching so closely to catch Jesus “slipping up.” They notice that his disciples plucked some grain. The Pharisees yell

“gotcha” because this violates their interpretation of the prohibition against reaping on the **Sabbath** in the Old Testament (Deut 23:25).

- Historically, the Pharisees (later Rabbis) had determined 39 things (40 save 1)³ that someone could not do on the **Sabbath**. They complain that he is **breaking the law**, but, in reality, this is a Pharisaic custom, not a Biblical mandate. We know this is a man-made rule because later Rabbis said such activity was fine because they used their hands rather than a tools.⁴

Schooled: Jesus uses the story of David in 1 Sam 21 to show the truth about the Sabbath rules. Asking the Pharisees, “Haven’t you read your Bibles” is like asking a chef “haven’t you eaten dinner.”

- In 1 Sam 21, David was on the run, hungry. They came to the Tabernacle, and the only food available was the bread of the presence, which was exclusively an offering to God (c. Ex 25:30). The bread remained out for a week, and then *only* the priests were supposed to eat it. Yet David was allowed to violate this rule, and no one had a problem with it. Rabbinic tradition (Pharisees own lore) describes this as happening on the Sabbath!
- Jesus is showing that the Sabbath regulations can be set aside in certain instances because they are provisional, not perpetual. They are temporary markers pointing to a permanent fulfillment.
- David had the power to override this regulation, and Jesus is the greater David, the greater King that has come. If David had authority over the rules, Jesus would have infinitely more! If you condemn Jesus, you condemn David (your great King)!

Lord of the Sabbath: “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.” “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mk 2:27). The Pharisees misunderstand Sabbath rest and the identity and authority of Jesus. They had a **backward understanding** of the Sabbath because they didn’t understand who Jesus was. Jesus didn’t need to submit to the Sabbath; the Sabbath needed to submit to him.

- The Pharisees saw their job as making Jesus obey their rules and missed that they would only find righteousness by submitting to him (e.g., making Mom and Dad play the rules for kids, e.g., watching Rated R movies).

Jesus is the one who created the Sabbath. He is the one who fulfills the Sabbath. He is the one who determines what the Sabbath is for.

Sabbath: There’s a lot that goes into the discussion of “Sabbath” and how to observe it. In fact, it’s still an ongoing discussion (e.g., Seventh-Day Adventists, Lord’s Day = Sabbath, what is work, what is rest, etc.). Sabbath is an important Biblical concept. **God rested** and commanded us to rest. He created the world in six days and rested on the seventh (Gen. 2:2-3). So, God set apart the seventh day (e.g., sanctified it, holified it because on it he rested). It’s enshrined in the fourth commandment: ⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall

³ *Mishnah* violation

⁴ Bock

not do any work... ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.” (Ex 20:8-11).⁵

- By the time of Jesus, various religious groups (e.g., Rabbies, Pharisees, ascetic communities) had started to develop interpretations and additional rules to create a “protective hedge” around Sabbath observance (e.g., don’t commit adultery, don’t be alone with a woman, don’t talk to a woman, don’t talk to anybody... how far do we want to take this?).

Heb 4 (there remains a rest for the people of God) and Matt 11:28 (Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest) show us that **Jesus is our true rest**.

- If we want real rest, we have to go to Jesus.
- Why did God rest on the seventh day? He can’t be tired, he can’t be lacking. He rested because he was satisfied with his creation. *The only way to truly rest is to be utterly satisfied in what is good* (Keller).
- It is true that we need rest. We need Sabbath. We aren’t different than the Israelites in that sense. But most people mistakenly believe that all you have to do is to stop working. It’s not that simple. “It is fun to have fun, but you have to know how” (Cat in the Hat).
- It’s not just about having rest or even the amount of rest but the type of rest (e.g., REM sleep; type of sleep essential to emotional well-being, memory formation, problem-solving, etc.; not just the **amount** of sleep but the **depth** of sleep).

Sabbath is not a vacation. Sabbath rest is not simply ceasing from labor. It’s an invitation to receive rest that only comes from God. It’s an invitation for deep spiritual renewal. Many of us are *physically* exhausted and need rest to recover from that, but a deeper, inner restlessness can’t be fixed by a nap, a day off, or even a vacation.

- Many of us work so hard because we can’t find the rest our souls long for. “A gold medal is a wonderful thing. But if you’re not enough without it, you’ll never be enough with it” (Cool Runnings). We suffer not just from physical exhaustion but also from the inner restlessness of working to prove ourselves. We are not able to look at ourselves and say, “It is good.” We need God’s perspective to ourselves like that. Christ defines me, not my work or my accomplishments.
- “To rest in the midst of work communicates, to others as well as to my own soul, a consciousness that I am not the engine of the great work... To think of myself as essential and necessary is to idolize my own power. The practice of rest helps to rescue me from that idolatry, freeing me to humbly and thankfully find my place in the great work [of God]” (McRoberts).
- But our rest is meant to be “holy” rest. It’s meant to be worship. All rest isn’t Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest is holy rest.
 - We are called to cease activity for a purpose (the worship and enjoyment of God).
- The Sabbath points to our ultimate rest in Christ. Christ secures our true Sabbath rest. The Sabbath is a shadow that points to Christ.
- Only in Jesus is our work ever “finished,” and only in Jesus can we find the rest our souls long for (e.g., my “work” is never finished, which is why I like video and print production: I have a final product).

⁵ “Σάββατον”, *NIDNTTE*, 220–28. Interestingly, Sabbath observance is “the most strongly emphasized” commandment and was held in great importance in Israel’s history.

Loophole Control: Jesus understood the limits, intent, and force of the law. The Pharisees didn't see the Sabbath as an opportunity to experience God but as a way to prove their righteousness. Rather than transforming their hearts and conforming their desires, they saw the Sabbath as a means to validate their purity (e.g., modern Judaism Sabbath coffee pouring; light machine; fooled him!). Rather than the Sabbath controlling them, they were trying to use it incorrectly to control God.

- How many of us use our obedience to try and manipulate God rather than love him? Cf. obligations vs. invitations.
- The world is scary, and we feel we need some control. So we develop these mechanisms that give us the illusion (delusion) of control. If I'm good enough, then God will bless me. **But we are never in control and were never meant to be.** Part of spiritual maturity means divesting ourselves of our control. God is the perfect, personal creator and sustainer of all things. He is God, and we are not. Rather than try to control him, we are called to submit to him. It is all grace, which is scary and wonderful, risky and freeing all at once.

3. Scene 3: Procedure Over Compassion (vv. 6-11)

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.

Hurting Hand: The Pharisees see the situation clearly and know Jesus' character. They believe that his compassion will cause him to heal this hurting man (compassion for the hurting is at the core of Jesus' character).⁶ They are waiting to catch him ("It's a trap," Akbar). They feel like this healing (since it's not life-threatening) can wait until the Sabbath is over.

Knows Their Heart: Jesus knows their thoughts (e.g., worst teacher, you'd never get away with anything). He knows your faith, wickedness, motives, and fears. He knows your heart. You can fool me but can't fool him (e.g., security camera with kids).

Legalism: This is the danger of legalism. It is salvation through behavior, and righteousness through obedience. It is anti-grace. It always diminishes the standard so that you can meet it. As a result, it restricts rather than equips. It harms rather than helps. It corrupts rather than heals. Legalism lowers the standard, while grace raises it. It raises it so high that only Jesus can accomplish it, which means we only achieve it by complete dependence on him!

⁶ *Gentle and Lowly* (Ortlund)

- Pharisees missed the heart of the law. They went beyond the OT regulations and looked down on everyone else who didn't live up to their personal standard. The Pharisees have flipped Sabbath-keeping from making them dependent on God to giving them independence from God.

Correct Interpretation: Jesus shows them the correct interpretation of “what is lawful.” The Sabbath is for doing good! When I ask, “What can't I do?” I'm trying to find the minimum obedience required (e.g., **Rabbinic two letter writing maximum**). That's not the point of God's commands (a.k.a. “How can I squeak by”).

- “Jesus does not abolish the Sabbath... but he emphasizes that the Sabbath points to him and finds its fulfillment in him...” (Schreiner). Jesus, the New Testament authors, and the early church do not abolish Sabbath but see no interest in “**detailed or ceremonial regulations concerning its observance**” (Silva).
- God has given us commands that are meant to bring us into communion with him and bring good to our neighbors. They don't earn us righteousness or forgiveness but flow out of the righteousness and forgiveness given to us by Christ.

Conclusion

Managing Sin vs. Overcoming It: We need to be careful when we look at the Pharisees (“**sincere belief can be sincerely wrong**”) and not be too quick to judge them when we, so often, have the same Pharisaical tendencies in our souls. They had developed a rigorous interpretation and application of the Biblical commands so as to **manage their sin and control their salvation**. They believed that they could, through **rigorous discipline** and **scrupulous obedience**, *earn righteousness before God*. This is the danger of everything from **legalism** to **self-help**. When we think if we can just be better and try harder, then we can achieve salvation, bliss, joy, etc., we are trying to control our salvation (caveat: working hard is not bad; being better is not bad). This leads us to compartmentalize and categorize sin (e.g., **two lists**). *My sin is normal and excusable; their sin is abnormal and inexcusable* (the same goes for the sins of our heroes).

Are We Like the Pharisees?: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life” (John 5:39–40). We can drift from God with our Bibles open in front of us. The Pharisees searched the Scriptures and devoted their lives to obeying the Law of Moses, but they missed the bright neon sign flashing “Messiah.” **The Pharisees knew God's word but didn't recognize when the Word took on flesh and dwelt among them.** We marvel at the blindness of the Pharisees, yet some of us have the same problem.

- Grace doesn't lower the call of obedience but elevates it. It calls us not only to *do* good things but to love good from our hearts.
- Grace doesn't minimize obedience but maximizes it. It calls us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love our neighbors as ourselves. It's the kind of selfless love that doesn't obey to get something in return but to reflect the great gift given to us by Christ.

- Grace doesn't think I can earn my way or prove myself but calls me to live in complete dependence and submission to the one who has sacrificed himself in my place.
- We are like the Pharisees when we try to maintain control of God rather than submit to his control of our lives.
- This is the scary thing about salvation by grace. If it is really grace, then we are completely dependent on God and he has transformative ownership of every part of my life.

Holding Back: The Pharisees were amazing at performing religious rituals (sometimes even rightly) and specifying their doctrinal positions but missed the heart of God. I don't want you to perform spiritually but to experience Jesus genuinely. What part of your faith is performed out of habit rather than heartfelt love of Jesus, preventing you from fully experiencing God's presence?

Matthew	Luke
14 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"	33 And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink."
15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?"	34 And Jesus said to them, "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?"
The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.	35 The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days."
16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.	36 He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.
17 Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed.	37 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed.
But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved. "	38 But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.
	39 And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.' "

Matthew	Luke
1 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat.	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 when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."	2 But some of the Pharisees said, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?"
3 He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him:	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 ate	4 how he entered the house of God and took

the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?	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 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."	5 And he said to them, "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

Matthew	Luke
9 He went on from there and entered their synagogue.	6 On another Sabbath, he entered the synagogue and was teaching,
10 And a man was there with a withered hand.	and a man was there whose right hand was withered.
And they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—so that they might accuse him.	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.
11 He said to them, "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? 12 Of how much more value is a man than a sheep!	
So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."	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?"
13 Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other.	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.

14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him.

11 But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.