Honoring the Sabbath
SS Lesson for 01/05/2014

Devotional Scripture: Col 2:13-18

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Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson teaches how we should Honor the Sabbath. The study's aim is to reveal how certain traditions can become more sacred to us than the Word of God and to show us that God's Word can stand on its own and does not need man's rules added to it. The study's application is to see God's rationale for giving the Sabbath Day to man.

Key Verse: Luke 6:9

"9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?"

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

This second contention about the Sabbath (cf. the first one in verses Luke 6:1-5) seems to have been brought about purposely by the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. As Jesus was teaching in the synagogue, He encountered a man... whose right hand was shriveled. The religious leaders were observing Jesus because they were looking for a reason to accuse Him. As was the case when He was opposed previously by religious leaders, Jesus knew what they were thinking (5:22). He used the situation to show that He has authority over the Sabbath. Jesus said... I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it? By this question He showed that refusing to do good on the Sabbath was tantamount to doing evil. If suffering is not alleviated, then one is doing evil to the sufferer. As the man stretched out his hand at Jesus' command, it was completely restored. Jesus performed no "work" on the Sabbath—He simply spoke a few words and a hand was completely restored. He humiliated the religious leaders and healed the man all at the same time without even breaking the Pharisees' law. It is no wonder that the religious establishment was furious and sought a way to get rid of Him.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Opposition to the Lord's teaching emerged early. The context of our key verse relates to controversies over the practice of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was very important in the life of the Jewish people. Observance of the Sabbath was instituted as one of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:8). Numerous injunctions concerning Sabbath practice were given in God's Word. According to Scripture, the main purpose of the Sabbath law was to devote a day wholly to God. Observing such a day was and is a part of honoring God's rule and reign over life. One day is to be set apart to foreshadow the eternal rest that awaits God's people. It is a day to give to God. There are important principles in this for us today. Although the Sabbath Day has become the Lord's Day for us, it is still proper to allow the Lord to rule over our lives by giving one day to worship. But this must be done with the proper perspective. The problem the Lord faced was that many of the religious Jews in His day had gone beyond the simple instructions of God's Word, adding many man-made Sabbath restrictions. The Jewish commentary on the Old Testament had numerous such provisions. Hence, the Pharisees objected to the Lord and His disciples feeding themselves from the fields on the Sabbath (Luke 6:1); they saw this as unlawful work. The Lord also healed a man with a withered hand (vss. 6-10), and they saw this as a violation of the Sabbath as well (vs. 11). The Lord's opponents became enraged when He decided to heal the man. It is clear that they were missing the larger point of the Sabbath. Doing healing or eating on the Sabbath was not wrong. Thinking that any physical labor or activity is a Sabbath violation is legalism. The point the Lord was making to them was that He and His disciples were serving God in doing what they did. That was not against the Sabbath. Rather, it fulfilled the purpose of the Sabbath! The point of the Sabbath is to come under the rule and reign of God by giving a day to worship Him. The Sabbath is meant to set us free to worship and serve God; it is not primarily about what we do not do on that day. Doing good to others is a valid Sabbath activity. The Lord chose to heal the man and allowed the disciples to pluck grain to eat. The Lord's rule was to do good—that is true Sabbath keeping. Sabbath practices can be a difficult thing to keep in proper perspective. Some go so far
as to say Christians need not observe any Sabbath practice at all. This is not scriptural. The principle of the Sabbath goes back to Creation. We should set aside a day as special to God. Others develop all sorts of rules and injunctions that obscure the true purpose of the Sabbath Day. Jesus' point was that the Sabbath is fulfilled properly by those who worship and serve God on that day. We are allowed to do good on the Sabbath! The Sabbath is part of God's loving rule and reign over our lives. Let us welcome with joy the opportunity to properly give God His day!

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The major outline of the lesson came from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

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Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

"Have you stopped beating your wife?" In the give-and-take of daily conversation, one must be alert to questions that presuppose something to be true that is not true or has not been proven to be true. Such questions have been referred to as loaded questions. "Have you stopped beating your wife?" is the classic example. Note that this question has been "loaded" with the assumption that the person being questioned is a wife-beater. Whether he answers no or yes, he will be admitting to the wife-beating presupposition.

Today's lesson shows Jesus doing verbal battle with those who want to discredit him. Question-loading is one of the techniques of his opponents. But the two encounters we will examine yielded results they did not anticipate. The two encounters in today's lesson involve issues of the Sabbath day. Sabbath is a Hebrew word meaning "rest" or "cease." This fact is fundamental for understanding God's requirements for Sabbath-keeping. Instructions regarding the Sabbath (the seventh day of the week) form a central component to the system of law of ancient Israel. Even before receiving the law at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19 and following), the Israelites were instructed to gather and prepare a double portion of manna on the sixth day so there would be no working for food on the seventh (see Exodus 16:1-26). The principle of Sabbath-rest finds its most important expression as the fourth of the Ten Commandments, and it is the longest one in both Exodus 20:8-11 and Deuteronomy 5:12-15. To "remember" the Sabbath was to keep it holy. It was to be a day of rest, a cessation from all normal work activities. To work on this day was to break the Sabbath. Violators were subject to the death penalty (Exodus 31:12-17). The Sabbath was instituted by God to be an enjoyable and necessary day for rest, reflection, and prayer. By the first century, however, it seems that some religious leaders of the Jews had elevated Sabbath-keeping to an oppressive art. Thus, keeping the Sabbath was more important than the benefits derived from keeping the Sabbath. Breaking the Sabbath as the Pharisees had defined it was an offense that marked one as religiously careless and sinful. The Gospels portray the Pharisees as masters of minutiae in this regard. Today's lesson finds Jesus at odds with some Pharisees over the issue of Sabbath-breaking. Matthew 12:1-8 and Mark 2:23-28 are parallels to our first segment; Matthew 12:9-14 and Mark 3:1-6 are parallels to our second segment.
Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Honoring the Sabbath by Making Jesus Lord of It (Luke 6:1-5)

1 Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grainfields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands.
2 And some of the Pharisees said to them, "Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?"
3 But Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read this, what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 how he went into the house of God, took and ate the showbread, and also gave some to those with him, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat?"
5 And He said to them, "The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

Making Jesus Lord by not yielding to man-made traditions (1-2)

Traditions are physical and temporary, I must focus on the eternal spiritual (2 Cor 4:18)

18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Beware of traditions based on principles of the world (Col 2:8)

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Treasure those things that are based on the promises of God (1 Pet 1:18-19)

18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Even if traditions are based on Scripture, interpretation must be from God (John 5:39-42)

39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life. 41 "I do not accept praise from men, 42 but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts.

Once tradition has been validated by God, be steadfast in it (Deut 5:32-33)

32 So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. 33 Walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

Incorrect tradition is rebellion in God's sight (Titus 1:10-14)

10 For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. 11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain. 12 Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith 14 and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.
Making Jesus Lord by using biblical examples (3-4)

Biblical examples that should be passed on to the next generation (Ps 78:1-6)

78 O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. 2 I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old — 3 what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. 5 He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, 6 so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.

Biblical examples that teach us hope (Rom 15:4)

4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Biblical examples that help us run the race with perseverance (Heb 12:1)

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Biblical examples that should be followed (Acts 3:22-24)

22 For Moses said, `The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.' 24 `Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days.

Biblical examples that teach us to follow the correct Way and the way of hope (Acts 24:14-15)

14 However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, 15 and I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

Biblical examples that reveals the mystery of Christ (Eph 3:4-6)

4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Biblical examples that teach us patience (James 5:10)

10 Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

Making Jesus Lord by recognizing Jesus as Lord (5)

Sanctification is setting apart Jesus as Lord in my heart (1 Peter 3:15)

15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

One day all must confess Jesus as Lord (Phil 2:10-11)

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
Confession of Jesus as Lord leads to salvation (Rom 10:9-10)
9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Confession of Jesus as Lord is prompted by the truth from the Holy Spirit (John 15:26)
26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

Honoring the Sabbath by Doing Good For Others (Luke 6:6-11)
6 Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered.
7 So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him.
8 But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, "Arise and stand here." And he arose and stood.
9 Then Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?"
10 And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.
11 But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Doing good for others by being sensitive to their needs (6-7)

Sensitive to needs as part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:26)
26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Sensitive to needs as if it they were our own (Heb 13:3)
3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Sensitive to needs with actions not words (James 2:15-16)
15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

Sensitive to needs especially when it is in our power to provide (Prov 3:27)
27 Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act.

Sensitive to needs where our plenty will supply the need (2 Cor 8:14)
14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality,

Sensitive to needs to display the love of God (1 John 3:17)
17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?
Doing good for others by doing the right things (8-9)

*God created us to do good works (Eph 2:10)*

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

*To keep from falling short, we must commit myself to God and continue to do good (1 Peter 4:18-19)*

18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

*Bless others by taking advantage of every opportunity to do good to all people (Gal 6:10)*

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

*We are to do good to our neighbors (Rom 15:2)*

2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

*We are to seek the good for others (1 Cor 10:24)*

24 Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.

Doing good for others by actions not just words (10-11)

*Faith without action is dead (James 2:17)*

17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

*We must be prepared for action (1 Peter 1:13)*

13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

*We must love in action not just words (1 John 3:18)*

18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

*The result of our faith should be action (2 Cor. 4:13)*

13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,

*Actions that are directed by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:19-20)*

19 While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Simon, three men are looking for you. 20 So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

*Concluding Thought From Bob Deffinbaugh*

Our text does far more than reveal the sinfulness of the Pharisees, and the silliness of their interpretation and application of the Sabbath. We can learn several vitally important principles from this passage. Let me summarize them in conclusion.

(1) **There is not a direct cause-effect relationship between legality and morality.** The Pharisees wrongly concluded that by keeping (their interpretation of) the law, they would be righteous. They thought that legality insured morality. This has always been wrong. As a friend of mine has said, there are many crimes that are not sins and there are many sins that are not crimes. Witnessing, spanking disobedient children, and meeting as a church in a home may become illegal, but they will not because of this become immoral acts. So, too, abortion may now be legal, but it is still an immoral act. Legality and morality are not the same. Legalists do not see this, and thus they are always law-minded for the wrong reasons. Law-abiding people are still sinners. Indeed, the purpose of the law was never to make men righteous, but to prove men sinners.

(2) **There is not a direct, one-to-one relationship between our interpretation of the Law and the Law itself.** The Pharisees had obviously confused or blended their interpretation of the law with the law itself. In other words, their interpretations of the law were the final authority. I believe that our Lord did not argue this point at this time for at least two reasons. First, He wanted to demonstrate His freedom from the law, not just from their interpretation of it. Second, he knew that the were unable and unwilling to distinguish the two from each other (their understand of the law from the law itself). Confusing our interpretation with the inspired Word of God sanctifies our opinions, even our errors, and makes it a mortal sin for men to differ with us. Let us be on guard about equating our perception of the truth with the truth itself. There is often a great deal of difference.

(3) **The precepts of the Law must always be applied in the light of the principles of God’s Word.** To the legalist, it is the letter of the law, not the spirit of the law that is supreme. Legalists, like a bureaucratic IRS agent (I do not say all are this way), looks not at the intent of the law, but only at the inscribed law. It is a scary thing to see what legalists can do to any law when they refuse to interpret that law in the light of the spirit in which it was given. I believe that the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew’s account, is our Lord’s interpretation of the Old Testament law, based not upon the letter of the law, but upon its spirit. In this, Jesus set Him interpretation of the law in opposition to that of the Pharisees. In this, Jesus sought to demonstrate that His handling of the Old Testament law was consistent with the original intent of God when it was given. The law is thus to be interpreted in terms of its original intent, rather than upon a rigid legalism. In the United States, we have an illustration of how devastating legalism can be. The Supreme Court was created to be the final interpretive authority, the final judge, as to the meaning of the law. This court was to interpret the law in the light of the purpose for which that law was originally written. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court has now become a kind of second legislative body, no longer judging the laws in terms of the intent of the framers of the constitution, but by the standards and purposes they wish to achieve. How tragic! How like the legalism of the Pharisees, who sought to impose their own agenda on God’s laws.

(4) **The precepts of the Law are to be understood and applied in the light of the person who gave them.** From what we know about the Pharisees, they must have had a very distorted view of God. If they thought they were **godly** they must also have thought they were **God-like.** Thus, they very likely viewed God as a person who found little to enjoy, and much to agonize over. Holiness consisted not so much in positive, affirmative actions as in what one didn’t do. One’s view of God would greatly shape the way in which one interprets and applies God’s commandments. Thus, having a very negative God-image (may I alter the over-worked self-image term?), one would view the commandments in their most negative light. Think about it for a moment. Suppose that you worked for a company which had a set of policies for all its employees. If you had a very strict and harsh manager, you would interpret the rules very conservatively. If, on the other hand, you had a very kind, understanding and tolerant manager, you would tend to interpret the company rules more liberally. You would not always assume the worst. Jesus claimed to be God, as the Pharisees well knew, but He did not conform to their conception of God. Jesus was, as Jonah similarly protested, a gracious and compassionate God, a God who delighted in the salvation of men. Jonah and the Pharisees were not compassionate, as Jesus pointed out (Matt. 9:13; 12:7; Hos. 6:6). Note that in both instances of our Lord’s reference to Hosea 6:6 in
Matthew, it is addressed to the Pharisees. Jesus was too kind, too caring, too forgiving, too intimate with sinners. A harsh conception of God led the Pharisees to a harsh interpretation of the law. Knowing the Rule-Maker is one of the greatest keys to understanding the rules which He has made.

(5) **The Law must always be interpreted and applied in the light of the covenant of which it is a part.** Think about it for a moment. Why do we not live under the laws of the 3rd Reich, or of Contemporary Russia, for example? The reason is simple: Laws are but a definition of the kind of conduct which a given government requires. The nature of the government determines the nature of the laws. An atheistic government may have laws prohibiting religious meetings, worship, or propagation. A truly communist government will likely have laws which prohibit free enterprise. Laws are a reflection of a given government, a clarification and definition of how life is to be lived under this kind of government. Even a change of administration in the United States (say from a very liberal one to a conservative one) can great affect what new laws are passed and how existing laws are interpreted and enforced. We must remember that the Sabbath laws, as all the Ten Commandments, were a part of the old covenant, the Mosaic Covenant. Jesus has already explained to the Pharisees that you cannot blend the old and the new. The reason why our Lord retained and defended His right to set the law aside was because it was a part of the old covenant, which was to be done away with, set aside, replaced by the new and better commandments of the new covenant. The Pharisees were either unable to understand, or at least to accept, the fact that the old order (along with the old laws) was passing away. I do not mean to suggest that the Ten Commandment and the requirement of the Mosaic Covenant have no relevance to the 20th century Christian. I do mean to say that we must today interpret and apply the Old Testament law in the light of the fact that Christ has set aside the old order and established the new.

(6) **Who you are determines whether or not you are subject to the Law.** David, our Lord reminded His critics, was able to violate the law which prohibited the eating of the sacred bread to anyone but the priests. The priests, because of who they were, could eat the sacred bread, and they could violate the Sabbath by offering sacrifices in the temple. Jesus, God incarnate, was free from the law, so to speak because He was the author of the law. You and I cannot take a book that has been written, copywritten, and published, and change its words, but its author can, because it is his work. So, too, as God Jesus was not subject to the law, and thus not bound to keep the Sabbath. Christ voluntarily place Himself under the law, in the sinner’s place, so that He could bear the penalty of the law, and redeem men from the power of death through the law. Jesus’ actions and words in our text are most significant, for they teach in principle in a minute scale what He will accomplish on a broad scale. Jesus was not merely claiming authority to set aside the Sabbath, He was claiming the right to set aside the whole law. By meeting the demands of the law without any sin, and by dying to the law in the sinner’s place, Jesus has set the law aside. Having died to the law, the resurrected Christ was no longer under the law, to which He had subjected Himself. Our Lord’s Sabbath actions were but a prototype of His work on the cross. Pressing this principle beyond its immediate application to our Lord, we can also say that the disciples of Jesus were given the same rights and freedoms as our Lord. Not only was David allowed to break the law and to eat the holy bread, so were his disciples. Not only was Jesus free from the law, so were His disciples. Our bondage or freedom is the by-product of our relationship to Christ, or our lack of it. Those who are “in Christ” are privileged to share in all the He accomplished for them.

(7) **The principle of perversion: The good things which God gives can quickly and easily be corrupted and perverted by sinful men.** Satan has, from the very beginning, sought to pervert the blessings of God, making them into a curse. God’s command that Adam and Eve could eat of every tree but one was for their blessing. Satan quickly entered to make God’s restriction look evil. In Romans chapter 7 Paul teaches us that the law is good, but that sin perverts it, so that the law actually is used to entice men to sin. So, too, the Sabbath law, given for man’s good, was perverted by the Pharisees.

(8) **One’s perception of the purpose of the Law has everything to do with one’s motivation for obeying it.** If I view God as harsh and unloving, and His law as restrictive and burdensome, then I will do everything I can to avoid its instructions. I will distinguish between my joy, my best interest, and the commands of God. This is exactly what the Pharisees did. For all their talk about keeping the law, the Pharisees had become experts at avoiding its commands. The very things which God required most (mercy and compassion), the
Pharisees were able to escape, and even to feel righteous for so doing. When I once come to the liberating conclusion that the psalmists had long ago reached—that the law was good, wholesome, and a delight to obey—then I will strive to learn it, to understand it, and to apply it: How blessed are those whose way is blameless. Who walk in the law of the Lord.... Blessed art Thou, O LORD; Teach me Thy statutes. With my lips I have told of All the ordinances of Thy mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, As much as in all riches. I will meditate on Thy precepts, And regard Thy ways. I shall delight in Thy statutes; I shall not forget Thy word.... O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day (Ps. 119:1, 12-16, 97). God's commandments, Old Testament or New, were to be viewed as blessed, a joy to carry out, and a joy when carried out. That is much needed perspective today. That is not the spirit of legalism.

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Concluding Thought from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Rules for Sabbath-keeping can be very strict among observant Jews today. When I moved into a largely Jewish neighborhood in Los Angeles, I would see Orthodox Jews walking each Saturday morning to the community center where they held services. It was important that their destination be no farther than a permitted "Sabbath-day walk" (compare Acts 1:12). They did not use automobiles to make the trip because car engines create fire for combustion, and making fire is considered "work" (see Exodus 35:3). Some very observant Jews also believe that any use of electricity is "fire making," and therefore they will not turn on lights in their homes on the Sabbath. A Christian friend told me of a Jewish neighbor who asked him to come over to help with an issue in this regard one particular Sabbath: his Jewish friend wanted him to open the refrigerator and unscrew the lightbulb so that it would not turn on when the door was opened. This was something the Jewish family normally did before the Sabbath began, but that week they had forgotten. Without my friend's help, the family would not have opened the refrigerator, where their premade meals for the day were, lest they break the Sabbath by turning on a lightbulb. The above situation probably causes most of us to grimace a bit. It seems so hair-splitting, doesn't it? But on any level of particularity, the issue of being a Sabbath-keeper or a Sabbath-breaker is rarely asked among Christians these days. There are a couple of good reasons for this. First, we realize that keeping the Sabbath is not the same as going to church on Sunday morning, and neither is missing a Sunday service a case of Sabbath-breaking. Please don't misunderstand: coming together with fellow Christians is a good thing and was faithfully practiced by the early church (see Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:25). But taking an hour or two on Sunday morning to participate in teaching and worship activities at a church building does not define Sabbath-observance for the New Testament era. Second, Romans 14:5 and Colossians 2:16-23 establish that it would be a mistake to create "a Christian Sabbath" with scrupulous regulations that define all activities for a specific day. Keeping all this in mind will help keep us from becoming modern-day Pharisees. Even so, the principle of having a period of rest, as the Sabbath was established to be, is biblical, God-ordained. This concept is not the same, however, as the old saying, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." If we take time off from regular work only to cram the break with nonstop recreational activities, then we are not following the Sabbath principle. Have you ever returned from a vacation more tired than when you left? If so, that vacation was not any kind of Sabbath rest. Mark's version of the grain-picking incident offers an additional statement from Jesus: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath principle is to benefit us, not to oppress us. The psalmist wrote, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (Psalm 46:10). Nonstop activity works against our knowing God better. Slow down, be still, and take time to contemplate and reflect on your relationship with God! Don't just see a morning time of prayer and Bible reading as another thing to be crammed into a busy schedule. Refresh your relationship with God, weekly if not daily.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. God's people were required to provide food for the hungry; we should likewise care for the poor (Luke 6:1; cf. Deut. 23:25)
2. Self-righteous people are always enforcing rules that enable them to condemn others (Luke 6:2)
3. The spirit of the law leads us to praise God (Luke 6:3-4; cf. I Sam. 21:1-6)
4. Jesus is to be honored as Lord on the Sabbath—and on every other day (Luke 6:5)
5. We humans tend to look for opportunities to criticize other people (vss. 6-7)
6. Believers in Jesus have many opportunities to honor Him by doing good —sometimes at great personal cost (vss. 8-11)