

9. The Lord of Sabbath and the apostles

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We've all used labels. We stick them on jars and manila folders so we'll know what's inside. But we also stick them on people for the same reason.

None of born-again Christians would like to be called as a legalist. But many of us tend to act that way without even realizing. We often mark territories, making sure everybody, I mean everybody, follow what we'd like them to do. If someone doesn't follow, all of sudden, it is easy for us to label that person as someone really not of God.

It's easier to debate homosexuality than to be a friend to a gay person. It's easier to discuss divorce than to help the divorced. It's easier to argue abortion than to support an orphanage. It's easier to complain about the welfare system than to help the poor.

It's easier to label than to love.

Is that to say we should be unconcerned for doctrine or lax in a desire for holiness? Absolutely not. That is to say there is something wrong with applying the label before examining the contents.

A. THE SECOND SABBATH VIOLATION

Luke 6:1-5 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."

Sometime ago, Jesus crossed His spiritual sword against the Pharisees who were the spiritual leaders of Israel during that time by healing a lame man on a Sabbath on .

The highest and most guarded of the Pharisees' territories concerned the Sabbath. Upon this ground Jesus and His critics fought their most intense battles.

Sabbath roots go deep, all the way down to the bedrock of Creation. After six days of fashioning stars and filling the earth with creatures, God rested on the seventh day as an example for us to follow.

Genesis 2:3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

The Lord sanctified – “set apart” – the seventh day of the week for us as a time of rest and refreshment. Later, God etched this same principle into the tablets of the Ten Commandments:

Exodus 20:8-10 "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 the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.

It was a simple commandment from God for us to rest, otherwise our greed would kick in and work 7 days a week while we discard worshipping the Lord.

Centuries passed. By the time the Pharisees in Jesus' day inherited this simple commandment, God's merciful principle of rest had grown into a merciless tangle of rules. The legalists had succeeded in squeezing the joy out of God's gift to His people.

Picking and eating the heads of grain from someone's fields was not illegal and it was a way of God's welfare systems for the poor. But doing it on Sabbath Day was "No, No" to the Pharisees.

By plucking the corn the disciples were guilty of reaping; by rubbing it in their hands of threshing; by flinging away the husks of winnowing; and the very fact that they ate it showed that they had prepared food on the Sabbath. To us the whole thing seems silly, but we must remember that to a strict Pharisee this was deadly sin.

You may say, "That was from ancient Israel." Listen to this: In early 1992, tenants let three apartments in an Orthodox neighborhood in Israel burn to the ground while they asked a rabbi whether a telephone call to the fire department on the Sabbath would violate Jewish law. Observant Jews are forbidden to use the phone on the Sabbath, because doing so would break an electrical current, which is considered a form of work. In the half-hour it took the rabbi to decide "yes," the fire spread to two neighboring apartments.

We marvel at the picky Pharisees, but we have to admit that sometimes we can be just as judgmental when someone violates our code of conduct. We all have our lists. We've all marked our territories, based on personal convictions. Although they might be vital to our own walk with God, we must remember that they are not God's law. We have no right to force them on others.

Jesus did not argue with them. Instead, He took them right to the Word of God in 1 Sam. 21:1-6. While David and his men were fugitives from king Saul, they ate the loaves that were for the only priests to eat, and what Jew would condemn Israel's great king? "But He was God's anointed!" they might argue, but that was exactly what Jesus claimed for Himself. Not only was He God's Anointed, but He was also the Lord of the Sabbath!

When Jesus made that statement, He was claiming to be Jehovah God, because it was the Lord who established the Sabbath. If Jesus Christ is indeed the Lord of the Sabbath, then He is free to do on it and with it whatever He pleases. God is more concerned about meeting human needs than He is about protecting religious rules.

B. THE THIRD SABBATH VIOLATION

Luke 6:6-11 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.

The Pharisees knew that Jesus would heal people on Sabbath. In other words, they knew about His character better than those who were close to Him.

God's commandments are always His enablements. When the Lord tells us to do something, we don't have to worry about circumstance, financial situation nor anything else for that matter. He will clear the way, provide what we need and give the abilities to get the job done for His glory. This was the case with the man with a formerly withered hand. At Jesus' command, he simply obeyed.

Apparently, the religious leaders thought it was fine to be filled with rage and desire to kill a godly man who never sinned against anybody on the Sabbath. That was all right, but you better not heal someone on the Sabbath. What a twisted logic!

There is always such a powerful lure to this type of religious legalism in the Christian life because there is never a shortage of leaders who want to lead this way, and never a shortage of people who want to follow this way. But God wants us to have the Holy Spirit write the application of His word into our hearts, not the rules of man made into the law of God.

I have found, in my own spiritual life, that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit. The habit of regular daily prayer is one which is indispensable to a believer's life, but the prescribing of the length of prayer, and the constrained remembrance of so many persons and subjects, may put it into bondage, and strangle prayer rather than assist it.

One of the reasons why legalism does not die down is that it breeds through our pride. While we label others lower than us, it fans our ego which allows us to look down on others. It is no wonder why Jesus hated the legalistic attitude of the Pharisees and still hates any legalistic mentality.

As I asked before, does it mean that we should embrace anything and everybody's theology, sing "Kumbaya" and get along? No, absolutely not. When a person or a church's doctrine goes against the Word of God, we must not associate with them.

C. THE CHOOSING OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Luke 6:12-16 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. 13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: 14 Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; 15 Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; 16 Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.

Jesus spent the whole night in prayer, because He was about to call His 12 Apostles from among the many disciples who were following Him. A disciple is a learner, an apprentice. An apostle is a chosen messenger sent with a special commission. Jesus had many disciples but only twelve handpicked Apostles. But they were not highly influential, nor wealthy, not popular people. Even though they were a motley crew, they were selected by God and He would equip them.

Why did He pray all night? For one thing, He knew that opposition against Him was growing and would finally result in His crucifixion. So He prayed for strength as He faced the path ahead. Also, He wanted the Father's guidance as He selected His 12 Apostles, because the future of the church rested with them. Keep in mind that one of the Twelve would betray Him, and Jesus knew who he was from the beginning.

While we study the four Gospels, some of us get confused with the different names of disciples. Here are some explanations:

- Judas, son of James was Thaddaeus.
- Simon the Canaanite was also called Simon the Zealot.
- Bartholomew was called Nathanael.
- Thomas is called Didymus which means "twin".
- James is called "the Less".

D. MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Disciple-making, or discipleship, is a meaningful, hands-on relationship between a person who is qualified and willing to be a mentor and a few who desire to grow stronger in character and deeper in the Christian walk.

The goal of discipleship is godly character development, which is best accomplished through modeling. For example, we learn patience by observing another person displaying that quality in the fray of everyday living. One life rubbing off on another life in an atmosphere of freedom, grace, acceptance, sharing and discovery. That's discipleship.

However, there is a flip side of discipleship:

- Discipleship is not one person controlling another. Rather it is more like coaching and encouraging.
- Discipleship cannot occur long-distance. It thrives on up-close, hands-on involvement.
- Discipleship is not formal, it's relational. There may be times when we learn more by setting aside the manuals and just talking about life.
- Discipleship cannot and should not be done in cross-gender setting. By nature, discipleship requires spending many hours and sharing personal information.

E. MORE PEOPLE AND MORE HEALING

Luke 6:17-19 And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, 18 as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. 19 And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all.

The news about Jesus spread fast throughout the whole region. These people were not looking for the Messiah who would give them eternal life, rather they were looking for someone to lead us out of the miserable life from the Roman government.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Although some of the spiritual things we do might be vital to our own walk with God, we must remember that they are not God's law. We have no right to force them on others.

2) God's commandments are always His enablements.