

## Sermon for Pentecost 2

June 3, 2018

### “The Gift of God’s Law”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from Jesus, the fulfiller of God’s Law. Amen.

Dear Christians, there was a couple, newlyweds, and it was their first weekend back from the honeymoon, and they were hosting a big family get-together. The new wife was nervous about the food preparation; she wanted everything to be perfect, plus, she was using her mother’s roast recipe for the first time on her own. She slid the roast into the oven and then realized she had forgotten one thing – she pulled the pan out, and trimmed the ends off the roast quickly, then put the roast in the oven. And when she turned around, she saw her confused-looking husband standing there. “Why do you cut the ends off? Isn’t that a part you can eat?” asked her husband. And the wife said, “My mother always cut the ends off, but I don’t know why.” So the couple found the mother and asked her about cutting the ends off the roast, but she said the same thing, “My mother always cut the ends off, but I don’t know why.” Fortunately, the grandmother was also there, and so they asked her about it, and she said, “I don’t know why you cut the ends off. I always cut the ends off because my pan was too small.” And so they found out that for two generations, the ends of the roast had been getting cut off for no reason at all – just slavishly following a tradition.

Now that’s a made-up story (although I’m sure it could have actually happened), but it rings true because that sort of thing happens in real life. It happens that people slavishly obey a tradition or a rule and don’t know why. It happens that Christians get the mixed up idea that God created rules and then created Christians so that there would be someone to obey the rules.

That’s backwards thinking, but you can see symptoms of it. A simple example in Christian life is whether or not to capitalize a pronoun that refers to God. Like, if you had the sentence, “God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son,” do you put a big capital H on “he” and “his” because they refer to God? Or do you just write “he” and “his” like normal?

Some might say, “You should capitalize. That’s what you’re supposed to do.” Some might say, “If you were texting, then you don’t capitalize, but if you were writing a paper, then you should.” Others might say, “No, it doesn’t matter, there’s no need to capitalize.” And still others might say, “Why are discussing the finer points of punctuation?”

It might be helpful here to remember the difference between a principle and an application of that principle.

Do you know what the principle behind capitalizing pronouns referring to God is? The principle is that we show respect, honor, and glory to our God. An application of that principle is to capitalize all pronouns that refer to the true God.

So what should you do? If you want to give respect to God by capitalizing his pronouns, go for it. If you want to give respect to God, but you don’t think capitalizing his pronouns needs to be part of it, then don’t capitalize the pronouns. But if you would decide not to capitalize the pronouns because you want to disrespect God, then you would be sinning. But the whole point is that so often, we just want someone to answer us the question, “What am I supposed to do? What do I have to do? What am I required to do?”

God doesn’t want robot slaves. He could have created robot slaves if he wanted to, but he didn’t; he did create us humans, and he made us rational, thinking beings, and instead of spelling out

exactly what we must do in every possible situation, he gives us principles and the ability to apply those principles. If the principle is my goal, how do I put that principle into action in the situation I'm in?

How much easier would it be if God just told us exactly what to do? Then we wouldn't have to think all the time. I mean, some people like to do Sudoku, but many other people would consider Sudoku to be a punishment, not pleasure. And in our Christian lives, we might wish that God would just tell us what to do so we could just get it over with and be done with it and not have to think about what we're doing all the time.

Plus, there's that part of us that likes to know the rules and keep the rules (at least while other people are watching) and then the really fun part – judge other people for how bad they are at keeping the rules.

It's hard to judge a person on their application of a principle. It's very easy to judge a person if there's a rule about what they are supposed to do. Either they did it or they didn't. And if they didn't, you can judge them. Can a Christian go to a bar? Or get a massage? Or watch a movie with profanity in it?

But that self-righteous judging, we sometimes even today call that judgmental person a Pharisee. That's because the Pharisees in the Bible were self-righteous and rule-oriented. In Mark chapter 2 we have an example.

Once on a Sabbath day, Jesus was passing through the grain fields, and his disciples began to pick heads of grain as they walked along. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?"

So the Sabbath day was the seventh day of the week, Saturday by our counting, and God said, like we read in Deuteronomy, that no work was to be done on the Sabbath. It was a day of rest and worship. That was a principle from God, but the Pharisees wanted to get all technical and layout exactly what the proper application was. So they had determined that no work meant a person could not do food preparation on the Sabbath. So, the disciples were picking grain and snacking on it! The Pharisees saw a good opportunity to slam Jesus' with some judgment about his disciples' behavior.

But Jesus said, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry (he and his companions)? He entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the Bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for anyone to eat, except for the priests. He also gave some to his companions.

David, before he was king, was on the run from Saul. Saul had a vendetta to kill David, because Saul wanted his own son to become king, even though God had anointed David as the next king. David and his band of men were in great danger, and were out of food, and so the priest let David and his men eat the Bread of Presence. Only the priests were supposed to eat that bread when it got replaced with new bread. And yet, in the face of need, the priest understood that the rule of not eating the bread was less important than showing love to people in need. The purpose of the Bread of Presence was not to have people go hungry.

And Jesus summed up his point: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is the Lord even of the Sabbath." God did not create the Sabbath day, and then create people so that they could slavishly obey it. God did not create his Law and then create people to slavishly obey it. God created people. And God blessed people with the Sabbath day. He created the Sabbath to be a blessing for people as they keep it.

As Jesus pointed out, it was ridiculous that the Pharisees were complaining that the disciples weren't living up to the Sabbath day. The Sabbath day was made to serve people, and Jesus, the Son of Man, is the representative of the whole human race; he's the Lord of the Sabbath who knows its purpose and how to keep it.

What's the point of the Sabbath day? We're reminded in our second Scripture reading, from Colossians chapter 2 "Therefore, do not let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in regard to a festival or a New Moon or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were coming, but the body belongs to Christ."

The Sabbath day was pointing ahead to Jesus. Week after week, people were given a break from work and their body got to rest a little bit. They were gathering for worship with their fellow believers, and their hunger for socializing and support was fed. They were gathering to hear God talking to them in his word, and their thirst for spiritual life was quenched. Week after week after week, pointing to the eternal rest that Jesus would provide.

As great as the Sabbath day was, it was like the shadow of a person that you can see before the person comes around the corner. Jesus is the person, and he's come around the corner, he's been revealed. Jesus talked about the rest he provides, "'Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

What makes Jesus' yoke and burden so light? The work is already done. Jesus' doesn't offer one day off per week of earning salvation; Jesus says that when it comes to earning salvation, you're retired. He already did your entire lifetime's work. He earned salvation; you don't have to do anything for it. And he doesn't offer a day off to your body to rest up for the next week; he offers eternal rest for your body in the paradise of heaven.

He offers rest from guilt, because he took away the burden of sin. He suffered the punishment for sin by giving up his perfect life and dying for you.

That's what the Sabbath day, the day of rest, was pointing to: Jesus, who gives rest by removing guilt, connecting you to God, and opening the gates of heaven to you.

"So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath," Jesus proclaimed. Of course he is! He gave the Sabbath day command. You're probably familiar with a red-letter Bible. In case not, a red letter Bible has the words of Jesus, the words he spoke printed in red ink to highlight what Jesus said. But really, a true red-letter Bible, how much of it should be printed in red, if every word that Jesus spoke was printed in red? The whole thing, right? Because Jesus is God, and all Scripture is God-breathed. So we had in our first Scripture reading, Jesus commanding the Sabbath day.

Why? Why did he give us the Sabbath day? Or, more accurately, why did he give us the principle of the Sabbath day, which still stands for us. Why did he give us the principle that we should take a break from working, rest, and focus on him, gathering for worship and listening to his word? He said, "The Sabbath was made for man."

He gave us that command to bless us. Not to make us suffer – he already did that on the cross. Not to make us lose out on wages so that we're poor – he became poor to make us rich, giving us an inheritance in heaven that's better than silver and gold. He gave us that command to bless us.

A time of rest, worship, gathering, praise, and food for our souls? Yeah, that's a blessing. A time of rest to spend with your God, Savior, friend, Father, and brother? Yeah, that's a blessing. A time for worship and praise to bubble from your heart and burst out of your mouth how much

God has done for you? Yeah, that's a blessing. A time to gather with your fellow Christians and strengthen your bond as co-members of the body of Christ? Yeah, that's a blessing. A time to relive baptism as the word of forgiveness washes over you again? Yeah, that's a blessing. A time to be fed by our Lord's true body and blood? Yeah, that's a blessing. A time to hear God teach, instruct, warn, encourage, and tell you how much he loves you? Yeah, that's a blessing.

God created us, and he created a great blessing for us: his Law. God's law is a great blessing for us. It's sour message drives us to our sweet Savior. It's warnings hold us back from plunging into sins. It's a light for our path, letting us see how to praise God as we walk through life. Thanks be to God for his wonderful Law, and may we delight in it day and night. Amen.

**Text:** *Mark 2:23-28*

*Jesus explains that the law serves to benefit us and our neighbors.*

<sup>23</sup>Once on a Sabbath day, Jesus was passing through the grain fields, and his disciples began to pick heads of grain as they walked along. <sup>24</sup>The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath day?"

<sup>25</sup>He replied to them, "Have you never read what David did when he was in need and hungry (he and his companions)?"

<sup>26</sup>He entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest and ate the Bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for anyone to eat, except for the priests. He also gave some to his companions."

<sup>27</sup>Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup>So the Son of Man is the Lord even of the Sabbath."