

A Question of Conduct

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It's a real, I can't tell you what a joy and a thrill it is to be here. Thank you so much for the invitation to come and share God's Word with you this morning.

I do apologize that I gave Graham apoplexy this morning because I took a wrong turn on my way here. I can't explain it. It's just one of these things you do at my age.

You just find yourself doing these things. And he told me when I came in, he said that it reached the point where he had suddenly began to prepare a sermon.

And I would love to hear that sermon that he prepared in five minutes. I reckon it's probably really good. I can't tell you what a joy it is to be amongst people who trace their roots in the Brethren Church.

Although I'm free church, I grew up half in Brethren circles. My best friends in school were guys who belonged to Brethren Church. And every Sunday night when I was 15 years old, after our evening service, I would disappear without my parents knowing.

[1 : 06] And I would go off to the Brethren Church because they had musicians there and they had hymns. That's where I learned all my hymns in the local Brethren Church. And I owe, seriously, I owe a lot of my discipleship during those days to my friends who belonged to Shuttle Street Hall and Paisley.

And I have nothing but the fondest affection for them and for that time. I am, though, troubled about one or two things.

First of all, you've asked a free church minister to confine his sermon to half an hour. But I shall do that even if I have to stop mid-sentence. And then you've asked a free church minister to talk about the Sabbath and confine it for half an hour, which is even more difficult.

And then you've given me a passage because you're going through the Gospel of Luke. And there are at least three topics in this passage that each require at least one sermon. So I will condense everything as instructed and try and see what we can derive from that.

We're going to turn to God's Word, to the Gospel of Luke and chapter 5 and verse 33. Luke chapter 5 and verse 33.

[2 : 26] They said to him, that's the Pharisees, they said to Jesus, John's disciples often fast and pray. And so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.

Jesus answered, can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them.

In those days they will fast. He told them this parable. No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment.

And the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins. And the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined.

No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says the old is better. One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the cornfields and his disciples began to pick some ears of corn, rub them in their hands and eat the grain.

[3 : 35] Some of the Pharisees asked, why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath? Jesus answered them, have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for the priests to eat.

And they also gave some to his companions. Then Jesus said to them, the son of man is Lord of the Sabbath. On another Sabbath, he went into the synagogue and was teaching.

And a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus. So they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.

But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, get up and stand in front of everyone. So he got up and stood there. 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?

He looked around at them all and then said to the man, stretch out your hand. He did so, but his hand was completely restored.

[4 : 41] And they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus. Let's pray together. Our Father, we want to come now to focus our thoughts on your word.

We pray that your spirit will make clear the truths that we're going to read about, so much so that our whole lives are affected forevermore. Touch as we pray and take away our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. If you're anything like me, Amazon is part of your way of life.

We use it regularly, at least I do. It's so convenient. You don't have to go around all the shops. You can just dial up what you want.

You can ring up what you want on Amazon. You can see a photograph of the item that you want. And you can see a description of that item. You press a couple of buttons and it's yours within a couple of days.

[5 : 42] But if you're anything like me, you'll also know that sometimes what you get is not what you expected. Now, that can be their fault.

Sometimes it's their fault. But other times, you get something different to what you expected because you didn't read the description properly.

That happened to me a number of times. It happened to my wife as well. Recently, we were at a wedding and she needed an accessory, I think they call it. It was one of these handbags and it had to go with her outfit.

And she saw one on Amazon. There was a photograph of it and she sent away for it. When it arrived, it was about three times bigger than she thought it was because although she had seen the photograph, it wasn't given in the right proportions.

And she hadn't got the measuring tape out and reassured herself that this was the size that she wanted. And it wasn't quite the right color. It wasn't what she expected. It was the right product.

[6 : 42] There was nothing wrong with the product. It just wasn't what she expected. When you read the Gospels, you can't help wondering, why was it that the Pharisees hated Jesus so much?

What was the problem with Jesus? I mean, after all, he displayed such power, such unmistakable power. Nicodemus, who came to him in John chapter 3, said, We know that you are a teacher sent from God because no one could do the kind of things that you do unless God was with him.

So his power was evident. His authority was evident. The crowds followed him. They listened to him with bated breath. He spoke as one with authority and not as the teachers of the law.

So why was it that within days, it appears, of him going about teaching through all the towns and villages in Palestine at that time, why is it that you get the impression, even at this stage, that there's conflict arising?

There's trouble brewing. And, of course, we all know the end of the story. This was not going to end well. It was going to end with them handing him over to the Romans and him being tried and crucified.

[8 : 01] Why was it? Why was it that there was such a conflict? And the answer lies with my Amazon story. They hadn't read the description properly.

So when they saw what God had sent to them, they didn't like him because he didn't fit what they wanted.

We've already seen this earlier on in Luke chapter 5, where after calling Levi to be one of his disciples, Levi, as a result of his new life, he wants everyone to know Jesus, so he arranges this dinner for everyone, all the sinners, all the low life in the place, the people who were on the margins of society.

And they all came round to his house and began to listen to Jesus. This does not go down well with the religious leaders of the time. And they complained and they grumbled about Jesus.

But Jesus said, I didn't come for the well people. I came for the sick. I haven't come to call the so-called righteous people. I have come to call sinners to repentance.

[9 : 23] In other words, Jesus' message was that the gospel was for bad people. Their message, what the scribes and what the Pharisees stood for, was that religion was for good people, or who they thought were good.

But Jesus said, no, you're completely wrong. And the Pharisees said, no, we don't like this man because he speaks a different language to us.

He thinks differently to us. We want to send him back to where he came from. No, because there's anything wrong with him.

Quite the opposite. There was absolutely nothing wrong with Jesus. He was exactly what God wanted to send. He was God himself. And it doesn't get better than that.

And this is the amazing thing. This is what I still find shocking about the men and the women who should have known so much better at that time.

[10 : 24] They knew their Bible. They knew the law and the prophets. They knew what had been promised and prophesied about Jesus. And despite that, they ended up rejecting him and sending him back.

Because they hated him. He made them jealous. They couldn't cope with something that was so new and so revolutionary and so opposed to everything that they stood for.

And so what you have in this passage that I read are three more issues. Rather, I should perhaps say two more issues. And both of which, they come into conflict with Jesus.

One of them was fasting. And the other was the Sabbath. The Pharisees were fasters. Fasters, we'll call them.

Fasting had become part of their way of life. Fasting is where you go without food. The idea was not because going without food drew you closer to God.

[11 : 40] There was nothing inherently good about not eating. But fasting gave you the opportunity to focus your mind on specific events and occasions where people maybe gathered together for prayer.

Or where there was an issue. Or where there was a war. Or where they were confessing their sin. Or whatever. Fasting gave the opportunity. Because people in those days, they took ages to prepare food.

Didn't have microwaves in those days where you could throw something in and 30 seconds later you've got a meal. In those days it took hours to prepare food.

And these were hours where under certain conditions you could spend in prayer. And so there were times set aside for fasting. But it was never supposed to be mandatory.

The Pharisees though, they believed that fasting made them closer, that drew them closer to God. They began to regard fasting as inherently something meritorious.

[12 : 45] Something that God was pleased with them for. And that meant that the more they fasted, the more pleased God was. In other words, they believed that they could please God by their own efforts.

And by their own rituals. And by their own do's and don'ts. So religion for them had descended into this routine of what you did at certain times of day.

And what you didn't do at certain times of day. And fasting was part of it. Twice a week apparently in Jesus' day, they fasted. Two days of the week were set aside for fasting, for going without food.

So they got the shock of their lives when they discovered that Jesus and his disciples, they didn't fast. So they went to him with a complaint. And they said, why?

Why is it that your disciples don't fast, but the Pharisees do? And here's Jesus' response. Jesus' response is simply this.

[13 : 42] That what you have is not what you expected, is it? You expect me to be like you.

To fit in with your routines and your do's and your don'ts. To fit in with your religious system by which you think that God is pleased.

You are entirely wrong. What's even worse? You've missed it altogether. You've missed the greatest news of all, which is that the bridegroom has come.

This is his response. Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? Who was the bridegroom? Jesus was the bridegroom. The wedding had come. God's promises were now being fulfilled.

This was the greatest moment on earth where everything that these very people had waited for, it was now happening. And they were missing it. Because they were so obsessed with their own

routines by which they believed that God was going to be pleased with them.

[14:50] Jesus answered, I mean, we can all understand what Jesus is saying, can't we? It's like going to a wedding, isn't it? I mean, none of us would ever go to a wedding. Even if you had decided to fast on that day, you would never go to a wedding and sit down at the table at the reception and say, well, I'm sorry, I can't eat this wonderful three-course meal into which a lot of money has been invested.

How discourteous would that be? Even if you were fasting, even if you had set that aside as a day of prayer, you would never do that. You would never act so discourteously against those who had asked you to the wedding, would you?

Well, that's what Jesus is saying. This is wedding time. The bridegroom has come. Is this a time for fasting? Jesus is saying there is a time and a place for fasting.

The question, of course, is there still a time and a place for fasting in today's church? I'll leave that one with you. There's no time to discuss it.

I would love to discuss it because I think it is such a fascinating topic. To go through the purpose of fasting in the Bible and to ask, is there still a place for it voluntarily, on occasion, going without food so that we can all focus our minds on prayer?

[16:14] I remember we did this once when I was a student. It was a long, long time ago. About 35 years ago, we all decided that in a Christian group of students, we were all going to set aside this day of fasting and prayer.

I still remember that day. Not because I think that God was especially pleased with us or because we earned God's favor by doing it. But I still remember that we were, I remember the concentration that there was in prayer that I've rarely felt.

Because it came to the point in the day when everybody was only thinking about food. And so that destroyed the whole thing. Well, it destroyed it at that point anyway. And so we decided, well, we better give this up because we're, but I still remember that day.

It was a really, really precious occasion. And the tradition I come from, fasting was practiced on occasions. But it was never mandatory.

It was always voluntary. It was always something that Christians decided to do for a particular reason. In order to give them the opportunity for focused prayer.

[17:21] Fasting and prayer go together. So that was Jesus' response. That was the complaint that the Pharisees brought to Jesus. And that was Jesus' response. But here's how he goes on.

He goes on to explain to them where they're going wrong. He's saying, your whole way of thinking belongs to a past generation. And it has become old.

And it's become redundant. What they belonged to was the Old Testament. Now, don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that the Old Testament is redundant.

But what happened was that they had become so dependent on God's law and all the ceremonies and all the rituals that they had forgotten that God's law pointed them towards the coming of Jesus. And now that Jesus had come, God's law was being fulfilled in the Messiah, in the Son of God.

[18:26] But instead of recognizing him, they clung so fast and so hard to their old routines and their old rules.

The rules that they had actually created for themselves. That they were now missing the greatest event in the history of humankind.

And Jesus puts it this way. He says this. He says, no one sews a patch of new material onto an old garment.

Because if you do, the new material will pull the old one apart. And I've never done this. I've never seen this happening. But perhaps some of you have. Apparently this is true. If something's really old and if it's all gone hard and it's all worn out, it's very, very brittle and very vulnerable.

And especially if you try and make it good by sewing a patch of new material onto it. The same is true. It's exactly the same thing with the new wine into old wineskins.

[19:31] Wineskins were used to store. They were animal skins that were all sewn up to form a container. And they would pour the new wine into this container, this, so that it would ferment over.

I don't know how long it would take to ferment. And as it fermented, gases would be given off and it would expand so that you had to, the container had to be flexible. If it wasn't, if it was brittle, it broke.

And the wine went all over the place and the whole thing was destroyed. In other words, Jesus is saying you can't pour new into old. If you're going to pour new into anything, it has to be new. You have to have a new way of thinking. One which has progressed. One which is ready for the Son of God. And as long as you continue to insist on your do's and your don'ts and your rituals and your ceremonies and all of these things that you love, because you actually think that you're winning God's favor by them, you'll never recognize the way that God has chosen to forgive our sins.

Of course, we're talking about his Son, who's the only way in which our sin can be forgiven. Your way of thinking has to change, said Jesus.

[20 : 56] In your present form, unless God changes you, then you're not going to see me for who I am. And the last verse in this chapter is actually one of the most solemn verses.

Look at it with me. Verse 38. Sorry, verse 39. And no one after drinking, no one after drinking old wine wants the new.

For he says the old is better. Now this has nothing to do with vintage wines or old wines or all of these things that so many people today go on about.

That's nothing to do with that. He's talking about a person who has gone for years of his life only drinking one kind of wine.

And he's so used to it that when somebody comes along with new wine and says, try this, he says, I don't even want to try it. I don't even want to look at it.

[21 : 53] Because for me, nothing's going to be superior to the old wines. A little bit. I'm going to give you a completely ridiculous example just to prove my point.

I used to work as a traveling engineer many, many years ago before I went into the ministry. And the company took on this young engineer once. And he had never traveled in his life.

He had never gone to another country. He had to get a passport. And he had to be introduced to the ways and routines of traveling. And his life had been so sort of restricted that any time he went out, he only ate fish and chips.

He only ate, I'm kidding you not, he only ate fish and chips. I don't know what he ate in his house. I'm sure he expanded his horizons a wee bit. But when he went out to a restaurant, he only ate fish and chips.

Sure enough, for the first couple of nights, it was fish and chips. So we started going off to the continent. And of course, they don't do fish and chips on the continent. And we took him to the continent and said, well, here's this menu with 20 different exotic items on the menu, each one of them costing a lot more than he was used to.

[23 : 06] And he would not try any of them. Totally refused. He says, if they don't have fish and chips, I'll just have bread.

And I'll have a cup of tea. It was about a year before he tried anything different. That was what these men were like. They refused to even contemplate that God was going to do something different to what they were used to.

Somebody said once, the greatest barrier to repentance is familiarity with the past and fear of the unknown.

And these were people, the Pharisees, who were so familiar with the past, they refused to contemplate what was unknown to them.

That's not faith. That's legalism. That's legalism. And it still happens to this day. People who think that religion is all about what you do for God.

[24 : 17] It's all about doing your best. It's all about your efforts. And it's all about the person who says, well, surely, if I live a decent life, then God's going to accept me at the end of the day.

Surely, if I'm kind to people, and even if I go to church, and if I think good thoughts, surely, surely it's all going to work out well in the end. That's not the gospel.

The gospel is about Jesus. And the gospel is about a person's relationship with Jesus as the Son of God and our Savior.

The gospel is not about what you do for God. It's about what God has done for you in Jesus. And that's why it's such great news.

Because the moment I go down the road of trying my best to please God, I'm never going to stop. Because I can never, ever live the kind of life that would please God.

[25 : 21] My life is full of sin. It's full of uncleanness. It's full of filth. And even if I was to try my best to please God, who's going to forgive all the stuff that I've done wrong?

Only God can do that. And he's promised to do it in Jesus Christ. Let's quickly move on to the next chapter. The next chapter which is about the Sabbath. Once again, a clash between Jesus and the Pharisees.

This time it's not about fasting, but this time it's what Jesus' disciples were doing. They went for a walk in the field. They were hungry. They picked up the corn and they rubbed the corn in their hands in order to just have a snack, to keep the wolf from the door.

But this didn't go down well with the Pharisees. They began to complain. Why are you doing that is unlawful on the Sabbath? And Jesus said, have you never read what David did?

He goes all the way back to the Old Testament to make a comparison. He entered the house of God and taking the consecrated bread. He ate what is lawful, only for the priests to eat. And then Jesus said to them, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

[26 : 34] Let's keep that in mind. The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath. Let's keep reading. On another occasion, he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled.

Jesus knew what was going to happen. Once again, the Pharisees were on the lookout to trap him, to see if he was going to do just as they expected on the Sabbath. So they would accuse him of breaking the Sabbath day.

Jesus once again said, which is, I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath, to do good or to do evil, or to save life or to destroy it? And he looked round at them all, and he said to the man with the shriveled hand, stretch out your hand.

And he stretched out his hand, and he healed him in a split second. And that was the moment when we read these chilling words. They were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do.

To Jesus. This time it was the Sabbath day, which was a big issue for them. The Sabbath day went all the way back to the Ten Commandments. The fourth commandment is, remember the Sabbath day to keep in holy.

[27 : 40] Six days you shall labor and to do all your work, but the seventh is the Sabbath to the Lord. Because in six days, God created the heavens and the earth. And on the seventh day he rested.

Now, how do we understand the Sabbath? You can't do it without going all the way back. It's not just part of the Ten Commandments. It goes all the way back to the very beginning of time, when God created the heavens and the earth, the universe.

And at the end of that process of creation, he rested on the seventh day. Right away, there's so many questions. Why does God need rest? God's God.

He's done with our body. Why does he need rest? Well, again, I'll leave that with you. But Exodus tells us something fascinating. Exodus tells us, and it wasn't just that he rested, whatever that means, but that he took delight in what he had created.

So for God, his rest was to rejoice. I hope when we think of God, we think of a rejoicing God this morning, because that is what he is.

[28 : 52] The Bible describes him as the blessed God, which means that there is joy in heaven this morning. Heaven is a place of unbroken joy.

And God took delight in the Sabbath day, because it was an occasion, that occasion when he finished the work that he had started in creating the heavens and the earth.

And so he established a pattern for humankind, where humankind would work six days of the week, and they would rest on the seventh. And he made it a law.

He had to make it a law, because we think we're invincible. We don't think we need rest. We think we can go on 24-7, because we're so full of ourselves as sinful human beings.

That's why God said, you must rest on the seventh day. We need to rest. The rest principle is embedded in God's human rights agenda for mankind.

[29 : 55] But the Sabbath did something else. It didn't just provide an occasion for rest. It looked forward to another occasion, that ultimate occasion, when once again God would finish his work.

Except this time it wasn't the work of creation. It was the work of our salvation, which was the day that Jesus rose from the dead, which was the first day of the week.

The Sabbath was all about Jesus. It was all about the Old Testament people looking forward to the coming of Jesus and what he would do.

The Sabbath for us, the first day of the week, we call it the Lord's Day. We come together like this to celebrate and to rejoice the fact that Jesus has risen from the dead, just like the church has been doing for 2,000 years and still does to this day.

When Jesus says, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath, that's present tense. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath.

[31 : 08] And we are here today to rejoice in the coming and in the death and in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead as the finished work of our salvation.

And we're here to discover him and to rediscover him time and again. And so today, the Pharisees didn't get what they expected.

There was inevitable conflict because the Pharisees, the leaders at that time, they expected one thing and Jesus bitterly disappointed them.

Instead of stopping and asking the question, maybe we're wrong. Maybe our expectations were all wrong all the time.

Maybe we should sit down and look at this man Jesus and with a fresh pair of eyes, perhaps we should ask God to reveal himself in Jesus.

[32 : 14] If they had only done that, then their lives would have been changed and they would have discovered the marvel of who Jesus was and what he came to do.

Instead of that, they went away bitter, disappointed, hateful, determined to put him to death.

Jesus puts it this way. He came to his own, that's Jesus talking about himself, he came to his own, his own people, and his own did not receive him.

That's exactly what's happening in this passage. His own people did not receive him. If only they had. But as many as did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God.

That is what salvation is all about this morning. It's about being a child of God. I cannot think of anything I would love to have more than to be a child of God.

[33 : 28] Because being a child of God means that God is the reason for my living. That God is my salvation and he has taken away all my sin and he's given me everlasting life in his son, Jesus Christ.

And I would invite you this morning, if you've never come to that relationship with him, then he invites you to come and he invites you to take him to be your saviour and your God so that you discover that Jesus is who he says he was and he is everything that God wants for us, our saviour and our Lord.

Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we thank you for your word and the way it always points us to the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that our hearts will be awakened and that they will be aroused by him afresh this morning.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.