

IT IS LAWFUL TO DO GOOD ON THE SABBATH

(Matt. 12:9-13)

The Jews, in seeking to protect against violating the Sabbath, had added extra “laws” to provide extra protection. These laws were seen as sort of a “fence” around the Law of Moses. But legalistic man-made rules that add to the Scriptures are always a detriment to the well-being of people. Thus the issue of legalistic Sabbath rules became a major point of contention between Jesus and the Jewish legalists.

Matthew 12:9 (NKJV)

9 Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue.

The parallel text in Luke 6 indicates this did not take place on the same Sabbath but thematically follows sometime later (cf. Mk. 3:1-5; Lk. 6:6-11).

Matthew 12:10 (NKJV)

10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—that they might accuse Him.

The word “withered” means “dried up”, “shriveled” or “useless”. Note the scribes and Pharisees were proactive here. It’s almost like they EXPECT Christ to heal on the Sabbath and are trying to set Him up so that they might accuse Him of doing something wrong when it happens.

I find this interesting because it shows that even they did not deny the legitimacy of His healing ministry – they were just quibbling about the details of WHEN it should happen.

No law in the OT actually forbade helping a person medically on the Sabbath; there was no law against healing or performing acts of mercy. However, the rabbis and the Pharisees had all kinds of laws against helping people.

“The rabbis generally permitted attempts to heal people on the Sabbath but only if their life was in danger. Otherwise, it was illegal to tie a bandage, set a broken bone, or administer medicine. Some rabbis even banned prayer for the sick on the Sabbath.” -**Holman Christian Standard Bible**

How’s that for providing pastoral care? Where is the love here? Nothing like a good Sabbath REST, you know! Crazy! No wonder Christ said, “Come to

Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Mt. 11:28). There was NO REST under this kind of legalism!

Obviously, this man with the withered hand did not have a condition where his life was in jeopardy – so it was high drama with this challenge before Jesus. They were really challenging Christ’s assertion to be Lord of the Sabbath! What would His response be? Well, He was always up to the challenge, and here is what happened.

Matthew 12:11 (NKJV)

11 Then He said to them, “What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out?”

The Jews commonly accepted that it was permissible to rescue one of their own animals that fell into a pit on the Sabbath.

This is something they would all do. Well, logic says that if they were willing to help a sheep, why could not a person, who is much more valuable than a mere animal, be helped? Therefore Jesus posed this question and answer.

Matthew 12:12 (NKJV)

12 Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

The logic of Christ here was impeccable and irrefutable! You can almost hear the deafening silence!

Mark 3:4 (NKJV)

4 Then He said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they kept silent.

Every Jew knew that people were created in the image of God and therefore of MUCH MORE VALUE than a mere sheep. It was beyond argument! You would have to be an evolutionist not to get this – and the Jews didn’t believe in evolution.

Jesus therefore gave forth the logical conclusion: **“Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”** What a revolutionary concept. The Lord of the Sabbath says it is LAWFUL to do GOOD on the Sabbath. **“It is always lawful to do good.”** (MacArthur)

In fact, the entire purpose behind the Sabbath law was for the GOOD of mankind – not their detriment. In Mark 2:27 Jesus said, “The Sabbath was

made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” The legalists had it backwards.

Matthew 12:13 (NKJV)

13 Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.

Jesus the Lord is ever in control of every situation. He commands the moment. He took charge. But before the action of healing took place, Mark makes this notation that is not recorded here.

Mark 3:5 (NKJV)

5 And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

Before Jesus dealt with the man and healed him, before that, Jesus looked right through these hard-hearted people with ANGER. There is such a thing as a righteous anger, and Jesus displayed it here.

Few things grieve our Lord more than hard-heartedness that doesn't care about people.

After giving them an intent look of anger, Jesus then commanded the man, “Stretch out your hand”. And immediately he stretched it out, and it was completely restored – instantly!

This was really a miracle of “creation”. To make a withered hand instantly whole was to basically take that which was “dead” and give “life” to it. It speaks of God's creative power to bring things to life that weren't there before. Since it was the Creator who instituted the Sabbath in the beginning, as seen in Genesis 2:1-3 this miracle demonstrated that indeed Christ was Lord of the Sabbath.

He claimed it, and then He proved it in this miracle which He performed on the Sabbath. Christ's miracles confirmed things. In chapter 9, Jesus claimed to be able to forgive sins, and then He proved it by healing the paralytic (cf. Mt. 9:1-8). Here Jesus claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath, and then He proved it through this creation miracle performed on this man with a withered hand. Thus, it served as confirmation of His claim to Lordship over the Sabbath and that, as the Son of Man, He is indeed the true Messiah.

