

A LORDSHIP ISSUE: LEGALISM VERSUS CHRIST

(Matt. 12:14)

The Pharisees could not deny the reality of Jesus' healing ministry, but they had a MAJOR problem with Him exercising it on the Sabbath. In Matthew 12, when Jesus healed a man with a withered hand, this was their response...

Matthew 12:14 (NKJV)

14 Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him.

Now this was telling! Jesus was doing GOOD on the Sabbath, but in response to His doing good, the Pharisees left the meeting and went out and plotted against Jesus on how they might destroy Him (cf. Mk. 3:6).

How ironic that in their theology it was wrong to do GOOD on the Sabbath, but it was not wrong to plot the death of someone doing good. That is some kind of twisted depravity.

Here they were so concerned about a mere technicality (a rabbinic technicality – not even backed by Scripture) violating the Sabbath, but at the same time they had no compunction about plotting murder on the Sabbath. Legalists are always grossly inconsistent.

Mark 3:4 is clear that when challenged by Jesus, these religious leaders were SILENT. They had neither Scripture nor logic to refute Jesus, but at the same time they refused to repent. This shows a deep-seated heart problem. They didn't need more evidence. They had a heart problem. As it says in Mark 3:5, they had HARD HEARTS.

The problem with having a hard heart is that it can become irremediable, as we see later on in this chapter. There is absolutely no answer, no hope, for a HARDENED HEART that absolutely refuses to repent no matter what. And because of their influence with people, it is especially tragic when it is seen in the lives and hearts of religious leaders.

Jesus restored – the Pharisees plotted to destroy. What a contrast. Jesus preached mercy – the Pharisees preached legalism.

One of the great evidences for the truth of Christ's ministry and that He truly was of God was that He went about constantly doing GOOD! That is God-like!

Acts 10:38 (NKJV)

38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

In contrast, the devil is always seeking to harm people. He seeks their destruction. No wonder Jesus in John 8 said to the Jews who wanted to kill Him, ***“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning...”*** (Jn. 8:44).

Indeed, people are known by their fruits – just as Christ said.

The ONE in Whom our soul finds true rest is the all-sovereign One. This is Jesus! He is ***“Lord even of the Sabbath.”*** He is Lord of the REST simply because He is Lord over all! It’s not all about rules and regulations; it’s not about laws and legalism. It’s about Jesus, who is gentle and lowly in heart, and whose yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Our Lord is not a harsh taskmaster but a very loving Lord who truly has our greatest good in mind every step of the way! Legalism is burdensome, harsh, and unloving. Jesus our Lord is the very opposite of this.

He is not a God who wants dead formal legalism, but a God who wants us to know His heart and seek after Him. He wants us to take His yoke upon us and learn from Him that He is a God who desires mercy!

Micah 6:8 (NKJV)

8 He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

It’s really a Lordship issue. Will Jesus be our Lord, or will legalism run our life? For us as Christians, it’s no longer about being under the Lordship of law or legalism, but rather being under the Lordship of Christ. And the Lord governs through LOVE. When Jesus is Lord, we take His commandments seriously, but we also learn “mercy” from Him, knowing that the greatest commandment is loving Him and then loving others.

It’s all about following Him and learning from Him. Think of it – the all-sovereign One is merciful – and He calls His children to be the same.

The GREAT issue in the text is the LEGALISM of the Jews versus the LORDSHIP of Christ. Jesus demands that true faith turn from depending upon legalism to finding REST in Him alone. He is LORD of the REST!

There are two great emphases in the gospels; namely, who Christ is as LORD and who He is as Savior! As Savior He died for all our sins, and as Lord over all He arose the third day. This is the GOSPEL of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4).

And here is the point: It must be personal. John is the gospel of BELIEF. John emphasizes Jesus is God and that He is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (cf. Jn. 1:1, 29). The climactic illustration of faith in the book comes in John 20, when “Doubting Thomas” said he would not believe in the resurrected Christ unless he personally saw him for himself. Well, when Jesus appeared to him, Thomas said, “My Lord and my God!” and then Jesus said he had seen and believed (Jn. 20:27-29). This is what it means to believe in Jesus. It must be PERSONAL. We must believe in Him as “My Lord and my God!” We must believe in Him as “my Savior”.

On judgment day MANY will say “Lord, Lord” to Jesus and He will say, “I never knew you; depart from Me” (cf. Mt. 7:21-23). It was never PERSONAL – it was never real in their HEART (cf. Rom. 10:9-10).

Jesus is Lord! He is Lord even of the Sabbath! The ultimate question is this: Is He your Lord?

The Bible says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

Jesus invites: “Come to Me...and I will give you rest.” Come and believe on Him as Lord and Savior, and He will give you rest!