

Jesus and the Pharisees (part eight of a twelve part series)

As promised, our focus in this segment will be upon the Sabbath healing recorded for us in both Matthew 12:1-14 and Mark 2:23-3:6. After allowing His disciples to eat the heads of grain while passing through grain fields, Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees for allowing them to violate the Sabbath. He responds by quoting from Hosea 6:6, as recorded in Matthew 12:7 –

“But if you had known what this means, ‘I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.”

The idea behind the word “compassion” (eleos), speaks of mercy. In other words, Jesus here is affirming the distinction between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. Observing the Sabbath was important. However, acts of mercy in meeting the needs of others were not a violation of the Sabbath. No one was more qualified to establish such a distinction than our Savior, which He confirms in a manner that must have shocked these religious legalists, in Matthew 12:8 –

“For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

Colossians 1:16-17 declares that Jesus Christ, as God the Son, was the Creator of heaven and earth. He is the One who created all that there is in six days and rested on the seventh, leaving the nation of Israel that example to follow. As a result, He had every right to interpret and apply the Sabbath Day as He saw fit; and makes that clear to the Pharisees in Mark 2:27 –

“Jesus said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.’”

This confrontation so irritated our Lord that He decided to take it to another level by entering into their synagogue, where there was a man with a withered hand. The Pharisees see this as an opportunity to continue their harassment of the promised Messiah (Matthew 12:10). Jesus sees it as the perfect occasion to exercise His Lordship over the Sabbath once again. With a sense of righteous indignation, coupled with his ongoing grief at their hardness of heart, He makes the most comprehensive application of the “spirit” of the Sabbath law possible, in both Matthew 12:12 and Mark 3:4 – “it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” Christ then proceeds to heal the man of his withered hand! (Mark 3:5) Did the Pharisees respond by believing in Jesus as their Messiah, Savior and Lord? Of course not! They begin conspiring with the Herodians, whom they despised as compromised agents of Rome, in an act of political expedience (Mark 3:6).

When we as Christians fall prey to unethical, opportunistic principles such as, “the end justifies the means,” and “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” we are no better than the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day, who sought to destroy Him.