

### The Lord Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath

#### Matthew 12:1-13

Matthew 12:1-8 - *“At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. <sup>2</sup> And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!”*

*<sup>3</sup> But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: <sup>4</sup> how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? <sup>5</sup> Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? <sup>6</sup> Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. <sup>7</sup> But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the guiltless. <sup>8</sup> For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”*

*<sup>9</sup> Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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? <sup>12</sup> Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” <sup>13</sup> Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other.”*

#### Background Notes

In the last half of Matthew 11 evidence was mounting that the nation of Israel was rejecting the Lord and His offer of the Kingdom. The towns in Galilee, where most of His miracles were done, would not recognize the Lord as the Messiah.

There is more evidence of that rejection in Matthew 12. The Pharisees, who were supposed to be the religious leaders of Israel, found fault with the Lord for breaking their man-made laws for the proper observance of the Sabbath. The Pharisees were the legalists of the day. Their sets of rules and lists of taboos were more important to them than the Word of God itself! They had taken the commandment of keeping the Sabbath totally out of the context in which it was given. They ignored God’s intent in giving the Sabbath as a day of rest and blessing for man, and had instead made a day of stringent rule keeping. The Lord condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and legalism. He deliberately chose to do many of His miracles on the Sabbath - to show the Pharisees that they had wrongly interpreted the Word of God!

It’s important to distinguish between **God’s moral laws**, and the **civil and ceremonial laws** God gave to Israel. The Old Testament Law that was given to Israel was a combination of civil, ceremonial, and moral laws. God’s **moral laws** were -

and still are - not just for Israel. They are for all mankind! **God's moral laws never change.** His moral laws are for all mankind, for all cultures, and for all time periods.

God's civil and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, however, were given for the theocracy of Israel. His civil and ceremonial laws ended with the coming of Christ. Keeping the Sabbath was a civil or ceremonial law, not a moral law.

Nine of the Ten Commandments are moral laws, and they are repeated in the New Testament. These moral laws still apply today, because God's moral laws never change. But one of the Ten Commandments was not a moral law: the keeping of the Sabbath as a day of rest. The Sabbath law is not a moral law, so it is not binding for Christians today.

And by the way, Sunday is not the "new Sabbath." Sunday is a special day for Christians because it's the day that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Sunday is "The Lord's Day"! We should follow the **Creation principle** of setting aside a day for rest each week, but we shouldn't take the Sabbath laws of the Old Testament and apply them to Sunday.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Legalism always results in a loss of common sense!

There are a number of teaching points that we could draw from Matthew 12:1-8, but this point is certainly appropriate:

**Legalism always results in a loss of common sense!** The Lord and His disciples were walking through the grain fields on the Sabbath. The disciples were hungry, so they picked a few heads of grain and ate them. The Pharisees found fault with this action because they claimed the disciples were "working on the Sabbath"! Working on the Sabbath was against the Pharisees' rules for the correct observance of the Sabbath - but the Pharisees were wrong. God's Law of resting from work on the Sabbath was never intended to keep people from eating when they were hungry! But legalism, then and today, always goes beyond the intent of God's commands – even to the loss of common sense!

Recently I was speaking to a young Jewish man who has become a Christian. He said that he left Judaism even before he became a Christian because he felt the Sabbath laws were ridiculous. They were crazy (as he put it). He mentioned that elevators in Jewish hotels are pre-programmed to stop at every floor on the Sabbath so that you don't have to push the buttons. According to the Orthodox laws, pushing an elevator button causes a tiny spark in the electrical contacts, and causing a spark is equivalent to making a fire, and making a fire is work, and if you work you're breaking the Sabbath! (We found this to be true in the hotel where we stayed in Jerusalem.) The elevator example is a little bit beyond common sense, and there are many similar laws in Orthodox Judaism that go beyond common sense. Legalism always results in a loss of common sense.

Although we may laugh at a lack of common sense in other people, such as some of the extreme laws in Judaism, I know some Christians who think that they're more spiritual because they sing hymns out of a specific hymnal. And they judge

the spirituality of other Christians which hymnal they prefer! Now listen folks, it's okay to prefer certain hymnals, but to make that a measure of spirituality for other Christians is legalism - and it's a loss of common sense! And it's wrong!

The Lord refuted the Pharisees' legalism with three arguments:

- a. He reminded them of the event in 1 Samuel 21, when David and his men ate the consecrated bread from the Tabernacle. Under the Law, this bread was to be eaten only by the priests. But that law was a **ceremonial** law, not a **moral** law. Ceremonial law and civil law may be suspended if it's a matter of sustaining life. Example: driving faster than the speed limit if you're rushing your wife to the hospital when she's about to deliver the baby in the car!
- b. The Lord reminded the Pharisees that the priests work in the Temple on the Sabbath, fulfilling the daily sacrifices that God prescribed, so obviously God's intent of the law of the Sabbath was not the same as the Pharisees' rigid regulations.
- c. The Lord told the Pharisees that He Himself was the "Lord of the Sabbath" (v8). That was a claim to deity! As God, He had instituted the Sabbath law in the first place, and therefore He knew how it should be applied.

Jesus taught that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. A day of rest was a benefit for mankind. The Pharisees never understood that concept. They failed to understand that God was more interested in seeing hearts of compassion than in the legalistic bringing of sacrifices under the Law. *"But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless"* (v7).

The Messiah was here. The King and His Kingdom were greater than the Temple and the sacrificial system. Would the Jewish leaders accept the King and His offer of the Kingdom, or would they go on with their legalistic, senseless interpretations of the Mosaic Law and all their incorrect and stifling man-made additions?

Legalism always results in the loss of common sense.

## **2. Legalism always results in the lack of compassion.**

*"Now when He had departed from there, He went into their synagogue. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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? <sup>12</sup> Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." <sup>13</sup> Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as whole as the other" (v9-13).*

Notice - in verse 7 the Lord quoted Hosea 6:6: *"But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless."*

We have an example of the truth that legalism always results in the lack of compassion in verses 9-13. The Lord went into one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, and a man who had a withered hand was there. It's possible that he was a "plant" by the Pharisees who wanted to catch the Lord in a trap. According to their incorrect interpretation of God's Law, if the Lord healed the man He would be "breaking the Sabbath." Their incorrect interpretation was based on Judaism's traditions and additions over the years. The Pharisees had no compassion for the handicapped man; they were only interested in everyone keeping their man-made set of rules. Legalism always results in the lack of compassion.

I know some Christian parents who would not allow their son to come to Emmaus Bible College because we don't exclusively use the King James Version of the Bible. Of course we use the King James Version, but not the King James version **only!** The exclusive use of the King James Version was more important to these legalistic parents than the desire of their son's heart to study God's Word. Legalism always results in a lack of compassion.

The Lord exposed the Pharisees' legalistic position and lack of compassion by asking them what they would do if one of their sheep fell into a pit on the Sabbath. Certainly they would rescue their animal in its need! How much more, then, was it lawful to **heal a man** on the Sabbath! The Pharisees had no answer. Their mouths were closed.

Legalism always results in a lack of compassion.

## Practical Application

### Remember -- people are more important than pets!

*"Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep?" (v12).*

A few weeks ago, Margie and I stayed in the home of a family that was out of town. We had to take care of the needs of the pets - two pet rabbits, one bird, and one turtle. It's important that we care for the needs of our pets – but the Lord indicated here that it's more important to care for the needs of **people!**

Are we concerned for the physical needs of our neighbors? Do you know of a family in your church or your community that could use a helping hand, perhaps because of a job loss, an accident, or an illness? Let's get motivated! Let's reach out to them and do what we can to help!

As we care for our pets, let's be reminded that people need care, too – people that we know, and people that we don't know. Remember - people are more important than pets!