

## *“Is it Lawful to Do Good or to Do Harm on the Sabbath, to Save a Life or to Kill?”*

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Read Mark 3:1-6

How do we live so as to produce life and not death? Christ brings liberty to the captive, sight to the blind, healing to the sick, and power to the impotent (Luke 4). How do we become ambassadors of such truth without “selling out”? How do we maintain the purity of the gospel without forsaking the purpose of the gospel?

First, it is the truth that sets people free (John 8:32). Paul celebrates this idea in the letter to the Galatians. The power of the cross frees people in captivity. Regardless as to the means, when the content of the cross is shared, people go free. The cross cannot help but do what it was designed to do. It brings hope, heals, and restores wholeness to the despairing, the diseased, and the dysfunctional. Second, from Mark 2:23-3:6 one can see how it is possible for the “shadow” of rules, rituals, and regulations to rob people of their relationship with God. Yet how do we guard ourselves and the ministry entrusted to us from becoming consumed by those things that kill rather than bring life. Is it possible to know if the shadow has become the end rather than the means to the end? Consider the following two thoughts.

First, if *life* characterizes the Christian walk, then the *relationship* one has with Christ is celebrated. If death marks the Christian life, then the life is in bondage to rules, rituals, and regulations.

Second, when discipleship begins with the setting down of rules and regulations in order to maintain and cultivate the Christian life, we have stopped on the shadow and have forsaken the substance casting the shadow. Transformation is inseparably linked to salvation. Regardless as to how anemic a Christian might look, it is a non-negotiable that they have moved from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son. Resurrection, redemption, adoption, reconciliation, justification, propitiation are descriptive terms used of every saved person. They are not prescriptive. They are not truths to be obtained, but rather to be enjoyed. These truths are the reality of the Christian life.

As strong as the following statement reads, I am compelled to say it, “If our focus in the Christian life is on how well one lives for Jesus or how feverishly they serve the risen Christ or how deep their personal sacrifice is for Him, then such thinking brings bondage, captivity, and death.” The issue is not how much you have done for Jesus, but rather how much Jesus has done for you. Your response to Him is incidental. When the emphasis is on your performance or your walk or the Christian life, and not the life of Christ showing itself in you and through you, with the individual completely resting in His finished work, then you are in bondage to the shadow. O how such

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thinking angers us. Our Americanism and innate depravity crave accomplishment and desires to say with Frank Sinatra, "I did it my way." We are driven by such autonomy. It is only grace and the gospel that frees us from ourselves.

Our reaction to such thinking is perhaps a real barometer of just how self-consumed we are and how deeply rooted the tentacles of legalism have wrapped themselves around our hearts. All expressions of obedience and all expressions of fruit bearing are simply the goodness and grace of God showing itself in us and through us to those around us. It is nothing more than this and it is surely nothing less than this.

We fault the Pharisee of Mark 2:23ff and Mark 3:1ff, but we are just as critical and self-consumed. Do I desire for your passions to increase for Him and your joy and delight in Him to superabundantly abound? Absolutely, but such work will never happen by rules, rituals, and regulations. They only happen because we are loved unconditionally by the supreme lover of our souls. Friend, let us not trip over the life-giving power of the cross. Let us not view with a calloused casualness the person and work of Jesus Christ. May we never tire of this life-giving truth.

So . . . "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" May God continue to knit our hearts together in a singular passion to see His people set free from the penalty and power of sin. May we not rest until His declaration of freedom rings throughout the land.