

Legalism and Liberty

Matthew 12:1-2 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. ²But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, “Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath.”

The disciples were responding to a basic physical response to lack of food: hunger. The solution also was simple: pick a little grain and eat it.

The Pharisees, in their desire to discredit Jesus, ended up discrediting the character of God. Does God's Law really prohibit hungry people from getting food on the Sabbath?

Leviticus 19:9-10 ⁹‘Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.

It seems that their idea of righteousness was only superficial: “The Law doesn't say you can't, but we don't collect grain, so you shouldn't either.”

Misery loves company, and so does a faith defined by little liberty and lots of rules. This is the essence of legalism.

Jesus had a big-hearted, wide-armed, welcoming, loving, gracious Father in heaven, and so those were the attributes of His faith.

The Pharisees had a stingy, closed-hearted, tight-fisted, micro-managing God, so their faith also followed suit.

Practically, faith is essentially a direct reflection of the God we REALLY believe in.

Matthew 12:3-8 ³But He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, ⁴how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? ⁵Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? ⁶But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. ⁷But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent. ⁸For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

In Matthew 9, Jesus gave them homework: “Go and learn what this means...” They did not do the assignment!

Love God and Love neighbor- sums up law and prophets

If they had, they might have made a discovery: God's loves people! His rules and commands are meant primarily to benefit- not restrict- those people!

Mark 2:27 ²⁷Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

Jesus is calling all of us into a faith that is defined by what it DOES, not by what it DOES NOT DO.

Matthew 12:9-14 ⁹Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. ¹⁰And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—so that they might accuse Him. ¹¹And He said to them, “What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? (Mark: “But they kept silent. ⁵After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart...”)¹²How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” ¹³Then He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand!” He stretched it

out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. ¹⁴But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

Jesus was revealing the true heart of God, which so many have misunderstood.

If a person is in real need, could God's command not to work on the Sabbath be a valid reason to withhold compassion? Could such a decision ever please God?

Driving home from church, a woman with a flat tire needing help, etc

Have the particulars of your convictions/interpretations become excuses for withholding basic compassion?

Are there people we are judging as unclean or unworthy, just because they are hard to love?

Have my personal convictions driven wedges between myself and people God has called me to love?

If we have strong faith and liberty in Christ, are we using it to reach out and show compassion in Jesus' name?

Maybe you're the man with the withered hand, in need of grace, help, healing. Jesus has time for you here and now!