

"1 He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. 2 They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. 3 He \*said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" 4 And He \*said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. 5 After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He \*said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him." Mark 3:1-6, NAS95.

About half of the Americans who are familiar with the New Age movement don't take its teachings seriously, and a third of them say New Age thought runs counter to Judeo-Christian teaching, says a new poll by the Princeton Religious Research Center.

The poll also shows that the general population's awareness of the New Age is low, but the number of Americans who adhere to New Age practices is alarmingly high, even among professing Christians. "Many who consider themselves good Christians nonetheless have engaged in practices that seemingly are counter to the teaching of their church," the pollsters said.

Roughly half of all Americans say they believe in extrasensory perception. Thirty percent of Roman Catholics and 22 percent of Protestants say they believe in clairvoyance, while 48 percent of Roman Catholics and 44 percent of Protestants say they believe in psychic healing, the poll shows. The poll indicates that 25 percent of both groups believe the movement of the stars may help govern the affairs of men and women. Christianity Today, February 10, 1992.

Our text this morning speaks to us of the One who rules the stars and governs the affairs of men, when even faith is not present.

Luke tells us, "on the Sabbath day he went into the Synagogue, as was his custom" (Lk. 4:16). In other words, Jesus was born under the law, and he kept the Old Covenant blamelessly. He identified with a sinner's religion, though being without sin himself because He came to save His people who were and are sinners. We have already established how He has identified with us through John's Baptism and the Wilderness Temptation.

Even though Jesus is obeying the Law in our text, Jesus' opponents found another chance to accuse him of disregarding the Sabbath when he healed a crippled man, for whom they do not seem to have felt any pity. Healing on Sabbath was only allowed by the rabbis, in cases of life and death and this was clearly not one of them. Jesus made no attempt to avoid the trap, as he could have done. Instead, he called the man to stand before them all and asked a question which went right to the heart of the issue.

Notice in our text that the man who is healed does not ask for it, is not looking for it but only obeys when he is told to come forward and stretch out his hand.

Clearly to leave such a man unhealed, when Jesus had the power to heal him, was to do evil. To do good on the Sabbath by healing the man was obviously the right course of action, and surely the Sabbath law did not forbid it? (The second half of Jesus' question, 'to save life or to kill' is only a stronger way of saying the same thing.) The Pharisees could not reply without condemning themselves, so they remained silent. Mark records that Jesus was angry as well as grieved at their stubbornness of heart. As this is one of the very few occasions when Mark records Jesus' anger, it is important to see what caused it.

3:1. The muscles and nerves of a "dried" or "withered" hand were inactive; thus the hand, smaller than usual, did not function (1 Kings 13:4 No cure was known for this paralysis).

3:2. In the teachings of Jewish legal scholars, minor cures were not permitted on the sabbath, although saving a life was a different matter. (Even the strictest observers of the sabbath allowed compromising the sabbath to save life or to fight in a defensive war.) The rule against cures applied to physicians, however, not to healings wrought by God, and Pharisees disputed among themselves whether prayer for the sick was permitted on the sabbath. Jesus' opponents are therefore going considerably beyond standard Jewish rules to try to convict him.

What does Jesus mean when He says to kill in verse three?

3:3-5. Jesus might mean that "killing" is permitted on the sabbath, as it was during

the Maccabean warfare (second century B.C.); more likely he draws a legal analogy from the principle that one could violate the sabbath to save life but not to kill except in self-defense; by extension, one could do good but not harm. Or it might just be saying in a stronger way, is it better to save life as opposed to killing.

3:6. Unintentional violations of the sabbath or issues of disagreement about what constituted work (matters that were debatable in Jewish courts) were normally treated lightly; capital punishment (Ex 31:14; 35:2) was thought appropriate only for those who willfully rejected the sabbath. Jesus' opponents go far beyond their own traditional teachings here.

The healing of this man on Sabbath was the moment when two most unlikely allies, the Pharisees and Herodians, decided to get rid of Jesus and began to plot how they might kill him. If we do not believe in Jesus, then we must finally crucify him. Mark warns us of this choice right from the start of his gospel. The Pharisees were the 'religious fundamentalists' of their day, while the Herodians, not mentioned in the other Gospels, seem to have been a secular party, supporting the Herodian dynasty. This was a combination of cynicism and political opportunism, one that is often seen in the world where there is opposition to the gospel. The enemy will use any tools that he can.

So as with our study last week we are able to add some more comment on our understanding of the Sabbath for us today as New Covenant.

Let restate a few things.

The Sabbath was the sign and seal of the Old Covenant (OC). It served as the very cornerstone of all the other feasts and holy days the children of Israel were to observe.

**Ex.31: 13,17** Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between you and me throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. 17 It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed. The Prophets testify to the same thing - **Ezek.20:12,20** Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. 20 And hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the LORD your God.

If the Sabbath was broken then the sign / seal was broken and so the whole covenant

was considered broken. We read the following in Ezek.20:12,16,20,21, &24 how they continually violated the Sabbath and were being judged as covenant breakers should be. 12 Moreover also I gave them my Sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. ... 16 Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my Sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols. ... 20 And hallow my Sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the LORD your God. 21 Notwithstanding the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my Sabbaths: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the wilderness. ... 24 Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols. As the sign and symbol of the covenant and the very cornerstone of the feasts and holy days we can see why the Sabbath was truly ceremonial. The Sabbath was the ceremonial sign that was the test of covenantal loyalty.

The Old Covenant stood as an historic covenant with the Sabbath as its sign and seal. The OC itself was one of the most significant OT signposts pointing to the new and everlasting covenant in Christ. For anyone now living in the light of the New Covenant (NC) it can be seen what a bright light the OC was for our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is why we teach that the Old Covenant was not a covenant of grace but that it had a gracious purpose.

We are not under the Mosaic Law nor the Sabbath command of the Old Covenant. There really cannot be a New covenant Sabbath breaker because Christ is our eternal Sabbath rest. If we are genuinely His then we rest in Him forever, period.

There at least six distinct approaches to the Fourth, or Sabbath, Commandment. The current debate on the true nature and purpose of the Fourth Commandment will not be resolved until we understand what the various views are really saying. Here are the six views:

One: Consistent Sabbatarian - The Seventh Day Adventist view.

Two: Inconsistent Sabbatarian - The Puritan, or classic Covenant Theology, View.

Three: Antinomian Sabbatarian - View of most present day Reformed? people.

Four: Utilitarian Sabbatarian - Reformers (Luther and Calvin) view.

Five: Promise/Fulfillment Lord's Day - The view of most New Covenant advocates.

One: A Consistent Sabbatarian fourth commandment or specifically commands that the Sabbath be changed from the seventh day of the week to the first. I label these people consistent Sabbatharians because they sincerely try to consistently follow the Fourth Commandment exactly as God wrote it on the tables of stone. In my mind, there is no question at all that these people are dead right if the Sabbath commandment is part of the unchanging moral law of God. They have the actual commandment itself on their side.

#### Two: An Inconsistent Sabbatarian

An Inconsistent Sabbatarian totally agrees with the consistent sabbatarian up to the point of seventh versus one in seven part. At this point he changes the "unchanging" moral law in two ways. He first changes the day from the seventh to first, and then also changes the God given reason(s) for remembering the day. We now keep the Christian Sabbath (A term and concept totally unknown in Scriptures) holy to remember the resurrection of Christ. The view has no clear and compelling New Testament evidence for either of these changes. However, to his credit, the inconsistent sabbatarian does honestly try to be consistent with the specific rules that God gave to Israel concerning Sabbath behavior. Nearly all the Puritans held this view.

#### Three: An Antinomian Sabbatarian

An Antinomian Sabbatarian is a creature of recent origin. Like the inconsistent sabbatarian, he agrees that the Fourth Commandment is part of God's unchanging law, and also agrees in changing it in the same two ways. However, at this point he parts company with his revered Puritan forefathers. This new breed will not allow any specific rules of conduct to be made for Sabbath behavior. In fact, he will not even lay down specific principles that enable one to evaluate and establish for certain whether any specific thing is permitted or disallowed. He will preach a powerful sermon, often the fifth in a series of nine or more, and adamantly insist that keeping the Sabbath holy is the moral duty demanded in this unchanging moral commandment of God. If, in true

godly concern, you ask this leader whether you are sinning if you take your wife out to dinner that (Sabbath) day, this solemn bishop of your soul will say, We do not make rules. That is entirely up to your Christian liberty. There are no rules because we do not want to become legalists. Now that is nothing less than a conscious form of anti-nomianism. That is fervently preaching that keeping the Sabbath is a moral absolute, while insisting at the same time that how you actually keep it is entirely up to your Christian liberty. That is treating a moral absolute as if it were a flexible principle. That is leaving the subjective judgment of individuals decide how they are to personally obey an absolute unchanging moral commandment. That is anti-nomianism!

It is probably the most dangerous of all the views simply because it is so grossly inconsistent at best and downright hypocritical at worst. The proponents of this view will vehemently preach the necessity of theologically affirming that the Fourth Commandment is a moral absolute while in actual practice treating it as if each individual believer could choose what is, or is not, right or wrong for him. This effectively destroys the practical authority of Scripture over a believer's actual conduct.

#### Four: The Utilitarian Sabbath

The Utilitarian Sabbath view was held by both Calvin and Luther as well as nearly all of the early Reformation churches. This view holds the following: (1) The Sabbath, as a holy day, was totally done away in Christ. There are no longer any holydays any more than there are holy vestments, holy sacrifices, holy places, or holy nations. (2) A one in seven day of worship is a good thing, especially since it is essential that the church have specific and consistent times set apart for worship and teaching. We should do everything possible to protect Sunday, not as a "holy" day but for the pragmatic reasons just mentioned. (3) The Lord's day (Sunday) is in no way connected to the fourth commandment and cannot be either established or defended as moral law with Scripture.

#### Five: The Promise/Fulfillment/ Lord's Day

The Promise/Fulfillment view is in basic agreement with Calvin and Luther in the Utilitarian view. The major differences are as follows:

There is a greater emphasis on the fact that the Sabbath was the Covenant sign (Exodus 31:12-17) written on the Tables of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments (Deut 9:9), that established Israel's nationhood. Since the Old Covenant was done away in Christ, the sign ended when the covenant ended (when the veil was rent from top to bottom) and the New Covenant established in the blood of Christ was ratified. The rending of the veil of the temple ended the holy place, the holy priests and their holy vestments, the holy sacrifices and altars, and both the holy covenant and the holy box that housed it. Of necessity, the sign of that covenant, the holy Sabbath, along with every other holy thing associated with it, ended that day when the Promise was perfectly Fulfilled. Just as everyone of those things pointed to Christ, and were each perfectly fulfilled in Him, so the holy Sabbath day of rest pointed to Him and His work and it was forever fulfilled in Him. Christ is our Sabbath!

Our joy is in desiring Christ and fully resting in him. Our desire is to treasure him more and live in the rest he has given us.

Our work toward pleasing God in some way to make us acceptable is finished. We are his and He is ours in and through Christ our lord and Savior.

"1 Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; 5 and again in this passage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." 6 Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 9 So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. 11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience." Hebrews 4:1-11, NAS95.