

DEFENCE 2: MAN IS GREATER THAN RELIGION MATHEW 12:09–13

Introduction

We know nothing about the man with the shrivelled hand. The gospels say nothing else about him. However, William Barclay tells us that there is a dramatic background given by one of the books which was never accepted into the New Testament, *The Gospel According to the Hebrews*. This gospel says that the man was a carpenter who made his living with his hands. It adds that the man pleaded with Jesus to heal him that he might not have to beg for food in shame (*The Gospel of Mathew*, Vol. 2, p. 331).

Christ used this event to prove His Messiahship and to show that man is greater than religion.

- I. The departure of Jesus (vv. 9-10).
- II. The truth questioned: Is a man more important than religion (Sabbath rules) (v. 10)?
- III. The truth illustrated (v. 11).
- IV. The truth stated: doing good for man supersedes religious rules (v. 12).
- V. The truth demonstrated: he healed the man putting the man's needs before religious rules — man is greater than religion (v. 13).

I. *Mathew 12:09–10 Jesus Christ, Compassion*

Jesus departed. This is not referring to Jesus' leaving the cornfield where He had just been debating with the religionists (vv. 1-8). It means that He left the town He was in for another town. It was "on another Sabbath" that He entered their synagogue (see Lk. 6:6).

1. Christ entered their synagogue. Note that discord, disputes, and opposition did not cause Christ to withdraw from worship nor prevent Him from doing what He should (see Mt. 12:1-8).

Thought 1. Note two striking lessons.

- 1) Jesus was worshipping on the Sabbath. He was where He belonged on the Lord's Day.
 - 2) Conflict and discord should not cause us to forsake the Lord's house. Our first obligation is to love and worship the Lord with our whole being.
2. Christ confronted a man with a shrivelled hand. Note that Jesus had not begun to heal the man. The religionists apparently noticed Jesus eyeing the man or else sensed Jesus' compassion and movement to heal the man. The religionists were disturbed, deeply so, for Jesus was about to disregard their beliefs and Sabbath rules again (see Mt. 12:1-8).

Thought 1. This man was in the synagogue. He was a man who sensed his dependency upon God. Note two things.

- 1) A physical handicap does not keep a person from being strong. A person can be handicapped and still be wonderfully strong. He can be strong spiritually and strong mentally, strong in confidence and strong in assurance, strong in a sense of God's presence and strong in a sense of purpose and meaning. God can give this kind of strength. In fact, physical health is useless and sometimes destructive without the spiritual strength of God. This man with the shrivelled hand evidently knew God's strength, yet he had a need. These two facts touched Jesus' heart.
- 2) A physical handicap can be used by God — greatly so. God uses handicaps...
 - to demonstrate great faith
 - to set a vibrant example of trust before loved ones, neighbours, and acquaintances
 - to be a dynamic testimony of God's saving grace
 - to cause a person's own salvation
 - to draw a person ever so close to God in a very, very special way
 - to cause a person to become a prayer warrior, an intercessor for both God's people and for a world reeling from a restless and warring spirit, lost and trying to find its way

II. *Mathew 12:10 Religionists*

The truth was questioned. Is a man more important than religion, than Sabbath rules? (See *Religionists*, Mt. 12:10.) The law said that persons could not be healed or helped on the Sabbath unless life itself was threatened. However, there sat the man, and he desperately needed help. Jesus had the power to help him, but should He? If He healed the man, He would be breaking the religious rule. Should Jesus put the man or the ritual first?

Mat 22:36-39 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Rom 13:10 Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

1 John 3:16-19 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence.

Micah 6:8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Thought 1. Note several lessons.

- 1) There are reasons why we put religious custom and the present order of things before man and the meeting of his real needs.

- a) We slip into a routine, a way of doing things, and we just continue in it because it is comfortable.
 - b) We fear change lest we lose some people and their support.
 - c) We fear the loss of position and security.
 - d) We fear failure, the weakening of what we already have, of losing the loyalty of others to our religious position and practices.
- 2) Every man has need. He needs salvation, a true worship experience, a personal relationship with God day by day, a sense of the Spirit's presence and direction moment by moment. He needs to know how to live in a world that pulls him away from God, a world that pulls him toward every worldly thing imaginable. Yet, everything is too often put before man: maintaining the religious organization, form, ritual, ceremony, custom, service, order, liturgy, rules, and regulations - all seem to be more important than meeting man's needs.
- 3) Nothing should keep us from meeting man's needs, from putting him and his needs first before all religious ritual and form.
- a) It is the only way the heart of man can be reached and satisfied (Col. 2:9-10; Jn. 10:10).
 - b) It is the only way the church can stop the loss of people who are being lost by the droves. As we have so often heard: they come in the front door and slip out the back door. Why? Their needs are not being met.

We need to be courageous and come before the Lord searching our hearts and asking several questions. Are we really reaching that many for Christ? Are people really accepting Christ through our ministry? Why not, when the Lord said the fields are white unto harvest? Could it be we are steeped in religion so much that we are putting religion before meeting the needs of people?

- 4) Man's basic need is to know and worship God in a personal way. Yet, too often we fail to reach out to man by putting worship, form, order, ritual, and rules before meeting his need. Too often, we act as though...
- man exists for religion, instead of religion existing for man
 - man exists for worship services, instead of worship services existing for man
 - man exists for maintaining the organizations, instead of the organization existing for man
 - man exists for the rules and rituals, instead of the rules and rituals existing for man.

III. *Mathew 12:11 Man is Greater than Religion*

The truth was illustrated to prove that man is greater than religion. Jesus asked: If a man had only one sheep, and it fell into a pit on the Sabbath day, would the man not rescue it?

Imagine the force of the Lord's question. It showed just how *unreasonable and illogical* the religionists were in their thinking. It exposed them as *ignorant and blind* to real spiritual truth.

The Lord's question had two points...

- Is an animal's welfare not put before religious rules?
- Is a man not of more value than an animal?

John 7:23 "Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?"

Heb 13:16 *And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

James 2:15 *Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.*

Thought 1. Two questions need to be asked, questions that should search our hearts.

- 1) Is an animal of more value than a man and his needs?
- 2) Can things (ritual and order) ever be said to be of more value than compassion for man?

How deceived and irresponsible we so often live and act! How often we oppose Jesus Christ and His true mission just as the religionists of His day opposed Him! And we do it for the same reasons (see *Religionists*, Mt. 12:10).

Thought 2. We have *animals* today that are put before reaching man and meeting his needs: the *animals* of religious rituals and rules and of personal position and security. The truth needs to be known and lived. Priorities need to be established.

Thought 3. Man is not only more rational than animals, he is spirit, capable of worshipping and living forever with God. Animals are not spiritual beings; therefore, man and his needs should be placed before animals. If a person has a problem with this fact, it reveals a deceived heart and blinded mind. How many of us follow religious form before reaching out to man and meeting his real needs? How many of us have deceived hearts and blinded minds in our practice of religion?

IV. Mathew 12:12 *Doing Good Supersedes Religious Rules*

The truth was stated. Christ said that doing good for man supersedes religious and Sabbath rules. We are to help a person who has needs before we worry about keeping the rituals and rules of religion.

Thought 1. There are many ways for us to go about doing good on the Lord's Day:

=> worshipping

=> visiting the lost and needy

- => feeding the hungry
- => bringing others to worship
- => helping those caught in unexpected distress
- => caring for those who are sick and hurting

Mat 20:28 “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Mat 25:35-36 “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

Acts 20:35 “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Rom 15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

Gal 6:2 Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

MATHEW 12:12 SABBATH, SUNDAY

the Sabbath or Sunday, is for rest and worship (see Mt. 12:5). What is allowed on the Sabbath or Sunday, the day set aside for rest and worship? God’s Son says, “It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath”; that is, it is lawful to *truly* help a person who has a *real* need. □

V. **Mathew 12:13 Man is Sacred to God**

The truth was demonstrated. Man and his needs are put before the Sabbath and religious rules. Man is greater; he is much more important. Jesus healed the man. Jesus demonstrated in no uncertain terms that there is nothing more sacred to God than man. Man is to be *reached* and *brought* into a personal relationship with Him (Lk. 19:10), and he is to be helped and brought into a state of abundant living — as much as possible (Jn. 10:10).

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

John 10:10 “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

1 Cor 9:22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

1 Th 5:14 *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

Thought 1. What a lesson for us as we reach out to lead men to God week by week and day by day. How much we need to correct our deceived hearts and blinded minds! How much we need to be freed from being enslaved to our religious order and forms and our own personal position and security!

- 1) We live only a short time, and then we shall give an account to God.
- 2) We have only a few short years to be about the task of the Lord.

Thought 2. Christ gives us an important lesson: we are to put man and his needs before our religious practices and our personal security. We are not to let our fears stop us (see *Religionists*, Mt. 12:10). ■

MATHEW 12:10 RELIGIONISTS

The religionists' conflict with Jesus over religious beliefs and rules is sometimes thought by modern man to be petty and harsh, or else such conflicts are just not understood. Three facts will help a person in understanding why the conflicts happened and were life-threatening, ending in the murder of Jesus Christ.

1. The Jewish nation had been held together by their religious beliefs. Through the centuries the Jewish people had been conquered by army after army, and by the millions they had been deported and scattered over the world. Even in the day of Jesus they were enslaved by Rome. Their religion was the binding force that kept Jews together, in particular...
 - their belief that God had called them to be a distinctive people (who worshipped the only true and living God).
 - their rules governing the Sabbath and the temple, intermarriage, worship and cleansing, and what foods they could and could not eat.

This belief and these rules protected them from alien beliefs and from being swallowed up by other peoples through intermarriage. Their religion was what maintained their distinctiveness as a people and as a nation.

Jewish leaders knew this. They knew that *their religion* was the binding force that held their nation together. Therefore, they opposed anyone or anything that threatened to *break* or *weaken* the laws of their religion and nation.

2. The religionists were men of deep, deep conviction. They were strong in their beliefs; therefore, they became steeped in religious belief and practice. To break any law or rule governing belief or practice was a serious offense, for it taught *loose* behaviour. And loose behaviour, once it had spread enough, would

weaken their religion. This is the reason Jesus was committing a great offense by breaking their law. In their minds, He was weakening their religion and threatening their nation.

3. The religionists were men who had profession, position, recognition, esteem, livelihood and security. Anyone who went contrary to what they believed and taught was a threat to all they had. Some religionists undoubtedly felt that Jesus was a threat to them. Every time Jesus broke their law, He was undermining their very position and security. (See Mt. 12:1-8; 16:1-12; 21:23; 22:15-22; 22:23-33; 22:34-40; 23:1-12.)

The errors of the religionists were fourfold.

1. They misinterpreted and corrupted God's Word. The religionists (Jewish teachers) corrupted God's Word (Rev. 22:18-19; Prov. 30:6).
 - a. A person corrupts God's Word by taking away from the words of Scripture. A person takes away from God's Word...
 - by denying sections that he does not like or understand.
 - by neglecting to live the whole counsel of God.
 - by interpreting some commandments too loosely.
 - b. A person corrupts God's Word by adding to the words of Scripture. A person adds to God's Word by interpreting and living too strictly. Such exalts the flesh and is nothing more than extreme discipline and self-control. Of course, both discipline and self-control are commendable and are qualities demanded by God's Word, but they are not an end in themselves.

God's Word is practical and leads to an abundant life, to real living. It is not cold, harsh, restrictive, monastic, unrealistic and impractical. God did not give His Word for a select group (clergy); He gave it for the common man. "His commands are not burdensome" (1 Jn. 5:3).

The Sadducees were especially guilty of taking away from God's Word. The Pharisees and Scribes were especially guilty of adding to God's Word (see Acts 23:8).

Thought 1. Note two things.

- 1) There are beliefs, religious practices and traditions that are not of God. Men do add to God's Word, putting restrictions upon people that God never intended.
 - 2) There is a judgmental and censoring spirit in the heart of religionists when their beliefs are broken.
2. They committed serious sin after serious sin in God's eyes. Paul lists them, and the indictment is one of the most terrible ever drawn up against man. (1 Th. 2:15-16).

- a. They killed the Lord Jesus. Note the title “Lord.” They thought they were killing only a man, only a carpenter from Nazareth, but they were actually killing the *Lord*. By Lord is meant all that is included in the title: the Lord God, the One who came *out of heaven* itself, the very Son of God Himself. The terrible guilt is clearly seen:

=> *the guilt of killing a person.*

=> *the guilt of killing the Lord Himself.*

- b. They killed their own prophets. This was a charge that has often been levelled at the Jews.

Mat 23:31 “So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.”

Acts 7:52 Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him.

- c. They persecuted Christian believers. They not only rejected the gospel, but they wanted to destroy the message and those who followed and proclaimed it. They did not want anyone following Christ.

Acts 4:1-3 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.

Acts 11:19 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews.

Acts 17:5 But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason’s house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

- d. They did not please God. No person can please God if he stands in opposition to Christ. The only way a person can please God is to surrender his life to Christ — to give all he is and has to Christ. The Jews were not about to do this. Nothing was going to break them away from their own religious ceremonies and ideas about religion.
- e. They were contrary to all men. They opposed and hated anyone who did not believe as they did. They should have loved those who differed, but instead they bitterly despised them.

- f. They tried to stamp out the Word of God lest some person be saved. Just imagine trying to stop God's Word. How in the world can a man stop the Word of God. The answer is self-evident. Even a world of men could not stop God's Word. This is the foolishness of men, and it was the foolishness of the Jews.
 3. They rejected God's way of righteousness, God's Messiah, which is Jesus Christ.
 4. They allowed religion in its tradition and ritual to become more important than meeting the basic needs of human life: the need for God and the need for spiritual, mental, and physical health. Christ, being the true Messiah, was bound to expose such error. Thus the battle lines were drawn.
- => The Messiah knew that He had to liberate people from such enslaving behaviour. He had to save them so they could worship God in freedom of spirit.
- => The religionists felt that they had to oppose Christ because He was a threat to their nation and to their own personal position and security.

The religionists' attack took two forms.

1. First, they tried to discredit Christ so the crowds would stop following Him (cp. Mt. 21:46).

Mat 12:10 And a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

Luke 6:7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath.

Mat 22:15-16 Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are."

Mat 22:17 "Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

2. Second, failing to discredit Him, they sought some way to kill Him.

Mat 12:14 But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

Mat 26:3-4 Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him.

Luke 22:2 And the chief priests and the teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people.

John 5:18 *For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

John 7:1 *After this, Jesus went around in Galilee, purposely staying away from Judea because the Jews there were waiting to take his life. (see John 7:19-20, 25) □*