

## Matthew 12:1-14

### How does Jesus describe the path that leads to eternal life?

*Matthew 7:13,14- "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."*

### Have you ever thought about why the journey to eternal life is so difficult?

- It is difficult, not because God made it difficult; it is difficult, even impossibly difficult, because of the depth of our sinfulness
- The people who complete this journey up the narrow path to eternal life ONLY do so by the sanctifying, saving Grace of God

*Ephesians 2:8,9- For by Grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast*

- Even with the grace of God at work in a Christian's life they still do not walk that path perfectly. There is a constant battle being fought in the Christian between the Spirit of God and their sinful flesh, and sometimes the Christian yields to the sinful flesh
- There are ultimately two ways to fall off, or veer off of the straight and narrow and they are summed up in two words- **Legalism** and **Lawlessness**
- In our passage this morning we are going to see Legalism on full display

## Missing the Heart of the Matter

### When the People of God Become Pharisees

#### What is Legalism?

**R.C. Sproul**- "Legalism involves abstracting the law of God from its original context"

**John Piper**- "Legalism is the conviction that law keeping is the ground of our acceptance with God"

- To sum up both of these men's definitions we could say....

**Legalism is misinterpretation, coupled with the misapplication of God's law**

- This definition is most fully personified by the Pharisees

### **Who were the Pharisees?**

- The Pharisees were a very influential and powerful group of religious leaders in the nation of Israel during Jesus' day whose sole purpose was to study and teach the Word of God. Being that they were occupied by a Gentile nation, the Pharisees mission was to help the Israelites maintain their faithfulness to God and their identity as a nation by promoting strict adherence to the O.T. law. The problem was they also advocated for strict adherence to the Jewish oral tradition which were additional laws that the Pharisees created in the process of teaching how the written word applied to the Israelites daily lives. They eventually placed these oral applications alongside and even above the written word.

### **So what is going on in Matthew 12:1-14?**

**It is simply that on two different accounts the Pharisees are accusing Jesus and His disciples of ultimately breaking the Sabbath law which was given to Moses at Mount Sinai as part of the Ten Commandments**

*Exodus 20:8-11- Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*

### **The question is: Did Jesus and the disciples break this Commandment?**

- Did the disciples break this commandment when they picked the heads of grain? According to Jesus they did not.

*Matthew 12:7- And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless*

- Did Jesus break this commandment when He healed the man with the withered hand? Again, according to Jesus, He did not.

*Matthew 12:11,12- He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.*

- The Pharisees had misinterpreted and misapplied the law
- They had turned their religion into something that it was never intended to be, they had missed the Heart of the Matter

**David Platt-** Lest we too quickly disconnect ourselves from the Pharisees, we need to be reminded that we are all born with a legalistic heart, a heart that thinks there is something we can do to merit our way to God. It's the foundation of all the religions of the world....

- Because of the potential for all of us to be Pharisees, I want to look at some truths found in our passage this morning that I pray will act as rumble strips in our minds and hearts to alert us when we start to veer off the narrow path in that direction

### **How do we know when we are becoming Pharisees?**

- 1. The People of God become Pharisees when they Condemn someone for breaking a law that is ultimately a matter of Conscience**

*Matthew 12:1-2*

- As we have already seen, the disciples had not broken the Sabbath law because Jesus declared them to be guiltless
- When God Gave Moses the 4th Commandment in Exodus 20 He did not have in mind someone picking a few heads of grain to satisfy their hunger.

**D.A. Carson-** In broad terms, the assumption in the Old Testament is that “work” is your regular employment and labor. It is what you normally do the rest of the week, so Sabbath rest (whatever else it involved) entailed cessation from such labor

- This “law” was one of the 39 additional laws that the Pharisees had developed to try to ensure that no one even got close to breaking the actual law
- This might have been something that they were convicted of but it was not commanded
- The Apostle Paul had to address this same issue in several of his epistles but one of the most clear is in his letter to the church in Rome
- The church in Rome, much like the majority of the first century churches, were a mixture of Jews and Gentiles

- You can imagine how difficult this was for the Jews because the religious system with all of its laws for worship and life that they had been immersed in for centuries had now been set aside

Hebrews 7:18,19- For on the one hand, a former commandment is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect); but on the other hand a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God

- He is talking about the Mosaic Covenant which represents the law being replaced by the New Covenant that was established through the blood of Jesus
- The Levitical laws for worship and festivals that were to be observed were deeply ingrained convictions held in the consciences of the Jewish Christians but they were no longer commands that had to be followed because they had been replaced
- They had become the phrase that theologians today use to describe the grey areas of scripture, **matters of conscience**
- The problem came when the Jews, or even Gentiles, began treating these matters of Conscience as hard and fast Commandments and judging those who did not observe them
- It is into that context that Paul writes Romans 14

#### *Romans 14:1-4*

- The point here is that Jesus is Lord of the Conscience, not man
- Here is a very important point that must be held alongside that truth. Just because you think or feel like something is ok doesn't mean that it is.
- Our conscience can be wrong at times because our conscience can change, it can be seared and hardened as the Apostle Paul says (1Timothy 4:2)
- Because of this we must have our consciences recalibrated daily through abiding in God's Word

*Hebrews 4:12,13- For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to who we must give account*

- In essence, when Jesus finished His rebuttal to the Pharisees over the first accusation they had made in verse 8 where He said, "For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath", He was telling the Pharisees, "they are ok because they are with me"!

## 2. The People of God become Pharisees when they care more about Rules, Regulations, and Rituals than the Restoration of People

*Matthew 12:9-14*

- Do you see the irony in this?
- The religious leaders on the day of rest would rather run down people than see them restored
- They, above all people, should be ministers of mercy because of the grace of God they had experienced in their own lives

*Matthew 23:4- They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger*

- Even the Apostle Peter was guilty at one point to giving way to this mindset

*Galatians 2:11-14*

- In Peter's case, it was not an issue of someone being restored physically, but it was most certainly an issue of a group of people being unnecessarily burdened spiritually and it was all because of some Old Testament rules and regulations
- The reality is when we as Christians allow Rules, Regulations, and Rituals to get in the way of the Restoration of people we have missed the Spirit of the law
- When we miss the Spirit of the law, we have missed the heart of the matter. We have missed the heart of God.
- In case you haven't realised, the Gospel and Legalism do not mesh
- Jesus understood the context of God's law perfectly. He understood the Heart of God's law perfectly, therefore He applied and used the law perfectly according to the wisdom and will of God
- The more that we abide in Christ and keep our eyes fixed on Him the safer we will be from veering off the narrow path and becoming a Pharisee

**D.A. Carson-** This kind of passage is not directed to the irreligious and to the immoral. Another kind of passage is addressed to that sort of person. This passage is addressed to conservatives like me, like most of you, I suspect...conservatives for whom good, structured show is sometimes more important than a vital relationship with Jesus Christ, and there we must be brought back to basics again and again and again.

We are told our religion must never, ever degenerate to mere rules. It must never, ever remove its focus from the supremacy of Jesus Christ. It must always remember there are people to be served. God help us to do. Let us bow in prayer.