



[Matthew 12:9-14](#)

(9) And after leaving there, He went into their synagogue. (10) And, behold, a man was there who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbaths?" so that they might accuse Him. (11) But He said to them, "What man is there among you who, if he has one sheep that falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift *it out*?" (12) And how much better is a man than a sheep? So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbaths." (13) And He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and it was restored as sound as the other. (14) Then the Pharisees went out of the synagogue and held a council against Him to discuss how they might destroy Him.

A Faithful Version

[Jesus'](#) [healing](#) of the man with the withered hand (also in [Mark 3:1-6](#)) reveals a fundamental difference between Jesus and the Pharisees in their approach to the [Sabbath](#). The Pharisees had not entered the synagogue to worship, nor did they ask Jesus their question—"Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"—out of loving concern. No, they were an accusing authority attempting to judge Christ by their regulations.

It helps to remember the historical context. The Jews were developing specific regulations to cover any and every possible circumstance to keep them from sinning. Eventually, they compiled 1,521 regulations covering Sabbath conduct alone. By Jesus' time, they had already turned their observance of the law into a legalistic ritual rather than a loving service to [God](#) and man. They did this sincerely in a vain effort to become holy, not understanding that this is not how a man becomes spiritually holy.

In this vignette, does Christ do away with the Sabbath or restore it to its original divine value and function, as He did with marriage and divorce in [Matthew 19:8](#)? He gives no indication that He intended doing away with it. He merely broke their misguided perception of how to observe the Sabbath.

We also need to recognize that the liberating healing He performed was not done to a

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man whose life was in immediate danger, but to one who was chronically ill. So are we spiritually; as [Jeremiah 17:9](#) says, our heart is "incurably sick" (margin). God gives us the Sabbath day to help free us from the chronic problems of human nature.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[The Fourth Commandment \(Part Two\): Christ's Attitude Toward the Sabbath](#)

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