

Hard hearts don't help

INTRODUCTION: Believers search the scriptures to discover what pleases God. They also find what displeases Him. In Mark 3:1-6 we have a vivid example of the latter. (Read the passage together, then discuss the following questions.)

1. Note that people were watching Jesus and testing Him, but He was also watching and testing them. How do you think they felt when He looked around the room at them “with anger”?
2. What was it about this encounter that so greatly displeased Jesus?
3. What was He expecting to see when He looked around at them?
4. Note the words used to indicate His displeasure: “anger” and “grief” (“deep distress”). In Exodus 34:6, God describes Himself as “slow to anger,” so what does it say about this incident that it caused Him to experience such strong emotion? Why do you think He reacted so strongly?

Spend a few moments comparing the passages that parallel Mark 3:1-6—Matthew 12:9-14 and Luke 6:6-11. What does each account of this event add to our understanding?

- In Matthew’s account, it’s the watchers who ask the question, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?” and Jesus who answers it. Matthew’s is the only account that compares helping animals on the Sabbath to helping a person.
- Mark’s is the only account that mentions Jesus’ emotions and the watchers’ hardness of heart. It’s also the only one that refers to Jesus looking around at them and the Pharisees’ subsequent conspiracy with the Herodians.
- Luke identifies the watchers as scribes and Pharisees. All the accounts refer to their purpose of hoping to accuse Jesus of wrong doing, but Luke alone mentions that Jesus knew what they were thinking. Luke is also the only Gospel-writer to mention the anger (rage) of the scribes and Pharisees.
- Like Mark, in Luke’s account it is Jesus who asks the question, posing it differently than they did in Matthew. Perhaps after the scribes and Pharisees had asked Him whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus rephrased it, saying, “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?”

LAW—How do we reconcile the law against working on the Sabbath with Jesus’ many miracles on the Sabbath? Is there a contradiction?

Ultimately, we must acknowledge that, as the Son of God and Author of the law, Jesus had every right to explain how the Sabbath principle was intended to be understood. This is at the core of the conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus. Either Jesus had the authority to explain Scripture or He was in violation of the law. In His explanation, doing good for others is not to be considered everyday work or labor.

Laws concerning Sabbath:
Exodus 16:13-36, 20:8-11, 23:10-12, 31:12-17, 34:21, 35:2-3; Leviticus 16:29-31, 19:3 and 30, 23:3, 25:1-22; Deuteronomy 5:12-15

We can examine the legal background concerning the Sabbath (*see the passages in the text box at right*). Even though the Old Testament clearly prohibited labor on the 7th day, there are only two recorded instances of the Sabbath being violated in Scripture; in only one of them is punishment meted out.

- In Exodus 16:27-30, some people went out to gather manna on the Sabbath. They found none because God had told them He provided that day’s manna on the 6th day. God was angry they failed to heed His warning, but He did not punish them.
- In Numbers 15:32-36, a man found gathering wood on the Sabbath was brought to Moses. God confirmed to the people through Moses that they should all participate in putting him to death by stoning.

When Jesus asked those gathered in the synagogue whether it was lawful to do good or harm on the Sabbath He framed the question using two forms of a literary device known as **parallelism**.

*Is it lawful ... on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm,
to save a life or to kill?*

He used **antithetical parallelism** to contrast opposite ideas. What is the opposite (antithesis) of doing good? Doing harm. What is the opposite of saving a life? Killing.

To antithetical parallelism Jesus added **synonymous parallelism**, which is the repetition of a phrase using different words. This structure gives us a broader picture of what is meant by doing good versus doing harm; the second line explains or expands on the first.

5. What does Jesus use as a synonymous parallel for doing good? *Saving a life*. What is His synonymous parallel for doing harm or evil? *Killing*.
6. Discuss how Jesus’ question clarifies the issue of healing someone on the Sabbath. If someone is unsure whether an action or behavior is good or evil, do you think it is helpful to ask, “*Does this promote life or destroy it?*” Is it fair to say that doing good is *always* life-saving while doing harm is *always* life-destroying?

By using a combination of synonymous parallelism with antithetical parallelism, Jesus heightened the contrast between good and evil. Killing is shown as an extreme form of harm, while saving a life is the greatest good that a person can do.

7. What two things did the scribes and Pharisees begin to do on the Sabbath that could have been considered illegal (unlawful)?
 - *They thought about (plotted) ways to destroy Jesus—harm Him, take His life.*

Extra work:

- Review other forms of parallelism (*emblematic, synthetic*).
- Practice writing antithetical and/or synonymous parallelisms of your own. It’s not so easy!

- *They actively conspired with the Herodians. Who were they?*

Herodians were a Jewish political party aligned with the kings of Herod's dynasty. The Herod of Jesus' day was a king well-known for his wickedness. John the Baptist had confronted him for marrying Herodias after killing her husband, his half-brother. According to Luke 3:19, John also chastised him for other wicked deeds. Ordinarily, the fastidious Pharisees would not have wanted anything to do with Herod or his followers. Herodians excused Herod's misdeeds and compromised with the Roman Gentiles who had given Herod's family power to rule.

In Mark 8:15, Jesus warned His disciples to "beware the leaven of Herod," clearly meaning they should avoid behaving and thinking as he did. In Mark 12:13, the Pharisees and Herodians joined against Jesus in a trick question about paying taxes to Caesar. Herodians most likely advocated paying taxes to Rome while Pharisees argued against it. Jesus wisely replied they should give to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's. (Sources: *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/smiths-bible-dictionary/herodians.html>, and the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* <https://www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/herodians.html>.)

8. **Discussion:** What do you think God would say about a believer joining with unbelievers in a project to harm or destroy a person? (*Helpful passages are 1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 2 Cor. 6:14-16, Ephesians 5:11, 1 Thessalonians 3:6.*) Which is worse as a Sabbath activity: Exerting oneself physically to help a person, or compromising oneself spiritually by conspiring to kill?

LOGIC: In the Matthew 12:9-14 parallel passage as well as the related Luke 13:10-17 passage, Jesus forced His audience to consider the logic of their own behavior by pointing to common Sabbath practices involving domesticated animals. Sheep, oxen, and donkeys are valuable commodities that cannot go a single day without the assistance of some form of human labor.

- In Matthew 12:9-14, Jesus noted that most good Jews would readily exert themselves to rescue a fallen sheep from a pit on the Sabbath.
- In Luke 13:10-17, He pointed out that no one would hesitate to do the labor of leading an ox or donkey out of a stall to food and water on the Sabbath.

In both examples, Jesus recognized the common-sense necessity of some labor on the Sabbath. He also upheld the value of people in relation to animals. People are always more valuable than animals. Anyone who would help an animal on the Sabbath but object to helping a person is a hypocrite.

9. To what does Jesus attribute their hypocrisy? *Their hardness of heart.*

LOVE: A study of the words "anger," "grief," "heart," and "hardness" will reveal further depths of Jesus' love for the man with the withered hand as well as the shallowness of His opponents' hearts.

Anger—the Greek word is *orge*, which describes agitation of the soul or any violent emotion (wrath, indignation). It's used only once here in Mark, but ten times in Paul's letter to the Romans. Notice that in Exodus 34:6 God described Himself as "slow to anger." While Jesus felt angry, He did not lash out against them violently. He withheld His powerful wrath and only rebuked and instructed them. Nonetheless He fully experienced this very real, very raw emotion.

10. What does His anger reveal about Jesus' level of concern for the man? *He has taken the man's plight to heart. He is offended by the others' lack of concern.*

Grief—the Greek word is *sullupeo* – to affect with grief together, give with one's self – and it's only used here in the New Testament. It's related to *lupeo* (Strong's 3076) – to make sorrowful; to affect with sadness, cause grief; to grieve, offend; to make one uneasy, cause him a scruple. *Lupeo* is used

twice in Mark 10:22 and 14:19 – both verses speak of an isolating grief or sadness, one that drives people apart rather than drawing them together. Perhaps *sullupeo* is used to show that Jesus was not repulsed by the crippled man but rather drawn to him and into his plight.

It's apparent that Jesus felt great sorrow for the man and wished that others felt similarly, however no one seemed willing to help. While they could not heal him, the people in the synagogue could have shown empathy. As He looked, Jesus could see all they had not done for the man prior to this. It's conceivable they had seen the man every Sabbath and failed to do anything.

Hardness of heart—a combination of two Greek words:

The Greek word for heart is *kardia*, referring to the organ at the center of blood circulation and regarded as the seat of physical life. The Bible also speaks of the human heart as the center of spiritual life. It's used 11 times in Mark:

- 2:6,8 – of the scribes reasoning in their hearts
- 6:52 – of the condition of the disciples' hearts (also 8:17)
- 7:6,19,21 – of hearts far from God, the fountain of evil thoughts, sexual sin, theft, murder, adultery, etc.
- 11:23 – as the seat of doubt and faith
- 12:30 – Jesus exhorts us to love God with all our *kardia*, (with every heartbeat?)
- 12:33 – loving God with all the *kardia* is more than making all the sacrifices (as in Mt. 9:13 and 12:7)

The second Greek term, *porosis*, sounds like a medical diagnosis, especially in reference to the heart. It indicates being covered with a callus; obtrusiveness of mental discernment, dulled perception; the mind has been blunted, stubbornness, obduracy. It's also found in Romans 11:25 (referring to Israel's rejection of Christ) and Ephesians 4:18 (about the unsaved person's ignorance of and exclusion from "the life of God," because of hardened hearts). Saying a heart is "hardened" implies this wasn't its original condition. Hearts were made to be soft and pliable, but now they're stiff and unyielding.

Jesus accurately diagnosed their condition as *kardia-porosis*! Because of it, they not only did not want to help the man but also wanted to destroy Jesus—ultimately because they hated God. This was the exact opposite of loving Him with their whole hearts (Mark 12:30,33)!

11. If they'd had soft hearts, what might they have done differently for the man with the withered hand? *They could have helped him find a good seat and ensured that he had a place to go for lunch that day. Knowing Jesus could heal people, they could have asked Him to heal the man: "Oh, will you please? Would you be willing?"*
12. Consider how radically the man's life would be changed for the better by having two strong hands. *He would be able to work rather than depending on the generosity and kindness of others. He would be able to provide for his family, rather than being a burden on them. He could care for himself in all the little daily tasks—feeding himself, putting on clothes, etc.*
13. Consider the strength and purpose of Jesus: What obstacles did He overcome in order to help the man? *No one asked Him to help the man, but that didn't hinder Jesus. He didn't even allow their hatred to stop Him, no matter what they would do in retaliation. He didn't try to avoid controversy but set Himself up as their opponent.*

APPLICATION: Christians are not bound by Sabbath ordinances but exhorted to have soft hearts and exert themselves on behalf of others. Compare 1 John 3:17 to Deuteronomy 5:7-11.

- **Deuteronomy 5:7-11** warns God's people against hardening their hearts against impoverished brothers. Hardness of heart is paralleled with closing one's hand, having base thoughts in one's heart, having a hostile eye, and being grieved over the loss of what is shared. God knows our thoughts and actions toward needy people.
- **1 John 3:17** echoes the language of Deuteronomy concerning the disposition of a Christian's heart toward others: "But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

14. There are many ways to apply this principle, but we're going to consider it in relation to the problem of abortion. What might Jesus' expectation for us be as He looks around this room?

Consider the following:

LAW—Many women have abortions because they've broken God's law concerning sexual sin (whether they're aware of it or not). Should their guilty status prevent Christians from helping? Why or why not? (*One reason is that abortion is a further violation of God's law.*)

LOGIC—The following syllogism is one use of logic in the debate over abortion:

Premise #1: It is wrong to intentionally kill innocent human beings.

Premise #2: Abortion intentionally kills innocent human beings.

Conclusion: Therefore, abortion is morally wrong.

While the Bible does not address the issue, many passages support the logic of opposing abortion:

- God views human life as special (*Genesis 1:26-28, 5:1-3, 9:1-7; Psalm 8:3-6; Proverbs 14:31, 17:5; Jonah 4:11; James 3:8-10*)
- God treats preborn children as individual members of the human family (*Genesis 16:11-12, 25:22-24; Judges 13:4-5; Job 31:15; Psalm 22:9-10, 71:5-6, 139:13-16; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:15 and 41; Galatians 1:15-16a*)
- God hates the shedding of innocent human blood (*Genesis 4:8-11, 6:11-13, 9:5-6; Exodus 20:13, 23:7; Deuteronomy 27:25a; Psalm 9:12, 10:13-14, 11:5; Proverbs 21:7, 28:17; Jeremiah 22:3; Amos 1:13; Romans 13:9-10; 1 Peter 4:15; 1 John 3:11-15; Revelation 22:15*)

Find more relevant passages here: <https://www.lifemattersww.org/CHURCHES/Why-life-matters/What-the-Bible-says-about-life>.

LOVE— How does love for people who are "crippled" by abortion serve as a powerful force for saving lives? List practical ways for showing love to...

- Women who've had abortions
- People who support keeping abortion legal
- People who perform abortions

CONCLUSION: It's easy to be angry about abortion, but man's anger doesn't fulfill or achieve the righteousness of God (James 1:19-20). We also don't want to be paralyzed by grief over abortion. Like Jesus, we want to show compassion, especially to unborn babies and their parents but also to people who promote abortion.