



The Lord Jesus Christ said to them, *"I did one miracle, and you are all astonished. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the Patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. 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? Stop JUDGING by mere appearances and make a right judgment."* (John 7:21-24)

The observation of the Sabbath was the fourth of the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. This was a Commandment that specifically prohibited manual labor and traveling great distances which the Holy Bible specified with such examples as plowing, harvesting, collecting of food, and building a fire. On the day before the Sabbath, the people gathered enough food for two days, and on the Sabbath itself they normally did not leave their homes.

Punishment for not observing the Sabbath has its examples in the Holy Bible as well. While the Israelites were wandering in the Sinai Desert a man was caught gathering sticks on the Sabbath. God

instructed Moses to have him killed, and the Israelites stoned him (Numbers 15:32-36). This manual labor performed on the Sabbath was severely punished by death.

What did the Sabbath actually represent? It was twofold: it was a day of celebration of God's creation of the world (Exodus 2:11) and a day of thanksgiving reminiscent of the Israelites liberation from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). Therefore the Sabbath was a day intended for joy and happiness. Further, the Sabbath was set aside as a day of reflection and rest from manual labor and long travel for everyone, families, servants and it even included the animals.

The Lord Jesus Christ healed a lame man on the Sabbath and received instead of acclaim and praise, much criticism for this miracle being performed on the Sabbath. Why would others criticize such a merciful miracle performed on the Sabbath? Why would others judge and slander another?

The Rite of Circumcision dating back to the Patriarch Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14) was performed routinely on the eighth day following the birth of a male child. If the eighth day fell upon the Sabbath the circumcision was performed. Was not healing a lame man as important as circumcising an infant? If work was permitted in the Temple on the Sabbath,

was the Lord Jesus Christ not more exalted than the Temple?

Exactly who were the Pharisees who dared to question the Lord Jesus Christ's miraculous action and merciful deed? Who were they to think they were God to place judgment upon another? The Pharisees were scholars who ardently studied the Torah and originated the oral tradition that determined how the written law should be carried out. Even more than this, the Pharisees mandated that the letter of the law be carried out with utmost strictness, often with malice and seemed to argue with the Lord Jesus Christ incessantly. It has often been said by the Early Church Fathers that those who speak on their own authority seek their own glory.

Loving kindness and mercy were not among the characteristics history has listed for this Jewish religious party. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself at times was exasperated with them for their rigidity and called them hypocrites and "*brood of vipers*" (Matthew 3:7). Judging and hypocrisy were common traits exhibited by the Pharisees. Yet, the Apostle Paul and Nicodemus came from among this party and the Lord Jesus Christ was known to have dined among them.

St. Clement of Alexandria (c.195) wrote regarding hypocrites, "This is how those who are consecrated to Christ should appear. And they should frame themselves in their whole of life just as they fashion themselves in the Church - for the sake of gravity. They should seek to actually be meek, pious, and loving - not merely to seem to be so. However, I cannot understand how people can change their fashions and manners depending on the place. Similarly some Christians lay aside the inspiration of the assembly. And after their departure from it, they become like others with whom they associate. Nay, in laying aside the artificial mask of solemnity, they are proved to be what they secretly were. After having paid reverence to the discourse about God, they leave behind what they have heard. Outside the assembly, they foolishly amuse themselves with ungodly playing and romantic quavering, occupied with flute-playing, dancing, and intoxication and all kinds of frivolity."

The Lord Jesus Christ was not teaching that the Sabbath should not be observed as the Pharisees quickly misjudged. He was not admonishing them for their strict observance of the Sabbath. The Lord Jesus Christ was attempting to explain to them what the Sabbath actually meant and that it certainly did not exclude merciful deeds. He said, "*The Sabbath*

was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). The Lord did not say the law should be neglected but rather the hypocrisy was admonished.

St John Chrysostom in Homily XLIX on the Holy Gospel of St. John chapter 7 states, "For to slander Him suited their malice and wickedness. What He says is this, 'Cast out from yourselves the malice and wrath and envy and hatred which has without cause been conceived against Me: then there is nothing to hinder you from knowing that My words are indeed the words of God. For at present these things cast darkness over you, and destroy the light of right judgment Judge not according to appearance Do not give your decision according to your estimation of persons, but according to the nature of things, for this is to judge rightly."

Though we can plainly see the hypocrisy in the Pharisees, what lessons are there for us to learn from their actions? Do we judge those whom we do not see as often as ourselves at Church? Do we believe because we attend Vespers and the Divine Liturgy regularly, or presume to donate more, or serve as a deacon or in the kitchen that we do more than most others? Do we try to have the strongest opinion about an upcoming project or event and only see things our way?

Is this not the Pharisee's in different clothes? What we should do is call those missing at Vespers and encourage them to come, offer to carpool, or invite them to dinner following the service. Deacons should encourage each other with meetings and reminders to come and be on time. Encourage rotation of kitchen duties so everyone will feel a part. Ask for others opinions when involved with a project of interest realizing that not one but many projects can be accomplished when everyone is made a part.

Besides teaching us not to judge others, what other lesson is within the Lord Jesus Christ's teaching to the Pharisees? He teaches by His Holy words and example that any time is the right time for merciful deeds. What are some merciful deeds that we all can do? Calling the sick and praying for them, visiting the elderly and reading the Holy Bible, taking the Sunday School lesson to a student that missed it, visitation in the hospital and sharing the sermon. A silent donation to the less fortunate is a merciful deed that is easily performed for a person short of time.

Merciful deeds such as teaching young children the love of the Lord, caring for the sick, and in general helping those who are in need, not only might have been performed on the Sabbath (Sunday, the day of the Lord) but **SHOULD HAVE** been carried out on

the Sabbath and any other day of life a person has been blessed with.

Let us not be warned as the Lord Jesus Christ did the Pharisees, "*WOE TO YOU, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness*" (Matthew 23:27,28).

Let us all pray to the Lord to conduct all our thoughts and to deliver us from every evil grief and distress of heart.

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