

Kill or Restore?

What good are our laws and rules? Supposedly they are to control society in an organized and tranquil way to allow us to be productive and live in peace with one another. Our laws are supposed to be designed for the good of society as a whole, even if at times they help to focus power in the hands of those who have more power over others.

Our rules and modes of behavior in religious life should fulfill the same purpose of indicating what is best for us and our neighbors. We do not always manage to reach that fulfillment. It was one of the problems Jesus confronted in his day. There were many rules of behavior among the Jews. They had all been designed to help one follow the 613 commandments contained in the Pentateuch. The result they achieved, however, was not that of fulfilling God's instructions, but to oppress the people. What should have extended life became death. What should restore killed.

Through Moses God had given something that indicated a healthier way to live in community and in relationship with Yahweh, God of Israel. From the goodness of God's instructions, they had developed something crooked. What should have offered healthy life had been transformed to punish those needing help.

It was not just the man with the withered hand who was injured through the application of Jewish traditions. They also hurt all who were in need of God's grace. The purpose of God's instructions was not to punish, but to restore lives, pointing them to the will and love of God. God wanted the regeneration of the people, not their punishment. What we need to answer is which purpose are we involved in, to restore or to kill? Our neighbor is just as worthy of life and grace as are we ourselves. The way we choose to treat others influences our own condition.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*

Matthew 12:9-21

⁹Jesus left that place and went to a synagogue, ¹⁰where there was a man who had a paralyzed hand. Some people were there who wanted to accuse Jesus of doing wrong, so they asked him, "Is it against our Law to heal on the Sabbath?"

¹¹Jesus answered, "What if one of you has a sheep and it falls into a deep hole on the Sabbath? Will you not take hold of it and lift it out?"

¹²And a human being is worth much more than a sheep! So then, our Law does allow us to help someone on the Sabbath." ¹³Then he said to the man with the paralyzed hand, "Stretch out your hand."

He stretched it out, and it became well again, just like the other one.

¹⁴Then the Pharisees left and made plans to kill Jesus.

God's Chosen Servant

¹⁵When Jesus heard about the plot against him, he went away from that place; and large crowds followed him. He healed all those who were ill ¹⁶and gave them orders not to tell others about him. ¹⁷He did this so as to make what God had said through the prophet Isaiah come true:

¹⁸"Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,
the one I love, and with whom I am pleased.

I will send my Spirit upon him,
and he will announce my judgment to the nations.

¹⁹He will not argue or shout,
or make loud speeches in the streets.

²⁰He will not break off a bent reed,
or put out a flickering lamp.

He will persist until he causes justice to triumph,

²¹and in him all peoples will put their hope." (GNT)