

Luke 6:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing; Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it?

Analysis

Is it lawful on the sabbath days to do good, or to do evil? to save life, or to destroy it? (ψυχὴν σῶσαι ἢ ἀπολέσαι, *psychēn sōsai ē apolesai*)—Jesus reframes the debate with penetrating logic. The choice isn't between healing and doing nothing; it's between doing good (*agathopoiēsai*, ἀγαθοποιῆσαι) and doing evil (*kakopoiēsai*, κακοποιῆσαι). By this standard, refusing to heal when able is equivalent to destruction. To withhold good is to commit evil; neutrality is impossible.

The phrase **to save life or to destroy it** (σῶσαι ψυχὴν, *sōsai psychēn*) carries both physical and spiritual meaning—*psychē* means life/soul. While they plotted his destruction (v. 11), Jesus offered salvation. The question exposed their hearts: they would rather destroy Jesus than see a man healed.

Historical Context

Rabbinic debate centered on what constituted permissible Sabbath activity. The principle *pikuach nefesh* (saving life) permitted Sabbath violation for life-threatening emergencies, but the Pharisees didn't consider this man's condition life-threatening. Jesus elevated the standard from emergency intervention to positive good—the Sabbath should be a day for doing good actively, not merely avoiding harm. This radical ethic transcended their casuistry.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' question challenge the false neutrality of refusing to do good when we have opportunity and power?
2. What situations tempt you to hide behind rules rather than extending mercy and doing active good?

Interlinear Text

εἶπεν	οὖν	ὁ	Ἰησοῦς	πρὸς	αὐτούς	Ἐπερωτήσω	ὕμᾱς
said	Then	G3588	Jesus	unto	them	I will ask	you
G2036	G3767		G2424	G4314	G846	G1905	G5209
τί	ἔξεστιν	τοῖς	σάββασιν,	ἀγαθοποιῆσαι	ἢ		
one thing	Is it lawful	G3588	on the sabbath days	to do good	or		
G5101	G1832		G4521	G15	G2228		
κακοποιῆσαι	ψυχὴν	σῶσαι	ἢ	ἀπολέσαι			
to do evil	life	to save	or	to destroy			
G2554	G5590	G4982	G2228	G622			

Additional Cross-References

Mark 3:4 (Salvation): And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.

Luke 14:3 (Word): And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?