

Mark 3:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

Jesus poses a question exposing twisted priorities: 'Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?' The question is profound—refusing to do good when opportunity exists is doing evil; failing to save life when possible is taking life. Jesus establishes moral binary: inaction isn't neutral. The Sabbath's purpose is doing good and preserving life. The irony is devastating: Pharisees plot Jesus' murder (v. 6) while condemning Him for healing! 'They held their peace' (ἐστιώπων) indicates guilty silence. Reformed theology emphasizes law's purpose is love.

Historical Context

Jewish rabbinic tradition debated Sabbath healing. General consensus: save life on Sabbath (pikuach nefesh), but postpone non-emergency healing. Jesus rejects this logic. His question 'to save life or to kill' gains irony from Pharisees plotting His death (v. 6)—violating the sixth commandment while claiming Sabbath zeal. Early Christians emphasized mercy over ritual.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' question challenge false dichotomy between doing good and religious rule-keeping?
2. Where do you treat inaction as neutral when Jesus calls it evil?
3. What does this reveal about the true purpose of God's commands?

Interlinear Text

καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς Ἐξεστιν τοῖς σάββασιν

And he saith unto them Is it lawful on the sabbath days

G2532 G3004 G846 G1832 G3588 G4521

ἀγαθοποιῆσαι, ἢ κακοποιῆσαι ψυχὴν σῶσαι ἢ

to do good or to do evil life to save or

G15 G2228 G2554 G5590 G4982 G2228

ἀποκτεῖναι οἱ δὲ ἔστιώπων

to kill But they held their peace

G615 G3588 G1161 G4623

Additional Cross-References

Luke 6:9 (Salvation): 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?

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