

## “CONFLICT, CONVERSION, AND CONFESSION”

John 5:9b-18

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

### INTRODUCTION

Legalism is a deadly problem. There is much misunderstanding of legalism. In essence, legalism promotes human effort and energy in order to gain favor with God—either for salvation or for sanctification. Many times it involves the addition of laws and regulations beyond what Scripture requires for the believer, and then it mandates these regulations in order to be acceptable before God. The legalist will then put an inordinate importance upon the man-made law and minimize the far more important divine laws and requirements of Scripture.

It is not legalism for an individual or for an organization/church to have standards that they agree upon for ministry or worship. Some standards may not even have a Scriptural basis—but may have a practical basis. However, if the church promotes these human standards as a way to curry God’s favor, or as a way to be “more spiritual” than other believers who do not follow the particular standards, then the elevation of the standards become legalism.

One of the signs that a person or church is becoming legalistic is the ignoring of crucially important spiritual values and blessings because the focus is so much on the human standard. Such is the situation before us in the text today. The Pharisees had added a whole layer of human regulations to the Scriptural requirements for Sabbath observance—and there were some specific divine requirements for the Israelites (Ex. 20:9-11/ 23:12; 31:14; 35:2-3; Num. 15:32-36, etc.). Jesus did not recognize the importance of these man-made regulations when they conflicted with the divine plan and purpose. He often ignored such laws and taught his disciples to reject those that were unscriptural. The Pharisees had so hedged in Sabbath observance that it was no longer a spiritual blessing; it had become a huge burden.

He told His disciples in Mk. 2:27 that the Sabbath was made for man—for his blessing and benefit—not man for the Sabbath. Moreover, He said, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath (2:28). In this passage he adds another thought to the issue.

In this incident, the Pharisees could not even acknowledge the wonderful and amazing miracle done to the poor invalid; they were too concerned about the violation of their human rule. What about us? *Are our eyes open to the amazing things that the Lord is doing in our midst?* Have our hearts swelled with wonder and gratitude because of how wonderful the Lord is and what wonderful works He is doing? *Or, are we focusing on our own agenda and our own interests and missing the mighty work of God in our midst?*

The passage begins and ends with **conflict** between the Jewish leaders and the healed man and Jesus, it sandwiches in the middle the **conversion** of the man healed, and it concludes with a powerful **confession** of our Lord as to His relationship with His Father.

**YOU MUST FOCUS ON THE MIGHTY WORK OF THE SAVIOR AND ON HIS POWERFUL RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS FATHER.**

## I. CONFLICT OVER THE MIGHTY HEALING OF THE INVALID (9B-13)

The kind of day was “Sabbath”—not “a Sabbath” or “the Sabbath”.

The expression here is somewhat unique—Sabbath “on that day.” (A special Sabbath?)

### A. Criticism of the Man who “had been healed.”

Note the way he is described—no longer as an “invalid” or “sick man”—he was now healed and remained in that condition!

Note that their criticism was continuing—not a single statement.

“**Not lawful**” for you to carry your mattress. According to whom? Not God!

**THESE MEN TOTALLY IGNORE THE SIGNIFICANT MIRACLE!**

### B. The Response (11)

I do not do this on my own authority—but on the authority of someone much greater than me—“The One who made me well”—He must have divine approval if He has such divine power—and therefore, He can command me to carry my mattress.

**Note that his emphasis is not upon “breaking the law,” but upon the act of healing.**

### C. The identity of the Healer (12-13)

1. The disrespectful question—“Who is *the MERE man* who would dare violate DIVINE LAW by commanding you to “take up and walk.” An abrupt summary focusing upon the offensive “work”, not on the fact that it was merely the mat on which the helpless cripple had been lying!

2. The uncertain answer—He did not know who healed him.

Note again he is described as “the healed one.”

The reason for his uncertainty is that Jesus “**had slipped away**” *because of the crowd.*

The only NT use of “slipped away”—a term having the idea of “turning the head aside, dodging a blow”—thus avoiding someone or thing. In this case, as was so common with Jesus, His **reason** for leaving quietly (rather than the **means** of leaving—the crowd making it easier) was to avoid the commotion that naturally arose with such a crowd. He preferred to quietly do His spiritual work with the man and not involve Himself with the sensationalism of the excitable multitude that would lead to carnal interest in spectacular displays.

## II. CONVERSION OF THE HEALED MAN (14-15)

### A. The Seeker (14)

Note, that the man did not seek the Lord; the Lord sought Him!

Problem with the philosophy of “**seeker sensitive churches.**”

**We need to seek the lost; Jesus does. We need to bring them to Christ and**

**teach them His ways, not adapt our churches and practices into comfort zones for lost people where they will feel comfortable and non-threatened.**

B. The Atmosphere—the house of the Lord (temple—likely outer courts).  
Was he there offering sacrifices of thanksgiving?

C. The Message (14)

1. You have become permanently healed physically (perfect tense).
2. You need to be spiritually healed—have all your sins forgiven.
  - a. There seems to be an implication here that his ailment was somehow related to previous sin. (Hendrickson disagrees.)
  - b. He was “living in sin”—present tense.
3. You must avoid worse consequences
  - a. In this life
  - b. Especially in the next—eternal condemnation

What about you? **Have you broken with your sin and turned to the Savior for salvation?** Remember John 3:18.

D. The Response (15)

Why did he “tell the Jews”? Was he, as some commentators say, **a traitor** to Jesus? Was he upset because Jesus had confronted him about his sins? Was he, knowing their animosity toward Jesus, trying to get Him into trouble with the authorities?

There are a couple of reasons why I reject the above scenarios.

1. His use of terms different from the accusatory terms of the Jewish leaders.  
His emphasis is on “the one who made me well”—not the lawbreaker.
2. The term John uses for “told” almost has the idea of a “prophetic declaration”; everywhere else in John it speaks of the Holy Spirit’s declarations (16:13, 14,15), of Jesus’ declaration (16:25), and of Messiah’s declarations (4:25); in I Jn. 1:5 it refers to the declarations of the apostles.
3. He refers to “Jesus”—the Savior—as the one who healed him—both physically and spiritually?

### III. THE CONFESSION OF CHRIST (16-18)

A. The Lord of the Sabbath (cf. Mark 2)

1. He in principle “was doing these things” on the Sabbath—showing that He did not consider Himself bound by Jewish legal traditions. Could this expression include other previous brushes with Jewish Sabbath regulations?
2. The legalists therefore “*were persecuting Jesus.*”—they began and continued to do so. [What form this persecution took, we cannot be sure.]

B. The Unique Son of God Who is Equal with the Father (17-18)

Note the word “*answered*” here; being in the middle voice, the verb seems to

have **legal force** here. He gives an official defense of His person and work.

1. His identity with the Father's work (17)
  - a. Sabbath rest for God does not exclude His works of **preservation** and **redemption**. He holds the universe together constantly, guides its affairs, and seeks and saves the lost.
  - b. This work has continued "until now."
  - c. The Son does exactly what the Father is doing. They engage in ONE task.

2. His identity with the Father's Deity (18)
  - a. Cause of additional animosity from the Jews—Seeking rather to kill Him; no longer satisfied to merely "persecute" Him. (Or, the word could be translated "all the more" and imply that the earlier persecution also involved as idea of trying to kill him.) The verb shows their **unremitting efforts—kept trying to kill Him**. Eight times John uses this verb of the Jews' efforts to kill Jesus (For other attempts to kill Him, see 7:19, 25; 8:37, 59; 10:31; 11:53; 12:10).

Sabbath *breaker*—i.e. loosing or destroying the Sabbath as they knew it. Jesus demonstrated that a man's true rest is not from human labor, but **for divine heavenly labor**. Sabbath rest is a preparation for the "positive, final fulfillment of spiritual service." God Himself does not keep the Sabbath as they insist! On the Sabbath we must rest as God rests. **To cease to do good is not to keep the Sabbath, but to sin.**

Blasphemer—Calling God His own Father

- b. Profound statement of His Divine Nature
  - (1) God is **HIS OWN** Father. He is the Son of God in a unique sense—not in the sense that an ordinary Jew could or would claim. They would tend to say, "Our Father," not "my Father."
  - 2) He made Himself "**equal with God**". (cf. 10:30)  
He doesn't replace God; He shares the divine nature.  
**Notice that the Jews clearly and accurately understood the implications of Jesus' words. Jesus claims to be God!**

## CONCLUSION

If the Unitarian or Arian ideas of Jesus were true, surely Jesus would have corrected the Jews here; but He did not. He was equal with God the Father and that was the reason they wanted to kill Him. They saw Him as a blasphemer. *If Jesus were not truly God, He would not be a good man—He would be a very BAD MAN!* If these men were wrong in their understanding of Jesus' words He was morally obligated to correct them. He did not do so!

Note that the conflict continues until our time.

- 1) Many continue to substitute human good works as an approach to eternal salvation. No one can ever be saved that way, and Jesus continues to oppose that teaching.
- 2) Many continue to reject the claims of Christ concerning Himself. They see Him as a good man, maybe even a prophet or great teacher—but not the Son of God equal with the Father.
- 3) Many continue to persecute Jesus and His people (cf. Hinduism Islam, atheism, etc.)  
**You must stand boldly for Him and not back down nor be ashamed.**

Note that the need for conversion continues until our time. **You need to be saved, and Jesus is the only One who can save you!**

Note that Jesus' confession concerning Himself is still true today. **You must accept and believe Him and seek to persuade others!**