

the key to the fundamental difference between **the wise and the babes**: what are men willing to have told to them that they do not already think they know? If men believe they already know all there is to know that is significant, then revelation to them is impossible. However, God has chosen revelation as His means of communication, and by so doing, has quite literally hidden His truth from all those who choose not to be told anything they do not already know and approve. (See on 11:14; 13:10-17) At the same time, His truth gets through to all the rest. The express purpose of the Gospel is to dethrone self and enthrone God in men's hearts. Had the Father made the Kingdom of God the prize for human scholarship, then its message would have been grasped only by the few great intellectuals, but in this case it would have become the object of human achievement and the stimulus to pride and self-sufficiency. Such an approach would have defeated the purpose the Gospel was intended to accomplish. But by addressing His message to all who are humble, the Lord brings it within reach of everyone who is willing to descend from his throne and exalt God to His rightful place. Luke 10:23, 24 indicates how distance in time from Jesus of Nazareth kept some men from seeing God's truth perfectly revealed, a limitation of which they were not responsible, but by which they were nonetheless hindered. But the blessing pronounced upon the disciples was occasioned, not by the accident of birth that chanced to drop them into the same time schedule on earth with Jesus, but because they permitted themselves actually to perceive in Jesus what the self-praising religious analysts were unable to fathom, because these latter were unwilling to acknowledge it. Mt. 13:16, 17 clarifies this concept: "Blessed are your eyes BECAUSE THEY SEE . . ." For example, God revealed Jesus' true identity and mission to Peter, while this same vital information remained unpalatable and, consequently, unappreciated and unknown to the Jewish hierarchy! (Cf. Mt. 16:17; 1 Co. 2:8.) But the same evidence God gave Peter was also at the disposal of the scholars. The difference in the evaluations lay in the evaluators.

Christianity is for the weak. The problem is that men dislike the awful tension of being weak in a world that demands that they be strong. As a result, they are greatly tempted to prove themselves strong—to themselves and others—by illegitimate means that equivocate their dependence upon God or anyone else. Least of all does anyone wish to admit his own intellectual inferiority and dependence. But in the presence of the Almighty, one can hardly confess anything else

but weakness, inferiority and dependence. It is a shame that so many miss the point of this sort of confession, when they suppose that to admit this means to deny some part of their essential humanity. But belief does not require intellectual dishonesty or mediocrity to have validity, just intellectual humility. Christ can make weak men strong, if they but confess their need of Him and seek His power. (Cf. Jer. 1:6, 7; 2 Co. 11:30; 12:9, 10) Irreligious people who seem so strong are often people who have not been tested, are yet young enough, rich enough to maintain a substantial level of autonomy. But just let some of these factors fall below subsistence levels and put them through some real crises that try men's souls and then judge their strength. Unbelief is no evidence of a person's intellectual superiority or of some inadequacy in the evidence upon which faith could be founded. Unbelief may only be proof of the unbeliever's prejudiced standpoint, his own limited grasp of the available information and his unbounded self-esteem. Jesus does not condemn intellectual excellence any more than He condemns the mere possession of wealth. But He does point out the danger inherent in both: idolatry. He who bows before a mental concept of his own devising is no less an idolator than the man who kneels at Mammon's altar.

The Apostle Paul could measure the exact distance between **the wise and understanding** and **the babes**, between the effects of a false education and viewpoint, and the knowledge of Christ, because he had personally covered that distance in his own spiritual pilgrimage. When he announced his estimate of the Jewish tradition at its highest, most scholarly level, he describes it as "rubbish" (Phil. 3:8), not because Hebrew culture was deliberately false or calculatingly wicked but because of its false view of reality in rejecting God's Messiah. The scholars of Jesus' day could give a number of apparently valid reasons for rejecting the "untenable claims of that Nazarene," reasons that would have been perfectly consistent within the framework of the accepted system of thought. But once reality broke through this system that was permeating Paul's mind, when he met Jesus face to face on the Damascus highway, he was shocked with the realization that his perfectly consistent system was based upon a false premise that ignored true reality (as opposed to the imagined reality in the Jewish system that invented a Messiahship for God to respect.) Saul of Tarsus bowed before the evidence, while many of his brilliant contemporaries did not.

Jesus could see the future judgment with unerring eye and rejoiced because the very laws, which were set in motion to save the

saveable, were functioning perfectly. People were actually coming into God's Kingdom in God's way! The proud, the unrepentant, those who deemed themselves **wise and understanding**, the self-satisfied, those who sat on both the throne and cathedra of their own lives, those, in short, who refused God's rule and wisdom, were damning themselves. The Kingdom of God was right on course! (Study notes on Mt. 3:2, 15; 4:17) Those whom God wanted to be saved—the little people who had so little other chance for greatness or godliness in this life, but who wanted to do things God's way—these were really grasping the fundamental truth of God's message. The publicans, the harlots, the demon-possessed, the simple, common people of the land, because of their open-hearted response to Jesus, stood out in bold contrast with the Pharisees and others who made laws for God to keep! Nevertheless, Jesus puts no premium upon either ignorance or stupidity as qualifications for recognizing His divine wisdom. Intellect, per se, is no disqualification, nor are all simple people qualified. Intellectual power or its opposite are simply immaterial, for Jesus is describing the MORAL qualifications of the individual who would be examining His revelations. A man does not have to be either an intellectual or a simpleton to be able to trust Jesus, just humble, whatever his intellectual gifts or deficiencies.

God in his wisdom chose not to save the comparatively righteous or to damn the relatively wicked. He elected to remove the old man completely, since, when judged by absolute perfection, he can only be condemned, because he does not measure up. Therefore, it is only when we stop justifying ourselves and judging ourselves somehow to be worthy, when we stop living by our self-rule and stop walking by sight, when we begin life under Jesus' direction, that we can see what God is trying to tell us about life and truth. The trouble with **the wise and understanding** is that they think they have sufficient understanding, that they are already righteous in any way that is really important, that they have enough. (Cf. Rev. 3:17; 1 Co. 4:8) They want to preserve something "worthy" in themselves and not surrender to death, letting the whole life be sacrificed. The news that God has already condemned ALL men is totally unacceptable to them. After all, they argue, we're no great sinners! But the greatest of all sins is to be conscious of none. The very next scene which chronologically takes place in the house of Simon the Pharisee, so well illustrates this problem. (Study Lk. 7:36-50) Look at that woman standing at Jesus' feet, without any pretenses or demands, weeping in appreciation of her Lord and fully knowing that

Jesus knows all about her. She is not trying to save face: she would save her soul! Then, by contrast, study the Pharisee who feels no sin. How little he understood, how little he loved, how little he repented, how little he was forgiven! The **babe** is one who is willing to come out in public, even in the house of hypocrites, and admit his sin, wanting to do anything for Jesus,—even wash feet while listening to the sarcastic remarks of others. Such are willing, as was the Prodigal Son, even to face one's own self-righteous older brother.

Wise and understanding . . . babes. Even though the Master uses these categories to describe widely contrasting attitudes people have toward truth, it does not follow that any individual who finds himself in one or the other class will always remain there. The very work of the Gospel proclamation involves dealing with those prejudices held by any who feel that their own wisdom, their own reasons, are sufficient to reject Jesus. And if such people hear the Gospel presented often enough and persuasively enough, they may be induced to admit the folly of their wisdom and turn themselves over to Jesus after all. Further, a person who was once open to the tender appeals of the Lord may someday awaken to the realization that the Lord no longer really dominates his life and this former **babe** has then become **wise and understanding** in his own eyes, so much so that even Jesus Himself can no longer make Himself understood to this man. This former **babe**, now well-versed in Christianity, has made himself insensitive to the call of God, despite his constant familiarity with it. The Apostles were constantly doing battle with their own understanding of Jesus and His program. (Cf. Lk. 9:45; 18:34; Gal. 2:11ff.) One's own self-satisfaction ("I know enough, I am good enough, I am doing enough"), is just as blinding to spiritual light today as religious pride in Jesus' day. This is why we must consent to die to self and live only for Him. To become and remain what Jesus means when He speaks of **babes**, we must be willing to say, "The self that I thought so righteous, justly deserved death. I accept the sentence of death and die to my rationalizations, self-defence and self-rule. I now submit my understanding to the test of the truth that Jesus guarantees, always remembering that I may well have an imperfect grasp even of His truth." This is why Christ's servant must constantly ask himself whether he is eager to learn new truth that he did not already know, whether he really be prompt to obey and sensitive to Jesus' desires.

God has always been using **babes**, the few, the foolish, the weak, to confound the strength, numbers and wisdom of the self-

confident. (Cf. Is. 29:14; 1 Co. 1:19, 26ff.; 2:6ff.; 3:18-21; Psalms 8:3 and notes on Mt. 21:16) The Lord had chosen these unknown, trusting men to pit them against all the wisdom, wealth and power of the foremost leaders in Israel, and ultimately, in the world. Jesus may have been rejoicing to see that the establishment of the Kingdom on earth was first to be done by poor, weak instruments (as the powerful of earth would judge them), for He could see that even this tactic would be a strong argument in its favor, for men would be drawn to admit that the greatness of the power operative in such a movement must be God's! (2 Co. 1:9; 4:7; 12:9, 10) But never let that calumny stand that would scorn them as "unlearned, common men" (Ac. 4:13)! Though they had studied in no recognized school of the day, they sat under the unique instruction of the only Rabbi accredited by the Father.

What effect would this prayer have had upon the disciples who heard it? Would they have immediately grasped the great issues that are involved here? Perhaps the Lord said more than Matthew's summary includes, in which case they might have sensed more readily the Master's meaning. That He should give praise and thanks to God for such relatively insignificant men as these, must have touched them deeply.

Bruce (*Training*, 102, 103) takes another point of departure. Instead of looking at the theological objections levelled at Jesus by the hierarchy, he examines the objections they may have had to His methods and procedure. Consider also his application:

The reference in the thanksgiving prayer of Jesus to the 'wise and prudent' suggests the thought that these evangelistic efforts were regarded with disfavour by the refined, fastidious classes of Jewish religious society. This is in itself probable. There are always men in the church, intelligent, wise and even good, to whom popular religious movements are distasteful. The noise, the excitement, the extravagances, the delusions, the misdirection of zeal, the rudeness of the agents, the instability of the converts—all these things offend them. . . .

None of the 'wise and prudent' knew half so well as Jesus what evil would be mixed with the good in the work of the kingdom. But He was not so easily offended as they. The Friend of sinners was ever like Himself. He sympathized with the multitude, and could not, like the Pharisees, contentedly resign them to a permanent condition of ignorance and depravity. He rejoiced greatly over even one lost sheep

restored; and He was, one might say overjoyed, when not one, but a whole flock, even *began* to return to the fold. . . . His love was strong and where strong love is, even wisdom and refinement will not be fastidious.

. . . Another class of Christians, quite distinct from the wise and prudent, in whose eyes such evangelistic labours as these of the twelve stand in no need of vindication. Their tendency, on the contrary, is to regard such labours as the whole work of the kingdom. Revival of religion among the neglected masses is for them the sum of all good-doing. Of the more still, less observable work of instruction going on in the church they take no account. Where there is no obvious excitement, the church in their view is dead, and her ministry inefficient. Such need to be reminded that there were *two* religious movements going on in the days of the Lord Jesus. One consisted in rousing the masses out of the stupor of indifference, the other consisted in the careful, exact training of men already in earnest, in the principles, and truths of the divine kingdom. Of the one movement the disciples, i.e. both the twelve and the seventy, were the agents; of the other movement they were the subjects. And the latter movement, though less noticeable, and much more limited in extent, was by far more important than the former; for it was destined to bring forth fruit that should remain—to tell not merely on the present time, but on the whole history of the world.

If Bruce's observations seem to miss the main point Jesus is making, let it be remembered that we have yet a great deal to learn from the Lord, especially about methods, and it is often at this point that we need to acknowledge our ignorance and, as babes, learn from Him.

11:26 Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight. This subordinate clause depends upon 11:25 for its principle verb (*exomologōimai*, "I praise and thank thee") and provides us Jesus' second expression of thanks or praise for the Father. Whereas before He praised Him for His absolute sovereignty, here the Son's emphasis is upon God's good pleasure, His *eudokia*. (Cf. uses of *eudokia* in Lk. 2:14; Phil. 1:15; 2:13; 2 Th. 1:11; Eph. 1:5, 9 unites these two concepts of the absolute sovereignty of His will and the emotional impact of God's pleasure. See also Lk. 12:32; 1 Co. 1:21; Col. 1:19)

Barnes' personal expression of confidence in the wisdom of God is worthy of repetition here. (*Matthew-Mark*, 123)

(The proud and haughty scribes and Pharisees) rejected his gospel, but it was the pleasure of God to reveal it to obscure and more humble men. The reason given, the only satisfactory reason, is, that it so seemed good in the sight of God. In this the Savior acquiesced . . . and in the dealings of God it is fit that all should acquiesce. *Such is the will of God* is often the only explanation which can be offered in regard to the various events which happen to us on earth . . . (it) is the only account which can be given of the reason of the dispensations of his grace. Our understanding is often confounded. We are unsuccessful in all our efforts at explanation. Our philosophy fails, and all that we can say is, "Even so, Father, for so it seems good to thee." And this is enough. That GOD does a thing, is, after all, the best reason which we can have that it is right. It is a security that nothing wrong is done; and though now mysterious, yet light will hereafter shine upon it like the light of noonday. I have more certainty that a thing is right if I can say that I know such is the will of God, than I could have by depending on my own reason.

One of the clearest lessons of this text is that Jesus does not expect to save the whole world. It tears at His great heart, but He will not relent. Even though He yearns to rescue everyone, yet He is willing to say even here, "Not my will, but yours, be done." He is grateful that this psychological law, which permitted God's truth to be concealed even while it was being revealed, was God's idea, God's will. (Study 1 Co. 1:30; 2 Co. 4:4)

B. MAJESTIC SELF-REVELATION (11:27)

How can Jesus be so sure that this psychological law, which automatically excludes the proud Pharisee while at the same time opens God's truth to the humble disciple, is in perfect agreement with the eternal counsel of God? This critical question receives its resounding answer in the magnificent claim now expressed.

11:27 All things have been delivered unto me of my Father. What were **all things** that were delegated to the Son? Plummer (*Luke*, 283) is right to notice that "it is arbitrary to confine the *panta* (i.e. **all things**) to the *potestas revelandi*" (i.e. right to reveal. See also the expository sermon "Rest in a Restless World" which follows.)

1. All authority in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28:18; Heb. 2:8, 9; Dan. 7:14; 1 Co. 15:24-28; Jn. 3:27-36).
2. Power on earth to forgive sins (Lk. 5:24).
3. Right to be Lord of the living and the dead (Ro. 15:8, 9).
4. Inheritance of all things (Heb. 1:2; 2:10; 1 Co. 8:6).
5. All glory and honor, a position superior to angels (Heb. 1:4; Phil. 2:9-11).
6. The responsibility to suffer for all (Heb. 2:8, 9).
7. The headship over the Church (Eph. 2:22).
8. The authority to judge all men (Jn. 5:22).

There could be many more. Nevertheless, the most important prerogative claimed by Jesus in this context is primarily the unique knowledge of God. Such a claim is common in John's Gospel (cf. 3:35; 6:46; 7:29; 10:14, 15; 13:3; 17:2, 25), but so utterly unique in so outspoken a form in the Synoptic Gospels (although there are numerous allusions and a few widely-scattered but clear declarations like this one), that this claim has been rejected by some as a genuine utterance of the Lord. However, no critical evidence in the manuscripts can be presented to undermine its authenticity as part of Matthew's Gospel. It can only be discredited in circles where prejudice makes its truth unwelcome. It is interesting to notice that this kind of claim has never been popular in intellectual circles because, if Jesus is right, such a statement declares false or, at best, totally inadequate men's best efforts to arrive at absolutes and truth without going by way of Jesus. And **the wise and understanding** just do not like to be told that they are wrong. Some of the best brains of Jesus' day used this kind of utterance against Him to crucify Him. It is Jesus' highest claim to exclusive knowledge of God. We must feel this exclusiveness: it puts us on the outside. **My Father** speaks of a relationship shared by no other. (Cf. Jn. 5:17, 18) **The Son** refers to One who is unique among all other sons of God.

Is Jesus speaking here of a past fact (**have been delivered**) or by anticipation? That is, did He at that moment actually possess all that He claims? Yes, because He sees the Father's sending Him to earth and committing all these tremendous responsibilities to Him as one act. All the pain and glory that is involved in being the Son of God was part of His commission.

Lenski (*Matthew*, 454), citing Luther, points out the perfect balance in Jesus' deity and perfect humanity:

By this he indicates that he is true man, who has received them from the Father. For neither would God deliver all things to one who was only man, nor would one who was only God received them from another. For neither is it possible for one who is only man to be over all things, nor for one who is only God to be beneath God. Thus in this one person true God and true man are joined together.

Luther argues his case well but we must also weigh Jesus' next statement into our conclusions.

No man knoweth the Son. This very assertion gives us reason to re-study and re-examine all that we thought we ever knew about Him. As we struggle to understand Jesus' divine and human nature, and as we try to comprehend His earthly ministry and interpret His message, we must hold lightly our own interpretations, lest they become more decisive in our deliberations, than the very Word of Christ itself. Though He came to earth with the specific intention to reveal God, and though He let Himself be seen, heard and studied, there was always that other side of Jesus, His infinite deity that staggers men's minds and keeps Him just beyond their complete grasp of His nature. Note how unobtrusively Matthew admits to being one of those very few Galileans who did not presume to know all there was to know about the Master. He simply quotes Jesus' words without qualification or personal reservation. He might have said, as do modern critics in their estimates of the historical Jesus, "His affirmation, that no one really understood Him, may have been true when He said it, but we have Him figured out now!" The favored cities of Galilee too thought they knew Jesus, but their conceit prohibited them from recognizing anything more in Him than just another Nazarene carpenter, or perhaps as another Galilean rabbi whose opinions were to be added to the ever-growing body of scribal traditions. But lest we hide our own limited knowledge behind repeated criticisms of the unbelieving Jews, let us ask ourselves whether, with our greatly increased opportunities to know the completed revelation as presented and explained by the Apostles in the NT, we have done any better. Do we know the Son, His attitudes, His methods, what He was trying to get us to understand about God, the world, sin, life and eternity?

Neither doth any know the Father save the Son. Feel the stupendous impact of this bold declaration made by a young Hebrew who stands before the entire world and cries, "If you would really know the heart, mind, nature and will of God, look at me!

Come to ME, learn from ME. I am the only Person who really knows God! All who came before me are liars, thieves and robbers." (Cf. Jn. 14:9; 1:18; 10:1; 1 Jn. 5:20) The grand significance of this statement is that there is no God but the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! We must believe that Jesus is the exclusive authority and our only necessity, for, if He is right, there can be no other way back to God than through Him. (Jn. 14:6) People demand free-thought, because they do not want Jesus' authority over their lives. But if they would see God, they must honor the Son by submitting themselves totally to His authority! (Jn. 5:23, 24) And Christians cannot rule their lives and still call themselves His disciples, for Jesus recognizes no peer nor rival. But His authority or right to rule is implicit in His knowledge and revelation of the Father. This claim must have been positively scandalous to Jesus' Hebrew audience, for He is claiming a knowledge of God that no prophet, seer or sage either before or after Him, could pretend.

And he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him.

Jesus' own thanksgiving (11:25, 26) certifies that His own will is in perfect agreement with the Father's good will, hence those to whom Jesus **wills to reveal** these mighty truths are the **babes** of 11:25. There is here no arbitrary selection of certain persons to whom this knowledge is granted. Rather, Jesus graciously invites all men, trying to lead them to lay aside their prejudices. His grace is sincerely offered to every man, but He has chosen that only those who are humble shall receive it. His will remains a closed book to condemn those who can, but will not, study it, because their lives are occupied with other things, their minds already jammed with human wisdom. **The Son willeth** (*boûletai*). There is a choice that has been made. Jesus decided not to give the same intimate revelation to those who prove themselves definitely wicked, as He would to those who submit to Him as trusting disciples. So this declaration is all of a piece with the presuppositions inherent in everything Jesus has been saying throughout this entire passage. That none are to be excluded, except by the exercise of their own will, is proved by the universality of the following invitation. (See on 11:28) Yet, as Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 98) points out:

It is a thousand pities that men have paused at this point in the pouring out of His soul in anguish of longing to make men know the Father—paused to build metaphysical theories in theology while the Redeemer's heart breaks with longing for lost men who will not heed. . . . He is as far

as possible from thinking of barring any from the Father. He is setting before Himself the problem of how to get men to this knowledge that gives eternal life. It is the cry of the Savior, not the dogma of a theologian, that we hear from Him. He knows the Father, He is in a world in which He finds no man who knows Him, all men must know Him or they have missed the whole meaning of life and had better never have been born. . . . He must make them know His Father. . . . How? . . . He offers Himself as the way to the Father.

D. PLEADING, UNIVERSAL INVITATION (11:28-30)

How does this passage fit together with the sections preceding it? Only the fact that Jesus possesses full authority qualifies Him to issue this universal invitation. The connection is perfect, since Jesus has just described Himself as the only One qualified to reveal the Father. Now He invites all men to be His students.

To whom is this invitation addressed? **All ye that labor and are heavy laden.** Upon first reading, this attractive offer seems limited to a single, particular group: the down-trodden, oppressed masses. But reflection reveals that sooner or later every human being finds himself caught by unexpected changes in life that leave him sorrowing, burdened, anguished and frustrated. The ancient Hebrews had understood this, and they expressed themselves in what makes an excellent and striking background for Jesus' bold declaration. (See Ecclesiasticus 40:1-9) Life itself, with its seemingly interminable and apparently inevitable cares, becomes a galling yoke to those who have no choice but to keep their noses to the grindstone. Even those who are in some measure successful become aware of the fact that they must maintain their success with an even greater expenditure of strength, even though their resources are failing.

It is worthy of note that many of our trials are of our own choosing, because they are based upon some concept of life that holds us firm in that situation. We feel bound by our principles to remain in that situation and suffer the trial. But if it is a false concept of life for which we suffer, in Jesus' discipleship it would lose its importance and power, as it would be submerged into reality as Jesus preaches it. Too often men measure life by an unreal standard and then scourge themselves mercilessly for failing to meet it. Ironically, such false standards are not the things that truly matter in the final analysis.

It is not physical work or mental activity that drains us, leaving us weak, frustrated and burdened for one day's work. We were designed to work—and work well. We function best when we are profitably and contentedly working. But here is the catch: much of our work is neither profitable nor pleasing. And even in our best work we fail to achieve all our goals. Our hopes far exceed our realization. The tedium of routine sets in to dull our interest and increase both our boredom and our fatigue. On the other hand, the goals that Jesus sets before us, and the prospects of realizing them, gives us direction, stimulation, security, and, as a consequence, real rest, even though we may have even more work to do and more responsibility as His disciples than ever before. Life takes on a new significance, even daily tasks glow with new meaning.

But in this Jewish context is Jesus talking about the aches and pains of everyday living? Yes, and more, for His emphasis is also a moral one.

1. He is talking about the moral struggle to live up to the divine standards.

- a. This constant measuring oneself with God's perfection is a discouraging, heart-breaking disappointment! (Cf. Gal. 5:1; Ac. 15:10; Ro. 7:21-24) In the end, without the victory and power of Jesus, ours is a losing battle to be good enough. (See notes on 5:48 and Notes Introductory to the Sermon on the Mount, Vol. I, pp. 184ff., esp. 190.) This invitation, then, is Christ's answer to the dubious and the desperate who are afraid that His ideals are unreachable. Jesus knows that, without His life in us, there is even more bondage and frustration in trying to imitate Him, than there is in any other law. This is why He invites the hopeless and the skeptics to come to Him, so He can make them over, empowering them to be all that they dream.

- b. But Jesus' hearers were not merely struggling with God's requirements. They were also measuring themselves by human standards mistaken for divine law. (Cf. 23:4; Lk. 11:46) Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 102) describes this:

He was thinking of the drudging burden of the endless round of ceremonial exactions, petty negations, shallow dogmas, formal duties with which the religionists of the day loaded life down until

it seemed impossible for the ordinary man to be godly. . . .

Plummer (*Matthew*, 169) summarizes it:

The scribes could not give rest to souls which He can promise (note the emphatic *kagō*) 'They bind heavy burdens (*phortia*) and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders' (23:4); but His burden (*phortion*) is light. This shows that 'heavy laden' (*pephortisménoi*) does not refer primarily to the load of sin, but to the burdens which Pharisaic interpretations of the law imposed, and which, after all, gave no relief to men's conscience; . . . The heavy load of observances which gave no relief and perhaps also to the sorrows of life, which, apart from the consolations of a true faith, are so crushing. To those worn out with restless seeking . . . to those who are weighed down with unprofitable burdens . . . (Jesus offered His invitation.)

2. But that He includes also all of the weary, burdensome toil of sin and the suffering that accompanies it, is evident from the consideration that Jesus' discipleship has a unifying power to make us at peace with ourselves. Most of us are "walking civil wars", because of our divided heart. We are determined to try to serve both God and Mammon, have our fling with the flesh and still reap a harvest of righteousness in the Spirit. But this tension can only break us, since only God's world is the true one, only His rules function and bring us true joy. The other name for that tension, wherein we try to live in God's world and yet run it by our own rules, is "sin!"

All ye that labor and are heavy laden: here again Jesus' shepherd heart expresses His full, deeply-felt compassion for the shepherdless, harrassed and helpless sheep. (Cf. 9:36) And when He says **all**, He means it with that same generous universality found everywhere in His teaching: "Whosoever will, may come." (Cf. Rev. 22:17; Mt. 10:32; 12:50; 16:25; 18:4; Jn. 3:16; 4:14; 6:37; 11:26) Here is your personal invitation: include yourself in this category of **"all ye that labor"**. Let no one imagine that he does not come under this invitation or that God might have other plans for saving him. This is it!

Come unto me. The great ones of earth maintain a strict reserve of inaccessibility around them. In contrast, Jesus is not only willing to be approached by "just anybody," but even graciously invites us! Imagine a 30-year-old Jew spreading His arms to receive the entire human race, saying, "All you who have any problems, come to me and I will help you!" Said by any other person, these words either sound ludicrous or border on blasphemy. The Jews were accustomed to this invitation made by Wisdom personified in their literature. (Cf. Prov. 8—9:6; Ecclesiasticus 24:19; 51:23-27) Further they had even heard great rabbis invite students to come for instruction. But never before had they heard anyone offer himself as the unique solution to all the deepest problems of the human race. As in the case of Jesus' miracles, so also here with His claims, truth and justice demand that we dismiss Him as a raving maniac, crucify Him as an imposter or bow before Him as our God. **I will give you rest.** This is just like Jesus to help the struggling, the unsuccessful, the weak and unworthy. (Mt. 12:20) Yet this is distinctly God's work. (Ex. 33:14; Jer. 31:25) How ill the Nazarene conceals His identity, if He wants none to mistake Him for God come in the flesh!

Come to me . . . I will give you rest. The extremely personal nature of this invitation is absolutely amazing, for Jesus presents us no formal system of philosophy or theology, no writings containing abstract theories, no new legal system or package of simple answers to the world's ills. He knows that we have had enough of that already. Instead, He is offering Himself! No doctrine or philosophy could ever do for us what our intimate fellowship with Jesus can.

11:29 **Take my yoke upon you and learn of me.** The **yoke** is a symbol well-known to the Hebrews, standing for control, discipline, obligation and even bondage. (Cf. Isa. 9:4; 1 Tim. 6:1; 1 Kgs. 12:4; Ps. 2:3 LXX; Jer. 5:5; 27:1—28:17; Psalms of Solomon 7:9; 17:30; Ac. 15:10; Gal. 5:1; 2 Co. 6:14) We cannot help feeling the contrast in Jesus' mind between **MY yoke** and all the other burdens borne by the weary and heavy-laden. But this very contrast suggests that even Jesus' yoke is definitely a kind of control, an obligation, a discipline. If so, then He is making it crystal-clear that He is not merely our Friend and Example. He is to be our Lord and Master. Rather, our new relationship to Him requires of us that we be willing to learn truth from Him and obey His voice, in the same way that the Jews felt their obligation to the Law and

discipline of Moses. **Take my yoke upon you** means that we are to submit to Him by our own free decision and deliberate resolve. Freedom in Christ cannot mean an absence of any control whatever, for that would mean antinomian anarchy. The greatest freedom from that tyranny that would enslave and destroy self is to be found by placing self completely under the dominion of Christ.

Learn of me, stated in clearer modern English is simply: "Learn from me." (*emàthete ap'emoú*; cf. Col. 1:7 *emàthete apò Epafra*) Obviously, the **rest** Jesus offers is not an eternity of boring inactivity, since He envisions a discipleship of learning and activity. The joy of comradeship with the Lord in doing God's will, in our struggle with temptations and in our efforts to bring men into the Kingdom, is the very kind of labor that leaves our spirits rested and refreshed, even though our work is never completely or perfectly done. But before we could ever hope to begin such a task we must learn from him. Those who know not this fellowship nor this hope, cannot know the psychological strength that comes from it. They can but face the unabated frustrations of the present and the dark unknowns of the future.

What must we learn from Him? Frankly, everything. We see immediately that the righteousness which accords with God's will is not a ritual consisting in certain external observances but rather a meek and lowly heart. Because He too is a human being, notwithstanding His undoubted deity, we can imitate Him. We find inspiration and motivation to attempt His challenging ideals, because He deliberately set us an example for imitation. (Phil 2:5-8; 1 Pet. 2:21ff.) The **yoke** and the **burden** He gives us are His exacting requirements, but with His power working in us, the possibilities of realization are by far so much greater. This Teacher is one who was first a learner Himself. (Heb. 2:14-18; 5:7-9) He Himself has submitted to the very yoke He would have us wear. His example not only teaches us how to wear ours well, but, since we have seen the joyous result of His life, we are the more encouraged to shoulder it. (Cf. Heb. 12:3)

Learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart. Jesus is inviting us to investigate His method, meet Him personally and enroll in His school. Tenderly He motivates us to find in Him a Teacher that is kind and patient with slow students. **I am meek and lowly in heart.** (Cf. 5:5; 21:5; Nu. 12:3; 2 Cor. 10:1) Scan the ministry of Jesus and count the times He proved this proposition true. In how many ways did He do things to which no ordinary oriental monarch would have stooped? How did He act in a manner unthink-

able to the kind of typical rabbi described in Mt. 23 and Lk. 11? Something of the importance of this observation can be felt by analyzing Jesus' public reputation as the one who "welcomes sinners and eats with them"! (cf. Lk. 15,1, 2) The Lord is not merely discussing His own personal character here, but also the methods He will use with His disciples, for His methods with each one, grow out of His own nature. What a contrast He makes to those harsh teachers who only know how to demand that the pupil rise to his duty, but who do not know how to motivate the poor learner to desire above all else to learn how to do what he knows is right. Nor is the Lord satisfied to sit in the cathedra of heaven and dictate lectures on religion and ethics. He is personally concerned that the dullest students, as well as the most brilliant, achieve their own personal best.

These gentle, comforting words, so easy for us to accept now, must have been a message difficult to believe for many in Jesus' audience. John the Baptist had hoped that the Christ would have seized the reins of government, destroyed the wicked leadership that was corrupting the nation, and usher in the Kingdom of the Messiah. This was the heart-cry of every Nationalist among Jesus' hearers, it was an ambition not entirely absent from the breast of the Apostles. Instead of giving Himself out to be the mighty Messianic Warrior-King ready for violence and civil revolution, the Lord quietly but firmly insisted: **"I am meek and lowly in heart!"**

Rest for your souls. While the wise and godly Hebrew sought rest for his soul in the contemplation of wisdom (cf. Ecclesiasticus 6:18-31, esp. v. 28; 51:27), Jesus boldly asserts that true rest is only available to those who learn from HIM. He presumes that only His Word is the true wisdom, the only ultimate truth of real permanence. (Cf. Mt. 11:27; 7:24-27; 24:35; Jn. 14:6) "Learn from me (and) you will find rest for your souls" is no empty promise if He has the right to say this, for one will find no satisfying rest outside of the reality represented in Jesus' message. The easy way to do a difficult task is to use the proper methods and equipment. There is nothing so fatiguing, so frustrating and, ultimately, so unsatisfying as to struggle with the difficult task, using inadequate equipment. It is the Lord's plan to equip us thoroughly for every good work. (2 Ti. 3:16, 17) By doing things His way, our struggle to accomplish the very same task, no matter how difficult, becomes easy by contrast to our own inadequate methods. We notice the repose when we change over to His system, because it rests us while we work. But even this simple promise puts to the test the reality of our confidence

in Him, for we must decide whose world is real, whose instructions are the true ones. For so long as we continue to do things our way, we will continue to dash ourselves against the harsh realities that contradict our pet notions. So doing, we will never find peace and rest. This promise becomes also a test of our methods even in our service to Him, for if we do not find anything but frustration, disappointment and endless fatigue in the service of Jesus, we need to ask ourselves whether we have really learned His method, share His Spirit and, hence, know His power and victory.

To call this **rest** merely spiritual, as opposed to physical rest, is a false dichotomy, since man is all of a piece and his spirit lives in a body. Both his spirit and his physical life are involved in his *psychē*, the word here translated **soul**. Jesus is offering rest for the whole man. This comes in two stages:

1. Upon simple faith in Jesus as we come to Him for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption (cf. 1 Co. 1:30, 31), we rest from the struggle to prove ourselves good enough to satisfy God. We rest from the harrassing guilt of our sins. Our distress and fears are mercifully eliminated as we commit ourselves to His grace. (Cf. Ro. 5:1; 8:1; 2 Ti. 1:12)
2. There is greater rest in bearing the yoke of Christ, in imitating Him and in becoming conformed to His image, for in so doing, we deny ourselves. The natural result of this is that that selfish clamor for attention and those conflicting desires that kept us constantly at war with ourselves are devaluated and gradually eliminated. Rest from self is rest from every other struggle with temptation. Why? Because we have settled our fundamental question of priorities as to which is most important: what the Father wills for us, or what we demand for self. Obedience to His will liberates us from the indecision and unrest of self-will. Submission to His yoke brings us real rest, since it is the joyous deference to a King whom we know and love as our Father. To obey rests us from the despotism of our desires, the liabilities of liberty and from the conflicts of conscience.

11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. This is an astounding claim! Jesus is saying that, after all is examined, His way alone is best: "Compare my demands upon your life, the discipline to which I call you, and its end results, with those required by any other discipline, and other yoke, any other world-

view, and you will find that my discipline, in the long run, is the easiest and the load I place upon you the lightest." Carver (*Self-Interpretation*, 102) understands how the painfully exacting demands of Jesus can be considered "light and easy".

He did not mean to tell us that being a disciple of His is not exacting, nor that true righteousness is an easy task. . . . (But) so soon as religion becomes really possible, it becomes in a sense easy, for when it is genuine its very essence is liberating. . . . No meaningless rules in the school of Jesus. . . . The lessons are light because they are enlightening. They put you in the way of learning deepest truths and highest realities. Pupils—real students—never object to hard lessons; they glory in them. But they want their lessons to "have some sense to them", to lead somewhere, to hold clues to life's mysteries and nature's riddles. Any lesson that does that is easy, fascinating.

Easy yoke? Light burden? No hard work seems joyful at the moment, but what training for greater things it produces in those who have been disciplined by it! (Heb. 12:3-11) AFTER he turned himself over to Christ, Paul had more work to do than ever before, but what a difference in the prospects of accomplishment his new attachment to Christ made! Christ's yoke is easier, His burden lighter, not in the sense of less toil or difficulty, but in the sense of what is achieved for eternity. It is only the long-range view, which takes eternity into account, that permits one to see that His way really is best, though it be temporarily punctuated with crosses. (2 Co. 4:16-18; Heb. 12:2; 1 Jn. 5:3) Jesus has never lowered the standard of righteousness to make life easier for anyone. Rather, He actually raised the standard to absolute perfection. Despite this, the burden He places on our shoulders is actually lighter than any other we might choose, because He alters us. He alters our motives for bearing the load, thus giving us power to do it! W. M. Taylor (*PHC*, XXII 289) suggests that the yoke of Christ is easy:

1. Because our conscience approves of this burden.
2. Because love lightens our work, making us less conscious of a load that would otherwise be unendurable.
3. Because Jesus' own Spirit empowers us to bear it.
4. Because the longer we submit to His discipline, the easier it becomes. What at first required a great deal of effort becomes easy and more enjoyable with time.

5. Because we are encouraged by a valid, unshaken hope which has power to keep us steady under our discipline, where otherwise we would break and fall.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what sense does Matthew mean that "most" of Jesus' miracles were done in the area of the three Galilean cities?
2. Were there absolutely no converts made in these cities? Explain.
3. Locate the cities of Capernaum, Bethsaida and Chorazin.
4. Locate the cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, describing that part of Bible history regarding those cities that has bearing on Jesus' use of them as a basis of comparison.
5. Explain the cosmology involved in the expression "exalted to heaven" and "brought down to Hades". Is Hades "down" and heaven "up"? From what standpoint? If Jesus is really God, hence knows that the earth is spherical, then how can He conscientiously use these terms that are obviously oriented to a flat-earth concept? Or, does physics have anything to do with His basic meaning?
6. Define "Hades", giving its varying shades of meaning, and tell how Jesus uses it to describe the fate of unrepentant cities. Explain how cities can go down to Hades.
7. What other passages of Scripture show in what sense the expression "wise and understanding" is to be understood?
8. What other passages of Scripture help to explain what Jesus means by the term "babes"?
9. List the declarations in this section that reveal the divine nature and authority of Jesus.
10. Explain how God hides truth and, at the same time, reveals it. Do this by drawing your illustrations from the ministry and results of Jesus.
11. What is the full content of the expression: "All things" in the larger context of "All things have been given to me by my Father"?
12. When were "all things" given to Jesus? For how long were they to be His?
13. In what sense does Jesus mean that none really know Him?
14. In what sense does only Jesus know the Father?
15. What is the connection between Jesus' grand claims that He makes for Himself and His great invitation offered to all?
16. Explain the expressions "take my yoke upon you and learn of me" and "my burden is light". What is the *yoke* and the *burden*

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in this context? To what sphere of human endeavor do they refer when used by One who presents Himself to all as Teacher?

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER ELEVEN "LOOKING FOR ANOTHER CHRIST"

Introduction: WHY look for another Christ? Because some are disappointed in the Christ given to us! This is not so surprising in light of the experiences of the people described in this chapter:

I. THE PERPLEXITY OF THE LOYAL-HEARTED (11:2-15)

- A. John the Baptist: "If you are really the Messiah, how is it that the world goes on more or less as before, as if you had never come?"
 1. This is the statement in other words of the problem of pain and evil: "Why does not God DO something about evil in the world, especially about the wicked themselves?"
 2. It is similar to the question stabbing the conscience of our age: "If you are really the Church of the living God, if you really proclaim a Gospel of salvation and moral transformation that really works, why have you not done more to eliminate evil and initiate a practical demonstration of the rule and love of God on earth?" Our age just cannot ignore 2000 years of bad church history with its failures, corruptions and misrepresentations of Jesus.
 3. As with all expressions of the problem of evil, these questions reveal an ignorance and a misapprehension of God's plans.
 - a. In the patient, merciful ministry of Jesus, God WAS doing a great deal about the injustices in the world.
 - b. Human intellect had failed to decipher the designs of God.
 4. John's personal problem was the disproportional exaltation of Jesus' divine office as Judge, to the detriment of His merciful human ministry as the Son of man come to seek and save the lost.
 - a. The Law, Prophets and John had prepared Israel for the glorious coming of the King.

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- b. Jesus had come but apparently nothing was happening that would square with John's understanding of the coming Christ.
 - c. In desperation, John cries out: "Are you the coming One?"
5. But John's faith in the Lord brought him to no other source for answers to his dilemma.
- B. Jesus' answer: He appreciated the honest perplexity of His loyal prophet. He corrected His understanding and vindicated him completely. Notice the correction (11:6): "Tell John that although human intellect has failed to give him complete understanding of his problem, his intellect must submit to the wisdom of my methods and results. If his intellect judges my way not to be the best, it must see what I am accomplishing, even if it means turning his back upon his prejudices about what I should be doing. John must be content to say, 'God's methods are against my wisdom: I cannot understand why He does what He does, but I follow because HE leads me, for I have learned to trust Him.'"

II. THE FICKLENESS OF AN UNREASONABLE AGE (11:16-19)

- A. John had come protesting against the falsely-inspired merriment of his age.
- B. Jesus had come refusing to sorrow over the things that made men of His age mourn.
- C. Reaction of people in general: "If you are really the Holy One of God, why do you fraternize so familiarly with the rest of us? You are not saintly enough!"
- 1. One reason for this reaction was the exaggeration of Jesus' divine character at the expense of His necessary and true humanity. Men thought that the great God would never so disturb Himself, so befoul Himself as to attend the banquet of a common sinner! Here again human intellect was at fault.
- 2. Another reason is that human emotion is falsely stimulated. Men sought the inspiration of their joys and sorrows in the wrong places.
- D. Jesus' answer: "Human emotion must seek my inspiration, must learn to dance to my music, and mourn to my lamenta-

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tion. The age must discover that the only way into the Kingdom of God is that of beginning to rejoice where hitherto there had been no joy; to mourn where hitherto there had been no mourning. . . . Men must be done with dancing to the wrong music, with mourning over unimportant things."

- E. The Lord committed to the judgment of time that age dissatisfied with wisdom contrary to its fickle tastes and capricious emotions.

III. THE IMPENITENCE OF THE MOST FAVORED CITIES (11:20-24)

- A. Their reaction: "You cannot be taken too seriously as the voice of God. We plan to run our lives much as we have been doing it before you came along!"
 - 1. Here is the depreciation of Jesus' divine authority and the demotion of the King to the level of any other human being.
 - 2. Although these towns had personally witnessed Jesus' triumph over sin and its results that were causing the suffering in their midst, they did not recognize in His mastery a perpetual protest against their own sins. They remained rebels against God.
 - 3. Here is the refusal of the will to submit to the control of God in Christ.
- B. Jesus' answer: "Your great opportunities make you so much more responsible before God for what you know, therefore your punishment for impenitence will be so much more severe! Change your mind about what I am teaching you: turn back upon your false concepts of the Kingdom of God and submit to His rule now!"

IV. THE FOLLY OF THE WISE AND THE WISDOM OF THE BABES (11:25-30)

- A. The wise and prudent reaction: "Any fool knows that yours is no way to establish a kingdom! Your program does not rhyme with any standard rabbinical formula of how the messianic kingdom has to be."
 - 1. This is the refusal of human intellect to bow, acknowledging its own ignorance.

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2. The net result is the reduction of Jesus to less than a human prophet, for the wise see in this Nazarene something less than a sage whose advice should at least be considered.

B. The reason for this reaction is that God gives His greatest blessings only to the humble, but the human heart protests against the thought of starting all over again by being born again. People demand a religion that may be grasped as a prize for intellectual achievement; a religion that permits them to give full vent to their passions; a religion that grants them the dignity of their own self-will. But Christ demands that man surrender his darkened intellect, his vulgarized emotions and his prostituted will, so that he might begin again as a little child.

C. Who is a little child?

1. He is an ignorant man asking instruction.
2. He is an emotional person seeking proper inspiration.
3. He is a will searching for authority.
4. He is a weak one seeking power.
5. He is imperfect, but looking for perfection.
6. He trusts Jesus to lead him to find all this and more.

V. APPLICATION: How do people of our age look for another Christ?

A. By letting the disappointments and failures in our personal Christian life turn us aside from the Christ who actually came:

1. Do we have no assurance of forgiveness and relief from our guilt and sins?
2. Do we fail to find the joy and brightness we expected?
3. What kind of Christ did we expect? Does our *image* differ from the reality?

B. By letting the general condition of the world blind us to the real Christ and His purposes.

1. Jesus came to save the world and yet the larger portion of it not only remains unsaved but is also growing larger in proportion to the total population. How can He let this go on?

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2. If you look for another Christ, what kind of Messiah could alleviate the human predicament better than Jesus is now doing?
- C. We are not actually expecting the coming of another Christ that is not to be identified with Jesus of Nazareth, but the Jesus Christ whom we know will return in another form! (See Ac. 1:11; Phil. 3:20, 21)
 1. When He comes, He will only seem to be another Christ different from the humble Galilean we once knew.
 - a. He will be a Christ whom most men had never believed in.
 - b. He will be a Christ whom most never expected to see come.
 - c. But He will be the very Christ whom John the Baptist said would come in blazing glory.
 2. But He will appear in His power and majesty to bring to a glorious conclusion the mission which He undertook in shame and weakness.
 - a. He has never changed His mission: it has ever been His intention to make righteousness to triumph over sin and get God's will done.
 - b. The same Jesus who was crucified in shame, raised in glory and now reigns at the Father's right hand, is even now perfecting His mission with an eye to that day when He will come for His saints.
- D. What then is to be our reaction?
 1. We must ask ourselves, "Am I willing to admit my ignorance and ask instruction; am I willing to yield my emotional nature and take only His inspiration, dancing only to His piping, and mourning only to His lamentation; am I willing to take my will and submit it wholly to His authority; am I willing to take the place of unutterable weakness and depend upon His strength? Am I willing to confess my absolute and utter imperfection and give myself to Him for perfecting of all that concerns me?"
 2. "This is the passage from proud independence to simple confession of weakness. So men enter into this Kingdom. So men find their rest. . . . Our very pre-eminent re-

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spectability prevents the definite daring necessary to get into God's Kingdom. We are prone to drift upon easy seas, to admire the visions of the beautiful land, consent to the beauties of the great ideal, and never enter in because we will not . . . consent to yield to the claim of the King. . . ."

3. "Let this be the hour when you have done with your dilettante fooling with sacred things. Let this be the night when you translate your sickly anemic imagination into grip, force, go and determination."

(The above outline and some of its points were suggested by G. C. Morgan's sermon "The Kingdom By Violence" in *26 Sermons by Dr. G. Campbell Morgan*, Vol. II, p. 229ff.)

Another outline of this chapter might be:

"JESUS JUDGES HIS CONTEMPORARIES AND HIMSELF"

- I. John the Baptist (11:2-15): "More than a prophet!"
- II. His people in general (11:16-19): "Like children!"
- III. The most favored cities (11:20-24): "Damned!"
- IV. The simple disciples (11:25-30): "Learned!"
- V. Himself (11:20-30): "The Unique Hope of the Race!"

EXPOSITORY SERMON CHAPTER ELEVEN

"REST IN A RESTLESS WORLD" (11:20-30)

Introduction: The newspapers of the world report riots that picture the great unrest of our world. In the great cities of the world every day is heard news of strikes, riots, protest movements, wars and famines. We wonder where this will all lead to or when it will end. Men's hearts faint for the fear and anxiety over the things that are coming over the world. And why should that be?

There is NO REST IN OUR RESTLESS WORLD, BECAUSE THERE IS NO CERTAINTY.

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1. One woman is uncertain, because another woman could take her husband away from her, and she is not sure that he would not like to go with the other woman!
2. The student is not sure that he can pass his exams, in order to find a small place in our society.
3. The worker can not be sure that tomorrow a machine will not take away his position and work for him.
4. The big industrialist can not be sure that he can hold his wealth.
5. The politicians can only try to establish a better government, but they can never be sure of the outcome.

In whatever other area we can discuss, there exists no rest-bringing security. We can certainly say that the one thing in our world that is certain, is our UNCERTAINTY! And our uncertainty troubles us!

But over the centuries we hear a mighty voice that says: "Come to me! I will give you rest!" In our dark world full of care and strife, difficulties and problems, anxieties and fear, these words bring us comfort, inspiration, encouragement and rest.

Let us listen to this voice from a bit closer by. What does Jesus mean to say to us?

I JESUS CONDEMNS THE UNBELIEVING BECAUSE THEY DID NOT REPENT (11:20-24)

- A. Even though Jesus had fulfilled His commission in this world, yet His own people did not accept Him: they did not repent!
 1. Even though He had done His greatest miracles in their presence, miracles that established His message as God's personal revelation:
 2. Even though He had revealed God's will to them, yet they did not repent.
- B. There was no one more joyfully seen, heard and received than Jesus of Nazareth!
 1. They were all ready to make Him their King and establish a worldly messianic kingdom.
 2. They were willing to risk everything to follow Him, rising up against the Roman government, against the hypocritical religion of the Pharisees and chief priests, against all political authority.
 3. They wanted to have a King who could give them bread,

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miracles and wealth, a place among the greatest empires of the world!

4. They wanted the SECURITY, that could come through His miraculous power. They wanted His providence and protection, His conquest of all enemies and His divine defence. They wanted to have all this, while THEY REMAINED UNCHANGED IN HEART AND LIFE.

C. But Jesus sees that they have not understood Him:

1. He had called them to repentance; they wanted to make Him their servant.
2. He wanted to put God in them; they wanted Him and God in THEIR service.
3. Jesus' heart is broken over their deep need of repentance and over their unwillingness to repent.
4. Jesus has so strenuously, so faithfully, so unselfishly, so carefully tried to give them God! And they have neither seen it nor understood!

D. Is this not a picture of our world?

1. We want God on OUR conditions: all His blessings, all His goodness, but He does not dare demand our repentance nor our obedience!
2. Jesus wants to bring us to reality and truth; He wants to create God in us; He wants to put real rest and peace in our heart, but UNDER HIS CONDITIONS: "I tell you, unless you all likewise repent, you shall all likewise perish!"
3. But to whom did Jesus say that?
 - a. To people that thought that simply to be in the vicinity of Jesus was the same thing as faith and repentance.
 - b. To people who thought that common goodness was the same as deep-felt repentance:
 - (1) These were more or less better people than those of Sodom, Tyre and Sidon.
 - (2) But Jesus did not want to make people *more or less* good, but just as perfect as God Himself! (Mt. 5:48)
 - c. To people who thought that culture and enlightenment were sufficient to enjoy the better life.

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- (1) They had had the best enlightenment, because they could hear the Truth itself and revelation of God's will, preached by Jesus Himself!
- (2) But the light against which we sin, will be the measure whereby we will be judged!
- (3) The greatness of the quantity of information that we have received concerning God's truth, does not release us from the responsibility to repent and trust Jesus!
- d. To people who thought that to do nothing was as sufficient as repenting. Their sin was the sin of refusing to take a positive stand for Jesus Christ!
 - (1) How many people today exalt Jesus as a Superman, "a Man born before His time", perhaps a great Prophet, yes, even as God's Son?
 - (2) And yet they do nothing with Him! They take no responsibility for what they know about Jesus of Nazareth!
4. So why does our world have unrest, insecurity, desperation?
BECAUSE WE WILL NOT TRUST JESUS AND REPENT!

Let us listen further to His words:

II JESUS LAYS DOWN HIS OWN CONDITIONS, WHEREBY WE CAN RECEIVE GOD'S TRUST AND REST. (11:25, 26)

Even though He gives us conditions that are absolutely necessary to which we must render whole-hearted and immediate obedience, yet He gives us also His own personal example how we should understand the conditions He requires. What does He do?

- A. He thanks God and rejoices with the Father over the method whereby God chose to reveal His will. This is the grateful acceptance of the will and plans of His Father.
 1. Even though He could not reach the unrepentant people and cities, after thousands of attempts, yet He gives God thanks that God had used this method to reveal Himself and that it was God's idea.
 2. Even though there were a very few simple people that truly accepted Jesus, yet Jesus THANKS the Father for them.
 3. Jesus recognizes the universal Lordship of His Father. This

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too is an anchor for our souls, if we acknowledge that there is no place in this universe, no problem in our world over which our God is not fully Master and fully in charge!

4. Jesus praised and thanked God that His plan *really works* to save those people who *can be* taught.

B. But what is God's method to save the world? By revealing these eternal truths to humble seekers, to "little children."

1. Who are "the wise and understanding" of this world, from whom God has hidden His will? These are the people who are "wise" in their own eyes and proud of their own understanding.

—So far as the world could see it was Pilate who was a greater man than Peter, but Jesus could do much more with a Peter than with Pilate!

—The high priest Caiaphas went far higher in the human society than Matthew, but that publican could become an Apostle for eternity, because he could forsake everything to follow Jesus!

2. Who are the "little children", to whom God has given great revelations of His will? These are the humble people who open their lives to follow Jesus' leadership and accept His teaching.

a. The doors of God's Kingdom remain open for those who repent and become little children.

b. These are the people who admit their ignorance, confess their sins and come to Jesus for forgiveness. (I Cor. 1:18-31)

3. Yes, this is God's plan and Jesus thanks Him for it.

III JESUS ACCEPTS THE MORAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE AND PRESENTS HIMSELF AS THE ONLY POSSIBLE REVEALER OF GOD (11:27)

A. "All things have been committed to me by my Father."

1. Perhaps we are caused to think immediately of the glory and royalty of God's Son, because we know that, at the end of the world, everything will be the inheritance of Jesus.

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2. But here Jesus is not speaking about the glory and wealth that shall be His.
3. He understands very clearly that the weight of the sins of the whole world have been laid upon HIM!
 - a. There is no *arrogance* here, but an honest bending of the Lord Jesus Himself to take upon Himself the gigantic weight of a lost mankind upon Himself.
 - b. He had just seen people, that had had the best possible opportunity to be saved, refuse the call of God.
 - c. Perhaps He is reminded of the ancient words of Isaiah:
"All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned every one to his own way;
And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."
(53:6)
Our own unwillingness to repent was laid upon God's Son!
 - d. Yes, "the government will be upon his shoulder", but the insignia thereof are not the colorful flags and marching eagles of a great empire, but the bleeding "stripes by which we are healed"!
4. Yes, all things have been committed to Jesus by His Father: the moral responsibility for all men *just like they are*: in their sins, their dying and in their deep need for repentance and redemption!
This is why we are not surprised about what Jesus says next:
 - B. "No one knows the Son but the Father!"
 1. Here is a cry that comes out of the loneliness of the Lord Jesus.
 - a. There is no man on earth that realizes the greatness of the burden of the Son of God.
 - b. Jesus has not found anyone who really understands how He feels among sinners, nor shares His burden.
 2. Jesus has had thousands of followers, but very few of them continued to follow Him, even though those few themselves were deeply unaware of His mission, His purpose, and His Person. Even so late as the last week of His life, before going to the cross, Jesus had to say to them,

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"Have I been so long with you, and you do not yet know me?"

3. Jesus feels deeply His loneliness on earth: no one really knows or understands Him.
 - a. But people must understand Him in order to be saved!
 - b. But we must understand His message, in order thereby to be able to know the Father.
- C. "No one knows the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him."
 1. Jesus finds Himself in a world where no one really knows God!
 - a. This means that all the great inventors of religion are liars, if they contradict, diminish or deny the Word of Jesus!
 - b. This means that all the lesser religious lights who have led men away from God's Will are "thieves and robbers"! (Jn. 10:1)
 2. This is a world, in Jesus' day and in our own as well, wherein people have lost the very key to life, because they live as if God does not exist. But Jesus knows that God is the central fact of all reality, the greatest, most important fact of all.
 3. Jesus, prayed: "This is eternal life, that men might know you, the only true God, AND JESUS CHRIST, whom you have sent!" (Jn. 17:3)
 4. Only JESUS knew God. Here Jesus expressed the longing to make God known to men.
 5. He MUST make God known, but how can He go about the task of revealing God?
- D. Here is His method whereby He reveals the Father.

IV. JESUS INVITES HUMBLE DISCIPLES TO COME TO HIM AND LEARN (11:28-30)

- A. This young Jew, not more than 33 years old, invites the entire human race to come to Him to learn. He promises that every one, however great his problems might be, shall find rest for his soul! Let the stupendous nature of this invitation sink deep into your heart: feel the gigantic nature of the fraud if

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the claims implicit in this invitation are false. Feel the power of God's loving mercy, if these claims are true! Here we must decide what we think about Jesus!

B. But Jesus has to be the teacher, if we are to find rest for our souls. The only ones whom Jesus can help are the "little children". We must be willing to learn EVERYTHING from Him.

1. Jesus has already had too many theologians and professors, who molded His ideas according to their own conceptions! He wants *disciples*, or followers, who are willing to follow Him and live under His discipline. The so-called "great" preachers, professors, priests, bishops, popes, councils, theologians and universities are not what Jesus is looking for! He seeks men and women, boys and girls who are willing to enroll themselves in His school and learn under HIM.

C. Even though Jesus Himself is the Revealer of the eternal God, even though He Himself is the Creator of heaven and earth, even though He is the Judge before whom all must give account, yet He is gentle and lowly in heart.

1. He is not a teacher that His students need to be afraid of.

2. He does not boss His students around; they do not need to be afraid to expose their ignorance before Him.

3. My friend, He could become your Teacher: with Jesus you need fear no ridicule or contempt in His school.

4. If you are an eager student, you will find Jesus ready to help you, sharing with you the same spirit of joy in knowledge. He will help you at whatever level you find yourself, in order to bring you up to His level of full knowledge of the entire universe! You will find Him a wise and sympathetic Teacher, who will lead you into truth.

5. How many times has Jesus already shown Himself this kind of Teacher? How many times did the sinners and publicans come to Jesus, even though they had run away from the proud, strict Pharisees? They knew that Jesus was different, so, friend, do not put Jesus in the same class with religious leaders that you know, because He is not at all like any teacher you ever knew. He is in a class all by Himself, but you will enjoy enrolling in the class!

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6. The publicans and sinners of Jesus' day felt the attraction of His gentleness, and they knew that He could help free them from sins that they had for years taken for granted.

D. In Jesus' school you find SECURITY and rest for your soul!

1. To the tired worker, Jesus gives genuine rest for the body, nerves and mind, because Jesus gives true rest for his SPIRIT. Such a person can now sleep, because he has a forgiven conscience.
2. To the tired and heavy-laden worshipper, Jesus gives rest also.
 - a. Tired of religious ceremonies, duties, norms and empty forms? Then, Jesus offers you devotion to a Person.
 - b. Tired of defeats and disappointments in the struggle against sin? Then Jesus gives you the refreshment of forgiveness and power to overcome.
3. To the tired worldling who has found everything to be futile and empty, Jesus offers His fullness, all His friendship and companionship.

INVITATION: Friend, you know your own cares, your own sins, and problems. Let Jesus take your difficulties and free you. Lay all your difficulties down at the feet of Jesus. Enroll yourself in His school: He invites you now.

CHAPTER TWELVE

- Section 26. Jesus Faces Charges of Sabbath Breaking (12:1-14)
Section 27. Jesus the Healing Servant of Jehovah (12:15-21)
Section 28. Jesus Is Attacked For Casting Out Demons and Charged With League With Satan (12:22-37)
Section 29. Jesus Gives the Sign of Jonah and Condemns His Generation (12:38-45)
Section 30. Jesus Refuses to Permit Fleshly Ties to Bind Him (12:46-50)

STUDY OUTLINES

- I. JESUS FACES CHARGES OF SABBATH BREAKING (12:1-14)
 - A. For permitting "grain threshing" on the Sabbath (12:18)

CHAPTER TWELVE

ANSWERS:

1. Human need rises above strict legal procedure. (12:3, 4)
2. Work in God's service is permitted on the Sabbath. (12:5, 6)
3. God's interpretation of law is much more lenient than yours (12:7)
4. I am Lord of the Sabbath. (12:8)
- B. For healing man's withered hand in synagogue on Sabbath. (12:9-15a)
 1. To refuse to do good or save life is to do harm or destroy. (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9)
 2. You work by helping dumb beast. Why not help man who is worth so much more to God? (12:11, 12a)
 3. Doing good is legal! (12:12b)
 4. Jesus established His correct conclusion by the miracle of healing the man's hand. (12:13)
 5. The Pharisees immediately held counsel with the Herodians discussing how to destroy Jesus. (12:14)

II. JESUS THE HEALING SERVANT OF JEHOVAH (12:15-21)

- A. Situation: Jesus strategically withdrew from immediate hostility of the religious leaders. Common people followed Him from many areas, seeking healing. Jesus healed them, ordering strict secrecy.
- B. Result: Fulfilment of Isaiah 42:1ff.
 1. His Nature (12:18a)
 2. His Authority and Task (12:18b)
 3. His Method (12:19)
 4. His Results (12:20)
 5. His Universality (12:21)

III. JESUS IS ATTACKED FOR CASTING OUT DEMONS AND CHARGED WITH LEAGUE WITH SATAN (12:22-37)

- A. SITUATION: He healed a blind, dumb demoniac, which resulted in the crowds' asking, "Is He the Messiah?" Jealous Pharisees counterattack by asserting Jesus works by devil's power.

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B. JESUS' BASIC REBUTTAL:

1. Satan is divided: good! (12:25, 26)
2. What about your students who exorcize demons? (12:27)
3. Reasonable alternative: God's Spirit empowers me. (12:28)
4. More evidence: in order to overpower the devil, one must be stronger than Satan! (12:29)
5. Neutrality is impossible. (12:30)

C. JESUS EXPLAINS HIS WARNING AGAINST BLASPHEMY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (12:31, 32; cf. Lk. 12:8-10; Mk. 3:28-30)

1. All sins will be forgivable, except that by which all knowledge of God's truth and forgiveness is received, i.e. by His Spirit.
2. Eternal damnation awaits the sinner who rejects all that is the Spirit's work among men.

D. TALK IS NOT CHEAP (12:33-37)

1. Speech reveals one's sense of moral discernment. (12:33-35)
2. There are no words that do not count, for God holds us accountable for all. (12:36, 37)

IV. JESUS GIVES THE SIGN OF JONAH AND CONDEMNS HIS GENERATION (12:38-45)

A. Unreasonable request for a sign of Jesus' identity and authority. (38)

B. Jesus' logical refusal: "It is unfaithfulness to God to ask for more signs than those already given!" (12:39)

C. Jesus' merciful exception: the resurrection is His last sign. (12:40)

D. Jesus' condemnation well-grounded. (12:41, 42)

1. Illustration: Ninevites heard only the prophet Jonah.
2. Illustration: Queen of the South heard only Solomon.
3. Implicit Conclusion: According to the light against which you have sinned will be your judgment. You have had greater opportunities to know God's will.

E. Warning: "Your religion has made you empty, leaving you a spiritual vacuum for anything that will fill it up."

V. JESUS REFUSES TO PERMIT FLESHLY TIES TO BIND HIM (12:46-50)

Section 26

JESUS ANSWERS CHARGES OF
SABBATH BREAKING

(Parallels: Mark 2:23—3:6; Luke 6:1-11)

TEXT: 12:1-14

I. SUSPICION

1. At that season Jesus went on the sabbath day through the grain-fields; and his disciples were hungry and began to pluck ears and to eat.
2. But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which it is not lawful to do upon the sabbath.
3. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was hungry, and they that were with him;
4. how he entered into the house of God, and ate the showbread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them that were with him, but only for the priests?
5. Or have ye not read in the law, that on the sabbath day the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless?
6. But I say unto you, that one greater than the temple is here.
7. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.
8. For the Son of man is Lord of the sabbath.

II. INVESTIGATION

9. And he departed thence, and went into their synagogue:
10. and behold, a man having a withered hand. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day, that they might accuse him.
11. And he said unto them, What man shall there be of you, that shall have one sheep, and if this fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?
12. How much then is a man of more value than a sheep! Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath day.
13. Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, as the other.

III. DETERMINATION

14. But the Pharisees went out, and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How did their conduct sanction His healing of the man?
- b. How does Jesus change, in verse 12, their question of verse 10, in order to bring out the underlying principle on which He justified His conduct?
- c. In what ways have some individuals indicated that they regard animals more than they do man?
- d. Could it be that MAN, for whom the sabbath under the law was made and not vice versa, is also the lord of the Sabbath in the sense that he is to use it for his own rest and for God's glory? Certainly, Jesus was the unique "Lord of the Sabbath" in a particular sense. But is not man also the "lord of the sabbath" in his freedom to decide what good deeds of mercy or necessity he shall perform?
- e. Why do you think Jesus brought "saving lives or killing" into His argument with the Pharisees? (Mk. 3:4) What is the connection?
- f. Why was Jesus so angry with those Pharisees? (Mk. 3:5)
- g. Why did these respected religious leaders wish to destroy this young Rabbi from Nazareth?
- h. Why did they call the Herodians into their discussions about how they might do away with Jesus? How could the Herodians help? (Mk. 3:6)
- i. What was the advantage to be gained for Jesus by calling the man with the shrivelled hand forward before healing him? (Lk. 6:8)
- j. What difference do you see in the way Jesus went about His work and the way the Pharisees operated?
- k. Why do you think Jesus kept going into the synagogues, even though He could probably foresee the difficulties and opposition He would meet there?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

One sabbath while Jesus and His disciples were walking through grainfields, His disciples, feeling hungry, began to pluck some of the heads of grain, rub off the husks in their hands and eat. But when some of the Pharisees noticed it, they remarked to Jesus, "Look! why are you and your disciples doing what is forbidden on the sabbath?"

Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David and his men did when they were in need and hungry—how he entered into the house of God (when Abiathar was high priest), took and ate the consecrated bread of the presence, though they did not have the right to eat? Only the priests can eat it. And he even gave it to those who were with him.

"Or have you not read in the law how the priests working in the temple on the sabbath profane the sabbath without guilt? I tell you, something more important than the temple is here.

"And if you had grasped the meaning of this scripture (Hosea 6:6)—'I desire mercy and not merely sacrifices'—you would not have condemned the innocent. The sabbath was made for man's benefit, not man for the sabbath. This is why the Son of man is even lord of the sabbath."

He went on from that place and on another sabbath He entered their synagogue and taught. Now there was a man present whose right hand was shrivelled or wasted away. The legal experts and Pharisees watched Him closely to see whether He would heal him on the sabbath.

Then they quizzed Him, "Is it right to heal anyone on the sabbath?" so that they might find an accusation to use against Him.

But He, knowing their motives, spoke to the man who had the withered hand, "Come here and stand in the midst of the group." The man rose and stood there. Then Jesus addressed the others, "Now, I put the question to you, Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or harm, to have life or destroy it?"

But they were silent.

Then He posed another question, "Suppose that you had one sheep which fell into a pit on the sabbath, would you not get hold of it and lift it out? How much more precious is a man than a sheep? So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath!" He looked around on them all with anger, deeply hurt at their inhumanity and hardness of heart. Turning to the man, He spoke, "Stretch out your hand." When he did so it was restored as sound as the other.

But the Pharisees, filled with insane fury, went out and held counsel against Jesus, discussing with one another and with the Herodians what they might do to Jesus to destroy Him.

NOTES

- I. JESUS FACES CHARGES OF SABBATH BREAKING (12:1-14)
- A. FOR PERMITTING GRAIN THRESHING ON THE SABBATH (12:1-8)

1. THE SITUATION (12:1)

12:1 **At that time** can be rather easily identified due to the maturity of the standing grain which the disciples are eating: the time is sometime in the Spring of 27 A.D., shortly after the second Passover of Jesus' ministry. (Cf. Jn. 5) Keil and Delitzsch (*Pentateuch*, II, 439) note that "in the warmer parts of Palestine the barley ripens about the middle of April and is reaped in April or the beginning of May, whereas the wheat ripens two or three weeks later."

His disciples were hungry. Herein lies the rightness of what they did: God had not only instituted the Sabbath for man's blessing, but He had also made men to be hungry. The desire for food is not somehow secular, as opposed to sacred, merely because it has to do with this body and this life. Otherwise, would not God have dispensed with human hunger on the Sabbath, so they would have been able to serve Him without distraction? No, human hunger is no more sinful or secular than a thousand other human activities which divine revelation clearly limits to this age, this life. (Cf. Mt. 22:30, marriage; eating and drinking, 1 Tim. 4:3-5; 1 Co. 6:13) So, all other things being equal, even the human hunger of Jesus' disciples was part of God's plan for man, just as much as it was His intention that they rest sufficiently in body and soul by proper Sabbath observance. Even the simple confession "I am hungry", means "God has made me this way and I am just feeling experientially and personally this part of His good government of my human existence." But, of course, what is involved here is essential human need, not the responding to a mere desire unprompted by essential necessity.

They began to pluck ears of grain and to eat, "rubbing them in their hands" (Luke). Apparently, Jesus used none of His miraculous power to provide necessary daily food either for Himself or His men. (Cf. Mt. 21:18, 19=Mk. 11:12, 13) The arrogance of the Pharisees to make such a charge (12:2) becomes the more painfully apparent when it is remembered that the Sabbath was not observed by the Hebrews, even the Pharisees, with rigorous austerity. They even turned the day into one of feasting and entertainment of guests. (Cf. Lk. 14:1-6 and Plutarch, *Symp.* iv. 6, cited by Trench, *Miracles*, 207: "The Hebrews honor the Sabbath chiefly by inviting each other to drinking and intoxication.") By contrast, Jesus' men had to settle for what they could find to fill their empty stomachs.

Moses' Law expressly permits this action on any day of the week. (Dt. 23:24, 25) And all the Gospel writers make it precisely clear that what the disciples did was done while they were on the move,

going through the fields of standing grain. So the issue here is not theft, but merely what the objectors regard to be work done on the Sabbath. (Cf. the attitude of the synagogue's ruler, Lk. 13:14. Note *ergázesthai*.) Presumably, the disciples offended the rabbinic interpretation of "work" on several counts, since not only did they pluck the heads of grain (which legalistically could be called "harvesting"), but they also rubbed them in their hands (*psōchontes taís chersín* could be described by the nitpickers as "threshing"), and if they blew the husks out of their hands before eating, they could be accused of "winnowing"! (Cf. Lk. 6:1) Worse still, by this whole series of acts they could also be accused of preparing a meal on the Sabbath, whereas Sabbath food should have been readied the day before!

Morgan (*Matthew*, 125) points up the stark contrast between all this Jewish legalism and the personal mentality of the Apostles:

It was a perfectly simple and natural action of the disciples, and reveals very clearly their estimate of their Lord's heart. They did not for a moment imagine that He would rebuke them. They knew, as members of the Hebrew nation, that they were doing things that the Pharisees would object to, but they were with Him, and familiarity with Him, and a consciousness of His attitude towards the Sabbath, set them free to pluck the ears. . . . It is a revelation of the relationship existing between the Christ and His disciples. There was no hesitation, no appeal, no fear.

Or, if there had been any of this timidity, especially with Pharisees prowling in the vicinity, Jesus had allayed their fears, even if He Himself did not choose to satisfy His own hunger in the same way. (The Pharisees do not attack His own eating, but that of His disciples.)

2. THE PHARISEES' REACTION (12:2)

12:2 But when the Pharisees saw it. Though these may not be identical with those earlier critics (Mt. 9:2-8; Lk. 5:17), nevertheless their attitude is precisely the same and so illustrative of the zeal of the heresy-hunters. (Cf. Ac. 14:19; 17:13; Gal. 2:12) It is a revealing trait of these (and perhaps all) hypocrites that they lay great stress on the external forms and ceremonies of religion while standing quite mute before the pleas of the deeper, more real demands of justice, mercy and faith. Is it possible, then, to judge the shallowness and irrelevance of a man's religion by the amount of undue stress he lays upon such externals?

They said to him, Look. These hard-nosed legalists seem to have regularly sought opportunities to jump on anyone who did not respect their traditional view of Sabbath observance. (Cf. Jn. 5:10) **Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath,** or, as Mark and Luke put it, "Why do your disciples do (it)?" This question provided what seemed to these inquisitors to be the perfect trap:

1. Either the Nazarene must accept the Pharisees' premise that the disciples' actions truly violated the Sabbath and, therefore, He must condemn His own followers, thereby alienating them. This, because, for better or worse, He had taught them. Thus He would be shown up as knowing little better Himself! The disciples' actions clearly reflected His tacit approval of this freedom from the traditional, but obligatory requirements of the rabbis.
2. Or He must publicly repudiate the Pharisees' premise that the disciples' actions violated the Sabbath, in which case He would expose both Himself and His followers as transgressors of the Law. By defending their transgression, He becomes in spirit Himself a transgressor. In that event, though He would have defended His followers, they would still have defected, since, insofar as they shared the basic viewpoint of the Pharisees, He would have damned Himself in their eyes.

Either way, it represented a triumph for the enemy. Either way, they have Him trapped. In either case, He stands to lose disciples and His popularity will be broken, for He would have committed Himself to the wrong side of a vital issue on which no self-respecting Hebrew could afford to be wrong, namely about the Sabbath.

This appears to be a beautiful dilemma on which to crucify Jesus, but the trouble with it, as well as with any other false choice, is that the fundamental proposition upon which the dilemma is constructed is false. The Pharisees could not dream that their own interpretations of the Sabbath law were of no where near the same validity as the Sabbath law itself. They had no conception of the possibility that they themselves, in their very attempt to interpret carefully the Sabbath law, had in fact become violators of its spirit and intent. The simplest method of eliminating the dilemma facing Jesus was to show that, while He took the Sabbath law seriously and taught His disciples likewise, what the disciples were actually doing was no profanation of God's original intent. Thus He destroyed the false proposition

upon which the Pharisees' dilemma is constructed, i.e. "Our understanding of the proper observance of the Sabbath is the only view possible." But before showing the proper, original intent of the Sabbath, He needed to draw their attention to the exceptions to strict interpretation of law which even the Pharisees themselves both admitted and justified.

But the Pharisees were so sure that they had found Jesus in flagrant violation of fundamental Mosaic Law because of their exaggerated stress on the Sabbath. The surprisingly high number of clashes between Jesus and His opponents that turned upon this one point is explicable in view of the superstitiously high regard with which the Jews held the Sabbath. Farrar (*Life*, 329) summarizes their feelings:

The Sabbath was a Mosaic, nay, even a primeval institution, and it had become the most distinctive and the most passionately revered of all the ordinances which separated Jew from Gentile as a peculiar people. It was at once the sign of their exclusive privileges, and the center of their barren formalism. Their traditions, their patriotism, even their obstinacy, were all enlisted in its scrupulous maintenance. Not only had it been observed in heaven before man was, but they declared that the people of Israel had been chosen for the sole purpose of keeping it. . . . Their devotion to it was only deepened by the universal ridicule, inconvenience, and loss which it entailed upon them in the heathen world. They were even proud that, from having observed it with a stolid literalism, they had suffered themselves on that day to lose battles, to be cut to pieces by their enemies, to see Jerusalem itself imperilled and captured. Its observance had been fenced round by the minutest, the most painfully precise, the most ludicrously insignificant restrictions . . .

Other religions had their sacred temples, holy cities, priests, sacrifices and festal assemblies, but to the Jews alone was the Sabbath given as the peculiar sign of their exclusive belonging to God. The sanctity with which Jews regarded the Sabbath may the more easily be gauged by the intensity and deadly seriousness with which they objected to Jesus' claims, teaching and practice regarding it. The importance of the issue may also be weighed by the unrelenting determination of Jesus to make His point, even though, for Him, death rode with the outcome. And the almost delighted conclusion of these heresy-hunters that what His disciples were doing with His obvious sanction was

"not lawful on the sabbath," was prompted by, and explicable on the basis of the fact that this act rendered them strictly liable to death by stoning according to the ancient mosaic precedent. (Cf. Nu. 15:32, 33)

Not lawful on the sabbath. What the disciples were doing was clearly a breach of rabbinic traditions, but not of the Biblical law, so the charge of the Pharisees is false. The original commandment given by God forbade work. (Study Ex. 20:8-11; 23:12; 31:12-17; 34:21; 35:2, 3; Lev. 23:3; Nu. 15:32-36; Dt. 5:12-17)

THE SABBATH LAW

- I. Who must observe it? (Ex. 20:9)
 - A. The Hebrew and his family
 - B. The Hebrew's servants
 - C. The Hebrew's animals
 - D. Any sojourners in Hebrew cities
- II. Why must they observe it? (Ex. 20:11; 31:15)
 - A. Because God rested on the seventh day
 - B. Because God blessed the seventh day
 - C. Because God hallowed the seventh day as "a sabbath unto Jehovah," making it thus "holy unto Jehovah."
 - D. The Sabbath is a special "sign between God and Israel (Ex. 31:13)
 - E. The Sabbath is a perpetual agreement between God and Israel (Ex. 31:16)
 - F. Penalty for profanation by working was to be death (Ex. 31:14, 15; 35:2)
 - G. In order that servants may rest as well as the Hebrews themselves (Dt. 5:14)
- III. How must they observe it?
 - A. Negatively: what must not be done on the Sabbath?
 1. The Hebrew must do no work; work must be done on the other six days (Ex. 20:9, 10)
 2. No plowing or harvesting (Ex. 34:21)
 3. No kindling of a fire in the homes (Ex. 35:3; Num. 15:32-36?)
 4. No baking or boiling food (Ex. 16:23)
 5. No treading the winepress (Neh. 13:15)
 6. No hauling of goods or food to markets (Neh. 13:15)
 7. No carrying on of trade (Neh. 13:16; Amos 8:5)
 - B. Positively: what could be done on the Sabbath?

1. The Hebrew must rest (Ex. 34:21) a "solemn rest" (Ex. 35:2)
2. Holy convocations (Lev. 23:3) Keil and Delitzsch (*Pentateuch*, II, 439) comment:

Moreover Knobel is wrong in identifying the 'holy convocation' with a journey to the sanctuary, whereas appearance at the tabernacle to hold the holy convocations (for worship) was not regarded as necessary either in the law itself or according to the latter orthodox custom, but, on the contrary, holy meetings for edification were held on the Sabbath in every place in the land, and it was out of this that the synagogues arose. (Cf. 2 Kg. 4:22, 23)

On this latter verse, they comment (*Kings*, 311):

From these words . . . others have drawn the correct conclusion that the pious in Israel were accustomed to meet together at the prophets' houses for worship and edification, on those which were appointed in the law (Lev. 23:3; Num. 18:11sq.) for the worship of God . . .

Cf. also Ezek. 46:3

3. Sabbath offerings in the Temple:
 - a. The regular, continual burnt-offering with its relative drink-offering (Nu. 28:1-8)
 - b. Additional, special Sabbath offerings of two male lambs with the relative libation (Nu. 28:9)

This hasty sketch of the Sabbath law mirrors a true impression of the absolute simplicity of the Sabbath ordinance. After all, God did not wish to burden His people with a multitude of regulations and so defeat the very purpose of the Sabbath by making it a burden. But, ironically, the interpreters of the Law were not satisfied with so simple a prohibition. "Work" must be defined so carefully as to eliminate any equivocation. With these definitions came a multiplicity of other rules, all intended to clarify God's will. What a travesty on piety to presume to be able to state God's will more clearly than He was able to do it Himself! But the orthodox took all these minute regulations with intense seriousness. For them, to keep these traditional definitions was to keep God's Law. To neglect or disregard them was to defy God! But when will the Church of Jesus Christ learn the lesson

that such a slavish adherence to the letter of Scripture, the more precise it is, usually produces only a wider departure from its spirit?

3. JESUS ANSWERS:

a. *Human need rises above strict, legal procedure* (12:3, 4)

There are times when it is proper to ignore the opposition, to let it die frustrated by its own weakness, fall of its own weight. But the Lord sees that this is not the time. This is the moment when He must do battle or surrender His cause. In the skirmishes that ensue He feels absolutely impelled to return the fire of the Pharisees, but He does so much more than this. He teaches us how to understand and apply the specific terminology of God's law as it applies to us. He reveals Himself as lord even of the Sabbath. He places the proper emphasis on real human need, as opposed to inhumane application of God's will which had originally been intended for man's good.

Whereas the critics' original objection had been levelled at the disciples' actions, everyone knew that Jesus, not the disciples, was really on trial. This explains why Jesus leaped to meet the attack. There is no apology here; rather He accepts full responsibility for what His men had done and justified them completely (See on 12:5).

12:3 Have you not read? Mark's rendering (2:25) is more brusque: "Have you never read. . . ?" (*oudépote anégnote*). However, Jesus expected a positive answer, as demonstrated by the form in which He framed the question (negative *ou*). Of course, they had read the cited Scripture many times, but had been blinded to its significance. This is a stinging rebuke for ignorance of Scripture when asked of those who pretended to be its official interpreters. The Lord used this approach effectively several times. (Cf. Mt. 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31) Even on this occasion He hammers on the inexcusable ignorance of the Scriptures, driving home their inability to grasp the real meaning of their own sacred texts. His argument rises with smashing force by means of two questions: "Have you not read? . . . Have you not read in the law?" (12:3, 5) until He clenches His conclusion with "If you had known what this means (Hos. 6:6), you would not have condemned the innocent." (12:7)

What David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him. The incident cited (1 Sam. 21:1-6) becomes also Jesus' vindication of the historicity of the facts narrated there, since it is inconceivable that Jesus should deceive men by making use of facts merely supposed to be true, but which He Himself knew to belong rather to the unfounded or otherwise unprovable traditions

of His people. Mark (2:26) reports David's act as taking place "in the days of Abiathar the high priest," whereas his father Ahimelech held that office until his murder by Saul. (Cf. 1 Sam. 21:1—22:21; 23:6) Thus, David asked bread, not of Abiathar but of Ahimelek. The solutions that have been offered to these apparently contradictory facts are:

1. There was a slip of the memory either on the part of Jesus or Mark, i.e. Mark forgot what Jesus actually said when He mentioned the right name, or worse still, Jesus momentarily misremembered the proper name and confounded father and son. But either of the suggestions is inadequate in light not only of the inspiration of Mark and the undoubted authority and infallibility of Jesus, but also in light of better arguments that harmonize the same facts more suitably, without requiring the disqualifying of either Jesus or Mark.
2. Jesus was speaking by prolepsis. Whereas Abiathar's high priesthood did not begin until later, yet, because he, through his association with David, became so much more famous than his father, is described by this later title by prolepsis. Note that Mark says no more than *epi Abiathar archierēs*, which may mean no more than "in the time of Abiathar the high priest", and so not exclusively specifically, "when Abiathar was high priest", as the RSV renders the phrase. (For uses of *epi* with genitive to denote time, see Arndt and Gingrich, 286, I, 2)
3. Abiathar may have already been priest during the high priesthood of his father, carrying out some priestly functions. But even if he had nothing to do with the high priesthood *per se*, he actually became high priest only a few days after David's visit to his father Ahimelek, whose help to David cost him his life and whose death automatically made his only surviving son the next high priest. So the high priesthood of Abiathar was only a matter of hours after his father fed David and his men, and so may loosely be described centuries after the event as high priest, as he was thereafter known.

13:4 how he entered the house of God, not the Temple but the tabernacle pitched at Nob, apparently not at Shiloh. (Cf. 1 Sam. 21:1; 22:9, 10, 11, 19) **And ate the bread of the Presence.** (Cf. Ex. 25:30; Lev. 24:5-9) **Which it was not lawful for him to eat . . . but only for the priests.** On this point the law is

clear: "It shall be for Aaron and his sons; and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy unto him of the offerings . . ." (Lev. 24:9) But what is the precise thrust of Jesus' argument? Does He justify David's course, or does He merely argue as He does because He knows the Pharisees justify David?

1. If this is a mere *argumentum ad hominem* based upon the fact that the Pharisees excused David for eating the holy bread, then His argument goes no further, since it would be valid only against those who mistakenly justified such a violation of the law of which David thus becomes guilty. But that Jesus Himself also justified David is evident from the fact that God also, in a sense, justified David and Ahimelek by not immediately smiting them for this "violation of strict Levitical practice". (Did God always punish violations of ceremonial or moral law immediately upon commission of the sin as He sometimes did?) Further, were there any hint that Jesus really condemned David's action, His opponents could have pounced upon it as a weapon against Him, since He had placed the actions of His disciples in the same position with David's, and if they had sensed that He held David to be culpable, they could have accused His disciples of the same.
2. Or, on the other hand, does Jesus justify David's actions, thus share the same fundamental proposition with the Pharisees while using it to show their inconsistency? If so, one must interpret Jesus' statement: **the bread . . . which it was not lawful for him to eat**. How can some action be justifiable and still be **not lawful**?
 - a. According to a strictly literal interpretation of the particular code in question, that bread was for none but priests only. There was a general prohibition specifically stated in the Levitical text that forbade the sharing of the bread of the Presence with laymen like David. (Lev. 22:10-16; cf. also Ex. 29:33; Lev. 10:12-15) The presentation bread was not merely the priests' food, because it was a consecrated sacrifice. (Lev. 24:9)
 - b. However, David's actions were in perfect harmony with good Scripture interpretation. Were Ahimelek and David wrong to interpret the Levitical law so liberally? God did not strike either man dead for any supposed transgression of this law. Nor had there been any Scriptural exception

which would permit the high priest to depart from this legislation in order to show love to a fellow man in need. And yet when he did so, this high priest and David were not punished by God for so doing, as was Uzzah (2 Sam. 6:6, 7), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1, 2) who also departed from strict legal procedure. The obvious difference between the apostasy of these latter and the actions of David and Ahimelek lies in their recognition that even the letter of God's holy law may be superceded and set aside by other, higher considerations. In this case, human need takes precedence over any ritual, custom or practice. Keil and Delitzsch (*Samuel*, 218) comment:

If they were clean at any rate in this respect, he (the high priest) would in such a case of necessity depart from the Levitical law concerning the eating of the shew-bread, for the sake of observing the higher commandment of love to a neighbour (Lev. 19:18) . . .

- c. David's actions were consistent with good legal administration. If **what David did . . . was not lawful** (as Jesus says), then how is it that the Lord of the law can let what must be seen as a strictly illegal action pass without censure? Do we not see here the principle that law, all law, or any given law, is enacted for the orderly exercise of social relations? Any mature leaders know that exceptions to the law may be made when society is running smoothly and that the only danger in exceptions is when they become the rule and chaos results. At such a time, the return to strict law enforcement is needed in order to reestablish the order. Exceptions may also be made when it is evident that the purpose or spirit behind the law is not being ignored or violated by the exception. Now while this argument does not PROVE the rightness of Ahimelek and David's act in giving and receiving the presence-bread, yet it illustrates the fact that Jesus' concept of law admits the type of exception Ahimelek's offer proposes.
- d. David's actions were vindicated also by Jewish interpretation, as Edersheim (*Life*, II, 57) remarks: "Jewish tradition vindicated his conduct on the plea that 'danger to life

superseded the Sabbath-law, and hence, all laws connected with it' . . ."

Mark's rendering of Jesus' words (2:25) puts more emphasis on this human need, proving thus that Jesus' attention is directed toward the claims of stark necessity in preference to hard-nosed legal procedure that would have deprived David of this essential food. The resultant thrust of Jesus' argument is: if David's hunger could set aside a divine regulation, could not the hunger of my men waive your interpretation of the sabbath no-work law? And if Farrar (*Life*, 333) is right in suggesting that David ate the bread of the Presence on the Sabbath, since the bread was only changed on that day (cf. 1 Sam. 21:6 with Lev. 24:8, 9), the Lord's argumentation takes on more force, as these Pharisees, to be consistent with their own principles would have had to condemn the high priest for attending to a sojourner on the Sabbath!

NOTE: The sectarian "law of prohibitive silence" is proven false by Jesus' declarations here! The so-called "law of silence" states that God has clearly commanded everything He wants men to have or do or be. So, if God has not spoken regarding any issue, according to this theory, He must be against it. But this theory of the tacit prohibition or "law of prohibitive silence" contradicts Jesus here, since God had not expressly stated anywhere that any others than priests could eat that bread and live, much less live and be justified by Jesus. This is a case where not the letter but the real spirit behind the letter was observed in careful conformity to God's intention and will.

b. *Work in God's Service is permitted on the Sabbath* (12:5, 6)

12:5 Or have ye not read in the law? Feel the climactic construction and striking contrasts that Jesus combines in this sentence!

1. **In the Law!**
2. **On the Sabbath Day!**
3. **The Priests!**
4. **In the Temple!**
5. **PROFANE THE SABBATH!**
6. Yet, are guiltless.

The service of God was the object in view behind the Sabbath-law, not merely rest. Naturally, the priests worked on the Sabbath in order to carry out the service of God. In fact, there was extra work for them

to do on that day! (Nu. 28:1-10; Lev. 24:8) Offerings for the redemption of the firstborn had to be made after the thirty-third day whether it fell on Saturday or not. (Ex. 22:29, 30; Cf. Lev. 12:1-8 and Lk. 2:21, 22, 27, 39) Ex. 22:30 suggests that firstborn animals had to be sacrificed on the eighth day even if it were Sabbath. (But was this the work of the priests at the tabernacle or temple or were these animals slain by their owner at home?)

But the main point Jesus makes is that, if the priests did NOT carry out their obviously laborious tasks on the sabbath, they would certainly be profaners of the seventh day. Yet who would dare seriously argue that they were, in any sense, violating the sabbath? And yet, by the Pharisees' own definitions of work, the law contradicts itself by making those governed by it to violate its precepts by keeping other of its requirements! **The priests . . . profane the sabbath** must not be taken literally here, for Jesus intends the word **profane** ironically, since the priests' work only appeared to be profanation due to its nature as real work. The Lord's statement ("priests profane the sabbath") is only a concession to His opponents' mistaken interpretations which dared force the Law to contradict itself.

Lenski (*Matthew*, 463) suggests that Jesus' preceding arguments were but the induction of a general principle from a particular case admitted by all, whereas here He proceeds to the specific case actually stated in the Law which verified the principle inferred earlier: "All ceremonial laws, including the sabbath-law, are limited in their application." He rightly teaches that even the Law itself presents its ceremonial applications as not absolute in character and those who would so understand them must contradict the intent of the Law itself. The ceremonies are subservient to the real motivation which caused God to give the ordinances in the first place: i.e. the motivation behind all ordinances is found in their service to the well-being of man. (Cf. Deut. 30) The only reason the Law required the hard labor of *the priests on the Sabbath in the Temple* was the spiritual need of the people, for it was this, and not with a mere outward regulation or form, that God was concerned.

But from Jesus' argument at this point may we infer that He somehow elevates His disciples to the level of priests serving in the service of God in a Temple greater than that at Jerusalem? Though this conclusion is not absolutely compelling, yet the reaction that this statement must elicit from His objectors would be: "Whom do you make your disciples to be? Of course, the priests work in the Temple, because they are required by Law to do so. But your disciples are

common laymen whom we have caught reaping grain on the Sabbath!" From this viewpoint we see that the Master may be hinting at a priesthood superior to that of Aaron, which would be described more fully in the literature of the New Covenant (i.e. the epistle to the Hebrews). On the other hand, if Jesus means to suggest no more than the principle, illustrated by this case in point, that "All ceremonial laws are limited, not absolute, in their application", then it is truer to say that He is merely attacking the Pharisees' own misinterpretation of the Sabbath regulations. However, see on 12:6.

12:6 **But I say unto you, that one greater than the temple is here.** What could the Lord gain by antagonizing the Pharisees with claims such as this? What is the relation of this sentence to His preceding argument? Trench (*Miracles*, 196) believes that this assertion is rationally explained as the response made by the Lord to a contemplated rebuttal by the Pharisees: "Then, lest the Pharisees should retort, or in their hearts make exception, that the work referred to was wrought in the service of the temple, and was therefore permitted, while there was no such serving of higher interests here, He adds, **"But I say unto you, that in this place is One greater than the temple."**

What is the **one greater than the temple?** (*toû hieroû meîzón estin hōde*)

1. Can Jesus be the one greater than the temple?

- a. Trench (*Miracles*, 196) believes that "He contemplates his disciples as already the priests of the New Covenant, of which He is Himself the living Temple." In favor of this view it should be noticed that **temple** (*hierón*) is neuter and might seem also to have the weight of Jn. 2:18-21. Accordingly, Jesus' declaration would be: "I, God's living Temple and the immediate expression of the presence of God, am greater than the Jerusalem sanctuary." However, the fact that He is more often pictured as High Priest of the heavenly Sanctuary would caution us against viewing Him as the Temple itself, although it is true that, while He is the High Priest, He is also the sacrificial Lamb. (cf. Heb. 8:1-3; 9:11, 12, 24; Jn. 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6, 9) Perhaps it would be truer to say that, as High Priest of the spiritual order soon to appear, He employed His disciples in a service far higher than that of the Levitical. But against this alternative is the technicality of Jesus' actual accession to the high priesthood. (Cf. Heb.

2:17; 5:7-10; 6:20) Would He be considered priest prior to His own consecration as such, i.e. before He offered Himself in His death?

2. *Meizon* is neuter gender and so requires that Jesus' allusion to be something other than masculine, as to an idea, a principle or the like: "There is something involved here that is greater than all that the Jerusalem Temple stands for."

- a. Taken in connection with the following verse (12:7), Jesus may mean that there is a principle of religion entirely overlooked by these narrow-souled objectors. There ARE matters of the Law weightier than all the purely ceremonial aspects, which include everything from the smallest tithes clear up to include the Temple itself. (Cf. Mt. 23:23; Micah 6:6-8; 1 Sam. 15:22) These are justice, mercy, faith, loving kindness, humility and real obedience! Taken in this connection, Jesus intends to specify precisely what is greater than temple service, by insisting that God wanted men to learn mercy, not merely how better to offer sacrifices. But, while this idea is certainly true in itself and much contextually in its favor, it may not exhaust Jesus' meaning.

- b. Lenski (*Matthew*, 464) calls attention to three parallel situations in this section which in some way refer to the Temple:

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) David entered <i>the house of God</i> | David ate the holy bread |
| (2) Priests serve <i>in the Temple</i> | Priests butcher sacrifices
(their own food also) |
| (3) Something here <i>greater than Temple</i> | Disciples pluck and eat grain |

He notes also that in all three cases something occurs contrary to the Pharisean notion, but what is perfectly in harmony with the mind of God Who gave to Israel her Tabernacle, the Temple, and, lastly, the presence of the God-man Himself. Lenski concludes that the neuter adjective *meizon* ("greater") is more natural when seen as referring to something parallel in thought with "house of God" and "Temple", which are also non-personal references. However, he concludes that the former two symbolize the

divine presence, whereas Jesus' personal and immediate expression of the divine presence is far superior either to tabernacle or temple.

3. Despite the fact that the neuter *meizon* ("something greater") is the best reading of the Greek text, it can still be construed to refer to Jesus.
 - a. That *something*, in the final analysis, whatever it is, Jesus says, is superior to the Temple service. If so, it is superior to the entire ceremonial law which regulated the Temple. Later (12:8) Jesus places Himself above all the ceremonial law, even above the Sabbath itself, whence the implication that, even here, Jesus' presence and service is superior to the Temple.
 - b. Or, all that the Hebrews had in Jesus as the Christ was far superior to everything they enjoyed in the Jewish religion which their Temple was their most glorious symbol.
 - c. All that Jesus taught about true religion revealed a view of God and man far superior to all that the Jews had in their Temple service. But even this revolves around who Jesus is, i.e. He is no mere teacher, but the revealer of the mind of God.
 - d. Edersheim (*Life*, II, 58) emphasizes the Service to Christ in the following logical form:

The Service of God and the Service of the Temple, by universal consent superseded the Sabbath-law. But Christ was greater than the Temple, and His Service more truly that of God, and higher than that of the outward Temple—and the Sabbath was intended for men, to serve God: therefore Christ and His Service were superior to the Sabbath-Law.

But while we are searching for Jesus' specific meaning, let us not miss the thunderous impact that this shocking claim must have made upon His hearers, for, to those pious (and some not-so-pious) Hebrews, what could be higher, holier or more glorious than the earthly dwelling place of the glory of Jehovah? The truly devout could answer, with the understanding of Solomon: "Even the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee! How much less this house that I have built!" Even so, who does this young rabbi from Nazareth think He is, going around

to insist that what His disciples are doing is somehow part of a service to God greater than our temple?

c. *God's Interpretation of His Law is more lenient than yours* (12:7)

If you had known what this meaneth . . . you would not have condemned, means "You did not understand Hosea 6:6 and so you transgressed the spirit of real religion because of your ignorance." (See comments on 9:13; cf. 1 Sam. 15:22; Prov. 15:8, 29; Jer. 7:22, 23; Am. 5:21-24; Psalms 40:6-8; 50:8-15; 51:16-19; 69:30, 31) The seriousness of this charge ("You . . . have condemned the guiltless!") must be apparent, because it classed these Pharisees, "the righteous" with the most abominable sinners they could imagine, such was the heinousness of this their religious conclusion. (Cf. Prov. 17:15; Isa. 5:18-23)

"I desire mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6) **Mercy** (*chesed*: "love, favor, grace, mercy, kindness," according to Scerbo, *Dizionario Ebraico*, 92; "Mercy, pity, piety of men towards God," so Gesenius, 294; *éleos*, according to Arndt and Gingrich, 249, refers to "mercy, compassion, pity." Usage pictures this compassion, called for by Hosea, as both that which God has for man and that which man must show his fellows. But which meaning best suits Hosea's intent and, consequently, Jesus' use here?

1. God's mercy: "I desire that you learn what my mercy really means, not merely how better to sacrifice; I intend that you learn to know ME, not solely the liturgies and sacrifices I taught you." Israel in Hosea's day was being destroyed spiritually from lack of knowledge, having rejected and thus forgotten the law of God. (Hosea 4:6) They had raised impassible barriers between themselves and God because of their sins and it could truly be said that Israel did not know the Lord. (Hos. 5:4) Their crying need was to sense once again the real mercy of the Lord. (Hos. 6:3) Though Hosea vividly portrays Israel's sins, and consequent judgments that must come because of them, (Hos. 6:7—10:15) he pleads with Israel to remember God's longsuffering love and constant tender mercies. (Hos. 11:1-11; 14:1-7) According to this view, then, Hosea was pleading that Israel comprehend the fact that God was not a mere great man in the sky to be placated by so many sacrifices and ceremonies. Rather He is a God who punishes the iniquity of any person or nation, and a God who delights

in being gracious and merciful even in the hardest cases, especially that in which Israel then found herself. In this case, Jesus' use of this text means: "The essence of real religion is not the perfect, punctilious and perpetual performance of the proper practices, but in knowing and responding to a real, living God who cares about man."

2. Human mercy. This view sees God as pleading, "When I taught you to offer sacrifices in the first place, what I was trying to teach you was not that religious rituals and ceremonies are important. What I wanted you to sense was that I desire that you show mercy. When you offer any sacrifices, what are the sins you confess for which you make those offerings? Sins against the people with whom you live. Now, if you admit that you need my mercy and forgiveness in relation to those sins, how much does your neighbor require the forgiveness and mercy that only you can give? And if, in harmony with your obedience shown through your sacrifices, I showed mercy to you, should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" (Cf. Jesus' concept in Mt. 18:23-35) This view also has the advantage of harmonizing well with the original context of Hosea due to the heartlessness and unmercifulness of Israel. (cf. Hosea 4:1, 2; contrast Hos. 10:12)

Probably the latter explanation is the better, since it may also include the former. This is so, because those who really understand the mercy of God, have also grasped their own responsibility to show mercy to their fellows, even as God has shown them loving kindness. And, conversely, those who perfectly demonstrate human compassion and forgiveness have learned it from God. Another evidence that human mercy is intended is the prophet's antithesis: *"mercy and not sacrifice."* Evidently, as sacrificing is a requirement of men, so mercy is something God expected of them.

Obviously, then, mercy to fellow human beings is far more important to God than the punctiliously correct but mechanical observance of the letter of the Law. Even so sacred an institution as the sabbath must take second place to deeds of mercy, because of the greater importance of people as human beings made in the image of God. The real purpose behind God's commandments and rituals was His desire to teach men the real value of human life and a merciful spirit that needs no law other than the cry of human need. All legalists generally tend to be tender and careful toward the rituals but harsh to

fellow humans for whose sake the laws were really intended. But by Jesus' constant insistence upon this principle (Hos. 6:6), we are led to see that that text lays down a principle which must touch and influence our understanding of the whole gamut of external ceremonies commanded by God: i.e. the external ordinances were not instituted for the sole purpose that man might observe them. Rather, they were designed to bless man by disciplining him for service to God out of the spontaneous expression of his own free choices. However, this observation of Jesus does not countermand either the Sabbath commandment, any more than that any of these Scriptures (Hos. 6:6 *et al.*) describe the end of material sacrificing. Far from it, many times in the same context, they pass rapidly from those spiritual sacrifices that are pleasing to God, to discuss the material sacrifices that must be offered in the right frame of mind. (Cf. Malachi 3:10 in its full context; note Jesus' way of exhorting to mercifulness, Mt. 5:23, 24) Even mercifulness of God shown a healed leper did not excuse him from ceremonial obedience to a Levitical ordinance that God had given for cases such as his! (Cf. Mt. 8:2-4)

I desire mercy and not sacrifice. By this citation Jesus proves that there were thousands of positive acts of goodness and mercy that the Jews should have been doing on any and every Sabbath. **I desire mercy** leaves them entirely free how to express the genuine concern for their fellows, but Jesus' scorching rebuttal unmasks their obvious indifference to the positive requirement that they actually do something useful whether it be Sabbath or not. Lenski (*Matthew*, 466) thinks that

Jesus is not speaking of mere humanitarian pity, nor of merciful actions inspired by the law. The mercy that Hosea refers to comes from the gospel, which fills also the Old Testament.

But this is not faithful to Hosea's context, since it would have made no sense to Hosea's original audience, if Lenski is right, nor could Jesus reproach the Pharisees for not grasping this concept. So He is discussing that real, humanitarian pity that causes a man to interpret and apply the Law in such a way as to do kindness to his fellow creatures. **Not sacrifice, sacrifice** here is taken typically for the entire ceremonial law, the Sabbath-law included, because the ceremonial aspect of the Sabbath was not the end-all of God's intention for giving the Sabbath. Thus, the Hebrews, should have been able to see that Saturday could have been spent in positive deeds of mercy that expressed the active love and compassion of God in them. Mercy is

something that is always lawful! (Cf. Gal. 5:22f "against such there is no law." I Tim. 1:8, 9)

Trench (*Miracles*, 197) poses the trenchant problem regarding the application of the principle Jesus stated: just to whom does the Lord intend to apply it, to His own disciples or to the Pharisees? He makes a good case for both:

1. To the disciples: "If you had at all known what God desires of men, you would then have understood that my disciples, who in love and pity for perishing souls have so laboured and toiled as to go without their necessary food, were offering that very thing; you would have seen that their loving violation was better than other men's cold and heartless fulfilment of the letter of the commandment." (I presume here that Trench means a "violation" of rabbinic definitions rather than of the Sabbath-law itself. HEF)
2. To the Pharisees: "If you had understood the service wherein God delights, you would have sought to please Him by mercy,—by a charitable judgment of your brethren,—by that love out of a pure heart, which to Him is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices (Mark xii. 33), rather than in the way of harsh and unrighteous censure of your brethren."

Should any suppose this standard to be the easier, because God requires **mercy** above rituals, let him be merciful and act fully consistent with this standard whereby he gives the other fellow the benefit of the doubt for but one single day, and he will see that God raised the requirement to a far more rigorous demand than ever before imagined! **Sacrifice** is by far the easier part of religion. Many can make great, expensive sacrifices (and they are necessary!), but how many submit to the daily discipline of being consistently merciful to their fellows?

Guiltless. This is the Lord's verdict. It must have brought raised eyebrows among those scribes who were even then straining eagerly to wring out of Jesus the very opposite admission. But even this scandalous remark will be rapidly forgotten after Jesus lays before them the authority upon which He arrives at this pronouncement of their innocence: "As Lord of the Sabbath myself, I find them not guilty of any wrongdoing on this day!" (cf. 12:8)

d. *I am Lord of the Sabbath* (12:8)

For the Son of man is lord of the sabbath (*kúrios gar estin*, Mt.; *hōste kýrios estin*, Mk.) Why does Matthew and Mark use

these special connectives (*gār* and *hōste*), when Luke proves that one can do without them and still have a grammatically good sentence? *Gār* ("for") is intended to introduce the reason why Jesus reaches the verdict announced in the previous verse, concerning the disciples' innocence, while Mark's *hōste* ("so") introduces what Jesus sees as the logical result that derives from admitting that "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath." (Mark 2:27, 28) Since this latter declaration is Mark's record of the context in which Jesus made this great claim, we are obligated to ask whether Jesus was saying something about Himself, about any man, or both. Since "son of man" as well as "Son of man" have quite different meanings, even though both expressions refer to man in an ideal or abstract way, we must understand whether Jesus intended the one or the other meaning, when He surprised His listeners with this pithy remark. (Since in the original manuscripts of the Gospel writers all words were written in capital letters, capitalization in English translations are the result of translators' decisions about the meaning.)

1. "son of man" meaning "any man" taken as a Hebraism.

- a. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 29) argues that "on this occasion Jesus is not defending *Himself* for anything that He did on the Sabbath; He is defending His *disciples*; . . . the authority which He is stressing here is not so much His own authority as the authority of human need." While Barclay is right to sense this thrust in Jesus' argument, nevertheless Jesus' authority is very definitely under discussion. Even if the Pharisees attacked the disciples' practice, their intention was to undercut their confidence in Jesus by whose tacit permission (if not His direct approval) the disciples violated the Sabbath by their eating grain reaped on that day.
- b. "son of man" is a Hebraism referring to mankind in general (cf. Ps. 8:4; Mt. 12:31 with Mk. 3:28). Regarded in this fashion, the phrase is rendered by Barclay's (*ibid.*, 23) suggestive translation thus: "For man is master of the Sabbath."
- c. Mark's context (2:27, 28) seems to promote this conclusion by revealing that God planned the sabbath to be a benefit to man, not a burden. It also makes man, any man, lord of the sabbath in the sense that any man must decide what he should do with the sabbath so as to achieve

his own welfare and please God. The Sabbath-law was not the lord of man and might temporarily be set aside when its strict observance conflicted with his welfare or hindered his expression of the impulses of God's Spirit within him. But such exceptions only proved the rule and never replaced the rule. Man was not free to dispense with the Sabbath as his caprice led. Only in really pleasing God by obeying Him does one find the satisfaction of his own best interests anyway.

2. "Son of man" meaning that unique title Jesus took to identify Himself with humanity. (See on 8:20; 9:6)
 - a. Those who see this interpretation of the phrase in question argue that such a marvelous claim is perfectly harmonious with, and even part of the explanation of, the foregoing, less lucid claim that the Jews had in Him something greater than the Temple (12:6).
 - b. While sheer frequency of use is not determinative in discovering meaning, it should be noted that Jesus uses the phrase "Son of man" elsewhere as His own unique title. However, even though He used the words almost exclusively as a title scores of times, mere frequency of use cannot be the final, deciding factor, since, if Jesus meant "mankind" here in this one text, then that is His meaning. The true meaning of an author is determined by discovering what the author really intended to say, not by what we may determine from word counts, even though this method may help us approach the author's true meaning with more probability.
 - c. Matthew's introductory "For" (*gar*) argues that this claim explains Jesus' acquittal of His disciples, a verdict that calls for authority beyond which there could be no further appeal. So Jesus really is defending His right to say what He does.

If this latter view be the proper one, His vindication lies in what He Himself is. As rightful **Lord of the sabbath**, as His miracles and signs amply demonstrated, then He may declare what is allowable on that day. And from the uniquely Jewish standpoint that regarded the Sabbath above every other day, this makes Jesus Lord of all life, since, if He is Lord of the day of all days, He is then Lord of all

lesser days too. This self-revelation as the ideal Man who is superior to the Sabbath-law itself qualifies Him to know what was really involved in the original ordinance. It also qualifies Him to expose any tampering with its real purpose. This is why He defended His followers from the accusation of profaning the Sabbath merely on the basis of mistaken rabbinical notions which entirely missed the point of the real intent behind the Sabbath. Jesus is no longer arguing with the Pharisees, He is TELLING them, on the basis of His rightful authority, what the real meaning of this sacred day must be.

The great issue to be resolved here is whether God intended man to understand this concept of the original Sabbath ordinance now expressed by Jesus, i.e. that the Sabbath was made for man, not vice versa. Could the ancients have known and understood this and, hence, practiced its meaning in proper activity on that day?

1. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 277) argues that "When the welfare of man conflicts with the observance of the Sabbath, the latter must give way. But of this man himself is not the judge, because he can not judge with impartiality his own interests. . . . No one is competent to judge in the case who does not know all that pertains to the welfare of man, and this is known only by the Lord." But this comment ignores the fact that the very lack of precision surrounding the Sabbath ordinance itself makes man the sole judge of what must be done. By deliberately being not casuistic, God literally left men really free to use the Sabbath in ways that their conscience, enlightened by His other precepts, might devise. And the quibble about the human intelligence being incompetent to know all that pertains to human welfare misses the great point that God left men unfettered in order that they might be free on the Sabbath especially to deal with those practical problems of mercy or necessity which men actually faced. This freedom left men even more responsible before God for what they did with the Sabbath! That freedom did not enslave the Hebrews with a host of tyrannical regulations but should have been the first lessons in that great principle of what we have learned to appreciate as Christian freedom revealed in Jesus Christ.
2. McGarvey's assertion (*ibid.*) that "the passage teaches, then, not that men might violate the law of the Sabbath when their welfare seemed to them to demand it, but that Jesus could set it aside, as he afterward did, when his own judgment of

men's welfare required him to do so," puts unnecessary emphasis on the word "violate". A man does not "violate" the Sabbath by exerting himself in his own best interests or in that of his neighbor, even though some stickler for the traditional interpretation of "work" might call his exertion "work, therefore, violation." The Sabbath-law was notably unhedged about with minute details about how it was to be observed. This left man largely master of his own decisions regarding what activities he could pursue on that day, activities, that is, which did not transgress what was actually written in the Law regarding that day.

3. The Pharisees' great mistake was that they had raised to the level of divine revelation those private judgments about what could (or could not) be done on the Sabbath. From the view of God's original intent, it would have been fairly difficult to violate the Sabbath, else it would have become what Jesus expressly affirms that it was not, i.e. the tyrannical lord of man.

But let it be noted, contrary to many older commentaries, that it is no argument for His requiring Christians to observe weekly sabbaths to say that He is yet **Lord of the sabbath**. For His fundamental argument here is that He is Lord of the whole Law that instituted the Sabbath for man's benefit. But this beneficial quality of the Sabbath is no argument for observing it further today. The Sabbath, as any other part of the Mosaic economy, was instituted for the blessing of the people under that particular system. The real stumblingblock for Sabbatarians of every age is their inability to conceive of the possibility that God could institute an entirely new and different kind of system or arrangement **SO FAR SUPERIOR TO THE SABBATH** or any other phase of Mosaic Law, that the temporary benefits of the Mosaic system seem detrimental by comparison! The Sabbath was a temporary means to achieve a particular end for a certain people. The Son of Man proved His full, rightful lordship over that day by disposing of the Sabbath in favor of a system far superior to it.

B. FOR HEALING A MAN'S WITHERED HAND ON THE SABBATH (12:9-15a)

1. SITUATION: A TRAP LAID FOR JESUS (12:9, 10)

12:9 **And he departed thence**, i.e. from where the former controversy occurred, but that He did not immediately **enter their synagogue**, we are informed by Luke (6:6) who notes that it was

"on another sabbath". But He DID enter the synagogue, and by so doing, stepped again into the arena with the beasts. Why, when His appearance was sure to rekindle the fires of controversy and invite attack upon Him? Because in the synagogue God's Word was going to be read and men would worship there. No fear of possible trouble was permitted to interfere with Jesus' felt need to be there. **Their synagogue:** these are the same Pharisees from last week's encounter. Luke (6:6) reports Jesus' usual activity in the synagogue as teaching. The wily scribes and Pharisees were maliciously watching (*paretēroun, paretērounto*) to see whether he would heal the cripple. **12:10 And behold, a man having a withered** (Luke: "right") **hand.** It is not clear whether he was "planted" in the audience by the Pharisees in order to make this use of his weakness, or whether his presence in the synagogue merely furnished the occasion they sought. Since Mark (3:2) notes that they were waiting to "see whether He would heal him on the sabbath," the man is very much in their mind as part of their scheme, whether he himself is aware of it or not. It might be that Jesus let them watch for quite a while (note the imperfect tense in Mark 3:2; Lk. 6:7), so long in fact that they felt compelled to make the first move. So they toss Him a seemingly innocent, almost academic question, but which, if answered either positively or negatively, would embroil Jesus in the very trap they had laid for Him. On other occasions they "watched Him" with similarly malicious intent, (cf. Lk. 14:1; 20:20) that they might accuse Him of Sabbath profanation which, if proved, bore the death penalty. (Ex. 31:14) Perhaps their testimony would go to the Sanhedrin.

Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? By asking this loaded question, they seem to call direct attention to the man's twisted arm. Could it be that they had judged Jesus rightly, i.e. they knew that He could not encounter the diseased arm without doing something about it? If so, how right they were, but how wrong they were to use this partial knowledge to combat Him on His own ground! Perhaps they thought they had found the perfect dilemma with which to finish Him:

1. "If He answers that healing may not be done on the Sabbath, we will unmask His inhumanity to man." (Or, granted the live possibility that these Pharisees were not all this sensitive to human problems, they would more likely have thought, "If He condemns healing on the Sabbath, He will prove us right.")

2. Or if He answers that healing may be done, we will expose His flagrant rejection of the ancient and revered opinions of the fathers."

Is it lawful? is itself a legitimate question, depending upon what one intends to do with it, for even the Lord Himself used it to open debate on the legitimacy of healing. (Lk. 14:3) But the Pharisees' motivation poisoned it. Lenski (*Matthew*, 468) sighs: "We see how little impression Christ's word regarding mercy has made on them, v. 7. They still ask only . . . 'is it lawful,' and not, 'is it merciful?'" But, because the case was not one of life and death, since the withered hand could wait until the next day to be healed, this was an excellent test case for deciding between the two conflicting views or approaches to Sabbath interpretation.

Is it lawful? What hypocrisy! The hierarchy consider it a matter of small importance that they desecrate the Sabbath in order to challenge, criticize, plot against and crucify this One who alone proved His right to govern it. They had no interest in proper legal interpretation, their hypocrisy being betrayed by their own censoriousness. Worse still, since genuine concern for man and a deep un-hypocritical love prove to be the best rules of thumb for interpreting God's laws, where these are absent, a close, slavish adherence to the letter of the law, which generally produces a heartless, inhumane application of that law to others, can only lead to a wider departure from its spirit.

2. JESUS' ANSWERS AND CONCLUSION (12:11-13)

a. *A Deliberate Intensification of the Tension* (Mk. 3:3; Lk. 6:8)

Jesus is not at all unaware of their secret motives. (cf. Mt. 9:4; 12:25; 22:18; Jn. 2:24, 25) He called the crippled sufferer to come forward to stand before the whole synagogue as the test case. Jesus' subsequent remarks are made so much more impressive by the sight of this man standing in a conspicuous position among the accusers. With Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 21) we can applaud, as he notes:

He met opposition with courageous *defiance* . . . We see Him openly and deliberately defying the Scribes and Pharisees. This thing was not done in a corner; it was done in a crowded synagogue. It was not done in their absence; it was done when they were there with deliberate intent to formulate a charge against Jesus.

b. *Jesus raises the moral issue* (Mk. 3:4; Lk. 6:9)

Though they had flung this question at Him, as one would hurl a challenge, He bounced it right back at them to make them answer it: "I ask you, Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to destroy it?" But by so doing, He exposed the Pharisees as mute, moral cowards in the presence of a real issue. And they cannot object to His question either, as if He had failed to answer theirs by asking His. Two reasons:

1. He who asks a question, asks the favor of an answer, and as suppliant, he has no right to dictate what sort of answer he shall receive. Therefore he cannot object if the answer he seeks is a question that exposes his own weakness and failure, if that question gets at the truth he seeks.
2. Some questions must be reframed before they can receive a proper answer, since, in their present construction, they do not lead to the truth ultimately sought, as the question flung at Him by the Pharisees here.

So, the real question is not "to heal or not to heal," as stated by the dilemma posed Him by the Pharisees, but rather "to do good or harm, to save life or to kill". Now, while "to heal or not to heal" is a legitimate question (see on 12:10; Cf. Lk. 14:3), to clarify the real character of the act of healing a man, Jesus sounds out the Pharisees' moral acumen by simply asking to what moral class of deeds does healing belong? Is healing helpful or harmful? Does it save or destroy life? When the question is put in these terms, it becomes instantly clear whether healing is justified or not. The real alternative then becomes not "to do it or not", answered "one must do nothing at all", but "to do good or fail and do harm", for, to Jesus, to fail to do good is to sin. (Cf. Jas. 4:17) To leave the man's hand shrivelled even one more day is to "do wrong", whereas to restore it immediately is an act of obvious moral excellence, worthy of a Sabbath intended to bless man.

But why should Jesus add "to save life or to destroy it"?

1. This is an argument from the greater to the lesser. By carrying this question to its necessary extreme, which extreme has the moral approbation of His audience, He covers all the territory in between. That is, if the ultimate extreme be admitted, all lesser acts included in the principle are justified also. There seems to have been no life-and-death urgency about

healing the man's hand, so Jesus could not justify His act as "saving a man's life or letting him die". But if they admit the necessity to save a man's life, a much greater act often accompanied by a far greater exertion of energy or "work" then could they reasonably object to His doing the lesser, easier task of merely healing him?

2. Knowing that they were out to kill Him if they could but do it legally, perhaps His contrast is between their desire to destroy Him and His desire to restore a man to full life.

But they were silent (cf. also Lk. 14:4) Their silence on this moral issue must have provoked Jesus to real anger. (Mark 3:5) As He surveyed the entire group, He could find no man who would commit himself on this question. And the deep anger He felt was occasioned by their unwillingness to understand, despite the clear-cut morality of the issue. The mental block hindering their comprehension was, of course, their unwillingness to surrender their pride and reject their own conclusions, hoary with centuries of thought, that the Sabbath no-work law covered certain categories and not others, despite the fact that God had made no such distinctions or qualifications. *Hardness of heart* was that unwillingness to accept truth when confronted with it. (Cf. Mk. 6:52; 8:17; Jn. 12:40; Ro. 11:25; 2 Co. 3:14; Eph. 4:18)

But why were these theological experts silent when faced with this dilemma? Why did they not merely raise the objection that Jesus' question raised a false dilemma, presenting a false dichotomy and that there existed a third alternative not respected by His statement of the choices? Why could they not merely have objected in this manner? "But to obey the law of God as we are able to understand it is good, whereas healing is work that can be postponed until the end of the Sabbath. Hence, healing on the Sabbath is really to do harm, and we sincerely wish the man no harm. Further, the real choice is not between saving a life or destroying it, since only the man's withered hand, not his life, is involved. Consequently, not to heal his hand, Jesus, would NOT be to destroy his life, as you insinuate."

1. Perhaps the best answer to this quandary is the fact that in the case of the Pharisees, the problem lay not with logic but in their morality. There may have been something in the tone or manner of Jesus that indicated to them that He was not discussing solely the particular merits of the case of the man's withered hand. The unflinching gaze of the Son of man may have convinced them that He was bringing them to a

moral show-down. So the contrasts He sets before them describe the two distinct courses of action followed either by Jesus or the scribes themselves. Consequently, the meaning is: "Is it legal on the Sabbath to do good (as I am now planning to do for this cripple) or to do harm (as you meditate it against me), to save life (by bringing it to full, normal usefulness) or to destroy it (as you plan in my case)?"

2. Morgan (*Luke*, 85) suggests another alternative:

In the presence of a man like that, you do one thing or another: you either do him good, or harm. . . . You are either acting for his recovery; or you are acting for the perpetuation of his misery. . . . In the presence of human misery and dereliction, we cannot be neutral."

Whoever perpetuates pain or disability, when he possesses the power to help, becomes guilty of inhumanity, the most iniquitous of social sin. (cf. Mt. 22:39; 1 Jn. 3:15)

They were silent! They WOULD not say that doing good is lawful on the Sabbath, for this opened up too many exceptions to their carefully prepared but partisan rules. But, on the other hand, they did not DARE affirm that doing evil or destroying life was legitimate Sabbath activity. **They were silent!** This was their damnation, for it was their moral obligation, as authoritative exponents of Judaism and the guardians of orthodoxy, to take a positive stand for righteousness and truth right then and there before the waiting synagogue. Without any hidden motives or falsifications, they had to permit Jesus to bring perfect soundness to that withered hand. But their moral cowardice, grown strong from their constant leaning upon the authority and opinions of other men, kept them from braving the consequences of having to think for themselves or publicly change ground on this live issue. They were silent

1. Because they feared instant exposure as frauds before the people;
2. Because the Christ was powerfully and swiftly maneuvering them into an inescapable trap and they felt and feared His terrible ascendancy over them;
3. Because of their determinedly wicked hearts, since they had no intention of playing nice games of logic or morality with Him nor did they care about truth, for their avowed purpose was "to find an accusation against Him."

4. Or did some of them, deep in their conscience, really admit that healing WAS lawful and morally obligatory?

As learned men of the cloth, it was their duty clearly to pronounce judgment, but they said not a mumbling word. But by their silence they automatically surrendered their credentials, for who can trust the authority of a leader who in the face of a real problem must confess his ignorance and failure, especially in his own field where he had pretended earlier to be the expert? By their humiliated silence, they left Jesus entirely free to act without any possible fear of criticism.

- c. *Argumentum ad hominem*: "You work by helping a dumb beast"
(12:11, 12a)

Jesus says, "Even if you refuse to answer your own question thrown back at you, I will abide by the answer to it that you show by your own actions."

12:11 **What man shall there be of you?** Indeed, what **man?** (*Tís ánthropos*; *tís* alone is sufficient to ask the question "who? or what man?" so *ánthropos* becomes emphatic here.) Inhumanity was the Pharisee's fundamental failure, so the Lord asks, "Who does not have a man's heart to feel this?" The ordinary man, what would he do in such a case? But would the Pharisees' rules permit them to do what common sense dictated, if the sheep in question were their own? **That shall have one sheep:** this is the owner, not simply a passerby who happens to see the helpless animal, consequently, someone who feels personally the value of the distressed beast.

But is it legitimate to make out of this part of the illustration a claim to be the "Owner of man", as does Morgan (*Matthew*, 127)? The emphasis of the argument here is rather upon the relative value of men contrasted to that of animals and the response we make to each.

One sheep, i.e., this is not a question of the loss of the whole valuable flock, but of one lone stray. And yet, despite the toil and exertion involved in saving the animal (see the Lord's picturesque words describe the shepherd's straining!), hardly any owner would even dream that he was technically profaning the Sabbath. He would probably never admit to having profaned it at all. And yet, despite the clearly justifiable nature of this humanitarian gentleness to dumb beasts, it does represent a technical violation of the Sabbath law, unconscionably justified by the average legalist, though not, by any means, the most rigid rabbis. Here is the irony: the Pharisees, like anyone

else, have to live in God's real world, despite his own unrealistic home-made rules. Because of the very character and necessities of his own earthly condition, regardless of what the Pharisee taught about the strictness of Sabbath-keeping, he himself was forced to do things on that day that could easily be adjudged to be a very laborious process! These scribes must be made to feel the keen contradiction between their principles, by which they had attempted to blame Christ, and their own practice by the logic of which they themselves justified what He did. Their grudging, narrow-heartedness was brutally exposed by their own inhumanity to man in the face of their solicitous attention to their own worldly interests (by saving one of their own possessions on the Sabbath). But once they admitted the REALITY of their practice, this argument becomes irresistible.

12:12a How much then is a man of more value than a sheep! The effectiveness of this argument is proven by Jesus' constant use of it. (Lk. 13:15-17; 14:5, 6; Jn. 7:21-24) Study other uses of this standard of value: Mt. 6:26; 10:29-31; 1 Co. 9:9, 10. What kind of blindness is required to render men incapable of grasping the chasm of difference that yawns between all lesser creatures and Man, who God destined to be lord of creation! (Ps. 8:5, 6; Gen. 1:26, 28; 9:2) One of the sure products of a false or hypocritical religion is inhumanity to man. What incensed Jesus was the fact that these nit-pickers would not have hesitated to help a brute beast in danger on the Sabbath, but denied Him (and others) the right to minister to distressed human beings on that day! According to Jesus, any religion that makes its adherents inhumane is a FALSE religion, regardless of all its other pretenses to orthodoxy. Who would dare affirm that a human being is somehow of less value to God than a dumb beast? And yet Jesus' question remains one that has not even yet been adequately understood and applied by Christians.

This rhetorical question is really an exclamation of human value that damns all human rules and schemes that reduce a man to the brute level. Why is it true?

1. Because of man's inherent sense of worth; he, above all animals, is conscious of himself.
2. Because man is moral, even though this means he can sin where a sheep cannot. Man should be saved, because he is so valuable because of what he is.
3. Because of the infinity of the human spirit, not totally limited to the bounds of the flesh in which man lives.

4. Because God chose to communicate with and redeem MAN, not sheep.

d. *Jesus' Own Conclusion.* (12:12b)

12:12b **Wherefore it is lawful to do good on the sabbath day.** This surprisingly elementary declaration rushes from the fulness of Jesus' consciousness and concept of God and goes straight to the root of the problem, shatters all the legalistic objections and immediately resolves the question. **Doing good** knows no seasonal limitations: this is what the Kingdom of God is all about. This is why positive helpfulness is not only permissible, but obligatory any day of the week. (Jas. 4:17) Here Jesus repudiates the standard ecclesiastical rule that healing might be done on the Sabbath only where there was danger to life. But more than this, He rejects the assumption that the Sabbath was instituted to make man somehow less humane, less willing to meet the needs of his fellows. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 34) says it well:

It was Jesus' basic principle that there is no time so sacred that it cannot be used for helping a fellow-man who is in need. We will not be judged by the number of church services which we attended, or by the number of chapters of the Bible we have read, or even by the number of hours we have spent in prayer, but by the number of people we have helped when their need came crying to us.

Jesus proved the validity of this proposition in his own ministry, by healing not merely this once, but at least seven times on the Sabbath!

1. The demoniac in the Capernaum synagogue exorcized (Mk. 1:21-28 = Lk. 4:31-37)
2. Peter's mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14, 15 = Mk. 1:29-31 = Lk. 4:38, 39)
3. The sick man at Jerusalem's Bethzatha pool (Jn. 5:1-9)
4. This man with the helpless hand (Mt. 12:9-13 = Mk. 3:1-6 = Lk. 6:6-11)
5. The man congenitally blind at Jerusalem (Jn. 9:1-14)
6. The deformed woman (Lk. 13:10-17)
7. The dropsical man in the Pharisee's house (Lk. 14:1-4)

The conclusiveness of this answer of Jesus to their insidious question is shown by the fact that, whereas they had challenged the rightness of healing on the Sabbath, He proved that it is legitimate **to do good on the Sabbath**, and therefore, **to heal**. The greater includes

the lesser. (See above on 12:11) From this and the preceding illustration, it becomes clear that the Old Testament worthies, who interpreted the Sabbath law to mean that deeds of necessity and mercy were certainly allowable on the Sabbath even though this seems to contravene the intent of the law, showed greater understanding of the Sabbath institution, yes, even of the Law itself, than did these Pharisees who sought to protect its application by special casuistic interpretation. There should be no doubt that activities of any other kind than those of mercy or necessity were really forbidden by God, despite this more liberal view of the Sabbath ordinance. Nevertheless, Jesus demonstrated here once and for all that man, any man, was lord of the Sabbath in the sense that every individual person had to decide how best, within the few limits God actually placed on these activities, to worship God and to serve the needs of his fellows on that day.

However, the older commentators are greatly errant in supposing that Christ merely changed the proper holy day of the week to Sunday, making "the Lord's Day" a Christian Sabbath of which the modern disciple is obligated to make proper use through work and worship as if it were somehow more holy than the other six days. Even those usually doctrinally sound Bible students who seek to restore NT faith and practice in the life of the Church greatly err in limiting their concept of worship to what is done by the assembly of saints on Sunday in the local meeting place. The net result of this logic is the reestablishment of the "Christian Sabbath=Sunday" concept. Both errors arise from the mistaken conviction that Jesus actually regards one day higher than another, so that what is done on that day is somehow "holier" or more important or more critical than the activities in which one is engaged on any other day of the week. But God is no longer interested in making special holy days, places or special holy men in contradistinction to the rest of God's people, days or places. This is the prime reason why there are no peculiarly Christian feast-days or high holy days that are somehow more precious to God than any other. The stewardship of every day, the special sanctification of every hour by every person is that holiness which Jesus seeks.

Here again (see on 12:3, 4) the so-called "Law of Prohibitive Silence" must be found on the side of those Jews who interpreted the Sabbath law to mean that no deeds of mercy, or acts to alleviate human suffering, were permitted. The Law forbade the normal, week-day occupations. But it did not specify what activities might be legal when done on a Sabbath. The "Law of Prohibitive Silence", if applied here, must render quite illegal all of our Lord's Sabbath activities, for

in this He went clearly beyond what was strictly written. Further, He taught that man is superior to the Sabbath law and should be using it positively for his good and the good of others. Finally, the Lord argues as if He expected these legal experts to have grasped this truth and He holds them as inexcusable for their ignorance of it.

e. *The Miracle Proves Jesus Right* (12:13)

12:13 Then saith he to the man, "Stretch forth thy hand." The hand was the man's right hand (Luke) and, unless he were left-handed, the uselessness of his right arm only plagued him as he tried to work with his less dextrous left hand. Jesus had already recognized the high utility and splendid service rendered by one's right hand (cf. note on Mt. 5:29, 30). Notice Jesus' procedure: without so much as a command that the shrivelled limb be healed, without even touching it, Jesus simply asked the man to stretch it out. No Pharisean definition yet elaborated could possibly define what Jesus had just done as "practicing the profession of medicine and healing". Nevertheless, just as surely they knew that He had healed the hand. And worse yet, had they but the conscience to see it, they were going to have to **WORK OVERTIME** that Sabbath in order to prove that He had worked! For who could ever demonstrate that to speak a single word of such marvellous power to heal was an infraction of the Sabbath?

These Jews had in their own history the marvellous cure of the withered hand of Jeroboam by the man of God from Judah. (1 Kg. 13:1-10) This was done in connection with the terrifying sign that God had indeed spoken by the prophet. The chief difference between the two accounts (that of the man of God and this of the Son of God) is that the Judean prophet besought the Lord for Jeroboam, whereas here Jesus heals the hand Himself directly without public appeal to God.

And he stretched it forth. By this act the man shows his good sense, expressed his open contempt for the inhuman traditions and interpretations that would leave him a cripple another day, and confessed his faith in Jesus. Without great eloquence and profuse confessions, the man's simple act evinced his acknowledgement of Jesus' authority. He did what he had been told, even though he knew it impossible.

And it was restored whole, as the other, with the same shade of tan, matching callouses and identical degree of aging. Should we expect God to botch the job by mismatching the poor man's hands by providing him a child's fist or the delicate fingers of a lady?

The Lord had beaten the Pharisees fairly, without unnecessary roughness and with unanswerable argument and undeniable evidence. Instead of repenting or humbly seeking His indulgence for more time to reconsider His position, they are driven by their instinct to self-preservation and resort to "violence, the last resort of vanquished opponents." (Lenski, *Matthew*, 471)

3. THE NEGATIVE REACTION OF THE LEADERS (12:14)

12:14 But the Pharisees went out, and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him. Their counsel was not merely about Him, but decidedly prejudiced **against him**. Justice and evidence, fair play and commonsense have nothing to do with this discussion among these ecclesiastics, for no gentle graciousness nor logical argument on His part could sway them from this verdict of guilty. Their reaction, according to Mark 3:6 and Luke 6:11 is immediate and pointed:

1. They became furious (*eplēsthēsan anōtas*), true enough, but their motivation may well have been mixed with envy of His sway over the people. Even a relative outsider like Pilate could sense this. (Mt. 27:18) Why should they not be furious? He had ignored their traditions, reduced them to silence and publicly shamed them on vital moral issues! Their list of complaints against Him is growing:
 - a. He had attacked their illicit economic gains produced by the market which He claimed desecrated the Temple (Jn. 2:13-16)
 - b. He applied Messianic Scripture to Himself (Lk. 4:18-21)
 - c. He claimed to forgive sins, risking the charge of blasphemy (Mt. 9:3)
 - d. He mingled freely with the scum of Jewish society (Mt. 9:9-13)
 - e. He did not observe their stated fastdays (Mt. 9:14)
 - f. He ignored their rules for Sabbath observances and justified His disciples in the same (Jn. 5:16; Mt. 12:1-14)
 - g. He claimed to be equal with God (Jn. 5:17, 18)

Lange (*Matthew*, 218) summarizes the fundamental basis: Objections of less weight, and an interminable catalogue of calumnies, were connected with these charges. But the real stumbling block of the Pharisees, was

that conflict between the spirit and the dead letter, between the gospels and traditionalism, between salvation and unbelief, righteousness and hypocrisy, and holiness and proud self-seeking, which Christ represented and embodied.

2. They immediately counseled among themselves what to do with Jesus. They had already proposed to kill Him in Jerusalem (Jn. 5:16, 18), but their intention had been thwarted then. Although John does not record any specific attempts made on His life, apparently His strategic return to Galilee blocked any immediate efforts in that direction. By maintaining a moving ministry (see on 12:15), He kept any concentration of hostile efforts from forming, thus keeping the attackers off balance. He had already faced their critical judgment at close range and ably defended Himself. (See on 9:2ff.; cf. Lk. 5:17ff.)
3. They formed an unholy alliance with the Herodians. (cf. Mk. 8:15; 12:13; Mt. 22:15, 16) The Herodians were apostate Jews who not only accepted Roman rule in Palestine and supported the wicked Herodian house, but also affected pagan practices in the name of "culture". It must indeed have been a fierce hate for Jesus that could drive these usually fastidious Pharisees to make common cause with those Hellenizing Herodians! Mutual jealousies and long-standing enmity were forgotten in this conspiracy against Jesus, since He was a menace to both parties equally. But what could motivate the Herodians to join the Pharisees? Maybe it was simply calculating political expediency to unite against this "upstart rabbi whose religious following could take on political overtones that menaced the status quo". Perhaps they too hated the high religion He preached that exposed their shameful lives.

How they might destroy him: this is their determination, not whether to do so but how. To the mind of those who accept the significance of Jesus' miracles, this reaction is completely irrational. How could people who had just seen God heal through Jesus turn right around and plot His murder?

1. Because they could not even guess the fearful power at His disposal, should He choose to use it in self-defence. (Cf. Mt. 26:53) Could He not use His powerful word to destroy them? Nevertheless, they do not hesitate shamelessly to plot.

2. They certainly did not accept the proposition that God was actually working through Jesus. Once granted the thesis that no Messiah could ever be like Jesus of Nazareth, it became a simple matter to fault Him with collusion with Satan. (See on 12:22-37)
3. And if this latter conclusion be true, they were obligated by their perverted conscience to proceed with His elimination, the sooner the better.

With fitting irony Lenski (*Matthew*, 471) unmasks the perverted Pharisaic conscience: "To heal on the Sabbath—a mortal crime; but to plot murder—a perfectly legal act!" Violence is the only hope of those who are frustrated in their attempts to silence truth. For those who have eyes to see it, here are the first indications of the inevitability of the cross.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the occasions on which Jesus was accused of breaking the Law.
2. State and explain briefly all His answers to charges of Sabbath breaking.
3. Discuss the Sabbath: the law as God gave it; the law as the Pharisees had interpreted it and tried to enforce it; the teaching and practice of Jesus on it; and our relation to the Sabbath.
4. Were the disciples accused of stealing the grain?
5. What was wrong with their conduct, according to the Pharisees?
6. Did God make the law to which the Pharisees appealed in their criticism of Jesus' followers?
7. Did Jesus justify David's conduct? How did He use the allusion to the incident in David's life to justify the action of His disciples?
8. Was Abiathar the High Priest at the time of David's visit to the tabernacle? How may the discrepancy be explained?
9. Where in the Law does God permit the priests to work in the temple on the Sabbath without fear of breaking the Sabbath commandment?
10. What bearing does this mention of the priests' work on the Sabbath have upon Jesus' conduct on the Sabbath?
11. What does Jesus mean by saying, "One greater than the temple is here," as some translators put it, or, "Something greater than the

- temple is here," as the Greek has it? What is greater than the temple?
12. How does Jesus' allusion to Hosea 6:6 advance His argument? How would their comprehension of this passage have kept them from condemning the innocent?
 13. Who is (or are) "the guiltless"? (v. 7)
 14. In what connection does Mark (2:28) cite Jesus' word "So the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath"? How does this help the interpretation of this declaration of Jesus?
 15. How did Jesus respond to the Pharisees' challenge: "Is it right to heal on the sabbath day?"
 16. What is the point of the sheep story?
 17. How did the Pharisees react to Jesus' healing the man's hand? What did they do?
 18. If the Sabbath was God's Law for His people, why is it that the Church does not recognize the Sabbath any more?
 19. From the fact that the disciples were gathering their own food in this simple way, what may be deduced about Jesus' use of His miraculous power to feed them?
 20. What proof did Jesus offer the Pharisees that demonstrated His teaching correct and approved by God?

Section 27

JESUS THE HEALING SERVANT OF JEHOVAH

(Parallel: Mark 3:7-12)

TEXT: 12:15-21

15. And Jesus perceiving ~~it~~ withdrew from thence: and many followed him; and he healed them all,
16. and charged them that they should not make him known:
17. that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying,
18. Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my Spirit upon him, And he shall declare judgment to the Gentiles.
19. He shall not strive, nor cry aloud; Neither shall any one hear his voice in the streets.

20. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, Till he send forth judgment unto victory.
21. And in his name shall the Gentiles hope.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How does this passage harmonize with those instances where Jesus told some of the healed to spread the good news of their healing?
- b. How does this passage harmonize with those great public sermons that Jesus delivered where thousands of disciples and multitudes of listeners were present and so stirred up as to decide to make Him their King? What is the difference between Jesus' methods and the tactics described in this text as not to be used by the Messiah? How are we to harmonize them?
- c. Did Jesus ever fail to heal anyone? How do you harmonize your answer with the fact that at Nazareth, for example, He could not heal many because of their unbelief? (See Mark 6:5)
- d. Isaiah had predicted that the Messiah would not use any of the methods that great world leaders knew are absolutely necessary to promote great movements in human society. How, then, could Jesus possibly hope to succeed without using those methods? Now, after answering that question, deal with this one: how far has the church followed her Lord and how far has the Church let herself be victimized by the belief that success in this world is to be measured by the world's standards and gained by use of this world's methods?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Aware that the Pharisees and Herodians were plotting against Him, to arrest and ultimately kill Him, Jesus walked out of the synagogue, where He had healed the man who had had a shrivelled hand, and took His disciples down to the lakeshore of the Sea of Galilee. People in great numbers followed Him down there and He healed everyone. They kept coming from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumaea, from the district beyond the Jordan and from as far away as Tyre and Sidon up in Phoenicia! This vast multitude came because they had heard about his wonderful ministry. Then Jesus suggested to His disciples to keep a boat just offshore ready for Him to board, because of the mob of people. He had healed so many people that the crowd kept coming, crowding around Him, trying to touch Him. Whenever people possessed by demonic spirits caught

sight of Jesus, they would fall down before Him, screaming: "You are God's Son!" Repeatedly Jesus sternly warned them that they must not interfere with His own revelation of Himself by their ill-timed revelations. Nor were the freed demoniacs to make Him any more famous than He was.

This all resulted in the fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah had written (42:1-4):

"Observe what kind of Servant I have chosen for myself:
Notice my Beloved who pleases me well!
I have chosen to put the fulness of my Holy Spirit bodily in Him.
As a result, He will be qualified to announce true justice to all
people, even to the Gentiles.
But He will not argue and shout.
Nor will He make loud speeches in the streets.
He will never crush the weak nor destroy the smallest amount
of faith.
He will not stop until He has won the victory, making justice
to triumph!
He will be the hope of the world!"

SUMMARY

So many people followed Jesus, despite His growing enmity with the religious leaders, that the people mobbed Him. Yet He kept helping them, keeping an escape route ready in event of necessity to finish His task. Among those who came for healing were demoniacs whom Jesus forbade to reveal His real identity and create more sensational news than His ministry at this point required. This total picture of Jesus at work brought to fulfillment something Isaiah had said about God's Servant: The Servant of Jaweh, fully acceptable to God would be filled with God's own Spirit, thus qualified to announce His judgments. His appearance on earth would be unassuming, quiet and helpful to the weakest. He would not give up nor fail without having accomplished God's purpose. Even the lowly Gentiles could have reason for hope because of Him.

NOTES

A. SITUATION: JESUS MAKES A STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL (12:15, 16)

12:15 **And Jesus perceiving it, withdrew from thence.**
Here is exemplified in Jesus' own practice the very tactic He urged

upon His men: "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." (Mt 10:16; cf. also 10:23) His retreat in the presence of growing opposition is doubly motivated:

1. He steps away quietly from the immediate hostility and danger of the religious leaders plotting His untimely murder. He knew that He must eventually go to the cross and carefully prepared His disciples to face that hour, but His "hour is not yet come". Here He follows His own prudent advice given the Apostles earlier, whereby He may live to fight another day. Rather than destroy His enemies with a single word of power which would have blasted them into eternity, He patiently withdrew, giving them more time to reconsider His message and credentials. By His leaving, He took the pressure off of them, permitting them occasion for cooler reflection. In this we see the real meekness of our Teacher.
2. He withdraws, not merely to save His own skin, but in order to be free to continue ministering to the needs of people while there is yet opportunity. (Cf. Jn. 11:8-10; 9:4, 5) This motivation becomes clear, not only from the fact that He continued to meet people's needs, but especially from the strict injunction to silence He laid upon the healed, (12:16) Actually, the greater amazement is that Jesus was able to carry on His teaching ministry so well as He did, so famous had His healing ministry become! And, despite the time-consuming hindrance represented by the multitudes as their needs cut into His available teaching time, still He sent none away without helping them. (Cf. Mt. 15:30; 19:2; 8:16; Mk. 3:7-12; Lk. 6:17-19)

And many followed him; and he healed them all. (For details, see Mk. 3:7-12; Lk. 6:17-19) Why should the crowds flock around Jesus, whereas their own rabbis lost their crowds? What was the magnetic drawing power that brought these thousands from distant areas? Was it merely His wonderful power to work miracles?

1. His miracles are a concentrated exercise of divine power unknown even among the miracle-working prophets of the old dispensation. The great signs and wonders of ministries such as those of Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and Moses, though directly connected with the giving of the ancient revelations, were not nearly so compactly concentrated in the daily labors of any

one of these great men. By contrast, Jesus' daily activities multiplied evidences of God's immediate, personal intervention into Jewish history. This excited the tired, disillusioned hearts of despairing Hebrews who longed for some word from Jehovah, some evidence of His concern for His people after 400 years of silence broken only by the now all-but-silenced voice of John the Baptist.

2. But something else, itself as soul-stirring as the miracles, proved just as marvellous and just as successful a gatherer of crowds as the working of signs and wonders. Jesus had proven Himself to be absolutely Universal: He was every man's Savior and Friend. He had recognized no classes, separated Himself from no man's need. Time and again He had shown Himself quite independent of the exclusivistic prejudices of ecclesiastical Judaism. He not only worked miracles and preached thrilling sermons. He acted like a God who cares about us. Despite the frustrations surrounding the teaching of His Apostles, because of the limited time left Him before the ultimate crises culminating in the cross, still He chose to teach His Apostles how to minister to people by being available when people had need. His example made His teaching easier to catch, so He really taught more effectively even though all seemed to conspire against His efforts.

12:16 And charged them that they should not make him known. (See on 8:4; cf. also Mt. 9:30; Mk 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; Lk. 4:34, 35, 41; 8:56) This order that they keep these things secret was absolutely essential if He were to remain free to continue His work. How little the common people really understood the pressure under which Jesus was operating. Pressure from the murderous religious leaders, pressure from the Zealots to establish a worldly kingdom, pressure from the crowds themselves to give them endless help of all kinds, and pressure from ignorant friends and disciples who thought they knew best. (cf. Mt. 16:22; Mk. 3:21; Jn. 7:3, 4)

Though the Master had specific goals to meet within the time limits of His earthly mission, yet here again we see a total absence of selfish ambition. There is not a foolish seeking after a greater notoriety so often found among leaders who would consolidate their popularity and support. Jesus knew that this would only counteract against all that contributed to the real success of His ministry. But even more notable than the absence of selfish ambition here is the

stern prohibition of that unwanted publicity. But the undesirableness of that notariety stems from two different reasons:

1. It is not the moment of truth for the final showdown with the ecclesiastical leaders which must ultimate in His death. Jesus does not confuse recklessness with courage.
2. Popular movements with their shallow, though high-running, enthusiasms have a way of trampling upon important truth, glossing over significant distinctions and ignoring some people as unimportant. This was even more true with the nationalistic movement of the Zealots and their fellow-travelers, to whom a wonder-working "favorite son" would mean the genius to spark political rebellion and revolution in which men would grind God's great ideas of Messiahship down into inflammatory slogans and uselessly extinguish precious lives.

B. RESULT: FULFILLMENT OF ISAIAH 42:1ff.: JESUS IS JEHOVAH'S HEALING SERVANT (12:17-21)

Notice how Matthew has organized his material: he places this evaluation of Jesus in the busy midstream of His ministry. Whereas before (8:17 et al.) he had gently suggested the Messiahship of Jesus on the basis of His fulfillments of ancient predictions, here he challenges the reader to reflect on all that he has previously included as evidence. The fact that he includes this evaluation here at a critical turning point in Jesus' relationship to ecclesiastical Judaism, throws into sharper contrast the Messiah who was really prophesied would come and the popular concepts that tended to deny certain features undeniably predicted in this undoubted Messianic prophecy.

12:17 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, that (*bina*) may express purpose, in which case it expressed what God had intended should occur, or it may mean result, in which case it expressed merely that Jesus' actions resulted in this fulfillment, not that it was His conscious intention to fulfill the prophecies to defraud or deceive the Jewish public.

Here is evidence contrary to the theory, popular in some theological circles, that some unknown prophet (or even uninspired editor) prepared the latter portion of Isaiah's book, chapters 40-66. This so-called "Second Isaiah", or "Isaiah II", according to scholarly imagination, is supposed to have lived in Babylon during the famous exile there, or even sometime over the indefinite span of several hundred years. (For fuller explanations of the Isaianic debate, see the critical introductions

to the OT in general and special introductions to Isaiah.) It is a popular theory which affects not only one's view of the prophecy of Isaiah, but also one's view of inspiration in general. This is because what is involved here is not merely the unity, inspiration and authority of Isaiah, but also the inspiration and authority of the NT Apostles is deeply immersed in this scholarly imbroglio. (See John Ransom's study "Jesus' Witness to Old Testament Inspiration" at the conclusion of this chapter.) How is this so? Because the authors of the NT cite specific OT texts, not merely a few times in passing allusions, but often, giving specific credit to the OT author. In not a few cases, the NT scribe introduces his quotation naming the ancient prophet and claiming that the passage is the production of the "Holy Spirit who spoke through the prophets". For those who accept the inspiration and authority of the NT writers, this affirmation is not only conclusive but also signifies:

1. that the OT book referred to was actually written by the author mentioned by the NT writer;
2. that the OT writer was actually moved by God to produce what is now in our possession as the OT library or canon;
3. that to deny either inspiration or genuineness of authorship to the entire volume of any OT book cited by the NT writers is to doubt the inspiration and authority of the NT men themselves.

It is fashionable in some scholarly circles, however, to wave these propositions aside by saying that the NT authors do not delve into the technical problems of critical introduction, and therefore, based their own affirmations upon the opinions about OT authorship universally held up until their time. It remained until more recent times for modern scholarship to open these questions and search for answers to questions that did not even arise prior to the birth of German scholarship in the 1700's.

Notwithstanding this pride in human accomplishment, the evolutionary prejudices that fostered the conclusions may be dealt with by referring to the following evidence that no such evolutionary development in the history of the book of Isaiah (that we have today) has taken place:

1. It is gratuitous to assume that the spate of writing that began to flow out of eighteenth century Europe is the only attempt to delve into the critical questions that revolved around the authorship of the OT books. If the Holy Spirit were not

trying to tell us something by moving the NT writers to cite OT authors by name, often attributing their work either to God or to the Holy Spirit, what purpose could be served by deception at this point? Honesty impels us to confess that, if the OT situation is not that pictured in the NT, then a pious fraud has been perpetrated upon the believing Church by the very authors of the Book that documents that Church's divine origin and mission. But if we accept the divine origin of the NT, by that act we are committed to accept the critical information provided in the NT, especially on the subject of OT authorship and inspiration, matters which even in that first century after Christ were no longer easy to research. Who can adduce proof that the Holy Spirit did not intend, by the very manner in which He cites the OT, to provide exactly the critical information that we need on these vital questions concerning the OT's origin, unity and consequent authority?

2. Many of the citations themselves point not merely to the book that was then circulating under the name of a given prophet. They speak directly about the author himself and quote the message of some passage in his writings:
 - a. Study the manner of quotation, for example, in John 12:38-41 where the emphasis is placed upon the great personal vision of Isaiah himself. Young (*Introduction*, 218), after noticing that quotations are cited from both "first" and "second Isaiah" (53:1; 6:9, 10), points out that particular event in the prophet's life which proves John to be attributing these two prophecies "to the *man* Isaiah as author."
 - b. Note Paul's practice in Romans 9:27-33; 10:16-21. A concordance study of NT citations from Isaiah will demonstrate how the NT writers regarded Isaiah's prophecy.
3. But that Jesus and the Apostles were neither accommodating themselves to the level of critical knowledge of that day nor refusing to pronounce judgment upon the controversial questions which engage those who study the OT, is perceived by Young (*Introduction*, 30):

Jesus Christ is the Truth, and when He spoke, He spoke words of truth. It is true that in His human

nature our Lord's knowledge was limited, as may clearly be seen from a passage such as Mark 13:32. But this does not mean that He was subject to error. As man His knowledge may have been limited, but, as far as it went, it was true. Our Lord did not speak upon those subjects of which in His human nature He had no knowledge. All that He spoke was true. If our Lord was in error in questions of criticism and authorship, how do we know that He was not in error when He spoke of His saving death at Jerusalem? Admit error at one point, and we must admit it all along the line. In this present work the authority of Jesus Christ is accepted without reserve. He was, we believe, correct when He spoke of His substitutionary death, and He was correct when He spoke upon the nature of the Old Testament.

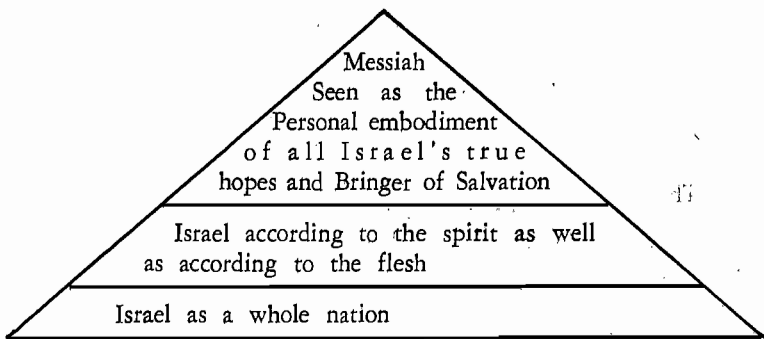
That which was spoken through Isaiah the prophet is not literally reproduced verbally from the text either of the Septuagint Greek translation nor is it even an independent translation of the Hebrew text, as a comparison of Matthew's citation which either of those texts will prove. In fact, Matthew provides here an interpretative rendering which shows its meaning or fulfillment along with the citation itself. And, since he bases no doctrine upon a peculiar rendering, no Jewish scholar can complain that his liberties taken with the text are unfair to the meaning of Isaiah or dishonest in the use he makes of it. Such summarizing of Scripture texts in such a way as to show their meaning is called by the rabbis "targuming." Thus, if the scribes themselves gave such interpretative paraphrases of their Scriptures, we should not be scandalized if Matthew uses the same teaching method. But, aside from good Jewish practice, when the divine authority of Matthew as an inspired Apostle is remembered, the modern reader can be certain that we have in this text the right use and correct meaning of Isaiah's original message.

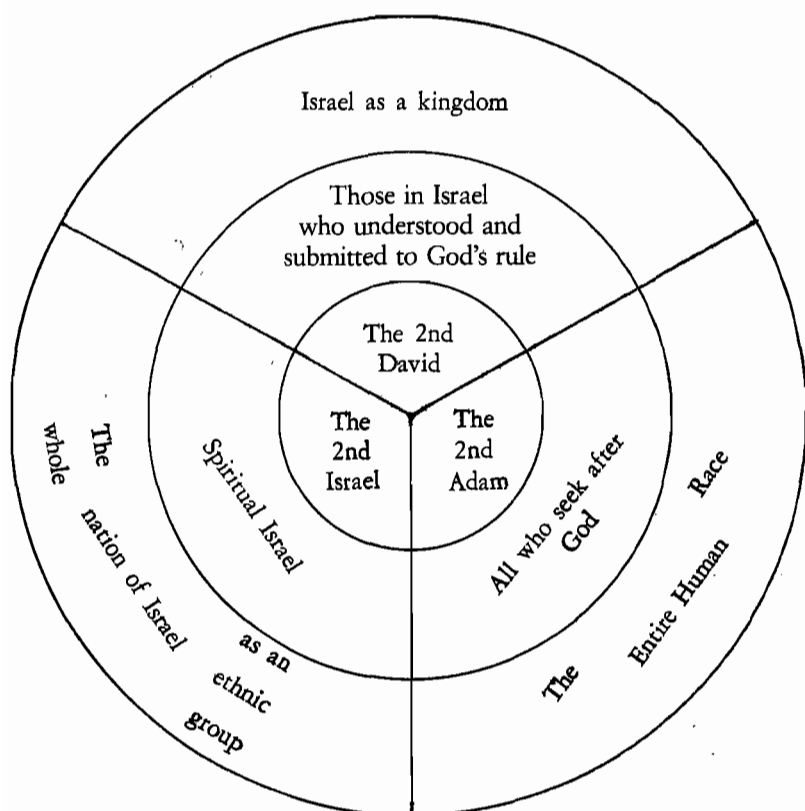
12:18 Behold my servant whom I have chosen. Delitzsch (*Isaiah*, II, 174) notes:

In 41:8 this epithet was applied to the nation, which had been chosen as the servant and for the service of Jehovah. But the servant of Jehovah who is presented to us here is distinct from Israel, and has so strong an individuality and such marked personal features, that the expression cannot

possibly be merely a personified collective. Nor can the prophet himself be intended; for what is affirmed of this servant of Jehovah goes infinitely beyond anything to which a prophet was ever called, or of which a man was ever capable. It must therefore be the future Christ. . . . Still there must be a connection between the national sense, in which the expression "servant of Jehovah" is used in 41:8, and the personal sense in which it is used here. The coming Savior is not depicted as the Son of David, as in ch. 7-12, and elsewhere, but appears as the embodied idea of Israel, i.e. as its truth and reality embodied in one person.

Study these diagrams suggested by Delitzsch, comparing also the notes on Mt. 2:15 (Vol. I, 72) and comments on Hosea 1:11 (Vol. I, 83).





As at the apex of the pyramid, so also at the center of the circle is Messiah who is the embodiment of all that Israel stood for, since it was God's purpose to unite EVERYTHING and bring everything to its full fruition in Him. (Cf. Eph. 1:3—2:22)

So, as Lenski (*Matthew*, 472) shows, if these diagrams represent significant OT truth, then even the LXX addition of the words "*Jacob my servant*," and "*Israel my chosen*" to this text is explicable, thus lending no support either to rabbinical or modern naturalistic exegesis that would deny Isaianic reference to the Christ.

Remember God's announcement using these words! (Mt. 3:17; cf. 17:5) Did the early Christians mean to call Jesus "the Servant of Jehovah" when they referred to Him as "the servant or child" (*ho pais*)? (cf. Ac. 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30) Nevertheless, it is significant

that this NT paraphrase of Isaiah's word chooses this word which admits a double meaning: *son* or *servant*, even though the Hebrew clearly said *audi*, "my servant, slave." In this gospel paraphrase is suggested that nice union of a servant's obedience and the preciousness of a son, both ideas being perfectly bound up in the person of Jesus. (Cf. Heb. 5:8; 10:7; Phil. 2:7, 8; Jn. 10:17)

2. HIS AUTHORITY AND TASK (12:18b)

I will put my Spirit upon him (*ep'autón*, cf. Mt. 3:16; Lk. 3:22; Jn. 1:32, 33) Thus, the literal fulfilment of this prophecy took place at His public anointing as God's Messiah. (See Notes on 3:16, 17, Vol. I, 117ff.; kindred prophecies: Isa. 11:1, 2; 61:1) From the point of view of Jews not yet capable of comprehending incarnation, this promise is essential to guarantee the unquestionably divine authority of the coming Prophet to do all that is here affirmed of Him. But this inspiration is not merely incarnation *per se*, because, besides Paul's telling us that Jesus divested Himself of equality with God to take upon Himself the form of a man, a servant (Phil. 2:5-11), Peter also asserts that the Lord went about doing what He did under the power of the Holy Spirit (Ac. 10:38). It is Jesus alone who "has the seven Spirits of God" (Rev. 3:1), the power of God without measure (Jn. 3:34). Jesus claimed to have this power of the Spirit (Lk. 4:18-21), and His whole life and ministry was that claim's highest demonstration.

And he shall declare judgment to the Gentiles. Judgment (*krisin* in Greek and *mishpât* in Hebrew), while signifying "the act of judging," "the result of judging," "justice, right, acquittal," or "righteousness (when seen as the sum total of one's judgments, his character)", derives its sense from the actual message that the Christ actually taught. For the Jewish parochialism, **judgment** meant that in the Kingdom of the Messiah the Gentiles would only be (1) completely annihilated, (2) merely punished and subjugated to the Jewish Messiah and His people; or (3) converted to Judaism. (Study the apocryphal apocalyptic literature of the intertestamental period to appreciate this.) But as we learn from the Gospel of the Messiah as it was ultimately proclaimed by Himself and His Apostles, the **judgment declared to the Gentiles** is of a far different character.

To the Gentiles: what a contrast to that Jewish exclusiveness that would keep Gentiles from ever getting real justice. By contrast, Isaiah had revealed that the Messiah alone is qualified by God's Spirit to deal out true justice to the pagan nations. (See below on 12:21 and Notes on 8:11, 12 and 10:18.) While it is possible to

take **Gentiles** in the pejorative sense (cf. Mt. 18:17; 5:46, 47 which link *ethnikós* and *telōnēs*, to mean "the most godless unbelievers," perhaps we see the fiery judgments of the Messiah to be poured out upon the wicked. This is not too likely, since later in this same paragraph Isaiah speaks of Messiah as being the hope of these same pagans. (Mt. 12:21; cf. also Ro. 15:8-12)

3. HIS METHOD (12:19)

12:19 **He shall not strive, nor cry aloud; neither shall any one hear his voice in the streets.** Strive (*erizo*, Arndt-Gingrich, 309: "quarrel, wrangle; cf. *éris*: strife, discord, contention") Like Master like servant. (2 Tim. 2:24) Delitzsch (*Isaiah*, II, 175) summarizes the Messiah's approach:

Although he is certain of His divine call, and brings to the nations the highest and best, His manner of appearing is nevertheless quiet, gentle and humble; the very opposite of those lying teachers, who endeavored to exalt themselves by noisy demonstrations. He does not seek His own, therefore denies Himself; He brings what commends itself, therefore requires no forced trumpeting.

How characteristic of Jesus' ministry that He got so much done without fanfare and rabble-rousing! His quiet success shames the many who seem to be doing a great deal (if we may judge from the noise they make), but yet produce so little, or even no results.

If we take seriously Jesus' fulfillment of this part of Isaiah's prophecy, the figure of "Jesus the Revolutionary" as an indiscriminate destroyer of the Establishment is unpardonably misrepresentative of His program, deeply ignorant of His real intentions and manifestly false. Violence, the pulse-beat of the Zealots and the Assassins, was to play no role on the Messianic stage, except as in the plan of God the Messiah Himself should have justice snatched violently from Him as He gave His life a ransom for many. (Ironically, even if we admit the exclusive application of this prophecy to the Jewish nation, those Zealots for nationalistic Judaism of every age, who plotted incendiary revolution, stand condemned by this their own Scripture. For, according to those rabbis who see no Messiah in these words of Isaiah, Israel must conquer by meekness, never by agitation and violence! What shall we say more of lightning war, heavy armaments and astute diplomacy rather than total dependence upon the leadership of the anointing Spirit?)

4. HIS GENTLENESS (12:20a)

12:20a **A bruised reed shall he not break, and a smoking flax shall he not quench.** **Bruised** (*sunetrimmenon*, Arndt-Gingrich, 801: "shatter, smash, crush, break," acquires the meaning of "bent" or "bruised" when used in reference to anything the strength and usefulness of which depends upon its being straight, as in our case a cane reed.) **Reed** (*kalamos*, Arndt-Gingrich, 399: "reed; stalk, staff; measuring rod; reed pen") In what character are we to see this symbolic **reed**?

1. As a simple *cane* growing wild along the riverbank? (Cf. Mt. 11:7; Lk. 7:24) If so, how would that attract the attention and interest of the Messiah? Is the emphasis here on the common people whose very commonness could normally be expected to lay no claim on the Messiah's attention, and yet He would really care?
2. As a *staff* with which one walks? It is not difficult to see that, once the fiber walls of the cane are bruised, crushed or broken, the staff becomes useless to the one who used it as his support while walking. Is there a sense in which God had been depending upon Israel, but who in the times of the Messiah would be practically useless to Him?
3. As a *measuring rod* (remember Rev. 11:1; 21:15f. in Greek)? Is the sense of this symbol to be based upon the normative character of Israel as the people of the Law of Jehovah, now not only badly broken but hideously distorting their witness to God before the world? This idea is roughly parallel to the **smoking flax** seen as a smoldering lamp.
4. As a *reed pen* (Cf. 3 Jn. 13; Ps. 44:2 LXX), the point of which has been crushed or, at least, bruised beyond the point where it can any longer be used as a writing instrument?

Perhaps the solution is not so much to be found in precisely determining which use of the word best describes the service to the owner, as in the recognition that the main feature of all uses is its instrumentality in his hands. Further, it is very likely that the **bruised reed** and the **smoking flax** will be parallel ideas. *Línon tufómenon* may be flax or linen or something made of them. Here the application is to a lamp-wick that is smoldering. (Arndt-Gingrich, 476) These metaphors vividly describe the unfortunate, down-trodden, suffering humanity in contrast to the proud, self-sufficient, self-serving great of earth who have no need of God. Ironically, it has always been the **bruised**

reeds, those who confess themselves no better than a **smoking flax** that have really turned to Jesus for help, confiding their trust in Him, leading them to admit their failure and seek His transforming power. Those who view themselves as the brilliant, the powerful, the wise, beautiful people have very little motive to come to Jesus for help. (See on Mt. 9:9-13)

Morgan's (*Matthew*, 128) insistence, that Jesus must be talking only about sinners who deserve judgment but from whom Jesus restrains immediate, inexorable justice or punishment, instead of referring to imperfect humanity in general, is pointless, since there is no fundamental difference between the two. Any admission of imperfection on our part is sufficient to damn us, since absolute perfection is the standard. (Mt. 5:48) This prophetic text promises that the Messiah will deal gently and mercifully with this inadequacy and failure of any man in whom the light of faith burns low and who is broken, unable to stand erect for whatever reason. As the King, Israel might have expected Him to dispense with or dispose of all that was imperfect in the land, leaving only a race of moral supermen surrounding Him. But not Jesus. His mercy will not hear to treading down anyone or trampling upon the slightest evidence of faith in any individual, however imperfectly he expresses it. This verse marks the moral chasm that separates Jesus Christ from the rest of us self-interested sinners. We are ready to leap on the bandwagon of the strong, the successful, the prosperous, whereas Jesus' attention was directed to the weak, the failures, the no-accounts. We are embarrassed by the presence of the relatively "unfit for our noble company," but it is by this very group that the Messiah's great heart was stirred to do something about their condition. (See on 9:35-38) And, greater still, He would not break even a **bruised Pharisee reed** nor **quench a smoking Sadducean wick!** He did not make use of the world-shaking power available to Him at His immediate call, in order to destroy the opposition. Even late in His ministry He was still trying to bring about that stupendous miracle of miracles: the conversion of Pharisees!

5. HIS RESULTS (12:20b)

At this point Matthew's quoting becomes considerably freer and more interpretative in light of the fulfillment which he desires to indicate. While he may leave out two lines of a whole verse and translate rather freely part of another, it will be seen that he has lost none of the essential meaning. Whereas Matthew has **unto victory** (*eis nikos*), Isaiah's Hebrew text had "in truth" (*le'emet*, translated

by LXX *eis alétheian*) Our Evangelist apparently made this change for very good reasons:

1. *Emeth*, or "truth" in Hebrew has several splendid nuances all of which enrich Isaiah's meaning: "Permanency, durability, firmness, stability, perpetuity, security; truth". (Cf. Gesenius, 63; Bagster, 19; Scerbo, 15) Any or all of these terms picture a Messiah whose zeal will not be extinguished, nor will anything break His strength, till He shall have succeeded in establishing justice so permanently, so truly that nothing else can disturb or hinder or change it. That, says Matthew, is nothing short of total **victory**! (Contrast Hab. 1:4; Isa. 59:9-14; 5:7)
2. Another of Matthew's reasons may have been that the first part of Isa. 42:4 contains a Hebrew word-play, which, while translatable into Greek, can also be summarized simply by the word **victory**.
 - a. The Hebrew puns have obvious relation to what was earlier affirmed of the Messiah: "He will not burn dimly nor be bruised," which means: "He will succeed."
 - b. Another evidence that Matthew is simply telescoping Isaiah's two verses (42:3b, 4) into one is the fact that he begins his citation of 42:3b (or Mt. 12:20b) with **till** (*béōs an*) whereas Isaiah had no conjunction whatever and the LXX inserts "but" (*alla*). The word **till** obviously comes from Isa. 42:4b where it introduces a clause similar in meaning to Isa. 42:3, and correctly summarizes the meaning of the intervening material.
3. Matthew's free quoting of the Hebrew text should pose no obstacle, since as Edersheim (*Life*, I, 206) has pointed out, the common practice of the day was to give an interpretative quotation. The distinct difference between Matthew and the rabbis, of course, consists in the divine authority which he brings to these interpretations by virtue of his own inspiration as Christ's Apostle.
4. In the ultimate analysis, what is the difference between *truth* as a concept, and **victory**, meaning "success" or "results"? If apprehension of reality be the only truly functional view of the universe, then only what recognizes that truth, or reality, can succeed. The ultimate pragmatism can be based only upon ultimate truth. Temporary victories based upon limited reality can never claim finality, for only total truth, or com-

plete reality, can prevail, because this is just the way things really are. Or, to put it another way, only that can succeed which abides by God's rules.

Unto victory, applied to the Messiah's work in context with the murderous hate of the Pharisees, tolls the death knell for every form of opposition that dares rear its head against God's Anointed Servant!

6. HIS UNIVERSALITY (12:21)

12:21 **And in his name shall the Gentiles hope.** Comparison with Isaiah's original reveals that Matthew has omitted the first two lines of Isa. 42:4: "He will not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set justice in the earth." As suggested above, he probably intended to synthesize the meaning of the two verses into one, thus shortening the quotation without losing any of its essential meaning. Isaiah had also written: "And the isles shall wait for his law," (Isa. 42:4c), whereas the LXX translates, with only one minor variant, exactly as Matthew has it: "And upon his name shall the Gentiles hope." What was the link that the LXX translators and Matthew see between the Messiah's "law" and His "name"?

1. The Messiah's Torah (his *law*) is the revelation He brings to the nations.
2. His **name** is not merely some personal name, but, as in the case with the various names of God, is a special term expressing some grand revelation about Himself. The **name** suggests all that the Messiah will be. Consequently, the Gentiles will find hope in all that His name reveals about His office, His doctrine, His standards, etc.

Gentiles: see also Isa. 42:6, 7 where the description continues of Messiah's personality and work for "the people" and "the nations." The complete fulfilment of this prophecy regarding a ministry to the Gentiles was not realized until some time after Jesus' earthly ministry was terminated by His ascension. Nevertheless, as explained at Mt. 10, the work of the Apostles, and of the Church born of their preaching, is simply the extension of the ministry of Christ in the world, especially among the **Gentiles**. But Jesus was not insensitive to the problems or faith of pagans even during His earthly work. Matthew has already touched very gently upon the Messiah's universality that ignores racial barriers. Besides inserting the names of at least three **Gentiles** into Jesus' genealogy, he recorded the visit of the presumably Gentile Magi (2:1-12), documented Jesus' interest in "Galilee of the Gentiles"

(4:12-17), examined His cure of the Roman centurion's slave (8:5-13) and described the disciples' later witness as to be "before Gentiles" (10:18). Is there any hint, however, that among the crowds that assembled around Jesus from Idumea, beyond the Jordan, Tyre, Sidon and Syria, were any Gentiles present in significant numbers? (Cf. Mt. 4:24, 25; Mk. 3:7)

In his name shall the Gentiles hope. Is this to be construed as evidence of a world-wide expectation, anticipating the coming of Christ to the Gentile world? Does Isaiah mean to suggest that the pagans would long for the birth of Jesus?

1. Taken subjectively, probably not, since many turned their backs upon Him when He did appear, and many flatly rejected the Gospel of a crucified Savior preached by His emissaries. (1 Co. 1:18ff.) The world would certainly be longing for something or someone who could fill the vast moral void and bring light to the intellectual darkness of their hopeless existence. That is, having scoured the earth for answers to their deepest problems, the Gentiles would collapse in hopelessness because of the apparent futility of living even another day. Yet, because they do manage to suffer another day, they sense the blind hope arising in them that there must be some sense to life, despite all the madness that surrounds them. But where is it to be found? It is into this spiritual vacuum and desperation that Messiah will come with answers, life and joy, direction and spiritual power.
2. Objectively, whether the pagans realized it or not, or whether the Jews wanted it or not, Christ was to be the hope of the world!

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Why did Jesus retreat before those who began to declare themselves openly as His enemies?
2. Show how Jesus' ministry was a complete fulfilment of the prophecy cited in this section. Identify the prophecy and show its meaning.
3. Explain how Jesus' ministry fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah would bless the Gentiles, even though, as a group, there were few Gentiles who ever really were contacted by Him personally. List all the specific incidents in which Jesus deliberately and personally helped Gentiles. Then list all the hints and overtones that indicate Jesus' interest in the salvation of the Gentiles, as well as the Jews.

4. Tell the meaning of the description of the Messiah: "He shall not strive nor cry aloud; Neither shall any one hear his voice in the streets." How was this fulfilled in the way Jesus carried on His work? Did Jesus ever defend Himself by exerting His supernatural strength?
5. Explain the beautiful picture of Jesus, expressed under the figure of someone who would not "break a bruised reed nor quench a smoking flax." Who or what is represented by the reed and the flax?
6. What tactic did Jesus use when near the Sea of Galilee, in order to make possible better crowd control when they crowded Him too closely?
7. Where did all the people come from? Of what significance is this fact in showing how Jesus began more fully to fulfil the prophecy of the Messiah's ministry to Gentiles?
8. Trace in outline form the larger fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy through the Christ's ministry to the Gentiles by means of the Church's evangelistic efforts after Pentecost.

Section 28

JESUS ANSWERS THE CHARGE OF BEING IN LEAGUE WITH SATAN

(Parallel: Mark 3:19-30)

TEXT: 12:22-37

22. Then was brought unto him one possessed with a demon, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the dumb man spake and saw.
23. And all the multitudes were amazed, and said, Can this be the son of David?
24. But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of the demons.
25. And knowing their thoughts he said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:
26. And if Satan casteth out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?
27. And if I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges.

28. But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you.
29. Or how can one enter into the house of the strong *man*, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.
30. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.
31. Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.
32. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come.
33. Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit.
34. Ye offspring of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.
35. The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things: and the evil man out of his evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.
36. And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.
37. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. How can one's friends and family be a more treacherous hindrance to one's work and the accomplishment of one's mission, than any number of outsiders who attack openly from without? See Mark's parallel text.
- b. Do you think that Jesus' *friends* or His *family* tried to hinder His busy ministry by attempting to seize Him? On what basis do you decide this?
- c. Why would the crowds begin to remark that Jesus "could not be the Son of David, could He?" when they knew His name to be Jesus? What are they suggesting in this negative way?
- d. The Pharisees were no fools, even though badly mistaken about Jesus. How could they charge with any plausibility at all that "this man does not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of the demons"? What is the unstated premise behind this asser-

tion, a premise more or less acceptable to their audience, which rendered logically unobjectionable their conclusion?

- e. Explain the opposite of the common proverb: "Seeing is believing." These Pharisees actually saw Jesus cast the demon from the blind, dumb demoniac and yet did not believe Him. They saw but did not believe. Why? What kind of mental block does it require to reject the meaning of what the senses undoubtedly see?
- f. Is it ever necessary to use logical arguments to deal with the false beliefs of others? Following good Bible examples some believe that to quote a passage of Scripture is all that is required to correct the false or inadequate arguments of others. How does Jesus' method in this section broaden our view on this question?
- g. Why would Jesus' family and friends think that He was going crazy? Does not this fact, that the people closest to Jesus suspected His mental sanity, disturb you? We have argued before that Jesus must either be a gross imposter, insane or else precisely what He claimed to be. How does this evidence from the personal observations of those closest to Jesus affect our understanding of His nature and claims?
- h. Do you believe that demons inhabit the world today? If so, where? If not, why not? Can you explain the apparent phenomenon that demons do not show the same character as during the lifetime of Jesus? Was that merely a wonder "strictly limited to that credulous age," as some hold, or have demons changed their tactics to accommodate to the age?
- i. What is your opinion: could Satan and/or demons make more progress in our materialistic age by pretending not to exist, while continuing their demonic activity in the souls of men? Beware of labelling every thing you do not like "demonic activity," but, with this caution in mind, do you see any evidences of demonic activity in our age? If so, what Biblical passages lead you to conclude that demons are really at work in what you see? If not, what Scripture leads you to conclude that no demons are at work?
- j. Supposing that modern-day miracles, regardless of the religious tenets of the one performing them, are actual, verifiable facts, what safeguards do we have that protect us from either (1) attributing miracles done by God's power to Satan's agency, thus blaspheming in one way the Holy Spirit, or else (2) being ourselves deceived by demons, hence led off into damning heresy? Should we disregard the religious tenets of the one performing the true, verifiable miracle? What should we do if his ministry

glorifies Jesus, leading men to true conversion in harmony with the already revealed will of Christ in the New Testament? What other Bible passages bear on this subject?

- k. If the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all deity, as the Bible teaches, how can it be that sin against the Father and Son would be forgiven, but not sin committed against the Holy Spirit? What, in the nature of the work of each, helps us to answer this?
- l. So many people have difficulty understanding the meaning of the expression "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit." Do you believe that this sin is serious? Do you believe that such a sin would be so involved and so difficult to understand that not only would most people commit it without ever knowing it, but also that most Christians would not be able to protect themselves against it, due to its mysterious, hidden nature? If so, then what has God's mercy provided as an escape or an antidote against it? If not, then the sin against the Holy Spirit must be something very fundamental and necessarily obvious by nature, and something which involves the daily thought and practice of everyone. What, then, do you conclude to be "blasphemy, or the sin, against the Holy Spirit"?
- m. There exist in our *vocabulary* words that have lost their meaning. However, are there any words in our *speech* that are entirely devoid of meaning, words about which we can say, "But I did not mean anything by what I said"? Are there any words that do not count, words for which God will not hold us accountable?
- n. Why are a man's words so good an index of his character?
- o. If a person thinks he has committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and is deeply disturbed about it, has he, in fact, sinned against the Holy Spirit? How do you know? What should be done about (or for) such a person? Can we tell when a person has committed this sin?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then Jesus returned home to Capernaum. But no sooner had He arrived than a large crowd of people assembled, leaving Jesus and His disciples no time nor opportunity to eat. When His relatives heard how much pressure under which He was working, they came to take Him away by force to save Him from Himself, because they were saying, "He is going crazy!"

Just then a blind, dumb demoniac was brought to Jesus. He healed him, casting out the demon. The result was that the dumb

man could both speak and see. All the by-standers, amazed by what they saw, kept remarking, "Jesus could not be the Messiah, could He? . . ."

But when the Pharisees and theologians, who had made a special trip down from Jerusalem, heard that kind of talk, they growled, "He Himself is possessed by Satan! It is only by special secret agreement with the king of evil spirits, that this guy drives out the demons!"

Knowing⁸¹ what was in their minds, Jesus deliberately called them to Him and said in proverbial form: "Tell me, how CAN Satan drive out Satan? A kingdom torn by civil war is easily destroyed. No divided kingdom can last for long. A city or home filled with division and strife soon destroys itself. So, if Satan rebels against himself, i.e. if Satan casts out Satan, as you say, then he is fighting himself! How long can this rule last? If you are right, then he is destroying himself! And that's the end of him! Stop complaining and rejoice!

"Further, if I drive demons out by invoking the devil's powers, as you argue, by what secret agreement do your own people drive them out? If this is your argument, then they themselves will decide whether you are being fair with me or not.

"On the other hand, if my secret power is really God's Spirit that is destroying the power of Satan's might, then you may be certain that God's Kingdom and God's rule has just come to earth. It is in your midst and you fail to see it!

"Or to put it another way: how could anyone break into the house of a strong man like Satan and rob him of his victims, unless he first tie him up? He cannot. But if Satan were bound and gagged, then a person like me could ransack his house and free as many demonized victims as he pleased.

"Do not forget that anyone who is not on my side is automatically against me! Anyone who does not help me, hinders. Satan fights me; not for me!

"So I can tell you for sure that God can forgive people for any sin and slander, yes, whatever blasphemy they utter. But to slander God's Spirit is to go beyond the point where God cannot forgive you. Even someone who says something against me, Jesus, can be forgiven. But the man who speaks against or slanders the Spirit will not be forgiven—never—either in this world or in the world to come. That man is guilty of eternal sin".

(Jesus said this because they were saying, "He is possessed by an unclean spirit," instead of recognizing His work as that of the Holy Spirit.)

Jesus went on, "Choose: if you see that a tree's fruit is good, you know that it is a tree of quality. If you see that a tree's fruit is bad, then you must admit that the tree is bad too. You can tell what kind of tree it is, by the fruit it produces. You sons of snakes! How can what you say be good, when you are yourselves evil? Whatever is really in your heart will find expression in your talk; it must come out! That with which you have filled your life is betrayed by your talk. A man that is really good at heart talks like it, and conversely, an evil man cannot help but reveal the evil that is in him. It will come out in what he says. I can tell you this: men will stand accountable on judgment day for every thoughtless word they have ever said! Do you realize that you could go to hell or be eternally saved just on the basis of what you once said here on earth?"

SUMMARY

Jesus' family and friends tried to interfere with His ministry. Since He drove Himself so hard, people thought Him to be going mad. Jesus cast the demon from a blind and dumb man. Excited crowds began to attribute Jesus' power to that which would animate the Messiah. The religious leaders tried to stifle Jesus' influence with the people by charging His stupendous feats to being in league with Satan. Jesus' brilliant rebuttal was:

1. Satan is fighting himself? Rejoice, he will not last long that way!
2. You do not molest those Jews among you that purportedly cast out demons, why bother me?
3. Reasonable alternative: God's Spirit empowers me.
4. To overcome Satan, one must actually be mightier than Satan.
5. Neutrality is impossible: either between Satan and me or between you theologians and me.
6. Beware of slandering God's Spirit.

No talk is cheap, since for good or ill, talk reveals the real content of a man's life. There are no words that do not count.

NOTES

A. SITUATION

1. THE HEALING OF A BLIND, DUMB DEMONIAK RESULTED IN THE CROWD'S ASKING IF JESUS BE THE MESSIAH. (12:22, 23)

12:22 Then was brought to him one possessed with a demon, blind and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that

the dumb man spake and saw. (Cf. Mt. 9:32-34 and the Notes thereon. For a fuller defense of the accounts of demon-possession and of the reality of demons, see Notes on 8:28—9:1 and on 10:8. It should be evident that no part of the following conversation can have any sense, unless both the Lord and His critics are actually correct in their assuming that (1) demons have objectively real existence and are known to inhabit human beings, and that (2) Jesus literally expelled them with a word. Whatever case may be made for the Pharisees' superstitious ignorance of the true explanation behind the observable phenomena, one cannot deny that they had no doubts about the certainty of their occurrence, nor about the fact that He had really cast the demon out.

Is this the same event as recorded in Luke 11:14, 15, 17-23? That it may not be the same event repeated from Mt. 9:32 is evidenced by the fact that the former demoniac was dumb (*kōfos*), whereas this man is both blind and dumb (*tuflós kai kōfos*), although it is possible that Matthew has included the fuller discussion here, since it might have been inappropriate at that earlier place. Here he can expand upon Jesus' answers to the Pharisees' libellous charges, whereas had he included this material in chapter 9 the organization of what we may suppose to be his outline would have been clumsy. (See Notes on Matthew's organization of his materials, especially on 4:23-25; 9:35-38.) If this is what really happened, the fact of the demoniac's blindness may not have been important enough to mention. And due to the topical character of Matthew's narrative, it may be that he has included here, for special reasons, the narrative recorded by Luke (11:14-23) in its proper chronological setting.

12:23 And all the multitudes were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" (Cf. similar popular reactions to Jesus' miracles: Mt. 9:32-34; Mk. 1:27; Mt. 9:8; Lk. 7:16; Mt. 8:27, 34; 13:54, 57) The trend of these passages indicates that, although there were undoubtedly many individual reactions that parroted the snarl of the Pharisees or else ended merely in a curiosity satisfied about supernatural phenomena, nevertheless the consistent impression made by Jesus' mighty works was that God was doing them. People sensed that God had come near to His people. But more than this, they began to draw nearer to the conclusion to which Jesus had so skillfully led them. "Could this be the Messiah?" (Cf. Jn. 10:37, 38) And the effect continued. (Jn. 6:14; Mk. 7:37; Mt. 15:31; Lk. 9:43; 13:17; 18:43) **The Son of David**=Messiah, the Christ. (Cf. Mt. 9:27; 15:22; 20:30) **Can this be?** This is a surprisingly emphatic

demonstrative pronoun: **this** man of all people who does not look nor act like the Messiah we expect, can HE be the Messiah? **Can this be?** (*μήτι βοήτος εστίν*) is a question asked in Greek as if a negative answer were expected ("This could not be the Messiah, could it?"), but because of the circumstances in which it is offered, one can almost feel the half-joyful, half-fearful tension in those who dared voice it in the presence of those great theological experts, the Pharisees. (Cf. Jn. 7:31) This hesitation born of perplexity is certainly justified by their long experiences with the rabbis and by the retort growled by those theologians just as soon as this wavering question is voiced.

Worse still, their timid question is accompanied by no recorded challenge to the blasphemous dogmatic assertion of the Pharisees that Jesus' miracles were but the result of satanic collusion. In Jerusalem others had defended the Lord when essentially the same accusation was levelled at Him (Jn. 10:21), yet here in Galilee no one said a mumbling word of defense (so far as the record goes). Farrar (*Life*, 346f.) suggests two chief reasons for this:

1. Despite the merciful expressions that convinced them of His real concern for them, they intuitively sense that in His presence they stood on that twilight zone between the earthly, workaday world and the real, unseen world of spirits. Until they are personally convinced that the Spirit He represents is God's and not Satan's, the awesomeness of His personal powers could be interpreted either way, even though the weight of the evidence had been totally on the side of God.
2. Those reverend inquisitors from headquarters commanded such an extraordinary sway over these simple Galileans that it left them the more easy dupes of this haughty and dogmatic, however false, calumny. But while none dared stand and raise his voice against that hideous blasphemy, Jesus needed no human backing to shatter it to smithereens!

2. JEALOUS PHARISEES COUNTERATTACK, ASSERTING JESUS' WORKS DONE BY DEVIL'S POWER (12:24)

12:24 **But when the Pharisees heard it.** Mark (3:22) calls them "scribes from Jerusalem," so the pressure is on. (Cf. Mt. 15:1=Mk. 7:1) Judging from their pontifical attitude, they are an official investigating committee sent out to examine the claims of any popular leader. (Cf. Jn. 1:19)

But when the Pharisees heard what the crowds were beginning to say, they knew that this young Rabbi's popular movement was getting out of hand and that He must be stopped immediately,

publicly and finally. But how? Grasping for straws and without a moment's reflection, they spat out their abuse: **"This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of demons."** Later, disenchanted people jeer similar abuse. (Jn. 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20) Had they reflected upon the logical implications of this statement, they might have sought something a bit more substantial, since the Lord easily mows down their argument. Did the Pharisees themselves believe this calumny? Two views are offered:

1. It was a clever, desperate lie and they knew it to be false when they said it.
2. They were psychologically and ethically incapable of discerning where truth lay: they mistook good for evil, God for the devil.

Beelzebub (cf. Mk. 3:22: "He has Beelzebub in him!" and Mk. 3:30: "He has an unclean spirit." Cf. Mt. 10:25) The charges are two: (1) that He is Himself demon-possessed, and (2) that He performs miracles in collaboration with the demon prince. The first charge is an attack on His sanity; since "he has a demon" is not intended to affirm actual demon-possession, but is the affirmation that the person so labelled acts as if he were, hence, must be dismissed as mad. (Cf. Mt. 11:18; Jn. 7:20; 8:48, 49, 52; 10:20) This does not mean, however, that the Jews mistook mere insanity for demon-possession. Rather, on the contrary, their harsh experiences with demon-possession gave them a terribly cutting metaphor to hurl at anyone they wished to put down or put away as insane. Whether or not the Pharisees sincerely thought Jesus to be the walking embodiment of Satan when they snarled "He has Beelzebub," is not the point, for it is an old trick to turn public opinion away from a would-be leader by asserting his insanity. The second charge, and by far the more serious, is that of a secret pact with Satan. And that it is with Satan and no lesser demon that they charge His allegiance and alliance, is amply proved by Jesus' answers in which He shifts easily from *Beelzebub* to Satan without any conscious change of subject. (See on 12:26, 27)

Note carefully the Pharisees' wording: "This man does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebub . . ." Let it be noted with A. B. Bruce (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, ad loc.) that the various opinions offered to explain Jesus (that He was mad, that He was the Messiah or in league with Satan, even Herod's view that He was John the Baptist risen from the dead) merely prove the reality of Jesus' ministry of miracles. None doubted the reality of His works, even though they chose to place a different construction on them. How these scribes would gladly have cried, "He casts out no demons whatsoever!"

But the undeniable nature of the facts drove them to concoct a hypothesis that would attempt to undermine the importance of the fact.

But beyond their obvious professional jealousy, what is the rationale behind this slander which makes it even half palatable to men who by virtue of their training and position were no fools?

1. The logical rationale may be stated thus: "The prince of demons obliges Jesus by recalling the demons from their victims whenever Jesus wishes it." What they are saying is not at all impossible, since Satan can empower human servants to work miracles. (2 Th. 2:9, 10; Mt. 24:24) McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 107) thinks that

The assertion, if believed by the people, would not only have destroyed their confidence in the divine mission of Jesus, but it would have established in the place of it the injurious supposition of a league with Satan. It derived great plausibility from the consideration, that as there were at least two powers by which demons might be cast out, and as both were invisible, it might appear impossible to decide whether it was the power of God or the power of Satan. The Pharisees thought that they had advanced an explanation which, whether true or false, Jesus could not clearly disprove . . .

2. The moral rationale is best stated by Edersheim (*Life*, I, 574)

It could no longer be denied that miracles were wrought by Jesus. At least, what to *us* seem miracles, yet not to *them*, since "miraculous" cures and the expelling of demons lay within the sphere of their "extraordinary ordinary"—were not miracles in our sense, since they were, or professed to be, done by their "own children." The mere fact, therefore, of such cures would present no difficulty to them. To *us* a single well-ascertained miracle would form irrefragable evidence of the claims of Christ; to *them* it would not. They could believe in the "miracles," yet not in the Christ. To them the question would not be, as to us, whether they were miracles—but, By what power, or in what Name, He did these deeds? From our standpoint, their opposition to the Christ would—in view of His miracles—seem not only wicked, but rationally inexplicable. But ours was not

their point of view. And here again, we perceive that it was enmity to the *Person* and *Teaching* of Jesus which led to the denial of His claims. The inquiry: By what Power Jesus did these works? they met by the assertion, that it was through that of Satan, or the Chief of the Demons. . . . All this, because the Kingdom which He came to open and which He preached, was precisely the opposite of what they regarded as the Kingdom of God. Thus it was the essential contrariety of Rabbinism to the Gospel of the Christ that lay at the foundation of their conduct towards the Person of Christ. We venture to assert that this accounts for the whole after-history up to the Cross. Thus viewed, the history of the Pharisaic opposition appears not only consistent, but is, so to speak, morally accounted for . . . their deeds being evil. Once arrived at the conclusion, that the miracles which Christ did were due to the power of Satan, and that He was the representative of the Evil One, their course was rationally and morally chosen. To regard every fresh manifestation of Christ's power as only a fuller development of the power of Satan, and to oppose it with increasing determination and hostility, even to the Cross: such was henceforth the natural progress of this history.

B. JESUS' BASIC REBUTTAL (12:25-37)

1. SATAN IS DIVIDED AGAINST HIMSELF: GOOD! (12:25, 26)

Study Jesus' procedure in making this answer:

1. He surrounded Himself deliberately with Pharisees, in order to deal with their slander to their face. (Mk. 3:23)
2. He runs together three well-known and easily admitted illustrations of internal dissention producing weakness and precipitating a fatal crisis: divided kingdoms, cities and homes.
3. He drives home the application to Satan's case.

12:25 And knowing their thoughts he said unto them (Cf. Mt. 9:4; Mk. 2:8; Lk. 6:8; 9:47) He discerns not merely what they had said, for it would require little of anyone to overhear the words murmured by the scribes for the ears of everyone who might be swayed by the dangerous opinion that Jesus of Nazareth might

somehow be the Messiah. He read their **thoughts** (*enthumēseis*), those secret deliberations of their minds that motivated their words.

Did the Pharisees' really believe that Satan could be so stupid as to combat his own best interests by aiding Jesus to destroy his own influence exercised in and through the demons? Or was this not rather just an error in their thinking that they committed without really being committed to the necessary conclusion to which their assertions must lead? He who is grasping desperately for proof in an uneven debate does not often have time to assess the absurd ramifications that a certain position must take. However, it is true that "evil is the ultimate folly," and, in the long view, Satan is the biggest fool, because he has rejected the wisdom and reality of God's moral government of the universe. Thus, once admitted the conclusion that Jesus is not of God, a position held by these scribes, it was an easy step to conclude that the usually very crafty Satan could perhaps have been napping intellectually when he empowers Jesus to destroy the hold of his own demons. Or, perhaps they thought that he could deceive people by seeming to perform in God's name miracles that were actually Satan's doing. And if "evil be the ultimate folly," who can say that the Pharisees themselves, because of the arrogant tenacity with which they adhered to their false notions, and by which they pursued their evil course, could actually reason correctly? Even if their reasoning is correct, they were wrong, since Jesus' helping God by bringing internal dissension to Satan's ranks, really meant the victory of God's Kingdom anyway.

Jesus' argument which reveals the foolishness involved in their suggestion:

Major premise: Any organization, divided against itself, will fall.

Minor premise: Satan is divided against himself.

Conclusion: Therefore, his organization will fall.

Rather than make His conclusion explicit by stating it, Jesus frames it into a question which neither the Pharisees or anyone else were qualified to answer: **How then shall his kingdom stand?** How indeed? This leads us to see that Jesus puts beyond doubt the fact that Satan cannot afford such luxuries as the internal strife which the Pharisees unwittingly attribute to him by their bad logic. Satan could not tactically tolerate nor practically permit the casting out of his minions, for, either way, he loses. If he permits or empowers Jesus to exorcize demons, he loses control over the victims, and Jesus gains a popular pulpit from which to trumpet His message of the near

arrival of God's Kingdom. The constant and vigorous proclamation of God's rule on earth would be a strange platform indeed from which to mount an insidious, diabolical counteroffensive against God!

None can deny the real, inner discord that reigns in Satan's kingdom, but this, of course, cannot refer to a complete break or a total self-annihilation through civil war among the demons. While each part of Satan's realm is really mutually contradictory and contrary to every other part, yet, in relation to God's Kingdom, the powers of darkness are united and solidly against God's rule. It is upon this fundamental, unified antagonism to God's reign on the part of all of Satan's servants, that Jesus founds His argument.

No passage could more clearly teach that the reign of evil in the universe has a personal, malevolent chief who functions as a polarizing force that unites every other force into its common rebellion against the rule of God. But this text heralds also the final defeat of that dark ruler. Here in a few words is the final rebuttal to that dualism that insists that there are two equally powerful forces in the universe, one infinitely good, the other infinitely evil, that decide the fates of man. Jesus' insistence upon the impossibility of stability amidst internal strife applies with equal force to God's Kingdom too: if God fights the god of this world as an equal, the strife could conceivably wreck the universe. But God recognizes no equals, much less Satan! (Cf. Isa. 42:8; 43:10-13; 44:6, 8; 45:18, 21-23; 46:9)

2. WHAT ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS WHO EXORCIZE DEMONS?

(12:27)

12:27 **And if I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore shall they be your judges.** **Your sons** is not likely the physical offspring of the Pharisees, but rather refers to someone of whom the Pharisees could say no evil and whom they publicly approved as experts in demon-exorcism. **Sons**, taken Hebraistically, suggests that they were their disciples. Is this an obscure reference to exorcists similar to those described by Luke (Acts 19:13, 14) and by Josephus (*Antiquities*, VIII, 2, 5; *Wars*, VII, 6, 3)? Two views have been entertained concerning the activity of these **sons** of the Pharisees:

1. They really exorcized demons by God's power.
 - a. Lenski (*Matthew*, 478) uncovers the force of Jesus' argument:

The fact that Satan neither could nor would lend himself to such expulsions, v. 25, 26 have put beyond

question. Whoever drives out devils can do so only in the necessary connection with God. What a desperate self-contradiction, therefore, to claim that when Jesus drives out devils, this is done in connection with *Satan*; but when their own experts drive them out, this is done in connection with God! Something is viciously wrong with men who ascribe the identical effect to absolutely opposite causes.

- b. In favor of this view is the present indicative verb "(they) are casting out" (*ekballousin*). (Or is this a gnomic present, i.e. one which speaks only of what is thought to happen in general, without deciding whether the action involved is real or not?) It must not be argued, however, that such a concession on the part of Jesus would somehow invalidate the uniqueness of Jesus' miracles, simply because He acknowledged the exorcism of demons by Jewish exorcists, any more than that the Exodus narrative justifies Egyptian magic in competition with the genuine miracles of Moses, merely because Exodus records these feats of magic. (Cf. Ex. 7:8—8:18)
 - c. And if they really exorcized spirits by God's power, then the same explanations that described their activity could well be true of Him as well. (That those exorcists might have actually worked miracles by God's power may be suggested by the realization that God could easily have done so in order to give merciful relief to the suffering victims, despite the inadequacy of the understanding of the Jewish exorcist whose prayers and incantations were mistakenly thought to be the effective cause. This, because God has never promised to limit His goodness to "the righteous," and His Son clearly proved God's concern for the desperately mistaken. (Mt. 5:44, 45; Lk. 6:35, 36)
 - d. So, for these reasons, these Pharisean experts who labored to exorcize demons by the exercise of divine power would be in a position to convict their own teachers of injustice.
2. These exorcists only appear to exorcize demons, but they really did what they did either by use of human psychology or by use of Satan's means and power. This becomes an argument by concession: "Granted for sake of argument that your students actually exorcize demons . . ."

- a. It may be that these experimental practitioners among the Pharisees worked in much the same manner in which the exorcists, mentioned by Luke and Josephus, expelled demons, i.e. by magical formulas or incantations, the use of talismans and perhaps direct witchcraft. (See *ISBE*, 1067b; cf. Tobias 6:1—8:3)
 - b. If this is the case, then Jesus would be arguing, "Would you dare assert that your experts cast out demons using the indubitable methods of the living God and not rather the methods suggested by clever men trying to do this without God's help? Those experts, against which you can say no wrong, are using methods other than the unquestionable power of God. And since you affirm that these actually exercise a spiritual power upon the demons, and since you know that there are only two such powers, and since you cannot attribute their activities to that of God, you must admit that their methods and power is of Satan! What objection can you possibly make to MY doing so (for you say I use Satan's power), when those whom you approve do the same? They will unmask the injustice of your accusations, for by blaming me, you blame them too!"
 - c. This view of the question has the weakness of not really advancing Jesus' cause by producing another objective argument, since this view tends merely to see a tension created by Jesus between the Pharisees and their own disciples.
 - d. Further, our ignorance of the actual methods or success of these Pharisean exorcists does not permit us to dogmatize on their connections either with God or Satan.
3. Either way, Jesus had them trapped:
- a. "If by your own definitions Satan empowers your disciples, they will condemn you, for they would never willingly attribute their pretended success to his power. And yet they cannot, as do I, cast out demons by the simple exercise of a single word of authority, or they would be noted for their miracles as am I."
 - b. "If God, by your calculation, empowers your disciples, then you must prove that they have some better claim to God's help than do I. Since they dare not pretend so much, else

they would come forward to challenge my labors, they shall decide whether my work is God's or demonic."

3. REASONABLE ALTERNATIVE: GOD'S SPIRIT EMPOWERS ME. (12:28)

12:28 But if I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the kingdom of God come upon you. Luke has "finger of God" (Lk. 11:20; cf. Ex. 8:19; Dt. 9:10) Here in the protasis we have an implicit explanation of His mysterious power: **I cast out demons by the Spirit of God.** This is the reason why Jesus sounds the dreadful alarm (12:32) against blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. While it will be seen that the attribution of Jesus' miracles to Satanic influence is not the only way to blaspheme the Spirit, it is certain that the rejection of Jesus' alternative reflects a distorted bent of mind that would drive a man sooner or later to reject whatever evidence God offers him through the Spirit whether before or after Pentecost.

Implicit in this alternative is the dilemma universally recognized by the Pharisees: "Either He expels demons by God's power or by collusion with Satan." Jesus had just eliminated the second alternative as logically absurd. (12:25-27) The critics are left with the only other possible alternate explanation: "The Spirit employed by Jesus cannot be that malignant demon but must be God's." And, if so, the divine authority of everything He was saying was thereby vindicated, especially what He had so insistently preached about the near approach of God's Kingdom.

Then is the kingdom of God come upon you. This is not merely an interesting, academic alternative: it is a direct, ominous warning that they have just been confronted with the presence and power of the rule of God Himself! And, since they had deliberately and maliciously attacked Him Who in the human form represented that God they profess to serve, they were caught in open rebellion against the King of heaven and earth. Because in their view the coming of the Kingdom of God and the arrival of the Messiah must occur simultaneously, there is also implied in this statement the reality that Jesus Himself is the Messiah and King of the Kingdom which they had so grossly insulted. But these Pharisees, blinded by their own views as to what the coming Messianic Kingdom must be, could not recognize in the ministry of Jesus the obvious signs of its beginning. (Cf. Lk. 17:20, 21 where they were still asking for a time schedule, since they could not visualize anything so inward, so spiritual as the rule of God by means of a spiritual government right

in their midst.) These theological doctors could only rock back on their heels with tongue in cheek and raised eyebrows, smirking, "What kind of a kingdom do you think YOU represent? certainly not the great messianic reign that WE anticipate!"

Then is the kingdom . . . come upon you. (*phthano*, Arndt-Gingrich, 864: "(1) come before, precede; (2) be just arrived, then simply, arrive, come; (3) come up to, attain to." The Lord is not here discussing the (then) future appearance of God's reign in and through the Church, which was the object of much of His preaching. Instead, He refers to the even then tangible evidences that fairly shouted for all to hear that God was taking over from Satan! Satan is being bound even now! Instead of complaining about Jesus' successes, these very Pharisees should have led the whole Jewish nation in festal rejoicing in their glorious good fortune to be able to live to see the very realization of all that their religion had prepared them for.

4. TO OVERPOWER SATAN, ONE MUST BE STRONGER THAN HE. (12:29)

12:29 This simple, clear illustration is easily visualized by anyone who knows what it would require to plunder the house of the strong. Jesus intended to do two things regarding Satan:

1. Bind the strong man

- a. By His perfect submission to the will of the Father, Jesus had been tying Satan's hands ever since the beginning of His ministry. (Mt. 4:1-11) Since Jesus refused to indulge Himself along the lines suggested by Satan, the tempter found himself completely helpless, because the devil could not force Jesus to sin. By staying well within the will of God for man, Jesus was perfectly protected by the power of God that obliged Satan to respect those limits.
- b. But in this context, Jesus' argument assumes the fact that Satan has already been defeated, because His own miracles prove it. That is, if Jesus has already triumphed over demons, it is proof that He had defeated their master as well. Those Pharisees were standing in the presence of the Conqueror and Destroyer of Satan's dominion! But in what sense and at what time did Jesus bind Satan?
 - (1) In the absolute sense, he had not done so at that moment, since Satan continued to attack Him again and continues to harass His disciples.

- (2) Therefore, Jesus must mean that Satan was bound only in the sense that he stood helpless to hinder every single victory that Jesus wrought over his realm, whether in demon-expulsion or in making physically right all that sin and disease had distorted.

2. **Spoil his house. Spoil his goods** (*tà skenē autoū harpāsai*) could perhaps be better rendered "steal his instruments, his vessels, his goods" so that the language may more clearly refer to the poor wretches who had served as his vessels. (Cf. Ac. 26:18; 1 Jn. 3:8; 2 Tim. 2:26; Col. 1:13) The fact that Jesus had already begun His victorious liberation movement to set the prisoners free, proves that He had already successfully bound their lord. Though Jesus states this as a logical necessity, His miracles demonstrated beyond all doubt that He was doing what He here claims.

The reason the Son of God came into the world was to destroy the works of the devil! (1 Jn. 3:8; cf. also Col. 2:15; 1 Jn. 4:4) So, His argument is: "By the very fact that I am doing my best to unchain a demoniac enslaved to Satan, I prove myself to be his enemy. By succeeding I prove myself his Master!"

5. WARNING: NEUTRALITY IS IMPOSSIBLE (12:30)

12:30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth. This text is not to be confused with Mk. 9:38-40 or Lk. 9:49, 50 nor thought to be the contradictory of them. In those texts the Lord provides a rule whereby a disciple is to judge another (with humility and tolerance), whereas here He provides the test whereby a disciple may judge himself (with strict intolerance). (See Plummer, *Luke*, 259f.) Whereas this terse axiom simply means to say "Neutrality is impossible," several knotty problems arise regarding its application: to whom does Jesus address these words: to the Pharisees? or to the undecided crowds? To what does He refer: His relation to Satan or the relation of every man to truth?

1. His relation to Satan. This view sees Jesus as only now concluding His argument regarding His true relation to Satan: "Satan, instead of helping me as you say, fights my ministry! He definitely does NOT remain neutral or take my part. I could wish that you could see the intensification of his efforts to thwart me at every turn! Could you but see what I know from repeated personal combat with this Liar, Murderer

and Accuser, you would never have so carelessly suggested that my powers are to be explained by some supposed, secret pact with him!" Morgan (*Matthew*, 130) has it this way:

(Jesus) had cast the demon out of a man and so had gathered him back into unified and balanced life, had gathered him back to His family, and to the family of God. It was Satan that had scattered, . . . spoiled. . . . Do not confuse the Person Who stands at the centre of the gathering force with the person who stands at the center of the scattering force.

If one man gathers what another scatters and vice versa, it should be clear that their goals are completely at odds. This utter diversity of aims should prove that Satan and Jesus have nothing in common.

2. His appeal to the undecided in this audience. If this thrust expresses His intended application, then He insists that no one can remain neutral when right and truth can be known. An agnostic mentality, in the presence of the positive, beneficial evidence of my true identity demonstrated by my miracles, is to align oneself with my enemy: there is no middle ground.
 - a. Lenski (*Matthew*, 481) thinks that Jesus now switches from objective to subjective argument here, having sufficiently dealt with the truly antithetic positions of Satan and Himself.
 - b. But were the Pharisees endeavoring to maintain a neutralist posture at this time? Evidence against this is their regular convocations to deliberate the right means of eliminating Jesus. (Cf. Mt. 12:14 and parallels; Jn. 5:18; 7:7) They might be feigning a neutrality they do not feel, merely to pretend, in the presence of the crowds at least, objectivity as they examine this upstart Rabbi and to render a carefully deliberated judgment.
 - c. But if the Pharisees are not to be thought of as attempting a mediating position, reserving judgment until all the evidence is weighed, then Jesus is to be seen as directing this warning at the uncommitted crowds. This stern warning admonishes the undecided to make up their mind about Jesus. The highest degree of psychological probability lies behind their uncertainty, since their new-found appreciation of Jesus (12:23) now demands of them an

open repudiation of leaders that had long held their esteem for their prodigious learning. To this hesitating multitude, frustrated by its own indecision, Jesus launches this warning:

- (1) The Pharisees, as a group, are far from being neutral or objective. They do not have eyes for truth wherever it might be found.
- (2) Anyone who shares this mentality is really opposed to me. Any who accept my message and my authority must break with that mentality.
- (3) Therefore, choose!

It is not necessary to the sense to discover what it is that each **gathers** or **scatters**, for there is enough antithetical tension in the simple sense of each verb to prove the diametrically opposed purposes of those engaged in either activity.

C. JESUS EXPANDS HIS WARNING AGAINST BLASPHEMY OF THE SPIRIT (12:31, 32)

1. ALL SINS FORGIVEABLE, EXCEPT THAT WHICH REJECTS THE MEANS BY WHICH ALL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S TRUTH AND FORGIVENESS IS COMMUNICATED, I.E. BY HIS SPIRIT.

12:31 **Therefore I say unto you. Therefore** (*διὰ τοῦτο*: "on account of this," or, "for this reason") is the conclusion based on what reason: on account of this what?

1. Immediate context: "Since neutrality regarding Jesus is impossible due to the fact that he who is not with Him automatically declares himself against Him. . . ." Because of this mindset in those who were against Jesus, it would be patently impossible for the Holy Spirit to bring enough convicting evidence that would lead men to submit to Jesus as Lord.
2. Larger context. The terrible warning Jesus now utters is occasioned; not only or merely because of the impossibility of neutrality (although this too is involved), but because they had said at the very outset of this debate "He is possessed by Beelzebul;" (Mk. 3:22) and "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow casts out demons." (Mt. 12:24) This is probably the better interpretation, being confirmed as it is by Mark's explanation of the same ominous forewarning: "for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'" (Mk. 3:30)

That this is truly Mark's explanation of the occasion

of this unusually severe utterance, and not part of the warning itself, is demonstrated by three suggestive approaches:

- a. Mark's citation of Jesus' words abruptly changes from first and second persons to third, i.e. from "I say to you" to "for they had said, 'He has . . .'" This change of persons, admittedly, could be taken as an aside uttered to His disciples in which the Lord quotes accurately what the Pharisees were muttering, without turning their words into first person, as we do in English: "for they said, 'I have an unclean spirit.'" The change of persons alone is not decisive.
- b. Mark's writing switches from direct quotation (vv. 28, 29) to simple narration. Mark does not, like Matthew, intend to include other material on this same subject at this time. Rather, since he will move immediately to the next episode, it will be seen that he inserted this brief word which at once justifies the unusual harshness of Jesus' warning and concludes the incident.
- c. Mark is therefore not attempting to define the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, thus limiting it to the accusing Jesus of alliance with demons. Rather, we should notice that his scope is larger. Mark would show the brilliance and completeness of his Master's handling of two very delicate situations in which Jesus is being opposed in one way or another:
 - (1) Mk. 3:21: "for they were saying, 'He is beside Himself.'" (*élegon gàr hótì exéstē*).
 - (2) Mk. 3:30: "for they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'" (*élegon pneúma akátharton echei*).

So the reason for what follows lies in the fact that the Pharisees were so very close to blaspheming the Holy Spirit, if they had not already done so, not merely because they gave the wrong explanation of Jesus' miracles, but because they had for so many years before deliberately shut their eyes and ears to God and so long resisted submission to being taught by Him, that when they met Him in this direct confrontation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, they could not recognize

Him. Rather, their habitual insensitivity to God automatically led them to discount everything God was saying through Jesus. It is no wonder that Jesus repeatedly scored them both publicly and privately for their moral insensitivity and deliberate resistance. (Cf. Mt. 23; 16:5-12)

Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven: what glorious news! In our efforts to find the elusive meaning of the unforgiveable sin, we trample down this astounding announcement! **Every sin**, no matter how heinous, **every blasphemy**, even those vicious, mocking words hurled directly at God or that spiteful spitting upon all that God calls holy, can and **shall be forgiven**. Trumpet this news down into the self-imposed dungeons of those hopeless souls whose ritual of self-accusation has them spell-bound into believing that for them there can be no hope or forgiveness! And, when Mark (3:28) cites Jesus as adding: "whatever blasphemies they utter," he seems to be searching for the vilest sin to which man can stoop. Not that sins may be catalogued as "mortal and venial," but since man would naturally understand crime against God as the most serious, Jesus includes the foulest blasphemies of which the human heart is capable: "Yes, even this shall be forgiven!" It is not within the purpose of Jesus at this point to outline the terms by which this forgiveness may be obtained, this latter revelation remaining for future messages to clarify. But the usual blasphemies and sins may be forgiven, because, by their nature, they do not make repentance impossible. (Cf. Isa. 1:18) Who cannot rejoice here? (Micah 7:18)

But the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. To the above-stated general principle, Jesus attaches one all-important amendment. There are two ways to consider this exception:

1. Is this a sin which is only one of an infinitely long list of relatively similar sins? Apparently not, because the Lord throws this particular sin into contrast with **every (other) sin and blasphemy**.
2. Or is this a sin which is so fundamental that it potentially touches, affects and includes all the others, so that to fail in regard to it is to cut oneself off from all possibility of forgiveness for all the others? It is that moral perverseness that, in full knowledge of the good, calls good evil and evil good. It takes an unforgiveably wicked mind to ascribe evil to someone whose work and teaching stand only on the side of righteousness and merciful helpfulness to sinful, suffering humanity. Since these fruits of His life are the proof of God's Spirit at work through Him, to slander the Spirit's gifts and power,

contrary to what one's own mind must recognize as from God, is evidence of the deepest perversity, the display of an incredible maliciousness.

Why is this sin so inexorably unforgiveable? Simply because a man in this frame of mind just cannot repent. Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 49) explains something of this impossibility:

If a man cannot recognize the good when he sees it, he cannot desire the good. If a man does not recognize the evil as being evil, he cannot be sorry for it, hate it and wish to depart from it.

But what is involved here is not the native ability or inability to discern evil, but the gradually developed unwillingness to be able to see truth as truth, good as good and evil as evil.

12:32 And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him. Even the very people responsible for Jesus' death are described as having done it "in ignorance!" (Cf. Ac. 3:17; 13:27; 1 Co. 2:8; Lk. 23:34; 1 Tim. 1:13), Even though the sins of ignorance are still culpable. (Cf. Lev. 5:17-19) God did not overlook them. But how is it possible for Jesus here to pronounce forgiveable what is said against Himself, whereas the Apostles later would reserve to the hottest hell anyone who dared speak against Jesus? (Cf. Heb. 10:29; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 2:22, 23; 4:2; 5:10-12; Jude 4; 1 Co. 16:22!)

1. Jesus recognizes the facility with which men misunderstand the true nature of what appears to the Jews as a mere human messenger but in reality is God Himself in human dress. Incarnation is a unique experience, so unique, in fact, that He admits that a man could possibly be scandalized by His humanness, as if He were but another rabbi, or, at best, another prophet. Though the seemingly human Messenger (Jesus Himself) might be open to misconstruction, God's Spirit at work on men's conscience would not be hampered by this impediment of incarnation. Hence to reject wilfully what must be the admission of one's own heart under conviction by what one knows of God's message must be utterly unforgiveable.
2. The Apostles say what they do during the unique era of the Holy Spirit's ministry. Since it was the Spirit's specific mission to glorify Jesus, anyone who rejected His testimony to Jesus thus turned his back upon the Spirit's best efforts to save him. So the Apostles warn that to reject Jesus or His message is to perish! So the apparent contradiction is resolved by

distinguishing the dispensations under which each declaration was made.

Blasphemy against the Spirit . . . speak against the Holy Spirit. Blasphemy is that speaking against someone or something with malicious intent, or the defamation of what is holy, good or noble. While it is true that every sin, whatever its specific character, tends toward blasphemy, because of that rebellious heart that wants to be its own master and is willing thus to deny and crush all authority but its own self-rule, and while every blasphemy of what is holy tends toward the defamation of Him who makes it holy, i.e. the Holy Spirit, because of that bent of mind that calls evil good and good evil, still Jesus is warning of a line which, if crossed, leaves no room for pardon, because repentance has then become a psychological impossibility. Along that line that approaches the point of impardonability are other sins dreadfully near in character to **blasphemy against the Spirit**: quenching the Spirit (1 Th. 5:19), grieving the Spirit (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30), resisting Him (Ac. 7:51). In none of these cases is found the dire warning against committing sin for which there is no expiation, as is found in passages which thunder their warnings against that haughty trampling upon God's most strenuous efforts to save man. (Cf. Heb. 6:4-6; 10:26-31) These sins are not so very far apart, however, since, in the wider sense, every sin of the believer who has experienced the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, may be called a sin against the Holy Spirit. But these sins against His influences in the life of the believer, while potentially leading man to harden himself enough to want to blaspheme against the Spirit, still are not unpardonable, for, otherwise, who could be saved?

But **blasphemy**, or also, **speaking against the Holy Spirit** is the grave danger it is, for this is the external evidence that the individual has been committed to this unwillingness to repent for some time. The grave danger, of which this utterance is but the outward proof, is that bent of mind that has long before chosen not to recognize truth and goodness when it is encountered. As Jesus says next (Mt. 12:35), **blasphemy against the Spirit**, spoken by the lips, is but the true product of the heart. What was the person's mentality will finally come out in his talk. There is a serious, public commitment of oneself to that position already taken in his heart, for, whereas his indifference to truth and goodness had become more or less to be suspected, the unblushing maliciousness of his words not only commits him publicly to his damnable stand, but shows others

what he had been thinking privately for quite some time before he arrived at that moment. Viewed in this light, the sin against the Holy Spirit is, as Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 49) describes it:

If a man for long enough shuts his eyes and ears to God's way, and takes his own way, if he for long enough refuses to listen to the guidance God is offering him, if he for long enough turns his back upon the messages which God is sending him, if he for long enough prefers his own human ideas to the ideas which God seeks to put into his mind, then in the end he comes to a stage when he cannot recognize God's truth . . . beauty and goodness when he sees them. He comes to a stage when his own evil seems to him good, and when God's good seems to him evil.

Speak against the Spirit. There have been disciples of the Lord who have insisted upon a resurgence of miraculous manifestations of the Holy Spirit's activity as evidence of the real government of God. They feel that this would serve concretely as scientific proof to an agnostic world that these modern Christians are really the bearers of the divine message. Classic Christianity, on the other hand, has rightly affirmed the adequacy of the proofs once for all given by the Apostles and early believers to support the divine origin of their message. Once vindicated as from God, the message needed no continual propping up with continued miracles. Nevertheless, in contrast to this, sincere disciples urge a resurrection of "Pentecostal power", and insist that any who cannot speak in tongues (ironically chosen by many though not all as the unique sign of the Spirit's presence) are somehow inferior Christians. Rather than listen to the message of the Spirit that leads to real repentance and transformation of life, deeper love for ignorant and imperfect brethren and longsuffering patience and a greater constancy, these disciples tend to spend energy and time promoting the external forms of the Spirit's manifestation of the first century. As a reaction against this warped understanding of the Spirit's word, other Christians, who do not share this view, attribute the so-called "manifestations of the Spirit", cited by modern "Pentecostals", to forces other than the genuine power of God. (The power of one's own spirit through self-hypnosis, demonic activity, etc. are mentioned as explanations.) Chagrined, the modern charismatics feel that this accusation is to **speak against the Spirit**. Both sides need to beware lest the one attribute God's real activity in the modern world to Satan and lest the other mistake freaks of their own minds or actual demonic activity for God's leadership. Both sides must

recognize their own need for patient love and generous consideration of the weaknesses of the other, since these attitudes ARE the undoubted fruit of the Spirit. While it is this author's opinion that God may work many true modern miracles through leaders of any denomination, either out of mercy in answer to their prayers and to convince them of His love despite their ignorance and imperfection (Cf. Mt. 5:45), or because He desires to test the loyalty of His own people whether they will follow Him alone or not (Cf. Deut. 13:1-5), the *likelihood* of repeated manifestations of the Spirit's special gifts is small due to their nature and purpose. (See my article "Miracles" in this volume.) As a result, to object to the unfortunate conclusions of convinced charismatics (or those who suppose themselves such) is not to **speak against the Spirit**, but rather to "try the spirits" whether they be of God.

Not forgiven . . . neither in this world, nor in that which is to come. Should the explanation of this sin be based on the interpretation placed on the phrases **in this world** and **that to come**?

1. It is true that the word **world** (*aióni*) is susceptible of being translated *age*, in the sense of "dispensation, epoch, era." (Cf. Arndt-Gingrich, 26, 27)
 - a. Accordingly, we should interpret, according to this view, *this age* in reference to the pre-Messianic or Jewish period, and *the coming one* in reference to the age of the Messiah, or Christian epoch.
 - b. But the alternative explanation, **neither in this world** bounded by time and space, **nor in the coming world**, as limitless as eternity itself, covers practically the same ground, since
 - (1) **this world** includes both Jewish and Christian dispensations;
 - (2) furthermore, there is no opportunity to repent nor any further provision of grace between the present age and eternity wherein forgiveness could be granted;
 - (3) the distinction of the Jewish age from the Christian makes no practical difference anyway, since, if a man is not forgiven as a Jew nor as a Christian, to what could he possibly appeal? The Jewish age flowed right into the Christian dispensation which will halt only for judgment and, after that, eternity.

2. Further evidence that the division of **this world** and **the coming one** into Jewish and Christian ages is a false one, is to be seen in the fact that there is no record of an exception made either by Christ or the Apostles whereby they limited the universality of their Gospel invitations. So far as the record goes, none ever excluded any individual who, in any time previous to their presenting themselves as candidates for conversion, had blasphemed the Holy Spirit. But the problem arises, would any who had really blasphemed the Spirit present himself as a candidate for baptism? (Study Ac. 7:51ff.)
3. Additional evidence against this distinction of Jewish and Christian epochs is to be found in the specific announcement by Jesus that **every sin and blasphemy** (against the Father) and **whosoever speaks against the Son shall be forgiven**. Now, if **this world** means that the Jewish age, an age in which Jesus was being spoken against and in which He was ultimately crucified, then a man who blasphemed the Holy Spirit at work in Jesus through His miracles and His God-inspired message (cf. 12:28), could both have and not have forgiveness, which is a manifest self-contradiction.
4. **This world** and **the world to come** is NT language for
 - a. **This era of human history** bounded by time and space plagued by cares. (Mk. 10:30a; Lk. 16:8; 18:30a; 20:34; Eph. 1:21a; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 4:10; Tit. 2:12; Mt. 13:22, 39)
 - b. The post-judgment era as unlimited as eternity (Mk. 10:30b; Lk. 18:30b; 20:35; Eph. 1:21b; 1 Tim. 6:19; Heb. 6:5)

So, Jesus says that this sin will absolutely never be forgiven. It is difficult to imagine how He could have stated the eternality of future punishment in more unequivocal terms! Lenski (*Matthew*, 483) is right to observe that:

Jesus is warning the Pharisees who had never believed in him. Hence the sin against the Holy Ghost may be committed, not only by former believers . . . but also by men who have never believed.

Neither in this world nor in that to come, taken in reference to this unforgiveable sin, must not be supposed to suggest that for other lesser sins, forgiveness might yet be hoped for, if not now, perhaps after death. There is no purgatory or second hope of grace

for those who die without pardon. Jesus' expression intends only to reinforce the absolute hopelessness of the person who blasphemes God's Spirit. (Cf. Lk. 16:26; Heb. 3:13; 9:27; Gal. 6:7) From the foregoing passages it is clear that death without pardon merely fixes a soul's destiny and teaches that everything depends upon the choices man has made in this life.

Even the Mosaic economy distinguished between unintentional and deliberate sin. (Cf. Nu. 15:22-30) For the former, forgiveness was possible; for the latter, nothing but extermination was prescribed: "because he despised the word of Jehovah, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him." (Cf. 1 Sam. 2:25; 3:14; Isa. 22:14)

2. ETERNAL DAMNATION AWAITS THE SINNER WHO REJECTS ALL THAT IS THE SPIRIT'S WORK AMONG MEN.

a. One key to understanding this sin against the Spirit is the question: What is the Holy Spirit's work? When did it begin?

- (1) It began primarily at Pentecost after Jesus' earthly message and work were fully completed. (Ac. 1:7, 8; 2; Jn. 16:7-14; 15:16, 17, 26)
- (2) It consisted in glorifying Jesus and revealing God's will through the Apostles' words and works. (Jn. 15:26; 16:13-15; Mt. 10:19, 20)
- (3) It consisted of convincing the world of its sin, its need of righteousness and the reality of judgment. (Jn. 16:7-11) It consisted in leading men to repentance. Thus to blaspheme Him is to put the sinner in an attitude so hardened as to render repentance absolutely impossible, because he mentally sets his will against the Spirit's appeals.
- (4) It consisted in making men holy, like God. It becomes a deliberate insult to God for men to claim to be unable to distinguish His work from that vileness and spiritual rottenness produced by that unclean spirit which is the antithesis of all that God stands for! That immoral pretense to be unable to discern lasting good in the feeblest efforts of God's human agents and institutions, however imperfect and ineffectual they may seem, is a mindset that calls good evil and evil good. This is the damnation of agnosticism and of those skeptics that pretend to be quite unable to make

a firm decision for truth and righteousness. Even though some of them admit the rightness of God's standards, they see much unholiness and unrighteousness in the Church, as judged by the Church's own ideals, but they do not commit themselves to those ideals nor preach them in the unselfish endeavor to bring every man up to the unbesmirched standard they pretend to honor. The end result is their rejecting as unworthy of their higher intelligence the only work and wisdom which is capable of bringing them to ultimate reality: God's.

- b. **Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit**, then, consists in the final and complete rejection of all that the Holy Spirit has used to bring man to repentance: the Scripture which is His own written message and the Church which is His living voice in the world. (Heb. 2:1-4; 3:19—4:11; 6:4-8; 1 Co. 10:1-13; Jn. 15:1-5; Eph. 3:10) It is the final and complete suppressing of all that one's own conscience, however enlightened by the revelation of God it might have been, would have the man do. This sin is not one single act, nor merely backsliding followed by repentance, but rather that final, complete and perpetual rejection and opposition to the Spirit's message which is the expression of a mind willfully shut to God's proffered mercy. (Cf. Lk. 12:8-10; Heb. 10:26-31)

Contrary to the opinion of some, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not only possible in the present age, but also much more likely and common, since prejudices against the Spirit's influence in one's life, and superficial sophistication that close haughty eyes to what is good, right and true, have had the advantage of nearly twenty centuries of human experience recorded by history, from which to learn to love the right and abhor the evil. And yet, despite these distinct advantages that derive from living in this century, nevertheless, men continue to "accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths . . . who will listen to anybody and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth," (Cf. 2 Tim. 4:3, 4; 3:7) or be moved to action by it, even though they are genuinely convicted by it.

D. TALK IS NOT CHEAP (12:33-37)

1. BECAUSE SPEECH REVEALS OUR SENSE OF
MORAL DISCERNMENT (12:33-35)

12:33 **Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by its fruit.** The transparency of this germ-parable is no problem, for **the tree** is the source of **the fruit**, infusing into the fruit its own nature and vigor, whether for good or ill. (Cf. Jas. 3:10, 11) The question here is just how the Lord means this obvious truth to be applied. What is **the tree** and what **its fruit** in this figure? Is Jesus **the tree**, or the Pharisees? Is **the fruit** His work, His results, His doctrine, or theirs or both? In either case, the imperative ("make the tree") has nothing to do with changing the objective character of **the tree**, but refers only to everyone's understanding of that character. This is evident from the fact that Jesus would not order anyone to make himself morally worthless, nor could He order them to change His objective character either for better or worse ("good" or "corrupt"), since this lies outside their power. But He CAN order them to examine how they put the case in their own mind, regardless of the persons to which they ultimately apply this figure. (Cf. uses of *poietn* in Jn. 5:18; 8:53; 10:33)

1. Jesus Himself is **the tree** referred to and His ministry **its fruit**. If so, He applies to Himself here the same rule He lays down as a measurement of all others. (Cf. Mt. 7:16-20; Lk. 6:43-45) In this illustration Jesus demands that the opposition make a choice: if the results of His life and work are evil, then they are justified in exposing Him as evil, for He produced them. But if casting out demons, and His other miracles in general, brings only glory to God and blessing to mankind, then they are driven to pronounce Him good, for these positive benefits are also His work. Now the Pharisees themselves are faced with a real dilemma: "If we pronounce His work to be good, we are forced to admit the good Spirit at work in Him, in which case we will be laughed off as fools for antagonizing this man of God and we will be found in opposition to God. But if we judge the freeing of a human being from the clutches of demons as a vile, evil deed, the people who recognize this act as humanitarian, will damn us for inhumanity!" The problem He lay before them put their conscience to its most crucial test: can the evident, consistent, excellent results of Jesus' work be the deed of a

vile imposter empowered by Satan? (Study Jn. 10:25, 37, 38 in this connection!)

2. An interesting interpretation of this verse is suggested by an alternative translation: "Either make the tree good, and its fruit (will be) good, or else make the tree corrupt, and its fruit (will be) bad." The addition of the copulative verb is perfectly possible, and even though this translation may also suggest the foregoing meaning, it seems to give another twist to Jesus' picture. Instead of pointing back to the Pharisees' unfair evaluation of His work, it becomes an exhortation to purify the heart, so that all that it produces in words and actions will be sound. Leave the heart corrupt and all that flows from it is corrupted. In support of this explanation it should be noticed that in the following verse Jesus proceeds with this same observation, using more or less literal language. As Lenski (*Matthew*, 487) puts it: "The heart overflowing in speech through the mouth is about the same as the tree with its native fruit. The overflow shows what is in the reservoir."

12:34 Ye offspring of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? Offspring of vipers (*gennémata echidnôn*) is crisp, vigorous language coming right out of the heart of Jesus, and is the true representation of His heart too, but totally free of that hate-filled bitterness that language like this usually reflects. It is the indignation of the righteous in the face of hypocrisy. But, more important, it represents the judgment of the Judge Himself. He condemns them as morally hopeless! Ironically, by the common standards of Jewish piety, many sincere people accounted these very leaders to be a generation of saints, and, granted the basis upon which this supposed "righteousness" was founded, this popular opinion is understandable. But the Lord exposes them as **a brood of vipers!** (Cf. Mt. 3:7; 23:33). Because the Pharisees had expressed the maliciousness in their hearts when they accused Jesus of having a secret alliance with the Devil, Jesus is perfectly justified in pointing out the true condition of their lives. (12:24) **Ye being evil** (= "You are evil"): let humble souls, heretofore scandalized by the well-known hypocrisy of these leaders or perhaps burdened by the endless rules required by them or staggered by their deadly treachery in politics and their moral blindness in practical religion, fear them no longer, for they are **evil**. Even at this point in His ministry, Jesus spares no words in exposing the devilish animus of these accusers.

How can you? The answer anticipated by absolute Justice is "You cannot!" This is the application of Jesus' implied simile about trees and fruits: why should anyone expect moral excellence from you who are so viciously wicked? Should I, or anyone else, look for prime quality fruit on such trees as you? The reason is clear: **for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.** What is in one's heart—its orientation, its prejudices, its points of view, its ideals, its desires, its hates and its loves—**MUST** come out in his speech, whether it be the very wisdom of God or the vilest lies ever conjured up by the Adversary. (Cf. Rev. 13:11, 5. 6; 16:10, 11; 1 Pet. 1:22—2:2; Jas. 3:5ff.; Tit. 1:15; Mt. 15:11-18; Mk. 7:21-23) Study Jesus' way of arguing the proposition that the Jews could not be brought to believe in Him precisely because of the condition of their heart:

1. They did not have God's Word abiding in their heart (Jn. 5:38).
2. Nor did they have the love for God in them, so the hate that came from their lips was more than explicable. (Jn. 5:42)
3. Their heart was set on human approval. (Jn. 5:44)
4. Their heart was hardened (Jn. 12:39) so much so that they could not bear to hear the truth when presented to them (Jn. 8:43). See also Ro. 8:5-7.

What is in the heart will be revealed sooner or later as the conscious or unconscious confession of the lips. (Cf. Ro. 10:9, 10)

12:35 The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things: and the evil man out of his evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. Study 13:52 where Jesus uses this same figure to speak of scribes trained for the Kingdom of God as being similar to a provident householder who is able to bring out of his treasure both old and new things. This is possible, because the man actually possesses those things and is, therefore, the richer for it. Jewish theologians of Jesus' day who were willing to accept the mentality of Jesus, His point of view regarding the Kingdom, etc., coming as they did from the rich history of God's dealings with Israel, were able to produce out of their own religious heritage and theological experience, great, new insights into true reality and the will of the living God. From the human stand-point alone, they were centuries ahead of mere philosophers groping for insight without the benefit of the same divine revelation which the Hebrews had in their theological treasure. So also here, **to bring forth** (something) **out of** (one's) **treasure** means that any man can hope to express, by means

of his words, actions and influence, only what he himself really is or what he really possesses in his life. This observation, when used as objectively as humanly possible, becomes the test whereby we can judge our progress toward maturity: what is the general character of the way we are treating people? What is the general tone of our conversation? (Use Eph. 4:25-32; 5:3, 4; Phil. 2:14; 4:4-8; Col. 3:8-17; 4:5, 6, etc. as typical standards.) It should be obvious from this, although, unfortunately, too often it is not, that the subject, direction and tone of our conversations is a perfect mirror of the condition of our life. Christians may too often presume that indulging in complaining, merciless censuring, selfish wrangling and the like, is perfectly harmless precisely because it cannot harm the person or possessions of another fellow human, as would theft, rape or murder. But Jesus insists here that everything we say is an accurate reflection of what we are, and for this reason, we must be judged by what we say. (12:37)

As in the preceding verse, so also here, a man's **treasure** is what HE thinks valuable, whether it be objectively good or bad. It is his wealth measured in "thoughts, judgments, convictions and the like." (Lenski, *Matthew*, 487) And it is truly **his treasure** in the sense that only he has made it so by assembling what is there deposited and only he can draw from that fund of knowledge, opinions or attitudes. (When we speak of drawing on the knowledge-fund of others, we really mean to increase our own treasure from which we may later draw as the occasion arises. And we can only draw from their treasure as they are willing to communicate or share with us what is in their mind. So it is we ourselves who decide what goes into the treasury of our own minds.) Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 51f.) reminds us that:

It is an obvious fact that there is nothing so revealing as words. We do not need to talk to a man long before we discover whether he has a mind that is pure or a mind that is dirty; . . . whether he has a mind that is kind and sympathetic or . . . cruel, callous, critical; we do not need to listen for long to a man who is preaching, teaching or lecturing to find out whether his mind is clear and lucid or . . . muddled and involved . . . It is the words which a man speaks in his unguarded moments, the words which he speaks without thinking, . . . when the conventional restraints are removed, which really show what he is like. As Plummer puts it, "The carefully spoken word may be a calculated hypocrisy."

But does not Jesus' general discourse here contradict much of human experience? He urges that character is known by conduct: "So then by their fruits you will know them. . . ." What is in the heart will come out in the speech, He says. Nevertheless, is it not one of the facts of experience that right conduct and bad character may be found together right in the same person? Is it not a rather common fallacy to think that the really important test of a man's character is what he *does*, thus implying that right conduct is always a safe and certain clue to character? Marshall (*Challenge of New Testament Ethics*, 63ff.) illustrates this point well and concludes that proper conduct is neither a certain clue to character nor a way to achieve it. Then he resolves the apparent inconsistency between this universal observation about human conduct and what Jesus intends to teach:

It is sometimes objected that such an idea (i.e. conduct is no certain clue to character) is flatly contradicted by our Lord's words: 'So then by their fruits you will know them.' Here surely Jesus teaches that character is known by conduct, that just as a fig tree is known as such by the fruit it bears, so what a man *is* is known by what he *does*! That is true, but Jesus is thinking of conduct as a *whole*, conduct so extended as to cover the whole man, with all his actions, words, motives and thoughts, conduct as the natural and inevitable expression of a man's very nature, like the fruit which a tree bears because it can bear no other. The whole point of the illustration which precedes this utterance of Jesus is that without a good tree there can be no really good fruit—and just as a good tree is essential to genuinely good fruit, so a good character is essential to genuinely good conduct. . . . When outwardly right conduct does happen to appear in a man whose motives are mean or base, it would be dismissed, if all the facts were known, as rotten fruit. That right conduct of a sort can and does appear in men whose character leaves much to be desired, Jesus was well aware.

So, what has been observed here about one's unplanned or unconscious expressions explains why, on the one hand, we can find right conduct in those whose motivations are corrupt, since for some reason they believe that their own interests can be advanced and so what they do is done for personal profit. Hence, what they express publicly as apparently good or right conduct is no indicator of their real character, for it takes in too little of their *total* conduct. A study of

their total conduct would disclose their sinful prudence, their scheming, their cunning and selfishness. It is in this sense alone that Jesus intends His dictum: "By ALL their fruits you shall know them. . . . The (genuinely) good man out of his (total) good treasure brings forth good. . . ."

So, what should **the good man** do, when he hears out of his own mouth clamor or bitter, hateful talk of which he is immediately ashamed? Let him thank God for this reminder that he is yet in need of God's grace and dependent upon Him for forgiveness, lest he be proud of his growth toward maturity. Let him humble himself and say, "I am afraid that there is probably more vileness down there in my heart than I had thought, since I had thought myself incapable of such language. But I was wrong. Forgive me for what I myself repudiate, even though I said it!" The motivation behind such confession of sin is not only the transparent honesty that admits sin even in oneself, but also that genuinely righteous unwillingness to justify it even to protect oneself. In the ultimate analysis, it is only with SINNERS that Jesus can do anything. (Cf. Mt. 9:9-13 Notes) For the righteous (those who fancy themselves such), who drive themselves unmercifully to present themselves as perfect in the eyes of others, do not wish so to bare their sinfulness before men.

Observe that, for Jesus, there are only two classes: **the good man** and **the evil man**. Elsewhere the Lord defines what constitutes the difference between each class and what qualifies a person to be in it: total confidence in Jesus or lack of it. Even a disciple of Jesus, who is yet quite imperfect and troubled by sin, is **good**, by Jesus' reckoning, because he trusts Jesus to make him perfect. This makes even the relative good moral person, who trusts his own relative moral maturity to carry him, an **evil man**. This concept is more fully developed by Paul, especially in his meaty discussions on the relative uselessness of the works of righteousness which man himself does trying to be "good enough."

2. THERE ARE NO WORDS THAT DO NOT COUNT, FOR GOD HOLDS US ACCOUNTABLE FOR ALL WE SAY (12:36-37)

12:36 **And I say unto you.** What follows is no mere addition to the foregoing argument (though it is this too, of course). What follows is the authoritative declaration of One qualified to declare the norms by which every member of the human race will be judged in that great Day. **Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.** Idle (*argòs*) means (1) "unemployed, idle, with nothing to do" of men in

the marketplace, Mt. 20:3, 6; (2) "idle, lazy" of widows, 1 Tim. 5:13, . . . "neglectful of, careless . . ." (3) "useless," Jas. 2:20; 2 Pet. 1:8; *rhéma argòn*, "a careless word," which, because of its worthlessness, had better been left unspoken. (Arndt-Gingrich, 104) Does the Lord see some of His audience squirming and uncomfortable because of His frank appraisal of their most honored theologians, who would wish to excuse them by whining that they had not seriously intended to accuse Him of being in league with Satan? Or that their accusation of demon-possession had been hastily or carelessly uttered? If so, even those tell-tale words spoke eloquent volumes about the men who had uttered them. Men are more or less willing to accept responsibility for words which they have carefully considered and tend to excuse themselves for careless utterances to which they give little importance and which are soon forgotten. But the Master insists that **every idle word** is the object of God's notice and concern, not merely those words which were carefully calculated to impress the hearers, and if **every idle word**, how much more those which are well-pondered! (Ps. 139:4) In the field of human psychology Sigmund Freud receives credit for discovering, or, at least, popularizing, what Jesus Christ had already stated: what issues from the lips in speech was really present in the mind of the speaker and so much a part of his personality as to be a correct index of his character. A person is really accountable for ALL that he says, even though he may wish to repent of those his own words of which he may be ashamed. Thank God for repentance and forgiveness of sins!

But if it be true that "the carefully spoken word may be a calculated hypocrisy" (Plummer), and if careless, idle speech is that for which the speaker takes no conscious responsibility, what is the practical implication of Jesus' doctrine and how are we to understand the Apostles' urging Christians to control their speech? (cf. Eph. 5:4; Col. 4:6; Jude 15, 16, *et al.*) Would this not tend to cause men merely to sublimate their vilest blasphemies, thus leaving their real thoughts unsaid and so promote the deepest hypocrisy?

1. No, because if men for Jesus' sake begin to start taking their own careless speech seriously, it ceases to be **idle** or **careless**. It becomes considered speech. And as they seriously ponder the worthlessness, the carelessness and the real damage to themselves and others that it represents, they arrive at the conclusion that they must repent of it and seek God's forgiveness. This is not mere sublimation, but elimination.
2. And the conscious effort to cultivate proper speech that gives

grace to the hearer is not done for the sake of mere culture, but for Jesus' sake and in order to grow up into the image of Him.

3. The total result of the Lord's approach is the conversion of the character of the individual, so that for him there can be no words which are somehow secular while others are holy, some which count while others do not. Here again, as earlier (5:33-37), Jesus is insisting upon the sanctity and importance of every human expression.

Our Savior knows that "if any one makes no mistakes in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also." (Jas. 3:2) This is why His admonition is psychologically so important, for He knows that the discipline, required to control one's own tongue, is going to produce the desired effect in the discipline of all else in one's life. Unlike merely human psychologies, Jesus' view of man has a thorough-going theological orientation, so fundamental that it really deals with man's total need.

Account in the day of judgment. Here there is no debating the reality or necessity of judgment, but simply the insistence that we recognize the fact that, though our words be as unrecallable or ungovernable as feathers strewn in a windstorm, yet God has them all collected and on file. Long-forgotten conversations that seemingly made little impression upon our consciousness are subject to immediate recall by God! (Ro. 14:12; 1 Pet. 4:5)

12:37 **For:** He states the reason for the surprising conclusion just given. The severely-measured accountability is based upon the scrutiny of one's heart and this is revealed by whatever the mouth betrays about the heart's contents and character. **By thy words,** or by what a man says, he betrays his real religion, regardless of all his protestations to the contrary. Orthodoxy of creed is not the final test, says Jesus, but what that creed causes a man to do or say. (Jas. 1:26; cf. Prov. 18:21; 13:3; Mal. 3:13-15; Lk. 19:22) **Thou shalt be justified . . . condemned.** Nothing is intended here about a person's justifying himself by the sheer glibness of his speech, for the real Justifier here, as ever, is God. While it is true that in this life we really do justify or condemn an individual by his words, holding him responsible for what he says, and while it is true that people try to clear themselves by artful self-defence, Jesus is discussing issues that will be concluded **in the day of judgment.** There only God justifies or condemns.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Tell of the character and position of the Pharisees, showing why they would level such a charge as they make against Jesus in this section.
2. Does either Matthew or Mark say clearly that the Pharisees (who said Jesus was in league with Beelzebub) actually did blaspheme the Holy Spirit? If so, how? If not, what did Jesus mean by what He said regarding blasphemy?
3. Quote or paraphrase all of Jesus' answers to the charge that He was in league with Satan. Explain what they meant and how they applied to the accusation.
4. What is the meaning of the expression "Son of David"? How was it intended by the crowds in this section? Why did the Pharisees object to its use with reference to Jesus?
5. Did the crowds actually call Jesus "the Son of David"? How do you know?
6. Explain as far as the evidence goes what can be known about demons and demon possession. Who or what are demons? List the phenomena mentioned in the Bible generally surrounding demon possession. Describe Jesus' methods for casting them out.
7. Who were the "sons" of the Pharisees who cast out demons? What was the point Jesus was making by bringing them into the argument?
8. What is the slander involved in linking Jesus with Beelzebub? Who or what was Beelzebub or Beelzebub in Jewish thinking?
9. What is the meaning of the argument about the strong man, and the method for stealing his goods?
10. What are the possible interpretations of Jesus' denial of the possibility of neutrality: "He that is not with me is against me"? Give evidence for and against each, selecting which you think best fits Jesus' meaning in this context.
11. From what field of endeavor does the expression come: "He that gathers not with me, scatters"? Is this a Hebraism, parallel to the preceding declaration, or is this a separate thought, advancing Jesus' argument one more full step?
12. In what sense does Jesus mean the statement: "Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men"?
13. Of what sin were the Pharisees and theologians who were then attacking Jesus guilty? What was the real source of their sin?
14. Explain the connection between the discussion about the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and the following discussion

about the nature of one's heart.

15. Had the Pharisees and theologians committed the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? What evidence indicates this?
16. Had Jesus' friends committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit by referring to His unflagging zeal to keep on helping people at the expense of His own rest and comfort as "madness"?
17. Who were these well-meaning "friends and/or relatives" who tried to save Jesus from Himself by seizing Him to take Him away from it all? How do you know? What relation does your answer have to the fact that shortly after this event Jesus' mother and brothers interrupt Jesus' preaching by asking Him to step outside to talk with them?
18. Can a man speak righteously and have a wicked heart? Can a man speak wickedly and have a good heart? State Jesus' general rule and then show how the seeming exceptions to the rule are not exceptions at all, but examples of something else of which Jesus warned us, which, in turn, proves this general rule true also.
19. What kind of a word is an "idle word"?
20. What is the meaning of the expression (in Mark's parallel) "He hath Beelzebub"?
21. Was the remark, that Jesus casts out demons by the prince of demons, itself blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Explain.
22. Is the sin against the Holy Spirit something people can and do commit today? If so, how? If not, why not?

Section 29

JESUS GIVES THE SIGN OF JONAH

(Possible Parallel: Lk. 11:16, 24, 26, 29-32)

TEXT: 12:38-45

38. Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, Teacher, we would see a sign from thee.
39. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet:
40. for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
41. The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here.

42. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.
43. But the unclean spirit, when he is gone out of the man, passeth through waterless places, seeking rest, and findeth it not.
44. Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished.
45. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man cometh worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this generation.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Discuss repentance. What is it? How is it important? What statements by Jesus show that a negative repentance, or the mere putting an evil thing out of one's life, is insufficient?
- b. How should we understand and apply what Jesus said about a demon returning to the man from which it had departed?
- c. John said that a record of the miracles was given that men might believe (John 20:30, 31), and Jesus clearly stated that miracles were basic to faith. Here, however, Jesus rebuked the desire for signs and said that it proceeded from a wicked heart. How do you harmonize these statements?
- d. Do you think that something more than evidence is needed to produce conviction in a man, that is strong enough to cause him to change his life? What is the relationship between a man's will and the evidence presented to his mind?
- e. Why do you suppose it was so sinful for these theologians to ask for special supernatural proof of Jesus' authority? What kind of sign would have satisfied them? Why were they seeking a sign? Were not they the rightful religious authority that, as defenders of public morality and religion, not only had the right but also the obligation to demand the credentials of all religious teachers including Jesus?
- f. What do you see as the difference, if indeed there is a difference, between the requesting of a sign from heaven on the part of these Pharisees on the one hand and the requesting of signs from heaven on the part of someone like Gideon, on the other? (Judges 6:36-40)
- g. What is so special about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead

that causes Jesus to say that it is the one sign He will give, that would convince the Jews of His divine identity and authority? What about the other miracles that He had done that accomplished the same purpose for other people before the resurrection ever took place? (Jn. 14:11) Was there something inferior or deficient in those other miracles?

- h. How do you account for the fact that Jesus in this text declares that He will give no other sign to that generation than that of His resurrection, while, as a matter of fact, He is recorded as having done many other miracles long after this statement, yet they were done before He died and rose again. How do you account for this fact?
- i. Is not God to be the Judge at the great judgment? How then can the people of Nineveh and the Queen of the South stand up at the judgment to condemn the people of Jesus' generation?
- j. Jesus gives a precise statement that no one can mistake: "So shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Yet, none of the Gospel writers, Apostles and enemies of Jesus ever record this prophecy or sign as being actually fulfilled. All who ever speak of Jesus' predictions or of the fulfillment, describe Jesus as having arisen "on the third day," or "after three days," or something similar. How then do you harmonize this precise language in the prophecy or sign with the loose language of the supposed fulfillment? Is it possible that Jesus made a mistake? Is it possible that the Apostles misunderstood His meaning here? Should we reinterpret all the Last Week passages that concern the facts of the burial and resurrection period as so to fit the "three days and three nights" prediction even if this makes the Apostles contradict the Lord?
- k. Some scholars are for various reasons not convinced that the book of Jonah is a book of sober history. They describe it as "poetic fiction, an allegory, a parable, a prose poem, a didactic story, a midrash, a symbolic book, a legend containing a kernel of fact." On the basis of Jesus' use of the experience of Jonah here in this context, do you think it possible to discern whether it is any of the foregoing, or else a narrative of historical fact? If not, why not? If so, upon what basis?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then some of the theologians and Pharisees demanded, "Teacher, we wish to see supernatural proof from God that establishes your authority to teach."

But Jesus refused, "Only evil and faithless people ask for more proof of my identity as if all the proof I have just given were not enough. I will not provide further proof to satisfy your idle curiosity, except the portent involved in the miraculous history of Jonah the prophet. That demonstration is this: In the same way that Jonah spent the better part of three days in the great fish and so became a sign from God to the inhabitants of Nineveh, so will I, the Son of man, spend the better part of three days and nights buried in the earth. By this means will my experience become a supernatural proof to the people of this present age that God is actually speaking through me.

"The inhabitants of Nineveh will stand up on judgment day along with the people of these times and the Ninevites, as mute witnesses, will condemn you. This is true because they felt their need to turn to God and did so with reference to the message preached by Jonah. But you have heard something here greater than Jonah!

"Similarly, at the judgment, the Queen of the South will stand up as mute testimony against the unbelievers of this generation and condemn you. You see, she felt the longing for greater wisdom than she possessed and came halfway around the world just to listen to **Solomon's wisdom**. Listen: there is something involved here greater than Solomon!

"This evil, unbelieving generation is like a man out of whom a demon has departed. The demon goes through dry country looking for a place to rest, but he never finds it. Then the demon says to himself, 'I will return to my home I just left.' So the demon returns and finds the man empty, cleaned up a bit, tidy—but **EMPTY**. Then the demon goes and rounds up seven other demons that, for wickedness, make him look like a beginner! This gang of demons comes and moves in to live there. So in the end, the plight of that man is much worse than at the beginning. And that is just what is going to happen to this generation of evil people!

SUMMARY

Jesus warned the skeptic religionists of His day that a religion that only makes a man empty and unable even to discern the obvious evidences of God's working in his own generation, is false, regardless of all else that might be said for it. It is incapable of filling life. There have been people in history that, with less evidence than the theologians were demanding of Jesus, turned to God and expended great effort to learn even a portion of God's wisdom and truth from God's people. But there is far more evidence now for this generation

than those underprivileged people of Jonah's or Solomon's generations ever possessed. This generation will be condemned by those far less-privileged people who did better with their far inferior opportunities to know the truth.

NOTES

A. UNREASONABLE REQUEST (12:38)

12:38 Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, Teacher, we would see a sign from thee. Then (*Tôte*) suggests an immediate temporal connection between the preceding incident and this demand that Jesus present His credentials. Whether it occurred immediately upon the conclusion of the Lord's forensic victory over the Pharisees or, as Luke suggests (11:16), was part of their original attack, is not so important as the spirit which this question manifests and the additional illustration it provides us of the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. **Certain of the scribes and Pharisees**, though not the same persons as those who accused Jesus of secret alliance with Satan. (Note Luke's *héteroï*, 11:16, if parallel.)

Teacher, we would see a sign from thee. Their right to requested this is undoubted and is the proper safeguard against imposture. (Cf. Dt. 18:15-22; 13:1-5) Because of these Mosaic regulations granted to the Jews on the importance and nature of supernatural credentials, they were so ahead of the rest of the world that Paul could safely generalize, describing his people: "Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom." (1 Co. 1:22) But in this group of rabbis now surrounding Jesus, were there any who were beginning to feel that Jesus had brought them face to face with real, divine authority, or that He might possibly be, after all, the Messiah with all the concomitant majesty and authority? Were there any who, feeling themselves so deeply but strangely swayed by His unparalleled ministry, now sensed their need either to acknowledge Him once and for all or to repudiate His claims and destroy Him? Were there any who felt that some compelling miracle would really overcome what they had come to believe were objections honestly arrived at? While a mentality of honest and proper doubt is at the base of this demand for signs in general, lest those who are to be influenced by the message vouchsafed by them be deceived by presumptuous revelations falsely attributed to God (cf. Jn. 2:18 and the attitude of the Jerusalem committee toward John the Baptist, Jn. 1:19-28), more often than not this sign-seeking attitude was, as A. B. Bruce (*Expositor's*

Greek Testament, in loc.) termed it: "impudent, insulting and hypocritical." Whereas their tone is formally respectful, it is motivated by infinite cunning, because it was really an appeal to the multitudes by a display of authority, and, at the same time, a ploy to maintain their own prestige, a stratagem they often employed when no other reasonable objection presented itself. (Cf. Mt. 15:39b—16:4; 27:42 and par.; Mk. 8:11, 12; Lk. 11:16, 29, 30; 23:8; Jn. 6:30) Their purpose here, as elsewhere, is clearly to trap Him by means which He either cannot or will not escape. (Cf. Mk. 8:11; Lk. 11:16; Mt. 16:1; 19:3; 22:35; [Jn. 8:6]) Though their action is described as *peirázontes*, which can be interpreted as that neutrally oriented testing of a thing to see of what it is made, or the testing of a person to see how he reacts, nevertheless Jesus reads their motives written on their hearts and declares them as **evil and adulterous**. So their nicely-worded challenge is neither objective nor sincere. Their imposture is unmasked when they who sit on the jury of inquest, because of personal prejudices and moral failure, refuse to admit the evidence of signs already given. By rejecting the obvious proof of other evidence, they disqualify themselves and automatically surrender their right to demand signs, for, by their tacit admission, they cannot arrive at a satisfactory conclusion verified by and based upon all foregoing evidence. Their hypocrisy is discovered when these self-appointed, but disqualified, judges resolutely maintain their effrontery in making such a demand.

From thee: They demanded not only that the sign be done by Jesus but that it be **from heaven**. (Cf. Mk. 8:11; Mt. 16:1; Lk. 11:16) What were they expecting? (Cf. Jn. 6:31; 1 Sam. 12:18; 1 Kg. 18)

1. Is Lenski (*Matthew*, 490) correct in putting the emphasis upon "a sign to see" (*sēmeion ideîn*), as if they demanded something that required no faith, but just sight in order to be converted to Him as the divine Messiah? Do we see here an unhealthy craving for an astronomical circus performance in which the sun, moon and stars perform antics, in which unworldly visions appear against the heavenly backdrop or in which angelic armies suddenly become visible as they pass in review in the presence of God?

But what is wrong with drawing back the curtain to the spiritual world, permitting mortals to see the universe full of music, color, light and beauty—worlds crammed to overflowing with evidences of God's presence and care? After

all, is this not the promised fulfilment after which our Christian longing yearns? Could there be any spiritual harm in demonstrating once and for all that Jesus alone can, by the single force of the spoken word, perform greater feats than those of which even the wildest imagination of writers of science fiction or of the tellers of ancient myths could dream? Are the commentaries correct in saying that such prodigies would meet no spiritual need, would point to no salvation from sin and would share nothing in common with saving faith? Is it true that such portents would only satisfy temporarily that morbid part of our being, because when fed would only cry for more, and when no more is forthcoming, reverts to the old dissatisfactions, doubts and denials? (So, Lenski, *ad loc.*) After reading C. S. Lewis' Christian mythology (*The Tales of Narnia*) and his trilogy of science fiction (*Out of the Silent Planet*, *Voyage to Venus* and *That Hideous Strength*), one can no longer be so sure that such visions must necessarily produce such bad fruits. Lewis makes a good case for living out one's life on earth in genuine conformity to God's will even after having personally walked and lived among angels and stars. Further, however imperfectly Lewis may have imagined the reality, such experiences left the earthling more than satisfied with their reality both while they were being experienced and longing for them when he left them to return to the present experiences of earth life. But the longing for the breaking in upon earth's reality by the celestial life, as Lewis imagined it, was perfectly consonant with the longing for the presence of God. But even among Lewis' characters we find people who were not gently drawn to these same happy conclusions. Rather, just because of their character, they are repelled by everything that attracts and satisfies those who choose to be servants of God. This, of course, just proves the validity of the evidence which they rejected and consequently the justice of their condemnation. Lewis proves thus that it is possible to imagine a personal, first-hand experience of celestial phenomena without one's freedom being violated.

And that such a vision could actually minister to men's spiritual needs is demonstrated by the supposition that Jesus could have opened their eyes to fantastic spiritual realities, even as God did for His lesser servant, Elisha, when he

prayed that He grant this vision to his servant. (2 Kg. 6:14-17) He could have drawn back the curtain for an apocalyptic portrayal of the past, present and future vicissitudes of God's people and their final victory in Christ. And this kind of demonstration, such as we actually find filmed in the book of Revelation, could have been made so as to produce in the witnesses that kind of satisfaction with the reality of Jesus' authority that to deny what they would have experienced would be a denial of themselves. This does not mean that they would have automatically submitted themselves to His will or entered His discipleship, for sheer display of heavenly power or visions can produce quite the opposite effect. (Cf. Mt. 8:34 Notes; Ex. 20:18-22) Naked supernaturalism does not impel belief. Therefore, Jesus could have performed this sign without damaging their will, so that they would somehow have been forced to believe against their wishes. So why did He not do it? See on 12:39, 40.

2. **From Heaven:** Is this a Hebraistic circumlocution for "from God"? Or was this demand due to a popular suspicion that miracles done on earth could be rigged, whereas signs **from heaven**, taking place in a sphere where no human hand could possibly manipulate, would not be deceptive, spurious or counterfeited, hence, more genuine, more convincing? Under the influence of the Jewish apocalyptic literature of the inter-testamental period, they may have actually been demanding the literal manifestation of the messianic, royal display pictured in those popularizations of Jewish expectations regarding the Messiah's appearance. Also, since some of their own disciples or even rabbis themselves were known to have performed exorcisms (as those to which Jesus Himself alludes for sake of argument, 12:27), or since some of their rabbis claimed to have healed by their great (supposed) piety or prayers, let Him provide some astounding, decisive and indubitable proof of His authority. (See Edersheim *Life*, II, 68, 69)

B. LOGICAL REFUSAL (12:39)

12:39 **But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it . . .** The very character of the questors themselves is Jesus' reason for refusing to give what they ask, not that He could not, in the nature of signs, provide the most

extraordinary miracle to demonstrate His identity and bedazzle them with His glory and power. But in what sense are they so culpable? (Cf. other similar characterizations of people who stand in the presence of substantial proof but act the part of unbelievers: Mk. 8:38; Mt. 17:17; Ac. 2:40; Phil. 2:15) Are they more specifically wicked than pervers, kidnappers or any other sinners in the catalogues? Their request provoked a groan in Jesus (Mk. 8:12), because here are the elders of His nation, the standard product and best examples of that religion they professed to be from God in exactly the traditionalized form currently taught, whom He must condemn, placing them on a par with brutish, irreligious men. And He **MUST** do this, because their religiousness has made them into persons who can fly in the face of all foregoing evidence that should have been sufficient to convince them and still demand signs, as if nothing worthy of the name had ever been done!

1. They are **adulterous**. **Adulterous**, in this peculiarly Jewish context, describes that spiritual infidelity according to which Israel, formally united to God by a covenant as binding and as intimate as marriage, spurned her divine Husband by idolatry, hypocrisy and indifference toward God. (Study Jer. 2:2; 3:1-22; Hos. 1:2—2:20; 4:10; 7:4; Ezek. 16 and 23) What were the percentages for believing that these spiritual descendents of patriarchs, who could commit fornication in the name of religion in full view of the burning, holy mountain where God had just given the most fantastic display of His own holiness and presence, would somehow respond any better, or be more significantly affected by a marvellous display of supernatural fireworks? It is unfaithfulness to God to ask for more signs than those He deems already sufficient!
2. They are **evil**:
 - a. Because their motive for asking for a sign is not that they might have good reasons for believing Him and submitting to His Lordship, but that they might be even more confirmed in their despising His revolutionary doctrine. They were not asking for evidence for faith, but for more material to criticize.
 - b. Because they desired to be vindicated in that rejection in the mind of the multitude. Their eye was not set on seeing truth, but on seeing their prestige and influence reestablished with the people.

- c. Because these unfaithful Jews are rejecting those portents by which God had already signalled the identity and consequent authority of the Messiah. In their perversity they 'prescribe' what course of action God Himself has to follow to suit their whims. Because they turned their back upon the multitudinous evidences that God had already given, it became morally impossible to concede them what they require. Dictating to God is evil!
- d. Because it is sin to reject evidence. (Dt. 18:18, 19; cf. Lk. 16:30, 31) These scribes were being disloyal to their own law and blatantly blind to all the prophetic precedents in their long history of God's dealings with Israel through men who brought just such evidences as Jesus now presented.

So it would not have mattered what manner of evidence the Lord COULD have presented them, their character rendered any objective examination of it impossible. The word **generation** refers specifically to **this evil generation** of Jews then confronting Jesus (v. 45; Mk. 8:12; Lk. 11:29), but the denunciation is also applicable to ANY group in any era that refuses the testimony of evidence that contradicts their pet theories and by which refusal they hope to defend their skepticism. In order better to appreciate what is involved here in the nature of supernatural evidence, contrast Jesus' answer given to the Pharisees with that sent to John the Baptist. (11:11ff.) The Pharisees could not be treated in the same manner as was John, since they rejected the evidential power of Jesus' miracles as credentials by ascribing them to the power of Satan, whereas John accepted the witness of Jesus' works as the mighty acts of God. So, in his case the Lord could refer him to them.

And there shall no sign be given to it . . . McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 1f) argues that:

In demanding of Jesus a sign, the scribes and Pharisees denied by implication that any of the multitude of signs which he had wrought were real signs; and their demand was for one of a different kind. In answering that no sign should be given but that of the prophet, he could not have meant that he would give no more of the kind which he had been giving; for he did give more of these, and in great abundance; but he meant that none should be given of a different kind, except the sign of Jonah. This was different, in that it

was wrought *upon* him, and not *by* him, and it was therefore a more direct and manifest exhibition of power from heaven.

C. MERCIFUL EXCEPTION (12:39c; 40)

12:39c and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. Here is written the wisdom and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ: in the presence of His fiercest opponents, who themselves deserve nothing but an eternity of tortured conscience, He graciously grants them precisely what they ask, a sign of a different type. For even this merciful exception to His own strict rule ("No sign shall be given.") is in itself a demand that these critics suspend judgment until the fulfilment of the sign given. Study Dt. 18:15-22). From a Jewish standpoint, therefore, they got everything they asked for, even though it was not precisely what they would have dictated, had that opportunity been offered them. Our Lord can make even the most insidious, dishonest, unfair demand to boomerang upon those who make it, and, at the same time, provide Himself with further evidence of His true identity. So the resurrection is to be the one great sign which might yet convince them, since all signs and miracles previous to the resurrection are given power and significance by it. No one miracle stands alone, but receives its meaning from the resurrection, because a permanently dead miracle-worker is of less abiding significance than a living, resurrected Lord. Thus it was that Jesus was to be "designated Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead . . ." (Ro. 1:4; cf. Jn. 2:18-22) This act of God in raising Jesus from death was His authentic stamp of approval not only upon the words and acts of Jesus (Cf. Ac. 2:22-33), but also God's guarantee that it is with THIS Man, and no other, that all men must have to do. (Ac. 17:31)

The sign of Jonah the prophet, as a phrase, suggests that it would have been a sign well known to the original hearers, especially to anyone acquainted with the history of that prophet. However, in what did this particular sign consist? Did Jesus intend to apply only certain features in the episode of Jonah's life, i.e. only the incident of the sea monster and not the preaching of repentance to the pagan metropolis? These questions are answered by Jesus' next statement, which, while there is absolutely no textual evidence against it, has been the basis of many ingenious, but unsuccessful, attempts to expunge it from the original words of Christ. (See Plummer, *Matthew*, 183; McGarvey, *Jesus and Jonah*, chap. I; Keil, *Minor Prophets*, I, 383) The sign of Jonah must be interpreted in light of Jesus' own

application of it in this context, and not by some other use He is thought to have made elsewhere of this incident in the life of Jonah. (Cf. Lk. 11:30 and Plummer's comments thereon as well as on Mt. 12:40. The agnostic commentaries tend to place the emphasis on the preaching of Jonah and deny as preposterous the miraculous elements in Jonah's experience.)

12:40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Despite the no little temptation to see in Jonah's mission to Nineveh a symbolical and typical importance (with Keil, *Minor Prophets*, I, 383ff.), these words are Jesus' explanation of what HE means by **the sign of Jonah**. McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 9ff.) argues that:

His own resurrection, after entombment for three days, is called the sign of Jonah, because of the similarity of the two miracles. This view is confirmed by the consideration that it was undoubtedly a miraculous sign which the scribes and Pharisees demanded; and the word sign in his answer must be understood in the same sense. . . . But how could Jonah have been a miraculous sign to the Ninevites? He wrought no miracle among them; and his preaching could not have been regarded by them as miraculous until, by means of some separate miraculous sign they were convinced that it was a miraculous prediction. That which made him a sign to the Ninevites must then have been his experience in the fish, connected as it was with the command twice given to go and cry against Nineveh. But did the Ninevites hear of the sign of Jonah before they repented at his preaching? These men and many others answer, no; and they so answer because the fact is not stated in the Book of Jonah. But while it is not stated in that book, it is stated by Jesus, and there is nothing in the book which conflicts with the statement. On the contrary, the book leaves the way open for the supposition that the news of the miracle reached Nineveh as soon as Jonah did, if not sooner. . . . Necessarily, then, if there was a real analogy, and not a sophistical assertion of one, the sign in the person of Jonah must have been communicated to the Ninevites, and it must, as in the other case (i.e. of Jesus' resurrection, HEF) have been the controlling evidence on which their faith and their consequent repentance rested . . . the sign of Jonah was the miracle wrought on

his person, and . . . this was certainly known to the Ninevites before they repented at his preaching. . . .

And it is to be noticed that, in drawing an analogy between His future resurrection and the experience of the prophet, the Lord asserts that **Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale** (sic: ASV; better: **sea monster**, so ASV footnote and Arndt-Gingrich on *kétos*, since **whale** may be too specific a word to describe this specially prepared fish.) Attacks on the force of Jesus' affirmation of the historicity of the facts surrounding Jonah have been suggested along the lines mentioned by Plummer (*Matthew*, 183):

Our Lord's mention of Jonah as preaching to the Ninevites does not require us to believe that the story of Jonah is history. In His own parables He made use of fiction for instruction. Why should He not use an O.T. parable for the same purpose? If He were on earth now, would He not quote Dante?

McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*) has so thoroughly dealt with these and other similar attacks, that one could do no better than to summarize his answers to the objections and simply acknowledge our indebtedness. Page numbers in each case refer to *Jesus and Jonah*.

1. Objection: "Writers and speakers of every age and people speak of fictional characters and their experiences as if they were real, without, at the same time, assuming any objective reality for the existence or activities of those characters. Or, in relation to written works, they may refer to them without concerning themselves about their historicity, literary form, authorship or date of composition."
- a. McGarvey (19): "If the hearers of Jesus had so understood the story of Jonah, the cases would be parallel; but it is notorious, and it is freely admitted that they understood the story to be true, and when, therefore, Jesus spoke of it as a true story, he deceived them if it was not."
- b. In other words, such allusions to fictional characters and experiences are permissible only where writer and readers or speaker and audience know where each other stands on the question of the objective non-existence of those characters. One can cite even Walt Disney's cartoon characters as illustrations without being thought a fool, so long as his audience is aware of where he stands on

the question of their ultimate, objective reality. But where he gives the impression that he holds their view of the matter when he really disagrees, then he conveys a false impression.

2. Objection: "The reference to Jonah is an illustration and, as such, serves only to suggest a thought which does not rest, for its effectiveness as a means of conveying the thought, upon the full historical validity of the thing which serves as the basis for the illustration."
 - a. McGarvey (20): "The question is not whether an illustration drawn from a supposed fact would be invalidated by the discovery that the account of the fact is allegorical; but whether the particular use Jesus made of the story of Jonah implies that Jonah was in the fish . . . for if Jesus treated the story as historical in speaking to men who held it to be so, then He was either mistaken about it himself, or he deceived his hearers. There is no possible escape from this alternative."
 - b. But granted that this is an illustration, what is thereby proved against the historicity of the story upon which the illustration is based? Again, McGarvey (21): "The undoubted reality of the past fact is what gives force to the assertion respecting the future one. . . . If the Pharisees could have answered Jesus, as these critics now do, by saying, Very well, Master; Jonah was not in the bowels of the fish; they could have added: therefore, according to your own showing, you will not be in the heart of the earth. Instead of being an illustration of something . . . the remark was a solemn prediction of a fact yet to be, which should be analogous to one that certainly had been."
3. Objection: "The book of Jonah was a well-known didactic parable written expressly to communicate a great moral lesson. Hence, Jesus' hearers would have understood His reference to that parable of Jonah and, consequently, He would not have given them a false impression."
 - a. Who can prove, however, that the Jews of Jesus' day understood the book of Jonah to be anything less than sober history?
 - b. But for any sort of moral lesson to be taught, the audience must understand the reference made by the speaker. While it is possible and admissible to use fictitious characters or make reference to imaginary facts as if they were real,

if Jesus were doing this, then, His hearers did not understand His allusion, since they thought Jonah to be history. If Jesus believed Jonah to be fiction, then He made a false impression, because He talked as if it were fact. (McGarvey, 23)

- c. So what is left is a Jesus that cannot be acquitted of the charge of intentional duplicity if He knew that the event was not real and yet used it to confirm their impression that it was. (McGarvey, 24)

Nor is there any hope of admitting a portion of the book of Jonah as containing a kernel of truth, while rejecting the rest as unhistorical, unreliable accretions of a later age. Some would teach that Jesus' notice concerning Jonah may be trusted only to justify credence in that kernel of fact upon which the traditional exterior ultimately rests. But the "traditional exterior" which is passed over as "unhistorical, unreliable accretions", that is, referred to in this manner by the critics, is precisely those elements that are miraculous. McGarvey (32) is right to notice that:

If the words of Jesus . . . prove that the narrative of Jonah rests "ultimately upon a basis of fact"; that the outlines of the narrative are historical, and that the Ninevites did actually repent, why does not his explicit declaration that "Jonah was three days and three nights in the bowels of the sea monster" prove that this also is historical? I am afraid, after all, that the ultimate reason for denying the credibility of the narrative is that which is the avowed reason of unbelievers—an unwillingness to accept the miraculous in the story—and this is the very essence of skepticism.

Others, in the endeavor to relieve themselves from the dilemma of seeing Jesus committed to a position unfavorable to the skeptical critics, follow the expedient of pontificating that Jesus did not actually say this, the statement itself coming from some lesser voice. Compare Plummer (*Matthew*, 183):

There is no doubt that ver. 40 is part of the original text of this Gospel; it is absent from no MS. no version. But there is good reason for believing that it was no part of Christ's reply on this occasion. 1. It is not in Lk. 11:29-32. 2. It does not fit the context, which speaks of preaching producing repentance and is in no way concerned with the Resurrection. 3. It would not be intelligible to Christ's

hearers, who knew nothing of His future Resurrection. 4. The parallel drawn between Jonah and Christ is not true. . . . But the facts will not justify the statement that Christ's body was "three days and *three nights*" in the grave. . . . The verse may be a gloss which got into the authority which Mt. used; or it may be an insertion made by Mt. himself on the supposition that Christ's mention of Jonah referred to him as a type of the Resurrection. . . .

But to deal with these arguments in detail it is necessary to observe that:

1. While admitting for sake of argument that these two passages are parallel, the fact that this statement (Mt. 12:40) is not in Luke 11:29-32 is no argument against its being reported by the eyewitness Matthew as over against Luke who was not present. And were even both men present to hear Jesus' original reply, it does not follow that both would agree on a verbatim citation, as even a superficial examination of thousands of parallel synoptic Gospel texts reveals. However, it is debatable whether they be even parallel reports of the same event.
2. The context speaks not merely of preaching producing repentance, but specifically of this captious demand for a sign, hurled at Jesus. This, and nothing else, is what called forth this answer of Jesus. Contrary to that skeptical mentality that refuses to admit the objective reality of any supernatural events, the Jewish mentality requires that a sign consist in some prediction which can not be manipulated by the one giving it, nor which can be foreseen or presupposed by normal human sagacity or foresight, i.e. that it be specifically supernatural in character. So the sign does not lie in some supposed contrast between the preaching of Jonah which produced the repentance of the Ninevites on the one hand, and the preaching of Jesus Christ which resulted in the impenitence of the unbelieving Jews, on the other. This, because the impenitence of the Jewish nation as a whole was already a foregone conclusion. If not, the standard procedure through Jewish history was the brutal rejection and murder of the living prophets and the hypocritical glorification of the dead ones. (Cf. Mt. 23:29, 30) So, from a practical standpoint, there could be no sign, nothing supernatural, in predicting their refusal to repent. To think so is to ignore all that the

- Jews really intended to convey by their demand for a sign.
3. To speak of Jesus' future resurrection so those hearers would perhaps be unintelligible, but so what? Perhaps they would be unable to foresee the mechanics of that event, but what does their inability prove about the right or propriety of revealing otherwise unknowable truth? That is what revelations are for! Did Nicodemus instantly comprehend the new birth when Jesus tried to capitalize on that rabbi's confession that "You are a Teacher come from God"? Rather than let Jesus teach him as One possessed of the requisite authority to reveal otherwise unknowable truth, Nicodemus began to argue against what he could not immediately comprehend, since, to him, the mechanics of the rebirth were quite unclear. No, the objection here is based upon the prejudice that God cannot reveal to man what he does not already know or what does not immediately appeal to his intelligence as right and proper. Even the Apostles themselves, before the resurrection actually occurred, stumbled at the clearest, unfigurative explanations of this event, but that did not hinder Jesus from continuing His patient efforts to reveal it to them. (Cf. 16:21-23; 17:22, 23; 20:17-19)
 4. The objection, that sees the parallel between the experience of Jesus and Jonah as fundamentally false, since in no sense can it be said that the body of Jesus lay in the tomb a full **"three days and three nights,"** is based upon the mistaken notion that this phrase is literal and, hence, to be considered the most precise expression of the schedule of events governing the Last Week of Jesus' life. But that this phrase is not in any sense literal nor intended strictly to govern the time schedule for the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord is proved by the following considerations:
 - a. If we must understand Jesus literally here, we must also expect Him to prophesy His own resurrection elsewhere as taking place "on the FOURTH day," if He is to remain in the tomb literally **three days and three nights,** no more and no less. But this He never says. It is always "on the third day" or "after three days," which are two exactly parallel statements of a Hebrew idiom, as a careful analysis of the various Synoptic texts will verify. (Cf. Mt. 16:21 and Lk. 9:22 with Mt. 8:31; Mt. 17:23 with Mk. 9:31; Mt. 20:19 and Lk. 18:33 with Mk.

- 10:34; also Lk. 24:7, 46 and Jn. 2:13) Surely Jesus Himself understood His own language when He explained elsewhere to His disciples what He meant here when put under pressure by the scribes to furnish them a sign. Therefore, unless we are to accuse the Lord of self-contradiction, we must permit Him the usual liberties to use language as men normally use it and we must look elsewhere (other than to a literal meaning) for the correct interpretation.
- b. One possible explanation of these seemingly precise words is that we have here in idiomatic Jewish usage which must be interpreted according to Jewish patterns of speech and not by the way Gentiles use the same words. Study of the following passages in their contexts will reveal that the Semitic mind habitually expressed time sequences in relatively precise language whereas only an approximate time element is intended. (Cf. Gen. 42:17, 18; Esther 4:15-17; 5:1; 1 Kg. 12:5, 12; 20:29; 1 Sam. 30:12, 13; cf. even Cornelius' manner of reckoning time, Ac. 10:3-30. Or is the entire account retold from the Semitic standpoint of Peter or some other who served as Luke's informant?) Thus, this usage among the Hebrews of counting a part of a day for a whole day really existed. Further, the chronology of Jewish kings is notoriously problematic due to the habit (to us, frustrating) of counting a part of a year for an entire year. While this usage is perhaps strange to the western ear, this strangeness does not cancel its real existence in Semitic speech patterns. Taken in this sense, then, Jesus is speaking as a typical Semite when He says "three days and three nights," but means no more than "sometime within a period of three days more or less."
- c. Another possible explanation of these seemingly precise words is the fact that this expression is part of a sign, or a prophecy of things that must come to pass in the future, and like all prophecies, must be handled according to the normal exegetical rules governing the proper interpretation of prophecies. One such rule most pertinent here is that the sign, or prophecy, must be interpreted in the light of its actual fulfillment and not on the basis of any meaning attached to its words that would disregard

that fulfilment. This same prophecy, or sign, was stated literally elsewhere. (See under 4a above.)

- d. Jesus' Jewish enemies understood Him to mean less than 72 hours. (Mt. 27:62-64) Their testimony to the meaning of this expression is invaluable in that they were the most interested in seeing the failure of what they considered the most iniquitous imposture, and yet it was to this very class that Jesus addressed the sign in question in precisely the language recorded by Matthew.
- e. Luke names the days involved in the Last Week schedule of the death, burial and resurrection as "Friday (*paraskeuê*, translatable as "preparation" for some festival day, as here, the Sabbath, or rendered as the normal Greek word for Friday), Saturday (the Sabbath), and Sunday (the first day of the week). See Lk. 23:54—24:1. Matthew, though less obviously, is just as clear: "evening" after Jesus' crucifixion (Mt. 27:57), "Next day, that is, after the day of Preparation" (Mt. 27:62) or "sabbath" (28:1) and "first day of the week" (Mt. 28:1). Similarly, Mark follows much the same pattern: Mk. 15:42; 16:1, 2, as does John 19:31, 42; 20:1).

The great obstacle in question is not whether the story of Jonah be credible and worthy of God or not, for Jesus' authority vouches for its authenticity. The insurmountable problem lies in trying to prove that OT account to be anything but true history. McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 61) argues that "if the story of Jonah is not history, it is, of course, a piece of fiction . . . which originated in the brain of an Israelite." But that this alternative is itself even more incredible than the view it is invented to supplant, is proven by the following considerations suggested by McGarvey:

1. "It is incredible . . . that any Israelite, capable of conceiving and of writing such a story, would be so irreverent toward one of the great prophets of his nation as to make him act the part ascribed to Jonah . . .
2. "It is still more incredible that the leaders of the chosen people at any period of their history would have allowed such a document a place among their sacred books . . .
3. "No Israelite, inventing a story of God's dealings with a great Gentile city like Nineveh, would have represented him as being so regardful of the welfare of its people, so quick to forgive their sins, and so tenderly mindful of the innocent within its

walls. Especially would no Israelite write a story whose culminating point was a stern rebuke of his nation for animosity toward an oppressive heathen power. . . .

4. "This incredibility is intensified when we consider the date assigned to the Book of Jonah by those who hold it to be fictitious. . . . A Jew of a later age would be the last man on earth to invent a story showing tender regard for (Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire) on the part of Israel's God. . . . The farther down the stream of time you bring the date of the book, the more incredible that it could have obtained the place which we know it did obtain in the sacred writings of the Jews."

While their arguments are largely based upon psychological probabilities, which in no sense can be considered mathematically certain however likely they may seem, and so could be rejected as hypotheses contrary to fact, still the canonization of Jonah's book by Jewish leaders is a fact, a fact that is explicable only on the hypothesis that its history was objectively too true and documented to permit them the right to reject it.

In the heart of the earth need mean no more than within the earth, since it is a common expression used without its literal signification. (Cf. Dt. 4:11; Ezek. 27:4, 25ff.; Jon. 2:3; Ps. 46:2) Nothing is here affirmed of the depth of Jesus' future entombment nor of the exact location of Hades, but simply the reality of that burial. It does not really matter whether He means simply the grave of Joseph of Arimathea or Hades, because for the purpose of the sign, the meaning is the same. (Cf. Lk. 23:43; Ac. 2:27, 31; Eph. 4:9; I Pet. 3:19?)

D. JESUS' CONDEMNATION WELL GROUNDED (12:41, 42)

1. NINEVITES HEARD ONLY THE PROPHET JONAH (12:41)

12:41 The men of Nineveh shall stand up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it. If God be the Judge, how is it true that ancient pagans could be said to condemn anyone? In the sense that anyone who fulfills what is required of all, condemns those who fail to do what was in their power, because the former prove that all COULD have done their duty and that any who do not do so are left without excuse for their failure. In this case the duty, required of both the men of Nineveh and the Jews of this generation in which Jesus lived, was repentance. God is still the Judge and He will be justified in the verdict He

renders against the unrepentant Jews by the fact that the Ninevites proved that repentance toward God is both humanly possible and the right reponse of the generosity of God.

But why would the Ninevites condemn this generation? Because Christ's preaching was based upon far better attested evidence than that of Jonah's. Did God accompany Jonah's ministry with the variety and abundance of undoubted supernatural evidences of the divine authority of his message, as He had done for His Son? If not, those Gentile Ninevites had far more reason to demand signs of that foreign prophet from a tiny subject kingdom than did this generation of God's chosen people, nevertheless those godless pagans repented and this nation of "God-fearing" Jews did not. Apparently the men of Nineveh received the marvelous story of Jonah's deliverance as sign enough and proof enough that he truly spoke for the living God, so they believed his message. McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 56) imaginatively fills out the picture thus:

When he began to cry out in the streets of Nineveh, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown,' the question necessarily went from lip to lip, Who is this? The answer, that it was the great prophet of Israel, by whose supernatural foresight the victories of Jeroboam, running through a period of forty years, had been won, was enough to arrest solemn attention; but when it was added that on first receiving the command to come and utter this cry, he tried to escape the task by running away, and sailing far out upon the sea, but that Jehovah, who had given the command, overtook him, brought him back in the bowels of a fish, cast him out alive on dry land, and then renewed the command, this added tenfold power to the word of the prophet.

The Ninevites' honesty in receiving the sign and preaching offered them, however limited the number of signs and sermons, was still Gentile honesty, because it originated outside the pale of Jewish advantages and enlightenment. But the Jewish response to Jesus, coming as it did from a people endowed with four thousand years of rich history of the wonderful dealings of the living God, a people who, rather than face up to the moral responsibility required of them by the abundance and variety of signs provided them in support of the message of Jesus of Nazareth, would dare to demand some proof of His authority, can be described as nothing less than callous dishonesty and moral irresponsibility! God's standard of judgment here, as everywhere, is: "According to the light against which you have

sinned will be your judgment." (Cf. Lk. 12:47, 48; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jas. 4:17. Study other examples of Jesus' use of the superior quality of Gentiles' response to God despite great handicaps, in order to throw into greater contrast Jewish unbelief notwithstanding their excellent opportunities to know God and do far better. Mt. 8:10-12; cf. 15:22-28; Lk. 11:32; 13:23-30; 17:11-19; Mt. 21:43; 22:1-14. See also the examples where pagan cities, because of lack of opportunities, will be punished with less severity than privileged Jewish cities who knew Jesus: Mt. 10:15; 11:22-24; Lk. 10:12, 14.)

The men of Nineveh . . . shall condemn this generation. Here is further evidence of the uniqueness of Jesus' message, proof that He does not intend to express the aspiration of His age, for, instead of picturing the nation of Israel as standing in judgment of the Gentiles, He affirms that these Gentiles will condemn the Jews. Our limited knowledge of rabbinic thought current in Jesus' day does not permit us to pontificate about all the views of His contemporaries. However, we may timidly ask where was the rabbi that dared raise his voice to take so radical a view of Jewish culpability, as does Jesus here? We ask this, since we do not know who would have been spiritually mature enough as to be able to conceive an idea so inimical to all that Maccabeanism and its spiritual children stood for.

Further, Jesus clearly sees the outcome of judgment that only Jehovah could know with certainty. Who is this that dares place His own people on the balances with those penitent pagans only to find Israel condemned? Who is this that sees the outcome of the proclamation of His own death and resurrection so clearly as to be able to warn His people that the Jews of that age would reject that future sign and thus seal their fate?

They repented at the preaching of Jonah (*metenōēsan eis tò kérugma Ionâ*) "Faith-only" groups who would deny any connection between obedience to Christ in Christian baptism and remission of sins hope to sustain this theory by appeal to this passage and Lk. 11:32 as evidence for a special use of the Greek preposition *eis*. *Eis* is used in Ac. 2:38 in the phrase "for remission of sins" (*eis âfesis tôn hamartiôn*) where most translators render the phrase: "for the remission, in order to receive forgiveness, so that your sins will be forgiven, etc." But since those, who exaggerate the *sola fede* principle as to exclude baptism from the plan of salvation, must dispose of the damaging evidence of such texts on salvation as Ac. 2:38; they think themselves to have found in the Greek phrase the solution to their quandary. Upon superficial examination of our texts (i.e. Mt. 12:41

and Lk. 11:32), it would seem that evidence for some other translation of the Greek preposition might have been discovered.

It is argued that the Ninevites repented *eis tò kérugma Ionâ*, i.e. "because of the preaching of Jonah." Therefore, it is said, it is proper to translate Ac. 2:38 in harmony with the "faith only" view as follows: "Repent . . . and be baptized . . . because of the forgiveness of your sins," i.e. because your sins have been forgiven. That there is a causal use of the preposition *eis* is affirmed by grammarians and lexicographers, as, for example, Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 104; Robertson and Davis, *New Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 256; Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 227-229. However the best evidence upon which they affirm the causal use of *eis* is based principally upon Matthew 12:41 and Luke 11:32. The weakness of this evidence lies in the fact that it ignores the usual meaning assigned to the word *kérugma*: "proclamation, announcement, preaching." (Arndt-Gingrich, 432) Nouns ending in *-ma* are regularly and primarily considered the result of the action implied in the verb from which they are formed. (Chamberlain, *Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 12) Thus, the *kérugma* of Jonah was not the action of preaching, but "the thing preached" by him, i.e. the message itself. While it is historically true that the Ninevites repented because Jonah preached to them (Jonah 3:5-10), this is not a proper translation of what Jesus said. Rather, Jesus said, ". . . for they turned to the message preached by Jonah . . ." (Mt. 12:41 and Lk. 11:32, Charles B. Williams's translation. Or, as Plummer (*Luke*, 307, 308) has it: "*In accordance with the preaching*' they repented; i.e. they turned towards it and *conformed to it*; compare . . . 2 Tim. 2:26; or else, 'out of regard to it' they repented." That the repentance of the Ninevites was directed *toward (eis)* a definite end which formed the form and substance of Jonah's message is well-known. (Consider other examples of this use of *eis*: Jn. 3:16-19, 36; 1:12; 2:11, 23; 6:29, 35, 40; Ac. 10:43; 14:23; 19:4; 20:21; 24:24; Ro. 10:9, 10; Ac. 20:21; 2 Tim. 2:25; Ac. 26:18; 11:18; Lk. 24:47) Thus a well-meant attempt to prove that Peter meant "be baptized because your sins have already been forgiven" fails of necessary proof, because it cannot be sustained from our present text. The repentance of the Ninevites was their definite move *toward (eis)*, their willing entrance *into (eis)* harmony with all that was the burden of Jonah's message. Whereas their former conduct had led them to turn their backs upon righteousness, sobriety and fear of God, the kind of conduct which was the very opposite to that which Jonah's oracle

proclaimed, their repentance was their personal commitment to (*eis*) all the moral implications that his *kérugma* demanded.

Behold, a greater than Jonah is here. (Cf. this saying with 12:6 with which Matthew places it in context. Is *pleōn*, "more," different in practical emphasis from *meizon*, "greater"?) Lenski (*Matthew*, 495) is right to notice that the "neuter *pleōn* includes everything the Jews had in Christ." Jesus is claiming that right in the presence of these dishonest critics and prejudiced authorities was something far more important, **something of greater proportions than Jonah.** Whereas the neuter **something** might tend to draw the mind to the many, convincing signs that had characterized His ministry, or perhaps to the ministry itself, the very mention of the man **Jonah** as the standard of comparison brings us back to the unstated implication: "I, Jesus, am greater than that inspired prophet whose message called forth from his pagan audience the most amazing demonstration of repentance!" He is fully justified in severely censuring His own people, since He had already proven Himself, beyond any reasonable doubt, to be superior to the great prophets of the past to whom these Pharisees gave full honors and yet pretended to be unable to recognize the proper Messianic identity and dignity of Jesus.

2. THE QUEEN OF THE SOUTH HEARD ONLY SOLOMON (12:42)

12:42 The queen of the south shall rise up in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it: for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here. This is obviously a second example reinforcing the point stated in the foregoing illustration, and, as such, becomes the historical validation of those OT texts. (1 Kg. 10:1-13; 2 Chron. 9:1-12) Here again the same arguments are valid that were used in reference to the historicity of Jonah, for, had the Pharisees been able to deny that the Queen of the South ever came to Palestine to visit Solomon, or that Solomon really never possessed his fabled wisdom, then they could also have retorted: "Your claim to possess a wisdom superior to that of Solomon is an empty boast."

The Queen of the South had received authentic, though somewhat partial, news of Solomon's wisdom. Her felt need, her longing for greater wisdom than she possessed, was sufficient to cause her to make the long, arduous journey, ignoring the hardships, dangers, time and expense involved, to hear him. Her diligence in seeking out that wisdom stands in bold contrast to the attempted neutrality and cold indifference of Jesus' own people. She was also outside the

influence of the Mosaic economy, hence, not blessed with the enormous advantages and opportunities to know God as did the chosen people. Therefore, even though it was the famed wisdom of Solomon that drew her, by which the Lord glorified Himself in him, and even though she felt compelled to exclaim her praise for Jehovah his God for His love for Israel that had placed such a man on the throne, yet there is no impelling evidence in the OT record that she was converted to Hebrew monotheism, since her "acknowledgement of Jehovah as Israel's God, was reconcilable with polytheism." (Keil, *Kings*, 160) And this is what we would expect of her: that she return to her own realm with serious doubts about her former paganism, that she live up to the light available to her. In the record she speaks consistently of Jehovah as "your God," as if she did not claim Him as her own. (Cf. 1 Kg. 10:9; 2 Chron. 9:8)

The wisdom of Solomon, the point of comparison here, was of a practical sort, the best human psychology for excellent human relations. But its origin was a God-given gift that manifested itself in the finest practical philosophy man has yet seen. This is at the same time its greatness and its limitation, since it was not particularly presented as a divine revelation to save men from their sins. There were definite religious overtones and a positively religious basis, but Solomon sought his psycho-sociological orientation within the religious framework of the Mosaic system. (Study *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiastes* to sense this.) The most religious maxims in his work presuppose a complete religious system explained elsewhere.

With this view of **the Queen of the South** and of **the wisdom of Solomon**, we begin to discern that the second illustration is not exactly equal to the first. Rather, Jesus has moved, with excellent rhetorical effect, to an illustration involving a pagan who, though deeply moved by her contact with Hebrew monotheism, apparently did not become converted to it, in contrast with the Ninevites who actually repented. Further, in contrast to the preaching of a divinely inspired message by Jonah, we have in this illustration only the **wisdom of Solomon**. As a seeker after truth and as an expounder of great wisdom and knowledge, **Solomon and the Queen of the South** make an excellent point of contrast where-with Jesus may censure His own privileged age. Solomon's truly great erudition was so far inferior to the grand revelations of Him who is the Wisdom of God personified, and yet God's own people could not recognize that same Wisdom right in their midst, in their own land! And, as will be discussed in connection with Jesus' use of parables to hide truth about the Kingdom while, at the same time

revealing it, we see that the Jews in general did not take the trouble to understand what was not clear and well-founded in the message of Christ. They just wrote Him off as a religious fanatic. Despite their great advantages to know by personal investigation, they just did not care that much about truth.

Greater than Solomon: on the neuter *pleion* see on 12:41 and on *metron* at 12:6. Here again the neuter (*pleion*) speaks of all that Christ represented to the Jewish people. He had been laying before them the eternal wisdom of God and they did nothing, but scorn it. But that ancient queen condemns not only those unbelievers, but all who cannot discern in this young rabbi from Nazareth "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Co. 2:3) nor see in the face of Christ "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God," (2 Co. 4:4, 6)

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from Jesus' words is that every man is judged according to the light against which he has sinned. What would the Lord say to the Twentieth Century? "You have enjoyed even greater opportunities to investigate the truth, granted the historical perspective of twenty centuries. The Christians who lived out their lives in the early years of the Church and sought out the truth, with far less advantages that you, will rise up in judgment against your generation to the very extent that it does not live up to its privileges and the knowledge of God's will that it could have obtained." Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 56) rightly concludes that "in Jesus we are confronted with God; and the one real question in life is: 'What is our reaction when we are confronted with God in Jesus Christ?'" Do we see in Him a revelation of God greater than the inspired prophets of the Old Testament, a wisdom greater than the wisest man who has ever lived? Do we bend every effort to know the truth, regardless of the expense involved, and then, having found it, submit to it, even to the extent of the humiliation of repentance?

E. WARNING: THE DANGER OF THE UNCOMMITTED LIFE (12:43-45)

Earlier (11:16-19), Jesus had described the moral caliber of His generation by dramatizing them as fickle children playing in the marketplace whom no one could satisfy. Here His tone is graver as He likens them to a demonized man! (Cf. Lk. 11:24-26) This is a parable illustrating the fundamental impossibility of neutrality, indecision and inaction where truth can be known and when that truth requires a positive response. The text for this story may well

be 12:30 (Cf. Lk. 11:23 as context for this same illustration.)

But the unclean spirit (cf. Mt. 10:1; Mk. 1:23; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; Lk. 4:33; 6:18; 9:42) **When he is gone out of the man:** by what instrumentality the demon leaves his victim, Jesus does not say. Since the demon thinks himself free to return to his old habitation (12:44) and proves his thesis correct (12:45), we might conclude that the demon was not cast out by Jesus, for His stern rebuke, given in the case of the demonized boy, specifically forbade the demon's return. (Cf. Mk. 9:25) Considering the completeness of Jesus' cures, many presume His practice to have been uniform and His attitude the same at all other times. On the other hand, demons are not notoriously obedient to the will of God however expressed. Further, the very prohibition of the demon's return in the case cited suggests that, had Jesus not so spoken, the demon would have returned. **Passeth through waterless places: why waterless?** Is this an example of Jesus' accommodation of His language to a popular superstition connected with contemporary demonology? Or is He actually revealing something that demons really do? (Cf. Isa. 34:14; Baruch 4:35; Tobit 8:3) Concerning this problematic expression McGarvey (*Jesus and Jonah*, 15) wrote:

While it would be hazardous to make it the 'basis of a demonology for which he is to be held responsible,' he certainly is to be held responsible for the remark itself. If an evil spirit, when he left a man, did not frequent waterless places, I should be glad to learn from Professor T. what kind of places he did frequent.

The critics are thus forced by Jesus' assertion to prove that demons do NOT in fact frequent arid areas, in order to demonstrate His words as mere accommodation to popular demonologies. The present state of their knowledge of demons does not permit them such pontifical powers. They too are dependent upon the Gospel narratives for much of their information on this subject and merely betray an unscientific bias when they begin arbitrarily to sift out what information seems to suit their preconceived notions as to what can be true about demons. **Seeking rest and finding it not** may be just part of the scenery of the parable and intended to reveal nothing about the spirit world. It serves to explain why the unclean spirit wanted to return to his old habitat. But this rigidly limited information does not permit us to speculate further about the mentality or habits of demons.

It might well be questioned whether Jesus intends to provide us

a rudimentary lesson in demonology while teaching on an entirely different subject, and not rather a simple parable the details of which are not to be pressed to provide information on demons. That this is a parable is clear not only from the moral indicated at its close, but also from its application to the Jewish unbelievers. But to describe this story as a "parable," does not need to imply that what Jesus says about demons therein must, therefore, be impossible or incorrect so far as it goes. Even though this information may not have been offered to provide some insight into demonology, nevertheless it could have been just as much to Jesus' purpose to give us correct information on demons as to invent a fable to teach His truth, even though fables function remarkably well to reveal a truth. The Lord knows better than anyone then or now how demons act and is probably speaking accordingly in this parable. If He did not speak in harmony with reality, we cannot know it and He certainly missed an excellent opportunity to cast some light onto that dark page of spiritual reality. Granted, His major thrust has nothing to do with demonology, but with what is the fundamental meaning and application of this story, i.e., the empty heart of a Judaism purified but uncommitted. But though this is admittedly a question of probabilities and not one of certainties, yet, until we are prepared to demonstrate the details of Jesus' story to be unrealistic in their portrayal of demonic thought or behavior, we remain dependent upon His words for any information we have.

The man who is the victim of the demon's caprice is **this evil generation** (12:45), so what happens to him is but a picture of the vicissitudes of Jesus' contemporaries who were even then rejecting Him. The fortunes of the demonized man represent the nation under the present spiritual domination of the scribes and Pharisees and the party bosses of the other movements and parties competing for the attention of the nation. Because Jesus' mention of **the last state of the man** (12:45) suggests an earlier period when lesser evils plagued him, and as this last stage of his condition coincided with **this evil generation**, it is necessary to recognize the historical precedents that lay the groundwork for his later condition. A. B. Bruce (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, Synoptic Gospels, 193) thinks that:

It is not at all likely that Christ's view was limited to the period dating from John's ministry. Moral laws need large spaces of time for adequate exemplification. The most instructive exemplification of the degeneracy described is supplied by the period from Ezra till Christ's time. With Ezra

was ended *material* idolatry. But from that period dates the reign of legalism, which issued in Rabbinism, a more subtle and pernicious idolatry of the *letter*, the more deadly that it wore the fair aspect of zeal for God and righteousness.

Jesus is painting the outlines of Jewish history in which the nation has been liberated of its bent for idolatry since the time of the Babylonian exile and remained free from its allurements during the Maccabean revival. But this temporary repentance from the worship of wooden gods was merely succeeded by a reverence for the letter of God's law which proved so fatal to the true spirit of the worship and true service of God. Into the shrine, emptied of its idolatries, had swept the Pharisean scrupulosity and Sadducean liberalism, Herodian worldliness, the unrealism of the Essenes and the nationalistic bigotry of the Zealots, all so much more deadly because the old gods had been merely substituted by anything but submission to God. Is the superficial repentance and revival partially a reference to the flurry of religious activity promoted by the disciples of John the Baptist who had not also become disciples of the Christ? Is there also a reference here to the activity of Jesus, intended to bless and free Israel from the very evils to which it must necessarily fall victim when **this evil generation** will finally crucify Him who is their last hope?

12:44 Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out. The demon still considers it his own dwelling, as God had not been invited in to occupy every room in it. **My house**, as a phrase, does not decide the question whether the demon has been driven out, for he could still describe his former habitation this way, even if driven out, especially if he suspected it yet empty of occupancy since his departure.

And when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. *Empty* (*scholázonta*, "unoccupied, standing empty"), not occupied by any compelling force, not positively committed to any cause, neutral. Why should Israel remain uncommitted to the will of God in the face of the great issues with which it was continually faced?

1. The man on the street was probably too absorbed in the every day business of making a living to concern himself seriously in seeking out and submitting himself to the truth.
2. Others, confused by the great debates between the learned rabbis, may have excused themselves on the basis of theological incompetence and so left it to the experts.
3. Yet others, seeing the truth and admitting that Jesus was right,

were afraid to take an unpopular stand.

4. Others may have desired merely to be left alone, since they wished to be undisturbed by hard decisions.
5. Some may have begun to grasp the spirit of adventure involved in the spiritual messiahship of Christ, but preferred the security of the old ways, rather than launch out taking the risks required by the adventure.

There were probably as many reasons as there were people who held back and, for one reason or another, did not bow to the will of God in Jesus Christ. But in all these excuses there is one common element. Morgan (*Matthew*, 135) describes this spiritual vacuum in the heart of Israel: "There was no indweller, possessing, holding, mastering . . ." (Contrast with this state of affairs: Ro. 8:9; 1 Co. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Co. 6:16; Eph. 2:21, 22; Jn. 14:23.) Jesus' criticism cuts to the heart of Judaism: "Your religion has only made you empty; it cannot fill you. It leaves you the easy victim of any power that can fill that vacuum!"

Swept clean of all the repulsive foulness of idolatry and heathenism. **Garnished** (*kekosmēmēnon*, Arndt-Gingrich, 445: "1. Put in order; 2. Adorn, decorate."), but not filled. Decorated with the external beauty of Pharisaic devotion to the study and practice of the letter of the Law, the nation was living an outwardly reformed life characterized by empty virtue and hypocrisy and hollow ceremonies. God is not there, the only One who could have successfully resisted Satan. (Cf. 12:29)

12:45 Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there. A total of eight spirits is not unusual, since the Gospel writers describe cases of multiple demonization. (Lk. 8:2; Mk. 5:9=Lk. 8:30). **Spirits more evil:** what could be more repulsive, more foul than idolatry? Pride, unbelief, fanaticism, greed, self-righteousness, formalism, hypocrisy and, worst of all, rejection of Israel's Messiah! It must be noted here that Jesus never confuses demon-possession for sinfulness, nor does He ever identify demons simply with sins or even temptations to sin. Let us not make that mistake either. Nevertheless, it is very true that the basic teaching of this parable, which speaks exclusively of real demons as the basis of comparison, may find splendid application in reference to the vacuous religious life out of which certain evil practices have been removed without transforming the resulting idleness into positive Christian activity that leaves no room nor time for evil because filled with all

the fulness of God. **Dwell there** (*katoikeē*): just as God is said to dwell in the Temple, i.e. make His permanent abode there (cf. Mt. 23:21, *katoikōmēti*), so these demons wander no longer, but take full possession of their victim. There is nothing said here of a forced entry into the dwelling, since there is everything about the house to invite habitation and nothing to prohibit it. The first demon did not need the others to help him force an entrance, nor are they described as being especially "stronger than he." They are only **more evil than he**.

And the last state of that man becometh worse than the first. This sentence is the turning point in the Lord's parable, belonging as well to the application as to the story itself. Vicious evils, both more in number and virulence than those once repented of, can take over the unfilled life. (Cf. 2 Pet. 2:20; Jn. 5:14; Heb. 6:6; 10:26f.) And with these evils, of course, comes the attendant responsibility and greater guilt. (Jn. 15:22-24) **Even so shall it be also unto this evil generation.** While this statement, stated in the future tense, menaces a dreadful future, there is still opportunity to repent. Plummer (*Matthew*, 185) observes:

They have not reached this desperate condition yet, but they are in danger of it, and some of them will reach it. The warning is similar to that about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which He does not say that they have committed, although they were near it.

But this hope is almost academic, since the very nature of this spiritual hardness practically eliminates the possibility that Israel would yet turn to God in any great numbers. **This evil generation** (*tē geneā tautē tē ponērā*) is no merely technical, eschatological term referring to the entire Hebrew race clear down to the last trumpet. On the contrary, it is a practical expression that precisely pinpoints Jesus' accusation upon the Jews then living and rejecting the real life and hope He was even then offering. (Cf. Mt. 11:16; 12:39, 41, 42, 45; 17:17; 16:4; 23:36; 24:34; Lk. 11:29-32, 50, 51; 17:25; 21:32) **This generation** means those people who, with the living lessons of Hebrew religion before their eyes and with the echo of the voice of John the Baptist ringing in their ears, had merely cleaned up their lives superficially, removing only the grosser, cruder sins of the flesh but leaving untouched the sins of the spirit and the depleted spiritual power and untenanted temple of their hearts. They had not surrendered the habitation and control of their life to its rightful Owner. (Study Malachi 3) By leaving the word **generation** general

and unapplied, the Lord leaves the hearer free to feel its implications either in the formal expression of the Jewish life and religion or in his own personal emptiness before God. By attacking Judaism at its best and finding it wanting, Jesus' own message stands out as the only true alternative. Thus, the Lord has met the opposition by claiming that His teaching was absolutely essential to fill human need, leaving no place for the return of the vileness that had so permeated its existence before. This is a clear claim to absolute religious authority, if not to Deity itself, because, after all, who could speak with such finality about the whole generation of which he is a part and be unable to find any redeeming feature in its people, its priesthood, its government, its religion, its popular ideals, its practical ethics and its national hopes? The Lord had already explained His charge. (Cf. 12:39 Notes) That **evil generation** felt the full blow of Jesus' condemnation when God permitted the Romans to destroy them to the uttermost within just a few short years after this pronouncement, never to rise again for nearly two millenia. (1 Th. 2:16)

It is interesting to observe that this vigorous battle of ideas began with the Pharisees' accusation that Jesus was demon-possessed (Mk. 3:22, 30), but Jesus does not terminate it without first proving conclusively that the Jews themselves were so very much like a man repossessed by eight vicious demons! But this is no mere tit for tat rebuttal or name-calling, because Jesus can see the true nature of His people more clearly than any other contemporary observer. But He is no Judge to remain in the ivory tower of heaven to condemn but a compassionate Savior who labored incessantly to save that very generation! Instead of complacency and self-justification, we find in Him that deep concern and pained patriotism that longs for the salvation of these very opponents who refuse to see that their very accusation itself is symptomatic of the disease which they believe to diagnose in Him.

From the Master's application of His parable, we are able to discern profound lessons for ourselves, suggested by Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 57):

1. The mere removal of a few of the fouler, more repulsive sins of which we are guilty, and the temporary victories over Satan, must not be confused for the final, decisive triumph over sin. So long as self is alive in the individual, the evil once banished from his life has not yet been destroyed. This is why the total filling of one's life with all the fulness

of Christ is so very important. (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17-19)

2. Out of the foregoing comes the observation that mere negative religion can never suffice to hold virulent evil at bay. Those whose piety consists entirely of the observance of God's prohibitions are only half-armed against the assaults of Satan whose delight is unbounded when he can convince anyone that doing nothing is as good and useful for the promotion of godliness as doing positive acts of useful helpfulness to others.
3. Consequently, the Church that would keep her converts permanently saved from sin will find this task easy in proportion to her success in giving them Christian work to do.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the position of the scribes and Pharisees in Judaism, showing the theoretic reasonableness of the request they made of Jesus.
2. Explain why Jesus' refusal to comply with their request is more reasonable than the request itself.
3. Explain why Jesus complied with their request, even though He had sufficient grounds for refusing.
4. In what way was Jonah "a sign" to the Ninevites? Does Luke 11:30 relate here?
5. In what way was Jesus to be "a sign" to His generation?
6. Narrate briefly the story of Jonah's ministry to Ninevah showing the relevance of Jesus' use of that experience as proof of His identity. In what respect is the sign that Jesus offers the scribes and Pharisees similar to Jonah's experience?
7. Explain the judicial principle involved in the fact that both the Ninevites and the Queen of the South will "stand up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it." How is it possible for one group of human beings to condemn another group of people, all of which are imperfect?
8. What is that "something greater than" either Jonah or Solomon? Did Jesus intend two separate items that in each case are greater than the two men named, or did He mean one item of surpassing value, illustrated from two separate angles? Are there other possible translations of this phrase that shed a different light on the meaning? Why is this "something" actually greater?
9. What "generation" was the object of Jesus' condemnation of "this generation"?

10. State the occasion upon which Jesus had spoken of His resurrection as a "sign" before this. Note whatever similarities may exist between the several situations in which He gave this sign.
11. Explain the Jewish usage involved in the phrases: "three days and three nights." What do the Gospel writers describe as the fulfilment of this expression?
12. Did Jesus fulfil the "sign of Jonah"? How? When?
13. How does the story of the seven demons in a beautiful apartment connect with Jesus' teaching on signs and on repentance?
14. What is repentance, as illustrated in the account of Jonah?
15. How much may be learned about demonology from the story of the demon here narrated? If nothing, why not? If so, what information is to be gained?
16. Explain how that generation of Jews was like the demon-possessed man.

Section 30

JESUS REFUSES TO ALLOW FLESHLY TIES TO BIND HIM

(Parallels: Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21)

TEXT: 12:46-50

46. While he was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, seeking to speak to him.
47. And one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, seeking to speak to thee.
48. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?
49. And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren!
50. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Discuss Jesus' personal manner of life: Where was His home? What was His trade or craft? What means of support had He during His ministry? What were some of His personal habits or practices? How would you analyze Jesus of Nazareth as a human being? Do not try to dodge the issue by saying He is

incapable of analysis, even though you may have to revise your estimate many times and remain, finally, unsatisfied with your attempts. Take a long look at Jesus to see how you would have reacted to Him, had YOU lived in HIS family, in HIS town, had you been a part of His world.

- b. What does this text reveal about His relation to His family?
- c. What, do you think, was the purpose of Mary and His brothers in trying to talk with Jesus at precisely this time? Do you think their purpose was perfectly normal and neutral, a simple wish to be with this beloved Member of their family? Or, looking at the situation from Jesus' standpoint, do you decide that their purpose was hostile, a desire to save Him from the necessary, inevitable clashes and climax of His ministry? Is it important to know this in order to understand Jesus' refusal?
- d. What is the meaning of Jesus' response? Is He refusing to see Mary and His brothers? Is He refusing to claim kinship with them? What is the point of His obviously symbolical remark?
- e. What does this passage teach, if anything, on the subject of the possibility of Mary's becoming an intercessor between God and/or Jesus on the one hand, and sinners on earth, on the other?
- f. Do you think Jesus means to elevate every brother, sister or mother on earth to the same level with His earthly kinfolks? What is then important about whether He intended to do so or not?
- g. If you take the view that Jesus' kinfolks were intending to "save Him from Himself," hence were essentially hostile to the ministry He was performing, what is so very wrong with the request they made?
- h. Do you think Jesus ever gave Mary and His brothers the interview they sought? On what basis do you say this?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

While Jesus was still talking with the people about the accusation of His being in league with Satan and the theologians' demand for a sign of His authority to teach, His mother, Mary, and His brothers, James, Joseph, Simon and Judas, arrived at the crowded house where He was teaching. However, they could not get near Him, because of the people crowded all around Him. So they remained outside, requesting to speak with Him. They sent a messenger to Him to call Him: "Look, your mother and brothers are here, standing outside, asking to speak to you."

But Jesus sent them this answer, replying to the man who had

brought the message, "Who is really my mother? Who are really my brothers?"

Then looking round at that circle of faces all around Him, Jesus, with a sweeping motion of his arm pointed to His disciples, remarking: "Here are my real mother and brothers! You see, anyone who listens to God's Word and does what my heavenly Father wants, that person is really my brother, sister and mother! That is all the family I really recognize!"

SUMMARY

While Jesus was busy teaching, His physical family called Him to step aside to speak with them, since the crowd was too dense to permit their getting near Him. But Jesus refused to let family ties bind Him, since the only significant bond, as far as Jesus is concerned, is the tie of discipleship and obedience to God.

NOTES

I. REGARDFUL RECALL TO REPRESS RECKLESSNESS

(12:46, 47)

12:46 While he was yet speaking to the multitudes, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, seeking to speak to him. While . . . speaking creates a definite link with the discourse that has just been recorded and provides a clue to explain this move made by Jesus' relatives. The total context of this episode is peculiarly illuminating! (Cf. Mt. 12:22-50 with Mk. 3:19-21, 31-35; Lk. 8:19-21) The events which lead up to this section, and perhaps motivate Mary and her sons to react as they do, are:

1. A busy ministry that permitted Jesus and His men no leisure even to partake of necessary food. (Mk. 3:20)
2. The vicious attacks by ecclesiastical spies from Jerusalem (Mk. 3:22; Mt. 12:24) Did this charge seem to have just enough truth back of it to convince His family that Jesus was becoming so absorbed in His work as to be losing His mental balance? Did this trigger their move to seize Him?
3. His own alarming language, so unique and audacious for Him whom they took to be simply their kinsman, may have prompted this action.

These factors make the solicitous care of His kinsfolk the more understandable: they wanted to save Jesus from Himself and from the dangers to which He seemed oblivious. (Mk. 3:21) And yet even

their misguided solicitousness for His health and safety make the situation, from which they would save Him, even more critical, for they are interfering with the directions and schedule of the Son of God! What may be surmised about the internal family connections of Jesus?

1. The real atmosphere of Jesus' former home life is apparently only good. Even though this interference on the part of Mary shows her failure to comprehend His mission, it does not betray distrust. Even if the assertion "He is beside Himself," is her secret fear and the brothers' open expression, it is not to be construed as a criticism, but as the anxious conviction of those who love Him.
2. This action of His brothers in united agreement does not prove anything one way or the other about their age in reference to the question as to their exact relationship to Jesus. (See "*The Brethren of the Lord*," special study after 13:54-58; also Mk. 6:3; Jn. 7:3-5; Ac. 1:15) ISBE (520) notes that:

When it is urged that their attempts to interfere with Jesus indicate a superiority which, according to Jewish custom, is inconsistent with the position of younger brothers, it may be answered that those who pursue an unjustifiable course are not models of consistency.

Lange (*Matthew*, 231) agrees that what is happening here is not the expression of an unbelief that deliberately rejects evidence, but rather the practical, however temporary, failure to be what the word "disciple" really requires of the one who wears that title:

They do not press through the crowd, nor lay violent hands on Him; they send a respectful message, and patiently await His answer. Besides, we find that some time afterward the brothers of Jesus are not of the opinion that He should not work at all, but rather ask Him to transfer the scene of His operations from Galilee to Judea, and openly to come forward before all the world (John 7:1, etc.). In this light the conduct of His family must be viewed. Their unbelief consisted not in doubting Him, but in imagining that it was theirs to preserve and direct Him by their worldly policy. Meyer is therefore mistaken when he maintains that the mother of Jesus was, at the time, not decided in her faith. Such

instances as the later suggestion of His brothers (John 7:1), the history of Peter (Matt. 16:23), that of Thomas (John 20), nay, that of all the disciples, prove that during the period of spiritual development prior to the Feast of Pentecost, there were seasons when even believers might for a time be unbelieving, *i.e.*, self-willed, and deficient in the spirit of full surrender to Christ.

However well-intentioned this interruption of Jesus' career, however highly motivated, it is nonetheless an interference and must not be tolerated. Worse still it is the sort of interruption in which Jesus' mother and brothers make their claims upon Him felt as their Relative. Had Mary forgotten those words that so early had begun to separate Him from her? (Lk. 2:49) Or that His earthly course was not to be dictated by His earthly, fleshly ties? (Jn. 2:4) Had these brethren known what surely their mother must have known, would they have been so quick to suppose they could counsel Him or teach Him wisdom or pretend to know what was best for Him or the movement He had set in motion? **Standing without.** Aside from the accidental circumstances which caused them to be outside, what were they doing there **standing without**, when they should have been inside listening to Him!? Again, if even their own special relationship to Jesus gave the advantage of many private conversations with Him, by what right can they interrupt the lessons of others who heard Him gladly?

12:47 **And one said to him.** This almost accidental notice of the man who shouted to Jesus affords us insight into the informal teaching situation and atmosphere maintained by Jesus. The man felt he could interrupt the Lord without incurring censure. But the man, by his good services, is also contributing to that view of governments that promotes the competition and contrasts involved in hierarchy, dynasty, honors, position and authority. Even though he is simply trying to do a service for Jesus and His relatives, he unconsciously elevates these relatives above common disciples, since these latter can wait while questions important to the family are attended to. It is as if the very relationship which they enjoyed guaranteed them His attention prior to that for common followers. And even if none of this was intended by that generous, unknown person, it has since become the doctrine of an apostate Church and deserved to be dealt with immediately and decisively. This, Jesus does next.

II. REFINED REBUFF REJECTING THE REPROOF (12:48)

12:48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Were Jesus merely human and a king of earthly governments, He might have been expected to stop His instruction, either make room for them to find special places in His audience until finished, or, in deference to their urgency or desire for privacy, go along with them. (Cf. 1 Kg. 2:19, 20) Instead, "The words of Jesus have the undoubted ring of conscious authority and express the determination of one who wills the control of His own life." (ISBE, 2002)

Though framed in the interrogative form, Jesus' question, uttered in all seriousness without even the faintest accent of scorn or satire, becomes the strongest kind of denial that family ties were more binding upon Him, or more important to Him, than spiritual relationships. In His own personal case He damns that old skeptical proverb: "Blood is thicker than water!" (= Family ties are more binding than those formed through one's baptismal relationship.) And the mentality of the people to whom this saying is directed renders it so much more poignant. The oriental concept of family solidarity had probably no more vigorous exponents than the Hebrews, since the reciprocal responsibilities of parents and children had been ingrained in them for centuries. Notwithstanding the many unfortunate exceptions to this fine rule, where family ties counted for little (cf. Micah 7:2-7; Jer. 9:4), nevertheless the concept of family was very highly developed among the Jews. (Cf. Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, chaps. VIII and IX.) Despite the background of His people and His own deep love for His kin, He must publicly deny what their request implied. Remember A. B. Bruce's sensitive comment (*Expositor's Greek Testament*, Synoptic Gospels, 194):

There are idealists, promoters of pet schemes, and religious devotees whom it would cost no effort to speak thus; not an admirable class of people. It did cost Jesus an effort, for He possessed a warm heart and unblighted affections.

But Jesus' denial, that physical bonds are somehow more important to Him than spiritual, has proved to be not only essential for Mary's understanding at the time, but also for His followers' instruction in all ages. PHC-22 (317) has it:

It certainly is no fault of Mary herself, whose name should ever be held in the highest respect by all who love the Lord, that a corrupt church, reversing all the teaching of the

church's Head, not only elevated the earthly relationship far above the spiritual, but in virtue of this relationship put the mother in the place of the Son, and taught an ignorant people to worship her and trust in her as a mediator. But the fact that this was done, and is persisted in to this day, shows that when our Lord set aside the mere earthly relationship as one that must be merged in the spiritual, He was correcting not only a pardonable error of Mary, but a most unpardonable error that afterwards, without any encouragement whatever from her, should be committed in her name.

That the Roman Catholic denomination persists in this error is demonstrated by the Documents of the Second Vatican Council in the following references: "The Liturgy" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) Chap. V, paragraph 103; "The Church" (*Lumen gentium*), Chap. II, par. 59; Chap. III, par. 60-62, 66-69; "The Apostolate of the Laity," (*Apostolicam actuositatem*), Chap. I, par 4; "Ministry and Sacerdotal Life," (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*), Chap. III, par. 18; "Missionary Activity," (*Ad Gentes*), Chap. III, par. 42. The Closing Speech, Third Session, 21 November 1964, contains the proclamation of Mary as "The Mother of the Church" and worthy of worship, as well as a prayer directed to Mary.

Jesus is the Master of interruptions! With perfect mastery He deals quickly with this badly-timed, wrong-headed interference caused by people who should have known better. Without hedging about His fleshly relation to His kin or without getting embarrassed with them for their presumption, Jesus not only does not scold them for putting this unnecessary pressure upon Him, but rather, He deftly fields their appeal and turns it into a superb opportunity to reveal what we needed to know about His kinship! Jesus was fast on His feet, because He was long on His knees: these answers came out of His communion with the Father. Study how the Master Orator, even in this preplexing situation, tosses this surprising question into the air to excite even greater interest in the answer. And this question, put in exactly this form, automatically drives the hearer to seek a profounder meaning to the terms mother and brothers.

III. RECOGNITION OF HIS REAL RELATIVES (12:49, 50)

12:49 And he stretched forth his hands towards his disciples and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren!
12:50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister and mother.

His sweeping gesture heightens the dramatic effect of Jesus' question and draws even more interested attention to His answer. Lenski (*Matthew*, 503) feels this:

And while men's minds are still searching, and before they can center on a wrong answer, Jesus himself gives the terse, striking, perfect answer which, because of the way it is introduced, will the more remain fixed in the memory.

But what is the intent of Jesus' affirmation here?

1. Is it to censure His kinsmen for interrupting His teaching the Word of God? This may be implied, but it is not direct criticism. He knew they were spiritually ignorant as were so many other genuine friends and disciples, especially when, driven by the anxiety of their deep concern for Him, they say, "He is beside Himself!" (Mk. 3:21) But He could recognize a world of moral difference between their mistaken concern, even if it was prompted by misconceptions and partially by their imperfect faith, and that malignant, deliberately insulting judgment that snarls: "He has an unclean spirit!"
2. Is He denying the claim of all family ties under all circumstances? No, but He puts them to the test of discipleship. His dying thought is the responsibility for His mother's care. (Jn. 19:26, 27) His family relationship must have been of the very best sort, if He could use them as illustrations of His relation to God and His disciples. "Jesus would scarcely make use of the family symbolism to designate the sacred relationships of the Kingdom of heaven, while, at the same time, He was depreciating the value and importance of the very relationships which formed the basis of His analogy." (ISBE, 2002) Rather, He would have us see that the only hope of permanence for these ties beyond the horizons of this earth-life is that they be joined with the bonds of common discipleship in the Kingdom of God.
3. Is He merely using their appeal as an opportunity to point out those ties that are far higher and stronger than any fleshly bonds? Without despising His family, or requiring that His disciples do so with their own families, He simply puts God and His spiritual family first.

On spiritual kinship to Christ, consider the following texts: Ps. 22:22; Mt. 28:10; Jn. 20:17, 18; Ro. 8:29; Heb. 2:11-18; Mt. 10:35-57;

19:29; Jn. 1:13; 8:31-39 (cf. John's message, Mt. 3:7-10); Lk. 11:27, 28; 2:49; Jn. 2:4; Jn. 15:14; Jas. 1:22ff.; Eph. 2:19; Gal. 6:10; Ro. 9:6, etc.

For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister and mother. Ironically, God is the way to Jesus Christ. Just as in other connections the Scriptures teach that men cannot make claims upon God unless they come through Jesus (1 Jn. 2:23; Jn. 14:6), so here we learn that no one can make claims upon Jesus unless they come to Him by way of the Father's will! **The will of my Father** is no matter of small importance to Jesus, because He sums up the whole point and direction of the life of a true disciple by picturing him as **he who does the will of my Father**. Some extra-sensitive and perhaps less-informed disciples nervously wonder how they can tell what God's will for their life should be, and unfortunately, they overlook grand passages of Scripture that spell out exactly what the Father wills for them every day! (Cf. Mt. 7:21; 18:14; 9:13; Jn. 6:28, 29, 39, 40; 7:17; Eph. 5:17; 6:6; 1 Th. 4:3; 5:18; 1 Tim. 2:4; Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:9) Here again is written your name and mine: **whosoever!** The grand lessons that pour out of this declaration of our Lord are many, not the least of which are these:

1. **WE TOO ARE KIN TO JESUS!** Even though we did not get to walk with Him in Galilee, though we never saw a miracle, never felt His healing touch, still the humblest Christian among us today stands side by side with Nazarene and can call Him "Brother!" The kindest Christian mother today is as dear to Jesus as the "Holy Virgin." The most obedient little boy or girl, who for Jesus' sake, does what their daddy or mommy says, is Jesus' little brother or sister! Would to God we could get that paganism out of our hearts that longs to "walk where Jesus walked," but refuses to do what God says where we DO walk! That kind of longing to have been one of Jesus' immediate family, which cannot seek to please the heavenly Father in the simplest, ordinary acts of common courtesy and helpfulness in our own family, can claim no relationship to Jesus of Nazareth! In these simple words, Jesus throws open the front door of His house to us who live in this land in this century, that we might enjoy all the joyous privileges of His home! Although in one, true sense we are the willing servants of God, yet in another sense we are not servants in God's house, but **SONS**, and that makes Jesus

our Brother! (Study Gal. 3:23—4:7; Heb. 2:10-13) We are His poor relation, but this does not make Him ashamed. (Heb. 2:11) Best of all, He plans to own us as His own before the entire spiritual universe assembled before the Father! (Mt. 10:32)

2. To Jesus, this relationship is supreme and becomes, at the same time, the standard by which all men will be judged. So the test of connection with Jesus is not church membership, family ties, or other accidental or unreal tests that do not really describe our real standing, but whether we do God's will or not! How many will be lost, because they permitted their loving, concerned, well-meaning family to come between them and Christ! (Cf. Mt. 8:21, 22; 10:37; Lk. 9:59-62) What an example in the personal experience of our Lord Himself! When it comes to doing the will of God first above all, whether it be the Messiah Himself or one of His lowliest servants, no human ties or claims may be allowed to interfere or dictate our course. Even the Lord of glory has walked this lonely, difficult path and dealt with these thorny problems. He faced this crisis in His own life and gave us a brilliant example of dealing gently but firmly with a delicate, trying situation where those nearest and dearest would take us farthest from the Father's will.
3. "Whosoever" is Jesus' disciple is in the family of God, whether he is a member of our group or not, whether he is of our race, nation or social class, whether we like him or not. How this gospel of the true family of God rebukes every sort of sectarian attitude and breaks down prejudicial barriers!
4. Chrysostom, quoted by Lange (*Matthew*, 232) is remembered as saying:

How many women have blessed that holy virgin and her womb and have desired to be such a mother as she was! What hinders them? Christ has made for us a wide way to this happiness: and not only women, but men may tread it: the way of *obedience*, this is it which makes such a mother—not the throes of parturition.

5. And even as we find spiritual kinship to Jesus founded upon our common interest and our common commitment to do the will of the Father, we will also discover the fundamental

- secret underlying Jesus' promise that those who follow Him will gain in this life many more fathers, mothers and other dear ones than they ever gave up. (Cf. Mt. 19:29; Mk. 10:29, 30; Lk. 18:29, 30) These are the people who really understand us and share our commitment to the Lord, for they too are really Jesus' folk and we really do have so much more in common with them than with our own unbelieving, ungodly kin. Furthermore, this is the reason why the "family of God" is no mere figure of speech or academic question buried under dusty doctrines. God's family is a REAL family.
6. Another lesson in this text is the warning against the subtle danger of allowing ourselves as Christian workers to be distracted from our rightful duty by those dear friends and kinfolk who would cause us to place self-interest or self-preservation or our family ties first. We are easily self-warned and reasonably braced to face the taunts of our enemies, but the perilous persuasiveness of those who love us represents a far greater threat to our best good than any enemy. Jesus led the way by putting family claims upon His time and life into their proper perspective.
 7. When we remember the anxiety of Jesus' relatives for His health and safety when He was burning Himself out campaigning for the Kingdom of God, and given His inflexible adherence to what was clear to Him as the will of God, we see that it is too frequent a temptation to presume, with Jesus' brethren, that the Kingdom of God may be promoted and protected by the practice of prudential policy born of experience in this selfish world and learned from it.

CONCLUSION

Matthew's orderly method of organizing his materials, which places this event at the logical conclusion of a major section, is quite revealing. Even as he concluded his eleventh chapter with Jesus' thanksgiving for humble, honest hearts who trusted Him, in which He pointed out that, while God's revelations are for all, only disciples will understand them, since intellectual gifts are not the determining factor, so also here Matthew concludes this section with Jesus' declaration that, while the Kingdom of God is open to all, only real disciples need apply. The credentials of discipleship are validated, not by one's family ties, but by his obedience. Despite the evidences of a growing negative response to Jesus and despite His growing necessity

to deal vigorously with slander and opposition appearing in every form, Matthew triumphantly concludes these sections on opposition to the Master by including this brief piece that fairly shouts the happy news: "No matter how black seem Jesus' hopes of reaching **this evil generation**, nevertheless, He has won a few good hearts in those disciples who do the Father's will!" In addition, Barclay (*Matthew*, II, 22) is probably right to see this section as Jesus' invitation, once again offered to "enter into kinship with Him through obedience to the will of God . . . to abandon our own prejudices and self-will and to accept Jesus Christ as Master and Lord. If we refuse, we drift farther and farther away from God; if we accept, we enter into the very family and heart of God."

THE DEITY AND GREATNESS OF CHRIST IN MATTHEW 12

- 12:6 Jesus claimed to be greater than the Temple of God.
- 12:8 He claimed Lordship over the Sabbath!
- 12:28 He proved that His works, done by the Spirit's power, were clear evidence that God's Kingdom had just arrived.
- 12:40 Jesus claimed to know not only to what end His ministry would come, i.e. His death on the cross, but also its glorious outcome, i.e. the resurrection after burial.
- 12:41 Jesus claimed to be greater than Jonah the inspired prophet whose labors produced the most amazing repentance in his hearers.
- 12:42 Jesus claimed to be wiser than Solomon whose wisdom had never been surpassed by any man.
- 12:50 To do God's will is to become a kinsman of Jesus. "My Father" is a claim to uniqueness. (cf. Jn. 5:17, 18)

This staggering series of claims contains no apology for their being made nor even an explanation of their meaning. They are offered to be understood by their original hearers at face value. Jesus expected them to take Him literally. But, if we are sure of His sanity, we cannot take Him literally without either crucifying Him as a bold imposter or bowing our knees before Him to confess Him Lord of our life! And this is the very conclusion to which Matthew in his presentation of the Gospel would lead us: to decide!

FACT QUESTIONS

1. During what general period of Jesus' ministry is this particular

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incident to be dated?

2. What was the general character of Jesus' life and work at this time, that provides particular poignancy to this incident?
3. List other incidents in Jesus' life and ministry in which the mother or brothers of Jesus showed particular misunderstanding or lack of true appreciation of His great purpose for having come into the world.
4. Discuss the meaning of Jesus' answer given in reply to His kin-folks' request that He stop what He was doing to step outside to talk with them.
5. Name Jesus' brothers.
6. Discuss the three fundamental views offered as to their actual relationship to Jesus. Which of these three views do you accept? State the reasons for accepting this one and rejecting the other two.
7. According to Jesus, who are really members of His own true family? On what basis does He establish this kinship?

DO YOU HAVE IT IN YOUR HEART?

Matthew 11, 12

Do you know who said each of the following statements? What or who prompted them to say it? What did they mean by it? What, if any, are the textual problems or translational variations? How would you apply the truth contained in their words to your life practise?

1. "Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding . . ."
2. "Wisdom is justified by her works."
3. "And if ye are willing to receive it, this is the Elijah, that is to come."
4. ". . . he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."
5. "Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,
Who shall prepare thy way before thee."
6. "Blessed is he, whosoever shall find no occasion of stumbling in me."
7. "Art thou he that cometh, . . ."
8. "A gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!"
9. "For the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath."
10. "And in his name shall the Gentiles hope."

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11. "Can this be the son of David?"
12. ". . . neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal *Him*."
13. "for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."
14. "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; . . ."
15. ". . . but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him . . ."
16. ". . . and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first."
17. "Behold, my mother and my brethren!"
18. "He that is not with me is against me . . ."
19. "A bruised reed shall he not break and smoking flax shall he not quench till he send forth judgment unto victory."

JESUS' WITNESS TO OLD TESTAMENT INSPIRATION

By John Ransom

Is the Old Testament inspired of God? Is it scientifically and historically accurate? Is it consistent with itself, not contradicting itself in various places? These things, and more, will in this paper constitute inspiration. That is, the Old Testament Scripture is "God-breathed" in the original copy and was fully inspired and without error or contradiction.

Many faithful believers have serious doubts about the Old Testament, even some who have a firm faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, in this study we will approach such a group, assuming here the deity of Jesus Christ, that He is God's Son. We will turn to Him who is God in the flesh for an evaluation of Old Testament Scripture. While we value the studies of men in higher and lower criticism and external and internal evidence, we will, as Christians, look at these Jewish Scriptures through the eyes of Him who is our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

As Harry Rimmer reminds us (*Internal Evidence of Inspiration*, 149):

For if the Lord Jesus Christ is in truth and fact the Son of God as He claims to be, He is then the highest authority on any subject of which He speaks. . . , He could and does speak from the standpoint of omniscience . . . He can speak from the source of divine wisdom, knowing that even the future cannot alter His teachings. . . . So when we study the testimony of the Saviour concerning the nature and source

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of the text of the Bible, we are consulting the final and absolute witness. His statements should settle the question once and for all.

It seems wise at this point to plunge immediately into Jesus' use and opinion of the Old Testament, these being proofs of its inspiration. We notice:

I. HIS WHOLE LIFE'S COMPLETE SATURATION WITH THE OLD TESTAMENT.

The things He says are frequently couched in the language of the Old Testament. H. S. Miller (*General Biblical Introduction*, 53) lists a great many of these: "The abomination of desolation" (Mt. 24:15 = Daniel 12:11); "Great tribulation such as hath not been since the beginning" (Mt. 24:21 = Daniel 12:1); "The blood of the covenant" (Mark 14:24 = Exodus 24:8); "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful" (Mt. 26:38 = Ps. 42:6, 12; 43:5); "where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44, 46, 48 = Isaiah 66:24); "Blessed is he that cometh" (Mt. 23:39 = Psalms 118:26); "Into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46 = Psalms 31:5); "Say to the mountains" (Luke 23:30 = Hosea 10:8); and many more. Jesus' whole life was bound up in Old Testament references. He began His earthly ministry with "It is written" (Mt. 4:4, 7, 10) and ended it in the same manner. (Luke 24:46)

II. HIS ACCEPTANCE AND FULFILMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT REFERENCES TO HIMSELF.

On one occasion Jesus said in reference to the Old Testament, "Ye search the Scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life; *and these are they that bear witness of me.*" (John 5:39) Then, almost immediately, He went ahead to say in vv. 46, 47: "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writing, how shall ye believe my words?" Again He acknowledges and accepts the prophetic voice of the whole Old Testament in this sweeping statement, "These are my words which I spoke unto you, while I was with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the Psalms, concerning me." (Luke 24:44) No statement could be more clear than this as to His absolute assurance of Scripture, nor could any opportunity be more suitable to express doubt, had there been any.

The Gospel writers have faithfully recorded for us event after event in Jesus' life that fulfilled Scripture. This begins with His

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birth (Mt. 1:22, 23) and continues throughout His life (Mt. 2:5, 6, 15, 17, 18, 23; 4:13-17; 8:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:31, 54, 56; 27:9, 10, 46) up to the very time of the crucifixion (John 19:24, 28, 35-37). This demonstrates clearly how "His whole life was a fulfilment of Scripture." (Miller, *op cit.*, 54. However, see the special study "*How Does Matthew Use the Prophecies?*" Vol. I, p. 81ff., HEF)

An example of His own application of prophecy to Himself may be found in Mt. 21:42 where He foretells His own rejection as recorded in Psalms 118:22, 23. Rimmer (*op cit.*, 176-178) notes that "He had no doubt in His own mind about the certainty of the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning Himself, and history certainly vindicated His reliance upon the infallibility of the written word." In John 13:18 He quotes Psalm 41:9 of His betrayal by Judas. In Luke 22:37 He quotes from Isaiah 53:12, referring these words to His own death. In Mt. 12:40, 41 He takes the account of Jonah and makes it a figure of His own death and resurrection.

Notice also His acceptance of prophecies other than those concerning Himself. Rimmer (p. 165) comments:

In Matt. 15 (7-9) He definitely declared that Isaiah spoke of and to the people of Christ's time. That is to say, Isaiah had anticipated by seven centuries the social and religious conditions of the nation of Israel and described them in terms that were historically fulfilled. Since men cannot foretell the future, and since prophecy is the sphere of omniscience, His conclusion is that Isaiah was borne along by the spirit of God in such passages.

(While Rimmer's conclusion is fundamentally correct, his choice of Matt. 15:7-9 as a specific case in point is unfortunate or, at best, inconclusive. See the comments on that passage, HEF)

Who would dare say, after examination of Christ's knowledge, use and application of prophecy, that He did not have explicit faith in these Holy Scriptures?

III. HIS STRESS ON OTHERS' KNOWING AND FOLLOWING THE OLD TESTAMENT.

If one would very highly recommend to you a doctor, lawyer, book or certain action, you could conclude that that person were either trying to deceive you, or else that he had strong faith in what he recommended. Such is true of Jesus, and we are convinced that He was not a deceiver! In His omniscience, Jesus plainly trusted the Scriptures and strongly recommended them to His listeners. In the

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Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:17-20) Jesus shows the extreme importance He attaches not only to a knowledge of the Word, but also to the practice of teaching it to others. In fact, those who follow and teach the Scriptures "shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven," while those who disobey and teach others to disobey "shall be called least."

On four occasions, as Miller (*op cit.*, 53) notes, "He expressed surprise that the Jews had so carelessly read their God-given Scriptures. (Matt. 19:4, 5; 21:16, 42; 22:31, 32; Mark 12:26; from Genesis 1:27; 2:24; 5:2; Psalm 8:2; 118:22, 23; Exodus 3:6)" What a biting rebuke it must also have been to the Pharisees, who prided themselves on their exact knowledge of the Word, when He said to them in response to their ignorance on some point, "Have ye not read the Scriptures?" (Mark 12:10; Matt. 21:16, 42)

His real attitude toward the Old Testament Scripture and particularly its relation to man's behaviour is revealed when He says, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures" (Matt. 22:29). In this He alludes to the fact that a basis for error in spiritual matters is ignorance of Scripture. Also implied in this is the implicit conclusion that the Scriptures themselves do not err.

Yes, this was the guide to which Jesus continually pointed His listeners. Would our Lord purposely lead them to a faulty, erring production when He Himself had the Word of Life? *I believe not!*

IV. HIS COMPLETE ACCEPTANCE OF ITS HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS.

Many critics have at least denied the historical records of the Old Testament, but Jesus' view of the inspiration of the Old Testament was, as we stated at the outset, an assumption of the full, or plenary, inspiration of that document and this included its historical accounts.

This is demonstrated when He, many times almost casually, and yet with utmost assurance, referred to these events. Notice Matt. 12:42 where Jesus tells of the visit to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba. When He does this, the whole weight of His authority is cast behind the authenticity of I Kings 10 and II Chronicles 9. Almost in passing (Luke 4:25-27), He confirms the accounts of the widow of Zarephath to whom Elisha was sent and the cleansing of Naaman the Syrian leper. In these last two illustrations, as Rimmer points out (*op cit.*, 169-172), Jesus upheld with His authority some of the greatest (and most often criticized) miracles of the Old Testament.

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This is so likewise in John 3:14 where He compares Himself to the bronze serpent which Moses lifted up. Again Rimmer notes that:

Here He approves another Old Testament miraculous event without the slightest intimation that it is unhistorical and untrue. In fact, He found nothing incredible in the fact that God could do such marvels.

Our Lord also established some of His most basic teaching on the truthfulness of these Old Testament accounts. In John 6:32, 49 He makes certain reference to the feeding of the children of Israel in the wilderness. "Upon the credibility of this section of the Old Testament text, Jesus Christ bases His entire ministry and offers salvation to men."—Rimmer (172). (However, Rimmer overstates his case here. Perhaps he should have affirmed that the Lord based His *argument* about His ministry upon universally believed facts of the OT passage, not the ministry itself upon the credibility. HEF) Recorded in Mark 12:26 are Jesus' remarks concerning Moses and the burning bush. Jesus used this historical event to propel His teaching on immortality to the unbelieving Sadducees, and, ultimately, to the whole world. In Matt. 12:3, during an argument with the Pharisees concerning the Sabbath, Jesus cites the episode of David, recorded in I Samuel 21:6. Rimmer notes (173): "Upon the historicity of this event He bases His reasoning concerning the superiority of man over the day of rest." Still another example of this type of unshakable confidence in the historical accounts of the Old Testament is found in Matt. 19:4-9. Here Jesus gives His teaching concerning the sanctity of marriage, referring to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, thereby accepting and confirming in one sweeping statement the creation by God, the origin of marriage and the existence, words and work of Moses."

To obtain a broad view of what Jesus thought of the historical accounts in Jewish Scripture, we might think of it in the following way: Jesus believed in Noah and the flood (Matt. 24:37-39; Luke 17:26, 27); in the accounts of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15); and in Lot and his wife fleeing from the city of Sodom (Luke 17:28-32); in the call of Moses at the bush (Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37); and that David really ate the shewbread (Matt. 12:3-5; cf. I Samuel 21). Our Lord believed that God created man and established marriage (Matt. 19:4-6), that Solomon reigned as a glorious, majestic King (Matt. 6:29) and that the Queen of Sheba came to visit him (Matt. 12:42). He is certain of the great miracle wrought for the Gentile widow of Zarephath (I Kings 17:10-16) and the healing of Naaman

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the leper (Luke 4:25-27) as well as the lifting up of the bronze serpent in the wilderness by Moses that the people might be healed (John 3:14). Jesus showed no doubt whatsoever that Israel actually wandered in the wilderness and was miraculously fed manna from heaven (John 6:32, 49). He showed no doubt that righteous Abel and Zachariah were really slain as recorded (Luke 11:51; Matt. 23:35); or that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were real persons (Matt. 22:31, 32). He believed that Moses lived and spoke (Mark 7:10; 12:19, 26); that David was a divinely inspired writer (Mark 12:36; Luke 20:41-44); that Daniel was a prophet (Matt. 24:15); and that Jonah actually spent three days and nights in the fish's belly (Matt. 12:39, 40; 16:4).

When my Lord held such a view of the historical accounts of the Old Testament, how can I doubt or how can I have any less confidence in them than He? Surely His testimony must be of prime importance to me!

V. HIS APPEAL TO IT IN EVERY SITUATION.

Jesus' own words were of great power and authority, and He Himself recognized this. In Mark 13:31 He said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," and again in John 6:63, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." Furthermore, He affirmed that these words were not His but the words of the Father who sent Him. Yet was it to His own word that He turned in every situation? No! Whether Jesus is attacked or questioned on the subject of the Sabbath or vows, marriage or the resurrection, His answer is usually Scripture, and an abundance of it. The Old Testament Scripture is the authority in all of these controversial matters. He pierces right through their ancient traditions and distorted opinions with His accurate and to-the-point references. So teaches Pierre Ch. Marcel (*Revelation and the Bible*, 122-124) To this Broomall (*Biblical Criticism*, 36) adds:

Christ held the Old Testament as a final authority dealing with matters of faith and conduct. He appealed to it frequently with His characteristic "It is written . . ." as if to say, "God has spoken in His Word and that settles it!" (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). He even cited examples out of the Old Testament as authoritative for His own conduct (Mark 2:25ff.). Its statements about legal matters were considered authoritative (John 8:17), and its predictions concerning Him were looked upon as true and of supreme authority in deciding His messianic claims (Luke 24:25-27, 44ff., John 5:45ff.). The voices

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of Moses and the prophets were considered as authoritative in matters of the soul's destiny (Luke 16:29-31). Christ believed that if a principle of truth were taught in the Old Testament, there was no need to appeal to a higher authority.

VI. HIS OBVIOUS STATEMENTS AS TO THE OLD TESTAMENT BEING FROM GOD, HENCE, GOD'S WORD.

This is one of Jesus' most important assertions of Old Testament inspiration. Here He plainly reveals God as the source of the Word and also indicates the nature of that inspiration: "Not *one jot or tittle* shall pass from the law till all be fulfilled." Broomall (*op cit.*, 35, 36) comments:

In Matt. 4:4 Christ cites Deuteronomy 8:3 ("Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God") in His reply to Satan's temptations. Here Christ gives His approval to the belief that the Old Testament comes "out of the mouth of God." (cf. Hebrews 1:1 . . . In citing Psalm 110:1 Christ affirms that David spoke that verse "in the Spirit" (Matt. 22:43; cf. II Samuel 23:2; Rev. 1:10).

Rimmer (*op cit.*, 164) reminds us that:

In Mark 7:8-13 there is a typical instance containing a direct statement of Jesus as to the authority of the Scriptures. In condemning the Pharisees on the ground that they had left the commandment of God and retained the traditions of man, He said to them, "Full well do ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own traditions." Thereupon He quoted the words of Moses as they are found in Exodus 20 and 21; Deut. 5 and Leviticus 20. At the conclusion, He says that by their conduct they *make void the word of God by their traditions*. It does not take an analytical mind to notice that when Jesus quotes words by the pen of Moses, He stated that these are the words of God and should be obeyed.

Carl F. H. Henry ("Inspiration", *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 278) notes that

In John 10:34ff., Jesus singles out an obscure passage in the Psalms ("Ye are gods," Psalm 82:6) to reinforce the point that the Scriptures cannot be broken."

He then very clearly labels this as *the word of God* delivered to men.

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Warfield ("Inspiration," *ISBE*, 1476, 1477) joins the following illustration:

The confidence with which Jesus rested on Scripture, in its every declaration, is further illustrated in a passage like Matt. 19:4. Certain Pharisees had come to Him with a question on divorce and He met them thus: "Have ye not read, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh . . . What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." "*He who made them . . . said.*" "What therefore *God* hath joined together." Yet this passage does not give us a saying of God recorded in Scripture, but just the words of Scripture itself, and can be treated as a declaration of God's only on the hypothesis that all scripture is a declaration of God's.

All of this seems to sum up Christ's positive and unequivocal stand on the inspiration of the Old Testament. Nothing could be clearer and more to the point than these many references (and many besides) that plainly attribute the Old Testament to God Himself and to His Spirit. As men and women believing in the Christ, we too will view the Old Testament as being delivered unto men by the mouth of God through faithful witnesses.

Perhaps the one basic question still in the mind of the honest inquirer for truth is: "Did Jesus' endorsement of the Old Testament include *all* the Old Testament, or only certain portions of it?" This brings us to Jesus' seventh proof of Old Testament inspiration:

VII. HIS ENDORSEMENT OF THE COMPLETE OLD TESTAMENT.

H. S. Miller (*op cit.*, 38, 44) informs us that the Jews divided the canon of the Old Testament into three main sections: the law, prophets and writings (or Psalms). Jesus quoted from and made definite reference to each of these by name. Miller continues:

"All this" (the events thus far in this chapter) "was done that the Scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled" (Matt. 26:56; Mark 14:49). Hence, *the prophets* are Scripture and must be fulfilled. Jesus expounded "in all the Scriptures, *beginning at Moses and all the prophets*, the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). Hence the . . . first two sections are Scripture and the theme is Jesus. (Next) the heart

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of the travelers burned within them as He opened to them the Scriptures (Luke 24:27, 32)

Then a little later as Jesus appeared to them He said, "These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the *law of Moses* and in *the prophets*, and in *the Psalms* concerning me." (Luke 24:44) Here in this sweeping statement Jesus includes all of the Old Testament, each of the three sections are clearly named as if this were exactly His intent, i.e. to point out the unity and authority of the complete Old Testament both to His first century disciples and to us.

In addition to this, Miller (*op cit.*, 52) notes that "He covered and endorsed the entire Old Testament in one statement, "from the blood of righteous Abel (Gen. 4:1-10) unto the blood of Zachariah' (II Chron. 24:20, 21), or from Genesis to Chronicles, just as we would say 'from Genesis to Malachi' (Matt. 23:35)"

Jesus' whole view of the inspiration of the Old Testament was strongly opposed to the idea that only parts of the Bible are infallible and trustworthy. Edward Young (*Thy Word is Truth*, 48) argues that:

It is not only in specific teaching or in great doctrines that the Scriptures cannot be broken. Rather, in all parts, in its very entirety, the Bible, if we are to accept its witness to itself, is utterly infallible. It is not only that each book given the name of Scripture is infallible, but, more than that, the content of each such book is itself Scripture, the Word of God written and, hence, infallible, free entirely from the errors which adhere to mere human compositions. Not alone to moral and ethical truths, but to all statements of fact this inspiration extends. That inspiration which the Bible claims for itself is one that is full; it is plenary inspiration. As our Lord said, in giving expression to their very doctrine, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matt. 5:17, 18).

To this Rimmer (*op cit.*, 168) adds: "The statement that the fulfillment of the Old Testament was more certain than the continuance of the physical creation, lifts those writings so high above human literary productions that they can be considered only as supernatural in their origin."

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As we examine the Old and New Testaments and additional historical evidence, it may be seen that the majority of the people in Jesus' day accepted the Old Testament Scriptures that we now have as in a real and true sense "God-breathed." Jesus and His followers were certainly no exception to this. James Orr (*Revelation and Inspiration*, 182) observes that while "modern writers may question whether the view of Jesus and His apostles was a correct one, . . . they will not question that the view was there." This leads us to Rimmer's statement of the conclusion (*op cit.*, 179): "The only alternative to the acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God is to discredit the person of Christ and discount His testimony." And, quoting Westcott, Miller (*op cit.*, 54) says,

We must either accept the doctrine of plenary inspiration . . . or deny the veracity of the evangelists. If our Lord's words are accurately recorded, or even if their general tenor is expressed in one of the gospels, the Bible is indeed the *Word of God* in the fullest spiritual sense . . .

It also seems well to note, in the midst of all His positive statements of acceptance (of the Old Testament), Broomall (*op cit.*, 36) notes the negative fact that Christ nowhere insinuates that the Old Testament is erroneous in any detail. . . . There is not the slightest suggestion that it is in need of correction. Even His famous 'but I say unto you' as found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:22, etc.) is not to be interpreted as a correction of the former revelation, but is to be understood as a correction of Jewish misunderstanding of the Old Testament teaching." (While not quarrelling with Broomall's basic conclusion, we may construe Jesus' statements of authority in another fashion, i.e., rather than the mere correction of Jewish misunderstanding and rather than a simple correction of former revelation, He stands fully in agreement that the former revelation came from God but upon His own authority raises the standard to perfection itself. See my notes on Mt. 5:20, "*Jesus' Purpose*," Vol. I, 255ff. HEF)

Yes, Jesus affirmed that, although heaven and earth would pass away, His words would endure (Matt. 24:35; Mark 13:31; Luke 21:33). Yet to what did He turn in His hour of dire temptation? the Old Testament. Or in teaching? Or correction? To the Old Testament. When His own word was everlasting, would our Lord turn to anything lacking these same great God-given powers? I think not!

Rimmer (*op cit.*, 178) reminds us that:

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Whether Christ used (the Old Testament) for illustration, argument, in warning, or as prophecy fulfilled in Himself, He handled the ancient record with a holy reverence in the belief that it was the Word of God.

May we gain and foster such a use and reverence for the Word ourselves.

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