Commentary on Matthew
Bible Study Notes and Comments

by David E. Pratte

Available in print at
www.gospelway.com/sales

Commentary on Matthew:
Bible Study Notes and Comments

© Copyright David E. Pratte, 2019
All rights reserved

ISBN: 978-1-6780-5607-0
Imprint: Independently published

Note carefully: No teaching in any of our materials is intended or should ever be construed to justify or to in any way incite or encourage personal vengeance or physical violence against any person.

Front page photo
A Tomb Like that in Which Jesus Was Buried

"…there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb…" (Matthew 27:57-60 – NKJV)

Photo credit: Djampa distributed under GNU FDL version 1.2 via Wikimedia Commons

Other Acknowledgements

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are generally from the New King James Version (NKJV), copyright 1982, 1988 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are from *Holy Bible, New American Standard* La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright ©2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (MLV) are from Modern Literal Version of The New Testament, Copyright 1999 by G. Allen Walker.

Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from the New International Version of the Holy Bible, copyright 1978 by Zondervan Bible publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Scripture quotations marked (HCSB) are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible, copyright 2008 by Holman Bible publishers, Nashville, Tennessee.

Other Books by the Author

Topical Bible Studies

Why Believe in God, Jesus, and the Bible? (evidences)
True Words of God: Bible Inspiration and Preservation
"It Is Written": The Authority of the Bible
Salvation through Jesus Christ: Basics of Forgiveness
Grace, Faith, and Obedience: The Gospel or Calvinism?
Growing a Godly Marriage & Raising Godly Children
The God of the Bible (study of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)
"In the Beginning God Created": Creation vs. Evolution
Kingdom of Christ: Future Millennium or Present Spiritual Reign?
Marx, Lenin, or Jesus: Communism or the Bible?
Do Not Sin Against the Child: Abortion, Unborn Life, & the Bible
Short Bible Talks: Invitations, Lord's Supper and Collection Talks

Commentaries on Bible Books

Genesis
Joshua and Ruth
Judges
1 Samuel
2 Samuel
1 Kings
2 Kings
Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
Job
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Daniel
Gospel of Matthew
Gospel of Mark
Gospel of Luke
Gospel of John
Acts
Romans
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians & Colossians
1 & 2 Thessalonians
Hebrews
James and Jude
1 and 2 Peter
1,2,3 John

Bible Question Class Books

Genesis
Joshua and Ruth
Judges
1 Samuel
2 Samuel
1 Kings
2 Kings
Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther
Job
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Isaiah
Daniel
Hosea – Obadiah
Jonah – Zephaniah
Haggai – Malachi
Gospel of Matthew
Gospel of Mark
Gospel of Luke
Gospel of John
Acts
Romans
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians and Galatians
Ephesians and Philippians
Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians
1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon
Hebrews
James – Jude
Revelation

Workbooks with Study Notes

Jesus Is Lord: Workbook on the Fundamentals of the Gospel of Christ
Following Jesus: Workbook on Discipleship
God's Eternal Purpose in Christ: Workbook on the Theme of the Bible
Family Reading Booklist

Visit our website at www.gospelway.com/sales to see a current list of books in print.

Other Resources from the Author

Printed books, booklets, and tracts available at
www.gospelway.com/sales
Free Bible study articles online at
www.gospelway.com
Free Bible courses online at www.biblestudylessons.com
Free class books at www.biblestudylessons.com/classbooks
Free commentaries on Bible books at
www.biblestudylessons.com/commentary
Contact the author at
www.gospelway.com/comments

Table of Contents

Introduction to Matthew 9
Chapters 1,2 – Jesus' Early Life 14
Matthew 1 14
Matthew 2 28
Chap 3-20 – Jesus' Public Ministry 38
Matthew 3 38
Matthew 4 53
Matthew 5 65
Matthew 6 142
Matthew 7 168
Matthew 8 191
Matthew 9 205
Matthew 10 221
Matthew 11 247
Matthew 12 261
Matthew 13 294
Matthew 14 316
Matthew 15 328
Matthew 16 347
Matthew 17 371
Matthew 18 383
Matthew 19 405
Matthew 20 429
Chapters 21-28 – Jesus' Last Days on Earth 443
Matthew 21 443
Matthew 22 465
Matthew 23 485
Matthew 24 505
Matthew 25 529
Matthew 26 546
Matthew 27 589
Matthew 28 622

(Due to printer reformatting, the above numbers may be off a few pages.)

Notes to the Reader

To save space and for other reasons, I have chosen not to include the Bible text in these notes (please use your Bible to follow along). When I do quote a Scripture, I generally quote the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated. Often – especially when I do not use quotations marks – I am not quoting any translation but simply paraphrasing the passage in my own words. Also, when I ask the reader to refer to a map, please consult the maps at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary.

You can find study questions to accompany these notes at
www.gospelway.com/sales

To join our mailing list to be informed of new books or special sales, contact the author at
www.gospelway.com/comments

Introductory Thoughts about Commentaries

Only the Scriptures provide an infallible, authoritatively inspired revelation of God's will for man (2 Timothy 3:16,17). It follows that this commentary, like all commentaries, was written by an uninspired, fallible human. It is the author's effort to share his insights about God's word for the purpose of instructing and edifying others in the knowledge and wisdom found in Scripture. It is simply another form of teaching, like public preaching, Bible class teaching, etc., except in written form (like tracts, Bible class literature, etc.). Nehemiah 8:8; Ephesians 4:15,16; Romans 15:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:12-14; 5:12-14; 10:23-25; Romans 10:17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:4; 2 Timothy 2:2,24-26; 4:2-4; 1 Peter 3:15.

It follows that the student must read any commentary with discernment, realizing that any fallible teacher may err, whether he is teaching orally or in writing. So, the student must compare all spiritual teaching to the truth of God's word (Acts 17:11). It may be wise to read several commentaries to consider alternative views on difficult points. But it is especially important to consider the *reasons or evidence* each author gives for his views, then compare them to the Bible.

For these reasons, the author urges the reader to always consider my comments in light of Scripture. Accept what I say only if you find that it harmonizes with God's word. And please do not cite my writings as authority, as though people should accept anything I say as authoritative. Always let the Bible be your authority.

Notes on the *Ancient Christian Commentary*

The *Ancient Christian Commentary* is a compilation of comments on the Scriptures written by men who profess to be followers of Christ in the early centuries after the Scriptures were completed. Like any uninspired men, they may be mistaken at times. Many were part of groups that had departed from God's way, even as are many modern commentators. Nevertheless, I quote them at times because I find the viewpoints of those who lived so close to the first century to be especially interesting. I hope you also find the comments helpful.

"He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" – 1 Corinthians 1:31

Abbreviations Used in These Notes

ASV – American Standard Version
***b/c/v* –** book, chapter, and verse
ESV – English Standard Version
f – the following verse
ff – the following verses
HCSB – Holman Christian Standard Bible
KJV – King James Version
MLV – Modern Literal Version
NASB – New American Standard Bible
NEB – New English Bible
NIV – New International Version
NKJV – New King James Version
NRSV – New Revised Standard Version
RSV – Revised Standard Version

Introduction to Matthew

Author

The inspired author of this account of the life of Christ is the apostle Matthew, however this is nowhere stated in inspired literature. It is affirmed by uninspired writers who lived within 60 to 70 years of its writing.

Horne writes: "Of the genuineness and authenticity of Saint Matthew's Gospel, we have the most satisfactory evidence." He then cites numerous references to Matthew's account of the life of Christ from early Christian writers. He concludes: "The fact, therefore, is fully established, that Matthew, the apostle of our Saviour, was the author of that Gospel which is placed first in our editions of the New Testament."

Pope says:

> "The earliest church writer to attest Matthew's authorship is Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis (ca. 60-130 A.D.). ... Matthew attained a major position of prominence in the second century and was quoted more than any other gospel among the church writers. ... (This) also refutes any claims by unbelieving skeptics who would try to place the composition of Matthew in the second and third centuries by some unknown, non-apostolic author."

It also refutes the so-called Documentary Hypothesis which tries to claim that the book of Matthew was simply a conglomeration of material from other sources by an unknown author. This view reflects the influence of liberal modernism which essentially denies the true inspiration of Scripture. It is possible that Bible writers referred to other sources for information – Luke acknowledges that he did so. But that nowhere denies that the final result was the work of one author, and especially an inspired author.

McGarvey says: "There is no book of antiquity, in either sacred or profane literature, whose authorship is more unquestionable." He then cites evidence that very early writers recognized our four inspired records of the life of Christ:

> "Irenaeus, of the second century, recognized our present four gospels; Tatian, who died A.D. 170, recognized them and composed a harmony of them; Theophilus, 168, wrote a commentary on them; and Clement of Alexandria, 189, distinguished them from an uncanonical gospel according to the Egyptians ... These authorities make it unquestionable that the book of Matthew was universally received as an inspired

document at a date too early for men to be mistaken in reference to its origin."

Facts about the author Matthew:

1. He was the son of Alphaeus – Mark 2:14. Another apostle named James was also designated the Son of Alphaeus, but that may have been a different father of the same name.

2. He was also named Levi – Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27.

3. He was a publican or tax collector – Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27; Matthew 9:9.

4. He was called by Jesus while he was serving at his place of tax collection – Luke 5:27,28.

5. He invited Jesus to attend a feast with other publicans – Luke 5:29-32.

6. He was directly chosen by Jesus to be an apostle – Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Acts 1:13.

Since Matthew was an apostle, it follows that all references to the twelve would include him, even when he is not named. As an apostle, he would be an eyewitness to many of the events about which he wrote and would also have been directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. This made him well qualified to write this account of the life of Christ.

Date

Again, there is no inspired evidence for the date when the book was written. However, history concludes that it was the first of the Gospels written.

Horne writes:

> "Matthew is generally allowed to have written first of all the evangelists. His Gospel is uniformly placed first in all the codes or volumes of the Gospels: and the priority is constantly given to it in all the quotations of the primitive fathers, as well as of the early heretics. Its precedence therefore is unquestionable, though the precise time when it was composed is a question that has been greatly agitated."

He lists dates that various writers have assigned from AD 37 to AD 64. McGarvey says it was written between AD 42 and AD 58.

Lengthy discussions have occurred regarding whether Matthew originally wrote his account in Hebrew or in Greek. The only existing copies we have are in Greek. Apparently some uninspired early Christian authors claim there was a Hebrew text though they had not seen it. Some authors, including Horne, conclude that Matthew may have originally written in Hebrew and then himself later wrote the account in Greek. Horne says:

> "From a review of all the arguments adduced on this much litigated question, we cannot but prefer the ... opinion as that which best harmonises with the consent of antiquity, namely, that

> Saint Matthew wrote first a Hebrew Gospel for the use of the first Hebrew converts. Its subsequent disappearance is easily accounted for ... by the prevalence of the Greek language, especially after the destruction of Jerusalem ... It also is clear, that our present Greek Gospel is an authentic original, and consequently an inspired production of the Evangelist Matthew, written ... within a few years after those memorable and important events."

He concludes that Matthew wrote his account in Hebrew in about AD 37 or 38 and then again in Greek in AD 61.

In any case, the important thing to remember is that the record we have is inspired and that it was written soon after the events which it records.

Theme

As with the other gospel accounts, this is a record of the life of Christ.

Some have pointed out that the book was written especially to benefit Jewish readers to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah. This is based on the fact that Matthew establishes Jesus as the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and to David, often refers to Old Testament prophecies, quotes Old Testament Scripture, and mentions Jewish customs and localities without explaining them, as though assuming the readers would understand without explanation.

McGarvey says:

> "In pursuit of his main purpose, Matthew presents an array of prophecies fulfilled in the person of Jesus, of miracles wrought by him and with reference to him, of characteristics possessed by him, and of predictions uttered by him, which constitute an overwhelming proof of his Messiahship and his divinity."

References to Jesus outside the Bible

Some skeptics have doubted the existence of Jesus, claiming that there is little evidence outside the Bible. In fact, the Biblical evidence is sufficient, inasmuch as the inspiration of the writers is confirmed by eyewitness testimony of miracles, fulfilled prophecy, and the resurrection of Jesus. Furthermore, the Bible has been repeatedly demonstrated to be historically accurate in many other areas.

Nevertheless, we do have evidence outside the Bible of the existence of Jesus that confirms the accuracy of Scripture. Consider the following quote from Joseph Free:

> "Christ *is* referred to by the pagan Roman historians. Tacitus, telling of the persecution of Nero, refers to the Christians, already a 'great multitude,' who derived their name 'from one Christus, who was executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate'...

"The Roman writer Suetonius also refers to the expelling of the Jews from Rome for raising tumults at the instigation of one 'Chrestus,' plainly a mistake for 'Christus' ... Pliny the younger was propraetor of Bithynia and Pontica in A.D. 103-105; he wrote to the Emperor Trajan for guidance respecting the treatment of Christians. He bears testimony to the innocent lives and allegiance to Christ, their founder. There are several others who refer to Christ, including Lucian the Cynic, Celsus, and Josephus (the reference to Josephus has been thought by some to be spurious)..." Free, pages 286,287

The language of the Bible

"... during the later years of the nineteenth century A.D. ... Thousands of papyrus documents, including letters, wills, receipts, tax documents and the like were found in the excavations in Egypt, where the hot dry sands of that country had preserved them for some two thousand years. ... these everyday papyrus documents were written in the same type of Greek as used in the New Testament ... This demonstrated that the New Testament was not written in some artificial language containing many 'invented' words, but was actually written in the everyday Greek which would be intelligible to everyone. God's purpose in making the gospel known to everyone is seen even in the type of Greek which was used – 'koine' (common) Greek." – Joseph Free, page 293

Summary of contents by section

Chapters 1,2 – Jesus' early life
- Chapter 1 – Genealogy of Jesus and the angel's visit to Joseph
  - 1:1-17 – The genealogy of Jesus
  - 1:18-25 – The angel's explanation to Joseph about the Virgin Birth of Jesus
- Chapter 2 – The visit of the wise men and Herod's treachery against Jesus
  - 2:1-12 – The visit of the wise men
  - 2:13-23 – Herod's treachery against Jesus

Chapters 3-20 – Jesus' public ministry
- Chapter 3 – The ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism
- Chapter 4 – Jesus' temptation and the call of several apostles
- Chapters 5-7 – Sermon on the Mount
  - 5:1-16 – Beatitudes, salt, and light
  - 5:17-48 – Jesus' teaching contrasted to previous teaching
  - 6:1-18 – Proper motives in serving God
  - 6:19-34 – Proper attitudes toward material things
  - 7:1-6 – Judging others
  - 7:7-12 – Answers to prayer
  - 7:13-29 – Importance of obedience to God and avoiding false teachers

Chapter 8,9 – Jesus' miracles
Chapter 10 – The Limited Commission
Chapter 11 – Questions from John the Baptist and discussion of Jesus' work
Chapter 12 – Controversy about the Sabbath and the source of Jesus' power
Chapter 13 – Teaching in Parables
Chapter 14 – Death of John the Baptist; additional miracles
14:1-12 – Death of John the Baptist
14:13-21 – Feeding of the 5000
14:22-33 – Walking on the water
Chapter 15 – Conflict about human traditions; further miracles
15:1-20 – Conflict about human traditions
15:21-29 – Healing of the Canaanite's daughter and feeding of the 4000
Chapter 16 – Warning about the Pharisees and predictions of Jesus' church and death
16:1-12 – Warning about the Pharisee's Leaven
16:13-28 – Jesus' promise of His church and predictions of His death
Chapter 17 – The Transfiguration and related events
Chapter 18 – Greatness in the kingdom, dealing with temptations and sins
Chapter 19 – Teaching regarding divorce and riches
Chapter 20 – Further discussion about the kingdom and Jesus' death
Chapters 21-28 – Jesus' last days on earth (trials, death, and resurrection)
Chapter 21 – Triumphal entry, cleansing of the temple, and related teaching
Chapter 22 – Conflict and debates with Jewish leaders
Chapter 23 – Public rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees
Chapter 24 – Prophecy regarding the temple and Jesus' coming
Chapter 25 – Teaching regarding Jesus' coming and final judgment
25:1-13 – Parable of the Ten Virgins
25:14-30 – Parable of the Talents
25:31-46 – Description of the final judgment
Chapter 26 – Passover and the Lord's Supper, Gethsemane, Jesus' arrest, and Jewish trials
Chapter 27 – Roman trials and crucifixion
Chapter 28 – Jesus' resurrection

Chapters 1,2 – Jesus' Early Life

Matthew 1

Chapter 1 – Genealogy of Jesus and the Angel's Visit to Joseph

Compare Luke chapters 1-3.

1:1-17 - The Genealogy of Jesus

1:1 – The genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham

Compare the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1-3.

Matthew begins his account of the life of Christ by emphasizing Jesus' genealogy. This would be of special importance because it is necessary to establish that Jesus was the Messiah in fulfillment of major Old Testament promises. This contrasts to John who began his account by emphasizing the Deity of Jesus as the eternal Creator (John 1:1-14).

Jesus Christ

We note first that Matthew plainly affirms Jesus to be the Christ. We will see that the name "Jesus" (meaning "Jehovah is salvation") is the personal name assigned by God in the instructions given by the angel to Joseph later in this chapter. The term "Christ" means one who is anointed.

Anointing was a ritual used to dedicate prophets, priests, and kings to office. But the term is especially important because it is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah." The Old Testament had repeatedly predicted the coming of the Messiah (Psalm 2:2), and Jews

for generations had been waiting for that coming. Modern-day Jews, not believing in Jesus, are still looking for the coming of their Messiah. But Matthew claims that Jesus was that Messiah.

The Son of David and the Son of Abraham

Matthew then states that Jesus was the Son of David and the Son of Abraham. These claims are absolutely essential because the Old Testament prophecies, which would be fulfilled in the Messiah, required that He be a descendant of David and a descendant of Abraham.

The Christ had to be a descendent of Abraham in order to fulfill the promise to Abraham that through his seed would come a blessing on all nations: Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:3-5; 28:13,14; Galatians 3:16; Acts 3:25,26.

The Christ also had to be a descendant of David in order to fulfill the promise to David that the Messiah would reign on his throne. This was understood by the Jewish people. They were expecting their Messiah to come as the descendant of David and deliver them from their enemies. However, we will see as the account progresses that they had a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the Messiah and of the deliverance that He would bring.

Many other passages refer to Jesus as the "Son of David" – that is, the descendant of David – thereby repeating the claim that He was in fact the Messiah. Many people referred to Him by that term, demonstrating that they recognized him as the descendant of David and in many cases that they recognized him as the Messiah. See 2 Samuel 7:13-16; Psalm 132:11; Isaiah 9:6,7; 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15-17; Matthew 22:42-45; 9:27; 15:22; Luke 1:31,32,69,70; Acts 2:30; Romans 1:3; Revelation 22:16.

For Matthew to begin his account by claiming Jesus to be the fulfillment of these Old Testament prophecies was to make a bold claim indeed. Matthew will continue through the rest of his account repeatedly demonstrating evidence that Jesus in fact was the one prophesied in the Old Testament to be the Christ, the Messiah.

Notice also that the account refers to Jesus as the "son" of both Abraham and David. However, he was not the immediate first-generation descendant of either of these men. Rather, he was a descendant after many generations. This demonstrates that the word "son" is sometimes used in genealogies to refer simply to a descendant. We will see the same thing is true with regard to the use of the word "begot." This also demonstrates that genealogies sometimes skip generations and are not intended to include necessarily every generation.

Some names in Biblical genealogies are of little consequence because they refer to people who did little of significance, so the Scriptures have little to say about them. However, all Biblical genealogies serve one very important purpose and that is that they

demonstrate that the record is intended to be history. The Bible writers claim to be inspired of God by the Holy Spirit, but they also claim to be historically accurate. Those who deny that the Bible is intended to be historical are denying the inspiration of Scripture, since the inspired men themselves claimed to be historical.

> ...Matthew wrote appropriately, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." On the one hand he is not able to be counted simply from natural generation among families, since it is written, "Who shall declare his generation?" [Isaiah 53:8] He is before the centuries and of one substance with the Father himself, from the standpoint of eternity. But by this genealogy he is also numbered among the families of humanity according to the flesh. For in truth, while remaining God, Christ became man without ceasing to be God, unaltered till the end of time. – Severus (*Ancient Christian Commentary)*.

> "Christ" (χριστος) – "...the Septuagint for ... anointed ... of the coming king whom the Jews expected to be the saviour of their nation and the author of their highest felicity:... 1. of the Messiah, viewed in his generic aspects (the word, that is to say, being used as an appellative rather than a proper name), ... 2. It is added, as an appellative (Messiah, anointed), to the proper name (Jesus)..." –Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

1:2 – Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob, and Jacob begot Judah and his brothers.

Luke's genealogy actually traces the ancestry of Jesus all the way back to Adam and then to God. However, Matthew begins his genealogy with Abraham. Abraham was the beginning of the lineage of the nation of Israel because it was to him that God first made the promises regarding his offspring. So, to establish the identity of Jesus as the Messiah, Matthew needed to go back no further than Abraham.

Isaac was a child of promise born to Abraham in his old age. God assured Abraham that the promises He had given would be fulfilled through Abraham's son Isaac. Isaac in turn had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Since Esau was the older, we would have expected the promises to be fulfilled through him. However, he foolishly sold his birthright to his brother Jacob, and Jacob eventually received also the blessing from Isaac.

Jacob himself was deceitful, yet God repeated the promises through him knowing that he was more suitable for God's purposes than was Esau. Jacob then had twelve sons, referred to here as Judah and his brothers. The reference is specifically to Judah because David was a descendant of Judah, and it was through David that God promised the coming of the Messiah. The sons of Jacob then became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The promises that God made to Abraham were then repeated to his son Isaac and then in turn to Isaac's son Jacob. See the references listed on verse 1 above.

1:3,4 – Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar. The genealogy then proceeds through Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon and Salmon.

Since the Messiah was prophesied to come as a descendant of David, the genealogy traces the offspring of Jacob through David's ancestor Judah (Genesis 49:10). Judah had several sons. His oldest son had been married to Tamar, but he died for his wickedness.

In the Old Testament, when a man died without child to inherit, the man's brother should marry his widow and raise up descendants to the dead man. However, because this was not done in the case of Judah's sons, Tamar tricked Judah himself into having sexual relations with her. This resulted in the birth of the twin sons Perez and Zerah. The genealogy of Judah then proceeded through Perez. See Genesis 38:6-30.

Women in the genealogy

Other than Jesus' mother Mary, there are four women mentioned specifically in the genealogy. Mention of women was uncommon in Jewish genealogies. But this genealogy mentions Tamar in verse 3, Rahab and Ruth in verse 5, and Bathsheba in verse 6.

It is not clear why these women are included but other women are not. However, each of them was unusual in some way. In the case of Tamar, she actually seduced her father-in-law by pretending to be a harlot. Such conduct was surely sinful, even though it was intended to serve a good purpose, yet God used Judah's descendants in the lineage of Christ.

One lesson we can surely learn is that God by no means intended to use only righteous people in the lineage of Christ. All of the people were sinful in various ways, even as is true for the best of people, but many of them were predominantly sinful and clearly unacceptable to God. Yet God used such people to accomplish His purposes.

1:5 – Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, and Obed begot Jesse.

The genealogy then records the more immediate ancestors of David. Once again two women are named. We are told that Boaz, who became the husband of Ruth, was himself the son of Salmon and a woman named Rahab.

Joshua's account of the conquest of Jericho records a very important role played by a woman named Rahab. Rahab had been a harlot, but when spies were sent by Israel to spy out Jericho, Rahab hid the spies and demonstrated faith in God. As a result, she and her family were spared when all the other people in Jericho were slain. See Joshua chapter 2.

It would seem reasonable that this Rahab in Joshua chapter 2 could have been the one in Jesus' genealogy. However, the timing is difficult because the Rahab in Joshua's account lived so many years before Boaz and Ruth.

As a consequence, Young's concordance and some commentators believe that the Rahab in Jesus' genealogy was a different woman than the harlot in Jericho. But McGarvey explains that this really solves nothing because the genealogy says Rahab was married to Salmon, and Salmon was a contemporary of Rahab of Jericho.

Another possibility, however, is that names have been omitted from the genealogy. We will see later that this is definitely true in other places in the genealogy. If this is the case, the names must also have been omitted from other genealogies.

The marriage of Boaz and Ruth is recorded in the book of Ruth. Ruth was a Moabite. Israelites were forbidden to marry Moabites, but in the case of Ruth she was a convert to the true God. She had been married to an Israelite who died without offspring. Eventually she became married to Boaz, who was a near kinsman and could fulfill the responsibility of raising up seed to Ruth's dead husband. Boaz and Ruth became the parents of Obed, who in turn was the grandfather of David.

1:6 – Jesse begot David the king, and David begot Solomon by Bathsheeba who had been married to Uriah.

Obed, who was the son of Boaz and Ruth, in turn became the father of Jesse who was the father of David. Isaiah referred to the Messiah as a descendant of Jesse. See Isaiah 11:1,10.

David, of course, became in many ways the greatest king Israel ever had. Because of David's faithfulness and his humble, submissive heart, God promised to David that his sons would reign on the throne and that the Messiah would be his descendant (see references under verse 1 above). The Jewish people in Jesus' day generally understood that the Messiah would be the heir to the throne of David.

Despite David's general faithfulness, he was guilty of a horrible sin when he committed adultery with Bathsheeba. When Bathsheeba conceived as a result, David had her husband Uriah killed so David could marry her to cover up the adultery. See 2 Samuel 11,12. The child who had been conceived by David and Bathsheeba then died as part of God's punishment for their sin. But later they had a son Solomon who became king of Israel after David.

Solomon was granted great wisdom as a special blessing from God, along with other great blessings. Israel reached the height of their glory during the reign of Solomon. However, Solomon disobeyed God's command by marrying many women of surrounding nations. As God had predicted, this led Solomon into idolatry and eventually led to the division of the nation. See 1 Kings 11.

As we have mentioned before, all four of the women who are listed in Jesus' genealogy are in some way unusual. Each of them had some morally questionable issue in her background which might have led some people to wonder whether such women should even be in the genealogy. Tamar committed adultery with Judah. Rahab had been a harlot and a Canaanite, and Israel was supposed to slay all the Canaanites. Ruth was a Moabite, and Israelites were forbidden to marry Moabites. And Bathsheeba became the mother of Solomon despite her adultery with David.

Obviously, in each case, God allowed special circumstances. But why should these women be the ones specifically chosen to be in the genealogy? Perhaps the best answer is that Matthew was reminding the people that God can use women as ancestors of Jesus despite morally questionable backgrounds. That is, not that they continued in their sins, but that because of their backgrounds, people might think they should not even be in the genealogy. Yet none of the people of Jesus' day could deny that these women belonged in the genealogy.

Perhaps these women are mentioned in order to show that Mary also would belong in the genealogy despite apparently questionable circumstances. In fact, Mary was a very righteous woman, as we will see. But her circumstances might appear questionable since she conceived outside wedlock. No Jew, who knew the history of the Jewish nation – and most Jews did know their history – could object to Mary as the mother of the Messiah. And while there are some people today who claim that Mary was immoral, there is no evidence that people in Jesus' day used her as an excuse to reject Jesus.

1:7 – Solomon begot Rehoboam, who in turn begot Abijah the father of Asa.

Following Solomon, his son Rehoboam became king. As God had predicted, the kingdom divided during the reign of Rehoboam. This was the consequence of the idolatry that Solomon had introduced. But the specific issue that led to the division was Rehoboam's refusal to heed the request of the people to lighten their load of taxation and oppression by the government. See 1 Kings 12.

So, beginning with the reign of Rehoboam, the nation of Israel was divided into two nations: Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Matthew's genealogy, however, will continue to follow the descendants of David through Rehoboam because it was through this line that the Messiah would be born.

Rehoboam's son Abijah became king after him, and the next was Asa. Abijah was wicked like his father Rehoboam, but Asa was generally a good king.

1:8,9 – The kings who descended from Asa were Jehoshaphat, Joram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

Matthew then lists the kings who descended from David through Asa. Some of them were generally good kings who walked according to the uprightness that had characterized David. But others were generally wicked. The evil kings included Joram and Ahaz. However, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Jotham, and Hezekiah were generally good kings.

Hezekiah was king of Judah when the northern kingdom of Israel was taken captive by Assyria because of their sins. Because Hezekiah trusted in God, and because of his promise to David, God spared the nation of Judah from Assyria. Judah continued to exist as a nation with their own kings for several generations.

Names missing from the genealogy

At this point we confront a question that must be dealt with. Several kings, whose reigns are recorded in the books of 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, are nevertheless omitted from Matthew's genealogy. Between Joram and Uzziah there were the kings Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah. There was also a period in which the wicked woman Athaliah had usurped the throne. We may understand why she was omitted, but why omit the other kings?

Matthew gives us no explanation. However, whatever explanation is given, no one can rightly conclude that Matthew was inaccurate. The omissions were obviously deliberate and would have been easily understood by all the Jewish people. Matthew knew the genealogies just like the other people knew. They were easily available in the Old Testament record. And most important, Matthew was inspired.

Such omissions were common in genealogies (see our notes on verse 1 above). Our mindset might lead us to be troubled by them, but the Jews – who placed far more emphasis on genealogies than we do – would not be troubled. In fact there is no record of anyone questioning Jesus' genealogy. Jewish leaders objected to Jesus as the Messiah on a number of other grounds, but no one seems to have questioned the accuracy of the genealogies. As an example of omission of names in a genealogy compare Ezra 7:1-3 to 1 Chronicles 6:6-11; compare Esther 2:5.

Presumably omitting names in a genealogy was acceptable practice as long as the end result was correct. That is, the overall direction of the genealogy correctly demonstrated that Jesus was the descendant of David and therefore rightful heir to the throne. This is the point that Matthew is establishing, and the names that have been omitted do not in any way diminish that conclusion. Any Jew could easily check existing genealogies in Jesus' day and prove that Matthew was correct in claiming that Jesus was a descendant of David.

Again, McGarvey explains:

> "In proving that Jesus descended from David, it is immaterial how many names (Matthew) omits, provided those which he gives are correct: for the list from which he copied is three times repeated in the Jewish Scriptures and the means of testing his accuracy were in the possession of every synagogue throughout the world."

He then cites various examples in which terms such as "son" are used in Scripture to refer to a more distant offspring. See Genesis 46:8-15; 32:9; 2 Samuel 19:24.

We will see that Matthew wants the genealogy to have a balance of three sections of fourteen generations each. We will discuss his reasons later. But in order to reach this balance, he needed to eliminate some generations.

1:10,11 – Hezekiah's descendants were Manasseh then Amon and then Josiah. Josiah's descendants were Jeconiah and his brothers around the time of the captivity to Babylon.

Matthew next gives the generations from Hezekiah, at the time the northern tribes of Israel went into captivity, to the time when the southern nation of Judah went into captivity to Babylon. He lists Manasseh and Amon, who are evil kings (although Manasseh repented in his later years). Then he lists Josiah who was a good king.

The reference to Jeconiah and his brothers actually includes several kings who reigned in succession, all of them evil. Specifically there was Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah or Coniah), and Zedekiah. Each of these kings is known by more than one name in the Old Testament record. During the reigns of these kings, Babylon came at various times and took groups of Jews into captivity. Finally Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in 586 BC.

Again we note that Matthew skipped several individuals in the genealogy, although in this case he makes clear that he has done so simply by referring to them in general as "his brothers."

1:12-16 – After they were carried to Babylon, the genealogy includes Jeconiah then Shealtiel then Zerubbabel then Abiud then Eliakim then Azor then Zadok then Achim then Eliud then Eleazar then Matthan then Jacob. Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.

The genealogy then lists the names from the time the Jews were taken into Babylonian captivity till the birth of Jesus. Zerubbabel is elsewhere in Scripture identified as the governor (not the king) of Judah when they returned from the Babylonian captivity (see Ezra 3:2; 5:2; Nehemiah 12:1; Haggai 1:1,12,14; 2:2,23).

Some have questioned why Matthew would list a descendant for Jeconiah when Jeremiah 22:30 says Jeconiah would be childless. The

answer is that the passage does not just say he would be childless, but it explains that no man of his seed would prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling in Judah.

The point is that no descendant of Jeconiah would continue the dynasty ruling as an earthly king over Judah. The descendants listed here did not sit on the throne of David nor did they rule in Judah. We will see that Jesus is sitting on the throne of David, but not ruling in Judah. And Jesus' rule is spiritual, not earthly.

Most other men in this part of the genealogy are of little significance in the record. There are no other Biblical genealogies that mention them, since they lived in the time of silence between Malachi and the New Testament, when no inspired records were made. No doubt the genealogies were available publicly in Jesus' day, so any who were interested could check the genealogies for themselves to confirm Matthew's record.

The genealogy comes then to Jacob who begot Joseph the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. Note that in every other case the genealogy says that a certain person begot another person. However, the record does not say that Jesus was begotten by Joseph. The account says that Jesus was born to Mary and that Joseph was her husband, but it does not say that Joseph begot Jesus. This point is significant since Jesus was born of a virgin as the record will show later.

1:17 – Matthew summarizes that the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen, from David until the captivity in Babylon were fourteen generations, and the captivity in Babylon until the Christ were fourteen generations.

Matthew interestingly groups the genealogy into three groups of fourteen generations: fourteen from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian captivity, and fourteen from the captivity to Jesus. We have seen that, to achieve this, Matthew had to omit some names. He does not explain his purpose in this. McGarvey comments that it was common in genealogies to leave some people out for the sake of symmetry and to make them easier to remember.

We may also observe that the genealogy as recorded here does not include exactly fourteen people in each of the sections that Matthew identifies. Some claim that, in order to make the numbers come out as fourteen in each case, people in the overlap have to be counted both in the group before and in the group after them.

A comparison of the genealogies of Matthew and Luke

Matthew's genealogy obviously differs from that of Luke. Two proposed explanations for the differences are as follows (see McGarvey's notes and Lamar's comments on Luke).

1. Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph, since Jesus is the legal heir of Joseph. This shows the right of Jesus to the throne of David, since He was legal heir of the men in the list. But Luke's genealogy is the ancestry of Mary, Joseph being named in the list instead of Mary since men's names are inserted in genealogies instead of their wives.

Luke gives Mary's genealogy to show that Jesus was really the descendent of David even physically by bloodline through his physical mother. This is important, since Jesus was not physically the son of Joseph. This explanation appears to fit the context of the accounts. Matthew's account describes events surrounding Jesus' birth from the perspective of Joseph, so it gives Joseph's genealogy. Whereas Luke describes the events surrounding Jesus' birth from the perspective of Mary, so he gives the genealogy through Mary.

2. Both genealogies are essentially genealogies of Joseph, but Matthew gives the line of succession of kings to prove Jesus' right to the throne of David. But Luke gives the genealogy of Joseph by his actual fleshly line of birth, not necessarily following the line of kings. The difference is that succession to the throne was not always according to physical sonship, as when a son would die without children.

In either case, the bottom line is that Jesus was a descendent of David by legal inheritance and was also rightful successor to the throne of David.

And remember also that, while these questions about genealogies may seem strange to us, the Jews in Jesus' day would understand their genealogies and how they were used better than we do. They could easily check the records of Matthew and Luke against the existing genealogies. If they found any real discrepancies, they could easily have made an issue of them. Yet there is no record that they ever did so.

This would indicate that those people understood these matters that are less clear to us centuries later. It ill behooves anyone today to make an issue of these points from the perspective of millennia later, when people who lived in that day and could easily check things out, made no such issues.

1:18-25 – The Angel's Explanation to Joseph about the Virgin Birth of Jesus

1:18 – The record of the birth of Jesus: When Jesus' mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they had come together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew now begins his account of Jesus' birth. Mary had conceived Jesus in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit before she came together with her betrothed husband Joseph.

Note the implications regarding the Virgin Birth. Mary and Joseph had not come together and physically consummated their marriage.

They were only betrothed. But Mary conceived by the power the Holy Spirit.

An angel had explained this to Mary prior to her conception in Luke 1:26-38. Luke wrote the account from the perspective of Mary, but Matthew will here give us the record from the perspective of Joseph.

1:19 – Being a just man and not wanting to make a public example of Mary, Joseph was considering putting her away secretly.

Joseph had not previously been informed of God's plan regarding the Virgin Birth. So when he learned Mary was pregnant, he was about to privately put her away without making a public issue to cause embarrassment to her. He is here called her husband and she is called his wife in verse 20, but it has already been explained in verse 18 that they were just betrothed. They had not yet come together. So such terminology was appropriate even in the case of a betrothal in that day because the betrothal was legally binding.

When he heard that she was already expecting, Joseph naturally concluded that she had been sexually unfaithful. He knew he was not the father of the child. To marry her then would be unthinkable.

The Old Testament teaching about an unmarried woman, who became pregnant while she was betrothed, is discussed in Deuteronomy 22:23-29; Leviticus 19:20-22. Joseph could not know how Mary became pregnant, so perhaps the application of the law was so uncertain he decided to not pursue it. Rather than require that Mary be publicly embarrassed and even put to death, he considered pursuing the part of the law that allowed him to divorce her (Deuteronomy 24:1ff).

1:20 – An angel appeared in a dream and instructed Joseph to take to him Mary his wife because that which she had conceived was of the Holy Spirit.

But unknown to Joseph, all this was the work of God so that Mary had committed no sin. God sent an angel to Joseph in a dream to explain he should take Mary his wife to him because she had conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. Note that Joseph is called "son of David," showing his place in the genealogy of David.

This further affirms the Virgin Birth. Not only had Mary been told by an angel that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit, but now Joseph was being told the same thing. Mary had not committed fornication but had conceived by a miraculous act of God. Further, ***we*** are being told this by the inspired records of Matthew and Luke.

There are those today who claim that Jesus was not conceived miraculously but was either the child of Joseph or else Mary did in fact commit fornication. Such claims simply deny the inspiration and the historical accuracy of the records of the birth of Jesus.

The inspired men Matthew and Luke both plainly say that Mary conceived, not as a result of a normal relationship with a man, but as a result of the power of the Holy Spirit. They both say that this was revealed miraculously from heaven by angels. They also both say that both Mary and Joseph were righteous and godly.

Some have claimed that, since this revelation came to Joseph in a dream, perhaps it was his imagination or even he may not have truly understood it. Dreams can be very confusing things today and surely are uninspired. However, this ignores the fact that dreams in the Bible were often used as a means of revelation from God (see 2:12,13,19,22; Genesis 37; Numbers 12:6; Daniel 2; etc.).

Matthew by inspiration states plainly that an angel spoke to Joseph in this dream. And what was stated to Joseph exactly corresponded to what the angel told Mary, and Mary was not dreaming.

1:21 – Mary would bring forth a son who should be named Jesus because He would save His people from their sins.

The angel further affirmed to Joseph that Mary would have a son, and that He should be named Jesus because he would save His people from their sins. "Jesus" means a Savior and was a common name for Jewish boys. But in this case there was a special reason for the name: Jesus would save people from their sins.

Note that the spiritual nature of the coming of Jesus is here emphasized even before His birth. As in Luke chapter 1, we see several evidences, even before Jesus' birth, that His work would be of special supernatural nature.

Many other passages show that Jesus would save men from their sins: John 1:29; Acts 3:26; 4:12; 5:31; 13:23,38; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 1:7; 2:1,2; 3:5; Revelation 1:5; 7:14.

1:22,23 – The birth of Jesus would fulfill the prophecy that a virgin would be with child and bear a son, and they would call His name Immanuel, meaning "God with us."

A virgin would conceive.

Matthew then records that the birth of Jesus would fulfill the prophecy of God through Isaiah that a virgin would conceive and bring forth a son who would be called Immanuel. See Isaiah 7:14. Note how the passage directly states that the Old Testament writer Isaiah was guided by God when he spoke.

Some have claimed that the word for "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 can refer simply to a young woman, not necessarily a virgin. However, the Greek word "virgin" used here in Matthew means a young woman who has not had a sexual relationship with a man. This, together with the context of Matthew 1, proves without question the meaning of Isaiah's prophecy.

It would be nothing special if the word simply meant a young woman, since it is quite common for women to conceive sons. What is

special about the prophecy is that a woman would conceive without having a relationship with a man.

Here is further proof of the special character of the son who would be born. He would be born of a virgin, which was necessarily a miraculous event. And that birth had been prophesied over 700 years before it happened!

"Virgin" (παρθενος) – "...in our lit. one who has never engaged in sexual intercourse, *virgin, chaste person...*" – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

The son who was born would be called Immanuel.

"Immanuel" means God with us. The full implications of this name may not be apparent until it is explained later. John 1:1-18 explains that Jesus was God from eternity but came to earth to dwell in the form of a man: therefore, God with us. God would come to earth born as a man.

This is the first of many examples of Old Testament prophecies that Matthew in his record says Jesus fulfilled. This demonstrates that the Old Testament writers were in fact inspired of God, as Matthew affirmed here. But it also demonstrates that Jesus was sent from God in fulfillment of divine purposes.

1:24,25 – Joseph took Mary to him, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn son. He called the son Jesus.

When Joseph awoke from the dream, he did as the angel had instructed. He took Mary to him as his wife. And he did not have a sexual relationship with her until Jesus had been born. Note how this emphasizes again that Jesus was born of a virgin. The passage clearly teaches that Joseph was not the father of Jesus and that Mary was a virgin until Jesus had been born.

However, nothing here states or implies that Joseph and Mary had no sexual relationship ***after*** Jesus' birth (as Catholicism teaches). We will see later that Mary had other children besides Jesus. Had she refused to fulfill the marriage relationship with Joseph, rather than being especially godly as some would portray, she would in fact have refused to fulfill her marital obligations and would have tempted her husband to unfaithfulness. See 1 Corinthians 7:2-5.

Observe that, although Jesus was born miraculously, nevertheless God went to great lengths to make sure He would be raised by both a mother and a father (in this case, an adopted father). This is the normal and natural plan that God established from Creation. God wants children to be raised in a family with both a mother and a father to care for them.

The modern idea that children can be raised by just one parent or by two "parents" of the same gender is a perversion of God's plan. There may be exceptional circumstances in which one parent is missing due to

circumstances beyond control, but to deliberately choose such a course is disobedience to God and unloving to children.

Summary of the Evidence that Jesus Was Born of a Virgin

1. The genealogy says that all the men except Jesus were begotten by their ancestor in the genealogy. But Jesus is a clear exception: Joseph is simply said to be the husband of Mary who was the mother of Jesus – 1:16.

2. Matthew affirms that Joseph and Mary had not come together and had not known one another sexually before Jesus was born – 1:18,25.

3. An angel told Joseph that Mary had conceived by the Holy Spirit – 1:20; compare verse 18.

4. Isaiah had prophesied that a virgin would conceive a son, and Matthew says this was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus – 1:22,23.

5. Luke's account directly affirms that Mary was a virgin – 1:26,27.

6. Luke's account states that Mary would conceive by the power the Holy Spirit – 1:35.

7. Mary affirmed that she had not known a man – Luke 1:34.

8. Elizabeth by inspiration said Mary was the mother of her Lord and all future generations would call Mary blessed – Luke 1:43,44,48.

Significance of the Virgin Birth

1. As a miracle, the Virgin Birth proves that Jesus was special. He received God's approval as a representative of God.

2. Symbolically, it shows that Jesus was both God and man: God in the flesh. Jesus was conceived by God (Deity) in the womb of a woman (human). He was Immanuel or God with us.

Matthew 2

Chapter 2 – The Visit of the Wise Men and Herod's Treachery

2:1-12 - The Visit of the Wise Men

2:1 – After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem.

The birth of Jesus

Matthew's account now turns to some of the events that followed the birth of Jesus. He records that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea during the reign of King Herod. Bethlehem was a small town just south of Jerusalem (see ***map***). Notice how Matthew identifies the names of places and rulers, thereby assuring us that this is intended to be a true historical account, not myth or legend.

In particular, it is important that Jesus was born during the time of the Roman Empire. Daniel had predicted in chapters 2 and 9 that the kingdom of God would be set up during the time of the Roman Empire. Jesus fulfilled the prophecy as the Son of David in the proper time and the proper place.

Luke 2 records that Joseph and Mary were actually from Nazareth in Galilee, but they went to Bethlehem because of a decree by the Roman Emperor Augustus that each person return to their city of origin. Being descendants of David, Joseph and Mary were required to go to the city of David, which was Bethlehem. There Jesus was born and His birth was announced to shepherds. Matthew, however, omits these and other details, but gives us rather other information not recorded by Luke.

Herod the Great

The Herod who reigned at this time was Herod the Great. He was the beginning of a line of rulers in Palestine who were known by the term "Herod." Uninspired historical evidence reveals much about this man, including his cruelty and wickedness. This will become a concern regarding Jesus as the story continues.

International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says regarding Herod the Great:

> Antony appointed him "tetrarch" of Judea in 41 bc, and ... through the favor of Antony and Augustus he obtained the crown of Judea in 37 bc. ... The first act of his reign was the extermination of the Asmonean house, to which Herod himself was related through his marriage with Mariamne, ... he sacrificed Mariamne his wife, the only human being he ever seems to have loved (28 bc), his mother-in-law Alexandra (*Ant*., XV, vii, 8), and ultimately, shortly before his death, even his own sons by Mariamne, Alexander and Aristobulus 7 bc ... one of the last acts of his life was an order to execute his son Antipater ... and another order to slay, after his death, a number of nobles, who were guilty of a small outbreak at Jerusalem ... Josephus writes this epitaph: "A man he was of great barbarity toward all men equally, and a slave to his passions..."
>
> "Without a doubt, Herod was the most prolific builder in Israel's history. The edifices he constructed reflected his devotion to his Roman sponsors, and his self-promotion. On the other hand, because his father was Idumean and his mother Nabatean, he was never fully accepted by the Jews. In order to ingratiate himself to the majority within his kingdom, he thought a new temple for God in Jerusalem." – Hoffmeier, page 130

The wise men

The record then immediately tells of the visit of the wise men who came from the East. They first came to Jerusalem to inquire about Jesus. People would naturally go to the capital city to seek information about a king.

"Wise men" (Greek magi) were leading scholars in religion and philosophy. Like today, such people may be sincere seekers who have learned much truth, but they may also be fakes who are in error to a small or great degree. The same Greek word is used in the LXX translation of Daniel 5:11 referring to Daniel as a leading magos.

The wise men in this account were apparently sincere seekers of truth to the extent that God chose to use them for another of the many supernatural evidences of the character of Jesus. Pope points out that these wise men may in fact have been successors of men who learned the truth from Daniel. As such, they could have been Gentiles or Jews who had continued to live in Babylon after the Babylonian captivity.

Tradition says there were three wise men, but this is based mostly on the number of gifts (see verse 11). But any number of men could bring three gifts. There is simply no Bible evidence at all regarding the number of men. Furthermore, we have no way to know their names, nor is there any indication that they were kings.

"Wise men" (μαγος) – "1 *a Magus* ... wise man and priest, who was expert in astrology, interpretation of dreams and various other occult arts ... 2 *magician*..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

The day on which Jesus was born

Those who celebrate a holy day in commemoration of the birth of Jesus state the following:

Christmas is: "The 25th of December, on which the Church celebrates Christ's birth ... Whether or not the birth of our Lord really occurred on this day, ancient authorities are not agreed" – *Catholic Dictionary*, p. 161.

"Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church ... The first evidence of the feast is from Egypt. About A.D. 200 ..." – *Catholic Encyclopedia* on "Christmas"

> "In the East, and later in the West, Christ's birthday was observed on January 6th in connection with his baptism, a day on which the pagan world celebrated the feast of Dionysus, associated with the lengthening of the days ... In Rome, December 25th is attested as the day of Christ's birth in 336. It was introduced perhaps by Constantine the Great who evidently chose the day because of the popular pagan feast of the sun ... The early Christians did not observe the festival of Christ's birth, to which they did not attach the importance ascribed to his death and resurrection" – *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, p. 117.

So those who religiously celebrate Christmas provide us the following evidence:

1) No one really knows on what day of the year Jesus was born.

2) Early Christians did not observe a holy day in memory of Jesus' birth, since they attached no special importance to it.

3) The practice of observing Jesus' birth religiously was begun when the church had gone into apostasy from the New Testament doctrine. The date of December 25 was chosen because it was a popular pagan feast day in worship of the sun.

It follows that there is no authority for the religious observance of the birthday of Christ. It is a humanly devised practice based on human tradition and paganism. See Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; 26:2; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Isaiah 24:5; 30:1; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13.

2:2 – The wise men inquired about the one who was born king of the Jews, because they had seen his star in the East and had come to worship Him.

In Jerusalem the wise men inquired where they could find the One who was born to be king of the Jews. They had seen his star in the East and wanted to worship him. An angel had prophesied to Mary that Jesus would reign on the throne of David. This would make Him the king of

the Jews. Apparently something to this effect had been revealed to these wise men.

Wise men in the East often studied stars. This often involved astrology and worship of the stars. But astrology is a false religious superstition often condemned in Scripture (Deuteronomy 18:9-14,18-22; 2 Kings 17:16-18; Jeremiah 10:2). However, then, as now, some who studied the stars may have been quite accurate as with modern astronomy. In any case, this star was not a natural phenomenon. It must have been miraculous since it traveled ahead of the wise men, then stopped and stood over the house where Jesus was (verse 9). No natural heavenly body could move in this way.

How did these wise men know the star was leading them to the king of the Jews? This is not specifically revealed, but verse 12 later says that God warned them in a dream to avoid Herod. This could be the same way He communicated to them originally.

The main purpose of this event is to give us more proof about who Jesus was. It is hard to know what more it may tell us about who these wise men were.

2:3 – King Herod and the city of Jerusalem were troubled over this news.

When King Herod heard of the mission of these men, he was troubled, as was all Jerusalem. It is likely that the rest of the city was not troubled for the same reasons that Herod was.

Subsequent events show that Herod's motive was concern for his own authority. He wanted to keep power for himself and his heirs. Herod was not a true Jew by birth, and certainly was not the rightful heir of David's throne. Anyone born to that position by proper lineage from David would be a rival to the throne and dominion of Herod.

Why other people were troubled is not clearly stated. McGarvey suggests that perhaps they feared war between rival factions.

2:4 – Herod gathered the chief priests and scribes and asked them where the Messiah would be born.

Evidently Herod connected the statements of the wise men to the prophecies of the Christ. So he inquired of the chief priests and scribes where the Messiah was to be born. He sought to give the impression to the wise men that he was cooperating with them, but his ulterior motive will be revealed as the story progresses.

The chief priests were leaders among the classes or courses of priests that had been organized by David as recorded in 1 Chronicles 24:1-19. The scribes were men who copied official documents by hand. This often included copying the Scriptures and other written materials of religious significance. As a result the scribes were known for being well-educated in the law. We will see, nevertheless, that these religious

leaders had become quite corrupt and sought primarily to defend their exalted position in the eyes of the people.

2:5,6 – The religious leaders quoted a prophecy that the ruler who would be shepherd of God's people would come out of Bethlehem in the land of Judah.

The chief priests and scribes accurately informed Herod that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. This was prophesied in Micah 5:2 where Micah prophesied that out of Bethlehem would come a ruler who would be shepherd of God's people Israel.

As the record of the life of Christ proceeds, we will see that these leaders thoroughly misunderstood many prophecies about the Christ. However, it is also clear that they understood some prophecies correctly, including this one.

Notice that here is another Old Testament prophecy that was accurately fulfilled by Jesus. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as the prophecy predicted, despite the fact that his parents actually lived in Nazareth. And we will see eventually that He grew up in Nazareth. Yet the prophecy correctly said that he would be born in Bethlehem. See John 7:42.

2:7,8 – Herod asked the wise men for more information about when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem to bring back information to him so he could worship the child.

Acting hypocritically, Herod called the wise men and asked them to tell him about the star and when it had appeared. This information became useful to him later because it helped him determine how old Jesus might be (verse 16) since. He informed them that Bethlehem was the place to look, and asked them to go find the Child and then come to tell him so that he too could worship the Child.

His wicked intent is revealed later. Sin is always bad. To deliberately plan it and scheme to achieve it, multiplies the error. Worse yet, Herod had no scruple against using religion as a false front for his wickedness. Unfortunately, many other people do the same.

2:9,10 – The wise men followed the star till it stood over where the child was. Then they rejoiced exceedingly.

So the wise men left, following the leading of the star. It traveled before them till it stood over the place where the Child was. Seeing the star then, they rejoiced greatly.

As discussed earlier, the fact that the star went before them and then stood over the where the Child was, is proof that it was a miraculous event. No star would act this way by nature. I have read attempts to explain this event by natural processes, but they make no sense to me. Nor is there any reason why this should have occurred by natural

processes. The birth of Jesus was surrounded by many miracles because it was such a great event in history.

2:11 – The wise men came into the house where the child and Mary were. They worshiped Him, then they gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Having found the place the star indicated, the wise men went into the house. There they found Jesus and His mother Mary. They worshiped Him and gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The latter two spices are obtained from trees and are used as perfumes or incense. In particular, both were used in various Old Testament worship rituals (Exodus 30:34-38; Leviticus 2:1,2,14-16; Exodus 30:23).

Note that Jesus was in a house when the wise men found him. Luke 2 records that Jesus was laid in a manger in a stable when he was born. Modern tradition indicates that He was still in the stable when the wise men visited him. However, Matthew makes no mention of the stable or manger, but rather says he was in a house. The whole account implies that some time had passed since the birth of Jesus. They did not visit Jesus soon after His birth like the shepherds did.

The act of these men is truly amazing. They undertook an extremely long journey in a day of poor transportation. They were not even sure where they were going or if they would find the One they sought. What was their purpose in all this? They simply wanted to personally see a little Child and worship Him and give Him gifts, because they believed one day he would be a great king.

One wonders what became of these men later. Did they live long enough to meet the grown Jesus or perhaps even to hear and obey His gospel? The record does not say.

"Frankincense" (λιβανος) – *"frankincense,* a white resinous gum, obtained fr. several kinds of a certain tree in Arabia, used both medicinally and for sacral purposes…" – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

"Myrrh" (σμυρνα) – "…the resinous gum of the bush 'balsamodendron myrrha', *myrrh…" – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.*

2:12 – The Lord warned the men in a dream that they should not return to Herod, so they went home another way.

The wise men did not know Herod's evil intent, but God did. So He warned the men in a dream not to honor Herod's request, but to go home by another route without telling him where to find Jesus. Again, Herod's real intent will be revealed later in the story.

2:13-23 – Herod's Treachery against Jesus

2:13 – An angel warned Joseph to take Jesus and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there till it was safe to return, because Herod would seek to destroy the child.

The wise men had not given Herod the information that he wanted, but God knew there was still danger for Jesus. So an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream to warn him of Herod's evil plan. Herod wanted to kill Jesus. So Joseph was told to escape the power of Herod by fleeing with Jesus and Mary to Egypt. They were to stay in Egypt until the angel informed them otherwise.

2:14,15 – Joseph took Jesus and Mary and departed to Egypt by night. They remained there until the death of Herod. This fulfilled the prophecy that God had called His Son out of Egypt.

In obedience to God's instruction, Joseph took his family and left secretly by night to go to Egypt. There they stayed until Herod died.

Like so much we have read, this too is a fulfillment of prophecy that God would call His Son out of Egypt. See Hosea 11:1. This fulfillment appears to be a type-antitype or symbolism, more than a direct prophecy. The passage in Hosea describes God's calling the nation out of slavery in Egypt. But this was necessary in order for God to bring into the world His only-begotten firstborn Son Jesus. The calling of Israel out of Egypt was both essential to and symbolic of the later call of Jesus out of Egypt where He had fled to escape Herod.

So Matthew 2:15 is a secondary application of Hosea 11:1. Just as God had sent Israel into Egypt to save them from the famine, so he sent Jesus into Egypt to save him from king Herod. Then, just as He called Israel out of Egypt to develop His plans for the nation (including the fact that the Christ would be born as a descendant of Israel), so He called Jesus out of Egypt to fulfill His purpose for Jesus. The New Testament shows that many Old Testament events were symbols, types, or shadows of New Testament events (Colossians 2:16,17; Hebrews 9:9).

This illustrates that, when Matthew says that an event fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy, this does not necessarily mean that the prophecy was primarily directed as a prediction of that specific event. Sometimes the prophecy may have a fulfillment in one event, but that served as a symbol of some other event. And sometimes an event is simply another example of the kind of thing discussed in the Scripture. We will see other examples as we proceed.

Note the great faith of Joseph and Mary to suffer such inconvenience to fulfill God's will for Jesus. They left for a journey of at least one hundred miles, in a society in which such journeys were difficult, to go live in a foreign, unknown land. Surely this required great

sacrifice. This demonstrates the serious responsibility Joseph and Mary had accepted in raising Jesus.

As usual, some skeptics deny the flight to Egypt since no other Bible writer mentions it. However, Pope points out that various uninspired early Christians and even enemies of the gospel acknowledge that Jesus had been in Egypt.

2:16 – When Herod realized the wise men were gone, he killed all the male children in Bethlehem under two years old, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

When the wise men did not return to Herod, he realized they had ignored his request. In great anger he ordered the death of all male children in Bethlehem and its borders from two years old and down. This age was determined by information he had received about the star from the wise men. The obvious intent was to destroy Jesus, whom the wise men had said was born to be king of the Jews. Since Herod could not identify specifically which baby this was, he killed them all anticipating that Jesus would be included among those who died.

Notice that this indicates that Jesus was no longer a little baby. Acting on the information given him by the wise men, Herod killed those who were two years old and under. So the information indicated that Jesus could have been as much as two years old. This confirms our earlier conclusion that the wise men did not visit Jesus at the stable when the shepherds were there. This event happened sometime later.

Note the barbarous cruelty of this man. To kill a future rival to the throne was exceedingly wicked, though many rulers were known to practice it. But the wholesale slaughter of all children in a whole region, knowing that most were not even the one he sought – such evil is unthinkable. Yet how different is it when our leaders today allow the wholesale slaughter of millions of unborn babies in the practice of abortion?

Note that Herod's search for prophecy about the birth of Christ at Bethlehem proves that he had some faith in the Bible. Yet he deliberately tried to hinder the fulfillment of what the prophecy predicted.

2:17,18 – This fulfilled a prophecy in which Jeremiah spoke about weeping and great mourning in Ramah, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.

Jeremiah had prophesied weeping and mourning in Ramah: Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because the children are not – that is, they ceased to live. "Ramah" means hills or highlands. The passage quoted is Jeremiah 31:15.

Again, the passage in Jeremiah does not seem to refer primarily to this event in Matthew 2. Rather, we appear to have another event which

is similar to what is described in the passage. So the Old Testament event that Jeremiah mentions becomes symbolic of the New Testament event. Matthew calls it a fulfillment in this sense – not that this event was meant primarily from the outset.

We often do a similar kind of thing in our preaching and teaching today. We see a Bible passage that presents some truth, then we demonstrate that some other event or situation is an expression or example of the same kind of event. So we may say it is a fulfillment, not in the sense of any exact prediction, but in a sense of another demonstration of the same kind of thing.

The information we earlier presented about Herod shows us that such cruelty was apparently characteristic of the man. History records many people he had killed, even sometimes on a whim, to avoid any possible rivalry to his power.

Several writers cite a quotation in which, having heard that Herod killed one of his own sons, Augustus said: "It is better to be Herod's hog than his son." As a Jew, Herod would not kill a hog. But it was well known that he was willing to kill people, even his closest relatives.

The reference to Rachel is symbolic. Rachel is mentioned as Jacob's wife, mother of Israel as a nation, just as Jacob was father to the nation. She represents the weeping mothers of Bethlehem.

Note how Jesus faced persecution and opposition so early in His life. He was a threat to a man's human ambitions and evils, so the man sought to remove Him. Jesus faced this often in His life, and we too must be willing to face opposition and persecution.

Contrast Herod's conduct to that of the wise men. The wise men worshiped Jesus, but Herod tried to kill Him. This illustrates contrasting reactions to the life and teaching of Jesus: some believe and honor Him, but others disbelieve and reject Him. This pattern continues throughout history. We should expect the same contrasting reactions today when we preach the gospel of Christ.

Once again, apparently some skeptics cast doubt on the accuracy of this event because it is not mentioned elsewhere. But that is one of the purposes of having more than one account of Jesus' life. Each writer adds information that other writers choose not to include. But this is no contradiction, nor does it prove the information to be false.

If in fact the information had been included in another account, many skeptics would proceed, as they often do, to simply claim that one writer copied from the other. So if no other record confirms an account, skeptics say that is reason to doubt it. But if other accounts do confirm an event, the skeptics still say that is reason to doubt it! It soon becomes clear that the real problem exists, not in the gospel accounts, but in the hearts of the skeptics!

2:19,20 – After Herod died, an angel instructed Joseph to take Jesus and Mary back to the land of Israel, since those who sought the child's life had died.

At God's instruction, Joseph had taken his family to Egypt to avoid the danger from King Herod. But eventually Herod died. Then the angel appeared to Joseph again and told him to return to Israel with Joseph and Mary, because the one who sought to kill Jesus was now dead.

God continued to guard and protect Jesus in order to accomplish His purpose.

2:21,22 – When Joseph returned to Israel, he learned that Herod's son Archelaus had become king in Judea. So he went to live in Galilee.

When Joseph's family had returned to Israel from Egypt, they learned that Archelaus reigned in Judea in place of his father Herod. As a result, Joseph was afraid to live in the domain of Herod's son. So having received another dream from God, Joseph took his family to live in Galilee (see ***map***).

History records that, when Herod died, his territory was divided among three sons. Judea was reigned by Archelaus, who was as wicked as his father. But Galilee was ruled by Antipas, a milder man. In his territory God knew Jesus could grow up safely.

2:23 – So Joseph came to live in Nazareth. This fulfilled another message of the prophets that He would be called a Nazarene.

Since God had directed Joseph to live in Galilee, he chose a small village named Nazareth. This is the place where they had lived before they made the trip to Bethlehem – Luke 2:4.

This also fulfilled a prophecy that Jesus would be called a Nazarene – see Isaiah 40:1 in the Hebrew. McGarvey says that the term "prophets" is used because many prophets implied that Jesus would live in a lowly status, though none mention Nazareth by name.

Nazareth means sprout or branch. In the first century its name was a term of contempt or humility for what was despised or lowly – John 1:45,46. As such, it fits the Old Testament description of Christ – Isaiah 14:9; Ezekiel 15:1-6; Malachi 4:1; John 15:6; Romans 11:21.

Matthew completely skips over all of Jesus' life from the time of His return from Egypt to the time of John's ministry. No gospel account tells anything about these years in the life of Christ, except that Luke gives a brief account of Jesus in the temple at age 12. It is characteristic of inspiration to avoid giving facts simply for the sake of feeding our curiosity, as human writers often do. Only those events that contribute to our faith and knowledge of truth are recorded.

Chap 3-20 – Jesus' Public Ministry

Matthew 3

Chapter 3 – The Ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus' Baptism

Compare Mark 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-22

3:1,2 – John came preaching in the wilderness of Judea saying people should repent because the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

We are now introduced to John the Baptist. John came preaching in the wilderness of Judea in the region of the Jordan River (compare John 3:23). This region was a wilderness, not necessarily in the sense of a dry desert, but in the sense that it was sparsely inhabited by people.

John's birth is described in Luke chapter 1. He was the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth; and since Elizabeth was a relative of Jesus' mother Mary, this means that John and Jesus were also related.

Like many important Bible characters, his birth was unusual. He was not born by a Virgin Birth as was Jesus, however he was born late in the lives of his parents who for many years had been unable to have children. An angel predicted his birth to Zacharias; and when Zacharias expressed doubt, he was struck dumb till the child was born.

Pope points out that the uninspired history of Josephus confirms the ministry of John. It says that he "was called the Baptist." It furthermore confirms that he was a good man who taught the people to live righteous lives and to come to the baptism.

John preached that people should repent.

To repent means to change one's mind. A person in sin must recognize his error and be willing to change his life to please the Lord. Obviously, John talked about more than just repenting, as the following verses show. But repentance was such an important part of his message that it is here used as the summary of it.

Preaching repentance is essential to all true gospel preaching. Jesus also preached the need to repent (4:17). So did Peter in the first gospel sermon (Acts 2:38). Paul preached repentance to the idol worshipers in Acts 17:30. Note that this means all gospel preaching is "negative preaching" in that it must tell people that they are guilty of sin.

See Luke 13:3,5; 24:47; Acts 17:30; Matthew 21:28-32; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 20:21; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10.

> "Repentance" (μετανοια) – "a change of mind: as it appears in one who repents of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done ... especially the change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

John preached that the kingdom was at hand.

The kingdom is fundamental to the message of the gospel. The kingdom of the Messiah had been repeatedly prophesied in the Old Testament. The Jews in Jesus' day expected it, but thought it would be an earthly political kingdom that would dominate all surrounding nations, like David and Solomon had done in the Old Testament.

Even today, many people make the same mistake, thinking that the kingdom of Jesus must be an earthly civil rulership. However, proper study shows that the kingdom is spiritual in nature (John 18:36). In fact, it is the same body of people as the church and refers to all who have been saved from their sins by the blood of Jesus (Colossians 1:13,14).

(See also Daniel 2:31-45; Matthew 16:18,19; Mark 1:14,15; 9:1; John 18:36; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-17,33; 1 Corinthians 15:22-28; Hebrews 12:23-29; Revelation 1:9.)

Note that John said the kingdom was at hand, just as Jesus himself later taught in Mark 1:15. In Mark 9: 1 Jesus promised that the kingdom would come during the lifetime of some to whom He was preaching. How then can people today be correct when they say that the kingdom still has not come but must be established when Jesus comes again? That would mean that John and Jesus were false prophets, for they both said it was at hand at the time they were publicly preaching. But Colossians 1:13 explains that people in the first century were in the kingdom.

Some people believe that the church began during the ministry of John and that he baptized people into it. But if that is so, why did he say

that it was at hand, rather than in existence? And after John was dead (Matthew 14:1ff), Jesus said He would build the church in the future – Matthew 16:18. No one is said to be added to the church or the kingdom till after Jesus died to purchase it – Acts 20:28; compare 2:47. Jesus became the Head of the church after He arose from the dead – Ephesians 1:18-23.

To learn more about the nature of Jesus' kingdom, we urge you to study our free articles on that subject on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct (see the section about Man and His Future).

3:3 – John's work fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah who predicted the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord. Make His paths straight."

Isaiah 40:3-5 predicted the significance of John's work and explained his purpose. He said one would come preaching in the wilderness to prepare the way for the Lord. The illustration refers to men building a highway through waste, unpopulated areas in preparation for the travels of a great king.

As with our Interstate highways, hills must be chopped down, low areas filled, crooked places straightened, and rough places smoothed. This preparatory work would make the coming of the king much smoother and easier than it would otherwise be.

Spiritually, this was what John would do for Jesus the Messiah. He would work among a spiritually barren people, preparing them to receive their Messiah as king. He strove to bring a corrupt, sinful people to a state of spiritual-mindedness, purity, and concern for truth, so they would be willing to receive Jesus. He accomplished this by preaching that the people should repent. They should turn away from their sins and do as God teaches (verses 5ff).

So the work of John was not the final goal or an end in and of itself. Rather, he prepared the way for someone else. Isn't it foolish, then, for people to cling to the forerunner, calling themselves after him, and continuing to claim to be a part of the church that he began? The real King Himself has now come and has begun His church. See also Acts 19:1-7. John was just the appetizer. Jesus is the main course.

3:4 – John was clothed in camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey.

Not only did John live in the wilderness (an area generally uninhabited by men but inhabited only by wild animals), but he wore rough clothing and ate food he would find in the wild. His clothing was made from camel's hair – a very rough cloth – along with a leather belt. His food was locusts – insects he would find in the wild – and wild honey.

This reminds us of Elijah as described in 2 Kings 1:8. Clearly John was nonconformist in his lifestyle as well as his teaching. One wonders what people would think of a gospel preacher today who lived such a lifestyle. Yet John was not only pleasing to God, He was one of the greatest prophets ever to live!

3:5,6 – People came to John from Jerusalem, Judea, and all the region around the Jordan to be baptized in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.

John also preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins (Luke 3:3). People came to John from all around, confessed their sins, and were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

Many Old Testament passages required the people to confess their sins in order for God to forgive them (Leviticus 16:21; 26:40; 1 Kings 8:33,35; 2 Chronicles 30:22; Ezra 10:1,11; Nehemiah 1:6; 9:2,3; Psalm 32:5; Proverbs 28:13; Daniel 9:3-20). The confession of sins as a result of the preaching of John would help people to admit their need for repentance and would help prepare them for the coming of the Messiah.

In some ways, John's message was similar to the gospel Jesus later sent the apostles to preach after His resurrection. That gospel also involves a baptism for the remission of sins based on repentance (Acts 2:38). However, John's baptism was preparatory for the redemption that would come through Jesus (verse 3). It looked forward to the work and especially the death of Jesus (Acts 19:4). It also required confession of sins. It could give remission only in the sense that Old Testament animal sacrifices could: by anticipation of the sacrifice of Jesus that would come later.

After Jesus had actually died, the gospel that He sent preached a baptism that looked backward to His death as an accomplished fact. It must be preceded by confession of Jesus, not confession of sins (Acts 8:37). We are baptized into His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3,4). Therefore, John's baptism is no longer valid (Acts 19:1-7). Those who claim to practice it today have erred. Today we must be baptized in Jesus' name looking back to His sacrifice as an accomplished fact, so that our sins are immediately and completely washed away (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Hebrews 10:1-18).

The fact that people were baptized ***in*** the river demonstrates that John's baptism was an immersion in water, which is what the word "baptism" means. John 3:23 identifies more specifically the area where John baptized, and explains that he chose that place because there was "much water" there. Immersion in water requires much water, but neither sprinkling nor pouring do so. Baptism in water – whether John's baptism or the baptism of the gospel – refers to complete immersion in water.

See Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12; John 3:23; Acts 8:38,39; Mark 1:9,10; Hebrews 10:22.

Note that the people John baptized were nowhere called "Baptists." The Baptist was the one doing the baptizing, not the people who were baptized.

3:7,8 – John called the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism a "brood of vipers." He asked who warned them to flee from the wrath to come. And he taught people to bear fruits worthy of repentance.

The effect of John's preaching was that multitudes came out to be baptized by him. But when they came, he boldly preached their need for repentance.

Pharisees and Sadducees

The extremely stern rebuke recorded here ("brood of vipers") was not necessarily directed to all who came. It was mainly directed at the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were known for their hypocrisy and self-righteousness (see also Matthew 12:34; 23:33). Eventually these leaders rejected John's message and refused baptism, probably because he condemned their conduct so firmly and because they saw no need to repent (Matthew 21:23-27; Mark 11:27-33; Luke 20:1-8; 7:30).

Note that the Pharisees and Sadducees were religious sects comparable to today's denominations. Both of these sects had apparently arisen during the years of silence between the completion of the Old Testament and the coming of Jesus. The Pharisees were known for their strict adherence to the tradition of their elders. The Sadducees denied the existence of the resurrection and spirits, whereas the Pharisees believed in both. See Matthew 15:1-9; Acts 23:8.

Bold rebuke of sin

John referred to these religious leaders as a "generation of vipers." This emphasized the fact that they were dangerous and sly. Some people today never want specific denominations to be mentioned by name and rebuked in our preaching. Others do not want us to say that such people need to repent. Others do not even want general truths taught if they will be offensive to anyone listening. John's preaching involved all of these.

John did not speak from malice, ill will, or self-righteousness. But he knew the people were wrong, and the only way they could be right would be to change. And the only way the people would change would be if they realized that they were wrong. So John tried to get them to see their error. We need such preaching today.

Perhaps by ignoring the sins of these people, John could have baptized more. But he spoke out plainly, even though the result was that some of them rejected his baptism. Today many preachers and members think their goal is large numbers of baptisms. But John knew that baptism is worthless unless preceded by true repentance, and repentance comes only when people know that they have been wrong. We should not baptize people just because they are willing to be dipped

in the water. We must teach them to recognize their error and agree to live properly.

Fruits of righteousness

John questioned whether these men were really concerned about fleeing from the wrath to come, for he knew they were hypocrites. Above all else, they needed to heed his message, but they were the least likely to do so. Knowing these people were hypocritical and corrupt, John warned them that repentance requires fruit in the form of a changed life.

Repentance means a change of mind. This change of heart, if genuine, will lead to a change of life: "fruit worthy of repentance." Mere outward appearances, like these men were accustomed to, would not suffice. They had to truly change their hearts, then their lives. God requires that we change our conduct (Acts 26:20) and even make restitution to overcome the harm done to others by our past sins. See Ezekiel 33:14,15; Leviticus 6:1-5; Ezra 10:3,11,17,19,44; Matthew 21:28-31; Luke 19:8; Philemon 10-14,18,19.

Luke's account mentions some specific changes that some of the people needed to make. Some needed to learn to be generous with those who are needy, others were taught not to tax the people unjustly, others were told not to use force to take people's possessions, etc. Note that John did not just preach vague generalities. He was willing to name specific applications of the principles he taught. Faithful preachers today must do the same.

3:9,10 – Do not say to yourself, "We have Abraham as our father." God is able to raise up children to Abraham from the stones. But the ax is laid to the root of the trees. So every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

Descendants of Abraham

John especially warned the people not to trust in their physical lineage through Abraham to insure they were pleasing to God. This was a major error of the Jews. They had been God's special people under the Old Testament because God had made special promises regarding the offspring of Abraham. Many Jews apparently thought this assured them that God would be pleased with them, almost without regard to how they lived. But John said this did not guarantee they would be saved "from the wrath to come."

Descent from Abraham was a purely physical relationship, but it did not prove spiritual acceptance. John said God had the power to make a stone into a descendant of Abraham. But would that make the stones spiritually pleasing to God? Likewise, God would fulfill His promise to bring the Savior into the world through the Israelite nation. But this did not guarantee that all Israelites were acceptable to God.

The role of the nation of Israel in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham simply meant that the Messiah would be born through that lineage. God intended to use the nation for His purpose, but that was no guarantee of spiritual acceptance. Whether or not any individual Israelite ultimately was pleasing to God would depend on his individual character. This demonstrated why John was teaching that they needed to repent.

God had often displayed wrath on His own people, and the Jews ought to have known this. So physical relationship to Abraham was no guarantee of God's favor. What was required was a trust in God and a righteous life. See John 8:33-47; Romans 9:7,8; Galatians 3:29.

The ax laid at the root of the trees

The wrath John warns about is further described in verse 12. He illustrated it with an unfruitful tree. A husbandman (farmer) would first prune the tree in hope this would lead it to produce. If this did not work, he would cut it down, burn it, and replace it with a tree that would bear fruit.

Both individually and nationally Israel had been pruned and cared for by God for generations. Still they were corrupt. Now the ax was laid at the root of the tree: it was about to be cut down. The pruning process had not led to fruitfulness in God's service, so God was ready to destroy the nation and establish instead the new spiritual kingdom, the church. But as individuals each Israelite could be spared to enter into this new kingdom by repentance and bearing the fruit of good works. Otherwise, wrath of God would come in the form of eternal punishment in fire (John 15:6).

3:11,12 – John baptized with water unto repentance, but the One coming after him was mightier than he was, whose sandals he was not worthy to carry. He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand, and he would thoroughly clean his threshing floor. He would gather His wheat into the barn and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

John explained in more detail his work and especially the coming wrath. He affirmed that the One who would come and for whom he was making preparation was mightier than he was: that is, He had much greater power and authority. He would be so much greater that John said he was not worthy to even carry His sandals or unlatch His shoes (Luke 3:16). This would be a most humble act of service, yet John states that he was not worthy to do even this.

Note that John 1:19-34 makes clear that Matthew 3:11 was not spoken directly or primarily to the Pharisees and Sadducees, who had been previously addressed, but is general information about the work of John.

John baptized with water, but the One to come later would baptize people in the Holy Spirit and in fire. Consider the following comparison between these baptisms and that of the gospel.

John's Baptism

Consider Luke 3:1-17; Acts 19:1-7.

Here we learn the following regarding John's baptism:

* ***Element*** – ***water*** (Matthew 3:11,16) (compare Mark 1:5,8,9; etc.)

* ***Action*** – ***immersion***. This is implied because the word means immerse, never sprinkle or pour. Note John baptized ***in*** the Jordan (verse 6), and Jesus came "up out of the water" (Mark 1:10).

* ***Administrator*** – ***John*** (verses 6,13,11) (compare Mark 1:4,5,8,9; etc.)

* ***Name (authority)*** – ***God***. John was ***sent*** to baptize in water (John 1:33), sent from ***God*** (John 1:6). So, he was not acting on his own ideas, but was an ***agent*** or representative acting on the authority of God. (Luke 7:29,30; Matthew 21:23-32)

* ***Subjects*** – ***all Israel***. All Judea came (verse 5), all the people of Israel (Acts 13:24). Note that John's baptism was not for people of all nations, but just one nation. (Mark 1:5; Luke 3:21)

* ***Command*** – People were expected by God to obey it; it was not just something God promised to do for them. Those who refused to obey rejected the counsel of God (Luke 7:29,30). (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:13; Matthew 21:23-32)

* ***Conditions*** – the people must do the following:

Hear John's preaching (verses 1,2) (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3,8-14)

Believe on Him who would ***come after*** (Acts 19:4). (Matthew 21:23-32)

Repent (verse 2) (verse 3; compare other accounts)

Confess sins (verse 6), not confession of Jesus. (Mark 1:5)

* ***Choice*** – ***subjects***. All people were invited to obey and each had to decide if and when he would obey. Some chose not to obey, others chose to obey (Matthew 21:23-32; Luke 7:29,30).

* ***Purposes***:

Preparation for Jesus' coming (verses 1-3,11) (John 1:31; compare verses 29-34; Acts 19:4; Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:3,7; Luke 3:4-7,16; John 1:7,8,15,19-28)

Remission of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). (Jesus was an exception, not needing forgiveness, yet He was baptized to fulfill righteousness – Matthew 3:13-15).

* ***Duration*** – ***ceased*** by the time Jesus died. It looked forward to Jesus' coming and prepared the way for Him. By the time of Acts 19, John's baptism was invalid because Jesus had come and gone. People who received John's baptism after Jesus died, had to be baptized again.

If anyone claims that today he had received John's baptism, such a person is in error. His baptism is not valid, and he needs to be baptized even as these men did in Acts 19.

(Other passages: Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-22; John 1:6-8,15,19-36; Acts 1:5; 11:16; Matthew 21:23-32; Luke 7:29,30; John 3:23; Acts 13:24; 1:22; 10:37; John 10:40)

Holy Spirit Baptism

Note these passages: Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-21,33; 10:44-49; 11:1-4,15-18 (Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33)

* ***Element – Holy Spirit***

John said water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism are two separate and distinct baptisms. But only one baptism is in effect today (Ephesians 4:3-6). Most people who claim Holy Spirit baptism today also practice water baptism. That would be two baptisms, not one.

* ***Action – immersion***. This is implied by the meaning of the word "baptize," which means to immerse, overwhelm, engulf. This is a spiritual baptism, not physical, in which the subjects were to be overwhelmed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

* ***Administrator – Jesus*** Himself. This required some one greater than John. Only Jesus is great enough.

* ***Promise –*** It was something God promised to do for the people, not something they were commanded to do for Him.

* ***Subjects – apostles*** (Acts 1:4,5, compare verse 2). The first Gentile converts also received it (Acts 10,11).

* ***Choice – God*** decided who would receive it, when, and where (Acts 1:3-8). It was not a blessing offered to all, such that anyone could have it if they chose.

* ***Purpose*** – It gave the apostles ***power*** to bear ***witness*** throughout the world (Acts 1:8). And it gave miraculous power of tongues (10:46). In the case of Cornelius' household, it was necessary to convince the Jews that God was willing to receive Gentiles as His children (10:45; 11:17,18), so Peter would baptize them in water (10:47,48). (Compare Acts 15:1-11.)

* ***Duration*** – Began at ***Jerusalem***, "not many days hence" after Jesus' ascension (Acts 1:4,5).

Note there are only two recorded instances of Holy Spirit baptism: the apostles when the first Jews were converted, and Cornelius' household when the first Gentiles were converted. No other event in the Bible is described as Holy Spirit baptism. There are other instances of baptism, and other references to the Holy Spirit. But no others are called Holy Spirit baptism.

Holy Spirit baptism ceased. The subjects to receive it were just a few. It was never for all men. Its purpose was fulfilled and it is no longer needed.

The message it guided men to receive has now been fully delivered and recorded (John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Timothy 3:16,17). This message will not be delivered again (Jude 3; compare 1 Peter 1:22,23). The written word gives all the evidence we need that Gentiles may be saved by the gospel. Miracles confirmed new revelation as it was delivered (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:3,4). Since revelation is no longer needed, miracles are no longer needed (John 20:30,31; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

Baptism in fire

Fire is mentioned three times in the context of Matthew 3. In verses 10,12 it refers to the punishment of the wicked, which they will receive when Jesus comes to judge mankind (Matthew 25:31-46). The third reference, sandwiched between the other two, is baptism in fire (verse 13). Context shows that it refers to the same event as the other two references to fire. This is especially clear since verse 13 immediately follows and describes the effect of fire. Compare Revelation 20:15.

Verse 12 pictures Jesus as a separator who separates the good from the bad, like winnowers used fans to separate wheat from chaff. They would grind the grain underfoot, loosening the chaff from the grain. Then they tossed it into the air and used wind to blow off the chaff. The chaff was then burned in the fire.

Verses 11,12 do not intend to say that either Holy Spirit baptism or fire baptism was for all people, just like verse 7 did not intend to call all people a "brood of vipers." The brood of vipers referred only to certain people in the audience. Likewise, some people in the audience (the apostles) would receive Holy Spirit baptism, some (the obedient) would receive water baptism, and some (the disobedient) would receive fire baptism.

The context clearly shows a separation of people, some to receive one reward and others a different reward. The previous verses describe the ax being laid to the root of the tree, so it would be cut down and cast into the fire if it was unfruitful. Surely that would not happen to all people in the audience.

Verse 12 distinguishes the wheat from the chaff. The wheat would be gathered into the barns, but the chaff would be burned up. There is a separation clearly implied between those who are treated one way and those who are treated a different way. In a similar way, no one would claim that Holy Spirit baptism was for the disobedient (even though disobedient people were present in John's audience). So, no one should expect that fire baptism was for the obedient.

Some commentators claim baptism in fire was a baptism of suffering in persecution. Jesus later spoke of such a baptism, but it is not mentioned in this context. What is mentioned in this context is the fire

of punishment for sin. Besides, the baptism of suffering persecution was administered, not by Jesus, but by wicked men. And how would such a baptism contrast John to Jesus?

Others say baptism in fire figuratively described the effects of Holy Spirit baptism. But the expression "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" implies baptism in two separate elements: Holy Spirit and fire. It does not mean that one is the element and the other is the effect of the first element. Again, fire in the context refers to punishment of sin.

Still others think baptism in fire refers to the fiery tongues that came on the apostles in Acts 2:3. But those tongues did not engulf the apostles (baptizing them), but sat upon them. Further, those tongues are not said to be fire, but "like as of fire." Finally, there is no indication of such tongues coming on Cornelius' household.

Of the three baptisms mentioned by John, two have now served their purpose and ceased and the third is yet to come.

Some people think that the reference to being burned up implies that sinful people will be annihilated and ceased to exist after death. However, please note that the fire is "unquenchable." Whereas literal chaff may be burned up, the baptism of fire on the wicked is unquenchable.

Compare these baptisms to the other great gospel baptism.

Baptism of the Great Commission

None of the above baptisms is the baptism of the Great Commission, by which we are baptized – see Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21. By the time Ephesians 4:3-6 was written, there was only one baptism being practiced by the authority of God, just as there was only one God and Father. That one baptism involves the following:

* ***Element*** – ***water*** (Acts 8:35,38,39).

* ***Action*** – ***immersion***. Acts 8:38,39 – They went down into the water, he baptized him, and they came up out of the water. This fits immersion, but not sprinkling or pouring. The word "baptize" means to immerse. Compare Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12.

* ***Administrator*** – ***men***. Men were told to baptize others (Matthew 28:19).

* ***Name*** (authority) – ***Deity*** (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – Matthew 28:20). These three individuals together constitute the one God of the Bible. All possess the same authority. So, baptism in Jesus' name is the same as baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; etc.).

* ***Subject*** – ***all men*** (sinners). The command is addressed to all the world (Mark 16:15), all nations (Matthew 28:19).

* ***Command*** – Men were required to do it to please God.

* ***Conditions*** – Before being baptized, men must do the following:

Hear (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47)
Believe (Mark 16:16)
Repent (Luke 24:47)
Confess Christ (Romans 10:9,10; Acts 8:37-39)
* ***Choice – subject***. The command was addressed to all people, and each one had to decide for himself whether or not to obey.
* ***Purpose – salvation or remission of sins*** (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38) (compare Luke 24:47).
* ***Duration – as long as men need salvation*** (till Jesus returns).
This baptism continues today.

3:13-15 – Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. John discouraged it, saying he needed to be baptized by Jesus. But Jesus said to permit it so they could fulfill all righteousness. So John allowed it.

Other accounts give other details about Jesus' baptism which are not mentioned here (compare Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-22; Luke 3:21,22).

After other people had been baptized, Jesus came to John to be baptized. He came from Nazareth in Galilee, where he had been brought up after His birth in Bethlehem. This was a long distance to travel, showing His commitment to the need for baptism.

John concluded that he needed to have Jesus baptize him, rather than the other way around. Apparently he believed that the one who is greater should do the baptizing, and he had already affirmed that Jesus was greater – verse 11. Perhaps he also knew that baptism required repentance unto remission of sins, but Jesus did not have sins.

Jesus urged John to allow Him to be baptized, because it is proper for us to fulfill all righteousness. Note that, in response to John's concern, Jesus did not confess sins as other people had (verse 6), nor did He claim to have repented as did other people, nor did He indicate He needed remission of sins. He was an exception because, as elsewhere taught, He had no sins – Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 3:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Even so, baptism is so important that Jesus believed He needed to do it to accomplish all righteousness – that is, to completely obey the will of God for man and set a good example for others – compare Matthew 17:24ff.

It follows that it is not proper to use Jesus' baptism to teach the purpose why other people should be baptized, especially people today. In the first place, as we already demonstrated, John's baptism is no longer valid today. And in the second place, Jesus could not be baptized for the remission of sins since He had no sins. So His purpose for baptism was an exception as explained in this context. No one else is in a similar circumstance.

3:16,17 – When Jesus came up from the water, the heavens were opened and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting upon Him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Then the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in a bodily form like a dove. Note that the passage does not say the Holy Spirit is a dove, but that on this occasion it took a bodily form like a dove (Luke 3:22; John 1:32-34). Jesus came to earth in the bodily form of a man, and the Holy Spirit on this occasion took a bodily form like a dove.

The testimony of God regarding Jesus

A voice from heaven then spoke saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Here is supernatural testimony to the nature of Jesus. Both the Father and the Holy Spirit gave testimony. The Spirit appeared and the Father spoke saying Jesus was His Son and that He was pleased by Him (compare 12:18). John himself explained that this event was the God-given sign to prove to John that Jesus was the One for whom John served as the forerunner – see John 1:29-34.

This serves as important miraculous testimony giving Divine evidence regarding the nature of Jesus. The voice who spoke from heaven clearly was God the Father. He directly and personally testified who Jesus is, and confirmed His approval of Jesus. The presence of the Holy Spirit also demonstrates His approval. Surely none of this would have happened if Jesus was a pretender or a fraud as many people claim.

We have a similar event in which God directly confirmed His approval of Jesus in the Transfiguration as recorded in Matthew 17:5. On that occasion the Father made a similar statement, and He added that we should give heed to the teaching of Jesus because of who He is. Those who doubt the identity of Jesus need to deal with this direct testimony from God.

The nature of baptism

Jesus' own baptism confirms that baptism is a complete immersion in water. He was baptized "in" the river and then came up from the water (Mark 1:9,10). This is similar to the case of the Ethiopian treasurer (Acts 8:38,39) where we are told that he went down into the water, he was baptized, and he came up out of the water. Such language makes sense only if referring to a complete immersion.

In order to avoid this conclusion, denominational commentators have been known to argue that the passage does not necessarily mean immersion since Matthew says Jesus came up "from" (απο) the water, but not "out of" (εκ) the water. So if the argument means anything, then it would follow that, if the Scriptures said the person who was baptized came up "out of" the water, then that would prove they were immersed.

Well, interestingly enough, the account of the baptism of the Ethiopian treasurer says he went down into the water, was baptized, and came up "out of" (εκ) the water (Acts 8:38,39). Furthermore, in Mark's account of Jesus' baptism, many texts say that Jesus came up "out of" (εκ) the water (Mark 1:10). So according to the argument, this must mean they were immersed!

Again, in order to avoid the force of the evidence for immersion, denominational folks often picture Jesus standing in the Jordan River as John pours water over His head. But in practice, denominations never baptize that way, so what good is the argument? If the intent is to pour or sprinkle water on the person, why walk out into a pool or river? The sensible thing would be to do as denominations do: stand by the water and scoop some up. The passage makes sense only if Jesus' baptism was an immersion, since one cannot immerse without going down into the water and coming up from it.

This conclusion is also confirmed by other teaching elsewhere that shows baptism involves a burial and a resurrection (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). In baptism the body is washed with water (Hebrews 10:22). This requires much water (John 3:23). Only a complete immersion fits the Bible pattern for water baptism. Neither sprinkling nor pouring fits the description given in Scripture.

To learn more about the action involved in baptism we urge you to study our free articles on that subject on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct. See the section about salvation.

The persons in the Godhead.

The account of Jesus' baptism is also important evidence for the number of individuals in the Godhead. The passage clearly presents the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as being three separate and distinct individual living Beings.

Jesus was on earth as a man who was being baptized. The Holy Spirit descended in a separate body like a dove. And the Father spoke from heaven. Clearly the Father was not being baptized, nor was the Holy Spirit. They are separate and distinct beings from Jesus. So, contrary to the doctrine of those who claim there is only one being in the Godhead, the account clearly shows that there are three separate and distinct individuals in God.

> The Lord Christ himself, who comes in the form of a servant to John, is undoubtedly the Son, for here no one can mistake him for either the Father or the Holy Spirit. It is the Son who comes. And who could have any doubt about the identity of the dove? The Gospel itself most plainly testifies: "The Holy Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove." So also there can be no doubt whose voice it is who speaks so personally: "You are my beloved Son." … – Augustine (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

To learn more about the number of individuals in the Godhead we urge you to study our free articles on that subject on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct. See the section about God.

Matthew 4

Chapter 4 – Jesus' Temptation and the Call of Several Apostles

4:1-11 - The Temptation of Jesus

4:1 – The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where He would be tempted by the devil.

See also Mark 1:12,13; Luke 4:1-13.

Jesus was guided by the Holy Spirit to go from Jordan to the wilderness. There He was forty days without food, being tempted by the devil. Perhaps the devil tempted Jesus throughout the forty days, but we are told about only three of the temptations, which apparently came at the end of the period.

Jesus was tempted.

Some have claimed that the events described here are only symbolic or legendary, not literal historical events. Yet the Bible writers record them as real historical events, just like they record the other events in the life of Christ. When skeptics and modernists see some difficulty or otherwise do not like some event recorded in Bible history, they simply dismiss it with a wave of the hand as though it was a legend or a myth. Some do this with the account of creation, the flood of Noah, the Virgin Birth, the resurrection of Jesus, etc.

We may not understand all the specific details of how these events occurred, such as the creation or the resurrection. So we may not understand all about how these temptations occurred. But that is no excuse to deny the reality of the events. Such denials simply amount to unbelief in the accuracy and inspiration of Scripture.

Nor should we question or deny the truthfulness of these temptations on the grounds that God cannot be tempted (James 1:13). Jesus was God from eternity, while He was on earth, and since His resurrection and ascension. He processed fully all the characteristics of Deity throughout (see our commentary on John 1:1 and Philippians 2:5-8). God cannot cease to be God.

However, it was not as God that Jesus was tempted. He came to earth in the form of a man in order that He might endure hardship and temptation even as other humans do. God also cannot die. But he came to earth as a man in order that He might die. It was as a man that He was tempted and as a man He died. The fact we may have difficulty explaining ***how*** He could be both God and man at the same time does not deny the reality of Bible teaching.

The passage does not say that the Holy Spirit tempted Jesus (James 1:13), but that He led Him into the wilderness where the devil could tempt him. Hebrews 4:15 says Jesus was tempted in all points like we are, but He did not sin. We will see how Satan tempted Him and will observe how His temptations included the elements of temptations that we usually face. 1 John 2:15-17 lists three ways the world tempts us: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. Jesus was tempted by all these avenues in this event.

McGarvey notes how this story illustrates the spiritual highs and lows that we all face. From that exalted state of His baptism, Jesus passed into a time of temptation.

Jesus is often compared to Adam. When Satan tempted Adam, Adam fell and so brought sin into the world with all its terrible consequences. Satan likewise approached Jesus seeking to defeat God's purpose in Him by leading Him to sin. Had Satan succeeded, Jesus could not have been our Savior since He had to be sinless to be our sacrifice. Jesus succeeded where Adam failed, and so made possible our salvation from sin.

The temptations of Jesus were also necessary in order that we might know that He can sympathize with our temptations and our weaknesses. He was tempted in all points like we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15; 2:18).

The passage also shows that being tempted is not of itself necessarily sin. Temptation is an enticement to sin. Jesus was tempted, but did not sin.

Luke records the specific temptations in a different order from that recorded by Matthew. This is no contradiction. It simply demonstrates that Bible writers did not profess to always record all events in chronological order.

Jesus was tempted by the devil.

The passage refers to Satan as the devil (verse 1; Luke 4:2) and as the tempter (verse 3). He is also called Satan in 1 Chronicles 21:1; see also Job 1,2. He tempted Eve appearing to her in the form of a serpent in Genesis 3. But the book of Revelation explains that that serpent was the devil or Satan (Revelation 12:9; 20:2; 2 Corinthians 11:3).

The passage presents Satan as a living individual, capable of communicating a message to other intelligent beings. Satan is not just a figment of the imagination, nor a myth or symbol, but a living powerful

individual spirit being. He has the power to disguise himself to appear in other forms, to use various agents, and to use various means of deception.

4:2-4 – Jesus fasted 40 days and nights. Afterward He was hungry. Satan tempted Jesus saying, if He was the Son of God, He should turn stones into bread. Jesus responded that it was written that man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

McGarvey discusses two characteristics that make these temptations difficult. (1) The strength of the appeal to human desire. (2) Deception. The cunning camouflage would make the temptation appear innocent. The more difficult it is to recognize why an act is wrong, the more likely we are to "fall for it."

The temptation

Jesus fasted for forty days. Luke 4:2 says He ate nothing. It does not say that He drank nothing. Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9-11,18; and 1 Kings 19:8 say that Moses and Elijah also endured forty-day fasts. I have been told that going without food this long may be physically possible, so this may not have been miraculous. But of course, no one can go more than a few days without drinking. The account of Moses, however, says he neither ate nor drank. Interestingly, the three who later appeared at the Transfiguration are the same three who endured such lengthy fasts.

At the end of the fast, of course, Jesus was hungry. This introduces the first temptation. Since Jesus was so hungry, the Devil used His hunger as the grounds for his first temptation. He challenged Jesus to turn stones into bread (to satisfy His hunger), if He was the Son of God. This temptation appealed to the lust of the flesh (1 John 2:16), for it appealed to the desire of the body for food. It also involved an element of "pride of life," for Satan taunted Him, "If you are the Son of God." This implies doubt about Jesus' identity. He should perform a miracle, not just to meet a need for food, but also to demonstrate to Satan that He was who He claimed to be.

Why would this have been a temptation? McGarvey points out that the temptation is not easy to see, even today. We can see why Jesus would be tempted to do it, but what would have been wrong had He done it? I suspect that the overwhelming majority of denominationalists would have no idea why this would be wrong. They would think that Jesus had the power and "God never told him not to do it," so what could be wrong with it?

Consider the following points:

(1) First, the act would have misused Jesus' miraculous powers. The fundamental purpose of miracles was to "confirm the word" (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4; Acts 14:3; etc.). They were never done when this

purpose was not accomplished, as when there was no one present to be convinced or to bear witness to the miracle. Sometimes (not always) they accomplished some physical benefit, but that was never the determining factor in whether or not they were done.

In particular, no prophet ever exercised miraculous power just to accommodate his own physical desires. Yes, Satan was present, but miraculous confirmation to him of who Jesus was would accomplish nothing. He would neither believe nor obey anyway. Besides, he already knew who Jesus was (see verses 34,41).

This illustrates a typical error of those today who claim modern-day miracles. They emphasize miracles for the sake of the physical benefit to those who receive them. In fact, they claim God must provide such benefits now simply because people are in need, even though God's message has been completely revealed and confirmed in the Scriptures. But neither Jesus nor His apostles ever worked miracles primarily or solely for the physical benefit.

(2) The position Jesus was in had been brought about by God's will. The Spirit had led Jesus here, and evidently there was no food available by any normal means. Had food been available by other reasonable means, there would have been no motivation or reason to do a miracle to make bread.

God had led Him here but had made no provision for Him to eat, so evidently God did not intend for Him to eat at this time. Had God wanted Him to eat, He would have provided a means to make food available in the place to which God had led Him. This showed that God had spiritual purposes for Jesus to accomplish here. Physical things are never as important as spiritual, so Jesus should understand that He was to serve God's spiritual purpose and wait till God led Him to a place where there was food.

Jesus would not act presumptuously without guidance from God. This is a hard lesson to learn. Faith demands that we do what God directs, without changing it. Then we must trust Him to provide what we need to accomplish what He directs. When He directs us to do a thing and does not authorize something else, then we must restrict ourselves to doing what He said and no more. To do otherwise is to show a lack of faith. If we use human reasoning to do something other than what He evidently directed us to do, then we are following human wisdom instead of Divine authority.

This is the problem described in Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13.

Jesus' response

The above lessons may not have been so obvious, except that they are clearly implied in Jesus' answer. He said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God'" (Deuteronomy 8:3).

This was originally spoken by Moses regarding the nation of Israel as they traveled in the wilderness. He said that God humbled them, allowed them to hunger, and fed them with manna to teach them that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The people were required to depend entirely upon God for their food. They had no other source to sustain them in the time of hunger. Their need was met in the way and at the time that God's word determined. This shows that, in Jesus' view, this was a matter of trusting in the word of God, rather than seeking their own way to satisfy their desires. When they tried to obtain their food in some way other than what God had said, God was displeased and punished them (Exodus 16:1-9).

Jesus' statement shows that following the word of God is even more important than eating physical food. We must completely depend on God for spiritual guidance, even in times of hunger. This is the true significance of faith. We must not follow our human wisdom apart from Divine guidance even to satisfy basic needs. God will see to it that our needs are met if we do what He says. So we must not change His instructions even to obtain food.

This demonstrates the error of modern churches that emphasize meeting people's physical desires rather than emphasizing their need for salvation through Christ. Some say, "You cannot teach the gospel to people with empty stomachs." This is called the Social Gospel. It makes satisfying the desire for food and other physical desires more important than trusting in the word of God. The Lord has authorized the church to worship God and preach the gospel so people can have eternal life. To satisfy instead the desire of people for entertainment, recreation, social activities, and food is to make material desires more important than obeying the word of God, as Satan here tempted Jesus to do.

Finally, Jesus' response shows that we must do ***all*** that God says – every word – without neglecting parts we find difficult or unreasonable to our minds. Compare Acts 3:22,23; James 2:10; Matthew 28:20.

Note that, in every temptation, Jesus' method of response was to cite Scripture: "It is written." We can never have the knowledge and strength we need to resist temptation properly apart from God's word. When we attempt to deal with sin and temptation without appealing to Scripture, we tie our own hands spiritually and we neglect to follow our Master. See Ephesians 6:10-18; 2 Timothy 3:16,17. There is power in the word that God's enemies recognize. Even Satan recognizes it. Quoting Scripture often changes the whole direction of a discussion.

4:5-7 – Satan then took Jesus to a pinnacle of the temple and tempted Him, if He was the Son of God, to cast Himself down. He quoted Scripture in which God promised to give His angels charge to bear Him up lest He dash His foot on a stone. Jesus responded that we should not tempt the Lord.

The temptation

Since Jesus had used Scripture so effectively against Satan, Satan here tried using it against Jesus. He took Jesus to a high pinnacle of the temple and dared Him to simply jump down. He quoted Old Testament passages saying God would send His angels to care for Him (Psalm 91:11,12). So, if Jesus were really God's Son, surely God would not let Him be hurt.

Note that Satan's servants sometimes quote Scripture and actually use it to mislead people into sin. We should not think that the only people who quote Scripture are people who teach truth or that sinners are so afraid of Scripture that they will never use it. On the contrary, people often quote Scripture, but misuse it and thereby promote error, whether or not they realize this is what they are doing.

Some people today argue that the Scriptures are not reliable because many churches quote them, yet they contradict one another. But even Satan quoted Scripture. The fact that some quote Scripture does not mean they understand it or follow it properly. This is one of Satan's plans for destroying the effectiveness of Scripture. He perverts it so people misunderstand, then he convinces them that the Scriptures themselves are unreliable. Jesus relied on the Scriptures anyway, quoted it back, and showed that Satan misapplied it. We should do the same.

Jesus did not argue with Satan about the Scripture, but it is clear that Satan misused the passage. It is simply not true that God has promised to protect His people from all physical harm. Consider, for example, the suffering of Job and the faithful men and women of Hebrews 11, many of whom suffered greatly in this life. Nearly all Jesus' apostles died for their faith and all of them suffered, as did many other Christians. To claim that the Psalm is a promise that God's people will never come to harm is to clearly abuse the passage.

It is true that God promises that we cannot be spiritually destroyed if we serve God obediently. It is also true that there may be physical blessings to those who serve God. But even Jesus was not absolutely protected from harm, for eventually He was slain by sinful men.

The power of this temptation was its appeal to pride (1 John 2:16): if Jesus was who He claimed to be, then surely God would take care of Him. Surely God would not allow Jesus to die so prematurely. So if Jesus would jump, this would prove to Himself, to Satan, and to all who heard about it that Jesus really did have favor with God. Satan's taunt also

implied a lack of faith on Jesus' part: if He really trusted God, He would not be afraid to jump.

This reminds me of kids today who dare someone to do something foolish, then say he is "chicken" if he won't. If an act is foolish and there is no good reason to do it, what difference does it make what people say about you if you will not do it? If good sense tells you the act is foolish, then it is foolish to do it regardless of what people say.

Jesus' response

But Jesus did not argue with Satan about all of this. He simply responded by quoting another passage. You shall not tempt or make trial of the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 6:16). Man should not put God to the test and challenge Him to prove that He will keep His promises. God has adequately and repeatedly proved His faithfulness to His promises when situations required it. All we need to do is to examine the evidence in the Bible. God is God. He is not on trial and He refuses to allow men to put him on trial. The purpose of God's arrangement is for man to be on trial.

For us to deliberately put ourselves in trouble, and then somehow believe God is obligated to solve the problem, is to put God on trial. Even if He is willing to help us in some circumstances, He has never promised to do so when we deliberately and knowingly get ourselves in trouble. He has commanded us to use good judgment and work to care for ourselves. He has made no promise to care for those who refuse to do what they should to care for themselves (2 Thessalonians 3:10; Ephesians 4:28).

Note that Jesus' answer applies the principle of taking all the Bible says about a subject. We should interpret every passage in light of all the other Bible teaching about the subject. We should not "interpret" one verse in a way that contradicts the teaching of some other passage. Whatever was meant by the passage Satan quoted, it could not mean that God would take care of us if we deliberately endanger ourselves to put Him to the test.

And interestingly enough, notice that Satan apparently accepted the answer. It would appear that he knew all along that what he was asking Jesus to do was wrong. In any case, it was clear that Jesus was not going to give in, so Satan moved on to the next temptation.

4:8-11 – Satan then took Jesus on an exceedingly high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth. He offered to give all this to Jesus if He would worship Satan. Jesus responded by quoting the Scripture that we should worship the Lord and serve only Him. Then Satan left and angels came and ministered to Jesus.

The temptation

Satan then showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and offered Him authority to rule them all as king, enjoying that glory and power.

The condition Jesus would have to meet, however, was that He must worship and serve Satan.

This shows the great importance that Satan attached to destroying Jesus' service to God. Satan would not make such an offer to just anyone to get him to sin. Most people will serve him for just a little of this world's goods. Satan recognized the serious threat Jesus was to him, and he was willing to go to any extreme to defeat God's plan through Him.

The power of this temptation was not in its subtlety. The sin of worshiping someone other than God – especially worshiping Satan – was obvious. The power was in the tremendous reward offered. The appeal was based on "lust of the eyes" (1 John 2:16), as Jesus was shown all the nations of the world with their wealth. It would also involve the "lust of the flesh," as it offered Him the pleasure and wealth of those countries. And it offered "pride of life," as He would receive the glory and power of such a position.

Note that the earthly rulership of the world that Satan here offered Jesus is exactly what Jews and Premillennialists say He came to earth to receive. They say that Jesus came to earth expecting to be a great earthly ruler, but unexpectedly the Jews rejected Him and killed Him instead. But if God intended for Jesus to have this, Jesus would surely have known that God intended Him to have it, in which case Satan's offer would have had very little power. All Jesus had to do would be to wait till His Father's time, then He would have had all this power without disobeying His Father or giving in to Satan. The strength of the temptation lay in offering Jesus all this glory and power instead of doing what God had really sent Him here to do: suffer and die for man's sins.

Pope makes the interesting observation that Satan, who was a created being, was seeking to be worshiped by Jesus, who was the Creator! It is bad enough when men worship created things. But Satan had the audacity to ask, not just men, but the Creator Himself to worship him.

The verse also affirms much about Satan's power. First, it shows that Satan showed Jesus all these kingdoms from a high mountain. There is no mountain from which one can literally see all the kingdoms of the world, not even all of them in the Roman Empire. This must have involved a measure of superhuman power – a demonic wonder (though perhaps it involved showing some things verbally or conceptually, not visibly). Also, Satan clearly said he had the power to give all these kingdoms to Jesus (Luke 4:6). If this were not true, Jesus would have known that too. The offer must have been within Satan's power to accomplish. He does have great power in the world – or at least he did until Jesus defeated him.

Jesus' response

Jesus replied again by quoting Scripture. He said we must never worship anyone but God (Deuteronomy 6:13). Surely we must never

worship and serve Satan. God is the true Ruler of the universe, and we must put Him first in our lives at all times. He alone deserves our love and worship. Yet amazingly few people really serve Him, and many have chosen to actively serve Satan.

The fundamental error of idolatry is that it seeks to give to someone other than God the glory that belongs only to God. Deuteronomy 4:19; 5:7-9; 17:2-5; 2 Kings 21:1-6; 23:4,5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 10:7,14; 2 Corinthians 6:16-18; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 John 5:21; Romans 1:25.

When Jesus had successfully resisted all the devil's temptations, Satan left him and angels came to minister to Him. Jesus had successfully resisted all the devil's temptations. Satan had succeeded in tempting the first Adam, bringing sin with all its consequences into the world. But the second Adam successfully resisted Satan's temptation. This was necessary to qualify Him to be the sacrifice to solve the consequences of sin.

Luke adds that Satan left only for a season (Luke 4:13). This was only temporary, until Satan could find another opportune time to try again. So when we overcome temptation thereby defeating Satan, we must remember that it is only temporary. He will always be watching, waiting for a time when he thinks we may be weak and he can successfully tempt us. We should never become overconfident with Satan. See 1 Peter 5:8,9; James 4:7.

4:12-25 - Call of Several Disciples

4:12-16 – When Jesus heard that John had been imprisoned, he went to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he lived in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. This was in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, fulfilling the message of Isaiah that in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light.

When Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been imprisoned, He withdrew from Judea to Galilee. (For more about the imprisonment of John, see Matthew 14:1-12.) Jesus left Nazareth (see Luke 4:22-30) and lived in Capernaum. This city is located on the north end of the Sea of Galilee, in the borders of the tribal possessions of Zebulun and Naphtali (see ***map***).

This fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah – Isaiah 9:1,2; compare 8:21,22. This prophecy said that the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, near the sea and beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles, a great light would shine where the people sat in darkness and the shadow of death. Galilee was not known for producing prophets (John 7:52), yet Jesus fulfilled this prophecy.

It appears that following this time Capernaum was a central base of operations for Jesus to which he returned several times in His journeys.

"Beyond Jordan" is typically an expression for east of the Jordan river. However, here it refers to territories that were west of the Jordan. Commentators have observed that, because this was a quotation from Isaiah, it is stated from the viewpoint of the Assyrians who invaded, referring to the land west of the river.

> What great light did they see? The light concerning which it is written: "He was the true light that illumines everyone who comes into this world." [John 1:9] This was the light about which the just man Simeon in the Gospel declared, "A light of revelation to the Gentiles and a glory for your people Israel." [Luke 2:32] That light had arisen according to what David had announced, saying, "A light has arisen in the darkness to the upright of heart." [Psalm 112:4] Also, Isaiah demonstrated that light about to come for the enlightenment of the church when he said, "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you." [Isaiah 60:1] – Chromatius (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

4:17 – Jesus preached that the people should repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

This message was very similar to what John the Baptist had preached (see notes on 3:2). As we discussed regarding the preaching of John, preaching repentance is essential to all true gospel preaching (see notes there).

Jesus also preached, as did John, that the kingdom was about to begin – see Mark 9:1. Some say that this is what Jesus meant, but the Jews rejected him, so He postponed the kingdom till His second coming and established the church instead. In other words, He said that the kingdom was at hand, but He was mistaken! The truth is, He was right, and the people who expected an earthly kingdom are wrong.

The kingdom is fundamental to the message of the gospel. The kingdom of the Messiah had been repeatedly prophesied in the Old Testament. The Jews in Jesus' day expected it, but thought it would be an earthly political kingdom that would dominate all surrounding nations, like David and Solomon had done in the Old Testament. As we have seen, many people today also think that was Jesus' plan. However, proper New Testament study shows that the kingdom is spiritual in nature (John 18:36). In fact, it is the same body of people as the church. See notes on Matthew 3:2.

4:18-22 – As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon Peter and Andrew casting a net into the sea. He called them to follow Him and He would make them fishers of men. Then he saw the brothers James and John in the boat with their father Zebedee mending their nets. He called them also. All the men immediately followed Him.

Compare Luke 5:2-11; Mark 1:16-20.

Jesus found two sets of brothers at the Sea of Galilee: Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and John his brother James, sons of Zebedee. They were fishermen. At this time Peter and Andrew were casting a net into the sea, and James and John were with their father in the boat mending their nets.

Peter and Andrew were already acquainted with Jesus. John 1:40-42 states that Andrew had first brought Peter to Jesus, telling Peter that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus had then changed Simon's name to Cephas or Peter.

It is possible that John, the son of Zebedee, was the other of the two disciples who heard John the Baptist refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world in John 1:35-40. Those two men then follow Jesus and spent the day learning from Him.

In Luke 5:2-11, these same men witnessed a great miracle done by Jesus before He called them as described here in Matthew. That passage also tells us that James and John were Simon Peter's partners. By comparing Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40 to John 19:25, some have concluded that the mother of James and John was a sister to Mary, the mother of Jesus. If so, then Jesus was a cousin to James and John.

Jesus here called them to change their occupation. They were to take part in a greater work than catching fish. They were to catch men, meaning that they would preach the gospel to attract people to come to the Lord. Saving souls is like catching fish in many ways.

When they returned to land, they left all and followed Jesus. Peter, Andrew, James, and John later became apostles. Considering the other accounts of Jesus' interaction with these men, it is clear that they did not leave everything and immediately begin to travel with Jesus the first time they met Him. He may even have talked to them more than once about doing this work, then at some point they agreed to do so.

In any case, they were willing to make a great change in their lives to do His bidding. They literally left their homes and families for long periods of time so they could physically travel with Jesus in His preaching work. This required them to leave their former occupation, despite the money and experience they had invested in it. This was a great sacrifice for them.

We too must be willing to sacrifice anything necessary in order to do Jesus' will. This may or may not involve a change in how we receive our physical income (compare 1 Corinthians 7:20-23). We may not be

called to physically travel about following Jesus, as were these men. But our sacrifices may yet be great, and we should be willing to make whatever sacrifices are needed.

4:23-25 – Jesus went about teaching in the synagogues in Galilee and healing all kinds of diseases and sickness. His fame went throughout Syria, and they brought Him people with diseases, demon possessed, epileptics, and paralytics. He healed them. And great multitudes followed Him.

The work of Jesus in Galilee is briefly summarized here. He went about teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of disease and sickness. People came with diseases and torments of all kinds: demon possession, epilepsy, paralysis, etc. He healed them all.

"By the word of divine power he cured the weaknesses of the body, but by the medicine of heavenly teaching he healed the wounds of the soul." – Chromatius (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Note that Jesus could heal all kinds of sickness. None was impossible or beyond His ability. No failures. No excuses. Just healings. Luke 4:40 says that He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. Modern "faith healers" claim to be able to heal as Jesus and His apostles did, but there are always cases they cannot heal, and often they try but fail. Clearly they do not have the power Jesus had; therefore, they are impostors.

People spread the news about Jesus as far away as Syria (this is the region north of Palestine – see a ***map*** – however, some people believe the term is used here to refer to the entire region, including Palestine, which the Romans officially referred to as Syria).

As a result of these powers, Jesus had great followings of people from all over the area: not just Galilee, but also from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond Jordan. The name Decapolis means ten cities, and refers to a region by that designation east of Jordan (see a ***map***). The expression "beyond the Jordan," as used here, would refer to the territory east of Jordan.

The synagogues were places in various localities where the Jewish people met each Sabbath day to read and discuss Old Testament Scripture. The synagogues did not exist in the Old Testament but apparently began during the period between the last of the Old Testament books and the birth of Jesus. They served as an excellent opportunity for Jesus to teach the people, and Paul and other apostles continued to use these places as opportunities to teach as long as they could.

Matthew 5

Chapters 5-7 – The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best-known sermon Jesus preached. Many people profess to appreciate and respect His teachings, yet I wonder how well people really understand them, and even more I wonder how well we practice them.

Some people tend to think that the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are basic, simple teachings of Jesus. Perhaps that is because these are some of His best-known teachings. But I beg to differ with the view that these teachings are simple. I find much of this material very challenging to understand and even more challenging to apply.

As we study this sermon, let us emphasize two aspects:

1) The specific lessons Jesus taught for our lives: What principles or concepts did He teach us to practice?

2) What teaching methods and principles did Jesus use? I am convinced we can learn more about good teaching from observing the way Jesus and inspired men taught than by any other source of teaching training. Jesus did not teach the way people expected Him to, nor did He teach the way many people today want preachers to preach.

The Beatitudes - 5:1-12

5:1,2 – Seeing the multitudes, Jesus went up on a mountain and sat down. His disciples came to Him and He taught them.

This sermon is often called the Sermon on the Mount because Jesus went up on a mountain to preach it.

It is very similar to Luke 6:20-49, but there are significant differences. Some believe these are just two different descriptions of the same sermon on the same occasion, but to me they appear to refer to completely different occasions. This sermon was preached on a mountain, but Luke 6 says He had been on a mountain but came down to a level place or plain to teach (verse 12, compare verse 17). The contents are also different. Perhaps these apparent differences can be

harmonized, but if they are different sermons then this would explain all differences. Like other preachers, Jesus no doubt often preached similar sermons to different people at different times.

Note that this sermon is addressed primarily to Jesus' disciples. He saw multitudes, which may include those who were not disciples. But He went up on a mountain and His ***disciples*** came to Him (verse 1). The sermon may contain lessons that are useful to all people, but it was addressed primarily to disciples.

Jesus began with what are called the "Beatitudes."

"Blessed" (μακαριος) is an adjective used to describe someone who has received a blessing or is worthy of praise. It is sometimes translated "happy." So a beatitude is a statement of blessing or happiness. Other passages state such blessings, but Jesus here gave a whole series of them.

As we proceed, notice how the teaching of Jesus repeatedly contrasts to what most people believe. Most think they would be happy if they had wealth or possessions, fame or popularity, education or worldly wisdom, power or authority, or fun and pleasure. But these do not produce lasting satisfaction. The wise man had them all but said they were vanity and vexation of spirit – Ecclesiastes 2:1-11. (Compare Luke 12:15; Ecclesiastes 5:10.)

The blessings Jesus pronounced are always spiritual in emphasis. So happiness depends, not on what you ***have***, but on what you ***are***; not on ***outer*** circumstances, but on ***inner*** character; not on what you ***get***, but on what you ***give***. One is happy or blessed if his conduct or character is such that he has a right relationship with God resulting in a sense of contentment or fulfillment, joy or peace – Psalms 32:1,2; 1:1; Proverbs 3:13; Romans 14:22; Revelation 1:3; 14:13.

Vincent says "blessedness" involves a clear recognition "of sin as the fountainhead of all misery, and of holiness as the final and effectual cure for every woe…"

Barclay adds:

> "The blessedness which belongs to the Christian is not a blessedness which is postponed to some future world of glory; it is a blessedness which exists here and now. It is not something into which the Christian will enter; it is something into which he has entered.
>
> True, it will find its fulness and its consummation in the presence of God; but for all that it is a present reality to be enjoyed here and now. The beatitudes in effect say, 'O the bliss of being a Christian! O the joy of following Christ! O the sheer happiness of knowing Jesus Christ as Master, Saviour and Lord!'"

So those are truly blessed who develop the characteristics described and as a result are pleasing to God. This means that true blessedness is available to all, since all can develop the character that pleases God.

"Blessed" (μακαριος) – "... favored, *blessed, fortunate, happy, privileged* ..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

5:3 – Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

Greek has two words for "poor." One (πενης) describes a man who is just able to meet his needs: he is able to care for himself, but just minimally. But the word used here (πτωχος) means destitute and needy like a beggar: helpless to meet ones needs.

Physically the word is used to describe Lazarus the beggar (Luke 16:20,21) and the poor widow whose whole living consisted of two mites (Mark 12:42ff). Such a person would recognize he is completely unable to help himself and so must depend on others for help. It contrasts to one who is independently wealthy and so feels no need for help from others.

Barclay says: "...it describes the poverty which is beaten to its knees. ... Blessed is the man who is abjectly and completely poverty-stricken. Blessed is the man who is absolutely destitute."

Since the beatitudes refer to spiritual characteristics, "poor" here emphasizes "poor in ***spirit,"*** not in material possessions. This refers to humility (similar to meekness, which is listed in a later beatitude).

Humility is an attitude or quality of mind (Acts 20:19) whereby a person holds a low esteem or opinion of his own goodness and importance. He realizes that he is utterly destitute spiritually: a spiritual beggar. It is the opposite of pride, haughtiness, and self-exaltation.

Isaiah 66:2 – God will look on one "who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."

In Luke 6:24 Jesus discussed the opposite of those who are poor in spirit (verse 20) and pronounced a woe upon the rich. This refers to those who are not humble but proud and haughty: they think they are spiritually superior to others.

Proverbs 16:18,19 – Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly.

See also Proverbs 29:23; Matthew 11:29,30; Numbers 12:3; Galatians 5:22,23; 6:1; Ephesians 4:2,3; Colossians 3:12,13; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Titus 3:2; James 3:13-18; 1:21-25; 1 Peter 3:1-6; Romans 1:30,32; 12:3-5; Philippians 2:2-5; Proverbs 6:16-19; 16:5,18; 13:10; 1 John 2:15-17; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; 1 Corinthians 13:4,5; 2 Timothy 3:2; Luke 14:7-11; Psalm 57:17; Isaiah 57:15.

Applications: What will being poor in spirit mean in our lives?

Consider just a few of the points we can learn about being poor in spirit:

** One who is poor in spirit will recognize his own sinfulness.*

Luke 18:9-14 – A Pharisee trusted in ***himself*** that he was righteous, prayed with himself, thanking God he was better than other people. Because he emphasized how good he was**,** he failed to see his sins. In contrast, the publican pled for mercy, admitting he was a sinner. So Jesus said one who ***exalts*** himself will be abased, but one who ***humbles*** himself will be exalted (verse 14).

We have all sinned. We have no right to look down on anyone as if we deserve salvation because we are so good, but they don't deserve it. In the end, the publican was more righteous than the Pharisee – and we can be too – but only by humbling ourselves like the publican and pleading with God for forgiveness.

Revelation 3:17-19 – The church in Laodicea contrasts to the publican. They thought they were wealthy and needed nothing, not realizing they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Jesus rebuked them because they needed to repent. This is why Scripture so often associates repentance with humbling oneself. See 1 Kings 21:27ff; 2 Chronicles 7:13,14; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Peter 5:5-9; Proverbs 15:31-33.

One who is truly poor in spirit realizes his spiritual poverty: that he cannot possibly be saved by his own merit, but like a beggar he must come to God through Christ to forgive him. This requires complete repentance and commitment to change.

** One who is poor in spirit will recognize his complete dependence on God.*

Psalm 34:6 – This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

Matthew 18:1-4 – Jesus said the greatest in the kingdom is one who is humble like a little child.

A child is totally dependent on others to meet his needs. Who provides his food, changes his diaper, and dresses him? When he has pain, for whom does he call? A child knows he is weak, but he knows Momma and Daddy can meet his needs. So, humility leads us to humbly admit our complete dependence on God.

John 15:5 – Jesus supplies our needs like a vine supplies the branches. "Without me, you can do nothing."

Humility toward God is an admission of our own weakness, unprofitableness, and inability to obtain or accomplish by ourselves the things we need. We are all spiritual beggars needing help from someone far greater than we are. God knows what we need better than we know, and He has power to do what needs to be done. Humility leads us to appreciate Him, trust His will, and give Him the glory, rather than exalting self.

(Jeremiah 10:23; 2 Chronicles 26:15,16; James 4:6,10)

** One who is poor in spirit will honor others rather than exalting self.*

This spiritual poverty before God will lead us to humble ourselves also toward other people.

Note Romans 12:3-5 – Don't think more highly of self than you ought to think, but think soberly. Be honest and realistic in evaluating yourself compared to others. It is easy to think we are more capable than others, have better ideas than others, and deserve greater honor than others, when this may not be the case.

Specifically, we should appreciate the good qualities of others. Other people do have good points, and often they are better than we are in some areas. We tend to exaggerate our own good points and exaggerate other people's bad points. The fact we have different abilities from someone else does not mean we are more important than they are or more worthy of honor than they are (note verses 4,5).

Give God credit for what good points you do have. "…think soberly as God has dealt to each one…" If a sober evaluation shows you do have abilities and righteousness, remember you have these blessings only by the goodness of God. You are like a beggar who had been granted great gifts by a rich man. Give glory to God.

Romans 12:16 – Do not set your mind on high things … Do not be wise in your own opinion. A humble person does not focus on how he can receive glory and honor from people. Some people won't accept any job, situation, or relationship unless they think it will exalt them in the eyes of others. Give them a job that lifts them up before people, and they'll gladly do it. Give them a job nobody knows about and it is left undone or is done only grudgingly.

The humble person willingly accepts humble tasks and humble people so long as he can serve God, even if the world does not highly exalt those tasks or those people.

(Luke 18:9-14; 14:7-11; 16:15; Titus 3:2,3)

* *One who is poor in spirit will serve the needs of others.*

A humble person will inconvenience himself to help others. He will forgo his desires so other people can receive what they need.

Matthew 23:11,12 – God measures greatness in terms of service rendered to others. People then, like now, thought greatness was measured by how much honor you receive or how much authority you possess (verses 5-10). But we are really great before God if we humble ourselves to do what is good for others.

This does not mean authority is bad. Jesus possessed it, yet was meek and lowly. The point is just having authority does not make you great. Service makes you great, and you can do that with or without authority. But service requires humility.

Philippians 2:2-8 – Each should count others better than himself. Let each of you look out, not just for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. I should have enough concern for your well being that I am willing to set aside my own desires in order to serve your needs.

Jesus is the example. He was meek and lowly. Imagine being in heaven with God, in the form of God, yet humbling yourself to come to earth as a man, and even to die on the cross. That's what Jesus did. Why? To meet our needs. To be of service to us. We should have that mind in us.

"As I consider you above, you likewise consider me above, and so (on) all around. (The result is) a marvelous community in which no one is looked down upon, but everyone is looked up to" (Lenski).

(Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:5)

The blessing on the poor in spirit

Jesus said the poor in spirit are blessed because theirs is the kingdom of God. This kingdom is the reign of Christ. Those who submit to His reign are now in His church, but will be the glorified kingdom in eternity after the resurrection (Acts 14:22; 2 Peter 1:11; Colossians 1:13,14). Only those who are truly humble will serve God faithfully in His kingdom now and then eternally in His eternal kingdom in heaven.

But how does poverty of spirit lead us to possess this kingdom? To enter Jesus' kingdom, we must be born again (John 3:3,5) by having our souls purified in obeying the truth (1 Peter 1:22,23). This includes believing in Jesus enough to repent of sins and be baptized so Jesus can remit our sins and add us to His church, the kingdom (Acts 2:38,47).

In Luke 6 Jesus pronounced a woe on the rich, because the only consolation they receive will be what they get in this life. No blessing awaits the proud in eternity. They exalt themselves in this life, and whatever satisfaction that gives them will be all they receive. (Compare Matthew 6:1ff.)

So, one must recognize himself to be a spiritual beggar who cannot save himself but must depend on God to forgive his sins by the blood of Jesus. Such a beggar will not argue about the terms of forgiveness, but will simply accept the teaching of God's word that salvation is only for those who are cleansed by the blood of Christ and are then added to the church. He will humbly submit, obey the gospel, and let the Lord add him to the kingdom.

So, the poor in spirit will possess the kingdom of God.

(See also Daniel 2:31-45; Matthew 3:1,2; 13:11; 16:18,19; Mark 1:14,15; 4:11; 9:1; Luke 8:10; John 17:10; 18:36; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-17,33,47; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 15:22-28; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:13,14; Hebrews 12:22-29; Revelation 1:5,6,9; 5:9.10.)

Observations regarding teaching

The first item in Jesus' list of blessings is that we are blessed if we are spiritual beggars. If you or I were making a list of things that give us blessings, how many of us would list humility at all, let alone list it first of all?

Jesus expressed the opposite of the world's view. Most people don't view humility as leading to blessings. They pity humble people. They think happy is he who is independent, self-reliant, and can meet his own needs. Even more happy is he who is exalted, prominent, and honorable in the view of others. But Jesus said the real blessing comes to one who sees himself as a spiritual beggar who must confess his sins and plead with God to meet His needs.

How often do we truly pray for God to humble us, and then thank Him when circumstances in life do humble us? Jesus said that those who seek to be part of His kingdom now and in eternity must value and practice humility.

5:4 – Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

What does it mean to mourn?

Mourning (πενθεω) obviously means to weep, grieve, or lament. Barclay says:

> "…the Greek word for to mourn, used here, is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning for the dead … It is defined as the kind of grief which takes such a hold on a man that it cannot be hid. It is not only the sorrow which brings an ache to the heart; it is the sorrow which brings the unrestrainable tears to the eyes."

Mark 16:10 – This word is used to describe the grief of the disciples at Jesus' death.

In Luke 6 Jesus added: "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." (See also Genesis 37:34 in LXX.)

But, physical mourning does not always lead to comfort, nor does physical laughter always lead to mourning. So again, as in the other beatitudes, Jesus must have spiritual applications in mind.

Even more than with poor in spirit, who would have thought to include mourning in a list of blessings? Jesus amazes us by saying those who are sad are happy!

Applications: What does this mourning refer to in our lives?

* *As sinners, we should all grieve for our sins.*

Psalm 38:18 – I will declare my iniquity and be in anguish for my sin. Notice the depth of sorrow. The attitude is not: "Actually, it really was fun and I wish I could still do it. But well, if I have to, I'll give it up." We must grieve over our sins and sincerely wish we had never committed them.

2 Corinthians 7:10 – Godly sorrow leads to repentance unto salvation. One who does not repent cannot be saved, and he cannot truly repent without sorrow.

James 4:8-10 – Sinners must mourn and weep.

Luke 18:13 – The publican, seeking forgiveness for his sins, beat his breast saying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

Matthew 26:75 – After he had denied Jesus, Peter went out and wept bitterly.

True repentance must be preceded by godly sorrow. Our laughter must turn to mourning and our joy to gloom!

(Joel 2:12,13; Psalms 34:18; Luke 15:11-25)

* *We must not take pleasure or be satisfied in our sins.*

In Luke 6:25 Jesus added, "Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep." This contrasts to those who weep or mourn (verse 21), so the laughing must refer to those who see no need to grieve over sin.

Many people think those who are happy are those who live it up and have fun. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." They feel no remorse at all for their sins. Commercials tell us that beer drinking is living the "high life" – the good life.

Others convince themselves that God will never punish them. Or they think they are just fine the way they are, despite their sins. People with these attitudes see no need to change.

Still others decide to quit some sin, but are not really sorry they did it in the past. They just see no reason to continue it, or they fear they will suffer consequences. But they continue to think what they did was justified or acceptable – they do not sorrow or grieve for the sin.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 – People who fail to grieve for their sins in this life, will experience in eternity the sorrow of those who have no hope. Such people need to turn their laughter into mourning. They need to learn to grieve and mourn for sin.

* *We should also grieve over the sins of those around us.*

Genesis 6:5,6 – When God saw the wickedness of men in Noah's day, He was grieved in His heart.

1 Corinthians 5:2 – Paul rebuked the church in Corinth because they had not grieved over the fornicator in the church. Instead, they were puffed up – they took pleasure in the act, when they should have mourned.

> The mourning discussed here does not concern the common natural law of the dead but rather their sins and vices. Thus Samuel grieved over Saul, [1 Samuel 15:11] and the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel. [1 Samuel 15:35] Also Paul the apostle says that he wept and mourned over those who, after committing fornication and impure deeds, did not feel the need of repentance. [2 Corinthians 12:21] – Jerome (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

How many tears have been shed by godly parents whose children have left the faith or have never obeyed the gospel? How often have congregations of God's people been torn apart by division or immorality in the lives of members?

Sin ought to upset us. We should be troubled when we hear about the evils of the world, especially when those evils come among God's people. Those who truly are grieved over the sin around them will try to teach and warn people to change!

How much does sin grieve you? Do we ignore it, worse yet laugh at it, or enjoy it as a form of entertainment? Or do we sincerely grieve over it and seek to urge people to forsake sin and serve God?

> "As we look at the Cross, we are bound to say, 'That is what sin can do. Sin can take the loveliest life in all the world and smash it on a Cross.' One of the great functions of the Cross is to open the eyes of men and women to the horror of sin." – Barclay

(See also Romans 9:2,3; 2 Corinthians 12:20,21; Isaiah 63:10; 61:3; 66:10; Ezekiel 9:3-6; 2 Peter 2:7,8; Luke 19:41-44; Philippians 3:18; 2 Corinthians 2:3-5.)

The blessing on those who mourn

** Those who mourn will be comforted.*

Psalms 32:1,2 – Similar to Jesus' beatitude, David pronounced a blessing on one whose transgression is forgiven so that the Lord does not impute iniquity to him. He then proceeded to describe the horrible guilt of one who remains in his sin (verses 3-5).

Psalms 51:8,12 – David pled with God to forgive his sin, so that he could once again have joy and gladness, the joy of salvation.

Acts 8:39; 16:34 – After they were baptized, both the Ethiopian treasurer and the Philippian jailer rejoiced in their salvation.

There is great joy in knowing that our sins are forgiven, but that joy comes only after we sorrow enough to truly repent and receive forgiveness according to God's will. So mourning leads to comfort if that mourning is true godly sorrow.

Luke 16:25 – Abraham said the rich man enjoyed good things in his life, but afterward he was in torment. His laughter turned to mourning. But Lazarus had received evil things in life, but afterward he was comforted.

The ultimate comfort for those who mourn for their sins will be in eternal life. True godly sorrow leads to repentance and forgiveness, so in eternity we have no cause to mourn.

Revelation 21:4 – In heaven will be no weeping or sorrow.

** But Luke adds that those who laugh now will mourn later.*

Rejoicing over sin or refusing to repent leads to the grief of punishment. In fact, in eternal punishment, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:42,50; 8:12; 22:13).

How deeply do you grieve and mourn for your sins and the sins of those around you? Do you grieve enough to repent, turn from sins, and seek God's forgiveness? Do you speak to those around you to warn them to turn from sin?

(2 Corinthians 7:9,10; James 4:6-10; 1:12; Luke 2:25; 18:13,14; Isaiah 40:1-5; 51:11; 61:1-3; Matthew 11:28-30)

Observations regarding teaching

Who would have thought, when making a list of blessings or reasons for happiness, to include mourning? Mourning is joyous or happy?

People today want preachers to talk, not about sad things, but about pleasant things – things that make them feel good. Preach a positive message. But even when preaching about subjects that people would expect to involve positive things, Jesus preached about negative things! When preaching about blessings, He discussed grief and spiritual poverty!

Jesus did not teach the way people expected Him to, nor the way many people today want preachers to preach.

5:5 – Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

What does it mean to be meek (πραυς)?

** This is a difficult word to translate into English.*

It is sometimes translated "gentleness," but to many people, the English words "meekness" and "gentleness" imply weakness. But weakness is no part of the significance of this word. A meek person is inherently a strong person.

The best way to know the meaning of a word is to study passages where it is used. This will show that meekness is an attitude or quality of heart (1 Peter 3:4) whereby ***a person does not act primarily from his own self-interest, but submits his will and sacrifices his desires in order to accomplish what is best for others.***

Meekness is the opposite of self-will, self-interest, and self-assertiveness. A meek person, instead of exalting himself, his ways, ideas, and wishes, chooses to put himself in second place to achieve what is good for others. This is a sign, not of weakness of character, but of strength.

The word is used secularly to describe a tame animal that submits to its master's will instead of doing as it pleases. So a meek (tame) horse will respond to the reins. Does this mean the horse is weak? Surely not, but it is willing to follow its master's will.

** Other verses emphasize the importance and meaning of meekness.*

Galatians 5:22,23 – Meekness is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

> Imbued with the precepts of the gospel, they imitate the meekness of the Lord, who says, "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart." [Matthew 11:29,30] Moses found the greatest favor with God because he was meek. It was written about him: "And Moses was the meekest of all people on earth." [Numbers 12:3] – Chromatius (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Moses and Jesus were both especially held up as examples of meekness. Were they weak and spineless? Their character will help us understand what meekness means.

See also Matthew 11:29,30; Numbers 12:3; Galatians 5:22,23; 6:1; Ephesians 4:2,3; Colossians 3:12,13; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Titus 3:2; James 3:13-18; 1:21-25; 1 Peter 3:1-6; Zephaniah 2:3.

> "Meekness" (πραυτης) – "'...it is an inwrought grace of the soul; and the exercises of it are first and chiefly towards God. It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting; ... it is only the humble heart which is also the meek, and which, as such, does not fight against God and more or less struggle and contend with Him. This meekness, however, being first of all a meekness before God, is also such in the face of men...' (Trench, Syn. xlii)."

> "...It must be clearly understood, therefore, that the meekness manifested by the Lord and commended to the believer is the fruit of power. The common assumption is that when a man is meek it is because he cannot help himself; but the Lord was 'meek' because he had the infinite resources of God at His command. Described negatively, meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is equanimity of spirit that is neither elated nor cast down, simply because it is not occupied with self at all. ..." – Vine.

Applications: What will meekness mean in our lives?

* *Above all, one who is meek will submit to God's commands.*

James 1:21-25 – ***Meekness*** toward God's word requires putting away filth and wickedness. Be doers of the word, not just hearers.

Other passages demonstrate this concept without using the word:

Matthew 16:24 – To be Jesus' disciples, we must ***deny self*** and follow Him.

Luke 1:38 – Regarding the Virgin Birth, Mary said, "Let it be to me according to your word."

The selfish person says "I want this, I want that...." The meek person says, "What does ***God*** want? Is this really ***best*** according to ***God's*** way?" God's ways are so much better than ours that the meek person carefully considers ***God's will first***, then his own will last.

We tend to want to please ourselves; so we may conclude an act doesn't matter to God, even when it really ***does*** matter to Him. True meekness will lead us to examine every act, word, and thought to see what effect it will have on our service to God. Then we do only what we are sure pleases Him.

(1 Samuel 3:9,10; Numbers 12:3,6,7; Romans 6:19; 12:1; 8:1-11; Galatians 2:20)

* *One who is meek will face difficult circumstances without rebelling against God.*

As shown in the book of Job, meekness teaches us that God is in charge: He knows what He is doing, even when He chooses to allow us to suffer (Job 1:21).

Numbers 12:1-3 – Moses' meekness was described in the context of a complaint against his leadership. People constantly complained against him, even though he was just doing what God said. How many of us would have stood for it? No wonder he was called the meekest man on earth! (11:10-15)

Matthew 26:39 – Knowing what was coming, Christ prayed in the garden to avoid the suffering of the cross. Yet He said, "Not as I will, but as You will." That is meekness!

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 – Paul's thorn in the flesh kept him from being overly exalted. Satan, not God, brought the problem. But God allowed it to remain, because it produced good for Paul. So our problems may be allowed because they teach us important lessons.

We want to control our own lives. I have had panic attacks when facing problems I could not remove. But hardships, that we cannot solve, may teach us to be humble and depend on God. Of course, we should try to eliminate our problems. But if He chooses to allow the problem to continue, instead of blaming Him, we should look for the lessons such problems can teach us.

The truly meek person realizes that God can use hardships for our good, so he will submit without rebelling.

(Hebrews 12:2-6; Deuteronomy 8:1-5,15,16; Psalms 37:1-16; Romans 8:17,18)

** One who is meek will urge others to turn from their sins.*

Some people think a person who speaks out against error is not being meek. They think he is intolerant, egotistical, self-willed, pushy, and motivated by "hate." But it is a misunderstanding to think there is a conflict between Biblical meekness and firm opposition to error.

Exodus 32:19,20,26-28,30 – When Israel made the golden calf, Moses became angry, plainly told them they had sinned, and called for disciplinary action. Yet he was the meekest man on earth! These are the acts of a meek man!

Matthew 15:3-9,12-14 – When Jesus rebuked the sins of the Pharisees, His disciples told Him He had offended the Pharisees; perhaps they assumed He should back off. What did Jesus do: Back off? Apologize? No, he proceeded to call them blind guides and told the disciples not to follow them. But remember, He was "meek and lowly in heart."

Galatians 6:1 – If a man is overtaken in a fault, those who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of ***meekness*** ("gentleness" – NKJV). Does meekness mean we do not show others they are wrong? No, the passage commands us to do so.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 – In ***meekness*** ("humility" – NKJV) correct those who oppose themselves so they can recover themselves from the snare of the Devil. Rather than hindering godly people from telling others to turn from sin, meekness ***leads*** us to do that very thing!

Does meekness mean we should be apologetic, beat around the bush, and take ages to get around to telling people they are wrong? Study the teaching approach of Moses, the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, and His apostles and prophets. You will see that they did not take long to tell people when they were in sin. Usually they brought up the people's sin the very first time they had a chance to speak to them at length.

When people are sincere but ignorant, meekness may involve speaking quietly. And surely meekness will teach us to be patient. But when people ought to know better, as in the examples of the golden calf and the Pharisees, meekness may lead to forceful rebukes. And in no case are we doing anyone a favor when we let people stay in sin without warning them!

What then does it mean to correct others with meekness? Remember the meaning of the word. The meek person does ***not act from his own self-interest but sacrifices his own will to accomplish what is best for others***. He does not teach to gain honor before people or to prove he is smarter than others. He acts, first out of submission to God, and second out of sincere concern for the well-being of others! But letting people stay in sin is never in anyone's best interest!

People generally don't like to be told they are wrong, no matter how you do it. People complained regularly about Moses, ran Paul out of nearly every town where he preached, and killed Jesus and most of His apostles. They didn't do those things because the preachers kept quiet about the people's sins! Yet all these men were meek and set the example for our teaching.

The meek person must remember that he too has been in sin. Yet he will urge people to leave their sins, because he must submit to God and ***because he cares about men's souls!***

(Matthew 23:15-17,27,28,33; 21:12,13; John 8:41-47,54,55; James 4:6,7; 1 Peter 5:5-9)

The blessing on those who are meek

Those who are meek will inherit the earth ("land" – NKJV footnote). What does this mean?

Jehovah's Witnesses say the 144,000 are the persecuted who will go to heaven in verses 10-12, but other righteous people are the "meek" who will live forever on this literal earth (verse 5). But aren't the 144,000 meek, and the meek will inherit the earth? And aren't there people besides the 144,000 who are persecuted? If so, they too should go to

heaven. The truth is that all the beatitudes include all Christians. And all God's people have just "one hope" – Ephesians 4:4.

"Inherit the earth" may confuse us, but Old Testament Israel often received such promises.

Psalms 37:11 – The meek shall inherit the earth. Verse 9 – Those who wait on the Lord will inherit the earth. Verse 3 – Trust in the Lord and do good. Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.

Psalms 25:13 – One who fears the Lord, his descendants will inherit the earth. (69:35,36)

Proverbs 2:21,22 – The upright will dwell in the land, but the wicked will be cut off from the earth.

Isaiah 57:13 – He who trusts the Lord will possess the land and inherit God's holy mountain.

Isaiah 60:21 – The righteous will inherit the land forever.

This originally referred to God's promise that Israel would dwell in Canaan. But just as the earthly kingdom of Israel became a symbol for the spiritual kingdom of Christ, so inheriting the land of Canaan became a symbol for the blessings in Jesus' spiritual kingdom, the church. People commonly misunderstand both the spiritual nature of Jesus' kingdom and the spiritual blessings in it.

Another related view is that Jesus may refer to the ***new*** heavens and earth, that are promised to us when this earth has been destroyed (1 Peter 1:3,4; 2 Peter 3:1-14; etc.).

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 – Another possibility is that God created the earth for the benefit of His servants. So faithful Christians will properly benefit from the blessings of the earth. We may not be materially wealthy, but we have the best understanding of life here on earth and the hope of eternal life after this life. (Note Mark 10:29,30; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Philippians 4:11-13; Matthew 6:19-34.)

> "Inherit" (κληρονομέω) "...to receive the portion assigned to one ... the tranquil and stable possession of the holy land crowned with all divine blessings, an experience which pious Israelites were to expect under the Messiah ... hence it became a formula denoting to partake of eternal salvation in the Messiah's kingdom: Matthew 5:5 ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Observations regarding teaching

As with humility and mourning, if you or I were making a list of our blessings, how many of us would include meekness? Most people don't view meekness as a blessing at all. They think happy is he who dominates others and gets his way. "Look out for number one." "Assert yourself." But Jesus said the real blessing comes to one who sacrifices his will to meet the needs of others.

How often do we truly pray for meekness? Jesus said that those who seek to be His true disciples must value and practice meekness.

5:6 – Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

What does it mean to hunger and thirst after righteousness?

** "Hunger and thirst" describe an urgent craving for what is absolutely essential to life!*

"Hunger" (πειναω) describes the pain caused by lack of food, and "thirst" (διψαω) refers to the suffering caused by lack of drink. So the words came to describe anything for which we have an urgent and serious need.

"...to hunger ... to suffer want ... to be needy ... metaph. to crave ardently, to seek with eager desire ... Matthew 5:6..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer on "hunger."

So once again, Jesus pronounces a blessing on those who lack and are in need!

But further, the words emphasize that what we need is absolutely essential: we must have it! Hunger and thirst are urgent desires, not just for things we want, but for necessities of life!

A person may say, "I'm really hungry for a big steak!" If you are selective about what ***kind*** of food you want, you are not really hungry! The person who is really hungry doesn't care whether he gets steak or mush! He is desperate for food.

So "hunger and thirst" describe, not just strong desires, but strong desires for absolute necessities of life. If the need is not met, we will die!

** "Righteousness" describes the state of one who is* ***right*** *or acceptable before God.*

Jesus refers to hunger and thirst, not for physical food, but for righteousness.

1 John 5:17 – All unrighteousness is sin. So righteousness is the opposite of sin.

Acts 10:35 – Those who fear God and work righteousness are those who are accepted by Him. So the righteous are those who are acceptable to God.

Matthew 25:46 compare 1 Corinthians 6:9 – The righteous are those who will receive eternal life, but the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God.

To be righteous simply means to have a right standing before God – to be viewed by God as right or not guilty of sin. We must have that right standing in order to enter eternal life.

So Jesus here compares us to a man wandering in a desert seeking an oasis with food and water. Without those necessities of life, we will die! But the necessity for which we should have a deep, driving urge is, not food and drink, but a right standing before God. We must be

committed to doing whatever it takes to be right, like a starving, thirsty man seeks food and drink!

Barclay is quoted as pointing out that the original language is helpful here. Greek has a form of speech (the genitive) that, when used following words such as "hunger" or "thirst," would be parallel to our saying, "May I please have a drink ***of*** water," or "I would like a piece ***of*** cake." But the form Jesus used here (the accusative) means, "May I please have ***the*** water": I want the whole pitcher! Or "I would like to have ***the*** cake": i.e., I want all of it, not just part of it.

Jesus here is teaching us to hunger and thirst to be completely righteous. Some people are content to have "some" righteousness. They want to have some religion and do some good. They desire parts of it, but they are content with partial measures. There may be other aspects of true religion that are not so appealing to them. The true disciple of Christ hungers and thirsts for the whole thing! He wants everything that it takes to be righteous in every aspect of his life. We must hunger and thirst after "righteousness": not just part of it, but all of it.

How strongly do you and I really want to be right before God? (Psalms 63:1; Luke 5:32; Psalms 42:1,2; John 6:27)

> "Righteousness" (δικαιοσυνη) – "...1. in the broad sense, the state of him who is such as he ought to be, righteousness ... ; the condition acceptable to God ... a. univ. ... b. integrity, virtue, purity of life, uprightness, correctness in thinking, feeling, and acting: ... c. in the writings of Paul (it) has a peculiar meaning ... (it) denotes the state acceptable to God which becomes a sinner's possession through that faith by which he embraces the grace of God offered him in the expiatory death of Jesus Christ. ... 2. in a closer sense, justice, or the virtue which gives each one his due ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Applications: What will hungering and thirsting after righteousness mean in our lives?

How will a person act if he hungers and thirsts for righteousness?

** One who hungers and thirsts after righteousness urgently seeks to know God's word.*

2 Timothy 3:16,17 – The Scriptures instruct us in righteousness and provide us to every good work. No one can be right until he learns how to be right. The only way to know this is to study Gods' word. We must hunger and thirst after God's word!

1 Peter 2:2 – We should desire the word like newborn babies desire milk. What is that like? They want it often and urgently! That illustrates hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

Acts 17:11 – The Bereans were noble because they received the word with readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily to know the truth. They also illustrate hungering and thirsting after righteousness. They wanted the truth. They knew they needed to go to the Scriptures to

learn the truth. They had a ready mind to accept God's word. So they studied it daily.

Hosea 4:6 – Lack of knowledge causes God's people to be destroyed. Such ignorance has led to major divisions among God's people. Some of us have personally witnessed such problems (such as the institutional issues of the 1950s and 60s). We saw firsthand what a lack of knowledge can do. This is why we emphasize again and again the need for Bible teaching.

Psalms 19:7-11; 1:2; 119:47,48,97-99; Joshua 1:8 – This is why so many Scriptures urge us to love God's word and meditate on it day and night. God's word converts the soul, makes us wise, and rejoices our hearts. It is more to be desired than gold and sweeter than honey. In keeping it is great reward.

If a person truly hungers and thirsts to know the will of God, will he appreciate opportunities to study and learn or will he seek to skimp on such opportunities? It deeply troubles me to hear of a trend in many congregations who want less teaching.

Some want shorter gospel meetings. In my lifetime meetings have changed from two weeks or ten days, to eight days (Sunday through Sunday), then six days, then just week-end meetings. Some churches have altogether eliminated gospel meetings. Some eliminate the Sunday evening meeting with a net result of less teaching each week. Some want shorter assemblies and shorter Bible classes.

Then preachers go to foreign countries – like India, Philippines, and Nigeria – and people there want them to preach several hours every day for days, then they beg for more!

Which attitude should characterize those who hunger and thirst for righteousness like that starving, thirsting man in the desert? Do you and I hunger and thirst for truth?

(Proverbs 2:1-20; Hebrews 5:12; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 2 Timothy 2:15; John 6:44,45; 8:31,32; Matthew 13:23; Romans 1:16; 10:13,14,17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:26,29,35; 9:6; 11:14; 18:8; Luke 6:46-49; 11:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Revelation 3:20)

* *One who hungers and thirsts after righteousness urgently seeks to be forgiven of sin.*

The Bible describes two ways to be righteous before God. One is to never do wrong, so God accepts us as innocent because we have never been guilty. But the only person ever righteous that way was Jesus. The rest of us have all sinned, so we can be righteous only by being forgiven by Jesus' blood.

Romans 5:18,19,21 – Through the righteous act of Jesus (His death – 5:6-11), many will be made righteous. So grace reigns through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus.

Romans 10:9,10 – But to receive this forgiveness, we must respond to Jesus' death. With the heart one believes to righteousness and with

the mouth confession is made to salvation. Romans 6:3,4 then shows one must be baptized into Jesus' death (compare Acts 2:38; 22:16; etc.).

Who will seek this forgiveness? Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness! When a person truly believes that he is doomed to a sinner's hell and the only way to escape is by Jesus' blood, he will be like that starving, thirsty man in the desert who sees an oasis. You won't have to argue with him; he will ***want*** to confess Christ and be baptized.

(Romans 3:10,21,22; 4:5; Hebrews 8:12; Luke 18:9ff; Acts 10:34,35)

** One who hungers and thirsts after righteousness urgently seeks to live an upright life.*

Having been forgiven so God can accept us, we must diligently seek to maintain that relationship. This requires us to live godly lives, because sin ruins our relationship with God.

Romans 6:12-14,16,18,19 – Do not present your members as instruments for sin but as instruments of righteousness.

Titus 2:11,12 – God's grace teaches us, not to excuse our sins, but to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live soberly, righteously, and godly.

1 Peter 2:24 – Jesus died for us that we might live for righteousness.

Matthew 6:33 – Seek ***first*** the kingdom of God and His righteousness. One who truly believes in Jesus' gospel will have a burning determination, not just to be forgiven of his sins, but to live a godly life so as not to fall back into sin.

This is what it means to hunger and thirst after righteousness. Being right with God is the most important thing in life. But that requires living a righteous, godly life. Yes, we can be forgiven if we sin again, but only if we repent and recommit ourselves to living uprightly.

Psalm 42:1,2 – As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God …

(1 John 3:7; Romans 12:1,2; Galatians 2:20; 5:22-25; John 15:4,5; Matthew 16:24)

The blessing on those who hunger and thirst after righteousness

Jesus promised that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be ***filled.*** That man, starving and thirsting in the desert, can receive, not just a morsel of food and a sip of water. He can be filled: completely satisfied! Jesus provides a feast in the desert! If we are truly committed to being right, God will see to it that we receive the means to do so.

** Those who hunger and thirst after truth will find the truth.*

Proverbs 8:17 – The wisdom of God says, "Those who seek me diligently will find me."

Proverbs 2:1-9 – When we apply our hearts and cry out for wisdom and understanding and seek them as for silver and hidden treasure, then

we will find the knowledge of God. We will understand ***righteousness*** and justice and every good path (verse 9).

(John 7:17)

** Those who hunger and thirst after forgiveness will find forgiveness.*

Matthew 7:7 – Ask, seek, and knock and it will be given. Everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds.

Hebrews 7:25 – Jesus is able to save to the uttermost.

(1 John 1:8-10; Romans 4:7,8; 3:21-26; 1 Corinthians 6:11)

** Those who hunger and thirst after an upright life can live an upright life.*

1 Corinthians 10:13 – God is faithful. He will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability, but with every temptation He will make a way of escape.

Philippians 1:11; 4:13 – We can be filled with the fruits of righteousness. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

Romans 8:31-39 – Nothing on earth can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

How often do we think, "I'm not sure I'm going to make it." Some don't even bother to try because they convince themselves "I could never be good enough to go to heaven."

No matter what horrible sins you have committed in your past – name any sin you have committed – and you can still be saved. If you truly hunger and thirst after righteousness, you will be filled!

Only one person can ultimately stop you from going to heaven: not Satan, not your worst enemy, no false teacher. The only person who can stop you is ***you!*** If you lack the hunger and thirst – that driving urge to be right before God – you won't make it. But if you have it, nothing can stop you, because Jesus promised He will give what you need to be right!

Proverbs 21:21 – He who follows righteousness and mercy finds life, righteousness, and honor.

Jesus is the water of life and the bread of life so that whoever comes to Him shall never again thirst and need never hunger – John 4:13,14; 6:35.

(Isaiah 55:1,2; Revelation 21:6; 22:17; John 4:10-14; 6:33-69; 7:37; 15:4,5; 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24)

Observations regarding teaching

Jesus did not teach the way people expected Him to, nor the way many people today want preachers to preach. Describing our blessings, He pictures us, not only as meek, grieving, spiritual beggars, but spiritually needing to be right with God like a starving, thirsty man needs food and water. How strongly do you and I really want to be right before God?

5:7 – Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

What does it mean to be merciful?

"Mercy" refers to an attitude of kindness or pity toward people who suffer affliction or unfortunate circumstances, accompanied by a desire to help them in harmony with God's will.

** Mercy is closely related to other Bible concepts:*

"Compassion" refers to sympathy for the problems of others, so that we sorrow for their sorrow. Mercy then is the outward manifestation of compassion, that leads us to work to help people in distress.

"Love" is an attitude of good will for people that leads us to desire to act on their behalf. But love should be extended to all people regardless of their circumstances, whereas mercy is concern especially for those who are suffering.

** Many Scriptures show the importance of mercy.*

Micah 6:8 – The Lord requires His people to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before God. (Hosea 12:6)

Matthew 23:23 – Mercy is one of the weightier matters of the law.

Luke 6:36 – Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Here is a foundational principle: ***We learn about mercy by observing God's mercy toward us.*** Just as we learn love from God's love (1 John 4:7-11) and we learn holiness from God's holiness (1 Peter 1:15,16), so we learn mercy from God's mercy. Note how this follows through in our study.

"Mercy" (ελεος) – "...mercy, kindness or good will towards the miserable and afflicted, joined with a desire to relieve them..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Applications: What will being merciful mean in our lives?

** One who is merciful will seek to understand the needs of others (compassion).*

Matthew 9:36-38 – Jesus had compassion because people were distressed and scattered like sheep without a shepherd. Then he taught His disciples to seek for laborers to help those who are distressed and scattered.

Luke 10:30-37 – A man was beaten, robbed, and left dying by the side of the road. A priest and Levite saw him but refused to help, but a Samaritan stopped and helped. What distinguished the Samaritan from the priest and Levite? Compassion! The Samaritan helped because he understood and was moved by the man's need.

Romans 12:8 – He who shows mercy, should do so with cheerfulness. Sometimes we help others grudgingly, as though it is a drudgery. What can improve our attitude? Compassion! When we really put ourselves in the other person's place, we will appreciate the value of helping.

** One who is merciful will try to help others meet their physical needs.*

Philippians 2:25-27 – When Epaphroditus was severely ill to the point of death, God had mercy and spared him. We too should have mercy on those with physical needs.

Luke 10:30-37 – The Samaritan helped the man who was beaten and left by the side of the road. The Samaritan illustrates love (verses 27,29), compassion (verse 33), and mercy (verse 37). Jesus said we should go and do likewise.

Mercy leads us to help people who are in genuine need. Do to others as you would have them do to you (Matthew 7:12).

(Psalms 37:21; Exodus 2:6)

** One who is merciful will forgive others like God forgives us.*

Hebrews 8:12 – God is merciful to our unrighteousness in that He offers to remember our sins no more. God demonstrated His mercy by offering forgiveness to all even at the cost of the death of His Son. (1 Timothy 1:15,16; Ephesians 2:4,5)

Proverbs 28:13 (Luke 1:50) – God's mercy, however, has always been conditional: men must believe, repent, and turn from their sins to be forgiven (Luke 13:3,5; 24:47; Acts 17:30; Matthew 21:28-32; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 20:21; 8:22; 2 Peter 3:9; 2 Corinthians 7:10).

Matthew 18:21-35 – A man owed his king an unpayable debt. When he pled for mercy, the master had compassion and forgave the whole debt (verses 26,27). The servant, however, was owed money by another servant. When that servant asked for mercy, the first servant threw him in prison (verses 29,30). The master said the servant should have showed mercy, like the master had shown him mercy (verses 32,33). So, Jesus said God will not forgive us, if we do not forgive others (verses 34,35).

Note again that God's mercy teaches us mercy toward others. God offers forgiveness to all, but that forgiveness is conditional. Likewise, for us to show mercy like God shows mercy means we should go to those who sin against us and urge them to repent (Luke 17:3,4). And when they repent, we should forgive them like God offers to forgive us. In fact, God says He will not forgive us, if we do not forgive others.

(Colossians 3:12,13)

** One who is merciful will teach the gospel so souls can be saved.*

Matthew 9:36-38 – Jesus had compassion because people were distressed and scattered like sheep without a shepherd. Then He instructed us to be concerned too. We should pray for laborers. We must learn to have mercy on the lost like our Master has mercy.

Luke 15 – The Pharisees complained because Jesus associated with sinners (verses 1,2). He responded by telling three stories showing why we need to care about the lost.

The prodigal son had been lost in sin, but determined to repent and return to his father. The father had compassion and forgave him (verse 20), but the older son was angry at his brother's return. The father explained that it was fitting to rejoice because the lost brother was found (verses 28,31,32). What distinguished the father from the older brother? One was merciful; the other was not. Which one are we like?

Some people have great compassion on people who suffer physically. But there is no greater act of mercy anyone can do for another than to lead him to salvation. But to do this we must show them they are in sin. This is an act of mercy.

What concerns you most: a friend dying of cancer or a friend dying in sin? Do we have mercy toward the lost like Jesus did?

(Matthew 9:10-13; Jude 22,23)

** One who is truly merciful will follow God's word in the help he offers others.*

James 3:17,18 – We should first seek purity, then peace, mercy, etc. Neither peace nor mercy should ever lead us to sacrifice the pure truth. As with all other Bible characteristics, mercy must be directed by God's word.

Luke 16:24-26 – The rich man in torment called for Abraham to have mercy and give him water to drink, but Abraham refused because it would violate God's will.

Sometimes people decide for themselves apart from God's word what they think is merciful.

Some people think mercy means we should not punish disobedient children, but the Bible teaches that failure to discipline children who need it is actually a lack of love (Proverbs 13:24).

Others think it is unmerciful for people to speak out against sin. But we have learned that God's word teaches us to oppose sin ***because*** we have mercy on the sinner. Remember Jesus is our example of mercy, and He cared for the lost by teaching them where they were wrong, even when people hated and persecuted Him for it (John 7:7).

Our treatment of others must always be characterized by mercy. But it is never truly merciful to do for others what is contrary to God's word, no matter how much they may want us to do it or how much our human reasoning may seek to justify an act.

The blessing on those who are merciful

Matthew 5:7 – If we show mercy, we will receive mercy, not just from other people, but from God Himself.

Psalms 18:25 – With the merciful, God will show Himself merciful.

1 Peter 1:3,4 – The mercy of God has begotten us again to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven.

Without God's mercy we have no hope of eternal life! But Jesus assured us that, if we want God to show mercy to us, then we must be

willing to show mercy to others. Have we learned proper mercy from the example of Jesus?

(James 2:13; Romans 1:31,32)

Observations regarding teaching

People today probably respect the quality of mercy more than some of the other qualities Jesus discussed. Even so many people do not appreciate mercy. Many view mercy as weakness. They promote their own interests regardless of the effect on others. "Show no mercy. Take no prisoners!"

Other people think God's mercy is unconditional: God chose before the world began to save certain people regardless of how they act. Others think Jesus' mercy made him a spineless wimp who spoke out against nothing as sinful. But in fact He rebuked sin and required people to repent of sin to receive that forgiveness. His mercy is the example for our mercy.

We should teach and practice mercy as Jesus taught and practiced it.

(Hebrews 10:34; Luke 15:20; Romans 12:8; Philippians 2:1-4; 1 Peter 3:8,9; Zechariah 7:9,10; Proverbs 14:31,21; 3:3; Daniel 4:37; Psalm 37:21)

5:8 – Blessed are the pure in heart

What does it mean to be pure in heart?

"Heart" in the Bible usually refers to the mind or inner man. It is the source of our thoughts, will, and emotions, the seat of knowledge, attitudes, intents, and desires. It is our spirit, the "hidden man of the heart" (1 Peter 3:4).

"Pure" means clean or free from anything that defiles, corrupts, or contaminates. Since Jesus here refers to spiritual purity, then a pure heart must be free from guilt or evil.

James 4:8 – Purify your hearts, you double minded.

Proverbs 4:23 – Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Purity of heart is especially important because the kind of person you really are is determined by your thoughts and attitudes. Outer conduct and speech are determined by inner character. So the "issues of life" – the choices and decisions we make – are determined in the heart.

> The pure of heart are those who have gotten rid of sin's filth, have cleansed themselves of all the pollution of the flesh and have pleased God through works of faith and justice. As David testifies in a psalm, "Who will climb up the Lord's mountain, or who will stand in his holy place? The one with innocent hands and a pure heart, who has not received his soul in vain." [Psalm 24:3,4] And David, rightly knowing that God can be seen only with a pure heart, prays as follows in the psalm, "Create in me a clean heart, O

God, and renew a right spirit within me." [Psalm 51:10] – Chromatius (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Jesus' disciples should not be satisfied just to have purity in outward works and words, but we must start with inward purity. This inward purity must then be reflected in how we act and speak outwardly.

Applications: What will purity of heart mean in our lives?

** One who seeks to be pure in heart must realize the importance of attitudes and motives.*

1 Samuel 16:7 – When Samuel was looking for a king, God said, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature ... For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

1 Chronicles 28:9 – David warned his son Solomon to "know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts." Our attitudes and motives do matter to God.

1 Corinthians 4:5 – When the Lord comes, He will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. An earthly judge can examine your words or deeds, but not your heart. Imagine standing before the Divine Judge who will reveal the innermost secrets of your thoughts and will use them to determine your eternal destiny.

What does God see when He looks into your heart and mine?

(Mark 7:20-23; Matthew 12:34,35; 1 Corinthians 13; James 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 2:23; Jeremiah 11:20; 17:18; Acts 1:24; 5:3,4; Luke 16:5; Matthew 15:7,8; 15:18,19; 23:25-28; 5:27,28; Proverbs 23:7; Nehemiah 4:6; Genesis 6:5; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; Romans 6:17; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 9:7; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Romans 2:25; Hebrews 3:8ff; Psalm 51:10)

** One who seeks to be pure in heart must realize that he can control his thoughts.*

Some people think you can control your speech and deeds, but not your thoughts. The Bible not only says we can control our thoughts, but it requires us to do so.

Proverbs 4:23 – Keep your heart with all diligence for out of the heart spring the issues of life. To change an impure life, we must begin by recognizing where the problem is. We will never get our lives right until we get our hearts right. But the good news is that you can "keep your heart." You can determine what is in your heart.

Colossians 3:2 – Set your ***mind*** on things above, not on things on the earth. We control how our minds are "set."

Philippians 4:8 – Instead of thinking on evil, we must ***meditate*** on what is true, honorable, pure, etc. "Think on these things": ***we can control our thought patterns***.

We may not be able to stop evil thoughts from ***coming*** to our mind. The coming of the thought is a temptation. Whether or not we sin depends on what we do with the thought. Sin comes if we entertain the thought, encourage it, and take pleasure in it. So when we find ourselves thinking, acting, or speaking improperly, we must search our hearts, remove evil thoughts and replace them with pure thoughts.

Matthew 6:21 – Where your treasure is, there will your ***heart*** be also.

Your mind is similar to your stomach: it digests what you feed it. To promote good spiritual health, you must feed your mind on what is pure, not on what is evil. When we continually and unnecessarily feed the mind on evil, it becomes polluted, resulting in evil deeds and words.

Upon what do you allow your heart to feed?

Do you focus your thoughts on wealth, prosperity, and material possessions? Or do you focus on serving God and receiving a home with Him in eternity?

Do you dwell on entertainment that is pornographic, sexually suggestive, or encourages evil thoughts? Or do you pray, study God's word, and meditate on pure words and deeds?

Do you frequent gambling casinos, bars, dance halls, and other places that encourage improper conduct, or do you realize that "evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Jesus teaches, not just that we should have pure hearts, but that we can do so. We are responsible to control the attitudes and influences to which we subject our minds.

(Philippians 2:5; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Proverbs 23:19,17; 23:7; 6:27; Psalm 141:4; Colossians 3:2; Romans 12:2; 8:5,6; 2 Corinthians 10:5; Matthew 13:15; Luke 8:15; (Romans 12:14-21; Luke 6:27,28; Genesis 27:41; Matthew 15:18; 1 Timothy 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Peter 1:22; Matthew 11:29; 1 Peter 3:4,15; Romans 2:5; Matthew 5:28; 6:13; 18:7; Romans 13:14; Ezekiel 36:26)

** One who seeks to be pure in heart must also realize the importance of words and deeds.*

On the other extreme, some people think that attitudes are all that matter. If they claim to have faith or love in their hearts, they think they will be accepted despite living disobedient lives.

Mark 7:20-23 – What comes out of the heart defiles the man: adultery, murder, theft, licentiousness, etc. The inner man matters because sin originates in the inner man. But it isn't just the attitudes that matter. The acts themselves matter: they defile the man.

Matthew 12:34-37 – The mouth speaks from the abundance of the heart. A good heart leads to good speech. An evil heart leads to evil speech. But we will be justified or condemned by our words. One reason our condition of heart matters is that it controls our words and deeds – but our words, deeds, and thoughts all matter.

James 4:8 – To draw near to God we must cleanse our hands ***and*** purify our hearts. Purity of heart is not all that matters. One who has a pure heart will realize that what he does also matters. (Psalms 24:3,4)

1 Peter 1:22 – In order to have pure souls we must obey the truth. You cannot have a pure heart without obedient actions. The two are inseparable in God's plan. Salvation is not a matter of either a good heart or a good life – both are required.

The idea that words and deeds do not matter is itself an impure attitude. God's people must not minimize good words, good deeds, or good thoughts. Those who seek to have pure hearts must realize that all aspects of our lives are important to God.

(2 Corinthians 7:1; Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6; Titus 2:7,14; 3:1,8,14; 2 Timothy 2:21; 3:16,17; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 2:10; James 4:17; Galatians 6:10; Colossians 1:10; Hebrews 13:21)

** One who seeks to be pure in heart must receive forgiveness of sins.*

Honest people must acknowledge that we have not always been pure in heart or conduct. We have all sinned against God. What do we do?

Psalms 51:10 – Create in me a clean ***heart***, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. The heart that has been polluted by sin can yet be cleansed by being forgiven. How can this be done? God's word will tell us.

Have ***faith*** in Jesus: Acts 15:9 – He purifies our hearts by faith.

Repent of sins and determine to live for God: Romans 12:1,2 – Be transformed by ***renewing*** your mind and present your body a living sacrifice to God. (Luke 13:3)

Obey the truth: 1 Peter 1:22 – We purify our souls in obeying the truth.

If you are not yet a child of God, this obedience requires ***baptism*****:** Hebrews 10:22 – Your ***heart*** is cleansed when your body is washed with pure water.

If you are a child of God in sin, ***pray*** for forgiveness: Acts 8:21,22 – Repent and pray that the thought of your ***heart*** may be forgiven.

No one can be pure in heart until his sins have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Has Jesus' blood purified your heart?

(Psalms 119:11; Deuteronomy 6:6; Hebrews 8:10; Proverbs 23:17; Hebrews 4:12; Ezra 7:10; 2 Timothy 2:22; 2 Peter 3:1; Titus 3:1)

The blessing on those who pure in heart

Broadus is quoted as explaining that Oriental monarchs were greatly secluded. It was a great privilege to have a personal face-to-face audience with the king. So, the king's intimate advisors or people who

had access to his presence were spoken of as those who saw the king's face (Esther 1:14). In ancient Persia even Queen Esther feared for her life if she went uninvited into the presence of her own husband as king (Esther 4:11-5:2).

The reward of those who are pure in heart is that they will see God. In what sense is this true?

** We can see God in this life.*

In a sense those who are spiritually minded can see God all around in creation (Romans 1:20), in His blessings to us, and in the life of Christ (John 14:9).

The word "see" is often used in Scripture to refer to understanding and experiencing something personally.

John 3:36 – Those who live in sin shall not see life.

Psalm 16:10 – God would not allow His holy one to see corruption.

John 3:3,5 – Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God – verse 5 explains this to mean he cannot enter the kingdom.

So the pure in heart are the ones who can truly understand and experience what it is like to know God. Like those who have an intimate relationship with a great king, they can have a personal fellowship with Him throughout this life that leads to all the blessings enjoyed by those who are intimate with God.

** We especially seek to see Him in eternity.*

1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:10 – Those who obtain salvation will always be with the Lord and live together with Him.

Revelation 22:4 – God's throne will be there and His servants will serve Him. They shall see His face. This is the ultimate desire of those who are pure in heart.

Do you want to see the Lord in eternity? Being pure in heart is so essential that it determines whether or not we will be with the Lord in eternity.

(Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 3:2,3; 3 John 11)

Observations regarding teaching

Jesus' teachings about mercy and purity of heart may come closer to the kind of teaching many people would expect. Nevertheless, Jesus still did not teach the way people expected nor the way many people today want preachers to preach.

Many people have no desire to be pure at all. Others think all that matters are their actions and maybe their words, but not their hearts. Others think that all that matters are attitudes, not actions or words.

Jesus taught that we must have pure hearts to see God, and that our pure hearts must lead to proper conduct in word and deed. Jesus' teaching leaves no room to neglect words, deeds, or thoughts.

But most people just don't care. As one commentator said, "The worldly person would not give a fig to see God anyway; he had rather have a new Ford" (L.A. Mott).

Let us learn the lessons, both about the ideas Jesus taught, and about the manner He taught.

5:9 – Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

What does it mean to be a peacemaker?

"Peace" refers to a harmonious relationship between persons, freedom from strife or enmity. It also includes the state of calm, safety, or security that results from this harmony. So, a "peacemaker" is one who seeks to bring about peace where strife exists. He acts to reconcile alienated parties.

Some passages about the importance of peace:

Galatians 5:22 – Peace is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

1 Peter 3:10,11 – One who wants to see good days should seek ***peace*** and pursue it.

Ephesians 1:2 – Many epistles begin by wishing grace and peace to the brethren.

(Psalm 119:165)

Applications: What will being a peacemaker mean in our lives?

** A peacemaker should first seek peace between himself and God.*

The Bible describes peace between different groups of individuals. But the most basic and important peace of all is the peace we need between us and God.

John 14:27; 16:33 – Jesus gives peace, not like the world gives. In the world we have tribulation, but Jesus overcame the world so we could have peace. The result is that our hearts do not need to be troubled or afraid.

Note that the world cannot give true peace. No government agency can give it – not the Congress, the President, or the UN. No psychiatrist or self-improvement book, no college course, no friend or family member can give it. It comes only from Jesus.

Romans 5:1 – This peace comes from being justified through Jesus Christ. The problem that ultimately destroys peace with God is sin. That is why peace can come only through Jesus.

Colossians 1:19-23 – Alienation between us and God comes when we violate God's word – "wicked works." This makes us enemies of God, not because He wants enmity, but because He cannot have fellowship with people in sin.

So when we sin, we become alienated as enemies of God. The process of making peace with God is called "reconciliation." When our sins are forgiven, the cause of alienation is removed, so we are presented holy and blameless before God.

Note what peacemaking required. First, God had to act: He sent His Son to die so our sins could be forgiven. This explains why only Jesus

can give this peace: it must come through the blood of cross. Then we must act to meet the conditions of forgiveness. Other passages show this requires faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. Then it requires continuing steadfast in the faith, not moved away from the hope of the gospel.

Philippians 4:6,7 – When sins are forgiven, we have the privilege of prayer so we need not be anxious but can have the peace that passes understanding. Peace with God gives peace within.

Peace with God is the most important peace, but it can always be achieved. We may not always be able to achieve peace with other people, depending on their attitudes. But peace with God is always achievable, because He is always willing to forgive. It depends entirely on our willingness to repent and meet the terms of forgiveness.

The most important peace you will ever make is peace between you and God. But you must be willing to turn from sin and dedicate your life to serving God.

(Romans 15:13; 14:17; Luke 2:14; Isaiah 59:1,2; Ephesians 2:12ff)

** A peacemaker should then seek peace between other people and God.*

If we care about other people, we want them to have this peace with God.

Isaiah 57:20,21 – God says there is no peace for the wicked. They are like a troubled sea that cannot rest. Guilt alienates men from God, destroys our peace of mind, and gives fear of judgment and eternal torment. We are tossed about like a sea in a hurricane. When sin is forgiven, the troubled sea is calmed like Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

Luke 1:77-79 – Jesus came to give the knowledge of salvation by remission of sins, to give light to those in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. All people can have that peace by following the way of peace.

Acts 10:36 – The word of God preaches peace through Jesus Christ. This is the gospel message that should be preached to everyone on earth (Mark 16:15,16). We can lead others to peace by teaching them about remission of sins so they can follow the way of peace.

Do you know people who need this peace: friends, loved ones, neighbors, co-workers, fellow-students? The best way you can ever be a peacemaker for others is by telling them the saving message of the gospel.

(Romans 8:6,7; 10:15; Ephesians 6:15; 2:13-19; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

** A peacemaker seeks peace between children of God.*

Mark 9:50 – Have peace with one another. If I have peace with God and you have peace with God, then we should have peace with one

another. The best way to have peace with another person is if we both have peace with God.

Ephesians 4:3-6 – Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Peace and unity go together and are based on God's plan for oneness. Unfortunately, God's people sometimes have strife because some fail to maintain the truth in one or more of the areas listed. God gives the platform for peace and unity, but He requires us to "endeavor to keep" that unity and peace.

2 Timothy 2:22 – Pursue peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Peace does not happen by chance. We must "pursue" it. Diligent effort is required.

Sometimes peace is broken by doctrinal differences. But often it results from a conflict of personalities or personal opinions. One wants things done one way, another wants them done another way. One has a personality trait that is not really wrong but just rubs another brother the wrong way. God expects those who serve Him to bear with one another and have peace despite such differences. But this takes effort. We must "pursue" that peace.

A true peacemaker must be firmly committed to peace among God's people. If others go into error, he seeks their restoration. He works for peace on the basis of God's word, and never wants his own will or opinions to be the cause of strife.

(Romans 14:19; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; James 3:17,18; 1 Corinthians 14:33)

** A peacemaker seeks peace with all other people.*

Hebrews 12:14 – Pursue peace with ***all*** men, not just with Christians.

Romans 12:18 – As much as depends on you, live peaceably with ***all*** men. With some people peace may not be possible, but we should always seek peace. And we should not cause alienation by our improper attitudes or motives.

Proverbs 20:3 – It is honorable for a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel. Anybody can cause trouble. All you have to do is to start arguing about something. Some people like to start arguments. Some like to do it in Bible studies. Any fool can do that. What takes wisdom and self-control is learning how to ***solve*** conflicts in harmony with God's word. Jesus' disciples must seek peace and be willing to follow God's word to achieve it with all around us.

** A peacemaker seeks truth and righteousness even above peace.*

In the very next beatitude after this one, Jesus said people may persecute us and speak all kinds of evil against us. That does not sound like peace is possible with all men. There are limits on our willingness to pursue peace.

John 16:33 – Jesus gives peace, but the world gives tribulation. Worldly people may oppose us despite the fact we do right and

sometimes ***because*** we do right. In such cases, we are not responsible for the conflict, and we should not compromise truth just to have peace.

Matthew 10:34-37 – After all this teaching about peace, Jesus said He came to bring strife and conflict instead of peace! He came to set close family members against one another, so one's enemies may be people in his own household. Sometimes our dearest loved ones will oppose our stand for the gospel. When this happens, we must not compromise Jesus' will. Whoever loves father or mother more than Jesus is not worthy of Him.

James 3:16-18 – The wisdom from God leads us to be peaceable and willing to yield. The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. But we must be ***first*** pure, ***then*** peaceable. Important as peace is, truth is more important.

Romans 12:18 – If it is possible, as much as depends on ***you***, live peaceably with all men.

The lives of Jesus, John the Baptist, the apostles, etc., involved continual conflict with people in error. There can be no peace between truth and error, so there can be no peace between God's servants and those who oppose the gospel.

Peace is a major goal. Some seem to think it is the only true goal, and we should compromise anything to achieve it. But we must not sacrifice our stand for God's will in order to have peace. Nevertheless, it must not to be our improper conduct or attitudes that cause the problems.

The blessing on peacemakers

Peacemakers will be called "sons of God."

God is often called the God of peace, because only He can give true peace.

1 Corinthians 14:33 – God is not the author of confusion but of peace.

2 Corinthians 13:11 – If we are of one mind and live in peace, the God of love and peace will be with us.

A son imitates his father. The Bible often calls people "sons" of someone, because they imitate his character. Some are sons of the devil because they follow his will (John 8:44). Jesus said being a peacemaker makes us like God, so He calls us "sons of God."

Are you a son of God? Have you been forgiven of your sins so you can be part of his family, the church? If so, to be one of His true sons, you must work for true peace.

(Romans 15:33)

Observations regarding teaching

People tend to admire peacemakers, but they have mistaken concepts of how to achieve peace. They often think Christians should

seek peace by tolerating everything people do, no matter what God's word says. That's the kind of teacher many people think Jesus was.

I read about a mega-church that required its leaders to teach and practice that marriage would be only between one man and one woman. The founder of that church objected because he founded the church on tolerance, acceptance, and positive thinking.

That's the kind of preaching many people prefer: talk about pleasant things but don't say people are wrong. But you don't have to read much about Jesus' real life and teaching to know that He never compromised truth for the sake of peace, even if it meant people would kill Him.

5:10-12 – Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. When people revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for the sake of Jesus, rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets in the past.

What does it mean to be persecuted?

"Persecute" means to pursue, harass, trouble or molest, to cause harm, hardship, difficulty, affliction, or suffering for someone because we dislike who or what they are.

"Revile" means to speak abusively, berate, disparage, or reproach. Jesus explained it to mean saying all kinds of evil falsely.

Note the contrast to the previous beatitude. Even when we seek peace, we may instead find persecution.

Applications: What will persecution mean in our lives?

** Those who are blessed are those who suffer for **righteousness'** sake.*

Evil is spoken of them ***falsely*** for ***Jesus'*** sake.

1 Peter 4:12-16 – Do not suffer as an evildoer. Rejoice if you partake of Christ's sufferings or are reproached for the name of Christ. If you suffer as a Christian, glorify God in this matter.

1 Peter 2:19,20 – What credit is it to suffer for your faults? But if you do good and suffer, this is commendable before God.

Sometimes when criminals or terrorists get caught and punished or when homosexuals and other immoral people are rebuked for their sins, they claim they are victims of persecution. But they are not suffering for righteousness' sake. They are suffering the consequences of evil. There is no blessing in any such suffering. When we suffer, make sure it is for doing good, not evil.

(1 Peter 3:17)

** God's people should expect such persecution.*

2 Timothy 3:12 – All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Expect it! Persecution comes because people in sin

do not like to be around godly people. Our example and teaching pricks their conscience. So, they try to silence us.

This persecution may take various forms:

They may ***argue*** to try to prove us wrong – Matthew 19:3-9; 22:15-22; 22:23-33; Acts 6:8-10. (Matthew 21:23-46; John 5,7,8,10,11; Acts 4:5-12; 5:27-32; 9:20-22,28-30; 13:6-12,45; 17:2-4; 19:9; 22:1-22; 24:1-21; 25:6-12; 28:23-28).

They may ***try to get us to sin*** so they feel justified when they sin – Numbers 22:12-17; Matthew 4:1-11. (Genesis 39:7-18; James 1:13-15; 1 John 2:15-17).

They may ***verbally abuse*** us (mockery, slander, lies, false accusations, name-calling). They may accuse us of sin, lack of love, hypocrisy, false teaching, etc. They hope this makes us feel guilty so we hush, or it discredits our reputation so they themselves don't look so bad – Luke 6:22,26; Matthew 26:59-68; 27:27-31,39-44; 1 Peter 4:3,4 (1 Kings 18:17; Hebrews 11:36).

They may use ***pressure tactics*** to silence us (financial pressure, legal actions, threats, refusal to associate, loss of possessions, etc.) – Acts 4:14-22; Luke 6:22. (Matthew 10:17; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; Acts 17:5-9,13; Hebrews 10:34; 11:37,38)

They may resort to ***physical force and violence*** (imprisonment, beating, even death) – Daniel 3 & 6; Matthew 14:1-12; chap 26 & 27. (Hebrews 11:35-38; 1 John 3:11-13; Acts 7:54-60; 4:3,21; 5:18,40).

John 15:19,20; 16:1-4 – If we were like the world, worldly people would not hate us. If they persecuted Jesus, they will persecute us too. Jesus warns us of this so we will know ahead of time what to expect.

If we are not mentally prepared, we may stumble when persecution comes. If we think Christians should have easy lives with no problems, our faith may be shaken when harm comes. But if we remember that Jesus predicted it, we can prepare for it.

Jesus promises that His people will face opposition. Bible history confirms this. Sometimes it is more severe than at other times. But Christians will be opposed for serving God.

(Matthew 10:22,34-37; 1 Thessalonians 3:3,4; Acts 14:22; 1 Peter 4:12; Matthew 23:34; Acts 6:8-7:60; 8:1-3; 9:23-25,29,30; chapter 12; 13:50; 14:2,5,6,19; 16:19-24; 18:12-17; 19:23-41; 21:27-23:10; 23:12-35; 25:1-5; 28:16-31; Luke 11:47-51; Matthew 10:17,21; 2 Corinthians 11:23-27; Acts 9:1,2,4; 22:4-8; 26:10,11,14,15; John 3:19,20; 5:16-18; 16:2; 12:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; Matthew 24:9-13)

** Those who are persecuted can and must remain faithful despite persecution.*

Matthew 10:22 – You will be hated of all men, but he who endures to the end will be saved.

Matthew 10:28,32,33 – Do not fear those who can only kill the body, but fear Him who can destroy body and soul in hell. Do not deny Christ or He will deny us. But if we continue to confess Him, He will confess us.

Acts 5:29, 40-42 – We must obey God, rather than men, and continue to preach truth.

Persecutors hope that suffering will cause us to fall or at least to cease preaching the gospel. Jesus' blessing is not for those who simply suffer persecution, but for those who remain faithful.

How do we know we can remain faithful? "So they persecuted the prophets who were before you." God's faithful servants throughout all ages have endured without denying Jesus or turning from the truth. We can and must endure as they did if we seek the blessing of God.

(1 Peter 3:14-17; Matthew 13:21; 1 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:3,4; Acts 8:1-5; 1 Peter 3:13-18; 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:11,12; 3:12,14; Romans 8:35-39)

* *Those who are persecuted should defend the truth but not seek personal vengeance.*

1 Peter 3:15 – Be ready to give a defense, even in persecution (verses 14-17). If you give Bible proof but people ridicule, then they are not really opposing you. They are opposing God's word!

Do this with meekness and fear. Do not react with self-righteous pride simply trying to win an argument. Oppose the sin while loving the sinner: sincerely try to persuade them to repent and serve the Lord.

1 Peter 2:21-23 – Follow the example of Jesus. Despite terrible opposition and suffering, He did not sin. He did not harm or even threaten to harm those who persecuted Him. He often told them they were wrong, but He did not seek personal vengeance.

Romans 12:14,17-21 – Do not curse those who persecute you, but bless them. Do not repay evil for evil, but return good for evil, and leave vengeance in God's hands. We may flee or appeal to civil authorities for protection, but we should not seek personal vengeance against those who oppose the truth (Romans 13:1-6; Acts 21:27-40; 22:22-30; 23:10-35; 25:1-12).

Acts 5:29-32 – This does not mean we fail to tell people their error. Sin should be rebuked, including the sin of persecuting God's people. But speak from a desire to lead them to repent.

So the person least likely to be swayed by persecution is the person who:

(1) Has the truth, and

(2) Knows ***why*** he believes as he does and can defend his position with the Bible, and

(3) Expects opposition, but has the answers ready when it comes.

(Matthew 4:1-11; Acts 7:51-60; 23:1-5; Luke 23:34; 1 Corinthians 4:12,13; Matthew 5:43-45; 1 Kings 8:18; John 18:19-23)

The blessing on those who are persecuted

Why should we rejoice and be exceedingly glad?

** So they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake are in good company!

James 5:10 – Take the prophets as an example of suffering and patience. They suffered for God, but were patient, continuing to stand for God's truth. If they did it, we can do it.

Persecution is a testimony to our influence for good! Sinful people don't bother to persecute other sinners or even negligent, indifferent church members. The very fact people bother to oppose us shows that our lives and teaching are having an impact! (Luke 5:26)

Hebrews 12:1-4 – Faithful people of God have suffered every imaginable persecution (11:35-40). They become a great cloud of witnesses urging us to run with patience the race before us. Especially Jesus, who endured the cross and the opposition of enemies, becomes an example we should consider lest we become weary and discouraged. If they were faithful, we can be faithful!

(Acts 7:52,54-60; 8:1-4; 20:18-20,23,24; 2 Corinthians 11:23-27; 1 Peter 2:21-23; Acts 5:41; 1 Peter 5:8,9)

** Great is your reward in heaven.*

Here is clear proof that heaven is the reward for God's faithful servants. We have seen that all faithful Christians will be persecuted. But those who are persecuted for righteousness sake will receive a great reward in heaven. Those who claim that our reward will be on this physical earth, but not in heaven, are here demonstrated to be mistaken.

Mark 13:13 – He who endures to the end will be saved.

Romans 8:16-18 – The suffering we endure here cannot compare to the glory afterward.

1 Peter 1:3-7 – Now we are grieved by manifold trials. But when Jesus is revealed, we will receive an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven.

Revelation 2:10 – The Christians at Smyrna faced severe tribulation. But Jesus promised that, if they were faithful until death, He would give them a crown of life.

The one point that most needs to be emphasized to suffering Christians is that ***it's worth it.*** Troubles are temporary. No matter how much we suffer, soon we will receive a reward far greater than any problem we can endure. What price are you willing to pay to please God and receive His eternal reward?

(2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Luke 21:19; 1 Peter 4:12-16; 1:3-9; Philippians 1:28,29; 2 Timothy 1:12; Revelation 2:10; Matthew 13:44-46; Romans 8:35-39; 5:3-5; Hebrews 6:15; 10:32-39; 13:12-14; 2 Timothy 2:8-13; 1:12; John 14:1-3; Matthew 10:28-33,22; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-9; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 4:12-16; Mark 10:30; Acts 5:41; James 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Corinthians 7:4)

Observations regarding teaching

If you were to make a list of your blessings, what would you include? Health? Physical necessities? Freedoms? The church? Family? Of course all of these really are blessings from God.

However, look at the characteristics that Jesus said God blesses: poverty of spirit, grieving over sin, meekness, suffering persecution, etc. Many things in Jesus' list most people would consider to not be blessings at all. Others would not be high on their list.

Jesus did not teach the way people expected Him to, nor the way many people today want preachers to preach. He often did not emphasize the "feel good" things people like to hear about. Instead, He often pointed out people's failings and need to change. But He always showed that people could and should live lives that please the Father in heaven.

His preaching did not make people feel comfortable about who they are or what they have. It emphasized making people better. He taught people to repent of sin and then improve in God's service.

Let us learn the lessons, both about the ideas He taught, and about the way in which He taught.

The Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World – 5:13-16

5:13-16 – You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its flavor how will it be seasoned? It is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Men do not light a lamp and put it under a basket but on a lampstand so it gives light throughout the house. Let your light shine so men may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Having discussed the blessings we have as disciples, Jesus next discussed our influence as disciples. Consider some lessons we can learn.

Jesus used two examples to illustrate our influence: salt and light.

** Salt has influence – verse 13*

By itself salt is essentially worthless. Its usefulness consists almost entirely of its influence on other things.

Salt flavors food, improving the taste. But people rarely eat salt by itself for its own sake. ("What are we having for dinner tonight, dear?" "We're having baked salt!")

Salt is a preservative that prevents other foods (such as meats) from decaying and spoiling. Likewise, by their influence Christians help preserve people around them from spiritual decay and corruption.

"With the Dead Sea only 90 miles south, salt was a common commodity in the area and well known for its flavor and preservative qualities." – *Archaeology Study Bible*, page 1377.

The value of salt lies entirely in its influence on other things. So Jesus taught that Christians must be an influence for good.

** Light has influence*

Because light is so powerful, it is often used to illustrate powerful forces in the Bible.

1 John 1:5 – God is light.

John 1:9 – Jesus was the Light that gives true light to men. (John 8:12; 1:4; 12:35,46; 9:5)

Psalms 119:105 – God's word is a light to our path.

Acts 26:18 – Saul was sent to teach Gentiles to turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God. So light illustrates the power of God.

Matthew 5:14 – Jesus said Christians are the light of the world. Our influence is such a powerful force that Jesus compared it to the ultimate physical source of energy in the universe.

Light is the source of nearly all energy we use on earth. Sunlight directly warms the earth. It causes plants to grow; animals get energy by eating the plants; we burn wood or wood products for heat and fuel.

Light evaporates water which falls as rain, as the rainwater flows to the ocean, we harness the rivers with dams to make electricity.

Light is essential to life. Besides providing the source of energy to do work, light is essential to our growth. Most forms of life use light to see and function.

Light is essential for many forms of information and guidance. We need light so we can see to move about and accomplish work. Most useful tasks are performed in light. This is why people naturally sleep at night; when it becomes daylight, we work. If we work at night, we need artificial light to function.

The influence of light is so essential that without it we could not exist or function.

Do we realize and appreciate the power of our influence?

[The city on the hill may be viewed as a third illustration.]

Everybody has influence – good or bad.

We are like a city sitting on a hill that cannot be hidden – verse 14.

Many people know that elders, preachers, and teachers need to set good examples. But sometimes people think they don't have much influence: if they do good, it won't help people much, and if they do evil, it won't hurt people much.

We may even hope people will not notice what we do. We slip into assembly at the last minute (or even late), sit in a corner, then slip out right after dismissal (or even before). We hope nobody calls on us or gives us a job. If we miss, we hope nobody notices and asks us where we were. We want to be members, but with no responsibility.

Jesus said the city set on a hill cannot be hid. You always have influence. If you are a Christian, people watch you.

Hebrews 11:4 – How many things do we remember about Abel? We know that Cain killed Abel, but the only thing we know that Abel himself ever did was offer an acceptable sacrifice. Yet he, being dead, ***still speaks***. His influence still lives on to this day.

When someone does wrong, we may say, "He just destroyed his influence." Not really: you can't destroy influence. You can change it from good to bad, but you will always have influence.

Instead of thinking that church leaders are the only ones who need to set good examples, we should all realize that we do have influence. We are responsible to make sure we set a good example to those around us. Let ***your*** light so shine that men may see ***your*** good works.

(Ecclesiastes 10:1; Hebrews 6:11,12; 13:7; 1 Kings 22:52,53; Hebrews 12:15,16; Jas 5:10,11).

Consider some specific groups we should try to influence:

* We should be a good influence in the church.

1 Timothy 4:12 – Be an example to those who believe.

Acts 9:36-39 – Dorcas was full of good works and charitable deeds. When she died, people wept and remembered the good she had done.

Sometimes women think they don't have much influence because they can't lead in church meetings or serve as elders or preachers. Remember Dorcas.

Everybody has influence. Sometime you and I too will die. When we do, what kind of influence will live on among the Christians whom we have known?

* We should be a good influence in our homes.

Some church members put on a good front around other Christians, but what about in the privacy of our own homes? Do we show a different side to our character?

1 Peter 3:1,2 – A Christian woman needs to set a good example for her husband, being in subjection and dressing modestly. Even if her husband is not a Christian, he might be won by her conduct. Instead of using the failures of our spouse as an excuse to do wrong ourselves, we must accept the responsibility to do right anyway and set a good example.

2 Timothy 1:5 – Timothy had faith, but it first dwelt in his grandmother and mother. Children develop attitudes, habits, and characteristics – good or bad – by the influence of parents. Years after parents have died, we often see in the children the same characteristics the parents possessed. Sometimes parents set a bad example and their children may never serve God faithfully. Other parents are faithful and zealous, and often their children continue faithful long after the parents die: maybe many generations are faithful.

When your children grow up, if they follow your example, will they be what God wants them to be? Will they receive eternal life at the Judgment?

* We should be a good influence in the world.

Again, some church members really shine their lights around other members. But when they are around other people, what then?

Matthew 5:14-16 – You are the light of the ***world*** (not just other disciples). The light should be put on a stand so it gives light to ***all***. Some members don't show much concern about their example around people in sin. They may think, "Those people will criticize no matter what I do." But Jesus said to set a good example for the world.

1 Peter 2:11,12; 3:15,16 – We are directly commanded to be concerned about our influence on people who speak against us! If we abstain from fleshly lusts and live a good life, they will be put to shame and may be led to glorify God. Yes, people around us will criticize. But that is all the more reason to set a good example!

I once heard of a young Christian who went on a business trip with other employees. When the others insisted on stopping at a bar to eat, he walked down the street to a restaurant. Sometime later another co-worker asked to study the Bible with this young man because he said he knew that young man lived his faith: it wasn't just a show.

What about your light when you are on the job, at school, shopping, with relatives or neighbors? How diligent are you to make sure your life displays the kind of life Jesus lived?

(Philippians 2:15,16; Titus 2:7,8; 1 Thessalonians 4:11,12)

Jesus' disciples can lose their good influence.

You cannot lose your influence, but you can be a bad influence instead of a good influence.

Matthew 5:13,15 – Men don't light a lamp and cover it. Salt that loses its saltiness is worthless and is thrown out.

We can hide our light or lose our saltiness by leading others to sin.

Luke 17:1,2 – One who causes offense to others would be better off thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck.

What is an "offense"? "Occasion of stumbling" (ASV); "temptation to sin" (RSV); NKJV footnotes: "stumbling blocks" and "cause … to stumble"; "things that cause people to sin" (NIV). The original idea is the trigger of a trap: the part to which the bait it attached and sets off the trap to ensnare an animal. An offense is temptation that tends to lead someone to commit sin.

The passage describes the spiritual state of the one who ***causes*** the temptation. The person who is tempted may or may not actually commit the sin. If he does, there is no excuse for him. But the point is that the one who caused the temptation is himself sinning. Such temptations will come, but woe to the man by whom they come.

Joshua 14:8 (Numbers 13:25ff) – Of the twelve spies who were sent into Canaan, ten brought back an evil report and "made the heart of the people melt." As a result, the people refused to take the land, and the whole nation wandered forty years in the wilderness till that generation died, except for the two faithful spies. Evil influence can have serious effects.

2 Samuel 11:2-4 – Bathsheeba was bathing where she could be seen. David, king of God's people, saw her, wanted her, and committed adultery with her. From that act came conception, the death of the woman's husband, the death of the baby, and from then on David's family endured war with his enemies and conflict within his family.

Never belittle the power that the appearance of a woman can have. Some women think no harm will come if they wear swimsuits, low-cut tops, short skirts, shorts, or halters where men will see them. Even if no physical adultery results, remember that lustful thoughts in the heart are adultery in God's eyes (Matthew 5:28).

There was no excuse for David. But there was also no excuse for the woman who started the problem by improper clothing. If a godly man like David could be influenced for evil by a woman's appearance, what makes us think immodest apparel is not a problem today?

God wants us to be an influence for good, not for harm. Have we hidden our lights and lost our saltiness because our conduct has tempted others to sin?

(Genesis 3:6; 1 Kings 21:25; 2 Kings 17:22; 21:9; 2 Chronicles 22:3,4; Proverbs 28:10; Mal 2:6-9; Matthew 14:6-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-12; Romans 2:23,24; Matthew 18:6-9; Galatians 5:7-9; Hebrews 12:15; Proverbs 28:10; 1 Corinthians 5:6; Matthew 16:6,12)

We can hide our light or lose our saltiness by indifference and neglect.

Revelation 3:15,16 – The church of Laodicea was neither cold not hot but lukewarm, so Jesus said He would spew them out of His mouth.

Some people may not commit immorality or open evil, but neither are they doing useful works of service. Their example actually leads others to think they don't have to work either.

Sometimes we hide our light simply by refusing to stand up for what is right. We may apologize for our convictions rather than explaining them and persuading others to accept the truth. We may be involved in conversations where error is openly defended yet we make no effort to defend the truth.

We may think, "Maybe I am not a good influence, but as least I am not a ***bad*** influence." But there is no such thing as a neutral influence. There is no middle ground. If people are not a good influence, Jesus said they should be thrown out!

When I was young, people sometimes said about a person, "He is just good for nothing." That's what Jesus said about people who do not have an influence for good: they are good for nothing. They are like salt to be tossed out and trampled on.

It is not a question of whether you will influence others. It is just a question of whether your influence will be good or bad. What would Jesus think of your influence if He lived with you for a typical day in your life? Would He say you are hiding your light and losing your saltiness, or would He say your light is on the lampstand so its can give light to all in the house?

To be a good influence disciples must do good works.

Matthew 5:16 – Men should see our good works and glorify our Father.

* *Good words are needed but are not enough to be salt and light.*

Titus 2:7,8 – We should show an example of ***good works and sound speech.*** Sound speech is essential, but it does no good if not coupled with a good life. Sometimes members wonder why we don't convert more people. In some cases we may be doing nothing wrong; maybe it's all the fault of the people we try to convert. But sometimes the problem is that we try to attract people by good words, while they observe indifference, negligence, or even sinful conduct in our works.

Romans 2:18-21,23,24 – The Jews knew God's will and thought they could tell other people all about how to live their lives. They would rebuke others firmly for not living right. Yet, they themselves dishonored God by their lives.

Matthew 25:21,23 – The basis of our reward in judgment will be "***well done,***" not "well said." "Well done is better than well said," because well done is so much harder to accomplish than well said. Some people know what's right and talk enthusiastically about it. But living it is another matter.

Many people talk enthusiastically about how they really intend to obey. They may even attend some church meetings. They profess to believe and repent. They may confess and be baptized, but soon they're gone. It's much easier to talk good religion than to practice it.

Some members will talk about how important it is to know God's word, but then they often miss Bible study periods. They pray zealously for the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church, but they themselves rarely seek opportunities to study with the lost.

(Matthew 23:3,4; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 3:1,2; Acts 9:36-43; 1 Peter 2:21,22; Matthew 25:21,23; 1 Timothy 5:10; Matthew 21:28-31; 1 Samuel 15:13-23)

* *So proper influence requires good works along with proper teaching*.

1 Timothy 4:12 – We should be an example in ***word***, manner of ***life*****,** etc. This covers every aspect of life. If we live good lives, we encourage others to want to live good too.

1 Peter 2:12 – Have your ***conduct*** seemly so people may glorify God by the ***good works*** they ***behold***. If we seek to convince sinners that we can help them leave spiritual darkness, it is not enough to just teach them they are in error – even though that must be done. We must show by our lives the way God wants His people to live.

John 13:34 – Jesus commands us to love one another as He loved us. He taught us how to love by giving a perfect example of love. He loved so much that He gave the supreme sacrifice – His life (John 15:13).

1 Peter 2:21-24 – Jesus went everywhere preaching the gospel. But He also lived everywhere the perfect example of what He taught. His teaching combined with His example has changed the lives of millions throughout history. Selfish, sinful people have become loving, dedicated servants of God.

If we wish to be salt and light in a dying world, we must learn to be like Him. We will never be effective in converting the lost by teaching alone. And we will never be effective in converting the lost by example alone. Evangelism is effective only when good instruction is combined with good example, as in the case of our Savior.

The story is told of a young girl who died. Other children wanted to write an epitaph for her tombstone. They wrote: "It was easier to be good

when she was around." What about our influence? When you or I are around, do we make it easier for people to be good? Are other people encouraged to be better people when they observe our lives?

(1 Timothy 5:9,10; Proverbs 22:1; 1 Timothy 4:12; Philippians 2:15; 2 Kings 15:3,34; John 13:15; 2 Corinthians 8:21; Titus 2:7,8; 1 Peter 2:12,21,22; Hebrews 10:24; 11:4; 1 Peter 3:1,2)

The goal of our influence should be to glorify the Father.

Matthew 5:16 – Men should see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven.

Some people do good to receive praise of men.

Matthew 6:1 – Some people do good works, but only if it will result in people praising them. We must do good, but for the purpose of pleasing God (verse 1).

Verses 2-4 – Some people give money if people will honor them, name a building after them, or put their picture in the paper. Jesus said to do good without letting one hand know what the other does. The goal is to do good for the sake of helping others and to honor the Father, not to exalt us before people.

The same principle can be applied to all good works. If the work needs done, do we do it even if few people will know? Do we try to help others find out what we did, or do we keep quiet unless there is a good reason for people to know? If others do find out, is that the thing that's important to us, or is it the fact that we met a need and pleased God?

Our influence reflects on our Father.

We should not do good for the sake of receiving honor from people. But if we live for God, people will notice that we are different. You don't have to tell people; if you live right, they'll know. If we don't live right, they will probably find that out too. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.

1 Timothy 6:1 – Servants should count masters worthy of honor that the name and doctrine of God not be blasphemed. When Christians on the job are lazy, disrespectful, complaining, and negligent, people think, "He says he's a Christian, but you'd never know by the way he acts." But a loyal, hard-working employee will cause people to realize that being a Christian is worthwhile.

2 Samuel 12:14 – David's sin with Bathsheeba gave God's enemies cause to blaspheme.

Romans 2:23,24 – When God's people do not live good lives, God is dishonored and His name blasphemed.

1 Peter 2:12 – On the other hand, if we do live good lives, people may try to find fault; but when instead they see our good works, they will be led to glorify God.

You ***do*** have an influence, either good or bad. When people see your conduct, are they led to glorify God and want to serve Him better, or are they driven away from God and led to think they are just as well off in sin?

(Titus 2:4,5; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Isaiah 52:5)

Jesus' Respect for the Law - 5:17-20

5:17,18 – Jesus did not come to destroy the Law or the Prophets, but to fulfill. Till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle would pass away till all was fulfilled.

These verses at first cause confusion for some. When Jesus said He did not come to destroy the law, some conclude that He did not remove it. So it must still be in effect. But consider:

Other passages show that Jesus did remove the Old Testament at the cross.

Surely Jesus' teaching here did not contradict the teaching of other passages on the subject. But many other passages show that Jesus did in fact remove the Old Testament so that it ceased to be binding when He died on the cross.

Hebrews chapters 7-10

Hebrews 7:11-14,18 – The law allowed priests only of the tribe of Levi. But it predicted Christ would be a priest, though of the tribe of Judah (Psalm 110:4). This required that the law be ***changed*** (verse 12) and ***annulled*** (verse 18).

Hebrews 8:6-13 – Jeremiah 31:31-34 predicted God would make a ***new covenant*** different from the one He made with Israel when He led them out of Egypt. When Christ established this new covenant (verse 6), the first was ***obsolete*** and ***vanished away*** (verse 13). This did not contradict the Old Testament, but fulfilled it.

Hebrews 10:1-18 – Animal sacrifices under the first covenant could not completely take away sin (verses 4,11). Jesus died as the sacrifice of the new covenant to completely forgive sin (verses 12,17). So Christ ***took away*** the first will and established the second (verses 9,10). This did not contradict God's will but harmonized with it (verses 7,9).

This is how the law was weak and unprofitable: it told men they were sinners but could not permanently forgive them (7:11,18; 8:6,7). The law was not a mistake. It had a purpose, but a temporary one. When the new law came, the old had fulfilled its purpose. It was removed because it was no longer needed.

2 Corinthians 3:6-11

Again, the Old Testament (verse 14) is contrasted to the new covenant (verse 6). The old was a ministration of death, because it proved men deserved death. Yet it came with glory. The new covenant is a ministration of righteousness and is more glorious (verse 9).

Verse 11 – That which was glorious (the old covenant – verse 7) was ***passing away,*** so that which has more glory (the new covenant) may remain. What was done away was, not just the glory (verse 7), but ***that which was glorious (verse 11)*** – the Old Testament itself.

Galatians chapters 3-5

4:21 – Paul spoke to those who ***desired to be under the law***. So "under" law here means subject to it or under obligation to obey it (see 4:4). (Compare 1 Corinthians 9:20,21; Matthew 8:9; Romans 3:19.) He contrasts being under the law to salvation by faith in Christ under the gospel (1:11,12; 3:26-28).

3:24,25; 5:18 – The law was a tutor to bring us to Christ. But now that faith in Christ has come, we are ***no longer under the tutor*** – i.e., we are not under the law (5:18). We are freed, not just from condemnation, but from the law itself, which was the tutor.

5:1-6 – So those who seek to be under the old law (4:21) are entangled in a yoke of bondage (verse 1), Christ profits them ***nothing*** (verse 2), and they are ***estranged*** from Christ (verse 4). They are ***fallen from grace*** (verse 4).

Romans 7:1-6

Again Paul contrasts the gospel to the Old Testament. The law showed men were guilty of sin (3:20,23). But God did not want all men lost, so He offered the gospel (1:16).

7:2,3 – Illustration: a woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives, so if she marries another man she is an adulteress. She can remarry only if her husband has died.

7:4-6 – Likewise, we are ***dead to the law and delivered from it*** (discharged – ASV; released – NASB), just like the woman was released from the law of the husband who died (verse 2).

When the husband dies, the woman can be joined to a different man; so we are now joined to Christ. ***We are not subject to both the Old Testament and the law of Christ***. We have a different law, just like the woman has "another man." Following both laws at once would be spiritual adultery, like the woman having two husbands at once!

So we are "***not under the law***" – 6:14.

Colossians 2:13-17

Paul tells uncircumcised Gentiles (verse 13) *not to allow people to condemn them for not keeping the Old Law* (verse 16). The reason is that Christ ***wiped out*** the handwriting of requirements (ordinances) and ***took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross***.

Matthew 5:17,18 likewise teaches that the law would be removed when it was fulfilled.

Matthew 5:17-20 does not contradict the teaching of the above passages. It teaches the same conclusion in a way that emphasizes Jesus' respect for the law.

Not one jot or tittle would pass from the law till all was fulfilled.

Jot and tittle refer to the tiniest parts of the Greek language. They are equivalent to our expression, "dotting every 'i' and crossing every 't'." So Jesus refers to the smallest details of the law. This is what He said would not pass away till all was fulfilled.

So, if the law is still in effect, ***then the whole law still stands***: every jot and tittle, including animal sacrifices, circumcision, etc. This includes both the law and prophets (verse 17), even the least commandments (verse 19). "The law and the prophets" is a standard expression referring to the whole Old Testament.

So, if Jesus meant that He did ***not*** remove it, then He did not remove ***any*** of it – not even the smallest part. In which case it is all in effect. But no thinks He meant that because it clearly contradicts all the above passages. On the other hand, if Jesus is saying that He ***did*** remove the law, then He removed it ***all:*** every jot and tittle, the law and the prophets, even the least commands.

Luke 16:17 explains that "till heaven and earth pass away" means "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away." So, it would be easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for the law to pass away "***till all be fulfilled***" (verse 18). But Jesus came to fulfill it! ***So the passage actually teaches that all the law passed away when Jesus fulfilled it.***

"Pass (away)" means to lose force or become invalid.

Compare the similar language in Matthew 24:34 – This generation would not "pass away" till all things Jesus prophesied would be fulfilled. When all had been fulfilled, the generation could pass away. So Matthew 5:17,18 means the law could pass away when Jesus had fulfilled it.

In Matthew 5:18, what it means for heaven and earth to "pass away" is what it means for the law to "pass away" (identical words in Greek). When all is fulfilled, the law could "pass away."

"Pass away in the sense of lose force, become invalid … Matthew 5:18b" – Arndt & Gingrich (on Gr. παρερχομαι).

But Jesus did fulfill all.

Matthew 5:17 – The law could not pass away till He fulfilled all, but He came to fulfill it.

Luke 24:44-47 – All things must be fulfilled that were written in the law and the prophets concerning Jesus. (John 1:45; Acts 24:14)

Acts 13:29 – All that was written concerning Him was fulfilled.

No part of the law could pass away till all was fulfilled. We have proved that it has been fulfilled, so all of it passed away: every jot and tittle, including the Sabbath, the Ten Commands, etc.

A contract can become void illegally by destroying it or legally by fulfilling it.

If you hire me to build a house for a fee, it would be illegal to ***destroy*** the contract. But if we ***fulfill*** the contract (I build the house and you pay me), it would no longer be binding.

Genesis 6:18,22; 7:5 – God made a covenant to spare Noah if he built the ark. Both Noah and God fulfilled their parts of the covenant, so it is no longer in effect.

Genesis 17:9-14; 21:1-4; Leviticus 12:3 – Circumcision was a covenant between God and Abraham's descendants. The covenant is no longer in effect (1 Corinthians 7:18-20; Galatians 5:6; 6:15). Did God "destroy" the covenant? No, but He did remove it.

Matthew 5:17,18 – So God made a covenant with Israel at Sinai, including the Ten Commands and Sabbath and the whole law. Jesus did not come to destroy the law (remove it illegally contrary to its provisions). But He did come to fulfill it and replace it, in harmony with the provisions and intent of the law itself. He has fulfilled it, so it has passed away!

To learn more about the removal of the Old Testament and our relationship to it, we urge you to study our free articles on that subject on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct (see the section about the "Bible.")

"Destroy" (καταλυω) – "to dissolve, disunite ... b. metaph. to overthrow i.e. render vain, deprive of success, bring to naught ...; to subvert, overthrow ... (Grimm-Wilke-Thayer). For similar examples note Matthew 26:61; 27:40; Acts 5:38,39; Romans 14:20; Galatians 2:18.

5:19 – Whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches men so, would be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever obeys and teaches them, would be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

At the time Jesus spoke, the Old Testament was till in effect (see verses 17,18). It had not yet been fulfilled, so it had not yet passed away. People at that time were obligated to keep it, including Jesus Himself. And He did keep it perfectly throughout His lifetime. He also taught other people to obey it, including animal sacrifices, etc.

Here He affirmed that anyone who taught people to break the commands – even the least of them – would be the least in the kingdom. And on the contrary, any who taught people to observe them would be among the greatest in the kingdom. Those commands must be obeyed as long as they remained in effect.

But this does not prove that those commands would always remain in effect. If Jesus meant that those commands would remain in effect throughout time, then we today must obey ***all*** the commands – even the "least" of them. But essentially no one believes that all of the commands are still in effect, because that would contradict all the other Scriptures we have listed throughout the New Testament.

We have already shown that the law itself provided that it would be removed and replaced by another system. ***So people who truly respected the Old Law, would also respect the teaching that the law would be removed and replaced.*** Anyone who had proper respect for the Old Testament, therefore, would accept the gospel of

Jesus when it came into effect. In fact, such an understanding would lead a person right into the kingdom, and he would be "great" in the kingdom.

On the other hand, people who disrespected the teaching of the Old Law – including the teaching that the law would be replaced by the New Law – those people would be the least in the kingdom. In fact, many of them simply refused to even enter the kingdom. Others entered, but created havoc in the church because they were determined to hold onto the Old Law, as testified in Acts 15 and the books of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Any Jew who did not respect the Old Law when it was in effect, would not be likely to respect the new law when it replaced the old.

(Some commentators believe that the "commands" referred to in verse 19 are, not the commands of the Old Law, but the new commands that Jesus Himself was about to give them. This view makes the verse more easily explained: those who respected Jesus' teaching would of course be great in the kingdom. However, I seriously doubt that Jesus refers primarily here to the teachings He is about to give. My study indicates that expressions such as "these teachings," "these commands," etc., generally refer to instructions just previously given.)

5:20 – Unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, we will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus then concluded that, unless our righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, we will not even enter the kingdom. In fact the attitudes of the scribes and Pharisees generally led them to reject Jesus' teaching and to hinder others from entering the kingdom. So unless we are more righteous than were the scribes and Pharisees, we too will reject the kingdom.

Jesus' statement would likely have shocked most people at that time. The scribes and Pharisees were generally considered to be the strictest groups in emphasizing obedience to the law. They were viewed as "sticklers" in technicalities (Matthew 23:23). So what was lacking in their righteousness and what must we do differently to be sure we do enter the kingdom?

1) Even after the Law was removed, they refused to accept that it had been replaced by the gospel.

Many of those who caused the greatest problems on this point were among the scribes and Pharisees – Acts 15:5. So one thing we must do to exceed their righteousness is to recognize that Jesus did remove the Law. Having such a proper attitude would help disciples then and now to understand many gospel teachings including the teaching of Jesus in subsequent verses in Matthew 5.

2) They followed human tradition instead of divine law.

Matthew 15:1-9,13,14 – They condemned people who did not wash their hands before eating, and they released people from their God-given obligation to provide for elderly parents. These rules and many other rules they insisted people should follow were based on "the tradition of the elders" (verse 2). They made God's command of no effect by their traditions (verse 6), teaching as doctrine the commands of men (verse 9).

Matthew 23:16-22 – They made extremely technical distinctions to free people from Divine obligations.

Luke 14:1-6; John 9:13-18,30-34; Matthew 12:1-14; John 5:5-10,16-19; 7:21-24 – They condemned acts of mercy on the Sabbath. The Sabbath law was never intended by God to forbid works of mercy to help people in their need. By condemning Jesus and His disciples, the Pharisees were condemning the "guiltless" (Matthew 12:7).

3. They were self-righteous.

They thought they were better than they really were, failing to humbly admit their own sins, while condemning the sins of others.

Luke 18:9-14 – The Pharisee trusted in himself that he was righteous, boasting to God about all his good works, claiming to be far superior to the publican.

Matthew 9:10-13 – The Pharisees objected when Jesus associated with sinners and publicans. They thought they were too good to be around sinners. They did not recognize that they too were just as deserving of eternal punishment as other sinners. (Luke 15:2)

4) They were hypocrites – Luke 12:1.

They emphasized outer conduct and appearance without proper attitudes and motives – Matthew 23:23,24; 23:25-28; 15:8

They sought the praises of men rather than the praises of God, even to the point of clearly violating God's word in order to please people – Matthew 23:5-7; 27:18; John 12:42,43. Jesus will discuss this in great length later in Matthew 6:1-18.

Many people today think the scribes and Pharisees were condemned for their strict adherence to the technicalities of Divine law. When Christians today emphasize obedience to God's word, some accuse us of being like the Pharisees. The above evidence, however, shows that they had a ***reputation*** for emphasizing the law, but it was not deserved. They often violated God's law outwardly to follow human traditions, etc., and they consistently violated it in attitude.

All of these are areas in which we must do much better than the scribes and Pharisees if we are to please Jesus and enter His kingdom. We need to examine our hearts and attitudes to see that we do truly do better than they did.

Teaching about Murder and Hatred – 5:21-26

Beginning with these verses, Jesus contrasts His teaching on various subjects with teachings that had been previously accepted. He is preaching the gospel of the kingdom – Matthew 4:23. In my view, Jesus' teachings here are some of the most challenging teachings found anywhere in the New Testament. At times they are difficult to understand, and especially they are difficult to apply.

Several questions will arise as we study the material.

What was the source of the previous teachings that Jesus discusses?

1) In some cases Jesus appears to contrast His teaching to that of the Old Testament law. In fact, in several instances He directly quotes Old Testament laws.

But much of His teaching that He presents here was actually taught in the Old Testament too. So, He is not always contrasting His teachings to the Old Law, but at times He expounds part of the law that the people apparently did not understand. Yet on the other hand, some of the teachings Jesus gives here are not contained in the Old Testament at all but are different from the law. At times He goes beyond just explaining the Old Testament and gives new and different laws.

2) It some cases He appears to contrast His teaching to Jewish misrepresentations and human traditions that actually differed from the Old Testament law. In that case, He may not be giving new teaching but just explaining the Old Testament correctly. This would agree with the fact that He introduced the section by saying our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (verse 20), which often involved human traditions, etc.

3) My conclusion is that Jesus is contrasting His teaching both to Old Testament laws and to human misunderstandings of the Old Testament law. At times He contrasts His teaching with Old Testament laws, and at times He contrasts His teaching with Jewish traditions and misunderstandings of the Law.

In any case, regardless of what previous teachings Jesus refers to, the application to us is the same. Jesus is clearly presenting ***His*** teachings. He surely intended for the teachings He gives here to apply to His disciples in His New Testament. Whether He is giving entirely different laws from the Old Testament or just explaining Old Testament laws, nevertheless the teachings He gives still are intended to apply today. When He explains Old Testament laws, those laws are intended to be repeated as part of the New Testament, so the explanations He gives here must apply under the New Testament too.

How literal and specific did Jesus intend these teachings to be?

Many of these teachings can be applied literally. And study of other gospel teachings confirms that these applications harmonize completely with other New Testament passages elsewhere.

But I must admit that I struggle understanding how some of the teachings – if applied literally – could harmonize with other New Testament teachings. For example, should we literally pluck out an eye and cut off a hand (verses 29,30)? Should we literally encourage people to strike us on the cheek (verse 39)? Other New Testament teaching seems to show that some of Jesus' teachings here are meant to be symbolic.

And are the teachings meant to be specifically applied just as they stand? Why specifically pluck out an eye and cut off a hand? What about a foot or an ear? Why just turn a cheek? What if the person hit us in the chest instead of the cheek? It seems clear that, at times, Jesus give specific examples, but we are expected to learn from them a principle that applies more broadly to other similar instances.

Jesus did similar things many other times in His teaching. He often gave symbolic teaching which we must understand and apply properly. He often taught specific examples from which we must apply the principle He gave. But frankly, His approach gives me at times significant difficulty in knowing how far to go with the principles and the applications. We will consider examples of these points as we proceed.

But we must be very careful when we take statements of Jesus to be symbolic or spiritual. In particular, we must never allow ourselves to change the teaching so we can free ourselves or others from difficult requirements. Just because a teaching is symbolic does not mean we can set it aside and ignore it. It still has significant meaning and may still have very difficult applications. Our goal, as in all Bible study, is to determine the meaning that was truly intended by our Master.

5:21,22 – You have heard it said, "You shall not commit murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment." But Jesus says that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. Whoever says to his brother "Raca!" will be in danger of the council. And whoever says, "You fool!" will be in danger of hell fire.

Jesus rebuked hateful attitudes, not just physical murder.

Jesus first contrasted His teaching to the Old Testament command: "You shall not murder." This, of course, directly quotes one of the Ten Commands (Exodus 20:13; Deuteronomy 5:17). So Jesus here contrasted His teaching directly to the Ten Commands. (Note that this

would confirm that "the Law," that Jesus said in verses 17, 18 would pass away, would include the Ten Commands).

But what about the reference to the fact that those of old said whoever commits murder will be in danger of the judgment? This may refer to the fact that murderers would be called before judges, who would examine the evidence regarding their guilt. They would then be condemned to death if found guilty (Deuteronomy 16:18; 2 Chronicles 19:5ff).

As He often did elsewhere, Jesus then emphasized the importance of proper attitudes of heart, not just outward acts. And He taught the importance of avoiding circumstances, conduct, or attitudes that lead to sinful acts. Here, specifically, He dealt with attitudes of hatred and anger that lead to mistreatment of others and may ultimately lead to violence and murder. He taught that, even if a person outwardly refrains from physically taking a life, yet his heart and speech may contain sinful hatred.

Jesus rebuked improper anger toward a brother.

By Jesus' standard, a person would be in danger of judgment if he even was improperly angry with a brother. This immediately gives us an example in which we must consider other Bible teaching in order to properly understand Jesus' teaching. Other passages show that not all anger is wrong. (The KJV and NKJV express this by saying "angry ... without a cause." Some texts omit this, but even so it is clearly implied by other Bible teaching.)

In other passages Jesus Himself was properly angry with sinful people (Mark 3:5). So also were God (Psalm 7:11; Romans 1:18; 2:5-9; 5:6-11) and Moses (Exodus 11:4-8; 32:19-24; Numbers 16:15). Ephesians 4:26 says to be angry, yet do not sin. These passages show without doubt that not all anger is sinful. But anger is surely dangerous in that it often leads to sin (Ephesians 4:31; James 1:19,20; Proverbs 14:17; 29:11,20; 16:32; 25:28; 22:24,25; 15:1,28; Leviticus 19:17,18).

Taking these passages into account, I conclude that Jesus forbids the kind of anger that can lead to mistreating a brother (as in murder). That is, He forbids anger that grows out of hatred, rather than out of love. Proper anger, as in the passages already cited, is anger based on concern for truth and righteousness; it leads us to be upset when people commit sin.

Anger becomes sinful when we cease to seek the wellbeing of others, but instead we seek for them to be harmed or mistreated. This is the kind of anger that murderers possess (for example, consider the case of Cain – 1 John 3:11-15). Jesus says that, even if we never physically harm the other person, this anger is wrong of itself because it is based on hatred and the desire to harm others.

So Jesus corrects the error that leads to murder by rebuking the sinful attitudes of heart. He condemns sin at its inception: the thoughts that may lead to evil words or deeds.

(Note that Jesus' teaching here agreed with other Old Testament teachings. These concepts were not unknown to the Law, but some Jews failed to understand or emphasize them.)

Jesus rebuked hateful words spoken toward others.

Jesus next forbade ***words*** spoken to harm others. These too, He said, deserve punishment of the "council." Or they deserve the "hell of fire" (Greek γεεννα) – an expression Jesus often used for man's eternal punishment. (The "council" is a term for judges and courts of law, especially the Sanhedrin – Matthew 10:17; 26:59; Mark 13:9; 14:55; 15:1; John 11:47; Acts 4:15; 5:21; 6:12; 22:30; 23:1; 24:40; etc.)

The specific words Jesus mentioned included "raca." Dictionaries say this refers to one who is without intelligence – i.e., empty-headed. Also included is "fool," defined to mean one who is morally reprobate or without morals.

It appears to me that Jesus' point is similar to His teaching about anger. We learned that anger is not inherently wrong, but is wrong when expressed in hatred or malice intended to harm others. Jesus and His apostles frequently used the word for "fool" (both in English and in Greek) to rebuke various sinful people (the Pharisees and others). In fact, Jesus will do this before He ends this very sermon! How can Jesus be saying that it is inherently wrong to call someone a "fool," when He and His apostles repeatedly do it? See Matthew 7:26; 23:17,19; 25:2,3,8; compare 1 Corinthians 3:18; 4:10; 2 Timothy 2:23; Titus 3:9; 1 Corinthians 1:25,27.

Further, some people really do lack intelligence – they simply have never developed properly mentally. Is it always wrong to say so? Or what if someone really is a moral reprobate? Is it wrong to rebuke them and identify their error? And what about other words that mean similar things to the specific words Jesus listed? Are other such words OK, so long as we don't use the specific words Jesus listed here?

I conclude that Jesus did not mean to establish a code of forbidden words, so you can cruelly and spitefully use other words as long as you don't use these specific words. Rather, He describes a kind of ***attitude*** expressed in words, so that the ***principle*** He here states would apply regardless of what words are used to express it.

Furthermore, Jesus did not intend to forbid all kinds of negative remarks about others. For example, one commentator says an "uncomplimentary remark about a Christian brother is subject to punishment in the 'hell of fire'" and "the plain teaching (of) our Lord in this context is that ALL insults of every kind are sinful…" (his emphasis). Surely this exaggerates! If I tell a brother I do not like his haircut or the

color of his coat, is that not uncomplimentary and an insult of some kind? But have I necessarily sinned so I am in danger of hell?

And much more to the point, if I follow the Bible commands to rebuke a brother for a sin he committed or because he taught error, is that not uncomplimentary and a kind of insult? But is it sinful and worthy of hell if done out of sincere concern for his soul? For reasons such as these, I believe we need to consider other Bible teaching in reaching conclusions about the Lord's teaching here.

But while these points may all be true, the fact remains that Jesus is here teaching important truths that are often violated, even by God's people. So what principle is Jesus teaching, and what application should we make?

1) Are we not wrong to use words that attack a person's intelligence or moral conduct, when we know such statements are not really accurate, but we say them to ridicule the person, attack his personality, and discredit him? People often call a person an "idiot" or other derogatory terms, even though they know he is not really an idiot. But they disagree with him on some specific point, so they attack him by implying that his error is caused by general stupidity or immorality.

2) Are we not wrong to speak maliciously in order to take personal vengeance for something we think the person has done? This is the kind of evil attitude that, when carried to an extreme, can lead to physical violence and murder. This is Jesus' point in context. The attitudes of malice and hatred are wrong of themselves. And here He points out that it is wrong to express such attitudes in our speech.

So, we are wrong when we cease to speak for the benefit of others, trying to take vengeance on them or crush their feelings by cruel words. But nothing here forbids telling people they have sinned, provided we speak from sincere concern for the souls of others, even using very pointed words when needed. But we must be sure that our speech is based on God's word and is intended to help people repent, sincerely seeking their salvation.

It is often wise to focus our criticisms on the specific acts people committed, thereby avoiding attacking the person as though he himself is worthless or unworthy of our love and concern. In short, we must speak in love for the souls of all involved, for their good, not their harm.

Understanding these principles, Jesus' teaching here is a real challenge to all of us to guard our attitudes and tongues.

(Note that, once again, it appears that the Old Testament did at times teach similar things. Note Leviticus 19:18; Genesis 4:1-16; Proverbs 14:17; 22:24; 25:23; etc.)

"Raca" (ρακα) – "...It was a word of utter contempt, signifying 'empty,' intellectually rather than morally, 'empty-headed,' ..." – Vine

"...a term of abuse/put-down relating to lack of intelligence, *numskull, fool* (in effect verbal bullying)..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

> "...The Aramaic term expresses disparagement accompanied by anger and contempt. Addressed to the foolish, thoughtless, or presumptuous person, it means "blockhead," and is the most common term of abuse in Jesus' day..." – Kittle, *Theological Dictionary*

"Fool" (μωρος) – "1) foolish 2) impious, godless" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer

> "... Matthew 5:22, 'Thou fool;' here the word means morally worthless, a scoundrel, a more serious reproach than 'Raca;' the latter scorns a man's mind and calls him stupid; *mōros* scorns his heart and character; hence the Lord's more severe condemnation ..." – Vine

5:23,24 – If you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

The need for reconciliation

In contrast to the spiteful, angry hatred that He has just rebuked, Jesus next discussed the need to reconcile our differences. If we know that someone thinks that we have done them wrong, Jesus said we must go to them to seek reconciliation.

Other Scriptures teach that, when someone thinks another person has done wrong to ***him***, he is obligated to go to that person to tell him what he did wrong – Luke 17:1-4; Matthew 18:15-17; etc. But in the present passage Jesus shows that, if ***we*** are the one who is accused of wrongdoing, we should not wait for the offended party to come to us.

We should not think, "If he thinks I did wrong, let him come to me." No, if we know someone believes we have wronged him, we are commanded to go to him to be reconciled. So, both the offended party and offender are obligated by Jesus to initiate discussion of the differences. As one commentator observed, ideally they would meet one another on the way as they go to see one another.

The grave importance of this instruction is shown by the fact that it takes precedence even over worship to God. I must leave my gift at the altar and ***first*** be reconciled to my brother. ***Then*** I can offer my gift. (The reference to the gift at the altar shows this applied while the Old Law was in effect, with its animal sacrifices, but the principle would likewise apply today.)

Many people think that, as long as we fulfill the outward rituals of praise to God, then it matters little how we treat others. But Jesus taught

that, if I want God to accept my worship, I must strive to be right with my brother.

Yet many brothers will sit in worship assemblies seeking to praise God while knowing that they have bitterness in their hearts toward other disciples: toward preachers, elders, spouse, parents, children, etc. Jesus' lesson is that we should pursue reconciliation, not anger and bitter words.

Other considerations

Jesus deals here with general concepts. There is much more to consider regarding specific conditions, procedure, circumstances, etc. For example, one brother might attempt reconciliation, yet the other brother may refuse to even discuss the matter. Or one may humbly apologize and ask for forgiveness, yet the other brother might refuse to forgive him. Ultimately achieving reconciliation requires effort from both parties. Jesus is teaching us to do our part to live peaceably to the extent that depends on us (Romans 12:17-21). If others still refuse to be reconciled, then they are responsible before God.

Notice also that Jesus refers to a "brother." Verses 25,26 may deal with broader circumstances, but the main application in these verses would apply to differences with another disciple of Christ. The principles may have value with other people too, but it is not clear how far the obligation extends. Must I personally respond to every piece of hate mail I receive from people who object to the truth I taught in some printed material or the Internet?

The principle would seem to apply especially toward people with whom I have a fair amount of association, especially another disciple, and most especially one who is a member of the same local church (see Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:15-17). Again, the principle may have value beyond that, but that would appear to be the primary application.

The teaching also assumes that I am aware that the person thinks I have offended him. Jesus said that I "remember" that someone has something against me. I surely cannot be held responsible for reconciling a problem when I have no way to know the person is even upset with me.

And the principle would especially (perhaps primarily) apply to the case in which I am aware that I have done wrong. In that case I must especially take steps to reconcile.

5:25,26 – Agree with your adversary quickly while you are on the way with him, lest he deliver you to the judge, the judge delivers you to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. You will by no means be free till you paid the last penny.

Jesus then described yet another situation requiring reconciliation. This one involves a matter so serious that we could be held responsible

before a judge. This situation is somewhat different from verses 23,24, but the concept is similar. The reference to going to law shows this refers to relationships with those who are not disciples, since disciples should not take one another to court – 1 Corinthians 6.

Note that Jesus' teaching here must surely refer to a case in which we have really done wrong – something for which we should properly be found guilty if the matter went to court. No passage says we should admit having done something we know we did not do. Such would be a lie.

Jesus said that, in such a case, we should seek a resolution and correct our error ***before*** the matter even goes to court. Resolve it "quickly" – don't let it drag out. ("On the way with him" may mean even as we travel to go before the judge – even then continue to seek a solution).

If we let the matter go to court when we really have done wrong, the judge may demand imprisonment and the greatest permissible penalty. But if we quickly initiate efforts to resolve the matter by confessing our error to the one whom we wronged, perhaps he may have mercy. If not, then we have at least done our best to reconcile the matter.

Note how this again emphasizes our need to admit our faults and make them right. Some seek to hide their guilt, refuse to admit it, blame others – anything but acknowledge their guilt. Such people will not prosper before God and not likely before men (Proverbs 28:13). What is needed is humility and honesty to correct our errors.

This concept is sometimes referred to as "cleaning your own slate first." If I know I have been wrong, I should not wait for other people to prove me wrong, hoping I can avoid admitting guilt. Nor should I wait for them to confess wrongs they may have done, even if I am convinced their wrong was greater than my own. If I have done wrong, I should confess my wrong as early as possible. This also makes it much easier for me then to help correct others (Matthew 7:1-5).

Many people seek to use the courts to wring every dime they can get from everyone who they think has wronged them – real or imagined. Even if we think others did wrong, let us seek a fair, equitable solution, preferably out of court. In this way, we return good for evil, instead of seeking personal vengeance. And we avoid the kind of hatred and ill will that Jesus is discussing in context.

But of even greater concern than any penalty that an earthly judge may require, we should be concerned for what God may require of us. While we are able to do so, we need to make right the wrongs we have done. If our error remains uncorrected till the day of Judgment, we will give account before the greatest Judge of all with the greatest possible consequence.

For a further related point, see verses 38ff below.

For other passages about confessing and making right the wrongs we have done to others, see Luke 17:3,4; 15:18,21; James 5:16; Genesis 50:17; Proverbs 28:13.

Teaching about Adultery - 5:27-30

5:27,28 – You have heard it said of old, "You shall not commit adultery." But Jesus said that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Next Jesus cited another of the Ten Commands: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18). Note that in this case Jesus quoted simply what the law itself said, with no addition of any man-made traditions. That would appear to mean that He was here contrasting His law entirely to that of the Law.

Again, as with the discussion of murder, Jesus showed that avoiding sin requires more than just avoiding the outward, overt act of physical adultery. We must understand the kind of ***thinking*** that precedes and often leads to adultery. Then we must eliminate this kind of thinking.

Jesus said that one who looks at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. The word for "lust" refers here to especially strong desire. In fact, the same word is translated "covet" in Romans 13:9 and in the LXX of Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21 where the Ten Commands forbid coveting things that belong to a neighbor, including coveting a neighbor's wife. See the definition that we quote later.

So the lust refers to a desire so strong that one wishes he actually had the woman so he could have sexual relationships with her. But since he has no right to her, to have such a relationship with her would constitute adultery. In other words, he really and actually wishes he could have sexual union with a woman, despite the fact he (or she) is married to someone else.

He wishes he could do what God's law forbids regarding adultery, reveling in the thought in his heart. He may not actually commit the physical act for any one of various reasons: fear of being caught and suffering consequences, fear that the woman will not cooperate, etc. But he really would like to do it, so in his mind he entertains and enjoys the thought of doing it.

This practice is today called "sexual fantasizing," and many sex educators and counselors actually encourage it. They say that just thinking about it is fine, so long as one does not actually do the act. But Jesus says the one who fantasizes is also wrong, because he does the deed in his mind. And contrary to human wisdom, such thoughts actually encourage and make it more likely the person will eventually act on the desire.

This does not mean that a man has sinned just because such thoughts come to his mind. The coming of the thought is temptation (compare James 1:13-15; Hebrews 4:15). The sin that Jesus described is actually "lusting" and coveting the woman. Instead of rejecting the thought as being evil, one harbors it, enjoys it, entertains it, encourages it, and even wishes he could physically do it.

Proverbs 6:25 – Do not lust after her beauty in your heart, nor let her allure you with her eyelids. ***Lust in the heart*** is sinful, not just the physical act of sin. (Exodus 20:17)

Jesus' teaching here shows the error of pornography, suggestive books, movies, TV, jokes, and other forms of entertainment that lead men to think it is acceptable to revel in such lusts. For men to knowingly participate in such, enjoying the kind of thoughts that come to mind, would violate the teaching of Christ here. And it would be just as wrong for a woman to so lust after a man.

See 1 Corinthians 6:9-11,18; 7:2-4,9; Romans 7:2,3; Revelation 21:8; 22:14,15; Exodus 20:14; Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:23-7:27; Mark 7:20-23.

> "Lust" (επιθυμεω) – "... 1 to have a strong desire to do or secure someth., *desire, long for* ... 2 to have sexual interest in someone, *desire,* w. acc. of pers. ... with a strong desire for her, with lust for her (i.e., someone else's wife ...) Mt 5:28 (cp. Ex 20:17; Dt 5:21 ...)..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

The importance of proper thoughts

Even our ***inner attitudes*** must be right. To control our conduct, we must first control our thinking. This applies in many areas, including clothing and sexual suggestiveness. The physical act of adultery is not the only kind of sexual sin to be avoided. It is also wrong for a man to see or touch intimate aspects of a woman to whom he is not married. Such acts should be reserved for marriage (Proverbs 5:15-20).

Jesus teaches that it is wrong to enjoy the desire to do a wrong act. If an act is wrong, then it is wrong to desire to do that act. It follows that it would also be wrong to fantasize about improperly seeing or touching one to whom you are not married.

(Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 5:8; 1 Chronicles 28:9; Mark 7:20-23; Philippians 2:5; 4:8; Proverbs 6:18; 1 John 2:15,16; Genesis 6:5; 8:21; Romans 8:5-8; 12:2; Romans 1:29,32 in NKJV; Matthew 12:34,35; Proverbs 15:26; Titus 1:15; 1 Peter 1:13-15)

Temptation and sin

The Bible also shows that tempting other people to sin is of itself sinful. Instead, Jesus' disciples should seek to have a pure influence (see also 1 Timothy 4:12; Matthew 5:13-16; 18:6,7; Titus 2:7,8; 1 Peter 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 6:3; 8:20,21; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:23-33; Romans 16:17).

But it is wrong to desire to do wrong. So it is wrong, not just to tempt ourselves or others to commit the physical act of fornication, but it is also wrong to tempt someone to ***desire*** to do any sexually immoral act. If those temptations come, it is our duty to resist them. But regardless of whether or not we successfully resist the temptation, the person who tempts us has sinned.

Proverbs 7:5 – In particular, the context of this passage warns against immoral women who seduce a man to sin. This again shows the error of pornography and sexually suggestive entertainment. It also shows the error of wearing clothing that is sexually suggestive. By not covering themselves adequately, people tempt others to think improper thoughts.

Proverbs 7:10 – The clothing people wear often announces their work (policemen, soldiers, etc.). This woman wore the attire of a harlot. While no details are given, a prostitute's clothing is a billboard for her profession. Her clothing tempts men to want to do what is sinful.

Tempting people to sin is of itself sinful. This is specifically true of sexual temptation. Surely godly men and women should seek to avoid dressing, acting, or speaking in ways that tempt.

Lasciviousness/licentiousness

Mark 7:21-23 – Jesus lists things that come from within the heart of man and defile the man. Included is licentiousness/lasciviousness.

Galatians 5:19-21 – Licentiousness is a work of the flesh for which people will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

This word is translated: lascivious, licentious, lewd, sensual, wanton, indecent, lustful.

These words, in turn, are defined: "inclined to lustfulness," "arousing or exciting sexual desire," "inclined to, characterized by, or inciting to lust," "(sexually) suggestive," "causing or intended to cause sexual excitement or lust."

This confirms that we should avoid conduct, speech, or clothing that tends to arouse or excite the sexual desires of others.

Hosea 2:9,10 – Uncovering nakedness is lewdness (or lasciviousness, licentiousness). One reason nakedness is shameful is that it is often sexually suggestive. But nakedness in the Bible does not mean complete nudity. It means simply inadequate covering (see Genesis 3:8ff).

(Romans 13:13,14; 1 Peter 4:1-4; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Ephesians 5:19; 2 Peter 2:2,7,18; Jude 4)

Chastity

1 Peter 3:2 – A godly woman must be "***chaste,***" which includes how she dresses.

Titus 2:5 – Older women should teach younger women to be discreet, ***chaste***, etc.

This word refers to the opposite of "lasciviousness." The English word means "not indulging in unlawful sexual activity; virtuous ... not indecent, modest" (*Webster's New World Dictionary*). This re-emphasizes Jesus' point: a "chaste" person should not act, speak, or dress in ways that tempt other people to have lustful thoughts.

(2 Corinthians 11:2)

Propriety, modesty, or decency

1 Timothy 2:9,10 – Women should adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation. "Propriety" is translated "shamefastness," "modestly," or "decency." It means having a sense of ***shame*** or decency, so that one does not go beyond the limits of proper reserve or modesty. But we have already learned that failing to properly cover ourselves is shameful. A sense of "shame" should be rooted in godly character, so we should be ashamed to dress suggestively.

God designed the sexual union to be proper within marriage. But since for each woman there is only ***one*** man (and only one man for each woman), God says both must conduct themselves so that they are not guilty of tempting other people to lust for them.

5:29,30 – If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away, for it is better for one member to perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away for it is better for one member to perish than for the whole body to be cast into hell.

Jesus continues His discussion of adultery by discussing the need to avoid that which tempts us to sin (compare 18:8,9). He says to cut off the right hand or pluck out the right eye if it causes you to sin, because it is better to receive eternal life missing a body part than for all our members to be lost eternally.

This teaching surely should not be taken literally.

(Compare notes on 6:3,6.) We can know this by comparing to other teaching. There is no record anywhere of any faithful servant of God literally cutting off body parts to avoid temptation. If this is a literal command, why do we have no record of anyone doing it?

Why did Jesus specify discarding the ***right*** eye or ***right*** hand? Can a person not sin with his left hand or left eye? This alone proves Jesus' teaching is not meant to be specific and literal. And if a person were to cut off a hand or eye, could he not still be tempted to sin by means of his other hand or eye? And if he removed both hands and both eyes, he could still sin by his ears or tongue. So must he also remove all of these? But he could still sin in his mind. So should he kill himself to avoid temptation?

And if one cannot see, hear, speak, walk, or work, because he has removed his body parts, how can he teach the gospel, attend assemblies,

study God's word, and obey other Divine commands? Understanding our other duties shows us this is not literal.

"…if the impulse of the heart is left unchanged, the cutting away of a member would be pointless." – Hilary (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Jesus is making an extreme statement to show us how important it is to avoid temptation.

See Proverbs 23:2 for a similar example.

We avoid sin by eliminating what tempts us: people and circumstances, etc. This is of utmost importance. One must be willing to make great sacrifices to do what is right. Why avoid thoughts of hate and lust? Because thoughts often lead to acts and ultimately to hell! To avoid the deeds, we must avoid the thoughts that lead to them. That is, avoid what causes you to sin.

"You can never avoid all temptation." Yes, Jesus said there will always be temptation, but He also explains that we must be diligent to avoid it. Does the fact temptation cannot be totally avoided mean I should make no effort at all to avoid it? May I knowingly submit myself to it just for my own pleasure? May I say, "You can't avoid all temptation, so it's ok for me to attend burlesque shows," etc.?

As I go about the normal activities of life in doing things God expects me to do, I will face temptation: at work, shopping at the store for things useful to my family, teaching the gospel, and sometimes even attending church meetings. But there are other places, people, and circumstances that are known to have a greater degree of temptation, and many people submit themselves to that temptation for no good reason except just that the activity is something they want to do.

Many other passages teach us we should avoid tempting ourselves by participating for the sake of our own pleasure in activities that lead us toward sin: Proverbs 4:23; 6:27; 13:20; 22:3; Matthew 5:8; 6:13; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Genesis 39:7-12.

We must take care not to conclude that, since the passage is not literal, we may ignore its application altogether!

Jesus states the point extremely for a reason. We must take extreme measures to avoid that which leads into sin. This principle is taught repeatedly in God's word. To avoid an improper end result, avoid the things that lead to that result. So important is this that Jesus says it can determine our eternal destiny, and He emphasizes its importance graphically.

Examples of activities and places this principle would teach us to avoid include: attending dance halls, taverns, nightclubs, watching immoral entertainment or listening to immoral music, etc. The modern electronic age has brought such temptations into our very living rooms

on the Internet, television, computer games, etc. These make avoiding wicked thoughts so much more difficult than in recent generations.

However, Pope points out that these problems are not unique to our day. Imagine living in a society in which such immorality was commonly practiced throughout the society in the very worship of their deities. That is the temptation faced by people throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament times.

Notice the connection to the preceding verses. Why does Jesus mention the eye? Because he just spoke about looking at a woman to lust for her in the heart. We must go to extreme measures to avoid that sin. Why then does he also mention the hand? Because, just as it is sinful to desire to commit the physical act of adultery with a woman to whom we are not married, so it is sinful to desire to see or to touch that which is private and intimate and should be reserved only for marriage.

Here is also a statement on proper priorities in life. Many people are willing to go to great lengths to preserve physical health, yet they are less concerned about spiritual well being. Jesus is saying that spiritual health and wholeness are of greater value even than physical health and wholeness. We must be willing to sacrifice physical blessings in order to have spiritual blessings. In particular, having eternal life is more important than anything else in life. Don't allow any desire or pleasure of this life to cause you to miss eternal life.

Also we have here a statement showing that the value of any person's life is determined by his spiritual character and conduct, not by his physical circumstances. Many people think that a handicapped person lives a life not worth living. Some even think such people should be aborted or otherwise eliminated. Jesus says, if they live to please God, their lives are more valuable than those of whole people who live in sin.

Teaching about Divorce – 5:31,32

5:31,32 – It has been said that whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But Jesus taught that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except for fornication causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Jesus' teaching about divorce

Again, Jesus cited Old Testament teaching, this time about divorce. The law had said that anyone who chose to divorce his wife should give her a certificate of divorce. The purpose of the "bill of divorcement" according to the law was so she could become another man's wife – Deuteronomy 24:1ff.

But again, Jesus taught differently from the law. He said that one who puts away his wife (for some cause other than fornication) causes her to commit adultery. This assumes that she remarries as described in the last part of the verse and as implied in the previous verse. The

purpose of the certificate of divorce was that she might marry another man. But under Jesus' teaching, if she did so, she would be guilty of adultery.

Furthermore, by divorcing his wife, the husband puts her in the position where she is strongly tempted to remarry. And if she does remarry, Jesus says she is guilty of adultery and so is the man she marries. So, the divorce itself is wrong and should be avoided.

> Thus he does not allow the divorced woman to remarry. The man she lives with must pay the penalties of an adulterer. For even if, to all appearances, she is separated from her husband, in spiritual reality she remains his body. At the beginning, she was joined and fitted by God to her husband as "one flesh." For the same reason, neither is the man able to marry another woman. – Theodore of Mopsuestia (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Some have been confused by Jesus' statement that the divorce causes her to commit adultery. Does this mean that she is compelled to sin or automatically becomes guilty before God with no action of any kind on her part? But the language means simply that she has been strongly tempted, pressured, or pushed in the direction of adultery. She still has the right and the responsibility to resist, and she is capable of doing so (1 Corinthians 10:13). But the point is that the husband has done wrong by putting her in that temptation.

For other passages where one person "causes" another to do wrong, see Matthew 18:6,7; Romans 14:13; Revelation 13:12-16; Proverbs 7:21; 28:10; 2 Chronicles 21:11; Nehemiah 13:26; Malachi 2:8. Compare this to 1 Corinthians 7:5 where Paul teaches that a person who refuses to meet the needs of his spouse, puts them in the position of being tempted to commit fornication with someone else. That is simply the meaning of Jesus' statement here.

Conclusions that follow from Jesus' teaching

(1) Divorce itself is wrong, unless done for the cause of fornication, because it tempts one's spouse to remarry and thereby commit adultery. It follows that it is wrong to divorce a spouse in such a case, even if one does not intend to remarry.

(2) The only Scripturally permissible reason for divorce (in a Scriptural marriage) is because one's spouse has committed fornication. (It necessarily follows that, if one is in an unscriptural remarriage, he should get out, since the relationship is adultery.)

(3) The only person who has the right to remarry (following a Scriptural marriage) is the one who divorced his/her spouse because he/she was guilty of fornication. Nowhere is remarriage allowed for one who is put away because of his/her fornication.

(4) The passage plainly states that the one who marries a person who had been put away, for a cause other than fornication, commits adultery. And since both parties to that marriage must be guilty, it

follows that the remarriage in such a case is adulterous. The only solution would be to leave the marriage. This conclusion is stated as simple fact.

Nothing says that the one who was divorced (not for fornication) has the right to remarry if he or she waits till after the spouse who got the divorce has remarried or otherwise committed adultery. The divorce itself must be obtained because the spouse is guilty. If this is not the case, neither party has the right to remarry.

Jesus' teaching regarding divorce and remarriage is greatly enlarged in Matthew 19:3-9. See our notes there for a much more detailed discussion.

"Except for fornication"

This is translated as follows:
"saving for the cause of fornication" – ASV, KJV
"except for the cause of unchastity" – NASB
"except for marital unfaithfulness" – NIV
"except on the ground of sexual immorality" – ESV
"for any reason except sexual immorality" – NKJV
"except on the ground of unchastity" – NRSV
"except-for the reason of fornication" – MLV

"Except" (παρεκτος) – "...1) prep. with Genesis except, with the exception of (a thing, expressed by the gen.) Matthew. 5:32 ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer

"Cause" (ποιεω) – "2 to undertake or do someth. that brings about an event, state, or condition, *do, cause, bring about, accomplish, prepare,* etc. ..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

Teaching about Swearing Oaths – 5:33-37

5:33-37 – It was said to those of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord your oaths." Jesus said not to swear at all: not by heaven because it is God's throne, not by the earth because it is His footstool, and not by Jerusalem because it is the city of the great King, and not by your head because you cannot change the color of your hair. So let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No." Whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

The next saying that Jesus discusses said, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord." The NRSV says, "You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord." This is somewhat like Leviticus 19:12; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21-23; 6:13; 10:20. But it does not seem to directly quote any Old Testament passage, so Jesus may be quoting some common Jewish teaching not really found in the Scriptures.

Definitions of terms

To swear means to solemnly affirm a thing is true, or to affirm (or promise or threaten) that you will do something, calling as your witness someone or something considered sacred. It is assumed no one would lie when appealing to such a sacred or respected witness. Of course, many people still do lie under oath, thereby being disrespectful to those sacred things, as well as telling a lie. An oath is the thing sworn to or the act of swearing (the noun form of the verb "swear").

Note that swearing is not necessarily the same as our common concept of profanity, cursing, etc. The connection is only that people often call upon God profanely when taking oaths – that is, they do not mean what they say, so they are taking God's name in vain. In this way, "swearing" came to refer to what is more precisely called profanity. Again, when swearing an oath, people often call some curse upon themselves if they tell a lie. But swearing itself simply means to take an oath, which is not inherently the same as profanity or cursing.

A "vow" is similar but different in that it is a solemn promise, usually a promise to do something in the future. As such, it does not necessarily involve calling upon anything sacred as witness that what is spoken is true, so it differs in this from swearing. It also does not necessarily involve calling a curse upon oneself if he is lying, so it differs from cursing.

To "forswear" means to swear falsely – to affirm under oath that something is true, when you know it is not true. So some translations use this term in verse 33.

To "adjure" means to administer an oath or to insist that someone must swear to a thing.

Matthew 23:16-22 helps us understand Jesus' point.

Matthew 23:16-22 shows that the scribes and Pharisees had made elaborate technical distinctions about what kinds of oaths were binding and what kind were not, depending on what the person swore by. If you swore by the temple, the altar, heaven, etc., you were not bound ("it is nothing"). But if you swore by the gold of the temple or the gift on the altar, then you were obligated to keep the oath (you were "debtor").

Jesus showed here that God is involved in one case just as much as in the other case. If you swear by heaven, you cannot say the oath is not binding, because heaven is God's throne. If you swear by the earth, it is His footstool. If you swear by Jerusalem, it is the city of God. But if you swear by your head, what would it prove, since you cannot make one hair white or black – only God can do such things. His point is that their distinctions were foolish and evil. If you make an oath, God is witness to it and you are held to it, so why make silly distinctions?

> For this reason Jesus prohibits us from swearing by heaven or by the earth. This is in order that we should not give to creation an honor surpassing creation. Do not deify creation. Those who

swear, he says, "swear by the greater," as the apostle has said. [Hebrews 6:16] And he also forbids swearing by Jerusalem. – Cyril of Alexandria (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Let your yes be yes ...

The ultimate conclusion is that we must always speak the truth: let your yea be yea and your nay, nay. Do not make distinctions and think there are cases when you can affirm what you do not mean or what you do not know to be true. A Christian does not need an oath to confirm his word. He should always speak the truth so that people know he means what he says even when he makes no oath.

There is no excuse for speaking falsehoods or making promises we do not intend to keep, while leading people to think we mean what we say. When one must appeal to an oath to confirm that he is speaking the truth, he is implying that he may ***not*** be speaking truth at other times. This should never be the case for Christians. We should never need oaths to confirm what we say, because we should always speak the truth.

Jesus then said that, if we affirm a thing to be true, it must be understood that we really believe it to be true. And if we affirm a thing to be false, then we really believe it to be false. Anything more than this Jesus said comes from the evil one.

How far did Jesus mean for this instruction to be carried? It is clear that Jesus is saying we must always speak the truth, so we should never need oaths. When we make a promise, we should sincerely mean to keep it. But it sounds further like this is stating an absolute prohibition against taking oaths at all, even as in courtroom testimony. He says, "do not swear at all," and "whatever is more than these comes from the evil one."

On the other hand, we have seen that several of Jesus' statements in this context are not intended to be taken absolutely or without exception, but we must understand them in light of other passages. And there are many passages that seem to imply that the taking of oaths can be done, even under the New Testament.

Jesus allowed Himself to be put under oath and responded under oath in His own trial in Matthew 26:63,64. God swears oaths, and Paul often called on God to witness the truth of his statements. Note specifics cases in: Luke 1:73; Acts 2:30; 7:17; 18:18; 21:23; Hebrews 3:11,18; 4:3; 6:13,16; 7:20,21; 1 Thessalonians 5 27; Revelation 10:6; 2 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20; Romans 1:9; Philippians 1:8; 1 Corinthians 15:31.

Some have tried to explain this as a "not ... but" expression in which the first element is not absolutely forbidden but is simply deemphasized in comparison to the second element. Others have claimed that certain kinds of oaths were forbidden whereas others were permitted. However, these views seem somewhat difficult since Jesus elaborated in such detail on the instruction not to swear.

Fortunately, our courts allow us to "solemnly affirm under penalty of perjury" without needing to swear. So, the Christian who has a conscience in this matter need not be compelled to violate it.

"Swear" (Gk. ομνυω) – "...to swear; to affirm, promise, threaten, with an oath ... in swearing to call a person or thing as witness, to invoke, swear by..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Teaching about Vengeance - 5:38-42

5:38,39 – You have heard, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But Jesus taught us not to resist an evil person, but whoever strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth

The next old teaching that Jesus discusses is "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." This is quoted from the Old Testament in Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21. The context of those passages discusses guidelines to be used by judges in Old Testament Israel in punishing people who did violence to others. They should not allow evil to go unpunished, but neither should they decree a more serious punishment than the crime deserved. In short, the punishment should match the crime – neither too lenient nor too severe – by inflicting on the evildoer the same suffering that he caused to others.

But note that this principle, as stated in the law, applied to official decrees issued by judges in cases brought before them. However, in contrast the law limited personal vengeance that individuals could take in personally retaliating against those who harmed them. See Proverbs 20:22; 24:29; 25:21,22; Leviticus 19:18.

Jesus' new teaching tells us not to resist evil. Rather, if someone strikes us on the cheek, we should turn to them the other cheek (compare Luke 6:29). As discussed in the notes before verse 21 above, the principle Jesus teaches here is difficult both to understand and to apply.

The New Testament contains many examples of Christians who are persecuted, but I know of no example in which anyone literally did as Jesus here describes. Note in particular that, when Jesus Himself was slapped on the cheek, He did not just offer the other cheek but reasoned with those who did wrong to Him to show them their error – John 18:19-23. So the meaning is not what might appear on the surface.

Conclusions that can be confidently affirmed based on other passages.

1) The passage does not mean we should literally encourage people, who have done wrong to us, to do still more wrong, with absolutely no effort to discourage it. We will see several steps the Bible teaches that we can and even should take to avoid people doing further harm to us.

While it is true that we should not seek to harm others, it is also true that we should never encourage others to do wrong, so why would we encourage others to sin by slapping our cheek? If it is wrong for him to slap me, then it is wrong for me to encourage him to do wrong.

2) Many Scriptures show that, instead of encouraging people to do wrong, we should reason with them and teach them to do right. We should even rebuke them so that they are aware that their conduct displeases God. So if it is wrong for someone to slap my cheek, rather than encourage him to do wrong again, shouldn't I teach him from God's word that such conduct is wrong?

As described above, when Jesus was slapped on the cheek, He did not just offer the other cheek but reasoned with those who did wrong to Him to show them their error – John 18:19-23. Many other New Testament examples show Christians who were persecuted but did not literally turn the other cheek. See also Acts chapter 7; 16:35-39; 19:29,30; 22:1ff,24-29; 25:1-12; chapter 26; Matthew 26:55. Note 2 Corinthians 11:20 regarding the mistake of tolerating those who slap you.

Other passages instructing us to rebuke sin include Revelation 3:19; Matthew 5:23,24; 18:15-17; Luke 17:3,4; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:10-13; Proverbs 28:4.

3) Many Bible examples show Jesus' disciples fleeing to escape those who sought to do them harm. They did not just offer people the opportunity to do them further harm. See Acts 8:1-4; 14:4-6; 17:5-10,13-15; 20:1; 9:24,25,29,30; etc.

4) Many Bible examples show that Jesus' disciples appealed to civil authorities and their civil rights as citizens to receive protection from those who sought to harm them. They did not take personal vengeance against those who sought to harm them, but neither did they stand quietly by doing nothing whatever to protect themselves, even encouraging people to harm them further. See Acts 22:24-29; 23:12-24; 25:1-12; Romans 13:4; compare Esther 4:8-16.

So it appears that Jesus here overstates His teaching to make a point, not to be taken literally, just as He did in verses 29,30. Since the meaning is not meant to be taken literally, I conclude we must use the context and other passages to explain it. Jesus made a similar statement in the context of Luke 6:27,28 to teach our duty to love our enemies and not harm them. Matthew's account here puts the statement in the context of taking vengeance. Romans 12:14,17-21 is similar.

So the following conclusions would appear to follow:

1) We must not seek vengeance by personally trying to harm others to "get even" with them for wrongs done to us or to loved ones. See also Luke 6:27,28,31-33; Matthew 5:21,22,38ff; Romans 12:14,17-21;

Leviticus 19:17,18; 1 Peter 2:21-23; 3:8,9; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60; Proverbs 24:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:15.

2) When persecuted for righteousness' sake, we must not use physical violence to stop or resist the harm being threatened against us by trying to harm those who persecute us. See John 18:36; 1 Corinthians 4:11-13; Luke 6:27,28,35; Matthew 26:47-56; 10:16; Acts 7:60; 1 Peter 2:19-23; 39:9. See also notes on Matthew 5:43-48.

3) We should allow others to harm us further, rather than taking personal vengeance against them. But if there are ways we can prevent them from harming us without ourselves doing harm to them, we are still permitted to take those measures.

4) We should not let them run roughshod over us or others without being held accountable. To do so would not be good for anyone, including the evildoer. He needs to realize that such conduct is not right, and that he will be held accountable for it. We may appeal to rulers or authorities to protect us, but let us take care we do not do so from a motive of hatred or ill will or a desire to harm those who harmed us.

5) Everything we do should be motivated by good will and concern for the well being of others, even when they mistreat us. Note 1 Thessalonians 5:14,15.

The principle here would also appear to me to have application to the question of Christians fighting in wartime. I do not see how a Christian may properly go to war for their government and attempt to kill enemy soldiers ***simply because his government said to go to war***. To do that would be to conclude that Christian citizens of one country would end up fighting and attempting to kill Christian citizens of the "enemy" country.

Soldiers on both sides would attempt to kill people who have done no more wrong than what they themselves have done: their country said to fight and kill, so they are fighting and killing. This cannot possibly be harmonized with Scripture. (For further information about Christian's fighting in war, see Romans 13:1-7.)

Nevertheless, serious questions remain in my mind regarding how far these principles go in the case of criminals who invade one's personal property, threatening violence to one's family, for reason unrelated to our religious beliefs. (Some commentators point out, for example, that the act Jesus here discussed would constitute a personal insult but would involve no danger of death or even of lasting injury. So we may wonder whether or not the principle may be extended to the point of complete pacifism. Jesus did not say, for example, that if someone slays one of your children, you should offer him another child to slay.)

5:40,41 – If anyone sues you to take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.

If one takes your tunic in a court suit, give him your cloak.

Jesus here turns to a slightly different situation from verse 39, yet teaches a similar point. The situation here refers to a court suit against you. Apparently the point is that you lose the suit (rightly or wrongly) and are penalized by being required to give your opponent your tunic. If so, Jesus said to also offer him your cloak.

It appears to me that this instruction is no more literal than the turning of the other cheek. I know of no Bible example in which disciples, losing property to those who mistreated them, proceeded to actually offer to give other property also to those who so mistreated them. As in the examples cited above, Christians were often taken to court, but nowhere did they literally do as Jesus here describes. Rather, they sought to use the courts to achieve justice.

Nevertheless, the point is still the same as in the previous verses: Christians should not seek personal vengeance or try to harm people just because they have wronged us. Specifically, if someone did so mistreat you as to take your property in court, if you sometime later should see that person in need, you should help him. You should return good for evil. Do not hold against that person what he did so that you refuse to help him in his need. See also verses 43,44 below.

Go the second mile.

This instruction is generally taken to refer to a situation in which a citizen could be compelled to provide help in government service. An official may need someone to accompany him on a journey (as to carry a burden for him, etc.), so he could require a convenient bystander to travel a mile with him. In effect, this was like a tax or duty of citizens to government (compare Romans 13:1-7; Matthew 22:17-21; 1 Peter 2:11-15; Titus 3:1; 1 Timothy 2:1,2).

People might resent such an imposition, especially since it was done for a foreign oppressor. Nevertheless, Jesus taught His disciples to obey the law, even being willing to go beyond what was technically required. They should not resent those who made such requirements, seeking harm to come to them. The second mile may not be literal, any more than in the previous verses (if you owe taxes of $1000, must you voluntarily pay $2000?). Yet the principle teaches the need to do all that is required of us and even more, if needed, without bitterness.

5:42 – Give to him asks you and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

This extends the idea of the previous verses, showing we should give to those who ask us (compare Luke 6:44,45). Again, the statement is not literal in an unlimited sense. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 forbids supporting

someone who will not work. Nor should we loan money to someone who intends to use the money in some immoral or unlawful way, such as drunkenness, gambling, etc. So Jesus is not saying that we should give to just anyone who asks for anything we have without limitation. Was Naboth wrong to refuse to give his vineyard to King Ahab (2 Kings 21)?

> In giving us these directives ... he did not intend us to take them according to the bare sound of the words. For he does not command to give to everyone who asks without exception, even if one has nothing to give, for that is impossible. Nor does he instruct us, if we have plenty, to give to someone who asks with a bad motive. For the donation then goes for evil things, as when someone asks for the sake of lust and intemperance and not for real need, and the person who gives merely provides fuel for such intemperance. For why is it said concerning the apostles that "distribution was made to each as any had need"? [Acts 4:35] This tells us that they gave not so much to those who simply asked but that they provided for others on the basis of need. And do not forget about the verse that says, "A man is acceptable according to what he has, not according to what he does not have," [2 Corinthians 8:12] and "not so that others should be relieved and you burdened." [2 Corinthians 8:13] – Theodore of Heraclea (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Borrowing, like giving, was often an act of benevolence to help people in need under the Old Testament. If a fellow Israelite was in need, others were to loan to him without charging interest. Nothing here is discussing or precluding making interest on a legitimate business deal in which one party simply seeks to invest in his business to expand it, etc. Nor is it saying that we must make a loan to every such person who asks of us.

Jesus is teaching a lesson about benevolent care of those in need. Sometimes the best way to help such people is to lend them funds; in other cases it would be better to give. We should be generous, willing to share with those around us. Love your neighbor as yourself. See 1 Timothy 5:4,8,16; Matthew 15:4-6; 25:31-46; Esther 2:7; Luke 10:25-37; Ephesians 4:28; Acts 9:36-39; 20:34,35; James 1:27; 2:15,16; Galatians 6:10; 1 John 3:17; John 19:26,27.

We should understand this in light of God's generous benevolence toward us. Other Scriptures show that God does not give us just whatever we want. He gives only what is best for us (James 1:17; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10; Matthew 7:7-10) and only when we ask according to His will, etc. So it follows that He is not here instructing us to give to others under conditions other than what He would give to us.

Specifically, the point must be understood in context. We should love and help others, even if they have mistreated us. The point is, if people ask something of us, and we know it would be for their real good

to give it to them, we should do so, even if they have mistreated us. This is overcoming evil with good (Romans 12:17-21).

Nevertheless, the lesson is that we should be generous in caring for those who are truly needy. We should not resent them or seek to avoid helping, not even if they have mistreated us in the past.

Teaching about Loving Ones Neighbor - 5:43-48

5:43 – It had been said, "You shall love your neighbor but hate your enemy."

"Love your neighbor" was taught in the Old Testament in Leviticus 19:1. So people would have heard this said in the Law. But Jesus said it was also taught that you should hate your enemy.

Where is this taught in the Old Testament? The closest passage appears to be Psalm 139:21,22, which teaches, "I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies," referring to those who rise up against God. Other passages that have been suggested are: Exodus 34:11-16; Deuteronomy 7:2; 23:6; 1 Chronicles 20:3; 2 Kings 13:19; Psalm 137:8,9.

However, none of these seems to state exactly the idea Jesus referred to. Perhaps this is another case in which men had changed the teaching of the Old Testament. In any case, Jesus presents the teaching of the gospel in contrast to what people had earlier heard.

5:44 – Jesus taught us to love even our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us.

In contrast to the belief that we should hate our enemies, Jesus taught His disciples to love their enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us. See also Luke 6:27,28; Romans 12:14,17-21.

Love your enemies.

To love someone is to seek their good or well-being. To hate someone is to seek their harm or to fail to seek their good. Enemies are those who hate us and do not seek our good. The natural reaction of people who are mistreated is to fight back. But Jesus said our response should be to love even those who mistreat us, that is to seek their good. We desire to see them receive what is truly good for them, and we are willing even to work to bring that about.

The point is that we should seek good for all men, no matter how they treat us. Of course, it is easy to seek the good of those who seek our good. The hard part is seeking to do good to those who have harmed us. But two wrongs do not make a right. We must not seek personal vengeance against those who have harmed us. Responding properly in such cases is unnatural and difficult, yet it is the measure of true love. God set the example by showing this kind of love for us (Romans 5:6-8).

To curse someone is to say that we wish harm would come to them, so it is a specific form of hatred. To bless someone is to say that we hope good will come to them, so this is a specific form of love. When people pronounce curses on us, we must still seek their good.

Or they may act in spite for us. They may abuse or mistreat us out of spite. If so, we should pray for God's blessings on them. Such prayer will go far to improve our attitude toward them and lead us to do good for them.

None of this, however, means that we should not rebuke sinners or that we should not seek authorized discipline upon evildoers according to God's will. God's people also often appealed to the government to protect them from their enemies. All this harmonizes with God's will as taught in many places. See Esther 4:8-16; Acts 22:24-29; 23:12-33; 25:10-12.

In fact, it is good for the evildoer to be punished. Such punishment may lead him to repent and become a better person. Without punishment, he may continue doing evil and be lost eternally. But our motive in such punishment and rebuke must be to help the sinner to repent, not just to seek personal vengeance on him.

Furthermore, nothing here teaches us to associate with those who treat us as enemies. Many passages elsewhere show Christians often fled from their enemies or otherwise avoided them in order to avoid the harm that they may cause (1 Corinthians 15:33). In Matthew 2 Joseph was instructed to flee to protect Jesus from Herod. Paul often fled from his enemies.

Nothing requires us to allow enemies to associate with our families or to be involved in the local church. The passage simply teaches that we should not seek personal vengeance but should help them if we happened upon them when they have personal need.

Romans 12:17-21 shows that Christians should never return evil for evil. That would violate the principle of love, which seeks the good of all (Romans 13:8-12), and treats others as we want to be treated (Matthew 7:12). See also 1 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Peter 2:21-23; 3:9. Note: If we are forbidden to curse our enemies, then whom could we rightly curse? Obviously, no one (James 3:9-12).

This passage demonstrates the meaning of Biblical love (αγαπη).

Nothing about enemies would naturally and irresistibly attract us or cause us to be emotionally devoted to them. There is no reason why we should "fall in love" with them. So love is a choice, a commitment and a determination of the will, rather than an emotion or mood. Instead, we love them by choosing to seek their wellbeing, regardless of their character. We recognize they are humans, created in God's image. This is the same sense in which we should "love" every neighbor.

Further, this love shows itself in action: we do them good. We pray for them and bless them. True Biblical love is always active and expresses itself by giving and even sacrificing of ourselves for the benefit of those we love. Many Bible examples illustrate this kind of love. The Good Samaritan cared for a Jew, his natural enemy – Luke 10:25-27. Jesus prayed for His murderers, as did Stephen (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60).

This teaching relates closely to verses 38,39. Love for a neighbor or enemy does not always mean we do what they ***want***, but we do what they ***need*** – that which is good for them. This may not always be easy to decide. And we must also consider the good of others who may be affected by the situation. Our action should be based on that which is good for all, not just for one or a few.

5:45 – We should be sons of our Father in heaven, who makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and who sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

When we learn to love even those who mistreat us, we are learning to be like our Father in heaven. His example teaches us the unique kind of love that Jesus describes here. God's love is demonstrated by the blessings He gives to all, rain and sunshine, etc. The greatest proof of His love was His sending His Son to die to offer salvation to all (John 3:16; 1 John 4:7-11).

It is true that God punishes the wicked and rewards the righteous. It also follows that we may seek authorized punishment in this life on evildoers (punishment by civil law, discipline by the church, etc.). Nothing here contradicts these truths. And nothing here authorizes the taking of personal vengeance. But God exemplifies doing good to those who do evil to Him by giving good gifts to them. This shows that we should do what is best, even for those who seek our harm.

Children tend to imitate their fathers. So we must learn to be like our heavenly Father in these ways.

5:46,47 – If we love those who love us, what reward do we receive? Do not tax collectors do that much? And if we greet only our brethren, what do we more than others? Do not even tax collectors do that too?

Jesus then asked what credit there is to us if we love only those who love us, do good only to those who do good to us, and extend friendly greetings only to those with whom we have much in common (our brothers). Even sinners and tax collectors (whom Jews considered serious sinners) will do these things. Wherein does such conduct show followers of Jesus to be any better than others? Jesus uses this contrast to show how being like our Father (verse 45) differs from being like sinners.

Even people, who live at a low moral standard, have friends and associates whom they treat well. But this is mutual shared concern and

benefit. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours; if you show concern for me, I'll show concern for you. God says there is no reward for this – it shows concern for others only if we see benefit in it for ourselves. ("Greeting" here must be a salutation expressing good will and concern for the wellbeing of another. Jews refused to offer such greetings to Gentiles, reserving them only for their "brethren": fellow Jews.)

Jesus said we should not treat others well just because they have treated us well. Our standard should not be how they have treated us. Our standard should be to treat all people with love for their good, regardless of how they have treated us. This is showing the kind of love Jesus and His Father showed.

Jesus' question, "What do you do more than others?" is a profound challenge. It inherently requires Christians to be better than other people: we must live on a higher standard than others. To be a Christian is to accept the challenge to live above the world. It necessarily follows that Christians will be different from the world. We will not accept or follow society around us – Romans 12:1,2. To be unwilling to be different is to deny discipleship.

5:48 – We should be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect.

Jesus concluded this challenging section by requiring us to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. The context applies this primarily to perfect love; but if our love is perfect, then all aspects of our lives will be perfect, since love leads to obedience (Matthew 22:36-40; John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; Romans 13:8-10).

The word for "perfect" can refer to maturity or full growth, that which is complete. Yet the standard of perfection that Jesus described here is the perfection possessed by the heavenly Father.

It is hard to view fallible humans as being perfect in the same sense that the Father is perfect. Of course, we cannot be perfect as He is in the sense of infinite knowledge, power, etc. Rather, Jesus here refers to perfect love and conduct that should result. But even in this we have all failed in the past, so that we cannot be perfect as He is in the sense of having never done wrong. It is too late for that.

Nevertheless, through Jesus our past sins can all be forgiven as though we had not committed them. So we stand perfectly sinless before the Father, not on the basis of having never sinned, but on the basis of Divine forgiveness. This of itself proves that no man will ever earn eternal life – who would claim to actually achieve a sinless perfection matching that of the Father? Our hope must rest on God's grace!

But the most likely meaning here may be that sinless perfection should be our goal. We must be holy even as He is holy – 1 Peter 1:15,16. We must be imitators of Him – Ephesians 5:1. We should walk in the steps of the sinless Son of God – 1 Peter 2:21,22.

In practice, we will never achieve such perfection, for we do all sin – 1 John 1:8,10. Yet we could achieve this goal if we would diligently resist temptation as we should – 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Peter 5:8,9; Hebrews 4:15.

But the main point here is that this should be our goal. Even though we will continue to need forgiveness when we fail, yet we must never be satisfied with less than perfection. This is a goal that forever stretches before us, but will never be reached in this life.

"Perfect" (τελειος) – "...prop. Brought to its end, finished; wanting nothing necessary to completeness perfect ... of men, full-grown, adult; of full age, mature ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Matthew 6

Sermon on the Mount (continued)

6:1-18 - Proper Motives in Service to God

6:1-4 – Proper motives in charitable deeds

6:1 – Do not do charitable deeds to be seen by men, else you have no reward from God.

Jesus here begins a section, extending through verse 18, that emphasizes the importance of proper motives in worship and service. In 5:20 Jesus had introduced the principle that our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. In these verses He shows one of the major areas in which the righteousness of such people was inadequate. He warns against the motives of hypocrites who do good deeds, but for ulterior motives.

Verse 1 summarizes the issue: Jesus' servants must be sure that our good deeds – in this case giving gifts of charity – are not done for the purpose of being praised and honored by men rather than by God (compare 23:1ff). When people act from such false motives – even though the deed they do may result in a real benefit to others – nevertheless, the heavenly Father gives them no reward.

Too many people think that outward deeds are all that matter, ignoring the importance of attitudes and purposes. Several of Jesus' teachings in chapter 5 emphasized the importance of motives as well as deeds. Other verses also teach the essential importance of motives: John 4:23,24; 1 Corinthians 13:1-3; Romans 6:17,18; 1 Corinthians 11:23ff.

The particular motive Jesus discussed here was seeking to please people more than seeking to honor God. Notice that nothing here says it is wrong to do deeds that please other people or that other people appreciate. Christians do need to be concerned about what people think about us, especially for the purpose of having a good influence. See 5:13-16. Note: 1 Timothy 4:12; Matthew 18:6,7; Titus 2:7,8; 1 Peter 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 6:3; 8:20,21; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:23-33; Romans 16:17.

But we must never desire to please people more than we desire to please God. Such attitudes are dangerous because they can lead us to do

wrong in order to please people. But even if we do right, if our motive is primarily to please people instead of God, our service is still unacceptable.

Danger of Seeking Praises from People

John 12:42,43 – Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

John 5:44 – How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?

Galatians 1:10 – For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

Matthew 10:34-37 – Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to "set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law"; and "a man's enemies will be those of his own household." He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

Matthew 23:5 – But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.

2 Corinthians 10:12 – For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

2 Corinthians 10:18 – For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 – But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts.

Acts 4:19 – But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge."

Acts 5:29 – But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

Romans 2:28,29 – For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God.

6:2-4 – When you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you like hypocrites do so men will give them glory. They have their reward. But do not let your left hand know what your right hand does, so your good deed is secret. Then the Father in heaven will reward you openly.

Jesus then discussed the importance of proper motives in various specific works of service, beginning with charitable deeds (alms). First, He forbids sounding a trumpet, like hypocrites did, so people would be impressed and honor them. We sometimes express a similar idea by saying, "Don't toot your own horn."

If we take this absolutely literally, we could beat a drum, so long as we don't sound a trumpet. But the principle, of course, applies equally to other ways people use to announce or advertise their good works. The significance is that the giver wants to be sure other people know what he has given, so they will honor and exalt him.

Jesus said such people already have their reward. That is, the praises they receive from men are all the reward they will receive, because the heavenly Father has no reward for them in eternity (verse 1). So, if they like the praises of men, they had better enjoy them while they can, because that is the only reward they will receive!

"Do not let your right hand know what your left hand does."

Like some of the points Jesus discussed in chapter 5, this illustration is so extreme that it cannot be taken literally. This is obvious from the statement itself. Literally, a hand cannot "know" anything, since it has no mind. The whole body works together guided by the head. But the head knows what both hands are doing. So, the head is the only body part that literally "knows" what either hand is doing, and it knows what they both are doing.

The lesson, as discussed already, is that we should act "secretly" (verse 4) in the sense that we make no effort to broadcast our deeds for the purpose of receiving praise from men. Rather, our motives should emphasize pleasing God to receive His reward.

Does this mean we sin if anyone finds out we gave a charitable gift?

Some have claimed that this teaching is violated if we give a gift in such a way that others might see us and know about our gift and how much we gave – such as taking up a collection by passing a plate in a church meeting. But as already discussed, Jesus' statement is meaningless if taken literally. It must be a figure of speech. As with any figure of speech, it means what the speaker meant for it to mean. To assume and force upon it a meaning the speaker did not intend is to pervert and misuse his statement.

To understand the point, we must do as we have on similar statements in chapter 5. We must take all the Bible says: study the context, study other passages, and never reach a conclusion from one

passage that contradicts other passages. See Acts 3:22,23; Matthew 4:7; 28:20; James 2:10.

We have already noted that Christians should live so as to be a good influence on others (see notes on verse 1). In particular, Jesus had already said to let our lights so shine that men may see our good works and glorify our Father (5:16). We are salt and light, a city set on a hill that cannot be hid. We should not hide our lights under a bushel (verses 13-15). If we do good as God expects, we cannot hide. Surely Jesus is not condemning here what He encouraged in chapter 5.

Note other examples in which people gave gifts that were known to other people and the Scriptures uphold them for our imitation.

Luke 10:25-37 – Both the innkeeper and the injured man knew the Good Samaritan's gift.

Mark 12:41-44 – Jesus was able to observe the poor widow's gift.

John 12:1-8 – Jesus praised Mary for her gift of costly ointment.

Acts 4:32-35 – Christians brought gifts and laid them at the apostles' feet.

Acts 4:37,37 – Specifically, Barnabas was known to give a gift of the price of land he had sold.

Acts 9:36-39 – Dorcas was known for her charitable deeds, including garments for widows.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 – Paul openly praised the Macedonian Christians for their liberal gift.

So, when we study other passages, we find that other people often knew about the gift. Consider also what Jesus is about to teach about prayer. He says that prayer and charitable gifts should both be "secret," yet we will see that public prayer is not wrong.

The lesson to be learned is that we should give for the purpose of pleasing God and helping others, but should avoid publicizing the gift or giving to receive honor from people.

> When Jesus warned, "Beware of practicing your piety before men," he then added pointedly, "to be seen by them." On first glance it seems as if the same thing were being repeated, but if you were carefully to pay attention, you will note a careful distinction. ... He is not focusing simply on the outward act done but the inward intent. – Chrysostom (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

6:5-15 – Proper motives and conduct in prayer

6:5 – Do not pray like the hypocrites who pray standing in synagogues or on street corners so people will see them. They have their reward.

Jesus then introduced a second form of service which people often pretend to do to serve God, but are actually motivated by desire to be exalted by people. He discussed prayer, saying that some hypocrites

deliberately chose public places (such as street corners and synagogues) as places to pray, expressly because they wanted men to exalt them.

Again, Jesus said that the only reward such people would receive would be the praises they received from men. The heavenly Father would have no reward for them.

6:6 – When you pray, go into your room, shut your door, and pray to your Father in secret, and the Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

In contrast to the hypocrites, Jesus said to pray in secret in your own room (or inner chamber) with the door shut. God still knows you pray, but no one else knows, so your reward will be from God.

Note again that the instruction is not meant to be literal, but simply illustrates the lesson. Jesus Himself often went out on mountains (not a room with a closed door) to pray privately.

Some again think that Jesus here forbids all public prayer. This is a misunderstanding like the idea that it is wrong to give a gift if anyone knows about it (see verses 1-4). This is the same mistake we would make if we conclude that 5:29,30 is demanding literal dismemberment of body parts.

Again, to understand properly we must study other passages where public prayer is approved.

Matthew 15:36,38; 14:19,21 – Jesus prayed before He fed thousands of people.

Acts 4:23ff; 12:5,12 – Disciples gathered and prayed together in time of persecution. Note that "many" gathered to pray – 12:12.

Acts 16:25 – Paul and Silas sang and prayed in prison, and other prisoners heard them.

Acts 27:35 – Paul prayed in a group of hundreds of people on a ship. (Compare 21:5.)

1 Corinthians 14:15 – Christians prayed, sang, and studied together in their assemblies. (1 Kings 8:22; Ezra 9:4,5ff; Nehemiah 9:1-5)

Such passages show without doubt that Jesus' teaching about praying secretly in your room was not meant to literally forbid prayer in public or when others know you pray. Praying by yourself with the door closed is good and admirable, but nothing here forbids prayer in public. Praying together publicly is no more wrong than singing or teaching publicly – or having the Lord's Supper or the collection.

In light of such passages, why should Christians refuse to pray aloud before meals in public restaurants? There is another danger to be considered here: when we otherwise would pray, there is the danger of ***not*** praying because we are ***ashamed*** of what people will think of us. Is it not as wrong to ***not*** pray because of what people think as it is to ***pray*** because of what people think?

The real issue here is ***motive and attitude***. Do we pray for the purpose of honoring and pleasing God, or for the purpose of being

exalted by men? If we pray to please God, then He is pleased regardless of where we pray.

On the other hand, one clear advantage of praying alone is that it is so much easier to be sure our motive is to please God. What other possible motive can there be? Further, it is easier to focus and concentrate on the prayer without the distraction of others. That is doubtless why Jesus sometimes went onto mountains to pray and prayed in the early morning, etc. If we rarely pray when no one else knows we are praying, we need to consider how much we really do want to honor God with our prayers.

6:7 – When you pray do not use vain repetition like the heathen do, because they think they will be heard for many words.

Another warning regarding prayer is that we should not use vain (empty, meaningless) repetitions like heathen worshipers do. They think that their gods will hear them simply because they speak many words or long prayers. That is, they believe the physical verbalizing of words of itself has spiritual benefit or merits an answer from the gods, regardless of whether or not one means what is said or even thinks about it.

Jesus' meaning is clearly illustrated by idol worshipers in Bible times – see 1 Kings 18:26; compare Acts 19:34.

> "Depictions of prayer by pagan authors such as Pliny the Elder and Cato, as well as inscriptions from antiquity, indicate that highly repetitious and set pagan liturgies could be intoned to request (even constrain) the gods to benefit the petitioner…" – *Archaeology Study Bible*, page 1379.

But this practice is likewise illustrated by idol worshipers today. Hindus and other such religions teach the value of endless repetition of special prayer words called "mantras." For example, the cover of the Hindu Scripture *Bhagavad-Gita* says:

> "The recommended means for achieving the mature stage of love of God … is to chant the holy names of the Lord. The easiest method for most people is to chant the Hare Krishna mantra: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare/ Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare."

Jesus, however, emphasized instead the importance of attitude and motive, as He did throughout this sermon. What one thinks and means is essential to acceptable prayer. One must not just go through the outward motions of repeating words. The spirit and understanding must be involved (John 4:23,24; 1 Corinthians 14:15).

Yet many groups today that claim to be Christian will continually repeat memorized and pre-written prayers till they must at some point become vain or empty of meaning to the speaker. Or they believe they

will be heard for their many words, for they proclaim merit simply for the number of times certain prayers are repeated.

Sadly, many use the "Lord's Prayer," from verses 9-13, and repeat it endlessly in clear violation of the Lord's express instruction in the very context. For example, according to the Catholic catechism, completely saying the Rosary requires saying the Lord's Prayer (the "Our Father") once for each of 6 beads on the Rosary, and saying a prayer called the "Hail Mary" one time for each of 53 beads! "They think they will be heard for their many words."

But what about members of the Lord's church who continually repeat the same obviously memorized phrases again and again? While we may not be able to judge whether or not others mean what they say in prayer, surely such a practice may tend to promote vain repetition, especially for those who must attempt to follow such repetitious prayers. How much better if those who lead prayer would try to think of the specific needs of those in the audience and express those needs in their own words from the heart!

Again, it has been mistakenly stated that Jesus' teaching forbids making the same request more than once in the same prayer. The verse says no such thing. It is not always wrong to repeat the same request in prayer more than once. Both Jesus and Paul repeated prayers: Matthew 26:36-46; 2 Corinthians 12:9-12. And Jesus directly encouraged persistence in prayer in Luke 18:1-8. Nor does Jesus here inherently forbid long prayer. He Himself spent a whole night in prayer – Luke 6:12.

Actually, there is benefit in sincere repetition. Often the teaching of Scriptures will repeat a message for the purpose of emphasis. Our repeated request may in fact be a way of showing the depth of our meaning. Again, the key is that repetition must not be "vain": we must not just mouth words without meaning sincerely from the heart what we say.

6:8 – Do not be like these hypocrites, for your Father knows what you need even before you ask.

One reason why we need not use many words and repetitions in prayer is that God already knows what we need before we ask. This does not mean we should not bother to ask at all. In fact, He has not promised to answer unless we do ask. Nevertheless, we do not need to give Him information in our prayers – He already knows it all. Nor does repetition remind Him of things He has forgotten.

Yet God still requires that we do make request in prayer as an expression of our devotion to Him and our faith in Him as the supplier of all we need. If we are not willing to ask, He makes no promise to provide.

Repetition does not inform God of anything He does not already know. Nor is He impressed simply by the fact we say so much. Much

speaking is of no virtue of itself. But if we are sincere in our prayers, repetition may actually serve to demonstrate sincerity.

6:9 – Pray in this manner: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Jesus' model prayer

In contrast to the improper prayers Jesus has discussed, He taught the disciples to pray in the manner described here. Though this is generally called the "Lord's Prayer," in a sense this is not really His prayer, since He Himself did not actually pray it. He used it as a model to teach the disciples how to pray – compare Luke 11:1-4.

Especially we must understand that, contrary to some people's views, this is not intended to be a word-for-word formula for prayer that is repeatedly quoted verbatim. We have many records elsewhere of Jesus and His disciples praying, but in none of those examples did anyone quote this prayer verbatim or anything very close to it. To repeatedly quote the same prayer is likely to lead to the vain repetition that Jesus forbade in this very context – see notes on Matthew 6:7.

The key to Jesus' intent here is the manner in which He introduced the prayer in Matthew 6:9: "Pray in this ***manner***." This is an example designed to show the different kinds of things we may pray about. It is not a memorized spiel.

Our Father in heaven

God is our Father in that He created all men, loves and cares for us, and teaches us those principles of life we must follow. We should submit to His authority and pattern our character after His, somewhat like a child does for his earthly father.

But in contrast to our earthly fathers, He is our Father in heaven. He is our spiritual Father, and heaven is His spiritual dwelling place. See 1 Kings 8:30; Matthew 5:16; 6:9; 1 Peter 1:12; Psalm 11:4; Deuteronomy 26:15; Hebrews 12:25; Romans 1:18; Matthew 3:16,17 (Matthew 5:45; 6:1; 7:11,21; 10:32,33; 12:50; 16:17; 23:9; etc.; Mark 11:25; Acts 7:48,49; Psalm 103:19; 102:19; Matthew 23:22; Revelation 4:1,2; Isaiah 66:1; 63:15).

Further, God is Father to all people as the Father of our spirits (Hebrews 12:9), since we were all made in God's image (Genesis 1:26,27).

But in a special sense God is "our Father" to those who are His spiritual children in His spiritual family. In this sense, God is not our Father until we are born again into His family by obedience to His will (see Luke 8:19-21; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17; John 3:3,5; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 2, especially verse 19; Romans 8:14-17; etc.).

So, in the fullest sense, only those who are Christians can call on God as their Father in prayer, asking Him to meet their needs as described here. God has never promised to hear the prayers of those who are not obedient to Him. See James 5:16; I John 3:22; Proverbs 28:9;

15:8,29; Psalm 69:18; Isaiah 1:15-17; 59:1,2. Especially is it only a Christian who can pray for forgiveness as in verse 12 (see notes there).

However, when we have received forgiveness, what a joy to know that we can relate to God as to our Father. He is not just a remote king or despot, uncaring and uninvolved in our lives. He knows all about us (verse 8) and cares deeply for our wellbeing. He loves us and seeks our good. He wants us to speak to Him regularly, even as a loving father wants to speak to his children.

The Old Testament rarely spoke of God in such terms as our Father, but rather as the Almighty, Eternal Ruler, and Creator. It is through Jesus, the only-begotten Son of God, that we especially learn to relate to God as to a loving Father. See Matthew 10:30; Luke 15:22.

From all this it follows that only God – not man – should be exalted by being addressed spiritually as our Father – Matthew 23:9.

"Hallowed be Your name"

God's name stands for God Himself. To respect God as a Supreme Being, one must respect what stands for or represents God – in this case, His name. To hallow something means to treat it as holy. We must view God as sacred or respected, so we must view His name as holy. See Psalm 8:1; 148:13.

We should never speak or act disrespectfully toward God or His name. We praise and honor Him in worship. We avoid taking His name in vain. The opposite of hallowing His name would be profaning His name. We must avoid all profane expressions that fail to show respect for His name.

Note that Jesus expressly instructed that prayer should be addressed to God the Father. Other passages likewise teach us to pray to the Father in Jesus' name or through Jesus as our Mediator. It follows that we should not pray to or through Mary, saints, etc. See John 14:13,14; 15:16; 16:23,24,26; Ephesians 5:20; Romans 1:8; Colossians 3:17; 1 Timothy 2:5.

Likewise, I know of no passage that instructs us to address prayer to Jesus, yet such is commonly done among denominations. In the absence of New Testament authority for such a practice, I see no reason for Christians to participate. If one who leads prayer in a public church assembly were to address the prayer to Jesus, he would put Christians who object to such a practice in the position of not being able to participate in a public prayer.

6:10 – Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

"Your kingdom come"

At the time Jesus taught the disciples to pray this, the kingdom was at hand (3:2; 4:17; 10:9; etc.). The kingdom is the church (Matthew 16:18,19). It was about to begin, and people would soon be able to enter

it. He taught them to pray for this event which He predicted would soon occur.

Some people today believe that this kingdom still has not begun, so they still pray for it to come. However, the prayer has already been answered. The kingdom, that was prophesied in the Old Testament and that Jesus planned to begin, has been in existence since the first century. People first began to enter it on Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2 (see Daniel 2:31-45; Mark 1:14,15; 9:1; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-17,33).

Everyone, who respects Jesus as King and has been saved from his sins, has become a citizen in Jesus' kingdom, the church (Colossians 1:13,14,18; Hebrews 12:23-29; Revelation 1:9). Jesus now reigns as king, but His kingdom is spiritual, not political (John 18:36). He reigns in the hearts of men through His word. He will not begin to reign when He returns, but will reign till He returns and defeats the final enemy of death (1 Corinthians 15:22-28).

So in that sense, we cannot properly pray for that which Jesus here told the disciples to pray. We can, however, pray for the kingdom to grow and prosper in accomplishing God's purpose. And we can pray for Jesus' return, when the kingdom will be glorified and returned to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24).

"Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

God reigns supreme in His dwelling place. No sin nor rebellion is allowed there (Revelation 21:27). All who are there submit perfectly to the will of the Father. However, such is not the case here on earth. Here God has allowed men free will, and men have chosen to sin. As a result, earth is a place often characterized by sin and wickedness.

We should pray and work that the sin and rebellion on earth will be removed from the lives of all mankind, beginning with ourselves. Such a result is possible only through the grace of God, since all people do commit sin (Romans 3:23). God's grace is sufficient to forgive us and teach us to live godly lives (Titus 2:11-14). But we as humans must be willing to submit.

Too often we pray hoping that God will submit to our will, when we should be praying that we would be willing to accept and follow His will. In some cases where possible He may be willing to change His conditional will in answer to our prayers, but we must realize that often the things we want are not what He knows to be what we need.

This prayer is answered as each human repents of sin and submits his life to God's will. How sad it is that many churches frequently repeat this passage verbatim, yet they often neglect to obey basic teachings of the will of God. Likewise, many in our nation pray "God bless America," yet so few are willing to truly submit to the will of God that we might receive His blessings. Let us truly pray that we can learn to do the will of the Father on earth even as it is done in heaven.

6:11 – Give us day by day our daily bread.

Every good gift comes from God (James 1:17), including the physical necessities of life (Matthew 5:45; 6:19-34; Acts 14:17; 17:24-28). God created the laws of the universe by which our needs are met. He works through these laws to care for all men, especially His children. But we are responsible to work to provide the things we need. This is part of the laws He set up (1 Timothy 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; Ephesians 4:28; Genesis 3:17-19).

This illustrates that fact that, when we pray for God's blessings in any area, we are still responsible to do our part to bring about that for which we pray. Some think there are blessings for which we should pray, but we should then leave the results entirely up to God and do nothing to influence the outcome. Some believe this regarding salvation, others regarding physical healing, others regarding the outcome of elections, and still others regarding how many children they will have.

But God often fulfills our prayers by using the effort we put forth, blessing our work to produce what we need. Prayer and God's grace do not eliminate the need for man's work. However, when we receive what we requested, we must still remember that it was achieved only because of God's blessings on us. We could never fulfill our needs alone.

Note also that we should pray for bread each day. We are taught to pray for needs, not for luxuries that we merely desire (James 4:3,4). God has never assured us that He will supply us so thoroughly that we cease to need to depend on Him. Nor has He promised luxuries, such as whatever kinds of foods we may desire or enjoy (1 Timothy 6:7). Most of us have food we enjoy eating stored up for many days, but we should realize that God has not necessarily promised such bountiful blessings.

Many people do not enjoy these blessings as we do. We never know what a day may bring forth (James 4:13-16). We make plans and anticipate our future, but we have no way to assure the future. We must trust God each day for our needs to be met. We never reach the point that we do not need to trust Him to care for us.

6:12 – Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Whenever we sin, God is ultimately the One whom we have wronged, even when we may also wrong a particular human being. All sin is disobedience to God (1 John 3:4). So, while we need forgiveness from other people when we sin against them, yet we always need God's forgiveness whenever we sin. He has promised to forgive, through the blood of Jesus, when we meet the conditions of forgiveness.

God promises to forgive His children if we truly repent and ask His forgiveness in prayer. See Acts 8:22; Matthew 6:12; 21:28-32; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 John 1:8-10; Proverbs 28:13. If we have wronged specific individuals, we must also go to them and ask for their forgiveness (Matthew 5:23,24; Luke 17:3,4; 15:18,21; James 5:16; Genesis 50:17; Proverbs 28:13).

Note that only children of God are instructed to pray for forgiveness when they sin. No passage ever tells one who is not a child of God to pray for forgiveness. Such people must repent and be baptized (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21).

And note that, still another condition we must meet in order to receive God's forgiveness, is that we must be willing to forgive others when they sin against us. This forgiveness too is conditional on their repentance; but if we are not willing to forgive others, God will not forgive us. See notes on verses 14,15; Luke 17:3,4; Matthew 18:21-35; 6:12-15; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11; Ephesians 4:32.

Sins are here referred to as "debts." Verse 14 refers to them as "trespasses." The similar account in Luke 11:4 refer to them as "sins." When we sin against God or against others, we become indebted to them. We have done them wrong and owe it to them to make correction. We use a similar expression today when we say that one who has committed a crime owes a debt to society.

Jesus expressed a similar concept in the parable in Matthew 18:21-35 and Luke 7:40-43. In these passages, forgiving someone of a sin is compared to forgiving a debt. When we sin against God, the debt we incur is beyond our ability to pay, so Jesus paid it for us.

6:13 – Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

"Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

Some translations say simply, "deliver us from evil," others say deliver us from the evil one. The end result is the same. This is not intended to say that God ever tempts us. God tempts no one (James 1:13). Adam Clarke says: "This is a mere Hebraism: God is said to do a thing which he only permits or suffers to be done."

By His power God can protect us from temptation and give us strength to resist and endure against evil. In this way He delivers us from evil. Without the power God provides, we would face temptations and hardships that could have been avoided, if we would pray and trust Him.

The force of the request appears to me to be, "Help us avoid those ways that would tempt us, and help us by your power to overcome the temptations we must face." Or, "Do not so desert us to our own devices that we fall into temptation or are overcome by it, whereas we could overcome it with your help and strength."

The effect is to acknowledge that we need God's help in dealing with Satan and his temptations. We are not able to overcome sin without the blessings and strength God offers. See Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13.

Note again that, as with the request for daily bread, this request requires us to do our part to bring about that for which we pray. We must resist temptation and avoid unnecessarily placing ourselves in the way

of temptation simply for our own self-indulgence. How can we properly ask God to help us overcome sin while we knowingly place ourselves in spiritual danger just to please ourselves?

This prayer should teach us to avoid evil entertainment, suggestive recreation, off-color jokes, indecent apparel, modern dancing with a partner not our spouse, pornography, evil companions, attendance at bars or casinos or dances or loose parties, etc.

"Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever."

This sentence is included in the KJV and NKJV, but is missing in others. Regardless of what translation one uses, surely this expresses a Scriptural concept which is entirely proper to include in prayer. It simply praises God that His power and glory is such that He deserves to be recognized forever as the Ruler of all, and all should submit to His authority and praise Him.

Such expressions are called "doxologies," meaning an expression of honor or glory. Such praise is commonly offered in Scripture in passages such as Revelation 4:11; 5:12,13. Kyle Pope lists the following examples: 1 Chronicles 29:11; Psalm 89:52; Hebrews 13:21; 1 Peter 5:11; Jude 25; Revelation 7:12; Romans 9:5; 11:36; Galatians 1:5; Ephesians 3:21; Philippians 4:20; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16; 2 Timothy 4:18; 1 Peter 4:11; 2 Peter 3:18; Revelation 1:6.

6:14,15 – If you forgive the sins of others, God will forgive you. But if you do not forgive the sins of others, God will not forgive you.

Jesus then returns to our need to be willing to forgive, as in verse 12. His further explanation shows how important forgiveness is. This teaching is parallel to Mark 11:25,26. We should pray for God to forgive us as we forgive others. If we don't forgive others, God will not forgive us. See also Matthew 18:21-35.

We all know that we need God's forgiveness; we cannot possibly receive eternal life without it. If He is willing to forgive us of the extremely great wrongs we have done Him, how can we refuse to forgive those who wrong us? If we will not forgive, then He will not forgive us.

Luke 23:34 – "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Jesus' forgiving attitude should become ours. Even though He never did anything wrong, He was killed as a common criminal. Yet He was willing to forgive the people who did it.

We are far from sinless, and in many ways we deserve to suffer. Yet when people do wrong to us, we often become extremely upset. And even when people apologize to us, some of us are unwilling to forgive wrongs that are far less than Jesus suffered. Instead of being willing to forgive, we often seek vengeance.

Ephesians 4:32 – Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you. We should develop

the same kind of forgiving attitude that God and Jesus have. (Colossians 3:13)

1 Peter 2:21-23 – Jesus was reviled, but He did not in turn revile those who reviled Him. He suffered but did not threaten to harm those who were causing Him to suffer. Instead, He committed Himself to God. This shows us how we should suffer.

Note that the passage does not say we should desire for people to get away with their evil without being punished, even if they don't repent. It says we, like Jesus, should not personally seek to do harm to those who have harmed us, but we should leave it in God's hands.

1 Peter 3:8,9 – We should be compassionate, etc., not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that we were called to this, that we may inherit a blessing. This is what Jesus did.

Romans 12:14,17-21 – Again, if we are persecuted, we should bless people instead of cursing them. Don't return evil for evil but be peaceable. If our enemy wrongs us, we should still help him if he is in need. Instead of being overcome by evil, we overcome evil by doing good. We should leave the punishment of the evildoer in God's hands.

(1 Thessalonians 5:15; Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28; 1 Corinthians 4:12; Acts 7:60)

Conditions of forgiveness

Some people believe Christians should just forgive everybody who sins against us, whether or not they repent. This is common thinking among denominational people. But we have seen that we should forgive others as God forgives us.

One commentator goes so far as to acknowledge that God forgives men only when they meet the necessary conditions of forgiveness, including repentance. But then proceeds to claim: "It is the Christian's duty to forgive all men without regard to their repentance." So Christians must be more forgiving than God is? Incredible! Such thinking comes from accepting too much denominational influence.

Ephesians 4:32 – We should forgive people "just as" God forgives us (Colossians 3:13). Does He forgive people unconditionally even when they refuse to repent? Definitely not. When a Christian sins against God, He must repent and confess the sin, asking God to forgive Him. (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:8-10)

Luke 17:3,4 – If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, "I repent," you shall forgive him. What are the conditions under which we forgive a brother who sins against us? He must repent and tell us he has repented – the exact same conditions under which God forgives us.

Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Ephesians 5:11 – Consider furthermore that, until our brother has repented, we are obligated before

God to rebuke him (as in Luke 17:3,4). Suppose I forgive someone of his sin before he has repented. May I then continue to ***rebuke*** Him for it? No! No more so than God will rebuke us for sins of which He has forgiven us. We must not bring it up again, if we have forgiven it.

If a person has not repented of a sin they committed, then we can know that God has not forgiven him. Yet if God has not forgiven Him, then we continue to be obligated to rebuke him. ***My responsibility to rebuke an erring brother means I cannot consider him to be forgiven until I understand him to have met the necessary conditions for God to forgive him:*** when he has repented and confessed the sin. (Compare Matthew 18:15-17; 6:12,14,15.)

This is not being cruel and unforgiving. It is forgiving like God forgives, just as God commands us to do. Is God cruel and unforgiving?

The teaching of Jesus about forgiveness shows we ought never to hold a grudge nor seek personal vengeance against anyone who has wronged us. Instead, we ought to pray and work for his forgiveness, including rebuking him for his sin, sincerely hoping he will repent so God and we can forgive him. When he does repent and meets the conditions of forgiveness, then we consider him to be forgiven.

6:16-18 – When you fast, do not disfigure your face like hypocrites do so they appear to people to be fasting. They have their reward. When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so you do not appear to men to be fasting. But your Father in heaven sees in secret and reward you openly.

Jesus then discusses a third area in which He applies the principles of proper motivation. That area is fasting. Fasting is a refusal to eat and/or drink for a certain period of time for some spiritual purpose. That is, we do not eat and/or drink because there is something else we consider to be more important. In the Bible the purpose usually was an expression of sorrow (such as repentance) or to make a request of God accompanied by prayer.

Note that Jesus here neither condemns fasting nor requires it. In Luke 5:33ff, His disciples were clearly not practicing it, yet He did not rebuke them for that. He Himself had just practiced it (4:1,2). He anticipated there would be times when His disciples would want to do it. But He did not bind it or imply there would be something wrong if they don't practice it.

So fasting is not commanded and required as are prayer, Bible study, etc. Jesus does not give specific times or frequencies when fasting is required, as with the Lord's Supper or giving. There is no example of any congregation requiring it as a group practice. If done, it would be entirely an individual choice. Jesus does say there are times when it is appropriate and times when it is inappropriate.

The problem discussed in the current passage is that, as with alms and prayer, some people fast for the purpose of appearing religious so they can impress people and receive their praise. They disfigure their faces so people will know they are fasting and will honor them. Once again, Jesus states that, if receiving honor of men is their motivation, that is all the reward they will receive – i.e., God will not reward them.

As in the other cases, Jesus' advice is to avoid appearing to fast especially to impress people with our righteousness. He said to anoint your head and wash your face. In other words, act normally but make no special effort to let people know you are fasting. Then God, who sees everything, will see your service and will reward you.

Again, this does not mean we sin if others know we fast. The point is do it to please God, not to impress people. So we should not go out of our way to let people know what we are doing.

For other passages about fasting, see Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6-8; 2 Samuel 1:12; 12:21,22; 1 Kings 21:27; Nehemiah 1:4; 9:1-4; Esther 4:3; Psalm 35:13; 69:10; Isaiah 58:5; Daniel 9:3; Joel 1:13,14; Jonah 3:5.

6:19-34 - Proper Attitudes toward Material Things

6:19-24 – Serving God vs. serving material things

6:19,20 – Do not lay up treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven were neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Jesus here significantly changes the area of application, yet the lesson is still the importance of emphasizing spiritual concerns and inner attitudes above outer or material things. He said we should not lay up earthly treasure, because it is temporary: moth and rust corrupt it, or thieves break in and steal it. It simply does not last. The same principle applies to earthly entertainment, power, beauty, health, etc.

Whether it be a new house, car, clothes, furniture, or electronic gadgets, it will soon break, wear out, discolor, corrode, or be made obsolete by a new model. And even if it lasts long enough, sooner or later we will lose it or leave it.

Yet people put so much emphasis on material things that they act as though they are the goal of life. People seem to think that material possessions can make them happy or give them security. So, they may work long hours to obtain things, and then spend many more hours using or playing with their things, taking care of them, or making sure they don't lose them.

Often they neglect service to God and His work to obtain and indulge in material things. Yet in the end, they are not satisfied, happy, nor secure. In fact, they find they just want more of this world's goods – what they have is not enough. They lack security and peace of mind, because they fear losing what they already have.

Nothing here means that it is inherently sinful to possess material things. This is a "not … but" passage in which the point is not to forbid the "not" element; rather the purpose is to emphasize the "but" element. Other similar examples can be found in John 6:27; 12:44; 1 Corinthians 1:17; 15:10; 1 Peter 3:3,4; Mark 9:37; Matthew 10:20; Acts 5:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:8; Genesis 45:8.

We also know Jesus cannot be absolutely forbidding possession of material things, because some of them are essential to life. In fact, other passages command us to work to obtain material needs. And some Christians were rich yet were required, not to abandon their riches, but to use them in God's work (2 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 6:17-19).

In fact, even in this context Jesus said that if we have the proper emphasis, God would add to us the material things we need; so surely He cannot be saying that it is absolutely wrong to have material things. Rather, the point is to teach us not to over-emphasize material things, as previously discussed.

Instead, we should store our treasure in heaven. This is done by serving God (compare 19:21; Luke 12:21,33; 1 Timothy 6:19). The things of value to us should be the things awaiting us in eternity. These things cannot be taken away from us by any earthly force: rust, moth, thief, etc. The only way we can lose them is by becoming negligent or rebellious in our service to God. So this treasure gives true security and so is much more worthwhile than material things.

See also Matthew 10:28,37; 16:24-27; Mark 10:29,30; Luke 10:38-42; 12:15-21; 14:26-33; 18:22-24; John 6:27,63; Romans 2:28,29; 8:1-14; 12:1,2; Galatians 2:20; 5:16-26; 6:7-9; Colossians 3:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:8; 6:6-11,17-19; Hebrews 11:13-16,24-26; James 4:4,13-15; 1 Peter 3:3,4; 1 John 2:15-17; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 10:3,4; Ecclesiastes 5:10-19.

6:21 – Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Your heart and your treasure go hand-in-hand. Treasure is that which you value in your heart. If your heart is concerned primarily about material things, your effort will be directed toward them. As you work to gain and enjoy them, you will spend more thought and concern for them. You will focus your life on how to obtain them, use them, and protect them. This is a discussion of ***priorities***.

But if your heart is concerned primarily about God, His service, and your eternal destiny, you will emphasize deeds, words, and thoughts that lead to that goal. As you do so, you accumulate more treasure in heaven. What we invest in is what we care about, and vice versa.

But remember that, if we emphasize material things, we may never obtain them as we hoped. And if we do obtain them, sooner or later we will leave them. So what does that leave us in eternity? Nothing, because we focused on that which is temporary and will be lost. On the other hand, treasure in heaven is eternal. If we focus on it, we may not have

much in this life, but in eternity we have eternal riches that can never be taken from us.

So where are your heart and mine? The answer is found in what we emphasize with our time, energy, and ability.

6:22,23 – The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. If your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness.

Jesus refers to an eye that is "good" (NKJV) or "single" (KJV, ASV), "clear" (NASB), or healthy" (ESV). Some people have eyes that are "good" and others have eyes that are "bad" (compare Luke 11:33,34). This is a further illustration. It involves a figure of speech, often used in the Bible, in which seeing light is compared to understanding and knowledge.

The eye that is healthy or good will focus clearly, so "the whole body is full of light": the person understands and recognizes truth. A "bad" eye is "unhealthy" (NRSV, NKJV ftnt). It has little or no vision. It does not see clearly, so his "whole body will be full of darkness." He does not understand the truth, righteousness, etc.

Matthew 6 applies this to understanding priorities in life. A blind man cannot see well, no matter how bright the light is that surrounds him. Similarly, some people are blinded by their desire for material things. They are so determined to possess and enjoy things that they do not see what is really important in life. On the other hand, when one focuses on spiritual matters, he sees clearly what life is about.

Some translations speak of this eye as "single"– it gives a single clear image of what is really important to see. Such a person sees properly the one true Master (verse 24) and the one true goal in life (verse 33). It follows that one who emphasizes material things is seeing "double" or out of focus.

Many people try to pursue the primary goal of material things, yet they still believe they are pleasing God. They have double vision (compare James 1:6-8). They are trying to serve two masters (verse 24). The result is that their whole body is full of darkness or spiritual error and confusion.

But unlike a physically blind man, one is spiritually blind because of his own choices. He is blinded by his own desires, preconceived ideas, etc. Nevertheless, a spiritually blind man has the power to choose to see. He can determine to set aside his previous views and desires and give the evidence an honest investigation.

So, we must take heed to our spiritual vision. If we see that our focus has been on the wrong thing, we can choose to change our focus so we can see clearly and our whole body will be full of light.

6:24 – No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Jesus continued His discussion of material possessions (here called "mammon") by warning that we cannot serve two masters. Your master is the one you obey (Romans 6:16; Luke 6:46). It is the influence that determines how you act, what priorities you set, what choices you make. If you have a conflict of choices, your master is the power or influence that determines which choice you make.

Specifically, Jesus warns that God cannot be our Master when we also are loyal to mammon or material possessions. We must make a choice. We must love one more than the other. Something must come first. When there is conflict of loyalties, we must decide to go with one or the other. The one we choose in such cases is our real master, regardless of what claims we might make otherwise.

This does not mean we cannot have possessions. It simply means they must not control us. They are a stewardship from God, so we must use them to do His will. If we do, then God is the Master. If instead we trust in wealth for happiness and make it the goal of our lives, if we allow it to interfere with our service to God, then it is our master, not God.

The same principle is true with regard to other influences in our lives. Unless we are truly devoted to God, other things will get in the way. Our priorities will be determined by who is our real master.

In Matthew 10:34-37 Jesus taught that we must love Him more than even our own family members. If loved ones want us to do things other than what the Lord says, we must make a choice. The choice we make determines who our master is.

1 Timothy 4:8 shows that exercising ourselves to godliness is more important than bodily exercise. Even though physical exercise, sports, and recreation may have some value, they must not be allowed to take precedence over service to God.

We have already seen in the first part of Matthew 6 that some people sought the praises of men more than the praises of God. When pleasing people leads us to disobey God or neglect His service, then people have become our master instead of God.

Acts 5:29 says we must obey God rather than man.

In verse 33, Jesus will summarize the conclusion by stating that we must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. If this takes priority in our lives, this will help us to avoid worrying about material possessions.

When people do not put God's service as first priority in life, in His view they are not really serving Him at all. He refuses to take second place to anyone or anything. We either love Him and are truly loyal to Him above all else, or else in His view we hate and despise him.

This principle is also taught in other passages such as Matthew 4:10; Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21; James 4:4.13-15; 1 John 2:15-17; 10:28; 16:24-27; Mark 10:29,30; Luke 10:38-42; 12:15-21; 14:26-33; 18:22-24; John 6:27,63; Romans 2:28,29; 6:16-22; 8:1-14; 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 10:3,4; Galatians 2:20; 5:16-26; 6:7-9; Philippians 3:18,19; Colossians 3:1-3; 1 Timothy 6:6-11,17-19; Hebrews 11:13-16,24-26; 1 Peter 3:3,4; Ecclesiastes 5:10-19.

6:25-34 – Do not worry about material things.

6:25 – So do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?

To His disciples Jesus then continued His instructions about proper attitudes toward material things. He said we should not be anxious about food to sustain life or clothes to cover the body.

Some translations say to "take no thought" about such matters, but this does not mean we should simply ignore such matters or that we have sinned if we ever even think about such things. Other translations tell us not to worry or be anxious.

Again, as with other aspects of this sermon, we must consider Jesus' teaching in light of other Bible teaching. Food and clothing are necessities that other passages command us to provide for ourselves, our families, and others in need (2 Thessalonians 3:10; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 5:8).

McGarvey in his comments gives other similar examples in secular old English quotations in which "take thought" refers to worry or anxiety. The word is similarly used for anxiety in Philippians 4:6; Luke 10:41. It refers to what we would think of as despondency, depression, or obsession about a matter.

Jesus' lesson here is that we should not be overly concerned to the point we neglect the greater and more important work we should do in God's service. Too often we are overly concerned about whether or not we will have the ***kind*** of clothing and food, etc., that we ***want***. It isn't necessarily wrong even to have nice things, but it is wrong to let them dominate our concern to the point that we do not appreciate what we have or that we neglect to use God's blessings to do His work. See Matthew 16:24-27; Romans 8:5-8; 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 10:3,4; John 6:27,63; Luke 12:15-21; 1 Timothy 6:6-10; Colossians 3:1,2.

Jesus explained that life is more than food and the body is more than raiment. If God can provide us with a life to begin with, how can we doubt His ability and willingness to provide the things we need to care for our lives? Why did He even give us life? Is the purpose for our existence simply to eat and drink and clothe ourselves? Are we here just to enjoy material things? Surely we were given life for more important

reasons than this. Life consists of more than material possessions and indulging our physical desires (Luke 12:15).

We tend to confuse our priorities, often by putting the ***means*** as more important than the proper ***goals***. This has been Jesus' teaching throughout this discussion. We tend to lavish our care and concern on obtaining and enjoying material possessions so we can gratify our own pleasures. But physical things are not an end of themselves; they are a means we should use to achieve higher ends. If so, then they should never be allowed to hinder those higher purposes, but should contribute to the accomplishment of them.

Note that Jesus said we should not be anxious about even physical necessities. If so, then obviously we should not be anxious about luxuries beyond our needs. In our wealthy society few have reason to be anxious about needs, yet we are often filled with anxiety about luxuries. How will I obtain the ***kind*** of house, food, clothing, etc., that I ***want*** for myself and my family? Our concern ought to be: Am I using what I do have in the ways that please God and accomplish His purposes?

"Worry" (μεριμναω) – "...1 to be apprehensive, *have anxiety, be anxious, be (unduly) concerned* ... 2 to attend to, *care for, be concerned about* ..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

6:26 – Consider the birds of the air that neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet God feeds them. Are not you of more value than they?

Jesus then illustrated for us God's providential care for His children. He said to consider how God provides for other of His creatures. Birds don't sow, reap, or store up food for the future, but God feeds them. Surely we are more valuable than they are, so why should we doubt His care and concern for us? Other passages about God's care for animals include Psalm 147:9; Job 38:41; Matthew 10:29-31.

This shows that God made us for a purpose, so shouldn't we trust Him to take care of us? We should trust His wisdom and power to meet our needs. We can rest upon the assurance that He cares and will help us as surely as He helps the birds in the heavens, who are of much less value than we are (see verse 28).

Note that this does not prove that it is wrong to sow and reap or even to store up our blessings to meet future needs. That is not the message. Other passages using sowing and reaping as illustrations of very proper means of obtaining our needs. The truth is that birds are busy almost all day long obtaining their necessities. Watching them will show that they search continually for food for themselves or for their babies or for materials to make their nests. They are continually active in such ways, so Jesus is not forbidding us to work for such necessities.

The lesson is that God sees to it that the birds are successful in their efforts to find what they need. He is in charge and is the real source of their blessings. They obtain their needs without worrying.

Birds don't have nervous breakdowns about where their next meal will come from. They don't take sedatives to calm their fears about how they will obtain what they want in life. They have an inherent understanding that they should just fulfill the work God created them to accomplish, and He will take care of them. So we should focus our lives on fulfilling God's purpose for our existence, seeking His will above all else, and He will likewise take care of us (verse 33).

6:27 – Who by means of worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

Another reason to avoid anxiety is that it does no good! Many people wish they were taller or shorter than they are, or a different race, or a different gender. Can worrying change these things? My best friend in high school did not grow normally but was extremely short for his age. Could worry have changed this?

Worry solves no problems. Note again the distinction between anxiety and constructive planning. Planning is not wrong but in fact is essential to solve many problems, but anxiety involves emotional upset that accomplishes nothing helpful.

In some matters, careful planning followed by wise action may help improve a situation. But worry by itself never paid a bill, raised a crop, produced a product, or solved a problem. We must learn to study God's word, pray for God's help, think things through, do our best, and then leave the results in God's hands. When we have done our best to deal with a situation, don't waste effort worrying about it.

If worry cannot accomplish even the least matters, such as growing taller, why should we worry about other matters? The fact we cannot help small matters by worrying should teach us not to worry about larger matters either.

6:28-30 – So why worry about clothing? The lilies of the field do not toil nor spin, yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. So if God so clothes the grass of the field that exists today but tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not also clothe you, O you of little faith?

Jesus again uses nature to illustrate His lesson. Just as God feeds the birds (verse 26), so He also clothes the plants. Lilies do not toil nor spin to make clothes for themselves, yet their garments are more beautiful than any that Solomon wore, rich and great as He was.

Most flowers exist for just a short time. They may blossom in the spring or some other time of year. We may enjoy their beauty briefly, but they soon wilt or die. Then we may throw them in the fire because their usefulness has ended. Scripture often uses grass as an example of something temporary (Psalm 90:5,6; 102:11; 103:15; James 1:10,11). If God so cares for plants that exist for just a little while and will quickly be destroyed, who can think He will ignore the needs of His children?

Again, as already discussed, Jesus is not saying that it is wrong to work to provide clothing for ourselves and for our families. Nor is He speaking against toiling and spinning. The fact is that plants do work hard to meet their needs. This may not be obvious by watching them, since they do not move about like the birds seeking food. But studies have shown that plants work hard converting sunshine and air into the food they need to grow and function. So God commands us to work for what we need.

The intended lesson is that material things are just a means to achieve more important things in life. If God knows how to make flowers that are more beautiful than any clothing we can make for ourselves, why should we not trust Him to likewise provide for us? To Jews, the glory of Solomon was the very height of true glory (see 2 Chronicles 9:22,24). Yet even he could not decorate himself as beautifully as some flowers appear.

Note: "O you of little faith."

This little sentence demonstrates the real bottom line of Jesus' teaching. Worry is based on a lack of faith in God's provisions! He has already taught us to pray for God to meet our needs (verse 11). Do we then trust Him to provide for us? Compare Matthew 8:26; 14:31; 16:8.

If we pray diligently and if we trust God, we can be confident that He will give us what we need. But if we pray and still worry and stew, are we not showing that we did not really pray in faith (James 1:6-8)? Let us put Him first in our lives (verse 33), pray in faith, and then trust Him to provide what we need, understanding that we are still responsible to obey His commandments in order to accomplish His will.

6:31,32 – So do not worry about what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear. These are the kinds of things for which the Gentiles seek. But your Father in heaven knows that you need all these things.

Jesus is teaching that we should not worry about food, drink, or clothing – even these basic necessities. These kinds of worries characterize people who have no faith in the true Creator God, such as heathen idol worshipers. They do not trust God because they do not believe in a provident Creator. Are we better than they are? What is the difference between someone who does not believe in a God who provides for His creation and someone who claims to believe it yet acts the same as those who do not believe?

Jesus added that our Father knows that we need these things. He is not so uninvolved in our lives that He is unaware of our needs. He knows and He cares. Our responsibility is to serve Him faithfully. If we do so, we can trust Him to see that we will have what we need (verse 33).

Note that the worry Jesus discusses here is a form of obsession. But there are many things that people become obsessed about besides food and clothing. Some are obsessed about their homes or cars. Some are

even obsessed about pleasures: hobbies, entertainment, sports, recreation, or travel. Others are obsessed about health, about secular education, about the civil government, or about tragedies in the news. In these areas too our concerns may go beyond reasonable care. Our Father knows what we need in all these areas.

Some warning signs may signal that we have such an obsession. We may spend more time and care studying and researching such matters, seeking how we will obtain or enjoy them, than the time and care we spend studying and meditating on God's word. Or our conversations may turn more quickly to such concerns than it does to discussions of God's word. Or we may know endless facts about such matters but not nearly so much about God's will. Or we may be more easily upset about difficulties with such matters or more pleased when these matters go well than we are when there are difficulties or when things go well in God's service.

6:33 – But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Jesus then concluded that we should serve God – seek His kingdom and His righteousness – and these physical needs will be met. Note that Jesus added that we should seek ***first*** the kingdom and His righteousness. We need proper priorities. Spiritual matters come first, because they are the purpose for our existence. Material goods, though necessary, are only a means to a higher end. It follows that they should take a back seat and not hinder the higher ends.

The real issue throughout this discussion has been one of priorities. What comes "first" to us (verse 33)? Who is our Master (verse 24)? Jesus required that our first priority must be our service to God. (See also the passages listed under verse 24.) Our goal in life must be to further God's kingdom and our own right relationship before Him.

The kingdom of God refers to His rule or authority in our lives. In the gospel those who submit to the rule or authority of Christ are those who are in the church. In that sense, the church is the kingdom of Christ – that is, all who choose to submit to the reign of Christ constitute His church. So if God's reign is of paramount importance in our lives, then we must serve Him faithfully as Christians (members of His universal kingdom, the church) and as diligent workers in the local church. Compare Daniel 2:31-45; Matthew 16:18,19; Mark 1:14,15; 9:1; John 18:36; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-17,33; 1 Corinthians 15:22-28; Colossians 1:13,14; Hebrews 12:23-29; Revelation 1:9.

The righteousness of God refers to our own right conduct and relationship with Him. It refers, not to the fact that He is righteous, but to the pattern that He has prescribed in order for us to be righteous (compare Philippians 3:9; Romans 10:1,2).

This righteousness requires first of all that we be forgiven of our sins. None of us is righteous in the sense of having lived sinlessly, since all have sinned. But when our sins are forgiven by Jesus' blood, we are declared righteous on the basis of forgiveness. Then we must live faithfully according to His will to maintain our right standing before Him. This uprightness must be of top priority, above even physical necessities.

All these things will be added to you.

If we put God first, He promises to provide these physical needs, according to His will. God knows our needs (verse 32). He loves and cares for us, far more than for the birds and flowers. So, we can likewise trust Him to see that we receive what we need if we serve Him first. See Psalm 37:25. (Remember that part of serving Him is working to provide for our needs, as already discussed.)

This is no guarantee that God's people will never suffer. Many faithful servants have stood in need at times. Consider the examples of Job, Paul, and others (2 Corinthians 11:27). But if that happens, it is because God has willed to allow it for His own good reasons. As in the case of Job, we may not understand what His reasons are, but we must trust Him that He knows what He is doing and will provide for us in the way He sees best.

Even if we should die, He has assured us an eternal home where nothing is lacking. The lesson for us is to serve Him faithfully as our top priority, then trust Him to provide what He in His wisdom knows that we need.

The question for each of us is whether or not we are truly putting God and His kingdom first in our lives. Do we allow other matters in life to become more important to us than our service to God? Do we allow troubles and problems to become a burden such that we do not trust God as we should? Do we allow affairs of this life to hinder our worship to God, our study of His word, and our lives of faithful service?

6:34 – Do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Not only should we not worry about physical needs, Jesus then said not to worry about the future. Each day has enough evil to suffice that day. We will take care of tomorrow when it comes.

Again, this does not mean we should ignore the future and show no care whatever about it. The ant is praised for providing for future needs (Proverbs 6:8). So it is right for us to save for "a rainy day." But as with physical needs, we should not be overly concerned or anxious about the future. Who knows what will come? We do not even know how long we will be here. If tomorrow comes, we will deal with its problems then. We have enough on our hands to deal with today's problems.

Far too often we spend much of our time and energy worrying about what the future will bring. We may have all we need today, but what about tomorrow – will we have all we need then? So we brood and stew and lie awake worrying. Then the future arrives and most of the problems we anticipated never even develop! So, we should take care of today's work today. Do not "borrow trouble." Then when tomorrow comes – if it comes – we will handle it with the strength the Lord provides, the same way we handled today.

Matthew 7

Sermon on the Mount (continued)

7:1-6 - Judging Others

7:1 – Judge not, that you be not judged.

This is one of the most quoted yet least understood teachings in the New Testament. Many people believe this means we must not tell other people – especially religious people – that they are wrong and need to repent in order to please God. Many people are quick to say, "Judge not!" whenever anyone tries to prove that certain religious teachings or practices violate Scripture – especially teachings or practices in which they themselves are involved!

Rebuking others is at times required, not forbidden.

We will see that this verse means something very different from what many people believe, but consider first the evidence that the passage cannot possibly mean that we must never rebuke others for their sins.

1) *Many passages show that Jesus, His apostles, Old Testament prophets, and all faithful Bible teachers repeatedly pointed out the errors of other people, including religious people.*

In fact, examples of such teaching can be found on nearly every page of the Bible. See Matthew 15:1-14; 22:23-33; chapter 23; John 8:31-47,55; 7:7; Matthew 3:2-10; 14:1-11; Acts 2:14-41; 4:8-12; 5:27-33; 6:9; 7:51-54; 18:24-26,28; 17:1-3; 13:8-11; 15:2-7; Galatians 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 1:19,20; 2 Timothy 1:15; 2:17,18; 3:1-9; 4:10,14,15.

2) *Many passages directly instruct God's people to show other people their errors.*

"Judging" in this sense not only is not forbidden but is in fact required by the Scriptures.

2 Timothy 4:2-4 – "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will

heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."

See also Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:10-13; Proverbs 28:4; Luke 17:3,4.

3) *The context of Matthew 7 itself includes several examples that show it is proper to make judgments in the sense of determining whether or not other people are in sin.*

When Jesus called people "hypocrites," this was a judgment and a rebuke (verse 5; 6:1-18).

Verse 5 teaches us, after we have removed the beam from our own eye, to then help others remove the speck from their eye. This involves both judging and rebuking others.

Verse 6 says not to cast our pearls before swine, but this requires us to determine who is or is not a swine (in the sense of that passage).

Verses 15-20 warn us to beware of false prophets, but we must make a judgment about who or is not a false prophet by observing their fruits.

4) *When people say we are wrong to speak out against the sins of other people, they are judging us and thereby violating their own rule even as they speak!*

They tell us not to say other people are wrong, but they are saying we are wrong when they say this! When people tell us never to say others are wrong, they put themselves in the position of never being able to teach anything whatever, because whatever they teach there will always be people who violate that teaching. All religious teaching rebukes people who do not accept that teaching. The practical affect of this view of "judge not" is to categorically eliminate all religious teaching.

5) *In John 7:24 Jesus plainly commands us to "**judge righteous judgment**."* This proves that ***Jesus never intended to forbid all judging. He is forbidding only certain kinds of judging.*** Our responsibility is to determine what kind of judging is forbidden and what kind is acceptable. Once again we see the need to consider other passages when understanding Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

See also 1 Corinthians 5:12; 6:5.

Kinds of judging that Jesus forbids

Consider several kinds of improper judgment. We will enlarge on some of these in subsequent verses.

1) It is wrong to rebuke others when they have not really violated the will of God.

Sometimes people make judgements on the basis of outward "appearance" without knowing the real facts of the case – John 7:24. What may seem to be wrong when casually observed, may in fact be found to be correct if we would look deeper.

And sometimes people condemn others on the basis of some standard other than the word of God, such as human opinion or

doctrines of men – Matthew 15:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; Romans 14:1-4,10-13; Proverbs 17:15; etc.

The only proper standard for spiritual judging is the word of God – Matthew 7:21-28; John 12:48; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; etc.

2) It is wrong to rebuke others when we ourselves are as guilty as they are (and maybe more so) – verses 3,4.

But even in this case Jesus did not say we should not teach people they are wrong. Rather, He said to first correct our own errors, then we are able to help others effectively – verse 5.

3) It is wrong to judge others when we are not willing to be judged by the same standard by which we judge them – verse 2.

Some people are quick to rebuke others but become quite upset if anyone rebukes them. Since the word of God is the proper standard of judgment (John 12:48), it follows that, not only should we help other people see when their lives contradict God's word, but we should also humbly accept rebuke when other people show us we are violating God's word. See verse 2 below.

4) It is wrong to judge others from improper motives.

The proper motive must be a sincere love for souls that seeks to help others live right and receive eternal life. Improper motives would include pride, seeking to exalt self, loss of temper, seeking merely to win an argument, or accusing others because we have a personal grudge. See 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Galatians 6:1,2; James 3:14-18; 5:19,20; etc.

5) We must also avoid setting ourselves up to declare people's eternal destiny.

Jesus will declare the ultimate destiny of each individual on the judgment day (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Until that time, we cannot know for sure the destiny of others.

We should warn people when their conduct violates Scripture (as described above). And we must teach that sin leads to eternal punishment unless it is forgiven by God. But only God is able to read hearts and know at what point He is or is not willing to show mercy to forgive anyone. We are simply teachers of God's word. We are not the final judges to decree eternal destinies, either heaven or hell. See 1 Corinthians 4:3-5.

7:2 – With what judgment you judge, you will be judged. And with what measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

When people are kind and helpful, other people tend to respond in a similar way to them. But when people are harsh and hypercritical, others generally respond accordingly. This is also true to some extent with God's judgments of us. If we are harsh, unmerciful, and unforgiving in our judgments of others, God will judge us harshly and without mercy or forgiveness (see on 6:12,14,15).

James 2:13 likewise shows that some people judge others by dishonoring them because they are poor or have other hardships that are no fault of their own. Such judgments demonstrate a lack of mercy on people in need. God will respond by not showing mercy toward those who make such judgments.

In particular, the context here (verses 3-5) shows that we condemn ourselves when we commit the same sins for which we condemn others. Many people easily see the sins of others but overlook similar conduct in themselves. If we can see that other people are wrong, surely we ought to be able to see that we ourselves are just as wrong when we do the same things or worse.

However, the teaching again must be understood in light of other passages. It does not follow that, if we overlook other people's sins, then God will not hold us accountable for our sins. God must be true to His standard of judgment, which is His word (John 12:48). He must hold us accountable for sins for which we refuse to repent.

It also follows that we are wrong to judge others if we are not willing to be judged by the same standard we use in judging them. Many are quick to forcefully reveal the wrongs of others but quickly become upset when criticism is directed toward them. If we rebuke others, then we must be willing to accept rebukes for our own conduct. See Matthew 5:23,24; 18:15-17; Hebrews 12:5-15; 13:22; Proverbs 15:31,32; 13:18; 18:13; 10:17; 29:1; 19:20; 1 Peter 3:15; John 3:19-21.

7:3-5 – Why do you look at the speck and try to remove it from your brother's eye, but you do not consider the fact you have a plank in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Here Jesus shows that His main application in context is to hypocritical and unfair judgment in which one finds fault with someone else, although he himself is guilty of the same or more serious sins.

I cannot see to take the mote or speck from someone else's eye until I have removed the large beam from my own eye. See also Romans 2:21-24.

The Bible does not forbid all judging or rebuking of others (see notes on verse 1). But it does condemn hypocritical rebuking, in which we easily see the sins of others while ignoring our own sins. I cannot effectively help others correct their lives when it is clear that they are already as righteous or more so than I am. I am unfair and hypocritical when I live no better life – and maybe even live a worse life – than those I rebuke.

This explains the sense in which, in the context, Jesus says we should not judge (verse 1). When I declare the conduct of others to be

sinful, I clearly condemn my own conduct if I do the same or similar things. The obvious irony of Jesus' statement is that our own sins may be so glaringly obvious that anyone can see them, as if we had a log poking us in the eye. Yet we sometimes profess to see even a speck in someone else's eye, which may require very close observation to even find.

It is amazing how often people will quickly and loudly criticize other people for the sins of which they themselves are guilty.

A liar is often the quickest to accuse others of lying and is extremely upset if other people lie about him.

A thief thoroughly resents other people who steal from him.

Proud, boastful people deeply resent being put down by others who claim to have even greater accomplishments.

Dictatorial, domineering people who love to control the lives of others are often beside themselves when other people try to dominate and control them.

People who are abusive and harsh in their speech towards others – perhaps even falsely accusing them – become extremely upset if others treat them that way.

And so it goes. Such attitudes are often the cause of strife in the workplace, the home, and even the church.

But even in this case, Jesus did not say we must never tell other people they are wrong

Even a speck of dust in the eye is painful and should be avoided. Jesus is not teaching that seemingly small sins should be overlooked. Instead, He teaches that we should remove our own beam, and then we can see clearly to help the person who has a speck in his eye.

Even the speck should be removed, and it is proper for us to help another person remove it. The problem is that often our own conduct is as bad or worse. It is so easy to see even the small errors of others while overlooking even more obvious errors in our own lives. Jesus declared this to be hypocrisy. So Jesus' teaching shows the importance of proper example on the part of those who seek to teach others God's word.

And notice that Jesus Himself is here clearly demonstrating by His own example that judging others is acceptable when done properly. He Himself was judging those who would condemn other people for the things for which they themselves are guilty. He calls such people hypocrites! Surely this is a case in which Jesus illustrates to us the proper kind of judging.

7:6 – Do not give what is holy to dogs nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and tear you into pieces.

Dogs and pigs were looked down upon in Jewish society, and are often used in Scripture to illustrate things that are objectionable. Jesus uses them here to illustrate that a dog does not deserve anything holy and a pig does not appreciate pearls.

> "Generally considered unclean, dogs were scavengers rather than pets in the world of the Bible. On the other hand, pearls were very rare and greatly valued. Some of the finest jewelry from the ancient world contained pearls set in gold." – *Archaeology Study Bible*, page 1380

Under the law, people ate parts of the sacrifices, but to give that meat to a dog would completely violate holiness. Likewise, people can see the value of a pearl, but to a pig it is just another stone to be stomped on. But if you don't give him what he really wants (hog slop), he may attack you despite the great value of what you did give him.

The principle may have various applications, but the most obvious one is to teaching. Some people simply do not recognize the value of efforts made to save their souls by teaching them the truth. Instead, they reject the message (trample it underfoot) and then attack and persecute those who cared enough to give them the message that could save them!

Jesus is saying that we should refuse to teach such people further, because their past conduct has demonstrated:

1) They will not benefit from the truths we would present (like pigs will not appreciate pearls).

2) Rather they will disrespect, reject, and ridicule the truth (trample it underfoot).

3) Then they use the opportunity to turn and harm God's people.

Other passages with similar points:

Nehemiah 6:1-4 – Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem ridiculed Nehemiah's work for God, accused the Jews of rebellion, and threatened to do violence (2:10,19; 4:1-9; compare 6:5-14). They then demanded four times that Nehemiah meet with them to discuss, but their intent was to harm him (verse 2). He consistently refused to meet, saying he was doing an important work and would not leave it to talk with them.

Matthew 21:23-32 – Jewish leaders asked Jesus about His authority. He refused to answer because they refused to answer a valid question about John's baptism. These people had heard much teaching and seen many miracles, yet they rejected Jesus and His message. They were not willing to accept truth but simply tried to find fault with Jesus and then kill Him (16:1; 19:3; Luke 10:25; John 8:6; compare Matthew 22:15,35; Luke 19:47).

Matthew 26:59-63; 27:12-14; John 19:9; Luke 23:7-10; Isaiah 53:7 – During His trials, Jews repeatedly accused Jesus of sins and crimes of all kinds. He repeatedly refused to answer. Once again, He had taught these people many times before, but they had rejected His teaching and were determined to convict Him of sin and destroy Him.

Acts 13:45,46; 18:4-7 – When he began preaching in a city, Paul would teach the Jews first. But when they had heard the message, if they rejected and opposed it, he would turn away from them and teach Gentiles (19:8,9; 28:25-28).

See Proverbs 9:7-9.

Some people have proved themselves to be unworthy of further teaching.

When people have not had the opportunity to learn the truth, we definitely should seek to teach them. But when people teach false doctrine, reject abundant opportunities to learn the truth, and especially when they use whatever we say as an opportunity to attack and slander us, we should drop the discussion and move on to teach others.

Such people may try to intimidate and pressure us into answering their questions or discussing with them. They may accuse us of having something to hide or not being able to answer. But they have proved that, if we did answer, nothing good would come of it except strife, anger, division, and pain.

Like Nehemiah, don't neglect worthwhile work to spend time with those who only cause trouble. Like Paul, move on to teach other people instead (Acts 13:45,46; 18:4-7).

Matthew 15:14 – ***Let them alone***. They are blind leaders of the blind.

Matthew 10:14 – Shake off the dust of your feet and go find others to teach.

Such decisions should not be made lightly, but there are times when people have proved themselves unworthy of receiving further truth.

7:7-12 - Answers to Prayer

7:7,8 – Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.

Jesus adds more information regarding prayer, in addition to the discussion in 6:5-15. He assures us that God hears our prayers and is willing to grant our requests. If we ask (for something from God), we will receive. If we seek (for God to provide us something), we will find it. If we knock, God will open a door of opportunity for us. Jesus then repeats the three phrases in a different form, thereby emphasizing that God really does seek to answer our prayers. See Luke 11:9-13.

We should always appreciate the great privilege of prayer. Jesus here tells us that God does want us to take our requests to Him. Too often we fail to "cast our cares upon Him." As a result we either do not receive what we need or we are too anxious about our problems (compare 6:19-34; Philippians 4:6,7).

For other passages about the power of prayer, see 1 John 5:14,15; 3:21,22; James 5:16; Matthew 18:19; 1 Peter 5:7; John 14:13,14; compare 1 Samuel 1:10-28; 7:5-11; 2 Kings 20:1-7; 2 Chronicles 7:11-14.

In verses 9-11 Jesus implies a limit on God's answers to our prayers: He gives what is ***good***. He has also taught already in the sermon that we must not offer vain repetitions, and that God will not forgive us if we are not willing to forgive others. This should warn us that the promise of these verses is not unlimited.

Jesus does not here list other limits on God's answers to prayer; but once again we see that, as we have often discussed, in order to understand Jesus' teaching in this sermon, we must view it in light of the teaching of other passages. Other passages show other conditions we must meet in order for God to answer our prayers.

We must ask in Jesus' name (John 14:13,14; 1 Timothy 2:5).

We must ask in harmony with God's will (Matthew 26:39; 1 John 5:14,15).

We must pray in faith (Matthew 11:24; James 1:5-8).

And we must live a life of obedience in God's service (James 5:16; 1 John 3:21,22; Proverbs 28:9; 15:8,29; etc.).

It follows that the promise Jesus gives here is primarily to those who are children of God. However, the example of Cornelius in Acts 10 demonstrates that those who are not children of God may receive from God an opportunity to learn the truth if they will sincerely and diligently seek it. See also John 7:17; Acts 17:27.

The promise Jesus offers here is a true promise, but we must realize that there are conditions to meet.

7:9-11 – What man would give a stone to his son who asked for bread? Or would he give a serpent if the son asked for a fish? Even people who are in many ways evil will give good gifts to their children, so how much more will the Father in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?

Jesus then proceeds to assure that, not only will God give gifts, but He will give what we need and is good for us. God really does care about us. An earthly father would not give his son a stone instead of bread or a snake instead of fish. A father gives things that are needed and good for his child. This is true of all fathers who love their children, even though they are human, fallible, and often commit sins.

Jesus says that, if earthly fathers will give good things to their children, how much more will the Father in heaven give good things to His spiritual children. God is much greater than any earthly father. He

is more powerful and therefore capable of greater blessings. But even more important, He is sinless and would never do anything to harm His faithful children. So we can be sure therefore, that He will give us what we need.

These verses add further thoughts to verses 7,8. One thing we learn is that God knows better than we do what we need, just as an earthly father knows better than his children. So a child may ask for something, but if the father knows it would not be good for the child, he may refuse to give what was requested or may substitute something better.

Likewise, Jesus concludes that our Heavenly Father gives good gifts to His children. This may mean He gives something better for us than what we asked; or even He may not give anything at all, if He knows what we requested would not be good. As God taught Job, we must learn to trust Him to know and do what accomplishes His will, whether or not we understand why He does as He does (compare 2 Corinthians 12:9-11).

7:12 – Whatever you want men to do to you, this is what you should do to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

Compare Luke 6:31. Jesus here teaches a principle we can use to judge how we should treat others. The rule is not to treat them like they have treated us, and surely we should not treat them selfishly as to hurt them or simply seek our own gain at their expense.

Some religious teachers in history have taught this rule in a negative form: Don't do things to others that you don't want them to do to you. But what Jesus teaches is higher than this. His rule is positive: treat others the way you would want them to treat you if you were in their place.

This is another way of teaching to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36-40; Luke 10:25-37; 1 John 3:15-18; etc.). Treat people the way you want to be treated. The rule is fairly simple to understand, but often difficult to apply, because it requires great unselfishness, especially when dealing with people who have harmed us. The consequences are vast and far-reaching.

We should treat others well regardless of whether or not they have treated us well. Our standard should not be how they have treated us. Our standard should be to treat all people with love for their good. This is showing the kind of love Jesus showed. This requires that we live on a higher standard than others.

Once again, even this rule must be understood in light of other Bible teaching. Jesus is not saying that our own desires, by themselves, become the ultimate standard for how to treat others. This is surely one thing to consider to help us understand how to treat others. However, sometimes our own desires are faulty.

If we are not properly instructed in God's will, for example, we may want people to give us things or do things that would be contrary to God's

will. Jesus is surely not advocating that we should do such things for others no matter how much we want them to do such things for us. So we should do to others as we would have them do to us, provided our desires are properly informed and guided by His word.

"This is the Law and the prophets" shows that the principle Jesus stated here would teach us to follow the teaching of God's word regarding how to treat other people. Note: The subject Jesus discusses is how we treat other people. Nothing in this principle would teach us how we ought to worship God properly or about church work, organization, etc. Those are matters of direct revelation, not simply matters of how we treat others or want to be treated.

7:13-29 - Importance of Obedience to God and Avoiding False Teachers

7:13,14 – Enter by the narrow gate, because the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction and many go in by it. But narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Verses 13,14 contrast two ways of life, the broad way and the narrow way. Compare Jeremiah 21:8; Proverbs 14:12. Consider the contrast between these two ways in the following areas:

The destinations to which the ways lead

The broad way leads to destruction.

Matthew 10:28 – Destruction here refers, not to physical death, but to punishment in hell after death (compare Luke 12:4,5).

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 – Eternal destruction is punishment for those who do not know God or obey the gospel. This comes in the form of flaming fire when Jesus returns.

Matthew 25:41,46 – This is everlasting punishment in eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (Proverbs 14:12)

The narrow way leads to life.

Romans 6:23 – The wages of sin is death (destruction), but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus. This is not physical life, but eternal reward after this life.

1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:9,10 – This life refers to living forever with the Lord. It is life, not just in the sense of existence, but in the sense of spiritual unity and harmony with God, in contrast with the spiritual death which is separation from God. (Matthew 25:46)

Note that there are only two possible destinies for man.

Each person is on one or the other of these two ways, headed for one or the other of these two destinies. Every passage dealing with the subject shows there are only two ultimate destinies:

Romans 6:23 – The wages of sin is death, but God's gift is eternal life.

Matthew 25:31,32,46 – All nations will be judged by Jesus. The wicked will receive punishment and the righteous will receive eternal life.

Romans 2:6-10 – God will render to every man according to his works. Every soul who works evil will receive punishment. Every man who works good will receive eternal life. (Galatians 6:8; Luke 16:19-31)

Matthew 7:13,14 – The broad way leads to destruction, the narrow way to life.

Often people hope for a middle ground. They don't want to receive eternal torment, but they don't want to be dedicated enough to receive eternal life. They hope for purgatory, limbo, etc. But no such middle ground exists.

Matthew 12:30 – Jesus said if we are not with Him, we are against Him. There are only two choices. Even if we are not actively trying to hinder Jesus' work, yet if we are not diligently serving Him, we are against Him. (Acts 10:2; 11:14)

This is why Jesus said to enter the ***narrow*** way. It is the ***only*** way to eternal life. Any other way leads to destruction.

The popularity of the ways

There are ***many*** people traveling the broad way to destruction, but only a ***few*** on the narrow way to life. Most of us, given our own preference, would rather it not be this way, because it makes a greater chance we or our loved ones will be lost. But Jesus affirmed it to be true.

Many Bible examples show that God's faithful servants are always relatively few compared to the many who are not faithful:

1 Peter 3:20 (Genesis 6) – In Noah's day, just a ***few*** (eight) souls were saved.

Genesis 18:20-33 – Not even ten righteous people could be found in Sodom and Gomorrah. Only Lot, his wife, and his two daughters escaped, but his wife looked back and died. How far behind is our society?

Numbers 13 and 14 – Israel sent twelve spies into Canaan. Ten said they could not take the land, but two said they could. The people believed the ten and tried to return to Egypt. God made the nation wander for forty years till all the older generation died. Only the two faithful spies entered Canaan.

1 Kings 18,19 – On Mt. Carmel, Elijah stood alone against 450 prophets of Baal.

Romans 11:2-5 – Elijah thought he alone served God, but God said He had 7000. This was a large number compared to other examples, but few compared to all the people in Israel and the world. So today, God's people are a "remnant" (Romans 11:5) – few compared to people in the world.

The number of faithful people varies from time to time. Truth is "in season and out of season" (2 Timothy 4:2). But when was there ever a

time God's people were a majority on earth? ***Never***! Few are righteous, many unrighteous. In which group are we?

(Matthew 22:14; Romans 9:27; Luke 13:23-25; Revelation 3:4)

People sometimes try to justify practices because most people accept them.

They argue: "Everybody's doing it. Surely you can't believe all these people are lost! If what you say is true, there sure will be a lot of people in hell!"

What about in Noah's day, Moses' day, etc.? What was "everybody doing" when Sodom burned? Not only ***can*** we believe most people will be lost, but we ***must*** believe it. The fact most people accept a thing does not prove that God accepts it. Most people are going to destruction. Shall we go with them because "everybody's doing it?"

Some groups use their size or growth rate as proof God accepts them. They quote "by their fruits you shall know them" (Matthew 7:16) and claim their rapid growth or large size is a good "fruit" that proves they are pleasing to God. This is strange reasoning in a context that says most people are on the road to destruction and only few on the road to life (verses 13,14).

Did Noah or Elijah make many converts? Did their small following prove they were false teachers? By this logic, we just can prove who is right by counting heads: Catholics, Communists, Moslems, etc. The group that is growing fastest changes from year to year.

The issue is, who is ***doing the will of the Father*** (verse 21). The fruit of a false teacher is false teaching and false practices. The fruit of a true teacher in true teaching and true practices. (See notes on verses 15-23.)

This does not mean we should seek to be small for the sake of smallness. But we must determine who is right or wrong, not by who is largest or fastest growing, but by who is ***doing God's will.*** Those who do so will never be in the majority.

Some people want a big, impressive attendance, contribution, building, etc. They want large numbers of "converts." They don't feel comfortable in a small group, and don't like to be an "oddball." They get discouraged when they teach others and many people refuse to obey. They compromise truth to get more members, more money, etc.

God would like everyone to be saved (2 Peter 3:9). It is our job to spread the gospel to everyone, so all have the chance (Mark 16:15,16). We must never be satisfied to be small in our efforts to teach the lost. But in practice, most people will reject the truth. They will never obey, or will obey then fall away. We might gain ***numbers*** by refusing to stand for some unpopular Bible teaching, but God will not be pleased and people will not really be saved.

The strictness of the ways

The way leading to life is "strait" and "narrow." "Strait" (KJV) means narrow and confined or "difficult" (NKJV) (the word is not "straight," meaning not crooked).

To illustrate, imagine seeking a passage through the mountains. Here is a broad valley, easy to find, enter, and travel – but it doesn't go where you want to go. Somewhere is a narrow chasm with a narrow opening, hard to find, confining, restricted, with narrow walls hard to travel – but it goes where you want to go.

Truth is narrow (difficult, limited), but error is broad (easy, unlimited).

In secular matters, outside religion, truth is often narrow.

Truth is narrow in mathematics. How much is 3 + 3? There are an infinite number of wrong answers, but only one right answer.

Truth is narrow in history. In what year was the American Declaration of Independence signed?

Truth is narrow in measuring. How many inches in a foot?

Truth is narrow in science. At any given moment, how far is it from a point on the earth to a point on the moon?

Truth may not always be as narrow as in these examples, but to almost any given question, there will be more possible wrong answers than right answers. We accept this in everyday life.

Truth is definitely narrow in religion. Serving God requires submission to strict, confining limitations. We are not free to do as we please and still please Jesus. But serving the devil is easy to do: we may do whatever we please, or do nothing at all. There are few limits.

Consider some other passages.

Acts 3:22,23 – Hearken to Jesus in ***all*** he says or be destroyed. (Matthew 28:20)

Galatians 1:8,9 – If we teach things that differ from God's will, we are accursed. This does not mean we have no personal freedoms at all. Some things are revealed in general terms that leave us free to choose any of several courses that might fit the guidelines given. But we must not practice anything that is not included in what God revealed. (2 John 9)

James 2:10,11 – If we keep the whole law, but offend in one point, we are yet guilty and stand condemned.

This does not mean that being faithful to God is impossible or requires superhuman ability. Anyone can serve God, because He has promised to help us and to forgive us of our sins. But we must be willing to submit to Him with zeal and dedication, turning away from our sins. This is why so few find the road. It is not that they ***cannot*** find and follow it, but they are not ***willing*** to submit to its restrictions.

"Strait is the **gate***" (KJV). The restrictions for entering the way are narrow.*

There is one God and Father – Ephesians 4:4-6.

There is one Savior – Jesus. Acts 4:12 – There is salvation in none other. There is no other name under heaven wherein we must be saved.

There is one Faith – Ephesians 4:5. Some say, "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you're sincere." But God says there is one faith, just as surely as there is only one God. Many false faiths, but one true one.

There is one Baptism – Ephesians 4:5. Some teach it doesn't matter how or why you're baptized: sprinkling or pouring, infant or adult, saved by faith alone without baptism, etc. But the Bible says there is one baptism, just as there is one God. That baptism is a ***burial*** (Romans 6:4; Acts 8:36-39). It is for those old enough to first believe and repent, and it is essential to receive the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16).

In all these ways, the gate is strait. There are many ways to be wrong, but to be right we must do exactly as God said without human changes.

*"Narrow is the **way**" (KJV). Living as a Christian requires faithful obedience.*

Some want to believe there are strict requirements for ***entering*** the way, but after that it does not matter much what you believe or practice. They believe "once saved, always saved," or you must obey the "gospel" to be converted, but "doctrine" after that does not affect your eternal destiny. These folks have a ***narrow gate*** leading to a ***broad way***. Jesus said both are narrow!

There is one Church – Ephesians 4:4. Some say, "join the church of your choice. All the churches are going to the same place, just by different roads." But just as there is one God, so there is ***one*** body, which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23; 1 Corinthians 12:20).

One Pattern for Worship – Some say we can worship God any way we please as long as we worship the same God. But Jesus said worship in spirit and ***truth*** (John 4:24). Worship according to man-made doctrines makes worship vain (Matthew 15:9). There are many perverted forms of worship, but God will accept worship only if it harmonizes with His pattern.

God's pattern for church organization and work, moral purity, family relations, etc. must all be respected. This does not mean we should be stricter than He taught. But we must be just as strict as His word, no more and no less.

7:15-20 – Warning about false teachers

7:15 – There are false prophets. They come in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening rules.

Jesus then warns us to beware of false teachers. There are many false prophets in the world. This is a very real danger. This is one reason why so many are on the broad road to destruction.

The false teachers themselves wish we would overlook this danger, so they often try to convince us it is not a serious problem. But Jesus warns us that false teachers do exist and we must be on guard for them. Anytime a man tries to convince you that false teaching is not a serious problem, you can be sure that he is himself a false teacher! He is teaching error when he says false doctrine is not a big problem, and he is setting you up to accept other false doctrines.

Further, Jesus says that false teachers come as sheep but are really wolves in disguise. Deceit, disguise, and counterfeits are Satan's favorite methods. False teachers do not come admitting they are teaching error and will cause folks to be lost. Who would accept their teaching if they admitted this?

Instead, they appear to be as righteous and godly as they can be. They seem kind, concerned, caring, sweet, loving, educated, intelligent, persuasive, eloquent, entertaining, sincere, etc. But they destroy by false doctrine. We are responsible to know God's word so, like the Ephesians in Revelation 2:2, we can distinguish the true from the false.

In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 Paul says such are deceitful workers who transform themselves into apostles of Christ (compare Matthew 7:15). Deceit means that which is not true is presented as though it is true. Many false teachers know they are teaching error, but it does not follow that all false teachers realize they are teaching error. They may themselves have been deceived by other false teachers.

Some teach error because they hope to receive more income from teaching what is popular (1 Timothy 6:6-10; 2 Peter 2:15). Others seek to justify their own wicked practices (2 Peter 2:14), or they justify the sins of others so they can obtain a large following (2 Timothy 4:2-4; Matthew 23:1ff). But some may really believe they are teaching truth, not realizing that they themselves have been deceived.

But why should we be surprised at this? The devil has used deceit and lies throughout history. He is the father of all liars (John 8:44). He deceived Eve in the garden (2 Corinthians 11:3) and has been deceiving folks ever since.

It follows that we cannot determine who is or is not a false teacher on the basis of apparent sincerity or pleasing character. Some people claim that a person is a false teacher, not just if he persists in teaching error and refuses to repent, but only if he is knowingly hypocritical, knowingly deceitful, or has evil motives or attitudes.

This view would mean that Saul of Tarsus was not a false teacher even as he persecuted the church (Acts 23:1; 26:9). It would mean that, in order to prove a person to be a false teacher, we must demonstrate he has false motives. That involves us in judging people's hearts and thoughts. Such an approach is never taught in Scripture.

The very concept of sheep's clothing implies that the teacher's motives and character will appear to be innocent. Jesus said we know false teachers by their ***fruit***, not by their motives or attitude. Fruit is observable and objective. It refers to the obedience or disobedience that Jesus proceeds to discuss in verses 21-28.

Satan and his ministers will receive their just reward. But we must be sure they don't take us with them. The only way we can avoid that destiny is to make sure we know the truth of God's word and check out what we hear before we believe it (Matthew 7:15-27; Acts 17:11).

For other passages about false teachers see Matthew 15:14; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; Acts 20:28-30; 1 John 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Titus 1:9-14; 2 John 9-11; Romans 16:17,18; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter chapter 2.

7:16-18 – You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit and a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

Since we cannot recognize false teachers by observing appearances or character, Jesus uses further illustrations to show how we can recognize them. Different kinds of trees bear different kinds of fruit, so each kind of tree can be known by the fruit it bears. Figs cannot come from a thorn plant, nor can grapes come from a bramble bush, etc.

This is true because God created plants to reproduce after their own kind (Genesis 1:11,12 Galatians 6:7). In the same way, the character of a person – especially a teacher – can be determined by the works he produces. Good conduct comes from a good source, and evil conduct comes from an evil source. This is true of speech and deeds. One speaks and acts according to the kind of person he is (compare Matthew 12:33-37).

Notice that Jesus here disproves the theory of evolution which teaches that, given enough time, organisms can reproduce something entirely different from themselves. If evolution were true, then the test Jesus gives here would not work.

The point is that, we can know whether a person is good or bad by comparing his works to God's word (compare verses 21-28; Luke 6:37,39; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Galatians 1:8,9; 1 John 4:1,6). In particular, the fruit of a teacher is his teaching and the conduct that his teaching produces.

Just as a good tree must produce good fruit, so a good teacher produces teaching that leads people to obey God. But a false teacher produces teaching that leads people to disobey God. So we can know whether a man is a true or false teacher by whether or not his teaching leads himself and others to obey God's word or to disobey it.

We can trust this as a sure measure, regardless of how kind, nice, and sincere he seems to be. Regardless of apparent character or sincerity, if his teaching leads people to disobey God, he is a false teacher.

7:19,20 – Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So you will know them by their fruits.

Jesus then states the end result of teachers who produce bad fruit: they will be cut down and thrown into the fire. This surely shows the punishment of all false teachers who refuse to repent. Compare Galatians 1:8,9 and the passages we listed above regarding false teachers.

As we discussed earlier, some churches claim they must be acceptable to God because they have produced "good fruit" of rapid growth and large numbers of members or converts. We have already that this contradicts verses 13,14. But furthermore, verses 21-28 show that the fruit Jesus refers to is, not large numbers, but obedience to the Father. Our judgment should be based on the ***quality*** of the fruit produced (good or bad), not the ***quantity*** of people who accept a doctrine.

7:21-29 – The importance of obedience

7:21 – Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" to Jesus will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of the Father in heaven.

Jesus concluded His sermon by urging people to ***do*** what He had taught them. He first explained that it is not enough to call Him "Lord, Lord." We must obey Him. The requirement of obedience is clearly implied in the term "Lord." A lord is a master or ruler, one whom we must obey (Luke 6:46; Romans 6:12ff; Matthew 6:24; John 8:32ff). This basic principle has many important applications.

This principle gives a specific test to determine who really is or is not on that narrow road to life (verses 13,14). The test is not who simply claims Jesus is their Lord. Anyone can say He accepts Jesus and believes in Him. But a person is not truly Jesus' disciple simply because he professes to be. To enter the kingdom, one must do the will of the Father.

Further, this principle gives a test to judge teachers. Jesus had just warned us not to judge teachers on the basis of their apparent goodness. We must judge their fruits (verses 15-20). Then here in verses 21-23 He tells us specifically what fruits we are looking for. We cannot know they are true teachers just because they profess to follow Jesus and exalt Him

as "Lord." Rather, their teaching must lead to ***obedience*** to the will of the Father. If it does not, then they bear the fruit of false teachers, regardless of their claims.

Further yet, the obedience required is obedience to the ***will of the Father*** in heaven. Everybody obeys something or someone (Romans 6:16). The question is: Whose will are we obeying? To be saved eternally, we obey God's will, not human teachings, man-made doctrines, or our own will. Obeying human teachings constitutes lawlessness and leads to rejection (see references under verse 23).

Specifically, many people today claim they have "accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior," yet they do not obey Him. In many cases they know they are not obeying Him. In many other cases they proclaim as doctrine that obedience is not necessary to salvation as long as one believes. All such views clearly contradict Jesus' teaching here. If Jesus is Lord, we must obey. If we deny the need for obedience, either by what we teach or by how we act, then we are not truly honoring Him as Lord. We are just paying lip service (Matthew 15:8).

Some say, if one believes and ***confesses*** Jesus as Lord, he will be saved, whether or not he is baptized. We agree that confession is required (Romans 10:9,10), but it is only part of what is required. Jesus here clearly says that confessing Him as "Lord" without obedience will lead only to rejection, like those He describes in verses 22,23.

Still others teach people, if they "pray the sinner's prayer," Jesus will save them even before and without baptism. But such doctrine again amounts to calling on Jesus as Lord without doing the will of the Father. No New Testament passage anywhere offers salvation to any unconverted sinner on the basis of praying for forgiveness. On the contrary, what is required of the penitent believer is that He confess Christ and be baptized (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21). To teach otherwise is contradict Jesus' clear teaching that people must not only confess Him as Lord, but must also do the will of the Father.

Passages Showing Obedience Is Necessary to Salvation

John 14:15 – If you love Me, keep My commandments.

John 14:21-24 – He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. … If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

Acts 10:34,35 – …God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

Romans 2:6-10 – who "will render to each one according to his deeds": eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Romans 6:17,18 – But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Hebrews 5:9 – And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

Hebrews 11:8 – By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

Galatians 5:6 – For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.

2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 – in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

James 2:14-26 – What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? … Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. … You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe – and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? … Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? … You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. … For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

1 Peter 1:22,23 – Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible

seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,

1 John 2:3-6 – Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

1 John 5:3 – For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

7:22,23 – Many, who called Jesus "Lord," will say to Him in that day that they prophesied in His name, cast out demons in His name, and did many wonders in his name. But He will respond that He never knew them and they must depart from Him because they practiced lawlessness.

Jesus then declared that there will be many people who call Him "Lord" and who think they are serving Him, but they will be rejected because they practice lawlessness. The are rejected because they fail to meet the test of doing the will of the Father. Note some applications here.

These people really believe – apparently sincerely – that they are pleasing to God. Thy claim to accept Jesus as Lord and to confess Him, calling Him "Lord, Lord." They even claim to have done great good works in Jesus' name: prophesying, casting out demons, and even doing miracles. So the problem is not that they did nothing at all. But what they did was not proper. Jesus will reject them because He never knew them and because they worked lawlessness. They did not do the will of the Father.

Some today say they know God is pleased with them because they claim to have experienced miracles. When shown passages of Scripture that they are violating, instead of offering Bible evidence for their practices, they tell testimonies about miracles they claim to have experienced. Yet, just as with the people Jesus here describes, many such people are working lawlessness. Judas was an apostle and did miracles like other apostles, but was rejected. Many who make such claims have never even obeyed the first principles of gospel teaching about how to become true disciples (so Jesus does not "know" them).

Many such people are among those who have been deceived by false teachers, as in verses 15-20. They apparently really expect Jesus to accept them. This is the danger of false teaching. It leads people to believe they are saved when they are not. This demonstrates why it is so important to check out teachers by the Scriptures.

Then the passage shows that sincerity and good conscience are not sufficient to insure salvation. Many false teachers say people should just "let your conscience be your guide." So people believe, "Surely God will

not condemn all these sincere people." But Jesus said such people will be rejected unless they do the will of the Father. In fact, Jesus assured us that there are "many" such people.

Then there are those who claim that all we must do to be saved is to be "religious" or to worship the true God. When shown that people are not obeying Bible teachings, they claim we should overlook such matters because the people "worship the same God you worship" and "are just as zealous as you are." But the people Jesus described here were religious and zealous, worshiped the true God, and even confessed Him to be "Lord." Yet they were rejected. Again, we must do the works that God has commanded in Scripture.

Finally, note that the mere fact a person claims to act "in Jesus' name," does not prove his claim is true or that the Lord will accept him. Like many people today, these people claimed to act "in Jesus' name," yet were rejected. All kinds of deeds have been done throughout history professing to be done in service to Jesus, including false miracles, false teachings, false churches, false church organizations, man-made institutions, and even wars.

But the whole point of the context is that, in order to truly act in Jesus' name, we must ***obey*** Jesus' teachings. Just saying that we are acting "in Jesus' name" does not make it so. We must act by His authority to truly act in His name.

See also Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13; John 5:43.

"Lawlessness" (anomia) – "...1. properly, the condition of one without law either because ignorant of it, or because violating it. 2. contempt and violation of law, iniquity, wickedness..."Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

7:24-27 – Whoever hears Jesus' sayings and does them is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. Rain descended, floods came, and winds blew, but the house did not fall because it was founded on the rock. Whoever hears Jesus' sayings and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. Rain descended, floods came, and winds blew, and the house fell and great was its fall.

Jesus then compares those who hear His teachings to those who build a house. Those who ***obey*** the teachings are compared to one who builds his house on the firm foundation of a rock. That house will stand when storms and hostile elements beat upon it. So our lives before God will stand the trials of life and ultimately be acceptable before God if we obey what we have been taught by the Lord.

On the other hand, those who hear Jesus' teachings but do ***not*** obey, are like a man who builds his house on sand. When the storms come, that house will fall. Likewise, the trials of life and ultimately the

judgment day will show that the man who is not obeying Jesus is not spiritually acceptable.

Notice that both builders illustrate religious people: both build a house. Both are actively involved in their religion, like the people in verses 22,23. The problem is that some are not ***obeying*** Jesus' teaching.

And both men have access to the truth. The problem is not that one has heard the gospel and the other has not. Both have heard, but one ***obeys*** and the other does not.

Finally, note that this teaching applies to "everyone" – not just some. "Everyone," who hears but does not obey, has built his house in vain. Jesus said that this is spiritual foolishness. But "whoever" ***hears and obeys*** has a house that will stand before the Lord in the judgment. Only those people are truly wise. People around them may view them as foolish and ridicule them, but in the end, they will stand approved.

7:28,29 – When Jesus ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His teaching, because He taught them as one having authority, not like the scribes.

People were impressed with Jesus' teaching because He spoke, not like the scribes, but like One who possessed authority. We should also be impressed by this. Jesus did not teach even like true prophets, let alone like false teachers. He spoke as only the Son of God – God in the flesh – could speak. To miss this is to miss who He really professed to be.

Jesus did not just profess to act as a messenger to reveal a message from God. He Himself claimed authority far beyond any mere prophet or messenger (compare Matthew 16:15-17). Note some examples in just this sermon in which Jesus' teaching showed that He possessed authority in Himself:

He said that people must obey His teachings or they were foolish and would be destroyed (7:24-27).

He said He Himself would declare people's rejection on the grounds that He never knew them and they must depart from Him (7:23).

He repeatedly contrasted His teaching to that of other sources, even Moses and Old Testament prophets. He said "I say to you," as though the very fact that He says it makes it true (5:20,22,28,32,34,39,44; 6:2,5,16,25).

What mere human prophet had the right to so speak? These are claims of Deity. Either Jesus spoke as God in the flesh, or else He was a false prophet. Jesus said that His Father had given Him His teaching, but He also claimed authority in His own right.

Whereas human prophets emphasized the need for men to follow the teachings of God revealed through the prophet, Jesus repeatedly emphasized the authority of His own teaching. He said:

Matthew 7:24 – Men must hear and do these sayings of mine.

Matthew 28:18,20 – He claimed to possess all authority in heaven and on earth, so people must obey all that He commanded them.

John 14:6 – He said that He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Him.

John 12:48 – Men will be judged by His words in the last day.

2 John 9-11 – Whoever does not abide in the teaching of Jesus does not have God. But if we abide in that teaching we have the Father and the Son. Any who come and do not bring that teaching must be rejected.

Truly, no one ever spoke like Jesus did. He was no mere man. We must respect all that He teaches.

Matthew 8

Chapter 8 – Jesus' Miracles

8:1-4 – When Jesus had come down from the mountain a leper said He could cleanse him if He was willing. Jesus said that He was willing, touched him, and immediately the leprosy was cleansed. He told the man to tell nobody but to show himself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded.

Compare Luke 5:12-16; Mark 1:40-45.

When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. This shows that many people witnessed the miracles about to be described. Jesus' miracles were often done under circumstances in which there were many witnesses.

About this time, a leper fell down before Jesus and affirmed that Jesus could cleanse him of his leprosy, if He was willing. Luke adds that this man was "full of leprosy" – a very advanced case. Jesus touched him and said He was willing to cleanse the man. He told him to be cleansed, and immediately the leprosy left him.

The power of such a miracle is overwhelming. Even today, with all our modern medicine, leprosy is generally considered incurable. Modern "faith healers" won't even attempt to heal such cases. Why not if, as they claim, they have power to heal like Jesus and His apostles did?

Yet despite the difficulty of the case, the miracle still possessed all the characteristics of true miraculous healings. It was immediate. It was performed simply by the speaking of a word and a touch. It was obvious that the man really had the disease (he was "full" of it), and that he was really healed. The healing was complete, without remaining symptoms. The confirmation of the miracle is described in the following verses. Surely such an event illustrates the nature of true Bible miracles: it was impossible by natural law.

It is interesting that Jesus touched the man while he was leprous. This was very dangerous to do, if Jesus were not convinced He could heal the man. Lepers were supposed to remain separate from all other people, so that no one else could receive the disease (Leviticus 13:1-5; Numbers

5:2). Jesus was clearly confident from the beginning that He could heal the man.

Jesus told the man to go show himself to the priest and offer the sacrifice that Moses commanded. He said that this would be a testimony to them. The law required sacrifice of all who were cured of leprosy (Leviticus 13:49; 14:2ff). The priest was responsible to examine the leprous man and confirm the healing. Then the man should offer a sacrifice and could again associate with other people.

(Incidentally, the existence of this law showed that natural healing of leprosy could occur, otherwise there was no point in the law. But there is no indication that anyone knew how to cure it. It would be cured by process of nature, or it would simply not be cured. But no physician had means to cure it. Surely no one could cure it immediately by a word and a touch.)

In this case, Jesus had more than one reason for giving the command to go to the priest. First, it was required by law. But also, it would confirm that the healing had genuinely occurred. The man (and Jesus) would have the testimony of the priest to confirm it.

Note also that this command from Jesus showed that He recognized the Old Testament law as still being in effect during His lifetime. Modern-day Sabbath keepers sometimes argue that we should keep the Sabbath because Jesus did. However, the fact that He kept the Sabbath does not prove we should keep it, any more than His instruction to this leper proves that we should keep the laws about animal sacrifices. The law did not end till Jesus died (see Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 9:15-17; 10:1-10).

Sometimes Jesus did not want people to publicize His miracles until later.

Jesus told the healed leper not to tell others about the miracle. The record does not explain why He gave this command. However, Mark 1:40-44 says the man spread the news anyway, and so many people came to Jesus to be healed that He could no longer teach in the cities. He was forced to go into the wilderness. Jesus did not want to become popular for the wrong reasons or so popular so quickly that it actually hindered His work.

Obviously, the point is not that Jesus did not want these events to ***ever*** be told to anyone, else they would not be recorded in the Bible. Sometimes He instructed people to tell others and sometimes He forbade it– 9:30; 12:16; Mark 1:44; 3:12; 5:43; 7:36; 8:30; Luke 4:41; 8:56; 9:21; compare Mark 5:19,20. In Matthew 17:9 He told them to wait till after His resurrection to publicize a miracle. So the lesson must be that He did not want them told ***at the time***, but they should be told later when it suited His purposes better.

Furthermore, according to John 6:15, after one of Jesus' great miracles, the people were about to take Him and forcibly make Him a

king. Their conduct demonstrated that they wanted miracles for the physical benefit the miracles produced, rather than for the spiritual lessons the miracles taught about who Jesus is (6:26,27).

This shows that people, including His disciples, completely misunderstood the nature of His purpose on earth and His reign as Christ. They thought He would be an earthly king to rule over His enemies by force, whereas Jesus intended all along to establish a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36).

Jesus needed time to teach His message and prepare the apostles before the kingdom began. If people emphasized the wrong concepts of His miracles and of His kingdom, it would hinder His purpose. So He did the miracles to prove who He was, but often wanted the people to wait till later to spread their testimony of those miracles after He had time to preach and then to die and arise, so people would then have a better understanding of the spiritual nature of His message.

8:5-13 – Healing of the centurion's servant

Compare Luke 7:1-10.

8:5,6 – When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion pled for his servant who was lying at home paralyzed and dreadfully tormented.

Jesus entered Capernaum (on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee – see ***map***). About that time, the servant of a centurion was sick (a centurion was a leader of one hundred soldiers). Matthew adds that the servant had palsy or paralysis. Luke adds that this servant was dearly beloved by the centurion but he was about to die. The centurion's concern shows that servants were not always treated like mere property, but were sometimes loved and treated kindly.

Luke says the centurion heard about Jesus, so he sent some elders or leaders of the Jews to ask Jesus to come and heal this servant. Matthew describes the event as though the centurion himself went to Jesus. So Matthew means that the centurion "came" by means of agents: the elders. Perhaps both happened: he approached near, then sent the elders with his request. (Luke 7:7 says he did not consider himself worthy to approach Jesus.)

The elders begged Jesus to do this good deed for the centurion. They said he was worthy of it, because he was a good man who loved the Jewish nation. In fact, he had built the Jewish synagogue. This indicates that the centurion himself was almost certainly not a Jew (though he may have been a proselyte). But he did love the people of God under the Jewish religion.

8:7-9 – Jesus agreed to go, but the centurion said he was not worthy for Jesus to come under his roof. If Jesus just spoke the word, the servant would be healed. He understood authority because he had soldiers under him, and they came or went or acted according to his instructions.

Jesus agreed to go and heal the servant. But before He arrived there, the centurion told Jesus not to bother to travel all the way to the centurion's house. He said he was unworthy for Jesus to come into His house, and that was why he had not personally gone to Jesus. The more we recognize Jesus' greatness, the more unworthy we see ourselves in His presence.

Instead, he urged Jesus to just speak the command to save the servant, and he would be healed. He said He knew Jesus did not need to be personally in the presence of the servant to heal him. All He had to do was to give the command.

He explained that this was a matter of authority. He understood this, because he himself was subject to authority and he had authority over his soldiers. If he just spoke a word to his servants to come or go, they would obey. So he reasoned that Jesus could likewise heal the servant by speaking the words, without personally coming to the centurion's house. This demonstrated the faith and the humility of the centurion. He did not consider himself to be worthy for Jesus to come to his home. Yet he was confident Jesus could do the miracle.

This also illustrates the nature of authority. Authority is the right to give commands that others must obey. One with authority need only speak the word, and those who are subject to authority must obey. This is the case with true miracle power.

Jesus sometimes did little acts that were clearly incapable of causing the event by natural law, but these acts were not necessary to the accomplishing of the miracle. Often, He simply spoke, and that was all that was needed.

This concept of authority also shows that, when God speaks, we must obey. Anything else is a failure to respect His authority. When God speaks in his word regarding salvation, worship, the church, morality, or any aspect of our lives, those who truly believe and respect His authority will obey His spoken word. Understanding and respect for authority is absolutely fundamental to being a true follower of Jesus Christ by faith.

8:10-12 – Jesus marveled and said He not found such great faith even in Israel. Many would come from east and west and sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom, but the sons of the kingdom would be cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The centurion's faith amazed Jesus, and He told the people that this centurion demonstrated greater faith than Jesus had found among the

Israelites. The man was confident Jesus could simply speak and the result would occur.

Jesus used the faith of this man, who was apparently not a Jew, to teach a lesson about faith. He said that many will come from the east and the west – that is, great distances away from Palestine and therefore not Jews – and would sit down in the eternal kingdom with great patriarchs, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But many Jews – who thought they would inherit the kingdom – will be outside in the darkness. This must refer to eternal destinies, rather than to Jesus' kingdom on earth, since the patriarchs were never in Jesus' earthly kingdom.

This is just one of many passages predicting Gentile participation in the kingdom and rejection of many Jews. Such a concept was foreign to Jewish belief. Even after the church began, miraculous revelation was needed to convince members of the church to accept these truths. Yet here and elsewhere Jesus clearly taught them in His own lifetime.

Note also that Jesus here clearly states punishment for the wicked. He describes it as outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Some would deny this, but Jesus Himself taught such things repeatedly.

8:13 – Jesus told the centurion to go his way. It would be done for him as he believed. His servant was healed from the same hour.

Of course, Jesus does possess power such as the centurion described, and He proved it by doing as the man requested. Jesus said that it would be done as the centurion believed. On returning to the centurion's house, the messengers found that, indeed, the servant had been healed.

Now, what faith healer today can do as Jesus did? Again note that the disease was obvious: the man was paralyzed. The healing was obvious: he became well. The healing was instantaneous, for the man was well by the time the messengers returned to the house. Matthew says the servant was healed in the very hour that Jesus spoke. And the healing was clearly impossible by natural law, for Jesus did not even see or touch the man, yet He healed him. No faith healer today has such power. Jesus again demonstrated that God was with Him.

8:14,15 – Jesus entered Peter's house and saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her. She arose and served them.

Compare Luke 4:38,39 and Mark 1:29-31.

Peter's mother healed miraculously

Leaving the synagogue, Jesus went to the home of Simon Peter. Peter had lived in Bethsaida (John 1:44), but by this time he had a home in Capernaum. There Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, so they requested Jesus to help her. He rebuked the fever, so that it

immediately left her. She was then so completely recovered that she got up and served the people present.

This again illustrates the character of true New Testament miracles. First, it was clear that the woman was sick, since fevers cause clearly observable symptoms. Then it was clear that the problem was gone, for the symptoms were gone. Further, the healing occurred quickly, as did all Bible miraculous healings. Finally, the problem was so completely solved that the woman was able to get up and serve others. When fevers heal naturally, even after the fever is gone, the person is weak and must recuperate slowly. Jesus' healings left people with no signs the problem had ever existed.

All this contrasts to the so-called miracles of faith healers today. They often cannot heal people at all, or at least it is not clear that a healing has occurred. Or they claim a miracle for a partial or gradual improvement.

Peter was not celibate.

Note the consequence of this event to the Catholic claim that Peter was the first pope and to their doctrine of celibacy. This passage clearly proves that Peter was married (see also 1 Corinthians 9:5). So obvious is this that even Catholic leaders do not deny it. However, today, Catholic Church law requires that popes and other leaders in their hierarchy must not marry. The fact that Peter was married must prove either that he was not the first pope, or else that celibacy was not required, or both!

If Peter were alive today, the church most definitely would not accept him as pope. So, their man-made laws would exclude from the papacy the man they claim was the very first pope! (Some claim that Peter left his wife and ceased to act as her husband after he became an apostle. But had he done so, he would have clearly violated the teaching of passages such as 1 Corinthians 7:1-5.)

In fact, Peter was not the first pope, and celibacy is a false doctrine. Peter was not the first pope, since the office of pope is unknown in Scripture. Jesus is the Head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). And celibacy is a false doctrine invented by man (Hebrews 13:4; 1 Timothy 4:1-3). What right do men have forbidding what God expressly permits or declaring sinful that which God clearly declares to be honorable?

8:16,17 – When evening came, people brought to Jesus those who were demon possessed. He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick. This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that He took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses.

Compare Mark 1:32-34; Luke 4:40.

That evening other sick folks were brought to Jesus. He healed all of them, laying His hands on them (Luke 4:40). This included the casting

out of demons by simply speaking a command to them. This fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah that He took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses – Isaiah 53:4.

This use of Isaiah 53:4 has led some to claim that Christ has promised healing from diseases to all who serve Him faithfully. That this is a misuse of the passages is made clear by the fact that God's faithful people throughout all ages have at times suffered from sickness, and all eventually die. Matthew uses the reference here to refer to the miraculous healings that Jesus did while He was on earth.

Note that there were no kinds of diseases that Jesus could not heal. Nor did He attempt to heal people but failed. He never failed. Yet today faith healers claim to have healing power like in the first century, but there are many sick people they cannot heal, and they often fail. This proves their claims are false, and therefore they are not from God.

8:18-22 – Jesus' answered some mistaken followers.

Compare Luke 9:57-60.

8:18-20 – After Jesus had crossed the sea, a scribe said he would follow Jesus wherever He went. Jesus responded that foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head.

Seeing great multitudes, Jesus determined to cross over the sea. A scribe then professed that he would follow Jesus wherever He went, but Jesus told Him that He did not even have as much of a home in which to stay as a fox with its hole or a bird with its nest.

Jesus had no earthly gain to offer. We must not serve Him for financial gain, but instead must be willing to sacrifice all we have, if necessary, to do His will. This does not mean it would be wrong for Christians to have houses. Some did (Acts 12: 12; 16:15; 21:8). But we must never allow such to hinder our service to God, nor should we expect to receive such things as reward for serving Him.

Compare this to the people who, after He fed the five thousand, followed Him hoping for physical food as a reward (John 6). It may be that Jesus read this man's heart and saw he had material motives. Or it may be just that He gave this as a general warning, so the man would "know what he was getting into."

In particular, this man (and others) appeared to be discussing a specific commitment, that was unique to Jesus' earthly lifetime. That is, the man would join those who left home and literally traveled with Jesus everywhere He went. This was not required of everyone, even during Jesus' lifetime. Only the apostles and perhaps some others made this kind of commitment.

Jesus may have been warning the man of the hardships He and His apostles were enduring as they so traveled. People should not expect Him to be an earthly king, traveling in luxury and prosperity. This may

have been what many expected, as part of their expectation of an earthly kingdom.

"Son of Man"

This is the first time as recorded in Matthew that Jesus referred to himself as "the Son of Man." Kyle Pope has a helpful discussion of this expression in his commentary, which we summarize briefly here.

"Son of man" was used in the Old Testament to refer to one who simply was a human being – that is a descendant of Adam – Numbers 23:19 Job 25:4-6; Psalm 8:4; 144:3. Sometimes it referred to a man who had a special responsibility given him by God – Daniel 8:17, and numerous times in the book of Ezekiel.

Daniel 7:13,14 uses the expression with a meaning of special significance in which one like the Son of Man came in the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days to receive from Him glory and dominion and a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, so all people should serve Him.

That the expression is not intended to deny the Deity of Jesus on earth is clear from Matthew 16:13-17 where Jesus asked the disciples who He the Son of Man was. Peter in response confessed Him to be the Christ the Son of the living God, and Jesus pronounced a blessing on him for that confession saying God had revealed it to him. So the Son of Man was also the Son of the living God.

Pope lists other places where the expression is used in contexts that demonstrate Jesus possesses qualities of Deity, including the following:

He has a heavenly origin (John 3:13; 6:62).

He has power to forgive sins (Matthew 9:6).

He is the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:8).

He commands angels (Matthew 13:41; 16:27; 25:31; John 1:51).

He has the power of judging men (Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38; John 5:27).

He has the power to grant salvation (Matthew 18:11; John 6:27).

He has power over death (Matthew 12:40; 17:9).

It would appear that Jesus uses the expression to emphasize His humanity without in any way attempting to deny or belittle His Deity. Pope concludes that Jesus used the expression in order to identify Himself with the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13,14.

8:21,22 – Another disciple asked the Lord to let him first go and bury his father. Jesus responded that he should follow Him and let the dead bury their dead.

Another man was called to follow Jesus, but he wanted first to go bury his father. Jesus said that the dead may bury their dead, but this man should go preach the gospel of the kingdom (Luke 9:60). Jesus' meaning was that those who were spiritually dead could take their time

to care for those who were physically dead, but He had something more important for this man to do.

Again, this does not mean that funerals are sinful (see Acts 9:36ff; 8:2). The point is that such things may seem important, but they are actually less urgent than man's spiritual well being. There are fates far worse than death, so the death of others should not be allowed to hinder our service to God.

As already discussed, Jesus' call to this man to "follow" Him, probably meant that He was to immediately accompany Jesus in His preaching travels, like the apostles were doing. This may have been a commission like was about to be given to the seventy in Luke 10:1ff.

McGarvey reminds us that, under the law, touching a dead body would make a person unclean for at least seven days (Numbers 19:11-22). This would require a significant delay in this man's obeying Jesus' instruction to follow Him. Pope explains even further that, after one was buried in a tomb, the family would remain in mourning for a year or so till his bones could be taken from the tomb and placed in an ossuary box. If that is the meaning of this disciple, it may have been a year or more before he would have been ready to follow Jesus.

Jesus was to be here only a short time. Already He was predicting and anticipating His death. Even a few days' delay might be a hindrance in Jesus' plans. If this were what Jesus wanted, such would not be true in the same way in our day. Nevertheless, we must be willing to make whatever sacrifices the Lord requires of us.

8:23-27 – Calming of the storm on Galilee

Compare Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25.

8:23,24 – Jesus and His disciples got into a boat and a great tempest arose so the boat was covered with waves. But Jesus was asleep.

This miracle demonstrates Jesus' power over nature.

He and His disciples were in a boat crossing the Sea of Galilee (see a ***map***). Mark adds that other little boats were with them (4:36). A storm came up and nearly overwhelmed the boat. Mark adds that the boat was already filling (4:37).

Sudden storms are common on this sea. Many of the disciples were experienced fishermen on this sea. Yet they were frightened. This demonstrates this was no ordinary storm, and they realized they could not deal with it themselves. But Jesus was asleep.

8:25-27 – The disciples awoke Jesus and urged Him to save them because they were perishing. He asked why they were afraid, and said they had little faith. He rebuked the winds and sea, and there was a great calm. The men marveled about who Jesus could be that even the winds and sea obey him.

Jesus had been asleep (verse 24) while the disciples were so frightened at the prospects of this storm. They awoke Him to help them because they feared they would perish. Jesus' calm in the face of such danger is a lesson for us all, especially since He rebuked them for their lack of faith (verse 26).

Does this mean: (1) They should have known He was the Son of God, and no storm could destroy Him unless it was God's will? (2) They should have had more faith in Jesus' power to handle the situation as needed to do God's will? (3) Or, does it mean all of us should have more faith in God, so we should all be less fearful in the face of all danger?

Jesus stopped the storm by simply speaking – He rebuked it. The result was a great calm. Note that, by nature, winds die down gradually, and even after the wind ceases, it takes a long time for tossing waves to calm. And none of this can be accomplished according to natural law by the words of a mere human. But when Jesus spoke to the wind and the waves, a great calm resulted. The people who observed it marveled that the both the winds and the sea obeyed Him.

This complete power of Jesus over nature demonstrates the truthfulness of His claims. This is the primary purpose of all miracles – to confirm the truth of the words spoken by the people through whom the miracles took place (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:3,4). Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, the Savior of the world, God in the flesh, etc. (Matthew 16:15-18; John 20:28-31; etc.). When He did miracles, this confirmed His words (Acts 2:22). In particular, if He is the God who made the worlds (John 1:1-3), it is only to be expected that He can control what He created. Events such as this and His walking on the water confirm His power over nature.

Today people claim to do miracles, but the events that occur do not measure up to the characteristics of Bible miracles. One way this is true is that no one of them ever will attempt to calm such a terrible storm by speaking a word, and having it occur so noticeably that people observing know it happened by the spoken word. I have spoken to dozens of them who claim to have witnessed true miracles and never have any of them even claimed such a thing as this.

Another difference is that Jesus stated the disciples had "little faith," yet He worked a great miracle in their presence. Modern "faith-healers" often refuse to attempt miracles when they know people are present who don't believe they can do miracles; or they attempt a miracle and when they fail, they blame it on the lack of faith of the people

present. The fact the disciples lacked faith did not stop Jesus from doing this great miracle.

8:28-34 – Casting out a legion of demons from the man among the tombs

Compare Mark 5:1-21; Luke 8:26-40.

8:28 – When Jesus crossed to the country of the Gergesenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs. They were so fierce no one could pass that way.

Here we have another of Jesus' great miracles, this one involved casting out many demons. Mark's account gives the greatest amount of detail.

Jesus went to the east side of the Sea of Galilee to where the Gergesenes lived. Other accounts say Gadarenes. Some commentaries explain that one of the terms identifies the general area while the other term simply identifies the smaller district named after a particular city within that general area.

There He was met by two men possessed by demons. Other accounts mention only one, but this is no contradiction. It is likely that the one mentioned was more seriously possessed, or was the spokesman for the two. No account denies that there were two, but only one is described specifically. Such often takes place in telling historical accounts.

These men were so extremely fierce that no one could safely travel that area. Mark adds that no one could bind him because he broke chains and fetters. He dwelt in areas of tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones. Obviously he was very dangerous.

Note that these details prove that these men were known to the local people. Jesus' miracles, unlike modern claims, did not involve people unknown to the local people, or people who were not really known to have a serious problem. Nor were they testimonies about people hundreds of miles away whom no one ever heard of. They involved local people, clearly known by other local people to have the problem that was cured. This made the real occurrence of the miracle much more obvious and convincing.

8:29 – They cried out asking what they had to do with Jesus. They called Him the Son of God and asked if He had come to torment them before the time.

These demons recognized Jesus and referred to Him as the Son of God. Note that the demons know who Jesus is and tremble (James 2:19). If as some people claim, all one must do to be saved is to acknowledge the truth of Jesus' character, then demons are saved. This shows the error of the doctrine of salvation by "faith alone."

The demons also knew the time was coming when Jesus would overpower them and punish them (judgment day?), but the time had

apparently not yet come. So they asked if He intended to do this earlier than the expected time. Mark adds that the demons said their name was Legion because there were many of them.

8:30-32 – The demons asked Jesus, if He cast them out, to send them into a nearby herd of swine. He told them to go, so they went into the herd of swine. Then the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea and perished.

A herd of swine was feeding in the vicinity, so the demons asked if they could enter the swine. Jesus sent them, and the whole herd ran down a steep place into the sea and drowned. The shore on the east side of the Sea of Galilee is often very steep.

Mark 5:13 says there were two thousand sheep in the herd. Pigs were unclean to Jews, yet here was a very large herd. One wonders what happened to the demons after the swine perished. Surely they had to leave the swine then.

Mark also tells us that, after this, the man sat calmly at Jesus' feet, clothed, and in his right mind. Note the complete transformation brought about by the power of Jesus. Jesus here demonstrates the superior power of God over the forces of evil. This again confirms His word and the truthfulness of His claims. This man was totally incapable of being controlled by any human power, but Jesus completely and immediately solved His problem by speaking a few words.

We had not previously been told that the man was without proper clothing, but we are told that he was clothed after the demons left. Note that, when people are in their right mind and are submissive to Jesus, they wear adequate clothing. Those who do not do so are either not in their right mind or are not sitting at the feet of Jesus.

8:33,34 – The keepers of the swine went into the city and told what had happened to the demon-possessed men. As a result, the whole city came out to meet Jesus and asked Him to leave the area.

The keepers of the pigs fled into the city and told what had happened regarding the demon-possessed men and regarding the swine. As a result, the people asked Jesus to leave the area. Mark 5:15 says they were afraid of One who had such power over demons. Perhaps they were upset by the loss of material value in the destruction of the swine.

In any case, instead of appreciating Jesus' great miracle, the blessing to the men who were healed, and the removal of the danger they had presented, the people wanted Jesus to leave. So people today often reject clear evidence of the blessings Jesus offers.

Again, Mark tells us the man who had been healed wanted to go with Jesus, but He told the man instead to tell others about what had happened to him. So he published it throughout the region (5:18-20).

In other cases, Jesus had told people not to spread the message of a miracle they had received. This happened when broadcasting the news made such a demand for Jesus to do miracles that it hindered His teaching. It actually gave greater fame and attention to His miracles than He was ready for. But in this case He would be leaving the region anyway and the people needed a testimony of His power, so He told the man to spread the message.

Notes about demons

Demons are spirit beings who serve under the power of Satan.

They are often called "unclean spirits." Just as God has angels who are spirit beings that serve Him, so Satan has spirit beings that work for him. The following evidence (adapted from Barnes) shows that demons were living spirit beings:

1. Christ and the apostles spoke to demons, addressed them, and gave them commands. These communications and instructions were addressed to the demons, not just to the possessed people. The demons spoke, asked questions, gave answers, made requests, and were compelled to obey commands – Matthew 8:28,29; Mark 5:7,8,12; 1:24,25; 9:25.

2. The evil spirits sometimes left persons they had possessed and entered the bodies of others – Matthew 8:32; Mark 5:11-13.

3. Demons had names – Mark 5:9.

4. Demons are said to know Christ and to believe in Him – Mark 1:24; 5:7,8; James 2:19.

All these are characteristics of living spirit beings as separate distinct individuals from the people that they possessed. These are not characteristic of mere diseases.

In Jesus' day, demons had the power to so possess people that they were unable to free themselves without miraculous intervention.

See Matthew 4:24; 8:16,28-33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22; 17:18; Mark 1:34,39; 7:26-50; Luke 10:14-20.

Since miracles have ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-10), if demons have this same power today, then people would have no means whatever to be set free.

However, the Bible affirms that today we can resist Satan and his forces by means God has supplied without miracles.

See James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9; Ephesians 4:27; 6:10-18; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13.

This would harmonize with the conclusion that spiritual gifts have ceased, because they have fulfilled their purpose.

Note Zechariah 13:2, which shows that unclean spirits would pass out of the land at the same time that prophets would.

Conclusions

It appears that evil spirits were allowed special powers in the age when the supernatural means were available to expel them. When the power to expel them ceased, the power of demons became limited, so they could no longer possess people against their will.

Compare this to the power of angels. In Bible times they worked supernatural manifestations, appearing visibly to people and doing wonders, etc. However, now that miracles have ceased, angels no longer appear visibly and no longer do supernatural wonders.

We conclude that supernatural beings – angels and demons – both still exist and both work in the world, demons for evil and angels for good. However, according to God's plan, they are no longer permitted today to work in ways that exceed natural law. Their work is limited, so they must work in accord with natural law. This in turn means that God has provided what we need to resist demons, so they cannot today possess people against their will.

Matthew 9

Chapter 9 – More Miracles and Teaching

9:1-8 – Healing of a paralyzed man in Capernaum

Compare Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26.

9:1,2 – When Jesus came to His own city, a paralyzed man was brought to Him lying on a bed. Jesus told him to be of good cheer because his sins were forgiven.

These events occurred again in Jesus' own city Capernaum (Mark 2:1; Luke 5:17) after He crossed the sea again. A paralytic man ("palsy" – KJV) was brought to Him lying on a bed. Mark and Luke point out that Jesus was in a house crowded by the people who came to hear Him. The crowd included Pharisees and doctors of the law who had come from Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem (Luke 5:17). We will see that these men were obviously quite critical of Jesus.

The paralyzed man was carried by four men. Since they could not get near Jesus because of the crowd, they went up on the roof, removed the covering, and let the man down through the roof to where Jesus was (Mark 2:2-4; Luke 5:18,19). Beds in that area were pallets or thin mattresses easily carried.

Jesus told the man to cheer up because his sins were forgiven. He spoke this on seeing the faith of the men (Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20). Some claim examples like this prove that people today can be forgiven of sins simply by believing in Jesus without obedience. But the example proves no such thing.

In the first place, this was under the Old Law, so the gospel, with its requirement of baptism as a condition of forgiveness, was not yet in effect.

Further, Jesus "saw" their faith by the works they did in making such great effort to get the man to Jesus. Faith is seen by works, not by simply existing in the heart (James 2:14-26). So in fact this example proves the opposite of salvation by "faith only." It is an example of forgiveness because men demonstrated their faith by their works, exactly as taught in James 2.

This is just one of several occasions during Jesus' lifetime in which He claimed the power to directly forgive sins simply by speaking the sins forgiven. Compare Luke 7:48,49; 23:43. No mere man ever possessed this power. Only God can do this. Yet Jesus clearly claimed this power, even in the presence of these doctors of the law.

9:3 – Some of the scribes said that Jesus blasphemed.

This caused a stir among the scribes and Pharisees. They considered the statement to be blasphemy, since only God can forgive sins (Mark 2:6,7; Luke 5:21). They were, of course, correct that only God can forgive sins. But their motives were doubtful, and even more important, their implied conclusion was wrong.

It is true that, if Jesus was not Deity, He would have no right to directly forgive sins. No other prophet, apostle, or priest ever did such with God's approval, not even Peter (Acts 8:22). Others might pray to ask God to forgive someone else's sins (James 5:16), or they might instruct people how to receive God's forgiveness. But they themselves could not actually directly forgive the sins. Men sin against God. No mere man can grant forgiveness on God's behalf. We must seek forgiveness from God Himself – Matthew 6:12; Ephesians 1:7; 1 John 1:7-9; Isaiah 43:25; 44:22.

Some men today claim to be priests who can directly forgive the sins of others. Jesus proved His power to forgive by doing miracles. It is only right therefore to expect any man today who claims the same power to prove in the same way that he possesses the power. If he cannot give the same proof, then his claim should be rejected. This is why modern so-called priests, who claim to be able to forgive sins for God, are in error.

It is true that only God can forgive sins, yet Jesus did this very thing several times. But the point missed by these Jewish leaders is that Jesus ***does*** possess Deity. There is no blasphemy in the statement, since God can forgive sins and Jesus was God in the flesh. Note that this is proved to be the case by the fact that Jesus immediately proceeded to do a miracle to prove His claim was valid.

So here we have one of the passages that prove beyond sensible doubt that, even in the flesh when He came to earth as a man, Jesus still possessed the powers and prerogatives of Deity. He did not always choose to exercise them, though at times He did do so as on this occasion. But He possessed them all the time. If, as some claim, Jesus gave up His Deity while on earth and was ***only*** a man, then His action here would be blasphemy and those who accused Him of the sin would be correct.

9:4 – Jesus knew their thoughts and rebuked them for thinking evil.

But Jesus knew what these men thought in their hearts, and He set about to prove them wrong. The first thing He did to prove them wrong

was to read the thoughts of their hearts. This is a power no man has (1 Corinthians 2:10ff). Only God has the power (1 Kings 8:39), yet Jesus possessed it (John 2:24,25). So He responded by rebuking them for the evil thoughts in their hearts.

Note that Jesus here again exercised another power of Deity: the power to read men's thoughts. If He is not Deity, why does He possess power that the Bible says only God possessed? And note that He possessed this power even while He was in the flesh on earth. This act also constituted a proof that He was Deity. If He were not Deity, He simply could not have done what He did on this occasion.

9:5-8 – Jesus then asked whether it would be easier to forgive the man's sins or to enable him to walk. But so they could know that He had power on earth to forgive sins, He told the paralytic to arise, take up his bed, and go home. And that is what the man did. So the multitudes marveled and glorified God.

Jesus asked these experts in the law whether it was easier to say a man is forgiven of sins or to tell a paralyzed man to rise and walk. Of course, Jesus is referring, not simply to the ease of ***saying*** the words, but to power to make them come true.

Had Jesus simply healed the man, people would have been amazed but would not have recognized that He was God in the flesh. But Jesus first claimed to have the power to forgive sins, then He proved He had that power by doing a miracle to confirm His claim. He proceeded to tell the man to arise, take up his bed, and go home. The man did as told, and the people were amazed and glorified God that such power had been given to men.

But note that Jesus stated what His reason was for doing this. It was not primarily an act of mercy on the man, though mercy for his health problems was no doubt involved. But more than that, He said it was so they would know He had power on earth to forgive sins. It would confirm His word and prove the truthfulness of His claims.

The message to be learned is that to speak a man's sins forgiven or to heal the paralyzed man, either statement would have to have the power and authority of God behind it. Neither can be done without the power of God. So, if Jesus claimed He could forgive sins and then raised the man, this ought to prove to any honest mind that His claim to forgive sins was also valid, since God must be working through Him confirming His word.

So, instead of accusing Jesus of blasphemy, these men ought to have recognized and honored Jesus as being from God. When He claimed to possess power that only God could possess and then He confirmed His claim by miracles, instead of accusing Him of blasphemy and denying that He was even a good man, they should have believed that He was

God. Surely if He were guilty of blasphemy, God would never have empowered Him to do such miracles.

Note also the clear statement that the purpose of miracles was to confirm the word of the teacher. And note how convincingly Jesus did it. Here was a man so crippled he had to be carried on a bed by four men. The bed carried him to Jesus, but he carried the bed away from Jesus. This clearly shows the extent of the healing. He did not just limp away, but went away perfectly capable of carrying that which carried him to Jesus. Who among those who claim to do modern miracles can duplicate the power of New Testament miracles?

If this proves Jesus can forgive sin, someone may wonder if the apostles could also forgive sin since they also healed paralyzed people. The answer is "no." We must remember that miracles confirmed the claims the teacher makes. The apostles never claimed to forgive sin or to be Christ or God in the flesh. They claimed only to be servants or messengers of the Christ. Their miracles proved the truth of their claims. But Jesus claimed more than they did. He claimed to be the Son of God, God in the flesh, the Savior of the world, the Christ, etc. And His miracles prove His claims to be true.

9:9-17 – The call and feast of Matthew (Levi)

Compare Mark 2:14-22; Luke 5:27-39.

9:9 – As Jesus passed on, He saw a man named Matthew at the tax office. He told Matthew to follow him, and Matthew arose and followed him.

Jesus called Matthew much as he had called Peter, James, and John. Matthew is also called "Levi" in the other accounts. Matthew was the son of a man named Alphaeus, and was a publican or tax collector. He likely was a brother to another apostle James, the Son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13), also called "James the Less" (Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:56).

Matthew was sitting at his place of work, much like Peter and his partners had been at their place of work. Jesus called Matthew, and he forsook all and followed Him as the earlier apostles had done.

Publicans were Jewish by nationality, but they collected taxes for the Romans. As a result, the subjugated Jews considered them to be traitors; they were generally hated, and they were classed with sinners (Matthew 11:19; Luke 15:1). They were also frequently corrupt and used their power of taxation to overcharge the people and enrich themselves (see Luke 3:12,13).

Yet Jesus saw in Matthew a man who would be faithful in his duty, so He called him to be a disciple and later an apostle. The fact that Jesus would call a publican to make him one of His most trusted followers, demonstrates that Jesus did not respect the Jewish prejudices in such matters.

9:10-13 – As Jesus was eating, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Him and His disciples. The Pharisees asked why He would eat with publicans and sinners. He responded that those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick. They should learn the meaning of: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." He did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Other accounts explain that Matthew then made a feast for Jesus at his house (notice that he still owned a house – Mark 2:14,15; Luke 5:29). This was to honor Jesus, but it also gave an excellent opportunity for Jesus to meet and teach Matthew's friends and former fellow-workers.

The scribes and Pharisees were beginning to oppose Jesus and seek opportunities to criticize and discredit Him (verse 3). Here they objected to the fact that He ate with publicans and sinners. To these self-righteous Jews, associating socially with such sinners and outcasts was beneath their holy and righteous state.

Jesus replied with an illustration. He said that physicians are needed, not by people who are healthy, but by people who are sick. In the same way, He had come, not to call righteous people, but sinners to repentance. By associating with these people, Jesus was violating, not God's law, but only Jewish tradition. There was surely nothing inherently sinful in being a publican, and no law was violated by eating or associating with such people. Yet the leaders objected.

As Jesus explained, His motive was not to in any way justify anything sinful that had been done by any of these people. Nor did He condone their continuing to practice any sin. His intent was to teach them and to lead them to repent of their sins. Repentance requires that people recognize their sins, admit them, and determine to turn from them. So, He did not encourage sin, but urged people to leave it.

In order to do this, Jesus had to go where the people were. The gospel warns that evil companions corrupt good morals (1 Corinthians 15:33). So we must take care lest we associate with sinners in any way that leads us to fellowship in sin or to justify sin. But we cannot help people leave sin, if we refuse to be around them or communicate with them.

Jesus illustrated this by a physician. No physician can help anyone if he refuses to be around sick people. He does not associate with them because he thinks sickness is acceptable, let alone to encourage it. On the contrary, he is there to help the people to overcome their illness. So as the spiritual Great Physician, Jesus associated with sinners to urge them to change. None of this justifies us in having close friendships with people whom we are not trying to convert, who resist the truth, and who have a bad influence on us.

In making His statement, Jesus did not intend to imply that the Pharisees were righteous or that they did not need His teaching. All are sinners, therefore all need His instruction so they can repent.

Jesus told them to learn the meaning of Hosea 6:6, which says that God desires mercy, not sacrifice – see notes on Matthew 12:7. Many passages parallel this idea or quote this passage. See 1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:11-17; Psalm 40:6-9; 51:16,17; Micah 6:6-12; 3:1-12; Jeremiah 7:22-27; Joel 2:12,13. These passages help us understand God's statement here in Hosea.

As used by Hosea and in these related passages, mercy does not mean that we should simply overlook or ignore the sins of people. Mercy means (among other things) that we sincerely want other people to be free from sin. If they have committed no sin, we should not accuse them of sin. If they are guilty of sin, we should want to help them change their lives so they can be saved.

This in no way conflicts with the principle of keeping ourselves pure and avoiding harmful influences. Some people become so self-righteous that they will not help other people who are open to the truth and may be willing to correct their lives.

9:14,15 – Disciples of John asked Jesus why they and the Pharisees often fasted, but Jesus disciples did not fast. Jesus said the friends of the bridegroom would not mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them. But the days would come when the bridegroom was taken away and then they would fast.

Another question was asked of Jesus, this one concerning fasting. John's disciples and the Pharisees' disciples both frequently practiced fasting, so Jesus was asked why his disciples did not fast. The Pharisees had established traditions regarding fasting. Some fasted twice every week Luke 18:11,12). It is likely that the question implied that Jesus and His disciples should do the same. John's disciples were included among those who asked the question.

Fasting is shown here to be the opposite of eating and drinking. It involves abstaining from food and/or drink for some higher purpose – that is, the reason we do not eat or drink is that there is something else we consider to be more important. In the Bible the purpose usually was an expression of sorrow (such as repentance) or accompanied by prayer to make a request of God (see our notes on 6:16-18).

Jesus explained that His disciples did not fast because they had no reason to fast, i.e., they had no cause for sorrow. He illustrated by asking if the friends of the bridegroom would fast when they had the groom with them. But when the groom was gone, then they would fast. Jesus reference to Himself as a bridegroom was especially appropriate when responding to the disciples of John, since John himself had used this illustration regarding Jesus in John 3:29.

Jesus' explanation meant that He was still present with His disciples, so they had no reason to express sorrow. But He knew the time would come when He would be removed in a way that would give reason for great sorrow. That would be a time for fasting.

Note that Jesus here neither condemns fasting nor requires it. His disciples were clearly not practicing it, yet He did not rebuke them for that. He Himself had just practiced it (4:1,2). He explained that He anticipated there would be times when His disciples would want to do it. But He did not bind it or imply there would be something wrong if they don't practice it, as with prayer, or Bible study.

Although the Pharisees had apparently established traditions about how often one should fast, Jesus gives no specific times or frequencies when fasting is required, as is done regarding the Lord's Supper or giving. There is no example of any congregation requiring it as a group practice. If done, it would be entirely an individual choice.

Jesus does say there are times when fasting is appropriate and times when it is inappropriate. When practiced, it should be a sincere expression of a genuine concern. It should not just be going through the motions or an outer façade to impress people (Matthew 6:16-18).

9:16,17 – No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment or the patch will pull away and make the tear worse. And no one puts new wine in old wineskins or the wineskins break, and the wine and the wineskins are ruined. They put new wine in new wineskins and both are preserved.

Questions had been raised about differences between Jesus' teaching and practice as compared to that of John and the Pharisees. So He took the opportunity to illustrate the differences between His teachings and what others were used to. He used two illustrations.

(1) The first illustration was of an old garment, and He said no one would sew a piece of new cloth onto that old garment. If they did, the new cloth would shrink differently from the old, resulting in a tear in the garment. As a result both the old garment and the new cloth would be ruined. Perhaps this refers to differences in appearance, strength, etc.

(2) The second illustration was that a man does not put new wine into old wineskins. If he did, the new wine would ferment and expand, the old skins would burst, and the wine and skins would both be ruined. But if the new wine is put into new wineskins, both would be preserved.

The application of both illustrations appears to be a contrast between the teaching and practice of Jesus and His disciples as compared to the teaching and practice of teachers that went before Him. These former teachers would be the Pharisees, who tried to practice the Old Testament (along with their traditions), or John's disciples, who followed John's teaching and baptism. The point appears to be that Jesus' teaching would be an entirely new system. He did not intend to just make some modifications in the previous systems while leaving

them basically intact. He intended to bring in something completely new.

This makes an important point about the New Testament. Jesus and His apostles clearly taught that the gospel teachings would replace or supersede those of the Old Testament given through Moses. See Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

But some people have the idea that the old law (or at least the 10 Commands) is basically still in effect. But they think Jesus just removed some parts of the old law and replaced them with new parts. Jesus is showing here that such was never His intent. To do that would ruin both the old and the new, as in His illustrations. The only way He could make the needed changes was to completely remove the old and completely replace it.

This does not mean there are no similarities and no specific commands found in both systems. New wineskins, new wine, and new garments are all similar in many ways to the old. But the point is nothing was "carried over" into the new simply because it was part of the old. Everything that is now in effect is in effect because the New Testament teaches it, not because it was in the Old Testament.

It follows that we should never use the Old Testament alone to justify any practice today. We start over new, and must use only the New Testament to determine if a law is in effect today (though if we establish by the New Testament that a law is now in effect, then the Old Testament may help us understand it). To mix the laws would be to destroy God's intent (compare Galatians 5:3,4). This needs to be seriously considered by those who go back to the Old Testament to justify Sabbath-keeping, instrumental music, tithing, etc.

Applications to drinking wine

This passage is widely misunderstood as regards fermented wine. Some folks use this passage to justify drinking alcoholic beverages today. They claim Jesus' point is that only new wineskins would be strong enough to allow the wine to ferment within them without bursting. So, He must be speaking about alcoholic wine. However:

Even if the illustration does refer to fermented wine, that simply illustrates a concept based on what men do. That does not say whether the practice of itself is right or wrong. Compare, for example, Jesus' use of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8) and the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-13) as illustrations. Does this mean we are permitted to be unjust, since Jesus used these men as illustrations?

However, to understand the passage we must realize that Bible "wines" were not necessarily alcoholic (see Isaiah 16:10; 65:8; Jeremiah 48:33; Genesis 40:9-11; Revelation 19:15; 14:10). The ancients had the means to preserve nonalcoholic wines, and they referred to the

unfermented grape juice as "wine." As with our word "cider," only the context can tell whether or not the juice is fermented.

Actually, Jesus is not describing a common way to ferment wine, but a common way to ***prevent*** fermentation! Note:

1) Jesus plainly said that new wine in new wineskins would both be "preserved." The subject being discussed is how wine is ***preserved***! He is describing how to ***avoid*** fermentation, not how to achieve it.

2) Patton points out (pages 66,67) that Jesus' illustration cannot refer to how wine was fermented, because even new wineskins cannot resist the pressure if wine ferments within them. Even new wineskins would burst. Elihu confirms this in Job 32:19: "Indeed my belly is like wine that has no vent; It is ready to burst like new wineskins." So even new wineskins would burst if they are tightly sealed and the wine inside them ferments.

So Jesus' illustration would be invalid if He was referring to fermentation of wine. The only way His illustration is valid is if He is referring to how ***unfermented*** wine is ***preserved***.

3) What Jesus describes is that unfermented wine should be placed in new wineskins, then tightly sealed to keep out air and bacteria. Placed in a cool place, the wine will not ferment but will be preserved unfermented. This would also be true if the wine was boiled first to kill bacteria.

4) The reason new wineskins – not old ones – would be needed for this purpose is that they would be clean inside. If old wineskins were used after they had already held wine, they would have residue inside that would contribute to fermentation. If fermentation occurred, the wine would expand and burst the skin, just as Jesus described. But if the wine was put into new wineskins (assuming the wine is not contaminated by leaven otherwise), it would not ferment but would be preserved, just as Jesus described. Kyle Pope includes two quotations that confirm this to be true.

So, this passage not only does not justify the drinking of alcoholic beverages, it is not even talking about how to preserve fermented wine. It is a passage that describes one way nonalcoholic wines were preserved.

9:18-26 – Raising of the daughter of Jairus and healing of a woman with an issue of blood

See also Mark 5:22-43; Luke 8:41-56.

9:18 – As Jesus spoke, a ruler came and urged Him to come and lay his hand on his daughter so she would live.

Meanwhile a man came to Jesus who was a ruler of the synagogue. Other accounts give much more information here than Matthew does. Luke's account tells us that the ruler's name was Jairus. He came to ask Jesus to heal his sick daughter, twelve years old, who was dying.

When the ruler first came to Jesus, his daughter had not yet died; but before matters had much proceeded, messengers came to say she had died. So Matthew simplifies and simply says she was dead.

9:19-22 – As they went, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came and touched the hem of Jesus' garment. She thought she could be healed if she could just touch His garment. Jesus turned and told her that her faith had made her well. And she was made well from that very hour.

A great multitude traveled with Jesus. Among them was a woman who had an issue of blood for twelve years. She came behind Jesus, touched his garment, and was immediately healed.

Note the nature of the healing and the clear evidence that it was impossible by natural means. The woman had the problem for twelve years. She had suffered at the hands of many physicians, had spent all she had, and just got worse instead of better (Mark's account). When she touched Jesus' garment, she was immediately healed.

Clearly this is impossible by natural law. All these doctors had been unable to heal her in twelve years. But she was immediately healed just by touching Jesus' clothing. To be healed by any natural means at all would have been very difficult. To be healed by just touching a piece of cloth would have been impossible.

Jesus knew power had gone from Him, so other accounts say that He asked who had touched Him. He knew who had done it, just like God knew where Adam was and what he had done in the Garden. The question was intended to bring out the truth, not to gain information.

The disciples wondered that He would even ask who touched Him in such a crowd, but Jesus insisted that He knew power had gone from Him. The woman then came and confessed the whole truth. Jesus was not angry. He praised her faith, then told her to go in peace and be healed.

The woman clearly wanted to remain anonymous. She greatly feared to tell, yet Jesus made her do so. Why? If the main purpose was to solve her physical problem, that had already been accomplished, so why require the confession?

Jesus knew what had happened and the woman knew. Clearly, the point of making her confess was so that all the other people would know. Merely solving the problem was not enough. The purpose was not accomplished till people knew about it.

In this case, the woman's healing was a reward for her faith. Sometimes that was the case, but not always. In the case of the calming of the storm, the disciples lacked faith, yet Jesus did the miracle anyway.

See our later discussion regarding the laws of uncleanness in this case.

9:23-26 – When Jesus arrived at the ruler's house, He saw the mourners and told them to make way because the girl was just sleeping. But they laughed at Him. He put the crowd outside, went in, took her by the hand, and she arose. The report of this went into all that land.

According to other accounts, as Jesus proceeded to Jairus' house, a message arrived that the daughter was dead, so there was no reason for Jesus to come. Jesus went anyway, assuring the people (especially Jairus) to have faith, and she would be made well. He took only Peter, James and John and the mother and father into the house.

The people at the house were mourning, but Jesus said the girl was only sleeping. The people laughed, because they knew she was not alive. He took the child by the hand and told her to arise, which she did. He then said something should be given her to eat.

The daughter was clearly dead. This is clearly stated. Jesus' statement that she was not dead is a "not … but" statement. It was not intended to deny that she was dead; rather it emphasized that to Him this was as though she slept. He knew she could still awaken. Compare John 11:11-14. (Death is also compared to sleep in Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:14.)

The people were convinced nothing could be done. While the child lived, they wanted Jesus to come; but when she died, they figured Jesus could do nothing. When He held out hope, they laughed Him to scorn. Yet, Jesus not only healed her, she immediately got up and walked! He said to feed her, further proving she was really alive.

Note the evidence here of the nature of miracles. No one can raise the dead by human power. If she had just been severely ill, she could not have gotten up immediately and walked. Clearly this event was impossible by natural or human power. Yet Jesus did it.

According to other accounts, Jesus commanded the parents not to speak about this. We may wonder why. This may seem to contradict the purpose of having people make the event known to confirm the word, as in other examples. But Jesus' statement did not mean that He never wanted anyone to know. Many people already knew the girl was dead; they had ridiculed Jesus for suggesting otherwise. They would surely see the girl alive again, so they would know what He had done.

Further, Jesus clearly wanted everyone to know eventually. If not, why is it written in the Bible? The very fact the story is in the Scriptures proves Jesus eventually wanted everyone to know. The point is that He wasn't ready for it to spread widely ***yet***.

See the notes on the story of the leper in Matthew 8:2-4. Jesus healed a leper and commanded him to tell no one. Instead, he told everyone, and as a result Jesus could not enter the city to teach because the people thronged Him. His work was hindered because the man told the story immediately.

The leper's story is in the Bible, just like Jairus' daughter. Jesus wanted people to know these stories. He just wasn't ready for them to be told, because it did not suit His purpose yet. In time, the stories would be told and would confirm who He is.

Note on laws of uncleanness

We may wonder about the laws of uncleanness and ceremonial impurity as applied to these two miracles. Since the woman had a flow of blood, when she touched Jesus' garment, did this make Him ceremonially unclean? Leviticus 15 discusses such issues of uncleanness. It says that anything she would sit on (or lie upon) would be unclean, and likewise anyone who would touch what she sat on. Further, anyone that would touch her or her flesh would be unclean till evening (verses 7,19).

However, Jesus never really touched the woman or her flesh while she had the flow. She touched, not Jesus, but the hem of His garment (in fact, it makes one wonder if this was one reason why she did it this way – so she would not make Him ceremonially unclean). So my judgment is that He would not become ceremonially unclean.

However, He did touch the hand of the dead girl. The laws of uncleanness by reason of a dead body are discussed in Numbers 19:11-22. It is clear that one who touched a dead body would be unclean for seven days and must undergo ceremonial cleansing. The question is what application this would have to Jesus in this case.

1) One possibility is that Jesus became unclean. There was nothing sinful about this. Lots of people became ceremonially unclean for a whole host of reasons. This included touching a dead body, giving birth to a child, various forms of sickness, and even having sexual intercourse or a flow of blood or seed.

Clearly there was nothing sinful about any of these. Much of it was necessary, and touching a dead girl for the purpose of raising her was clearly a proper thing to do. So if Jesus did become unclean, no sin would be involved. The Bible does not claim that Jesus never became ceremonially unclean, but only that He never sinned.

2) Another possibility, however, might be that, as soon as Jesus touched her, she came to life again. In that case, it may be debatable whether or not He touched a dead body. It could be argued that His touch is what made her alive, therefore perhaps He did not touch a dead body, in the sense discussed by the laws of dead bodies.

3) And it could be that His purity made her clean, rather than vice-versa (especially since she immediately became alive). Sometimes unclean things contaminated clean things. But sometimes holy things made common things holy. Perhaps Jesus' holiness overruled the law of ceremonial uncleanness in such cases, so that He did not become unclean. Perhaps the healed person became clean at the same time that he or she was healed.

Personally, I see no Scriptural problem with whatever view a person takes on these matters.

9:27-31 – Two blind men cried to Jesus to have mercy on them. He asked if they believed He was able to do this. When they affirmed that they did, He touched their eyes and their eyes were opened. He warned them not to tell others, but they spread the news throughout the country.

See also Mark 8:22-26? Either Mark gave significantly more information about this event, or else the account in Mark 8 is a separate event altogether. We will assume they are the same and will include the details as recorded in Mark.

This miracle occurred in Bethsaida. There a blind man was brought to Jesus for Him to touch. Matthew records that there were two blind men who referred to Jesus as the son of David and asked for Him to have mercy on them. Since Mark mentions only one, he may refer to the one who is more outspoken and Matthew just gives us an additional detail (or he may be referring to a different event).

Matthew says that the men came to Jesus in the house, and He questioned them about their faith. Mark records that Jesus then led the blind men out of the town, spit on his eyes and put His hands on him. Then he asked if the man could see anything. The man responded that he saw men like trees walking. This indicated significant improvement for a blind man. Yet it was not a complete healing. Jesus then put His hands on the man and made him look up. Then the man could see everyone clearly.

Matthew says simply that Jesus touched the eyes of the blind men, and He asked them if they believed He was able to do the miracle. He said they would receive the miracle in accordance with their faith. As discussed elsewhere on other miracles, faith was sometimes a condition of healing but often was not.

As Jesus had done on other occasions, He told the man not to go into the town or tell anyone what had been done (compare notes on verses 23-25 above). Presumably this desire for privacy explains why Jesus had led the man out of the town before healing him.

This healing is like the many others we have studied. It was clear the man had a problem at the beginning and clear that it was completely healed at the end.

This miracle differs from others in the following ways: (1) Jesus put spit on the man's eyes. This obviously does not heal blindness, so it must have been simply a symbolic act to show that the power came through Jesus. (2) The healing occurred in stages: first the man could see men like trees, then he could see clearly. There is no clear explanation for why it happened this way. Jesus did completely heal the man and in a very short period of time. No one who claims miraculous power today can do what Jesus here did.

9:32-34 – A man who was mute and demon-possessed was brought to Jesus. When the demon was cast out, the man spoke. The multitudes marveled saying that it had never been seen like that in Israel. But the Pharisees said that Jesus cast out demons by the ruler of the demons.

See Luke 11:14-36.

This account records the healing of a man who had a demon that caused him to be mute (unable to speak). When Jesus cast out the demon out, the man was able to speak. This caused the multitudes to be amazed. Once again, Luke's account gives much more detail than does Matthew.

This was another of the many miracles Jesus did. However, though they could not deny that the miracle had occurred, some people tried to belittle it or deny the significance of it. They said that Jesus did this by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

Note that people who saw Jesus' miracles could not deny that miracles had been done. They here tried to deny the source of the power, but they could not deny what was done. Some people today try to deny that Jesus possessed such powers, but the people who actually saw what Jesus did could not deny the miracles.

Casting out demons by the power of the prince of demons

This discussion is important because it confirms the purpose of miracles. The Jews had read about the signs of Moses, Elijah, and other Old Testament prophets. They ought to have understood the character and purpose of true miracles. So they ought to have recognized that Jesus did true miracles, which proved Him to truly be from God.

God does not allow Satan to do true miracles, so He would not have allowed Jesus to do such miracles had He been from Satan. The whole purpose of miracles is to distinguish true prophets from false prophets, as discussed often before.

People sometimes claim that our charge against modern "faith healers" is similar to the claim these folks made against Jesus. We say they are teaching false doctrine and that whatever power they have is from the devil. And we call upon them to do true miracles to prove they are from God.

So people say we are like these who said Jesus cast out demons by the power of the prince of demons. But here is the significant difference. These Jews should have should known the difference between the characteristics of true miracles and the characteristics of false miracles, just like people today who claim to believe in the Bible should know.

Satan does attempt false miracles (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; Acts 8:5-12; 1 Kings 18; Exodus 7,8). And his servants may be able to do things we cannot explain. But they cannot do things that measure up to the characteristics of true Bible miracles as done by those who truly were prophets from God. God will not allow Satan's workers to do true

miracles, for that would defeat the main purpose of miracles. So false teachers cannot do things that are truly impossible by natural law.

Jesus, however, was unquestionably doing true miracles as great as anything Moses or Old Testament prophets ever did. Seeing this, the people could not deny the miracles, but they denied the source of the miracles anyway. This was their error and the difference between them and us. When they saw that Jesus did signs having the characteristics of true miracles, they should have admitted that He acted by the power of God.

However, no one today does such signs. When we deny their power is from God, we are not denying signs like those done by Jesus. Rather, when people today claim to do miracles but do not duplicate true Bible miracles, that is one of the very things that proves they are not from God. Therefore, it is proper to charge them with being from Satan.

9:35-38 – A plentiful harvest led Jesus to urge His disciples to pray for laborers.

9:35,36 – Jesus went about teaching in the synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and the healing every sickness and disease. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion because they were weary and scattered like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus then traveled throughout the area teaching in the synagogues and preaching the gospel in the cities and villages. This largely summarizes His purpose here and the work that He did. He also healed the sicknesses and diseases among the people. Notice again that He healed every kind of sickness and every kind of disease. Once again we see that, unlike modern so-called faith healers, there was no sickness that He was unable to heal.

He also had compassion on the people because they were like a flock of sheep that had no shepherd: they were distressed and scattered. This is the condition of any group of living beings who lack the guidance and leadership that they need. They were perplexed and confused; they were divided and separated.

Many of them may not have realized that they had a problem. Yet the problem existed and unquestionably the great majority of the Jews at times knew things were not as they should be. They may have blamed things on the Roman government and so have looked for a military king to free them. But their real problem was spiritual. They were not following the laws of God's so as to receive the blessings that He had promised.

People today are similarly distressed and scattered, not because no shepherd is available, but because they will not follow Jesus, the Good Shepherd. They prefer the philosophies and ideas of men. This always results in distress, confusion, and division. Yet people usually do not

even realize that this is their problem. They may blame the government, society, or their parents. But true unity and understanding can come only from following the Good Shepherd.

9:37,38 – Jesus told His disciples that the harvest is plentiful and the laborers are few. So we should pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.

The weary, confused condition of the people led Jesus to explain that they were ripe for spiritual reaping. This is another of many illustrations, like the parable of the sower, that Jesus used based on a parallel between farming principles and the converting of souls.

Many of these people, who needed a shepherd, were ready to be brought into God's service, but what was lacking was harvesters: people to go out and bring the harvest in. See John 4:35-38; 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. This may have been true especially in Jesus' day, but is also true at any time including today.

Having introduced the need for laborers, Jesus went about recruiting some. He first taught His disciples that they personally needed to be concerned about the harvest. They should be so concerned that they would pray for laborers. This shows us that, when we are truly concerned about a matter, we ought to pray about it.

This also shows that the way God has chosen to reap His harvest is by means of laborers. By getting the twelve to sincerely pray about this matter, Jesus showed them to appreciate the need. Then some would see that they could fill that need. They themselves ought to labor to meet that need.

By asking them to pray for the harvest, Jesus helped them to see the need. He then commissioned them to go out and labor – see chapter 10. Likewise, Christians today need to sincerely pray for the harvest and for laborers to work in the harvest. Once they see the need for workers, they can begin to realize what they themselves can do to fill that need.

Matthew 10

Chapter 10 – The "Limited Commission"

See also Mark 6:7-13; Luke 9:1-6; compare Luke 10:1-16

10:1-4 – Jesus gave the twelve disciples power to cast out unclean spirits and heal all kinds of sickness. The names of the apostles were: Simon called Peter, Andrew his brother, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus surnamed Thaddeus, Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him.

Having urged His disciples to pray for laborers in the vineyard, Jesus immediately proceeded to appoint twelve to take the lead in doing this work. They were to travel with Him, learn from Him, and eventually be charged to teach His gospel by direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. They would also do miracles of healing diseases and casting out demons.

The naming of the apostles

Verse 2 says they were chosen to be apostles. This term refers to one who is sent out on a mission. It is used in various ways in the New Testament. Here it refers to the men chosen by Jesus Himself to be sent on the mission for Him.

True apostles of Jesus had the following characteristics or qualifications:

1) Apostles had to be chosen by Jesus' Himself.

He is the one who "sent" them on the mission, authorizing their work. They did not assume the office by their own choice, nor were they chosen by majority vote or political maneuvering. There was always clear evidence that Jesus Himself had personally chosen each individual who received the office. See Luke 6:12-16; Acts 1:24-26; 26:16; Galatians 1:1. This made the apostles Divinely authorized representatives or ambassadors of Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:20).

2) Jesus then sent the Holy Spirit to directly guide the apostles as they preached the gospel and bore their testimony (Acts 1:8).

This direct guidance came when the apostles received Holy Spirit baptism on Pentecost (Acts 2). (John 16:13; 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 14:37; Ephesians 3:3-5; Matthew 10:19,20)

3) This baptism also gave them the power to do miraculous signs to confirm that their testimony really was from God (Acts 14:3; 2:43; 3:1-10; 5:12-16; 9:32-42; Mark 16:17-20; Hebrews 2:3,4).

These constituted the "signs of an apostle" (2 Corinthians 12:11,12).

4) Apostles could lay hands on other people and give them miraculous powers.

But those on whom they laid hands could not in turn pass the powers on to others – Acts 8:14-24; 19:1-7; Romans 1:8-11; 2 Timothy 1:6.

5) Specifically, one had to be an eyewitness of Christ after His resurrection, so that he could testify that he had personally seen Jesus alive after He had died.

The apostles had been chosen especially by Jesus to serve as witnesses of His work, especially of the fact that He had been raised from the dead (see Acts 1:21,22; compare 1 Corinthians 15:4-8; 9:1; Luke 24:36-48; John 15:26,27; 19:35; Acts 1:8; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39-42; 13:31; 1 John 1:1-4).

Note that, since no men today can have these qualifications, we can have no apostles living on earth in the church today. This destroys the concept of the Catholic Pope and Mormon apostles as successors to the apostles.

At this point Jesus chose these men. We will see that He sent them to preach for a while, but He kept them with Him throughout most of His ministry, training them by their association with Him so they could hear His preaching and observe His work.

Brief information about the men chosen:

Peter (Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13)

Also called Simon (Matthew 10:2) and Cephas (John 1:42)

Brother of Andrew (Matthew 10:2)

Lived in Bethsaida (John 1:44)

Fisherman and partners with James and John (Luke 5:1-11; Matthew 4:18-22)

Wrote the books of 1 and 2 Peter as an eyewitness of Christ

Andrew (Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13)

Brother of Peter (Matthew 10:2)

Fisherman from Bethsaida, partner with James and John (Luke 5:1-11; Matthew 4:18-22; John 1:44)

Disciple of John the Baptist (John 1:35-42)

Brought Peter to Jesus (John 1:35-42)

James (Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:17; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13)

Son of Zebedee, brother of John (Matthew 10:2)

Fisherman, partners with Peter and Andrew (Luke 5:1-11; Matthew 4:18-22)

From near Bethsaida (since partners with Peter and Andrew of Bethsaida)

Slain by Herod in Acts 12.

He and John were called "Boanerges" (sons of thunder) by Jesus (Mark 3:17) – the reason for that name is not explained. However, they did at times show forceful characteristics – see Luke 9:51-56; Mark 9:38.

John (Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:17; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13)

(see James for specifics)

Wrote the gospel of John, 1, 2, 3 John, and Revelation, as a witness of Christ

Philip – John 1:45-51 (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13)

Not the same as Philip who was one of the seven in Acts 6 and an evangelist (Acts 8)

Also from Bethsaida (John 1:44)

Brought Nathanael to Jesus (John 1:45-51)

Bartholomew (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13)

Most likely Bartholomew was the same as Nathanael, whom Philip brought to Jesus (John 1:45-51). (He was named among the apostles who went fishing together after Jesus' resurrection – John 21:2).

From Cana of Galilee (John 21:2)

Thomas (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13)

Also called Didymus, or the twin (John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2)

After Jesus' resurrection, he expressed doubt until he personally touched Jesus (John 20:24-28)

Matthew – Mark 2:14-17 (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13)

Also called Levi (compare Matthew 9:9-13; Mark 2:14-17; Luke 5:27-32)

A tax collector or publican (Matthew 10:3)

A son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14 – so probably a brother to James, the Son of Alphaeus)

Wrote the gospel of Matthew as an eyewitness of Jesus

James, the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13)

Considered to also be called "James the Less" (Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:56)

His mother was named Mary and his brother named Joses (Mark 15:40; Matthew 27:56)

Probably a brother to Matthew, who was also a son of Alphaeus (Matthew 9:9; Mark 2:14)

Thaddeus (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18)

Also called Lebbaeus (Matthew 10:3 – NKJV) and Judas, son of James (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13)

Simon the Canaanite (Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:18)
Also called Simon the Zealot (Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13)

Judas Iscariot (Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:16)
Betrayed Jesus and hung himself (Matthew 10:4)
Replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:15-26)

10:5,6 – Jesus sent out the twelve and commanded them to not go into the way of the Gentiles nor enter into a city of the Samaritans. Rather they should go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Jesus was about to send the twelve out for special preaching work. But first He instructed them where to go to teach, what to preach, and what provisions would be made for their needs as they traveled.

They were to teach the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not the Gentiles nor the Samaritans. They were not even to enter into the way of the Gentiles or enter into a city of the Samaritans. Samaritans were the result of mixed marriages between Jews and Gentiles during the period of the Babylonian exile (2 Kings 17:24-29). Jews and Gentiles both tended to look down on them (John 4:29).

In Matthew 15:24 Jesus stated that Israel was also the group to which He was primarily sent during His lifetime. Here He refers to them as lost sheep, even as in 9:36 He referred to them as sheep without a shepherd.

We must remember that this was still the period of the Old Testament. The Jews were still the chosen people of God. They had been prepared for the Messiah by years of prophecy and instruction from the word of God; they should have been the ones most likely to accept Him. Jesus' time on earth was limited, so He limited His preaching and teaching work to those who ought to have been prepared for it.

After Jesus' death, He commanded the apostles to preach the gospel to all people of all nations, Jew and Gentile (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16). However, even then the gospel was to be first preached in each city to the Jews. This gave the gospel a starting point in each city with people who ought to have been receptive. Then after they had their opportunity, the gospel would go to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

> This passage is not contrary to the command given later: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The former command was given before the resurrection and the latter after the resurrection. – Jerome (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

10:7,8 – They were to preach that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. They should heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. They had received freely, so they should give freely.

They should preach the message that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. This was the same message that had been preached by John the Baptist and by Jesus himself – Matthew 3:2; 4:17. This shows that still at this time the kingdom had not yet come but it was close, and these people should prepare for it.

As discussed in our notes on Matthew 6:10, the kingdom was established on Pentecost in Acts 2 after Jesus' resurrection. It is the church, the spiritual body over which Christ reigns. So the promise preached by John, Jesus, and twelve disciples has been fulfilled.

In addition to actually delivering their message, the twelve were to prove the source of their message by doing miracles of healing, etc. They would confirm the message to be from God by miracles, even as Jesus Himself had done. This power had been given to them by Jesus as recorded in verse 1. This was the primary purpose of miracles – Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Exodus 4:1-9; 7:3-5; 14:30,31.

Jesus explained the principle of sharing as their motive for this. They had generously received the blessings of God, so now they were to give them to others by preaching and healing. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others say that Jesus' statement means that it is wrong for preachers to receive financial support. But many other passages show this practice to be correct – see verses listed below.

To give freely means to give abundantly and generously. It has no reference to the price. However, it is true that the teaching is free of cost to those who have not yet accepted it. Since they have not yet believed it to be true, it is unreasonable to expect them to pay for its spreading. But those who accept it as true are responsible to finance the further spread of the message by supporting those who preach it. This is shown in the very context – verses 9,10.

10:9,10 – Do not provide gold, silver, or copper in your money belts, nor bag for your journey. Do not provide two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.

Jesus then told them how they should obtain their physical needs so they could spend the time preaching. They were not to be concerned for providing their own physical needs themselves. They were to take no food or money nor even a change of clothing. Instead, they were to depend on the people they were teaching to provide for them.

He explains this principle by saying that the laborer is worthy of his hire. That is, the man who so labors deserves to be supported. He has earned the income by the work that he has done.

The "Limited Commission": the temporary nature of these arrangements

These instructions are not meant to teach that preachers today must never make provisions for their own needs. That is, they are not today forbidden to own property, have plural sets of clothing, have money or food, etc. Much of what Jesus taught applied only to the apostles as they traveled. Other teaching changed after the gospel was first preached in Acts 2.

1 Timothy 5:8,10,14 – Preachers may marry (1 Corinthians 9:1ff). If a preacher marries, he has the same duty as any other godly man to provide for the needs of his family. This includes food, clothing, home, etc.

Luke 5:27-29 – Matthew owned a house even after Jesus called him to be an apostle.

Matthew 8:14 – Peter likewise had a house.

Acts 21:8,9 – Philip had a house and family.

Acts 18:1ff – Paul worked to provide for his needs – that is, he had money.

The "Limited Commission" was a special, temporary work during Jesus' lifetime, before the church began. The apostles urgently needed to prepare the people in cities where Jesus would personally come and teach before He died. It involved a short preaching trip.

The apostles would be moving from city to city frequently, not staying long anywhere. There would be no point in burdening themselves with many possessions. The fact they had so little with them would demonstrate that the people where they traveled needed to support them.

This commission was "limited" and temporary in several ways:

A Limited Commission

* At this time, the church did not even exist (Matthew 16:18).

* At this time preaching was only to Jews, but later it would include Gentiles. Compare Matthew 10:5,6 to 28:19 and Mark 16:15.

* At this time the message was that the kingdom was coming, but later they would preach that it had arrived. Compare Matthew 10:7; Luke 10:9,11 to Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9; Hebrews 12:28.

* At this time apostles performed miracles and were directly inspired (Matthew 10:19,20,1,8; Mark 6:7,13). But these powers were temporary and do not occur today (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

Nearly everything about this commission was "limited." To bind these instructions on preachers today is to pervert the temporary nature of the commission.

Note, however, that Jesus here plainly taught that preachers have the right to depend on those who receive the teaching to supply their

needs. This principle is taught throughout the New Testament, including after the church began. When people attempt to deny this, they fail to consider the teaching of many other Scriptures, and they fail to use properly the present passage which itself authorizes people to support gospel preachers.

For other passages about supporting preachers see 1 Corinthians 9:4-14; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9; Philippians 4:14-18; 1 Timothy 5:18; Luke 10:7.

10:11-13 – When they entered the city or town, they should inquire who was worthy, then they should stay there till they left. When they went into a household, they should greet it. If the house was worthy, their peace would come upon it. But if it was not worthy, then it should return to them.

Jesus also said that the apostles should not need to provide for themselves a place to stay as they traveled. They should depend on the people in the cities where they were preaching to give them a place to stay.

As they preached, however, some people would accept the message, but others would reject it. This was exactly the way Jesus Himself had been treated. He said they should not be discouraged by rejection, but should realize the responsibility lay with the people who rejected the message.

Upon entering a house, they were to greet it with an expression of peace. "Peace" was a typical Jewish greeting; when entering a house they would often say "Peace to this house." If the occupants were worthy, then they would receive the benefit of the peace according to the stated blessing. But if the occupants were to reject the disciples, the blessing would do them no good. See 2 John 9-11.

10:14,15 – Whoever will not receive them nor hear their words, they should shake off the dust from their feet when they depart from that house or city. Jesus assured them that it would be more tolerable for Solomon and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

In any house or city where the people would not receive the apostles or hear their words, when they left they should shake off the dust of their feet as a witness against that house or city. This refers to a symbolic expression implying they did not want to have anything more to do with those people, because of the stubborn sinfulness. As a physical act the practice is not bound upon Christians after the cross, though it is permissible (see Luke 10:10,11; Acts 13:51; 18:6). However, we should learn not to have fellowship with or condone sin.

If such a city were to reject these representatives of Jesus, it would be more tolerable in the judgment for Sodom and Gomorrah than for

that city. Clearly the judgment on that city would be severe. God had destroyed Sodom with fire and brimstone for its great wickedness, so they will receive no mercy from God (Genesis 18,19). But God would come closer to showing mercy to such people than He would to those who reject the disciples' preaching.

The reason for this is stated in Luke 10:13-15. Jesus and His disciples had done such great miracles in these cities that they had abundant evidence to show to them that they should accept the message of the gospel as being true. They had far greater opportunity to recognize their error than had Sodom and Gomorrah. So in that sense there was less reason for God to be merciful to these cities, if they rejected the abundant evidence they had, than there was reason for God to be merciful to Sodom and Gomorrah.

This should encourage us to see the serious nature of gospel preaching. Those who reject the message of the gospel are eternally doomed. Let us love the souls of all enough to be sure their blood is not on our heads.

10:16 – Jesus said that He sent them out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so they should be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Jesus said that He was sending them out as lambs among wolves (compare Matthew 7:15; Acts 20:29). This is a forceful illustration, but we must take care not to go too far with it. A sheep harms no one at any time, but a wolf continually seeks to harm others, especially sheep. So these teachers should continually seek the good of those around them and never harm anyone, not even those who were seeking to do them harm (the wolves). The apostles – and in many ways all disciples – live in a hostile world among people often seeking our harm. Yet we must respond by genuinely seeking their good. See Luke 6:27,28ff.

He uses still another illustration to explain this point: we should be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. A dove is completely harmless to other animals, even as a lamb is. But in what sense should we be wise as serpents? Some serpents can create great harm for their enemies; but Jesus is advocating, not that we should imitate the harm done by serpents, but that we should imitate its wisdom.

Many passages encourage us to have wisdom in dealing with our adversaries. See Luke 21:15; Romans 16:19; Colossians 4:5. The fact that we seek no harm even to our enemies does not in any way mean we should be foolish or fail to use good judgment. Even a serpent will usually try to flee or hide from its enemies. It makes use of the means available to protect itself.

"Innocent as doves that we may not harm anyone; cautious as snakes that we may be careful of letting anyone harm us." – Augustine (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

So Jesus is not saying that the sheep have no defense. We should use the means available to us for protection. We may flee or hide. We may also appeal to civil authorities for protection – Esther 4:8-16; Acts 22:24-29; 23:12-33; 25:10-12.

And above all, the shepherd defends his sheep from the wolves (compare John 10). So if we trust God, He will care for us, and His care is far greater than anything we could ever do for ourselves. (This does not mean we will never suffer physically, as Bible examples show. It means He will care for us spiritually and will enable us to do His will faithfully.)

Furthermore, this does not mean that we must make no effort whatever to resist evil. On the contrary, we fight against evil using the whole armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8,9). But what we oppose is, not the people themselves, but the error they commit. We hate the sin but love the sinner.

The reason we combat error is that we do love people's souls. We do this by speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) opposing the errors of others by rebuking them with the sword of the Spirit. See Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4. In doing this, we may hurt other people's feelings, and they may become angry and attack us or even say we are the ones doing wrong. But we seek no harm to them. We seek their good, knowing that their sins are not good for them, but harmful.

10:17-20 – Beware of those who deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings as a testimony to them. When they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak, for it will be given you in that hour what you should speak. It is not you who speaks, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

Delivered up to councils, synagogues, governors, and kings

Because of these wolves, there would be tribulation and persecution for Jesus' disciples. They would be delivered up to synagogues and councils. They would be brought before civil rulers for Jesus' sake. Such persecutions are recorded in great numbers in the Bible: Acts 4,5,7,8,12; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; etc. This is confirmed in Roman history. McGarvey quotes Tacitus who said Christians were "a class of men hated."

Instead of defeating the apostles, however, such persecutions would be opportunities for them to give their testimony about Jesus' resurrection. In such circumstances, they should be determined not to think beforehand about what answer they would give. They did not need

to premeditate, because the Holy Spirit Himself would give them the wisdom they needed to speak.

Guided directly by the Holy Spirit

This passage gives a good description of supernatural inspiration. It clearly distinguishes between supernatural knowledge and the natural knowledge of truth, such as men can have today as a result of study. Inspired men did not need to study about what to say, because God Himself would give the answer they needed. Today we must study to know how to answer (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16,17). It follows that the events Jesus here predicted must have occurred during the age of direct prophecy, which means they must have occurred during the lifetime of the original apostles.

This promise (10:19,20) assured the apostles they would receive direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. But it is not a promise that all disciples will be directly guided. This was spoken when the written word had not been completed. This power of direct guidance would cease when the written word had been completed, because direct guidance would no longer be needed (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Today we have that completed word to guide and strengthen us. But we must study the word to know God's will and how to answer others.

Note the extent of inspiration the Holy Spirit gave them. They were told not only what to say, but how to say it. They were not given general truths and then expected to express those truths according to their own wisdom. Such an approach might lead to error in how they expressed the thoughts. Direct guidance of the Holy Spirit left nothing to human wisdom. He not only gave inspired men the truth, He also guided them to know how to express the truth.

For other verses on direct revelation see 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2:10-13; Ephesians 3:3-5; John 16:13; Galatians 1:8-12; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; Luke 10:16.

10:21-23 – Brother would deliver up brother to death, a father his child, and children would rise against parents and cause them to be put to death. They would be hated by all men for Jesus' sake, but he who endured to the end would be saved. When persecuted in one city, they should flee to another, for they would not have gone through all the cities of Israel before Jesus came.

Enduring to the end even in time of persecution

In this time of persecution that Jesus is describing, many would betray and hate one another. This would include betrayal by even family members, relatives, or friends (see also Matthew 10:34-37). Christians would be hated, and some would be put to death (see notes above). Jesus Himself endured such treatment.

Despite these problems, it would be possible to endure to the end, and those who did so would be the ones who would be saved. This expression means that, in order to remain faithful to God and thus be eternally saved, disciples must be willing to stay faithful through all the trials and hardships Jesus has described, till they are over.

This does not mean they will then have no more temptations afterward. It means simply that they must endure till all this is over if they hope to have salvation. This contrasts to those who would fall away in these difficulties. If they fall in the trials, they will be lost. If they want to be saved, they must remain faithful.

Jesus was describing what would face the apostles in the work of preaching, however the passage states a general truth which has many applications to us today and throughout time. God's people in every age have faced opposition when they stand for truth. We must endure whatever trials we face if we seek God's reward. If we fall away, we will not be rewarded. We must continue on till life is over, whether by death or Jesus' final coming. If we faint along the way, we will be lost. Compare Galatians 6:7-9; Hebrews 12:3-5; James 5:7-11.

Fleeing from persecution

One way that Christians often dealt with persecution was to flee. They did not use physical force to protect themselves: they were harmless as doves. A part of their wisdom, as described in verse 16, was to flee for their own safety. The apostles in the book of Acts frequently left cities for the sake of their own safety to avoid persecution. See Acts 9:24,25; 14:6,19,20; 17:10,14; 20:1.

Jesus said they would not have gone through all the cities of Israel before He Himself came. This seems to me to tie to Luke 10:1. That passage is very similar to this one in Matthew, except that Jesus was there sending out the seventy. But the responsibility was very similar to the Limited Commission.

In that case, Jesus said that He sent the disciples into the cities where He Himself was about to come. It appears to me that one of the purposes of Jesus in sending out the apostles, and then later the seventy, was to prepare people for Jesus when He Himself would come to preach in those cities.

Here in Matthew's account, he explains that, if they encountered serious persecution, they should just move on to another city. There was so much work to do and so many cities to be taught, that they would not be able to teach everyone before Jesus came anyway. So rather than stay in a city where they were facing persecution, they should move on to another city where the message had not yet been presented.

10:24,25 – A disciple is not above his teacher or a servant above his master. It is enough for a disciple to be like his teacher and a servant like his master. If people called the master Beelzebub, how much more those of his household.

A disciple should be like his teacher.

Compare Luke 6:40.

The statement of Jesus here demonstrates both the meaning and the purpose of discipleship. The Lord is the master or the teacher, and disciples are those who learn from the master and follow his teaching. In particular, they imitate the principles by which the master lived.

So as followers of Jesus Christ, our goal must always be to follow the teachings of Jesus and seek to imitate His example. One important application for followers of Jesus is, when making decisions about right and wrong, we should always ask ourselves what Jesus would do if He were in our situation. When we know what He would do, then that is what we should do.

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher. A follower becomes no better than his teacher. If he perfectly follows his teacher, the highest he can rise is to the level of the teacher. He can be no better.

This is why it is so important for us to be sure that the leaders we follow are not false teachers or spiritually blind. Such leaders will surely lead us into the ditch with them (Matthew 15:14). It likewise follows that our ultimate teacher must be the only One who is truly worthy of imitation. That One is Jesus, and we should follow Him in all things. We must never allow men to lead us to any form of conduct to which Jesus would never lead us.

Other passages regarding imitating Jesus and seeking to be like Him are: 1 Peter 2:21-24; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Luke 9:23; 6:40; Philippians 2:5; John 13:15; 15:10,12; Ephesians 5:1,2; 1 John 2:6; John 13:16; 15:20; Hebrews 12:2-4.

> "Disciple" (μαθητης) – "1 one who engages in learning through instruction from another, *pupil, apprentice* (in contrast to the teacher …). 2 one who is rather constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views, *disciple, adherent*…" – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

Followers of Jesus will be persecuted.

Specifically in the context, Jesus explains that if He faced persecution, then we should expect the same to happen to us. They had called Jesus "Beelzebub" claiming that He cast out demons by the power of the prince of demons (Matthew 9:34; 12:24). Jesus states that they did this in order to persecute Him, and if we follow Him as our master, we should expect that we also will be persecuted.

The evidence that the world will hate us, as Jesus had said, is that a servant is not greater than His master. This is admitted by all (see references above). If people have such brazen disrespect and outright hatred that they would state such obviously false and hateful things and finally even kill the Son of God, how can His followers expect any better treatment? If they will treat the respected leader in such a way, why would they hesitate to mistreat lowly servants?

Such people will no more obey the teachings of Jesus' followers than they would obey Jesus' own personal teachings. If they persecuted Him, they will do so to us (2 Timothy 3:12; Acts 14:22). In practice, of course, a minority did keep His word, and a minority will follow the teachings of the apostles. But the majority rejected Jesus when He was alive, and they will reject our teaching likewise. We see many examples of this in the book of Acts.

People reject Jesus and His teachings, not because they lack evidence that Jesus is from God, but because they lack a desire and commitment to serve God. Those who are truly devoted to God's service will investigate Jesus' claims seriously and will accept them. Those who reject His claims are those who would not serve God properly regardless of the evidence.

Notice that Jesus here identifies false statements that people make about Christians to constitute a form of persecution. Persecution is not just physical harm, but includes false, accusatory, and slanderous statements made to hurt the reputation of God's people.

See our notes on Matthew 5:10-12 for more information about persecution.

Warnings about Persecution

Matthew 5:10-12 – Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 13:21 – …he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

John 15:20 – Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant is not greater than his master." If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

John 16:33 – These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

Acts 14:22 – ...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."

Romans 5:3 – And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance

Romans 8:17,18 – ... if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Romans 8:35-39 – Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Corinthians 1:8-10 – For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us

2 Corinthians 4:17 – For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory

2 Timothy 3:12 – Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Hebrews 10:32-36 – But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

1 Peter 2:19-23 – For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable

before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth" who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

1 Peter 3:14 – But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."

1 Peter 3:18 – For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit

1 Peter 4:1 – Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin

1 Peter 4:16-19 – Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now "If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.

1 Peter 5:10 – But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

10:26,27 – Do not fear men, for nothing that is covered or hidden will remain unknown. Whatever Jesus taught in the dark should be spoken in the light, and what they heard in the ears should be preached from the housetops.

Jesus then warned that man's real conduct – good or bad – cannot ultimately be covered or hidden. All will be revealed or made known. See Luke 8:17; Matthew 10:26; Mark 4:22; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14.

Jesus said secrets will be revealed and hidden things will come to light. The contexts where such statements are made often discuss hypocrisy and other sins that people attempt to hide from others. Jesus assures us that all will be made known. Things that have been done in the greatest secrecy, whispered in the darkest night, or covered by the most elaborate stealth measures, will someday be made known.

This is especially bad for hypocrites and those who oppose the gospel, since they seek to hide their true nature from people, leading others to think they are better than they really are. Jesus assures us that all will someday be fully known. This is a warning to hypocrites and sinners, yet it is also an assurance to the faithful and righteous.

In particular, the message that Jesus entrusted to the apostles during His personal ministry, should be preached from the housetops and openly proclaimed. This was to be revealed now so all people would

have the opportunity to correct their lives, rather than waiting till the Day of Judgment.

> He was conversing with them quietly and alone in a small corner of Palestine. ... For they were soon to be commissioned to speak not to one or two or three cities but to the whole world. They would soon be traversing land and sea, amid inhabited countries and across deserts, addressing both princes and tribes, philosophers and orators, telling it like it is with an open face and with all boldness of speech. – Chrysostom (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Mark 4:21,22 connects these statements showing in that the light of the gospel is what reveals error, so our job is to preach it and make it known. The real nature of sin and evil is made clear by the truth of God's word. If we will preach that truth, even in this life people might see their errors and correct them. If they never learn the truth in this life, and if no one else learns the truth about them, it will all be made clear at judgment.

Of course, this is also true of righteousness. Some people may condemn us as evil in this life, and few people if any may believe we are right. But sooner or later, the light of truth will shine and reveal who is truly pleasing to God. If we have sought to hide our evil, it will yet be revealed. Yet in the context, if men have falsely accused us of evil or condemned our lives unjustly, again the truth will be made known, and all will see our true standing before God.

Let us live at all times so that we have nothing to fear, in word, thought, or deed. Would you be ashamed for others to know your innermost thoughts and words? Remember, God knows all, sees all, and will judge all.

10:28 – Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Compare Luke 12:4,5.

Do not fear persecution that men cause in this life, but remember our eternal destiny.

Jesus knew that persecution would come to Him and the ultimate price He would pay for His stand for truth. He also knew that similar persecution would come upon His disciples. Here he warned the disciples to be ready. The effect of persecution and opposition, of course, is to cause disciples to be afraid to stand for our beliefs. Those who object to Jesus' teaching hope that their threats and mistreatment of us will cause us to keep quiet for fear of the consequences.

Jesus, however, warns that we should not be afraid of things people can do to us. The worst thing they can do is to kill our bodies. After that,

there is nothing they can do to harm us. Far more important is that we should fear the One who can cast us into hell after He has killed us!

We must keep our priorities right. Death seems a terrible thing, but it is of relatively little consequence if we receive eternal life afterward. On the other hand, if we give in to the intimidations of men and fail to obey God, He has the power to cast us into hell. That is a consequence to fear! If we remain true to God despite man's threats, the worst thing that can happen is that man may kill us.

This passage is a great assurance of man's inability to cause us to be lost eternally. No one can make us sin against our will, and therefore no one can cause us to be eternally lost. But we should fear to sin against God and face gehenna hell.

This verse does not, of course, mean that we must have no fear in any sense of what people can do to us. Of course, we feel the emotion of fear. Apparently even Jesus did so in Gethsemane as He faced death. The point is that we should not allow this emotion to cause us to do wrong. We should be courageous in the face of such opposition. True bravery is the strength to do right despite our fears.

In particular, in the subsequent verses here in Matthew 10, Jesus will assure us of our Father's care and protection for those who serve faithfully (note verse 31).

Consider other passages assuring us that we should not fear people and the harm they can do to us: Psalm 56:4,11; 118:6; Proverbs 29:25; Daniel 3:16-18; 2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 2:14,15; 13:6; 1 Peter 3:13,14; Acts 20:23,24; 18:9; Romans 8:35-39; John 14:1,27; Revelation 2:10; Isaiah 8:13; 41:10-14; 51:12; Jeremiah 1:8; Ezekiel 3:9.

Applications to punishment after death

This passage is a powerful refutation of the materialist view that the only punishment we receive for sin is physical death. Materialists believe that, when we die, that is the end of our existence. Even some folks who claim to be Bible believers will say that that the worst punishment that wicked people face is physical death and then nonexistence. They claim that "hell" is the grave where the body is buried.

But what is there to fear about being buried in the grave after we die? If our conscious existence has ended at death, we would not even be consciously aware of the grave. In such a case, physical death would be our greatest fear, in which case we ought to fear the men who can cause it! Yet Jesus here clearly teaches us not to fear men who can cause physical death, but far worse than death is the consequence of hell ***after*** physical death.

It follows that the word "destroy," as used here, does not refer, as some people claim, to annihilation or ceasing to exist. Rather, it refers to ruin such that the object that is destroyed is no longer capable of functioning to accomplish its purpose. Compare Matthew 9:17.

The word is used to refer to that which is "lost" in Matthew 15:24; 18:11, but something which is lost does not cease to exist. In fact, in these passages Jesus states that He came to save that which was lost, but did He come to save that which was annihilated and ceased to exist? Rather, He came to save those who had ruined their relationship with God.

In Matthew 10:39; 16:25, He stated that those who "lose" their lives for His sake will find it. But how can one find that which has been annihilated or ceased to exist?

In Mark 1:24, a demon asked Jesus if He came to "destroy" them. But a demon in a similar case in Matthew 8:29 asked if Jesus came to "torment" them before the time. This demonstrates that, as regards future punishment of the wicked, the term "destroy" means to torment. Those who are cast in the lake of fire will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Revelation 20:10).

For other passages regarding hell and the punishment of the wicked after death, see Matthew 5:22; 8:12; 10:28; 13:39-43,49,50; 18:8,9; 25:30,41,46; Luke 12:4,5; 16:19-31; Romans 2:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9; Revelation 20:10-15; 21:8.

See Kyle Pope's comments for further help.

> "Destroy" (απολλυμι) – "...1 to cause or experience destruction a act. *ruin, destroy* ... b mid. *perish, be ruined* ... 2 to fail to obtain what one expects or anticipates, *lose out on, lose* ... 3 to lose someth. that one already has or be separated from a normal connection, *lose, be lost...*" – *Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.*

"The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being." – Vine

10:29-31 – Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin, and none of them falls to the ground apart from the Father? The very hairs of our head are all numbered, so do not be afraid, because we are of more value than many sparrows.

God's care for his people

Jesus continued His discussion about persecution, assuring us that God cares for His people. Consider even the birds, which are of relatively little financial worth, yet God cares for them and knows what happens to them. Yet we are of much greater value than they are. God knows so much about us that He can even tell how many hairs are on each person's head!

What is the point? God has not created us and then left us to our own devices. He has not ordered how we should live our lives and then gone off and ignored our struggles to achieve His purposes (as taught by some Deists and others). He is very involved in our lives. He knows our needs even before we ask Him (see Matthew 6:8). Just as He cares about that sparrow, He surely cares for us.

God may allow us to suffer, but He will protect us so that no one can compel us to be lost (verse 28). He will not allow temptations that are beyond our ability to handle. He will instead always make a way of escape so we can remain faithful (1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13). He controls all things to work for our ultimate good, if we remain committed to Him (Romans 8:28-34).

The application in the context of Jesus' discussion about persecution is that God knows when people mistreat us, and He knows the sacrifices we make for Him. We can be sure we will be rewarded for our faithfulness, and those who oppose us will be punished. It follows that our labors for the Lord are not in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Observations about false beliefs and the nature of God

Note the consequence of this teaching for the doctrines of evolution and animal rights. Among the many errors of evolution is that it makes little or no distinction between the value of people and the value of animals, because evolution teaches that we came from the animals. But Jesus says we are of greater value than many sparrows. Why would this be true if we evolved from the lower animals?

Environmental extremists and animal rights advocates tell us that we must make great sacrifices of our own needs in order to avoid harming any animal, even birds. Yes, this verse shows that God cares about the birds. But it also teaches that God's concern for men and for our needs is much greater than His concern for animals. We are made in God's image. The animals are here to serve our needs. People's needs should not be sacrificed for the sake of protecting a few animals of relatively little value.

Notice also what we learn here about the omniscience of God as well as His care for His creation. God knows how many hairs each one of us has, and He knows what happens to each little bird. If so, then the consequence must surely be that He knows everything that happens in our lives and everything that happens in the world that He has created. His knowledge and wisdom are incredible, and His love and care for His creation are incredible blessings.

For other passages regarding God's omniscience, see Proverbs 3:19; Psalm 139:1-4,6-12; 147:4,5; 94:9; John 16:30; Matthew 10:29-31; 6:8,32; 1 Kings 8:39; Romans 11:33,34; Isaiah 29:15; 40:27,28; 46:9,10; 55:8,9; 1 Samuel 2:3; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Job 12:13; 28:24; 1 Corinthians 2:10,11; Hebrews 4:13; 1 John 3:20.

10:32,33 – Whoever confesses Jesus before men, Jesus will confess him before His Father in heaven. But whoever denies Jesus before men, Jesus will deny him before His Father in heaven.

In times of persecution, Jesus' disciples need the courage to confess Christ and not deny Him. If we confess Christ, even in the face of

opposition, He will confess us before the angels of God. But if we deny Him, He will deny us.

When we face opposition, we may fear what people can do to harm us (verse 28). We must not allow such fear to lead us to deny Him or to claim, as did Peter, that we do not know Him. We must continue to be strong for the faith. But this conviction and confession must characterize our lives continually, not just in times of persecution.

Our confession of Jesus demonstrates to those around us that we understand, believe, and are committed to follow Jesus because of who He is. Such a confession gives opportunity for other people to learn the truth, but it also strengthens our commitment and devotion because we have openly taken a stand about who Jesus is.

True confession is not just an acknowledgment of some specific truth about Jesus or who He is. It is a commitment to follow and serve according to His teaching. It is an open declaration to accept His Lordship in our lives. In short, it is an acknowledgment that we have committed ourselves to be one of His true disciples. As shown in the context here, that requires being willing even to suffer persecution for Him.

Such a confession of Jesus is required before we are baptized, as a condition of being forgiven and becoming a child of God. But it must continue in our lives as Christians, especially in our teaching. In fact, the Scriptures teach that those conditions, which the gospel says are necessary leading up to baptism in order to become a follower of Jesus Christ, must also continue in our lives after baptism.

Not only must we learn the gospel in order to be come a Christian, but we must continue learning after baptism. The same is true for believing and repenting of sins. And here we see the same is true for confessing Christ.

Confession is required as a public commitment in order that we can be baptized to receive forgiveness of our sins. Then we must continue to stand for Jesus and urge others to also believe in Him. If we fail to do so, we lose our reward. But if we continue to stand up for Him, we receive a great reward.

For other passages about the importance of confessing Jesus, see Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32; 16:15-18; John 1:49; 4:42; 9:35-38; 11:27: 12:42,43; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Timothy 6:12,13; 1 John 4:15.

10:34-37 – Jesus came to earth, not to bring peace, but a sword. He came to set a man against his father, daughter against mother, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Jesus is not worthy of Him, and he loves son or daughter more than Jesus is not worthy of Him.

Following Jesus often leads to conflict with other people.

As part of His warning about the persecution and opposition that we face for Him, Jesus warned the disciples that their acceptance of His teaching would lead to conflict and division with those who would not obey Him. This would be true even within the closest of personal relationships. See also Matthew 10:21,22; Mark 13:12,13; Luke 14:26-33; John 15:18-16:4.

Jesus commands unity among His disciples (John 17:20-23; Ephesians 4:3-6; 1:22,23; 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:20). Yet here He clearly states that they will be divided from others. This occurs because the message of the gospel condemns sin; and when people will not repent, they often resent the message and seek to silence the messengers. Such division has always existed between those who stand for truth and those who oppose it.

Jesus did, in a real sense, come to bring peace on earth, but this is primarily peace with God. It is a peace that removes the alienation between man and God that has been caused by man's sin (Romans 5:1,2; see Luke 2:14).

Jesus also commanded His disciples to seek peace with other people, but this peace means we must not alienate others because of our own human desires and willful ways. However, never did God tell us to compromise the will of the Father in order to have peace with men.

For passages showing that we should seek peace with God but should not compromise the truth in order to have peace with men, see Matthew 5:9; James 3:13-18; Romans 12:18; 14:19; Genesis 13:8; Proverbs 20:3; Psalm 133:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Ephesians 4:2-6; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Peter 3:11.

Many other passages show that we will surely face persecution and opposition in our service to Christ.

Conflict may separate even members of a family.

This division would even separate families, father against son, mother against daughter, etc. (compare Micah 7:6). Yet Jesus required His disciples to not back off or compromise simply because loved ones do not like the message. On the contrary, He was teaching them so they would be prepared to accept such a consequence as a necessary part of serving Him when the time came.

Jesus plainly says that, when people love father or mother or any relative or close friend more than they love Jesus, they are not worthy of Him. Jesus said that, if we love Him, we will keep His commands (John 14:15; 1 John 5:2,3).

The proof that a person loves some human being more than they love Jesus comes when they are willing to do what pleases their human loved one at the cost of doing other than what Jesus teaches us to do. Note that even Jesus' own brothers at times opposed Him – John 7:8.

There are people who believe we should only preach a positive message and should not rebuke sin. Such people need to reckon with passages such as this. Some would seek peace at any price and have us believe that we should never teach anything that results in alienation among people. Yet Jesus here clearly states that alienation will come when His disciples stand for truth. If our message is totally positive and we do not rebuke sin, why would division or alienation ever occur? In fact, had Jesus never done such "negative" preaching, would He ever have been crucified?

Likewise, when people reject gospel teaching because they don't want to face the fact that their loved ones are in error, they too need to reckon with this passage. Many people cling to their family religion because, "It was good enough for my parents, so it's good enough for me." Or, "If I accept that belief, I would be saying that my dead mother is lost."

The fact is that many people have loved ones who will be lost. Nearly every conversion we read about in the New Testament involved people who had to change from their family religion. Rather than using family religion as an excuse to not serve Christ, we must face the reality that Jesus Himself warned us that such situations would occur, and we must be willing to pay whatever cost is necessary to stand for the truth. Jesus said that those who compromise in such cases are not worthy of Christ.

However, the gospel also assures us that, no matter what sacrifices we make in this life, we receive greater blessings in return and ultimately receive eternal life (Matthew 19:29). In particular, Jesus said that our spiritual family will consist of all who obey the will of the Father in heaven (Matthew 12:50).

10:38,39 – He who does not take up his cross and follow Jesus is not worthy of Him. He who finds his life will lose it, and he loses his life for the sake of Jesus will find it.

This same concept is taught also in Matthew 16:24,25. See our notes there.

Jesus has just discussed the fact we must be willing to suffer for Him even in the face of opposition from family members and loved ones. Those who are not willing to face such opposition are not worthy of Him. Here He continues by teaching that, if we want to be worthy of Jesus, we

must (1) take up our cross, and (2) follow Jesus (verse 38). This requires losing our lives for His sake (verse 39).

Note more closely:

Take up your cross and follow Me.

Many think this refers to bearing a burden for the Lord: we must at times suffer difficulties to please Him. Surely such will at times be required, but there is a fuller meaning if we consider the context.

(1) What is the purpose of a cross? A cross was not just a burden to be borne. Far more than that, a cross was an instrument of ***death and total sacrifice***.

(2) Jesus said to take up our cross and ***follow Him***. Where did He go with His cross? He went to His death!

(3) In verse 39 Jesus said we must ***lose our lives*** for Him.

So, the significance of "taking up your cross" is ***giving your whole life to God***, as Jesus was about to give His life for us. This involves bearing burdens, but it is far deeper than that. It is a ***total dedication*** of life. Our whole life is given to His service in anything He says. This will lead us to willingly deny self. Following Him then requires us to live as He lived His life (1 Peter 2:21; Matthew 10:34,35; 1 Corinthians 11:1).

Luke adds "take up your cross ***daily***" (Luke 9:23). There is a sense in which Christians must give their lives to God every day. This is not necessarily a physical death as Jesus died for us (though such might be required). It is a daily total sacrifice of self to do the will of Jesus.

Whatever He wants with my life is what must be done with it. What I want no longer matters, but I give myself for Him, just as He gave Himself for me despite the fact His human nature did not want to have to do it.

This determination to live our lives in service to God begins with "repentance." In repenting we determine to turn away from our own will and live our lives to please God. We cannot be saved without this, and that is why repentance is so important in salvation. It is also why so many people are not truly Jesus' disciples: they are not willing to make this total sacrifice.

For other passages regarding the total commitment that serving Jesus requires, see Romans 12:1,2; Galatians 2:20; 1 John 3:16-18; Matthew 6:19-33; Galatians 5:24; Romans 6:6-23; 2 Timothy 2:11; 2 Corinthians 4:11; Ecclesiastes 12:13.

Losing your life for Jesus

Verse 39 then follows, helps us understand verse 38, and strengthens the point being made. Whenever any person holds his life so dear to himself that he wants to use it to please himself – when he seeks to do his own will and accomplish his own purposes, rather than denying self and serving God – that person will in the end lose his life eternally.

But when anyone loses his life for Jesus' sake – when he gives his life in service and sacrifice to God by denying himself, as described above – such a man will save his life by gaining eternal life.

There can be no greater or clearer teaching anywhere that describes the meaning of being a disciple. We must live a life of complete and total submission to the will of God. This is how our Master lived, so this is how His disciples must live.

When men seek to convince other people to accept their proposals or ideas, they typically describe all the advantages while ignoring or downplaying the problems involved. We observe that Jesus and His apostles were realistic in teaching others what it means to be a disciple of Christ. They assure us of the blessings to be received, but they also warn us about the persecutions and the sacrifices involved.

Those of us today who teach the gospel need to do as Jesus did here. We need to make sure that people understand the sacrifices and hardships that will be involved in following Jesus, but we should also make sure they understand that the rewards are worth the sacrifice.

10:40-42 – He who receives Jesus' apostles, receives Jesus; and he who receives Jesus, receives the One who sent Him. Whoever receives a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. He receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. Whoever gives even a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple to one of these little ones, he shall by no means lose his reward.

Those who receive the apostles of Jesus are thereby receiving Jesus.

Jesus then stated a fundamental truth about man's reception of the message sent through inspired teachers. Jesus sent His messengers, inspired them to speak His message (Matthew 10:19,20), and gave them power to confirm their message by miracles (10:1). All of this showed that the message they spoke was not of their own origin, but was the word of Jesus. And the word of Jesus was the word of God.

It follows that, when anyone accepts the message of the inspired representatives, he is heeding, not the messenger himself, but the ***source*** of the message: Jesus Himself. On the other hand, if one rejects the message, He is rejecting, not just the messenger, but the source of the message. This in turn means a rejection of Jesus and His Father. ***We reject Jesus by rejecting His word which he revealed through inspired teachers, and we accept Him by accepting His word.*** See also Matthew 10:40; John 12:48; 13:20; Galatians 4:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:8.

Many today claim they have "accepted Jesus as their Savior," yet they believe that obedience to Jesus' teachings is not necessary to

salvation (see Luke 6:46). Others claim they will respect what Jesus Himself taught (the "red letters"), but they see no problem with rejecting the teaching of Jesus' apostles and prophets. They may even say that such teachings are just human opinion.

But Jesus here refutes all such ideas. The teaching of inspired apostles and prophets (whether written or spoken) was as much the teaching of Jesus as were the things that He Himself personally taught. If we don't obey the teaching of inspired men, we may as well reject Jesus' personal teaching. See also John 16:7-13.

See 1 Corinthians 14:37; 2:10-13; Ephesians 3:3-5; John 16:13; Matthew 10:19,20; Galatians 1:8-12; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16,17.

Receiving a prophet in the name of a prophet

To receive a prophet in the name of a prophet means to receive him because he is a prophet (ESV). Jesus has just described that, to receive a prophet as being a prophet, means to accept his teaching as being a message from God. This in turn requires people to obey that message. However, it also involves supporting and encouraging the teachers in their work. See the notes earlier in this chapter on the Limited Commission. When people received the men who were sent by Jesus, they were expected to support them in their work. See also 3 John 5-8.

Those who do receive a prophet in this way will receive a prophet's reward. Likewise, those who receive a righteous man, because he is a righteous man, will receive a righteous man's reward. And those who give a little child even a cup of water in the name of a disciple will not lose their reward. What is the significance of giving a cup of cold water to a little one?

In Mark 9:41 Jesus taught that, whenever anyone gave the apostles a cup of water to drink in Jesus' name because they belong to Christ, that person would by no means lose his reward. Jesus had sent the apostles (and later others) to do the work of preaching His message (see notes on the Limited Commission earlier in this chapter). They were supported in that work by the people who accepted their message and who, in turn, would provide food and lodging for them.

This support of gospel preachers continued under the Great Commission of the gospel, though it also then included financial support, etc. (see 1 Corinthians 9:4-14; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9; Philippians 4:14-18; 1 Timothy 5:18; Luke 10:7). Jesus' reference to providing a cup of water in His name, because they belong to Him, refers to this practice. His point was that, even the smallest gift or deed done in support of His work would be rewarded.

The point here in Matthew's account seems to be the same. Whether one provides for a prophet because he is a prophet, a righteous man

because he is a righteous man, or a little one because he is a disciple, will receive his reward.

So a "little one" here appears to me to refer, not to a child physically, but to one of God's little children. Disciples of Jesus are often described as little children (1 John 2:1; etc.). We are not told exactly what the reward is for giving a cup of cold water, but it seems to me to at least include the blessings that God has for those who are prophets, righteous men, etc.

Matthew 11

Chapter 11 – Questions from John the Baptist and Discussion of Jesus' Work

11:2-19 - Questions from John the Baptist

(Compare Luke 7:18-35.)

11:1-6 – Messengers from John inquired about Jesus.

11:1-3 – As Jesus taught in His disciples' cities, John heard in prison about His works. He sent two disciples to ask if Jesus was the Coming One, or did they look for another?

Having sent the apostles out on their preaching trip, Jesus went to preach in their cities. As He did so, messengers came to him from John the Baptist. We studied about John's ministry in Matthew 3. The last we heard about John was that Herod had imprisoned him (4:12), but John's disciples reported to him about Jesus' works. From prison John sent two of his disciples as messengers to Jesus.

The disciples were to ask Jesus whether He was the one to come, or were they looking for someone else? Clearly this was a question whether or not Jesus was the Messiah, the one for whom John had been sent to prepare the way. Note that John himself, when he had been asked this same question, had categorically denied that he was the Christ – John 1:20,21.

Why would John ask such a question? He was a prophet. He himself, before his imprisonment, had recognized Jesus and testified concerning Him. He had said that Jesus was the lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. And he testified specifically that Jesus was the one for whom he was preparing the way. (See John 1:15,29-34; Matthew 3:14).

Why question it now? The Bible does not specifically state the reason for his questions. Here are some possible explanations that may fit the evidence.

First, it must be understood that Jesus did not act like the kind of king that most Jews expected in their Messiah. Jesus spent His time

teaching and preaching with emphasis on spiritual matters. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He showed no interest in political aspirations and even less in building military might to throw off the Roman conquerors. He did not fit in any way the Jewish misconception. It is entirely likely that John may have shared this misconception, and it is virtually certain that his disciples shared it.

So, one possible explanation for John's question is that he did it for the benefit of his disciples. Perhaps they were having doubts, so he sent the disciples to Jesus that they might receive confirmation regarding His work.

On the other hand we know that, when prophets spoke for God, they themselves had to study the meaning of their prophecies. The fact God had spoken through them did not prove they understood the prophecy. They had to consider what was revealed and think about it in order to understand it, just as did those who heard their prophecies (compare Acts 10). Several other prophets, after receiving revelations from God, nevertheless had questions and doubts: Moses, David, Elijah, and Peter.

Or perhaps John was just impatient for Jesus to set up His kingdom. Perhaps the delay was causing John to have doubts. His message had been that the kingdom was at hand. If, as we have discussed, he shared Jewish misconceptions about the nature that kingdom, Jesus' conduct may have confused him. Or again, perhaps his disciples were having these doubts because of their misconceptions, so he sent disciples to obtain clarification for the disciples' benefit.

The question that John asked is not necessarily an indication that he sinned. There was no rebuke such as Jesus gave His disciples in 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; etc. He had not been with Jesus personally to see His miracles, as Jesus' disciples had. He had been imprisoned for his preaching, and he was probably expecting a different approach from the Messiah than Jesus was taking.

The Bible does not hide human frailty even in its greatest heroes. Let us not think that we must never admit the weaknesses of great Bible characters or of ourselves. We too are humans subject to human trials. Let us take strength from the fact that even great men of God needed reassurance at times, yet God was pleased with them.

Kyle Pope makes the interesting observation here that the passage distinguishes between teaching and preaching. It says that Jesus did them both. Both involve presenting a message for the purpose of instructing others. Pope suggests that, when the two are distinguished, the difference might be that preaching involves a proclamation with little or no opportunity for the audience to interact. Whereas teaching would involve interaction in which the hearers are allowed to ask questions or make comments. Perhaps in many contexts there might be no difference.

11:4-6 – Jesus said to tell John about the things they heard and saw that Jesus was doing: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed are those who are not offended because of Him.

Jesus answered the inquiry of John's disciples, not by direct statement, but by "necessary implication." He presented the evidence on which the decision should be reached, then He left it to John and his disciples to reach the proper conclusion.

The evidence that Jesus gave was His miracles.

Since John could not personally see the miracles of Jesus, Jesus simply told the messengers to go tell John what things they had seen and heard from Jesus. The blind were given sight, the lame were made to walk, lepers were cleansed, the deaf could hear, the dead were raised, and even poor people had the gospel preached to them. Jesus taught any who would hear, but the poor were especially receptive (Luke 6:20; James 2:5; etc.).

In Luke 4:17-20 Jesus had read a passage from Isaiah 61:1,2 and said that He fulfilled that passage by doing some of these very things. No doubt John would have known about this and similar passages, so that Jesus' statement would have led him to understand the significance of Jesus' work.

Notice that Jesus answered John's question about who He was by calling attention to His miracles and His teaching. This would have answered John's question about Jesus. His miracles confirmed that He was from God, so John and his disciples should accept Jesus' claims as true. Jesus' preaching and teaching likewise fulfilled Old Testament prophecies.

Once again the record shows that the purpose of these miracles was to convince people to believe Jesus' claims. It convinces us, if we are honest, that He was from God, and therefore was who He claimed to be. There could be no other explanation for such events. Only by the power of God could one do these things. The messengers could see for themselves and report to John.

One wonders why modern, so-called prophets, do not confirm that they are from God by doing similar works. There are those since the first century who have claimed to be prophets sent from God like Jesus and His apostles. This includes men such as Joseph Smith, Muhammed, and others. If these men are truly from God, why cannot they prove that their message is inspired by using the same means that Jesus and His apostles did?

Note also that Jesus expected people to draw conclusions that necessarily followed from His work and teaching. He never stated the conclusion nor directly answered the question. Instead, He did the work and told them to draw the conclusion that followed.

Other passages that confirm the purpose of miracles are as follows: Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 17:16-24; 18:36-39; Exodus 4:1-9; 7:3-5; 14:30,31.

Jesus concluded by pronouncing a blessing on those who do not stumble at Him.

Many Jews did stumble, refusing to believe in Him despite the evidence. In fact, many openly opposed Him, and in the end they killed Him. Jesus did miracles to give the proof that shows people of His day and our day who He is. Yet many continue to stumble, because Jesus does not say what they wish He would say. We must investigate the evidence with honest hearts. God does not force belief on anyone. See 1 Peter 2:6-8; Romans 9:30-33.

I am not sure what the implication is regarding John. I doubt that Jesus was implying that John was stumbling. Jesus may have said this as an admonition to John's disciples, or perhaps it was just a general admonition to all who consider the evidence.

In any case, we must be sure that we are not among the number who stumble but among those who believe and obey.

11:7-19 – Jesus' commendation of John

11:7-10 – Jesus asked if they expected John to be a reed shaken by the wind or a man clothed in soft garments. Those in soft clothing are in king's houses. Did they expect to see a prophet? Yes, he was more than a prophet because he was the one prophesied to be the messenger to prepare the way for Jesus.

As John's messengers left, Jesus discussed the character and work of John.

He asked if the people expected John to be a reed shaken with the wind. This implies a man unfirm in his teachings, easily swayed by opposition or public opinion (Ephesians 4:14). In other words, was John a wishy-washy compromiser? Was he easily convinced to change his doctrine to please the people or to keep quiet when facing opposition?

Jesus' question contrasted John to many of the religious leaders of that day. The scribes and Pharisees held strong opinions and often taught human traditions, but they were also highly swayed by the opinions of the people. Many times they refused to act in the ways that they wished they could act, but they were afraid they might alienate the people.

Clearly John was different from other religious leaders. Jesus did not answer His question about John, because the answer was so obvious that He did not need to answer it. John's steadfast opposition to the Pharisees, Herod, and all error was well known (see chapter 3). He was

in prison and would eventually be slain because of his outspoken opposition to Herod's improper marriage.

Yet many preachers today are "reeds shaken by the wind." They compromise and adapt their doctrine to please the hearers or to avoid controversy (2 Timothy 4:1-4). They may claim they need to preach a positive message and seek peace, yet the result is that they fail to tell souls the sins for which they need to repent so they can be saved! They obviously are not like John.

Again, Jesus asked if they expected John to be clothed in soft, gorgeous apparel, like men who live sumptuously in a king's court. Once again, this was the way the religious leaders of that day often were. They were lovers of money (Luke 16:14). But Jesus had no need to answer the question directly about John. Everyone knew John lived a plain, simple life in the wilderness, eating and dressing roughly. This harmonized with his uncompromising doctrine.

Yet again, many preachers today do want to live in luxury and softness. Some want to get rich from preaching. To them it is a source of wealth. Others may not seek wealth, but neither do they want to preach in difficult areas or difficult congregations, sacrificing or striving with hardship in laboring for the Lord. They too need to learn from John. (2 Timothy 4:5; 1:8)

John was more than a prophet; he was the forerunner of the Messiah.

Jesus then asked if they had expected John to be a prophet. He said John was a prophet and even more than that. There had been many prophets in the past, but several hundred years had passed since Malachi, the last written prophet. Most likely John was the first prophet to have been sent to the people in many years. But besides being a prophet, John had a special role in preparing the way for the Christ.

On this matter Jesus quoted Malachi 3:1, indicating that John fulfilled this prophesy of the messenger who would come to prepare the way for Christ. This has already been discussed in Matthew 3 (see notes there; compare Mark 1:12; Luke 7:27). Note that, not only was John a forerunner of the Christ, but his work itself had been prophesied.

11:11 – No man was greater than John the Baptist, but the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Jesus then said that no one born of women had been greater than John the Baptist. This was an incredible comment, especially being an evaluation from the Son of God Himself. Consider some of the great men throughout the history of the Old Testament: Moses, Abraham, Noah, David, and Elijah himself. Great as these men were, none was greater than John. This does not say John was greater than these, but he was at least as great as any of them in God's eyes.

Doubtless Jesus excluded Himself from those to whom He compared John. Though He had been born of a woman, it was not a

natural birth. He apparently refers to those who are simply humans. Both John and Jesus had clearly showed that Jesus was greater than John.

Yet Jesus said that one who was least in the kingdom of God was greater than John. What does this mean? First, it shows that John was not in the kingdom, else surely he would have been as great or greater than most. But if he was not in the kingdom, it must have been because it did not exist. Contrary to Baptist doctrine, the church (which is the kingdom) did not begin during the lifetime of John the Baptist. Those who were least in the kingdom (when it did come) therefore, would be greater than John in that they were in the kingdom, but he was not.

Not all people who are in the kingdom will accomplish more than John, but they do enjoy greater blessings. They are subject to the reign of Christ as king, and above all they actually have lasting forgiveness. They receive the true gospel and all the blessings in the church that come through Christ.

Today in the kingdom, people actually are saved by Jesus' blood. John's work was only preparatory for what we have actually received. We should truly appreciate what we have as compared, not just to John, but to all people of previous generations before Jesus.

11:12,13 – From the days of John until the time when Jesus spoke, the kingdom of heaven suffered violence, and the violent took it by force. All the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

The law and the prophets prophesied till John.

Jesus then affirmed that all the law and the prophets prophesied until John. Does this mean, as some claim, that the Old Testament ceased to be binding and the New Testament came into effect with John's ministry? No, because the gospel clearly shows that the law was still in effect throughout Jesus' lifetime (see Matthew 8:1-4). The law did not cease being binding till Jesus died on the cross (Hebrews 9:16,17; Colossians 2:14). It could not cease until Jesus had fulfilled it (Matthew 5:17,18), which He did when He died on the cross.

What did happen then when John came? Jesus said in Luke 16:16 that then the gospel of the kingdom was ***preached***. Until John, the law and the prophets "prophesied." He does not say they then ceased being in effect. He is talking about what was ***prophesied*** and what was ***preached***. Until John, the law and the prophets were the only thing being preached. They ***prophesied*** till John. Then the gospel of the kingdom began to be preached.

But what did John and Jesus and the apostles preach about the kingdom? They did not preach that it was in effect or had begun during Jesus' lifetime, but that it was "at hand" It was about to come or begin (Matthew 3:1,2; 4:23; Mark 1:14,15). John's preaching announced the coming of a new system and the end of the old. He was the last of the Old

Testament line of prophets. He was the transition from the old to the new.

Men sought to take the kingdom by force.

Not only was the kingdom preached since John, but Jesus said the kingdom suffered violence and men of violence took it by force. Luke 16:16 says this meant that people were pressing to enter it. But it did not exist yet (Mark 9:1; Matthew 16:18), so how could people press into it? Jesus does not say that they succeeded in entering it, but that they wanted to enter it. They expected it to come soon and were vigorously trying to bring it into existence so they could enter it. They even sought to take Jesus by violence and make Him king (John 6:15).

Men sought to compel the kingdom to begin so they could enter it. They did this because they thought it would be an earthly kingdom, and they sought the glory and advantages of positions in that kingdom. But this was a misunderstanding of the nature of the kingdom, how it would come, and how people enter it. When the kingdom did come, it would be a spiritual kingdom entered only by a spiritual new birth (John 18:36; 3:3,5; Colossians 1:12.13; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Acts 2:38,47).

11:14,15 – Jesus said if they were willing to receive it, John was Elijah who was to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

In verse 10 Jesus had quoted Malachi 3:1 as being fulfilled in John. But Malachi 3:1 ties to Malachi 4:5,6 and Isaiah 40:3-5. All these passages were fulfilled by John the Baptist according to Matthew 3:1-3; 11:10,14; 17:10-13; Mark 1:2,3; 9:11-13; Luke 1:17,76; 3:4-6; 7:27; John 1:21-23; 2:14,15.

But Malachi 4:5,6 prophesied the coming of Elijah. Here Jesus plainly states that Jesus was Elijah who was to come. In Matthew 17:10-13 Jesus' disciples had asked about Elijah because Elijah had just appeared with Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration. Jesus agreed that Elijah must come and restore all things as quoted from Malachi 4:5,6.

However, Jesus proceeded to state that Elijah had already come and the people did not recognize him. Instead they had mistreated him in a way similar to the treatment that Jesus Himself was about to receive from them. Then the disciples understood that He was talking about John the Baptist.

In John 1:21-23 John the Baptist denied that he was Elijah, but it is clear that he meant he was not literally or physically the same person as Elijah. Yet the other passages listed above show that he was the "Elijah" who fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies. He was not literally Elijah, but Elijah was a type or symbol of John like David, Moses, and others were types or symbols of Jesus. So John was the Elijah whom the prophecies had symbolically predicted.

Perhaps the clearest explanation of these references is in Luke 1:17, where it was prophesied to John's father Zacharias that John would

come in the "spirit and power of Elijah." This is the sense in which John fulfilled the prophecies about Elijah. He was not Elijah personally or identically as shown in John 1:21. But he was Elijah in a figurative or symbolic sense in that He was like Elijah in many ways in his character and work.

> The austerity of their life and firm resolve were equally strong in Elijah and in John. Both lived in the desert. The former girded himself with a belt of skins, and the latter had a similar belt. The former was forced to flee because he accused Ahab and Jezebel of the sin of impiety in their lives. John was beheaded because he accused Herod and Herodias of unlawful marriage. – Jerome (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Jesus instructed those who had ears should listen carefully to His teaching. See also Matthew 13:9,43; Mark 4:9,23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35. Other Scriptures warn against the danger of being hard of hearing regarding Jesus' message. We must have hearts willing to accept what we hear from the gospel. See also Matthew 13:15; Acts 28:27; Zechariah 7:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

11:16-19 – Jesus compared His generation to children who say their companions will not dance when others play the flute nor lament when others mourn. So the people complained that John had a demon because he did not eat and drink, but Jesus was a glutton, winebibber, and friend of tax collectors and sinners because He did eat and drink. Wisdom is justified by her children.

The hypocrisy of those who rejected both John and Jesus

Jesus then illustrated the hypocrisy of those of His generation, especially those like the Pharisees and lawyers, who rejected both Him and John. He likens them to children in the marketplace. If someone suggested a happy pastime, they rejected that. If someone suggested a sad pastime, they rejected that too! Nothing that anyone could suggest would satisfy them. No matter what they suggested, people were not pleased.

The application was that John came without eating bread or drinking wine. He had a special diet and, especially as a Nazarite, he drank no grape juice – see Luke 1:15. So people said he had a demon and rejected him. Jesus, however, was the opposite in these matters. He ate and drank normally, and people said he was a glutton, winebibber, and friend of tax collectors and sinners (because He ate with them – see Matthew 9:10,11; Luke 15:1,2). So they rejected Him too!

This is how it is when people just don't want to serve God. They will find some excuse to criticize the messenger who tells them God's word. No matter what method he tries, they will criticize. The point is that they just don't want to hear the message! Their complaints are neither consistent nor logical. Logic and consistency are not the issue. They just

must find some way to make it look like the preacher is the one who is wrong, not them. It is a form of blame shifting.

C. S. Lewis said that some people treat God like a policeman arresting a criminal: "Anything you say will be used against you."

We should realize that faithful preachers and teachers will be treated similarly today. Some people just do not want to accept some aspect of the gospel message, so they find reasons to criticize the messenger: his character, methods, etc. But charging the character or methods of the teacher does not prove that his teaching is error.

Preachers and teachers should not teach error or have sinful attitudes. But there are many areas of character and methods of approach that are matters of personal judgment. Often these become grounds for falsely accusing men of sin or rejecting their teaching, when the real problem is that people do not like the doctrines that are being taught.

Such people may not want to admit the real reason for their complaints, because that would make it obvious that they are opposing the gospel teaching. So they find something personal to complain about the messenger. We may be tempted to think that, if the messenger was simply more pleasing in his mannerisms, the people would accept the message. But in fact no change would satisfy such people unless we change the gospel teaching, which we cannot do.

Wisdom is justified by her children.

The word "children" in Scripture is often used to refer to people who possess some certain characteristic. A child often possesses characteristics similar to his father or mother, so to say a person was a child of some characteristic simply means he possessed that characteristic. The children of wisdom, therefore, would be those who possessed wisdom.

Children justify their parents by demonstrating the training of their parents in their lives. So, those who possess wisdom would justify wisdom by acting like they possessed wisdom. They would recognize, accept, honor, and appreciate wisdom when they find it, and would then act wisely. But those who do not appreciate wisdom will find ways to justify rejecting it. So only the true children of wisdom will accept it.

"Wisdom has been proved right by her actions." – Hilary (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Both Jesus and John acted wisely and spoke true wisdom. But the people did not recognize or appreciate it because they were not children of wisdom. This is Jesus' message. When He and John spoke wisdom, the people did not appreciate wisdom; so, instead of evaluating what John and Jesus taught and recognizing the wisdom of it, the people found foolish and irrelevant reasons to reject John and Jesus.

Did Jesus drink alcoholic wine?

The reference to Jesus as a "winebibber" is sometimes used to argue that the "wine" referred to here was alcoholic, so Jesus drank alcoholic wine and therefore we can practice social drinking today.

However, it must be remembered that wine in the Bible was often not fermented (see our notes on 9:16,17). The point is that John, as a Nazarite, could drink nothing from the grape vine. Jesus, however, not being a Nazarite, could drink grape juice. This did not prove He drank alcoholic drinks.

John was accused of having a demon. Did he have one? Of course not. Jesus was accused of gluttony. Was He guilty? Of course not. And Jesus was accused of being a winebibber. Was this true? No more so than the charge of gluttony or demon possession.

Jesus' whole point is that people were irrationally accusing both Him and John of things that were not true, in order to discredit them. To use a charge that Jesus denied to try to prove that He drank alcohol would be folly.

The evidence, in fact, would imply the opposite. A "winebibber" was a drinker of wine. The charge was false, so the more reasonable conclusion is that Jesus was not a drinker of alcoholic beverages, just like He was not a glutton and John did not have a demon.

11:20-30 - Jesus Discusses His Work

11:20-24 – Jesus rebuked the cities in which people refused to repent despite seeing His mighty works. Tyre and Sidon would have repented if they had seen the mighty works done in Chorazin and Bethsaida. Sodom would have been spared if they had seen the mighty works done in Capernaum. So, it will be more tolerable for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom in judgment than for these cities.

Jesus then pronounced woes on various cities where He had done much preaching. People in these cities had witnessed most of His great miracles, yet they had not repented. This included cities such as Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. Capernaum, He said, had been exalted to heaven, but would be brought down to Hades, the grave or the state of the dead.

Jesus said that even such cities as Tyre and Sidon would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes, if they had such opportunities to hear the truth and see the confirmation of miracles that had been done in Chorazin and Bethsaida. He said Sodom would not have been destroyed had miracles been done there such as had been done in Capernaum. So judgment would be more tolerable for those cities than for the ones where He had preached.

Tyre and Sidon were seaports occupied by Gentiles. Old Testament prophets had often warned these cities of judgment coming on them. The Jews looked down on them as reprobates and moral outcasts,

unworthy of Jewish association. Yet Jesus said they would be more receptive to the truth than were the Jews in the cities where He preached.

Sodom was a city that had been completely destroyed, along with Gomorrah, in Genesis 19 because of their wickedness, especially homosexuality. God had promised Abraham in Genesis 18 that He would spare the cities if He could find only ten righteous people there. But not that many were found, so the cities were destroyed.

Yet Jesus here says that wicked cities such as Tyre and Sidon and Sodom would have been more receptive to the evidence of His miracles then had the cities where He had been preaching. Note that, so early in His preaching, opposition to Jesus had grown so strong that He had such rebukes as this for them.

God comes closer to pardoning sinners when they have had little opportunity to learn the truth than those who are impenitent despite having much opportunity. Note that this does not mean God would spare the people in these cities. Had He spared Sodom? The point is that, the Jews knew these cities would not be spared but would be punished. How much more should they realize they themselves stood condemned before God!

The problem with these cities was they had abundant evidence but simply refused to accept it. Once again Jesus demonstrates the purpose of miracles. Miracles gave people the evidence to believe. It is amazing to find people in more recent times who claim to be prophets sent from God, yet who make little or no attempt to give miraculous evidence to prove their claims. Jesus was perfectly willing to give the proof until such time as people demonstrated such hardness of heart that they would not accept the truth regardless of the evidence.

"Capernaum was located on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Bethsaida was in the Jordan River delta to the northeast, and Chorazin was on a basaltic rise north of Capernaum." – *Archaeology Study Bible*, page 1387,1839. All were near the Sea of Galilee. See a ***map***.

11:25-27 – Jesus thanked God that He hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes. He said all things have been delivered to Him by His Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son reveals Him.

Truths hidden from the wise and prudent but revealed to babes

Jesus rejoiced that the Father, who rules as Master over heaven and earth, had hidden these truths from wise and prudent men. Wisdom and prudence are used together in a number of Scriptures. But there are two fundamentally different kinds of wisdom and prudence. There is the

wisdom and prudence that comes from the word of God based on the revelation that God has given (Proverbs 16:21; 18:15; Hosea 14:9).

But there is also the wisdom and prudence of men which is based on human wisdom in human learning, not on God's revelation. Jesus said that God had a hidden His message from the wise and prudent – obviously, meaning those who trust in human wisdom and understanding. People with this kind of wisdom and prudence often reject the truth as described in Isaiah 29:14; 5:21; 1 Corinthians 1:19,20,27.

Instead, God revealed His truth to "babes." Just as there are different kinds of wisdom and prudence, so there are different kinds of babes. Jesus refers here, not to physical babies or even to the spiritually immature, but to those who are willing to put their trust in someone greater than themselves (God, in this case) to guide them and give them wisdom and understanding – compare Matthew 18:1-4; 1 Corinthians 14:20; compare 1 Peter 2:2.

The Father took this action because it seemed good to Him. He recognized that people of great reputation for human wisdom and learning have a tendency to trust that human wisdom. As a result, they generally reject the gospel as being childish or offensive (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). It is hard for them to enter the kingdom, much like it is hard for a rich man (this does not mean it is impossible, but only that it is difficult). We must humbly submit to God's will like a little child (Luke 9:46-48). People who take pride in their learning find this difficult to do.

Notice how this shows that the average person can understand the message of the gospel. One does not need above average intelligence and superior education to know the will of God. Rather, one must humbly trust in the word of God and study with an honest heart and an open mind.

See other passages that teach that honest people can understand the Scriptures: Mark 7:14; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Acts 17:11; Ephesians 3:3-5; 5:17; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Isaiah 55:11; Psalm 119:104,105,130; 1 Timothy 2:4.

All things delivered to Jesus; knowledge of the Father and the Son limited

Jesus then explained how people of childlike faith were learning the truth. He said the Father had delivered all things to Jesus (that is, the truth about man's relationship to God). As a result, Jesus knew the Father like the Father knew the Son, so the Son could reveal the Father to others.

So those who wanted to know the Father, could learn through Jesus. In fact, there is no other way by which one really can come to know the Father. This revelation is made known through the teaching given by Jesus' inspired apostles and prophets and now revealed in the gospel.

Compare Hebrews 1:1,2; John 1:18; 14:6; Luke 10:16; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 1 Corinthians 14:37.

To know God would include understanding the real character of God. We can know what He is really like only through the revelation that Jesus gave of Him. But even further, we can know God in a personal relationship only by learning and obeying Jesus' will. Jesus is the Mediator, the sacrifice for sin, who alone makes it possible for man to come into fellowship with God. See 1 Timothy 2:5,6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 2:1-6.

While we doubtless can never know Jesus and the Father as fully as they know one another, we can know the Father well enough to have fellowship with Him though the revelation Jesus has given of Him.

These statements amount to an absolute claim on the part of Jesus that He possessed Deity. Observe that He claimed that all things have been delivered to Him by the Father. He claimed that He knows things about the Father that no one else can know unless Jesus reveals it. He had a unique knowledge of the Father, even as the Father had a unique knowledge of Him.

What other person could truthfully make such claims? What true prophet or apostle ever claimed that knowledge of God could come only through him or that all things had been delivered to him by God? No mere human could ever honestly and truthfully make such claims, but Jesus made them. And He backed up His claims by His miracles and His resurrection.

11:28-30 – Those who labor and are heavy laden may come to Jesus for rest. They should take His yoke on them and learn of Him, for He is meek and lowly in heart, and they will find rest for their souls. For His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Jesus then issued His invitation for all who labor and bear heavy burdens to come to Him and He will give them rest. This is rest for the soul, not rest from physical labor (verse 29). This means that the labor and heavy burden to which Jesus refers is the burden imposed by sin. Through Jesus, we can escape the burden of guilt and the fear of punishment, since we have forgiveness, peace of mind and hope for the future.

However, Jesus attaches conditions to His offer. It is not an unconditional offer. There are things men must do to receive the rest that Jesus offers. Jesus says that they must learn of Him. No one can come to Jesus without first learning about Him and the conditions we must meet in order to come to him.

Learn of Jesus

Hearing and learning the gospel of Christ is essential to salvation. See also John 6:44,45; 8:31,32; Matthew 13:23; Romans 1:16;

10:13,14,17; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:26,29,35; 9:6; 11:14; 18:8; Luke 6:46-49; 11:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:14; Revelation 3:20.

Come to Jesus

Furthermore, we must make the decision to come to Jesus. This is an individual choice. Jesus does not force or compel people to come to Him by irresistible grace. He invites, offers motivation, and allows people to choose. Contrary to Calvinism, God did not determine from eternity who would be saved and who would be lost, regardless of the choice of the individual. God never violates the free will which He has granted to the people whom He created. Rather, each person has the power to choose right from wrong like Adam and Eve had in the garden.

Take His yoke

Further, Jesus does not promise freedom from all responsibility and labor. On the contrary, in order to have rest for our souls, we must labor for Jesus. We must take on us the yoke that He gives. A yoke is a symbol of labor and service. We must learn about Him and His will, then we must be willing to do His will.

Receiving salvation from Jesus requires obedience on man's part. See Matthew 7:21-27; 22:36-39; John 14:15,21-24; Acts 10:34,35; Romans 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Hebrews 5:9; 10:39; 11:8,30; Galatians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; James 1:21-25; 2:14-26; Luke 6:46; 1 Peter 1:22,23; 1 John 5:3; 2:3-6.

But we need not fear that serving Jesus will be like serving human masters who rule with harshness and cruelty. Jesus is a gentle and humble master. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. That is, it is easy and light compared to the burden of sin that He removes. He does not promise freedom from labor or work. He promises only that we will find working for Him to be far better in the long run than the burden of sin.

But only Jesus can offer this rest, because only Jesus can forgive our sins. Only He could offer the sacrifice that meets our need for forgiveness and salvation from the sins we have committed (Acts 4:12). Only He can restore our relationship with the Father (John 14:6).

Once again note the exalted claims of Jesus. Only Deity would have the right to make the offer that Jesus makes here. What man – even a prophet or apostle – would invite people to come to him, learn of him, and he would give them rest to their souls? This is clearly a claim of Deity.

Have you accepted this invitation to follow Jesus? If not, are you willing to do so?

For additional Scriptures regarding man's power to choose, see Genesis 2:16,17; 3:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15; 11:25; Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21; Psalm 119:30; Deuteronomy 30:15-19; Isaiah 1:18-20; Matthew 23:37; 13:14,15; Revelation 3:20; 22:17.

Matthew 12

Chapter 12 – Controversy about the Sabbath and the Source of Jesus' Power

12:1-14 – The teaching of Jesus about the Sabbath and mercy

12:1,2 – As Jesus and His disciples went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, His disciples, being hungry, began to pluck the grain and eat. When the Pharisees saw it, they claimed that Jesus' disciples were breaking the Sabbath.

Jesus and His disciples were traveling about, as they often did in their preaching work. This day was the Sabbath, and they were traveling through grainfields. The disciples were hungry, so they plucked grain and ate. (The term "corn," as used in the KJV, is a general term for grain such as wheat or barley, rather than our modern concept of corn.)

This was not stealing, but was expressly permitted by the law as long as one did so only to meet an immediate need, not to carry it home and keep it for future consumption (Deuteronomy 23:24,25). The Pharisees, seeing what was done, criticized the act, not as stealing, but as a violation of the Sabbath.

"Sabbath" (σαββατον) – "...1 the seventh day of the week in Israel's calendar, marked by rest fr. work and by special religious ceremonies, *sabbath* ... 2 a period of seven days, *week...*" – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

"The root means 'to cease, desist' (Heb., shabath; cp. Arab., sabata, 'to intercept, interrupt'); ... The idea is not that of relaxation or refreshment, but cessation from activity."– Vine.

Jesus never violated the Sabbath law or any other Divine law.

Some people claim that the Pharisees' accusation was correct, and the disciples truly were violating the Sabbath law. They claim this event shows that Jesus justified people in violating the Sabbath law. Others go even further and claim that His arguments in this context show that

violating many other laws of God may sometimes be acceptable in certain circumstances.

Pope quotes Joseph Fletcher in his book *Situation Ethics*, page 85. Fletcher refers to this very example in Matthew 12 and concludes: "…The *Christ* of the Christian ethic leaves no doubt whatsoever that *the ruling norm of Christian decision is love: nothing else*…" He then proceeds to justify divorce based on Jesus' reference to David eating the showbread.

Those who justify disobedience to God's law under extenuating circumstances need to realize that they are essentially defending situation ethics as Fletcher did. They may not go as far as Fletcher did, but they need to realize where their reasoning would lead.

On the contrary, Jesus and His disciples often taught the need for obedience. Jesus' arguments in verses 5-14 clearly show that what His disciples did ***was permitted*** by the Sabbath law and was ***not*** a violation of it. Jesus violated only Jewish man-made traditions, not Divine law.

This was the first of a whole series of conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees about the Sabbath. Three things must be remembered:

(1) Jesus lived under the Mosaic law (Matthew 5:17-20; Galatians 4:4). It remained in effect till He died. The Sabbath was part of that law, included even in the 10 Commands (Exodus 20:8-11; 16:22-30; 23:12; 31:12-17; 34:21; 35:2,3; compare 22:16; Numbers 15:32-36; etc.).

Jesus obeyed the law without ever committing any sin (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Sin is transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). If Jesus was sinless, then He never transgressed any Divine law – not the Sabbath law or any other Divine law.

Jesus' sinlessness was essential to His being a sinless sacrifice for us (see again 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:21-25). ***If Jesus had transgressed or violated the Sabbath law or any other Divine law, He could not have been sinless and He could not have been the sacrifice that could remove our sins.*** To claim, as some do, that Jesus violated the Sabbath law, is to spiritually condemn all men to eternal torment, for it leaves us without a sacrifice for our sins!

(2) Compare verse 2 to verse 7 – The Pharisees said Jesus' disciples did what was "***not lawful***. But Jesus expressly stated that the disciples were "***guiltless***" ("innocent" – NASB). The Pharisees had added a whole complex system of traditions about Sabbath observance, as they had done with other things (Matthew 15:1-14). These intricate, detailed rules were based on their own ideas, not on what God's law really said. Yet they bound them as essential on others. Jesus resisted and opposed the Pharisees' human ***traditions,*** which were not taught in God's law.

(3) Note verse 10 – The Pharisees criticisms were motivated, not by sincere concern for the Sabbath, but by a desire to trap Jesus. They did not speak out of loving concern for Jesus' disciples to help them obey God. They sought only to discredit Jesus.

12:3,4 – Jesus reminded the Pharisees that, when David had been hungry, he and those with him entered the house of God and ate the showbread, which was not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests.

1 Samuel 21:1-6 records the event to which Jesus refers here. As the account says, David and his men ate the showbread from the tabernacle when they were hungry, even though only priests were permitted by the law to eat it (Leviticus 24:5-9).

Some people say this means that, due to unusual circumstances, David was justified in doing what would otherwise have been sinful. But Jesus says that David did what was "not lawful," whereas He said His disciples were "guiltless," so why would He parallel the two? Jesus once fasted forty days (Matthew 4:2), and even then He refused to disobey God's law in order to satisfy hunger. So why would He justify David's act? (Compare Matthew 16:24; 6:33; Romans 12:1; etc.)

A better explanation is that David's act really was a sin (Jesus said it was "not lawful"), but the Pharisees justified him for it. But now they wanted to condemn Jesus' disciples for something that was ***not*** a sin (the disciples were "guiltless")!

Jesus surely knew the Pharisees would justify David, else the argument would be worthless: the Pharisees would jump on His argument and say, "Yes, David sinned and likewise your disciples have sinned." So, Jesus' argument must mean that the Pharisees justified David even though he really was guilty, yet they condemned Jesus' disciples when they were really innocent. Jesus is here pointing out the ***inconsistency*** of the Pharisees.

> Now the real argument of Jesus is this: David, when hungry, ate the show-bread, which was confessedly unlawful for him to eat, yet you justify him; my disciples pluck grain and eat it on the Sabbath, an act which the law does not forbid, and yet you condemn them. – McGarvey

Such an argument would not prove Jesus' disciples were right, but it would point out the inconsistency, hypocrisy, and improper motives of the Pharisees. And remember, this is Jesus' main point: the Pharisees did not really care about what the disciples did, they just wanted to trap Jesus (verse 10). See a similar example in 12:27.

Kyle Pope suggests an alternative explanation, which I enlarge as follows. The showbread was replaced each week, but what David ate was apparently left over at the end of the week. Perhaps others besides the priests could eat this leftover bread. In that case, David did not sin, so why did Jesus say he did what was unlawful? Perhaps He meant that the Jews thought the act was unlawful but justified David due to circumstances. So why not justify Jesus' disciples? In that case, He was using the term "unlawful," not precisely, but like the Jews used it in verse 2 and the like He used the word "profane" in verse 5.

Having pointed out the inconsistency of the Pharisees, Jesus then proceeded to show why the disciples were not even wrong.

Sabbath law did not forbid acts of spiritual service or kindness to the needy.

Subsequent conflicts between Jesus and the Jews showed that many kinds of activities ("work") did not violate the Sabbath law, even though they might on the surface appear to do so.

Note some of Jesus' explanations of the Sabbath law:

Works of worship and spiritual service did not violate the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:5 – The priests offered sacrifices in the temple on the Sabbath but were "blameless." The Sabbath law did not forbid acts of religious worship and service, even though those acts involved work.

John 7:21-24 – Circumcision required males to be circumcised on the eighth day, even if that fell on a Sabbath. This was both a spiritual ritual and a medical procedure. Jesus concluded that the Sabbath did not forbid other forms of physical healing and care for the sick, especially when done for a spiritual purpose. But Jesus' healings were medical cures done primarily for a spiritual purpose (they were miracles that confirmed His teaching). They no more violated the Sabbath than did circumcision.

Healing the sick and helping those in need did not violate the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:9-14 – It is lawful to "do good" on the Sabbath (verse 12), therefore "it is lawful" to heal the sick on the Sabbath (verse 10). In Luke's account, Jesus adds: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" (Luke 6:9). Healing sick people and saving lives did not violate the Sabbath, just like it was lawful to rescue an animal that fell into a pit on the Sabbath. It was not the kind of work that the law forbade, but was a work of kindness to care for those in need.

Mark 2:28 – Mark's account adds that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. This meant that the Sabbath law required men and animals to rest, which gave physical and spiritual benefits. To use the law to forbid helping the needy would pervert its intent, making it a hindrance instead of a benefit. (Mark 2:23-3:6; Luke 6:1-11)

It follows that Jesus' acts of curing people did not violate the Sabbath. See also Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6.

God works on the Sabbath.

John 5:17-19 – Once again in this context, Jesus had been criticized for healing on the Sabbath (5:1-16). He argued that He worked on the Sabbath, just like His Father did. The Sabbath was tied to the fact that God rested on the seventh day of creation. But Genesis 2:3 does not say that God rested from ***all*** work on the seventh day, but only from the work of creation.

Consider other passages that describe work that God continues to do daily, including on the Sabbath:

* He gives to all life and breath and all things, and in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:25,28).

* He gives rain and fruitful seasons (Acts 14:17), and sends the rain and makes the sun shine on the just and unjust (Matthew 5:45).

* He is the giver of every good gift (James 1:17).

*He upholds all things by the word of His power (Colossians 1:17; Nehemiah 9:6; Hebrews 1:3).

God does all these acts every day, which means that God did work on the Sabbath. Were God to cease working for even one day – any day – we would cease to exist! So, the example of God Himself proves that the Sabbath did not forbid all work, especially works of kindness and provision for the needs of others.

God did miracles on the Sabbath!

Specifically, the Jews had objected that Jesus did a miracle on the Sabbath. But all miracles were done by the power of God. If God did not approve of that work, it could not have happened! So how could Jesus be wrong, if God did a miracle through Him on the Sabbath? The very fact that a miracle occurred on the Sabbath automatically proved that God did not object to doing miracles on the Sabbath, since God was the One who did the miracle!

Jesus' arguments proved that many kinds of work were not forbidden on the Sabbath. And much of this the Jews already knew. The problem in Matthew 12 is that Jesus' disciples may have violated a Jewish tradition about the Sabbath, but they did not violate the law as God gave it. And even more critical, the Jews did not really care about the Sabbath law, as such. They were simply looking for an opportunity to condemn Jesus (verse 10), and that is the real basis of this entire conflict.

12:5,6 – The priests did work in the temple even on the Sabbath, yet they were blameless. Yet Jesus stated that with them was One who was greater than the temple.

Here Jesus affirmed that acts of ***spiritual service*** in worship and service to God in the temple – offering sacrifices and other temple duties – were not a violation of the Sabbath. In doing this work, the priests were "***blameless***." It was not a sin, and even the Pharisees knew this.

But note verse 6: "One greater than the temple" was there, referring to Jesus. The disciples were traveling and plucking the grain on the Sabbath in order to help Jesus in His work of preaching the gospel and preparing men for salvation. This was serving ***Jesus***, which was greater spiritual service than even the temple service. If the priests were allowed to work in the temple on the Sabbath, then the disciples should also be allowed to help Jesus in His work on the Sabbath. So, Jesus affirmed them to be "***guiltless***" (verse 7).

The work done by the disciples in Jesus' service was "greater than the obligation of the temple service on the priests. If, then, the priests were justifiable, much more than disciples." – McGarvey

Note that here, as in Matthew 4:7, Jesus applied the principle of taking all things the Bible says in order to reach a conclusion. By "taking everything the Bible says" and putting it together, we can learn that the priests' service and Jesus' disciples' service did not violate Divine law.

We also see here another example in which Jesus made a statement that amounts to a claim to Deity. How could any mere human rightly claim to be greater than the temple or that serving Him was greater than serving in the temple? Who but God could make such a claim? Yet Jesus made the claim, which makes sense only if He claimed to be God in the flesh.

Notes on the word "profane":

In Matthew 12:5 Jesus said the priests in the temple "profane" the Sabbath, and are blameless. Does "profane" mean they sinned? Surely not, for all the reasons already described. Jesus never justified sin. He said the priests were "blameless," therefore they did not sin.

And no one would possibly think their conduct was sinful. After all, they were doing what God specifically commanded them to do. It cannot be sinful to do what God commands! This is a simple application of taking all the Bible says on a subject. So whatever "profane" means, in this context it cannot mean that they sinned.

"Profane" generally refers to the sin of treating sacred things with disrespect. But the priests were not treating anything with disrespect by working on the Sabbath, because they were doing what God commanded them to do.

Grimm-Wilke-Thayer says the adjective form may alternatively be equivalent to a Hebrew word meaning "unhallowed or common" (Leviticus 10:10; 1 Samuel 21:4; Ezekiel 22. 26). Note also the following English definition for "profane": "...2. Non-religious in subject matter, form, or use; secular: *sacred and profane music...*" – *American Heritage Dictionary.*

So, although this word often refers to sin, it can simply mean a thing is treated as common. Since the word cannot refer to sin in Matthew 12:5, I conclude it should be taken to mean "common." But remember that a thing was not sinful just because it is common. So, the idea here would be that the priests worked on the Sabbath day just like they did other days (common days). But in their case, everyone knew they did not violate the Sabbath because God had commanded them to do that work.

(Another possibility, as discussed previously, is that Jesus was using the word "profane" like the Jews used such words, but He did not agree with their use of it.)

12:7 – Jesus then said the Pharisees needed to know the meaning of the Scripture, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." Had they understood this, they would not have condemned the guiltless.

Here Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." Does this teach that mercy means we should excuse people who continue to commit sin?

Note that, in Matthew 9:11-13, Jesus had specifically explained the application of Hosea 6:6. When He was criticized for associating with sinners, He quoted Hosea 6:6 and explained that He obeyed this verse by calling sinners to repentance. "Mercy not sacrifice" did not mean Jesus kept quiet about people's sins; instead, it meant that He rebuked them and called them to repent! It was His mercy that led Him to seek their salvation.

So, Hosea 6:6 does not say that mercy means we should excuse or overlook sin. Instead, the passage confirms that mercy is a reason to warn people to repent and be saved! Jesus' teaching in Matthew 12 did not contradict what He had already taught in Matthew 9!

Study Hosea 6:4-11.

The context of Hosea 6:6 does not discuss the Sabbath law nor does it excuse people from obeying Divine law. The point is that, when they thought they could get away with it, the Jews freely violated God's laws. But they made a big show of offering the required sacrifices and keeping the holy days to impress people with their religious devotion. Their obedience was just a show, but they did not really care about God or His law.

Many other Old Testament passages rebuke Israel for making a show of sacrifices and other acts of worship, even while they continued to practice serious evils – see Isaiah 1:11-17; Micah 6:6-12; 3:1-12; 1 Samuel 15:22; Jeremiah 7:22-27; Psalms 51:16,17; Joel 2:12,13. This is like people who attend church at Christmas and Easter, then confess to the priest, but haven't really repented and don't intend to change – they just seek justification for continuing to sin!

The passage is not saying it is wrong to rebuke people for sin, since God was plainly rebuking Israel in the context – note verse 5! Hosea 6:6 is actually rebuking the error of people who continue in sin – including the sin of mistreating other people – while outwardly professing great devotion in worship.

Jesus cites the principle of "mercy, not sacrifice," because the Jews had condemned the innocent in order to trap Jesus.

Matthew 12:7 explains that the Pharisees violated the principle of Hosea 6:6 by condemning the guiltless.

Jesus said, if they understood the principle of mercy instead of sacrifice, they "would not have condemned the guiltless." ***Jesus'***

application of mercy related to condemning people who had not sinned. Mercy teaches, not that we should excuse people from obeying God's law, but that we should not unjustly condemn the innocent. To do that shows a lack of mercy.

Matthew 12:10 shows that the reason the Jews condemned Jesus and His disciples was to trap Jesus.

They made issue of the Sabbath, not because they cared so much about the law nor because the disciples had really violated the law, but because they sought to accuse Jesus of sin. Other passages show that they repeatedly sought opportunities to find fault with Jesus' teaching or to condemn Him for sin. See Matthew 22:15; John 8:6; compare Matthew 15:1-14; 8:1-13; 27:18.

This is how Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees is similar to God's rebuke of Israel in Hosea 6:6. The Pharisees professed great concern about the Sabbath like Israel professed great concern about sacrifices and worship. But they were not really devoted to God or His laws. And they surely were not trying to help the disciples save their souls! They just wanted to trap Jesus and justify themselves in the eyes of the people by making Jesus look bad.

Jesus had also rebuked the Pharisees in many other passages, because they were motivated by desire to maintain honor in the eyes of people, rather than really obeying God. See Matthew 6:1ff; 15:1-14; chapter 23; John 12:42,43.

Condemning people who have not violated God's law is a lack of mercy, especially when done out of selfishness and lack of concern for others. This is why Jesus using Hosea 6:6 to rebuke the Pharisees, exactly as He had done in Matthew 9:13. (Compare Luke 6:36,37.)

(Note: The reference to "mercy" here does not refer to mercy on the disciples' hunger. They were not dying from hunger. It would not be a great hardship to the disciples to stop somewhere to eat, instead of plucking the grain. Had they fasted even till the next day, that would not have been an unusual Bible practice.)

Jesus' point is similar to John 7:24.

In John 7:21-24 the Jews had again condemned Jesus for healing on the Sabbath. He proves their arguments to be invalid, then says they should judge not according to appearance but judge righteous judgment.

This is similar Matthew 12:7. If they really cared about God, about His will, and about the souls of others, they would not jump on a situation that looked like someone had done wrong and use it as an opportunity to condemn others, especially not for their own selfish reasons. They would be sure they had their facts straight and that people really had violated God's law before they condemned them. And they would speak out of concern for others, not out of selfish motives.

Consider other passages about mercy and obedience.

Matthew 23:23 – Mercy is one of the weightier matters of the law. Many passages command God's people to be merciful, even as God is merciful (Luke 6:36). Mercy involves kindness or compassion on someone who is afflicted or suffering. Mercy should lead us to care for people with physical needs (poverty or sickness) and to be patient and longsuffering with people who are trying to overcome sin.

Other Scriptures show that mercy harmonizes with obedience, rather than justifying disobedience.

God Shows Mercy to Those Who Obey Him, Not Those Who Disobey.

Exodus 20:6 – God shows mercy on those who love Him and keep His commands.

Deuteronomy 7:11,12 – God will show mercy on those who keep the commands that He commanded them.

Psalms 25:8-10 – Because God is good, He teaches sinners in the way. His paths are mercy and truth to those who keep His covenant.

Psalms 103:17,18 – The Lord's mercy is on those who remember His commands to do them.

Romans 12:1,2 – The mercies of God should lead us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God and be conformed to His will.

Galatians 6:16 – Peace and mercy on those who walk according to this rule.

These and many other verses show that God's mercy is extended to those who obey Him, not to those who disobey Him. Instead of believing that mercy means people can continue to practice sin, we ought to realize that people who are in sin need to repent and become obedient in order to receive mercy.

(Numbers 14:19; Deuteronomy 13:17,18; 1 Chronicles 21:13; Nehemiah 1:5,6; Psalms 62:12; 85:10; 119:58-60,77,88,124-128,159; 143:8; Proverbs 3:1-3; 14:22; 16:6; Daniel 9:4-11; Mark 6:34)

Other passages show that mercy should lead us to rebuke sin and call on sinners to repent.

Is it truly merciful to allow people to continue in sin and not warn them about the consequences of their sin?

Mercy Should Lead Us to Rebuke Sin So People Can Repent and Be Forgiven.

Psalms 51:1-4 – God showed mercy to David when he confessed and acknowledged his sins.

Psalms 119:132-135 – Be ***merciful*** to me, as Your ***custom*** is toward those who love Your name. Let no iniquity have dominion over me. Redeem me that I may keep Your precepts. Teach me Your statutes. (Note that God's "custom" is to extend mercy to those who are redeemed and keep His precepts. See also verses 129-136.)

Psalms 141:4,5 -- Do not incline my heart to practice wicked works. Let the righteous strike me; it shall be a ***kindness*** (mercy). And let him rebuke me. Let my head not refuse it. (Rebuking sin is not unmerciful. It is a kindness that should not be refused.)

Proverbs 28:13 – He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have ***mercy***.

Isaiah 55:7 -- Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have ***mercy*** on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (compare verses 8,9).

Jonah 4:2 – Jonah said God is gracious and ***merciful***, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness. But 3:1-4:2 shows that God showed mercy to Nineveh by requiring Jonah to rebuke them for their sins so the people would repent and quit their sins.

Matthew 9:11-13 – Jesus was criticized for associating with sinners. He explained that "mercy, not sacrifice" meant He should teach them to repent.

Luke 15:20 – The father had ***compassion*** on the prodigal son when he came to himself, determined to serve the father, returned, and confessed that he had sinned – verses 7,10,17-21.

Romans 6:1,2,12-15 – Shall we continue in sin because we are under ***grace***? Certainly not! Do not let sin reign in your body, nor present your members as instruments of sin, but present your members as instruments of righteousness.

1 Timothy 1:13-16 – When Paul was in sin, he obtained ***mercy*** as a pattern to those who believe for eternal life. Note: This is a "***pattern***" for God's mercy for all of us to follow. The pattern of mercy here shows that people in sin should be shown their error so they can repent (see Acts 9 and 22)!

What we learn from Bible passages about mercy is that, when people disobey God, they should be taught their error. Then they should repent and acknowledge their error and determine to change. Then they receive mercy from God.

Mercy does not make exceptions to the Bible requirement that people should be taught to repent of sin. Mercy shows us to teach and practice these things!

(2 Chronicles 30:6-9; 36:15,16; Nehemiah 9:28; Jeremiah 3:12,13-15; Joel 2:12-14; Luke 18:13)

12:8 – The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

Once again, Jesus is not saying that He had the right to violate the Sabbath because He was the Lord of the Sabbath. The point is that Jesus was present at the creation. He was the Creator, so He was the One who rested on the seventh day – John 1:1-3. This makes Him Lord of the Sabbath. As such, He ***knew*** what the Sabbath law meant. He had the right, not to break it, but to authoritatively ***explain*** what it meant. He made the law, so He had the right to define what it meant.

In the following verses, having confronted Jewish misconceptions of the Sabbath, Jesus performed a great healing on the Sabbath. What was the purpose of miracles? To prove the messenger was speaking God's will. How could Jesus do a miracle if He had just preached error about the Sabbath or had justified people who violated it?

If the Pharisees had appreciated Jesus' miracles, they would have recognized His Lordship and authority. How then could they condemn His explanation of the Sabbath law? The fact Jesus could do miracles proved Him to be Lord. Surely then His explanation of the Sabbath must be correct. The conflict occurred, not because Jesus justified disobedience to the law, but because the Pharisees' used their man-made traditions as an opportunity to try to trap Jesus.

Observe again that Jesus' statement was clearly a claim to Deity. How could any mere man rightly claim to be the Lord of the Sabbath? No one but God could truthfully make such a claim, yet Jesus made it. He called himself "the Son of Man," but His claim recognized Him as Deity: hence, God in the flesh.

A study of the concept of emergency exceptions to Divine law

Another view of Matthew 12:7 ("mercy, not sacrifice") is that Jesus was saying that healing on the Sabbath was acceptable because acts of mercy constituted an ***exception*** to the law. I believe this is a valid concept, and it relates to the "ox in the ditch" principle of verse 11. But as explained above, I don't believe this is what Jesus meant in verse 7 or in the context of verses 1-8.

How did Jesus know it was acceptable to pull an ox from the ditch on the Sabbath or to heal on the Sabbath? How do we know it is acceptable to miss church meetings for sickness or to help someone else who is sick? We have no right to make exceptions to Divine Law on the basis of personal desires or opinions. We must recognize exceptions only

on the basis of Scripture. So, on what Scriptural basis do we establish exceptions to these laws?

Later, in verse 11 under a similar circumstance, Jesus gives an illustration that explains. Anyone would have pulled a sheep out of a pit, even if it were done on a Sabbath day. This would definitely constitute work. Normally it would be forbidden. But everyone would agree it could be done under these ***emergency*** circumstances. What makes it acceptable? What verse justifies it? Hosea 6:6: mercy, not sacrifice.

Note that Jesus' example (the ox in the ditch) shows He recognized the principle as an ***emergency exception***. He was not justifying disobeying the Sabbath or any other law for the sake of personal desire or convenience of ourselves or others. The act was not wrong because it was an approved exception to the law.

Works of mercy to help people in their need take precedence over acts of worship to God and especially over laws such as the Sabbath, which was given for the benefit of people. To use this as an excuse to not help someone in need would be a total perversion of the purpose. This would be like saying to a dying man, "Sorry, I can't help you because today is the Sabbath and I have to rest." Or it is like saying to a lost sinner, "Sorry, I can't come to teach you because it's the Sabbath and I have to rest."

Modern applications of this principle include: (1) Rather than attend worship services, we stay home to care for someone who is really sick and must have someone there to care for them. (2) We are driving to services and see someone hurt in a wreck. (3) Someone has a heart attack in the middle of worship assembly, we don't say, "We can't do anything about it because we're worshiping."

All these are examples of works of mercy due to emergency, mitigating circumstances. None of them justifies staying home from worship just to please ourselves, for convenience, or to please our family, etc. The issue is which is a more necessary use of my time at the moment: to show mercy by helping this needy person, or doing some other act of worship and service to God? The point is that such acts of mercy constitute a Divinely approved exception to laws that would otherwise require us to act differently.

So, I recognize that the concept of emergency exceptions is a valid concept and may have had some application regarding the Sabbath. Nevertheless, I believe the previous discussion demonstrates that, in this context in Matthew 12, Jesus' primary point is, not that healing on the Sabbath was an exception to the law, but that it simply was never a violation of the law to begin with. The Sabbath law was intended to forbid only certain kinds of work, and those kinds of work did not forbid the kinds that Jesus discusses.

"It is not an excusable *violation* of law, but it is *lawful*." – McGarvey

12:9-10 – Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and there was a man with a withered hand. They asked Him whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, hoping to find something for which they might accuse Him.

Compare Luke 6:6-11; Mark 3:1-6.

This records yet another encounter Jesus had with the Pharisees about the Sabbath (see verses 1-9 above). In the synagogue on the Sabbath He found a man with a withered right hand (see Luke's account). The scribes and Pharisees were increasingly turning against Him. They watched to see if He would heal on the Sabbath, so they could discredit Him by accusing Him of violating the Sabbath.

A withered hand is shriveled, shrunken, deformed, and useless. It is an obvious, physical deformity. Anyone can see if the condition exists, and anyone can see if it has been corrected. It cannot be healed by any medical treatment then or now. Surely no healing could occur in a moment of time, simply by a spoken word.

Matthew's account says that Jesus' enemies asked Him if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. But Jesus read their hearts, which means that He knew what their intent was. He reworded the question, as recorded in Luke's account, and asked them whether it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do harm. Should life be saved or destroyed?

The Pharisees asked whether or not it was lawful to heal, but by rewording the question Jesus showed that the issue was whether or not it was lawful to do ***good*** on the Sabbath.

12:11,12 – Jesus asked what man, if he had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, would not lift it out? A man is of much more value than a sheep. So Jesus concluded that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.

Jesus responded to the question by asking about a similar but different situation. Suppose a man had a sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath. Who would not lay hold of it and lift it out? He then said that a man is much more valuable than a sheep. This showed that, if it was legitimate to help an animal that was suffering on the Sabbath day, then it would be legitimate to help a man who was suffering.

Jesus concluded that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath. In so arguing, Jesus showed that the Sabbath command was never intended to forbid acts of mercy and kindness to others. It was designed to benefit men by forbidding labor for personal gain and profit, thereby promoting needed rest and spiritual meditation.

The Jews themselves recognized that there were times and situations when the Sabbath law did not forbid needed acts of mercy. To refuse to do such acts because it was the Sabbath would amount, in God's eyes, to doing harm and destroying life. If people refused to act on the Sabbath but waited till the next day, the opportunity might be gone. People in need might suffer needlessly for another day, or might even

die. Compare Luke 13:14; 14:3; John 5:10; 7:23; 9:16. (Pope cites evidence that some Jews sometimes did oppose helping an animal or even a human in emergency circumstances on the Sabbath, but apparently Jesus knew these Jews did not hold that view.)

The Jews accepted this conclusion regarding animals. Jesus shows that it surely extended to include acts of mercy to humans in need. Just as He had defended His disciples' eating grain as an authorized act, so He justified His work of healing needy people on the Sabbath. Religious service and works of mercy were both practices that the Sabbath law was never intended to forbid. The Jews themselves recognized this in other cases, but condemned Jesus because of their hardness of heart.

> From the two disputations taken together, the people learned that works of religion, like those of the priests in the temple, and works of humanity, like feeding the hungry and healing the sick, were lawful on the Sabbath. – McGarvey

Note that the teaching method that Jesus used not only demonstrated that His conduct was justified, but it also demonstrated the ulterior motives of the Pharisees. This was a fundamental part of Jesus' purpose. He showed that, by their own understanding, they knew that His position was correct. He demonstrated further that they had no answer to his evidence. But what is more, He showed that, by not admitting their error, they were biased and dishonest.

12:13,14 – Jesus told the man to stretch out his hand, and when he did it was restored as whole as the other. The Pharisees then went out and plotted how they might destroy Him.

Luke adds that Jesus then looked at His audience. This gave the opportunity to any one, who objected to His evidence, to speak up, answer His question, and disprove His conclusion. No man had an answer, so Jesus told the man to stand up and stretch out His hand. When he did, it was restored as whole as the other.

This again clearly demonstrates the nature of true Bible miracles. Why don't modern "faith healers" do such miracles? They won't even attempt to heal such obvious, physical deformities! They know they cannot duplicate the kind of healings Jesus did here, yet they continue to claim they do miracles like He and His disciples did. They do not do so, and this is what proves they are frauds.

The Pharisees reacted with rage. They then discussed and plotted among themselves how to destroy Jesus. Such a reaction is amazingly dishonest and inconsistent. Jesus had answered their arguments, and had given them opportunity to respond, if they could. They had no reply for His evidence.

Furthermore, by His very act of healing the man, Jesus had proved that God was with Him. The very purpose of miracles was to prove that a man was speaking from God. Jesus claimed that doing such miracles

was in harmony with God's law, then He did miracles to confirm His teaching. Yet people then, and many even today, continue to claim that He violated the Sabbath law!

Surely in the light of such evidence, an honest person should at least reconsider his conclusions and abandon them if he cannot find answers to the evidence. Yet the Pharisees, like many people today, instead of recognizing their error, just go away in a rage and even seek how they will discredit the one who disproved them.

As Pope points out, these Jews objected to healing a man on the Sabbath but apparently had no objection to plotting murder on the Sabbath!

12:15-21 – The work of Jesus fulfilled a prophecy from Isaiah.

12:15-18 – Jesus withdrew and great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all. Yet He warned them not to make Him known. This fulfilled what Isaiah spoke regarding My chosen Servant in whom My soul is well pleased: I will put My Spirit upon him, and He will declare justice to the Gentiles.

Because the Pharisees were plotting to put Him to death, Jesus left that region. He had work to do before the time came for Him to die. He knew that death was inevitable, but He had not completed the responsibilities which He needed to fulfill before the time came. Great multitudes followed Him. He healed these people but warned them, as elsewhere, not to make Him known. He did this on several occasions. See notes on Matthew 8:2-4.

This work fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah found in Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:3. Isaiah had prophesied about a servant whom God had chosen. Jesus was that servant in the sense that He came to live as a man and learn by personal experience what it is like to be subject to authority as people must be. See Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 5:8,9.

As a servant, He pleased the Lord (compare Matthew 3:17). God put His Spirit (the Holy Spirit) on Him. In this way, He declared a message for all men, including justice to Gentiles: justice in the sense of truth, law, and righteousness. Jesus did this by preaching the gospel.

This is one of many Old Testament prophecies, fulfilled in the New Testament, that demonstrate that the gospel message was sent for the benefit of Gentiles, not just for Jews.

12:19-21 – He will not quarrel nor cry out. And no one will hear His voice in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed nor quench a smoking flax till He sends forth justice to victory. In His name Gentiles will trust.

The prophecy said that Jesus would not quarrel nor cry out; no one would hear His voice in the streets.

Jesus surely came to speak out against sin and corruption, but He did not allow himself to become involved in angry quarrels in which

people simply sought to win arguments while refusing to listen to the views of others. Instead, He reasoned with people and provided evidence for the truth. But if they would not accept the message and became violently opposed to Him, He simply left as He had just done (verse 15).

Jesus did not attempt to accomplish His will by violence, revolution, or rebellion against rulers. He was not a rabble rouser going into the streets to lead mob violence or demonstrations to force people by overwhelming numbers to comply to His will.

Many people in that day thought the Messiah would start a violent revolution against the prevailing government. Many people today try to picture Him as a revolutionary, a rebel against the establishment who sought to overthrow all existing customs.

This is not a true picture of Jesus. It is true that He plainly and forcibly spoke against sin and all human traditions which are being bound his law on the people. But He was thoroughly dedicated to obedience to the will of God as revealed in the Scriptures, and He sought to lead all people out of sin.

He would not break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax.

This expresses the idea that He was patient and helpful to those who were trying to do right but were suffering hardships. They might be like a reed, trying to stand yet so bruised that standing was difficult. Or they might be like a wick that was trying to burn brightly but was able only to produce smoke.

God expects His people to learn to be a bright light in the world (see notes on 5:13-16). He expects us to stand firm for the truth. Yet many of us at times struggle. We often find our stand and our light are instead weak. Jesus would not summarily destroy such people as hopeless. He did not seek to destroy people. If there was any hope, He helped them. And so ought we to do.

He would send forth justice in victory. He would lead men, not by violence, but by patience and love, so they could be just and receive victory. Even Gentiles would trust in him. The idea that Gentiles would benefit from the rule of the Messiah was unheard of among the Jews, yet it was prophesied in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament. See Matthew 28:19; Acts chapter 10, etc.

12:22-32 – Jesus accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub

See also Luke 11:14-36; Mark 3:23ff

12:22-24 – A man was brought to Jesus who was demon-possessed, blind and mute. Jesus healed him so that the man could see and speak. The multitudes were amazed and wondered if Jesus could be the Son of David. But the Pharisees said that He cast out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

Jesus cast out a demon that made a man blind and mute.

This account describes a man who had a demon which caused the man to be blind and mute (unable to speak). Jesus cast out the demon so that the man was able to see and speak. This caused the multitudes to be amazed and wonder if Jesus was the Son of David – i.e., the Christ.

This was just another one of the many miracles Jesus did. The account of Matthew and of the other gospel writers constitute eyewitness testimony that these events really occurred and the Pharisees themselves had witnessed many of these miracles.

However, they were determined to deny the significance of Jesus' miracles. They were so opposed to Jesus that, not only did they refuse to believe in Him themselves, but they were determined that no one else should believe in Him. So, they had to have some answer for Jesus' miracles. Here they claimed that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

Beelzebub was a deity of the city of Ekron – 2 Kings 1:2. Of course, the Pharisees could not prove that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub. But by making the accusation, they hoped to undermine the credibility of Jesus' miracles in the eyes of the people. Like many people throughout history, including today, they hoped that merely making the accusation would lead people to believe it or at least to doubt Jesus.

No doubt they assumed that, while they could not prove their accusation, neither could Jesus disprove it. But Jesus proceeded to give a lengthy response whereby he demonstrated the fallacy of their accusation.

Note that people who saw Jesus' miracles could not deny that miracles had been done.

The Pharisees tried to deny the source of the power, but they could not deny what had actually occurred. They claimed that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, but that had the effect of admitting that the demon had really been cast out and the man could really see and speak. The evidence was unavoidable.

Some people today try to deny that Jesus possessed such powers, but they were not there to see what Jesus did. The testimony of the eyewitnesses, who actually saw Jesus' signs, is that no one – neither Jesus' friends nor His opponents – could deny the reality of what had happened. It is a strange belief that leads people thousands of years later

to deny that these events occurred when everyone who was there and saw them admitted that they did occur!

When people today claim to have the power to do miracles, we deny that power for several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that we have never seen anything done that resembles the characteristics of true Bible miracles. But when Jesus and His apostles did miracles, even His enemies – those most opposed to his teaching – could not deny that the events had actually occurred.

For other examples of miracles done by God's prophets and admitted by even those who were their opponents, see the following: Exodus 8:17-19; 14:26-31; 1 Kings 18:20-40; Daniel 3; Luke 22:50,51; John 11:47,48; chapter 9; Acts 8:5-13; 13:6-12; 4:10,14-16; 9:1-18; 14:8-18; Numbers 16:28-35 & chapter 17; Matthew 12:9-14; Luke 5:17-26; 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 1 Kings 13:1-6; chapter 22; 2 Kings 1 & 6; Daniel 2 & 5; Jeremiah 28; Acts 19:11-17; 2:22.

The discussion that follows is important because it confirms the purpose of miracles.

The Jews were familiar with the signs done by Moses and Elijah and other Old Testament prophets. They ought to have understood the character and purpose of true miracles. So they ought to have recognized that, when Jesus did true miracles, this proved Him to truly be from God.

God will not allow Satan's workers to do true miracles, for that would defeat the main purpose of miracles. The fundamental purpose of miracles was to distinguish true prophets from false prophets, as we have discussed often before. So false teachers cannot do things that are truly impossible by natural law. It follows that God would not have allowed Jesus to do the miracles He did had He been from Satan, as the Pharisees here claimed.

People sometimes claim that our charge against modern "faith healers" is similar to the claim these folks made against Jesus. We say they are teaching false doctrine and what power they have is from the devil. And we call upon them to do true miracles to prove they are from God, if in fact they have that power. So people say we are like the Pharisees who made charges against Jesus.

But here is the significant difference. These Jews should have known – and people today who claim to believe in the Bible – should know the difference between the characteristics of true miracles and those of false miracles. Satan does attempt miracles, but they are fakes (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; Acts 8:5-12; 1 Kings 18; Ex 7,8). His servants may be able to do things we cannot explain, but they cannot do things that measure up to the characteristics of true Bible miracles.

Jesus, however, was unquestionably doing true miracles as great as anything Moses or Old Testament prophets ever did. Seeing this, the people could not deny the miracles, but they denied the source of the miracles anyway. This was their error and the difference between them

and us. Seeing clear evidence of signs having the characteristics of true miracles, they should have admitted it must have been the power of God.

People today do not do such signs. When we deny their power is from God, we are not denying signs like Jesus and truly inspired men did. Rather, the fact is that modern workers claim to do miracles like those in the Bible, but when we examine their works, any honest person can see they are not duplicating true Bible miracles. This is one of the very things that prove they are not from God. Therefore, it is proper to charge them with being fakes when they claim to do miracles like those in the Bible but then cannot produce them.

12:25,26 – Knowing the Pharisees' thoughts, Jesus said that every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself, so how will his kingdom stand?

Jesus' reply to the charges against Him involved several arguments. First, He said that a kingdom or house divided against itself would fall or be destroyed. This is an important and simple principle, which has many applications besides the one Jesus gives it here. Any group of people will fail to accomplish their purposes effectively if, instead of cooperating to accomplish their goals, they spend their time and energy warring against one another.

We see this illustrated in the division of the kingdom of Israel. Specifically, the northern tribes were divided from Judah in the time of Rehoboam and Jeroboam. There was severe conflict among the people about the burdens that had been put upon them by Solomon. When Rehoboam refused their request to remove those burdens, the nation divided. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.

Here Jesus applies this principle to Satan's kingdom. Satan is not foolish. He knows he cannot succeed if he works against himself. But if Beelzebub was empowering Jesus to cast out demons, then Satan was casting out his own workers, thereby defeating them. In such a case, his kingdom must fall. Satan would never do such a thing.

So Jesus' point is that we can trust Satan not to cast out demons. But Jesus really had cast out demons, as everyone had seen and admitted. Therefore, He had not done it by the power of Satan, as they had accused. This confirms the point we have already made. Satan does not do true miracles. True miracles come only from God.

The principle that Jesus states here is much broader than just the specific application that Jesus makes here. The principle applies in a home, a business, a government, and in the church. It is one of many passages that shows the Lord's church must be united. We cannot continue to strive against one another and accomplish the Lord's will.

Division among God's people is forbidden. When it occurs, we must rebuke it and even discipline those who cause division. See 1 Corinthians

1:10-13; 12:25; Galatians 5:19-21; John 17:20,21; Luke 11:17; Romans 14:19; 16:17; Titus 3:10; Proverbs 26:21; 6:16-19.

12:27,28 – Jesus asked, if He cast out demons by Beelzebub, then by whom did the sons of the Pharisees cast them out? So, they would be the judges of the Pharisees. But if Jesus cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God had come upon them.

By what power did the sons of the Pharisees claim to cast out demons?

In responding to the accusation that He cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, Jesus' second argument was that these Jews apparently claimed that their sons (or disciples – compare 5:33) could cast out demons. Exorcism was apparently a power that some Jews believed they possessed (see Acts 19:13). Clearly these Jews believed their sons could cast out demons, else Jesus' argument would have no force.

Note that Jesus did not admit that their disciples really could cast out demons. He simply asked a question framing it from their viewpoint. They said that He cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, but they believed their own sons could cast out demons. So, were they claiming their sons also acted by the power of Beelzebub? If not, then why claim He did so by the power of Beelzebub?

He put the burden of proof on them. What difference could they prove between what He did and what they claimed their sons did? How could they prove that Jesus acted by the power of Beelzebub, but their disciples did not? Jesus is simply arguing that they are contradicting themselves (like He argued on 12:3,4).

Note that here is an example in which Jesus used the term "judge" to describe people who demonstrated the error of others, not by a formal court hearing or even a presentation of evidence, but by their conduct. The Pharisees were judged in the sense that their error was made clear by observing the circumstances.

"… 'they shall be your judges,' not by authority but by comparison." – Jerome (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

The kingdom of God was upon them.

Jesus then stated the conclusion that followed. He had clearly cast our demons. Now if in fact He did not cast them out by the power of Satan – as the evidence indicated He did not – then the miracles must confirm His teachings as being true. He must be casting out demons by the "finger" or power of God. This meant that Jesus' teachings were true as confirmed by the miracles.

But Jesus had taught that the kingdom of God was upon them (about to come). This discussion had begun because the people who witnessed Jesus' miracles believed that this proved He might be the Messiah. But if Jesus was teaching the truth and the kingdom was about

to come, then these Pharisees were in real danger for they were rejecting Him and His teaching. Jesus' miracles confirmed His message to be from God.

Finger of God

"Finger of God," as used in Luke's account, is described as "Spirit of God" in Matthew's account (12:28). So some claim the Holy Spirit is not a living spirit being, but just the power of God. Yet many passages describe the Holy Spirit showing He possesses the characteristics of a living spirit being. See John 16:13; Acts 5:3; 15:28; Romans 8:26,27; 15:30; 1 Corinthians 2:10,11; 12:8,11; Ephesians 4:30.

Jesus expression here is clearly figurative. Does God have a literal hand with literal fingers? How can a spirit literally be a finger? Clearly it cannot, so the expression must be figurative. In which case we must not interpret the expression literally, but must seek a meaning that harmonizes with other passages.

Many examples use non-human things to illustrate characteristics of human beings. Jesus said He was a vine (John 15), a door (John 10:1ff), men are branches (John 15) and sheep (John 10), etc. So here the power of the Holy Spirit is compared to the finger which God uses to do His work. See also Exodus 8:19; 31:18.

Note that many folks today deny the value of "debate" and the use of logical argumentation and necessary inferences in religious discussion. They claim that such reasoning cannot be used to prove binding conclusions about what is right or wrong in religion. Yet here and often elsewhere Jesus used these very methods to prove His views were correct and those of His opponents were error. While we must take care that our attitudes and our reasoning are correct, yet such methods are valid and useful.

12:29 – In order to enter the house of a strong man and plunder his goods, one must first bind the strong man.

Jesus then used an illustration that gave the proper explanation for His power over demons. A strong man armed for battle can defend his possessions. But if a stronger man comes, he may bind the strong man and remove his means of defense. Then he can take the man's possessions as spoil.

Jesus had proved that He did not cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub. That explanation did not work, so there must be a different explanation for His defeat of demons. The only reasoning that does explain Jesus' power over demons is that He has greater power than Satan.

Like the strong man who is bound by a stronger man, Satan's power was being overwhelmed by Jesus' power. That is how Jesus cast out demons. Rather than working for Satan, as His enemies accused, the proper explanation for Jesus' casting out demons was that He was Satan's enemy and was overpowering him.

> They wanted to show that it was not by his own power that Jesus cast out demons. But he instead proved that he held in bondage with all authority not only the demonic powers but even their foremost leader. Christ prevails over Satan by his own power, and thus over the demonic forces. – Chrysostom (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

This explanation once again reaffirms the nature and purpose of miracles. Miracles were a manifestation of the superior power of God over the power of Satan. It follows that every miracle must be superior to anything Satan could do. False teachers cannot do miracles as great as those of true prophets. Specifically, demons could never avoid being cast out by God's power. No power of Satan can ever be as great as God's power of miracles.

12:30 – One who is not with Jesus is against Him, and one who does not gather with Jesus scatters abroad.

Jesus then stated a general principle of truth: "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters." No one can be neutral about Jesus. We must be for Him or against Him. There is no middle ground. It is not clear to whom Jesus meant the immediate application. Perhaps He referred to the bystanders, admonishing them that they cannot remain uncommitted to Him and His teachings.

Jesus is at war with Satan. There are only two sides in this war. We are either on Satan's side or Jesus', whether or not we like it. Some people think they are simply undecided and are taking a middle road. Other people are procrastinating a decision. But indecision is really a decision for Satan and against Jesus. In order to serve Jesus, we must make a conscious, deliberate decision to do so. Until we have made that choice, we are still against Jesus and on Satan's side.

If we are not working on Jesus' side, gathering for Him (bringing in a harvest for Him), then we are on the opposite side, working against Him. This is so, even if we do not intend it to be so.

12:31,32 – Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, except blasphemy against the Spirit. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, he will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Compare Mark 3:28-30; Luke 12:10.

Reading the context shows that the Pharisees had rejected Jesus, and some had claimed that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub. Jesus said they could be forgiven for having spoken against Him, but could not be forgiven for speaking against the Holy Spirit. Obviously, as shown by other Scriptures, Jesus is not saying that all sins of speaking against Him will unconditionally be forgiven, but rather that

all kinds of sins can be forgiven for those who meet the conditions. But this is not true of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Mark 3:30 adds that such people never have forgiveness, but are guilty of an eternal sin. It also explains that He said this because they said He had an unclean spirit – that is, they had attributed the work He did by the Holy Spirit to the power of Beelzebub. This would indicate that they either had blasphemed the Holy Spirit, or that they were dangerously close to it and He is warning them to take care.

The Bible talks about people who have been forgiven of horrible sins if they will repent: murder, adultery, idolatry, denying Jesus, etc. We must repent to be forgiven. So, sin cannot be forgiven if a person will not repent but persists in it for the rest of his life or has so hardened his heart that nothing will move him. The statements these men made about the Holy Spirit indicated a hardness of heart that led Jesus to warn them about the danger of blaspheming the Spirit.

The point, I believe, is that Jesus was alive on earth at the time. His enemies might reject Him (as He knew they would) and even kill Him. But that would only result is His becoming the sacrifice whereby men may have a sacrifice whereby their sins could be forgiven. Even many of those who killed Him would yet be saved by His blood. Many of these people were forgiven on Pentecost (Acts 2) and afterwards.

But after He left, He would send the Holy Spirit to reveal the gospel to His disciples (see John 14-16). The Spirit came on Pentecost and guided the apostles to preach the truth (Acts 2). If after that, men continue to reject the Spirit, there is no later means coming for them to be forgiven. If they rejected Jesus while He was on earth, there would be something coming later (the gospel) through the Holy Spirit whereby they could yet be saved. But if they rejected that, there would be nothing else coming afterward to save them.

If this is correct, then people blaspheme the Holy Spirit only when they reject His message to the point they refuse to repent and obey it. If they ever repent and obey the Spirit, they have not rejected Him in the sense Jesus is here describing. This means that, when a person is upset and concerned that they may have blasphemed the Spirit, their very concern shows they have not yet rejected the Spirit. The very fact they are upset shows that they are they still receptive to the message of the Spirit. If they will receive the gospel and repent, they may still be saved.

> So it is unrepentance that is a blasphemy against the Spirit. It is not forgiven either in this world or in the next. ... this refusal to repent has absolutely no forgiveness, neither in this age nor in the age to come, because repentance obtains forgiveness in this world in preparation for the next. – Augustine (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

12:33-37 –Speech as a measure of one's character

Compare Matthew 7:15-20.

12:33-35 – Either the tree and its fruit are good, or else the tree and its fruit are bad, for a tree is known by its fruit. Those who are evil cannot speak good things, because the mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart. A good man brings good things out of the good treasure of his heart, and an evil man brings evil things the evil treasure of his heart.

Jesus used illustrations to show the relationship between the inner man and the outer man. Different kinds of trees bear different kinds of fruit, so each kind of tree can be known by the fruit it bears. A fig tree is known by the fact that it bears figs. An apple tree can be known by the fact that it bears apples. So Jesus says that a tree that is evil will give evil fruit and a good tree will produce good fruit. Figs cannot come from a thorn plant, nor can grapes come from a bramble bush, etc.

In the same way, a person's character can be determined by the work he produces. Good conduct comes from a good heart, and evil conduct comes from an evil heart. This is true of speech and deeds. One speaks and acts according to the kind of person he is. The point is that, we can know whether a person is good or bad by comparing his conduct to God's word (compare Matthew 7:21-23).

In the context, this could be applied to Jesus Himself. The Pharisees had accused Him of violating the Sabbath and the casting out demons by Beelzebub, but they could not prove their accusations. Jesus did many miracles. How could these good works come from an evil tree that God did not approve? Jesus produced good fruit and should not be accused of being from Satan.

Then in verses 34-37, Jesus applied this to the Pharisees showing that they spoke evil because they were evil. He accused the Pharisees of being a brood of vipers: evil, poisonous snakes waiting to strike and harm. They spoke, as men do, from the contents of their heart.

Note that we can apply the same principles today to determine whether those who speak to us are good men or evil men. We must compare the way they speak to the principles of right and wrong in God's word. But in the same way we should examine ourselves to be sure we are not judging others unfairly. If we find evil in our own conduct, then we need to look within our hearts to correct it. Sincere repentance is needed, not just external appearances.

This is just one of many passages in which Jesus and the gospel emphasize the importance of inner attitudes. Our speech and conduct our reflection of the character of our inner person. In order to change the outer man, we must begin by changing the inner man.

12:36,37 – Men will give account in the judgment for every idle word they speak. You will be justified or condemned by your words.

Jesus then affirmed that men should think carefully before they speak because our words will be examined in the judgment. We will give

an account even for idle words: words spoken carelessly without much forethought. If so, how much more should we realize the seriousness of our premeditated words?

The conclusion is that we should think carefully and weigh our thoughts before we speak, because our speech reflects our thoughts. We will be condemned or justified on the basis of what we say as well as what we do and think. Surely speech can be a great blessing, or it can be our downfall. The tongue is a powerful instrument and must be carefully guarded.

The reference to idle words does not mean that it is always sinful to speak words that are silly nonsense. Several translations translate it every "careless" word (NASB, ESV, NRSV). One possible explanation is that we should realize that we will be judged even for the words that we speak carelessly with very little thought. We may think no one is listening or paying attention or that what are saying does not matter much. But the fact is we will still be judged even for those words, so we must be sure that all our speech harmonizes with God's will.

Another possible view of the passage is that we will be judged for words we speak that serve no useful purpose when in fact we ought to speak productively. This would harmonize with the meaning of "lazy," as when a person ought to be working but refuses to do so. So when we ought to be speaking true, useful speech but instead we fail, we will be judged for our unwillingness to say what needs to be said.

Note other passages where this word is used: Matthew 20:3,6; 1 Timothy 5:13; Titus 1:12; 2 Peter 1:8; James 2:20.

Other passages about speech include: 1 Peter 2:1; 3:10; Matthew 12:34-37; 15:11; Ephesians 4:29,31; James 1:26; 3:2-10; Colossians 3:8; 4:6; Psalm 141:3; 19:13,14; Proverbs 10:19; 18:2,21; 13:2,3; 12:13,14; 15:4,28; 16:23,24; 20:3; 21:23; 25:11,12; 29:11,20; 31:26; 19:1; Titus 2:8.

"Idle" (αργος) – "...1 pert. to being without anything to do, *unemployed, idle* ... 2 pert. to being unwilling to work, *idle, lazy* ... 3 pert. to being unproductive, *useless, worthless*..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

12:38-40 – Pharisees and scribes asked Jesus for a sign. He said an evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, but no sign would be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so the Son of Man would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

(Compare Luke 11:29,30; see also 1 Corinthians 1:22.)

Jesus then responded to a request that He perform a sign.

When the scribes and Pharisees came asking Jesus to do a sign, He rebuked them as an evil generation. Jesus had responded wisely and carefully to the criticisms about His conduct on the Sabbath and the

claim that He did miracles by the power of Beelzebub. But when the opposition continued and became so obviously wrong, He responded forcefully.

Jesus said He would be a sign to His generation as Jonah had been to the people of Nineveh (see also Matthew 16:4). As Jonah was three days and nights inside the great fish, so Jesus would be three days and nights in the earth. In other words, the one sign Jesus would give them was His death, burial, and resurrection! He would be raised from the dead, just as Jonah escaped the whale.

Note that Jesus did not refuse to do a sign. He said no sign would be given "except" the sign of Jonah. So, these people had seen many signs and had accused Him of working miracles by the power of Satan, yet they still called for more signs! So Jesus refused to give them another sign at that time, yet He still promised to give them one more sign: His resurrection from the dead.

Also note that Jesus here placed His stamp of approval on the historical accuracy of the Old Testament story of Jonah, including the fact he was in the whale three days and then escaped. This story is much criticized and often rejected by skeptics, yet Jesus here expressly confirms it as historic fact. In fact, Jesus was saying that His own resurrection would be a historically accurate event just like Jonah's three days in the belly of the great fish. One event would be as valid as the other. So, if the story of Jonah were not true, then Jesus' claim to be raised is likewise not believable. To deny Jonah is to undermine the resurrection!

Some people say this passage means that anyone is evil if he relies upon signs as proof of Jesus' Deity or proof that a message is from God.

Some say this passage means that no one should look to the miracles recorded in the Bible as evidence for believing the claims of the Bible to be true. People especially make this argument if they claim they can do miracles today like Jesus and His apostles did, so we ask them to back up their claim by doing signs. They sometimes quote this passage and say we are an evil and adulterous generation to ask them for signs

Consider the following:

(1) Many passages clearly state that the purpose of miracles was to confirm the truth of a message or claim from God. Surely Jesus did not mean to contradict the clear teaching of these other passages. See Mark 16:20; John 5:36; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; 2 Corinthians 12:11,12; Hebrews 2:3,4; 1 Kings 18:36-39; Exodus 4:1-9; 7:3-5; 14:30,31.

(2) Jesus did not condemn all who asked for signs. In other cases He deliberately did signs knowing people needed them in order to believe (see verses above). In many cases inspired men did miracles in the presence of unbelievers or false teachers. In fact, they sometimes deliberately did miracles in order to prove they had superior power from

God. See Acts 8:5-13; Acts 13:6-12; Exodus 8:17-19; 1 Kings 18:20-40; Daniel 2; Acts 19:11-17.

(3) We are commanded to put teachers to the test to prove whether or not they are false teachers – 1 John 4:1. If a man claims to be able to do true miracles, it follows from the above facts that one way to test him is to ask him to prove his claim by actually doing miracles that we can observe and test according to the characteristics of Biblical miracles.

(4) The people whom Jesus rebuked here and elsewhere were those who had ulterior motives for seeking signs. Specifically, it refers to people who had seen abundant signs but still refused to believe. See John 6:26ff. These people had seen many of Jesus' signs, including the obvious ones He had just done on the Sabbath day. See Matthew 12:15; 12:9-14; 11:1-6; 11:20-24; chapter 9; etc. Yet instead of believing, they determined to kill him (12:14), accused him of acting by the power of Satan (12:24), and then asked for more signs! Such men are definitely wicked.

However, this is unlike people today who challenge faith healers to do miracles to prove their claims. We have seen no miracles at all! Faith healers have yet to do in our presence even one instance of a genuine miracle that truly possesses the characteristics of miracles as done by Jesus and His apostles. We are not like those who have seen signs but yet demand more signs. We have seen no real signs, but we challenge those who claim they have the power to do them as a genuine test of whether or not they are from God.

(5) Even though they were a "wicked generation," Jesus still offered these scribes and Pharisees a sign. He did not refuse to give any sign at all. He gave the sign of the prophet Jonah – i.e., as explained above, He would arise from the dead. He said this would be His sign to that generation (i.e., the "evil generation"). So Jesus gave them a sign after all!

Will modern faith healers do this sign for us? Even if they say we are a "wicked generation," let them do this sign. Let them raise back to life someone who has been dead at least three days! This sign will be quite adequate to fulfill our request!

(6) Modern faith healers do not teach the same doctrine that Jesus and His apostles did, so it is reasonable to doubt them – Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11.

(7) The Scriptures themselves tell us that miracles would cease when the written word was complete – 1 Corinthians 13:8-13; James 1:25; Jude 3. The Scriptures are now complete, so we have good reason to question the claims of modern so-called faith healers.

For further information on the three days, see our notes on Matthew 28.

12:41,42 – The men of Nineveh would condemn that generation because they repented at Jonah's preaching, and someone greater than Jonah was there. The queen of the south would condemn that generation because she came from afar to hear Solomon, and someone greater than Solomon was there.

Jesus then further affirmed the wickedness of that generation by comparing them to other people who recognized true prophets or messages from God. He gave examples of Old Testament people who believed prophets or messages to be from God on far less evidence than Jesus had shown these people that He was from God.

The Jews looked down on the people of Nineveh, claiming they were not the people of God. Yet the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah (see the book of Jonah). However, the people of Jesus' day would not acknowledge Him and accept His teaching as true, even though He was much greater than Jonah and had given them much greater proof that He was from God than Jonah ever gave the Ninevites.

The Queen of Sheba was not a Jew, so Jews would look down on her as not being one of God's people. Yet she had come from the ends of the earth to speak with Solomon. When she did, she acknowledged his great wisdom (see 1 Kings 10; 2 Chronicles 9). Yet Jesus said someone much greater than Solomon (Jesus Himself) was in the presence of His generation, and they refused to acknowledge Him, even while claiming they were God's people!

So Jesus said these Old Testament people would rise up in judgment against the people of His generation. Note that people can "judge" others in the Bible sense without sitting on thrones and issuing formal decrees of guilt or innocence. This judging was done without even saying anything. The example of these Old Testament characters judged Jesus' generation by showing them to be without excuse.

Note further that Jesus' statement here shows that the people of His day were demanding further evidence (signs) even though they had plenty of evidence (see verses 29,30 above). They had more evidence that Jesus was from God than these Old Testament people had regarding Solomon or Jonah. Yet Jesus' generation was rejecting Him and saying He was from Satan, whereas these Old Testament people recognized God's power and message. That is why Jesus was justified in refusing to give other signs at the time.

Also note that, great as Solomon and Jonah were, Jesus plainly said He was greater. He did not mince words. By itself, this would not necessarily prove He was claiming Deity, but it harmonized with His claims to Deity and showed that He believed He had given substantial evidence that He was from God.

And then note that Jesus here once again placed His stamp of approval on the Old Testament stories of these characters, including Jonah.

12:43-45 – When an unclean spirit leaves a man but finds no other place for rest, he returns to the place from where he left and finds it empty. He takes seven other spirits worse than himself and they enter the man; so the man's last state is worse than the first. So it shall be with that wicked generation.

(Compare Luke 11:24-26.)

Jesus then told a story to illustrate the principle that one cannot be neutral in matters of right and wrong. Having just cast out a demon, He drew His illustration from that event, but the application has a deeper spiritual meaning.

A demon left a man and traveled about finding no place to rest. So he finally decided to go back and see the house where he had lived before (referring to the man from whom he had been cast out). He found the house (the man) swept and orderly, but nothing was living there. So the demon found seven other spirits worse than himself, and they all went to live in the man. The result was that the man was worse off than he had been having just the one original demon (compare 2 Peter 2:20).

This illustrated the principle Jesus had taught that we cannot be neutral about Him or about good and evil (verse 30). In order to effectively oppose evil, we must actively do what is good. If we do not do so, it will be impossible to keep the evil out.

Many people think they can remove wickedness from their lives and live as morally upright people, without actively pursuing the practice of the good works of service to God and other people as required by the gospel. In God's eyes, they are like the man who gets rid of evil, but leaves his house (soul) empty. He does not fill it with good. Something must live in our souls: good or evil. The only way to keep evil out is to replace it with good.

In Matthew's account Jesus added the comment, "So shall it be with this generation." This shows that the story has a spiritual application. The principle that Jesus taught is a general truth that applies to anyone who attempts to remove evil, but it had a particular application to people of Jesus' day. Especially it applied to the people who were attempting to be neutral about Jesus.

Some people, then and now, think they are good people, having removed wickedness from their lives. Yet they refuse to commit themselves to Jesus and His word. They want to avoid evil without committing themselves to defend what was good (Jesus as the Christ, in this case).

Jesus said this would not work. They had to be either against Him (wicked) or for Him. They could not ride the fence. If they tried, then like

the man who had lost the evil spirit, they would end up much more wicked than before.

12:46-50 – Jesus was told that His mother and brothers stood outside and wanted to talk to Him. He asked who was His mother and His brothers. Then He indicated His disciples and said they were His mother and brothers, for whoever does the will of the Father in heaven is Jesus' brother, sister, and mother.

Compare Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21.

As Jesus' preaching continued, His mother and brothers came to Him. Someone told Him they were there and wanted to speak to Him. Jesus used this as an opportunity to teach that His true mother and brothers are those who obey the teachings of His Father. John 7:5 says that even His own brothers did not believe in Him.

Consider the following lessons:

Membership in Jesus' spiritual family is even more important than membership in His physical family.

Jesus did not here renounce His earthly family, nor did He mean to criticize them. He simply used the opportunity to teach a spiritual lesson. Earthly, physical family relations are important, but many people emphasize them to the point of being more willing to please their earthly family than to please the Lord. Jesus is here showing that, important as earthly family may be, more important is being part of the spiritual family of God.

God's spiritual family is called the church after it was established and people began becoming part of it.

Ephesians 2:16,19 – Jesus reconciled Jew and Gentile to God in one body through the cross. Therefore, we are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the ***household*** of God.

Ephesians 3:14.15 – For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

1 Timothy 3:15 – Paul wrote so we may know how to conduct ourselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God.

(2 Corinthians 6:18; 1 John 3:1,2; Galatians 6:10)

Membership in this family is important because children of God are those who are "born again."

1 Peter 1:22,23 – When we obey God's word, we purify our souls and are born again. But the new birth makes us children of God, and children of God are members of His family, the church.

Galatians 3:26,27 – We ***are*** children of God by faith, because we ***were*** baptized into Christ. Baptism puts us into the church (1 Corinthians 12:13), which makes us children of God.

Membership in this family is important because only children of God will receive God's eternal inheritance.

Romans 8:16,17 – If we are children of God, then we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

1 Peter 1:3,4 – God has ***begotten*** us to an inheritance reserved for us in heaven.

This does not say that the church itself gives us the inheritance. ***God*** gives the inheritance. But ***to whom*** does He give it? He gives it to His children, members of His family. But His family is the church.

Jesus here shows that, to be members of the family, we must obey the Father.

A father possesses authority so that his children must obey his instructions.

1 John 5:1-3 – One of the most important aspects of our relationship with our Father should be love. When one has faith and is spiritually born again, he must love God and all His children. This love will lead us to keep the commands of the Father. People who claim to be children of God and love God, while yet denying their need to obey Him, have shown that they do not understand the real meaning of love.

2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 – In order to be sons and daughters of God and have Him as our Father, we must separate ourselves from that which is spiritually unclean, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Becoming a child of God is conditional, and remaining in God's fellowship as a child of God is conditional.

Some claim they are children of God while yet denying that obedience is necessary. Here and elsewhere Jesus plainly denies such a claim. Only those who obey the Father are His spiritual children.

(See also 1 John 3:10; 5:18; 3:9; 2:29; Romans 8:14-17; Ephesians 5:1; Matthew 5:9,45; Hebrews 12:6ff.)

Jesus did have physical brothers.

The Catholic church teaches that Mary was always a virgin and never had sexual relations with Joseph

"Nor does the New Testament ever imply that Mary ceased to be a virgin; on the contrary, it confirms, though it nowhere states, the Catholic dogma of her perpetual virginity." – *Catholic Dictionary*, p. 555.

The Bible surely does confirm that Mary was a virgin until Jesus' birth (Matthew 1:18,23,25; Luke 1:27,34,35). But where did the Scriptures say that Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus?

On the contrary the Bible repeatedly expressly mentions Jesus' sisters and even names His brothers (Mark 6:3; Matthew 12:46-50; John 2:12; 7:3-5; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19; Acts 1:14). How could Mary be a virgin if Jesus had brothers and sisters?

Catholicism claims that "brother" here means cousin. However, the only arguments offered to defend this view are tradition and unproved speculation. The facts are:

* The word for "brother" is never used for a cousin in the New Testament. (It is used for a fellow-countryman, but context clearly shows this is not the meaning in these verses.)

* The New Testament has a word for cousin, but that is not the word for "brother" as used here (Colossians 4:10).

* The word for "sister," used physically, always in the New Testament means a member of the same immediate family, never a cousin or more distant relative. Catholic scholars almost universally ignore the sisters of Jesus.

* Catholics place great emphasis on the fact Mary was the physical mother of Jesus. But the terms "brother" and "sister" are used parallel to Mary as "mother" of Jesus. Does "mother" mean "aunt"? If "mother" means an immediate family member, why not the same for the brothers and sisters?

* If Mary had refused to have sexual relationships with Joseph, as Catholicism claims that she did, this would have been a direct violation of the teaching Jesus later inspired in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5. The Scriptures plainly teach that a husband and wife should fulfill the sexual desire for one another.

* The concept that Mary had no children other than Jesus is based on the idea that the sexual relationship is somehow morally inferior, so that virginity is more holy than childbearing in marriage. However, the Scriptures clearly teach that the sexual union is pure and holy so long as it is done within a Scriptural marriage – Hebrews 13:4. Furthermore, the Scriptures teach that it is a great blessing to a married woman to be a mother of children – 1 Timothy 2:14,15.

Applications regarding Jesus' mother

Catholicism teaches that Jesus must grant every request that Mary makes of Him.

> "'At the command of Mary, all obey, even God' ... God grants the prayers of Mary as if they were commands ... whatever the Mother asks for, the Son never denies her." — *Glories of Mary*, Alphonsus Maria De Ligouri, 2nd Edition, pp. 154-156 (compare pp. 18,12,71,87).

However, this context in Matthew shows clearly that Mary made a request of Jesus which He did not obey. She wanted Him to come out and speak to her and His brothers, but He had other things more important to do at the time.

Furthermore, Jesus showed that, on the basis of obedience to the Father, all faithful disciples can have a relationship with Him that is closer and more important than His relationship with His own earthly

family, including His mother. He stated that those who do the will of His Father in heaven are His brother and sister and mother.

Everyone can have this close spiritual relationship with Jesus by obeying the Father. But this means that, based on obedience, anyone can have a more important relationship with Jesus than Mary would have had simply on the basis of her physical relationship to Him. Catholicism overemphasizes the relationship Mary had with Jesus as His mother and ends up drawing false conclusions.

Matthew 13

Chapter 13 – Teaching in Parables

13:1-23 - Parable of the Sower

13:1,2 – Jesus sat in a boat and taught the people on the seashore using parables.

Teaching by the seashore

As Jesus was teaching by the sea, great multitudes gathered to Him. He got into a boat to speak as the crowd stood on the shore. Jesus taught in many different circumstances. Sometimes He taught in a synagogue or in the temple. Sometimes He stood on a mountainside and addressed the multitudes before him. At other times He spoke in homes or to other small groups or individuals.

In this case, He sat in a boat as He addressed the people who stood on the shore. This arrangement had the advantage that the people could see and hear Him effectively, but they could not throng Him. Note that in this case the teacher sat while the people in the audience stood.

Jesus used any circumstance or arrangement that He could if it provided a good opportunity to teach. He taught in organized religious meetings, such as synagogues or the temple, but He also taught in informal meetings, large or small. We should learn to do the same.

Teaching about the kingdom

The parables in this chapter discuss many aspects of the kingdom. Jesus had been preaching and teaching about the kingdom ever since the beginning of His public ministry. Many premillennialists claim that originally He intended to build an earthly kingdom. However, they say that it was at this point in Jesus' ministry that He realized the Jews would reject Him, so he withdrew His offer of the kingdom and determined to establish the church instead.

The truth is that Jesus continued preaching and teaching about the kingdom following this, and His disciples continued preaching and teaching about the kingdom in the early history of the church as recorded in the book of Acts. In fact, people began to enter Jesus'

kingdom on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 – the very kingdom that God predicted in the Old Testament.

From the beginning God intended for the kingdom of Jesus to be spiritual, not literal and earthly. It consists of all who were in the church and who have been forgiven by his blood.

See Daniel 2:31-45; Matthew 16:18,19; Mark 1:14,15; 9:1; John 18:36; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-17,33; 1 Corinthians 15:22-28; Colossians 1:13,14; Hebrews 12:23-29; Revelation 1:9.

13:3-9– As a sower sowed, some seed fell by the wayside, where birds devoured it. Some fell on stony places where it was scorched by the sun because it lacked root. Some fell among thorns that sprang up and choked the seed. But some fell on good ground that produced thirtyfold, sixtyfold, or a hundredfold.

Jesus then began a series of parables. This parable is recorded in three of the gospel accounts (Matthew 13:3-9,18-23; Mark 4:2-9,14-20; Luke 8:4-15).

A parable is a story about a natural or physical event, yet it illustrates a spiritual lesson that is in some ways similar to the story. It follows that a parable involves the use of symbolism. Not all Bible teaching should be taken literally, but this does not mean we are free to impress upon the teaching ideas of our own invention. Just because a teaching is symbolic does not mean it is unimportant or that we are free to do with it whatever we choose.

It is important to understand that parables were not identical in every detail to the spiritual lesson being taught. No illustration fits perfectly. So we must seek to understand what Jesus really meant in a parable, harmonizing our conclusions with Jesus' other teaching. We must not speculate or place our own opinions on the parable, especially when we cannot prove those conclusions to harmonize with other Scripture.

"… only those points of analogy which were certainly in the mind of the author should have a place in the interpretation." – McGarvey.

The first parable recorded here was the parable of the sower. In Jesus' day people were familiar with growing things because many of them made their living farming, working in vineyards, etc. So, Jesus often used seeds and plants as illustrations in His teaching.

In this parable the sower went forth to sow. We will observe that sowing the seed represents teaching the gospel to various kinds of people. Note that the sower had to go forth to sow: he had to go where the field was. Likewise, we today must go where the people are in order to teach them. We cannot simply sit in our homes or even meet in our houses of worship. Many will not come to hear, so we must go to them to sow the seed of the gospel.

As a farmer sowed seed in his field, the seed fell into various kinds of soil. The first soil is described as hardened soil alongside the path. Seed that falls there has no chance to take root, because the ground is too hard. So birds simply devoured the seed.

The second soil was like stony ground where there was not much earth. There the seed sprang up, but because of the lack of depth of earth it was scorched and withered away in the hot sun. The third soil was thorny ground where the thorns sprang up and choked the plants that grew. The final seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop, a hundredfold, sixtyfold, or thirtyfold.

One important point to remember is that in every case the same farmer planted the same seed. The different results that occurred had nothing to do with differences in the seed or the sower. They were caused entirely by differences in the soils.

Jesus then challenged those who were present to really listen and pay attention. God gave them ears, and they should use those ears to listen to the teaching of God's word (compare 11:15). They should seek the truth with honest, open hearts.

The parable is not explained at this point in the account, however we will receive the explanation later.

> "Parable" (παραβολη) – "...1 someth. that serves as a model or example pointing beyond itself for later realization, *type, figure* ... 2 a narrative or saying of varying length, designed to illustrate a truth especially through comparison or simile, *comparison, illustration, parable, proverb, maxim*..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

13:10-17 – Discussion about why Jesus taught in parables

13:10-12 – When Jesus' disciples asked why He taught in parables, He said that it was given to the disciples to know the mysteries of the kingdom, but it was not given to others. To him who has, more will be given, but from one who does not have will be taken away even what he has.

Why Jesus taught in parables

After Jesus had spoken the parable, the disciples asked Him why He taught in parables. He responded that it was given to them to know the mysteries of the kingdom, but other people received only the parables. We will see that eventually Jesus explained the parable to them because of their sincere desire to know.

Jesus said that whoever has, will receive more; and whoever lacks, will lose even what he has. See also Matthew 25:29; Luke 8:18; Mark 4:24,25. This is a common experience in many areas of life. When people have abundant wealth, it is usually easier for them to gain more wealth, but those who lack wealth tend to continue in poverty. Businesses that have many customers tend to gain more customers, but businesses with

only a few customers often go out of business. Many other examples can be given.

Specifically in spiritual matters, those who use the opportunities they have in God's service will receive other opportunities for service. But those who neglect their opportunities, will lose even the opportunities that they have. This is the lesson taught in the parable of the talents as in Matthew 25:29.

Jesus here applies this principle to the knowledge of truth. People who have knowledge generally have it because they have an attitude that appreciates and values knowledge. So they put forth the effort to learn. This was true of Jesus' disciples. Such attitudes lead one to gain more knowledge. In addition, the better background one has in knowledge, the easier it is to gain more knowledge.

On the other hand, people who lack knowledge of truth usually do so because of improper attitudes such as those Jesus describes in the context. These attitudes lead such people to reject and lose even what knowledge of the truth they have.

Notice that this does not mean that people with improper hearts will know nothing at all. In fact, they are able to know enough that they ought to accept the truth. The problem is that they will not accept the truth that they do receive, so as a result much of the rest of the truth just confuses them. Note that the wicked people who were rebuked to by Jesus' parable in Luke 20:9-19 understood enough to realize that the parable had been spoken against them.

Jesus refers to the information He provides as "the mysteries of the kingdom." A mystery, as used in the gospel, does not mean that the information can never be understood. Rather, it means that it is not understood until it is revealed. As Jesus explains in the following discussion, the meaning of the teaching is revealed at the proper time and circumstances, but remains unknown otherwise.

> "Mystery" (μυστηριον) – "...a hidden thing, secret, mystery ... In the Scriptures 1. a hidden or secret thing, not obvious to the understanding ... 2. a hidden purpose or counsel; secret will ... In the N.T., God's plan of providing salvation for men through Christ, which was once hidden but now is revealed: Romans 16:25; I Corinthians 2:7...; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:26f ... 3. ... the mystic or hidden sense ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Calvinistic unconditional election

Kyle Pope quotes John Calvin as using this passage as evidence that God chose certain men to learn the truth but left other people without the ability to learn it based on no other distinction except for God's own arbitrary choice. That is, as taught in Calvinism, God's choice of who would be saved, as compared to who would be lost, is completely unconditional having nothing to do with the choice or will of the individual person.

This is not the teaching of Jesus here or anywhere in Scripture. He is not saying that God arbitrarily and unconditionally chooses some people to receive truth and others to remain in ignorance. We will see that people have the power to choose, and the result is based on their own choice.

For passages that demonstrate man's free will power to choose, see the following: Genesis 2:16,17; 3:1-7; 1 Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 4:15; 11:25; Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21; Psalm 119:30; Deuteronomy 30:15-19; Isaiah 1:18-20; Matthew 23:37; 13:14,15; Revelation 3:20; 22:17.

13:13-15 – Jesus spoke in parables because the people did not see or hear or understand. The prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled in them that they would hear but not understand, see but not perceive, because their hearts had grown dull. Their ears were hard of hearing, and they closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and be healed.

Jesus quoted a passage in Isaiah 6:9,10 saying that the people in general had closed their eyes to the truth. They did not really want to know it, because it would require changes in their lives that they did not want to make. So their hearts were hardened and their eyes and ears were closed to the truth. See further notes on the parable of the sower below.

As result, when Jesus spoke in parables, many people would just be confused and would be lost. They would see Jesus' miracles, but would not perceive the significance. They would hear His words, but would not understand the proper meaning. The disciples, however, who really wanted to know the truth, would continue with Him, search deeper, and learn the truth. So He was willing to give them further explanation.

Sometimes people think that the purpose of parables was to help clarify Jesus' teaching. That is not completely true. It is true that, when people have honest hearts to pursue the meaning of the parable, then it can help illustrate the lesson. But at the same time, when people do not have honest hearts to accept truth, parables will just confuse them so they reject the teaching.

Jesus did not always intend for all people to understand His teaching. While He wished for all to have honest hearts, He knew that not all would do so. So, He deliberately designed His teaching to separate those who really were sincerely dedicated to learning truth from those who were not.

This is important for us to understand about our teaching today. Notice that the distinction between who understands and who does not understand is determined by the choice of the people. They have the free will power to choose to search for truth with an honest heart, in which case the message will be understandable. But people can also choose to harden their hearts, in which case they will just be confused.

This directly contradicts the teaching of John Calvin on this point. Notice the following statement made by Calvin regarding those who are lost as contrasted to what Jesus actually said:

John Calvin: "…God withholds his word from them, or keeps their eyes and ears closed, that they do not hear or see" (Pope, page 414)

Jesus: "…their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes."

So, Calvin says that God keeps some people's eyes and ears closed, but Jesus said that people close their own eyes. This is a fundamental distinction between the gospel of Jesus and the false gospel of Calvinism.

This explains one reason why we get such different reactions from people today when we teach the gospel. In a very real sense, the message is simply not intended to convert everybody. Of course, it can convert everybody who has an honest heart, and God wishes that all did have an honest heart. But God allows people to make their own choice, and not everybody will choose to sincerely seek for and accept the truth. The message is designed to separate the wheat from the chaff. This is a deliberate design on God's part.

Sometimes people think preachers today should make the teaching as clear as possible. Why should we be obligated to do so, when Jesus did not do so? Our teaching should be understandable for those who sincerely seek truth, but we are not obligated to make the truth clear to those who have blinded hearts.

Teaching methods are not always used because they make things clearer. Some methods are actually not as clear as other methods, but they may have other advantages. Some methods emphasize understanding, but other methods are intended to stir people's interest in a subject, stimulate them to think, or emphasize the importance of a point, etc.

See also Isaiah 42:18-20; 44:18; Jeremiah 5:21; Ezekiel 12:2; Matthew 8:17,18; John 3:19,20; 2 Corinthians 4:3,4.

13:16,17 – Jesus then blessed the disciples because their eyes did see and their ears did hear. He said many prophets and righteous men desired, but were not able to see and hear, what the disciples could see and hear.

On the other hand, Jesus pronounced a blessing on His disciples because they were open to accept truth. They had eyes so they could see and ears that could hear. Again, this was a matter of personal choice. Whereas others had various motives for not truly being open to the truth, the disciples were enabled to learn because of their sincere desire.

We will see this illustrated in the context, when Jesus was teaching parables, some people would harden their hearts, reject the message, and go away confused. But if the disciples needed further explanation, they would stay with Jesus and ask the meaning of the parables. They received understanding because they searched sincerely for it. Likewise,

today we must have honest hearts to continue in our search for the truth and not turn away just because some teaching seems difficult.

In fact, Jesus said that many prophets and righteous men of old days had wanted to see and hear what the disciples were privileged to receive. But those men of the past were not enabled to learn these things simply because they had not been previously revealed (1 Peter 1:10-12; Ephesians 3:3-5). The disciples were truly blessed, and so are we since we now have the message fully revealed. Let us appreciate it and open our eyes to receive it.

13:18,19 – The wayside soil represents a person who hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it. Then the devil comes and takes away what was sown in his heart.

For the benefit of His disciples, Jesus then began to explain the parable of the sower. Luke clearly says the seed represents the gospel (Luke 8:11). Matthew refers to it as of the "word of the kingdom." Just as the seed of a plant has the power to reproduce that kind of plant, so the gospel has the power to produce children of God (1 Peter 1:23; Romans 1:16). The different kinds of soil represent different kinds of hearts, and this explains why different people respond differently to the gospel.

The wayside soil represents people who do not understand God's word, so the devil removes it. Matthew's account speaks of the "wicked one," but other translations say "the devil" (Luke 8:12) or "Satan" (Mark 4:15). Because the word is removed, these people never even believe (Luke 8:12). Many people are like this today. The gospel just never seems to sink in. They never really understand or accept it at all.

If you spend much time on a farm, you will see paths where cows walk or the farmer drives his implements. Often the ground is bare hardened dirt: it is so hard no seed can grow. Any seed that falls will be eaten by the chickens and crows. This is the way some people's hearts are to the gospel. Why do so many people have trouble understanding or believing the Bible?

Misunderstanding results from the attitudes of people, not because of any fault in the Bible.

Sometimes when people reject the truth, people want to blame anything except the sinner himself. Some even blame the Bible, saying it is too hard to understand. But consider:

1 Thessalonians 2:13 – The Bible is not the word of men but the word of God. And everything God does is good. If we blame the Bible for the fact people do not understand it, we are really blaming God. Is God to blame?

1 Corinthians 14:33 – God is not the author of confusion but of peace. When people are confused, it is not God's fault. That means it cannot be the Bible's fault, since the Bible is from God. God is not the

author of confusion, but He is the author of the Bible. Therefore, the Bible is not the cause of confusion. (Psalm 119:105)

Even in the parable of the sower, we will see that other people ***did*** understand (verse 23). But remember that the seed is the same throughout the parable, and the seed is the word of God. So some people do understand the Bible. When people don't understand, it is because of the ***soil,*** not the ***seed:*** the ***people,*** not the ***Bible.***

Some people misunderstand because of lack of study.

Some people actually hear some truth, but they are just not interested enough to pursue further understanding. They fail to investigate further, so they never come to know the truth.

Hosea 4:6 – People are destroyed for "lack of knowledge."

The same is true today. How many people are really diligent in studying their Bibles? Even those in the Lord's church sometimes do not study daily like those noble Bereans (Acts 17:11). The average person ***possesses*** a Bible, but has very little knowledge of the ***contents***.

(Romans 10:1-3)

Some people misunderstand because they have been misled by false teachers.

Matthew 7:15 – Jesus said to beware of false teachers who come in sheep's clothing but are inwardly ravening wolves.

How many times have you seen it happen? Someone is taught some Bible truth and is interested. Then some family member or preacher gets hold of him, contradicts the Bible teaching, and confuses him. Next time you try to talk to him, he refuses to even listen, or his attitude is completely different.

In the parable, the birds that snatch away the seed represent the devil who takes away the word. But Jesus said the devil uses false teachers to do his dirty work.

(2 Peter 2:1; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

Some people misunderstand because of prejudice.

Some people have their minds made up. They simply will not allow themselves to accept anything new, and often will not seriously consider the evidence.

Matthew 13:14,15 – In the midst of this study of the parable of the sower, Jesus explained that many people hear but do not understand (like the wayside soil). Why? They don't want to accept what is being taught, so they close their eyes and ears and harden their hearts.

Perhaps they were brought up a certain way and refuse to change. Maybe they don't want to accept the fact their family and loved ones are wrong. Or perhaps they are too proud to admit they themselves have been wrong.

When my mother became a Christian, repeatedly she would take a Bible and underline passages and send it to her parents to read. They

would refuse to even read it but would send it right back. In many ways they were such nice people, but they simply refused to listen to any viewpoint other than what they had already accepted.

Other people just don't want to make the sacrifices necessary to live according to the Bible pattern. They are looking for an easy, convenient salvation that does not require much work but allows them to live according to their own pleasures. So, they reject the truth and seek a doctrine that pleases them. (2 Timothy 4:2-4)

Proverbs 18:13 – He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him. Yet time and again people say they are "satisfied with their religion" or "not interested" in discussing it. And nothing you can say will convince them to consider what the Bible really says.

The devil uses many ways to snatch the truth from people's hearts so they do not understand and obey. What about you? Have you let the devil snatch the truth from your heart? Or have you given an honest hearing to the truth, studying diligently to learn the right way?

13:20,21 – The stony soil represents people who hear the word and receive it with joy. But they have no root, so they endure only for a while. Then when tribulation or persecution comes, they stumble.

The ground in some areas is filled with stones. This kind of soil is especially obvious in some areas. I have observed it when traveling in New England and in some mountainous areas of the West. If seed falls there, the topsoil allows the seed to sprout, but the soil is not deep enough for the seed to take good root. When hot, dry weather comes, the plants shrivel and die.

Some people are like that religiously. Give them the gospel, and they just receive it with enthusiasm. But soon they burn out and die. What can we learn from this?

A person who truly becomes a child of God can fall away and be lost.

Some people teach that once a person is forgiven, he can never so sin as to be eternally lost. Others, even in the church, admit it can happen; but when it does, they are so upset and amazed that they want to blame everybody except the person who fell away. They may say, "What did we do wrong?" They want to blame the church or teachers, etc.

The stony soil definitely proves that people can accept the truth and then fall away. When these people heard the truth, the seed sprang up (Matthew 13:5). They received the word with joy (13:20). They believed for a while (Luke 8:13). Then they withered away (Matthew 13:6). They stumbled (13:21). They fell away (Luke 8:13).

Note that the passage clearly says that they believed but then they fell away. Contrary to the doctrine of once saved always saved, a believer

can fall away. Luke 8:12 says that the subject being discussed here is whether or not people will be saved. So, the conclusion necessarily is that those who fall away will not be saved.

Other passages also show that people who have been saved from their sins can nevertheless so sin as to be lost.

Galatians 1:2; 5:2-4 – Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia and called them sons of God (3:26). But some wanted to bind circumcision and Old Testament commands. As a result, Christ was of no profit to them, they were severed from Christ, and fallen from grace. You cannot fall from a place where you have not been. They were in grace, but they fell from grace.

Why should it shock us to see this happen today? Jesus said all along it would happen. Yes, we should examine ourselves and make sure we have not contributed to their fall, and we should be sorry for those who do fall. But let us not think it is impossible or be so shocked when we see it that we automatically think it is the church's fault and start blaming one another.

What caused these people to fall?

Some give up because of tribulation – Matthew 13:21.

Suffering, hardship, problems, and troubles in life can discourage people to the point they give up if they do not have depth of conviction.

Acts 14:22 – We must enter the kingdom through many tribulations. Some convince themselves that Christians should not have to suffer. People who believe that are likely to give up when they do suffer.

Job 1,2 – Satan thought Job would give up serving God if his problems were great enough. And many people do give up in time of sickness, death in the family, financial loss, or family problems. But Job demonstrated that we do not have to give up. We can remain faithful if we have the right attitude.

Some give up because of persecution – Matthew 13:21.

2 Timothy 3:12 – All who live godly will suffer persecution. We should expect it because Jesus promised it. But when it happens many lose heart and fall away.

Persecution may come because of enemies of the truth who threaten even physical harm (Acts 5:40-42).

Persecution may come because of family members, friends, or loved ones who oppose our stand for the truth. They may try to argue with us, pressure us, tempt us, or otherwise hinder our service to God. We must love Jesus more than we do friends and relatives (Matthew 10:34-37).

Christians should not be surprised when tribulation or persecution comes. Jesus predicted it. We must be strong enough in our conviction to overcome it.

In this parable, some types of soil overcame the tribulations. This proves that people can be faithful. When people fall away, they can ultimately blame no one but themselves. The problem is in the soil. The problem ultimately is not the fault of the seed, the sower, or even other people. Others may have contributed to the problem, so we need to examine ourselves. But we can all remain faithful if our attitudes are right. This is why it is so important, when people have first been converted, that other Christians attempt to strengthen and establish them in the faith.

It is not enough to begin serving God; we must endure till the end (10:22). What about you? Are you stony soil: the kind of person who quits when the going gets tough? Or are you the kind of person who will continue to serve God no matter what?

(See also 1 Corinthians 9:27; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Acts 8:12-14; Hebrews 3:1,6,12-14; 10:26-31.)

13:22 – The thorny soil represents those who hear the word but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, so the people become unfruitful.

The seed that fell on thorny ground was choked and could not produce fruit. Where I lived in high school the soil was pure sand. We had a field that grew great sandspurs, but nobody could get it to grow anything worthwhile. That is the way some people are. They are great at producing things of little value, but they never produce fruit for the Lord.

What is it that keeps people from being fruitful?

The deceitfulness of riches

Many people have some desire to serve God, so they become Christians. But they also desire possessions and wealth. They end up spending so much time obtaining, caring for, and enjoying their possessions that they bear little fruit for God.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 – He who loves silver and abundance will not be satisfied with them. Riches are deceitful. We think they will satisfy us, but they never do. We just want more. In the meantime, we are working so hard to obtain and enjoy possessions that we neglect the only thing that really can satisfy: our service to God. That is the deceitfulness of riches.

Luke 12:15-21 – The rich farmer illustrates those who think life consists of the abundance of our possessions. He accumulated great wealth, but was not rich toward God. Having gathered his wealth, he died. So what good did it do him? He is an example of a man deceived by riches.

A college student in a dorm washroom saw a bar of soap on a nearby sink. Another student came in, and when he left he took the bar of soap. Soon he returned and put the soap back saying, “I decided it wasn’t worth it to go to hell for a bar of soap.”

But what about us? Could it be that, unless we repent, we will go to hell for things of not much greater value. It may be a car, house, boat, furniture, clothes. But Jesus said that, if you gain everything on earth, it is not worth missing heaven.

(1 Timothy 6:6-10; Matthew 16:26)

The pleasures of this life – Luke 8:14

2 Timothy 3:1,2,4 – Grievous times come when men are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. This describes many today. They are so involved in pleasure they neglect God's work.

What they do may or may not be sinful of itself: hobbies, TV, sports, camping, movies, computer games, and other entertainment. The danger comes when we allow these desires to lead us into immorality or we are willing to sacrifice God's work to do these. Pleasures are like the thorns that choke the word of God.

(Hebrews 11:24-26; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12)

The cares of the world

Anything of the world that comes between you and God is included: wealth, pleasure, politics, education, even pleasing our family and loved ones.

Note again that Jesus is describing people who begin to serve God but do not remain faithful. But He never says they completely fall away. They just don't bear fruit. Disciples do not have to completely give up their service to God to be lost. They may continue outward rituals of service to God, but they don't bear fruit.

They are like that field by our house. They are productive, but they don't produce the things that really matter. They produce weeds and sandspurs, but not good fruit.

What about you? Are you thorny soil: the kind of person who emphasizes wealth, pleasure, and the cares of the world? Or are you the kind of person who is willing to sacrifice this world's advantages to seek first the kingdom of God?

(James 4:4; 1 John 2:15-17; Romans 12:1,2; Colossians 3:1,2; Titus 2:11-14; James 1:27)

13:23 – The good soil represents people who hear the word and understand it, and they bear fruit: some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

Not all soil is bad soil that fails to produce a crop. In many places there is good soil that can produce good crops. Likewise, there are people with good attitudes who are willing to obey God and work for Him. There are several lessons we can learn.

It is possible to obey God and be saved.

Sometimes we get so discouraged by the hindrances in our service that we begin to think it is impossible to stay faithful. Or we may think

there is no use teaching others because they will just fall away anyway. Perhaps we may reach such conclusions because we hear so much preaching that warns us of the dangers that surround us. We need those kinds of warnings, but we also need to be reminded that some soil is good soil.

Philippians 4:13 – I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. No tribulation, persecution, or hardship can force us to be lost (Romans 8:35-39).

We need to be aware that there are dangers that can lead us to be lost. But we also need to have confidence that God will help us to remain faithful if we continue diligently striving to serve Him. You can be good soil for the Lord: the choice is up to you!

Note too that, contrary again to Calvinism, the good soil here represents those who have a good and honest heart even before the seed has been sown and borne fruit. That is to say, Calvinism is in error when it says that people are born totally depraved and cannot possibly do anything good before the Holy Spirit performs a direct operation on their heart enabling them to do right. Jesus here plainly says that these people have good and honest hearts even before the seed was sown.

(1 Corinthians 10:13)

We must bear fruit to the extent of our ability.

Among the good soil, some produced more fruit than others: some thirtyfold, some sixty, some a hundred. But Jesus said it was all good. People have different abilities, but we must all do the best we can.

Matthew 25:14-30 – The parable of the talents shows that people are expected to achieve according to their ability (verse 15). One servant gained five talents and another two, but the Lord rewarded both. The only one punished was the one who did not do what he could.

Romans 12:4-8 – In the church, people have different ability. We need to use whatever ability we have to serve the Lord to the fullest extent.

Someone else may have more ability than you do in teaching others; but if you both teach to the extent you are able, the Lord will accept you both. But the Lord expects more results from the one with more ability.

Someone else may have more material possessions than you do; but if you both contribute to the extent of your ability, the Lord will accept you both. But the Lord expects more from the one with more ability. (Acts 11:29 2 Corinthians 8:12)

If you don't do what you can, you are not good soil. But if you do your best, the Lord will be satisfied with thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold. You can be good soil for the Lord: the choice is up to you!

What must we do to be good soil? – Luke 8:15

* *We must hear the word with good and honest hearts.*

We must not be like those who refuse to accept the truth, but must be like the Bereans who search daily and received the truth readily (Acts 17:11).

This avoids the problem of the wayside soil.

** We must be patient.*

Galatians 6:9 – Do not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. We know there will be tribulation, but we must persevere anyway.

This avoids the problem of the stony soil.

** We must hold fast the word and bear fruit.*

The fruit of a Christian is obedience to the teachings of our Master Jesus Christ. This fruit is clearly required in order to receive forgiveness and salvation in the end.

Matthew 6:33 – Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness. Keep our priorities right and continue to work for the Lord, instead of letting less important matters of life get in the way.

1 Corinthians 15:58 – We must be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

This avoids the problem of the thorny soil.

You can be good soil for the Lord: the choice is up to you!

Which kind of soil are you? Somewhere in this parable you are found. The thing that makes the difference is the soil: the attitudes of the heart. In every case, the seed and the sower are the same. Different results occur because of the differences among the soils.

13:24-58 – Other Parables and Teaching

13:24-30 – The kingdom is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat. When the grain sprouted, tares appeared, and the servants asked the owner if they should gather them up. He said to let them grow until the harvest, then they would gather up the tares and burn them but gather the wheat into the barn.

Jesus here stated the parable of the tares, then later in the discussion He explained it. In this parable, Jesus stated some things that are similar to the rule of Christ in the hearts of men. However, Jesus stated later that the field in this story refers to the world. The kingdom refers to the good seed that is sown in the world.

A man sowed good seed in his field (wheat – verse 29). This was a useful grain the householder wanted to have in his fields. But an enemy came while men were asleep and sowed tares among the wheat. Tares look much like wheat and can only be distinguished from the wheat when they are well along in growth. But tares are not a valuable crop like wheat. Such an act would indeed be the act of an enemy. Pope gives evidence that this kind of deed was common in the Roman empire.

When the plants produced a crop, the servants recognized that tares grew among the wheat. They asked the householder about it, and he realized this was done by an enemy. The servants asked if the tares should be pulled up, but the master said to leave them alone for the time being because the wheat would be uprooted too. He said to let them grow together until the harvest, then pull up the tares and burn them. Then the wheat could safely be put in a barn.

The most reasonable explanation for the master's decision is that the tares were not distinguishable from the wheat until both were significantly grown and the heads of grain appeared. At that point the roots of the tares and of the wheat would be so intertwined that pulling up the tares would also pull up much of the wheat, causing it to be ruined before the harvest. However, if the servants would wait until the harvest, the tares could be pulled up and discarded, but any wheat that was pulled up at the same time could simply be harvested.

This parable is explained later in the chapter.

13:31,32 – In another parable Jesus said the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that is the least of all seeds. But when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree so birds of the air can nest in its branches.

See Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18,19.

In yet another parable, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed that a man sowed in his field. A mustard seed is very small, but it grows and becomes a large herb. It becomes like a tree that is so great birds could live in its branches. This parable is not explained, so we must conclude from the context and other passages what it means.

Jesus is not making a technical argument regarding whether someone might find a seed in some far corner of the earth that might be smaller than a mustard seed. The point was that this was the smallest seed of common use and knowledge among the Jewish people. And the end result of its growth was similar to a tree, so that it was among the greatest of the bushes with which they were familiar.

Like that mustard seed, the kingdom of heaven may seem small and unimpressive. As a king in His kingdom, Jesus' life, His work, His message, and His people may seem weak and insignificant. Jesus was born into poverty in an insignificant family, had little formal education, and never achieved significant wealth, military might, or political influence.

Nevertheless, Jesus knew that the message of the gospel would spread. As a result, many people across the world from then till now have been influenced by it. Many great and seemingly powerful kingdoms of men have come and gone since the first century. Some of them may have had significant influence. But none of them continue having influence even till today like Jesus' kingdom.

From that small and unimpressive beginning came the great kingdom which gives all men opportunity to be saved from their sins and receive eternal life. The teachings of Jesus, His character, and His work continue to influence the lives of millions of people throughout history even till today. Only through Him can people receive eternal life.

13:33 – In another parable Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to leaven that a woman hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened.

See also Luke 13:20,21.

In yet another parable, Jesus compared the kingdom to leaven placed by a woman in three measures of meal. As a result, the whole lump was leavened. Leaven is yeast and has a great power to influence that which is around it. Like leaven, both good and evil have power to influence their surroundings.

In this illustration, the leaven refers to the influence of the message of Jesus about the kingdom. It grew with power and influence far beyond what might be expected, so that it had great influence on many lives.

Like the apparent circumstances of Jesus, the gospel seems insignificant and unimpressive. It is a message originally taught and then recorded in words. Some have ridiculed it as being just a book. Yet the power is in the concepts taught in the message.

The Scriptures frequently tell us of the power of this message, and the effects of it can be seen in the lives of millions of people since the first century. Of greatest importance, only through this message can men receive eternal life.

(Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:22,23; Jeremiah 23:29; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

13:34,35 – Jesus taught the people only by means of parables. This fulfilled the prophecy of speaking in parables and uttering things kept secret from the foundation of the world.

Jesus had explained in verses 13-15 why He was teaching in parables. At this point in time, He taught the people only in parables. So we have many of these parables listed in this context. Of course, Jesus did not always teach just in parables, but that was the case at this time.

This fulfilled a prophecy taken from Psalm 78:2, which was prophesied that God would speak to the people by means of parables uttering truths kept secret where from the foundation of the world.

13:36-43 – In the parable of the tares, the one who sowed good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. At the harvest the tares are gathered up and burned. All things that offend will be gathered out of the kingdom and cast into the furnace of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. The righteous will shine in the kingdom of the Father.

Later, when Jesus had sent the multitudes away, the disciples asked him to explain the meaning of the parable of the tares. He then proceeded to explain the meaning of each element of the parable.

In properly interpreting Jesus' parables, it is not always possible to assign specific spiritual meaning to every specific item mentioned in the parable. However, in the case of this particular parable, the explanation that Jesus Himself gave explains the meaning of the following items:

* The householder who sowed good seed represents Jesus, the Son of Man.

* The field represents the world. Note: Jesus' own explanation states that the field is the world. To equate the field with the church or with Jesus' spiritual kingdom is to misunderstand and to contradict Jesus' own explanation.

* The good seed, which is the wheat, represents the sons of the kingdom, that is the disciples of Jesus.

* The tares represent the sons of the evil one, that is sinners.

* The enemy who sowed the tares represents the devil.

* The harvest represents the end of the world.

* The reapers represent angels.

Jesus' explanation is as follows: at the end of the age, the tares will be gathered up and burned in the fire. The Son of Man will send his angels who will gather from His kingdom all those who do iniquity and practice lawlessness. These will be cast into a furnace of fire where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Observe the exalted position which Jesus calmly and naturally attributes to himself. He is the one who sows good seed in the world. And He is the one who will send angels to judge the good and the bad throughout the world. Who but God could occupy this position, and what mere man would make such claims if he were truly honest?

In this parable, the kingdom must refer to the world, since Jesus himself said the field is the world and the tares would be allowed to continue to grow there till the harvest. Jesus rules as king of kings over the entire world. I do not see how this can mean that these tares and wicked ones are here characterized as being in Jesus' spiritual kingdom, the church.

The righteous will then shine as the sun in the kingdom of the Father. No sin or sinners will be included, since all these have been removed. Again, Jesus calls upon those who have ears to listen carefully to the message that He is proclaiming.

Notice that at this point Jesus is giving the explanation for the parable. This is no longer primarily symbolic, but is Jesus' own explanation of the symbols. In that explanation Jesus said the wicked would be cast into a furnace of fire. While perhaps there is some element of symbolism in this, it cannot be denied that Jesus intended for us to understand that the wicked will be punished in fire.

Applications to church discipline

Some say that this passage teaches that churches must not practice withdrawing from erring members, but must leave them in the church until the judgment. This is clearly mistaken for the following reasons:

1. Other Scriptures clearly require the church to practice church discipline. This involves withdrawing our association from those in the church who sin and refuse to repent, so that we do not keep company with them. This practice is clearly commanded in Scripture, and the Bible does not contradict itself.

See 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10,11; Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 1:3-11,19,20; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11; 2 John 9-11; Hebrews 12:15; 1 Corinthians 15:33.

2. The field in which the wheat and tares grow together is the ***world*** – verse 38. Good and bad people coexist in the world. The passage does not say that the field is the church or Jesus' spiritual kingdom. McGarvey points a similar use of "kingdom" in the parable of the pounds, in which the kingdom includes those who did not want the king to reign over them – Luke 19:14,15,27.

3. Gathering the tares from the field, as discussed in the parable, refers to uprooting them – verses 28-30. This is explained to mean casting them into the furnace of fire so they are burned. This refers to eternal punishment – verses 40-42. This could never be done in church discipline, and it could not possibly refer to church discipline. No Christians ever have the right or power to do it. The servants who do this uprooting are angels, not other Christians. The Christians are the wheat: they are not the servants who do the harvesting, but they are part of that which is harvested. So the passage has no reference to discipline in the church.

The point of the passage is that the angels did not immediately take sinners from the earth and send them to hell. They wait till the judgment when Jesus returns. Saints and sinners coexist in the world till then. If men are punished eternally as soon as they appear to be tares, many good people would be lost.

13:44-46 – The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. A man found it and joyfully sold all that he had to buy the field. And the kingdom is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls who, when he found one pearl of great price, sold all that he had and bought it.

These two parables show the value or worth of the kingdom. In both of them, the blessings received by submitting to Jesus can be compared to great treasure. In the first parable that value is compared to treasure hidden in a field. In the second it is compared to a pearl of great price. In both cases, men found them and gave everything they had to obtain them.

Treasure buried in a field would have been much more common in that day than today. The concept is described also in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25:25 and in Proverbs 2:4 and in Job 3:21.

Both parables teach that the blessings in the kingdom are so valuable the one should be willing to give up everything else in order to obtain them. Nothing else is of equal value, so nothing should be allowed to stand the way of receiving the blessings of the kingdom.

The difference in the parables is that in one case a person was looking for what he found. In the other case, one somehow came across it apparently unexpectedly. However, he recognized its value when he saw it and did what was needed to obtain it. Whether a person is searching for the truth of the gospel or whether he simply comes across it as an unexpected blessing, either way he must put forth the effort necessary to receive that blessing, no matter what it may cost him.

And note further the sacrifice that the men in the parables made to obtain that which they desired. They gave all that they had in order to obtain what they considered to be so greatly valuable. What are we willing to sacrifice in order to have the blessings of God's kingdom? What efforts have we made to study His word, worship Him, pray to Him, and bring forth the fruit that He desires? Or have we allowed the cares of this world and other things to hinder us? Are we truly willing to give all that we have for the kingdom?

Philippians 3:7,8 – But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

Note the joy that results when men receive the fruits of the kingdom. When we really appreciate the value of God's role in our lives, we will be willing to make the sacrifices necessary to serve Him. People will not have to try to force us or compel us to make the sacrifices. We will see the value of it ourselves.

13:47-50 – The kingdom is like a dragnet cast into the sea that gathered some of every kind. When it was drawn to shore, the good was gathered into vessels, but the bad was thrown away. So at the end of the age the angels will separate the good from the bad, and the wicked will be cast into the furnace of fire.

This parable is similar to that of the parable of the tares. In this case a dragnet is cast into the sea and gathers every different kind of sea creature. When it is full, it is taken to shore and the contents are separated good from bad. The good is saved, but the bad is thrown away.

This once again illustrates that, at the end of the age, the angels will separate the wicked from the just. The wicked will be cast into the furnace of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. See the parable of the tares for more detailed explanation.

13:51-53 – Jesus asked if the disciples had understood. When they said that they did, He said that a scribe instructed about the kingdom is like a householder who brings from his treasure things new and old.

Jesus then asked if the disciples now understood the teachings that He had given in His parables. When they affirmed that they had, He then gave them one last illustration in which He compared a scribe, who is teaching concerning the kingdom of heaven, to a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.

One who teaches the word of God must remind people of things they have already heard before, but he should also challenge them with things they may not have understood in the past. People do not always need to be taught things they do not already understand. Sometimes they need to be reminded and urged to remember and practice things they have already heard in the past. The responsibility of faithful teacher of God's word is to present teaching of both kinds.

Jesus had finished His parables, so He left and went elsewhere.

13:54-56– When Jesus came to his own country, the people were astonished and wondered where He got His wisdom and mighty works. They knew He was the carpenter's son, His mother was Mary, and His brothers were James, Joses, Simon, and Judas. And His sisters were with them.

See also Mark 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30.

As He continued preaching, Jesus came to His "own country." The parallel passages show that He was in His hometown in Nazareth. There He entered the synagogue and taught on the Sabbath day, as He customarily did.

Note that, contrary to the accusations made against Him, Jesus regularly kept the Sabbath. But remember also that He lived under the

Old Testament law. He also offered animal sacrifices and told others to do so – see Luke 2:21ff.

Other passages show that the Old Law was in effect till He died (Hebrews 9:16,17; Galatians 4:4; Colossians 2:14). That law, including the Sabbath, was removed when He died and is no longer in effect. See Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17.

We also learn that Jesus was diligent in attending the regular worship assemblies of God's people in His day. He used every opportunity to meet and teach, and He made other opportunities outside the regular meetings. We today also have regular church meetings to worship God and study His word. Jesus' example teaches that we too should be regular in customarily attending such meetings in the local church today.

The people there witnessed and were amazed at His teaching and miracles, but they were troubled because they knew Him. He was (they thought) the son of Joseph, and they knew His brothers and sisters. He had grown up among them. They could not imagine one they had known all their lives could be such a great teacher. Compare John 6:42.

John 7:15 – And the Jews marveled, saying, "How does this Man know letters, having never studied?"

However, we observe that, even though these people did not accept Jesus, yet they could not deny the wisdom of His teaching and the validity of His miracles. They openly admitted His "mighty works." Once again we observe that, even those who refuse to become followers of Jesus could not deny His miracles.

Furthermore, McGarvey observes that, despite their inclination to oppose Jesus, not only could the people not deny His miracles, but they raised no objection to His morals or personal character or conduct. No doubt many of them had known Him since childhood. Yet the worst accusation that they could make against Him was His humble family connections.

Note again that Jesus did have physical brothers and sisters. See our notes on Matthew 12:46-50.

13:57,58 – Seeing that the people were offended at Him, Jesus said that a prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house. Because of their unbelief, He did not do many mighty works there.

Jesus recognized their unwillingness to acknowledge Him, so He responded to it. He said a prophet may be honored in many places, but the people who would be the least likely to accept him would be those "in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house."

When people know a person's childhood, they often don't see him as anyone special. They don't expect someone raised among them to

become greater than they are. They may reject him or are at least much harder than others to convince.

So Jesus refused to do many miracles there, because of their unbelief – though other accounts say that He did heal a few sick people (Mark 6:5). As explained in Luke's account, Jesus knew they wanted miracles, but He also knew their hearts that they would not believe even if they saw miracles.

The purpose of miracles was to give reason to believe (John 20:30,31; etc.). Miracles were not done just to solve people's physical problems, but to present evidence that one was a representative of God and God's power worked in him.

Knowing from the outset that these people would not believe, Jesus knew there was no point in doing the miracles. He would not do them just for their entertainment or to satisfy their curiosity. So He marveled at their unbelief and continued teaching in other places.

Matthew 14

Chapter 14 – Death of John the Baptist and Additional Miracles

14:1-12 - Death of John the Baptist

(Compare Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9.)

14:1,2 – Herod the tetrarch heard about Jesus and concluded that He was John the Baptist risen from the dead.

The account here returns to a discussion of John the Baptist. The last we had heard of him he was in prison. At this time we are told that Herod the tetrarch heard about Jesus and concluded that he was John the Baptist risen from the dead. This was his explanation for why Jesus had the powers that He did.

Coffman says this Herod was a son of Herod the Great (see chapter 2), and that he inherited the tetrarchy of Galilee and Peraea. He visited his half-brother Herod Philip II in Rome and fell in love with Philip's wife Herodias, who was also a niece to Herod the Tetrarch. He divorced his wife, married Herodias, and made her his queen.

When Herod the Great had died, the territory that he had ruled was divided up among his sons. The Herod referred to here was also known as Herod Antipas. Jesus later referred to this Herod as a fox (Luke 13:32). He was also the same Herod before whom Jesus appeared during one of His trials (Luke 23:6-12). Other passages indicate that some people in Herod's household may have been disciples of Jesus (see Luke 8:3; Acts 13:1).

Note that, by human standards, Herod here paid Jesus a great compliment. John the Baptist was a great prophet. To compare any man to John, and especially to think he was John risen from the dead and therefore did great miracles, would be a great compliment. Many people today would make a similar claim regarding the greatness of Jesus.

However, in Jesus' case, this failed to begin to measure to the greatness of who Jesus really was. Compare Matthew 16:13-18. Other people compared Jesus to John or to other great prophets, but such a

view is totally inadequate. We understand Jesus only if we view Him as the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus blessed Peter for confessing this truth.

Once again we observe that, even those who were no friends of Jesus, could not deny the fact that He did miracles. They may come up with all kinds of explanations for where He got the power. In this case Herod thought He got it from being a prophet raised the dead. But in any case, he recognized that Jesus had great powers.

14:3,4 – Herod had imprisoned John because John said it was not lawful for him to have Herodias, who was the wife of his brother Philip.

Herod was evidently feeling guilt for the murder of John. This account is told after John's death, showing Herod's reaction when he heard about Jesus. Herod had been responsible for John's death, and we are now told, in retrospect, how it happened.

The conflict initiated because John told Herod it was not lawful for him to have Herodias, the wife of Herod's brother Philip. For the sake of Herodias, who we will see much despised John for having said this, Herod had imprisoned John.

Several lessons can be learned here:

(1) Sin must be rebuked.

John was a faithful, outspoken man of God who plainly told Herod of his sin. Many people today would tell us we should not so rebuke sin – that it is not Christ-like, we should not "judge," we should be more loving, etc. Yet John did what people say ought not be done.

The Bible repeatedly instructs us that such teaching is not just acceptable, but it ought to be done. Instead of criticizing John and others who rebuke sin, we ought to be ashamed when we are too cowardly to do likewise. See Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4.

(2) Even civil rulers should be rebuked when they are in sin.

The Bible tells us to obey and respect rulers. Some think this means that, even if you might normally speak out about a sin, you should keep quiet if the guilty person is a ruler. So in the name of "separation of church and state," preachers are told to keep quiet about moral issues on which rulers have taken stands that contradict the Bible.

But John believed rulers who sin should be rebuked, and so likewise did many other men of God such as: Elijah who rebuked Ahab (1 Kings 18); Nathan who rebuked David (2 Samuel 12); Daniel who rebuked Nebuchadnezzar and others (Daniel 4,5); etc.

(3) Those who speak out for truth ought to expect persecution.

Throughout history this has been true. John the Baptist was here imprisoned and beheaded. Other persecuted men of God include Abel (Genesis 4), Elijah (1 Kings 19), Paul (2 Corinthians 11:16-33), Stephen (Acts 7), James (Acts 12), and of course Jesus, as well as many others.

We should expect the same to happen to us in various forms (2 Timothy 3:12; see our notes on Matthew 5:10-12), and should be willing to pay the price without compromising truth.

> "Virtue is undesirable to those who are immoral; holiness is abhorrent to those who are impious; chastity is an enemy to those who are impure; integrity is a hardship for those who are corrupt; frugality runs counter to those who are self-indulgent; mercy is intolerable to those who are cruel, as is loving-kindness to those who are pitiless and justice to those who are unjust." – Peter Chrysologus (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

(4) Some people are involved in marriages that are inherently sinful, and the only way to solve the problem is to leave the marriage.

When this is the case, faithful preachers of God's word, like John, must be willing to speak the truth regardless of what price they must pay as a result.

Some today, even in the church, would tell us that God would never be so cruel as to require a marriage to break up. We are told that, if it is improper to enter into a marriage, such as in the case of an unscriptural divorce and remarriage, then it is only necessary to repent of having entered the marriage, but it is not necessary to end the remarriage.

But note that John said it was not lawful for Herod to "***have***" her. He did not say it was just unlawful for him to "take" her but he could keep her if he would repent of having taken her. The clear indication of the word "have" is that the marriage relationship itself was unlawful. The only way to correct such a wrong would be to cease "having" her: end the relationship.

So, here is one clear example showing that it is not at all contrary to the character of God to tell people they must break up unscriptural marriages. If the marriage relationship itself is sinful, then the only way to repent and become right with God is to end the marriage.

This has happened in other Bible examples (see Ezra 10). It would surely apply in cases of polygamy and homosexual "marriage." It follows that this is also true in cases of unscriptural divorce and remarriage (see our notes on Matthew 19:3-9; 5:31,32. Compare 1 Corinthians 7:10,11; Romans 7:2,3). Faithful preachers must, like John, have the courage to speak out in such cases, no matter how angry the man and woman become (as they did in the case of Herod and Herodias).

Note that there may be several possible reasons why this particular marriage was unlawful. Divorce and remarriage, in and of itself, was not sinful under the law, nor was it forbidden for a man to have more than one wife. The text says Herodias was Philip's wife, so perhaps he had never yet divorced her. In such a case she had two husbands, and this is never recorded as being accepted by God even when men were allowed to have plural wives.

However, Kyle Pope records a quotation in which Josephus claims that Herodias divorced her husband in order to marry Herod Antipas. But even though men were permitted to divorce their wives, women were not permitted to divorce their husbands.

Another possibility is that the marriage violated the law which forbade a man to marry a near kin (remember that Herodias was Herod's niece) or the wife of his brother (Leviticus 18:6,16; 20:21), except in case it was necessary to raise up descendants to a deceased brother.

14:5 – Herod wanted to slay John, but was afraid of the multitude who viewed John as a prophet.

Mark 6:19 says that Herodias had desired for some time to kill John, presumably because of his teaching about their marriage. Herod himself had some desire to kill John. However, we are told the reason why, to this point, Herod had not done so. It was not because he had conscientious or moral objections to it, but because he was afraid to anger the crowds who considered John a prophet.

Many leaders today have similar motives, including many politicians (John 12:41,42; 13:6). The goal is simply to do what the people want, regardless of the moral issues involved and regardless of what God says. This puts the people above God, and even if a man ends up doing what is outwardly right, still he is wrong because he has wrong attitudes and motives.

We will see that religious and political leaders, as recorded in the accounts of the life of Jesus, were often afraid to act because of their fears of the people. Often people have the idea that leaders just do what they want, regardless of what other people want. But the fact is that many leaders, even those who are of significantly wicked, nevertheless are often afraid to cross the will of the people.

> "Such fear [of the people] can restrain the power to sin but is unable to remove the will to sin. … It is only the fear of God that can set minds straight, repel criminal actions, preserve innocence and give steadfast power." – Peter Chrysologus (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

14:6-9 – At Herod's birthday celebration, the daughter of Herodias pleased him with her dance, so he vowed to give her whatever she would ask. Prompted by her mother, she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Herod was sorry, but because of his oath, he agreed.

Herod ended up deciding to behead John because Herodias' daughter pleased him by dancing at his birthday celebration. He was so pleased that he promised to give her anything she wanted. At the advice of her mother, she asked for John's head.

Many dances in the Bible, especially the Old Testament, were not sexually suggestive. The dance of Herodias' daughter very likely was suggestive (compare Exodus 32:6,19,25). In any case, it surely had a powerful allurement for Herod, for it led to grave and serious consequences. Modern dances involving couples not married to one another are sexually suggestive and often lead to grave and serious consequences.

Herod suffered the consequences of his impure motives. He did not really want to kill John: the passage says that he was sorry to do so. But now he had various people he sought to please. He wanted to please his step-daughter, to whom he made an oath, and he wanted to please the other people who were present and heard the oath.

This shows the conflicts that people face when they are motivated by desire to please people. they often get in circumstances where they are pressured by different people in different directions. Then whom do they please? This is why a servant of God must put God's will first and let that decide any conflicts (Matthew 10:34-37).

Note also the folly of rash vows. Herod committed himself to do anything his step-daughter wanted before he knew what the consequences would be. The result led to the death of a great man of God. Before we commit ourselves to any promise, we should determine exactly what conditions are required of us. Be very careful to state conditions or at least make sure they are understood, so that we can honorably keep our word without sin (compare James 5:12; Ecclesiastes 5:1-6).

> "…people, aware of the good things in the law, … know it is inappropriate for them to turn away from the glory of the commandments. Yet four factors cause them to give in to sin: an oath, fear of the leaders, the allurements of pleasure and a bad example." – Hilary of Poitiers (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Consider other passages about being overly concerned about pleasing people: John 12:42,43; 5:44; Galatians 1:10; Matthew 6:1-18; 10:34-37; 23:5; 2 Corinthians 10:12,18; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; Acts 4:19; 5:29; Romans 2:28,29.

14:10-12 – So Herod had John beheaded, and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, who in turn brought it to her mother. John's disciples then took away the body and buried it, then went and told Jesus.

Here we are told the final outcome of the story. Herod kept his vow, an evil woman got her way, and John lost his head. It is interesting to observe the conduct of the various people in the story:

(1) Herod was an evil man who committed the sin of an immoral marriage, then his sins led him into deeper and deeper sin. Instead of repenting and backing out, he just went further into sin.

(2) John was a faithful man of God who simply stood up for the truth and preached God's will. For this, like many preachers, he was persecuted. In his case it led to his death.

(3) Herodias' daughter was a pawn who allowed herself to be used by her evil mother. She ought not to have danced seductively before any man. But she ought especially to have rejected any suggestion that she be the means to end the life of a man of God. She was guilty of having fellowship in a sin which she may have had little personal desire to commit.

(4) Herodias illustrates the great harm that can result when an evil woman determines to use her influence and powers for evil ends. She was evidently bitter and resentful that John had said she had no right to be married to Herod. Apparently she had no power herself to kill John, but she got the job done anyway. Many other women throughout history have likewise been the cause of great evils. Never think, because women were created primarily to be followers rather than leaders, that they never get their way.

John had rebuked Herod because he had another man's wife. This was a terrible sin, but not especially noteworthy in the sense that many people throughout history – especially many rulers – have been guilty of the same kind of sin. Had they dropped the matter, little or nothing would be known about their sin in history. But by beheading a great prophet to take vengeance for his rebuke, Herod and Herodias guaranteed that they would be remembered throughout history as notorious criminals.

Sad and disgusting as this story is, modern entertainment would doubtless delight in portraying the story, not in order to condemn the evils done, but in order to portray the lurid details with all their sexual suggestiveness. Doubtless many people would enjoy witnessing a portrayal of such immorality.

John's disciples, having heard what happened, came and took his body, buried it, and went to tell Jesus what had happened. What a sad ending to the life of a great man of God. But like all faithful servants of God, he died with the hope of a better life when this life is over.

14:13-21 - The Feeding of the 5000

(See also Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13. This is the only miracle recorded in all four of the gospel accounts.)

14:13,14 – When He heard about John's death, Jesus departed by boat to a deserted place, but the multitudes followed him. He was moved with compassion and healed their sick.

Jesus left with His disciples for an uninhabited place. (That a "desert" in the Bible is not necessarily dry and lifeless but simply uninhabited, is made clear by the fact the accounts show that this "deserted place" had much green grass.) Mark's account (6:31) shows Jesus did this because they needed a rest. They had apparently just returned from the difficult labors of their travels and teaching in the Limited Commission (Mark 6:30).

However, placing the event in the context, it becomes obvious that this was also Jesus' response to hearing of the death of John. Doubtless this was a time of great hardship and temptation for Jesus. John had been the one sent by God to prepare the way for Jesus. Besides being Jesus' cousin, he had been a great prophet. But here Jesus had just heard that he had been beheaded for preaching the truth.

Surely all of this would have caused great emotional turmoil for Jesus. He knew that eventually His own time would come to die for His preaching. The death of John would surely have reminded him of the great and difficult task He Himself was facing. He sought some time to rest and, we will see, to spend time in prayer.

However, they were unable to escape because the people followed them. Despite His desire for rest, Jesus had compassion on the people and healed their sick. Mark adds that He viewed them as sheep without a shepherd so He taught them. This shows Jesus' unselfish concern for the people. He greatly inconvenienced Himself to meet their needs. It is important to remember that, even when we ourselves are suffering discouragement, we should not neglect our responsibilities to help others. Both we and they would benefit.

14:15-19 – At evening the disciples asked Jesus to send the multitudes away to buy food in the villages. Jesus told them to give the people food, but they said they had only five loaves and two fish. Jesus told the multitudes to sit on the grass, took the loaves and fish, gave thanks and gave to the disciples to give to the multitudes.

The people stayed with Jesus for a long time and when evening came they needed food to eat. The disciples recommended that Jesus send the people to the villages to buy food. Instead Jesus told the disciples to give the people food to eat, but they thought they could not

do so because all they had were five loaves of bread and two fish. This was a lunch from a lad in the crowd – John 6:9.

Jesus had the disciples give Him the food and then He had the people sit on the grass. Other accounts add that they were to sit in groups of hundreds and fifties.

He blessed or gave thanks for the food before passing it out. This practice is often mentioned before meals in the Bible, especially in the gospel. In fact, one would be hard put to find an example of Christians eating when they did not first give thanks. Prayer and thankfulness should be a regular part of our lives, and before meals is an especially good time to be thankful.

Jesus then took the food and distributed to the twelve who in turn gave to the people. Coffman shows there is a symbolic significance in this. What Jesus here did with physical food is what He also did with spiritual food. He is the source of the truth, but it is distributed to the people through His inspired agents. Even as they dispensed physical nourishment on this occasion, so inspired men dispensed spiritual nourishment by inspired teaching during their lifetimes, and by recording the message in writing in the Scriptures for us.

14:20,21 – All the people ate and were filled, and they took twelve baskets full of fragments that remained. Those who had eaten were five thousand men, plus women and children.

To impress on us the greatness of this event and so we will know it could not be possible by natural means, we are told additional specific details. All the people ate and were filled. It was not the case that some just watched or just ate a little. Everybody ate their fill. Then the remnants were taken up and there were many times as much left over as they had to begin with. Finally we are told there were five thousand men present, not counting women and children.

Without these details we might wonder about exactly what happened. But now there can be no doubt that Jesus created many times the food He originally had. He started with enough to feed one boy and ended up with enough to feed far more than five thousand people and then had far more left over than He started with. There is no way to avoid the conclusion that this is impossible by natural means and therefore a great miracle.

Because Jesus had the people take up the remaining fragments, some people use this to teach that Jesus does not want people to be wasteful. This may be true, but it is not the main point. The far more important purpose of taking up the fragments was to prove without question in anyone's mind that a great miracle had occurred. More food was left over at the end by far than they had to begin with.

This miracle teaches us Jesus' great power and confirms the truthfulness of His claims that God was with Him, just as all of His

miracles proved. It also proves His power to provide for the needs of His people. He also showed by His example that He wants us to be thankful for our food.

This miracle especially emphasizes to us Jesus' work as a provider and Creator. Each of Jesus' miracles demonstrates in a miraculous or supernatural way some power that God possesses and uses in a natural way. The power to raise the dead proves that God is the source of life. Likewise, miracles of healing proved that God is the source of help to care for our problems. Here, His power to provide food demonstrates that God is the provider of all our needs.

14:22-33 – Walking on the Water

(See also Mark 6:45-56; John 6:15-21.)

14:22,23 – Jesus told the disciples to go to the other side of the sea while He sent away the multitudes. Then He went on a mountain by Himself to pray and was there alone when evening came.

Having performed this great miracle, Jesus again wanted to be alone for awhile. John adds that Jesus realized the people were about to try to make Him a king by violent means. He withdrew from the multitudes because this did not fit His plans (though if premillennialism were true it would fit them perfectly).

He sent the disciples across the sea of Galilee in a boat, sent the multitudes away, and Himself went up into a mountain to pray. Note how often Jesus went to His Father in prayer. Prayer was a continual and powerful force in His life. It ought to be the same for us. He often liked to pray alone on a mountain or in some other deserted place. This harmonizes with His teaching in Matthew 6 about the value of praying in private.

At this point Mark says He sent the disciples away to Bethsaida, John says to Capernaum, and both Mark and Matthew note that they actually land at Gennesaret (Mark 6:45,53; John 6:17; Matthew 14:34). Several possible explanations show there is no contradiction. Gennesaret is a region or area including both Capernaum and Bethsaida (the Sea is sometimes called the Sea of Genessaret). So in traveling either to Capernaum or to Bethsaida, they would have gone to the region of Gennesaret.

It may be that the ship belonged at or was going to Bethsaida, so the twelve landed there and then planned to go by foot to nearby Capernaum (or vice-versa). Or perhaps they had business first at Bethsaida and then went on to Capernaum, etc.

14:24-27 – In the middle of the sea, the boat was tossed by waves caused by a contrary wind. In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them walking on the sea. Seeing Him, the disciples thought it was a ghost and cried out in fear. But Jesus identified Himself and told them not to be afraid.

The disciples launched out, evidently in the evening or night sometime (14:15), but Jesus remained behind. The sea became quite contrary and the disciples were having a difficult time crossing. In the fourth watch (3 AM to 6 AM) Jesus came walking on the water.

Mark adds that Jesus would have passed them by. We are not told why. Perhaps it simply means He was going faster than they were and the result would have been to pass them had He not slowed down to approach them. In any case it is amazing enough that He could even stand on the water.

To prove without question the impossibility of the miracle by natural means, the account says they were in the middle of the sea. The disciples knew this sea well and were well aware that no one could possibly stand there. And yet Jesus was able, not just to stand without sinking, but to walk and move faster than the boat did!

The disciples saw Him and could think of no explanation other than it was a ghost. So they were frightened and cried out. Jesus, however, comforted them assuring them it was simply He, and telling them not to be afraid.

Kyle Pope points out that the Greek expression, here translated "It is I," is exactly the same as Jesus used for Himself in John 8:58 and is the same expression used in the Greek LXX of Exodus 3:14, where God described Himself as "I am."

14:28-31 – Peter asked if he could walk on the water to Jesus. When Jesus approved, Peter did so until he saw the wind. He became afraid and asked the Lord to save him. Jesus rescued him and said he had little faith.

Impetuous as ever, Peter asked Jesus if he could do a similar thing to what Jesus was doing. He wanted to walk on the water to Jesus. Jesus granted the wish, and Peter began walking on the water to Jesus. Despite his first success, Peter began to see the wind and the sea and became afraid. He began to sink and called out to the Lord to save Him, which Jesus did. However, Jesus rebuked Him for His little faith and His doubting.

Notice that doubts and fears are the enemies of faith. That is, faith is what gives us power to do right despite our doubts and fears. It is when we allow our doubts and fears to overwhelm our faith that we fail to serve God as we should. It follows that, when we allow doubts and fears to cause us to fail in some area of our service to God, then we too demonstrate a lack of faith.

As long as Peter kept His eyes on Jesus and what He could accomplish, Peter himself could accomplish great things. When he took his eyes off Jesus and began to observe the overwhelming problems involved, he began to fail. The same is true of us. If we keep our eyes on Jesus' provision and power, we can do much good. When we take our eyes off Him and began to consider the problems life presents, we fail.

We might criticize Peter for his lack of faith. However, the other disciples did not even attempt what he did, and likely most of us would not either. And often we fail in what we do attempt for the same basic reason that he did. Far too often, we too have a problem of a lack of faith. Examples like this help us see our need to grow in faith.

14:32,33 – When Peter and Jesus got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those in the boat worshiped Jesus saying that He was truly the Son of God.

When Peter and Jesus entered the boat, the wind ceased, and the twelve worshiped Jesus for His power saying he was the Son of God. Peter had failed because of a lack of faith. Yet the result of the miracle that Jesus did was to give His apostles evidence to strengthen their faith.

This miracle teaches several things:

(1) As with all miracles, we see the power of Jesus, confirming His claims and His teaching as being from God. The primary purpose of miracles was always to confirm a message or a messenger to be from God. In this case, the miracle done by Jesus confirmed the faith of the twelve that Jesus is the Son of God.

(2) We see His power over the elements. Since He created the wind and the sea, surely He can control them. He can use them in ways no mere human could ever do. Likewise, He controls all aspects of the creation, including mountains, seas, stars and heavenly bodies,

(3) We see His power to save. Just as He could save Peter from the sea, so He can save us from sin. When we sink in sin, as we all do, we must appeal to Him to save us.

(4) We see that failure in God's service is due to a lack of faith. As it was in Peter's case, so it is whenever we fall into sin. If we had faith enough we could endure every challenge. We sin when we lack the faith and fail to remain faithful.

(5) We learn that faith must show itself in action. When Peter had faith, he was able to walk on the water, but it was lack of faith that caused him to sink. Likewise, we please God – and in particular we receive salvation from sin – on the basis of obedient faith, not just "faith alone." In Scripture the faith that pleases God must show itself in action.

Note that here Jesus is clearly praised as being the Son of God, and the passage clearly says that they worshiped Him. Surely in this context no one could rightly claim that the word for worship simply meant respect as for a ruler or earthly master. In the context of this miracle and the confession that Jesus is the Son of God, surely this was religious

worship. If Jesus were just a man, such worship should have been clearly forbidden (compare Acts 10:25,26). The fact that Jesus allowed this proves that He recognized Himself as being worthy of worship which only Deity should accept.

14:34-36 – When they crossed over to the land of Gennesaret, the people recognized* Him *and brought all who were sick from the surrounding region. They sought even to touch the hem of His garment, and if they did they were made perfectly well.

This chapter ends with a record of more miracles Jesus did. In fact, all who were ill in Gennesaret were brought to Him and He healed them all. All it took for people to be healed was to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. It was Jesus, of course, not the garment, that did the healing. But some contact was needed to demonstrate the source of the power.

Note that, unlike modern so-called healers, there were no cases too difficult for Jesus. Modern "faith healers" claim they have the same power that Jesus and His apostles had, yet they often fail when they attempt to heal people of certain diseases. In fact, they always fail in the really obvious ailments that are clearly physical (not psychosomatic) in origin. Jesus and His apostles (after Holy Spirit baptism) never tried to heal anyone and failed. No disease was too great for them to cure.

This is another of the many proofs that modern healers are frauds and have not the power they claim. Since the purpose of miracles was to confirm the claim of the teacher to have revelation from God, when modern healers claim they can duplicate Bible miracles but then they fail to do so, we have proof they are not from God.

Matthew 15

Chapter 15 – Conflict about Human Traditions; Further Miracles

15:1-20 - Conflict about Human Traditions

Compare Mark 7:1-23.

15:1,2 – The scribes and Pharisees from Jerusalem asked Jesus why His disciples transgressed the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before they ate.

In this event certain scribes and Pharisees came from Jerusalem and raised a criticism. It is possible that the fame of Jesus and the conflicts that He had with scribes and Pharisees in other areas had raised concerns among those who were from Jerusalem. Since Jerusalem was the location of the temple and the focal point of the Jewish religion, it is reasonable to conclude that these scribes and Pharisees would be considered more expert in the law and in dealing with controversy. McGarvey suggests that perhaps these came with the intent of succeeding in controversy with Jesus where others had failed.

The Jewish leaders followed numerous traditions handed down from their leaders. This included traditions about washing hands, vessels, etc. – note Mark 7:3,4 (Luke 11:38). In this passage a discussion began between Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees regarding these traditions. It began because the Jews criticized Jesus' disciples for not washing their hands before they ate as required by the traditions.

A tradition refers to a teaching or practice which has been "handed down" (i.e., given from others). The attitude we should have toward a tradition depends on the source and the authority behind it. Some traditions are handed down from God through inspired men. These we are commanded to observe – 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6 (compare verse 14); (1 Corinthians 11:2). These are of divine origin since the apostles were inspired (Galatians 1:11,12; John 16:13; 2 Peter 1:20,21; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; etc.)

The tradition of washing hands, however, was not a tradition from God. The Jews openly admitted it was a tradition of the ***elders***. Its origin

was nowhere authorized, taught, or commanded by God, yet the Jewish leaders criticized those who did not keep it. Jews in that day, as today, evidently respected tradition as having binding authority alongside the law of God. A person was wrong if he violated the traditions of the elders even if no law of God was violated.

"...the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them..." – Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 13.10.6)

> "From this it is clear that the priests were instituting many new practices, even though Moses with great fear and with dreadful words had commanded that one should neither add nor take away anything ... [Deuteronomy 4:2] But this did not at all stop them from instituting new practices." – Chrysostom (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Many people today likewise hold certain practices or beliefs simply because they are traditional. "We've done it this way for years." "My family has always been members of this church." Some churches today argue that certain practices are right simply because they harmonize with the traditions of that church, regardless of whether or not they can be found in the Bible (compare Galatians 1:14)

> "Do we get from the Bible alone all our knowledge and certainty about what God has told us? No, there is also Sacred Tradition ... What is tradition? The Word of God handed on to us by the Apostles in their preaching and by their successors in the church to the present day ... Do you have to believe in tradition? Yes ... we are obliged to accept all the truths contained in the Bible and Tradition..." – *A Catechism for Adults*, William Cogan, 1975 Edition; ACTA Foundation, Chicago, 1975.; pages 9,10.

It is obvious from the attitude and methods of the Jews that they were determined to condemn Jesus. Note that they apparently found no way to condemn Him according to the law of God. They had tried to do that regarding the Sabbath (chapter 12), but were unsuccessful since Jesus was able to prove that His disciples broke, not the law, but only the Jews' traditions about the law. Here they openly accused Jesus' disciples of violating the traditions.

Jesus' response teaches us His attitude toward human traditions. Instead of attempting to show that His disciples had not violated the traditions (as He had done when accused of breaking God's law), He admitted the violation but attacked their false concept regarding traditions.

> "Tradition" (παραδοσις) – "a giving over, giving up; *i.e.* 1. the act of giving up, the surrender ... 2. a giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing, *i.e.* tradition by instruction, narrative, precept, etc. ... hence, equivalent to instruction ... again,

of the body of precepts, especially ritual, which in the opinion of the later Jews were orally delivered by Moses and orally transmitted in unbroken succession to subsequent generations, which precepts, both illustrating and expanding the written law, as they did, were to be obeyed with equal reverence…" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

15:3-6 – Jesus accused them of transgressing God's commands because of their traditions. God said to honor father and mother, and one who curses father or mother should be put to death. But they said a person could be released from honoring his father and mother by claiming that what might have been used to profit his parents had instead been dedicated to the temple.

Tradition is wrong if it releases people from doing what God's word requires them to do.

First, Jesus resisted man-made traditions if they transgress God's commands (verse 3) or make God's law void (verse 6). He gave an example: God's law then, as now, required that people honor their parents and not curse them (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 20:9; Deuteronomy 27:16; compare Ephesians 6:2,3). One application of this teaching was one was required to care for his elderly parents if they had need (see "honor" in the context of 1 Timothy 5:3,4,8,16; compare "honor" in 1 Timothy 5:17 regarding elders; note John 19:25-27).

Jewish tradition, however, released people from this responsibility if they had given money to the temple treasury – compare Mark 7:10-13. The effect of this was to free any man who was unwilling to care for his parents. All he had to do was make the far lesser sacrifice of a gift to the temple. (This was cursing parents in the sense of bringing harm upon them.) So, this tradition released people from doing what the law of God required them to do.

People often do similar things today. Some refuse to care for an elderly parent, even in cases where they really could do so if they would put forth the effort. Instead they choose to avoid their responsibility by putting the parent in an institution or nursing home paid for by the government or the church. They think this approach is acceptable because it is a customary practice viewed as acceptable by society. So following tradition allows them to escape their responsibility by accepting the far less demanding responsibility of paying taxes or giving to the church.

Many other man-made traditions likewise release people from obedience to divine commands. Some traditions teach as a matter of doctrine that obedience to God is not necessary to receive eternal life at all. Others teach that we need not remember Jesus' death in the Lord's

Supper each first day of the week (Acts 20:7). Still others release people from the command to be buried in baptism, saying all that is needed is sprinkling or pouring (Romans 6:4).

So tradition is wrong if it releases people from doing what God's word requires them to do. Jesus said this was rejecting the command of God.

Note that Jesus did not deal directly with the issue of washing hands. Instead He dealt with the issue of ***authority***. We need to learn this lesson in our religious discussions. We must first settle how we should decide what is right or wrong, else we can never agree on specific applications.

Note also the strong commitment Jesus expressed for the written law. First, He quoted statements from the written law and said this was what God commanded. Then He said that those who would release one from obedience was making the commandment of God of no effect. So, although the law had been written at least fourteen hundred years earlier, Jesus recognized it as the commandment of God, He believed that people even in His day must respect it as Divine commandment, and He taught that those who released people from observing it were guilty of making God's commandment of no effect.

15:7,8 – Jesus applied to them the prophecy of Isaiah about people who drew near to God with their mouth and honored Him with their lips, but their heart was far from Him.

Next Jesus deals with the teaching of the law itself regarding human laws in religion. He quotes Isaiah 29:13 showing tradition can be wrong in two other ways:

Traditional practices are wrong if, in carrying them out, we are simply going through the motions of serving God without meaning what we say.

The fact that a practice is repeated regularly does not of itself prove that it is sinful or that people are simply going through outward motions. In fact, many divinely-authorized traditions involve repeated participation in practices, such as having the Lord's supper every week, giving every week, and even assembling frequently for Bible study and prayer.

However, merely following human traditions often lends itself to going through outward motions without sincere dedication in the heart, and this was often the case with the traditions practiced by the Jews. By their tradition a man could loudly profess his faith in God because he gave money to the temple, yet his heart was far from Him for he did not even obey the basic command to care for his parents. Likewise, he could think he was very religious because he kept the outward ritual of washing

his hands, and yet, like these Jews, he could still be full of all kinds of inward evils.

In other examples we have already studied, a Jew might think he was quite devout because he obeyed outward traditions about the Sabbath, yet he might use those very traditions as a means of condemning people who were doing good works on the Sabbath. See other examples that Jesus listed in Matthew 6:1-18 and Matthew chapter 23.

Likewise, similar problems are very common today when people justify their religious practices on the basis of tradition without Scriptural authority. Such people often go through the outward rituals ordained by their traditions and therefore think they are very religious. Yet in reality their hearts are far from God because they are practicing things that contradict His will or that are unauthorized by it.

Consider, for example, those who diligently worship God on Christmas or Easter but between times they participate in many forms of immorality. Or similarly, consider those who will repeatedly confess sins to a priest then proceed to knowingly repeat the very kinds of sins they have confessed.

For other passages about the importance of serving God sincerely from the heart, see 1 Corinthians 13:1-7; Matthew 6:1-18; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 8:5; Galatians 2:20.

15:9 – In vain they worship God teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

Tradition is wrong if it involves people in teaching as doctrine the commands of men.

Many traditions that men have invented involve people in practicing things that differ from what God told us to do. The traditions may lead us to practice things God never authorized. We do them because men invented them, yet they do not fall within the meaning of what God said for us to do in His service. The end result, as Jesus said here, is that people are acting by human authority and/or disobeying divine commands. This makes worship vain (empty, futile, worthless).

Here are some examples of practices that many churches traditionally follow but which differ from what God's word tells us to do: man-made creeds as a standard for the church, church laws passed by councils of men, prayer to Mary or saints, calling a preacher "Reverend," infant baptism, baptism by sprinkling or pouring, earthly headquarters for the church, celibacy of priests, religious celebrations of man-made holy days, salvation by "faith alone" without obedience to the gospel, one man as "pastor" of a church, church fundraising by raffles and rummage sales and bazaars, instrumental music in worship, etc.

To learn more about these practices, we urge you to study our free articles on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct.

Note that what Jesus says here about tradition, is true also about practices done from any other source, if they have these same characteristics Jesus has condemned. We are wrong in any practice, whether we practice it from tradition or any other reason, if in doing it we fail to do what God commands, if we are not sincerely meaning our service to God, or if we are involved in practices invented by men but nowhere authorized by God.

For other passages about the danger of following human doctrines, see Matthew 15:13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; 26:2; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Isaiah 24:5; 30:1; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13; John 5:43; 1 Chronicles 15:13; 1 Kings 12:26-33; 2 Kings 17:19.

Not all practices violate God's word simply because they are traditional.

On the other hand, note that Jesus is not here making a blanket condemnation of all practices that are traditions, but only those which meet the conditions He describes. Some people swing to the opposite extreme and rebel, thinking all practices are wrong simply if they have been practiced for many years. Jesus is not saying this.

Some practices are continued for years because God commanded them. Examples are singing, prayer, the Lord's supper, baptism, etc. These have been practiced for years and come down to us today. So, they are traditions, yet Jesus does not condemn them but requires them.

Likewise, some traditions even have a human element in them yet they do not inherently violate any of the principles Jesus here discussed. On the contrary they may constitute authorized practices. Examples would include worshiping every Sunday at 10:30 AM, having a similar order from week to week in our worship, having Bible study every Wednesday, owning a building in which the church meets, supporting a gospel preacher to work with the local church, using songbooks, etc.

These practices are authorized because they fall within the meaning of what God has told us to do. However, there is an element of human decision in them because the authorized leaders of the church must make some decisions in order to carry out the commands God gives the church. At the same time, however, we should be aware that the church would have the right to change to any other authorized alternative, and we should not condemn other congregations that decide differently as long as what they decide violates no New Testament principle.

So, a practice is not wrong just because it is a tradition. The issue is whether or not the tradition is in harmony with God's will. Traditions are like the religion of our parents, the teachings of preachers, having a good conscience, etc. Whether a practice is right or wrong is not

inherently determined by whether or not it was believed by our parents or was taught by some preacher or is a tradition. A practice might be a tradition or taught by our parents, etc., and still be right. But none of these things of themselves is sufficient weight to prove a practice is right. To prove it is right we must find Bible authority for it. God's word is the only standard.

The fundamental error of the Jews, which Jesus is here rebuking, is that they followed traditions of the elders as being valid and even binding despite the fact they violated Divine principles in doing them. The Jews were wrong, not simply because they had traditions, but because they allowed their traditions to lead them to displease God in the ways Jesus here described.

Note that Jesus here does what we often need to do. The people questioned a specific practice like people often question us today. But quite generally people misunderstand the practice because they have an improper approach to Divine authority. Jesus could not answer the specific question till He first corrected their misunderstanding of authority. We must do the same when, as is often the case, people ask us questions that show a misunderstanding of Bible authority (such as the practices we have listed above).

15:10,11 – Jesus told the multitude that a man is defiled, not by what goes into the mouth, but by what comes out of his mouth.

Having proved the Jews were wrong in the fundamental method by which they attempted to settle the issue of washing hands, Jesus then returned to the original issue of whether or not it was wrong to eat with unwashed hands. He explained that washing hands was not necessary because what makes a man defiled is that which comes out of the mouth that, not what goes into the mouth (see notes on verses 15-17 for further explanation).

Note that Jesus gives this explanation, not to the Jews who originally questioned Him, but to the multitudes. The questioners were clearly not honest men. Jesus dealt with the issue of authority, which is what they really needed to hear. However, He did not leave the basic question unanswered lest the crowds misunderstand or even think He had no grounds for the stand He took on that issue.

15:12 – Jesus' disciples then asked Him if He realized that the Pharisees were offended when they heard His saying.

The disciples then came and pointed out that Jesus had offended the Pharisees. No doubt He had done so. He had disproved the whole foundation for much of their religion by disproving their view of tradition. He had implied they were hypocrites. And He had clearly said they were violating God's law.

The Pharisees were respected and honored religious leaders in their day. Jesus' accusations could be compared to making such charges against the preachers and bishops of some major modern denomination. No wonder the disciples were concerned about the effect of Jesus' words. Many people today likewise object when we teach against the errors of religious leaders of our day.

Did Jesus apologize for His words? Not at all, but instead He repeated and reinforced the saying and made it stronger (verses 13,14). Yet there are Scriptures that teach us not to offend people. So some people hold the false conclusions that we must never be guilty of saying anything that offends anyone. Jesus' response shows that we need a better understanding of the concept of causing offense.

Jesus offended people, not just here, but on many occasions; yet we know He never did wrong. His apostles and prophets likewise often offended people by their teaching. This frequently happens when sin is rebuked, and multitudes of Scriptures show the need for sin to be rebuked. In almost every city Paul entered, he had to flee from angered people. So we need to learn the difference between causing offense sinfully and teaching that offends without causing sin.

In many ways this issue is similar to our discussion of tradition: it may be wrong to follow tradition, but it is not always wrong. Similarly, offending others may or may not be wrong depending on why they were offended. If we preach false doctrine, if we set a bad example that leads others to sin, if we preach with an ungodly attitude, or if we press our personal liberties to the point others violate their consciences, then we would be guilty of causing unscriptural offense (Matthew 18:6,7; Romans 16:17,18; Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8 & 10).

But if we preach the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and people are upset by the truth because it condemns their practice and they are not willing to change, then many Scriptures would show that we have done what is right. In these cases, the fault lies with the people who refuse to accept the truth. And like Jesus, we must continue to speak truth even if others are offended by it.

Other passages teaching us to rebuke sin include: Revelation 3:19; Matthew 5:23,24; 18:15-17; Luke 17:3,4; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:10-13; Proverbs 28:4.

15:13,14 – Jesus taught that every plant will be uprooted if it has not been planted by the Father in heaven. He said to let those religious leaders alone because they were blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a ditch.

Plants that had not been planted by the Father

Even though His teaching had offended the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus did not apologize but strengthened and repeated the teaching. In verse 9 He had taught that worship is vain when based upon the doctrines and teachings of men that do not agree with the teachings of God.

Here He repeats that teaching by comparing human doctrines to plants not planted by the Father. He says such teachings will be uprooted (verse 13). In a garden there are good plants and plants that are useless and even harmful. A good gardener will uproot and throw away those plants that are harmful.

Likewise, Jesus says every teaching that does not originate with the Father in heaven will be uprooted. The very fact a teaching is human in origin and not Divinely authorized is sufficient grounds for it to be rejected (see notes on verse 9).

Blind leaders of the blind

Then Jesus made specific application to the men who teach such teachings. He said they are blind leaders. Despite the respect and influence they had in the eyes of the people, Jesus did not back off His condemnation of them. He could not because they were leading people astray. A blind leader cannot show the way for other people to follow because he does not know the way. He will simply lead them astray. This is the case with these teachers of human doctrines.

Many people believe that, if they follow men who teach them things that are not right, God will condemn the teacher but accept the follower because he was just doing what he was told. This is in fact official doctrine in some churches.

> "Obey blindly, that is, without asking reasons. Be careful, then, never to examine the directions of your confessor. ... But you say, if I am damned in consequence of obeying my confessor, who will rescue me from hell? What you say is impossible...." – *The True Spouse of Jesus Christ*, by St. Alphonsus Marie Liguori, pages 351,352

But God says the teacher and the follower both receive the same destiny. This is why we are so often warned about the danger of false teaching. Such men can lead people to be lost eternally (Matthew 7:15-23; 15:14; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; Acts 20:28-30; 1 John 4:1; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Titus 1:9-14; 2 John 9-11; Romans 16:17,18; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter chapter 2).

This is also why we must search the Scriptures to make sure we do not accept just whatever religious teachers say but only what God's word says (Acts 17:11).

15:15-17 – When Peter asked for an explanation, Jesus explained that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and is eliminated.

Further discussion about eating with unwashed hands

Peter asks Jesus again about the teaching on eating with unwashed hands, and Jesus explains that the practice is entirely a matter of personal hygiene having nothing to do with moral purity or one's spiritual relationship to God. If one eats with dirt on his hands the worst thing that happens is that it passes into his stomach, through his system, and out the intestines, having done no spiritual harm whatever. So, it is not a matter of spiritual significance one way or the other (compare verse 20).

It is not wrong to wash hands, if one chooses to, as a matter of personal hygiene. In fact, there is physical value in it. But it is not a spiritual issue and therefore no religious law should be made about it, as the Pharisees had done.

Mark 7:19 adds that the same thing is true under Jesus' New Testament teaching regarding the various kinds of meats that, under the Old Testament, were considered unclean. So here we have evidence that one change that would occur under the gospel, as compared to the Old Testament, is that the laws of clean and unclean foods would be removed under the teaching of Jesus – see Colossians 2:16,17.

Does this mean that *nothing* that enters the body is ever wrong spiritually?

No, for some things are of spiritual significance. Some things are not just eliminated from the body having done no harm, as Jesus says is true of dirt on the hands.

If one reads pornography the message goes into the mind and there affects the mind, tempting and influencing one to have evil thoughts. The same is true of false doctrines, immoral entertainment, etc. These affect the heart, which Jesus here says is the basis of moral and spiritual standing (compare Proverbs 4:23).

There are other things primarily physical which can yet have a spiritual significance. Alcoholic beverages and drugs are taken into the body, but again they are not simply eliminated having done no harm. They go into the bloodstream and then affect the mind, weakening one's judgment, inhibitions, and resistance to temptation. So, they are condemned in other passages regarding drunkenness, sobriety, etc.

The same principle can be applied to other things. What Jesus says here must be taken in light of all other teaching elsewhere. The point is that, what is true of the things just mentioned, is not true of dirt on the

hands which does not affect the spiritual standing of a man because it is simply eliminated from his system having done no spiritual harm.

15:18-20 – Man is defiled by the things that come out of the mouth because they come from the heart. This includes evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These things defile a man, but eating with unwashed hands does not defile a man.

Jesus then listed a number of specific things that illustrate the principle that a man is defiled by what comes out of his heart. The list includes:

Evil thoughts

The word for "evil" is a general word for badness. The point is that, when our thoughts are evil, our hearts are already corrupted. This in turn will eventually lead to evil conduct or evil speech. This is the principle that Jesus discussed at length in the Sermon on the Mount (see our notes especially on Matthew chapter 5; see also Matthew 12:34-37; Proverbs 4:23).

Murders

This refers to taking the life of another human being. Others have as much right to live as we do. So, killing another is not doing good, but is unloving (Romans 13:8-10). We would not want others to do it to us, so we ought not do it to anyone else.

People are in God's image; so killing a person (male or female, regardless of age or physical condition) is sinful, whereas killing a plant or animal is not (Genesis 9:2-6). This would include the modern practice of abortion, since the unborn is considered by God to be a child or baby just the same as those who have been born.

To learn more about abortion we urge you to study our free articles on that subject on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct (see the section about moral issues.)

See Genesis 9:2-6; Matthew 15:19,20; Revelation 21:8; 22:15; Romans 13:8-10; Exodus 23:7; 20:13; Proverbs 6:16,17; Deuteronomy 27:25.

Adulteries

Adultery, when distinguished from fornication as it is here, refers to sexual intercourse involving people at least one of whom is married to someone else (Hebrews 13:4). Such a practice results from selfishness and harms everyone involved: those who commit the sexual act and their companions. It is unfaithfulness to one's marriage companion, it damages the marriage relationship, and it is a sin against God.

Adultery is of such a serious nature that it gives the spouse the only Scriptural grounds for divorce (Matthew 19:9). However, when one

divorces for other causes and then remarries, he is guilty of adultery in his remarriage (Matthew 19:9; Romans 7:2,3). So adultery is a very unloving act. One who loves his neighbor will avoid it at all costs (Romans 13:8-10).

For passages on adultery and fornication see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11,18; 7:2-4,9; Romans 7:2,3; Revelation 21:8; 22:14,15; Exodus 20:14; Hebrews 13:4; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:1-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8; Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:23-7:27.

"Adultery" (μοιχεια) – (verb μοιχαω) – "to have unlawful intercourse with another's wife, to commit adultery with... Matthew 19:9..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Fornications

Fornication is a general term for sexual relations outside of scriptural marriage (Hebrews 13:4). It includes all kinds of illicit sexual relations, including adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, etc. See the verses listed above.

Contrary to the teaching of some, here is a passage in which Jesus rebuked the practice of homosexuality. Jude 7 uses this term to refer to the homosexual practices of Sodom and Gomorrah. So, although Jesus did not directly name the practice here, it is included in that which He did name. We will see that the practice is also rebuked by Jesus' statements in Matthew 19, and of course it is rebuked in many other Scriptures as well.

"Fornication" (πορνεια) – "...fornication ... a. prop. of illicit sexual intercourse in general ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Thefts

People should not take other people's property without their permission. Christians realize that people have a right to keep what they worked for. This is called "property rights." Rather than denying the concept, as some allege, the Bible defends the concept.

Of course, God ultimately owns everything, but we "own" what is "ours" in contrast to other people. We want others to respect our property and not steal from us. So, we ought to love our neighbor and not steal his property.

Stealing takes many forms, not just one or two. Besides the obvious forms of armed robbery or shoplifting, there are dishonest business practices, "white collar" theft (juggling the books, extortion, etc.), employee theft, and refusal to pay debts. All these are stealing because one takes that which belongs to others, without their permission.

Clearly stealing is a common problem in modern society. Many people simply are not content to earn their income by an honest occupation.

See Matthew 7:12; Romans 13:6-10; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Exodus 20:15; Isaiah 6:18; 1 Peter 4:15,16; Titus 2:9,10; Matthew 15:19,20; Psalm 37:21; Ezekiel 33:15.

False witness

A witness is "one who can or does aver what he has seen or heard or knows" – Vine. So a false witness is someone who testifies that something is true, when in fact he knows it to be false. This is simply a specific form of lying.

In Exodus 20:16 the Ten Commands said, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

The Jews attempted to use false testimony to condemn Jesus to death (Matthew 26:59,60). They did the same to attempt to convict Stephen (Acts 6:11-13).

Such a practice is well known today even as it was in New Testament times. Not only does false testimony sometimes occur in courtrooms, but it often happens among politicians. Those who seek to persecute God's people also often bear false witness, as we have seen in the case of Jesus and Stephen.

For other passages about false accusation see Deuteronomy 19:16-21; 2 Samuel 11:2-5; 1 Kings 18:17,18; 21:8-13; Psalm 27:12; 35:11; Proverbs 17:15; 18:13,17; 24:28; 25:18; Isaiah 5:20; Matthew 5:10-12; Luke 6:22,23,26; 3:14; John 7:24; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-11 (revilers); Ephesians 4:31; 1 Timothy 6:4; 2 Timothy 3:3; Titus 3:2; 1 Peter 2:1,12; 3:16; 4:4; 3 John 9,10.

Blasphemies

This refers to speaking evil against someone else, especially speaking disrespectfully of God and spiritual things. Evil speech comes from an evil heart – Matthew 12:34-37. To speak respectfully of God, we must think respectfully of God.

> "Blasphemy" (βλασφημια) – "railing, reviling ... a. univ. slander, detraction, speech injurious to another's good name ... b. specifically, impious and reproachful speech injurious to the divine majesty ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

"...speech that denigrates or defames, *reviling, denigration, disrespect, slander* a gener., of any kind of speech that is defamatory or abusive..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

15:21-28 – Healing of the Canaanite Woman's Daughter

Compare Mark 7:24-30.

15:21-24 – Jesus went to the area of Tyre and Sidon, and there a Canaanite woman urged Him to heal her daughter who was severely demon possessed. Jesus refused to answer. His disciples urged Him to send her away because she kept crying after them, but Jesus said He was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

A request from a Canaanite woman

Jesus went to the area of Tyre and Sidon. These are seacoast towns in Phoenicia, outside the territory of Israel (see a ***map***).

We may wonder why Jesus would go to such a place, especially in light of the fact that He said He was sent to the house of Israel (verse 24). Mark 7:24 adds that He went there not wanting anyone to know where He was. This would indicate that He was still looking for a chance to rest. He had sought a place to rest (Mark 6:31), but could not succeed in getting one as the crowds continued to come and make demands on Him. Perhaps He completely left the territory of the Jews to get a rest.

A Canaanite woman came and asked Jesus to have mercy. The fact that she was a Canaanite woman and this was Phoenician territory would mean that she was a Gentile (Mark 7:26 calls her "a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth"). This fact becomes significant in the story. Yet this Gentile woman addressed Jesus, not just as "Lord," but as "Son of David." This would indicate that she not only believed that the Jews would have a Messiah, but she was convinced that Jesus was that Messiah. This was amazing faith in a Gentile. It also indicated how widely the fame of Jesus had spread since, so far as we know, He had never before visited this territory.

She requested Jesus to heal her daughter who was severely demon possessed. When Jesus did not respond to her request, she began to ask the disciples to help. They in turn asked Jesus to deal with it because she was continually crying after them.

Jesus' response

Jesus' responded that He was sent to no one except the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This appears to mean that He would not do a miracle for her because it did not accomplish His purpose. He came to teach and work among the Israelites. She was not an Israelite, so He would not even do a miracle for her.

We know that eventually God intended for all people to have an opportunity to hear the gospel. But Jesus' personal ministry was to Jews, and it was to them that He also restricted the twelve at this time (Matthew 10:5,6). God had prepared the descendants of Abraham for the coming of the Messiah, and He sent Jesus among them at the most

beneficial time. His work required a ministry to the Jews. It would not accomplish His purpose to begin now to preach and work miracles among the Gentiles.

Jesus wanted Gentiles to have the opportunity to be saved (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16; Luke 24:47; etc.). But He had to develop His plan until the time was right to work among them. He must begin among the Jews. He was already strained to the point He could not find rest from all the work He had to do among the Jews. To begin a ministry among Gentiles was not possible for Him at this time, nor was it wise according to the development of God's plan. So, He refused to do a miracle as requested.

This also shows a lesson about the purpose of miracles. If as some claim, the primary purpose of miracles was compassion on the needs of people, Jesus should have helped this woman's daughter without delay. She surely had a need. But He refused, thereby proving, as is often done elsewhere, that His miracles had a higher purpose. The over-riding purpose was to confirm His claims (Mark 16:20; John 5:36-39; 20:30,31; Acts 2:22; 14:3; etc.). When it did not suit this purpose, He did not do miracles, even though people may have benefited.

15:25-28 – When the woman asked Him for help, Jesus said that it was not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. The woman responded that even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table. Jesus said she had great faith and would receive what she desired. Her daughter was healed that very hour.

The woman worshiped Jesus and pled for His help.

The woman came and the record says that she worshiped Him. Once again we have evidence that Jesus accepted worship. In this case He accepted worship from a Gentile woman like He had accepted it from His own disciples in 14:33 (see our notes there). Once again, surely this was not just honor as might be given to an earthly master or civil ruler, since she had just referred to Him as the Son of David and sought miraculous healing. If Jesus did not possess deity, He most certainly should have refused such worship.

Further, the passage states that she pled with Jesus to help her. Her plea sounds like a humble but urgent call for help. Her need was so great that she humbly begged for mercy almost like a drowning man calling for rescue. Her humble, sincere persistence shows her great urgency and also becomes an example to us showing how we should pray for our needs (Luke 18:1-8). Just because God does not at first answer our prayers, that does not mean He will never answer. He may simply be waiting till later according to His purpose.

The illustration of giving the children's food to dogs

Jesus responded with an illustration to explain why He was not helping her. He said you don't take the children's food and give it to the dogs. The point is that food was intended to benefit human beings, so it would be foolish to make children suffer by giving their food to animals. Remember especially that Jews generally considered dogs to be disgusting.

As in verse 24, the application of Jesus' statement was that His work was intended to benefit the children of Israel. They were God's children under the law. It did not fit God's plan to take the benefits intended for them and give them to those who were not God's children.

Like all illustrations, this one should not be taken beyond its intended meaning. Jesus did not mean to say He had no more care for Gentiles than for dogs, nor did He justify the Jewish treatment of Gentiles as if they were dogs. Jesus concern for Gentiles was demonstrated by His treatment of the Samaritan woman (John 4), and His eventual sending of the gospel to the Gentiles. The point of the illustration was that a blessing should not be given to someone other than those to whom it is intended.

The woman, however, with good understanding, took up the illustration and said that, while the Lord spoke the truth, even so sometimes dogs do get some of the children's food. Sometimes crumbs are dropped and the dogs eat them. McGarvey observes, "We know not which to admire more – the readiness of her wit, or the depth of her humility."

She might have been angry at the Lord for His refusal and His comparison. Instead she manifested great determination to have Him help her daughter. She did not take offense or give up. She said she did not want to take anything that would cause loss to the Israelites. What she was asking would be so easy for Jesus that it would amount to no more than giving crumbs to a dog. Such would be no great loss to the children.

The healing

Jesus praised her for her great faith, and performed the miracle she desired. The passage says her daughter was cured from that very hour. Mark 7:30 says, when the woman returned home, she found the devil was gone from her child.

Her faith was demonstrated by the fact that she was so convinced that Jesus could do the miracle, also by the persistence with which she refused to give up, and by the humility with which she accepted Jesus' explanation for why He had not helped her. Again, as McGarvey says, "… as faith increases, he goes up and we go down, so that the greatest humility before him is one evidence of the greatest faith."

> "Then compare her humility with the proud language of the Jews: 'We are Abraham's seed and were never in bondage to any man.' 'We are born of God.' But not so this woman. Rather, she calls herself a dog... For what does Christ then say? 'O woman, great is your faith.'" – Chrysostom (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Jesus praised the great faith of this Gentile in contrast to His criticism of the little faith of Peter in 14:31. Faith is a matter of degree. Not all who have faith have it to sufficient extent to receive God's blessings. Just as doubts indicate a lack of faith, so humility is a demonstration of faith. And in both cases the measure of faith is demonstrated by our conduct. The faith that God rewards in the gospel is always a faith that demonstrates itself in obedience and is rewarded only when obedience has occurred.

This does not mean Jesus had changed His purpose as stated regarding Israel. There was some benefit in confirming His word among these Gentiles. The Bible record of this miracle still serves as evidence, and when Gentiles later heard the message they would see that He had done a miracle among them. But it was only done in an exceptional case, so that He was still justified in refusing generally to do other miracles among them.

Note that miracles were done only when it would serve to provide evidence on which to base faith. However, sometimes they were also a reward for faith, thereby confirming the need for faith. In this case the miracle confirmed that Jesus was who this woman believed Him to be. It confirmed the legitimacy of the faith possessed by such as this woman. So, it served to convince others they ought to have the same faith.

15:29-39 - Feeding of the Four Thousand

Compare Mark 7:31-8:10.

15:29-31 – Jesus traveled around the Sea of Galilee and sat on a mountainside where the multitudes came to be healed. They were amazed when they saw the miracles.

From Tyre and Sidon, Jesus went to the Sea of Galilee, traveled around its edge, sat on a mountainside, and healed the people brought to Him (in contrast to His unwillingness to do miracles in Tyre and Sidon). He healed people who were lame, blind, maimed, unable to speak, etc. As a result all these problems were solved, and the healings were evident to the people. The people gave glory to God.

See how Jesus' miracles differ from those of modern-day professed faith healers. Many come to modern healing services; but people who come with obvious, serious diseases, also leave with obvious, serious diseases. The kind of things done here by Jesus simply cannot be done by modern healers. It is rare they do anything that even looks like these miracles. And what they appear to accomplish does not last if there is a

genuine physical disease. But it is certain that many who come to them for healing will leave without a healing. But Jesus never failed when He attempted to heal anyone.

15:32-36 – Jesus said the multitude had stayed with Him three days and had nothing to eat. He did not want to send them away hungry, but the disciples said they had only seven loaves and a few little fish. He took the loaves and fish, gave thanks, broke them, and gave them to the disciples, who gave to the multitude.

The people had stayed with Jesus for a long time and needed food to eat. Jesus told his disciples that he was concerned about sending the multitude away hungry because they might faint on the way. The language probably does not mean the people had been fasting with no food for three days. Rather, they had been with Jesus three days and for that reason they no longer had any food, probably because they had used up what food they had with them at the beginning.

The disciples could not imagine where they could get food enough in the wilderness to feed so many people. Jesus asked what food they had and they said seven loaves and a few fish. He then had the people sit on the ground. He blessed or gave thanks for the food before passing it out. Praying before meals is often mentioned in the Bible, especially the gospel (see our notes on 14:19).

Although this miracle was similar in many ways to the feeding of the five thousand in 14:15-21, it is clear from the details that they were two separate events. Jesus Himself referred to them as two separate events in 16:9,10. Many of Jesus' miracles were similar to other of His miracles, so why should we be surprised that this kind of miracle occurred on two separate occasions?

And yet there are skeptics today who say that Matthew must have confused the two events. Now think of that. Jesus Himself refers to them as two separate events. Both Matthew and Mark by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit record them as two separate events, and Matthew was also an apostle who was personally present and witnessed both events. And yet we have skeptics today who, even though they were never even born till thousands of years later, are so incredibly egotistical that they think they know better than Jesus, Matthew, Mark, and the Holy Spirit!

15:37-39 – Everyone ate and was filled, and they took up seven large baskets of fragments. Those who ate were four thousand men besides women and children. Jesus then left in a boat and went to the region of Magdala.

The additional details that are given impress on us the greatness of this event, so we will know it could not be possible by natural means. All the people ate and were filled. People did not just eat a little, nor did some eat while others watched. Everybody ate their fill. Then the

remnants were taken up and there were many times as much left over as there had been to begin with. Finally, we are told there were four thousand men present, not counting women and children.

Without these details we might wonder about exactly what happened. But now there can be no doubt that Jesus created many times the food He originally had. He started with a small amount of food and ended up with enough to feed far more than four thousand people. At the end He had far more left over than He started with. There is no way to avoid the conclusion that this is impossible by natural means and so was a great miracle.

Once again, this miracle teaches us Jesus' great power and confirms the truthfulness of His claims that God was with Him. It also proves His power to provide for the needs of His people. And it shows He believes in being thankful for our food.

Note that this is the second time Jesus has done an almost identical miracle (compare Matthew 14:13-21). The repetition of such a miracle emphasizes the power of Jesus.

Jesus then dismissed the multitude and took a boat to Magdala, a town on the western shore of Galilee (see ***map***).

Matthew 16

Chapter 16 – Warning about the Pharisees; Predictions of Jesus' Church and Death

16:1-12 - Warning about the Pharisee's Leaven

Compare Mark 8:11-21; Luke 12:1.

16:1 – The Pharisees and Sadducees tested Jesus, asking Him to show them a sign from heaven.

Pharisees and Sadducees came and sought Jesus to do a sign. The Pharisees and Sadducees were normally opponents in their religious views. Yet in this case they joined together to oppose Jesus. In order to understand what follows, it is important to understand what has preceded and also to understand the motives of these men. Compare Matthew 12:38-42 where a similar request and answer occurred.

These men had already seen many signs. If they were honest and sincere men who simply had never had opportunity to know whether or not Jesus was from God, then Jesus' response would have been different. But these men had seen many signs which have been recorded by Matthew. In Matthew 12:38ff they asked for a sign immediately after they had been told about a great miracle He did, but they said He did it by the power of Satan.

Mark 8:11 says they made this request as a way of tempting or testing Jesus. Their motives were hypocritical. It is not wrong to put a teacher to the test to see whether or not He speaks the truth (1 John 4:1). But it is wrong when we have received abundant proof and reject it because of the hardness of our hearts, but then ask for more proof as if none has been given. This was the case of these men.

16:2,3 – Jesus said that when the sky was red in the evening, they said it would be fair weather. But if the sky was red and threatening in the morning, they said it would be foul weather. They knew how to discern the face of the sky, but could not discern the signs of the times.

Jesus in turn reproved the men because they did not recognize the significance of signs when they saw them, so why should He give them another sign? They recognized weather signs. They could tell whether it was going to rain or be fair the next day. Yet they could not recognize the significance of the signs of the times.

This response shows that the problem was not that the men needed more signs. They had been given many signs already. He had done miracles and fulfilled many prophecies about which these men were well aware (see Matthew 12:15,9-14,22;11:1-6,20-24; chapter 9; etc.). He had done much teaching, all of which should have shown them He was from God. Yet instead of repenting and accepting Jesus' teaching as truth (11:20-24), they just determined to kill Him (12:14).

Had they been honest of heart, like Jesus' disciples, they would have accepted the evidence and not required more. But when they had been given signs, refused to recognize the significance of them, and then asked for more, there was no point in giving more evidence. They would just misunderstand and reject any other signs He did, just as they were misunderstanding and rejecting the rest of His evidence and teaching.

16:4 – Jesus said that a wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and they would receive no sign except the sign of the prophet Jonah. So He left them.

Jesus refused to grant their request for a sign.

He refused to do the sign they requested, saying they were wicked and adulterous. This is the same response He gave in Matthew 12:38ff. The reference to adultery is not literal adultery, but spiritual adultery. A true follower of God should love and submit to His will, like a faithful wife should love and submit to her husband (Ephesians 5:22-25). By following their own will, human desires, and human traditions, these Jewish leaders were acting like an unfaithful wife who fails to show proper love and submission.

The purpose of miracles was to give evidence so people would believe the teaching of the one through whom the miracle was done (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; John 5:36-39; 20:29-31; Hebrews 2:3,4; etc.). If people have seen many miracles but still don't believe, what is the point in giving more miracles? Jesus did not do miracles just to satisfy curiosity. He did them if people needed proof of the truth. When people had received that evidence and shown themselves to be dishonest, why keep giving them more evidence?

Jesus did, however, offer one more miracle even for these people: – the sign of the prophet Jonah. This is explained in Matthew 12:39,40 to mean that, as Jonah was three days in the whale's belly, so Jesus would be three days and nights in the heart of the earth. This of course refers to the fact Jesus would be raised from the dead. Here is the greatest proof of all. If people did not believe the miracles they personally saw Jesus do, maybe they would believe this one (and in fact many did – see Acts 2, etc.).

There was no point continuing to do the kind of signs these people requested, so Jesus refused. But He would give one more miracle which would be the final test of whether or not they were honest enough to accept the truth.

Some modern-day "faith healers" use this passage to justify refusing to do miracles when challenged by those who want to test their claims to do miracles.

But as we discussed in chapter 12, this response is unfair for several reasons (see also our notes on 12:38):

(1) The Bible tells us to put teachers to the test when they make claims to be from God – 1 John 4:1. How can we test these people's claim to do miracles if they refuse to do them? We do not question the power of God or the Holy Spirit. But we do question that these men really are from God and have the power of the Spirit, as they claim.

(2) Jesus refused to do miracles only after people had seen numerous miracles and proved themselves to be a "wicked and adulterous generation" by rejecting the evidence. This is not our case. We have never seen miracles at all. Even the "testimonies" we hear do not fit the character of true Bible miracles. How can they know we will reject the evidence before they ever give it to us? They have judged our motives and concluded we are "wicked and adulterous" without evidence.

(3) Bible prophets often did true miracles – and even sometimes suggested doing them – in the presence of those who doubted they were from God. This was even done in the presence of false teachers in order to show the contrast between true teachers and false teachers. This was done for the benefit of sincere people in the audience, if not for the benefit of the false teachers. If they judge us to be false teachers, then let them do the miracles at least for the benefit of others who watch. Exodus 4-11; 1 Kings 18; Acts 8:5-12; 13:10ff; etc.

(4) These men do not teach the same doctrine as did Jesus and His apostles, so it is reasonable to question the evidence for their authority (Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; etc.).

(5) The written word is now complete, so miracles are no longer needed to confirm the word. In fact the word says miracles have now ceased (John 20:30,31; Jude 3; 1 Corinthians 13:8-13; James 1:25). This

makes it all the more reasonable to put to the test the claims of men who say they can do miracles.

(6) Even so Jesus gave these people one more miracle: His resurrection from the dead. We have surely never seen that one done by modern miracle-workers. Let them do the "sign of Jonah" for us: raise someone from the dead!

Note that there are times when we should refuse to answer an inquirer.

Christians tend to think we must answer every question anyone asks us and provide every bit of evidence anyone wants; if we cannot or do not, they think we have failed our mission. It is generally true that, if a person has never heard the evidence and there is no evidence for doubting their sincerity, then we surely ought to answer them (1 Peter 3:15; Jude 3; etc.).

But there are times when people have proved themselves unworthy of receiving evidence. This was the case of these Pharisees and Sadducees. They had been taught and had received much evidence. They did not want evidence in order to honestly investigate it and consider the truth of Jesus' claims. They wanted it to use it against Jesus to try to find some fault by which they could discredit Him. When that is the case today, we also should refuse to give people the evidence or information they request.

Matthew 7:6 – Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. Surely this is the basis on which Jesus was acting.

We should make sure people have the evidence they need. But when they do have the evidence yet they have made it clear they will just use against us any other evidence we give, then we should stop giving it.

For other passages on this point, see Nehemiah 6:1-9; Matthew 7:6; 21:23-32; 16:1-4; 26:59-63; 27:12-14; John 19:9; Luke 23:7-10; 1 Timothy 1:3-7; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 2:14-18; Titus 3:9-11; Acts 13:45,46; 18:4-7.

16:5-7 – When they came to the other side, Jesus disciples had forgotten to take bread. He told them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. But they thought this was because they had taken no bread.

Jesus and His disciples again crossed the sea, but the disciples had forgotten to take bread. Jesus warned them to beware of the leaven (yeast) of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They thought He was criticizing them for having forgotten to take bread.

Notice that this implies that the disciples usually took bread with them when they traveled with Jesus.

16:8-12 – Jesus again said they had little faith. He asked if they understood the feeding of the five thousand and of the four thousand and how much food they had left over. He asked why they did not understand He was not talking about bread. Then they understood that He was talking about the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The danger of harmful teaching and influence

Jesus realized their thoughts and pointed out they had missed the point. First, He showed that they should have realized He was not upset because they had forgotten literal food. He had just fed five thousand people and then four thousand people. But in both cases His purpose was spiritual much more so than physical, as He explained in John 6. Providing physical food was never a primary concern for Jesus. Their overemphasis on food showed a lack of faith (compare Matthew 6:30; 8:26; 14:31).

Instead, He was warning them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They then realized He was talking about their doctrine. Luke 12:1 adds it was also a warning about hypocrisy. (Compare Matthew 6:1ff; Matthew 23.)

Teaching, and the hypocritical motives that in this case accompanied the teaching, can influence other people just like leaven can cause a whole lump of bread to rise. This illustration is also used in other instances (1 Corinthians 5:6-8; Galatians 5:9).

Influence can be good or bad depending on whether or not it leads people to serve God. But these Pharisees and Sadducees had already proved they were not properly concerned about truth. They were hypocrites. This helps confirm why Jesus did not do miracles for them (see notes on verses 1-4). It also warns us to make certain we do not allow ourselves to be influenced by such people.

Many passages warn us to be on guard regarding the influences around us. If we are not on guard, people may lead us into error without our realizing they have done so. Again as in 15:14, we must beware of what direction men would lead us. See the warnings listed there about false teachers.

Note also again, as in 15:12, that Jesus did not hesitate to rebuke false teachers and to warn people to avoid them. Some today have become too "nice" to point out the sins of others. They object when people refer to others as false teachers. They say we are gossips and slanderers if we point out errors. They warn us to "judge not." They claim we are unloving and un-Christ-like. Yet Christ disproves all such claims by simply doing what people say we ought not do.

Other passages about our need to be on guard for harmful influences include Proverbs 4:23; 6:27; 13:20; 22:3,24; 23:20; Matthew

5:8; 6:13; 18:8,9; 26:41; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; 15:33; Genesis 39:7-12; 2 Timothy 3:5; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Peter 2:11,12.

Our need to emphasize spiritual truth

Finally note that here is another of many examples in which the disciples misunderstood Jesus because He was speaking spiritually when they were thinking physically (compare John 2:19ff; 4:10ff; etc.). Jesus often used language that sounded like it was referring to physical matters when, in fact, He was using it to teach a spiritual lesson. This was fairly obvious when He taught with parables. Yet He did the same kind of thing sometimes when people did not realize He was doing it.

This in a way points out our weaknesses. We have a tendency to emphasize material things, so when people speak, we think they are speaking of physical things just like we are thinking about physical things. As a result, when they speak of spiritual things, we misunderstand. Far too often, in fact, we make major errors in our lives because we are thinking about physical things when we should be thinking about spiritual things.

16:13-28 – Jesus' Promise of His Church and Predictions of His Death

Compare Mark 8:27-9:1; Luke 9:18-27.

16:13,14 – Jesus asked His disciples who people said He was. They answered some say John the Baptist, others Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets.

Jesus and the twelve came near Caesarea Philippi, which was located several miles due north of the Sea of Galilee at the foot of Mt. Hermon (see a ***map***). Mark adds these events took place "on the way," and Luke adds it was when Jesus had been praying. Jesus asked the twelve some of the most instructive questions ever asked. Note again Jesus' great skill in using questions in teaching.

He first asked who ***people*** were saying that He was. What opinions did people hold of Him? It is certain that He did not lack knowledge of what people thought. He merely sought an opportunity to teach.

Consider the magnitude of the question of who Jesus is. Few people then truly understood the proper answer, and many today still do not. But it is the fundamental issue of the Scriptures. If people do not know who Jesus is, they cannot be saved or be pleasing to God (John 20:30,31; 8:24; 3:16; Romans 10:9,10; Mark 16:16; etc.). This is why so often the Bible accounts of teaching began with a discussion of Jesus, who He was and what He did (Acts 2:14ff; 8:35; 17:1-3; etc.).

The disciples responded that various people thought Jesus was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. Luke adds that they thought He was a prophet raised from the dead. Of course, that is necessarily implied in the other accounts since the prophets named were all dead.

These were all very high opinions (it is likely that other people, like many scribes and Pharisees, held less flattering opinions, but the twelve chose not to mention them). All the men they mentioned were great prophets, held in high esteem by the people. And they were all dead, so Jesus must be the resurrection of some great prophet. For most people to be so viewed would be an expression of great honor indeed.

Note that these same opinions are similar to what many people today hold. Many view Jesus as a great man, a master teacher, the greatest moralist that ever lived, etc. But ***no higher***. Even in the church, some have claimed that Jesus while on earth was a man – just a man. Some say that He gave up His Deity while He was on earth, or that He gave up all or some of the unique characteristics of Deity. How does this differ from what people were saying about him when they claimed He was just a man: a great prophet, but still just human?

Men's opinions of Jesus are almost universally very high, but often not high enough. Note also that, as usual in religion, the opinions of men did not agree with the truth of God.

16:15-17 – When Jesus asked who the disciples said that He is, Peter said He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus pronounced a blessing on him, saying that this had been revealed to him, not by flesh and blood, but by the Father in heaven.

Having heard the opinions of men, Jesus then asked who the twelve believed Him to be. One of the greatest questions ever asked is: "Who do you say that Jesus is?" The faith we have concerning Him will determine the whole course of this life and then our eternal destiny.

Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

No other answer is fitting or high enough. Men's answers were very high, but much too low for Jesus. They classed Jesus as a great man with exceptional Divine power working in Him. Yet these were not the correct answers.

Jesus is God's own Son, God in the flesh. He is the Christ, the anointed ruler of God's people as prophesied through the Old Testament. Therefore, He must be recognized as the Master of our lives. Any other view is too low a view of Jesus.

This is one of numerous examples in which people during Jesus lifetime confessed who He was. Confessing Jesus has been a fundamental test of discipleship beginning during His lifetime and continues to be so today. A willingness to confess Jesus has always been an essential requirement of salvation.

Observe that the confession Peter made here is exactly the confession that the Ethiopian eunuch made before his baptism (Acts 8:37). Jesus pronounced a blessing on Peter for having made the

confession and said that the Father in heaven had revealed it to him. He then proceeded to promise to build His church on the very truth that Peter had confessed (verse 18). Surely this is what must be confessed today when people seek to be baptized to become part of the church that Jesus built.

For other passages about confession see our notes on Matthew 10:32,33. See also Romans 10:9,10; John 1:49; 4:42; 9:35-38; 11:27; 12:42,43; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Timothy 6:12,13; 1 John 4:15.

Notice that Peter confessed Jesus to be the Son of the living God. The true God has often been identified as the living God in contrast to idols who have no life. See Deuteronomy 5:26; Joshua 3:10; 1 Samuel 17:36; Psalm 42:2; Jeremiah 10:10; Daniel 6:26; Hosea 1:10; Acts 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 1:9.

Jesus pronounced a blessing on Peter for this answer.

This time Peter was in step, not out of step as he so often was (and would be in just a few moments again). Jesus shows that the source of this truth was not men (flesh and blood). The opinions of men have already been suggested but shown to be inaccurate. The source of the true identity came from God Himself. (Bar Jonah simply means son of Jonah).

This is a clear instance in which Jesus was claiming to be greater than any mere man. He rejected the view that He was just a great man. He praised the view that He was more: the very Son of God. This, He said, was the truth of God in the matter.

Some people say Jesus never made claims to be Deity but His disciples reached that conclusion without His ever claiming it. Yet here we see plain statements in which He did claim a superhuman position. Either He truly is the Divine Son of God or He is a liar and impostor. In neither case can He be viewed as just a good or great man but no more. He Himself here rejects this low view of Himself.

Jesus did not ask this question at the beginning of His public ministry. He asked it after the apostles had sufficient time to observe His teaching, His life, and His miracles. They had abundant evidence upon which to base a conclusion. How had God revealed Jesus' true identity to Peter?

* By the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures – John 1:19-36; 5:39

* By the declaration of the Father at Jesus' baptism – Matthew 3:13-17

* By the miracles Jesus performed – Matthew 11:2-6; John 10:37,38; 5:36; 20:30,31

* By other confessions they had heard from others – Luke 4:41; John 1:41,49 (compare Matthew 14:33)

Notice that Jesus originally asked who He the Son of Man was (verse 13). The answer was that He was more than just a man, He was

the Son of God. There is no conflict between the concept that Jesus was the Son of Man and the concept that He was the Son of God. He was both. He was God in the flesh. He took on the body of a man, but he did not lose the character of Deity.

Other passages affirming the Deity of Jesus are: John 1:1-3,14; 20:28; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:3,8,9; Philippians 2:5-8.

To learn more about the Deity of Jesus, we urge you to study our free articles on that subject on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct (see the section about Godhood).

16:18 – I say also to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

Having received from His disciples the confession that He was the Son of God, Jesus proceeded to make a great promise for the future. He promised He would build His church. Clearly the church was a major part of Jesus' plans. If not, why would He promise it at such a time of major importance as this? Further, this church is somehow connected to the Deity of Jesus which Peter had just confessed, else why bring it up at this time?

Important lessons about Jesus' church

1) Jesus promised to begin His church.

This is the first passage referring to the church in the New Testament. The church is simply God's chosen people, the group whom He has called by the gospel and forgiven of sins (Acts 2:47). In Scripture it is also referred to as His body, kingdom, family, etc.

The church is simply another name for the saved or the elect: that group of people who have been chosen by the Lord. It is that body for which Christ is the Savior and Head, and which He purchased with His own blood – Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:23,25.

The fundamental meaning of the word for the church (εκκλησια) refers to a group of people who have been called out or separated from others. Many passages show that God's people have been called out of the world to belong to God as His special people. See 1 Peter 2:9; Titus 2:14. We are called by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14) to become part of the body, which is his church (Colossians 3:15; 1:24).

In the Bible, the church always refers to a group of ***people***, never to a physical ***building***. The word has two primary uses:

1. The church ***universally:*** the body of all saved people everywhere (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 5:22-25; Acts 2:47).

2. The church ***locally:*** a congregation of saved people in a certain area who meet, work, and worship together, such as the church Jerusalem, Corinth, etc. (Acts 8:1; 13:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2; Revelation 1:4).

> "Church" (εκκλησια) – a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly ... 4. in the Christian sense, a. an assembly of Christians gathered for worship ... b. a company of Christians, or of those who, hoping for eternal Salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs according to regulations prescribed for the body for order's sake; aa. those who anywhere, in city or village, constitute such a company and are united into one body: ... bb. the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth; collectively, all who worship and honor God and Christ in whatever place they may be..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

2) The church would begin in the future.

The church did not exist at the time Jesus spoke this, for He said He would build it. It follows that the church could not have been begun during the lifetime of John the Baptist, as some claim, since John was already dead (Matthew 14:1ff; compare Luke 9:7-9,18-21ff). Nor could it have existed in America in 147 B.C. as taught in the Book of Mormon. It began later. In fact, Jesus purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28), so it could not be His church till after He had died.

This passage and all passages before Acts 2 speak of the church as coming in the future (see also Isaiah 2:2,3; Daniel 2:44; Mark 1:15; 9:1; Acts 1:4-8).

In Acts 2 Peter preached the first gospel sermon after the death and resurrection of Jesus. On that occasion three thousand people obeyed the gospel teaching to believe in Jesus, repent of their sins, and be baptized for the remission of their sins (verses 36-41). From that point on, all who received salvation by obedience to the gospel have been added to that body of people (2:47).

Many other passages after Acts 2 speak of the church as being in existence (see Acts 5:11; 8:1-3; 11:22,26; Colossians 1:13; etc.). So the church that belongs to Jesus began in Jerusalem on Pentecost after Jesus' ascension as recorded in Acts 2.

3) The church would belong to Jesus.

Jesus said He would build ***His*** church. It was purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28). He died to save it (Ephesians 5;23,25). He is the head of it as the husband is head of the wife (Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:22-25). And we will see that He is the Founder and foundation of it (compare 1 Corinthians 3:11; 1 Peter 2:3-8).

Surely then the church should follow the will of its Head and Founder, not the doctrines of men (see our notes on Matthew 15:1-14). And it ought to be called by names that honor Him, not names that honor men (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).

*4) Jesus promised to build His church **singular**, not "churches" plural.*

It was never Jesus' plan for there to be many denominations, differing in doctrine, name, organization, worship, and plan of salvation, yet all claiming to follow Him. The gospel repeatedly teaches that Jesus built one universal church consisting of all saved people. Unity is required and division is forbidden.

Denominations did not begin until centuries later when people, though claiming to be disciples of Christ, departed from the gospel and began to follow the doctrines of men which separated them into various different conflicting and disagreeing bodies (Acts 18:28-30; Galatians 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 1:3-6; 4:1,6,7; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 3:9-11; 2 John 9-11).

It follows that the church in the New Testament never refers to a denomination. Jesus built just one church. All people today who want to be true followers of Jesus should be members of the one church that He built, not of some man-made church which is nowhere authorized in the Bible.

For Scriptures about the one church and the importance of unity, see John 17:20-23; Ephesians 4:3-6; 1:22,23; 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 1:10-13; 12:20,25; Galatians 5:19-21; Luke 11:17; Romans 14:19; 16:17; Titus 3:10; Proverbs 26:21; 6:16-19.

"On this rock"

What is the rock on which the church is built? Catholicism says the rock is Peter, who they claim was the first Pope. So, they argue that Peter was the rock on which the church was built, Peter was given the power to bind and loose (verse 19), and Peter passed this authority on to successors who were the Popes of the Catholic Church. Yet Scripture repeatedly contradicts this doctrine.

** The Bible says Jesus is the church's foundation.*

1 Corinthians 3:11 – For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-7 – Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, … Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone"…

Matthew 16:13-18 actually confirms this truth. The context (verses 13,15,16) shows that the passage does not discuss who ***Peter*** is; it discusses who ***Jesus*** is. The passage does not exalt ***Peter***; it exalts ***Jesus***. Jesus does not confess ***Peter***; Peter confesses ***Jesus***.

The verse is not saying Peter ***is*** the rock on which the church is built, but rather it ***contrasts*** Peter's name (Greek πετρος, masculine – a piece of rock) to the rock on which the church would be built (Greek πετρα, feminine – a solid ledge of rock).

(Some have claimed that Matthew wrote an Aramaic text that, unlike the Greek text, does not distinguish between Peter's name and the rock on which the church is built. But no such Aramaic text exists, so how can an argument be based on a text that does not exist? Every ancient manuscript that we do have does make the distinction.)

Jesus often compared Himself to physical objects: a temple (John 2:18-22), a door (John 10:7), a vine (John 15:1-11). Here He compares Himself to a rock, a name often used for Deity in the Old Testament (Psalm 31:3; 71:3; 89:26ff; 18:2,3,32,33).

The foundation of the church is not Peter, but rather the truth that Peter had just confessed about who Jesus is: Jesus is the Christ the Son of God (verse 16). This is confirmed by the context and by other Scriptures. To say Peter is the foundation would be to put a man in the place of Deity!

The early writer Chrysostom confirmed this as follows:

"He added this, 'And I say unto you, You are Peter, and upon this rock will I build my Church' (Matthew 16:18) that is, on the faith of his confession." – Chrysostom (Homily 54).

Jesus "has built His church upon Peter's confession" – Chrysostom (Homily 82).

Note that sometimes today we may distinguish between the cornerstone and the foundation. Modern cornerstones are usually just symbolic having no real function as part of the foundation. But cornerstones in Bible times were so essential to the foundation that they were spoken of as interchangeable with the foundation. See Isaiah 28:16.

** The Bible says Jesus is the Head of the church.*

Ephesians 1:22,23 – And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over ***all*** things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Jesus' church cannot have two heads any more than one head can have two bodies.

Ephesians 5:22-24 – The husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Jesus' church can have only one Head, just as a wife may have only one husband. To say the church has both Jesus and Peter as head would be spiritual adultery.

Ephesians 4:4-6 – Jesus is the ***one*** Lord over the ***one*** body (the church). There cannot be two Lords any more than there could be two Gods.

See also Colossians 1:18; Matthew 28:18-20.

** Paul affirmed he was in all ways equal with other apostles.*

2 Corinthians 11:5 – For I consider that I am not at all inferior to the most eminent apostles.

2 Corinthians 12:11 – …in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing.

All the apostles were ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). If Peter had authority over all apostles, Paul would have been behind him, but Paul denies this.

* *Peter was a married man* – Matthew 8:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5.

But modern Popes are not permitted to marry.

Hebrews 13:4 – Marriage is honorable for ***all*** people (that includes apostles and all church officials). In fact, bishops are not only permitted by Scripture to marry, but they are required to do so – 1 Peter 5:1-3; Titus 1:5,6; 1 Timothy 3:2.

1 Timothy 4:1-3 – Celibacy is a doctrine of apostasy.

* *Peter refused to allow men to bow to honor him religiously* – Acts 10:25,26.

But modern Popes accept and encourage this. Compare Matthew 4:10; Revelation 22:8,9.

* *Peter was never addressed by titles of exaltation such as are used to honor modern Popes.*

Matthew 23:9 expressly forbids calling any man "Father" as a title of religious honor. Yet modern Popes and priests wear this title, in direct violation of Jesus' command. In fact, the word "Pope" originally meant "Father" (*Catholic Dictionary*, p. 667).

Peter is never called "Pope," "Chief Pastor," "Prince of the Apostles," "Head of the Church," "Ruler of the Church," "Supreme Pontiff," etc. He was called simply an apostle and servant (1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1) and fellow-presbyter (1 Peter 5:1).

* *No men today can be successors of apostles.*

There is no Scriptural proof that the powers of apostles were handed down. Where is this major doctrine taught in the Bible? Those who believe it must prove it. But they cannot.

1) Apostles were required to be eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ (Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39-41; 1 Corinthians 15:4-8).

Judas' replacement was required to be an eyewitness – Acts 1:21,22.

Paul was an eyewitness (1 Corinthians 15:8; 9:1; Acts 22:14,15; 26:16). He was a witness "last of all" and "out of due time" (Jesus appeared to him exceptionally late).

Are modern popes eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ?

2) Apostles did miracles to confirm their apostleship. These were the "signs of an apostle" – 2 Corinthians 12:12. This proved their teaching was from God (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4; John 4:48).

Do modern popes do signs to prove their apostleship like the original apostles did? If not, why should we accept them as successors of Peter? Why should we accept their teachings as being revealed from God?

3) Apostles could impart miraculous powers to others. Peter and other apostles gave gifts by laying on of hands – Acts 8:14-19; 19:1-7; Romans 1:8-11. Can modern popes impart miraculous powers to others?

Those who received gifts in this way (such as Philip) could not, in turn, pass the power on to others. Apostles had to come to impart the power (Acts 8:5-18). So, apostles could impart spiritual gifts, but they had no successors who could do likewise. So how could modern popes get the power to be their successors?

Apostles lived on earth only one generation.

4) The duties of apostles were fulfilled for all time by the original apostles. Theirs was not a work that needs to be repeated on earth continually.

The apostles wrote what the Spirit revealed to them (1 Corinthians 14:37; Ephesians 3:3-5; 2 Peter 3:15,16; etc.). These writings completely reveal all good works, everything we need to know to please God (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:3; John 16:13; Acts 20:20,27).

The miracles of the first century, recorded in the Bible, confirm that the message was from God (John 20:30,31; 1 Corinthians 15:4-8; note John 8:17,18; Matthew 18:16). The power to do miracles ceased when the Scriptures were completed – 1 Corinthians 13:3-11. God now preserves the Scriptures for all generations (1 Peter 1:22-25; 2 John 2; 2 Peter 1:12-15; 3:1).

The apostles' work on earth was completed in the first century and was recorded in the Bible, just like the work of Jesus was. We can no more have successors to the apostles living on earth today than we can have successors to Jesus living on earth or dying on the cross today. The work of the apostles is now accomplished by the Scriptures they wrote.

"The gates of hell (hades) shall not prevail against it."

Several meanings have been suggested for this. None of the following views do violence to the overall teaching of the Bible, but the question is which view is meant here.

(1) Some believe Jesus meant that the forces of Satan could never destroy the church, but it will always exist. "Gates" were places of authority and making decisions in Bible times. If "hell" refers to the forces of evil, then the meaning would be that the plans and powers of evil could never overpower the church.

This idea teaches truth in a very real sense. The seed of the kingdom is the word of God which can never be destroyed (1 Peter 1:23-25). Jesus is the ruling Power of the kingdom and His reign can never be overpowered (Daniel 2).

However, the question is whether or not this idea is what this particular passage is intended to teach. "Hell" here is "hades," meaning the abode of the dead (Luke 16:20-31; Revelation 20:13,14; etc.). It is not "gehenna," which refers to the eternal destiny of Satan and evil spirits. And the word for "it" in Greek does not agree with the word for "church."

(2) Another view: Hades could not prevail against Jesus – i.e., could not prevent Him from being raised to prove He is God's Son and serving as the foundation of the church (verses 16,18). This is also a true

teaching, and "it" could be translated "Him," referring to Jesus. However, a slight variation of this view would seem to fit the context better.

(3) The gates of hades (Old Testament Sheol) or similar expressions are also referred to in Job 17:15; 38:17; Psalm 9:13; 107:18; Isaiah 38:10. The gates of the abode of the dead could not hold Jesus so as to prevent His act of building the church as He had just promised to do.

Jesus was about to predict His death (verse 21), but even death could not keep Him within its gates so as to prevent His building the church. He would arise, come forth from the dead (the abode of the dead could not hold Him), and He would build the church as He promised. So, "it" refers generically to the whole idea Jesus had just stated, that He would build His church.

Illustration: "I will eat a hamburger, and nothing shall prevail against it." Against what: Me? The hamburger? Or my act of eating the hamburger?

16:19,20 – I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Jesus then commanded the disciples to tell no one that He was the Christ.

The church and the kingdom

Note how Jesus here uses the term "kingdom" interchangeably" with the term "church" (verse 18). He has not switched subjects. The kingdom is the church but just viewed from a different perspective. To refer to it as the church emphasizes that it is the "called-out people" belonging to God. To refer to it as the kingdom emphasizes the power of the ruler Jesus Christ. The kingdom began when the church began, and people were in it in the first century (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:5-9).

However, the church/kingdom did not exist at the time Jesus spoke here, for He was promising to give Peter the keys of the kingdom. Entrance into the kingdom had not yet been opened, but Peter would have the power to open it as guided by the Holy Spirit. He did this on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 when he preached the first gospel sermon.

It is false doctrine to say that Jesus never established His kingdom as a result of His first advent but He must come again to establish it. If the kingdom did not begin as result of Jesus' coming in the first century, then when and how did Peter ever use the keys of the kingdom? If the kingdom still has not begun today nearly 2000 years later, how could Peter ever use those keys, since he is been dead for centuries? Jesus' kingdom now exists and He is now king. See our notes on Matthew 3:2.

The power to bind and loose

Catholicism argues that Jesus here gave Peter the power as Pope to make laws that are bound or loosed for the church. But we have already proved that Jesus is the only Head of the church, so only He can make laws. Any view of this verse contradicts the Scriptures if it claims that any man is a lawgiver for God's universal church.

All apostles received the power to "bind and loose."

Matthew 18:18 shows that others also had power to bind and loose.

All apostles had power to forgive or retain sins, but only as guided by the Holy Spirit – John 20:22,23. No apostle could originate laws, but could only reveal the laws God made. ("Shall be bound in heaven" is a perfect passive participle in Greek, which means it refers to something that occurs as a result of a previous action. So, what the apostles taught had already beforehand been bound in heaven. Note the NASB, ESV footnote, Marshall, etc. Compare Psalm 119:89; Ephesians 3:10,11).

The apostles bound and loosed, forgiving and retaining sins, by preaching the gospel. If men obey the gospel, their sins are forgiven; if not, their sins are retained – Romans 1:16; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:36-41; etc.

A key symbolizes the power to open or to close (Isaiah 22:22; Revelation 1:18; 3:7). The gospel was the "key" or authority by which apostles opened the door for men to enter the church. Peter was the first to preach to Jews (Acts 2) and to Gentiles (Acts 10), but all apostles had authority to preach the gospel.

Jesus gave the key to Peter to use, but the gospel originated with Jesus, not Peter. Jesus determined the rules by which people could or could not enter the kingdom. Nothing here says Peter could originate rules for the church or that the other apostles submitted to Peter's authority.

All apostles received direct guidance of the Holy Spirit.

John 16:13; 14:26; Acts 2:1-4; Ephesians 3:3-5 – The Holy Spirit gave direct guidance to all the apostles. Why would apostles need guidance from a Pope if they were guided by the Spirit? Paul expressly stated that his teaching was not based on anything learned from man but on direct revelation from Jesus – Galatians 1:11,12,16,17; 2:6-9,11-14.

Finally note that Jesus wanted the apostles to understand His Divinity, but He was not yet ready for them to publish it. There was an element of timing in Jesus' work. Things must be done rightly, but also at the right time. Often He warned people not to do things that, later on, would have needed to be done.

16:21 – Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised again the third day.

The time of Jesus' death was drawing closer. He knew it was God's will for Him to die, and He wanted the disciples to understand this too. He stated it plainly and openly (compare Mark 8:31). He named the people who would abuse Him and stated what would be done: the elders, chief priests, and scribes would kill Him in Jerusalem, but He would rise again the third day (compare 17:22,23).

The disciples did not understand at this time (Mark 9:10), and surely Jesus knew they would not understand. Nevertheless, these plain statements serve a purpose for us and for them. The disciples would understand the meaning after the events occurred, and then they could tell us that in fact He had known it ahead of time and had predicted it. This proves Jesus to be a true prophet. John 13:19; 14:29.

The very nature of the prophecy is amazing.

No fraud, who really wanted to have a following, would ever predict such a thing. Why would he predict his own death, in the first place? No one, who wants to be influential also wants to die. And if he then predicted his resurrection, a fraud would know that shortly after his death he would be forever proved to be a fraud, and any following he had would be forever gone.

And note the amazing detail of the prophecy. It names the place and the people involved, it says exactly what would happen, and it even names the number of days after the death that the resurrection would occur. Jesus is unquestionably proved here to be a true prophet. What false Messiah or prophet ever made such accurate predictions?

This also proves that Jesus' death was not an unexpected change in God's plan as some think. Jesus and His Father knew it and expected it long before it occurred. If they knew it at this point, they would certainly have known it when Jesus came, so why would they be surprised when it happened?

Note how this multiplies the force of the resurrection.

For a man to be raised from the dead is amazing. But when he himself predicted it ahead of time, it is a miracle on both ends. Both the prediction and the thing predicted are amazing. How could this be anything but undeniable proof that Jesus is who He claimed to be?

Also observe that Jesus has not greatly changed the subject of verses 18,19. He had discussed there that He would build His church giving Peter the keys of the kingdom. To the disciples the idea of Jesus' dying seemed foreign to all of their understanding of God's plan, so Peter rebuked Jesus for saying it (verses 22,23). But in reality it was necessary for Jesus to die and rise again (verse 21) in order to establish the

church/kingdom of verses 18,19. Jesus purchased the church by dying for it (Acts 20:28).

16:22,23 – Peter rebuked Jesus saying He would not die as He had predicted. Jesus called Peter Satan and said for him to get behind Him. He said he was an offense to Him because he was not mindful of the things of God but of the things of men.

Peter's rebuke of Jesus

Peter, who had just confessed Jesus to be the Son of God, took issue with Jesus and began to rebuke Him for His prediction. He said it would never be that Jesus would die. For this, Peter himself received a stern rebuke from the Lord. Peter's outspoken nature had led to a great confession of Jesus for which the Lord praised him. Now it led to opposing the Lord and receiving a severe rebuke.

It is easy to understand the reasoning of Peter. Jesus had just agreed that He was the Son of God, so surely His people would not want Him to leave. He had promised a kingdom in which Peter would have an important role, and Peter surely did not want that promise to fail. Peter, like others of that day, thought this kingdom must be earthly and would require Jesus to reign as king on earth. How could He do this if He died? Perhaps Peter was especially just affirming his loyalty to Jesus. He and the other disciples would protect Jesus – they would never let those Jewish leaders hurt their Master!

Nevertheless, the weight of Peter's error is staggering when considered carefully. Here he stood ***rebuking*** the One he had just confessed to be the ***Son of God***! If He is God's Son, greater than any prophet, as Peter had confessed, how could any mere mortal correct Him or have better understanding than He did? Such is blasphemous.

Jesus' statement that Peter should get behind him may mean that he should follow Jesus instead of following his own ideas and trying to get Jesus to follow Him. We also need to learn this lesson. We are followers of Jesus. We have no right to decide for ourselves where to go, let alone trying to tell Him where He should go.

What led to Peter's downfall?

Clearly one problem was a lack of understanding of God's will. Had Peter understood the necessity of Jesus' death, he would have been unwilling to oppose it so. It is also possible that the praise Peter had just received had gone to his head, and now he was so sure of his ideas he thought he could insist on them even to the point of resisting Jesus.

But Jesus pointed out this specific reason for Peter's error: He was minding the things of men instead of the things of God. He was too concerned with his own ideas and desires about how things should go instead of just accepting what God had said. If Jesus truly was the Son of God and greater even than a prophet, surely what He said about this

was God's will. To oppose it for any reason would be opposing God's will. And anything other than God's will which we follow must be man's will.

This is really the root of all sin: following what people want instead of God's will. This is why we must reject all human inventions in religion and follow only what God says. We must also set aside human desires and do what God says even if it is not what we would have wanted (see notes on verse 24). So, Peter's sin here leads into the discussion of verses 24-27. See also our notes on Matthew 15:9,13. See Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19.

We need to learn that our present acceptance before God does not guarantee future acceptance. A man or church can fall from God's favor. 1 Corinthians 10:12 – Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall (compare Ezekiel 18:24). In fact, high honor can itself become a tool Satan uses to tempt us. When we think we are doing something especially good for God, Satan can use that against us.

We must be especially alert when we, or people around us, begin to think we have reached a level of success in God's service (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). When we begin to think we have achieved something great, we must be on guard lest may begin to think so much of our desires that we neglect God's plan (Colossians 3:2).

Jesus said Peter's statement was from Satan and was a stumbling block to Jesus.

In what way is this true? Surely Jesus did not sin because of what Peter said, for Jesus never sinned. Yet Jesus could be tempted (Hebrews 4:15). And what Peter said was a temptation to Jesus.

Peter was guilty of encouraging Jesus to disobey God. What Jesus had revealed was the will of God. Obviously, from the human standpoint it was hard even for Jesus to accept. There was a definite temptation to want to refuse to do it (compare Matthew 26:36ff). So, Peter's statement encouraged Jesus to desire to do that which would have been sinful for Him to do. Jesus rebuked Peter for so tempting Him.

Note that it is possible to sin by tempting someone else, even if that person does not give in and commit the sin toward which we tempted them.

Finally consider the consequences for the doctrine that Peter was the first Pope. We have seen that some people claim verses 18,19 mean Peter would be Pope. Yet here in verses 22,23, Peter sinned and was severely rebuked by Jesus. If verses 18,19 prove Peter was to be Pope, what do verses 22,23 prove? Should a man so prone to error as Peter, so impetuously inclined, and who in fact minded the things of man instead of the things of God, be the head of Jesus' church?

16:24,25 – Jesus said anyone who desires to come after Him, should deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Jesus. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for Jesus' sake will find it.

Jesus had begun this discussion by predicting His own death. Peter's rebuke had interrupted. Now Jesus refers back to both these points and ties them together. He had said He must die. Peter had expressed a desire to follow his own will in this instead of God's will. Jesus here proceeds to show His death proves we must not follow our own desires as Peter had just done.

Jesus explains what we must do in order to come after Him. But coming after Jesus is the definition of being a disciple. So Jesus' statement here summarizes the fundamental requirements of being one of His disciples. If we want to come be Jesus' disciple, we must (1) deny self, (2) take up our cross, (3) and follow Jesus. (4) This is then described further as losing our life (verses 24,25).

Note each of these requirements more closely:

Deny self

Denying self requires us to give up anything we would want that would hinder our doing the will of God. This does not mean a thing is automatically wrong if we want it. It means we must take our wants and desires down from the throne and place Jesus and His will as the governing power in our lives.

There is in each life room for only one master (Matthew 6:19-24). If God is to rule our lives, then our will must be made subservient to His. We must be willing to give up anything in life in order to please God. See Romans 12:1,2; Matthew 6:33; Luke 14:25-33; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15.

Take up your cross and follow Jesus

Many think this refers to bearing a burden for the Lord, so we must at times suffer difficulties to please Him: "Bad health is a cross I have to bear," or "My husband is my cross." Surely serving Jesus requires bearing burdens, but the meaning here is much deeper if we consider the context.

(1) What is the purpose of a cross? It was not just a burden to be borne. Far more than that, it was ***an instrument of death and total sacrifice***.

(2) Jesus said to take up our cross and ***follow Him***. Where was He going with His cross? He had just said He was going to die (verses 21,22).

(3) In verse 25 Jesus said we must give our ***life*** for Him.

(4) In verse 26 He asked what good our life would be to us if we are found unacceptable at the judgment.

So, "taking up your cross" means to ***give your whole life to God***, as Jesus was about to give His life for us. This involves bearing burdens, but it is deeper than that. It is a ***total dedication*** of life. Our whole life

is given to His service in anything He says. This will lead us to willingly deny self. Following Him then requires us to live as He lived His life (1 Peter 2:21; Matthew 10:34,35; 1 Corinthians 11:1).

Luke adds "take up your cross ***daily***" (Luke 9:23). There is a sense in which Christians must give their lives to God every day. This is not necessarily a physical death as Jesus died for us (though such might be required), but a daily total sacrifice of self to do the will of Jesus. Whatever He wants with my life is what must be done with it. What I want must no longer prevail, but I must give myself for Him just as He gave Himself for me, despite the fact His human nature did not want to have to do it.

Most people understand that giving one's life for a cause would be an act of supreme devotion. When a parent dies saving a child or a fireman dies saving someone trapped in a burning building, we understand those people paid the supreme sacrifice. That is what Jesus wants of us: the supreme sacrifice. We may need to die physically for His cause; but if not, we still must give our lives in His service.

This determination to so live our lives in service to God is based on "repentance." In repenting we determine to turn away from our own will and instead live our lives to please God. We cannot be saved without this, and that is why repentance is so important in salvation. It is also why so many people are not truly Jesus' disciples, because they are not willing to make this total sacrifice.

Consider other passages about dying for Jesus:

Giving Our Lives for Jesus

Galatians 2:20 – I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 6:14 – But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Galatians 5:24,25 – And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 5:15 – He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

2 Corinthians 8:5 – They first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.

Romans 12:1 – I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Romans 6:2 – How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

Romans 6:5,6 – For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,

knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

Romans 8:13 – For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Colossians 2:20 – Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations…

Colossians 3:3-7 – For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth…

2 Timothy 2:11 – This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him.

Lose your life for Jesus

Verse 25 then follows, helps us understand verse 24, and strengthens the point being made. Any person – if he holds his life so dear to himself that he wants to do his own will and accomplish his own purposes, rather than denying self and serving God – that person will in the end lose his life eternally (verses 26,27). But anyone who loses his life for Jesus's sake – gives it in service and sacrifice to God by denying himself, as described above – such a man will save his life by gaining eternal life.

There can be no greater or clearer teaching anywhere of the meaning of being a disciple. This is how our Master lived, so this is how His disciples must live. We must live a life of complete and total submission to the will of God.

John 12:25 – He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

16:26,27 – What is a man profited if he gains the whole world but loses his own soul? What will a man give in exchange for his soul? For Jesus will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will render to each one according to his works.

Jesus has just contrasted the value of earthly life to the value of eternal life (verses 24,25). This shows us the meaning of "life" in verse 26, which is used in some translations instead of "soul." It refers to eternal life to be received when Jesus comes and rewards all men. This is often called simply "life" in the Bible (Matthew 7:13,14; etc.).

The reason one ought to be willing to deny self, mind the things of God, and give his life for Jesus' sake, is that this course leads to eternal life. This reward is far greater than anything this world or this life has to offer. If you gain all the world – its possessions, pleasures, fame, power,

or anything and everything it can offer – you have gained nothing if in the end your life is forfeited in eternity.

Nothing this world has to offer is worth losing your soul. Your eternal destiny is of greater value than anything on earth. Yet millions of people every day neglect their service to God in order to gain the pleasures of sin (1 John 2:15-17). Many pursue possessions, entertainment and pleasure, fame and renown, power and influence, beauty, or sports and athletics. Many will do things that are clearly sinful in order to enjoy these. Others may not do things that are inherently sinful, but they are so involved in these pursuits that they neglect to serve God. If you gain all these but lose your soul, you made a poor bargain.

If this world and material possessions are relatively unimportant, and if the true importance lies in spiritual values and spiritual goals, then why should the church emphasize physical appeals to attract people? The church is here to help people have eternal life by faithful service to God. Using carnal attractions contradicts and violates the spiritual purpose for which Jesus created His church.

Truly Jesus will come again and judge all men (Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12; etc.). There will be a reckoning for how we live. When that time comes, we will either receive or lose our lives – eternally. Are you living so you will be ready for that life?

Consider other verses about the value of the soul and the concern God has for the salvation of the lost: 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4,6; Luke 15; 5:32; 19:10; Ezekiel 18:23,32; Titus 2:11; John 3:16; Mark 16:15,16; 2 Timothy 2:25,26; Jonah 4:11.

Other passages about the relative unimportance of material things include the following: Matthew 4:10; 6:19-34; Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21; James 4:13-15; 1 John 2:15-17; John 6:27,63; 10:28; 16:24-27; Mark 10:29,30; Luke 10:38-42; 12:15-21; 14:26-33; 18:22-24; Romans 2:28,29; 6:16-22; 8:1-14; 12:1,2; 2 Corinthians 8:5; 10:3,4; Galatians 2:20; 5:16-26; 6:7-9; Philippians 3:18,19; Colossians 3:1-3; 1 Timothy 6:6-11,17-19; Hebrews 11:13-16,24-26; 1 Peter 3:3,4; Ecclesiastes 5:10-19; Psalm 49:5-8.

16:28 – Some who were standing there would not taste death till they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.

Jesus now reverts to the original discussion of building His church, His promise to give Peter the keys of the kingdom (verses 18,19), and the fact that He must die and be raised (verse 21). After predicting the beginning of His kingdom, the church, Jesus had introduced the subject of His death. He had then been interrupted by Peter.

Jesus then used His death to discuss the need for giving up personal desires to please God, in contrast to minding the things of men as Peter had done. Now He returns to His death and resurrection and the kingdom He would establish as a result. This seems clearer in Mark's account (Mark 9:1).

Many would think, like Peter did, that if Jesus were to die, He could not possibly establish His kingdom. But that was because they were thinking of an earthly kingdom. Nevertheless, Jesus here reassures them that some of them would actually see the kingdom began.

So, the "coming" of Jesus here is not the coming with the angels to judge men (verse 27), but His coming in His kingdom after He had died and been raised (verses 18-21). Many think these are the same coming. But some standing there as Jesus spoke would not die till they saw Jesus come in the kingdom to which He here refers. How could this refer to the final judgment when even today thousands of years later the judgment has still not occurred? In spite of objections like Peter's, Jesus really would die and establish the kingdom He had promised, which is the church, and some of them would live to see it.

Mark 9:1 adds that the ***kingdom*** would come with ***power***. This ties into the discussion in Acts 1:3-8 in which Jesus again promised the coming of His kingdom. There He added that the ***power*** would come when the ***Holy Spirit*** came and empowered His apostles to preach His gospel. This in turn was fulfilled in Acts 2 when the Spirit came and empowered the apostles to preach in other languages. Peter then preached the first gospel sermon, and three thousand people obeyed and became citizens in the kingdom.

So Jesus' prediction of the kingdom was fulfilled, exactly as He promised, during the lifetime of the disciples after Jesus had died and been raised. At that time, Peter used the keys of the kingdom by preaching the gospel and making it possible for people for the first time to become part of the kingdom, which is the church.

From then on, people have been able to enter the kingdom by obeying the gospel and receiving forgiveness by Jesus' blood (Acts 2:47). Contrary to the belief of those who say the kingdom will begin when Jesus comes again, in reality the kingdom began soon after Jesus' death, and people have been added to it ever since then (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:5-9). See our notes on Matthew 3:1,2; 4:17; 16:18,19.

Matthew 17

Chapter 17 – The Transfiguration and Related Events

17:1-13 - The Transfiguration

Compare Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36.

17:1 – After six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John onto a high mountain by themselves.

Luke tells us that Jesus took the disciples and went on a high mountain to pray. Jesus often went apart to pray. Prayer was an important part of His life. When praying, He often sought a time when He could have privacy. Compare Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; Matthew 26:36-46.

With Jesus were Peter, James, and John. These three apostles seem to be the most frequently mentioned in the accounts of Jesus' life. Several times these three played important roles when others are not mentioned. Compare Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 5:37 (see also Mark 13:3). Other times just Peter and John are mentioned (Acts chapter 3 & 4; John 20:1ff).

> "Now it is asked how after six days he took them and led them separately onto a high mountain, whereas the Evangelist Luke established the number at eight. The answer is easy because in Matthew the days in the middle are counted, but in Luke the first and last are added. For Luke does not say after eight days Jesus took Peter and James and John but 'now about eight days after.'"
> – Jerome (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

17:2 – Jesus was transfigured in the presence of the disciples. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became white as light.

As He prayed, Jesus was "transfigured" (compare Mark 9:2). This means His countenance or facial appearance was changed. His face shone and His clothes became white and glistening (compare Luke's account).

Compare this event to Exodus 34:29-35 where the skin of Moses' face shone when he had been in the presence of God to receive the law (2 Corinthians 3:7-18; compare Acts 6:15). This was a miracle which was intended to demonstrate God's approval of the one whose appearance was so altered, so people would know God was working through him. Perhaps it even symbolized that Jesus would be a lawgiver as Moses had been (Hebrews 1:1,2). (Compare Revelation 1:16.)

17:3 – Moses and Elijah then appeared talking with Jesus.

Moses was the giver of the Old Testament law. Elijah was one of the most noteworthy prophets of the Old Testament. When thinking of the Old Testament, these are two men whom Jews would think of first and with greatest prominence. And both men had been dead for centuries. Yet here they were appearing before the apostles and speaking with Jesus.

The Old Testament is often referred to in the New Testament as "the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Romans 3:21). It is reasonable to conclude that Moses and Elijah here symbolized the Law and the Prophets. We will see the significance of this as the event proceeds.

Note that the account later refers to John the Baptist as a prophet like Elijah (compare 17:13). But it was not John who appeared in the Transfiguration, for the disciples would have recognized John. This man who appeared was truly Elijah, just as Moses truly appeared. The disciples did not understand the connection with John till Jesus later explained it.

Luke tells us the subject of the conversation. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah discussed Jesus' coming death in Jerusalem. So once again we have further inspired prophetic evidence that Jesus would die in Jerusalem.

What was the relationship between Jesus' death and the work of Moses and Elijah? His death ended the force of the laws revealed and taught by these Old Testament prophets (Colossians 2:14-17; see our notes on Matthew 5:17,18). Further, the work of the Old Testament prophets was to prepare the way for the coming of the New Testament and especially of Jesus the Savior (compare Deuteronomy 18:17-20).

So, these men were not antagonistic toward Jesus' death and the removal of the Old Law, but freely discussed it with Jesus. This shows that Jesus' work was not a contradiction or a violation of what they had done, but rather a fulfillment of it. Nor was Jesus' death an unexpected change in God's plan, as premillennialists would tell us. Jesus' death and the removal of the Old Testament completely harmonized with God's plan as revealed through the Old Testament prophets.

The appearance of Moses and Elijah also confirms that, though they were physically dead, they continued to exist in a state of conscious awareness. Death does not lead to the end of conscious existence. As a

general rule, those who have died have no involvement in affairs on earth. However, on certain rare occasions God has allowed some to appear on earth to demonstrate some important purpose. The continued existence of those who have died later becomes the subject of Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees in Matthew 22.

The appearance of these men who had already died was clearly a miracle. And like all miracles, its purpose was to confirm a message or an inspired messenger to be from God. In this case we will see that the appearance of these men was intended to confirm God's approval of Jesus as His inspired messenger.

17:4 – Peter said that it was good for them to be there. He suggested that they make three tabernacles: one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

Luke tells that, as on other occasions, the disciples were sleeping while Jesus was praying (compare Matthew 26:40-45). Note how much we miss when we sleep through great opportunities for spiritual work. This is a general tendency for all people, some worse than others. We seek our own physical ease and leisure, so we miss spiritual opportunities.

However, this does not mean the event here was simply a dream or vision, as though it did not physically occur. Luke also says that, when the disciples saw the event, they were "fully awake." Then they saw the glory of Jesus' transfiguration and they saw Moses and Elijah with Him.

But Peter suggested they made three tabernacles (or "dwellings" – NRSV) – one for each of these three great teachers. Luke's account tells us that Peter said this as Moses and Elijah were about to leave. In saying this, however, Peter did not know what he was saying. Mark adds that he did not know what to answer "for they were sore afraid." Clearly, what Peter said here is a mistake. Had he fully understood the significance of these events, he would not have said it.

Again, as in other examples recorded in Matthew and elsewhere, Peter was often the one to make impetuous mistakes. He seemed to always think something had to be said or done, so without sufficient thought he proceeded. He often made mistakes as a result, but sometimes he also said and did great things (Matthew 26:31-35,69-75; 16:13-18; 14:22-33; John 20:1-10; chapter 21; Acts 2,3,4).

What was Peter's mistake? Note that Moses and Elijah were ***leaving***, but Peter introduced his suggestion by saying, "It is good for us to ***be*** here." Likely this means Peter realized some great historic event was occurring. It was wonderful to have these three great teachers together. So, let Moses and Elijah not leave (as they were about to do). But let them make three places where they could just ***stay***. The prophets would not have to leave, but could stay and people could continue to benefit from their teaching.

Peter appears to be putting Moses and Elijah on an equal with Jesus: each one would get a dwelling place. In any case it is clear that he wanted to keep Moses and Elijah there: let them stay, not go away, so people could continue to benefit from their teachings. That this was not God's will is shown by God's reaction in answer to Peter's mistake.

> "Tabernacle" (σκηνη) – "…1 a place of shelter, freq. of temporary quarters in contrast to fixed abodes of solid construction, *tent, hut* a gener. *lodging, dwelling* … 2 transcendent celestial tent, *tent, dwelling*…" – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

17:5-9 – As Peter spoke, a bright cloud overshadowed them and a voice said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" The disciples fell on their faces with fear, but Jesus said to arise and not be afraid. Then they saw no one but Jesus. As they came down from the mountain, Jesus told them to tell the vision to no one until He had risen from the dead.

Even as Peter was making his statement, God responded to it. A bright cloud (not just an ordinary one) overshadowed them, causing the disciples to fear as they entered into it. Clouds at other times indicated the presence of God (Exodus 13:21,22; 16:10; 24:15-18; 33:9,10; Numbers 11:25; Deuteronomy 5:22).

A voice spoke from this cloud, which was obviously the voice of God the Father for it referred to Jesus as His Son. He stated that Jesus was "My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." This is what the Father had said from heaven when Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3:17 – see our notes there). Then the Father said to "***Hear Him***." When the cloud and voice were gone, only Jesus was left present – i.e., Moses and Elijah were gone.

What is the significance of this?

Testimony that Jesus is the Son of God and God's inspired spokesman

God had caused the change of Jesus' appearance and the presence of Moses and Elijah as a sign that God was speaking through Jesus. This was a miraculous confirmation of Jesus' work. But God the Father Himself then directly confirmed that Jesus was His Son and that people should listen to His message. This was direct miraculous testimony from the Father Himself about the nature and authority of Jesus.

And further, God is now speaking through Jesus just as surely as He had in the past spoken through prophets like Moses and Elijah (Hebrews 1:1,2; Deuteronomy 18:18,19). Such confirmation is the purpose of all miracles (Acts 2:22; Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4; Acts 14:3; etc.). Having seen this, the disciples should never again doubt that Jesus is God's Son and that, when Jesus spoke, His words were from God. Their later

recounting of this event would likewise testify to others about Jesus' approval by God.

As Jesus said in John 8:18: "I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me."

And Peter used this event as testimony for our faith in 2 Peter 1:16-18. "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain."

Evidence regarding the Old Testament laws compared to the New Testament

So Peter understood the lesson later, but at the time of the event, Peter went further than God intended and assumed things that were not what God meant for them to conclude (i.e., he drew an "inference" which was not a "necessary inference," but an incorrect inference.) Peter appeared to be honoring Moses and Elijah equally with Jesus, or at least to want to hold on to the authority of Moses and Elijah as well as that of Jesus. This was not God's intent, so God ***removed Moses and Elijah, left Jesus only***, and emphasized that people should ***hear Him*** – Jesus, not Moses and Elijah.

So, the lesson is that Jesus is a lawgiver and prophet as surely as were Moses and Elijah (Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Acts 3:18-24; Colossians 1:18; Philippians 2:5ff). ***But*** He is not a giver and prophet of the ***same law*** as they were, nor is He on a par with them (Matthew 16:13-18). God speaks to us today, not by the Old Testament prophets, but by ***His Son*** (Hebrews 1:1,2). Today we follow as authority for our practices in God's service, not the Old Testament law and prophets, but the gospel revealed by Jesus (Hebrews 10:9,10; Colossians 2:14-17; Ephesians 2:14; Galatians 3:26,27; Romans 7:1-7; see notes on Matthew 5:17,18).

The mistake Peter made was repeated by many later Jews, even in the church. They wanted to hold to ***both Moses and Jesus*** – both the Old Testament law and the New Testament law (Galatians 2; 5:4; Acts 15). Many people today make the same mistake. They want to bind the New Testament and also parts of the Old Testament. But the very first time this mistake was made, God corrected it by removing Moses and Elijah and leaving Jesus only.

Jesus' message is not in ***conflict*** with that of Moses and Elijah. But neither is it just an ***addition*** to their words. His message ***replaces*** theirs. We do not follow the commands given through Moses ***and*** the commands given through Jesus, but listen to Jesus ***only***. The commands of Moses and Elijah are no longer in effect.

At the time they saw this event, the three apostles did not repeat it to others because Jesus instructed them not to (compare Mark 9:9). After His resurrection, however, they repeated it (as we see it recorded here), and used it as evidence confirming Jesus' authority. And note that here we have another passage in which Jesus directly predicted His own resurrection.

The Bible repeatedly tells us that it takes two or three witnesses to confirm the accuracy of any historical event (John 8:16-18; Matthew 18:15-17). Here, Jesus took three men to witness this event. We can know that He is the Son of God, and that we must listen to all His message, because we have the testimony of those who witnessed such proofs as this.

17:10-13 – The disciples asked why the scribes said that Elijah must come first. Jesus said Elijah would come first and restore all things. And in fact Elijah had already come but the people did not recognize him but did whatever they wanted with him. In the same way Jesus would suffer at their hands. The disciples realized He was speaking about John the Baptist.

Compare Mark 9:11-13.

Jesus then dealt with a question from the disciples about Elijah. Elijah had just appeared with Jesus on the mount of Transfiguration, so the disciples asked why the scribes said he must come first. Perhaps they thought this is why Elijah, when he had appeared with Jesus, ought then to stay longer as Peter had implied. ("First" before what? Apparently, first before the Christ and His kingdom came.)

Jesus agreed with the scribes on this point that Elijah must come first and restore all things. This was stated in Malachi 4:5,6. However, Jesus proceeded to state that Elijah had already come and the people did not recognize him but mistreated him in a way similar to the treatment that Jesus Himself was about to receive from them. Then the disciples understood that He was talking about John the Baptist.

Several other passages refer to John as fulfilling the prophecies about Elijah: Matthew 11:14; Luke 1:17; John 1:21-28; Mark 9:11-13; compare Malachi 3:1; Isaiah 40:3. (See our notes on Matthew 3.) Perhaps the clearest explanation is Luke 1:17 in which it was prophesied to John's father Zacharias that John would come in the "spirit and power of Elijah." This is the sense in which John fulfilled the prophecies about Elijah.

John was not Elijah personally or identically as shown in John 1:21. But he was Elijah in a figurative or symbolic sense in that He was like Elijah in many ways in his character and work. Both Elijah and John were courageous, powerful preachers who rebuked men for their sins and called them to repentance. Both were colorful and unusual

characters. Both were faithful to God and effective in proclaiming His message to the people.

Here is another example in which Jesus clearly proves that Old Testament prophecies, which sound like they should be taken physically, nevertheless are meant to be taken in a spiritual application. Yet people often misunderstood because they made a physical application instead (compare Matthew 16:5-12).

And here again Jesus predicted that He would be abused and killed by the Jews even as John had been.

17:14-20 - Healing of an Epileptic Boy

Compare Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43.

17:14,15 – When they came to the crowd, a man knelt before Jesus and asked him to have mercy on his son because he was a severe epileptic, often falling into the fire or into the water.

When they had returned from the transfiguration, a multitude had gathered (Luke adds this was the next day). According to Mark, the scribes were questioning with Jesus' disciples (we are not told which disciples these were).

A man from the crowd came and knelt before Jesus, asking Him to heal his son. The symptoms were similar to epileptic fits. He often fell into fire or water. Mark adds that he often fell down, foamed, and ground his teeth. The KJV translates this as "lunatic." Mark 9:17 says he had a "dumb spirit." It is clear from the context that he had a demon.

It is unclear whether or not this is epilepsy in the same sense we use the word today. If it is, this does not mean that modern epileptics nor modern lunatics are possessed by demons. Many diseases in the New Testament were associated with demon possession but were diseases we commonly have today when there is no connection to demon possession at all. Examples are blindness, deafness, dumbness, etc.

Apparently demons sometimes had the power to cause diseases or at least were associated with diseases that can otherwise occur without demon possession (Matthew 9:33; 12:22; Luke 11:14). Even in the Bible, not every person who was blind, deaf, dumb, etc., was described as possessing a demon.

17:16-18 – The man brought his son to Jesus' disciples but they could not cure him. Jesus expressed sorrow for that faithless and perverse generation and wondered how long He would have to bear with them. He said to bring the son. He rebuked the demon so it came out and the child was cured from that hour.

Jesus' disciples had been asked to heal the boy, but they could not. At this point, they did not have Holy Spirit baptism, nevertheless they had done some miracles (Matthew 10:1ff). This one they could not do.

Jesus expressed disappointment in the disciples' lack of faith (compare verse 20), and the difficulty it created for Him to have to continue among such faithless and perverse people. Observe that Jesus became deeply troubled and grieved by having to deal with the weaknesses and sins of people, even His followers. Doubtless it is a great trial to God even today to see the lack of faith and righteousness that still exists among His people.

Mark's account states that, as the child was brought to Jesus, the demon convulsed him and threw him to the ground. The father told Jesus this problem had existed since the boy was a child. So this was not a recent development, but was a long-standing disease. True Bible miraculous healings consisted of curing obvious, unquestionably existing problems.

Jesus rebuked the demon, it left, and the child was cured the same hour. Mark adds that, before leaving, the demon convulsed the child to the point some thought he had died. But Jesus raised him up. As with other miracles, there was no waiting. It was not a partial cure. It was immediate and complete.

17:19-21 – The disciples privately asked Jesus why they could not cast out the demon. Jesus said it was because of their unbelief. If they had faith as a mustard seed, they could tell a mountain to move, and it would move. Nothing would be impossible. But He added this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.

Later the disciples asked Jesus in private the reason for their failure. Jesus gave two basic reasons.

(1) To remove certain kinds of demons, fasting and prayer were required. This implies that some kinds of demons were more difficult than others to cast out. The disciples had cast out some demons but could not cast out this one.

(2) They lacked faith. Jesus explained further that, if they had sufficient faith, even a faith so comparatively small as a grain of mustard seed, they could tell a mountain to be moved and it would. Nothing would be impossible for them. Compare 1 Corinthians 13:2.

This whole event becomes a lesson on faith. When He first learned of the disciples' failure, Jesus had sighed over their faithlessness. He had, in Mark's account, told the father, "All things are possible to them that believe." Then He told the disciples a similar thing.

What application does this have to us? Other scriptures show that this does not mean we can do miracles. Even the "all things" stated to the disciples must be understood in the context of all things that are the Father's will. They surely could not do miracles that contradicted the will of the Father. So we cannot expect faith to help us do things that are not the Father's will. And 1 Corinthians 13:8-11 and other passages show

that, according to the Father's will, miracles have now accomplished their purpose and have ceased.

Yet there is much today that God does want us to do. Philippians 4:13 teaches, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." This is a similar statement, but again from other Scriptures we must understand that the "all things" means all things that God's will for us to do. We may not be able to do miracles, but we can do whatever God teaches us to do. But this requires faith on our part, and often we fail because we lack that faith. We need greater faith to do greater works for Jesus. Lord, help Thou our unbelief.

Please note that our works go hand-in-hand with our faith. We do not please God by "faith only," as some teach. We must have faith that demonstrates itself in acts. When we do not do the acts, God concludes, as Jesus did here, that we lack the faith.

Further, note how Jesus' response differs from that of modern "miracle workers." Modern faith healers claim they can do miracles just like those in the Bible. When they attempt them, however, they often fail, especially in the cases that are more obviously impossible by natural law. When they fail, they often blame it on the lack of faith on the part of the people who want to receive the healing. Rarely do they admit it is because of their own lack of faith! Nor do they call in someone who has greater faith who can do it!

In those rare cases where Jesus' disciples attempted a miracle but failed, He blamed it on the lack of faith on the part of the one attempting to do the miracle. Jesus Himself never attempted to do a miracle and failed. Nor did the apostles ever fail after they receive Holy Spirit baptism on the day of Pentecost.

17:22,23 – In Galilee Jesus again told them that the Son of Man was about to be betrayed into the hands of men who would kill Him and the third day He would be raised up. The disciples were very sorrowful.

This is similar to Matthew 16:21 (see notes there). Jesus here added, however, that He would be betrayed. This is an additional thought, showing a detail not mentioned before. Jesus knew much about His death beforehand. How it must have pained Him to know this was ahead of Him. And what great proof of His Deity is given by the fact He predicted it all ahead of time!

This time the disciples had apparently learned from the rebuke Jesus gave Peter the last time Jesus said something like this. On that occasion Peter had rebuked Jesus and said He would never die as He had predicted. For this Peter received a powerful rebuke. This time no one dared to contradict Jesus, but they were sad to hear it. Mark and Luke record that they still did not really understand but were afraid to ask.

17:24-27 - The Temple Tax

17:24 – In Capernaum those who collected the temple tax asked Peter whether or not Jesus paid the temple tax.

When Jesus and His disciples had come to Capernaum, those who collected the temple tax asked Peter whether or not Jesus would pay it. This tax was called the "half shekel" (ASV). Exodus 30:11-16 shows that each person was required to pay a half shekel for the services of the sanctuary in order to finance the sacrifices and other temple services. See also 2 Chronicles 24:6; 2 Kings 12:4; Nehemiah 10:32.

17:25,26 – Peter said that Jesus did pay the tax. But in the house Jesus asked him whether earthly kings required their own children to pay taxes or just other people. Peter said it was just other people, so Jesus said the sons were free from the taxes.

Peter told those who inquired that Jesus would pay the temple tax. But when He saw Jesus, Jesus asked him about it. First, Jesus asked in general about taxes. Do kings make their own children pay taxes, or do they collect taxes from "strangers" – i.e., from people outside their own family? Peter, of course, said that taxes were collected from other people, so Jesus concluded that the children of the king were free from paying the taxes.

What is the application to the paying of the temple tax? The tax was to support the service of God in the temple. Since Jesus is the Son of God, it follows that Jesus is the Son of the One for whose service the temple tax was being paid. The children of the king did not need to pay taxes to support their own father, but were themselves supported by the taxes paid to their father. (Jesus was also the Son of David and the rightful heir to the throne of David, so in that sense He should be free from taxes. But here, I believe, He refers to the fact that He was the son of God.)

The conclusion would be that Jesus did not need to pay the tax for the service done in the temple. If anything, He had the right to receive service and honor from the worship offered in the temple and paid for by the tax.

Note the significance of Jesus' claim here. Peter had earlier confessed Jesus to be the Son of God (Matthew 16:15-17). This was good, but Peter did not seem to fully understand the implications of his own confession. Jesus was helping him see the full implication of who Jesus is. If Jesus truly is the Son of God, then He received the benefit of the worship done in the temple.

There are those who would tell us that Jesus Himself never really claimed to be the Son of God or to possess Deity. In truth, what Jesus did was to give people evidence that necessarily led them to that conclusion. This is known as "necessary inference." Here we have an

example in which Jesus clearly demonstrated His position as Deity along with the Father.

17:27 – To avoid offense, however, Jesus told Peter to go cast a hook in the sea and take the first fish that he caught. In its mouth he would find a piece of money that he should take to pay for the temple tax for Jesus and for Peter.

Obtaining the money miraculously

Jesus then determined to pay the tax, not because it was necessary, but as a matter of influence in order to set a good example for others. He instructed Peter, the fisherman, to go catch a fish. The first fish he caught would have in its mouth the exact amount of money to pay the temple tax for Jesus and Peter.

Why pay it this way? If Jesus could get money in this way – and if He knew this would work even before Peter ever went – then Jesus must be who He claimed to be: the Son of God. This was a miracle; and as with all Jesus' miracles, it confirmed Jesus' claims. Jesus taught Peter to appreciate that Jesus really is the Son of God. The method of obtaining the money would impress on Peter's mind the claims that Jesus had just made.

Since Jesus really is the Son of God, He did not need to pay the tax. If He could get money this way, then He really did not need anybody to provide Him anything, and He surely had no real problem paying this or any tax. His reason for discussing this with Peter was, not that He did not want to pay the money, but He did want Peter to learn the lesson of who He really is.

Avoiding causing offense

Note also that Jesus practiced what He is about to preach in 18:6,7. Had there been a principle of doctrine at stake, Jesus would have spoken out for the truth even if some were offended, as He did when opposing the false teachings of the scribes and Pharisees (see Matthew 15:1-14 etc.). But since there was nothing wrong with paying the tax – for Him it was simply a matter of personal liberty – Jesus determined to avoid making an issue that could cause confusion.

See also Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8 & 10. There are times when we have the liberty to act in a certain way, but to do so might be a spiritual hindrance to some people. It might cause them to sin or to reject the teaching of truth on some point. So, we ought to be willing to forego our liberty and not insist on practicing it, if in this way we can help further the cause of Christ.

In this case, as the Son of God Jesus really should not be required to pay the tax. However, if He refused, people would misunderstand and think He was too concerned about money or that He was teaching other people not to pay taxes. After all, if He, as the teacher, could refuse to pay taxes, so could everyone else. In fact, Jesus' attitude toward paying

taxes was about to become a major issue between Him and His enemies. So He paid it to set a good example for others as to how they should act, not because He was obligated. We need to apply this principle in other matters as well.

Incidentally, note that Jesus here, contrary to the opinions of some, approved of catching a fish with a hook.

Matthew 18

Chapter 18 – Greatness in the Kingdom; Dealing with Temptations and Sins

18:1-5 - Greatness in the Kingdom

Compare Mark 9:33-50; Luke 9:46-48; 17:1,2.

18:1 – Jesus' disciples asked who is greatest in the kingdom.

The disciples asked Jesus about who is greatest in the kingdom. This was a common problem among them (see also Matthew 20:28-28; 23:11; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 22:24-30). It shows their pride, their desire for honor among men, their material interest, and their material concept of the kingdom. They were still thinking in terms of human desires instead of the will of God (Matthew 16:23ff). Jesus responds to this attitude with a series of admonitions all of which show the concern we should have for others.

People often have pride that leads them to seek honor above others. The Bible often warns against this (1 John 2:15-17; Romans 12:3ff; Philippians 2:2ff). This is the same attitude that often led the Pharisees to sin because they often acted from desire to please the people or to avoid letting people know their real character. This led to hypocrisy and improper motives. Jesus often rebuked people for this attitude (John 12:42,43; Matthew 23:1ff; 6:1ff; 27:18; Luke 14:7-14). Now to find the same attitude prevailing among His disciples must have been a great burden.

However, often the same attitude exists today in government, in homes, in business, and even in the church. Often there are power struggles, people wanting their own way or wanting to be honored above others. People seek to exalt preachers or other leaders (1 Corinthians 1:10-chapter 4). The attitude leads to strife and conflict among God's people (James 3:13-18).

It would appear that the Catholic Church believes they know the answer to the question of who is greatest. They claim that Peter was the greatest and this was taught by Jesus prior to the present discussion

when, in 16:18, He taught that the church would be built on Peter's position as Pope. But if that is what Jesus taught, apparently the other apostles did not get the point, since they still were wondering about who is greatest.

If Jesus intended for Peter as pope to be the greatest in the kingdom, the present discussion would have been the perfect opportunity for Him to make that clear. Instead, however, He proceeded to rebuke the desire to be the greatest. Yet that attitude is exactly what led to the establishment of the Catholic hierarchy and the claim that the bishop of Rome is the head of the church. Jesus established no earthly head and no earthly hierarchy.

18:2-4 – Jesus called a little child and set him in the midst. He said that, unless people are converted and become like little children, they will never enter the kingdom of heaven. So whoever humbles himself as a little child is greatest in the kingdom.

To show the disciples their error, Jesus used a little child as an example. He said one must become like a little child to enter the kingdom. Then He said one must be humble like a little child to be great in the kingdom.

Entering the kingdom

Note that before answering their question about greatness in the kingdom, Jesus first discussed entering the kingdom. The disciples had assumed they would enter it and wondered only about how great they would be. Because of their pride, Jesus first warned them they had to change or be converted to even enter the kingdom.

To be truly converted we must become like little children. Some say little children need to be baptized because they have inherited Adam's sin and are totally depraved. Jesus did not teach this, nor did He ever baptize little children or teach others to baptize them. He said little children are acceptable before God just like they are.

To be acceptable before God, Jesus taught others to become like the little children. If little children are totally depraved, then it follows that we must become converted and become totally depraved to enter the kingdom! This is nonsense. The clear meaning is that true conversion makes us like children, but conversion forgives us so we are without guilt. So, children must be sinless or considered by God to be not guilty. (Compare Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17; Psalm 106:37,108). Sin is not inherited from our earthly ancestors (Ezekiel 18:20). Each person will be judged by God for what he has done, not for what Adam did (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Notice that Jesus was still talking about the disciples' entering the kingdom. It follows that the kingdom still did not exist at this point, and the disciples were not yet in it. In 16:19 Jesus promised to give Peter the

keys to the kingdom. And here in chapter 18 they were still not in the kingdom. People first entered the kingdom on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, which is when Peter used the keys by preaching the first gospel sermon.

See also Exodus 32:32,33; Hebrews 2:14,17 and 2 Corinthians 5:21; Mark 7:20-23; 1 John 3:4; Romans 6:16,19; 2:6-10; 14:12; James 1:14,15; Matthew 7:21-23; Jeremiah 19:4,5.

To learn more about total inherited depravity we urge you to study our free articles on that subject on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct (see the section about forgiveness or salvation).

Greatness in the kingdom

Having been converted so we can enter the kingdom, we must then be humble like little children to be great in the kingdom. Little children usually do not, like these disciples, worry about who gets the greatest honor from the world. They are humble and dependent, trusting on adults. They know adults are in charge and they are followers not leaders.

So we must be like them in relationship to God. We must realize that our greatness is not achieved by honor among men and getting our own way. We are dependent on God and must submit to His will. He is in charge and we must humbly follow His will.

In particular, little children often do not think they are too good to do humble jobs. So, we need to be humble to do works of service that proud people think are beneath them. Greatness is measured by our willingness to humble ourselves, give up our own honor and pride in the sight of men, and do humble works of service (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 9:35).

How does this connect to the following verses (5-14)? It appears that there is intended to be a connection. There is no indication of a break. Jesus continues to talk about "little children" or "little ones." It appears that, having shown we are great if we are humble, Jesus proceeded to show how humble people will act and, in particular, how we should treat other humble servants of God.

18:5 – Whoever receives a little child in Jesus' name receives Jesus.

Receiving a little child does not, it seems, still refer just to a literal physical child. Jesus said we must become like little children to be disciples; now He describes principles regarding how, if we have the proper humility, we will be similar to little children. In particular He discusses how we should treat other little children. This would include all who are like little children – i.e., all disciples. (See verses 6,10,14.)

This view agrees with many other Scriptures. Jesus' disciples are often called "little children" – John 13:33; Galatians 4:19; 1 John

2:1,12,28; 3:7,18; 4:4; 5:21. And other verses show that we should receive Jesus' disciples, and that the way we treat them is the way we treat Jesus Himself – Matthew 10:40-42; Luke 10:16; John 13:20; Mark 9:37-41; Luke 9:48; John 12:44; Galatians 4:14; compare Matthew 25:31-46.

Children and Jesus' disciples are viewed as representative of Jesus, so how we treat them is how we treat Him. In particular, we must have the humility to be willing to care for and serve the needs of children and other humble disciples.

Jesus is teaching about who is greatest in the kingdom. Most people think one is great if he has an exalted position in the eyes of people and if other people serve him. Serving a child is not thought of as great. The disciples thought serving Jesus was great but serving a child was not great. But Jesus said serving a child was serving Him. Greatness consists of serving the needs of others, no matter how humble. The disciples' concept of greatness – and our concept – needed revision.

18:6-14 - Warning against Causing Temptations

18:6,7 – Whoever causes a little one who believes in Jesus to sin, it would be better if he were drowned in the sea with a millstone around his neck. Woe to the world because of offenses. Offenses must come, but woe to the person through whom they come.

Jesus continues showing the concern disciples should have for one another in contrast to the attitude of seeking to be exalted above others (verse 1). Here He shows we should not cause them to sin.

Who are the "little ones"?

As discussed already on verse 5, "little ones" in the New Testament often refers to disciples, not children (Matthew 10:42; Luke 17:2; Mark 9:42). Verse 14 speaks of little ones perishing because they go astray. This surely includes disciples, not physical children. So, the "little ones" here are not just children (though they may be included), but also includes those who must become like children, i.e. disciples (verses 3-5).

Mark 9:33-49 helps confirm this conclusion by apparently showing a break in the thought between the receiving of children (as in Matthew 18:5) and causing offense to little ones (verse 6). And Luke's account (Luke 17:1,2) simply includes the teaching as though it is a general truth, not even connecting it to the discussion about children. This is also confirmed by the many other passages that instruct us not to cause anyone to stumble. The application is much broader than just to children.

If instead of caring for children and humble disciples (verse 5), we make them stumble, we would be better off dying a horrible death by drowning in the sea (the millstone was a large stone such as an animal would turn for grinding meal). This discussion began because the disciples were concerned about being viewed as great. Jesus taught them

to be like children, care for others' needs, and don't cause others to stumble. If we do this, we are great. If we cause others to stumble, we are not great but deserve severe punishment.

Consider the meaning of "offend" or "offense" (KJV).

Other translations are: "cause to sin" (NKJV, ESV), "cause to stumble, occasion of stumbling" (ASV, NASB), "stumbling-block" (NASB – verse 7), "temptations to sin" (ESV – verse 7).

The original significance of the word was the trigger of a trap or snare – the part to which the bait is attached. So, it came to refer to something that lures someone and causes them to be snared or trapped spiritually. It is a stumbling block: something in the path of a person that trips them or makes them fall. In spiritual matters, falling is sin. So, a stumbling block is something that tends to make someone fall into sin. It is a temptation.

Note the use of the word in verses 8,9. As a consequence of being offended, one may go to eternal fire. So, the reference is to things that entice or impel someone to do what is sinful: a temptation that could cause someone to so sin as to be lost. Consider also the example of Balaam in Revelation 2:14.

Contrary to what some folks think, as used here the meaning is not simply something that causes someone else to be annoyed, upset, angry, or disgusted with us. Though the word can mean this in some contexts, this is not the meaning here, as we have shown by context. It is not just a case where something we do hurts someone else's feelings or leads them to think we have sinned. These feelings may or may not accompany an occasion of stumbling. A person may feel very upset and yet not feel any urge to sin themselves. There is no stumbling block, as used here, unless the person is definitely led toward, encouraged, or urged to himself do something sinful.

Note that this passage is talking primarily about the spiritual consequences, not to the person who is being tempted, but to the person who causes the temptation. If one is tempted and sins, he is guilty. This passage does not excuse him. In fact the passage says there will always be temptations. So, we must have the strength to resist. But this passage is saying that the one who causes the temptation is ***also*** guilty of sin. Drowning with a millstone around your neck is preferable to the case of one who would so tempt others.

If one person tempts another so that the other person commits a sin, then both parties have sinned. Often one who sins may think he can escape responsibility by saying, "It was his idea," "He told me to," "The devil made me do it," "It's society's fault," etc. Or the one who tempted the other person may say, "I didn't do it. He's the one who did it."

Other people attempt to excuse themselves for their bad influence by saying, "Nobody can escape all temptation." "If I hadn't sold him (cigarettes or alcohol, etc.) some one else would have." "There are lots

worse things shown on TV, at school, etc." But this is exactly what Jesus said. Offenses must come, but woe to the person by whom the offense comes.

But neither person can escape responsibility by saying that the other is to blame. Both are to blame and both will be held accountable by God. They are "partners in crime," accessories to the wrong.

Other passages regarding tempting others include: Genesis 3:1-10; 1 Corinthians 15:33; 5:6ff; Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 4:12; Matthew 5:13-16; Titus 2:7,8; 1 Peter 2:11,12; 2 Corinthians 6:3; 8:20,21; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:23-33; Romans 1:32; Ephesians 5:11.

> "Cause to sin" (σκανδαλιζω) – "...1 to cause to be brought to a downfall, *cause to sin* (the sin may consist in a breach of the moral law, in unbelief, or in the acceptance of false teachings) ... 2 to shock through word or action, *give offense to, anger, shock...*" – *Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.*

Ways people may be guilty of causing stumblingblocks

Here are some examples of the many ways that a person may be guilty of tempting someone else to sin as Jesus forbids here.

1) A person may commit a sinful act in the presence of another person. When people observe someone commit a sin, they may be tempted to commit that sin themselves (1 Corinthians 5:7ff; 1 John 2:10). This is group or peer pressure, the band wagon. We want to be part of the group, we don't want to appear to be an oddball, so we go along. This is the main reason most people begin drinking, smoking, or using drugs.

Note that, in this case, the first person is wrong in two ways: first because he did the wrong act and then because his example encouraged others to do it.

2) A person may knowingly provide others with things that are sinful to use (whether or not he uses them sinfully himself). Genesis 3:1-10 – Eve sinned, first by eating the forbidden fruit, and then by offering it to Adam to eat. Modern examples would include: buying, selling, or producing cigarettes, dirty books, liquor, drugs, or lewd movies; giving a child a present forbidden by his parents.

3) A person may directly urge or encourage someone else to do wrong (whether or not he is doing the wrong himself). Genesis 3:1-10 – The serpent urged Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, but there is no evidence that he ate it himself. Such temptations are often stated as: "I dare you..." "I bet you're scared to..." "You're chicken."

Even if we do not commit sin ourselves, we may laugh at those who do commit the sin, as if it is acceptable; or we make fun of those who don't sin. Examples include young people who dare one another to drink, steal, take drugs, disobey their parents, or break the speed limit.

4) A person may act, speak, or dress in such a way as to lead someone to want to have evil thoughts (whether or not he himself is participating in those evil thoughts). Examples include: Telling

suggestive stories or jokes, dressing lasciviously with inadequate or suggestive clothing, modern couples dancing with someone other than their spouse, petting.

5) A person may so act as to lead people to think he condones error. Examples include: Sitting in a bar with men who are drinking, attending a dance even if we do not dance, attending a denomination without rebuking the sinful practices.

6) A person may approve or defend or justify those who sin, or he may take pleasure in the sin of others (Romans 1:32). Examples include: Laughing at a dirty joke, paying for a dirty movie or magazine, praising someone who did wrong, or criticizing those who condemn a sinful act. All such encourages people to continue to do wrong.

7) A disciple of Jesus may drive people away from the truth by improper attitudes or personal habits. Those who have been offended may never commit the same acts that they observed, but they also may never be reached with the gospel because they were so repulsed by what they saw. Their minds become closed to future teaching. (Some may be offended if we teach them the truth, but in this case we have not done wrong – Matthew 15:12.)

Examples include: smoking, social drinking, scanty apparel (Matthew 5:27-30), etc. If you practice these and if you diligently attempt to teach the gospel to others, it is just a matter of time till someone will reject your teaching because he knows the kind of life you lead. And even other Christians may be unable to teach that person because he has been so turned off by the "hypocrites in the church."

8) One may so act as to tempt another person to violate his conscience, even if the act is not sinful of itself (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8 & 10). The example in these passages is eating meat offered to an idol.

9) One may teach false doctrine and lead people to practice or believe error (Romans 16:17).

Note that different people may be affected differently by the same act. What constitutes a temptation to one person may be no temptation to another. Sometimes we excuse our conduct saying, "It would not tempt me if someone did that around me." "I talked to X and he said that it would be no temptation to him if I did that." That is not the point. The fact some are not tempted does not prove no one is tempted.

You might drink in my presence and I might have no desire at all to drink. But drink in the presence of a former alcoholic and he may be powerfully tempted. Or do so in the presence of young people and you may lead them to start and eventually become alcoholics. The same is true of scanty apparel. Some think that they are not tempted to lust because someone wears a swimsuit, halter, shorts, or short skirt. But just because some people claim not to be affected, that does not justify the act if there are other people who are tempted.

There are many ways to be guilty of tempting someone else to sin. Jesus shows that, if we have the proper humility toward other Christians, we will take care to avoid tempting them.

18:8,9 – If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it away. It is better to enter into life lame or maimed rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the everlasting fire. If your eye causes you to sin pluck it out and cast it away. It is better to enter into life with one eye rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.

Jesus continues His discussion of temptations by discussing the need to avoid that which offends ***us***. In verses 6,7 He had discussed avoiding things that tempt others (see definitions there). Now He discusses the need to avoid what tempts us. He says to cut off hand or foot, or pluck out an eye if it causes you to sin, because it is better to have eternal life missing a member then to have all our members and be lost eternally. See our notes on Matthew 5:29,30.

This teaching surely should not be taken literally.

We can know this by comparing to other teaching. There is no record anywhere of any faithful servant of God literally cutting off body parts to avoid temptation. If this is a literal command, why do we have no record of anyone doing it?

If a person were to cut off a hand, foot, or eye, could he not still be tempted to sin by means of his other hand, foot, or eye? And if he removed both hands, both feet, and both eyes, he could still sin by his ears or tongue. So must he also remove all of these? But he could still sin in his mind. So should he kill himself to avoid temptation?

And if one cannot see, hear, speak, walk, or work, because he has removed his body parts, how can he teach the gospel, attend assemblies, study God's word, and obey other Divine commands? Understanding our other duties shows us this is not literal.

Jesus is making an extreme statement to show us how important it is to avoid temptation.

We avoid sin by eliminating what tempts us: people and circumstances, etc. This is of utmost importance. One must be willing to make great sacrifices to do what is right.

Some reply, "You can never avoid all temptation." Yes, Jesus said in verse 7 there will always be temptation, but He also explains that we must be diligent to avoid it. Does the fact temptation cannot be totally avoided mean I should make no effort at all to avoid it? May I knowingly submit myself to it just for my own pleasure?

As I go about the normal activities of life in doing things God expects me to do, I will face temptation: at work, shopping at the store for things useful to my family, teaching the gospel, and sometimes even attending church meetings. But there are other places, people, and circumstances

that are known to have a greater degree of temptation, and many people submit themselves to that temptation for no good reason except to satisfy their own desires.

Many other passages teach us to avoid tempting ourselves by participating for the sake of our own pleasure in activities that lead us toward sin: Proverbs 4:23; 6:27; 13:20; 22:3; Matthew 5:8; 6:13; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Genesis 39:7-12.

We must take care not to conclude that, since the passage is not literal, we may ignore its application altogether!

Many people read this passage in Matthew 18, conclude it cannot be literal, and then proceed to ignore its application altogether! It is not literal, but it does teach a lesson. The lesson is that we need to take extreme measures to avoid that which leads into sin. This principle is taught repeatedly in God's word. To avoid an improper end result, avoid the things that lead to that result. So important is this that Jesus says it can determine our eternal destiny.

Examples of activities and places this principle would teach us to avoid include: attending dance halls, taverns, nightclubs, watching immoral entertainment or listening to immoral music, etc. The modern electronic age has brought such temptations into our very living rooms on the Internet, television, computer games, etc. These make avoiding wicked thoughts so much more difficult than in recent generations.

18:10 – Do not despise one of these little ones, for in heaven their angels always see the face of the Father who is in heaven.

"Little ones" may include children (verses 3,4), but also includes Jesus' disciples since we are all told to be like little children (see notes on verse 6). Jesus tells us first to receive the little ones, then not to tempt them, and now not to despise them.

"Despise" does not always refer to actively seeking to harm someone, but in many cases it refers simply to failing to properly value or appreciate someone or something (compare Genesis 25:34; Luke 14:26).

This discussion began because the disciples were seeking exalted positions above others (verse 1). Such desires often lead people to fail to value or appreciate humble servants of God. They want to be numbered among the great, so they have little desire to be numbered among or associate with the humble (compare Luke 18:9-14). But a faithful Christian will himself be humble and will value humble people. He will not despise them or set them at naught.

Jesus affirms that all people are important to God and so should be important to us. The proof of their importance to God is that their angels behold the face of the Father in heaven. Hebrews 1:14 says angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit

salvation. Apparently God cares so much for His people that He appoints angels especially to care for them. If they are so important to God to so care for them, surely they should be important to us.

Nothing here states that angels today will give direct guidance or revelation to people apart from the written revelation of Scripture. Nor does the passage promise God will do miracles to help people today. But it does imply that angels care for God's people, therefore so should we.

18:11-14 – The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost. If a man had a hundred sheep and one went astray, would he not leave the ninety-nine to seek the one that was astray? And if he found it, he would rejoice over it more than over the ones that did not go astray. Even so the Father in heaven does not will for one of these little ones to perish.

Throughout this section, Jesus has expressed the concern we should have for other disciples, in contrast to the desire which the disciples expressed in verse 1 to be exalted above others. Here He further shows His concern for His humble servants, by stating that He came to save the lost (see Luke 19:10). And His love is so great that He is like a shepherd who has a hundred sheep, but if one goes astray, He leaves the ninety-nine to go seek the lost one. When He finds it, he returns rejoicing. Likewise God does not want one of the little ones to perish. See Luke 15.

The application of the story shows God's concern for people who become lost. This is a story full of care and emotion. Just as the sheep belonged to the shepherd, so we belong to God. Many verses compare our relationship to God to that of a sheep and a shepherd (Psalm 23; John 10).

All we like sheep have gone astray (1 Peter 2:25). Sheep need care and protection. When they go astray, they often are completely incapable of finding their way home. The shepherd must go after them. We go astray by becoming guilty of sin. We wander from our Master's will. When we do so, we are incapable of finding the way back by ourselves.

A shepherd usually develops a personal concern for each sheep. He knows them and loves them. So if one becomes lost, he is very concerned and goes to great lengths to find it. So God loves and cares for us. If we go into sin, He wants us to return and He is willing to make personal sacrifices so we can be found.

Note that this love and care is individual and personal. The shepherd cares for each individual sheep. It is not just the group of sheep for which He cares, but for each one individually. So if any one becomes lost, he leaves the rest to go find the one that is lost.

So much does the shepherd care for the lost sheep, that he will inconvenience and even endanger himself to save the lost sheep. In the application, God loved us so much He actually allowed His Son to die in order to save us. We deserve to die. But God did not want us to die. He

did not just wait for us to find our way back. He sought for us at the cost of His Son's life.

It follows that, when the shepherd finds the lost sheep, he will rejoice. Surely if a shepherd loves the sheep and goes to the extent Jesus describes to save them, he would rejoice when the sheep was found. Such teaching contrasts to Calvinistic unconditional predestination. Jesus shows that each person has the power to choose whether or not to serve God. The passage teaches that God does not will for any of His sheep to be lost, nevertheless the sheep may so act as to be lost.

God cares about the humble servants in the kingdom. He wants them saved. Instead of seeking exaltation in the kingdom, we ought to seek the salvation of all and ought to work to help the saved stay faithful. To fail to show this concern for the souls of others amounts to despising them as Jesus described in verse 10.

All these lessons teach us proper attitudes toward Christians and also show us what the kingdom is all about. It has nothing to do with self-exaltation. It has to do with saving souls, and avoiding temptation so people can be faithful to God.

18:15-35 – Teaching about Rebuke, Discipline, and Forgiveness of One Who Sins Against Us

18:15-17 – If your brother sins against you, go tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. If he will not hear you, take one or two others so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. If he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. If he refuses to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Throughout this section, Jesus has expressed the concern we should have for other disciples, in contrast to the desire which the disciples expressed in verse 1 to be exalted above others. In particular, He had just stated that God does not want any of them to be lost (verse 14). In this passage Jesus deals with the problems created by sin in which one brother sins against another brother. Again, the concern is that we should help others avoid being lost.

Many other Scriptures discuss the need for discipline or chastisement when one of God's people goes into error. Many Old Testament Scriptures discuss the problem of sin in the nation of Israel. And many New Testament passages discuss the problem of sin in a local church.

One thing that should be clear from these many passages is that God believes in discipline among His people and in all of His ordained institutions. He required discipline in the nation of Israel, he requires it in the government, in the home, and in the church. We too need to

appreciate the importance of discipline and the purposes it accomplishes.

The reason for discipline: a private sin committed by one brother against another brother

This passage discusses sin committed by a "brother" (verse 15) – i.e., a member of the church (verse 17 – compare 1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

The conduct under consideration is "sin."

Sin is violation of God's law (1 John 3:4). We should not discipline people simply for conduct that is questionable ("iffy") or violates some member's opinion. It must be something that can be proved by Scripture to be sin.

Any kind of sinful activity might constitute the "sin" for which action is taken. The principles here described would apply to any sin that a brother might commit against another. It might be lying, stealing, cheating in business, physical violence, etc.

This case is a private sin committed by one member against another member.

At the outset the sin is such that it could be resolved by a discussion between just two brethren. If they can reconcile the problem, that is the end of the matter (verse 15). The procedure is designed to solve the problem as privately as possible, which would be appropriate only if the sin was not generally known. But if others know the sin, they must also be informed if there is repentance, else they would be obligated to continue rebuking the sinner.

Some sins are publicly known and may be publicly rebuked from the outset (Galatians 2:1-14; 1 Timothy 5:20). The case in Matthew 18, however, is handled privately; other members learn of it only if the private efforts at resolution are unsuccessful.

While this passage is discussing private sins, it necessarily implies that public sins also require church disciplinary action.

This is a necessary inference or Scriptural conclusion. It would make no sense Scripturally for the church to discipline private sins but overlook public sins. The result would be, if you sin privately, the church can discipline you; so make sure your sins are widely known and then the church cannot discipline you! Other passages confirm that other kinds of sins should also be disciplined.

It does not follow that the procedure described here must be followed step-by-step in the case of a publicly known sin. The procedure here is designed to resolve the matter as privately as possible; but a publicly known sin cannot be resolved privately, but will necessitate a public confession. Furthermore, with a public sin there is not just one individual who is obligated to resolve the problem with the sinning brother; all members who know are obligated to see that the matter is resolved. Note Galatians 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 5:20.

The first step: a private confrontation – verse 15

To resolve the alleged sin, the accuser must communicate personally with the offender: "Go and tell him his fault between you and him alone" (verse 15).

Privately, the offended brother shows why he believes the other is guilty.

Note that the offended brother is commanded by God to speak to the brother who sinned. He must not spread gossip to other people. Nor may he just ignore the fact his brother has sinned. To fail to rebuke the erring brother is as much a violation of the passage as telling other people. A soul's eternal destiny is at stake. Steps must be taken to restore him.

> "He has done someone harm, and by doing harm he has stricken himself with a grievous wound. Will you then completely disregard your brother's wound? Will you simply watch him stumble and fall down? Will you disregard his predicament?" – Augustine (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

To resolve the problem the accused brother must "hear" and be "gained."

Luke 17:3,4 – This requires the accused offender to be willing to discuss the matter, honestly considering the evidence against him. If there is proof he has sinned, then he must be willing to admit wherein he is wrong and ask forgiveness for it.

Sometimes the accused brother refuses to even discuss the matter. In such a case, obviously, he has refused to "hear." Such a response is sinful, even if he was not really guilty to begin with. But polite and respectful listening alone is not enough to resolve the problem. If the evidence of his guilt is clear, then he must admit error and ask forgiveness.

Matthew 5:23,24 – "Gaining" the brother means the matter has been reconciled Scripturally. It may be that the accused brother will confess the sin and ask for forgiveness. It may be that he can successfully defend his conduct, and both parties may conclude it was all a misunderstanding. Maybe both parties were wrong and must mutually apologize. Maybe the accuser will turn out to be wrong and he may end up apologizing. In all these cases, you have "gained your brother."

When the sinner repents and asks for forgiveness, the offended brother must willingly forgive.

The offended brother must sincerely desire the problem to be reconciled. He should not seek vengeance by tongue-lashing his brother, gloating, winning an argument, etc. The goal is reconciliation (Matthew 5:23,24). Acting from a different motive violates the passage.

The offended brother must sincerely hope the sinner will repent, so he can forgive him (verses 21-35; compare Matthew 6:12,14,15; Luke 17:3,4). Repentance and forgiveness then must end the matter (provided

the sin is not repeated). It must not be spread among the congregation, nor may it be brought up again as though the brother is still guilty. If the offended brother refuses to forgive, then he himself becomes guilty of sin.

This pattern does not cause problems, but is God's plan for resolving problems.

Some people view a person as a trouble maker if he confronts another Christian for his sins. But "gain your brother" shows that the sin has already alienated the brethren. The offended party does not "cause" or create trouble by going to his brother. The problem was caused by the brother who sinned. The offended brother is trying to solve the problem by restoring his brother (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19,20).

Often this simple initial discussion could resolve the matter. But if it is neglected, wounded feelings fester and bitterness develops. In case after case, problems that could be resolved by this procedure, become major problems because the pattern is not followed. Misunderstanding grows and the problem magnifies till it "blows up."

The second step: one or two other brothers are included – verse 16

What if the accused brother will not admit his sin? Then he has refused to "hear" his brother, and the matter moves to the next step (verses 15,16).

Each step continues until the accused brother clearly will not "hear" his brother.

This may require several discussions at each step. We move to the next step only when it is clear that the present approach will not accomplish repentance.

If private discussion does not solve the problem, the offended brother takes one or two other brethren with him to talk to the offender.

These men must first examine the evidence. No man may be condemned if he cannot be proved to be guilty. If they are convinced of the man's guilt, they too try to get him to "hear them." Perhaps the man will be moved by the fact that others also see his guilt. If he repents at this point, the matter is resolved. (Or perhaps these one or two men may convince the accuser that no sin has been committed.)

If the man still will not "hear them," then the matter moves to the next step, and these brethren become "witnesses" by whose testimony "every word may be established." (Deuteronomy 19:15; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28)

Note that these one or two brethren become involved in the situation "***with***" the accuser: he "takes them ***with*** him," not ***instead*** of him. The accuser must not be allowed to simply tell others the problem and then remove himself from the procedure while he expects others to "carry the ball." The accuser must confront the sinner in the presence of

the witnesses. He must remain personally involved throughout the entire procedure. Note Deuteronomy 17:7.

The third step: the church becomes involved – verse 17

The "church" must refer to the local congregation, since that is the only capacity in which the church can function (compare 1 Corinthians 5:4). The whole church becomes involved in the matter because the previous steps did not resolve it.

The fact the man is expected to "hear the church" demonstrates that the church becomes actively involved. They must listen to the evidence offered by the accuser and by the one or two witnesses, who "establish" the matter before the church by their testimony. The church then must make a judgment in the matter and rebuke the sinner, just as the brothers do in verse 16.

Perhaps the sinner will be moved to repentance by the knowledge that the whole congregation considers him to be in error. If the man refuses, however, to hear even the church, then it moves to the final step.

The last step: treat the sinner as a heathen and a publican – verse 17

Jews refused to associate with Gentiles or publicans; they would not eat or have social relations with them, because they viewed them as sinful.

Acts 10:28 – It was unlawful "for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation." In particular, they were not to eat with them (11:3).

John 4:9 – Jews had no dealings with Samaritans.

This involved, not just withholding spiritual association, but refusal to have social companionship. Jesus did not agree that people should be so treated simply because of nationality. But He here says this is how people should be treated if they, as brethren in the church, sin and refuse to repent.

The whole church should treat the sinner in this manner. Verse 17 requires the church to hear the case, make a judgment, and rebuke the erring brother. It follows that they should also be involved in the disciplinary action. This is reinforced by other passages about church discipline.

(See Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 19:1-10; Galatians 2:12; compare Genesis 43:32.)

Instructions regarding the church

It may be asked why Jesus would talk about discipline in the church to His disciples at the time when the church did not even exist. The answer must be that He was preparing them for the church so they would know how to conduct themselves after the gospel had come into effect.

Much of Jesus' teaching was designed to prepare the disciples for the coming of the kingdom. Many of His parables spoke of the nature of

the kingdom. In Matthew 16:18,19, He had predicted that He would build His church and give the keys to Peter. In John 3:3-5 He stated conditions for entering the kingdom. And here in Matthew 18:15-17 He gave the disciples instruction how to deal with problems in the church.

In Matthew 19:3-9, He gave instructions about divorce and remarriage. But those instructions could not apply until after the gospel had come into effect and the church had begun, since Jesus Himself plainly stated that His teaching on the subject was different from that of Moses, whereas the Law of Moses would continue in effect until Jesus died. See also Jesus' teaching in Matthew chapter 5.

Who should disassociate from the erring brother?

Some claim that only the offended brother – not the whole church – should disassociate from the impenitent sinner. This claim is based on the use of singular pronouns. Note the response by McGarvey as follows:

> "We have known persons to express a doubt whether this implies an exclusion of the sinning party from the fellowship of the Church; but to deny that it does would involve a great absurdity. It would require the offended party to live in the church with a man whom he justly treats as though he were a heathen and a publican; and it would require the Church to hold in her fellowship men who are rightly so treated by her own members. Surely if heathen men and impenitent publicans are to be *kept out* of the church disciples who deserve to be treated by the brethren as heathen and publicans must be *cut off* from the Church."

It may help us in understanding the language to consider the comments of Hogg and Vine on Galatians 4:7: "...this use of the singular pronoun in addressing a church is not without parallel in Paul's writings; see Romans 11:17; 1 Corinthians 4:7 and Galatians 6:1." They say the singular is used, though the whole church is addressed, in order to express the meaning: "any and every one of you individually."

To learn more about church discipline we urge you to study our free articles on that subject on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct (see the section about the Church and Worship.)

18:18 – Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

The concept of binding and loosing has been discussed in 16:19 (see our notes there). Note that, whereas in 16:19 Jesus was addressing Peter, here He is not doing so. Peter possessed no special power of binding and loosing above other apostles.

How does this verse tie to verses 15-17? Binding and loosing, in this context, means to hold one to be guilty or to declare him to be innocent. So, as observed above, the church must make judgments or decisions regarding sin in matters of church discipline. The efforts that Christians

make, and ultimately that the church makes, may influence whether or not a person remains in sin or is forgiven of sins.

The apostles bound or loosed by preaching the gospel so that people's sins could be forgiven if they obeyed or not forgiven if they refused to obey. So the church binds or looses by rebuking error and practicing discipline. As a result, a man's sins are bound if he refuses to repent but loosed if he does repent.

As noted in 16:19 and in all the verses above, this must be done in accordance with the will of God which is revealed by the Holy Spirit and now recorded in the Scriptures. There is no power here for the church or anyone in it to make church laws where God made none and then discipline others accordingly.

However, the verdicts we reach have eternal consequences. We are discussing, not just that which will affect our relationship to people in this life, but also in heaven. We must take this seriously when we act.

18:19,20 – If two agree on earth concerning what they ask, it will be done by the Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in Jesus' name, He is there in their midst.

As in other passages about prayer, Jesus again promised that God will hear and answer our requests. This must be done in harmony with the will of God (1 John 5:14). In fact the expression "in Jesus' name" requires us to act in harmony with His will or as He has authorized (compare Colossians 3:17).

The promise implies that joining together with other Christians in prayer will multiply the power and the likelihood that God will hear. We ought to join together in prayer in many matters, but the context especially discusses matters of church discipline.

Further, when God's people gather and act in harmony with the will of Jesus, He is present in their midst. This is true spiritually, not physically, of course. But His approval and fellowship are with us when we act. Again this is true in anything we do according to His will, but especially regarding disciplinary matters. (Note the reference to two or three as compared to verse 16.)

Notice again the implication in Jesus' statement that He possesses Deity. Who but God could instruct other people to meet in His name? And who but God could then claim to be in their midst when they did meet, no matter where it would be? What mere man or even a prophet could rightly make such a claim?

18:21-35 – Teaching regarding forgiveness

Compare Luke 17:3,4.

18:21,22 – Peter asked Jesus how often we should forgive a brother who sins against us: as many as seven times? Jesus said, not just seven times, but as many as seventy times seven.

Jesus has been teaching about proper attitudes of concern for brethren. In particular He has discussed sins committed by a brother against another brother (verses 15-17). Peter then asked how often we should be willing to forgive another brother. He suggested as many as seven times, evidently thinking this would be very generous and forgiving. Jesus, however, said more was needed. We must be willing to forgive seventy times seven.

The disciples would understand – even as virtually everyone else would understand – that Jesus was not saying that we should keep a record, forgive as many as four hundred ninety times, and then quit. The meaning of the expression is that we should be willing to forgive an unlimited number of times. In Luke 17:3,4 Jesus taught that we should be willing to forgive seven times in a day if a brother sins against us and repents seven times.

This gives a very good illustration, easily understood by most people, of the symbolic use of the numbers seven and ten. The number seven in Biblical symbolism often refers to that which is perfect. The number ten often refers to completeness. Multiplying the numbers together multiplies the force of the symbolism. So seven times ten or seventy would emphasize perfection and completeness. Multiplying again by seven would further emphasize perfection.

Jesus then told a parable to illustrate the need for forgiveness.

18:23-27 – A servant owed his master ten thousand talents. He was not able to pay, so the master commanded that he, his family, and all his possessions should be sold to make payment. The servant begged the master for patience so he could pay him. Then the master out of compassion completely released and forgave the man of the debt.

The meaning of this parable is evident from verse 35. It is a lesson on forgiveness evidently told to show that God will not forgive us if we are not willing to forgive others.

In the parable, the following parallels are clear, based on Jesus explanation:

* The king represents God.

* The servants represent any persons, especially any of Jesus' disciples. We are all sinners and owe God a debt we could never pay because of our sins.

* The debt owed by the first servant represents the debt we owe because of our sins. When we sin we become debtors to receive eternal punishment.

When the first servant came before the king to settle accounts, it was determined that he owed ten thousand talents. A talent was a

measure of weight. The value depended on what was weighed. If this refers to talents of gold, then the value is incredible.

One writer has estimated that the entire annual amount of taxes collected in the whole area of Palestine in Jesus day' was eight hundred talents of gold. This one servant owed more than ten times that amount. Imagine being in debt by ten times the amount of tax revenue collected in the State of Ohio in a whole year! No wonder the servant could not pay. (Note, however, that the passage does not say whether the talents here referred to gold or silver, so the exact amount cannot be determined.)

In order to pay the debt, the man, his family, and all he had would have to be sold (verse 25). The application to us is that our sins – no matter how many they may be – indebt us to God like the servant was to the king. There is simply no way that we can pay the debt, so the only possible conclusion from our viewpoint is for us to be punished overwhelmingly. There is simply no way we can make up for the debt we incur toward God because of sin.

The servant begged for mercy. He claimed if he was given time he would repay the debt (verse 26). This was impossible. But the event represents the fact that, to be forgiven by God we must recognize how terribly we are indebted to God and must throw ourselves on His mercy.

The king forgave the servant completely of the debt. He did not even demand he repay it any of at (verse 27). This represents the fact that God is willing to totally forgive us of the unpayable debt we incur by our sins. He is loving and merciful, willing to forgive those who come to Him according to His will.

18:28-31 – That servant found a fellow servant who owed him a hundred denarii. He took him by the throat and demanded payment. The fellow servant begged for patience so he could pay the debt. But the first servant refused and threw him in prison. Other servants saw what happened and told the master about it.

Having been forgiven of his unpayable debt, the first servant found another servant who owed him a hundred denarii. The exact amount of money is difficult to determine, but it was surely a payable debt. A denarius is generally considered to be a typical day's wage. So the entire debt amounted to hundred days' wages.

This represents the debt incurred to us when others wrong us. When people sin against us, they do wrong and incur debt. But the size of that debt, regardless of the wrong done, is insignificant compared to what we have done to God.

Yet the first servant was merciless. Though the second servant begged for patience – just as the first servant had earlier begged the master for mercy – yet the first servant had no mercy. He demanded the

second servant be thrown in prison for non-payment. This represents humans who refuse to forgive those who ask us for forgiveness.

Other servants were aware of what had been done. They were grieved, and went and told the master what happened. No doubt they were aware that the master had forgiven the first servant of an unpayable debt. But now that servant refused to even show mercy, let alone forgive, a relatively small debt.

18:32-35 – The master called the first servant and reminded him that he had forgiven the servant's whole debt. Should he not likewise have had compassion on his fellow servant? The master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay his debt. So the Father in heaven will do to us if we do not forgive a brother who trespasses against us.

The king heard what happened and called the first servant back before him. He treated that servant the way the servant had treated his fellow servant. The king demanded total payment. He was not willing to offer mercy to one who refused mercy to others.

The lesson in all this, again, is that God will not forgive us if we are not willing to forgive others (verse 35). This was the same lesson that Jesus had already discussed in Matthew 6:12-15 (see our notes there).

Applications and other passages

We must be willing to forgive others even as God forgives us.

Luke 23:34 – "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Jesus was willing to forgive the very people who mercilessly crucified Him.

Ephesians 4:32 – Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you. The kind of forgiving attitude that God and Jesus have are the same attitude we must develop. (Colossians 3:13)

Matthew 6:12,14,15 – We should pray for God to forgive us as we forgive others. If we don't forgive others, God will not forgive us. We all know that we need God's forgiveness. There is no way we can have eternal life unless He forgives us. If He is willing to forgive us of the extremely great wrongs we have done to Him, how can we refuse to forgive those who wrong us? If we will not forgive, then He will not forgive us.

Jesus' forgiving attitude should become ours. Even though He never did anything wrong, He was killed as a common criminal. Yet He was willing to forgive the people who did it (note that they received this forgiveness only when they repented and met the conditions of forgiveness as discussed in Acts 2). We are far from sinless and in many ways we deserve to suffer. Yet when people do wrong to us, we often

become extremely upset. And even when people apologize to us, some of us are unwilling to forgive wrongs that are far less than Jesus suffered.

See also Luke 17:3,4; Matthew 6:12-15; 18:21-35; Mark 11:25; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13.

Instead of being willing to forgive, however, we often seek vengeance.

1 Peter 2:21-23 – Jesus was reviled, but He did not in turn revile those who reviled Him. He suffered but did not threaten to do harm to those who were causing Him to suffer. Instead He committed Himself to God. This was the example He set to show us how we should suffer.

The fact that Jesus left vengeance in the hands of God demonstrates that these passages are not teaching that we should desire for impenitent sinners to get away with evil without being punished. It says we, like Jesus, should not personally seek to harm those who have harmed us, but we should leave it in God's hands.

1 Peter 3:8,9 – We should be compassionate, not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that we were called to this. This is what Jesus did.

Romans 12:14,17-21 – Again, if we are persecuted, we should bless people instead of cursing them. Don't return evil for evil but be peaceable. If our enemy wrongs us, we should still help him if he is in need. Instead of being overcome by evil, we overcome evil by doing good. We should leave the punishment of the evildoer in God's hands.

(1 Thessalonians 5:15; Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28; 1 Corinthians 4:12; Acts 7:60)

Conditions of forgiveness

Some people believe Christians are supposed to just forgive everybody who sins against us whether or not they repent. I have seen this parable from Jesus used to teach that concept.

Ephesians 4:32 – We should forgive people "just as" God forgives us. Does He forgive people unconditionally even when they refuse to repent? (Colossians 3:13)

Acts 8:22 – When a Christian sins against God, He must repent and confess the sin, asking God to forgive Him. (1 John 1:8-10)

Luke 17:3,4 – If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, "I repent," you shall forgive him. In this passage Jesus plainly states that one who sins against a brother must meet conditions in order to be forgiven. He must repent and state that he has repented. These are the exact same conditions under which God forgives us.

In fact, Jesus' parable here in Matthew 18 shows that forgiveness is conditional. Verse 35 shows that the king or Lord in the story illustrates God, not just a human who grants forgiveness. So if the story teaches unconditional forgiveness, then it teaches that ***God*** forgives men

unconditionally in flat contradiction to Scripture. Instead, each of the people in the story, who needed forgiveness, acknowledged their debt and requested mercy. In other words, they met conditions, just like the Bible says people must do in requesting mercy from those against whom they have sinned.

2 Timothy 4:2-4; Ephesians 5:11 – Consider furthermore that, until our brother has repented, we are obligated before God to rebuke him (as in Luke 17:3,4). When I have forgiven someone of his sin, may I then continue to ***rebuke*** Him for it? No more so than God will rebuke us for sins for which He has forgiven us. If we have forgiven the sin, we should not bring it up again.

But if a person has committed a sin for which he has not repented, then we must not believe that God has forgiven him. And if God has not forgiven Him, then we continue to be obligated to rebuke him. ***My responsibility to rebuke an erring brother means I cannot consider him to be forgiven until God considers him to be forgiven***, and that can happen only when he has repented and confessed the sin! (Compare Matthew 18:15-17; 6:12,14,15.)

This is not being cruel and unforgiving. It is being forgiving like God is forgiving. Is He cruel and unforgiving?

Forgiveness must come from the heart.

The teaching of Jesus about forgiveness shows we ought never to hold a grudge nor seek personal vengeance against anyone who has wronged us. Instead we ought to pray and work for their forgiveness, including rebuking them for their sin. Then we consider them to be forgiven when and only when they repent and meet the conditions of forgiveness.

This forgiveness must be sincere and granted willingly, even as we seek God to forgive us sincerely and willingly.

Matthew 19

Chapter 19 – Teaching Regarding Divorce and Riches

19:1-12 - Discussion of Divorce and Remarriage

Compare Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18.

19:1,2 – Jesus left Galilee and went to Judea beyond the Jordan. Great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them.

The discussion here recorded took place when Jesus was no longer in Galilee but was in Judea beyond (i.e., east of) the Jordan River. Judea was generally considered to be west of the Jordan. However, apparently part of it was east of the Jordan as it was designated under Roman authority.

Great multitudes were present and He did more miracles of healing.

19:3 – The Pharisees tested Him by asking if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason.

The Pharisees again attempted to trap Jesus, this time by asking about divorce. They asked if it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason. "Divorce" (NKJV, ESV, NASB, NRSV) is translated "put away" (KJV, ASV).

"Just any reason" (NKJV) is translated "for every cause" (KJV, ASV), "for any reason at all" (NASB), "for any cause" (ESV, NRSV), "according to every cause" (MLV).

So, the question regards the grounds, reason, or cause for which one may get a divorce. Is it permitted for a man to get a divorce for just any reason he may desire (or is there some limit on the grounds for which he may divorce his wife)?

Note that the Pharisees were again "testing" Jesus, tempting Him, trying to trap Him into saying something they could use against Him. Some commentators refer to a dispute in that day between two schools of thought among the Jews regarding Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and the teaching of the Law of Moses. One group said the passage meant a man could divorce his wife for any reason of his choosing. Others said it could

be only for serious moral faults, perhaps even only for adultery. The Pharisees then may have been trying to get Jesus to take sides in this dispute and thus lose followers among those who disagreed with whatever view he took.

Some commentators also point out that Jesus had already taught on the subject of divorce in the Sermon on the Mount. Perhaps knowing this, these Pharisees brought the subject up again hoping they could find something in Jesus' teaching whereby they could criticize Him for contradicting His previous teaching or criticizing Him for contradicting the law of Moses.

Further note that the question here was asked by the Pharisees and the discussion is directed toward them. Some people claim that the teaching Jesus gives here is "covenant" teaching, binding only on those who have committed themselves to obey the New Testament (i.e., Christians). They say it does not apply to those who are not Jesus' disciples; so such people may divorce and remarry numerous times and then later, if they become Christians, they just keep the mate they have then.

We will observe several problems with this view. An initial objection is that the teaching is not even addressed to disciples but to the Pharisees, who were not Jesus' disciples but were opponents trying to trap Him. Later the disciples ask Him about the teaching (verses 10-12; compare Mark 10), but He first teaches these Pharisees that God never wanted divorce and that the original marriage law taught against divorce. If the teaching applies only to disciples, why did Jesus address it to those who were far from being disciples?

The following comment is appropriate. Rather than focusing on how to get out of our marriages, we need to emphasize encouraging proper marriage relationships so divorce is not even considered.

> "If a man loves his wife, he does not even think about a law for dissolving marriages. Such a law seems unnecessary. But when someone begins inquiring about law aimed at dissolving marriage, there is already some sense of alienation present. ... when you see either man or woman searching out information on the laws of dissolving marriages, you might not be far from wrong in conjecturing that some alienation has occurred between them and that one or the other may be wanton." – Incomplete Work on Matthew (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

> "Divorce" (απολυω) – "...1 As legal term, to grant acquittal, *set free, release, pardon* ... 2 to release from a painful condition, *free* ... 3 to permit or cause someone to leave a particular location *let go, send away, dismiss* ... 4 to grant a request and so be rid of a pers., *satisfy* ... 5 to dissolve a marriage relationship, *to divorce* ... 6 to make a departure from a locality, *go away*..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

> "to loose from, sever by loosening, undo … 1. to set free … 2. to let go, dismiss … 3. to let go free, to release … 4. used of divorce … to dismiss from the house, to repudiate: Matthew 1:19; 5:32,33; 19:3,7-9; Mark 10:2,4,11; Luke 16:18 … 5. … to send one's self away; to depart …" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

19:4-6 – Jesus answered that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female and said "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two but one flesh. So, what God has joined together let not man separate.

God's original marriage law and its application to divorce

Jesus replied to the Pharisees' question by ignoring Deuteronomy 24 completely. His basic answer said nothing about that passage or about the teaching of the Law of Moses or about the dispute among the Jews. Instead, He went to God's original, basic intent when He instituted marriage at the Creation long before the Law of Moses. These statements do not directly refer to divorce, but they do state God's intent regarding marriage and thereby necessarily imply His displeasure with divorce.

> "Look carefully at the wisdom of the teacher. … Before Jesus made his own statement he made it clear through his opening remarks that what he had to say came from his Father's commandment." – Chrysostom (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

That is, before stating His conclusions, Jesus gave His evidence based on the teaching of God as revealed in the writings of Moses himself. He disarmed much of the force of any disagreement before he stated His conclusions. This is a wise lesson for all teachers of the word to learn, especially when facing critical opposition.

Jesus' teaching gives the following evidence against divorce:

(1) Jesus pointed out that God at the beginning made male and female (Genesis 1:26,27; compare 2:18-24). He made one man for one woman, not several women for one man or several men for one woman. And He certainly did not make two men to be marriage companions or two women to be marriage companions to one another. The fact He provided only one woman for the one man clearly expresses His intent for one man to be married to one woman. And He surely made no arrangement for two men to marry one another or two women to marry one another.

(2) Then Jesus pointed out that "for this reason" – i.e., because God had made one woman for the one man – marriage was ordained to join one man and one woman as taught originally in Genesis 2:24. Note that God intended for this instruction to apply, not just to the original man and woman, but to all people who descended from Adam and Eve. This must be true since the instruction refers to leaving father and mother,

but Adam had no father or mother. The original statement of God's intent regarding marriage was that a man should leave father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two become one flesh.

(3) This passage is also quoted in Ephesians 5:22-33, which removes all question whether or not the teaching of this passage is binding today. Furthermore, the context of Ephesians 5:22-33 parallels the relationship of a man and his wife to the relationship of Jesus and the church and to the relationship of a head to its body. A body has one head. Jesus has one church. Likewise, a man may have only one wife, and a woman may have only one husband.

(4) Jesus also showed that the original law said a man should "cleave" to his wife with a stronger bond even than one has with his parents. He leaves father and mother to cleave to his wife. The family bond to the parents will be severed, but the bond to the wife should not be severed. "Cleave" (KJV, ASV) is translated "be joined" (NKJV, NASB, NRSV), or "hold fast" (ESV).

(5) Jesus also said the ***two*** become ***one.*** God's marriage law joins two humans in the marriage and that is all God intended: just two, not three or four or more, neither at the same time nor in succession by divorce.

By this teaching Jesus demonstrated God's will in joining a man and woman in marriage. So Jesus concluded that God joins a man and woman in marriage, therefore man may not put them asunder (KJV, ASV, RSV) or separate them (NKJV, NASB, NEB). This is the fundamental teaching and basic conclusion of Jesus. God joins or binds the man and woman in marriage, so man must not separate them.

Marriage is a commitment or a covenant between the man and woman: "till death do us part". God is a party as a witness to this covenant commitment (Malachi 2:14-16). He holds them to their commitment regardless of what men may say or do. Men may say a couple is divorced and released from the marriage, but God holds them "bound" or "joined." He "makes them one."

Romans 7:2,3 – For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

God holds them bound, so He gives no approval for them to end this marriage nor enter another marriage. See also Matthew 5:31,32; 1 Corinthians 7:10,11.

"Cleave" (κολλαω) – "... 1 to join closely together, *bind closely, unite* ... 2 to be closely associated, *cling to, attach to...*" – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

"...properly, to glue, glue to, glue together, cement, fasten together; hence universally, to join or fasten firmly together ..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

"Join" (verse 6) (συζευγνυμι) – "...to make a pair, *join together, pair..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.*

Other observations

Jesus' teaching is a prohibition against divorce, not just against divorce and remarriage. Some have claimed that couples may divorce for various causes so long as they do not remarry. Verse 9 shows that divorce and remarriage would constitute adultery, but Jesus had already shown in verses 4-6 that the divorce itself is wrong (though it would not be adultery till there is remarriage). God joined the man and his wife, so ***man has no right to separate them:*** the divorce itself is wrong, not just the remarriage.

Further, Matthew 5:31,32 shows that, if they divorce, there is temptation to remarry (or to commit illicit sexual relations) and we should not tempt our companion by putting them in that position So, divorce, on grounds other than fornication, is wrong in and of itself. Remarriage compounds and complicates the sin, constituting adultery, but the divorce itself is wrong.

Observe that Jesus said a marriage must not be put asunder because God joined the man and woman together. But if God did not join them, then it would not be wrong for the relationship to end. And in fact such relationships must end in order to please God. Examples would include "trial marriages," homosexual "marriages" and polygamous marriages. We will also see that, if one divorces not for the cause of fornication and then remarries, the remarriage is adultery. It follows that God does not join them in the remarriage, and therefore they must leave the relationship in order to please God.

It also seems to me that Jesus' use of Genesis 2:24 here shows that the expression "the two become one" includes more than just the sexual union. He says God joined them (they become one), so man must not separate them, referring to divorce. But the divorce does not just end the sexual union; it ends the whole relationship. So, the expression "become one" must refer to the unity of the whole relationship of marriage, which includes much more than just the sexual union. Nevertheless, the sexual union is such a fundamental part of this relationship that, in verse 9, Jesus will show that violation of this union is the only grounds for ending the marriage.

Please observe also that Jesus here puts His stamp of approval on the Genesis record of creation, both chapter 1 and chapter 2. He cites both of those chapters. He confirms that there was a "beginning." Also, there was an original man and an original woman. He states that God created them. And He confirms that God originated marriage and determine the rules by which it is governed.

All this confirms the creation account as literal history. If those accounts were legend or myth, then Jesus would be basing his teaching about marriage and divorce on myth. To deny the accuracy of any of these facts is to deny Jesus as Deity and His truthfulness as an inspired prophet.

To whom does this law apply?

Note again that Jesus' teaching here is based on Genesis 1 & 2, not on Deuteronomy 24. This again reinforces the idea that the teaching is not just for people who have entered into covenant relationship with Jesus according to the New Testament. This passage contains instructions for all descendants of Adam and Eve. It is the fundamental law of marriage since creation (though God tolerated divorce under Moses' law). It applies, not just to people who submit to the New Testament, but to all people.

If God's marriage law does not apply to unbelievers, then by what right do people who are not Christians even get married? Does God not recognize their marriages? In verses 7,8 Jesus shows that, under the Law of Moses, God allowed some exceptions to the original marriage law. But what Moses allowed was not the intent of the original law. Jesus revealed that God now intended to return to the original law, which law applied to all people, not just those in a covenant relationship with God.

Again, Jesus began verse 9 saying, "I say to ***you***." The context in Matthew shows clearly that Jesus was addressing the Pharisees: people who were not His disciples. This also confirms that He intended His teaching to apply even to those who do not accept His covenant. (In Mark 10 Jesus later repeated the teaching to His disciples, adding some thoughts and omitting others. But the context of Matthew shows that verse 9 was addressed to those who were not disciples. The Pharisees were God's covenant people at that time, but they followed, not of the New Covenant of Jesus, but of the Old Covenant of Moses. And verses 7,8 clearly show that the Law of Moses taught differently from the teaching that Jesus gave here.)

Interestingly, other people make an opposite claim, saying that Jesus' teaching here is just an explanation of the Law of Moses, so it was binding only till He died on the cross. And since no passage after Jesus' death repeats the exception that one may divorce for fornication and remarry, these folks conclude that today there is no grounds for divorce at all. The fornication exception (verse 9) was part of the Old Law, they say, and was done away when Jesus died.

But the same point already made also answers this view. Jesus was expressly ***not*** interpreting Deuteronomy 24 or the Law of Moses here. In verses 7,8 He contrasted His teaching as being different from what Moses taught ("from the beginning it was ***not*** so" – i.e., not as taught by Moses). Instead He is here teaching what Genesis 1 and 2 meant, which

law was binding on all descendants of Adam and Eve, not just on the nation of Israel.

Furthermore, this teaching from Genesis 2 is repeated as part of the New Testament in Ephesians 5:22-33 after Jesus died. So the teaching stated in Genesis 2:24 is now part of the New Testament, and Jesus here gave the proper explanation of Genesis 2:24. It necessarily follows that we must apply the law under the New Testament just as He explains and applies it here. We have now returned to the original marriage law, so the explanation Jesus gives of it here is now in effect.

19:7,8 – The Pharisees asked why Moses commanded to give a certificate of divorce and put her away. Jesus said Moses permitted divorce because of the hardness of their hearts, but from the beginning it was not so.

As previously stated, Jesus' position was based, not on the law of Moses or Deuteronomy 24, but on Genesis 1 and 2. The Jews then asked Him specifically about what Moses taught. If the case was as Jesus said, why did Moses say they could give a wife a certificate of divorce and put her away? This would be a natural question since Deuteronomy plainly did allow divorce. Perhaps the Pharisees also hoped to make Jesus appear to contradict Moses.

Note that Jesus agreed that Moses did allow divorce, but He took no side regarding the Jews' controversy about the loose or strict meaning of Deuteronomy 24. He avoided that issue. However, He did clearly state that Moses allowed more liberal divorce than He Himself was allowing. He contrasts what He Himself said to what Moses said, and He also said Moses allowed what God never really intended from the beginning. It necessarily follows that what Jesus taught differed from what Moses taught.

Jesus does not say God was really pleased with what Moses allowed, though of course God tolerated what Moses said. God suffered or permitted it, but never had really wanted it. Apparently there were several things under the law that God permitted though He did not really want, including divorce and polygamy (which was permitted though it too violated Genesis 2:24). Another example is that God allowed the nation have a king though it was not what He intended (1 Samuel 8). Compare Acts 17:30.

The reason for this tolerance was the hard hearts of the people. The original plan of God was as Jesus had stated it. This was given for man in the state of perfection in Eden. Sin entered the world and with it came many complications. Men wanted plural wives (at once or in succession). Since the law was not perfect but only a schoolmaster to bring people to Jesus' perfect law, God seems to have tolerated things He preferred to be different.

Note that Jesus clearly affirmed that Moses allowed what was not allowed under God's original marriage law (compare Mark 10:5).

However, Jesus had explained the original law and said that this was what He was teaching about it. The people to whom He spoke were under the Law of Moses, but we today are no longer under it. So, either the teaching Jesus gave here was intended to be applied after the Law of Moses was removed, or else it never would be in effect for anyone! Obviously Jesus was teaching what His law would be when the Old Law was done away. He was preparing their minds for His coming kingdom as He did with many other of His teachings (compare Matthew 18:15-17). The fact that this original law is repeated in Ephesians 5:22-33 shows that it is in effect today, including the explanation Jesus here gives of it.

(Note: While it makes no difference today, it must follow that Deuteronomy 24, properly interpreted, did allow divorce for more reasons that just fornication or sexual unfaithfulness. This follows for two reasons. First, Jesus said that from the beginning God allowed divorce only for fornication, but He said that what Moses allowed was different from what was allowed from the beginning. Second, the Law of Moses required that a married woman who committed adultery should be slain – Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:13-21; Numbers 5:11-31. But a dead woman cannot divorce and remarry. So, obviously Deuteronomy 24 was not permitting divorce only for the cause of adultery.)

"Divorce" (αποστασιον) – "... *notice of divorce...*" – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich. [The term for "certificate of divorce" is a different term from "divorce" or "put away" elsewhere in the context.]

19:9 – Jesus said that whoever divorces his wife, except for the cause of fornication, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.

This passage is similar to Matthew 5:31,32 in many ways (see our notes there). Jesus says that, in the case in which a man's spouse is not guilty of fornication, and yet the man divorces her and remarries, the man is committing adultery. Furthermore, whoever marries the woman who is divorced also is committing adultery.

Jesus has already said that there should be no divorce. Now He adds two more points:

First, He forbids divorce when it is not ***for the cause of fornication***. It is obviously implied that, if one divorces a spouse for the cause of fornication, then he/she is permitted to divorce and remarry (if this is not true, there would be no point in stating the exception).

Second, He adds the fact that, if the man remarries having put away his spouse not for fornication, his remarriage constitutes ***adultery***, and if the woman remarries her remarriage is ***adultery***.

To whom do these teachings apply?

Jesus said this teaching applies to "***whoever***" does the act described. It is a universal law applying to all people, not just to Christians or to people who have entered into a covenant relationship under the gospel. It applies to all who have entered into a marriage in the first place, all to whom God's marriage law applies, all to whom God's laws regarding adultery and fornication apply. And that is everybody, Christian or non-Christian.

The gospel teaches that adultery and fornication are violation of God's marriage law (1 Corinthians 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4; etc.). But we have already seen God's marriage law applies to all people, not just to disciples of Jesus. This is confirmed by the clear New Testament teaching which expressly states that God's laws regarding adultery and fornication apply to non-Christians as well as Christians – 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 5:9,10; Colossians 3:5-10.

So Jesus says that divorce and remarriage, not for the cause of fornication, constitutes adultery. But the New Testament teaching about adultery applies to all people. And adultery is a violation of God's marriage law, which applies to all people. It necessarily follows, therefore, that Jesus' teaching about divorce and remarriage applies to all people, not just to His disciples.

Other Scriptures show that God recognizes the marriages of those who are not Christians – Matthew 24:35,36; John 4:16-18; Acts 24:24; Matthew 27:19. How could this be true if the marriage laws do not apply to them? Clearly God's laws regarding marriage, fornication, and adultery do apply to non-Christians as well as Christians. So the teaching of Jesus about divorce and remarriage applies to all people: "whoever."

What constitutes "fornication"?

"Fornication" (KJV, ASV, MLV) is translated "sexual immorality" (NKJV, ESV), "immorality" (NASB but the footnote says "sexual immorality"), "marital unfaithfulness" (NIV), or "unchastity" (NRSV).

Thayer, Vine, and Arndt and Gingrich all define the word to mean illicit sexual intercourse. Vine and Thayer specify that it stands for or includes adultery in Matthew 19:9. See the definitions below.

1 Corinthians 7:2-5 and Hebrews 13:4 show that the sexual union outside marriage is "fornication" or "adultery." So fornication includes any sexual union outside marriage. It includes a sexual union between two people neither of whom is married (premarital sex), or a sexual union between two people one of whom is married to someone else (extra-marital sex), or a sexual union with someone of the same sex (homosexuality).

This term then refers to physical intercourse, whether with someone else who is married, someone who is not married, or even homosexual intercourse. All such acts constitute fornication because they involve sexual union with someone other than a lawful spouse. Note

that Jude 7 specifically shows that homosexual acts, as practiced in Sodom and Gomorrah, constitute fornication. 1 Corinthians 5:1 shows that fornication includes extramarital sexual relations ("adultery").

One may wonder why some modern translations say "immorality" or "sexual immorality" instead of just "fornication." The reason is that many people think "fornication" means only "pre-marital sex." So, if the translators put "fornication," this might mislead people to think divorce would not be permitted in the case of a spouse who committed adultery after marriage. And people might think it does not include homosexuality. So translators use "sexual immorality" in order to include these other concepts.

Yet "sexual immorality" is also a confusing translation because it may lead people to think more than sexual intercourse is meant. What if a person dresses immodestly, tells a sexually suggestive joke, uses a sexual profanity, or lusts after a woman in the heart? Aren't these all sexual immoralities? But surely they don't constitute grounds for divorce. If they did, who would ***not*** have grounds?

Jesus is obviously intending to define grounds for divorce in a way that is capable of being ***applied*** so we can know if we do or do not have grounds. If the term is so vague as to include ***any*** kind of "sexual immorality," either He has not defined anything for us at all, or else we can all get divorces!

Consider the following definition from the MLV:

> **Fornication** is from the Greek word (pornia), which means any premarital or extramarital sexual acts between two or more people. ... It means physical sex, including all variations of physical sex. This word should never be translated as either 'immorality' or 'sexual immorality' as many translations have it wrongly.

So, the significance of the phrase is "illicit sexual intercourse" as we have described.

"Fornication" (πορνεια) – "... 1 unlawful sexual intercourse, *prostitution, unchastity, fornication..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.*

"...used a. properly, of illicit sexual intercourse in general ... used of adultery ... Matthew 5:32; 19:9." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

"...is used (a) of 'illicit sexual intercourse,' ... in Matt. 5:32; Matt. 19:9 it stands for, or includes, adultery..." – Vine.

The significance of the term "adultery"

All translations we rely on translate the term to mean "commit adultery." Thayer, Vine, and Arndt and Gingrich define this to mean unlawful intercourse with another person's spouse (see definitions below).

These definitions make clear that adultery involves the act of having the sexual union (intercourse) when one of the parties in the union is

actually the spouse of someone else. This concept becomes important in understanding why Jesus says the parties in a remarriage, if divorce from the previous marriage was not for the cause of fornication, are guilty of "adultery."

As verses 5,6 say, God joined the man and woman in the first marriage, and man cannot separate them. God holds the spouses to their marriage covenant (Malachi 2:14-16) even if men say they are released. So, when the man divorces his spouse (in the eyes of man or civil law), God still holds him bound to his marriage covenant to his first wife. When he has sexual union with his second spouse in his second marriage, it constitutes adultery because he is still, according to God's law, bound to the previous marriage.

This concept is confirmed by Romans 7:2,3 which shows that a man and woman are bound in marriage till one of them dies. So, if one marries another person, they are guilty of adultery, just as in Matthew 19:9. But note that we are told the man and wife in the first marriage are bound till death, and one of them is free only when the spouse dies. Divorce and remarriage does not free them. Only death frees them. So, each and every act of sexual union in the remarriage constitutes adultery (not just the act of divorcing and remarrying).

> "To commit adultery is to have relations with a woman who is not one's proper spouse. A man commits adultery if he brings another woman in, instead of the one to whom he was lawfully bound." – Apollinaris (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

> "Commit adultery" (μοιχαω) – "...1 be caused to commit adultery, be an adulterer/adulteress, commit adultery ... 2 be guilty of infidelity in a transcendent relationship, be unfaithful..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

"...to have unlawful intercourse with another's wife, to commit adultery with: ... middle μοιχωμαι, to commit adultery..." –Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

What should people in an unscriptural remarriage do?

Understanding what we have learned this far helps us see what a couple must do to correct an unscriptural remarriage situation. It is not enough just to admit they were wrong for having divorced and remarried but then continue in the remarriage. They must end the relationship in their remarriage because it constitutes adultery.

They must realize that in God's eyes they are still bound to their covenant to their first spouse. Their divorce and remarriage did not change this. So, they must realize they are bound in their previous marriage covenant and must act accordingly. As long as they continue in the remarriage, they are continuing in adultery. It is not just the act of divorcing and entering the remarriage that is sinful; but continuing in the second marriage is continuing a sinful relationship.

1 Corinthians 7:10,11 confirms this conclusion. As we have stated, it shows that divorce should be avoided (except for fornication – Matthew 19:9). But if divorce has occurred, the only choices that a divorced party has are to be reconciled to their first spouse or else remain unmarried. Remarrying or remaining in a remarriage are not lawful alternatives.

This conclusion is also confirmed by the Bible teaching about repentance. Forgiveness is available to people in sin, but only if they repent (Acts 2:38; 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9; Luke 24:47; Acts 8:22). Repentance requires people to cease doing that which is contrary to God's will and begin doing what is in harmony with His will. In this case the couple must cease their adultery. But their remarriage is adultery, so they must cease the marriage. Note 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Matthew 21:28-32; 3:2,8; Acts 26:20; Romans 6:1-19,23; 2 Corinthians 6:17; 7:1; Colossians 3:5-11.

In particular, one who repents must make restitution, including giving up what he unlawfully took. Adultery is compared to stealing in Proverbs 9:17. If one steals and then repents of stealing, he is not permitted to keep what he stole – Ezekiel 33:14-16. In this case, if one has an illegitimate spouse, he/she must give him (or her) up. Compare Luke 19:8; Acts 19:18,19; Philem. 10-19 (Leviticus 6:1-7; Numbers 5:5-10; Exodus 22:1-15).

The Bible gives examples of people who, in order to repent of unscriptural marriage situations, were required to give up their spouses – Ezra 9:1,2; 10:1-3,8,10-12,44; Matthew 14:3,4.

Consider how this compares to a person living in a polygamous multiple marriage or a homosexual "marriage." Could such a person be baptized and then keep his multiple wives or his homosexual "spouse"? If he entered the marriage after conversion, may he "repent" and pray and then continue in the illegitimate relationship? Remember that repentance and prayer achieve forgiveness for a Christian just as repentance and baptism do for an alien sinner.

What about the put-away fornicator?

Note that, by implication, a person may divorce a Scriptural spouse and then remarry only if he divorces her (or him) for the cause of fornication. There is no passage here or elsewhere that allows remarriage by the person who was put away because he/she was guilty of fornication.

To conclude, as some do, that such a person may remarry would mean that, if they were divorced when they were ***not*** guilty of fornication, they could ***not*** remarry (19:9). But if they were put away because they ***were*** guilty, then they ***may*** remarry. So, the effect would be that the guilty fornicator suffers less serious consequences then if he had been innocent! He is, in effect, set free from the terms of his covenant by means of the fact that he himself violated it!

When a person enters into a covenant, contract, or vow and then violates it, his violation may, under certain circumstances, free other parties from the terms of the covenant, but it does not free the violator to escape the covenant Scott free. The violator is still bound by the contract and must suffer the consequences of his conduct. To say that a person may free himself from a contract simply by violating it is to make a mockery of covenants and of God's law. See also Ecclesiastes 5:2-6.

Consider an example to illustrate the point. Joe is married to Jane but wishes he was married to Sue who is married to Bob. If Joe divorces Jane, he will never be free to marry Sue; if they did marry the marriage would be adultery and they must leave it to repent. So instead, Joe and Sue commit adultery, then they are divorced by their spouses. According to the belief of some, because Joe and Sue committed adultery, they are now free to marry, which is what they wanted to begin with! Even if they are church members, all they have to do is say they repent of the adultery and they get to continue in their marriage!

If Joe stole Bob's cow, in order to repent he would have to return the cow. But (some say, in effect) if he commits adultery with Bob's wife, he gets to marry and keep her, even if he claims that he has repented! Where are the fruits of repentance? Where is the restitution?

What if fornication is committed after the divorce?

There is only one "divorce" in Matthew 19:9 (not two). It is the same "divorce" whether for fornication or not.

It follows that the terms "divorce" and "marry" refer to the divorce or marriage as viewed by society or according to the law of the land. If that "divorce" is ***not*** for fornication, God does not accept it as ending the first covenant bond, but it is still called a "divorce" and "marriage."

Matthew 19:9 (and Matthew 5:31,32 and Luke 16:18) clearly say that, if the "divorce" is not for fornication, ***neither*** party may remarry. If either or both remarry, they are guilty of adultery. (Some translations omit this, but it is included in Matthew 5:31,32 and Luke 16:18.) If that divorce is not obtained for that reason, it is too later afterward to try to get some other "divorce" ("mental divorce" or "divorce in God's eyes" or whatever) for the cause of fornication.

So, it does no good for one to wait until after the legal divorce, then find evidence his/her spouse committed adultery, and then claim the right to "divorce" the spouse from the first marriage. The only choice is to reconcile with the first spouse or remain unmarried (1 Corinthians 7:10,11).

19:10-12 – The disciples said that, if this is the case, it is better not to marry. Jesus said that not all can accept this saying but only those to whom it has been given. There are eunuchs born from their mother's womb, made eunuchs by men, or who make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom.

The disciples were quite bothered by Jesus' teaching. They felt that if this was the law then one would be better off not to get married at all. It appears they concluded that, if a man was unsatisfied with his wife, he would still be obligated to live with her; so it would be better to stay single.

It is true, of course, that unfortunate circumstances can occur in marriages, but these are not the fault of God's marriage law. They are the fault of those who disregard His laws. Actually, Jesus' teaching is the only standard that truly respects the marriage institution as God intended it. Anything less cheapens marriage and allows people to break marriage lightly.

Disciples of Jesus must appreciate the fact that Jesus' standard was not given to make life miserable for people. Rather, it was given because God respects and honors His own institution. God's design for marriage from the beginning is the best plan for everyone involved: the husband, the wife, and the children. Because this is the best plan, God has made laws that forbid easily setting it aside.

Jesus responded to the disciples that some people, for various reasons, do not marry. That is their choice. Jesus is not saying anyone must marry. But one who decides to marry must accept the rules God has revealed regarding marriage. He described three circumstances in which a person might choose to not marry. Some are born without the power of reproduction. Others have that ability removed from them by other people. And some simply choose to remain celibate for the sake of the kingdom.

Note that Jesus did not say that, if people have a hard time accepting what He has said, they are free to just disregard it. He said the opposite. If a person is not willing to accept this standard, then the only alternative is to be a eunuch (remain celibate without sexual relations). Instead of backing off His teaching, Jesus confirmed it.

Too often, when people today consider Jesus' teaching about divorce and remarriage to be unduly restrictive, they simply rationalize changing the rules. They deny that Jesus taught what His teaching clearly means. Or they simply find some other means to deny the need for people to obey. This often happens especially when they or their loved ones have a strong desire to divorce and remarry! Jesus' response is that we must follow the rules as He has explained them or simply don't have a woman at all!

The important lesson to be learned is that people must respect God's marriage law. We should enter marriage and then conduct our marriage with an understanding and determination to abide by God's law throughout marriage. We should also teach our children these principles. We must take God's law seriously and must choose a marriage companion accordingly. We must resolve our differences in marriage without ever considering divorce to even be an option. The result would be a relationship that pleases God and is a blessing to everyone involved.

> "Eunuch" (ευνουχος) – "...1 a castrated male person, *eunuch*. ... 2 a human male who, without a physical operation, is by nature incapable of begetting children, *impotent male* ... 3 a human male who abstains fr. marriage, without being impotent, *a celibate*..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

19:13-15 – Jesus and the Little Children

Compare Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17.

19:13-15 – Little children were brought to Jesus so He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. Jesus said they should allow the little children to come to Him because of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus laid His hands on little children and prayed for them.

People were bringing little children ("infants," NKJV, or "babies," ASV – Luke 18:15) to Jesus for Him to lay His hands on ("touch" – Luke 18:15) and pray for them. He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying hands on them (Mark 10:16).

The disciples rebuked the people for doing this. We are not told their reason for this. Perhaps they thought Jesus was not interested in babies or had no time for them. Their concept of the kingdom seems to color almost every event. They viewed Jesus as preparing to become a great earthly king with influential people following Him. Perhaps they thought He did not need the support of children to do this, nor should He take time from His duties to show an interest in them.

Jesus however replied that they should allow the children to come to Him because "of such is the kingdom of heaven" or to such belongs the kingdom of heaven (ASV). Jesus cared about children and took time for them because they possess qualities that need to characterize those who are in His kingdom – see notes on 18:3ff. This must include the humility and trust and dependence described in 18:3ff.

Luke 18:17 adds that a person cannot enter the kingdom unless he receives it like a little child. That is, as in Matthew 18:3ff, one must have the humble, trusting attitude of a child or God will not accept him.

Unlike the kingdom envisioned by the apostles, in the spiritual kingdom that Jesus was preparing, people needed to be like these children. So, the children were important to Him. It was only the disciples' misconception of the kingdom that made them think children were unimportant.

Consider the implications for the doctrines of inherited total depravity and infant baptism.

Some people teach that little babies are born guilty of Adam's sin. Others say they must be baptized to be forgiven. Some even use this verse to show that little children can come to Jesus; but we are told that a person must be baptized to come to Jesus, therefore little children must be baptized. So this passage is sometimes used to argue for inherited depravity and baptism of babies.

In fact, however, the passage teaches just the opposite. Nowhere does the passage say that Jesus or anyone else baptized these babies. It says He touched them (or held them or laid His hands on them) and prayed for them. But He says the kingdom is for those who are like them, and we must be like them in order to receive the kingdom (compare Matthew 18:3ff).

What this really proves is that little babies are acceptable to Jesus just as they are without baptism. They are not totally depraved, else this passage would mean we must become totally depraved like they are in order to enter the kingdom! They are already in a safe condition, not accountable to God for sin. Further, they do not need baptism to be pleasing to God. As with these babies, all children are pleasing to God as they are without baptism. They cannot be baptized for the remission of sins for the simple reason that they have no sins to be remitted (Acts 2:38).

> "'... to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.' For children are ignorant of wickedness. They do not know how to return evil for evil or how to do someone an injury. They do not know how to be lustful or to fornicate or to rob. What they hear, they believe. They love their parents with complete affection. Therefore, beloved, the Lord instructs us that what they are by the gift of nature, we should become by the fear of God, a holy way of life and love of the heavenly kingdom; for unless we are alien to all sin just like children, we cannot come to the Savior." – Epiphanius the Latin (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

The Bible nowhere teaches the doctrine of inherited depravity. No one inherits guilt, sin, or depravity from their parents or from anyone else. Ezekiel 18:20 says that individuals will be rewarded for their own conduct, not for the conduct of their parents. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says each individual will be judged for the things that he did in his body, not for the things that other people did.

Infants cannot meet the conditions that the gospel requires each person to meet before he can be baptized. The gospel says that, before

baptism, each individual must hear the gospel, understand it, and believe it. Then they must repent of sin and confess Christ. Infants can do none of these things. So, they cannot do any of the things that the gospel requires people to do before baptism (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39; Romans 10:9,10). Further, they cannot worship God, study His word, partake of the Lord's Supper, or do most things the Bible requires people to do when they have been baptized. So, the command to be baptized was never addressed nor applied to babies.

To baptize babies is to change the requirements of God's word and to act without God's authority (Matthew 15:9; Galatians 1:8,9; Revelation 22:18,19; Colossians 3:17). It puts people in a position where they have received an unauthorized and unscriptural baptism. As a result, when they are older and scripturally need to be baptized, many refuse to be baptized because they think they already did it when they were younger. As a result they fail to do what the gospel does require at the point in their lives when they ought to obey. As a result, they remain in their sins all the while thinking they are saved.

Furthermore, the passage nowhere authorizes a special church ceremony to dedicate babies. No church ceremony was involved in this passage. Jesus acted as an individual, touching and praying for the babies. It is likewise appropriate for us today to hold and pray for babies. But this involves no organization or formal ceremony of any kind. To hold a special church ceremony for babies is not taught here or elsewhere. Such a practice as a church function simply constitutes an unauthorized substitute for infant baptism, which in turn is an unauthorized substitute for the baptism of those who are mature enough to meet the gospel prerequisites of baptism.

To learn more about infant baptism and the doctrine of inherited depravity, we urge you to study our free articles on those subjects on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct. See the section about forgiveness of sins.

19:16-30 - The Rich Young Man and a Discussion of Riches

Compare Mark 10:17-30; Luke 18:18-30.

19:16-19 – A man asked Jesus what good thing he should do to receive eternal life. Jesus said there was only one who is good, that is God. But in order to enter life, he must keep the commands. When he asked which ones, Jesus said to not commit murder, but to honor father and mother and love your neighbor as yourself.

A man, whom we are later told was a young man (verse 20), asked Jesus what He should do to receive eternal life. This is an excellent question, which we should all consider. It was also asked on other occasions (Luke 10:25ff; Acts 16:30; 2:37; 9:1-6; etc.).

Only God is good.

Jesus first responded to the fact that the young man had called Him "good." He asked why the man had called Him "good," since only God is good.

Some say this was an act of humility on Jesus' part in which He was humbly admitting that He was not as good as God or even that He did not possess Deity. This cannot be the proper view of the statement, however, since the Bible clearly shows that Jesus was good. In fact, Scripture repeatedly says that Jesus was without sin (John 10:11; Acts 3:14; Hebrews 7:26; 4:15; 1 Peter 2:20ff; 1 John 2:21; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Other passages also clearly show that Jesus possessed Deity (John 1:1-14; 20:28-31; Philippians 2:5ff; Hebrews 1:3-8; etc.). Jesus was humble, but never so humble as to lie or make deceitful statements.

The only sensible alternative then is that Jesus was challenging the man to consider his concept of "good" and the consequences of his statement. If only God is perfectly good, but the man considered Jesus to be good, then he was attributing a Divine characteristic to Jesus. So, if Jesus is really good, He must be Divine. Jesus was not denying His goodness or His Divinity. He was just challenging the man to realize that the consequence of his statement was to attribute a Divine quality to Jesus.

We need to likewise consider titles people often give to preachers today such as "holy" or "reverend." If Jesus would point out the significance of a title used for Him, we should likewise examine the titles used to address preachers. In Jesus' case the title fit because He possessed Deity. But modern preachers are mere men who do sin, so it follows that we should not address them with titles such as "holy" or "reverend." As with Jesus' statement, these terms are properly used only for God.

Keep the commands.

Jesus answered the young man's question by telling him to keep the commands. He then listed some of the Old Testament commands (compare Luke's and Mark's account for others named). In answering a similar question asked by a lawyer, Jesus had said to love God and your neighbor. The other commands that Jesus listed here are the fulfillment of the law regarding love (Matthew 22:37ff; Romans 13:8-10; 1 John 5:3; etc.)

These specific commands are Old Testament commands, though most have been carried into the New Testament. However, a point to be observed is that, under the Old Testament, the ***only*** way a person could have eternal life was to keep these commands perfectly without sin. The law provided no real forgiveness for those who violated the law.

19:20-22 – The young man said that he had kept these commands from his youth, so what did he still lack? Jesus said, in order to be perfect, he should sell what he had and give to the poor. Then he would have treasure in heaven and should come follow Jesus. But the young man went away sorrowful because he had great riches.

The young man said he had kept these commands since he was a youth, then he wanted to know what was lacking. Jesus said one thing was lacking (see Mark's and Luke's accounts). He, of course, knew all men's hearts and could tell wherein the man's heart was in error. So He commanded him to go, sell what he had, and give to the poor. Then he would have treasure in heaven. Other passages sometimes use this expression to refer to how we use our earthly possessions – Matthew 6:20; 1 Timothy 6:19; Luke 12:33.

Note that Jesus is not teaching a blanket requirement that all disciples must give up all possessions, so it is a sin for Christians to own property. If so, then the young man should not have given to the poor, because then the poor would be in sin! Other passages in both the Old and New Testaments teach God's people to care for the needy, but none require giving up all possessions to do so (see verses listed below).

Many other passages also show that disciples were acceptable though they owned property. Zacchaeus was accepted by Jesus when he committed to give only half his goods to the poor (Luke 19:1-10). Compare Acts 12:12; 21:8; etc. See also 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

There appear to be two points to be made. At that time Jesus was calling some to personally accompany Him in His preaching travels. This required them to leave their possessions behind (compare Luke 9:57ff; 18:28ff). Not all were required to do this, even in that day. But perhaps Jesus was asking this young man to do this (verse 21).

Furthermore, it is clear that Jesus read this man's heart and knew his weakness was his attachment to his wealth. Verse 22 tells us that the man was very rich. It is clear he was unwilling to obey when he heard Jesus' command, for he went away sorrowfully.

But observe that nothing had been said or even implied about wealth or riches until Jesus told him to sell his possessions and give them away. This demonstrates that Jesus read the man's heart. Despite the man's apparent devotion, Jesus knew he was too concerned about material possessions. So Jesus gave him an instruction that tested his conviction. The man failed the test. (Though he did not obey, his sorrow indicates that his original question was sincere.)

While we may not be required to give up all possessions, there is a real warning here for us. We must not be so attached to our possessions that we would be unwilling to give them up for the Lord (Luke 14:33; Matthew 6:19-33). If we are so attached, then like the young man, we are not true disciples.

Many other passages teach the need to care for the poor and needy. See 1 John 3:16-18; 1 Corinthians 13:3; 1 Timothy 5:4,8,16; Matthew 15:4-6; 25:31-46; Esther 2:7; Luke 10:25-37; 14:12-14; Ephesians 4:28; Acts 9:36-39; 20:34,35; James 1:27; 2:15,16; John 19:26,27.

19:23,24 – Jesus told His disciples that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom.

Jesus then used this event as an opportunity to teach how riches present a problem in our service to God. He said it is harder for those with riches to enter the kingdom than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. This is very difficult!

Note that Mark adds that Jesus said it is hard for one who ***trusts*** in riches to enter the kingdom (10:24). It follows that the mere possession of riches is not sin. Jesus is not teaching about possessing wealth so much as attitudes toward wealth. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the force of Jesus' statement.

Serving God faithfully is very hard to do for those who are rich. Possessions become sinful when we become so attached to them that we trust them to meet our needs or when we care for them, rather than put our proper priority on God's will. See our notes on Matthew 6:19-34 for more discussion.

Some try to view the "needle" as a low gate in the wall of a city, so that the camel had to get down on his knees to enter it. But the passage does not give this explanation. And Jesus' reaction is that, what He has stated ***is*** impossible (verses 25,26). So, we need not make it easier than it sounds. Jesus agrees that what He has described is in fact impossible.

McGarvey says regarding this that the idea

> "that 'the eye of the needle' here means a low and narrow gate through which the camel could not go except on his knees and after his burden had been removed, is not only without historical foundation, but is inconsistent with the context, which contemplates something impossible with men."

Here are other passages about proper attitudes and use of wealth: Matthew 6:19-34; 16:26,27; James 5:1-7; Psalm 49:6-14; 62:10; Ecclesiastes 5:15; Luke 12:15-21; 8:14; Proverbs 23:5; 27:24; Job 1:14-17; 1 Timothy 6:6-10,17-19; 1 John 2:15-17.

19:25,26 – Jesus' disciples were amazed and asked who could be saved. Jesus said that this is impossible with men, but with God all things are possible.

The disciples reacted by being exceedingly amazed so that they wondered, if the case is so, who could possibly be saved? The disciples were still probably thinking about a material earthly kingdom. They

were looking for material dominion, wealth, and honor (18:1). God had often promised earthly blessings to His nation under the Old Testament.

The disciples apparently thought rich people would be of great value and greatly desired to achieve Jesus' plans for the kingdom. But here was Jesus saying it is essentially impossible for such people to enter the kingdom. The disciples seemed to wonder, "If they can't make it, who could possibly make it?"

Actually, the fact that the kingdom is spiritual, not physical, constitutes one reason why Jesus said that it is hard for a rich man to enter His kingdom. Rich people tend to emphasize the physical instead of the spiritual. Things that appear to be a great advantage, and that in fact might be an advantage in an earthly kingdom, yet can easily become a disadvantage in Jesus' spiritual kingdom.

Jesus admits that it would be impossible, in human terms, for a rich man to be saved. But then it is humanly impossible for ***any*** man to be saved, from the standpoint of human strength, because all have sinned. Once we have sinned, we are doomed, so "with men" salvation is impossible for all sinners. But with God all things are possible. The God who could create the universe in six days and empower men to do great miracles surely also has the power to save people who have no power to save themselves. This states a general truth: God can do anything because He is all-powerful.

No man will be saved by his own power. All men need to learn this, but especially rich men. They may be accustomed to getting what they want by thinking they have earned it or can buy it. Salvation cannot be bought. It is not a humanly possible achievement. It requires Divine mercy and grace to grant what we cannot do for ourselves.

For other passages about the power of God see Genesis 17:1; 18:14; Mark 14:36; Luke 1:37; Job 42:2; 26:14; Revelation 19:6; Jeremiah 32:17,20-22; Psalm 33:10,11; 115:3; Proverbs 16:9; Isaiah 14:24-27; 43:13; 55:11; Revelation 3:7.

19:27,28 – Peter said that the disciples had left all and followed Jesus, so what would they have? Jesus said that, in the regeneration when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, those who followed Him would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Hearing what Jesus said about giving up possessions, Peter, outspoken as ever, promptly pointed out the sacrifice made by Jesus' apostles. They had left all to follow Jesus (as apparently Jesus was asking the young man to do). They had left their houses and families behind and were traveling with Him preaching. Luke 5:11 says they forsook all and followed Him.

Jesus pronounced a blessing on all who would do such. He said that, in the regeneration, when He sits on His throne of glory, they would sit

on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. In what sense is this fulfilled? This is difficult.

McGarvey's view can be summarized as follows: The apostles would sit on twelve thrones while Jesus sat on His throne (verse 28) and would eat and drink in Jesus' kingdom (Luke 22:28-30). Jesus has been sitting on His throne since he ascended back to heaven and will continue to sit on it till His second coming (Acts 2:33-35; Hebrews 1:13; Matthew 25:31; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28). The apostles would eat and drink at Jesus' table in the Lord's Supper, which will continue until Jesus' returns (Luke 22:15-20; 1 Corinthians 11:26).

So, the "regeneration" must refer to this same period of time from Pentecost till Jesus returns (which we might call the gospel or New Testament age). During this period men are regenerated by being born again by the power of the blood of Jesus Christ in harmony with the gospel. They are born again (regenerated) by the gospel so that they are new creatures and all things become new (2 Corinthians 5:17; John 3:3-5; Titus 3:5; compare Acts 3:21; 1 Peter 1:22-25; 1 John 3:1ff; Romans 6:3,4; etc.)

It would follow that the disciples are now sitting on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel: they have been doing so since Pentecost and will continue to do so till Jesus returns. Surely this is not literal and physical. So in what sense can it be true?

McGarvey's view is that they judge by the gospel message that they preached. They are pronouncing judgment on what is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, by means of the revelation that they gave to the world. They did this personally when they preached the gospel when they were alive, and they do it now through the written word. (Compare Revelation 3:21.) The twelve tribes then likely refer to the Israel of the New Testament which is the church, of which the Old Testament nation of Israel was a symbol (Galatians 6:16).

A related view is that they judge by their example. "…they are not going to sit as jurymen. But just as he said that the queen of the south is to judge that generation [Matthew 12:42] and the Ninevites will condemn them [Matthew 12:41], so will these too." – Chrysostom (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

In this sense, the statement is spiritual and not literal. This, as we have seen, is true of many of the prophetic statements about the kingdom. Since it is a spiritual kingdom, many of the references to it and what it involves are to be taken spiritually, not physically.

Note there are twelve thrones involved: one for each apostle. This made them equal in leadership. Nowhere is Peter given a throne above the other apostles.

19:29 – Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for Jesus' sake will receive a hundredfold in this life and inherit everlasting life.

Jesus then pronounced a blessing, not just on the apostles for their sacrifice, but on all who make such sacrifices for His name's sake. The blessing is pronounced on all who leave houses, lands, or family members for Jesus' sake. They will receive one hundred times as much in this life and then inherit everlasting life after this life (compare Luke 18:29,30).

This shows that the rewards Christians receive are not just limited to this life. There are definitely rewards and punishments that come after this life is over. Note that we inherit eternal life ***after*** this life, not during it as Calvinists teach.

Nevertheless there are great blessings in this life. Jesus does not name them specifically here. But as Christians, even if we lose earthly family members, we gain many spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ who love and strengthen us (Matthew 12:47-50). These will share their houses and lands with us to meet our needs. So, we gain more than we lose even in this life. And this mentions just a small part of the spiritual blessings we have in this life (Ephesians 1:3).

In what way may we need to leave relatives, wife, children, or property, etc.? Is every disciple necessarily required to give up all these? The implication is that we may not need to give them all up. In fact, Christians are forbidden to desert or abandon family members in the sense of neglecting to meet their needs and care for them. See 1 Timothy 5:8; 1 Corinthians 7:2-5; Ephesians 6:1-4.

Nevertheless, there may be times when we may be required due to circumstances to give up their relationship with family members. Compare Matthew 10:34-37; Luke 14:26-33. Because we serve God, people may persecute us to the point we must flee for our own safety (Acts 8:1-4). Some family members may turn against us and refuse to associate with us, love us, etc. We may have conflict that leads them to disown us.

Interestingly, when they read this passage, some people will teach that sacrificing our relationship with family members may be necessary and will claim that people should be willing to make the sacrifice. But when it is pointed out from verses 3-9 in this same chapter that divorce and remarriage situations sometimes require this, suddenly people claim this is asking too much and surely God would not require it! Or they will not stand against their own relatives who sin, but will defend and justify them, etc.

19:30 – Many who are first will be last, and the last first.

This statement is repeated by Jesus in 20:16. In both cases the point seems to be that people who think – or whom the world thinks – should

be highly exalted and honored, will not be honored by God as they expected. And likewise, people whom the world thinks worthy of little praise, glory, exaltation, or honored position, will instead receive great honor before God.

In the context the application is to wealth as compared to those who give up wealth. Wealthy people often expect they will receive the best of everything. They can buy what they want. They deserve to be honored and deferred to by others. And the world generally concedes that such is the proper view, so they give honored places to the wealthy people. So such people expect to be first.

However, in God's view their wealth means nothing. He gives them no special honor or privileges because of their wealth, and in fact expresses concern that their wealth may in fact lead to their downfall. The first become last.

On the other hand, people who have given up wealth to serve God are often viewed by the world as inferior, lower class citizens. They deserve no special honor and in fact are often ridiculed and persecuted. So they are viewed as though they are the last. God, however, views them as worthy of great honor as just described by Jesus. So the last become first.

The concept can also be applied to the Jews as compared to the Gentiles (see Luke 13:28-30). The Jews had been God's chosen people before the coming of the gospel, whereas the Gentiles in general had forsaken God. So, the Jews were first in the sense that they had a covenant relationship with God, where the Gentiles were last because they did not. However, under the gospel many Gentiles would accept salvation through Christ and so would become those who were first or honored in a relationship with God. Many Jews would reject the gospel and so would become last in they would not receive the blessings of the gospel.

Similar applications can be made regarding those who are honored in other ways by society: famous people, rulers, highly educated people, nobility, athletes, people with physical beauty, etc. These people may be honored by the world, but God gives them no special credit for these qualities. People who lack these qualities, however, will be greatly honored by God if they serve Him faithfully.

So, the first are last and the last are first.

Matthew 20

Chapter 20 – Further Discussion about the Kingdom and Jesus' Death

20:1-16 - Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard

20:1,2 – The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

There is a connection between this parable and the discussion at the end of the previous chapter. "For" shows this connection. Also 19:30 and 20:16 are identical statements. We should expect some lessons relating to what has just been taught.

A vineyard is a place for growing grapes, a common product in that area. A vineyard was owned by a householder (landowner), who had to hire laborers to work in the vineyard. This vineyard is here compared to the kingdom. God (who compares to the landowner) hires laborers (disciples) to work in the kingdom, doing works of service for Him.

This landowner hired people early in the morning, and they made an agreement about the wages. Each person agreed to work through the day for one denarius (shilling – ASV). This agreement becomes significant later.

Observe that, just as the landowner hires laborers for his vineyard, so God seeks servants who are willing to work in his vineyard. The kingdom is a place for workers to labor for the Lord. Obedience and dedicated service are required for those who seek to be rewarded by the Master.

20:3-5 – The owner went out again at the third hour and saw some standing idle in the marketplace. He hired them also to work in his vineyard saying he would pay what was right. He likewise hired some about the sixth and the ninth hour.

The owner of the vineyard continued throughout the day from time to time going out to hire more workers. He found some standing idle in the marketplace about the third hour (9:00 AM). The word "idle" means in effect they were unemployed. So he urged them too to work in his vineyard.

He promised he would pay them whatever was right. In this case there was no definite amount agreed upon. The workers accepted employment trusting the master that he would pay them a fair wage. We too must be servants who work for God trusting Him that He will give us what is right. In many ways we do not really understand what our reward will be like, nor will we understand fully until we receive it. But by faith we trust in the goodness of the Master that he will reward us generously.

This same pattern was repeated as he found other laborers about the sixth hour (12:00 noon) and the ninth hour (3:00 PM).

20:6,7 – About the eleventh hour he went out again and found others standing idle. He asked them why they stood idle all day, and they said no one had hired them. He told them also to go work in his vineyard and they would receive whatever was right.

Again about the eleventh hour (5:00) the owner found still other people idle. He asked why they were still idle since the day was nearly over. They said they had not been hired. He urged them also to go work in his vineyard, and he would pay whatever is right.

Note that these were not people who had been urged all day to work and had refused. They had not been hired and refused to work. They had simply never been hired. When he offered, they accepted. We are not told why they had not been hired. Yet we know that today there are many who need to come to work in the Lord's vineyard, yet have not done so. Like the Master of the vineyard, we need to inform them of the opportunity and urge them to come.

20:8,9 – When evening came, the owner told the steward to call the laborers and pay them, beginning from the last to the first. Those who had been hired about the eleventh hour each received a denarius.

When evening came, the laborers were paid for their work. The people who had been the last to be hired were the first to be paid. They received a denarius per worker. There had been no set agreement as to what they would be paid, but they were paid the same amount that had been promised to the people hired in the morning.

The payment of rewards at the end of the day is parallel to the judgment day, at which all God's servants will receive their reward. Obviously those who were hired later had not done as much work as those hired earlier, yet they were paid what had been promised to those hired earlier.

20:10-12 – When those who had been hired first came to be paid, they supposed they would receive more, but each one received a denarius. They complained because the men hired last had worked only one hour, but the owner had made them equal with them who had done the work even through the heat of the day.

When the time came to pay those who had been hired early in the day, they expected to receive even more than had been paid to those who had been hired later in the day. These other men had worked only a short time, whereas the ones hired in the morning had worked all day with labor and sacrifice through the hardest part of the day. So they expected to get paid more than those who were hired later.

However, they were paid just one denarius each. This caused them to complain because they thought it was not fair for them to have worked harder and been paid the same.

20:13-15 – The owner said he had wronged no one since they had agreed to work for a denarius. He said he wished to pay the ones hired last the same as the ones hired first. He asked if it was not lawful for him to do what he wanted with his own things, or was their eye evil because he was generous?

The landowner, however, defended his conduct. He was not wronging the ones who had been hired earlier. He was paying exactly what they had agreed upon. They had been hired on the agreement they would be paid a denarius, and that was what he paid them. How could they complain when they had agreed to it? It seemed fine to them when originally offered. Why complain now?

He said he chose to give to other people the same as he had to them. It was his money and he had the right to give it away as he chose. He was not wronging them since they received what they agreed upon. He was not wrong in giving away what belonged to him. So, if he paid these other folks more than they had earned, by comparison, what right did anyone have to complain?

He closed by asking, if he was being good (kind and generous), why should these people look at him with evil eyes (with jealousy or evil thoughts)? What right do we have to think evil of people who are generous with other people? If they choose to give away what they own, how can we complain if they give to others and not to us, provided they do what they promised toward us?

We should realize that working for the Lord is a blessing of itself. Those who serve God faithfully from early life till death are not at a disadvantage compared to those who come to serve him later in life. There are many blessings in serving God throughout life in addition to the reward of eternal life. Jesus had alluded to this in 19:29.

It is a great blessing to live without wasting years in sin but rather using those years honoring our God and encouraging other people to serve Him. Those who do so can look back without the regrets and sorrow that haunt those who have lived in sin, even if they truly repent later in life. No Christian who is truly faithful and mature should envy those who live their lives in sin and then become Christians later in life.

20:16 – So the last will be first, and the first will be last. For many are called, but few are chosen.

Jesus briefly closes the parable with the same statement recorded in 19:30 (compare Mark 10:31 and Luke 13:30). What is the meaning of the statement, and what is the application of this parable?

In 19:30 (see notes there) the point was that people may appear to have advantages in the eyes of the world (wealth or other material or earthly advantages), but this does not mean they had any advantage in serving God. What men honor as being "first" or worthy of respect, may not be worthy of respect in God's eyes and vice versa. God invites many, but only a relatively few are willing to so act as to receive the blessings He offers.

Application to Jews and Gentiles

In Luke 13:30 the phrase appears to refer to the fact some Gentiles would be saved in the kingdom, but some Jews would not be. This would make a sensible application of this parable. The Jews had been God's people for hundreds of years. They were descendants of Abraham and had begun serving Him from Mt. Sinai (compare early in the morning) when Gentiles were not serving Him.

Under the gospel Gentiles would be disciples too. But Jews thought they should have all the positions of honor, and Gentiles should have inferior blessings – maybe they should not even be allowed into the kingdom at all (compare Acts 10,11,15, books of Romans and Galatians, etc.). But Jesus was saying many Jews would not be saved at all and many Gentiles would be honored as highly as Jews. This was contrary to Jewish concepts of the kingdom, but the first would be last and the last first.

Application to exalted positions among disciples

However, in the context of Matthew 19 and 20, the lesson applies more directly to the apostles' question about what they would receive in the kingdom. In 18:1 they had asked about who would be greatest in the kingdom. In 19:27, after Jesus had shown the danger of trusting riches, Peter had said that the apostles had given up all they had, and he asked

what their reward would be. Note that later here in chapter 20 the apostles will again be fussing about which of them receives the greater honor.

In response, Jesus assured them they would have their reward (19:28-30), just as the landowner gave all he had promised to the laborers hired early. But now it appears Jesus is warning the apostles against thinking this meant they would be honored above others in the kingdom.

They seemed to have the idea that, because they were His earliest followers and had made such great sacrifices for Him (borne the heat of the day, etc.), that they should have special places in the kingdom. Jesus says they will have their reward, all they deserved. But this does not necessarily mean He will honor them above other later disciples.

Application to Christians who resent the conversion of people known for great wickedness

This parable of the vineyard may remind us of the older brother in the story of the prodigal son. He was jealous of the prodigal son who received a reward when he repented of wickedness, whereas the older brother claimed to have been faithful all along (Luke 15:28-30). In that context certain self-righteous Jews had criticized Jesus for associating with sinners. He told the lesson to show that all of us should seek the salvation of those who are lost.

Sometimes today people in the church are unwilling to work for the conversion of those whom they consider to be severely wicked people. Or they may even resent the presence of such people in the church when they have been converted. This may include such people as those who have been guilty of adultery, homosexuality, murder, stealing, or other sins that may even be looked down upon by society.

It is easy for those who have lived uprightly throughout their lives to think they are more worthy of God's rewards than those who have lived in wickedness and then later repent. The fact remains, however, that none of us are worthy of God's rewards. We have all been guilty of sin, and none of us will be saved except by the grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. So rather than resenting the conversion of any sinner who truly repents, let us rejoice for the salvation of souls as Jesus did.

God will reward fairly all of His servants.

So, the lesson would be that God will reward and honor people as He chooses, not by the standards that men may choose. Nor do we have a right to try to enforce on Him our standards of rewards and honors. Those who men think should receive the greatest rewards (the first) may not be so rewarded, and those whom God does reward may be those whom men think should not be rewarded (the last). Many will be invited to receive God's rewards, but only a few will qualify.

God will give people all that He promised, but the eternal reward is something no one deserves anyway. It is not up to us to complain if, in His grace and mercy, He gives people more than we think they deserve compared to us. In truth, all who are rewarded will receive more than they deserve or could ever earn, so why complain because we want to be rewarded more than someone else is? Whatever reward the Lord chooses to give us, it will be more than we deserve.

> "It is always foolish to question the goodness of God. There might have been reason for loud complaint if he did not give what he owed but not if he gives what he does not owe." – Gregory the Great (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Does this prove there will be no degrees of reward in heaven and all get the same? If so, then Matthew 25:14-30 and such passages must prove there will be degrees of reward in heaven. These are parables and should not be pressed beyond the point Jesus makes in the context.

The point is that it is simply not up to us to determine what the rewards will be, period. God is the giver of the reward. He will surely give all He has promised. But He is giving from His possessions, so who are we to enforce our standards on Him regarding the rewards anyone receives? As long as He gives all that He promised to us, we have no complaint if some people receive more than we expected or more than we receive. It is simply none of our business what rewards God gives as long as He gives us what He promised.

Does this justify "death-bed conversion" ("eleventh hour")? This is not the point of the parable, though other passages show God will accept any man's sincere conversion. Consider, for example, the thief on the cross whom Jesus forgave shortly before the time of death.

However, this does not justify people who know what they should do to obey God but repeatedly procrastinate for selfish reasons, and then just before they die they want to be saved. Such is not the case of the eleventh-hour laborers in the parable. They accepted their first opportunity to be hired, but they simply had no previous opportunity.

20:17-19 – Further Predictions of Jesus' Death

See also Mark 10:32-34 and Luke 18:31-33.

20:17-19 – As Jesus and the disciples traveled to Jerusalem, He told them that He would be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, and they would condemn Him to death. They would deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, to scourge, and to crucify, and He would be raised again the third day.

The discussion and events that follow in the account occurred as Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem (see a ***map***). This was Jesus' last trip to Jerusalem before His death. The account is drawing close to the final weeks of His life.

Once again He explained to the apostles that, in Jerusalem, He would be killed. He had predicted this before (see notes on Matthew 16:21; 17:22,23). This time Jesus added some new information not mentioned in the other predictions.

He said He would be condemned to death by the chief priests and scribes, but it would be the Gentiles that would kill Him. He would be mocked and scourged. His death would be by means of crucifixion. Scourging and crucifixion were Roman methods of punishment. Yet Jesus predicted ahead of time that the opposition of the Jews would lead to a Roman form of punishment and death. Then He would rise again on the third day.

All this came expressly true, which was amazing of itself. The fact that He knew and predicted it ahead of time makes it all the more conclusive that He was who He claimed to be.

20:20-28 – James' and John's Request Regarding the Kingdom

See also Mark 35-44; Luke 22:24-30.

20:20,21 – The mother of James and John knelt before Jesus and asked that her two sons might sit on Jesus' right hand and left hand in His kingdom.

James' and John's mother came humbly making a request of Jesus. Other passages show that her name was Salome (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40). She wanted her sons to sit on Jesus' right hand and left hand in His kingdom. These were the two most highly favored and honored positions (compare Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 1 Kings 2:19; Psalm 16:11; 110:1).

This request reintroduced the issue of who would have the greatest positions of honor in the kingdom. This had previously been discussed in 18:1ff, and even 20:1ff deals with it. (See also 23:1 and Mark 9:33-37.)

This again shows the disciples' misconception regarding the kingdom. They were still viewing it as an earthly, political government, so they sought to gain favored positions of material power and honor. Jesus has responded to this false idea so many times that it is sad to the point of being ridiculous.

However, He again attempts to get them to understand properly. It surely is clear, by this time, that they simply are not really going to understand until the kingdom actually comes. Meanwhile He keeps teaching so that, when the kingdom does come, they will have these teachings to look back on and realize that this is really what He kept telling them all along.

20:22,23 – Jesus said they did not know what they were asking. He asked if they were able to drink the cup He was about to drink and be baptized with the baptism that He was about to undergo. They claimed they were able. Jesus said they would in fact drink the cup and be baptized with the baptism, but it was not for Him to decide who would be on His right and left hands. This was prepared by the Father.

Jesus responded first by saying they did not understand what they were requesting. What an incredible understatement! The disciples' statements and questions had shown for ages that they did not understand the nature of the kingdom. Jesus had repeatedly told them they misunderstood, but even such plain statements did not deter them. Neither the mother nor the sons knew the nature of the kingdom, what responsibilities the kingdom would involve, nor what terrible prices of suffering and hardship it would require.

So Jesus asked James and John if they could undergo the hardships ahead (it is clear He spoke to them, since they answered). He asked if they were able to drink the cup and be baptized with the baptism He was about to receive. This is highly figurative language. Whether or not they understood His meaning at all is not clear, but it is almost certain they did not fully understand.

Drinking a cup is often used as an expression for suffering great hardship. Jesus so used it in the garden (26:39,42; John 18:11; compare Isaiah 51:17,22; Psalm 11:6; 75:8; Jeremiah 25:15-17; 49:12). He had just finished telling them He would have to die in Jerusalem. Clearly such supreme suffering is the cup to which He was here again referring. So great would be the suffering that He also compared it to being baptized (immersed) in suffering (Mark 10:38). When Jesus actually did drink the cup and receive the baptism of suffering, those who are on his right hand and left hand were, not James and John, but two thieves.

James and John replied that they were able to do this, though again it is doubtful they understood. Jesus affirmed they would undergo that cup and baptism, and they did undergo them. James was killed by Herod (Acts 12:2), and John underwent many hardships, even imprisonment (Revelation 1:9).

Nevertheless, Jesus said He was not able to promise what they asked regarding positions in the kingdom because that was to be determined according to what the Father had prepared. There is no further explanation, so we are left to wonder what the Father had prepared; but it was clearly not the kind of position in the kind of kingdom they had in mind.

Remember, when Jesus so answered, that He was not denying His position of Deity. On earth He was acting as a servant obeying His Father like other people must do (Philippians 2:5-8). He was setting us an

example of submission. Jesus possessed full Deity even on earth, but did not exercise any quality that would be incompatible with His role as a servant.

20:24 – When the other ten disciples heard the request that had been made, they were moved with indignation against James and John.

The other disciples were angry with James and John for this request. Given their view of the kingdom, this is understandable. They quite obviously had the same misunderstanding that James and John had about the kingdom. This misconception contributed to their improper requests and conflict. They wanted power and honor in an earthly kingdom, so they were jealous of any attempt by others to secure power and honor for themselves.

20:25-28 – Jesus said the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. But it should not be so among the disciples. Whoever desires to be great should be a servant, and whoever desires to be first must be a slave; just as the Son of Man came, not to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.

This section of Jesus' teaching is profound and yet simple, if we have the right idea of what He was trying to accomplish among us.

Authority versus service as a sign of greatness

He begins by explaining that, among people of the world and especially in political kingdoms like the disciples thought Jesus would build, those who are viewed as great and honorable are those who have authority, power, and the right to rule over others. It is the same in the eyes of people today. Presidents, governors, prime ministers, heads of great corporations – these people are viewed as great and honorable because they have power over people. Jesus said it should not be so among us (that is, among the apostles, but likewise among all in the church).

Some mistakenly claim that Jesus here denies the value of authority among people on earth. This claim is especially made regarding the authority of men over women in the home and in the church and the authority of elders in the local church. But such views pervert Jesus' teaching. Nothing He says here should be taken to contradict the value of authority as He Himself elsewhere ordained. Consider the following evidence:

* Jesus used Himself as an example of what He was trying to teach (verse 28), yet He is the highest authority of all (Matthew 28:28; Ephesians 1:15-23; etc.).

* Further, Jesus ordained many kinds of authority among people. He ordained parents to have rule over children (Ephesians 6:1-4; etc.).

He ordained civil rulers to have authority over citizens (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13ff). He ordained men to have authority over women in the home and in the church (Ephesians 5:22-25; 1 Corinthians 14:34,35; 1 Timothy 2:11,12; 1 Peter 3:1-7; etc.). He even ordained that elders rule in local churches, though He limited that to overseeing authorized works (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7,17; Acts 20:28-30; 1 Peter 5:1-3).

* "Lord it" over others (verse 25) is not the normal word for "lord" (κυριος meaning master, ruler). It is an altered form of the word (κατακυριευω), and is used to describe perverted use of authority.

This same word is used in 1 Peter 5:3 where elders are told not to "lord" it over the flock (see also Mark 10:42; Acts 19:16). This refers to the perverted concept in which a person uses authority selfishly for his own benefit. The word for "exercise authority" is also an altered form of that word (κατεξουσιαζω), used only here and in the parallel in Mark 10:42. The NRSV says, "their great ones are tyrants over them."

* He further proceeds to explain that ***greatness*** is not determined by the mere possession of authority. That which is great or honored by God is service to others. This work of ministering to the needs of others is what would give people preeminent places in the kingdom. Preeminence, of course, is what James and John had asked for, but the means to it is the opposite of what they had in mind.

So, a person may possess authority; that of itself is not wrong. In fact, proper use of authority is a form of service to meet the needs of others. But the mere possession of authority makes one no more great or honorable in God's eyes than anyone else with no authority at all. Jesus is here rebuking selfish use of authority in order to achieve the personal gain of the one who wields the authority. This is what Jesus forbids.

Note that Jesus' statement that He came, not to be served but to serve, is a "not ... but" expression. He is not denying that people served Him while He was on earth. He did not exercise authority to the extent that He did before He came to earth and after He returned to heaven. Nevertheless, He did receive service while on earth. The point of the expression is to emphasize that His main purpose here was to served by teaching, helping others, and ultimately giving His life for our salvation.

"Exercise authority" (κατεξουσιαζω) – "*...exercise authority,* perh. *tyrannize* τινός *over someone...*" – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

> "...Although the force of the *katá* is mostly lost in ordinary usage, it conveys the sense of rule to one's own advantage in Mark 10:42 (Gentile rulers), Acts 19:16 (the evil spirit), and 1 Pet. 5:2-3 (the admonition to the elders)." – Kittle, *Theological Dictionary*.

Applications

People in the church need to learn this. Far too often preachers, elders, deacons, teachers, song leaders, and even those who lead prayer

in the church think they are worthy to be honored because of the position they hold. They may serve, not so much because they care about the good they can do the people in the church, but because they want the praise and exaltation they expect for their position (compare Matthew 6:1ff). Often other people make a similar mistake, so they honor and exalt their leaders simply for the authority they have.

Often the result is competition among people for places of honor, just as was happening here among the apostles. People grab for the highest authority they can get so they can have the most honor (compare 1 Corinthians 1:10ff). They are jealous when someone else gets more authority and therefore, they think, more honor. Works may be neglected because little power or honor appears to be associated with them, even though those works are much needed to help other people.

The religious world is filled with examples, and even the Lord's church still has this problem. Big-name preachers want big ministries with many employees and big bucks coming in. Success is measured by how many TV or radio stations you are on, how big the church is where you preach, the number of gospel meetings you hold, the papers for which you write, or the college where you teach. Elders vie among themselves to see who can get his way and be before the people's eye the most. Song leaders and class teachers compete to see who gets most honor from the people.

This kind of thinking has often led to the introduction of perverted religious practices. God's plan for local, independent churches serves to hinder the accumulation of power, so men who want power must invent greater power structures. They are not satisfied to have authority in a local church. They want power in several churches, then in the churches throughout a region, then in churches all over the world.

This thinking is exactly what created the Catholic hierarchy. The whole structure is built on offices and officers in which people seek domination over others in ways that the Lord never authorized. In fact, it is interesting to contrast Jesus' teaching here to the Catholic teaching about the Pope. They could easily have answered the question of who was greatest among the apostles – they would have said it was Peter, because he was the Pope! But Jesus rebuked such thinking then and we must rebuke it now.

Among denominations the same kind of thinking leads to central headquarters and governing bodies and centralized organizations and officers of all kinds. The more people and money a person has under his authority, the bigger a name he has. In churches of Christ this thinking has led to centralized organizations of all kinds including missionary societies, benevolent societies (orphan and widow homes), sponsoring churches, huge workshops bringing together people from all over the country, church-supported colleges, etc. And invariably the people who

have authority in these centralized organizations are highly honored and viewed as great.

Likewise, people in the local church may vie for power. Some sow rebellion against the elders or complain about the preacher or teachers, not so much because these leaders have done anything wrong, but because other people want their power and honor.

Women's Liberation tells women they should have positions of preaching, authority, seminary teaching, etc. They want at least equal authority with men in the home, government, business, and everywhere else. Why? Because they want the power and honor they believe these positions can provide.

All this is rebuked by Jesus. We should not seek power for the sake of honor and glory. We should seek to serve others, to do what is helpful and beneficial to others. We should want to help people be saved, help people have their needs met. Whether this leads to honor or greatness in the eyes of men should not motivate us one way or the other. God honors us for service.

If we properly possess Scripturally authorized authority, that is fine as long as we use it to serve others, not for self glory. If we do not possess authority, that is fine too. There are many ways we can serve without authority. Let the women realize this. Let all who are not in positions of power realize they are just as great before God as those who are in power, provided they do what they can to serve God and their fellowman.

When a widow sacrificially gave as much as she could, Jesus honored her more than He honored rich people who gave larger gifts (21:1-4). The person who quietly preaches the gospel to a neighbor is as great before God as the man who stands before the congregation every Sunday, provided both are doing all they can to save the lost. The measure of greatness is service, not authority.

Jesus then used Himself as the example of what He meant. He possesses great authority, but He did not appeal to this as indication of His greatness. He came to serve others by giving His life as a ransom or purchase price to save us from sin. No greater act of service has ever been done, and it is this for which Jesus is especially honored for what He did on earth. He was the perfect example of the principle He was teaching.

Let us cease our strife, jealousy, and envy over power. Let us instead seek ways to serve others regardless of who has power. If we serve as we can, God will honor us more than He honors those who have authority but use it selfishly or negligently.

A ransom for many

In describing His purpose on earth, Jesus said that He came to give His life a ransom for many. A ransom was the price paid to redeem a person from slavery or captivity.

The gospel teaches that, when a person becomes guilty of sin, he becomes a slave to sin. See John 8:34; Romans 6:16-23. We can be

redeemed or bought back from that captivity through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18,19). Jesus once again here predicts He would die, but would not be dying for His own sins. He would die for the sins of others to redeem or ransom them from the consequences of their own sins.

"Ransom" (λυτρον) – "...the price for redeeming, ransom (paid for slaves, ... for captives,... – for the ransom of a life, ... to liberate many from the misery and penalty of their sins..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

20:29-43 - Healing of Blind Men

Compare Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43.

20:29-34 – Two blind men heard Jesus passing by and asked Him for mercy. When Jesus called them and asked what they wanted, they asked for their eyes to be opened. Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes, and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.

The miracle

This event happened on the way to Jerusalem but near Jericho (see a ***map***). A great multitude was following Jesus, and two blind men sitting by the roadside heard that it was Jesus passing by. Mark and Luke add that the blind men were begging by the roadside. They began to call for Jesus to have mercy on them. The multitude told them to be quiet but they cried all the more for Him to have mercy.

Jesus called them, asked what they wanted, and they of course said they wanted their sight. Jesus had compassion, touched their eyes, and they immediately received sight. As a result they followed Him. Luke's account says they followed giving glory and praise to God, and the other people praised God as well. This is appropriate for the great miracle and blessing they had observed.

Luke's account also adds that Jesus expressly commended the faith of the blind man. Faith was not always required on the part of a person who wanted a miracle, but sometimes miracles were done when the one requesting it demonstrated faith.

This teaches us that faith leads to God's rewards. However, it does not, as some claim, prove we can be saved by faith alone without obedience. In reality, outward actions were necessary in this case. The men had to call out to Jesus and then come when He called them. Outward actions were necessary as an expression of faith.

Note again, as in all miracles in which the details are given, it is clear that this miracle was impossible by natural law, and the pattern is such that modern so-called faith healers could never duplicate it. The problem was blindness, which modern "miracle workers" rarely even attempt to heal, let alone are they successful. Further, it was obvious these men were local people, so the observers could know who it was and whether

the problem was real. We are even told the name of one. Third, the miracle was immediate; it did not take prolonged, gradual improvement. Finally, the healing was complete.

This miracle, like all Jesus' miracles, served to confirm that He was from God, the power of God was working in Him, and He was who He claimed to be.

Harmonizing accounts

Matthew mentions two blind men where Luke's account mentions only one blind man, and Mark mentions one and gives his name as Bartimaeus. The most likely explanation is that there were two, but Bartimaeus was the more outspoken or otherwise noteworthy of the two. So, Mark and Luke expressly mention the one man and simply omit to mention the other man. This is not a contradiction but simply an emphasis on certain details while omitting others.

Another difficulty is that Luke says the blind men first heard about Jesus as He drew near to Jericho (18:43), and then later it says He entered the city and passed through it (19:1). Mark and Matthew both indicate that the miracle occurred as He was leaving Jericho. There must be a sensible explanation.

One possibility, mentioned by Robertson, is that there were two Jerichos: the remains of an old city and a newer one, but both wearing the same name. The healing occurred as Jesus was between the two. He was passing from the old city (Matthew & Mark), but yet coming to the new city (Luke). Pope confirms the existence of two cities, both named Jericho, from the writings of Josephus and from archaeology which has now found the remains of both cities about a mile apart.

Lenski suggests an alternative view. Perhaps Jesus passed through the city once. He got to the other side and for some reason decided to return. Perhaps He returned because Zacchaeus at this point invited him to return to his house. Another possibility is that, because of the time required by the healing of these blind men and subsequent events, it was the so late in the evening that Jesus returned to the city.

Whatever the reason, this would mean the healing occurred while Jesus was both leaving Jericho (Matthew & Mark) and going to it (Luke).

Chapters 21-28 – Jesus' Last Days on Earth

Matthew 21

Chapter 21 – Triumphal Entry, Cleansing of the Temple, and Related Teaching

Jesus was approaching the final days of His life. These final chapters of the book of Matthew record the events that occurred when Jesus was in the area of Jerusalem shortly before and after His crucifixion. Kyle Pope has done significant study of the events of the last week-and-a-half leading up to the crucifixion. His commentary contains the following chart summarizing major events of each day:

Friday	(John 12:1)	Arrival in Bethany
Saturday	Matthew 26:6-16	Anointing in Bethany
Sunday	Matthew 21:1-11	Entry into Jerusalem
Monday	Matthew 21:12-17	Cleansing of the temple
Tuesday	Matthew 21:18-26:2	Teaching on authority
Wednesday	(Luke 21:38)	Teaching in the temple
Thursday	Matthew 26:17-75	The Passover
Friday	Matthew 27:1-61	Crucifixion
Saturday	Matthew 27:62-66	Sabbath day
Sunday	Matthew 28:1-15	Resurrection

21:1-11 – Triumphal Entry

Compare Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-40.

21:1-3 – From Bethphage at the Mount of Olives Jesus sent two disciples to go into the village where they would find a donkey tied and a colt with her. They should loose them and bring them to Jesus. If anyone questioned them, they should say that the Lord needed them.

Jesus was continuing His journey to Jerusalem for His final visit there before His death. As He was getting close, He came to Bethphage. Luke adds this was near Bethany. Both of these villages are near Jerusalem on the east side of the Mount of Olives. This mountain is located east of Jerusalem, separated from the city by the Kidron valley (see a ***map***). It was here that Jesus later went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his arrest. Other significant passages refer to the Mount of Olives.

As He drew near, Jesus chose two disciples to go into the city and make preparations for His entrance. Jesus knew He was about to die, but the people did not understand this. They were expecting Him to be an earthly king and thought perhaps the time had come. They would honor Him with a great processional when He entered. Knowing this, Jesus made arrangements for an entry that would be humble and not at all the kind of thing to be expected from a great earthly ruler.

He sent them to a nearby village to find a donkey and her colt. They were to set them loose and bring them to Jesus. If anyone questioned them, they were to say that the Lord needed them. Apparently Jesus miraculously knew ahead of time that the animals would be waiting. However, some have reasoned that perhaps the owner of the animals allowed their use according to the practice of political leaders being able to request assistance from citizens (see Matthew 5:41; 27:32).

21:4-7 – These events fulfilled prophecy saying to tell the daughter of Zion that their king was coming, lowly and sitting on donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. So the disciples did as Jesus commanded and brought the donkey and colt. They laid their clothes on them and set Jesus on them.

This fulfilled prophecies in Isaiah 62:11 and especially Zechariah 9:9. The Messiah was prophesied to come in a lowly way sitting on the foal of a donkey. The disciples obeyed, found the animals, placed garments on them, and Jesus sat upon them. Zion originally referred to where the highest hills of Jerusalem, but the term came to be in effect an alternative name of for the city.

This was unexpected from one planning to be a great ruler. Today rulers and important people feel they must ride in an expensive limousine in parades. They would not be expected to ride a bicycle. So in that day a V.I.P. might ride in a chariot with powerful horses. But to enter the capitol city riding on a donkey's foal was extremely humble. Though the Christ was predicted to be a great ruler, He was also predicted to enter Jerusalem in this humble way. Jesus here fulfilled this prophecy.

Barnes offers an alternative explanation. He claims that sometimes kings did ride on a donkey or mule in their coronation parade. He says that, if a ruler rode into a town on a horse, this could be taken as a sign of warlike intent. But to ride on a donkey or mule was an indication of peaceful intentions. If this is correct, then by riding on a donkey, Jesus was showing that He was not coming into Jerusalem to lead a rebellion against the Romans, as many of the Jews expected. Rather, He was coming into town peacefully. Notice, however, that the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9, which Jesus here fulfilled, expressly says that riding on a donkey was a sign of lowliness. So it was more than just peaceableness.

But by either explanation, Jesus was demonstrating that He was not the kind of ruler the people had in mind. He had repeatedly said things designed to lead them to understand His would be a spiritual kingdom. In Matthew 20:28 He had told them He came to be a servant and die for others. He was using this opportunity to show them again that exaltation in the material, political realm was not His intent.

This was the fulfillment of the first of several prophecies given by Zechariah regarding the death of Jesus. See also Zechariah 13:7; 12:10; 11:12,13.

21:8-11 – A great multitude spread garments and branches on the road. People cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" When He entered the city, everyone was moved and asked who He was. The multitudes said He was Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth.

As He entered the city, multitudes of people lined the road. They placed their garments in the pathway and cut down branches and spread them in the road. These were all ways of welcoming and honoring Him, as people do for great leaders and heroes.

The people called out expressions of honor. They called Him "Son of David" – i.e., the descendant of David who was to rule on the throne of David as predicted in the Old Testament. This shows their confidence He would be king, but they misunderstood the kind of king.

"Hosanna" means "Save, we pray." It was a prayerful supplication for salvation, perhaps salvation from their enemies. It is quoted from Psalm 118:25,26, where it is used in connection with the expression "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." It is the same context that Jesus later quotes referring to the cornerstone that was rejected by the builders. Surely Jesus did come to save the people, but not at all in the way they expected. He saved them by allowing them to reject Him and crucify Him.

When He entered the city, people who did not know who He was naturally asked who He was that such an honor should be given. It was answered that He was Jesus the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.

It is incredible that people are so fickle. Just a few days later these same people would be calling out, "Crucify Him!" People who do not understand God's plan can easily be swayed from truth to error.

This subject continues in verses 15-17.

21:12-17 - Cleansing of the Temple

Compare Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45,46; Note John 2:13-16.

21:12-14 – Jesus drove from the temple those who bought and sold. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves. He cited the Scripture that God's house would be called a house of prayer, but they had made it into a den of thieves. He then healed the blind and lame in the temple.

Jesus cleansed the temple.

Having entered the city, Jesus went into the temple (not the Holy Place itself, where only the priests could go, but the courtyard of the temple). There He removed those who were using it for personal business profit. They were buying and selling, changing money and

selling doves. He had likewise cleansed the temple on a different occasion when He had visited Jerusalem earlier (John 2:13-17). Obviously these men had returned after He had left. The rulers, who ought to have kept out these perversions, apparently did not oppose the activity.

To justify His deed, Jesus quoted Scripture that the temple should have been a house of prayer (Isaiah 56:7), but they had made it a den of thieves (Jeremiah 7:11) or a house of merchandise (John 2:16). When Jesus had cleansed the temple previously, this proved His zeal for God's house (John 2:17).

The activities that Jesus removed pertained indirectly to the worship. The animals were offered for sacrifice, and the change was made so people would have had the right amount of money to give for the temple taxes or perhaps to pay for sacrifices, etc. These sacrifices and taxes were commanded by God. What then was the problem?

Probably some of these men were corrupt in overcharging for their products to take advantage of people who needed sacrifices but could not easily obtain them elsewhere. So God's worship requirements were being used as a means for personal profit to line the pockets of the merchandisers without regard for God or man.

But there is also another reason the practice was objectionable. Even if the fee had been fair and just, the business ("merchandise") should still have been conducted elsewhere. If done fairly, selling the doves and making change may have been an acceptable business matter. But to do it on the premises of the temple was a perversion of the purpose of the temple. It was to be a house of prayer – worship and spiritual service – not a place of making financial gain.

This presents several lessons for today.

(1) God distinguishes between worship activities and everyday activities.

The two are separate with regard to nature and purpose and sometimes with regard to time and circumstance. When God gives a spiritual purpose to an activity, we displease Him greatly when we change that purpose to a different purpose. This is especially true when we practice that which satisfies human desires for activities that are materialistic or physical in emphasis when we should be doing that which is spiritual service to give God honor and praise.

(2) God does not have to expressly say a thing is wrong in order for us to know that it is wrong.

The Old Testament nowhere expressly forbade selling or making change in the temple (though unfair business practices were often condemned). But He said what the temple was for, and these were not included.

Likewise, we are wrong if we simply do things differently from what He said, in ways that are not authorized or not included in what God commanded. This is based on the principle that we must have Bible authority for all we do, and we must not change what God has said in order to follow human ideas. See our notes on Matthew 15:9,13 (see also Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19).

Applications of these principles can be made in numerous areas because similar conduct is common today in the name of religion. Consider modern-day "faith healers," who claim they can do miracles by the power of God like Jesus and His apostles did. But they expect and may even require a generous donation first. Many of them get filthy rich, and yet they are not doing true miracles. In many cases they are frauds and know it.

Other groups make merchandise of people by offering spiritual benefits (such as indulgences and masses said for the dead), but the people must pay a fee for the service. Often these services are not Scriptural or are not needed by the people, but the religious leaders convince people it is needed and then charge a fee or otherwise get rich from it.

Then compare the modern "Social Gospel" movement. The church is God's temple today (1 Corinthians 3:16). This refers to the church as a body of people, not to the building. The church was sanctified by God for spiritual purposes, to worship Him and teach His word, just as the Old Testament temple was (1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Corinthians 14; Ephesians 4:16; etc.). Yet many people today seek to involve the church in financing, arranging, or using its facilities for recreation, entertainment, business activities, social gatherings, secular education, common meals, and other matters of personal desire and enjoyment.

While the church building is not a "temple" in the sense the Old Testament temple was, yet the principles taught here refer to the work of the local congregation in general. But that would include the building, since it was purchased to do the work of the church, so the church ought to use it only for that which is legitimate church activity.

Often people try to justify such activities on the grounds that a connection of some kind can be found between the activities and the work of the church – just as was the case with these activities in the temple. But the fact is that the activities themselves are no part of what God authorized the church to do, nor are they spiritual in nature and emphasis. There may be no specific passage forbidding the activities, but they violate God's purpose and intent for His church just as surely as these moneychangers in the temple. And Jesus, were He to return, would cast them out of His church as surely as He cast these money changers out of the temple. Those who share His zeal for the church will act as He would.

This is not to say that it is wrong for the church to take up regular collections and use them for Scriptural purposes, including financially supporting gospel preachers. Support of preachers is expressly taught in God's word (2 Corinthians 11:8,9; Philippians 4:15-18; 1 Corinthians 9:6-14).

(3) Likewise, the New Testament says that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

See 1 Corinthians 6:19,20. Could it be that in our lives there are practices, attitudes, speech, or manner of dress that is as displeasing to the Lord as were these activities in the physical temple? Could it be that, given the opportunity to speak out about the temple of your body or mine, He would find objectionable things that need to be cast out? If so, we can know it from His word as recorded in Scripture, and we need to remove from our lives all those things that He would have removed.

(4) The stand that Jesus took required great courage.

The feast of the Passover, at which He would be crucified, was approaching. Hundreds of thousands – perhaps millions – of Jews from all over the world were required to attend this feast. Jesus' great popularity had just been demonstrated in the Triumphal Entry. His act of cleansing the temple would surely anger those Jewish leaders who were obviously allowing these activities. Many thousands of other people must have learned about His acts.

Should He have endangered His popularity in this way? Do we have the courage to take the stands that we need to take, even when we know those stands would be unpopular and may turn people against us?

(5) Consider also the great firmness of the Lord in His opposition to sin.

Many people believe that Jesus was so sweet and gentle that He would never speak out against sin. They criticize people today who actively oppose sin. Yet not only here, but repeatedly we see Jesus' firm opposition to error. He publicly debated false teachers and plainly told people where they are wrong.

While it is true that we need to be sure that we oppose error with a genuine concern for the souls of those who were lost, nevertheless the example of Jesus shows that sin should be opposed. Those who object to such teaching need to reckon with the example of our Lord in events such as this.

Following this, Jesus healed blind, lame, and other people. This, as always, validated His claims to be from God. People were sure to question His authority for what He did. In fact, they did question Him repeatedly throughout the next chapters. But there should have been no doubt that what He said and did was from God since His miracles served as proof to confirm the message preached (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; etc.).

21:15-17 – The chief priests and scribes saw Jesus' miracles and heard the children crying "Hosanna to the son of David!" They were indignant and asked if Jesus heard what was being said. He responded that out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants God had perfected praise. He then left the city and lodged in Bethany.

The rulers of the people were always trying to criticize and find fault. Especially was this so when Jesus pointed out their errors as He had just done in cleansing the temple. This caused them to lose honor in the sight of the people; praise from men was a chief motivating factor for these men. Further, they were jealous of Jesus' great following as evidenced by the triumphal entry. So they tried to find fault and lower Him in the eyes of the people.

They criticized the fact that children had taken up the cry of praise and were saying the expressions of praise that the people had been saying. The rulers do not state what their objection was. But the expressions identified Jesus to be the Messiah. They did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, so they called on Him to stop the children.

Instead of stopping it, however, Jesus said it is what God wanted. He quoted Psalm 8:2 showing that praise would be perfected from the mouth of babies and nursing infants. What the children here were saying was the truth and should not be stopped. In Luke's account we are further told that Jesus said, if these people stopped praising Him, the rocks would cry out His praise. The praise was necessary. It had been prophesied. People needed to hear it. Rather than agreeing to stop it, He defended it.

Jesus went to Bethany to stay. It appears that this is where He spent most of His evenings during the last weeks of His life. This was the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:1; compare Mark 14:3). Bethany was located just east of the Mount of Olives (see a ***map***).

21:18-22 - Cursing of the Fig Tree

Compare Mark 11:12-14,20-24.

21:18,19 – In the morning as Jesus returned to the city, He was hungry. He saw a fig tree but found nothing on it but leaves. He said that no fruit would ever grow on it again, and immediately the fig tree withered away.

Jesus cursed a fig tree that had leaves but no fruit.

Note that Jesus was hungry the next morning as He went back to Jerusalem. He saw a fig tree having leaves on it. The fact He was hungry shows He evidently expected to find figs to eat. But there was no fruit, so He pronounced a curse on the tree saying no fruit would ever grow on it again. As a result the tree began to wither away.

It seems clear that Jesus cursed the tree because He found no fruit on it when He had reason to expect some. Yet Mark's account says it was not yet the season of figs. If so, why curse the tree for having no fruit?

Archaeology Study Bible explains as follows:

> "...the fig tree ... produces two sets of figs each growing season. Early figs appear in early spring not long after the first leaves. ... If a fig tree fails to bear early figs, either it is infertile or it will be unproductive later in the season, when the sweet, later figs normally appear. When ... Jesus saw that a fig tree on the Mount of Olives had leaves but not early figs, he cursed it... The tree's appearance from a distance gave the promise of fruit, but the actual potential for fruitfulness was lacking." (page 1454)

Other related explanations have been given, but there must be some such explanation for the circumstance, for it is evident that Jesus did expect to find fruit.

Why curse a tree for no fruit?

It is not as though the tree had the power to choose whether or not it would have fruit. Why act as if He was punishing it?

Many Scriptures show that trees are expected to bear fruit, especially those that are cultivated by men for that purpose. Note especially Luke 13:6-9 in a very similar context (see also Matthew 3:10; 7:17-19; 12:33; Luke 21:29). The point is not that the tree is being punished as if it made a wrong choice. But nevertheless, if it does not bear fruit it serves no useful purpose. If it serves no useful purpose, why should it continue to exist?

Jesus' act was not cruel. The tree had no feelings, just as it had no power to choose, so Jesus' act did not hurt the tree. But if it was not going to bear fruit, it had no purpose for existing and should be destroyed.

But almost certainly Jesus' act, like all His recorded acts, had a teaching purpose. And that purpose was not about how to deal with physical trees. As in the examples cited above, and in many of Jesus' parables and teachings, the physical event was done to teach a spiritual purpose.

Many commentators, based on the context, believe that this is primarily a symbolic warning to the nation of Israel, especially the Jewish leaders. God expected them to bring forth fruit of obedience and faithful service to Him. They professed great allegiance to God, but they were hypocritical. Like the fig tree, they put on an appearance of bearing fruit, but in practice there was no real fruit.

So, Jesus' act here symbolically represents what He was about to say and do in the city of Jerusalem. He was about to rebuke the hypocrisy of the nation and especially its leaders, showing that God had rejected them. Like the fig tree, they would be cursed because they bore no fruit for the Lord.

For us too, however, our reason for existence is to bear fruit for God – see Luke 13:6-9; John 15:1-10; Galatians 5:19-24; Ephesians 5:9; etc. We are to do the good works for which we were created (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14). If we do not, why should we be allowed to continue to exist? Of course, we do have a choice and we have capacity to suffer when punished. But the point of the illustration is that things that do not accomplish the purpose for which God created them will be destroyed. What about you and me?

21:20-22 – The disciples marveled that the fig tree withered away so soon. Jesus said if they had faith and did not doubt, they could even tell a mountain to be cast into the sea and it would be done. So all things asked in prayer in faith will be received.

Jesus taught the disciples about faith.

As a result of the cursing of the fig tree, Jesus had a discussion with the apostles about faith. Mark's account shows that this discussion occurred later in the day, so it appears to pertain to different lessons than the original one about bearing fruit.

The disciples (Peter according to Mark's account) expressed amazement that the fig tree withered away so soon. They had seen many of Jesus' miracles, and many powers of nature had been under His control. But this is the first time something like this is recorded.

Jesus used this as an opportunity to teach about the value of faith and the power of prayer. He told the disciples that, if they had faith and did not doubt, they too could not only wither trees, they could cast mountains into the sea. There is no record that Jesus or any disciple ever did such a specific thing; but the point is that, if they had enough faith, it could be done if it served God's purpose. Whatever disciples ***need*** to do in God's service can be done if we have faith in God. See Philippians 4:13.

Lessons for today

Note how this contrasts to what is often claimed by modern faith healers. Many today try to use this passage as proof that they have the same power as the apostles (they do not, however, cast mountains into the sea, wither trees, or do anything comparable to what Jesus and the apostles did!). However, when they attempt to do a miracle and fail, as they often do fail, they usually say it is because someone ***else*** lacked faith: usually the person who wanted to be healed. No passage says the one who wanted to receive the miracle must have faith. But this passage says the one attempting to ***do*** the miracle must have faith. So, if these people fail, they can blame no one but themselves.

This, of course, was addressed to the apostles who did have the power to do miracles, in harmony with God's will. This does not prove we today can do miracles. Other passages show that this power was

limited to the apostles and those on whom they bestowed the power by laying hands on them. The power existed in the age when the written word had not been completed and miracles were needed to confirm the message received directly by inspired men. Now that the written word completely reveals God's will, miracles are no longer needed, so they have ceased (see 1 Corinthians 13:8-11).

Furthermore, faith must act in harmony with God's will (Romans 10:17; 14:23; etc.). We cannot receive by faith anything that is not God's will to give. It is not God's will today to do miracles as are described here. However, this does not prove there is no application to us today.

God still promises today to provide His people with everything we need to serve Him faithfully – Philippians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Corinthians 9:8-10; Ephesians 3:20; 1:19,20. Miracles are not needed, so they are not promised. But God does provide everything we need. This is provided through natural and spiritual law in answer to prayer. But our prayers must be in harmony with the will of God – James 5:16-18; 1:5-8; John 14:13; 15:7,16; 16:23,24; Matthew 7:7-11; 1 John 3:22; 5:14,15. And prayer is answered only if we have faith that God will do what He has promised and give us what we really need – James 1:5-8.

So the lessons of this passage still apply today, not by means of miracles, but by God's power of providence in answering prayer. We still need faith, and we still can do all we need to do to please God. Could it be that our lack of accomplishments for God are due to lack of faith?

21:23-27 - Discussion regarding Sources of Authority

Compare Mark 11:27- 33; Luke 20:1-8.

21:23 – As Jesus came into the temple, the chief priests and elders asked Him by what authority he did these things.

This confrontation begins a whole series of confrontations between Jesus and the Jewish leaders of all sects. It continues through this chapter and the next, culminates in the scathing rebuke Jesus gave to the Scribes and Pharisees in chapter 23, and finally ends when they crucified Jesus.

Jesus had already endured many confrontations with these leaders. They repeatedly attempted to find fault with Him and catch Him in error, yet invariably they ended up proving only their own ignorance or error. Their self-interest and lack of real devotion to God had already been repeatedly demonstrated. Doubtless Jesus knew nothing He could say at this point would convert these men, yet His confrontations with them served to show the people what kind of men these really were and what kind of prophet and teacher Jesus was.

This issue began as Jesus taught in the temple and the chief priests and elders asked Jesus what authority He had and where He had received the authority to do what He was doing. This probably refers primarily to the cleansing of the temple in the previous verses. That act

surely would have concerned the chief priests, since they apparently were allowing what Jesus disallowed. Doubtless they would have objected to Jesus' coming into what they considered their domain – the temple – and casting out from it what they, the leaders of the temple, had been allowing.

Had they asked their question sincerely, not only would it have been a valid question, but it would have been extremely important. One of the most important questions anyone can ask in religion is what authority we have for our deeds. Far too many people are acting in religion without proper authority for what they do and teach. Note that Jesus never denied that the question itself was good. In fact, He responded by asking a question, which also concerned the source of authority.

The problem was that these men had already repeatedly proved themselves to be dishonest. They were not sincerely interested in knowing the answer to the question. As always, they were just trying to trap Jesus. The proof that this is true is as follows:

(1) They had already determined they were going to kill Jesus (Mark 11:18, Luke 19:47).

(2) Jesus had repeatedly given them proof by His miracles that His power was from God. In fact, He had done many miracles after He cleansed the temple, according to Matthew 21:24, yet they did not accept the evidence.

(3) In the act of cleansing the temple Jesus had quoted Old Testament authority proving why He did it. He had already answered the very question they were asking Him!

(4) Both Jesus and John had already repeatedly shown them their error on many points, yet they never admitted error and never changed.

Nevertheless, instead of just telling them they were dishonest, Jesus gave them another chance to prove whether or not they were honest. He asked them a question about authority. If they were sincerely interested in authority, they could have answered. The answer they gave proved they were dishonest so there was no reason for Jesus to answer their question.

21:24-27 – Jesus said, if they would answer a question, then He would answer their question. He asked whether John's baptism was from heaven or from men. If they said it was from heaven, then He would ask why they did not believe John. But if they said it was from men, they feared the people who viewed John as a prophet. So they said they could not answer, so Jesus refused to answer their question about His authority.

Jesus asked them whether the baptism of John was from heaven or from men.

Jesus' responded to them by asking them about the authority for John's baptism. Was it from heaven or from men? This was an incredibly skillful question to ask.

First, it concerned authority – the very thing they had asked Him about. They had asked Him what His authority was, and He in effect first asked them what John's authority was. Second, the two are closely linked because John had testified of Jesus. If these men accepted John's authority, they would have accepted Jesus, since John had testified of Jesus. On the other hand, if they rejected John's authority, what are the chances they would have accepted Jesus'?

Note that Jesus' question grants that authority is important to ask about. His problem with their question was not that He thought authority did not matter. On the contrary, He believed we must have authority from God, and had rebuked them for following the wrong authority (see notes on Matthew 15:1-14).

Furthermore, Jesus here states another fundamental and significant principle of authority, as He had also shown in Matthew 15. There are only two ultimate sources of authority. Every religious practice is either authorized by God (from heaven) or it originated with men. Any practice that did not originate with God must be human in origin and therefore is unacceptable in worship to God.

Also note here that it is sometimes valid to answer a question with a question. Sometimes people ask us questions and demand an immediate, direct answer. But questions are often loaded with preconceptions, and the state of mind of the questioners must be considered in how we answer. There are times when people do not even deserve to be answered (as this case turned out to be), and times when the answer must be gauged according to the mindset of the audience. This does not mean truth is relative. But our choice of words in our answer – and even whether or not we answer – must take into account the circumstances. Jesus' example proves this to be true.

The leaders would not answer because either they would condemn themselves or they would upset the people. So Jesus refused to answer them.

The skill of the question is seen further in the dilemma it posed for the Jewish leaders. John had, of course, come from God (John 1:6). The evidence for this was conclusive, just as was the evidence that Jesus was from God. The people clearly knew this to be true. But John had powerfully rebuked the hypocrisy of these leaders, just as Jesus had been doing. So the leaders had refused to be baptized by Him.

If these men now said that John was from heaven, then they were faced with explaining why they had refused to accept his baptism. And furthermore, John had testified about Jesus, so if they admitted John was from God, they would have exposed their own hypocrisy in questioning and opposing Jesus. If they accepted John, they should have accepted Jesus.

On the other hand, if they said John's authority was human, then they were in trouble before the people because the people believed John was a prophet. Again, they were determined to save face before the people at all costs. So they simply said they did not know the answer.

This was an unpleasant position for these self-righteous, dishonest, bigots who desperately wanted to appear justified and honorable before the people. Admitting they were wrong, when they had begun trying to prove Jesus wrong, would have been major embarrassment.

So, in one simple but profound question, Jesus had not only proved that they were dishonest, but He had also pointed out ***why*** they were dishonest. They could have easily answered had they been honest. But they could not answer because they did not care about authority! They only cared about maintaining honor before the people.

They had asked about His authority as if that mattered. But their response showed it did not really matter to them. Note that at no point do they appear to be concerned about the truth on the issue. They wanted position, prestige, and power, not proper service to God. Jesus' question exposed their hypocrisy.

Jesus responded by refusing to (directly) answer their question (although He actually did answer it in the subsequent parables). They pretended they did not know the answer to the question. But they were the Jewish leaders responsible for teaching truth and leading the people spiritually. If they could not determine the origin of John's teaching, why should Jesus try to reason with them about the origin of His deeds? Of course, the issue was deeper than they pretended. They were not ignorant. They were dishonest. This gave all the more reason why Jesus should not answer them.

Note again that, when we are asked questions, our tendency is to think we are obligated to answer. But often this is not the case. Some people frankly do not deserve an answer. Other people are not ready for

the answer. And some issues simply are not relevant. Sometimes people bring up irrelevant issues in order to distract people from other more important and more pressing issues (these are sometimes called "red herrings"). We must have wisdom as good teachers to know when and how to answer. Here is a clear case in which people did not receive an answer because they did not deserve an answer. See also Matthew 7:6; Nehemiah 6:1-4.

21:28-32 - Parable of the Two Sons

21:28-30 – Jesus told a parable of a man with two sons. He told the first son to go work in his vineyard, but the son said he would not; however, afterward he regretted it and went. He told his second son to work in the vineyard, and he answered that he would, but he did not go.

It may at first appear that Jesus changed the subject, but in fact the subject raised by the Jewish leaders continues to be discussed through the end of the chapter. They had asked about His authority. He here answers by illustrating the real problem. When God sent them prophets (John, in this case), they rejected all evidence that the men were from God. They would not accept Divine authority when it was given them! And the reason was that they did not really care about God's will; they cared more about their own goals and advancement in the eyes of the people.

In order to demonstrate his point, Jesus told a story about a father and two sons. He asked the first son to work in his vineyard. He refused, then later repented and went. He asked the second to work. He said he would, but then did not. (Some translations reverse the order of the sons, but the lesson remains unchanged.)

21:31,32 – When Jesus asked which of the two sons did the will of the father, they answered it was the first one. Jesus responded that the tax collectors and harlots would enter the kingdom of God before the Jewish rulers. John came to them in the way of righteousness and they refused to believe him. Publicans and harlots did believe him, but still the Jewish rulers would not repent.

Jesus asked these leaders which one of these sons did the will of their father. The answer was obvious so the Jewish leaders replied that it was the one who at first said he would not do it but then later changed his mind and obeyed. The second son professed to do his father's will, but in practice he refused.

Jesus then powerfully revealed the application. He said the first son was like the tax collectors and harlots. These were people the religious leaders looked down on and did not want to even be around. But they were actually better in God's eyes than these religious leaders. Like the

first son, they had lived in sin, rejecting God's will. But when John the Baptist came, they repented and obeyed God.

But these religious leaders, professing loudly to be religious and obedient to God, nevertheless rejected John's teaching and would not obey it. Even after they saw that the people were accepting John's teaching, still they would not obey. So, Jesus' meaning was that these Jewish leaders were like the second son in the illustration: they claimed to obey God but in practice rebelled.

They were the kind of people who loudly professed dedication to God but did not practice it in conduct. They said they would serve God but, like the second son, they did not do so in practice. They were like those who say "Lord, Lord," but do not do the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21). They praised God with their mouths, but their hearts were far from Him (Matthew 15:8). They told others what to do but did not live by their own teaching (Matthew 23:3). Christians need to learn to love God in deed and in truth, not just in word or tongue (1 John 3:18).

Jesus said the publicans and harlots would enter the kingdom of heaven before the religious leaders of the Jews! What a powerful rebuke this was of these self-righteous religious leaders. They considered themselves to be so superior religiously to publicans and harlots that they would not even associate with them and several times criticized Jesus for trying to teach them. They were certain that they were the kind of people that would be honored in the Messiah's kingdom when it came. But Jesus said publicans and harlots would enter the kingdom before they would!

Note that Jesus' parable answered the question He had asked the leaders about John. He said that John came "in the way of righteousness." He was from God. The Jewish leaders would not admit this, but it was obvious to all honest people.

Jesus also clearly pointed out the evil of these Jewish leaders. Though John was from God, they just would not admit it – not at first and not later. Indirectly this showed why they had problems with Jesus. It was for the same reason they had problems with John. They simply would not accept the will of the Father as revealed by His prophets because it was not what they wanted.

Another lesson taught here is the meaning of repentance. The first son, like the publicans and harlots, at first did not do what the father said. Later they changed their mind (repented) and obeyed. That is repentance: a change of mind in which people realize they have been doing wrong and determine to quit doing wrong and start doing right. This change is motivated by godly sorrow (2 Corinthians 7:10), and must lead to a change of conduct. The son ***did*** the will of the father.

Far too often, even if people do recognize and admit that they had been guilty of sin, they are not willing to change and obey God. Some may claim to have repented, but then they do not follow through and

obey. Repentance requires the fruits of repentance, which was exactly John's message (Matthew 3:8ff).

21:33-46 – Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers

Compare Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-18.

21:33 – Jesus taught another parable in which a landowner planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress and built a tower. Then he leased it to vinedressers and went to a far country.

Jesus had been rebuking the Jewish leaders (chief priests and elders – verse 23) for their refusal to accept the teaching of God through John the Baptist and through Jesus. This discussion continues here in another parable. We can know the explanation of the parable because of the context and because verse 45 says the chief priests and Pharisees realized He spoke this about them. So, the force of the parable is a rebuke of these leaders (though they did not realize this until the end of it).

In this parable a landowner planted a vineyard, prepared everything it needed to bear fruit, and then placed it in the control of vinedressers (husbandmen) and went to a far country. Vines and vineyards were common in Palestine. The people well understood the concepts involved in growing grapes. So Jesus and other prophets often used vines as illustrations of spiritual truths. See Psalm 80:8-16; Isaiah 5:1-4; Jeremiah 2:21; Luke 13:6-9; John 15:1-8.

Again, parables cannot always be explained in such a way that each specific physical item refers to some specific spiritual thing, but this can be done in some cases. In this case, knowing the outcome and point of the parable we can see particular significance in several items.

The landowner represents God who controls the vineyard. The vinedressers are the ones who do wrong, so they represent the Jewish leaders. The vineyard is a symbol of God's people, God's work, God's purposes, etc. The hedge, winepress, and tower do not have individual significance, but together they illustrate the fact the that the landowner prepared everything needed for the vineyard to bear fruit. The vinedressers lacked nothing they needed to grow good fruit and give a good return to the owner. So, there was no excuse for failure.

The landowner going to the far country does not necessarily represent anyplace God went, but simply that He left affairs in the hands of the vinedressers. The point is that God had worked hard to prepare the nation of Israel, His people, to serve Him and bear fruit to accomplish His purpose. He appointed people whose duty it was to lead the people and urge them to accomplish God's will so God, the owner, could receive the results He deserved. Just as the vinedressers should have cared for the vineyard in such a way that it gave a good return or harvest for the owner, so the Jewish leaders should have led the people to serve God, do His will, and accomplish His purposes.

21:34-36 – When vintage time came, the owner sent servants to receive fruit from the vinedressers. But the vinedressers beat one servant, killed another, and stoned another. They did likewise with other servants that he sent.

When the time of the harvest came, the owner naturally sent servants to receive his part of the fruit. He still owned the vineyard. He had made it, so it was clearly right that he should receive his portion of the produce. Instead, however, the vinedressers refused to give what was rightfully his. What is worse, they actually harmed the owner's messengers, beating, wounding, and even killing them. When he sent other servants, they did the same to them.

From the context again it is clear that this referred to the fact that the Jewish leaders were refusing to give God the fruit or produce He deserved in the nation of Israel among His people. Instead of leading the people to serve God and do His will, the leaders led the people to honor and exalt the vinedressers themselves. Instead of teaching and guiding the people to follow God's laws, they made their own rules and traditions which they bound upon the people. They were keeping for themselves the good things that should have been given to God.

The servants refer to people who asked the leaders to give God His just deserts, so they must represent the prophets and men of God whom God had sent to tell the people to serve God and do His will. But instead of rendering the service God deserved, the leaders of the people rejected the servants and persecuted them. When God sent more prophets, they were treated in the same way.

This had been true throughout the history of the Jewish nation, and Jesus was showing that it was still true in His day. What had they done to John the Baptist? Had they obeyed his teaching? No, they rejected him and killed him just as their ancestors had done to other prophets. This connects back to His earlier question about the authority behind John's teaching, and His earlier discussions regarding the Jews' rejection of God's prophets (compare Luke 11:47-51). This then led to the issue of how they would treat Jesus Himself.

21:37-39 – Last of all the owner sent his son thinking they would respect him. But the vinedressers said he was the heir and decided to kill him and seize his inheritance.

The owner finally decided to send his son as a messenger to these evil vinedressers. Mark adds that this was his only son whom he loved greatly. He thought they may have been disrespectful to servants, but surely they would respect his son. They would not think of harming or resisting one in so high a position, but would honor him and give the fruits they owed.

Instead, however, the vinedressers recognized him as the heir, to whom the vineyard would belong after the owner was gone. If they could

get rid of him, they might keep the whole inheritance themselves. So they cast him out and killed him.

This shows the attitude of the Jewish leaders toward Jesus. He was the very Son of God, but instead of appreciating this and respecting Him, they were even more determined to do away with Him than they had been with John and the other prophets. He was the greatest threat to their honor in the eyes of the people. He was revealing their error in the eyes of the people and taking away their following. If they could get rid of Him, then they hoped they would continue to receive honor among the people. They would have no more rivals. This is exactly what the leaders were already planning to do (Luke 19:47), and Jesus had predicted it several times to His disciples.

Observe the incredible patience and mercy of the owner, which represents God's mercy on the nation of Israel. He gave them opportunity after opportunity to do what was right. We might think that one or two opportunities at the most would be sufficient, yet God gave Israel many opportunities and finally sent His own Son to die that they could be saved.

But we must remember that we too have been undeserving of the Father's mercy. We too have failed Him time and time again, yet He sent His Son for our sins too. This should give us great hope and comfort to see His patience. It should also motivate us to seek more diligently to be faithful.

21:40,41 – Jesus asked what the owner of the vineyard would do to the vinedressers when he came. The Jews responded that he would destroy those wicked men and lease the vineyard to other vinedressers who would render the fruit its season.

Having told the story, Jesus made the application. He asked what the landowner should do to those vinedressers when he returned. The answer is so obvious that, even if they had understood the application (which they probably did not until He explained further), the leaders would still have to answer correctly! In Matthew's account they do answer, and Jesus agreed that they had given the correct answer. The owner would destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to the care of others who would give the fruit that was due.

Surely God could not tolerate such conduct as these Jewish leaders committed. They had killed the prophets and would kill Jesus. When it happened, what choice did God have but to give the kingdom to others? These men would be punished and others would have the leadership of God's people. That is exactly what happened.

In doing this, God eliminated the whole Old Testament system and the favored status of the Jewish nation. He allowed people of all nations, Jew or Gentile, to enter His kingdom. He set His Son as the Head of that kingdom, and called upon all who will truly serve Him to enter it. But

remember that, if we are not faithful, we too will receive the same fate as these Jewish leaders.

Note here that Jesus has again predicted His rejection and death. He did not come to earth believing that the Jews would make Him an earthly king, as premillennial folk think. (The parable is not intended to imply that the Father really thought the people would not kill His Son; rather it expresses the way the people ought to have done. Other verses show the Father knew all along what would happen.)

Jesus came to earth knowing He would be rejected. The prophets predicted it and so did He throughout His life. So the Father obviously knew and planned it. Jesus was not amazed when they rejected Him. After their track record of rejecting all the prophets God sent, the amazing thing would have been if they had accepted Him!

Notice also the consummate skill of Jesus as a teacher in this example, and the value of illustrations in teaching a lesson. Especially when one is teaching those who are prejudiced against the truth, a skilled illustration can lead them to recognize the truth which otherwise they might reject if stated directly. When people see the application of an illustration, they may even, as in this case, convict themselves. For a similar example, recall how the prophet Nathan used an illustration to lead David to see the error of his sin regarding Bathsheeba and her husband Uriah.

Note also how Jesus exposed the motives of these Jewish leaders. They did not care about God or His Son. They selfishly sought for all the benefits of God's blessings to be kept for themselves – places of honor and glory – while they in turn gave God nothing.

21:42-44 – Jesus then quoted the Scripture that the stone which the builders rejected became the chief cornerstone. This was a marvelous doing of the Lord. So, Jesus said the kingdom would be taken from the Jewish leaders and given to a nation that would bear its fruits. Whoever falls on this stone will be broken, but on whomever it falls it will grind him to powder.

Here Jesus stated the obvious bottom-line application of the parable. Jesus, the Master Teacher, clinched the conclusion of what ought to be done to these wicked Jewish leaders. He did so by quoting Old Testament prophecy confirming that they would reject Him. Oh yes, the Father and Son knew this all along.

Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22 – The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. Similar passages are quoted elsewhere in the New Testament showing that Jesus would be the chief cornerstone. Jesus is often referred to as the stone upon which the church is built – Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20. But His rejection by the Jewish leaders had been prophesied and foreknown

all along (1 Peter 2:3-8). Acts 4:11 makes exactly the same application of the prophecy that Jesus made.

This is a different illustration, but it makes the same point as the parable Jesus had just told. The builders are the Jewish leaders. They were supposed to build a beautiful temple for God – i.e., lead the people to worship and serve God properly. God had appointed Jesus to be the chief cornerstone – the most important stone in the whole building. Instead of following God's blueprint, the builders did not even recognize the chief cornerstone but rejected it. They had in mind their idea of what the cornerstone should be like. God's cornerstone did not fit into their plan! But their plan did not succeed. God still put the chief cornerstone in its place; ultimately the builders were the ones to be rejected!

Jesus followed through on the cornerstone illustration showing that, if a person stumbled and fell on it he would be hurt; but if it fell on him, he would be crushed to pieces. That is, if one tripped and fell over the cornerstone, he may break an arm or leg. But if the cornerstone fell on him, it would be fatal. Barnes adds that this was an allusion to one method the Jews used to stone people to death. The guilty party would be placed under the edge of the platform, and a huge stone would be dropped on him.

But what does the illustration mean spiritually? It seems to me to mean this: The Jews were going to reject and kill Jesus. That would lead to great pain for them and the loss of their favored status as God's nation. This is comparable to stumbling at Jesus, the stone of stumbling (1 Peter 2:3-8).

They would be rejected as a nation and the kingdom would be given to someone else. This refers to the fact that the nation of Israel would no longer be God's chosen people. The kingdom of Christ under the gospel would become God's special people. This would be a spiritual kingdom, a spiritual nation, serving God spiritually as described in 1 Peter 2:5-10. See also Galatians 6:16; Daniel 2:44; John 8:39; Acts 3:25,26; Romans 2:28,29; 4:11,12,16; 9:8; Galatians 3:7,8,26-29; 4:28; 6:16; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11,12; Hebrews 8:6-13; 12:22,23.

Though this would cause the Jews great anguish and sorrow, it might not be spiritually fatal. They could still repent and accept Him later. But if they totally and permanently rejected Him and did not repent later and obey Him, this would lead to final and eternal rejection at the judgment. The stone would crush them permanently, grinding them to pieces.

Although the application is directly aimed at the Jewish nation, and especially their leaders, nevertheless we must remember that the same is true of anyone who rejects the teaching of Jesus and refuses to repent. Many people stumble at Jesus, refusing at first to recognize who He is, unwilling to serve Him. This leads to loss in this life. But if they will yet

repent, there is still hope of eternal salvation. But if they refuse to repent, they will be eternally lost.

21:45,46 – Hearing this, the chief priests and Pharisees realized Jesus was talking about them. But when they tried to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes because they took Jesus to be a prophet.

The rulers finally got the point when Jesus explained it that clearly. What did they do? Did they repent? No, they did the very thing He had just said they would do. They determined to try to get rid of Him! He had just predicted they would do this, and as soon as the words left His mouth, they were trying to do it!

But what stopped them temporarily? They feared the people who viewed Jesus as a prophet. And here is the most incredible paradox. He had showed plainly that they were motivated by desire to receive honor from the people. That is why they would not answer the question about John's baptism, and that is what He intimated was the reason they would reject Him. And sure enough, the story ends with them acting entirely out of a desire to gain honor from the people! They were motivated exactly as Jesus had shown, but they refused to see it and proceeded to be guilty of it.

Failing in their desire to kill Jesus, their approach was to send people under pretense, hoping to trap Him in His teaching. They hoped He would make an error so that they could eventually find something they could use against Him before the Roman governor. That way they would have the Romans do their dirty work and kill Jesus for them! This is exactly what eventually happened, except for the fact that He never really said anything wrong. They just managed to get their way despite the truth He taught.

Matthew 22

Chapter 22 – Conflict and Debates with Jewish Leaders

This chapter continues the conflict and debates between Jesus and the leaders of the Jews. These were the final confrontations before His death. We may wonder why so much conflict occurred at this time. The conflict had been building throughout Jesus' ministry. But it came to a head here because He was in Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish religion, during the Passover feast. Jews from all around were present.

Jesus had entered the city to the great honor of the people in the Triumphal Entry. This incited the opposition of the religious leaders, including many of the most influential teachers, who sought to use the opportunity to defeat Jesus and overcome His popularity with the people.

22:1-14 - Parable of the Great Supper

Compare Luke 14:15-24.

22:1-3 – Jesus spoke another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like a king who arranged a marriage for his son and sent out servants to call those who were invited. But they were not willing to come.

When the previous chapter ended, Jesus had been rebuking the Jewish leaders for their refusal to accept the message given by John the Baptist and by Jesus Himself. He showed by parable that the Jews had rejected God's prophets and would in fact eventually kill even the Son of God Himself. As a result the rulers and even the nation would lose their favorable status with God. The people who would be hurt the most by their rejection of Jesus would be those who reject Him.

Here Jesus told another parable continuing this theme. He again addressed the issues they had raised about His authority, John's authority, and the people's rejection of God's prophets and especially of Jesus Himself.

This parable compares the kingdom to a king who planned a great marriage for his son. A royal wedding was always a great event,

especially the wedding of a future king. We see this expressed frequently in marriages in the royal family in England. Invitations to this wedding had apparently previously been sent; and at the proper time, the king sent servants to tell the people that it was time to come. However, the people who had been invited were not willing to come.

The king clearly represents God the Father and Jesus is the son. The marriage represents the beginning of the kingdom (church) which the Father had prepared and over which His Son would rule. The Jews had been invited and urged for many years to prepare themselves for this kingdom so they could enter it when it came. The Jews spoke as if they really anticipated that kingdom and wanted it, just like people often anticipate the wedding of a king's son (note Luke 14:15-20).

When the time came for the kingdom to begin and the Son was about to receive it, God sent servants (prophets like John the Baptist and Jesus' disciples) to tell people the time had come and to urge them to become disciples and accept the kingdom. This had been the message of John and of Jesus: The kingdom of heaven is at hand. However, for all their professed interest in the kingdom, when the time came to actually enter it, the people showed that they really did not want to come. They were more interested in other things of far less importance, so they made excuses to avoid coming.

Note that this parable is somewhat similar to Luke 14:15-24, but is enough different that they cannot be just two different accounts of the same parable. Some try to make this out to be a contradiction, but of course it is not. Jesus simply told similar illustrations on two different occasions but with some variation. Preachers today frequently do this in our teaching, so why should we require anything else of our Lord?

22:4-7 – The king sent other servants telling people that the dinner was prepared and all things were ready. But the people ignored it and went to do other things. Some seized the servants, mistreated them, or even killed them. This made the king furious, so he sent his army, destroyed the murderers, and burned their city.

So, the king sent other servants to urge the people to come. They told the people of the wonderful things prepared for the wedding feast: oxen and fatted cattle had been killed and everything was ready. They urged the people to come. This represents preachers and teachers of the gospel message who urge people to become disciples of Jesus and partake of the joys of the kingdom.

The people, however, treated the invitation as insignificant. Instead of coming, they went to take care of other personal affairs, such as farm and business. Luke's account names many silly and frivolous excuses the people made. Clearly the marriage was not important to them. If it had been, they would have come to the wedding and made their personal interests of secondary importance.

Some people actually mistreated the servants as if they had done something wrong. Some servants were even killed. This reminds us of the account in 2 Chronicles 30:5-11 in which Hezekiah, king of Judah, sent messengers to the northern tribes of Israel calling them to observe the Passover in Jerusalem. Many people mocked the messengers and laughed them to scorn. Such a response demonstrates the disrespect that Jesus illustrates in this parable.

This was obviously intended to show the extreme effort God made to get people to see the blessings of the kingdom and to enter into its benefits. Yet the people were extremely indifferent, even to the point of rejecting the kingdom for silly and frivolous reasons. They were too wrapped up in their own affairs to show interest in the kingdom. Some even persecuted and killed the prophets and teachers who told them about the kingdom.

All this would indicate disrespect and rejection of the king and his son. Imagine how the royal family of England would feel if people in this way refused to attend the wedding of a future king.

The king was furious with these people, first because they had disrespected Him and His Son by not coming to the feast, and second because they had mistreated and even killed the servants who invited them. He determined the people would be punished, so he sent his armies to kill the people and burn their city.

This reaction may seem extreme. However, remember that this was a response to the people's disrespect to the king, and in particular to the mistreatment shown to the king's messengers who invited the people. Some people had even killed the messengers, so the passage says that the king killed them because they were murderers. It is similar to the account in Judges chapters 19-21 in which nearly the entire tribe of Benjamin was wiped out because they protected the wicked men who had attempted to attack a visiting Levite and had killed his concubine.

And remember in particular that this is a parable. It represents the destruction of the Jewish nation and the end of their status as God's people, which climaxed in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, scattering the people so that Israel has never again been a nation such as it had been.

A similar application, however, can be made to people since that time who refuse to obey the gospel. People today profess to want to please God and go to heaven. Like the guests in this parable, they are invited repeatedly by God's servants who tell them about the blessings available if they will be Christians.

However, people refuse for various light and frivolous reasons. They are too interested in the affairs of this world, they have preconceived ideas, they are not willing to make the necessary sacrifice to work for God, or they are not willing to admit they or their loved ones have been

wrong. So they reject the message and refuse to enter the kingdom, the church.

Some people ridicule, persecute, or even slay Christians and preachers who tell about the opportunities and blessings that the gospel offers to those who will enter Jesus' kingdom. Like the guests in this parable, they will be destroyed at the final judgment unless they repent.

22:8-10 – The king said the wedding was ready but the people invited were not worthy. So, he told the servants to go into the highways and invite as many as they found. They gathered all whom they found, both good and bad, and the wedding was filled with guests.

The king was nevertheless determined to have guests at the wedding, so he told the servants that the guests originally invited were not worthy (compare Acts 13:46). So, they should go out into the highways and bring to the wedding any they could find. They did so and the wedding had many guests.

This apparently refers to the fact that, after the Jews had their opportunity and rejected it, the message would go to the Gentiles. People who had not been originally invited and prepared, would nevertheless have the opportunity to attend.

Doubtless the Jews to whom Jesus spoke, and even His disciples, misunderstood this. The Jewish leaders had seen the previous parable as a rebuke of them, and they may have seen the same here. But even the disciples never seemed to understand that Gentiles would enter the kingdom. It was much later before Jesus convinced them to invite these people (Acts 10,11).

What is the significance of the fact that people who came were both good and bad? Obviously, people cannot continue to be wicked and receive the blessings of the kingdom of heaven. Perhaps the idea is that they had been bad but were converted. All are welcome in the Lord's kingdom, no matter how wicked they have been, provided they repent, receive forgiveness, and do fruits worthy of repentance.

Another explanation may be that they were bad, not in the sense of wicked, but in the sense of social outcasts. They were people that would not have been considered worthy of the wedding feast. This is how the Jews viewed the Gentiles, and Jesus had said that the publicans and harlots would go into the kingdom before the Jewish leaders.

22:11-14 – The king saw a guest who was not wearing a wedding garment. When he questioned the man, he was speechless. The king said to cast him into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

After the wedding was filled with guests, however, another problem arose. A guest did not have a wedding garment. When the king

questioned him about it, he was speechless. Notice that the man had no excuse for being there without such a garment. Plainly, it was within his power to have a garment, but he had none.

So, the man was bound and cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (compare Matthew 8:11,12; 13:41,42,49,50; Luke 13:28). His refusal to wear a wedding garment was an insult to the king and to his son just like the insult created by the people who refused to come at all. This too demanded punishment. Compare Zephaniah 1:7,8.

This seems to be a different case from the people who simply refused to enter the kingdom. Here we are warned that, even among those who become Christians by entering the church, there might be found some who will not ultimately enjoy the blessings of the kingdom. Some who are members do not live the life, are not clothed with the righteous life God expects. There is no excuse for such people for all could live the life if they would (1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13). At the judgment they too will be rejected.

"Many are called, but few are chosen" seems to be Jesus' expression for the fact that not everyone, in fact only a minority, will actually end up enjoying the benefits of the kingdom. Many people will be invited and have the opportunity but will not enter. Others, even though they enter, will not act so as to ultimately enjoy the blessings.

The Jews probably thought that the kingdom, when it came, would be a blessing they would all enjoy. Today we might think anyone would see the value of being a child of God to have eternal life. Yet Jesus knew that there was more to the kingdom than these people realize. It was not what they expected, and in some ways not as attractive as they thought. It required effort and sacrifice they did not expect. Many preferred instead to do other things of life that interested them. So despite their expectations, many who ought to enter do not, and many who enter fall away.

22:15-22 - Tribute to Caesar

Compare Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26.

22:15-17 – The Pharisees plotted how to trap Jesus. They sent their disciples with the Herodians saying they knew Jesus taught the way of God in truth. Then they asked whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not.

Jesus' parables had exposed the evils of the Jewish leaders and had predicted the end result of their sins. In an attempt to discredit Jesus, they proceeded to send various groups to try to trap Him. Note that this first attempt was premeditated and orchestrated by the Pharisees. Every confrontation they had with Jesus caused them to lose face before the people. So, they determined to take the offensive and question Jesus in a way they hoped would discredit Him before the people.

Remember this happened in Jerusalem. So, these attempts were made by the very highest authorities and most able scholars among the Jews. If anyone could have trapped Jesus, they would have done it. If they could not trap Him, then no one could do it. Nevertheless, we see people today who still keep trying as though somehow they think they can accomplish what the people in Jesus' day could not.

The leaders did not do their own dirty work. They sent their disciples and a group of people called Herodians. Herodians were supporters of the Herods. Some believe this meant that they defended the view that the Jews should willingly submit to the authority of Rome, including the payment of taxes. Luke 20:20 states they were hoping to find something they could report to the governor about Jesus, especially if He would teach the people not to pay tribute to Rome.

They began by flattering Jesus, buttering Him up with false compliments about how He taught the truth and did not show partiality. Of course, this was true, but their statements served a hypocritical purpose. They simply sought to catch Him off guard. The passage says they intended to entangle Him in His talk. They hoped that, in an unguarded moment, He might make a statement that they could use against Him.

The question they asked was whether or not it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar. The consequence of this question was clear, if we understand their concept of Jesus. They thought He came to be an earthly king and overthrow the Roman rule. If so, He would not be likely to encourage paying taxes to the Romans. The Jewish people in general hated paying tribute, because they hated submitting to these foreigners. The tax money not only symbolized Rome's authority but also took money from the pockets of these Jews to support a government they despised. But it must be remembered that, throughout their history, people of Israel had at times been defeated by foreign enemies who required them to pay tribute (2 Kings 23:33; 2 Chronicles 36:3).

Doubtless the Jewish leaders expected Jesus to urge people not to pay the Roman taxes. If He did this, they would report Him to the Roman authorities and get them to join in opposing Him (Luke 21:20). In fact, they later accused Him before the Romans saying that He taught the people to refuse to pay tribute, despite the fact He here told them just the opposite (Luke 23:2). When people are determined to find fault, they will find it even if they must lie to do it.

On the other hand, if Jesus said to pay the tribute, this would hurt His influence with the people who hated the tribute and thought He would end it.

22:18-22 – Jesus recognized their wickedness and asked them to show Him the tax money. He asked whose image and inscription was on it, and they said it was Caesar's. He said to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. They marveled at this and left Him.

The question and the answer

Jesus was aware of their intents and hypocrisy. They thought they had set a trap that would discredit Him no matter what position He took. Yet He had the ability, not only to read their hearts, but also to understand their intent and the danger of the trap. Here in Matthew's account He clearly called them what they were: "hypocrites."

This section and succeeding events show clearly that Jesus was not the sugary sweet, spineless, milk toast promoter of peace at any price that people today make Him out to be. He did not back away from public debate, but participated openly. He did not sweet talk those who were in sin but called them what they were: hypocrites. Yet if we speak this way today, people say we do not have the spirit of Jesus!

He began His response with a visual aid. He asked to be shown the tax money, then asked whose picture and superscription were on it. Of course, it was Caesar's. Coins in that day often had on them a picture of a ruler, even as we often do with our coins today. So, Jesus said to render to Caesar what belonged to him and render to God what belongs to Him.

Romans 13:7 – Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor.

The answer so dumbfounded Jesus' enemies that they were struck speechless and left! They were amazed at His ability to answer their question and escape the dilemma they had presented. But He also amazed them by immediately seeing through their subterfuge and ignoring their flattery.

Observations about government and Jesus' kingdom

Jesus could give this reply because, to begin with, He had no intention of being an earthly ruler or overthrowing Roman power. The Old Testament kingdom had been an earthly kingdom. It would have harmonized with its nature to violently overthrow a foreign power, as often was done in the periods of the judges and kings of Israel.

But Jesus' new kingdom is spiritual and does not use physical warfare to accomplish its purposes (John 18:36; 2 Corinthians 10:3,4). So, there was not necessarily any conflict with Roman authorities or any other governing power. Civil government has been ordained by God. As long as the rulers do the work God gave them to do, controlling the people to avoid mistreatment of others (Romans 13:1ff), there would be

no conflict with a religious or spiritual system of worship and service to God such as Jesus was here to institute.

God's kingdom can easily coexist with human governments, so long as each maintains its God-given purpose. Conflict arises when the government leaves it legitimate role and attempts to justify and uphold wicked practices or to dictate doctrine and practice to the church or to persecute its people for their service to God. Or conflict arises when the church misunderstands its role and seeks to control the government, as the Catholic Church has done in times past, or to foment rebellion against legitimate civil rules or laws.

God's law is higher than any civil law, so we must never disobey Him to obey man's laws (Acts 5:29). But rulers who do their job properly should never have reason to make laws that require citizens to disobey God. If they do, Christians must obey God. But nowhere are we told to participate in or foment revolutions to violently overthrow the government.

This does not mean we should disobey civil law simply because the rulers themselves fail to obey God. Nor should we refuse to pay taxes because rulers use tax funds to do things that are sinful according to God's law. The Roman government was involved in evil both in Jesus' day and in Paul's day, but both teachers still said to pay taxes (compare Romans 13:5-7).

So, Jesus could easily tell people to obey both civil law and God's law. This solved the dilemma in which the Jews thought they had caught Him, and it was accomplished simply by appealing to the evidence provided by the tribute money itself. In the end, Jesus said to pay the tax. But He did it in such a way that the Jewish rulers could not use His teaching against Him or discredit Him in the eyes of the people.

An ancient commentator pointed out as follows that the image of Caesar was on the coin, but man is in the image of God:

> "The image of God is not depicted on gold but is imaged in humanity. The coin of Caesar is gold; that of God, humanity. Caesar is seen in his currency; God, however, is known through human beings. And so give your wealth to Caesar but reserve for God the sole innocence of your conscience, where God is beheld."
> – Incomplete Work on Matthew (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

For other passages on the duties of citizens to civil government, see Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:11-15; Titus 3:1; 1 Timothy 2:1,2; Acts 5:29; 22:25-29; 25:10-12.

22:23-33 - Question Concerning the Resurrection

Compare Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40.

22:23 – The Sadducees, who deny the resurrection of the dead, then came to test Jesus.

The various sects of the Jews appear, at this point, to be taking turns trying to trap Jesus. The Sadducees took their turn next. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Acts 23:8 adds that they did not believe in angels or spirits. So, when a person died, they believed he ceased to exist.

This latter doctrine was the root and foundation of the other Sadducee doctrines. If a person ceases to exist when they die, then of course there is no resurrection and no reward after death. However, if a person continues to exist in spirit form after they die, then resurrection and rewards after death are not only possible but reasonable. We will see that Jesus attacked their doctrine at its root – at the issue of whether or not people cease to exist at death.

This leads to a cute preacher's story that helps us remember the name of the sect. If there is no resurrection, we are of all men most miserable (1 Corinthians 15:19). The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, so they are "SAD-you-see."

Their doctrine still exists. Modern materialists hold the same belief. Humanists, evolutionists, and others say man is like an animal – when he dies that is the end of his existence. Jehovah's witnesses and Adventists are similar. They do not completely deny the concept of a resurrection. They say man has no inner man or conscious spirit that exists after death, but they say some people (not all) will be raised after death.

22:24-28 – The Sadducees cited the law, if a man died without children, his brother should marry his wife and raise up offspring for the brother. They told of a woman who had, by this law, married seven different brothers in a row. So, to which one would she belong in the resurrection?

The Sadducees tried to trap Jesus by showing an apparent contradiction between the law and the concept of resurrection. This was based on the Mosaic law that said that, if a man died without offspring to inherit his property, his nearest of kin should marry his wife to raise up seed to him (Deuteronomy 25:5).

The Sadducees told a story, perhaps hypothetical, in which a woman married seven brothers in accordance with this law from Moses (one husband died without an heir, so she married his brother, who then likewise died and she married another brother, etc.). They asked, in the resurrection, which one will be her husband.

The catch to the question, of course, is that the woman was properly married to all of the brothers. This was fine, since they each died before

she married another. But if there is a resurrection, they will all be alive at once, so which one will be her husband?

Probably the Sadducees considered this to be one of their strongest arguments. They had probably used this question successfully in confronting the Pharisees who believed in resurrection but would have found the question difficult to answer. Doubtless they thought this question would trouble Jesus, especially since He had taught that a person should have only one marriage companion (Matthew 19:3-9). Even their practice did not allow a woman to have a plurality of husbands, though the law did tolerate a man having a plurality of wives.

Actually, the question is not unreasonable. The same problem, in a less extreme form, would occur anytime anyone died and the surviving spouse remarried. This would be permissible even today. So in the resurrection, all such people would have more than one living person to whom they had been married on earth. Probably the Sadducees used an extreme illustration simply to emphasize the point.

22:29,30 – Jesus said they were mistaken because they did not know the Scriptures nor the power of God. He said in the resurrection people do not marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven.

No marriage in heaven

The Sadducees' question may seem difficult. But it involved an invalid assumption. They had assumed that, in the resurrection, people would still be married. Jesus answered the problem simply by saying there would be no marriage in the resurrection. People will be like angels, who do not marry. So, the problem is not a problem. The answer is that none of the men will be married to the woman, because nobody will have husbands or wives.

As an added comment, Luke's account says Jesus stated that people who have been raised from the dead will never die again. They will be like angels in this regard as well.

Barnes points out that, in order to make the doctrine of the resurrection seem impossible, the Sadducees had to assume the doctrine taught something that the Bible never says. This is a common tactic of those who attack the truth. First, they modify the Bible teaching by assuming it teaches something the Bible does not say, then they attack the view that they have falsely assumed and try to make it look ridiculous. People do the same thing today when they falsely accuse Christians of believing in water salvation, earning their salvation by works, refusing to help poor little orphans, etc.

In the past I have thought that Jesus was here revealing a new truth that had not been made known before. So the only way that we or the Sadducees could know that there is no marriage in heaven is because Jesus here so declared it. However, there is good reason that they and

we could know there is no marriage after death, even apart from Jesus' statement here.

Romans 7:2.3 – For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband … but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. (Compare 1 Corinthians 7:39.)

The teaching of this passage is even included in our wedding vows: "till death do us part." This is the obvious reason, as stated in Romans 7, why a person is free to remarry if his or her spouse dies. Marriage lasts only till death. After a person dies, his or her spouse is no longer married. Which means that marriage is only for this life on earth. It ends at death. So there is no marriage in the resurrection.

While I know no passage in the Old Testament that directly states this, nevertheless it is clearly implied by the fact that people in the Old Testament were free to remarry when their spouse died (Abraham after the death of Sarah, Ruth after the death of her husband, etc.).

This truth flatly contradicts the teachings of Mormons who say that a man and woman may enter into a celestial marriage for eternity, not just for this life. Likewise, Muslims offer as a reward for certain services that a man may enjoy dark-eyed maidens after this life is over. All such teachings completely contradict the teaching of Jesus.

But why should there be no marriage in heaven? Jesus does not explain. Perhaps the point is that one of the primary purposes of marriage is reproduction and training of children. If there is no reproduction and giving of birth in heaven, just as there is no death, then there would be no need for marriage.

Lessons about handling error

Note also that, in answering these people, Jesus did not hesitate to tell them plainly that they were wrong. Many people today think we should never say people are wrong religiously. They say it is "un-Christlike" to criticize other people's religious beliefs. Yet here Christ did it! In verse 29, He plainly said they were mistaken.

People tell us, "Everybody has a right to his own interpretation of the Bible. Truth for you is whatever you believe to be true." But Jesus did not believe this. To Him there was truth and error, right beliefs and wrong beliefs. He not only publicly debated these people, but He plainly told them their position was wrong. We can and should do the same today when people are likewise in error.

Jesus also stated why they were wrong: They were ignorant of God's word and of God's power. God's word taught the resurrection (as Jesus is about to prove). Those who knew God's word would believe in the resurrection. And God's power enables Him, not only to raise the dead, but also to handle seemingly insurmountable problems like this one the Sadducees had raised.

Many people doubt the resurrection because they simply believe it is impossible. Others wonder about people who died many years ago so their bodies have completely decayed. And what about people who have drowned and their bodies have never been found, or their bodies were completely burned up in fire? People wonder how God could reassemble these bodies in the resurrection. Those who understand God's power realize that all things are possible with God. To deny the resurrection is to be guilty of the same errors as these Sadducees.

Note also that Jesus reached His conclusion without contradicting the law. He always respected the law. His teaching harmonized with it, instead of contradicting it as His opponents expected.

Jesus was not condemning efforts to reason from the teaching of God's word to unstated conclusions (inferences). He Himself is about to draw a conclusion. However, we must be careful how we reason, for some reasonings are erroneous and do not follow from what is stated. They are based only on our imaginations, human reasoning, or speculation.

Finally, note that just because men quote Scripture does not prove they have the truth. It is possible to mishandle the truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

22:31-33 – Concerning the resurrection of the dead, Jesus reminded them of God's statement to Moses that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus said God is not the God of the dead but of the living. This astonished the multitudes.

God's statement at the burning bush proves the resurrection.

Jesus then proceeded to disprove the Sadducees' whole position regarding the nature of man and the resurrection. Remember that the reason they did not believe in the resurrection was that they did not believe men have spirits that continue to live after the body dies.

Jesus answered by citing the statement of God at the burning bush. He said, "I ***am*** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Exodus 3:6). Jesus then affirmed that God is the God of the living, not of the dead. All live to Him (Luke 20:38).

The lesson is that, at the time God spoke this statement, the men mentioned were dead physically. Yet He said, "I ***am"*** their God. Since He is not the God of the dead but of the living, then these men must have yet been in existence. God's statement is meaningless if, as materialists believe, death means that people simply cease to exist. How could God say I am the God of men who do not exist? And observe that Jesus proved this from the Jews' own law, and from one of their better-known passages at that.

This proves that men do have spirits that continue to exist after death, thereby disproving the foundational doctrine held by the Sadducees (and likewise all materialists, Humanists, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.). The argument did not directly prove that there will be a resurrection, but it proved the reasonableness of it and overwhelmed what was probably the Sadducees' strongest argument against it. The Sadducees recognized the power of Jesus' answer, as demonstrated by the fact they had no answer but surrendered the conflict.

Jesus elsewhere taught that people live consciously after death (Luke 16:19ff) and that they will be raised from the dead (John 5:28,29). The Bible also teaches these ideas elsewhere (note especially 1 Corinthians 15).

So convincing was Jesus' response, that some of the scribes standing by commended Him for His answer (see Luke's account). This is rather surprising, since the Pharisees so often contradicted Jesus and tried to find fault in His answers. But remember that many of the scribes were Pharisees who believed in the resurrection.

Here are other passages that confirm the resurrection of the dead: Acts 24:15; Luke 20:27-39; John 6:40-45; 5:21-29; 1 Corinthians 15:12-58; 6:14; 2 Corinthians 4:14; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Lessons we can learn about Jesus' methods of Bible reasoning and teaching

(1) Jesus believed in using "necessary inferences." The conclusion He reached was surely not directly stated in the passage He cited as His authority. Nevertheless, He not only reached the conclusion, He also taught it and required others to accept it. His conclusion, however, unlike their conclusion, was a valid one, not a false one. He said they were in error for not seeing it themselves. This shows that people today are wrong when they teach that necessary inferences are not valid or that we should not "bind them" or say others are wrong if they do not accept them.

(2) He appealed to the Scriptures as authority and absolutely believed the Scriptures were verbally inspired and accurately transmitted through the centuries since Moses' day. His argument depended on the fact that the very tense of the verb Moses recorded had been accurately preserved through the years in the Scriptures. God said, "I ***am,"*** not "I ***was."*** If there were any possibility of error in the original recording of the account or in its preservation since the record had been written, then opponents could have set aside His argument as invalid. Yet Jesus confidently affirmed that this was what "God said."

(3) Furthermore, note that Jesus plainly affirmed that the inspired record in the book of Exodus was written by Moses. Many modern liberal scholars deny that Moses wrote the first five books of the Old Testament. Jesus plainly defended Moses as the author of the Pentateuch.

22:34-40 - The Greatest Command

Compare Mark. 12:28-31; Note Luke 10:25-37.

22:34-36 – Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, Pharisees then came and a lawyer tested Jesus by asking Him what command was the greatest in the law.

The opponents of Jesus did not yet give up. They continued to have questions they thought would stump Jesus. He had been confronted by the chief priests and elders, then by the Herodians and disciples of the Pharisees, then by the Sadducees. Now the Pharisees themselves heard that their archrivals the Sadducees had been put to silence. So they came to see if they could achieve victory over Jesus, and thereby also show they were greater than the Sadducees who could not defeat Him.

One of the lawyers (who was also a scribe, according to other accounts) tested Jesus by asking which command in the law is the greatest. Note that he was testing Jesus, so the motive for this question, like all the others, was not entirely pure. Nevertheless, the lawyer's response to Jesus' answer shows he was closer to the truth than many others.

We may wonder why they thought this was a difficult question. Perhaps in their legalistic emphasis on technical details of the law, they thought no one could name one law that was the most important. Or perhaps they thought that, whatever He answered, they could find another law just as important. Or perhaps they had their own scheme of priorities among the laws, so that, if He did not agree with them, they hoped to prove Him wrong. But if He did agree with them, they would at least come out better than the Sadducees and would suffer no harm by the discussion.

22:37-40 – Jesus said the greatest command was to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And the second greatest command was to love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commands hang all the Law and the Prophets.

Jesus as usual was ready with the answer. Actually, He had discussed this same question with another lawyer on another occasion (Luke 10:25-37), or at least it appears to be another occasion. At that time the lawyer himself had been able to state the same answer Jesus gave here.

In other accounts Jesus began by affirming there is only one true God. This truth is confirmed in many other Scriptures: Deuteronomy 4:35,39; 6:4; 32:39; Psalms 86:10; Isaiah 43:10-13; 44:6-8; 45:5,6,21-23; Matthew 4:10; Mark 12:29.

Then He said the greatest command was to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind (Deuteronomy 6:5). As a bonus Jesus additionally named the second greatest command: love your neighbor as yourself

(Leviticus 19:18). These two commands are the most important, basic, or fundamental commands of all, hence "first" and "second." Although Jesus was here answering a question about the Old Testament, the principle still applies today in that these commands are also part of the New Testament.

Notice that Jesus requires that our love for God must be sincere and totally dedicated. We must love with all of our heart, soul, and mind. Love must come from within, not just be an outward profession. And our love for God requires total dedication. Halfhearted service will not do. We must be totally dedicated to the point of being willing to completely sacrifice all that we have. How thorough and complete is the love of those today who profess to love the Lord?

Furthermore, Matthew records that Jesus was able to give a reason why these were the most important commands: because all other commands hang on these two. This is to say that love is the proper motivation that leads us to obey all the other commands, and furthermore it is the basic reason why the other laws are important.

All laws grow out of our duty toward God and/or our duty toward other people. Our devotion to others becomes the motivating power that leads us to do what is best for them. So, by saying these are the most important commands, Jesus was not denying the need for obeying the others, but was actually showing that we are obligated to obey all the others too (Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13:1ff; Galatians 5:6; 1 John 5:3; John 14:15; etc.).

Some people try to classify laws, thinking some laws are essential to obey to please God, but other laws can be ignored with little or no penalty. But Jesus, by identifying these laws of love as the most important laws, automatically showed that all other laws are important too.

Other people think that obeying commands is not essential at all. Some even say we can be saved eternally without obeying any commands. If so, we can be saved without loving God or other people, for Jesus plainly said these are commands: the most important commands. Other people say that obedience does not matter as long as people love God. But such views directly contradict what Jesus said here. Jesus here taught that love is what makes obedience to all the other commands important.

Further, in giving this answer, Jesus showed that proper obedience begins in the heart. This is emphasized repeatedly in the gospel. Outward ritual without inward meaning is not the service God wants (1 Corinthians 13:1ff; Galatians 5:6). In fact, it is on this very point that the Pharisees stood condemned and were vigorously rebuked by Jesus (Matthew 23).

We should also note that, of these two laws that Jesus said were the most weighty, neither is one of the Ten Commands. Many people,

including perhaps the Jews who were questioning Jesus, would think that the Ten Commands were the most basic and important laws. Many today say that the Ten Commands were so fundamental to the Old Testament that they continue to be binding, even though Jesus removed the rest of the Old Testament. Yet Jesus here said that the most important of the Old Testament laws were not in the Ten Commands.

Some people want to say that these laws of love really are in the Ten Commands, because each of the ten is based on one of these laws. Of course, they are based on them. But that proves nothing, since the same is true of all the other Old Testament commands. That is what Jesus said here. Yet the fact remains that neither of these two commands is in the Ten Commands. If you read the Ten Commands without knowing other Mosaic teachings, you would not even think of these commands. So, it necessarily follows that the Ten Commands are not the most basic commands of the Mosaic Law.

Since both of the most important laws involve love, let us consider love and its proper place in our lives.

Love is concern for the wellbeing of others.

1 John 3:15-18 – If we love our brother, we help his need.

Ephesians 5:25,28,29 – Jesus loved the church so much He gave His life so we could be saved. Likewise the husband should be concerned for the wellbeing of the wife. He should nourish and cherish her.

1 Corinthians 13:5 – Love is not selfish.

Romans 13:10 – Love works no ill to its neighbor.

Love is a choice of the will.

Jesus said love is a command. Love can be commanded because it is a matter of the ***will.*** We can choose whether or not to love just like we can choose whether to obey or disobey any other command.

Some think love just happens and cannot be controlled – you "fall in love" or out of love. So, if people "just don't love one another," nothing can be done. But when we realize we can ***choose*** to love, then we realize we ***can put love into*** our lives. And if we fail to put it in, we ***sin.***

Romans 5:6-8 – Christ loved us while we were yet sinners, not because we were so lovable He couldn't help Himself, so He just had to fall in love with us. Rather, He ***chose*** to do what we needed to have done.

Luke 6:27,28 – We are commanded to love our enemies. But we love our enemies, not because we uncontrollably fall in love, nor because their character so overwhelmingly appeals to us, but because we choose to do what is best for them.

Further note that, just as Christ initiated love toward the church when we were sinners who were not acting lovingly toward Him, so it is the ***responsibility*** of each disciple to practice love toward others whether or not they love us. It is not right for us to wait for the other

person to start acting lovingly. It is our duty to begin to love them regardless of how they choose to act.

Love requires action.

1 John 5:2,3 – Love for God and for others requires us to love God and ***keep His commands***. Keeping God's commands is loving God.

1 John 3:18 – We must not love just in words, but in ***deed*** and in truth. This is a vital principle in every relationship and every circumstance. We ought to say loving things, but that alone is not enough. We must act in love. (Luke 10:25-37; 6:27,28)

Love requires giving and self-sacrifice.

John 3:16 – God so loved the world that He ***gave*** His only-begotten Son.

Ephesians 5:25 – Jesus loved the church and ***gave*** Himself for it.

1 John 3:14-18 – If you see your brother in need and don't ***give*** what is needed, you don't have love.

Romans 12:20 – Loving your enemy requires ***giving*** food and drink when needed.

The basic beginning point in doing what is right in any situation is ***love:*** willingness to ***give*** of our self for the good of others. Don't say, "I'll give in if he/she will too." If an act is good for others, ***do it*** regardless of what they are doing. If you have been wrong, ***admit it*** regardless of whether or not they have admitted their errors.

This is especially important when serious problems exist between people. As long as both insist on their own way, strife will continue. When one is willing to give in for the ***good*** of the group, then a start has been made to resolving the problem. When both are willing to give in for the good of the group, then the solution definitely will be found.

(1 John 4:9,19; Acts 20:35; Luke 10:25-37)

22:41-46 - Christ as David's Son and Lord

Compare Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44.

22:41,42 – Jesus then asked the Pharisees whose son Christ is. They said He is the Son of David.

The various Jewish sects had been asking questions to trap Jesus. He had answered them successfully and conclusively every time. Now that they were silenced, He took the opportunity to question them. Their repeated efforts to "stump" Him had failed every time, but He "stumped" them the very first time!

Note that His motive, unlike theirs, was not simply to win an argument or to make His opponent look bad. His motive was to help the Pharisees to see their error, and also to help the people to see that Jesus had the truth and those who opposed Him were in error.

He began by asking whose son the Christ is. The Jewish leaders believed Him to be the Son of David. The significance of this expression

is that the Christ would be the heir to the throne of David (compare Matthew 21:9). God had promised David that his descendants would reign on the throne over Israel. In particular the Messiah would be his descendant; hence, the "Son of David."

Jesus indeed was the Son of David and heir to the throne in this sense, as the genealogies show (Matthew 1; Luke 3). However, the Jews thought this was an earthly reign, and this was all they saw in the Messiah. He was David's heir, but they did not see that He would be something more as well. This is the point about which Jesus questioned them further.

22:43-45 – Jesus then asked them why David called the Messiah "Lord" when He said, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool.'" Jesus then asked, if David called him "Lord," how was He his son?

Jesus asked about the Messiah as David's son and lord.

Jesus did not deny that the Messiah was the Son of David. However, He pointed out that David himself called Christ his "lord." He quoted Psalm 110:1 in which the Lord (God) spoke to one whom David called "my Lord." Jesus affirmed – and the Jewish leaders evidently agreed – that this was a messianic prophecy spoken through David. Then Jesus asked how the Messiah could be both David's son and his Lord.

This question was very powerful and troublesome for the Pharisees. It aimed directly at their misconception of the Christ. If He were just David's descendant and heir to the throne, there would be no reason for David to call him his "Lord." "Lord" means ruler or master. No man calls his son "Lord" unless the son has some authority greater than the father. But David was a great earthly king. In the Jews' minds, no one could be greater as a king than David had been. They saw the Messiah as simply another great earthly king: great, but no greater than David, surely having no authority over David. So why would David call Christ "Lord"?

The Jews were stumped by the question and could give no answer, because they did not understand the real nature of the Christ. Had they understood Christ's nature, and had they studied more carefully they would have seen that the Christ was more than just an earthly descendant of David.

Lessons to be learned about Christ

The point of the question was to show that the Christ, while He was the Son of David, was also much more than just the Son of David. He was in fact also the Son of God, God in the flesh. He was both divine and human (Philippians 2:5-8; John 1:1-14; 20:28-31; Matthew 16:16).

In the flesh, He was a man and the earthly descendant of David through Mary. This made Him the lawful heir to David's throne. However, He had existed long before He was born. In fact He was God

from eternity and the Creator of all. He was conceived in Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit, hence God in the flesh.

This made Him far greater than just David's descendant. It was the spiritual side of the Messiah that the Jews did not see. They were continually thinking physically instead of spiritually. Here again, as always, Jesus taught them they must think spiritually. Physically He was not greater than David, but as the Son of God He was David's Lord.

When people understand the real nature of the Christ, they realize He was truly greater than David; but the question stumped the Jews because of their preconceptions. Many people today would make the same mistake, since they would claim that Jesus was a great man but not the Son of God and not God in the flesh. As with the Pharisees, such views fail to recognize the real nature of Jesus. Those who hold such views cannot answer questions like the one Jesus asked here any more than the Pharisees could. See our notes on Matthew 16:15-17.

Note again that here is an inference that Jesus expected the Jews to draw, but they misunderstood. Quite clearly they were in error because they did not draw the proper inference.

Note the incidental affirmation by Jesus that David was inspired of the Holy Spirit. He stated as a plain matter of fact that David spoke by the Spirit.

While the Jewish leaders so vigorously opposed the teaching of Jesus, Mark records that the common people heard Him gladly. This demonstrates that, especially at this Passover feast, there were large multitudes in the area of the temple where these events occurred. This means that Jesus and His enemies had a significant audience. Although Jesus' obvious defense of truth upset His enemies, yet the common people appreciated it. This made the Jewish leaders even more upset because Jesus had embarrassed them in front of the people.

To learn more about the Deity of Jesus, we urge you to study our free articles on that subject on our Bible study web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct.

22:46 – No one at that time could answer Jesus, nor did anyone attempt to question Him after that day.

Not only could the Pharisees not answer Jesus' question, but they finally gave up trying to trap Jesus. He had defeated them at every turn, so they ceased asking questions.

They did not, however, cease their opposition. They just attempted to defeat Him in other ways, and eventually succeeded in killing Him.

Note the attitude of people who are in sin but refuse to admit it. No matter how clearly their sin is exposed, they refuse to change. They will argue till they see they cannot disprove the evidence against them. Then they keep quiet; but instead of changing their lives, they resent the teacher in their hearts.

Many people believe in debating as long as they think they can win. When they are proved wrong, instead of correcting their error, they suddenly no longer believe in debating! It's like a man who can't stand how cold it is, so he solves the problem by ignoring the thermometer!

People who want truth will accept it even if it proves them to be wrong.

Matthew 23

Chapter 23 – Public Rebuke of the Scribes and Pharisees

Compare Mark. 12:38-40; Luke 11:39-52; 20:45-47.

Having silenced His opponents, Jesus concluded the lengthy debate by warning the listeners of the errors of the scribes and Pharisees. They had been unable to prove Him wrong on any point and unable to answer His questions, so they left the field of battle. This gave Him opportunity to warn the people.

Note that some people say it is un-Christlike to tell people they are wrong religiously. We are supposed to just tolerate their views and believe that "Everybody is going to heaven, but by different roads," or "All the denominations are serving God, just in different ways," and "Everybody has a right to their own interpretation; if you believe it's true then for you it is true," "Jesus said 'Judge not,'" etc. Such people often claim it is un-Christlike to debate religious issues publicly.

Other people think we should never talk about the errors of people who are not present. We are told that it is gossip, slander, or being a busybody to talk to one group of people about the errors of another group of people. If a church disciplines an erring member or a preacher rebukes the sins of some other group, we are told that we should mind our own business, and not speak evil of others.

Then there are those who say we should never refer to specific religious groups by name and then identify specific errors for which they are guilty (such as Catholics, Lutherans, etc.).

Yet throughout this chapter Jesus did every single one of these things that people say should not be done. He repeatedly names the scribes and Pharisees, which were specific Jewish sects or denominations. And He repeatedly and forcefully points out their errors, although He was speaking, not to the scribes and Pharisees, but to the multitudes and His disciples (verse 1; compare Luke 20:45).

Did Jesus do what is un-Christlike? Are we un-Christlike when we imitate Christ's example (1 Peter 2:21ff; 1 Corinthians 11:1; etc.)? There are many examples in Jesus' life in which He did these things, and likewise many examples in the teaching of John the Baptist and Jesus'

apostles and disciples. In fact, there are numerous passages telling us that we are responsible to rebuke sin (Revelation 3:19; Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Timothy 4:2-4; Jude 3; etc.).

This does not mean, of course, that every person we teach or even every person in error should be rebuked in the same forceful manner that these scribes and Pharisees were. Jesus was much more gentle with people who were sincere and who simply had never heard the truth. But these people had heard the truth and had multiple opportunities to know what was right. They were religious leaders who were responsible to know and defend the truth. Yet they repeatedly rejected and opposed truth. Their errors led many people astray from the truth. And their conduct repeatedly proved they were dishonest. It was under these circumstances that Jesus became as forceful in rebuke as we see in this chapter.

Furthermore, we must remember that Jesus here rebuked specific people for specific sins. This should not be taken as granting people today the right to view all people of Jewish descent as being guilty of sin. Jesus Himself, His apostles, and many early Christians were themselves Jewish. All people, regardless of ancestry, could accept the gospel and people today can do likewise. Ancestry does not make a person guilty (Ezekiel 18:20).

23:1-4 – Jesus told the multitudes and disciples that the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So the people should observe what they say but not follow their works; for they say and do not do. They bind on others heavy burdens hard to bear, but they will not move them with one of their fingers.

They say but do not do.

Jesus began by showing that the people did have some responsibility to respect the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees. They "sit in Moses' seat." Moses was a teacher of Israel; after he gave the law, other men were appointed to teach that law to the people (compare Ezra 7:6,25; Nehemiah 8:1-8; etc.). It appears that this is what it meant to sit in Moses' seat. (Some commentators think there was a specific seat in the synagogue called "Moses' seat" where the teacher would sit. This would be comparable to our concept of a pulpit.)

In Jesus' day these scribes and Pharisees knew much about the law and taught it to the people. They often taught their own human traditions too, and for this Jesus strongly rebuked them (Matthew 15:1-14). But as long as they taught what Moses really said (truly sitting in his seat), Jesus said to observe and do what they taught. They were fulfilling an office that God approved and the people should respect them for that.

However, they were also guilty of grievous sins in their own lives. Though they taught much truth, they did not live by it as God intended, but greatly erred from it especially in their attitudes and motives.

They were hypocrites and Jesus repeatedly identified them as such throughout this chapter and elsewhere (compare Matthew 6:1ff). A hypocrite pretends to be good in ways that he really is not (the original meaning is an actor). He tries to appear to people to be upright and spiritually honorable (for the sake of receiving respect from people), but he doesn't really live an upright life or does not act from proper motives. They did not practice what they preach.

A form of hypocrisy

In this chapter Jesus describes several forms of hypocrisy. The first form involves a person who knows what is right and teaches and expects other people to do right and pretends that he himself lives right, but in reality he does not practice what he knows to be right. This was the case with these men.

They taught other people, and told people when they were wrong, but they themselves did not live the kind of godly life they taught and professed. They could make great demands laying heavy burdens on others, but they would not even begin to live up to these demands themselves. Their profession was a false front, a facade. They were two-faced, hypocritical, living differently when they thought people did not know.

Are there not many religious leaders today who profess their righteousness loudly and tell others they must repent and do right, but meantime they are involved in all kinds of immorality and evil? Many big-name TV evangelists preach to others long and loud, but themselves live in high luxury from huge incomes, and often are involved in sexual immorality and worldliness of all kinds. And still more are involved in religious false doctrines that they will not give up because they are afraid of losing a following.

Likewise some preachers, elders, and members of the Lord's church preach loudly of the need to be strict and true to God's word in regard to baptism, music in worship, church organization, etc. Yet in their private lives they neglect and even abuse their families, have hateful and ungodly attitudes, are jealous, envious, deeply materialistic, make little or no private efforts to teach the lost, and in many cases are secretly involved in immorality. Let us not think we are right just because we have the outward form of truth on certain aspects of the church.

Note also that it is possible to respect the office or position a person holds and yet not respect the personal life of the individual in that office. If they tell us something acting in their official capacity, we should accept the authority they possess in that position. But we are not obligated to approve of all they do, and in fact should oppose their errors as Jesus did here.

23:5-7 – They did their works to be seen by men. They had broad phylacteries and enlarged borders on their garments. They loved the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the marketplaces. They sought to be called "Rabbi, Rabbi."

In these verses Jesus described other ways a person can be hypocritical.

Seeking the praises of men

Another form of hypocrisy is doing good things for an improper motive. One pretends he is acting out of sincere concern for God's will to please and honor Him. But his real motive is simply to make a big impression on people and receive their praise and adulation. Jesus had repeatedly rebuked these scribes and Pharisees for this problem (Matthew 6:1-18; 21:26,46).

Such conduct is clearly hypocrisy since one is not the truly good person that he pretends to be. Motives matter to God. It is not enough to do right. We must do right for the right reasons (1 Corinthians 13:1ff; Romans 6:17,18; Galatians 5:6; etc.)

But note that other people use this as an excuse to do wrong. They say, "Well, I couldn't really mean it and I don't want to be a hypocrite, so I just don't attend services (or get baptized, etc.). But at least I'm not a hypocrite!" But this is no solution since they are still wrong. The solution is to do right and do it for the right reason!

Outward show without the inner meaning

Then a related form of hypocrisy, which often is associated with the other kinds, is making a big show of outward ritual but without the inner meaning. This often accompanies wrong motives since, if our motive is to impress people instead of God, then we will do what we can to make sure people notice us without caring what is in our hearts.

The scribes and Pharisees expressed this several ways. They wore broad phylacteries and broad borders on their garments. The phylactery was a small pouch strapped to the body for the purpose of carrying written copies of part of the law. If worn on the forehead in a headband, it was called a frontlet. Or it may be worn on the arm, etc. These were worn especially at times of prayer. This was done as an application of Exodus 13:16; Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18, however it is doubtful these passages were meant to be taken physically (see *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, p. 228).

The wearing of a physical phylactery was not wrong and could even have some advantage (though probably God never intended to require it). But the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees is that they deliberately wore extra large ones to make sure the people noticed them. It was not really done to remind them of God's law, as God originally

intended, but was done to remind other people that they should honor the scribes and Pharisees for being so religious!

Likewise, God had told Israel to wear fringes in the borders of their garments to remind them of His law (Numbers 15:38-40). This was good, and Jesus was not condemning it as such. But again, the scribes and Pharisees made theirs extra large, not to remind them of God's will, but to make a big show to impress people.

Also in those days there were special seats at meals and banquets that were reserved for the most honored guests. These people made a great point of seeking the most honorable seat (compare Luke 14:7-11). And they loved to receive, in public places, greetings that showed how religious the people considered them to be. In short, they wanted the honor of the people, and the more public the better.

What about today? Many people, especially religious leaders, still want to be honored for their religious status, especially in certain circumstances. They wear special collars, flowing robes, or other special clothing so people will immediately identify them as religious people. They expect to be given special honors at gatherings. They want colleges or hospitals or buildings at such institutions to be named after them. They expect to preach for large congregations, have the most watched television programs and the biggest crowds when they preach. And they especially expect people to use special terms to honor them above other people (see the following verses).

In what way is this any better than what Jesus here condemned?

23:8-12 – You should not be called "Rabbi," for one is your teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for you have one Father who is in heaven. Do not be called teachers, for one is your teacher, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant, and whoever exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Titles of religious exaltation

Jesus then continued by teaching the proper attitude we should have toward our works of service for God. First, He said we should not wear titles to honor and exalt us above other Christians religiously. Three such titles are named to illustrate the point.

"Rabbi" meant originally "my great one" or "master" and came to refer to one who was learned in the law and therefore a teacher of the law. This term was used, not just for scribes and Pharisees, but also for Jesus (compare Mark 9:5; 11:21; 14:45; John 1:38; Matthew 26:25,49) and also John the Baptist (John 3:26).

"Father" is the same term used for one's earthly male parent, but here it is used in a spiritual context to indicate honor given to one

because he is in a spiritual position of honor and authority as a father has in the home.

"Master" (verse 10) meant "a guide" and referred to one who was a teacher to show others how to live their lives (so, some translations have "teacher"). However, it also came to imply authority. This is similar to the modern concept that religious teachers should be followed and obeyed because of their position, not just because they can establish the truth of their teaching by Scripture.

Like the phylacteries and borders of the garments, it appears that none of these terms were inherently wrong. In fact, they each could have a proper spiritual use even for human beings. "Rabbi" was used, not only for Jesus, but also for John the Baptist. "Father" was used for Paul in relationship to people he had taught and they were converted (1 Corinthians 4:15). "Master," in reference to one who simply teaches God's word, is perfectly legitimate since many people teach us God's word (Ephesians 4:11,12; Acts 13:1ff; Hebrews 5:12; etc.).

Likewise, there are other terms that refer to the work people do in the kingdom such as elders, bishops, apostles, preachers, etc. All these are scriptural terms to use to describe the work men do, and they deserve a measure of respect and appreciation of the work they do.

Humility compared to seeking exaltation

What then was the problem with the terms? The problem occurred when people used the terms as titles for the purpose of honoring and exalting certain people as spiritually superior to other people. Also included would be the modern concept that church members should obey their leaders simply because of their position as leaders, even when their teaching goes beyond Scripture.

Note that Jesus explains this by saying we are all brethren (verse 8), and true greatness in the kingdom is determined by service (verse 11; compare Matthew 20:20-28). In the way these people were using the terms to exalt men, they should be used only for Deity. Only God is our Father is the sense of one exalted and honored above other people. Only Jesus is our Master or Teacher in the sense of a supreme teacher above others.

The problem is not that the terms are wrong of themselves. The problem is that people insist on seeking and giving honor to exalt people to places people have no business being, instead of recognizing our own human humility (1 Corinthians 1-4; Romans 12:4,5; Philippians 2:1-8). These terms may properly describe a legitimate work people do. But they are wrong when they become titles sought and given for the purpose of exalting certain people as more important or spiritually honorable then other of our fellow Christians and brethren. Only God should be so exalted.

Yet that is exactly what is done today when people are called "Father," "Reverend," "Most Holy," and "Pope" simply because of the

position they hold. Clearly these are titles of honor, and those who wear them are viewed as being spiritually superior to others, so we should obey them. They do not just describe a work. Jesus explained that, as these terms are used, they belong only to God. And if you refuse to use them, the people or their followers will be offended that you are not showing proper respect!

This does not mean we should fail to respect or appreciate people for what they do. Everyone needs encouragement. But the honor should be given for service done, not just for a position or profession. It must never be honor above what we would give to other people who are working hard for the Lord. If someone does a good job, praise them for that job. And if someone else does a good job, praise them for that job. But do not give them an ongoing title that exalts them above others, simply because of the position they hold. And do not give men titles in ways that belong only to God.

Jesus taught us to humble ourselves and seek no exaltation above others. Then God will honor us. But if we seek honor above others, God will not honor us (see notes on Matthew 20:20-28).

Finally, note that Deity always deserves our honor and should be addressed with titles of honor. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are above all men all the time because of their position and their work, and they always deserve special terms of exaltation above people. Let us not forget to honor God, but let us see the humility of people.

23:13 – Woe to the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For they shut up the kingdom of heaven against men. Not only did they not go in themselves, but they did not allow others to enter.

Here is another specific form of the hypocrisy the scribes and Pharisees committed. Jesus pronounced it in the first of a series of "woes." "Woe" is an exclamation of grief, distress, or trouble. Jesus is warning these people that great consequences would be brought on them because of their hypocrisy.

These people shut the kingdom of heaven against men in that they not only would not enter themselves, but they also hindered others from going in. This was hypocrisy in that these people professed great dedication and concern for the kingdom. They professed to be diligently seeking it and eagerly anticipating it. However, when John the Baptist and Jesus announced it to them, they rejected all they said. Perhaps in doing this they did not realize they were rejecting the kingdom. But they were in fact rejecting it, and they should have known this.

They "shut the kingdom" by opposing the teaching which would enable men to enter the kingdom. They were like men standing at the gate of a city or the door of a house, not only refusing to enter, but refusing access to those who did want to enter. So they refused to obey John's teaching, and they tried every possible way to find fault with

Jesus, and eventually they killed both John and Jesus. Further, even after Jesus' death, they continued to oppose the preaching of Jesus' disciples. By doing this they were hindering people from accepting the kingdom, just as Jesus had said they would do in the parable of the wedding feast in the beginning of Matthew 22.

Consider the seriousness of such conduct. Those who are saved are in Jesus' kingdom, the church (Colossians 1:13,14). If we hinder people from entering, not only do we displease God, but we also hinder the salvation of other souls. God takes such sins very seriously (compare Matthew 18:6,7; Romans 1:18; Acts 13:6-10; etc.). People still today are hindering people from entering the kingdom whenever they teach false doctrine, oppose the teachings of truth, and seek to hinder people from entering Jesus' true church.

23:14 – Woe to the scribes and Pharisees who were hypocrites because they devoured widows' houses and for a pretense made long prayers. Therefore they would receive greater condemnation.

This verse is, in some translations, found only in the footnote. However, it is definitely found in Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47, so the teaching is definitely from God and an accurate statement of what Jesus said.

A second woe is pronounced describing the hypocrisy of these leaders because they were cruel and greedy toward harmless and defenseless unfortunate people. Some people use religion to cover their evils. It is a convenient front that makes people appear respectable while they practice immorality and mistreatment of others.

In particular, these men were cruel, selfish, greedy bullies who took advantage of people in need. The Bible says we should care and provide for widows and unfortunate people. Instead, some people see them as easy victims who have no means to protect themselves. So people take unfair advantage of them and take what little these poor people possess.

Meantime they cover their evil by making long prayers – i.e., they make great show of religious rituals so others think they are such good people they could not possibly harm anyone. Some even use their religious positions as opportunities to get people to trust them, then they use that trust to cheat their victims. Jesus pronounced a woe on such people and once again called them hypocrites.

An example is modern faith healers. They convince people they can do miracles to help people with their problems. It is bad enough that they cannot do true miracles the way they claim that they can. But the point here is that, even what they attempt to do is not done free of charge like Jesus and His apostles did. Instead these men beg for contributions and even tell people they should send a contribution so they can "expect a miracle." But poor people have often spent their living for doctor and hospital bills. They have little left to live on, yet they sacrifice greatly to

send money to wealthy preachers who live like kings. But the people receive nothing in return.

Sinners will receive condemnation, but these are even more worthy of condemnation, Jesus said, than others are. Such hypocrites deserve severe rebuke as Jesus gave it here.

For other passages about helping those in need, see 1 John 3:16-18; 1 Corinthians 13:3; 1 Timothy 5:4,8,16; Matthew 15:4-6; 25:31-46; Esther 2:7; Luke 10:25-37; 14:12-14; Ephesians 4:28; Acts 9:36-39; 20:34,35; James 1:27; 2:15,16; John 19:26,27.

23:15 – Another woe on the scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites was that they traveled land and sea to make a proselyte, but when he is won they make him twice as much a son of hell is themselves.

A further woe was that the scribes and Pharisees went to great lengths to make proselytes. A proselyte is a convert from one religious view to another. It is used regarding Gentiles who became Jews (Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43). Here McGarvey thinks it refers to Jews converted from other sects to the Pharisees. However, Kyle Pope gives significant evidence that many Jews did make significant effort to convert Gentiles to Judaism.

So a proselyte had been born a Gentile, but was converted to the Jewish religion. He would be circumcised and would be expected to keep all the Jewish laws. There was also a different group called "God fearers" who may attend the synagogues and respect the law of Moses. However, they had not completely accepted all the laws, specifically not being circumcised. These people were still considered Gentiles. Perhaps Cornelius was in this group (Acts 10).

In any case, the scribes and Pharisees were very zealous for their sect and would make great efforts to convert someone to their beliefs. However, since they were false teachers, the converts they made were not saved but became "sons of hell" like the scribes and Pharisees themselves were.

"Sons of hell" uses the word "sons" as in "sons of light," "sons of darkness," "son of exhortation," etc. Children typically partake of the character of their parents, so the expression describes someone who strongly possesses a certain characteristic. These people were "sons of hell." They had the character of the kind of people who will be in hell. This is a very powerful expression showing they were evil and would receive the condemnation of hell (verse 33).

We have often commented about people who think we should not tell others they are wrong religiously. I wonder what such people do with this kind of teaching from the Master Teacher!

Note also that the converts are twice as much sons of hell as their teachers. Error is progressive. The student often tends to be more extreme in his error than the teacher who taught him the error. When a

person zealously proclaims a false doctrine, often his students will progress to greater degrees of error than the teacher did. When people have the truth but leave it, they rarely remain close to truth. They gradually progress further and further away as future generations adopt the error.

23:16-22 – They were blind guides who said that swearing by the temple was nothing, but swearing by the gold of the temple was binding. But which is greater the gold or the temple that sanctifies it? They said swearing by the altar was nothing, but swearing by the gift on it was binding. But which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies it? Whoever swears by the altar, swears by what was on it; whoever swears by the temple, swears by the One who dwells in it; and whoever swears by heaven, swears by God who dwells there.

Jesus called them "blind guides" and later "fools and blind." Compare Matthew 15:14. A guide is one who shows other people the proper way to travel to reach the desired destination. So these men were supposed to be religious guides teaching others how to live their lives. But a guide who pretends to know the way despite the fact he himself is blind, actually cannot even see for himself where to go, let alone lead others. These men were false teachers, and here again is a warning of the danger of such teachers.

In this case their error concerned swearing and oaths. This is similar to Matthew 5:33ff (see notes there regarding definitions of terms, etc.).

To "swear" means to solemnly affirm that what we say is true, or to solemnly affirm (promise or threaten) that you will do some certain thing. It often involves calling as your witness someone or something considered to be sacred as proof that you are not lying. An "oath" is the thing sworn to (the noun form of swear).

A "vow" is a solemn promise, so may be similar to swearing. However, the vow is not necessarily sworn to by an appeal to something sacred to prove you are not lying.

These scribes and Pharisees had made lengthy and intricate rules about which oaths a person had to keep and which ones he did not have to keep, as Jesus described here. This is one of the examples of their human traditions that set aside God's laws (Matthew 15:1-14).

They said that, if you swore by the temple, the altar, heaven, etc., you were not bound ("it is nothing"). But if you swore by the gold of the temple or the gift on the altar, then you were obligated to keep the oath (you were "debtor").

Jesus showed here that God is involved in one case just as much as in the other case. If you swear by the temple, that surely includes the gold in the temple; if you swear by heaven, that includes the God who

dwells there, etc. This showed that their distinctions were foolish and evil. If you make an oath, God is witness to it and you are held to it, so why make silly distinctions?

In Matthew 5 He went further to say that you must really mean whatever you affirm to be true. You do not need an oath to confirm your word. You should always speak the truth so that people know you mean what you say even when you make no oath. There is no excuse for speaking falsehoods or making promises we do not intend to keep.

Note also how the character of these men is revealed by the distinctions they made. See how they emphasized things of great material value, but downplayed spiritual values. What mattered to them was not the temple (a place of spiritual worship), but the gold in the temple; not the altar (an object of spiritual worship), but the gift on the altar.

Jesus rebuked them saying it is the other way around. The gold is important because the temple is important, the gift is important because the altar is important, etc. As always, He must teach them it is the spiritual that is more important than the physical.

23:23,24 – They were hypocrites because they paid tithes of mint, anise, and cumin, but neglected the weightier matters of justice, mercy, and faith. They ought to have done the one without leaving the other undone. They were blind guides who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel.

These verses give a powerful description of another form of hypocrisy. A hypocrite often emphasizes minute details while overlooking major underlying fundamental principles. Usually the details that are emphasized are those that are outward and ritualistic in nature, thereby making the person appear outwardly to be very devout, while the matters ignored are those that pertain to proper treatment of others or proper service to God.

In this case, the scribes and Pharisees were very careful to tithe everything they received as income, even to the most minute of garden herbs. But what was neglected were fundamental principles of right treatment of God and others: justice, mercy, and faith. Jesus compared this to a person who would strain out tiny gnats from his food, but then proceeds to swallow a huge camel – i.e., little things are carefully done rightly, but major errors are ignored.

Is Jesus saying less weighty commands do not matter?

Some people miss the boat grossly on this passage. Some love to criticize anybody as hypocrites if they are concerned about properly practicing seemingly minor points. Then the critics set themselves up as judges of which commands of God are major and which are minor, they decide that the things they are disobeying are minor, and then they

proceed to ignore those things. When someone tells them they should change their conduct in these things, they say, "You are straining at gnats and swallowing camels."

Such people seem to think that Jesus is here teaching that, as long as you get major things right, nothing else really matters – and they get to decide for themselves what is major and what is minor! On this basis people decide it does not matter what the Bible says about baptism, instrumental music, centralized church organizations, church involvement in the Social Gospel, existence of denominations, practicing religious holy days, etc., etc.

Is Jesus here condemning the Pharisees for tithing mint, anise, and cumin? On the contrary, He said "***these you ought to have done***." The law commanded tithing, and Jesus was not saying the law did not matter. He compared it to straining out gnats, but who wants gnats in what he swallows?

The problem was not that they tithed or strained out gnats. ***The problem was the things they left undone:*** the camels they swallowed. It is like this:

Lesser Matters	Weightier Matters
Tithing herbs	Justice, mercy, faith
Straining out gnats	Swallowing camels
These you ought to have done	But not leave these undone

So, Jesus' lesson is, not that we may ignore lesser matters, but that we should certainly not ignore weightier matters. A person is not a hypocrite just because he is concerned about details. He is a hypocrite only if he is concerned about details ***while ignoring fundamental Bible principles.***

The problem with hypocrites is that they typically ignore the weightier matters. We should be concerned about lesser matters, but people who are concerned about lesser matters need to examine their lives very carefully to see if we may be guilty of ignoring weightier matters.

In what sense are some commands more "weighty" than others?

Note that this passage clearly teaches that some Bible commands are weightier than others. What does this mean? We have learned that it does not mean we can overlook the less weighty matters. So what does it mean? Nor does it mean that there are mortal sins that cause us to be lost if we commit them, but in contrast there are venial sins for which we will not be eternally punished no matter how long we continue to practice them.

The real difference is similar to Matthew 22:34-40, where Jesus said love is the greatest command. Some commands will have a more fundamental effect on our lives and will therefore have greater consequences. If a person emphasized faith, mercy, love, etc., this would lead him to be right in most aspects of his life. If in the meantime (under the law), he was failing to tithe garden spices, there would be only a relatively small part of his life wrong, and the proper application of the weightier matters would eventually lead him to get this right too!

But if he tithed the spices while failing to have faith, mercy, love, etc., he would find many aspects of his life would be wrong and they would not be likely to ever get right. These "weightier matters" affect many aspects of life. They are foundational to many other teachings and practices. If one practices them, they will lead him to be right in many other ways; but if he does not practice them, they will lead him to be wrong in many other ways. They will also produce greater good to others if he practices them, and greater harm to others if he does not practice them.

For example, if I never tithe spices, how much will others be hurt by that? Very few people will feel the effect and what effect they feel will be very rare. But if I never practice justice or love, that will have major impact on many people every day of my life. So, weightier matters are those that have a greater impact for good on more aspects of my life and on more people around me, etc.

I should be sure to practice both the lesser matters and the weightier matters, but Jesus calls some matters "weightier" because they have a greater impact on our life and service to God and others.

Consider the weightier matters listed here: justice, mercy, and faith.

Justice

Justice involves right, fair, and just treatment of others in every aspect of daily relationships. Yet some of the most pious and religious people in outward appearance and ritual can be incredibly under-handed in dealing with others.

Consider, for example, these Pharisees in their treatment of Jesus. They attempted to prove Him wrong according to the Scriptures. When that failed, instead of admitting He was right, they lied, deceived, slandered, refused to consider His evidence, and finally killed Him using every under-handed trick imaginable to accomplish it. Yet they were determined to hide this conduct from the people. They did not mind being unscrupulously vicious, but they did not want to appear to be that way!

Multitudes of other examples can be given. Some in the Lord's church are vitally concerned that our worship and organization be right, but will be cruel and heartless to their own wives, children, or neighbors.

Many other Scriptures command justice: Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 56:1; Psalms 33:5; Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Leviticus 19:35,36; John 7:24; Proverbs 17:15 –

Mercy

"Mercy" refers to outward expressions of compassion or sympathy, putting forth effort to help people in need. Yet again the people who outwardly profess great zeal for religious service can often be the most unmerciful to those in need.

Consider again, as an example, the Pharisees in their treatment of widows (verse 14). Likewise, television evangelists may profess godliness and claim revelations from God, but they will take the last dime a poor listener has on the false claim that they can give them a miracle.

Some members of the church can sin against others repeatedly and rarely ask forgiveness. And if they do ask it, they demand total and immediate forgiveness. Yet when others sin against them, they have all kinds of ways to make life miserable for those people.

Again, many passages command us to show mercy: Matthew 5:7; Luke 10:25-37; 6:36; 15:20; Romans 12:8; 1:31,32; James 2:13; 3:17,18; Philippians 2:1-4; Micah 6:8; Hosea 12:6.

Faith

"Faith" refers to belief or conviction by which we trust God and are led to obey His will. Yet again people who sometimes appear to be the most religious, will show their lack of faith when difficult choices must be made in serving God.

It is easy to proclaim our faith when we are with other believers who will praise us for our faith. It is much more difficult to show our faith by our lives when we face hardship and opposition.

Other passages requiring us to have faith include: Hebrews 10:39; 11:1,4-8,17,30; Romans 1:16; 4:19-21; 5:1,2; 10:9,10,13-17; Galatians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 5:7; James 2:14-26; John 1:12; 3:15-18; 8:24; 20:30,31; Mark 16:15,16.

These religious leaders, like many religious people today, including many in the church, ignored and neglected major, fundamental requirements of God's word, while emphasizing points of far less magnitude. We must not excuse disobedience to any of God's commands. But faithfulness is minor matters will never substitute for faithfulness in all God's will, including the weightier matters.

23:25-28 – They were like people who clean the outside of a cup and dish but leave the inside full of extortion and self indulgence. Instead, they should first cleanse the inside so the outside could also be clean. They were like whitewashed tombs that appear beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead men's bones and uncleanness. So they appeared outwardly righteous but inside were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

In these verses, Jesus returned to a discussion of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. Their hypocrisy took the form of emphasizing mere outward appearance to the disregard of inner purity. He used two illustrations: (1) a person who cleanses the outside of the cup but leaves the inside dirty, and (2) a tomb that is whitewashed and beautiful on the outside but full of dead men's bones and corruption on the inside.

Both illustrations describe people who insisted on appearing upright outwardly, but actually were full of evil, hypocrisy, and iniquity in the inner man. By cleansing the outside of a cup and dish, one might fool people into thinking they are clean though actually nothing has been done to clean the inside (which is where most of the impurity was to begin with). By whitewashing a tomb or planting beautiful grass and flowers on a grave, one may make the grave appear beautiful on the outside, but underneath it is still full of corruption.

God wants the whole man to be right. The lesson is not that the outward man does not matter as long as we have a good attitude, like some people falsely conclude. The lesson is that both the outer and the inner must be right. And if we begin with the heart and get it truly clean, we will eventually get the outside clean too. But if we leave the inside dirty, it is impossible for the cup to be truly clean no matter how good it looks on the outside.

Many passages emphasize the importance of the heart or inner man (see passages listed below). This is the place to begin in overcoming sin and becoming godly. If we get the heart right, and continue to work on it, this will eventually lead us to get the outward conduct right too (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10). But we cannot be right before God while our inner man is impure, no matter how good the outward man appears to be.

> "This passage teaches us that we should hasten to be righteous, not merely to appear so. Whoever strives only to appear righteous will cleanse his exterior and will take great care of what can be seen by others but will neglect his heart and his conscience. … For the one who is solicitous of his own interior salvation also takes care of his external, public reputation. But not everyone who cares first about his public reputation is also solicitous of his interior salvation." – Origen (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

It was this emphasis on outward appearance, while indifferent to inner purity, that led to nearly all the hypocritical conduct for which Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees in this chapter. It led to their teaching others to do right (since this would impress people that these leaders were devout students of the Word), but did not lead them to live it personally (verses 2-4). It led to wearing clothes, desiring titles, and seeking places that advanced their outward appearance of religion, but did not lead to really living right (verses 5-12). It led to concern for the gold of the temple and the gifts people gave, but did not lead to keeping one's word (verses 16-22). It led to concern for tithing minute details of income, but did not lead to treating other people right (verses 23,24), etc.

In particular Jesus said it led these men to be full of all sorts of extortion and self-indulgence (verse 23). Extortion involves taking what belongs to others by misuse of authority, threat of violence, intimidation, etc. (compare verse 14). These religious leaders did not mind doing that. They gladly lived to please themselves and satisfy their material whims, so long as no one found out about it or they did not lose the favor of the people. In short, they were selfish, ungodly people concerned only for their own self-advancement and self-exaltation. They did not really seek to please God nor did they really care about the wellbeing of the people.

The result was a totally disgusting and repugnant people, and Jesus described them in graphic terms that showed how God hated the character of such people. Nowhere did Jesus give more powerful rebukes for sin than in this chapter. And He spoke it regarding religious people. Often it is the religious people who are the most offensive to God. Evil people may know they are evil, but evil people who pretend to be good people are especially offensive.

> "Tell me, hypocrite, if it is so good to be good, why do you not strive to be truly what you only appear to be? And if it is so bad to be evil, then why do you allow yourself to be in truth what you would never want to appear to be? What appears to be ugly is even uglier in truth, but what is beautiful in appearance is much more beautiful in reality. Therefore either be what you appear to be or appear to be what you are." – Incomplete Work on Matthew (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

For other passages about the importance of the inner man, see Matthew 15:17-20; 1 Corinthians 13:1ff; Romans 6:17,18; 12:1,2; Proverbs 4:23; 23:7; Matthew 6:1ff (see also other passages mentioned in the notes on Matthew 23).

23:29-31 – They were hypocrites because they built the tombs of the prophets and adorned the monuments of the righteous; they said they would not have participated in persecuting them had they lived in the days of those prophets. In that way they witnessed they were the sons of those who murdered the prophets.

Jesus drew to a close this scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees by warning again that they would be guilty of persecuting the prophets He would send them. He had predicted this in His parables (21:35-39; 22:6). He here further pronounced a woe on their hypocrisy because they honored the prophets who had lived in the days of their ancestors, and claimed they would not have persecuted them as their fathers did.

He said that, in this, they were admitting their fathers were guilty, yet they themselves would fill up the measure of their father's guilt. This cannot mean they were guilty just because their fathers were guilty (Ezekiel 18:20). But by their own actions, they were going to imitate their fathers' conduct, and become guilty just like their fathers had.

In what way was this hypocritical? They acknowledged that they knew their fathers had done wrong, and they claimed they would never have done such things. This proved they were aware of their fathers' conduct and condemned it as being wrong. Nevertheless, they were about to do the very thing they knew was wrong! They would kill, beat, and persecute all the messengers Jesus would send.

> "Jesus did not pronounce woe upon them because they blamed others or because they build monuments. Rather, he pronounces woe because while pretending to condemn those who killed the prophets, they do worse. They witness against themselves." – Chrysostom (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

When we criticize as being wrong that which other people practice, then we ourselves practice the same thing, that is another form of hypocrisy. See Matthew 7:1-5.

23:32,33 – Jesus said they would fill up the measure of their father's guilt. He called them a brood of vipers and asked how they could escape the condemnation of hell.

The power of Jesus' language is overwhelming. He calls them serpents, a brood of vipers (compare the statements of John the Baptist in 3:7). They were vicious, cunning, determined to kill and wound for their own profit, uncaring about right and wrong. They would go to any length to achieve their ends, no matter how corrupt.

They were like a whole brood or nest full of poisonous snakes. Jesus knew their character, even as John had, and they would prove it again shortly in their crucifixion of Him. What a horrible picture! Then the Son

of God asked how it would be possible for these men to escape the damnation of hell.

Pope points out that even here Jesus did not give an absolute condemnation of eternal punishment. The time for final judgment was not yet. Jesus states the matter as a question showing the severe likelihood of their destiny. Surely we should take care about declaring people's eternal punishment.

And there are people who tell us it is unChristlike to say people are wrong religiously! Such people do not know the Christ of the Bible!

23:34-36 – Jesus said He would send to these people prophets, wise men, and scribes, and they would kill and crucify and scourge and persecute them. On them would come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah whom they murdered between the temple and the altar. All this would come on this generation.

Jesus said that He would send to them prophets, wise men, and scribes. These would be mistreated like the Jews had mistreated so many in the Old Testament times. They would be killed and crucified, persecuted from city to city, and beaten in the synagogues.

Jesus said this would bring on them – on that very generation – the blood of all the prophets ever slain in the history of the Old Testament, from Abel to Zechariah. Abel (Genesis 4) was the first to die at the hand of one who was embittered by his righteousness. The last recorded one was Zechariah the son of Berechiah, whom Jesus said was murdered between the temple and the altar.

The blood of these prophets would come upon the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day, not literally or even that they were actually guilty of killing these men. But they would be condemned, not just by what they themselves did, but many times over because they had the repeated warnings of the example of history. Knowing about the persecution and murder of all these prophets, they said they would never do such a thing. Yet they proceeded to do it anyway, thereby multiplying their guilt.

The Jewish people had been persecuting and mistreating God's prophets for years, just as Jesus had described in his parables. God had been patient, warning them of the consequences of their conduct. He had continued working with the nation so that he might bring Jesus into the world in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. Yet their wickedness and repeated rebellion was coming to a head. The language here seems to me to mean that all these years of sin were coming to a climax in that generation. They would receive the end result in the sense that the nation would fall in their generation, never to rise again.

Who were some of the prophets that generation persecuted? John the Baptist (Matthew 14), Jesus Himself (Matthew 27), Stephen (Acts 7),

James the brother of John (Acts 12), Peter and all the apostles (Acts 4,5), Paul (2 Corinthians 11:23ff; compare the book of Acts), etc.

The reference to Zechariah, son of Berechiah, is difficult. The natural immediate thought would be that it refers to the author of the Old Testament book of Zechariah, whose father was Berechiah (Zechariah 1:1). However, there is no record elsewhere to indicate that man was slain, and in fact the temple was being rebuilt in his day.

2 Chronicles 24:20-22 records the murder of a man named Zechariah who was slain in the temple for rebuking the sins of Joash. This would fit Jesus' description, especially since the book of 2 Chronicles is the last book as the books are arranged in the Jewish Scriptures. So, Jesus would have listed the martyrs slain for their faith from the first to the last as recorded in the Old Testament.

But the problem is that this man's father was named Jehoiada, not Berechiah. Some have suggested that perhaps he had an ancestor named Berechiah, but there is no such record in the Scripture. Others have suggested that the name refers, not to his physical father, but to a characteristic he possessed as is often done with similar expressions in the Bible. Berechiah means "Jehovah blesses." I am unable to determine a definite solution to the problem.

23:37 – Jesus said Jerusalem had killed the prophets and stoned those that were sent to them. He often wanted to gather their children together like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but they were not willing.

But Jesus was not done. His rebuke has been burning and explosive. His speech is uncompromising and overwhelming. Yet it was all said in love, and His closing remarks express His love.

He calls upon the city (i.e., the people). He knew they had and would kill His prophets. Yet this is not what God had wanted. Jesus was like a loving mother hen wanting to call her brood of chicks to protection and warmth under her wings. But the people would not come. Instead of a brood of chicks, they were a brood of vipers!

Here Jesus expresses His deep love and care for the people. He had said these terrible things, not to hurt them, but to help them. He sought to warn them of the consequences of their conduct. Yet it hurt Him deeply to know they were so rebellious.

So we ought to speak out plainly when we see sin, but let us do what we can to let the people know that we speak because we love them. And if they reject the truth, let it be because of the hardness of their own hearts, not because of our lack of love or concern for them.

This passage forever destroys the Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional election and predestination and limited atonement. That doctrine says God unconditionally chose certain people to be saved, regardless of their character. No one has power to choose because all are born totally depraved. So, God chose certain ones and loves and saves

them, but others He chooses not to save. Those who are not among the elect have no power to choose; Jesus did not die for them, and God does not love them.

Yet if all this is true, why does Jesus here say He wanted these people to be saved, and He was willing to save them? The problem was that they would not come! They had the power to choose and their choice was contrary to His (compare Joshua 24:15; Mark 16:16; etc.)

23:38,39 – Their house was left desolate. Jesus said they would see Him no more till they said, "Blessed is He comes in the name of the Lord!"

As a result of their rejection of Jesus, there was nothing left for them but a desolate house. This could refer to the destruction of the temple, which will become the theme of chapter 24. It would also fulfill numerous prophecies of the fall of the temple if the people would not repent (see 2 Chronicles 7:19-21; Ezekiel 10). Or perhaps it is simply a description of their rejection as a nation, the house of Israel.

In any case Jesus is clearly prophesying the ultimate rejection of the nation. He had warned repeatedly of this throughout several chapters and parables. His prophecy of this will come to a head in chapter 24. This does not mean individuals could no longer be saved, but the nation and its leadership would have no special place in God's plan any more. They had nothing left but an empty house.

They would not see Him again till they said, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." To what does this refer? This was said at His triumphal entry (21:9; compare Psalm 118:26). But this had already occurred (although Luke records similar teaching as having occurred before the triumphal entry – Luke 13:34).

So when did the people see Him and say this? Some said this after His resurrection, and many more at the preaching of the gospel in the book of Acts. Yet many literally saw Him before that, as at His trials and crucifixion. Perhaps the idea is that they would see Him for who He really was and then praise Him as being the One who came in the name of the Lord.

In any case, His most powerful and flaming rebuke was over. He had done His utmost to warn these people and those who followed them. Now their blood was on their own heads. They had no one to blame for their rebellious perversity but themselves. Jesus had delivered the warning they needed.

Matthew 24

Chapter 24 – Prophecy Regarding the Temple and Jesus' Coming

Compare Mark 13:1-37; Luke 21:5-36.

This is one of the most interesting passages in the Bible. Unfortunately, it has become controversial because speculators have assumed, contrary to the passage and other passages, that it is all a prophecy of Jesus' final coming. They assume the "signs" refer to the end of the world, and then attempt to interpret current events as fulfillment of those signs, concluding that the end of time must be near.

Many have even attempted to set dates for Jesus' return. In fact, this has been going on for generations. And interestingly, all the speculators are convinced His return is soon, usually in their expected lifetime (never centuries in the future). And over and over again the speculators have been proved wrong. But that does not stop them from speculating.

All such are false prophets, first because their predictions never come true (Deuteronomy 18:18-22), and second because the Bible clearly teaches that no one on earth knows when Jesus will return (1 Thessalonians 5:1-6; 2 Peter 3:10-12).

Further, those who speculate are almost always premillennial believers, who are convinced Jesus failed to set up His kingdom when He came to earth, and therefore He must set it up when He returns. He will then reign over a literal, political kingdom on earth for a thousand years. This cannot be true because the earth will be destroyed when He returns (2 Peter 3:10-12).

The fact is that the kingdom was set up at Pentecost (compare Mark 9:1; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-5,29-36). People in the first century were in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 1:9). Jesus was prophesied to reign as king when He also served as high priest at the right hand of God (Psalm 110:1-4; Zechariah 6:12,13), and He has been serving as high priest at God's right hand ever since the first century (Hebrews 6:20; 7:1; etc.). His kingdom is spiritual, not earthly (John 18:36). It is the church (Matthew 16:18,19; Hebrews 12:23,28). When He returns, He will not establish His kingdom and begin to reign, but will turn the kingdom over to the Father (1 Corinthians 15:22-28).

Since these things can be proved from clear, doctrinal passages, then we must never interpret anything in Matthew 24 or elsewhere in contradiction to these conclusions. Matthew 24 is clearly prophetic language, and such prophecies are often likely to be symbolic, not to be taken literally. We should never, from such prophecies, reach conclusions that do violence to doctrinal teachings. Especially we should never reach conclusions that belittle the great position of Jesus the King and His great kingdom, the church.

So, it may be that we will find some things in this chapter that are difficult to explain. But that is no excuse for accepting false doctrine or for reaching conclusions that contradict other passages. Even if I am not sure what a verse means, I can reject an explanation as being false if it contradicts what I know other Scriptures teach.

This is illustrated by two men walking down a street. One sees a woman across the street and says to the other man, "There goes your wife." The second man says, "That is not my wife." The first replies, "Well, who is she then?" The second says, "I don't know who she is, but I know she is not my wife!" He knew his wife, and therefore knew she was not his wife, though he did not know who she was.

Likewise, there are things in Matthew 24 that I am not sure what they mean. Yet I know the Bible teaches the truths described above, and therefore I can know that Matthew 24 is not giving signs that Jesus will return to establish an earthly kingdom.

24:1,2 – As Jesus departed from the temple, His disciples showed Him the buildings of the temple. He said that not one stone would be left upon another that would not be thrown down.

Jesus predicted the destruction of the temple.

Jesus had been in the temple. As He left, some disciples were showing Him the buildings of the temple. The temple was being rebuilt by Herod and was a truly impressive structure. It was worthy of admiration, and the Jews were justly impressed by it. They wanted Jesus to be impressed likewise.

In Jesus' lifetime people said temple had been forty-six years in being built (John 2:20). The Jewish historian Josephus said: "…the temple was built of stones that were white and strong, and each of their length was twenty-five cubits, their height was eight, and their breadth about twelve…" (Antiquities, 15.11.3)

But instead of showing awe and amazement, Jesus was still overwhelmed by the knowledge that the nation would be destroyed, as He had been predicting for several chapters. He bluntly amazed them by saying that those stones would be thrown down so completely that no one of them would continue standing on another. As they boasted of

their great achievement, seeking to amaze Jesus, He amazed them by saying that great building would be totally destroyed.

This is an explicit and amazing prophecy. It obviously refers expressly to the destruction of the temple and the end of the Jewish nation as Jesus had been predicting. This gives us our introduction to the understanding of at least the first part of the chapter.

This prophecy was explicitly fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70.

When the Romans captured the city, the temple was burned, apparently without orders from the authorities. Since it had been covered with gold, the building was dismantled stone by stone to recover the gold that had melted in the fire. Even the ground beneath was plowed up to find all the gold. The result was the complete destruction Jesus had described.

We will attempt to include from time to time quotations from Barnes and other sources that confirm the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy in the destruction of Jerusalem. Many of these quotations are from Josephus, a Jewish historian who witnessed the fall of Jerusalem. Being a Jew and not a follower of Jesus Christ, Josephus would have no reason to deliberately attempt to confirm the prophecies of Jesus. Nevertheless, many of his statements demonstrate the direct fulfillment of the prophecies of Christ. For example:

> "After the city was taken, Josephus says that Titus 'gave orders that they should now *demolish the whole city and temple*, except three towers, which he reserved standing. But for the rest of the wall, it was laid so completely even with the ground by those who *dug it up from the foundation*, that there was nothing left to make those believe who came hither that it had ever been inhabited.'"

Anyone today can know that Jesus was a true prophet, for the site of the temple is well known. But there is no temple there. As He said, it has been completely torn down. Today a Muslim mosque stands on the spot.

24:3 – As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked Him privately when these things would be and what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age.

The disciples asked when these events would occur.

Jesus then went to the Mount of Olives. The disciples were still overwhelmed by His prediction and asked Him about it. This discussion occurred in private with only four disciples present (Mark 13:3). The Mount of Olives stands to the east of the Temple area, separated from it by a valley. From the Mount of Olives, one has an excellent view of the temple area. Most likely, Jesus and the disciples were viewing the temple

as He spoke this whole prophecy. It is clear that it began as a prophecy of the temple, which prophecy was expressly fulfilled in AD 70.

Matthew's account records three questions: (1) When will these things be? This clearly refers to when the temple would be destroyed, as Jesus had just predicted. (2) What signs will precede Jesus' coming ("presence" – ASV footnote). And (3) (what signs would precede) the end of the age (world).

It is likely that the disciples thought these questions referred to the same event and all this would happen at the same time. At this point Jesus had said nothing about the end of the world or His second coming. What reason would the disciples have to ask a question about that as though it was something distinct from the destruction of Jerusalem? They were almost never interested in discussions about His second coming but focused instead upon the beginning of His kingdom. Jesus had amazed them with His statement about the destruction of the temple. If the temple was destroyed, it must be the end of the world in their minds.

Some commentators say the word for "coming" (parousia) almost always refers to Jesus' final return and judgment of all men. Some also say the expression "end of the age" is used elsewhere for Jesus' second coming, especially in Matthew (13:39,30,49; 28:20). But whether or not that is so, that does not mean the ***disciples*** understood this to be different from the destruction of the temple when they asked their question. We would expect Jesus to discuss the subject He raised (the destruction of the temple) and, if He discussed the second coming at all in response to their question, He would distinguish it from the destruction of the temple.

Luke 21:7-9 and Mark 13:3,4 do not include the question about the end of the age. They simply include questions about the destruction of the temple. It appears to me that Luke's account describes only the destruction of Jerusalem, so it may be that is the reason why he omits the third part of the question. This may indicate that Matthew intended to include information about the end of the world in the last part of his record, so he included the question the others omit (though of course Jesus would have to correct the disciples' misconception about the connection between the destruction of the temple and the end of the world.)

> "Coming" (παρουσια) – "1 the state of being present at a place, *presence* … 2 arrival as the first stage in presence, *coming, advent* … a of human beings, in the usual sense … of Christ, and nearly always of his Messianic Advent in glory to judge the world at the end of this age: Mt 24:3 … Mt 24:27,37,39 …" – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

> "…1. presence: 1 Corinthians 16:17; 2 Corinthians 10:10 … Philippians 2:12 … 2. the presence of one coming, hence, the

coming, arrival, advent ... 2 Corinthians 7:6f; 2 Thessalonians 2:9 ... Philippians 1:26. In the N.T. especially of the advent, *i.e.* the future, visible, return from heaven of Jesus, the Messiah, to raise the dead, hold the last judgment, and set up formally and gloriously the kingdom of God: Matthew 24:3; ... 1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; James 5:7f; 2 Peter 3:4; ... 2 Peter 1:16; ... 1 Corinthians 15:23; (1 Thessalonians 2:19); 2 Thessalonians 2:8; 2 Peter 3:4; (1 John 2:28); ... 2 Peter 3:12" – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

"End" (συντελεια) – "...in our lit. only in a temporal sense: a point of time marking completion of a duration, *completion, close, end..."* – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich. (This word is nowhere else used in the context.)

"Age" (αιων) – "... 'an extended period of time', in var. senses) 1 a long period of time, without ref. to beginning or end ... a of time gone by, *the past, earliest times* ... b of time to come which, if it has no end, is also known as *eternity* ... 2 a segment of time as a particular unit of history, *age* a *the present age* (nearing its end) ... b *the age to come,* the Messianic period ... 3 the world as a spatial concept, *the world* ... 4 the Aeon as a person, *the Aeon* ..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

Evidence that the first part of this chapter is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem

There are three general views of the content of the rest of the chapter, based on the questions the disciples asked:

(1) Some say that nearly all the rest of the chapter refers to the second coming or final return of Jesus. This view is clearly false, since it is clear that much of it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem.

(2) Some say it all refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the "end of the age" means the end of the Jewish age as a nation. This appears to be the case in Luke 21, but is it in Matthew 24 and Mark 13?

(3) Some say the first part of the chapter refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and the last part to the end of time when Jesus will make His final return. If this is correct, then the question remains as to where in the chapter the transition occurs.

I offer the following reasons why I believe at least verses 4-34 refer to the destruction of Jerusalem:

(1) The discussion began because Jesus made an express prediction about the ***temple***, and the disciples asked Him expressly about when it would happen (Matthew 24:1-3; Mark 13:1,2; compare Luke 21:5-7).

(2) The prophecy gives ***signs*** to warn about the coming of the event, but there will be no signs to warn about Jesus' final return (see 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6; 2 Peter 3:10-12 as above).

(3) Mark 13:11; Luke 21:13-15 show that direct inspiration would still exist when these events were fulfilled, but this power ceased near

the end of the first century after the apostles died (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Acts 8:14-21; etc.).

(4) The prediction describes the desolation of ***Jerusalem*** (Matthew 24:15; compare Luke 21:20).

(5) ***Jerusalem*** would be surrounded by armies (Luke 21:20).

(6) The fulfillment came on those in ***Judea*** (Matthew 24:16; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:21).

(7) Men should ***flee*** the wrath and vengeance (Matthew 24:16,20; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:21,22), but no one can escape the events of the final return.

(8) Being with child or having a suckling would be a special problem (Matthew 24:19; Mark 13:17; Luke 21:23), but why would such be a problem at the final judgment?

(9) Men would fall by the sword and be taken ***captive*** (Luke 21:24), but that is not how judgment will occur at Jesus' final coming.

(10) ***Jerusalem*** would be trodden down of the Gentiles till the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24).

(11) All these things through Matthew 24:34 (Mark 13:30; Luke 21:32) would occur in ***that generation*** present when Jesus spoke (see notes on verse 34).

This appears to me to prove that at least the part of the prophecy through verse 34 is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. While there may be a few points hard to explain, it is far more difficult if one tries to apply these verses to Jesus' final return.

24:4,5 – Jesus warned them to make sure no one deceived them. He said many would come in His name claiming to be the Christ.

Deceivers and false Christs

From the very outset of His answers to the disciples' questions, Jesus warned them to be on guard for deception. He knew there was danger the disciples would be deceived about the things He was predicting. And sure enough, people by the millions are deceived. This is not a light or frivolous matter, for Jesus began by warning them to avoid deception.

In particular, He warned them to watch out for men who would falsely claim to be the Christ, and would deceive many (compare verses 21,22). Since the disciples were expecting these events as Jesus had prophesied, it would be possible for a deceiver to come and lead them astray.

History records a number of false prophets who came between this time and the destruction of Jerusalem. Barnes states:

> "Josephus informs us that there were many, who pretended to Divine inspiration, deceived the people, leading out numbers of them into the desert. 'The land,' says he, 'was overrun with

magicians, seducers, and impostors, who drew the people after them in multitudes into solitudes and deserts, to see the signs and miracles which they promised to show by the power of God.'

"Among these are mentioned particularly Dositheus, the Samaritan, who affirmed that he was Christ; Simon Magus, who said he appeared among the Jews as the Son of God; and Theudas, who persuaded many to go with him to the river Jordan, to see the waters divided."

24:6-8 – They would hear of wars and rumors of wars, but should not be troubled because the end was not yet. Nation would rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There would be famines, pestilences and earthquakes. These were the beginning of sorrows.

Wars, rumors of wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes

Among the events Jesus predicted were wars and rumors of wars, nations and kingdoms rising against one another. Also, there would be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. These were the beginnings of the sorrows, but the end would not come then.

"End" here must surely refer to the end of the temple (and with it Jerusalem), since this discussion had begun when Jesus predicted that event. There is no valid evidence this refers to Jesus' second coming or the end of the world.

Some commentators say this "end" must be the "end" of the age that the disciples referenced in their question. But this is not required since Jesus referred to the destruction or end of the temple to begin the discussion. Besides, the word for "end" here is a different word from that used by the disciples in verse 3 (τελος not συντελεια – the words are related yet definitely different). The word the disciples used in verse 3 is used nowhere else in the context.

There is historical evidence that such events occurred in the years preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. McGarvey cites Alford who gave historical evidence, from Roman and Jewish writers, regarding such matters. He cites three threats of war against the Jews by the Roman emperors, and three Gentile uprisings against Jews. Also, there were numerous famines described by Roman writers, at least one pestilence, and five earthquakes. And these are just the ones in the records that are preserved till today. Imagine how many more were never recorded.

The Bible also records at least one of the famines – Acts 11:28-30.

But notice carefully that Jesus expressly told them not to get overly upset by this. These are the kinds of things that could occur any time, so modern false teachers make a hay day of talking about them. But Jesus plainly said that such things really would not tell them much even in that day. "The end is ***not yet***."

24:9-13 – They would be delivered to tribulation and death. They would be hated by all nations for the sake of Jesus. Many would be offended, betray and hate one another. Many false prophets would deceive many. Because lawlessness would abound, the love of many would grow cold, but the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Tribulation and persecution, lawlessness and false prophets

Another problem in this period of trouble would be tribulation and persecution for Jesus' disciples. They would be hated by people from many nations. Such persecutions are recorded in great numbers in the Bible: Acts 4,5,7,8,12; 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; etc. They are also recorded in Roman history. McGarvey quotes Tacitus who said Christians were "a class of men hated."

Still another problem would be false prophets (compare Matthew 24:5,24). Many would come and would deceive many people. The Bible is also filled with warnings and examples of these: Acts 8:5-13; 5:36,37; 21:38; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Galatians 2:1-4; Titus 1:10,11; 2 Peter 2; Jude; etc.

As a result of both these problems, many would fall into sin and betray and hate one another. Sin would abound, and many would grow cold in their love for God and His ways. The examples cited above show that, at times, Christians did become unfaithful in these periods of trial and error. It is sad but true, and Jesus here warns them to watch out for it.

He who endures to the end will be saved.

Despite these problems, it would be possible to endure to the end, and those who did so would be the ones who would be saved. This verse states a general Bible principle of truth. Those who are saved are those who are determined to remain faithful to the end.

What "end" is here referred to? The word in context refers to the end of the temple as Jesus had described it in verse 2, and with it the end of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. It hardly seems that verse 13 could refer to anything else. (Once again, this is not the same word used in verse 3.) Yet in what sense would people be saved if they endured to the end of the temple, etc.?

It seems to me that this must simply be an expression meaning that, in order to remain faithful to God and thus be eternally saved, disciples must be willing to stay faithful through all the trials and hardships Jesus has described, till they are over. Note Matthew 10:22.

This does not mean they will then have no more temptations afterward. Rather, they must endure till all this is over if they hope to have salvation. This contrasts to those He had just described who would

fall away in these difficulties. If they fall in the trials, they will be lost. If they want to be saved, they must remain faithful throughout all this.

The passage, however, states a general truth, which has many applications to us today and people of all time. If we fall away, we will not be rewarded. We must endure whatever trials we face if we seek God's reward. We must continue on till life is over, whether by death or Jesus' final coming. If we faint along the way, we will be lost. Compare Galatians 6:7-9; Hebrews 12:3-5; James 5:7-11.

24:14 – This gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, then the end would come.

The gospel would be preached to all nations.

Many people today think this verse must surely refer to the end of time when Jesus makes His final return. So, they diligently urge one another to preach this message throughout the world now to fulfill this passage, since they are convinced Jesus is about to come. (Once again, "end" is not the same word used in verse 3.)

However, the gospel message was preached throughout the world in the first century before Jerusalem fell to the Romans.

Colossians 1:5,6 – … the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth

Colossians 1:23 – if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

So, this prophecy given by Jesus was fulfilled in the first century before the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, just as Jesus said it would be. (See also Romans 16:25,26.) When it was accomplished, Jesus said the end would then come. This leads to the specific sign in the following verses.

This does not mean we should not teach the gospel today. All people in all ages need to hear the message. If the disciples in the first century could do it, we today can do likewise and should do so.

24:15-18 – When you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place, then those in Judea should flee to the mountains. One who is on the housetop should not come back to take something from his house, nor should the one who was in the field go back to get his clothes.

The abomination of desolation

This sign is critical. The previous signs were general and indefinite in that Jesus said, "the end is not yet," "be not troubled," etc. But regarding this sign, He said in the following verses that, when they saw this sign, His disciples should flee and not even go back for belongings. This was a very definite sign. What was it?

The "abomination of desolation" was spoken of by Daniel. It is referred to in Daniel 9:27; 11:31; and 12:11. But like many prophecies, it is difficult to understand. But fortunately the parallel in Luke 21:20 settles without doubt and for all time what this means. The passage is clearly parallel to Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14, since all the passages say that this is the thing which, when you see it, it is the sign to flee and woe to those who are pregnant, etc.

Luke 21:20 shows that the "abomination of desolation" refers to armies surrounding Jerusalem that would cause her desolation. "Desolation" is a word that is often used by the Old Testament prophets to describe the destruction of a nation or city. In Matthew 23:38 Jesus had said to Jerusalem that her house was left desolate. What made her desolate? The Roman armies surrounded the city and eventually destroyed the city, the temple, and multiplied thousands of the people.

That this is in fact the "abomination of desolation" is interestingly confirmed by Josephus, the Jewish historian, in a quote listed by McGarvey: "Daniel also wrote concerning the Roman government, that our country should be made desolate by them" (Antiquities, B. x, ch. xi, Paragraph 7).

This was the specific sign. Then, not before, the people were to flee for safety. So urgent was the need for flight that a person who was outside the city in the field should not re-enter the city to even get clothing. A person on a housetop should flee and not even go into the house to gather possessions. The command was to flee, and the whole point of all the other comments was to emphasize the urgency of the need.

History records that, when the Roman army advanced against Jerusalem, for some reason they then withdrew. During their withdrawal, the Christians fled in obedience to Jesus' command. Later the Romans returned and destroyed the city. This produced the desolation here prophesied which was an abomination to the people, especially because they hated the Romans. But the Christians escaped because they left when the opportunity occurred.

> It is a remarkable but historical fact that Cestius Gallius, the Roman general, for some unknown reason, retired when they first marched against the city, suspended the siege, ceased the attack and withdrew his armies for an interval of time after the Romans had occupied the temple, thus giving every believing Jew the opportunity to obey the Lord's instruction to flee the city. Josephus the eye-witness, himself an unbeliever, chronicles this fact, and admitted his inability to account for the cessation of the fighting at the time, after a siege had begun. (Wallace, *God's Prophetic Word*, page 252)

Barnes adds:

> It is said that the Christians, warned by these predictions, fled from the city to Pella, and other places beyond Jordan; so that there is not evidence that a single *Christian* perished in Jerusalem. Eusebius, Hist. Eccl., lib. 3, ch. 6 (See also *Archaeology Study Bible*, page 1415.)

All this fits perfectly if we understand that this is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. But none of it fits if this is taken as a prophecy of Jesus' final return. Why would that return affect only people in Jerusalem and Judea? What difference would physical armies make? What good would it do to flee to the mountains? Why would it matter whether or not you have your possessions with you? Why would it matter whether or not a woman was pregnant or what time of the year or week it was? None of this makes sense if applied to the final return of Jesus.

24:19,20 – Woe to those who are pregnant or nursing babies in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.

The danger of flight

Those who were pregnant or had nursing babies would have especially difficult problems fleeing the city. Flight would likewise be difficult if it occurred in winter or on the Sabbath. Again, what difference would any of this make if the reference were to Jesus' final return? Yet in fleeing from the destruction of Jerusalem, it would make much difference.

A pregnant woman would have great difficulty in fleeing. If a woman had little children, they would slow and hinder her progress and she would have far more concern and distress. She would be concerned not just for herself but also for her family.

Fleeing in winter would be far more difficult than other seasons. Rain, snow, cold would hinder flight and cause great discomfort.

What about fleeing on the Sabbath (as mentioned in Matthew's account)? Some have argued this proves the people were still observing the Sabbath. Doubtless the Jews would be observing the Sabbath, and they continued to do so till the temple fell (and afterward) because they

still believed the old law was in effect. But the unbelieving Jews would not obey Jesus' command to flee anyway, so they must not be the ones here addressed.

Some Christians might also rest on the Sabbath as a matter of custom (though not religious law). But it does not seem that such should hinder them from fleeing for their lives. Jesus clearly taught that it was legitimate to do on the Sabbath acts that were needed to save life.

It seems more to me that the problem with the disciples' flight on the Sabbath would be the fact that the Jews were enforcing the Sabbath. They would, for example, close the gates of the city on the Sabbath to keep people from traveling (Nehemiah 13:19-22). This would surely hinder flight. Likewise, if they observed others traveling on the Sabbath, they may have attempted to stop them, detain them, or otherwise attempt to enforce Sabbath restrictions on them.

Barnes explains:

> Jesus teaches them to pray that it might not be on the sabbath, because if they should *not* go farther than a sabbath-day's journey, they would not be beyond the reach of danger; and if they did, they would be exposed to the charge of violating the law. It should be added, that it was almost impracticable to travel in Judea on that day, as the gates of the cities were usually closed, Nehemiah 13:19-22.

24:21 – Then there would be great tribulation, such as had not been since the beginning of the world until that time, nor ever would be.

Great tribulation

The "great tribulation" clearly refers to suffering in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem. Many people try to connect it to Jesus' final return, but that is impossible. The context clearly ties it to the destruction of Jerusalem. And the very words of Jesus' Himself preclude such a thing from ever happening again. He said no such thing ever had happened before, nor would it ever happen again in the future.

It appears to me that the tribulation "in those days," as prophesied by Jesus here, refers to the suffering in the siege of Jerusalem leading up to the final fall and the destruction of the temple. This would include the severe hunger, famine, and pestilence that accompanied the siege, as well as the death of many at the hands of the Roman army. This tribulation would lead up to the final fall of the city as described beginning in verse 29.

Indeed, great suffering did accompany the destruction of Jerusalem. Josephus' account of the suffering is overwhelming. He says famine, diseases, and war caused the death of 1,100,000 people in the city. He says, "It appears to me that the misfortunes of all men from the beginning of the world, if they were compared to those of the Jews, are

not so considerable as they were" (Preface to Wars, paragraph 4; via McGarvey; see Wallace, pp. 253,254).

Barnes adds:

> If it be asked how it was possible for so many people to be slain in a single city, it is answered, that the siege of Jerusalem commenced during the time of the passover, it is estimated that more than three millions were usually assembled. See Josephus, Jewish Wars, book vi., chap. ix., § 3, 4.

24:22 – No flesh would be saved unless those days were shortened, but they were shortened for the sake of the elect.

Because the hardships would be so great, no one would have survived had things continued. But because of His concern for His elect, God promised He would shorten "those days." He would bring the suffering to an end.

Even those Christians who fled would have, apparently, been eventually hunted down and destroyed. But God had warned them to flee, and then to assure their escape, He promised that He would shorten the duration of the siege.

Hafley and Pope make the interesting observation that the expression "those days" differ from "that day" or "that hour." "Those days" in this context (24:19,22,29) refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and related events, whereas "that day" refers to Jesus' second coming (24:36,42,44,50; 25:13).

24:23-26 – If someone told them to look here or there for the Christ, they should not believe it. False christs and false prophets would arise and show signs and wonders to deceive even the elect, if possible. Jesus warned them beforehand. So, if people said to go look for Him in the desert or in the inner rooms, do not believe it.

False christs and false prophets

Jesus had already warned the disciples about the coming of false christs and false prophets (verses 4,5,11). He here repeated the warning with more details.

These false christs and prophets would show great signs and wonders to lead people to believe they were truly from God. This is a common problem with false teachers. They have means to lead people to believe them, but they do not have the true power of God. If disciples did not take care, they would be misled by these teachers. Compare Acts 8:5-12; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; Matthew 7:21-23; etc.

In particular, these false teachers would have followers (disciples) trying to persuade people to follow the individual as Christ. They would say he had come and was in some certain place, so people should go there

to find him (desert, inner room, etc.) Jesus said no such could be true for His coming would not be in such a secret way (see verses 27ff).

Jesus was telling them all this ahead of time so that, when it happened, they would know what to expect and would act properly and not be led astray. It is important for people to be forewarned and to know ahead of time what they are getting into. That way when the situation arises they will be prepared for it.

24:27,28 – As lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will gather together.

Lightning and gathering of eagles

These and the following verses are some of the most difficult to understand that we have encountered in Matthew's writing. They are clearly prophetic and symbolic. Prophetic, symbolic passages are often very difficult to interpret dogmatically.

The nature of the language is extremely similar to that of passages we generally take to refer to Jesus' final personal return. Yet we have repeatedly observed evidence that the context, at least through verse 34, refers to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Let us remember that, even if we do not know what is meant for sure, this does not mean we should accept things that do violence to other Scriptures. We have proved that, whatever is meant, it is not a prophecy that Jesus will establish an earthly kingdom and reign on earth a thousand years when He returns, nor is it saying there will be signs we can discern to tell us ahead of time when His final return is about to occur. What it does mean, however, is another question.

Verse 27 refers to the "coming" (parousia) of the Son of Man. The disciples had asked Him what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the world (verse 3). They were mistakenly connecting the destruction of the temple with Jesus' coming to end the world. Jesus here said His coming (parousia) would be like lightning coming from the east and flashing to the west, and that eagles gather where the carcass is.

This is obviously symbolic. Verse 27 even uses the word "as." The point almost surely is that Jesus' coming would be an obvious event that everyone will see. It would not be secret or hidden so that the people have to go to some special place to find Him (desert or inner room), as the false teachers implied (verses 23-26). Whatever it was, nobody would miss it and no one would be able to impart some special, private knowledge about when or where it would be. It will be like lightning in the sky that everyone can see.

The illustration of the carcass and eagles is that birds of carrion gather where the meat is to be eaten. You can tell where there is something dead or about to die by watching the vultures circle overhead. So destruction and suffering would be attracted to those who deserved it

by their conduct. Sin draws suffering and consequences like a dead carcass draws birds of carrion.

I see no conclusive reason why this could not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. It was an obvious event thoroughly known and observable like lightning at the time it occurred. And it surely involved the gathering of the eagles to the carcass. Some commentators have pointed out that the eagle was a symbol commonly used for the Roman army. Some even claim that it was regarded as sacred object (see Pope). And notice how verses 27 and 28 are tied together to verse 26 by the use of the introductory word "for."

If "coming" here refers to Jesus' final return because of the term parousia, Jesus must be contrasting to the coming of verse 30, which uses a different word.

24:29-31 – Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, stars will fall, and powers of the heavens will be shaken. The sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He will send His angels with the sound of a trumpet to gather His elect from the four winds.

Darkening and downfall of heavenly bodies

This section surely "sounds like" our concept of Jesus' final return. But how do we explain His final return as occurring "immediately" after the tribulation of those days? This surely refers to the "great tribulation" of the previous verse, which cannot be anything but the destruction of Jerusalem in context, and the very language of that verse says it refers to a destruction that cannot be repeated later.

Surely Jesus' final return did not occur "immediately" after the destruction of Jerusalem. It has now been over 1900 years later and He still has not come in a way that all could see, like lightning from the east to west, etc. And note that the word for "coming" here is ***not*** the word which some claim must refer to Jesus' final return (parousia).

But how would the various expressions used in these verses fit the destruction of Jerusalem? To answer that, let us consider the language used in Old Testament prophecy:

Expressions such as the sun darkened, the moon gives no light, stars fall from heaven, the powers of heaven are shaken – all these expressions were repeatedly used in Old Testament prophecy. They were highly symbolic representing the destruction or fall of great nations or kingdoms. See Isaiah 13:10; Ezekiel 32:7,8; Joel 2:10; 3:15; Amos 8:9. (Compare Isaiah 34:4; 24:23; Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20; Amos 5:20; Zephaniah 1:15; Revelation 6:12,13; 8:12; Luke 21:25,26.)

The mourning of the tribes of the earth is not a common expression. Perhaps it refers to simply the recognition of a great time of tragedy. Surely Jews all over the earth mourned at the destruction of Jerusalem. Perhaps the idea also would include others who would recognize this to be a great time of tragedy and grieving.

So in the context of the prophecy of Jesus, these expressions could be highly symbolic expressions referring to the final fall and destruction of the city of Jerusalem "in those days" immediately after the suffering of the great tribulation of the siege.

"Immediately" (ευθεως) – *"... at once, immediately..."* – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

The coming of the Son of Man in the clouds

In the Old Testament, God is spoken of as "coming" on the clouds in ways that are not the final return of Jesus:

Isaiah 19:1 – God "comes" in the clouds to judge and punish Egypt.

Psalm 18:9-14 – God answers David's prayer (verse 6) and comes (verse 9) with thick clouds around Him (verse 11) to punish David's enemies (verses 14-17).

Psalm 104:3 – Clouds form or surround God's chariot (by which He moves).

Daniel 7:13,14 – One like a Son of Man comes on the clouds to the ancient of Days to be given a kingdom.

So, coming on the clouds is an Old Testament symbol used to refer to God's activities, especially His "coming" in the form of a punishment or judgment on a nation or group of people. This meaning would surely fit the destruction of Jerusalem. And the rest of the language in the context is also clearly like much Old Testament prophetic language used regarding God's punishment of nations and peoples.

See also Exodus 19:16; 24:15-18; 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10,11; Psalm 97:2.

The trumpet gathering the elect

Matthew 24:31 says a trumpet would sound when angels are sent forth. This is used regarding the second coming in Matthew 13:41; 16:27; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; 2 Thessalonians 1:7. But in the Old Testament trumpets were often sounded to gather the people of Israel together (Exodus 19:16,17; Judges 3:27; 6:34). The expression is also used symbolically to refer to the gathering of God's people out of captivity (Isaiah 27:12,13). (See also Isaiah 18:3; Zechariah 9:14; Deuteronomy 30:4; Isaiah 24:21-23; Revelation 8:2,6-13; Hebrews 12:19; Numbers 10:2-10; Joshua 6:2-20; Judges 6:34; Nehemiah 4:18-20; 1 Samuel 13:3.)

So, the language could fit Jesus' final personal return. But it does not appear to fit the context here. On the other hand, the nature of the language would fit Old Testament prophecies of the destruction of nations, which could fit the destruction of Jerusalem.

In this sense, the tribulation would be the suffering involved in the Roman siege of Jerusalem. This would lead immediately to the downfall of the nation (the sun, moon, stars darkened, falling, etc.). The powers and dignitaries would be removed. The nation ceased to exist as a nation. Their form of worship ended as the temple was destroyed. Their favored status with God was no more. All these consequences would be, not as a personal coming of Jesus, but a coming in punishment and judgment on the nation of Israel that all the world could see.

So, sending the angel with the sound of a trumpet means what? "Angel" means messenger, not necessarily a superhuman messenger. Perhaps this is just the spread of the gospel after the destruction of Jerusalem. The Jews throughout the world hindered the spread of the gospel. When Jerusalem had fallen, Christians could more openly serve God and spread His word, gathering the elect to serve God in the church.

> "Messenger" (αγγελος) – "'a messenger, an angel, one sent,' is translated 'messenger,' of John the Baptist, Mat 11:10; Mar 1:2; Luk 7:27; in the plural, of John's 'messengers,' Luk 7:24; of those whom Christ sent before Him when on His journey to Jerusalem, Luk 9:52; of Paul's 'thorn in the flesh,' 'a messenger of Satan,' 2Co 12:7; of the spies as received by Rahab, Jam 2:25." – Vine

Admittedly this approach takes some expressions in highly figurative ways. However, it is clear that the context is figurative. And the context compels us to take some things figuratively, else we have hopeless contradictions. The language can mean what we have said regarding the destruction of Jerusalem, and the destruction of Jerusalem clearly appears to be discussed in context through verse 34.

24:32,33 – A parable based on the fig tree: When its branch has become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So when these various events are seen, know that it is near, even at the doors.

Parable of the fig tree

When the branches of the fig tree begin to put forth leaves, you know summer is near. Likewise, Jesus said that the things He had described were signs that would indicate when the things He was predicting were near, even at the very doors.

Clearly He was saying that the things He had described were signs to help them identify when the time was coming. Yet this can only refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. It cannot refer to Jesus' final return because it will come as a thief in the night. No one can possibly tell ahead of time when it will occur.

24:34 – Jesus assured them that generation would not pass away till all these things are fulfilled.

This verse is critical to our understanding of all that precedes it. Jesus said this generation would definitely not pass till all these things

that He had predicted would be fulfilled. Surely He meant to convey some definite meaning by this statement. If we can determine the significance of "this generation," we can learn something about the time when these things were to occur.

"Generation" (γενεα) is defined as "...the whole multitude of men living at the same time: Matthew 24:34 ... used esp. of the Jewish race living at one and the same period..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

Note especially that the phrase "this generation," as used by Jesus and other gospel teachers, clearly referred to the Jews alive at that time: Matthew 23:36; 12:39-45; 11:16; Luke 17:25; Acts 2:40 (compare Matthew 17:17; 16:4; Philippians 2:15).

In contrast, people living in the past or future were a different generation: Acts 13:36; 14:16; 15:21; Ephesians 3:5; 3:21; Colossians 1:26; Matthew 1:17; Hebrews 3:10 (compare Luke 1:48,50).

The meaning that Jesus gives to the phrase "this generation" seems quite conclusively to prove that He was speaking to the very people in whose lifetime these events would occur. Matthew 23:36-38, which is in the near context of Matthew 24, seems especially to show that Jesus was speaking about the very generation of people who killed Jesus and His prophets.

The context, especially in Luke 21:28-31, proves that Jesus is applying the phrase "this generation" to "you...you...you...you" – the very people to whom He was speaking at the time.

All this fits perfectly with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, which occurred less than forty years later. This also fits the many points in context we have explained that refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. To make this fit the final return of Jesus is almost impossible.

Some try to make "generation" mean the Jewish "race." Some rare alternative dictionary definition of the word might be stretched to make this explanation appear to fit (though even the dictionary examples are not very convincing to me). But it would be extremely hard to give convincing evidence for that meaning in this context in light of the above evidence that it means the very group of Jews living in Jesus' day.

Besides, what sense does it make to say, "This race of people shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished." Of course not. If it was predicted to happen to that race, how could the race pass away before it happened? Such a meaning would make our Lord speak nonsense and would convey no meaning at all.

He was clearly trying to tell us something reasonably definite about when this would happen. If we take "this generation" to have the same meaning that it does elsewhere in Jesus' preaching, then the meaning is quite definite and fits the context perfectly. It was fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

Some commentators have tried to argue that events in the early part of the chapter refer to the destruction of Jerusalem, but perhaps events

also refer to the second coming. We can agree that the destruction of Jerusalem in many ways is a type or symbol of the second coming, just as the flood and Sodom and Gomorrah are used as such symbols. Nevertheless, the main application through verse 34 appears to me to be to the destruction of Jerusalem.

I grant that there are difficulties in explaining all the specifics whatever view one takes. The most important thing is not to contradict other plain passages of Scripture. I believe the approach we have used accomplishes that. I see no great harm done with other explanations for some specifics so long as they do no violence to other Bible teachings that Jesus is now reigning on His throne in His kingdom and that His second coming will occur without signs or previous warnings.

24:35 – Heaven and earth will pass away, but Jesus' words will by no means pass away.

The Bible elsewhere teaches that the physical heaven and earth will be destroyed when Jesus returns for His final coming (second personal coming) – 2 Peter 3:8-13. Such passages are clearly not referring to the destruction of Jerusalem.

Yet in contrast to heaven and earth, which will come to an end, Jesus' words will not pass away. This is true of all His words, but it is especially true of the prophecy He was here making. The point is that His prediction will come true. Material things can fail more easily than this prediction can fail.

At this point, Jesus was clearly referring to an event other than the destruction of Jerusalem: the passing away of the heaven and the earth. Some believe from here through the rest of the chapter He turned from the discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem and answered the third question of the disciples: what is the sign of the end of the world? His answer basically will be that there is no sign for this, like there would be signs for the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem.

If you go as far as Matthew 25:31-46, it is clear that somewhere the subject changes to Jesus' final personal return. In that passage He describes, not the judgment on Jerusalem or the nation of the Jews, but the judgment on ***all nations***. And the destinies assigned will not be simply a great tribulation from which some can flee, but eternal punishment in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels in contrast to eternal life. So, at least in Matthew's account, there is a transition somewhere from the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24:1-34 to the final return of Jesus and the universal judgment. It appears that the same would be true of Mark's account.

The question is: Where does the transition occur? It seems fairly clear that all of the sections of Matthew 25 refer to Jesus' final personal return. Some say Matthew 24:35 begins the discussion of Jesus' final return and the universal judgment, which discussion continues through chapter 25.

There must be some similarities and parallels between the destruction of Jerusalem and Jesus' second coming else they would not be discussed so closely together.

24:36 – But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but only the Father.

This passage fits nicely with Jesus' final return, when heaven and earth will pass away. Of ***that*** day and hour, nobody but the Father knows when it will occur. "That day" contrasts to "those days" of the destruction of Jerusalem. There will be signs when Jerusalem will be destroyed; but in contrast to that, the final return will come quite unexpectedly (as is also implied in the following verses). This is what we learned earlier as also taught in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6; 2 Peter 3:10.

Furthermore, verse 33 said they could know, based on the information Jesus was giving, that the event referred to there was near even at the doors. But He says regarding the event described here in verse 36 that no one knows the day nor the hour. This would indicate that they could see the signs and know when the destruction of Jerusalem would come, but this contrasts to the second coming for which there are no signs by which we can know when it will occur (see also verse 42).

Interestingly, we have had many date setters who think they do know the day. Or at least they try to determine a calendar time. The whole point is that such cannot be done because it is not revealed.

On the other hand, if this applies to the destruction of Jerusalem, we have more difficulty. However, it could be said that, while there will be signs, Jesus is not telling them specifically the day or hour when it would occur. Hence, they should not expect Him to tell them a calendar date, but they should simply watch for the signs.

Some translations of Matthew and definitely Mark's account (13:32) say that even the Son does not know the day or hour. This is not a denial of Jesus' Deity. His Deity is clearly taught elsewhere (John 20:28; 1:1-3; Philippians 2:5-8; Colossians 2:9; etc.). However, on earth He subjected Himself as a human and became a servant (Philippians 2:5-8). As such, He did not always exercise the powers of Deity, which He possessed. Apparently this is just one of the points on which He did not exercise His powers – i.e., the power to know when these events would occur.

24:37-39 – As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. In the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they did not know until the flood came and took them all away. So it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

The destruction in the days of Noah is here used to illustrate Jesus' lesson. Punishment will come unexpectedly on people like the flood did.

Before the flood, people were simply going about everyday activities, not expecting the flood to destroy them. But the flood came unexpectedly and they were destroyed. This is how the coming of the Son of Man will be.

The passage is not saying that eating and drinking, marrying, etc., are evil activities. Other passages show that all of these are good, properly done, and in fact are necessary to life and proper moral conduct. The point is that this is all the people were doing. They were failing to prepare, like Noah did, for the coming of destruction.

This is how it will be at the "coming" of Jesus. People will be unprepared and will be destroyed. But what "coming" is referred to? It appears to us that the verses through verse 34 refer to Jesus' coming in judgment on Jerusalem. Some claim verses 37,39 refer to Jesus' second coming because they use the term parousia.

If Jesus still refers here to the destruction of Jerusalem, then the point would simply be that, in this destruction as in the destruction in Noah's day, evil people will be destroyed because they are unprepared. But the good people would flee as Jesus commanded and they would be spared as was Noah who obeyed God's command and prepared to escape the destruction.

Another possibility is that the destruction of Jerusalem is being used as a symbol or illustration to teach lessons about Jesus' second coming. In which case the lessons being taught at this point may have application to both comings. Perhaps we are transitioning from the destruction of Jerusalem to Jesus' second coming with lessons that apply to both.

Notice also that Jesus here clearly confirms the flood and destruction the time of Noah as a historical event. If it was simply a legend or myth, it would prove nothing about either the destruction of Jerusalem or about Jesus' second coming.

24:40-42 – Two men will be in the field, one taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill, one taken and the other left. So, watch because you do not know what hour the Lord is coming.

When the prophesied event occurs, there will be a great separation. Some people will be taken and others will be left, even though all were doing similar activities. If two are in the field, one will be taken and the other left. If two are grinding, one will be taken and the other left.

The meaning is most likely figurative. In such a symbolic context, there is surely no proof here of a sudden "rapture" of certain individuals such as the premillennial folk love to talk about. ***How*** one is taken or where he is taken is not stated. The rapture theory is a figment of over-active imaginations.

The idea that Jesus here emphasizes is separation. At the point in time at which Jesus comes, two people will be doing the same activity.

The result of His coming will be that the people end up separated, one taken and one left: one person will be blessed because he is acceptable to God, but another one will not be acceptable and so will not receive the blessing. The passage does not say how this will happen nor how long it will take nor what the final state of the individuals will be.

If the reference is to Jesus' final return, both people will stand before Jesus (as Matthew 25:31ff describes) and then one is taken to eternal life and the other is left to eternal destruction. Such would easily fit what is stated here.

If the reference is to the destruction of Jerusalem, some will recognize the signs of the destruction as Jesus warned and will suddenly flee to safety. The others, not knowing the signs or not believing, will stay behind and suffer in the siege.

The main lesson is to be on guard because you do not know when the Lord will come. Be prepared by living a faithful, obedient life. This is often emphasized regarding Jesus' final return (Matthew 25:10,13; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6; etc.). If we knew exactly when He would come, we might postpone getting ready. But since we don't know, we must get ready and stay ready all the time.

24:43,44 – If the master of the house had known when the thief would come, he would have been watchful and would not allowed his house to be broken into. Likewise people should be ready because the Son of Man is coming when they do not expect Him.

Jesus gave another illustration in which a homeowner wanted to make sure his house is not burglarized. If he knew when the thief was coming, he could wait and then get ready when the time came.

But in reality he has no idea when the thief will come, so he must be constantly ready. He must have all the necessary arrangements made ahead of time and then stay ready so he can be adequately prepared whenever an attempt is made. This is the way we must be regarding Jesus' coming. He will come when we don't expect, so we should be ready all the time.

This same illustration is the very one used elsewhere for the fact that no one knows when Jesus will come for His final return. He will come like a thief in the night so be ready all the time – 2 Peter 3:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6.

24:45-47 – Who is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household to give them food in due season? The servant who, when the master returns, is found doing what the master commanded, will be blessed. The master will make him ruler over all his goods.

Jesus then told a parable about servants who were responsible to care for their master's household when he went into a far country. Other parables that Jesus told also involved servants working for a master (compare Luke 12:42-46; Matthew 25:14ff; etc.). Such parables fit Jesus' purpose well because they involve a servant doing the will of a master like we must do the will of Jesus our spiritual Master.

The servant here could represent the responsibility we all have to serve Jesus according to His will. Surely the main lessons can fit all of us. On the other hand, Matthew's account refers specifically to a servant who rules over his master's house. Jesus' house is the church (1 Timothy 3:15; etc.). Those who rule over the house are the elders (1 Peter 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:7,17; etc.), and apostles. As spiritual leaders in the church they are especially responsible to feed the members (Acts 20:28) and see that they receive the spiritual nourishment they need. Perhaps Jesus had special reference to them here.

The master will return to check up on the servants. If at that time the master finds that the servants have been faithfully doing what they were told to do, he will reward them. This shows the responsibility we have – and especially the spiritual leaders have – as servants to do what God says. If we want His reward, we must be obedient and watching at all times so we are always ready for His return.

The application of this is obvious if the reference is to Jesus' final return and the final judgment. If the reference is to the destruction of Jerusalem, it could possibly be taken to refer to the fact that people needed to be watching for the signs of the tribulation, etc. Yet that hardly seems to fit the idea of the master giving a reward to the servant. The passage fits better Jesus' final judgment.

The reference to setting the servant over the master's goods does not prove anything definite regarding the nature of the reward God has for us. It simply shows that He has a reward. Parables must not be pressed to try to prove things that are unfounded elsewhere. Specifically, there is no proof for an earthly reign of Jesus, so it is folly to say this verse proves Christians will rule over sinners in the millennial kingdom. The ruling will happen while others are weeping and gnashing their teeth (verse 51). Is this the kind of people God will set His people to rule over?

Jehovah's Witnesses claim that the faithful servant is the Watchtower Society. When you question them for authority for the existence of such a central organization, this is one of the few passages they even offer. Yet there is absolutely no proof this refers to the

Watchtower Society. Nothing about the story could be proved to uniquely refer to such a group. It could as easily refer to the elders and apostles as described above.

If Witnesses can, without proof, apply it to their headquarters, then any other group can, with just as little proof, say that this applies to their headquarters or central organization. Such arguments prove nothing. First it must be established from clear passages that there is authority for such a central organization. This passage does not say it, but the argument only assumes the thing that needs to be proved.

In fact, if Witnesses can claim without proof that their headquarters is the faithful and wise servant, then we can just as easily argue that their headquarters fits the evil servant (verse 48)!

24:48-51 – If that evil servant says the master is delaying and begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master will come when he is not watching for him and will cut him in two and appoint him a portion with the hypocrites. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Instead of doing what the master says, the servant could become evil and think that, because the master delays his return, the servant can live as he pleases. He may begin to misuse the other servants, to live in dissipation and drunkenness. In short, he may fail to fulfill his duty to his master and live for himself instead.

The master will return when such a servant is not ready. The servant will be punished with the hypocrites where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The reward is for the faithful servant who obeys his master. The punishment is for one who lives for himself instead of doing as the master teaches.

The application of this is obvious if the reference is to Jesus' final return and the final judgment. If the reference is to the destruction of Jerusalem, it could possibly refer to the fact that people needed to be watching for the signs of the tribulation, etc. Yet that hardly seems to fit the idea of the master giving a reward to the servant. The passage fits better Jesus' final judgment, and as such would lead into chapter 25.

Matthew 25

Chapter 25 – Teaching Regarding Jesus' Coming and Final Judgment

25:1-13 - Parable of the Ten Virgins

25:1 – The kingdom of heaven is compared to ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Verses 31-46 of this chapter clearly refer to Jesus' final return, the final judgment when all nations will receive their eternal rewards. It appears that all the stories in chapter 25 likewise discuss Jesus' second personal coming and the final judgment. This is a kingdom parable. It appears that the destruction of Jerusalem is no longer under consideration at all.

Ten virgins went to meet the bridegroom. They had lamps that used oil (verses 3ff). The bridegroom was coming for the wedding feast (verse 10). Compare Luke 12:35-38.

> McGarvey says: "According to Jewish custom the bridegroom went to the house of his father-in-law to receive his bride, leaving at his own house a company of virgins, who were to come out with lanterns or torches to meet him on his arrival, and to escort him into the house. The ten virgins of this parable were to perform this pleasant service."

As the story proceeds it is clear that the bridegroom represents Jesus and his coming represents Jesus' second personal coming with the judgment of all people.

The virgins represent disciples, as we will see, not unbelievers. They expect the Lord and were all, at one time, ready to meet him.

Light represents goodness in the Bible (compare John 8:12). And having a lamp burning refers to being ready for Jesus' coming by living a faithful life of obedience and service (compare 24:46ff; 5:14-16).

25:2-4 – Five virgins were wise and took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But five were foolish and took their lamps but no extra oil.

All the virgins had lamps and apparently all were burning. So, all at one time were ready for the groom. This represents people who were at one time living lives of faithful service to Jesus. But some were wise. These knew that the groom might not come soon and they would need extra oil. They refer to people who are determined to do all Jesus commands remaining faithful no matter when He returns – Matthew 28:20; Acts 3:22,23; James 2:10. But some were foolish and did not prepare for a possible delay.

The application is that faithful Christians must be ready for the Lord whenever He comes, no matter when it might be. It is not enough just to be ready at some time in our lives. We must stay ready. We must be prepared to continue to do good throughout life. Compare Romans 2:7; James 5:7,8; Luke 8:15.

Too many people become Christians, but they are not ready to face a lifetime of hardship and effort in the Lord's service. If He were to come soon after these folks were converted, they would be ready. But as time passes they lose their zeal and become negligent, unfaithful, and are no longer ready. When they are not ready, that is when He will come.

25:5,6 – While the bridegroom delayed, they all slept. At midnight they heard the cry that the bridegroom was coming so they should go to meet him.

The bridegroom tarried – i.e., he came, but not at the time expected. It was midnight when he came – much later than one might have expected. This lesson is often emphasized regarding Jesus' return. We do not know when He will come so we must be ready all the time – 2 Peter 3:10-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6; compare Matthew 24:42-51.

The bridegroom finally came, just as Jesus definitely will one day come. He may delay, like the bridegroom. People may give up and think He will never come. But don't be misled by the delay. Like the bridegroom, He definitely will come one day.

When he came, a warning was given for people to go meet him. But we will see that, when the announcement was made, it was too late to do anything to get ready. One must be ready before the announcement is made – compare verses 10-12.

25:7-9 – All the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. But the foolish said their lamps were going out so they asked the wise to give them some of their oil. But the wise could not do so because then they might not have enough. They said the foolish virgins should go buy more oil.

When the announcement was made, all the virgins arose and made final adjustments as needed for their lamps. Because of the delay, the

foolish virgins were running out of oil. They asked the wise virgins to give them oil, but the wise virgins refused because they did not have enough for both themselves and the others. They told the foolish virgins to obtain their own oil.

This shows that, when Jesus comes, we will all stand or fall on the basis of our own preparation (or lack of it). We will not be saved because some loved one, friend, or church member is saved. Nor will we be lost because some such person is lost. We must be prepared for ourselves and will be rewarded for our own state. This is absolute individual responsibility.

Like the wise virgins, none of us have good deeds to spare so that we can give them to others so they can be saved. Like the foolish virgins, we will be lost if we are not ready on the basis of our own conduct.

2 Corinthians 5:10 – For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Romans 14:12 – So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

Ezekiel 18:20 – The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

Note that this thoroughly contradicts the views of several religious groups. Roman Catholicism teaches that we can get out of purgatory sooner by getting credit (indulgences) for the good deeds done by the saints. Mormonism teaches that, if people die unsaved, relatives still living can be baptized for them. All such beliefs are contradicted by passages such as this.

For other passages that teach individual responsibility see Matthew 7:21-28; 10:32; Acts 2:38; 10:34,35; James 1:23-25; Romans 2:6-10; 10:9,10; Galatians 6:7,8; John 3:16,36; 6:44,45; Mark 7:14; 16:15,16; Hebrews 11:6; 2 Peter 3:9.

25:10-12 – While the foolish virgins went to buy, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went in to the wedding. Then the door was shut. When the other virgins returned, they were refused entrance.

Those who entered the marriage feast were those who were ready at the time the groom came. Those who were not ready, simply could not enter. The door was shut, and the Lord will say to those outside that He does not know them (see 7:21-23). The application of this is that we must obey during this lifetime and before Jesus comes. After He comes, it will be too late to try to repent and get ready.

This disproves the theories of those who say there will be a second chance after Jesus comes. It also shows us the need to obey God now while we have the time and opportunity. Do not wait or procrastinate

because you never know when He will come and your opportunity will end.

Luke 13:24,25 – Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, "Lord, Lord, open for us," and He will answer and say to you, "I do not know you, where you are from."

2 Corinthians 6:2 – Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

Jeremiah 8:20 – The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved!

Luke 12:40 – Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect

Psalm 119:60 – I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments.

What a tragedy at the coming of the Lord to find ourselves outside and hear the Lord say, "I do not know you"!

See also Acts 22:16; 1 Kings 18:21; James 4:13,14; Luke 12:15-21; Proverbs 27:1; 2 Peter 3:4-12.

25:13 – So watch because you do not know the day or the hour when the Son of Man will come.

Here is a plain statement of the purpose of the parable. The lesson is to teach us that we do not know when Jesus will come. Therefore, we should always be ready.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-6 – But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. … Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.

2 Peter 3:10 – But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

See also Matthew 25:42-40; Revelation 3:3.

25:14-30 - Parable of the Talents

Compare the parable of pounds in Luke 19:11-27.

25:14,15 – The kingdom is like a man traveling to a far country. He called his servants and delivered his goods to them according to their ability: five talents to one, two to another, and one to another. Then he went on a journey.

The master was about to go on a journey.

Jesus told another parable about a master who was traveling to a far country. The word "for" implies there is a connection to the previous parable. That parable had taught the need to be ready all the time because we don't know when Jesus is coming. This parable continues by showing what the Master expects of us in order to be ready.

Jesus used several parables about a master who goes away and leaves his servants with responsibilities while He is gone (Matthew 21:33; 24:45). Jesus was about to go away: He would die, then He would ascend to the Father. He expected His disciples to work according to His instructions while He was gone. The frequency of such parables shows that He knew He would leave.

In this parable the master represents Jesus, the servants represent His disciples who are responsible to work for Him, and His return to call the disciples to account represents the final judgment as in verses 31-46.

Note that these were the master's own servants. They belonged to him, so he had every right to make demands on their time and labors. This will become significant when we consider the excuses of the one-talent servant. Jesus has purchased us with His blood. We belong to Him and ought to use our lives for Him (2 Corinthians 5:14,15; etc.)

He delivered his goods to his servants according to their abilities.

One servant received five talents, another received two, and another received one. A talent was a unit of weight used to measure silver or gold. A talent of silver may be worth about $2000, or a talent of gold about $30,000 (with inflation, these figures are low compared to current values of the dollar).

Different amounts of money were given to each man according to his ability. Note that today "talent" has come to mean ability, but in this parable talents were money given according to ability. They do not represent ability but were given ***according to*** ability. So, they may represent any blessings or opportunities with which God blesses us in this life: physical or especially spiritual.

Nevertheless, the lesson remains the same. God expects us to work according to our abilities. God does not require exactly the same results from all of His servants. In some things, we are all required to do the

same (be baptized, etc.). But some works require ability, and some people have more ability than others. In these areas, God expects each person to work to the extent of his ability, but He does not require them to achieve the same results as people having different degrees of ability. This will be demonstrated as the story proceeds.

25:16-18 – The servant who received five talents traded with them and made five more talents. Likewise, the one who had received two gained two more. But the servant who received one talent dug in the ground and hid the money.

The servants were obviously expected to use the money given them by the master to accomplish the master's purpose. The talents were not given to them just to enjoy for themselves or achieve their own ends. This illustrates the concept of stewardship. We have blessings given us by God, but we should use them for His purposes, not for our own pleasures.

The first servant, having received five talents, used them wisely in trading and gained five more talents. The second used his two talents to gain two more. The third simply dug a hole in the ground and saved the talent there. This was a common way of saving money in that day, but later we will see what the master thought of it.

In the story, gaining talents simply indicates using the money in wise business investments to gain more money. But what is the spiritual meaning? Probably the best explanation is that it simply refers to accomplishing gain for the Lord: accomplishing whatever work He expects us to do.

We could reason that, if we use properly the blessings God gives us, we gain more blessings. That is true in a sense. But the point simply seems to be that the Lord would receive a return on His gifts. Good would be accomplished. This might be teaching the lost, worship and praise, or caring for others, etc.

25:19-21 – Later the master returned and settled accounts with the servants. The one who had been given five talents returned them to the Lord saying he had gained five more talents. The master said he had done well and was a good and faithful servant. So he would be made ruler over many things. He should enter into the joy of his Lord.

The master returned to settle accounts. This surely represents the judgment (compare verses 31-46). We too must give account to the Lord for the way we have used the blessings He gave us. We are not free to do as we please without consequences. We will be required to answer.

The first servant, having used his five talents to gain five more, was rewarded by the master. He is called "good and faithful." He had reliably and effectively done what the master wanted. The master said he would

be ruler over many things and could enter into the joy of the Lord. The nature of the joy is not described, but the spiritual application is eternal life.

Some premillennial folks think the word "ruler" proves God will reward faithful Christians by making us rulers over cities in the millennial kingdom on earth. Others think our eternal reward will be to rule over planets or other places.

All such is foolishness. The ruling is the physical story, not the spiritual application. It simply represents our reward. It does not tell you what the reward is any more than the "far country" literally tells you where Jesus went, nor do the talents represent literal money, nor do digging in the earth or the number of talents have literal meaning in the application. All these are the physical story, but the spiritual application is not the same as the physical story.

25:22,23 – The servant who had received two talents came and said that he had gained two more talents. The master said he too was a good and faithful servant. He had been faithful over a few things and would be made ruler over many things. He too could enter into the joy of the Lord.

The second servant then came and he was rewarded because he had used his two talents to gain two more. His reward is described in the same terms as the first servant.

This shows us that not all servants must accomplish identical results in order to receive the Lord's reward. Different people have different abilities. The Lord expects all to use their abilities for Him. But He does not require each to accomplish the same as others in all areas.

See also the illustration of the parts of the body in 1 Corinthians 12. We should appreciate all in the church who work to the extent they are able, despite the fact that some do more than others in some areas. The issue is whether or not we are using the abilities we have to do the Lord's work. Ultimately it is only the Lord who can determine whether or not our work has been acceptable according to the measure of our ability.

In the parable of the pounds in Luke 19, each servant was given the same amount, but they achieved different results. Apparently this was just a similar story told on a different occasion (preachers today do this too). The point is similar. Different people achieved different results yet were rewarded if they did what they could.

25:24,25 – The servant who received one talent said he knew the Lord was a hard man, reaping where he had not sown and gathering where he had not scattered seed. He was afraid and hid the talent in the ground, so he returned to the master that which was his.

The one-talent man's excuses

Then the one-talent servant came and returned the talent given to him. He had not lost it, but he had not used it either. He had no profit or gain to offer the master. He simply returned what the master gave him.

He made excuses trying to shift the blame to the master. In effect, he accused the master of being the cause of his own failure. He said the master was a hard man, seeking profit from work he had not done himself. So the servant acted as he did out of fear. The fear seems to refer to the fear that he would be punished if he lost the talent. So he did not risk losing it but kept it safely. And he figured he was all right because the master had suffered no loss.

The master responded in the following verses, but let us consider the servant's excuses. On the surface it is obvious that the excuses did not justify his conduct because the other two servants had the same master. They would have faced all the same problems, but it did not keep them from being productive. They worked hard and accomplished much good. This servant could have too had he wanted to.

The one-talent servant accused the master of being too hard.

"Hardness" is somewhat in the eye of the beholder. The master was not hard on the first two servants, but generous and appreciative of their efforts. God is hard on those who disobey Him, but rewarding and protective of those who obey. It is only those who are not doing the Lord's will that need fear his "hardness."

Yet throughout history, lazy and rebellious people have tried to blame people in authority for being too "hard" on them. They think they have it rough; but it isn't their own fault, it is the fault of those who are in authority and punish them if they don't do what they are told.

The cry of our age is that we should not make demands of others. Parents should not be demanding on children, businesses should not expect too much of employees, schools should not demand too much of students, and leaders in the church should not require too much of the members. And anyone who does require much is "too hard."

Remember that the master represents God. People today often blame God directly or indirectly for their problems and failures. Some say the Bible is too demanding or too hard to understand. Others say a loving God should not allow suffering, so they blame God for the existence of problems or the death of loved ones. In these and other ways

people today, like this wicked servant, have the audacity to make accusations against God for their own failures.

He also accused the master of reaping where he had not sown, etc.

The servant acted as though somehow there was something wrong with reaping where the master had not sown. But throughout civilized history, there have been laborers and supervisors. The supervisors may not do the actual physical labor, but they still reap the benefits. Some people think this is not fair. This is the continual cry of the communists.

But the supervisors are working. They worked for the money they invested, and they worked to hire laborers, and they work to supervise the laborers. In this story, the talents belonged to the master and the servants belonged to the master. Why shouldn't he profit from their labor since they belonged to him? The idea that owners and supervisors should not profit from the work of those who are subject to them is commonly expressed by rebels, but the idea is entirely foreign to the Bible.

Further, the master was very generous in rewarding those who did work for him, as demonstrated by his treatment of the first two servants. His reward to them was very generous. It was not as if he took the profit they had achieved by their hard work and left them to suffer. He was not selfish and ungenerous, as the one-talent servant's statement makes him sound.

Also notice that this is one of many examples of blame shifting in the Bible. Always it is condemned, and those who attempt it are not excused but are held accountable by God. Examples are: Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:9-13; Saul in 1 Samuel 15:3,9,15,22f; Aaron in Exodus 32:2-5,21-24. One of man's favorite ways of avoiding responsibility is to try to blame others. Instead the Bible says we should admit our errors and ask forgiveness (Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9; James 5:16).

For other passages about blame shifting see 1 Kings 18:17,18; Genesis 39:7-20; Proverbs 19:3; Numbers 14:1-6.

He claimed he had caused the master no loss.

The servant simply returned what the master gave him. Likewise, there are people today who think that, as long as they cause no trouble or loss to those in charge, they are all right. And in fact this one-talent servant did better than many people. He did not take his master's goods, like the prodigal son, and waste them in selfish and evil living. Many people today not only do not actively serve the Lord, in fact they destroy His gifts by using them for their own personal desires. Others live in active practice of evil.

The one-talent servant apparently practiced no overt evil nor wasted the master's goods. Nevertheless, he was rebuked and punished because he did not accomplish worthwhile work for the master. It is not

enough to be neutral for the Lord. It is not enough that we do not practice evil and vice. We must be positively constructive, accomplishing good works for His glory. The person who does nothing bad, but is still not good for anything, will be punished like the one-talent servant.

25:26,27 – The master said the servant was wicked and lazy. He knew that the master reaped where he had not sown and gathered where he had not scattered seed. At the least he should have deposited the money with the bankers so he could have received interest on his money.

Here the lord responded to the one-talent servant. Note that the master did not bother to defend himself, giving the answers we have suggested above. He did not have to. He was not being judged here. Instead he proceeded immediately to show the servant ***his*** errors.

He said the servant was wicked and lazy.

This is the real problem. The arguments offered by the servant were just subterfuge and rationalization. These were not the real reasons he had acted the way he did. He did what he did because he was lazy, did not want to work, and was looking for excuses to avoid work. Again the proof of this is that the other servants, facing the same circumstances, had accomplished much.

The servant had caused loss to his master.

The master said that it was not enough for the servant to just return his money. The servant had the use of the money for all the time the master was gone. If he had just put it in the bank and let it draw interest, the master would at least have received some value for the use of his money.

The point is that, by not using the master's money properly, the servant really had caused loss to the master. If the master had kept the money instead of giving it to the servant, he would at least have had the use of it. There is value in having the use of money. But because the servant had the money, the master had no use of it. By returning only what the master gave him, the servant actually caused loss to the master: he lost the use of his money.

Likewise, the things we have from the Lord must be used for Him or else we actually cause Him loss. He gets no good or benefit from the things He has given us while we have them. But they are still His and must be used for Him. If we do not use them for Him, we are unprofitable and unfaithful as stewards.

Note that this story shows that, even in that day, there were bankers and interest. The Old Testament forbid Jews to charge interest of other Jews in case of poverty. But charging interest was not forbidden of non-Jews nor in cases of business investment, etc.

25:28-30 – The talent should be taken from the servant and given to the one who had ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will have abundance. But from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. The unprofitable servant was cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The punishment of the unprofitable servant

The master then pronounced on the one-talent servant a judgment as unfavorable as his former pronouncements on the previous servants had been favorable.

First, he said the talent that had been in the care of the one-talent servant should be taken from him and given to the servant with the ten talents. He then states a general principle of Divine judgment: Those who have, will receive even more; those who lack, will lose even what they have.

This principle was not stated as a form of malicious evil. The point is that faithfulness to God leads to increased opportunities and blessings, but unfaithfulness leads to loss of opportunities and blessings. Those who use what they have to serve God, will receive even more opportunities and blessings. Those who do not use what they have to serve God, will lose what they have. This is a consequence of our conduct.

"One who is given a gift of preaching or teaching is given it so others may profit from it. If one does not use this gift, he will lose it. But one who uses the gift diligently will gain even more of the gift in abundance…" – Chrysostom (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Finally, he decreed that the unprofitable servant should be cast into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. These expressions are also used in other places for the destiny of the wicked: Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 13:42,50; 24:51.

Lessons about the use of our abilities

Note that the one-talent man was punished, but not because he lacked ability or had only one talent. He was punished because he was "unprofitable." The lord would not have required that he produce as great results as the other two servants. It was evident from the beginning that he had less to work with. What the lord did require was diligent effort to do the best he could with what he had. He was punished because he failed to do that.

The parable does not directly state, yet clearly implies, that people with much ability and great blessings may still be lost if they fail to work to their potential. Even if they do some work, they will be punished if they do not achieve what the Lord expects of them. There are also people who have little to work with yet who work hard for the Lord, especially by comparison to what they had to work with. These people will be rewarded.

But there are people who have little to work with and use that as an excuse to do nothing. They may lack ability or opportunity compared to some others. But instead of doing what they can with what they have, they sit back and let others do all the work. If they would do what they can, the Lord would reward them just as generously as He does other people. But they do little or nothing compared even to what they could do, so they are rejected.

The Lord does not require you to do all that was done by the apostle Paul or Moses or Noah. But are you doing what you can?

25:31-46 – Description of the Final Judgment

25:31-33 – The Son of Man will come in His glory with all the holy angels and will sit on the throne of His glory. All nations will be gathered before Him, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. Sheep will be set on the right hand, but goats on the left.

Jesus concluded this discussion of His coming by describing the final judgment. This is clearly the final judgment because all nations are gathered before Him and their rewards are eternal. This is not described as a military defeat of a city or nation, as Matthew 24 described the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jesus is described as coming with His angels and sitting on the throne of glory. Then He acts like a shepherd separating goats from sheep. Goats and sheep often ran together, and the shepherd cared for them both. But their nature was not the same, so at times they had to be separated. This is compared to the separation of the righteous from the wicked at the final judgment.

These verses teach two important principles about the judgment:

1) At this judgment Jesus will be the judge. Compare 2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 10:42; John 5:22; Acts 17:30,31; etc.

2) All nations will stand before Him to be judged. This will not be just the nation of Israel (as the judgment of Matthew 24 included). It will include all people. Even people who have died will be raised to be included. See also 2 Corinthians 5:10; Acts 17:30,31; Romans 2:4-11; 14:10-12; etc.

There are numerous other passages that describe this judgment day: John 12:48; Acts 10:42; 17:30,31; Romans 2:4-11; 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 9:27; 10:26-31; Revelation 20:11-15; Ecclesiastes 12:13,14.

25:34-36 – The king will say those on the right hand are blessed of the Father and should inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. They gave Him food when He was hungry, drink when He was thirsty, took Him in when He was a stranger, clothed Him when He was naked, and visited Him when He was sick or in prison.

The reward of the righteous

Those on the right hand will be rewarded. They are called "righteous" in verses 37,46. They will inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The eternal reward of the righteous is often called an "inheritance." See 1 Peter 1:4; Matthew 19:29; Hebrews 9:15; compare 1 Corinthians 15:50; 6:9,10; Ephesians 5:5; Galatians 5:21.

The term "kingdom" is used in different senses in the Bible. There was the Old Testament kingdom of Israel (which later divided into the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel). There is the New Testament kingdom which is the church (Colossians 1:13,18; Matthew 16:18,19; Hebrews 12:22-28; Revelation 1:9). This kingdom will be turned over to the Father at the resurrection when Jesus returns (1 Corinthians 15:22-28,50).

Doubtless it is the kingdom in this latter sense that Jesus mentions here. It is just a continuation of the church, but it will have all unfaithful members purged from it, and to it will be added the faithful from Old Testament days, etc. It is the glorified eternal kingdom, which enters eternal life (verse 46). Compare 2 Peter 1:11; 2 Timothy 4:18; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 5:21.

This kingdom is described as "prepared from the foundation of the world." Some say this language could mean that, since the foundation of the world, the kingdom has been in the process of preparation. In any case, this shows that God has planned from the beginning of the world that those who are righteous will receive this reward. We do not always understand what God's eternal plans have been, but some passages such as this reveal to us some eternal aspects of His purposes. Compare Hebrews 4:3; 1 Peter 1:19,20; etc.

The basis of determining who will receive the reward of the righteous

This reward is granted to these because they have been benevolent to the needy, helping others by good deeds of kindness.

This statement is not meant to imply this is all we need to do to receive God's reward. This passage, like others, must be taken in connection with all other passages on the subject. Other passages show that, to receive the reward of the righteous, we must live good moral lives, obey the gospel, control our tongues, and even think proper

thoughts, etc. In fact, we will be judged for all we have done. See Ecclesiastes 12:13,14; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-11; Matthew 12:36,37; Jeremiah 17:10.

Nevertheless, being kind and benevolent to those in need is a required condition in order to receive God's reward at the judgment. Note that the acts here described are individual acts. Jesus is not here discussing the church as a body, as some think, nor is He authorizing the church to set up benevolent institutions to do all these good works as some argue on James 1:27 and Galatians 6:10.

Further, it is not intended that this is an exhaustive list even of all the ways we can help the needy. And there are many spiritual good works we can do. It is possible that the acts listed here are meant to be taken spiritually as well as physically. Surely the Bible teaches that spiritual needs are greater than physical needs (compare Matthew 6:19-34; John 6:27; etc.).

In none of these areas should we help people who are able to help themselves and are just lazy. Such people should be allowed to suffer the consequences of their misdeeds (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Again, the teaching must be considered in light of other related passages.

Here are the works for which Jesus here says we will be judged. We will consider then both physically and spiritually.

* Provide food and drink for the hungry and thirsty. Compare James 2:15,16 (or spiritually Matthew 5:6; John 4:13,14; 6:35ff; 7:37-39).

> "This can also be said of teachers who gave the food of learning to those hungry for righteousness, so they might be fed and grow healthy in good actions; who administered the drink of truth to those thirsty for the knowledge of God. Teaching in the Word, they certainly fed them and also gave to drink…" – Incomplete Work on Matthew (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

* Take in strangers (hospitality): Romans 12:13; 1 Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:1,2; Genesis 18:1-8; 19:1-3; 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:9,10. (Spiritually, we are strangers from God's covenant till we become God's children – compare Ephesians 2:12ff).

* Clothing the naked: James 2:15,16 (or spiritually Revelation 3:17).

* Visiting the sick: James 5:14,15 (or spiritually James 5:19,20).

* Visiting the imprisoned: 2 Timothy 1:16 (or spiritually John 8:34; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Romans 6:17,18).

Surely we should be diligent in these practices since we will be judged for them.

25:37-40 – The righteous will ask when they did these acts of benevolence to Him. He will respond that they did it to Him inasmuch as they did it to the least of His brethren.

Jesus had worded the deeds of kindness in a surprising way. He said the righteous had done these deeds to Him. Now the righteous ask when they did these things to Him. This is not meant to imply that they did not

know they did the deeds, but they are asking when they did these deeds to Jesus Himself.

Note that, Jesus is not here making an absolute prediction that these questions will be literally asked. Those who are truly righteous will be aware of the principle Jesus is about to state, so would have no reason to ask at the judgment. Jesus states it here because it is the principle on which He rewards people regardless of whether or not it is asked.

The principle Jesus states is that these righteous people did all these things to Him when they did them to "one of the least of these my brethren." The lesson is that, when we serve others, especially Christians, we are thereby serving Jesus.

This is true because Jesus has commanded us to do these good works; so when we obey, we not only help the human involved, but we also serve Jesus. In a further sense, though, Jesus considers Himself to be so closely tied to His people that serving them is serving Him. They stand as representatives of Jesus such that the way we treat them is the way we treat Jesus. (Compare Matthew 10:42; Proverbs 19:17.)

The principle is repeated regarding the wicked in verse 45. When we fail to help the needy, especially Christians, Jesus views this as a failure to help Jesus Himself.

This is a point we need to seriously consider. Few of us, if Jesus were personally in our presence and we could see that He really had the problems named, would ever think of refusing to help Him. We would immediately recognize our duty as His disciples to provide what was needed. Yet we might easily fail to help a fellow human, even a Christian, in the same circumstance. It is sobering to consider our need for being benevolent as Jesus here describes.

Furthermore, it is a great blessing to consider how closely Jesus identifies Himself with His people. So close does he view the relationship, that what people do to Christians is viewed by Jesus as being done to Him. Surely it is a great honor to have such a relationship and fellowship with the Creator of the universe.

Further, it should be a blessing to us to know that, by serving other Christians, we are serving our Lord. Even if others should show little gratitude or we receive little reward in this life, remember that ultimately we are serving Jesus, and He will reward our service.

25:41-45 – Jesus will tell those on the left hand that they are cursed and must depart from Him into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels, because they did not do for Him the good works that the righteous people did.

The whole sequence is then repeated with those on the left hand, except it is the opposite. The wicked are punished because they did not do the good deeds which the righteous people did do. Like the one-talent man, they are punished, not for active practice of evil, but for neglect of

doing good. They also ask when they refused to do these deeds for Jesus, and He responds that they refused to help Him when they refused to help others (see notes regarding the righteous).

The destiny of the wicked is said to be the curse of everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. Such language is often used elsewhere: Revelation 20:10-15 (note the reference here also to the devil); 2 Thessalonians 1:5-9; Matthew 13:39-42; Mark 9:48; Compare Luke 16:24. The fact this was prepared for the devil and his angels does not deny it was also prepared for sinful people. It just shows the tragic character of those who will receive this punishment.

It is hard to comprehend fully the nature of eternal rewards. One wonders how literal fire could hurt the devil or other spirit beings. The point to be emphasized, however, is that Jesus is clearly saying it will be a horrible punishment that we do not want to receive. It is the reward that God prepared for the devil and his angels, so it must be a horrible. It is so horrible that the best description that our Lord could come up with is to describe it as everlasting fire.

God is just and will do what is right. Perhaps we need to spend less time in theological argument about the exact nature of the punishment, and more time appreciating that the destiny of the wicked is terrible so we should learn and practice the way of life that will lead to avoiding this punishment. I choose to describe it as Jesus did and emphasize the need for all people to live so we can avoid it.

Other passages describing the eternal destiny of the wicked include the following: Matthew 5:22; 8:12; 10:28; 13:49,50; 18:8,9; 25:30,41,46; Luke 12:4,5; Romans 2:1-11; Revelation 21:8.

25:46 – Those on the left hand will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Finally and simply Jesus states that the righteous and the wicked will go to their eternal rewards.

The wicked will receive eternal punishment. See notes on verse 41 above and also note: Romans 2:8,9; 6:23.

The righteous will receive eternal life. Compare this reward as described in Romans 2:6-10; 6:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; 5:9,10; Matthew 5:10-12; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8; 1 Peter 1:3,4; Philippians 3:20; Revelation 21:3-5; 22:3,4; 1 John 5:11,12.

Note that both rewards are said to be eternal, which would imply that one lasts as long as the other lasts. Many people are glad to believe that the righteous will be rewarded eternally, yet relatively few will defend the view that the wicked will be punished eternally. Yet the passage clearly says that the duration of one will be the same as the duration of the other. The original language uses the very same word, though it is translated “everlasting” in one case and “eternal” in the other.

Some tell us that God is too loving to punish the wicked eternally. Yet the Bible repeatedly affirms this to be the case, frequently in the words of Jesus Himself. God is not only loving, He is also just and righteous. If God does not punish the wicked after this life, He would be thoroughly unjust.

Often the good people suffer as much in this life as do the wicked. Justice demands that the wicked be punished and the righteous rewarded. Since it does not happen in this life, then it must happen after this life. If it is just and righteous for God to give eternal life to the righteous, then it is surely just and righteous for Him to give eternal punishment to the wicked.

Surely Jesus has given us ample warning of judgment and what we need to do to be ready. He has said repeatedly that we don't know when it will come, so be ready. A word to the wise is sufficient. Let us be diligent in doing the good works, using our blessings to serve Him, always watching and ready by living a faithful life so that, whenever we stand before Him in judgment, we are ready to receive eternal life.

"Everlasting" "eternal" (αιωνιος) – "...1 pert. to a long period of time, *long ago* ... 2 pert. to a period of time without beginning or end, *eternal* ... 3 pert. to a period of unending duration, *without end* ..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

"1. without beginning or end, that which always has been and always will be ... 2. without beginning... 3. without end, never to cease, everlasting..." – Grimm-Wilke-Thayer.

"Punishment" (κολασις) – "...1 infliction of suffering or pain in chastisement, *punishment* ... 2 transcendent retribution, *punishment* ..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

Matthew 26

Chapter 26 – Passover and the Lord's Supper, Gethsemane, Jesus' Arrest, and Jewish Trials

26:1-16 - Preliminaries to the Passover

Compare Mark. 14:1-16; Luke 22:1- 13; John 12:1-8.

26:1,2 – After these sayings, Jesus reminded the disciples that the Passover was in two days and He would be delivered up to be crucified.

The time of Jesus' crucifixion was drawing near. Jesus here again predicted His death, however this is the first time that He said when it would be. Other predictions are in Matthew 16:21ff; 17:9; 20:18f; etc. This time He said it would be at the Passover.

The Passover was a Jewish feast commemorating Israel's exodus from Egyptian bondage. On that occasion, God went through Egypt and slew the firstborn sons of all the Egyptians, but spared the firstborn of Israel. To be spared, the Israelites had to mark their houses with the blood of a lamb.

The lamb was slain on the 14th day of the first month. This was followed by a feast of seven days of unleavened bread, which lasted from the 14th day at evening till the 20th day, inclusive. See Exodus 11:4-12:28; 12:43-51; 13:3-10; Leviticus 23:4-8; Numbers 9:1-14; Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Exodus 34:25; Numbers 28:16-25; 33:1-4; Joshua 5:10,11; 2 Kings 23:21-23; etc.

Since Jesus would be crucified at the Passover, there would be a symbolic connection between Jesus and the lamb that died so the people could be spared. See 1 Corinthians 5:7.

26:3-5 – The chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people met at the palace of the high priest named Caiaphas. There they plotted to capture Jesus by trickery and kill Him, but not during the feast lest the people riot.

The leaders of the Jews met at the palace of Caiaphas the high priest to plot how they would kill Jesus. Jesus had defeated their every effort

to trap Him in His teaching (chapter 22). Then He had publicly and powerfully denounced their wickedness in the presence of the multitudes (chapter 23). They had previously sought to kill him, but now they met to determine how to carry out their plans.

They determined to do this by trickery, and they did not want to do it during the feast because they feared the reaction of the people. Note how this reveals their character and demonstrates the accuracy of Jesus' descriptions of them. He had said they would kill Him and that they were primarily motivated by seeking the praises of men (21:46; 23:5-12; etc.). Sure enough, they seek to kill Him; but they can't do it fairly and openly because they fear the people. So they seek to do it by trickery when the people won't be so aware of it.

By New Testament times, the appointment of the high priest was often determined by politicians and kings. The *Archaeology Study Bible* (page 1569) records the following information: "Caiaphas was the longest-serving high Priest during the Roman control of Judea … He was the son-in-law of Annas, whose family controlled the high priesthood for much of the first century A.D." An ossuary (a limestone box for desiccated bones) has been discovered in a tomb south of Jerusalem having on it that inscription "Joseph son of Qaipha." Some archaeologists believe this contains the remains of some of the family of the high priest Caiaphas.

26:6-9 – When Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came with an alabaster flask of costly fragrant oil and poured it on his head. His disciples were indignant that it had been wasted but might have been sold and given to the poor.

These verses tell of an event in Bethany (see ***map***) at the house of Simon the leper (probably a healed leper). Other accounts are given in Mark 14:3-9 and John 12:1-8. However, John records the event before the triumphal entry, and the time is given as six days before Passover. Also, Jesus was anointed on the feet instead of the head. However, the other details are so similar that it is almost certain the two events are the same.

The ointment may have been placed on both Jesus' head and feet. McGarvey explains the difference in sequence by pointing out that Matthew gives no specific time sequence. He just says this happened when Jesus was in Bethany. Numerous events are told in different orders in the different accounts. This is not a contradiction. It is just the way people tend to tell stories. Perhaps Matthew told the story here because it reveals the greed of Judas who, in the subsequent verses, agreed to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Luke 7:37,38 also records an event in which a woman anointed Jesus with fragrant oil, but that is surely a different event.

As Jesus sat, a woman poured on Him an alabaster flask of costly fragrant oil or ointment. John's account tells us the woman was Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. Alabaster is a type of lime deposit (like what is found in caves). Mark 14:3 says the ointment was nard, a perfume made from the roots of the spikenard plant. It was imported and quite costly.

The disciples were indignant about this, because they thought it was wasteful. Rather than pouring it on Jesus, they thought it would have been better to sell it and give the money to the poor. Mark says it was worth three hundred shillings or denarii, which would have been about a year's wages for a laborer.

Actually, John tells us that the main one who objected was Judas, but he did not say it because he cared about the poor. He said it because he kept the money of the disciples and he was a thief and took some of it for himself!

26:10-13 – Jesus said the woman had done a good work for Him. They always had the poor with them, but would not always have Him. He said she had anointed Him for His burial. And wherever the gospel was preached, this woman's deed would be told as a memorial to her.

Jesus, however, did not share the disciples' criticism of Mary. He said she had done a good work for Him. There would always be poor people for whom they could do good, but He would not be with them long. She was, He said, anointing Him for burial.

It seems doubtful that she knew He was about to be buried. But she surely acted as a humble expression of honor to Him. And He used this as an opportunity to remind them that He was about to die and be buried. They would have Him for even less time than any of them realized. It was appropriate that they express their devotion for Him while He was there.

Jesus here stated a profound general truth: the poor are always with us. This does not mean we should ignore them, but poverty will never be eliminated. Jesus did not come to solve all the physical problems of mankind, and He did not establish His church to do so. He was not a political or social radical who thought He could remove all poverty from the earth.

Jesus knew troubles and problems will be here as long as the earth stands. We ought to be compassionate for such people, but it is also good and right to honor Deity. If you wait till all poverty is removed before you worship or give gifts to honor God, you will never honor Him.

Caring for the poor is a good work. However, it is not the only good work. It is not the only way that people can use their possessions to accomplish that which is beneficial or which honors the Lord. Mary had simply chosen to honor the Lord in a way different from what Judas and

the others thought best. But it was her possession and her money with which it had been purchased. It was her right to do with it as she chose.

Mary's act did not harm the apostles in any way. She was not in any way misusing anything that belonged to them. She had the right to do what she chose with her own, so long as she did nothing that was sinful or immoral – Acts 5:4. If so, others had no right to act as though she had done something wrong. We should be careful in our criticisms of the good works that other people do.

Then He predicted that the woman's simple and humble expression of love would be remembered throughout the world wherever the gospel is preached. And indeed that is exactly the case, for here is the record of it, and that record memorializes her act throughout the whole world. The very fact we are here reading this record demonstrates of itself that Jesus was a prophet able to accurately predict the future.

Jesus appreciates seemingly small and humble deeds when done according to His will from a sincere heart.

26:14-16 – Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests and asked what they would give him to deliver Jesus to them. They gave him thirty pieces of silver, so from then on he looked for opportunity to betray Him.

Judas' covetous greed was revealed in his thievery and his desire to obtain the value of the ointment for himself. Next we are told how this greed led him to betray His Master. Some have suggested that the incident regarding the oil that Mary used to anoint Jesus, combined with Jesus' rejection of Judas' objections, may have contributed to Judas' decision at this time to betray Jesus.

He went to the chief priests and asked what they would give him to betray Jesus to them. He evidently knew they wanted to capture Him. As an insider, he could lead them to Him at a time when they could quietly and privately achieve their aims.

They paid Judas thirty pieces of silver, just as prophesied in Zechariah 11:12,13. Thirty pieces of silver was the price of a slave – Exodus 21:32. From then on he looked for a good time to give Jesus to their purposes.

What a low scoundrel Judas here shows Himself to be! He had been with Jesus for about three years, had seen His great miracles and heard His great teachings. He had heard Him confessed to be the Christ, the Son of God. That He could willingly betray Jesus for such a paltry amount of money shows gross greed. He is rightly known through history as a symbol and a byword for traitors.

Modern efforts to excuse Judas from guilt are doomed to fail. It could possibly be, as some modern speculators imply, that Judas thought the Jews would not actually kill Jesus but only imprison or beat Him. Or maybe he thought Jesus could do some great miracle and escape His enemies. Or it could be that Judas thought this would begin the

conflict that would result in Jesus' victory. It is true that, after Jesus was condemned, Judas showed remorse.

But nothing can explain away the fact that Judas was already a thief. His greed was established fact. And He made no effort to discuss his plan with Jesus or get His approval. He may not have realized the full outcome, but he still betrayed His Lord and Master to satisfy his lust for money.

> "…Judas said to the Jewish priests: 'What will you give me if I hand him over to you?' … They do the same thing who accept sensual or worldly goods in exchange for handing over and casting out from their souls the Savior and Word of truth who came to dwell with them." – Origen (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

26:17-35 - The Passover and the Institution of the Lord's Supper

26:17-19 – On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples asked Jesus where He wanted them to prepare for the Passover. He told them to go into the city to a certain man and say the Teacher wanted to keep the Passover at his house. So the disciples obeyed and prepared the Passover.

The time of the Passover was growing closer, so the disciples asked where they should prepare a place for Jesus and His disciples to partake. He sent two disciples (Luke 22:8 says it was Peter and John) to find the place.

Mark 14:13-15 shows more detail in how they located the place. They were to go into the city and when they saw a man with a pitcher of water, they were to follow him. When he led them to his master, they were to ask that man for a place where Jesus and His disciples could keep the feast. He would show them a prepared upper room.

This is what was done. Note that many people came from out of town for the feast. All Jewish males were required to be present if possible. So the local people made places available for the visitors. It is possible, though, that Jesus knew this man. In any case, His ability to foretell how it would happen was surely another proof of His miraculous power.

26:20-25 – That evening, as He ate with the twelve, He said one of them would betray Him. They were sad and began to ask who it was. He said it was one who dipped his hand with Him in the dish. He would die as had been prophesied, but the man who betrayed Him would be better off never to have been born. Judas asked if he was the one, and Jesus said that he had said it.

Jesus predicted the betrayal.

The evening came when the Passover meal was to be eaten. This was the same evening when Jesus would later be betrayed, then on the next day He would be crucified as the story proceeds to show (compare 1 Corinthians 11:23).

Present with Jesus were the twelve apostles. John's account says that Judas left after Jesus made the statement that one of them would betray Him, so it is possible that He was not present when the Lord's Supper was instituted.

As they ate the meal Jesus said quite plainly that one of the apostles would betray Him. Judas had, of course, already agreed to do it (verses 14-16). Jesus here showed again that He knew exactly what was going to happen. He knew He had to die, but the one who betrayed Him still must bear His guilt for His wrongdoing. He would have been better off had he never been born. No attempt to make Judas out to be innocent, let alone a hero, can possibly be harmonized with statements such as this.

The disciples began each one to ask if he was the one to do this terrible thing. Jesus said it was one of them who ate from the very dish from which He was eating. This showed the hypocrisy of one who could so intimately associate with Jesus and then proceed to betray Him.

When Judas asked if he was the one, Jesus gave an affirmative that showed He knew who it was. The expression, "You have said it," was an expression of affirmation like when we say, "You said it."

John's account adds that Jesus identified the betrayer even further. John asked Jesus who would betray Him. Jesus said it was the one to whom He was about to give a sop from the table. Then He gave it to Judas. He told Judas to do quickly what He was about to do, but the apostles did not understand what He meant (John 13:21-30).

Jesus would be betrayed by one of His most intimate companions. Jesus had chosen Judas, taught him, proved His power before him, and gave him every opportunity to know the truth and do right. Yet Judas betrayed him. Sometimes in this life we are betrayed by those closest to us. Sad as such events may be, we must be willing to endure even as Jesus did.

God uses evil men to accomplish God's purpose.

Note that the fact God knew who would do this does not mean that He compelled that person or predestined him to do it. God knew from

the beginning how the Jews would treat Jesus and how Judas would act. Because He knew the character of these people, He used them for His purposes. But He did not make them choose to be evil. He did not violate their free will.

These men were already evil (in Judas' case this is clear from the fact He was a thief – John 12:6). This was their choice. It was the result of Satan's influence on them (Luke 22:3). But knowing the kind of people they were, God dealt with them in such a way that their evil character led them to do what God foreknew would happen. Evil men, when treated with love and goodness, will often react with evil and malice. Such was the case here. Jesus did nothing but good to Judas, yet Judas turned against him because of his own evil character.

Furthermore, Judas clearly demonstrates the Bible truth that God sometimes uses wicked men to accomplish God's purposes. God not only foreknew and predicted that Judas would betray Jesus, but the death of Jesus was all part of God's plan for the salvation of man. But it required wicked men to accomplish the deed. This included the wickedness of Judas and of the Jewish leaders and many Jewish people. God foreknew the wickedness of these people and used them for His purpose, but did not compel them to become evil.

26:26 – As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples. He said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

Matthew's account then records the institution of the Lord's Supper. Compare the parallel accounts in Mark 14:12-31; Luke 22:7-30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; see also John 16:20ff.

During the Passover meal, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave to the disciples, giving it a new and unique significance unknown under the Old Testament law. He said they should eat it in memory of His body.

"Bread" here must refer to unleavened bread.

This necessarily follows because this was the feast of unleavened bread (verse 17). At the Passover no leaven was even allowed to be in the house, let alone eaten in the meal Exodus 12:8,15-20. Exodus 23:18 says the blood of sacrifices must not be offered with leavened bread.

There is a symbolic reason for this. The bread represents Jesus' body, and leaven often represents sin (Amos 4:5; Luke 12:1; Matthew 16:6-12; Mark 8:15; Galatians 5:9). To be our perfect sacrifice, Jesus had to be without sin. So, only unleavened bread can properly symbolize His body. Note carefully Jesus as our Passover and leaven as a symbol of sin in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8.

Jesus then blessed the bread.

Luke and Paul say He gave thanks (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24). Different accounts use different terms in the original language, showing

that the different terms are used interchangeably. Gave thanks is also the expression used regarding the fruit of the vine. So, the blessing refers to giving thanks. But in giving thanks there is the further idea of asking God's blessing on a thing, to pray that He will bless it to a special, consecrated use.

This does not mean some miraculous change occurs, but simply that God is thanked and asked to help accomplish the purpose intended. The same expression is used for prayers before other meals and on other occasions: Matthew 5:44; 14:19; Mark 6:41; 8:7; 10:16; Luke 2:28; 24:30,53; etc. Yet nothing in these passages would imply that some miraculous change occurred in the meal.

> "Bless" (ευλογεω) – "... 1 to say someth. commendatory, *speak well of, praise, extol* ... 2 to ask for bestowal of special favor, esp. of calling down God's gracious power, *bless* ... a upon pers. τινα *bless someone* ... b upon things, which are thereby consecrated τι *bless, consecrate* ... 3 to bestow a favor, *provide with benefits...*" – *Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.*

Then He broke the bread.

This expression is used a number of times in the Bible to refer to a meal, whether a common meal or the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42). The context must determine what meal is referred to.

Some authors comment that this refers to the custom of one who presides over a feast breaking the bread to symbolize the beginning of the meal (the nature of the bread was such that breaking it was more appropriate than slicing it).

However, Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:16,17 imply that each individual who partakes "breaks" bread. This would indicate that "breaking" bread is an expression for partaking of the bread, or at least that it does not matter who does the physical breaking. If each person takes a piece and eats it, that constitutes breaking bread.

"This is my body."

Jesus then gave to the disciples and told them to eat because "This is my body." Luke and Paul add "which is given (broken) for you. This do in remembrance of me." This shows that it was a memorial to His death. Of course, He had not died yet. The fact He did this was prophetic of the fact He was about to die.

Also, this shows that He intended them to continue to do this after He died, for how else could they do it in His memory? That this was His intent is also clear from 1 Corinthians 11 and the practice of the early church as guided by the apostles (Acts 2:42; 20:7; etc.). This shows clearly that Jesus was here instituting a practice which He intended to be regularly repeated in the future.

The fact the body is broken or given for us shows that the reason we should partake is that it was a sacrifice for us. He gave His body, His life,

on the cross to save us from our sins. If He gave His life for us, then we ought to appreciate it. And if we appreciate it, then we will not neglect the memorial which He ordained for us to remember that death.

Note the appropriateness of the Passover feast and Passover lamb as the symbol of Jesus' death. God often established memorials for great events in the history of His affairs with His people, and often those memorials took the form of feasts. The New Testament does not continue the Passover or other Old Testament feasts as such. But it does give us a new feast, that of the Lord's Supper.

Some contend that "This is my body" means the bread miraculously became Jesus' literal flesh and blood body (transubstantiation).

The Catholic Church teaches:

> "The Holy Eucharist is the Sacrament in which Jesus Christ is really and physically present under the appearances of bread and wine ... [T]he appearances of the bread and wine (taste, smell, color, size, shape, weight) did not change, even though the bread and wine were actually changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. The substance of the bread and wine are changed into the substance of the body and blood of Jesus. This change is called transubstantiation.
>
> "When does the priest change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus? At Mass, when he says, 'This is my Body. This is My Blood.'" – *Catechism*, pp. 69-76.

So, in the mass when the priest says, "This is my Body. This is My Blood," a miracle occurs and the bread and cup turn into the literal, physical, actual flesh and blood of Jesus. However, to the physical senses the elements still seem in every way to be bread and fruit of the vine exactly as before.

However:

(1) *The sacrifice of Jesus was not to be repeated*: Hebrews 7:26,27; 9:24-28; 10:1-4,9,10,18.

The Catholic concept of communion has Jesus being sacrificed repeatedly to God. This flatly contradicts the Bible. (Compare Hebrews 9:11,12; 1 Peter 3:18.)

Some may claim that the mass is repeated in an unbloody way. If so, then what is in the cup must ***not*** be the real, physical blood of Jesus! How can it be an ***unbloody*** sacrifice if it is His physical blood? Further, if it is unbloody, then it is ***not*** the ***same*** sacrifice that Jesus offered, as Catholics claim. And finally, there is no point in an unbloody sacrifice, for without the shedding of blood there is no remission – Hebrews 9:22.

(2) *Jesus could not have acted as priest to offer a sacrifice on earth before He died*: Hebrews 8:4; 7:12-14.

Jesus could not be a priest while the Old Law was in effect, because He was of the tribe of Judah and priests of tribes other than Levi were forbidden under the Law. For Him to be a priest, the law first had to be changed, but this did not happen until He died (9:15,16; Colossians 2:14; etc.).

(3) *The doctrine of the Mass contradicts the nature of true miracles*.

When Jesus said, "This is my body. This is my blood," His physical body was present before them. If He turned the elements into His literal body and blood, He performed a miracle (which is what the Catholics say He did). Likewise, for priests today to change literal bread and wine into literal flesh and blood would take a miracle: this would mean that miracles are continually being accomplished every time the Mass is sacrificed.

However, consider the characteristics of true miracles. The purpose of true miracles was to confirm new revelations as being from God. No miracle was performed unless this purpose was served (compare Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; Hebrews 2:3,4; John 20:30,31; etc.). But what new revelation is being confirmed by 2000 years of continually sacrificing the mass?

With true miracles there was always obvious physical evidence that the miraculous event really had occurred. People were never asked to believe that a miracle had occurred contrary to the evidence of their physical senses. Instead, they were always able to observe that what was claimed as a miracle really had occurred. This was essential in order to accomplish the purpose of miracles.

For example, in John 2:1-11 Jesus turned water to wine. The result had all the physical properties of wine. It looked and tasted like wine because it really was wine. It no longer had the physical properties of water. In the mass we are asked to believe just the opposite of what our senses tell us. We are told that bread and fruit of the vine have literally become flesh and blood despite the fact that in every way they admittedly appear to still be bread and fruit of the vine. This contradicts the true nature of Biblical miracles.

The fact is that miracles are no longer occurring today because the purpose of miracles has been fulfilled, so they ceased to be practiced when the Scriptures were completed. Miracles occurred to confirm the word while it was being revealed through prophets who were directly guided by God. When the message had been fully revealed, the miraculous powers ceased (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). This happened in the lifetime of the original apostles (John 14:26; 16:13; Jude 3; James 1:25). So, no one today can do any miracle, let alone the miracle of the mass.

(4) *If the elements become literal flesh and blood, the participants would be guilty of the grossest form of cannibalism and blood drinking*.

The Old Testament was still in effect when Jesus instituted the communion. Catholics claim He had His disciples drink His literal blood. But under this law, drinking blood was absolutely forbidden, especially the blood of the sacrifices (Leviticus 17:6-14). Had the apostles any idea that they were drinking literal blood, they would surely have objected. According to Acts 15:29, drinking literal blood still violates God's law. So, it would still be forbidden today.

Further, if people are eating Jesus' literal flesh, that would be cannibalism in which people are eating their own God! Who can imagine a God that can be eaten and still be God? Even heathen do not claim to eat their own god as a form of worship.

(5) *There is no special priesthood to offer such a sacrifice today*.

Catholics claim that the power to perform this miraculous mass was passed on from the apostles to present-day priests. But the Bible denies there is such a special priesthood as the Catholics claim.

All Christians are priests (1 Peter 2:5,9; Revelation 1:6). We all offer spiritual sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15). There is only one mediator between God and man and that mediator is Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). No mere human stands as mediator whom we need in order to be able to worship God.

There is no evidence that the apostles handed down any authority to anyone except in two ways: (1) Their written word, the New Testament, authorizes us to obey God, but that is for all of us to read and obey (2 Timothy 3:16,17; Acts 17:11). (2) They laid hands on people to give them miraculous powers, but those who had received these powers could not in turn pass them on to others – Acts 8:14-24.

Catholicism argues that Jesus gave the apostles power to do this miracle when He said to them at the institution of communion, "This do in remembrance of me." But this still would not authorize them to pass the power to others.

"This do…" is not talking about performing a miraculous change of the bread and wine. Jesus did not do such a thing and was surely not telling the apostles to do it. He was simply telling them the purpose for which they were to "do" the eating and drinking: they were to do it in remembrance of Him. This is proved by the parallel passage in 1 Corinthians 11:25,26 in which Paul applied Jesus' statement to the Christians in Corinth telling them to "do" the drinking and eating in Jesus' remembrance.

(6) *Jesus Himself identified the cup to be "fruit of the vine" after He said it was His blood.*

In Matthew 26:28 Jesus said, "This is my blood." But afterward in verse 29 He called it "this fruit of the vine." To be consistent, Catholics would have to accept both statements as literally true. But how could it be literally His blood (verse 28) and at the same time be literally fruit of the vine (verse 29)? Did it change from fruit of the vine to literal blood

in verse 28, and then change back again to literal fruit of the vine in verse 29?

Paul made similar statements in 1 Corinthians 11. After the bread and cup had been blessed (verses 23-25), he repeatedly referred to them as "bread and cup" (verses 26-28).

(7) *The communion with Jesus' body and blood is spiritual in nature.*

1 Corinthians 10:16 says we are communing with the body and blood of Jesus in the bread and cup. Verse 18 compares this to Israel eating sacrifices under the Old Testament. This is called "communion" with the altar. But they did not eat the literal altar when they had communion with it. They ate literal animals, but this was spiritual communion with the altar.

Verse 20 says people who ate meat offered to idols had "communion" with demons. But were they literally eating the demons? No. They ate physical meat, but in so doing they communed with the demons (idols).

The parallel language necessarily means that, in the Lord's Supper, we eat and drink literal bread and fruit of the vine, but in so doing we spiritually commune with the body and blood (see below).

(8) *The bread and fruit of the vine are not literally Jesus' body and blood, but they are memorials that spiritually remind us of His body and blood.*

The Bible contains numerous figures of speech in which one thing is said to "be" another thing. These are not meant to be taken literally, but are expressions in which the one thing symbolizes the other.

Genesis 41:26,27 – In explaining Pharaoh's dreams, Joseph said the seven good cows and the seven good ears of grain "are" seven years of plenty, etc. They were symbols that signify or represent years.

John 15:1,5; 10:7,9 – Jesus said, "I am the vine," "My Father is the vinedresser," "you [disciples] are the branches." Again, "I am the door of the sheep." Are these literal statements? No, but these physical items are symbols which have spiritual meaning.

We use similar language. I show you a picture and say, "This is my wife." The picture is literally paper, but it is a representation that reminds me of my wife. Yet when I say it ***is*** my wife, no one misunderstands.

The kind of language we are studying is especially common in Bible memorials, especially in the institution of memorials.

The Passover (Exodus 12:11-14) – Speaking of the lamb that was slain, Moses said, "It is the Lord's Passover." Literally? No, the actual Passover was God's act of passing over the Israelites and not slaying their firstborn when He slew the firstborn of the Egyptians. The eating of the lamb was an annual feast to remember God's act of passing over the firstborn. But Moses said of the lamb, "It is the Passover."

This language is typical in memorials and is the same kind of language Jesus used in the Lord's Supper, which was likewise a memorial, and which was in fact instituted when He and His disciples were keeping the Passover. The disciples would understand because they were familiar with the language of the Passover. He said, "This is my body. This is my blood," but it was really a memorial of His body and blood.

Circumcision (Genesis 17:9-11) – God told Abraham regarding the act of circumcision: "This is my covenant." Was circumcision the literal covenant? No, the covenant itself was God's promise to bless Abraham's descendants as described in verses 1-8. Circumcision was the ***sign*** (token – ASV) of the covenant (verse 11), but verse 10 said of it, "This is my covenant."

Compare Luke 22:20 – In the Lord's Supper, Jesus said of the cup, "This is the ***new covenant*** in my blood." Is this literal? No more so than circumcision was the literal covenant with Abraham. The language means that it was a ***sign.*** Physically it was still fruit of the vine, but it was a spiritual memorial of the covenant.

Baptism – Baptism is a physical act using a physical element with a spiritual meaning. The ***physical*** element is water (Acts 8:35-39; 10:47,48). The physical act is immersion in water and a resurrection from that water (Acts 8:35-39; Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12; etc.).

But the ***spiritual*** meaning of baptism is that we are coming in contact with Jesus' death, so our sins are washed away or forgiven by His blood. We die to sin and are raised to walk in a new life, and as a result we come into Christ (Romans 6:3-11; Colossians 2:12; Acts 2:38,47; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:27).

Should we think that the physical immersion in water is literally, physically washing away sins, or that we physically come in contact with Jesus' blood, or that physically we are dying and being born again? No, that was the mistake Nicodemus made (John 3:3-5). The outer act is a representation or symbol of what is happening spiritually (1 Peter 3:21). To understand this does not belittle the spiritual meaning but simply recognizes the difference between the physical and the spiritual.

Likewise, the Lord's Supper consists of physical acts using physical elements with a spiritual meaning. The elements are the bread and fruit of the vine, and the acts are eating the bread and drinking the fruit of the vine. There are spiritual meanings of these acts. They are a memorial to Jesus' body and blood, a communion with His body and blood, in which we proclaim and discern His death (1 Corinthians 11:23-29; 10:16,17; etc.).

Shall we conclude, as some do, that the elements must become Jesus' physical body and blood, and we must physically eat and drink His body and blood in order to have the proper meaning? No, that would be as big a mistake as saying the act of washing in water can physically

wash away sin or that baptism must be a physical washing in Jesus' literal blood.

The eating bread and drinking fruit of the vine are symbols of the spiritual meaning. To say this does not belittle the spiritual meaning, but simply recognizes the difference between he physical and the spiritual.

26:27 – Jesus then took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them saying all of them should drink of it.

Next Jesus took the cup.

Significance of the "cup": container or contents? How many?

The "cup" is an expression referring, not to the ***container***, but to the contents: the ***element*** or ***substance*** that was in the container. This was "fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29).

Those who argue that the container is significant, and each congregation must use only one container, misunderstand the fact that Jesus referred to the ***contents***, the element. This is clear from the following considerations:

(1) In verse 26, Jesus took the "bread": the element itself, not a container. In verse 23 He took the "cup." The parallel language shows that we should understand that the language refers to the element. The nature of the fruit of the vine is such that it must have a container, but the significance of Jesus' teaching refers, not to the container, but to the contents. (The same point can be made from 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 and the other passages.)

(2) The parallel can be extended by seeing how Jesus continued to refer to the element, not to the container:

Regarding the bread, Jesus said: "bread," "it," "eat," "this" "my body." Clearly He referred throughout to the element.

Likewise, regarding the fruit of the vine, Jesus said: "cup," "drink," "it," "this," "my blood." Clearly Jesus referred throughout to the element, not to the container.

(3) Specifically, He took the "cup" and said, "***This*** is my ***blood***" "which is poured out for many for remission of sins." But it is the element – the contents, the fruit of the vine – that memorializes or represents the blood that saves from our sins. The container does not represent the blood.

(4) Further, He continued to say, "I will not drink of this ***fruit of the vine*** from now on…" So, throughout Jesus' statements regarding "the cup," He referred to the element, the contents. "The cup" (Matthew 26:27) is "this fruit of the vine" (verse 29). No emphasis or significance is anywhere given to the container or the number of containers.

Other passages regarding the Lord's Supper confirm this point:

(5) Matthew 26:28 shows that those who drink "the cup" are the "many" who receive remission of sins by the blood. 1 Corinthians

10:16,17 confirms this and shows that "we" bless the cup and we all break the one bread. Just as there is one "cup," so there is one "bread," and ***all who are in the body*** drink that cup and break that bread.

But this includes all Christians everywhere in the world, since all are in the one body. Specifically, Paul was not at Corinth nor was he a member of the church there, but he included the Corinthians and himself as the "we" who are in the body that blesses the cup.

So, it is the same "cup" in all the many congregations everywhere in the world, despite the fact that many different containers are used. The significance is the element, not the container. And the number of containers does not matter. Otherwise, the conclusion would be, not that each congregation must use one container, but that all congregations everywhere in the whole world must use the same container!

(6) Again, 1 Corinthians 10:16 says the "cup" is the "communion of Jesus' blood," just as the "bread" is the "communion of His body." But the parallel between these two expressions shows that the reference is to the elements. The bread is the element and the cup is the element: the fruit of the vine. Further, it is the fruit of the vine, not the container, which is the communion of Jesus' blood.

(7) 1 Corinthians 10:16,21 – The expression "cup of the Lord" is like the expression "table of the Lord." Is the "table" the physical structure on which the elements sit, or is it the elements, the meal itself? If we can understand that "the table of the Lord" refers, not to the physical structure on which the meal sits but to the meal itself, then why can't we see in the same way that the "cup of the Lord" refers, not to the container, but to the contents?

(8) 1 Corinthians 10:21 and 1 Corinthians 11:26-29 say we "eat the bread" and "drink the cup of the Lord." Do we drink the container or the contents? If "the cup" is the container, after the first person "drinks the cup (container)," and we send him to the hospital to have it removed, what does the next person "drink"? If we all "drink the cup (container)," we would have to have plural containers so we would all have something to "drink"! When we eat the bread, we eat the element. Likewise, when we drink the cup, we drink the element: the contents, not the container.

(9) In Luke 22:17 Jesus took a cup and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves." When they divided "the cup," did they divide the container or the contents?

When Jesus referred to the "cup," He referred to the contents, the element, the fruit of the vine, not the container. There is no spiritual significance to the container nor to the number of containers.

Compare this to our expressions: "Lasagna is my favorite ***dish***." "I just loved that ***book***" (not the container, but the contents, the story).

When people insist that the cup refers to the literal container, they make the same mistake that people do when they insist that the bread and fruit of the vine become Jesus' literal body and blood. Both

viewpoints take symbolic memorial language and insist that it must be taken literally and physically. And in both cases serious misunderstandings result.

Jesus then "gave thanks" for the cup and gave it to the disciples.

See above for notes on "blessing" the bread.

"Drink ye all of it" (KJV – Matthew's account)

What does this mean? It does not mean they were to drink all of the element, but that all of them were to drink the element. "Drink of it, all of you" (ESV and see other translations). Mark's account says they all drank from it.

But why did He say this and what is the application? The answer is found in the next verse (Matthew's account): All of them should drink it ***because*** ("for") it is His blood shed for many for remission of sins. ***All*** should drink because ***many*** benefit from it. The real point here is that ***Jesus wants everyone who receives forgiveness by His blood to remember His blood by drinking the fruit of the vine***.

Jesus is here showing that this memorial is ***not*** just for the twelve. We might not understand exactly what He meant or how we should put this into practice were it not for the other passages elsewhere that explain the early church's participation. Nevertheless, with the help of these other passages, we can see that His intent was to institute a practice to be continued in the future by all Jesus' disciples. This is the closest He comes, in the actual institution, to showing who should participate: the many who receive His forgiveness.

Similar language is used in 1 Corinthians 10:16,17: ***we*** who are ***many all*** break the one bread. Again the "many" and the "all" refer to the same group. The point is that all who are in the one body should break the bread and bless the cup. But the body consists of all who are saved by Jesus (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:3-6; 5:23,25). So, again, all who are saved should commune in this memorial. (And remember this means all Christians everywhere in the world, not just everyone in a local congregation, since Paul said "we" while writing to the Corinthians, though he was not part of that congregation.)

The word "many" is used frequently in the gospel to refer to all those who will be saved by the blood of Jesus. Here are a few other examples: Matthew 20:28; Isaiah 53:11,12; Hebrews 2:10; 9:28; Romans 5:15,19; 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12.

These passages, together with the practice of the early church as guided by inspired men, shows that Jesus statement "Drink ye all…" meant that He wants all people everywhere who are saved by His blood – all who are members of His body, the church – to partake of this memorial (compare Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Yet despite

this clear command from the Master, for many years the Catholic Church refused to allow people in general to drink the fruit of the vine.

Other information about when and where Christians should have the Lord's Supper is provided in other passages. The main point here is that Jesus wants all His saved people to participate in the memorial. When, how often, and where are not discussed here.

26:28 – For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

See notes on verse 27 for some observations on this verse.

The cup is a memorial to Jesus' blood. As the bread reminds us of His body, so the fruit of the vine reminds us of His blood. This blood is the blood of the new covenant. The gospel is called the new covenant in that it replaced the old covenant made with Moses at Mt. Sinai (Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17).

The blood of Jesus is the blood that established the new covenant just like animal blood dedicated the old covenant (Hebrews 9:11-10:18; Exodus 24:7,8). His blood is shown throughout the New Testament to be necessary to our salvation or remission of sins. Blood must be shed for us to be saved (Hebrews 9:22) because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Shedding of blood is an expression for death because the life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:10-16).

Jesus here stated plainly, not just that He would die, but the reason why He had to die: to save others from their sins. His sacrifice was the perfect sacrifice by which we are forgiven (1 Peter 2:21-24; 1:18,19; John 3:16; etc.). Because He died to save us, we must remember His blood in the Lord's Supper.

Jesus said that His blood would be shed for many "for the remission of sins." Without doubt everyone realizes this means that His blood was shed in order that people might receive remission of sins, not because they already had it. Yet this exact same language is used in Acts 2:38 to teach that all should repent and be baptized "for the remission of sins." This demonstrates that baptism is a condition people must meet in order to receive forgiveness, not because they already have it.

26:29 – Jesus then said that He would not drink of this fruit of the vine from then on until the day that He drank it new with them in the Father's kingdom.

This shows, as stated earlier, that the fruit of the vine had not miraculously changed to the literal blood of Jesus. It was still literally fruit of the vine.

Fruit of the vine

The original text literally says "fruit of the vine." The vine clearly refers to the grape vine. This is the significance of the "vine" in the Bible,

and the drinks used in the Passover meal were from the grape vine. So, the reference is to the juice of grapes.

Some argue that the element used must be fermented wine (or may be fermented). But the word "wine" is nowhere used in the New Testament to refer to the element of the Lord's Supper. The element is described as "fruit of the vine." (And even if the word "wine" was used it would not necessarily be fermented, since "wine" in the Bible refers to the juice of grapes whether fermented or not fermented.)

Some claim that the Jews had no means to preserve grape juice unfermented at this time of year. This is a secular argument, not a Bible argument. But there is much secular evidence that ancient people, including Jews, knew several ways to preserve grape juice unfermented. In his comments, Pope lists a number of ancient authors who document various ways ancient people used to avoid fermentation. Interestingly, Pope personally tried two of these methods and proved that they could successfully preserve grape juice unfermented without refrigeration for a year and a half.

The Jews were instructed to have absolutely no leaven in their homes at the Passover (see verses above on unleavened bread). Leaven is not appropriate in that which symbolizes Jesus. But yeast (leaven) is what ferments grape juice to wine. This would seem to indicate that alcoholic wine should not be used in the Lord's Supper. (See similar reasoning in Pope's comments, who also quotes Chumbley.)

There is no reason to conclude that the "fruit of the vine" should be fermented. To use modern fermented wine would be a great danger to reformed alcoholics who must not drink alcohol at all or they will be immediately addicted again. It would also tempt others to sin.

Jesus said He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until He drank it with them in the kingdom (note that His "drinking" is not physical). The point seems to be that, when Jesus' disciples drink the cup in the Lord's Supper, Jesus is spiritually fellowshiping us as we drink. If this is correct, since the Lord's Supper is taken in the church, this is another proof that the church is the kingdom.

Drinking it "new" is taken by some to mean it must be new fruit of the vine or non-alcoholic. I do not favor use of alcoholic wines, but it seems to me more likely that Jesus meant the ***partaking*** would be "new," rather than the ***element*** must be new. He would drink it in a new manner, different from the Old Testament Passover. It has a new significance in the kingdom as compared to the Passover in which the disciples had just engaged.

That day

What is referred to by "that day"? "Day" can refer to the daylight period or to the 24-hour day. But used in the singular, according to context, it can simply mean a period of time when something of

significance happens: John 8:56; Hebrews 8:9; Ephesians 6:13; 2 Corinthians 6:2.

In particular the expression "that day" can refer to a period of time of unstated or unlimited duration: Luke 6:23; John 14:16-20; 16:23-26. It is often so used in Old Testament prophecy. It seems to have this significance even regarding the "day" of Jesus' return as "that day."

Luke's account (22:18) does not even use the phrase "that day," but says simply "until the kingdom of God come." This would indicate no particular 24-hour period is meant, but simply the time when the kingdom comes.

Acts 20:7 (as confirmed by other passages) establishes that the first day of the week is the day for the Lord's Supper. But it seems to me to stretch Matthew 26:29 and Mark 14:25 to argue that "that day" refers to the first day of the week. "That day" never, to my knowledge, refers in prophecy to any particular day of the week as distinct from other days of the week. The explanation given above is the more natural sense, it seems to me.

26:30 – When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Having completed the Passover meal and the instructions regarding the memorial to Jesus' death, the disciples sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.

This is interesting. Even though the Old Law was still in effect, it is interesting that they sang: no indication of an instrument of music. This would be appropriate since all gospel teachings regarding music in worship say simply "sing." There is no evidence of instruments in any passage regarding New Testament worship in the church. Having ordained the Lord's Supper, Jesus did not lead them back to Old Testament worship with instruments. Also the language implies it was group singing. "They" sang. It was not one or two singing to the others.

26:31,32 – Jesus then said that all of them would stumble that night because of Him as had been prophesied: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered." But after Jesus had been raised, He would go before them to Galilee.

Jesus predicted that they would stumble because of Him.

Jesus had earlier predicted one of them would betray Him. Here He told them they would all stumble. He was trying to get them to see the great significance of the events before them. He knew all about it ahead of time, but they had no comprehension of the magnitude of what they were facing.

The effect of these warnings would be to prepare them and perhaps also give them evidence so that, after all these events did occur, they could look back and see that He had known and expected what would

happen. This should strengthen their faith after they finally did understand.

The disciples had faith that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 16:13-17). But they had a false concept of the Messiah. They expected an earthly king who would win great military battles over the Romans and lead the nation into a great earthly kingdom. But Jesus knew He would be taken captive without a struggle and would give up His life without attempting to stop it. This would completely confuse the disciples, so they would stumble and would desert Him.

This would fulfill Zechariah 13:7. When a shepherd is killed, the sheep are scattered. In the same way, when Jesus died, the disciples would be lost, frightened, and confused like sheep without a shepherd (compare John 16:32). This was all fulfilled later in this account, just as Jesus predicted.

Jesus further predicted, however, that their stumbling and His death would not be the end. He would yet be raised from the dead and would proceed before them to Galilee (compare Matthew 28:7,10,16ff). They probably also did not understand this. Nevertheless, after telling them the bad news, He encouraged them with the good news. We should remember to do this too for people we must rebuke or warn about sin.

Sometimes other people stumble because God's people do right.

Jesus had warned us not to be guilty of causing others to stumble (Matthew 18:6,7). Yet here He said His own conduct would cause others to stumble. We are not necessarily in sin just because other people stumble over our conduct. The difference is that Jesus was doing what was right and necessary according to God's will.

Many verses show that, when Jesus and His disciples obeyed God's requirements, other people stumbled because they did not know what was right or did not care. This refers to people who are in error stumbling at someone who does right. This should not change our determination to do God's will. (1 Peter 2:3-8)

However, what Jesus had forbidden is conduct in which we participate, not because God requires it, but simply because we want to do it, yet other people who are trying to do right are caused to stumble as a result. This is conduct we do that is wrong of itself or at least unnecessary, yet it causes sin among people who would otherwise not have sinned. This is what God forbade.

26:33-35 – Peter declared that he would never stumble even if everybody else did so. Jesus predicted that Peter would deny Him three times that very night before the rooster would crow. Peter affirmed again that even if he had to die with Jesus, he would not deny Him. And all the disciples said the same.

Impetuous and self-confident as ever, Peter boldly declared that, no matter how many other people stumbled over Jesus, nothing would ever make him stumble. Later, in direct contradiction to a plain statement from Jesus, he said he would even die for Jesus.

These are bold words, but much easier said than done. 1 Corinthians 10:12 – Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. We need to take heed. Many make bold professions of what they would do in God's service. We may be convinced we will do what is right and not fall into error. Yet when the time of temptation comes, it is not nearly as easy to do as it was to talk about.

Jesus plainly predicted that Peter would betray Him three times that very night. What a bold and powerful response Jesus gave in return to Peter! He did not just say Peter would stumble, as He had said before, but that in fact He would deny Him. And it would happen not just once, but three times. And it would happen not just sometime, but that very night before the rooster crowed. It was a very explicit and powerful prophecy. It was, of course, precisely fulfilled as recorded later.

But let us learn some lessons from Peter. His error is now obvious to us, but it would not have been at the time had we been in his shoes. There was truth in his statements. He would have fought to the death for Jesus, and he attempted to do so – John 18:10.

The problem came when he did not understand what Jesus was doing. When he saw Jesus surrender without a fight, Peter apparently lost faith. This shows us the importance of understanding truth. Courage and boldness are needed. But bold and courageous as we might be, if we don't understand what God expects, we will lose heart in time of hardship.

In contrasting Matthew 26:34; John 13:38; Luke 22:31-34 to Mark 14:30, we see that Matthew's account predicts three denials "before the cock crows," but Mark has "before the cock crows twice." This difference in prophecy is paralleled in the accounts of the fulfillment (compare Matthew 26:74,75 to Mark 14:68,72; Luke 22:60,61; John 18:27).

There is no contradiction. The cocks would crow twice in the night, around midnight and then again around morning. The midnight one had no particular significance, so people ignored it. The morning crowing signaled the beginning of day; it had significance to people, so it is "the cock crowing" – i.e., the important one (compare Mark 13:35). John and Matthew spoke only of the morning one, while Mark recorded both.

26:36-56 – The Garden of Gethsemane and Jesus' Arrest

Compare Mark 14:32-52; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-11.

26:36-38 – Arriving at Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples to sit there while He went and prayed elsewhere. But He took Peter, James, and John. He began to be very sorry and distressed and asked them to stay there and watch with Him.

Jesus and His disciples had now concluded the Passover supper and crossed the Kidron to the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:30). Here was a garden (what we would call a "park") called Gethsemane (meaning "oil press"). (See ***map.***) Jesus often went there to pray and meditate.

He was facing great hardship and trial. He knew what was coming, for He had repeatedly predicted it. Hard as the events of the next day would be, imagine how exceedingly more difficult it would be to know it all ahead of time! He needed time to pray and be strengthened for the ordeal to come.

He asked the disciples to stay while He went further on to pray. He took Peter, James, and John with Him: the three who had often accompanied Him at special times. He asked them to watch with Him, because He was deeply grieved.

Matthew says Jesus was sorrowful and deeply distressed. "Sorrowful" is also translated "grieved" (NASB, NRSV). "Deeply distressed" (NKJV) is also translated "very heavy" (KJV), "sore troubled" (ASV, MLV) and "agitated" (NRSV). He said that His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. The burden He felt was so great that it was as though it would kill Him. How tragic for our Lord to face this!

Matthew adds that He asked the disciples to pray to avoid temptation. This required them to keep awake, but we will see that they failed. He was greatly concerned about the trials of the future and needed prayer. And He needed His disciples to be concerned with Him, pray, and give Him support.

If Jesus needed such support, surely we often need this kind of encouragement in our times of trial. We ought to remember also to pray for others in their times of trial, even as Jesus here requested that they pray for Him.

We recall that King David also came to the Mount of Olives at a time of sorrow and grief as he fled from the rebellion of his son Absalom (2 Samuel 15:30-32).

26:39 – Jesus went a little farther, and fell on his face and prayed: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Observations about prayer

Note that Jesus prayed frequently, but especially when facing trials and temptations. The accounts of His life are filled with examples of prayer: Luke 3:21; Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; 9:28,29; 11:1-13. Here Jesus prayed at the very time He was facing trial. He did not try to handle the problems without God's blessings. But neither did He pray to God only in time of trouble. He prayed throughout His life.

We too should pray continually, but especially when facing trials and temptations. James 5:13 – Is anyone suffering? Let him pray. Sometimes we face trials and hardship but fail to use the avenue of prayer. We try to handle the problems ourselves instead of casting them on God.

On the other hand, there is no sense going to God in time of trouble if that's about the only time we pray. "If we don't talk to God in fair weather, there's no sense calling on Him in a storm." Like Jesus, we should be people of prayer, and we can be assured He will hear when we call in trial. We can learn this from Gethsemane.

See also Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Acts 4:23ff; Acts 16:25; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Peter 5:7.

Content of Jesus' prayer

Jesus then left the disciples and prayed the prayer recorded here. He asked, if possible, the cup might pass from Him. What is the "cup"? John 18:11 and Matthew 20:22 use the term to refer to suffering and hardship, especially the hardship Jesus endured dying on the cross. Similar language is used in the Old Testament for those who suffered punishment at the hand of God (Isaiah 51:17).

The illustration refers to a person who must drink something bitter or terribly distasteful, maybe even poisonous. Jesus knew that ahead of Him were the suffering and grief of the cross. It is not clear in exactly what sense Jesus sought to avoid drinking the cup. He had already predicted repeatedly that He must die, so He knew that. Some commentators say it was simply His human nature seeking if the Father could find some way to eliminate or at least ease the hardship.

What was there about this act that was so difficult that Jesus so wanted to avoid it? No doubt the physical suffering was a serious problem. But Jesus had taught us not to fear that – Matthew 10:28.

It seems that the spiritual aspects of the sacrifice were what Jesus was especially dreading. His Father was about to allow Him to suffer as if He was a sinner. The close relationship He had shared with the Father from eternity was about to be marred as Jesus was punished as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind: 1 Peter 2:21-24; Isaiah 53:4-11;

Galatians 3:13; 1:4; 2:20; Ephesians 5:2,25; John 6:51; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 4:25; 5:6-8; 8:32; Hebrews 9:26-28; Matthew 20:28. See Matthew 27:46. Note Hebrews 12:1-4.

If this view is correct, then consider Jesus' great sorrow at knowing that His relationship with the Father was about to be impaired, even for a short period of time. He knew it would be restored soon after the cross, yet He was deeply grieved. Consider by comparison how lightly people sometimes take their alienation from God. They view it as having small consequence: "Well, God is a God of grace and forgiveness …" Some don't care enough to ever do what God said they must to make things right.

Yet as difficult as Jesus viewed this undertaking, He was obedient and submissive to the will of the Father. He said, "Not as I will, but as You will." No matter how difficult it was, no matter how much He would personally prefer to avoid the suffering, yet He was willing to endure it if the Father said it must be so. (John 6:38)

This should also be our attitude in prayer. We may ask for any Scriptural blessing we believe would be best, but we must realize that often we do not know what is best. God knows what we really need and what is best for everyone (Matthew 6:10). This is what we should pray for and seek to do.

We next ask whether Jesus received what He most desired and asked for in the prayer. The answer is that He did not. Yet He was willing to do the Father's will anyway. The same is true for us. God does promise to answer prayer, but only in accord with His supreme will and knowledge of what is needed by everyone involved. Sometimes He does not give what we request because it is not best. Sometimes He makes us wait and gives the blessing later. The faithful Christian must be like Jesus and accept God's will in such matters. Compare 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

Yet this does not prove that God does not answer prayer. Luke 22:43 says an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him. When God could not give exactly what Jesus ***wanted***, He gave what Jesus ***needed***. He could not remove Jesus' problem and still save us from sin, so He sent strength so Jesus could endure the problem. So God answered the prayer, but He did not give what Jesus asked for. The same is often true of our prayers. See also Hebrews 5:7.

Consider some lessons about obedience.

Hebrews 5:8,9 – Jesus learned ***obedience*** by things He suffered, and became author of salvation to all who ***obey*** Him. Before He came to earth, Jesus knew what obedience was, but had not ***experienced*** personally what it was like to have to obey. To be our compassionate High Priest, He needed to undergo this.

Suffering as in Gethsemane and Calvary taught Him the personal experience of what it means to be a humble servant. Now ***we*** need to obey Him as He obeyed the Father.

Jesus obeyed even when it required great sacrifice.

He obviously did not want to endure the cross, but He saw it through because we needed it for our salvation.

Matthew 26:53 – He could have called twelve legions of angels to deliver Him.

John 10:17,18 – No one took His life against His will, but He laid it down by His own choice. He had power to lay it down and power to take it again. So His death was an act of obedience and love for the Father and love for us, because He had a choice about it. Hard as it was, He made the sacrifice.

Acts 24:25 – Felix wanted to heed Paul's preaching when he had "a convenient season." This is what many of us want. We will obey when obedience is convenient, but not if it requires great sacrifice. Who ever said it would be ***easy*** or ***convenient***?

Romans 12:1 – Present your bodies a living ***sacrifice*** to serve God. Obedience is a sacrifice. There is no sacrifice in doing what we already want to do. We demonstrate real obedience only when we do what is really ***hard to do*** even though it really isn't what we would have wanted.

Further, Jesus obeyed even though He was treated unjustly.

John 18:38; 19:4,6 – At Jesus' trial, Pilate said three times that He found no fault in Jesus.

Matthew 27:19 – Pilate's wife sent a message saying Jesus was righteous. Pilate then washed his hands saying Jesus was innocent (27:24).

Luke 23:15 – Herod found nothing in Jesus worthy of death.

Matthew 27:4 – Judas, who betrayed Jesus, said He had betrayed innocent blood.

If ever a man suffered injustice and mistreatment, it was Jesus. He knew it would be that way, but He obeyed anyway. When we think we have been treated unfairly or unjustly, we often become negligent to God's will or we quit completely.

1 Peter 2:20-23 – Jesus' suffering was an example to us. He was mistreated, but continued to ***obey***. He did not use His mistreatment as an excuse to do what would displease God. This is the example we should imitate. We must take mistreatment patiently to be acceptable to God.

Revelation 2:10 – Jesus told the church at Smyrna they would suffer and be persecuted. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Jesus obeyed even when He stood alone.

Matthew 26:40,43,45 – He asked the disciples to watch and pray with Him, but they went to sleep.

Matthew 26:56 – When He was arrested, all the disciples forsook Him and fled.

Matthew 26:69-75 – As He was tried, Peter denied Him three times with cursing and swearing saying he did not know Him.

Jesus stood alone before the High Priests, before Pilate, and before Herod. He was alone among the soldiers when they scourged Him, mocked Him, slapped Him, spit on Him, and put the crown of thorns on Him. All this He foreknew as He prayed in Gethsemane, but He still said He would do His Father's will. And He did it.

It is so hard for us to do right when no one (or only a few people) stand with us. It is so much easier to be part of a crowd – the bigger, the better.

Matthew 7:13,14 – God's people have always been different, always been in the minority, and always will be.

Matthew 10:34-47 – If our family and loved ones oppose us, we have to decide whom we love most: them or Jesus. We must say, as Jesus did, "Not my will, but thine be done."

If Jesus could suffer like He did, sacrifice like He did, endure mistreatment like He did, and stand alone like He did – all of that so we could be saved from our sins – then why aren't we willing to suffer, sacrifice, be mistreated, stand alone, and still obey Him? The only way we can please Him is to be willing to obey no matter how hard the circumstances are.

26:40,41 – Jesus found the disciples asleep and asked Peter if he could not watch with Him one hour. Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak.

Other accounts record that Jesus' agony was so great that sweat fell from Him like great drops of blood. It does not say that He sweat blood, but the sweat ran so profusely that it was like blood running from a wound. Jesus truly dreaded what He was about to face. We need to appreciate the depth of His agony, remembering that He was suffering, not for anything He did, but for what we did.

Sleeping instead of praying

Jesus returned to the disciples only to find them asleep. He had asked them to watch with Him. Instead, they fell asleep. Luke 22:45 says they were sleeping for sorrow. They apparently did have some sorrow and sympathy for what He was suffering. But they did not really understand. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that they were not doing what the Lord had told them to do.

Sleep has its proper place. It is good and necessary at the proper times and places. Jesus slept, and even did so when His disciples wondered why He did it (Matthew 8:23-25). But there are times when

we ought to be doing other things besides sleeping, and this was one of those times.

Specifically, we cannot sleep and worship God at the same time. They were supposed to be watching and praying with Jesus, but they were sleeping instead. We cannot pray, sing, or study God's word while we sleep. When the church is gathered, we should be involved in worship activities.

Some may have health problems or may stay up all night working or may have other reasons that make sleep difficult to avoid during worship assemblies. Nevertheless, we should make a diligent effort to stay awake because people who sleep are not accomplishing the acts God commanded.

Note that this statement is addressed to Peter, perhaps because of Peter's rash promise of just a short time earlier. If Peter was unable to keep so simple a command as to stay awake and watch with Jesus, how can he be so sure he would never stumble or forsake Jesus?

Dealing with temptation

Further Jesus told them to watch and pray to avoid temptation. Doubtless, the disciples did not realize the temptation facing them. They were at the most difficult time of Jesus' work – the point requiring the greatest courage and strength. Even Jesus needed prayer to deal with it. He had asked them to watch and pray so they could be strong to face the temptations coming. Instead, they slept. Note again the importance of prayer at times of temptation.

Many passages teach us to watch vigilantly for temptation so we can avoid it and not fall into it: Proverbs 4:23; 6:27; 13:20; 22:3; Matthew 5:8; 6:13; 18:8,9; Romans 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:33; Genesis 39:7-12.

No one can altogether avoid facing temptations. Satan is sure to bring some temptation into our lives. Nevertheless, Christians need to avoid tempting circumstances as much as reasonably possible. We should not bring ourselves into temptation unnecessarily simply for the sake of our own pleasures. And we must also seek God's strength so we can deal with temptation when it comes.

The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak.

Compare Galatians 5:17; Romans 7:14-25. This shows Jesus understood the disciples' great desire to serve Him. They had professed that they would not stumble at Him, and they no doubt meant it. But it is not easy to do what we intend.

There is often a conflict between what we really intend to do for the Lord and what we end up doing because of weakness of the flesh. We may know what we should do and to some extent we want to do it. But when the time comes, we give in to desires of the body for things other than what we know we should do.

This is a general truth not limited to just their sleeping. In fact, Jesus may be using their immediate act as an example of the even greater errors to come yet that night. They were not watching and praying, and just as they were failing in that, so they would fail to stand by Him but would all forsake Him as He had prophesied.

26:42-46 – Jesus then prayed a second time saying that if the cup could not pass from Him unless He drank it, may the Father's will be done. He then found them asleep again so He left them and prayed the same words the third time. Then He came to the disciples and asked if they were still sleeping. He said the Son of Man was about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners.

Repeated prayer

The accounts show that Jesus prayed this prayer three times. Note that there is value in repeated prayer.

Matthew 6:7,8 – Jesus warned against "vain repetition." Some people think, if they pray long prayers, God will hear, or people will be impressed with how devout they are. But this is vain. The problem with vain repetitions is, not simply the fact that they are repeated, but that they are vain. People don't mean what they say or don't do it for the right reasons.

Yet here in Gethsemane, Jesus repeated the same prayer.

Luke 18:1-8 – Jesus told of a widow who went to a judge so continually that he granted her request. Jesus used this as an example showing we ought always to pray and not faint.

2 Corinthians 12:8 – Paul prayed three times about his thorn in the flesh.

So prayers that are sincerely meant may be repeated. The problem with ***vain*** repetition is that it is not ***meant*** or comes from a wrong ***motive***. In fact, repeating a prayer may show how ***sincerely*** we mean it: it is so important we emphasize it by repetition.

Note that this repetition of prayer shows that 1 Thessalonians 5:17 and such passages do not mean we must pray every second of every day. Even Jesus did not do that. There were times when He was praying and times when He was not. He even repeated prayer so it could be counted how many times He did it.

When He came to the disciples after the third time He prayed, He again asked them about their sleeping despite His plain instructions. He said the time of His betrayal was at hand. It was a time for alertness, not for sleep.

Some translations render this as a statement: Sleep on now. Perhaps this could be taken to mean that now His period of urgent need was over. He had prayed, received strength from the angel, and He was calmed and ready to proceed with the affairs of the evening, the betrayal,

etc. So He gave them permission to go ahead and sleep. Nevertheless, the rendering as a question makes more sense because He immediately proceeded to tell them to get up, etc.

26:47-50 – A multitude having swords and clubs, accompanied Judas from the chief priests and elders. According to a pre-agreed sign, Judas greeted Jesus with a kiss so they would know whom to seize. So they laid hands on Jesus and took Him.

Even while Jesus was telling the disciples He would be betrayed, Judas came with the chief priests and elders for the very purpose of doing what Jesus predicted. They were armed with swords and clubs, evidently expecting a fight. Like the disciples, they thought Jesus intended to be an earthly king by military might. They expected He and/or His disciples would put up a stiff resistance.

We may wonder how Judas knew where to find Jesus. John 18:2 says He often came to this place to pray. No doubt Judas expected it might be a good opportunity to deliver Jesus to the leaders away from the multitudes, which is exactly what the leaders wanted.

Judas had a sign arranged with the Jews. The one whom he would kiss would be Jesus. We may wonder why this was necessary. Why wouldn't the leaders themselves just recognize Jesus and take Him? Perhaps some of them did not know Him well enough to be sure. But the main point is probably that it was dark. Rather than take a chance that Jesus might escape among the crowd in the dark, they had a sign so Judas could lead them unquestionably to the right person.

Judas fulfilled his bargain, kissing Jesus as though in salutation. Doubtless this was intended to arouse little suspicion among Jesus and the other disciples, and yet give the necessary sign to the Jews. Yet the hypocrisy and deceit of the traitor is incredible. We are amazed that he could, with such two-faced audacity, betray the very one who had so kindly befriended him, taught him, and proved beyond doubt that He was from God (see notes on Judas' agreement to betray Jesus). Again, we have no doubt that Judas deserves to be the classic symbol of traitors and betrayers.

Jesus asked Judas, "Friend, why have you come?" He, of course, knew why. But like God in the Garden of Eden, He asked the question, not for information, but to make the sinner think about his deed.

According to Luke 22:48, Jesus asked Judas, "Betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?" So He knew the intent of the act. Perhaps Judas thought Jesus would not recognize the significance of his act. But Jesus knew even before the act was done. He addressed Judas in a way that would lay on Judas' conscience the guilt for what he had done.

McGarvey observed that Judas had no concept of the reputation he would earn by his act. The name of Judas has become known as a synonym for a traitor, and his kiss has become a symbol of betrayal.

Throughout the world and throughout history his name and his deed have been recorded in infamy.

John adds that Jesus also asked the Jews whom they were seeking and He told them who He was (18:4-9). His captors then fell to the ground. Perhaps this was to find shelter in preparation for the expected battle, or perhaps it was a result of their guilt. Here was one who was clearly beyond their conception. He was so open and frank, yet they came to seize and kill Him. John also adds that Jesus then asked again what they wanted, and asked them to let the disciples go free.

John adds that Jesus requested that the disciples be let go, thereby fulfilling prophecy that none of them would perish (18:8,9). But they did seize Jesus.

26:51,52 – One who was with Jesus drew his sword and struck off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Jesus told him to put his sword back because all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

The disciples thought that the time had come to fight to protect Jesus. One of them drew his sword and cut off the right ear of a servant of the high priest. John 18:10 shows that the disciple was Peter, and the servant was Malchus.

The disciples had thought all along it would come to a military fight. Peter had valiantly affirmed His willingness to give his life for Jesus. He here acted quite boldly by human standards, keeping His commitment.

Incredibly, however, from the disciples' viewpoint, Jesus did not urge on the fight, let alone take a lead in it. Quite the contrary, He rebuked Peter, telling him to put up his sword. Then He healed the one who had been wounded (Luke 22:51).

This is amazing, first in that here Jesus did a great miracle in the very presence of His enemies. Some modern "faith healers" often refuse to attempt miracles in the presence of their enemies. Yet despite seeing this miracle done in their very presence as they were in the midst of abusing Jesus, the Jews continued in their determination to arrest and kill Him. If they had hearts to receive the truth, they would have changed long before. This miracle did not change them, but it showed still further how inexcusable their conduct was.

In Matthew's account, Jesus gave a reason for stopping Peter: "All those who take the sword shall perish by the sword." Compare Genesis 9:6; Revelation 13:10. The general application seems to be that, if a man turns to physical violence to accomplish his purposes, he will probably end up having physical violence done to him. This rebuked, not just Peter, but also the men who were trying to do violence to Jesus. It also serves as a warning to all men.

This surely shows that Jesus' kingdom should not use physical force to accomplish its purposes. The disciples never afterward attempted to spread the kingdom by force (as Muslims do), nor even to protect

themselves when they were persecuted for their preaching or practicing of God's will (compare John 18:36). This application appears to be settled by the context.

It is not clear, however, whether Jesus' statement was intended to go beyond the specific present circumstances and rebuke all use of weapons or physical violence by God's people. Could we use them against people whose only crime is that they are part of an army at war? Could we use them in acting as police officers for the government (compare Romans 13:1-7)? Could we use them even in self defense? The answers to these other uses of force are not definitely settled by this context. (Note also Luke's account where Jesus had told them to provide themselves with swords.)

26:53,54 – Jesus stated that, if He prayed, the Father would provide Him with more than twelve legions of angels. But if so, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled?

Jesus then gave another reason why it was foolish for the disciples to use physical force to defend Him. There was absolutely no need for anyone to defend Him. All He needed to do was to ask and, instead of twelve disciples to defend Him (eleven not counting Judas), He would have twelve legions of angels.

The point is that the disciples apparently believed that somehow Jesus needed them to defend Him. In fact, they had been with Him long enough to know that His power was so great He needed no help (compare Acts 17:24,25). One word from Him and He could have destroyed all who opposed Him. (Compare the angels that surrounded Elisha when he was attacked by the Syrian army – 2 Kings 6:17.)

The disciples should have realized that, if Jesus had wanted them to fight to defend Him, He would have told them to do so. If He needed physical force for His defense, He had available to Him all the power He could have needed. If He chose not to use physical force, then He must have had good reason.

The problem was that they had their own plan about how things should go, and when things were not working out they way they wanted, they (or at least Peter) began to act without instructions from Jesus. In short, this is an example of what happens when people act according to their own plan without Divine authority. If Jesus never tells us to do a thing, then He must have His reasons. If He wanted us to do it, He would tell us. To act when He has not so instructed is to displease Him (compare Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19).

Then Jesus explained why He was not calling the angels to defend Him and why in fact He was not using any power to oppose His arrest. In so saying, He gave one final reason why the disciples should not defend Him with force. The things about to happen were a fulfillment of

prophecy (compare verse 56). It was the cup the Father had given Him to drink (John 18:11; compare Matthew 26:39).

The point is that this was the Father's plan. Whether they liked it or not, this was the way it was supposed to happen. Otherwise, He would not have stood by and let it happen but would have used the force available to Him to stop it. In fact, He had repeatedly told them this was going to happen, including just a few days earlier (26:2). They should have had faith enough to follow His lead. If He was not resisting, they should have known that His way was best, and they too should not have resisted.

Had Jesus allowed his disciples to fight in His defense or had He died as a result of a violent revolution, His purpose would have been totally defeated and no one would remember Him, let alone be saved from their sins. The purpose of God required that Jesus voluntarily allow wicked men to crucify Him despite His complete innocence. Only in that way could He be the sacrifice for our sins, and only in that way would the world recognize the significance of what He did.

26:55,56 – Jesus asked the multitudes if they came out as against a robber with swords and clubs to take Him. He sat daily teaching in the temple and they did not seize Him. But all this fulfilled the prophecies. Then all His disciples forsook Him and fled.

Jesus then asked those who had come to arrest Him why they came with weapons against Him. Was He a robber or violent criminal of some kind?

The point is that they should have known fully that He was not a violent man. He was a preacher and teacher. He had always preached peace and treated people with kindness. They had no evidence that He had ever done violence or evil of any kind to anyone. They should have been ashamed to arrest Him at all, let alone to do it with violence and weapons.

Furthermore, He had taught daily in the temple. If they had proper grounds to arrest Him, why did they not do it then? Of course, He knew the reason: they feared the people. His question was intended to get them to see their own hypocrisy. He had repeatedly rebuked them for their hypocrisy and their determination to maintain their standing in the eyes of the people at all costs. Their manner of arresting Him just proved His point.

They had just finished attempting to defeat Him in public debate, and had been thoroughly defeated at every turn. They should have simply admitted He was right and they were wrong. But their pride would not allow that, so instead they determined to destroy the one who proved them to be wrong. And even this they were afraid to do in the open daylight where people might witness their evil, so they had to sneak around at night to do it.

Though He made one last attempt to reason with them, yet He knew they would not listen. This was their moment – their time to exercise some ignorant, sinful power and to seemingly overcome. They had to succeed in killing Him in fulfillment of Scripture. They would bruise His heel (Genesis 3:15). But He also knew this was not the final outcome of the conflict. In the end, He would triumph in a way beyond their wildest imaginations.

The disciples then forsook Him and fled. This fulfilled Jesus' prophecy, for He had just predicted it a few hours earlier (verses 31ff; compare John 16:32; etc.)! All of them, especially Peter, had denied this would happen, yet here almost immediately they were doing exactly what He had said they would do.

Again the reason, however, was that they simply did not understand. His plan was not their plan. When He did not resist arrest but rebuked them for their attempts to resist, this completely contradicted their expectations. Had He fought, they would probably have fought with Him, for that is what they expected would happen. When He refused to fight and allowed Himself to be taken, they lost their faith and their nerve, so they left in confusion and uncertainty. The shepherd was in the process of being smitten, and the sheep were being scattered.

26:57-68 – The Jewish Trials

Compare Mark 14:53-65; John 18:12,13,19-24.

Here begin a series of trials of Jesus, first before the Jews, then before the Romans. They may be summarized as follows:

Summary of Jesus' Trials

Trials before Jewish authorities:
Before Annas
Before Caiaphas and the council
Official trial before the council

Trials before Roman authorities:
Before Pilate (first time)
Before Herod
Before Pilate (second time)

Illegalities of the trial

When considering the trials before the Jews, we should remember that, at every point, the trials were not trials in the normal sense of the word. They were thoroughly illegal.

The primary illegality is that they did not even occur for the purpose for which trials are supposed to occur. The purpose of a trial is supposed

to be to determine whether or not a man is guilty of a crime and therefore worthy of punishment. Evidence is to be presented by both the accusers and the accused and then a verdict reached based on the evidence.

There was absolutely no possibility that these trials were intended to determine whether or not Jesus had done anything wrong. These same men had questioned Him publicly and privately for months and could never prove Him wrong about anything. They could never even disprove His teaching, let alone prove Him guilty of a crime (John 8:46; Matthew 22:46). There was not enough evidence to even arrest Him, let alone convict Him in trial.

The real reason for the animosity against Jesus was, not that He did anything wrong, but that the Jewish leaders were jealous of Jesus and rebelled against His teaching (Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10; 11:18; John 11:47,48; 12:11,19,42,43; 7:32). Long before they arrested Him, the rulers had already decided they were going to kill Jesus. See Matthew 21:46; 26:3-5; 12:14; John 7:1,19,25,30,32,44; 8:37,40,59; 10:31,39; 11:45-53,57; 12:10,11; 5:18; Mark 14:10ff; etc.

So, the only purpose for the trials was to determine what ***charge*** or accusation would be offered to justify the verdict that had already been reached. They needed some rationalization. Since the Romans were in power, it was unlawful for the Jews to kill a man on their own (John 18:31). And they needed an accusation that would satisfy the people so they would not blame the Jewish leaders.

Certainly they could not use the ***real*** reasons: that they were jealous and angry that Jesus had proved them wrong. They probably were not honest enough with themselves to even admit that reason. And that reason made them look bad instead of making Jesus look bad. They needed some charge, whether true or not, that could be made to look plausible as a reason for Jesus to be killed.

Having been begun for an entirely illegal, immoral, evil, and hypocritical reason, the trials were doomed from the beginning to be filled with hosts of other illegalities and miscarriages of justice. We will see as we proceed that this is exactly what happened.

Another illegality was that the trial was conducted at night and also was conducted so soon after the arrest that Jesus had no time whatever to obtain legal counsel or prepare a defense. The rulers finally reached a verdict based on statements that they compelled Jesus to make. The law required that a man be executed only on the testimony of two or three witnesses against him.

It is amazing to see the power that hypocritical self-will can have in the lives of men. These men were incredibly picky in making sure the letter of the law must be subscribed to in every minute detail (Matthew 15:1ff). Yet here they had no compunction against totally abandoning all semblance of obedience to the law in order to murder a man and a known prophet at that!

26:57 – Having captured Jesus, the men led him to Caiaphas the high priest where the scribes and elders were assembled.

The Jews, having achieved their goal of arresting Jesus, took Him to the house of Caiaphas the High Priest. Here the council of elders and scribes had gathered. This is the Sanhedrin council (a term based on the Greek name in verse 59), the highest Jewish tribunal or political body.

It was made up of seventy men from the following groups:

* Chief priests, which were past and present high priests and their families

* Scribes, who were Pharisee lawyers and copyists

* Elders, who were heads of the various Jewish tribes. The high priest was president of the council.

John mentions that, before this hearing in the presence of Caiaphas, there had been a previous hearing in the presence of Annas (John 18:13).

26:58 – Peter followed at a distance to the courtyard of the high priest. Then he went in and sat with the servants to see what the end result would be.

Compare Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18,25-27.

Having been rebuked for his attempt to defend Jesus, and having fled with the other disciples when Jesus' enemies successfully arrested Him, Peter nevertheless followed at a distance to see what would happen. In a way Peter is obviously wrong here. He had said He would never stumble at Jesus, and would even die before turning from Him, yet here he had fled and refused to stay with Jesus in His greatest time of need.

On the other hand, Peter did do better than most of the others. They fled and were nowhere to be found. He at least stayed nearby. He was loyal enough to want to know what happened and brave enough to be close by when there was, as we will see, danger to him in doing so. The others generally lacked even this courage.

Some have pointed out that Peter was like many today who want to "follow Jesus afar off." They want to be counted as being with Him, part of His group. But they don't want to get too close because that would require too much sacrifice. They are compromisers. They want to be committed, but not very; disciples, but not really. They want God in their lives, but not their first priority.

He seemed to be convinced Jesus would be condemned, since He would not fight back. But he wanted to witness it anyway, like a diehard sports fan who knows his team will lose but feels compelled to watch till it's over.

26:59-61 – The council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Then two false witnesses said they heard Jesus say that He was able to destroy the temple and build it in three days.

The purpose of this trial is here plainly stated (see notes before verse 57). The rulers were determined to kill Jesus. The only issue was what grounds they could use. These hypocritical rulers were willing to accept the testimony of false witnesses. The object was not justice, but conviction. Whether or not the witnesses told the truth did not matter. They were convinced Jesus was guilty, so they were determined to kill Him. But they wanted it all to ***appear*** convincing and legal.

Finally, two false witnesses came and accused Jesus of saying that He could destroy the temple and within three days build it again (without hands – Mark 14:58). Perhaps they thought this would prove Jesus was disrespectful to the temple worship. Perhaps they thought it was a claim to be more than human. Perhaps they just took it as a threat against the nation or the rulers of the temple.

In any case, Mark adds that even this testimony did not convict Jesus, because the witnesses could not agree among themselves. Note that here is a test of the validity of witnesses. If they contradict one another regarding critical parts of their testimony, then their testimony cannot be accepted as convincing. (Mark 14:56)

These witnesses referred to Jesus' statement as recorded in John 2:19, though they did not quote it properly and they surely perverted His intent. He did not say He could destroy the temple, but that ***they*** would do it. And His meaning referred to the temple of His ***body***: they would kill Him, but He would be raised after three days (John 2:21,22).

So, like many people today, they perverted Jesus' words and His meaning to prove their point. Far too often, those who are determined to oppose the truth must first misrepresent the teaching, then they attack their perversion of it in order to discredit it. Let us take care that we are not guilty of such tactics.

It is interesting that people took Jesus' prophecy that the Jews would kill Him, and they used that prophecy as an excuse to try to do the very thing He had predicted!

26:62-64 – The high priest asked Jesus why He gave no answer to the testimony against Him. When Jesus remained silent, he adjured Him by the living God to tell them if He was the Christ, the son of God. Jesus affirmed this was true, but said hereafter they would see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

The witnesses were getting nowhere, so the high priest took a different approach. He began to question Jesus, obviously with the hope that He would say something they could use against Him. This reminds

me of modern-day political investigations in which politicians have no real proof that a person has done wrong. So they call him and his associates to testify hoping they will say something that can be used against them.

First, the high priest asked Jesus why He didn't say anything. Why were all these men against Him? What had He done to cause such opposition? But Jesus made no response. This fulfilled Isaiah 53:7 which predicted that He would be like a sheep dumb before its shearers, so He opened not his mouth.

Luke 22:67,68 explains partly why Jesus made no response. First of all, it was obvious what their intent was. Nothing He could say would convince them He was innocent. And if He spoke to ask them a question, they would have no answers (or wouldn't answer honestly). They had never been able to answer in the past, so why would they now?

Besides, why did He need to say anything? Their witnesses were getting nowhere even without His rebuttal. Furthermore, He knew what the outcome had to be and that nothing could stop it. He was unwilling to attempt to stop it. It is amazing to observe the calm strength He had now after His terrible dread in the garden.

The high priest, using his authority as priest, then adjured Jesus by the living God to tell if He was the Christ, the Son of God. To adjure meant to call upon someone to speak under oath, to swear. (See Vine and Thayer on εξορκιζω. Compare Genesis 24:3; Judges 17:2; 1 Kings 22:16; compare related words in Genesis 24:29; 47:29; Mark 5:7; Acts 19:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; Nehemiah 13:25.)

Apparently it was customary legal procedure to call on someone to testify under oath (compare Leviticus 5:1). But it is doubtful that it was proper to force a man to testify against himself. In any case, to put a man to death, the law definitely required the testimony of two or more witnesses to His crime.

The Jews had failed to convict Jesus by legitimate means of the testimony of witnesses, as the law required. So they put Him under the force of an oath before God. If Jesus still remained silent, they would have taken this as a denial: He had failed to confess He was Christ when directly questioned under oath. Had He done this, they could surely have made Him look bad to His disciples. But further, they could no doubt have brought evidence that He had claimed it in the past; and if He now would not admit it, they would claim this proved He was an impostor.

So, though He knew the consequences, Jesus told the truth. Some accounts in some translations say, “Thou hast said” or “It is as you said.” This is obviously a form of consent. This is how the rulers interpreted it (verse 65). So, the NKJV translates “I am” (Mark 14:62).

In saying this, Jesus knew He was signing His death warrant. So having answered, He proceeded to let them know that this was not the end of the matter. This was a battle, but not the end of the war. They

might kill Him, but they would yet see Him having authority, glory, and judgment. This could be a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem as in chapter 24, or it could refer to the final judgment.

In any case, this was a further claim that He had the power and position befitting God's Son. He might stand before their judgment seat and they might punish Him at this time, but the time was coming when they would all stand before His judgment seat to receive the just recompense of their conduct.

26:65,66 – The high priest then accused Jesus of blasphemy and said they no longer needed witnesses. He asked the council for their verdict and they said Jesus was deserving of death.

The high priest then tore his clothing, which was a common form of Jewish expression of emotion: anger, in this case. The practice was so common that Barnes says they had a part of their clothes especially designed for this purpose!

He said Jesus was guilty of blasphemy – i.e., He had claimed for Himself that which belonged only to God. The rest of the council agreed and pronounced their sentence: He is worthy of death. Conveniently, the verdict just happened to come out exactly what they had intended for it to be from the beginning! Such a magnanimous sense of justice!

Note the devious method the council took to get their desired conviction. They proclaimed Him worthy of death for blasphemy. Why? Because He claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God, when they claimed that He wasn't. But how did they know He wasn't? This was the very point they should have been there to consider. It was the only really pertinent point.

Was He really the Christ, the Son of God or not? That was the issue. The mere fact that He claimed it did not prove He was guilty of a crime. What if the claim were true? The proper course would have been to examine the evidence regarding the validity of the claim. Consider His miracles, His fulfilled prophecy, the testimony of John, and the testimony of the Father Himself at His baptism, etc. But none of this was even brought into consideration.

Why did they approach it this way? Because it gave the conviction they had already determined to give. Their conclusion that Jesus was guilty of a crime was based, not on the evidence, but solely on their preconceived idea that He could not possibly be the Christ.

They started out convinced He was worthy of death and sure enough concluded that He was worthy of death. The blasphemy charge was just a subterfuge to get them where they had already decided to go, evidence or not. It was a conviction of capital crime, based on no evidence at all. Yet the law they claimed to uphold said they needed two or more witnesses.

26:67,68 – They then spat in Jesus' face, beat him, and struck him with the palms of their hands. Then they called on Him to prophesy which one of them had struck Him.

Evil men, when they think they have made a good man look bad, nearly always insist on rubbing it in. It will happen time after time.

Bad men can do hordes of evil things, and if you even so much as mention their errors critically, they will be furious. But let them find just one error for which they think they can convict a good man to have committed, and they have no greater delight than to make him miserable reminding him of it. Puny little men have no greater delight than proving their smallness by rejoicing when a great man falls.

They thought they had made Jesus look guilty. They had finally, after years of trying, made Him look bad. They thought they had Him where they wanted Him. Never mind their own envious, conceited, self-righteous disregard of justice and of God's law. They were in control and they were going to milk it for all it was worth.

They spat on Him and beat Him and struck him with their hands. Then they asked Him to tell them who it was that had hit him (Mark and Luke add that they first blindfolded Him). They reasoned that, if He was such a prophet, then He could tell them who did it even though He could not see. If He couldn't tell, He must be a fraud.

The hypocrisy here is so criminal it is beyond words. Jesus had proved by miracle after miracle that He was a prophet from God. Telling who hit Him when He was blindfolded was chicken feed compared to what He had done.

Jesus had repeatedly read people's minds. He had raised men from the dead, fed thousands with a boy's lunch, and healed people of all kinds of obvious and incurable diseases. He had even healed one of the men who arrested Him! They had never disproved a single miracle He ever did. In fact, at times they had even admitted His miracles. Yet here they paraded themselves like insolent, childish bullies, as if they had proved some big thing if He did not name the person who hit Him.

Jesus remained quiet, of course, as He had throughout the trial except when adjured to speak. As before, it would have made no difference had He named the people who hit Him. They would have just become more furious, made some excuse for it, and found other ways to mock and ridicule. They had ignored all His far greater miracles. Why would this one convince them? Besides, Jesus had to die, and He would do nothing to stop it.

In fact, we are amazed at the self-control it would take for Jesus to let this occur. He knew He was innocent and these men were the epitome of evil. Sometimes people mock us as Christians and we have no choice but to let it happen. But Jesus was able to call twelve legions of angels to His defense.

He could have done their puny miracle, then set Himself free, and destroyed them all in a moment. But He didn't, because for all their cruel, despicable iniquity, He loved them and wanted them saved. And He loved you and me and wanted us saved. And for all of us, He endured all this without reviling in return, let alone retaliating (1 Peter 2:18-25).

26:69-75 - Peter's Denials

Compare Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15- 18,25-27.

26:69,70 – As Peter sat in the courtyard, a servant girl said that he was with Jesus. But he denied it saying he did not know what she was talking about.

Peter had followed Jesus to see what would happen. As he sat in the courtyard outside the house where the trial was occurring, a servant girl said he was with Jesus. Peter denied saying he did not know what she was talking about.

John says this occurred toward the beginning of the trial, and adds that the maid was the doorkeeper. Luke adds that Peter was warming himself with others at a fire, and the girl saw him in the firelight and this helped her identify him. When we warm ourselves at the fires of our Lord's enemies instead of standing with Him, we have already denied Him by actions. Denial in words is sure to follow.

Matthew and Mark do not say the denials all occurred after the trial was over. They simply record the trial as one event, then they go back and record Peter's denials. As often occurs in historical accounts, the two subjects actually overlapped in time.

Since Mark's account had said that Peter would deny Jesus three times before the rooster crowed twice, Mark notes here the first time that the rooster crowed. This should have been a warning to Peter. Apparently he either missed the significance or ignored it. But Mark's record helps build the suspense of the story.

26:71,72 – When Peter was at the gateway, another person saw him and said that he was with Jesus of Nazareth. This time Peter denied with an oath saying he did not know the Man.

Another person saw Peter and said to the other people that Peter was with Jesus. This time Peter took an oath saying he did not know Jesus.

There are some questions in harmonizing the accounts here. Some translations add that it was another girl (or maid) that made the statement. But Peter's reply in Luke's account is, "Man, I am not." The word "girl" or "maid" was added by the translators, but this is based on the fact that the word for "another" is feminine. Mark's account says the maid saw him again, indicating the same one as before. John says, "They said to him."

The explanation probably is that several people joined in the accusation. Note that several accounts say one person said it to others who were there. Probably all these things happened. A maid said it, perhaps the same one as before. Then others took up the accusation, including another maid and a man or men. Finally, Peter denied it.

In any case there is no contradiction. Jesus prophesied, and the Scriptures record, three denials. The number of accusations or accusers is not stated. The answers given by Peter are either indirect quotations or they were all stated in Peter's denial.

26:73,74 – Later some bystanders again affirmed that Peter was one of them because his speech betrayed him. He began to curse and swear saying he did not know the Man. And immediately the rooster crowed.

The last denial came as a result of accusations from several people. They said Peter must be one of Jesus' followers, for his speech betrayed him – i.e., He was a Galilean like Jesus (Mark 14:70). John adds that a servant of the high priest, a relative of Malchus, joined the accusations thinking he remembered seeing Peter in the garden.

Peter again denied, with cursing and swearing. Like worldly people, and like he himself used to be before he became a follower of Jesus, he put himself under threat of punishment if he was not speaking truth. Of course, as is often the case, it was a false oath.

26:75 – And Peter remembered that Jesus had said he would deny Jesus three times before the rooster crowed. Then Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Immediately, even as Peter was speaking, the cock crowed (compare Luke 22:60). This reminded Peter that Jesus had said he would deny Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Jesus had warned the disciples in Matthew 10:33 that whoever denied Him before men, Jesus would also deny him before the Father in heaven.

Luke's account adds that Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Evidently at this time Peter was where he and Jesus could see one another. No doubt Jesus' look also served to remind Peter of what Jesus had said he would do. Remember that the Lord sees everything we do, whether or not we can see Him looking at us. So, the fulfillment of Jesus' prediction was crystal clear as the cock was crowing before Peter finished the third denial.

Realizing his guilt and how he had denied Jesus exactly as Jesus had predicted and exactly as he had absolutely affirmed he would never do, Peter went out and wept bitterly. No doubt he wept in guilt over what he had done, but probably also in sorrow over the whole turn of events. His Lord, whom He had loved and trusted, was now being condemned to death: another outcome that Peter had confidently affirmed would never happen.

Peter was confused because, in his willful stubbornness he had refused to believe any of this would happen. It just was not what he expected. Plus, on top of it all, he himself had failed miserably, even after the Lord had warned him he would do it and he had said he would never do it.

Lessons to be learned from Peter's error

This was surely a sad and difficult time for Peter. What should we learn and remember from this event?

1. It is easy for us to think how terrible he was, but we would have done as bad under the same circumstances. Remember that all the disciples forsook him and fled. They simply did not understand God's will about Jesus' death.

2. On the other hand, this is not the end of the story. What Peter had done is not much worse than what Judas did. Judas betrayed Jesus for money, and Peter denied him three times out of fear and confusion. We will see later how Judas reacted to his guilt.

But Peter reacted with genuine remorse, and after Jesus' resurrection he understood what all this really meant. Then Peter became a firm follower and preached the gospel without compromise to these very same people who killed Jesus. Here he denied Jesus before just a few of them; later he publicly accused a huge multitude of them of having killing the Son of God, and as a result thousands were converted.

Likewise, there is hope for us when we sin, as we all do. We may not betray Jesus in direct statements like Peter did (though many of us even do that). Yet we deny Him by not standing up for Him when we should. When we do fail Jesus, then like Peter we must repent with genuine sorrow, and determine to correct our lives and take our stand for truth. If we will, we too can be useful despite our past failures.

3. The event demonstrates that Jesus stood alone as He faced His trials and crucifixion. Even His closest friends deserted Him, one betrayed Him, and Peter denied Him three times. This helps demonstrate how tragic and difficult the circumstances were that Jesus faced in dying for us.

4. The event demonstrates that Jesus was a true prophet. He had predicted Peter's denials in detail before it happened, and Peter fulfilled every detail. This proves that Jesus was a true prophet, and therefore we should believe in Him as a teacher sent from God.

5. The event demonstrates that even the strongest and greatest servants of the Lord at times give in to weakness and temptation, committing grievous sins. This shows the danger that we all face and warns us to be constantly on guard for Satan's temptations. However, it also shows that, when we do sin, we can repent and return to the Lord and be useful to Him.

6. The record shows the honesty of the gospel writers. They did not hesitate to record even the most unfavorable events in the lives of the

greatest heroes. The goal was, not to exalt themselves or their friends, but to reveal the truth of the historical events that occurred and to accurately record the will of God. This helps us see that we have a reliable record in the Scriptures.

Matthew 27

Chapter 27 – Roman Trials and Jesus' Crucifixion

27:1,2 - The "Official" Jewish Trial

See also Mark 14:1; Luke 22:66-71.

27:1,2 – In the morning, the chief priests and elders met to plan Jesus' death. Then they bound Him and led Him away to Pontius Pilate the governor.

The council assembled again when morning had come. The night trial had been unofficial (probably illegal). They could not properly pass judgment at night. So, in the morning they held another meeting and ratified the decisions they had reached the previous night. Luke gives a fuller account, but the events and results were similar to the night trial.

It is interesting to observe that officials often go through public technicalities to make their decisions appear legal, but in reality the decisions are made behind closed doors in secret. The official meetings simply ratify what was already decided in private.

The legal reason for taking Jesus to Pilate, and the reason they offered to him (John 18:31), is that Roman law would not allow the Jews to execute a person. Actually, however, they did not mind executing people as long as they thought the Romans would not interfere (Acts 7). It appears that a deeper motive was involved.

Most likely they also wanted the Romans to do their "dirty work" for them. The Jewish rulers feared the wrath of the people and did not want to lose their favor by executing a popular leader (Luke 20:20). Most evil men prefer to get someone else to do their dirty work for them. They want to make the decisions but have others carry them out.

In this case, if the Jews could get the Romans to kill Jesus, then the Romans would bear the blame, or at least share the blame. On this occasion things worked out so well for their plans that, not only were they able to persuade the Romans to kill Jesus, but they actually got the people to support the act.

> "O religious leaders [of the Jews], this morning was far from your time of ascendency, as it might have seemed to you. ... A night of blackest darkness was brooding over your spiteful hearts. Out of this morning would come the overthrow of the temple and its altars, the surpassing of the law and the prophets... You offered up to die the Author of life, the Lord of glory ... and demanded the crucifixion of the Savior of the world." – Leo the Great (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Pilate was the Roman governor. It must be remembered that Judea and the Jewish people were at this time subject to the Roman Empire. This gave a dual political structure. The Romans under the Emperor had the ultimate authority. However, the Romans generally allowed local authorities to continue in power so long as they cooperated with Rome.

Millard (pp 226-230) records that Pontius Pilate is mentioned in the writings of the Roman author Tacitus, the Alexandrian philosopher Philo, and the Jewish historian Josephus. He documents that a 1961 team of Italian archaeologists found a stone slab in the theater at Caesarea which contains an inscription referring to Pontius Pilate the Roman prefect or governor. Part of the slab is missing but enough remains to identify Pilate without doubt. This evidence documents the existence of the governor before whom Jesus stood on trial. See also *Archaeology Study Bible*, page 1454.

In particular, Tacitus states that Christians wore the name of Christ who was executed during the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate. So both secular and sacred history records Pilate's responsibility for the death of Jesus.

27:3-10 – Judas' Suicide

Compare Acts 1:18,29.

27:3-5 – When Judas saw that Jesus had been condemned, he was remorseful and tried to return the thirty pieces of silver saying he had sinned by betraying innocent blood. But the chief priests and elders told him to take care of it. He threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and went and hanged himself.

Judas' attempt to return the betrayal fee

When Judas saw that Jesus had been condemned, he repented (was remorseful). Apparently he was bothered when he saw the serious consequences of his act against his innocent friend. Perhaps he never thought they would condemn Him to death but just beat Him or imprison Him. Perhaps He thought Jesus would escape their powers as He had at other times. Or perhaps, after Jesus was condemned, he just began to recognize the magnitude of what he had done.

Whatever caused him to change his mind, he took the money back and told the officials he was wrong in that he had betrayed innocent

blood. Note that Judas was attempting to undo the effects of what he had done. He no longer wanted to keep the money. It is unclear what he expected them to do. Perhaps he thought that, since he had betrayed Jesus, if he told them Jesus was innocent, they would release Him. In any case there appears to be real sorrow for his conduct and a desire to overcome its effects (restitution).

Note that this is the first of many times in these proceedings that Jesus was declared to be innocent. The council said he was guilty, but the very one who betrayed Him into their hands said He was not guilty but innocent. The guilty verdict was based on preconceived determinations, not on evidence. We will see that objective people repeatedly concluded He was innocent. Only His enemies condemned Him, and that was done without proof.

The reaction of the Jewish leaders is incredible. They had just been told that they had condemned an innocent man to death. The very one who had betrayed Him into their power and made it possible for them to capture Him, was now telling them He was not guilty and should not be condemned. You would think they would at least question him regarding his evidence for his conclusion. They should seek to reconsider their decision in light of any new evidence Judas had.

But what did they do? They said, in effect, that they had no interest in anything Judas had to say. "What is that to us?" What concern do we have in that? They had said He was guilty, but that was a false front. They did not care whether He was guilty or innocent. They were just looking for justification for the act they had already determined to do!

"...if he sins who betrays innocent blood, how much more do they sin who purchase innocent blood and provoke a disciple by offering a reward for his apostasy." – Jerome (*Ancient Christian Commentary*)

Judas' suicide

Judas then took the price of the betrayal and threw it down in the temple and hanged himself. Acts 1 adds that Judas' fell headlong and "burst asunder in the midst." Probably in his haste to kill himself he got a bad rope, used a weak branch, tied a poor knot, or in some other way after he had hung himself he fell and burst asunder. As a result his bowels gushed out. Assuming he was still alive when he fell, this would surely be a horrible death to die.

It is interesting to compare Judas to Peter (see notes on Matthew 26:75). Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter denied Him. Both sinned and both were sorry. Judas even admitted his error and tried to give back the money he had been paid. Yet Peter is remembered as a great hero and Judas as a villain. What was the difference? Peter got up again after his fall and lived a life of faithful service and sacrifice. Judas just gave up and hanged himself.

The difference between great men and villains is not that great men never fall, but that when they fall they get up and go on to accomplish great purposes. Weak men give up and quit trying.

Note also that Judas, when he gave up his efforts to serve God, ended his own life. Life is a blessing and gift from God (Acts 17:24-28). God gave us our lives to use to serve Him (Ecclesiastes 12:13). We are stewards of our own lives (1 Corinthians 6:19,20; Romans 12:1,2). God expects us to use our lives to accomplish His intended purpose. To destroy His gift by ending our lives is to be an unfaithful steward like Judas.

The Bible lists several instances of suicide and every one of them is a person who had become unfaithful to God. People who are faithful to God may suffer greatly, and may even wish they could die, as Job did. But they do not commit suicide because they have faith in God to help them through the trouble (1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13).

Here are other Bible examples of suicide: Judges 9:50-57 (Abimelech), 1 Samuel 31:3-6 (King Saul), 2 Samuel 17:23 (Ahithophel), 1 Kings 16:18 (Zimri), Matthew 27:3-5 (Judas Iscariot), Acts 16:27,28 (Philippian Jailer almost committed suicide).

27:6-10 – The chief priests said it was not lawful to put the betrayal money into the treasury because it was the price of blood. So they used it to buy a potter's field to bury strangers in. The field was then called the Field of Blood. This fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah.

But the Jewish leaders were afraid to take the money that had been paid as the betrayal price and put it into the temple treasury because it was a price paid for blood (i.e., it was betrayal money that led to a man's death). Again the hypocrisy is incredible. They don't mind paying the price to induce a man to betray a friend so they can kill the man. And they are willing to kill the man even when his betrayer tells them the man is innocent. None of that bothers them. But to take the betrayal money and put it in the treasury of the temple bothers them! This exemplifies the incredible hypocrisy for which Jesus had condemned them in Matthew 23.

Instead they used the money to buy a potter's field in which strangers could be buried. Because of the price paid for it, it was called a Field of Blood. Acts says that Judas obtained the field, probably meaning it was bought with money that legally belonged to him. He supplied the means for it, though others actually arranged the purchase. Barnes supposes that it was called a "potter's field" in that it had been used as a source of potter's clay. Perhaps the clay had become exhausted so it was suitable for little except as a cemetery.

This fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 11:12,13. Matthew says Jeremiah said it. Perhaps he also said it. It is not uncommon for more than one prophet to say a thing, whether or not we have a record of it

(see Jeremiah 19:4,6; 32:6-9). Another possibility is that some copies of the Old Testament placed the book of Jeremiah as the first book of the prophets, so that a reference to Jeremiah might include all the books of the prophets. Or perhaps this is a copyist's error, since in Greek there is only a difference of one letter between the two names.

In any case, the fulfillment of prophecy here is impressive and powerful. The Old Testament, long before the birth of Jesus, had predicted His betrayal and identified the very amount of money that would be given for it: thirty pieces of silver. Furthermore, it had even been predicted that the money would be used to buy the potter's field!

27:11-26 - The Trial Before Pilate

See also Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-35; John 18:39-19:16.

27:11 – Jesus then stood before the governor, who asked if He was the King of the Jews. Jesus said that it was as he had said.

Luke's account names numerous accusations the Jews made against Jesus as He stood before Pilate., None of these, however, were the grounds on which they themselves had condemned Jesus to be worthy of death. However, they knew Pilate would not care whether or not Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God. That was a violation, in their view, of religious law, but Pilate would not condemn a man for it.

That needed some accusation, regardless of whether or not it was true, that would appear to Pilate to be a threat against the Roman government. They brought up such claims as forbidding tribute to Caesar. Never mind that they had asked Him about this and He had said just the opposite (Luke 20:19-26).

They also accused Him of being a rabble-rouser stirring up the people. This was a general charge without proof, but it would get the Romans' interest. Nothing upset them more quickly than rebellion against their authority or attempts to cause riots.

Finally, they accused Jesus of claiming to be a king. This would, if true, concern the Romans, since it would make Jesus in competition with or rebellion against Caesar. This, of course, is what the Jews thought the Messiah would be; so, if Jesus had taught it, He would have been saying just what they themselves professed to hope for. So why should they make accusations against Him about it? But again, in reality, it was the very opposite of what Jesus had really taught.

Pilate did question Jesus about the claim that He was a king. And Jesus answered, "Thou sayest" or "It is as you say." This was an admission that the statement was true (compare notes on the Jewish trial). But other accounts give more details on the discussion. John 18:36 shows that Jesus explained to Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. So, He was not in competition with Caesar; the Romans had no reason to fear Jesus.

The Romans knew that they had subjugated many nations and that those nations had their own respected rulers, kings, etc. This did not trouble them, so long as those rulers were peaceable and offered no threat against Roman rule. Pilate concluded there was no danger of rebellion in Jesus' case, and therefore there were no grounds to punish Jesus. So, he repeatedly tried to reason with the rulers to get them to agree for him to let Jesus go.

27:12-14 – Jesus gave no answer when He was accused by the chief priests and elders. Pilate asked if He heard the accusations, but Jesus still refused to answer so that the governor greatly marveled.

When accused by the Jewish leaders themselves, Jesus made them no reply whatever (see notes on the Jewish trial). Again, there was no proof for their claims, so why should He answer? And He really did not want to stop the procedure anyway. Pilate was amazed that Jesus would make no effort at all to defend Himself.

Why should Jesus respond? They had offered no proof, but only accusations. There was really nothing to respond to. Besides, He knew the Jews would never believe His rebuttal. And of course, He knew the outcome was that He would die, and this was His Father's will. So He would do nothing to prevent it.

Note that this does not mean that we should never answer accusations made against us by those who oppose the truth of the gospel. Surely we should be careful regarding the manner in which we respond. But when the apostles were arrested and accused, they often responded with answers that defended the truth of God's word and their own innocence. Jesus response in this case was due to special circumstances that often do not apply in other cases.

In other accounts, Pilate states a clear, pointed verdict: he found no fault in Jesus. This statement is repeated several times throughout the accounts. The verdict of those who objectively considered the evidence against Jesus was that He was innocent. Nevertheless, He was crucified.

Rather than accepting Pilate's verdict, the Jewish leaders just made their charges more vehemently. According to other accounts, they claimed that He was a trouble maker who had taught the people from Galilee to Judea.

27:15-17 – The governor had a custom at the feast that he would release a prisoner whom the multitude desired. He asked if he should release Jesus or a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

There was a custom at the feast for the governor to release some prisoner whomever the people wanted released. Both the people and the governor knew this custom. The purpose of the custom, one would

suppose, was a means whereby the governor could attempt to please the people and gain their favor.

Pilate offered the people a choice that he would release Jesus or else a notorious man named Barabbas. Mark says Barabbas was guilty of insurrection and murder (15:7). John adds that he was a robber (John 18:40). It is apparent that this was a means to release Jesus. He seemed to think the people would surely prefer the release of this innocent preacher rather than the release of a known violent criminal.

It is interesting that the Jews would ask (as they did) for Barabbas to be released instead of Jesus. Barabbas was a truly evil man. He was guilty of all the evil deeds for which the Jews falsely accused Jesus and even more. He really was guilty of rebelling against Caesar, etc. Yet they asked for him to be released and called for the death of Jesus, whom they could prove guilty of none of these things!

Their hypocrisy is again incredible. If they really believed Jesus was guilty of claiming to be a king and rebelling against Caesar, and if they really objected to these things, then why ask for Barabbas' release since he was known to be guilty of all these?

27:18 – Pilate knew that they had delivered Jesus up because of envy.

Here is plainly stated the real primary reason the Jews wanted Jesus dead: ***envy.*** Jesus had truthfully stated that, above all, these Jewish leaders were motivated by a desire to please the people. He was taking away their following and making them look bad before the people by pointing out their hypocrisy. He was asking them questions they could not answer, yet they could never prove Him wrong. It was embarrassing, and they were envious of His popularity. This was their true motive for killing Jesus.

And Pilate knew what their motive was. They had not blinded or deceived him. (There was really no other alternative reason. No other motive could lead men to hate a person who was so obviously pure.)

This means Pilate knew Jesus was innocent. He knew Jesus was not worthy of death and that He ought to be set free. The only reason He was on trial was that He had dared to cross the evil rulers, so they were out to get Him. All this Pilate knew. So, as governor, whose duty it was to justly enforce the laws, he ought to have set Jesus free. However, political pressures led to a different conclusion, as we will see.

This illustrates the power and evil of envy. People may envy others for many different advantages that they perceive others have which they want for themselves. In this case, the rulers wanted the praises of the people and popularity in their eyes. They wanted their approval and recognition. Jesus had that approval and was taking away their popularity.

Envy is a powerful force for evil. Notice some other passages that warn about the danger of envy: 1 Peter 2:1; Romans 1:29,32; Matthew

27:18; Titus 3:3; James 3:14-17; 1 Timothy 6:4; 1 Corinthians 13:4; Galatians 5:19-26; Romans 13:13.

27:19 – Pilate's wife sent a message to him saying that he should have nothing to do with that just Man because she had suffered many things in a dream because of Him.

At some point during the trial, Pilate's wife sent a message to Pilate saying that Jesus was just (righteous). She had received a dream which, in some undescribed manner, had caused her great suffering regarding Jesus. She urged Pilate to have nothing to do with Jesus.

This is an intriguing event, yet this is the sum total of all we are told about it. Who Pilate's wife was and why God would choose her for such a dream, we are not told. Perhaps there was nothing really supernatural about it. Maybe she already knew about Jesus and what she knew convinced her he was innocent, so her conscience was disturbing her with dreams. It is interesting that she even knew Pilate had Jesus on trial before him. He had just been arrested the night before.

In any case, Pilate here had still another testimony that Jesus was innocent. This is the second recorded testimony to that effect. Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, later said He was innocent. Now the wife of His Roman judge also declared him to be righteous. Further, we know that Pilate realized the Jews' motive was envy, not that Jesus was really guilty. So, there was no excuse for him in condemning to death an innocent man.

27:20-23 – The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. When Pilate then asked what he should do with Jesus, they said He should be crucified. When he asked what evil Jesus had done, they cried out all the more saying to crucify Him.

The rulers then persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas to be released instead of Jesus. How they succeeded is not stated, but somehow they did. So, the people asked for Barabbas to be released. When Pilate asked what should be done with Jesus, they said to crucify him. This was probably the result of the prompting of the leaders among the crowd.

We have noted the hypocrisy of the leaders. By this time we should not be surprised at any evil extreme they would pursue in order to eliminate Jesus. But now consider the role of the multitudes in this. Just a few days earlier, when Jesus entered the city, they had greeted Him as their ***king***. Now just a few days later, they were demanding His ***death***! How can we explain such a complete turn about?

Obviously they were influenced by their leaders, the scribes, priests, etc. Probably they were also influenced by their disillusionment with Jesus' intentions toward the Romans. They expected their king to fight

the Romans and cast them off. Now here was this one they thought would be king, but having been arrested by the Romans He stood meekly before them making no effort whatever to resist them. Even His closest followers were making no attempt to resist the proceedings. This was not at all what they expected from their king.

In short, the problem for the people was the same as that of the disciples. They were so confused by Jesus' refusal to resist the Romans that they changed their minds. When people put their confidence in a leader to accomplish some great thing for them, but then they conclude that he has failed and has not even made a serious attempt, they may quickly come to oppose him just as strongly as they earlier supported him. In the case of the multitudes, under the influence of their leaders, they apparently became convinced Jesus was a complete fraud who ought therefore to be destroyed.

Pilate, to his credit, did make several attempts to have Jesus released. He asked the people what evil Jesus had done that He ought to be crucified. The people could give no further reasons, but simply insisted that He be crucified. Note that Pilate's statement shows that he had found no evil in Jesus. Otherwise, he would not ask about what evil had been done. Other accounts state explicitly that Pilate on more than one occasion stated that he found no evil in Jesus. He tried several times to convince the people that there were no grounds to crucify Jesus. But it was to no avail.

Pilate asked, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" Peter had given the wrong answer. Judas gave the wrong answer. The rulers gave the wrong answer. The people gave the wrong answer. Pilate surrendered to the wrong answer. What answer will you and I give?

The release of Barabbas ironically becomes symbolic of Jesus' entire death. The sinless Son of God died on the cross but a guilty criminal went free. Likewise, Jesus' death was the price paid so that every sinner in the world, including you and me, can go free. But we must choose to receive forgiveness according to the gospel.

27:24-26 – Seeing that he was unable to prevail but a tumult was arising, Pilate washed his hands before the multitude and said he was innocent of the blood of this just person. The people then said for His blood to be on them and on their children. So Pilate released Barabbas to them, had Jesus scourged, and delivered Him to be crucified.

Pilate's responsibility

Pilate made another attempt to approach the problem of Jesus. He knew Jesus was innocent. But still he did not want to displease the people. In fact, a tumult was arising. The Romans always faced the danger of uprisings from the people. A governor was responsible to keep

down such revolts, and no doubt the Jews were an especially difficult people to control. If word got back that riots were occurring, Pilate's own future might be at stake.

So he used a symbolic act to express his position in the matter. He publicly washed his hands before the people. The purpose was to claim that he was not responsible for condemning Jesus. Jesus' blood would not be on him. In doing this he was declaring again Jesus' innocence. He called Him a just or righteous person.

Perhaps he thought that this would influence the people to back off their position. If they saw he was so convinced Jesus was innocent that he would take no responsibility, and therefore the responsibility would have to be on the Jews themselves, maybe they would have second thoughts. In any case it is apparent he thought this would exonerate him of any wrongdoing.

However, it was not so easy as this. Pilate had responsibility; and like all responsibility, you cannot avoid guilt by letting other people make the decision for you and then you say it is all their fault if it was a bad one. If you have responsibility and you know a decision is bad, then you must refuse to do it.

Deuteronomy 21:1-9 instructed the rulers of a city to symbolically wash their hands to indicate that they did not know who had slain any man if he was found dead near their city. This may relate to Pilate's thinking, but it does not in any way help him since in fact he did know who was killing Jesus. He also knew that he was responsible to release an innocent man, not to crucify him.

Pilate was the highest tribunal in the land. He was responsible before Caesar, and even more importantly before God (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13ff) to see that the guilty are punished and the innocent protected. The primary duty of a judge, in short, is to see that justice is done. That requires the freeing of innocent people. Surely it is a perversion of justice to send an innocent man to a horrible death. Knowing Jesus was innocent, Pilate was duty bound to give Him no punishment of any kind. No amount of water can wash away that responsibility.

The plain fact is that, in failing to release Jesus, Pilate failed in his duty as governor. Above all, he failed in his duty before God. He still held the blood of Jesus on his hands after he washed them just as surely as before. The responsibility of blood guilt cannot be washed away by water. Pilate is rightly condemned by history as a spineless, disgusting compromiser who knowingly condemned an innocent man to death to please an angry mob. His guilt stands forever as a monument to the evil that can be done by men who do not have the power of conviction to stand for what they know to be right.

The people's responsibility

In their emotionally excited state, the people told Pilate they were willing to accept full consequences for Jesus' death on themselves and on their children. This did not justify Pilate for his dereliction of duty, though it probably made him feel better.

However, consider the serious consequences of the people's statement. They were accepting on themselves and on future generations the full responsibility for slaying this man who, it turns out, was the innocent, sinless, Son of God Almighty. Later, after Jesus' resurrection, the apostles reminded the Jewish people and their leaders that they were indeed responsible for the death of God's Son (Acts 2:23; 3:13; 5:28; etc.). These people were given the opportunity, through the gospel, to be forgiven. But there can be no doubt that they were held accountable for the crime. It is entirely likely, as well, that it was this responsibility that led to their ultimate downfall as a nation.

Sometimes people are bothered by the issue of who was responsible for Jesus' death: the Jews or the Romans. The answer, of course, is that it is not a matter of either/or: ***both*** were responsible. The Jews clearly were responsible. They accepted the responsibility, and the apostles later held them responsible. However, the Romans were also responsible because they killed Him, even though Pilate had declared Him to be innocent. Peter on Pentecost told the Jews that they killed Jesus "by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). So, both Jews and Romans sinned in the matter.

There are many times when more than one person or group of people must share guilt or joint responsibility for a sin. Suppose a man hires a killer to shoot someone. The man who does the shooting is a murderer, but the man who hired him is also guilty. A woman who gets an abortion sins, but surely the abortionist who does the killing is wrong too. The serpent urged Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, though the serpent himself never ate it. God held them both responsible (Genesis 3).

So, the Jews surely were responsible in that they urged the Romans to crucify Jesus. The Romans were also responsible in that they were the tools used to do the job. Of course, this does not mean that every individual Jew at that time was accepting responsibility for Jesus' death. Doubtless there were many who objected to it. Others may not even have been present at the trial. It follows that we should not consider all Jews who lived then to be responsible.

And surely Jews who live now two thousand years later should not be considered responsible for something for which they had no responsibility whatever. So, none of this justifies mistreating Jews or anyone alive today for what happened 2000 years ago. No descendants of those Jews deserve mistreatment for what their ancestors did.

Above all we must remember that Jesus died to save all of us from our sins. In that sense, all of us are responsible for Jesus' death. He need

never have come and died had it not been for our sins. Every time we sin, we crucify Him afresh and trample underfoot His sacrifice (Hebrews 6:6; 10:29). So in that sense we are all responsible for His death. Yet He died to save everyone: Jews, Romans, and all of us.

Pilate then, fully aware of Jesus' innocence, delivered Him to be scourged and crucified. He then released Barabbas, who all knew was truly guilty. Prophecy came true exactly as Jesus and the Old Testament had prophesied.

Scourging

See notes later regarding crucifixion. Note that, before the crucifixion came scourging. *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary* says scourging meant:

> "...to whip, flog, scourge ... as a public punishment of the condemned compare Deuteronomy 25:3; 1 Kings 12:11,14; II Corinthians 11:24,25; Acts 16:22; 22:24,25. Among Romans, rods were used or whips the thongs of which were weighted with jagged pieces of bone or metal. It was used to wrest confessions from victims ... Its victims tied to a stake with back bared to the tormentors generally fainted from the resulting lacerations or even died. It was forbidden to Roman citizens (Acts 22:25) being generally reserved for slaves or those condemned to death."

Note on time references

At this point Matthew goes on to describe the soldiers' mockery and scourging. Mark does the same, including the casting of lots for his clothes. Then he says, "And it was the third hour and they crucified Him..." (15:25).

John, however, states that, even after the mockery, Pilate brought Jesus back before the people, spoke to them again, and that it was about the sixth hour when he delivered Him to be crucified (John 19 especially verse 14). Matthew and Mark then add that there was darkness from the sixth hour to the ninth hour.

The most reasonable harmonizing of these accounts seems to be that Mark gives the details of the scourging, etc., and then says it was 9:00 AM when this happened. The meaning is probably that it was the third hour when these preparatory events began – i.e., when Pilate first delivered Him for the events which began the crucifixion process (Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:25; John 19:1).

After the scourging, however, he brought Jesus back for one last chance for the Jews to change their minds. Maybe the scourging would be enough to satisfy them. This proceeding dragged out until nearly noon, at which time Pilate finally gave up his attempts to save Jesus, and they actually nailed Him to the cross (John 19:15,16). Then all the earth became dark when they actually nailed Him to the cross (Mark 15:33-37).

Another possible explanation is that the problem is the result of a copyist's error. The symbol for the third hour is very similar to that for sixth hour. In this case, John 19:14 should actually read "third hour." Barnes mentions actual cases of this very error in Greek writings. He also says a few ancient manuscripts even have a three in John's account.

Clarke offers still a third possibility. Jews divided each day and each night into four 3-hour watches. The third watch in the day would be from 12 to 3, and it may be that Mark, by the third hour means the third watch (yet compare Mark 15:33. "Hour" = Greek ορα. It means a period of time, the context determining the duration. But generally it means 1/24 of the 24-hour day, especially when used with a number). Compare John 1:39; 4:6,52; 11:9; Acts 2:15; 10:3,9,30; 23:23.

The first explanation above does not indict the accuracy of Mark's record as we have it. There is no evidence or requirement that all statements must occur in exact chronological order as recorded. It is not an inaccuracy to record some events, then go back and give more details about some other event, or make a general comment that applies to the aforementioned statements. This is common.

In fact, no matter what explanation we give, there must be some overlap in Mark's account since he records the mockery after the delivery to be crucified while John says more trial followed the mockery. Further, the Greek word for "and" (δε) in Mark 15:25 does not demand chronological sequence, in contrast to επειτα which does demand it. Hogg and Vine discuss this in their commentary on Galatians 2:11.

27:27-44 - The Crucifixion

27:27-30 – The whole garrison of soldiers gathered around Jesus and put a scarlet robe on him. They twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and put a reed in His right hand. They bowed and mocked him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on Him and struck Him on the head with the reed.

In addition to the scourging, the soldiers made a great mockery of Jesus' claim to be "King of the Jews." His own clothes were removed, and He was given various symbols of royalty as a king. He was given a robe of scarlet or purple, a color commonly worn by royalty. He was given a crown, but they made one of thorns so it would hurt instead of being an honor. Then they gave Him a reed to use as a scepter.

Then they mockingly bowed to Him and called Him "King of the Jews." They spat on Him, and took the reed and hit Him over the head. This would cause the thorns to dig into His scalp at the same time that it belittled His claim to authority.

Probably the Romans all viewed this as mockery of Jesus Himself. That He would claim to be King of the Jews but have, to their mind, so little proof of it, was hilarious.

Further, this was no doubt intended to be a mockery of the Jews themselves. The Romans had little respect for the Jews. They would consider it very difficult and perhaps insulting to be required to police a people who were so stubborn, rebellious, and otherwise strange. To have an opportunity to insult One who claimed to be the King of the Jews, would be an opportunity to mock the nation as well as the pretender.

From Jesus' standpoint, of course, this would all be extremely difficult. These people were powerless before Him and He knew it. He absolutely deserved by inheritance to be king of the Jews (see Matthew 1). But more important, as the Son of God He deserved to rule over all these miserable creatures. They had no right to refuse to honor Him, let alone to mock and spit on Him. They thought they were mocking Him, but in reality He was the king of the Jews.

Jesus could have destroyed them in an instant. He could have called any power He wanted to compel them to immediately apologize for their egotistical insults and then compel them to truly humble themselves before Him. Yet instead, He knew He had to die and endure such insults, so He said nothing and let them continue in their evil. Hebrews 12:2 says He despised the shame.

27:31,32 – Having mocked Him, they removed the robe, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him away to be crucified. They found a man named Simon from Cyrene and compelled him to bear the cross.

The soldiers removed the "royal" garments and put Jesus' own clothes back on Him. As He went to be crucified, they found a man named Simon of Cyrene and compelled him to bear Jesus' cross.

John 19:17 says Jesus "went out carrying the cross for himself." There is no contradiction. Jesus was carrying the cross when He "went out." But this does not say He carried it all the way or that He carried it alone.

Luke 23:26 says Simon bore the cross "after Jesus." This could mean either that, after a time, Simon helped Jesus carry the cross, following "after Jesus," holding the rear of the cross. Or it could mean that Jesus carried it Himself for a time till He could go no further. Then Simon was compelled to carry it "after Jesus" had carried it. Cyrene was located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea west of Egypt (see a ***map***).

Catholicism has invented many superstitions about Jesus' journey to the cross and other events surrounding His death. Other groups have accepted these speculations and even invented others. But we should restrict ourselves to what the Bible says, since this is all that we can know to be true.

Archaeological note on Simon and Alexander

Mark's account identifies Simon as the father of Alexander and Rufus. This information would most likely have little interest to us.

However, archaeologists have found an ossuary (a pottery box for holding the bones of a dead person) clearly labeled "Alexandros (son of) Simon" along with other evidence that this was a man from Cyrene.

In 2010 I personally saw this ossuary on display at the Milwaukee Public Museum. Even though this was a secular museum, the ossuary was presented as almost surely belonging to the Alexander who, in this passage, is identified as the son of the Simon of Cyrene who carried Jesus' cross. See the July/August 2003 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, page 51, for more information.

27:33,34 – They took Him to a place called Golgotha, that is to say, Place of a Skull. They gave Him sour wine mingled with gall to drink, but He refused to drink it.

The place of the crucifixion was called Golgotha. This was the Hebrew word. The Latin word was Calvary. It meant "the place of a skull." It was a hill outside the city walls (John 19:20; Numbers 15:35,36; 1 Kings 21:13; Hebrews 13:11,12). Some say there is still a hill near Jerusalem called "skull hill," and some believe this is the place here referred to.

He was given sour wine (vinegar) to drink, mingled with gall (or myrrh). However, He refused to drink it. This was intended, some think, not to increase His torment, but to give Him a sedative that would ease His pain. By refusing to drink it, He was showing His intent to bear the whole "cup" His Father had given Him to drink. See Psalm 69:21.

27:35,36 – They crucified Jesus there, and divided His garments, casting lots, fulfilling the prophecy that they divided His garments among them and cast lots for His clothing. Then they sat down and kept watch over Him.

They crucified Him and divided His garments. This was customary for the soldiers to do with the clothing of one who was crucified. They divided His clothes, but John 19:23,24 adds that He had a tunic that was woven in one piece. So rather than tear it, they cast lots for it. This fulfilled the prophecy of Psalm 22:18. The garments were parted (divided), but the vesture was taken by lot.

Note the specific detail of the prophecy, yet it was fulfilled in every detail. Surely these Roman soldiers had no idea they were fulfilling prophecy, yet completely unintentionally they helped prove that Jesus was the very One they mockingly implied that He was not.

See notes above on the time element of the crucifixion.

A note on crucifixion:

The pattern followed in Jesus' case was historically typical of Roman crucifixions. The victim was often scourged, then compelled to carry his cross. He was then nailed or lashed to the cross. Jesus was ***nailed*** (John 20:25ff; Luke 24:39; Psalm 22:16). This inflicted great pain, especially when the victim moved.

The extremely unnatural position of the body led to cramps. This in turn led to the desire to move, which in turn caused more pain. Blood would drain to the legs. Fever – caused by the wounds, exposure, thirst, and pain – was one of the greatest horrors. Nevertheless, victims often survived for two to seven days. In Jesus' case, men were sent to break the legs of the victims to hasten death, but Jesus was already dead. Generally, the cause of death was heart failure.

For all these reasons, crucifixion was one of the most feared means of death. It came to stand for the concept of great troubles and suffering. But in Jesus' case, on top of all else, His Father forsook Him (see notes below). Further, there was the knowledge that He was innocent and deserved none of this, and that He was the Son of God and could stop it all in a moment.

And He did it all to save us from the punishment of our own sins. This is why the cross in the Bible is the symbol of Jesus' death and the redemption of mankind. Just as Jesus completely denied His own will to save us, He now requires us to completely give up our own will to please Him: Romans 12:1,2; Matthew 16:24ff; Galatians 1:20; Romans 6:6; etc.

Note that crosses used in crucifixion could come in various different shapes. Traditionally, pictures have shown Jesus crucified on a cross with a crossbar. This is likely to be correct but is nowhere directly stated in Scripture. Jehovah's Witnesses often make an issue about the shape of the cross, but in reality no one really knows.

For other passages about the cross, crucifixion, and Jesus' death see 1 Corinthians 1:17; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20; compare Matthew 26:28; 20:28; Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18,19; 2:24; Hebrews 2:9; Revelation 1:5; 5:9; 1 Timothy 2:4-6; Isaiah 53:5-9; 1 Corinthians 15:3; John 1:29; Hebrews 9:24-28; 10:9-13; 13:20,21; Romans 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15.

> "Cross"' (σταυρος) – "...1 a pole to be placed in the ground and used for capital punishment, *cross* ... a stake sunk into the earth in an upright position; a cross-piece was oft. attached to its upper part ... so that it was shaped like a T or thus: † ... 2 the cross, with focus on the fate of Jesus Christ, *the cross*..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

27:37,38 – Over Jesus' head they wrote His accusation: "This is Jesus, king of the Jews." Two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and the other on the left.

Over Jesus' head was written the accusation made against Him by the Jews that He was "King of the Jews." John 19:19-22 adds that it was written in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. It was placed where all who passed by could see.

The reaction of the Jews, as described by John, implies that Pilate put the sign more to belittle the Jews than to belittle Jesus. They were the ones who were bothered by it. Pilate knew they were envious of

Jesus. To state publicly that their king was being so ignominiously slain would be a wound to their vanity. In any case, the Jews were humiliated by it and asked Pilate to remove it. He refused saying, "What I have written, I have written." It said what he wanted it to say, and he would not change it.

Then we are told that two robbers were crucified with Him. Luke tells more about them. But the presence of the thieves proves the kind of people for whom this kind of treatment was reserved. Jesus was being treated as a common criminal! This fulfilled the Scripture that He was numbered with the transgressors (Isaiah 53:12).

27:39-43 – Bystanders mocked Jesus. They said if He could destroy the temple and build it in three days, He should save himself. If He was the Son of God, He should come down from the cross. If He could save others, then He should save Himself. They claimed they would believe in Him as King of Israel if He would come down from the cross. He claimed to be the Son of God, so let God save Him.

Here are some of the many statements of mockery hurled at Jesus. It must have been incredibly difficult for Jesus to hear these insults from evil, wicked creatures, knowing that He had full power to do everything they were taunting Him to do. In fact He could have destroyed them all in a moment. But He was dying to save ***them*** – ***and us*** – from sin! The Bible says their statements were blasphemy!

They said, if He could destroy the temple and build it in three days, He could surely come down from the cross (of course, He never said He would destroy the temple, though they accused Him of it – see our notes on His trial before the Jews). If He thought He could save others, why couldn't He save Himself? If He wanted people to believe He was King, all He had to do was come down from the cross and they would believe. He claimed to be the son of God; so if God really cared about Him, let God deliver Him.

Satan is so wily. What an appeal to pride! The effect would be to tempt Jesus to save Himself all this trouble and still accomplish His purpose. He could leave that cross and the people would believe! Isn't that what Jesus came to accomplish: to get the people to believe?

But had He done so, He would have failed God's purpose that He die for our sins. And besides, those people would not really believe if He had come down. They did not believe all the other great miracles He did, so why would they believe this one? What was needed was death and resurrection. That was the one great miracle He said He had left to give them.

Then they said He claimed to be God's Son and trust in God. If He is God's Son, then let Him call on God and see if God would deliver Him. If God really respected Him, then surely He could call on God to save

Him. Here again was a taunt to prove He was God's Son by coming down from the cross. If He couldn't come down, the implication was that He was not God's Son. Again, it was a temptation to give proof that He really was God's Son.

In the mockery of Jesus, the chief priests unknowingly fulfilled prophecy as recorded in Psalm 22:7,8. In this and many other ways the rulers of the Jews, in their attempt to discredit Jesus and destroy Him, actually fulfilled prophecy and thereby proved His claims to be valid!

In the end, God had a still greater miracle planned to prove Jesus was His Son. Coming down from the cross was easy compared to what God intended (Romans 1:4). But it required Jesus to accept the Father's will and wait for the Father's time. If we are God's children, we must do the same regarding God's will for our lives.

Interestingly, this story proves the distinction between the ***power*** to do miracles and the ***will*** to do miracles. When we say God does not do miracles today, many people say we are denying the power of God. In saying this, they become like these people taunting Jesus. They were saying that, if He did not do a miracle, He did not have the ***power.*** In reality, He had the ***power,*** but it was not God's ***will.***

That is exactly what we are saying about miracles today. God still has the power, but it is not His will, because the purpose of miracles has already been accomplished and they are not needed. If Jesus' refusal to come down from the cross was not a denial of God's power, then likewise, when we say that God does not do miracles today, we are also not denying His power.

27:44 – Even the robbers who were crucified with Jesus likewise reviled Him.

Matthew and Mark state, as a seemingly insignificant event, that the thieves also reviled Jesus. But Luke's account adds a major point.

Luke 23:39-43 – While Jesus was dying, He had a conversation with the two thieves who were dying with Him. One ridiculed Him. The other defended Jesus, recognizing that Jesus was innocent. Jesus promised this one would be in Paradise that day. This also shows Jesus' spirit of forgiveness.

Yet, this saying of Jesus has become a center of controversy. Many folks believe they are saved today by "faith only," so baptism is not essential to being forgiven of sins. When the subject is discussed, these folks often argue that the thief was saved without baptism, and that proves people today can do the same.

Consider Jesus' statement about the thief. Does it mean we can be saved by faith alone without baptism?

1. We really do not know whether the thief was or was not baptized.

Multitudes had been baptized by John the Baptist and by Jesus' disciples (Matthew 3:5,6; John 4:1,2). It is entirely possible that the thief was baptized and then later fell into sin. In this case, he would be an erring child of God not in need of baptism like an alien sinner. We cannot argue this is a case of salvation without baptism unless we can first prove the thief was not baptized.

2. The thief is also not an example of salvation by faith.

Those who argue for salvation by "faith only" cannot use the thief to defend their position either, for he did not have the kind of faith that is required for salvation today.

Romans 10:9 – If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. To be saved according to the gospel we must believe that God ***has raised*** Jesus from the dead. The thief on the cross could not possibly believe that, because Jesus had not yet died, let alone been raised.

So, if people believe faith is essential to salvation, they cannot use the thief as their example for how to be saved. He was no more saved by the faith of the gospel than he was saved by baptism. We could as easily use the thief to prove salvation without gospel faith as we could use him as an example of salvation without baptism.

So those who believe in salvation by "faith only" must admit we today are not saved like the thief was saved. But if so, why bring up the fact he was not baptized?

3. Many Scriptures clearly teach that baptism is essential to receive forgiveness under the gospel.

Mark 16:16 – He who believes and is baptized will be saved.

Acts 2:38 – Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.

Acts 22:16 – Be baptized and wash away your sins.

Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27 – We are baptized into Christ, into His death. We have newness of life after we have been baptized (John 3:3,5).

1 Peter 3:21 – Baptism now saves us.

God's word does not contradict itself. It clearly teaches baptism is essential to receive remission. Therefore, the thief cannot prove people ***are*** saved without baptism for that would contradict other Scriptures. So there must be some other explanation for the case of the thief.

4. The thief was saved while the Old Testament was still in effect. He is not an example of salvation under the gospel at all.

The truth is that the thief was saved under a different law and dispensation than we are under. That is why he did not need to believe

what we must believe, nor did he need to be baptized. How he was saved is irrelevant to how we are saved.

Colossians 2:14 – Jesus removed the first ordinances nailing them to His cross. Until Jesus died, the Jews lived under the laws given at Mt. Sinai through Moses. When He died, those laws ceased to be in effect.

Ephesians 2:13-16 – He abolished the old law through His blood shed on the cross (verses 13,16).

Hebrews 10:9,10; 9:16,17 – Jesus removed the first testament and replaced it with His new covenant the gospel. It is under this New Testament that we are saved by Jesus' death. As with any will or testament, Jesus had to die to bring His testament into force. The old law was in effect until Jesus died, then it was replaced by the New Covenant. (Compare Galatians 3:13; Romans 7:4.)

But the thief was forgiven before Jesus died and therefore while the first covenant was in effect. The conditions he had to meet to be forgiven prove nothing about the conditions under which we are forgiven. He proves no more about how we should be saved than does David, Moses, Noah, or Abraham. They did not have to believe what we do nor did they have to be baptized, because they did not live under the same law we do.

It may be argued that Jesus died before the thief did; but this still proves nothing because the question concerns the ***forgiveness*** of the thief, and ***that*** occurred ***before*** Jesus died. Since baptism is for the remission of sins, the thief would not need baptism for the simple reason his sins were already remitted directly by Jesus. There was obviously a period of time anyway from Jesus' death till He arose and commanded the disciples to preach everywhere that people had to be baptized to be saved – Mark 16:16.

The plain fact is that the thief was forgiven before the conditions required by the great commission came into effect.

5. While Jesus was on earth, He had the power to forgive people directly. After His death, people can be saved only according to the terms of His will.

During His life, Jesus directly spoke the forgiveness of several people (Mark 2:5-12; Luke 7:48,49; compare John 8:1-11). Apparently the thief is another such case. But the conditions under which Jesus forgave people then are not the terms of the gospel since, as shown above, it was not yet in effect.

To illustrate, during his lifetime, a man may distribute his possessions to anyone he wishes in any way he wishes. But after his death, no one has any right to receive anything from the man except according to the terms of his will or testament. But His will does not come into effect till He dies.

So, Jesus directly forgave people during His lifetime (apparently according to His ability to read their hearts and observe their lives). The gospel came into effect after He died, and people today receive

forgiveness only by complying with its terms. Those terms require baptism, as well as faith, as shown by the verses already listed.

Jesus surely seeks the forgiveness of all mankind. If we seek His forgiveness, it must be according to the conditions He has revealed.

27:45-56 - Miracles Associated with Jesus' Death

27:45 – There was darkness over all the land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour.

Several miracles occurred at Jesus' crucifixion. One was darkness over the land from the sixth hour (12 noon) till the ninth hour (3:00 PM). Note that this occurred at what would normally be the very brightest time of the day, and it lasted far longer than could be explained by an eclipse or any other natural phenomena. "Solar eclipses occur only during a new moon, while Passover was celebrated at the time of the full moon…" – *Archaeology Study Bible*, page 1425. In short, this darkness was impossible by natural law, so it was a miracle.

What was its significance? Like all miracles, it proved the supernatural intervention of God in the affairs of this world in order to confirm that some message or fact was truth revealed from God. It confirmed the word (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3). Miracles especially occurred in association with events of great spiritual significance in God's dealings with man. The miracles associated with Jesus' death are further confirmation that He was the Son of God as He claimed and that His message was truly from God.

Sometimes miracles also had symbolic significance. It is possible that this one symbolized the "darkness" of the event that was occurring (Luke 22:53). Darkness is a symbol of gloom, sorrow, and sin. Death is the power of Satan (Hebrews 2:14). This was surely a time of the power of darkness to lead men to create a great sin in crucifying God's own Son. It was surely a dark time for Jesus to endure.

> "Now a certain Phlegon, a philosopher among the Greeks, recollects this darkness as an incredible occurrence in the fourteenth [night] of the moon, when an eclipse should not have appeared." – Apollinaris (*Ancient Christian Commentary*) (See also Barnes' notes.)

27:46 – About the ninth hour Jesus cried out, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

This is one of Jesus' seven sayings on the cross. Consider:

This statement quotes Psalms 22:1.

Either Jesus was deliberately quoting Psalm 22:1 because He was aware it applied to Him, or else God simply knew Jesus would say this and inspired David to prophesy it. In either case, Jesus' statement is

another fulfillment of prophecy. Psalms 22 also describes many other aspects of Jesus' suffering on the cross.

Psalm 22 helps us understand the meaning of Jesus' statement (note verses 1,2). "Why have you forsaken me" is explained to mean God had not come to help Him in His time of great need and distress. Jesus was facing great problems. He sought a source of strength, but not even His Father in heaven came to help him.

Standing for what is right is sometimes very hard to do. Suffering great pain, agony, and rejection by others is also hard to do. But if you have other people there to strengthen and encourage you it is so much easier. (Galatians 6:2; Ecclesiastes 4:9,12)

Romans 8:31 – If God is for us, who can be against us? Above all, we need the strength God provides. The greatest source of strength is God Himself. If we are on His side, we need no one else.

Until the cross, Jesus had always had the Father with Him.

John 1:1 – Jesus was with the Father from the beginning. Before He came to earth, He had been in heaven with the Father, constantly in companionship with Him.

Matthew 3:17 – At Jesus' baptism, the Father spoke from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The Father was there. Jesus had His approval and fellowship.

Matthew 17:5 – At the Mount of Transfiguration again the Father spoke from the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (John 12:28,29)

Luke 22:43 – When Jesus was praying in the garden, in great agony facing the trials of the cross, He prayed that He might escape the suffering of the cross if possible. At this time the Father did not leave Him without comfort, but an angel appeared to Him from heaven, strengthening Him.

John 16:32 – "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." Even during Jesus' trials, when the disciples forsook Jesus and fled, yet the Father was with Jesus. He was not alone. This gave Jesus comfort.

Throughout all His existence and all His life on earth, Jesus always knew the Father was with Him. People did not understand Him; people forsook Him and rejected Him. Yet the Father stood by Him and helped Him with every difficulty that He faced. Until He was on the cross. Then at His time of greatest suffering and agony of all, even the Father forsook Him.

Why and in what sense did the Father forsake Jesus on the cross?

Perhaps I don't fully understand. Some claim there could not be an actual break in fellowship between the beings in the Godhead. Others claim that the Father did not leave Jesus alone because of John 16:32; 8:28,29. Nevertheless, Jesus plainly said the Father forsook Him.

The following ought to be clear: ***The sins of mankind were not imputed to Jesus***; that is, the guilt of the sins of mankind was not attributed to Jesus as though He Himself was guilty of those sins. I know of no passage that says guilt of sin can be transferred from any one individual to another (Ezekiel 18:20; 2 Corinthians 5:10). ***Nor did Jesus go to Hell (gehenna) for our sins***, but when He died He went to Paradise in Hades (Luke 23:43; compare Acts 2:31).

But consider the fact that, when Jesus was on the cross, He was the sacrifice for our sins.

2 Corinthians 5:21 – For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus was the only man who ever lived His whole life without sinning. Yet on the cross He was the sacrifice for our sins, so we who are sinners could be treated as if we are righteous.

Isaiah 53:6,11,12 – God laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all. He bore our iniquities and sins. (1 Peter 2:24)

Galatians 3:13 – Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"). This quotes Deuteronomy 21:23 which says "he who is hanged is accursed of God." So in order to redeem us from the curse of disobedience, Jesus Himself came under a curse even before God.

As our sacrifice, Jesus suffered and was treated as though He were a criminal. Furthermore, He was under a curse in the eyes of both God and man. So, Jesus was treated as a criminal, God Himself viewed Him as if He were a under a curse, and God did not come to His aid in His hour of greatest need, but allowed Him to suffer on the cross without assistance.

If this is how the Father was treating Jesus, then surely it must have been the hardest thing about the whole ordeal. Jesus could endure rejection by men as long as the Father was with Him. Suffering and pain would be terrible. But having had fellowship with His Father forever in the past, and knowing He had done nothing wrong, and now in His greatest hour of need and suffering and agony, surely the hardest thing would be to know that the Father now "forsook Him."

Jesus suffered, not just physical death, but treatment from God as the sacrifice for our sins as if He were under a curse. No wonder He cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

Surely when we think of Jesus' suffering on the cross, we ought to appreciate all He did for us. He suffered so He could save us. How can

we sit here, knowing what He did for us, and just go on day after day not living for Him who died for us? Surely that is the height of ingratitude.

27:47-49 – Some thought that Jesus was calling for Elijah. One filled a sponge with sour wine and gave it to Jesus to drink. The others said to let Him alone and see if Elijah would come to save Him.

Misunderstanding what Jesus had said, the people thought He was calling upon Elijah. "Elijah" means "Jehovah is God" or "Jehovah indeed" – an emphatic expression for Jehovah. When Jesus had called on the name of God, people mistook Him thinking He was calling to Elijah the prophet. (Another view, expressed by some, is that people did not misunderstand what Jesus said but deliberately mocked Him by pretending He was calling on Elijah.)

Someone in the crowd ran to get Jesus some vinegar or sour wine to drink. This was a juice which, some say, was often drunk by soldiers, unlike our vinegar. To offer this to Jesus was an act of mercy. See Psalm 69:21 – They also gave me gall for my food, And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Others, however, said to leave Him alone – i.e., don't care for His need. He had called for Elijah, they thought, so just wait and see if Elijah would come to help Him. They had taunted Him about His claim to be God's Son, saying that He should do a miracle and come down from the cross. Now they thought they should not help His need but wait and see if He could get help from Elijah.

John adds that, sometime in the crucifixion, Jesus stated that He was thirsty. It was a common ailment during crucifixion.

27:50 – When Jesus had again cried with a loud voice, He yielded up His spirit.

Matthew says simply that Jesus cried with a loud voice before He yielded up the Spirit. Luke's account tells us what He cried: "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46). Then He gave up His spirit. Consider some things we can learn from this statement.

Death is separation of the spirit from the body.

Jesus obviously possessed a spirit nature or essence, which returned to the control of the Father when Jesus died. All men have such a spirit nature.

Hebrews 12:9 – God is the Father of our spirits.

Zechariah 12:1 – God forms the spirit of man within him.

2 Corinthians 4:16 – The spirit is referred to as the inner man that dwells within the outer man (compare 5:1ff). Man is body and spirit: outer man and inner man. (John 2:19,21; 2 Peter 1:13,14)

At death, this spirit leaves the body and returns to the Father's control.

James 2:26 – The body without the spirit is dead. When Jesus died, clearly His spirit departed from His body and returned to the Father's control (Luke 23:46).

Acts 7:59 – When Stephen was slain, He called upon Jesus to receive His spirit. Just as Jesus' spirit left His body to return to the Fathers' control, so when we die, our spirit leaves our body and goes to God's control.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 – The dust (the body – Genesis 3:17-19) returns to the earth, but the spirit returns to God who gave it.

Some people tell us that man is wholly physical, like animals, and death is the end of existence. Like the Sadducees in Jesus' time, they do not believe man possesses a spirit that continues to exist after death (Acts 23:6-8).

Jesus' last dying statement proves that He disagrees with these materialists. He did expect His spirit to leave His body and continue to exist. (Luke 16:19-31)

Jesus was raised, and likewise all people will be raised.

As death refers to the departure of the spirit from the body, so resurrection is the return of the spirit to the body (in a renewed form). The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus arose from the dead.

Matthew 28:5-7 – All four accounts of Jesus' life record that He arose from the dead. Here an angel told the women who came to the tomb that Jesus was not there because He had arisen as He had said He would.

Romans 1:4 – Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:1-8 – Paul restates the gospel as preached by Him, including the fact Jesus was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures (verse 4). Many eyewitnesses testified that He was raised. Paul then argues at length (verses 12-19) that the resurrection is fundamental to the gospel, so much so that our faith is vain without it.

Romans 10:9,10 – To be saved, we must believe Jesus was raised from the dead.

At death, Jesus commended His spirit into the Father's hand. Later, the spirit returned to the body and He arose from the dead. At Jesus' return, we will all be raised.

1 Corinthians 6:14 – And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.

John 5:28-29 – Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 – Jesus is the firstfruits of the resurrection, and His resurrection is the assurance that we too will be raised when He returns.

When Jesus was crucified, it would appear that the Devil had defeated Jesus. But Jesus was really the victor because His death was the sacrifice whereby all of us can be saved from our sins and so escape the power of the Devil.

Yet through all His suffering, Jesus knew He would be raised. So as Jesus died, He commended His spirit to His Father's hands. Finally, the death and the suffering ended, but that did not end Jesus' existence. Jesus then defeated Satan's power of death by rising from the dead. There is only one enemy left to defeat and that is the Devil's power of death over us. That will be defeated at Jesus' return when all men are raised.

So in a manner similar to Jesus, when we die, our spirit does not cease to exist but returns to the Father's control. And when Jesus returns, our spirits will be reunited with our reformed and glorified bodies. That will be the final defeat of Satan.

(Matthew 22:23-33; Luke 12:4,5)

27:51 – The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and rocks were split.

Here is a continuation of the miracles surrounding Jesus' death (compare verse 45). The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. This was a very thick veil, hard to tear. Had man been able or been of a mind to tear it, he would surely have grabbed it at the bottom and torn upward. But this was torn from top to bottom. It was an act of God.

What is the significance? At the very least it symbolized a rejection and removal of the Old Testament system. The temple was the center of worship under the Law of Moses, and the veil was the center of the temple, separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (Exodus 26:31ff). By destroying it, God symbolized that the worship of that system was no longer what He wanted (compare Hebrews 10:1-10; 7:11-14; 8:6-13; 9:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-11; Galatians 3:24,25; 5:1-6; Romans 7:1-7; Ephesians 2:11-16; Colossians 2:13-17). Note that it was Jesus' death that removed the Old Law.

Perhaps the event also symbolized that there would now be access for all men to God and His grace. The veil separated men from the Most Holy Place, where God's presence symbolically dwelt over the Ark of the Covenant. Only the high priest could enter there to make atonement for the people. But that Old Law could not really forgive sins. When Jesus died, the way was made open for all men to come to God and receive forgiveness through our new High Priest Jesus (Hebrews 9:6-10:23; especially 9:7,8; 10:19,20; 6:19,20).

Tearing one's garment was also a Jewish custom for expressing great emotion and distress. Perhaps this was also a way by which God showed His emotion for the death of His Son and the sins of mankind, especially the attitude of the Jews that made it necessary.

Other signs that occurred at this time were an earthquake and rocks torn apart. These things could occur by nature, but they were often done by God at times to indicate the presence of His great power. Especially, it was done at the coming of the Old Testament law at Mt. Sinai. It is surely appropriate now that the ground also trembled as God removed that Old Law and brought about the institution of the New Covenant the gospel (compare Hebrews 12:18-29; Exodus 19:18).

27:52,53 – Graves were opened and many bodies of dead saints were raised. Coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

In addition, another great miracle was that graves were opened and many dead holy ones (saints) were raised. This miracle was evident to many people because those who had been raised came out of the graves after Jesus' resurrection and went into Jerusalem and appeared to many people. So, there can be no doubt that the miracle happened.

(It is not clear when these people actually arose. The appearances were after His resurrection, but when the people actually arose is not clear. There is no contradiction between this and the teaching that Jesus is the firstfruits of the dead. Several people were raised before Jesus was, such as Lazarus, the son of the widow of Nain, and even some in the Old Testament. The point is that Jesus is the first one to arise and never return to death even as we will be raised when He returns – compare Romans 6:3ff.)

The significance of this miracle is surely that God was testifying to the importance of His Son and to the great event that occurred when He died and arose again. Surely the resurrection of dead men signifies an event of great magnitude.

27:54 – When the centurion and his companions who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and other events, they feared greatly saying that this was truly the Son of God.

The purpose of these great signs can be observed by the effect they had on the centurion and others who were with him. A centurion is in charge of a group of one hundred men. This centurion was evidently supervising the soldiers who performed the crucifixions. Presumably he is the same one who was later asked by Pilate whether or not Jesus was dead (Mark 15:44).

Such men would be hardened to crucifixions and the death of criminals. Events surrounding any particular crucifixion would not be likely to significantly impress them. Yet this centurion was greatly affected by events surrounding the death of Jesus.

The effect of these events on him and others, according to the records, was that it caused great fear. Surely it would be a fearful thing

to witness darkness for three hours in the middle of the day, then an earthquake and stones breaking. Other accounts imply that He was impressed also by Jesus' conduct on the cross.

He said that surely Jesus was the Son of God. It is not certain that He believed in Jesus as the Son of God in the sense of Deity, God in the flesh, as the Bible teaches it. He was presumably a Roman, probably a pagan, and it seems unlikely he would know enough to understand that.

Luke's account records that he said, "Certainly this was a righteous man" (23:47). At least the centurion was convinced Jesus was one of God's children. He was convinced Jesus was a good man and had God's favor and that was the reason these great miracles were occurring.

(McGarvey, however, comments that the centurion may have lived in Jerusalem among the Jews long enough to have heard about the claims of Jesus and so may have had a somewhat accurate understanding of the concept of the Son of God.)

In any case, here is yet another instance in which the people deeply involved in Jesus' death became convinced Jesus did not deserve to die. Is appropriate here to summarize all of the people deeply involved in the trial and crucifixion of Jesus who declared Him to be innocent, not worthy of death despite the fact that He was slain.

People Who Declared Jesus to Be Unworthy of Death

Matthew 27:4 – Judas, who betrayed Jesus, said He had betrayed innocent blood.

John 18:38; 19:4,6 – At Jesus' trial, Pilate said three times that He found no fault in Jesus.

Matthew 27:24 – Pilate washed his hands saying Jesus was innocent.

Matthew 27:19 – Pilate's wife sent him a message saying Jesus was righteous.

Luke 23:15 – Pilate said Herod found nothing in Jesus worthy of death.

Luke 23:41 – The thief crucified with Jesus acknowledged his own guilt but said Jesus had done nothing wrong.

Luke 23:47 – The centurion in charge of the crucifixion declared that Jesus was a righteous man.

27:55,56 – The crucifixion was observed from a distance by many women who had followed Jesus from Galilee ministering to Him. This included Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

Several women are then listed as being present to witness all these proceedings. All of them had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him – i.e., they were part of His disciples and served according to His

teachings (Luke 8:2,3). The list named includes the following (compare John 19:25):

Mary Magdalene

Luke 8:2 tells us that Jesus had cast seven demons out of Mary. She is named in several places as being present at His death and being the first one to whom He appeared after the resurrection.

There is no Scriptural basis for the man-made tradition that Mary was a prostitute before becoming a disciple of Jesus. Furthermore, to conclude, as some have, that Mary and Jesus were sexually or romantically involved is totally without foundation in Scripture and is in fact blasphemous in light of Jesus' teaching about fornication – compare Matthew 5:27,28; 15:18-20.

Mary, mother of James and Joses

John 19:25 lists Mary the wife of Cleophas. McGarvey says Cleophas is an alternate form of Alpheus. So, this Mary may have been the mother of James, the son of Alpheus, who was one of the apostles (Matthew 10:3).

On the other hand, John also lists the mother of Jesus, was also named Mary and was also the mother of sons named James and Joses (Matthew 13:55). So it is not conclusive which Mary this refers to.

The mother of Zebedee's sons

Also included, according to Matthew, was the mother of Zebedee's sons. James and John were the sons of Zebedee, so this was the mother of James and John. John's account appears to list the same women as Matthew does (except he adds Jesus' mother Mary). If it is the same women, then this woman is listed as the sister of Jesus' mother. That would make Jesus a cousin to James and John. It would also explain why Jesus would ask John to take his mother in – because Mary was John's aunt. Finally compare Mark 16:1: if this is a list of the same three women, then this woman's name was Salome.

The fact that these women witnessed the death of Jesus demonstrates that these were public events. They were witnessed by many people. This means there would be abundant testimony regarding what happened at the death of Jesus.

If the gospel writers had been inaccurate, many people alive at that time could have testified to the inaccuracies in their accounts. It would have been almost impossible for the apostles or anyone else to have faked these events. And it is foolish for anyone today to claim that somehow they know the Bible records are inaccurate when there were so many witnesses alive at the time. If those people raised no criticisms regarding inaccuracy, by what proof could anyone today raise such criticisms?

27:57-66 – Jesus' Burial

Compare Mark 15:42-27; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42.

27:57,58 – When evening had come, a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea, who had become a disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate commanded the body to be given to him.

When evening came on the day before the Sabbath, a man named Joseph of Arimathea came and asked for the body of Jesus, and Pilate granted him permission to take it. *Baker's Bible Atlas* says Arimathea was located about twenty miles northwest of Jerusalem (see a ***map***).

Several things are told us about Joseph.

He was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews (John 19:38). One wonders at the legitimacy of being a secret disciple at a time when people needed to speak out for Jesus. On the other hand, Joseph apparently had much more courage than many or most other disciples, for he boldly asked for Jesus' body.

He was a rich man. This also helps explain why he asked for Jesus' body. He had the means to provide a good tomb for it. This fulfills Isaiah 53:9 which said the Messiah would have His grave with the wicked and be with a rich man in His death. Though He had died a criminal's death, yet He was buried in an honorable tomb.

Joseph was also a prominent council member (Mark 15:43), but had not consented to Jesus' death (Luke 23:51). Clearly he was not only wealthy but also powerful and influential. This could mean that he had been on the Sanhedrin council and had there opposed Jesus' death. (Other translations imply other possible meanings. Perhaps he was not on that council but just had a high position and had no real say in the decision, yet he did not agree with it.)

He was a good and righteous man who looked for the kingdom of God (Luke 23:50,51). He apparently believed the kingdom was coming soon; and since He was a disciple of Jesus, it is apparent that he had expected Jesus to be the king.

Asking for the body of Jesus would have taken courage.

Jesus was a condemned criminal who had just been executed by the most horrible means available. For anyone – especially for a man of Joseph's position – to demonstrate affiliation with such a man might risk the anger of the Romans, but would certainly involve indignation and loss of reputation among the Jewish leaders.

Mark adds that, when Joseph asked for Jesus' body, Pilate was surprised that He was already dead. Victims of crucifixion did not usually die this soon; some continued suffering on the cross for even several days.

To be certain that Jesus had died, Pilate sent for the centurion to determine from him whether Jesus really was dead. Here is evidence Jesus really died on that cross. He did not just swoon and then later revive as some claim. Even those who crucified Him granted that He was dead. As professional executioners, it is highly unlikely that those in charge would be mistaken about it.

27:59-61 – Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb which he had hewn out of rock. Then he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalena and the other Mary were there sitting opposite the tomb.

We are told briefly how the body of Jesus was prepared for burial.

Joseph wrapped the body in a linen cloth. John adds that Nicodemus (compare John 3:1ff; 7:50) helped him (John 19:39,40), and they used the spices that were customary in burial in that day: myrrh and aloes. Also when they buried him, Mary Magdalene and another Mary sat where they could see.

Joseph was a good, honest man, the story says. And three other honest people were involved to some extent. If they had discovered that Jesus was not really dead, they would never have buried Him. Nor would they have remained silent while the apostles preached that He had been raised from the dead. In addition to the centurion's testimony, we have the implied testimony of these people that Jesus really was dead.

We are then given a description of the tomb where Jesus was buried.

It was a new tomb, hewn from rock. After the body was placed inside, a large stone was rolled against the door (an exceeding great one – Mark 16:4). This tells us that it was a cave, which was a common form of burial in that day (remember that Sarah and other people in Abraham's family were buried in a cave as was Lazarus). John tells us that the tomb was in a garden near the place of crucifixion, and that no man had yet been laid in it (19:41,42). It was not uncommon to use the same cave to bury several people, but no one else was in this tomb.

This is all useful information. First, if it was a new tomb in which there was no other body, then there could be no mistake about which body left the tomb. There could have been no switching of bodies or any such sleight of hand. The body of Jesus was definitely placed in the tomb, as at least four people can testify from this record. And there was no other body there.

Furthermore, the walls were solid rock and a huge rock rolled over the door. Therefore, there was no way to sneak the body out or dig it out a back way. Nor could Jesus have awakened from a swoon, after all the suffering He had endured, and simply walked out or dug His way out.

He would have been in no condition to move the stone, and no other exit was possible.

Note that Jesus' burial was symbolic of baptism (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12). As He was completely surrounded in the element, so we must be in baptism: a complete immersion. See also John 3:23; Acts 8:38,39; Mark 1:9,10; Hebrews 10:22.

The location of Jesus' tomb is uncertain. Various locations have been suggested. In recent years it has been claimed that, not only has Jesus' family tomb been found, but that in fact remains of Jesus are there along with those of Mary Magdalena who is supposed to have been His wife. These claims have been discredited by other scholars. And the claims totally ignore all the Biblical evidence that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead. The claims that He married Mary Magdalene or had children by her are not only without evidence, but totally contradict Biblical teaching including the eyewitness testimony of Jesus' resurrection. (See Kyle Pope's notes for specifics.)

27:62-64 – On the day that followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees told Pilate that Jesus had said He would arise after three days. So, they asked for the tomb to be made secure until the third day lest the disciples come and steal the body and say He had been raised.

The Jews were not yet satisfied. They had seen to it that Jesus was killed. But they wanted to make sure this was the end of it – that there was no way the disciples could attempt to renew Jesus' claims. In so doing, they give us excellent assistance in demonstrating the complete victory of the resurrection. By making it harder for Jesus' body to leave the tomb, they make it all the more amazing that it did so.

They remembered that Jesus had said He would arise after three days. They evidently did not believe He could do this, but they were afraid the disciples might somehow steal the body and claim He had been raised. So, they went to Pilate and asked him to seal or secure the tomb so that the body of Jesus (whom they called a deceiver) could not be removed.

They feared "the last deception will be worse than the first." If His disciples could claim He had been raised, more people might be led to believe in Him than even before.

Note that these enemies seemed to have a better understanding of what Jesus had said than did His disciples. Despite the Jews' fears, none of the disciples seemed to have any idea that Jesus would arise, despite the numerous times He had said He would. They seem to have given up on Jesus completely. But these Jewish rulers had not forgotten. They wanted to make sure their plan was not foiled.

Note that this happened on the day after the Day of Preparation. There is evidence that this expression was a term for the sixth day of the

week or Friday, as we would call it. If so, then this means Jesus was crucified on Friday.

> "Day of Preparation" (παρασκευη) – "...in our lit. only of a definite day, as the *day of preparation* for a festival; acc. to Israel's usage ... it was Friday, on which day everything had to be prepared for the Sabbath, when no work was permitted Mt 27:62 ... J 19:42 ... *day of preparation for the Passover* (or *Friday of Passover Week*) vs. 14. For Christians as well [it] served to designate the sixth day of the week..." – Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich.

"The reference would be to the 6th day of the week." – Vine

27:65,66 – Pilate told the Jews that they had a guard so they should make the tomb as secure as they knew how. So they went and sealed the stone and set the guard.

Pilate gave them permission to secure the tomb, but he said for them to use their own guards. He had no objection to the tomb being sealed, but he did not intend to use his men for it. The Jews then sealed the stone and set a guard around it.

This did not, of course, stop the resurrection. We will see that Jesus still arose. But by their action, the Jews helped to show how amazing it was. The stone door was not only large and heavy, it was sealed. And there were guards outside. All this happened to keep the body inside. And it made it all the more amazing when the body still left. The Jews could not blame the Romans for having allowed the body to leave, for it was their own soldiers.

The end result helps show how convincing the proof for the resurrection is. The Jews did their very best to prevent it, but could not. And the precautions they took show beyond doubt that there can be no explanation for how it could have happened by any means other than what the Bible claims: Jesus arose from the dead.

Matthew 28

Chapter 28 – Jesus' Resurrection

Compare Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20 & 21.

28:1-10 - The Women Visit the Tomb

Compare Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18.

Variety of witnesses

The accounts of the resurrection are testimony from various different witnesses showing what they saw and personally witnessed following Jesus' death. As with other testimony, each witness tells what he/she saw, and each may omit things described by others.

This does not mean there are any contradictions, but only that God is here accomplishing the very purpose that witnesses serve in testifying regarding any historical event. The intent is to give the viewpoints of several different individuals. The result is a complete account of all we need to know of the main details of what happened. Sufficient detail is given to make sure the testimony is conclusive. By having the accounts of several witnesses, we possess the kind of evidence accepted by both God and man in historical testimony. See Matthew 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28; Deuteronomy 19:15.

Note that, in some accounts, the author's record simply summarizes events, some of which may not have personally involved the author. There is no claim that every detail is stated in its exact chronological sequence. This is standard procedure for historians. Rarely are all events given exactly chronologically. Rather, the writer will follow a particular person or series of events in one place or circumstance, then he will move to follow another person or series of events elsewhere. This generally requires an overlap of time with flashbacks, etc.

Furthermore, this was a time of great excitement, confusion, and even disorder. Many events happened simultaneously, or people may have even acted in disarray and disorder. But when events happen simultaneously, only one can be recorded at a time. And when people act in disorderly ways, no accurate account will seem to be orderly.

Questions regarding how time was measured.

Mark 16:9 says Jesus arose on the first day of the week. The resurrection of Jesus is in many ways the greatest event in the history of the world. We are nowhere directly told what day of the week Jesus died, but all four gospel accounts tell us Jesus arose on the first day of the week, and all of them mention it repeatedly. Why this emphasis on the first day unless there is some significance to it? (Luke 24:1,4,21; Mark 16:2,9; Matt. 26:1-7; Luke 24:1-9; John 20:1-10)

Some readers may consider the following discussion of the time to be more technical than necessary. However, Sabbatarians have made technical arguments on the language of the time element to try to prove that Jesus was raised on the seventh day of the week, not on the first day. Please consider the following information in response.

Jesus said He would arise after three days, on the third day, and would be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. Since Jesus used all these expressions, obviously they all mean the same thing. See Matthew 12:40; 26:61; 27:40,63; Mark 8:31; 14:58; 15:29; John 2:19,20; Matt. 16:21; Luke 9:22; 1 Corinthians 15:4.

Note that the Bible nowhere directly states what day it was when Jesus was crucified. There is evidence that it occurred on Friday, but this is not directly stated. What is stated though is that, however time was counted, Jesus was raised on the first day of the week and on that day He first began to appear to disciples. This definitely was the third day since He had been crucified.

We may have difficulty understanding how these expressions of times were used, but the people alive at the time surely understood. In Luke 24:1,13-21 Jesus appeared to two disciples after His resurrection. They clearly identified that day – the first day of the week – as being the "third day" since the crucifixion. They stated this to Jesus Himself, and He at no point disagreed or corrected their statement. So, regardless of whether or not we today understand on what day He was crucified or how the days were counted, Jesus did arise on the first day of the week, which was the third day after His crucifixion according to the way people then expressed time. Jesus himself indirectly confirmed it.

So, there is little emphasis in Scripture on what day Jesus died. However, there is great emphasis on the fact that He arose and appeared on the first day of the week. That day has significance for our worship. Regardless of specifically how we deal with the time element, no conclusions can be correct if they contradict the evidence we have just presented.

Specific evidence regarding expressions of time

Confusion is caused by attempting to use a technical mathematical approach to language that is not intended to be meant so precisely. Some try to calculate that "three days and three nights" must equal exactly 72

hours, no more and no less. But this assumes that the language is meant to be that technical.

Remember, the Bible speaks in the language of the common people. While we do want to understand precisely what the Bible means, we must not assume or force upon it a meaning that was not intended by God through the inspired writers. In other words, it is not a proper use of Scripture to insist that its meaning is more specific than what the inspired speakers intended as they communicated to the people in whose language they spoke.

With regard to time element, the question is whether or not such expressions as "in three days," "after three days," and "three days and three nights" are ***intended*** by Bible writers to mean exactly 72 hours, or could they refer to ***parts*** of days? When God inspired the writers to speak in the language of that day, intending to be understood by the people to whom they spoke, what did these expressions mean?

Actually, we today often use such expressions to refer to partial days. When we say, "I did this three days ago," do we necessarily mean exactly 72 hours ago? Or can it include partial days? Is such language intended to be mean exact mathematical precision, or not?

If a man says, "I worked all day," does he necessarily mean he worked 24 hours, or even 12 hours? Doesn't such language often mean simply that he worked the whole eight-hour or ten-hour shift that was required of him? So, a partial day is counted as a day.

> Consider also the guest at a hotel who checks in at 8:30 p.m. on Wednesday, and checks out at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday—less than 24 hours later. Did the man stay one day or two days at the hotel? Technically, the guest was there for less than one full day (24-hour period), yet the hotel legally can charge him for two days since he did not leave before the mandatory 11:00 a.m. checkout time. Considering how flexible we are in measuring time, depending on the context, perhaps we should not be surprised at how liberal the ancients could be in calculating time. – Eric Lyons, www.apologeticspress.org/AllegedDiscrepancies.aspx?article=756

More important, we must ask how such language is used in Scripture. Consider some Bible examples that demonstrate that counting of days may include partial days.

"In 3 days" or the "third day" means simply the day after tomorrow.

Exodus 19:10-16 – "today … tomorrow … third day" (so "the third day" = the day after tomorrow)

Leviticus 7:16,17 – "the same day … the next day … the third day" (so "the third day" = the day after tomorrow)

Leviticus 19:6,7 – "the same day … the next day … the third day" (so "the third day" = the day after tomorrow)

2 Chronicles 10:5,12 – "***After*** three days" (verse 5) = "***on*** the third day … the third day" (verse 12). Note that there is no distinction in meaning between "***after*** three days" and "***on*** the third day." But we have shown that "on the third day" means the day after tomorrow.

Matthew 27:63,64 – "After three days" = "the third day."

Acts 10 – An angel appeared to Cornelius at "about the ninth hour of the day" (approximately 3:00 p.m. – verse 3). He sent messengers who met Peter **"the next day"** (verse 9). Then **"on the next day"** (verse 23) Peter and his companions left for Caesarea. "And **the following day**" (verse 24) they arrived at Caesarea and taught Cornelius and his household the Gospel. So this must have happened three literal days later ("the next day … the next day … the following day"). However, during that discussion, Cornelius explained that he had seen the angel, "**four days ago"** (verse 30). So the correct meaning must be that partial days were counted as days. In the very same way, if Jesus was buried on Friday and arose on Sunday, that would be **three** days or on the third day or after three days according to their manner of counting time.

Luke 13:32,33 – Jesus said, "today and tomorrow and the third day" and "today, tomorrow, and the day following." So in Jesus' own language, "the third day" = the "day following" tomorrow! He clearly was counting partial days ("today" was surely partially gone when He spoke), so the language as He used it did not mean exactly 72 hours.

(Compare Genesis 42:17,18; 1 Samuel 20:12.)

"X days and X nights" can mean the same as "on the Xth day"

Esther 4:16-5:1 – Esther said the people should fast, neither eating nor drinking, for three days, night or day. Then she would go before the king. But she went before the king "on the third day" (5:1). So "three days, night or day" means the same as "the third day." But we have already seen that "the third day" may simply mean the day after tomorrow. Surely she did not mean she would count 72 hours, and exactly 72 hours later she would stand before the king.

Genesis 7:12,17 -The rain of the flood was on the earth "forty days and forty nights" (verse 12). The flood was on the earth forty days (verse 17). So "forty days and forty nights" is just another way of expressing "forty days." Should we insist that it rained precisely 40 days times 24 hours in order for the language to be correct? Did it begin raining at precisely the beginning of a day and end precisely at the end of a night, with no partial days included in the count?

1 Samuel 30:12,13 – "Three days and three nights" equals "three days ago." Should we argue this was exactly 72 hours?

Conclusion

So, the expressions "the third day," "after the third day," "on the third day," "in three days," and "three days and three nights" all mean the same thing, and none are meant to be technically or specifically 72 hours. All the expressions can include partial days. And we have shown that they can refer simply to the day after tomorrow. This means that it is reasonable to conclude that Jesus was crucified and buried on Friday, then raised on Sunday.

However, the main point to remember is, regardless of what day Jesus was crucified, He was definitely raised on the first day of the week.

Significance of the First Day of the Week

Mark 16:9 – Jesus arose on the first day of the week. The resurrection of Jesus is in many ways the greatest event in the history of the world. In many senses the crucifixion was as great. But the crucifixion would have been a defeat had it not been for the resurrection. The crucifixion left the disciples in sorrow and grief. The resurrection gave them victory and rejoicing.

As already discussed, we are nowhere directly told what day of the week Jesus died, but all four gospel accounts tell us Jesus arose on the first day of the week, and all of them mention it repeatedly. Why this emphasis on the first day unless there is some significance to it? (Luke 24:1,4,21; Mark 16:2,9; Matthew 26:1-7; Luke 24:1-9; John 20:1-10.)

John 20:19 – Jesus first appeared to the disciples on that first day of the week. The appearances of Jesus are also crucial to our faith because by them He proved to the world He really was raised and therefore is the Son of God (Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

On that first day of the week when He arose, He appeared several times (Mark 16:2,9; Matthew 26:1,8-10; Luke 24:1,19-21; John 20:1,11-19). Note that, one of these occasions was when the disciples had gathered together on the first day of the week. The disciples assembled on the first day of the week because Jesus arose on that day. He Himself chose to come to their assembly (compare Luke 24:33- 40).

John 20:26 – The second day Jesus appeared to the disciples was the following first day of the week. Again we are told the disciples came together. This was the eighth day after the first appearances. The way days were counted would make this the next first day of the week (compare Leviticus 23:39). If there is no significance to the fact these things happened on the first day of the week, why are we so expressly told this was the day it happened?

Acts 2:1 – The day of Pentecost was a first day of the week (Leviticus 23:15,16). The disciples were gathered on this day, and the Holy Spirit came to their meeting. As a result many assembled together, the gospel was preached, and 3000 were baptized.

Note the great events that occurred on this first day of the week:

(1) The Holy Spirit came, worked miracles, and gave the apostles power.

(2) The gospel was preached for the first time.

(3) The first people were converted to become Christians.

(4) For the first time the kingdom (church) was announced as existing so people could enter it.

Acts 20:7 – The disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread. This may be the only time the Lord's Supper is directly mentioned on the first day of the week, but it is certainly not the only passage that shows the first day of the week is significant.

1 Corinthians 16:1,2 – The churches took up collections each first day of the week.

Note the tremendous significance the first day of the week has to Christians. Many of the greatest events in the history of the church occurred on the first day of the week. And of the occasions referring to the first day of the week, four of them describe Christians assembling on the first day of the week, and a fifth surely implies assembling. On two of these occasions, Jesus came to be present among them, and on another the Holy Spirit came among them. How can anyone doubt God's emphasis of special significance for the first day of the week?

In order to see the force of this, consider what passages or events expressly name or directly mention any other day of the week. All these events, assemblies, and acts of worship are expressly mentioned as occurring on the first day of the week. But ***not one time*** is any other day of the week named as having any special significance to Christians. The second day of the week, third day, etc., are never mentioned. The seventh day is mentioned only in connection with meetings arranged by Jews or other unbelievers, never in connection with meetings for worship or other spiritually significant events arranged by Christians or faithful local churches.

This does not mean nothing important ever happened on any other day, but there is never any significance attached to the ***day*** – the day of the week is never named. Why all this emphasis on the first day unless there is something special and significant about it?

Reasons why the resurrection is important to us

The apostles and faithful Christians in the first century repeatedly emphasized the resurrection in their preaching. We should do the same. Here are some reasons why the resurrection is so important to Christians.

The nature of Jesus

Romans 1:4 – Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power ... by the resurrection from the dead. The resurrection was a sign used by God to confirm Jesus' claims to be true. Consider a few of the many examples where the resurrection was so used by gospel preachers.

Luke 24:44-46 – Jesus claimed His resurrection fulfilled prophecy and proved Him to be the Christ that the Old Testament predicted.

John 20:24-31 – Here is an example of Jesus' appearances to eyewitnesses to prove He had arisen. As a result Jesus was confessed to be "Lord and God." The power of this claim can be seen when we realize that no other major religion even claims the founder of their faith arose from the dead. The resurrection is a unique claim of the gospel of Jesus. (Acts 13:28-37; Matthew 12:39,40)

Acts 2:22-41 – After Jesus ascended to heaven, the apostles preached (as Peter did here) that the Jews had killed Jesus, but God raised Him and the apostles were eyewitnesses that He was alive again. This had even been prophesied in the Old Testament by David. The conclusion this leads to is that Jesus is both ***Lord and Christ*** (1 Corinthians 15:4; Acts 17:3).

(Note also Acts 3:15; 5:30; 10:40; 13:33ff; 17:3; 18:18,31, etc.)

The destiny of man

Scripture connects three future events to Jesus' resurrection: (1) the resurrection of all people, (2) the judgment of all people, and (3) the eternal destinies of all people.

1 Corinthians 6:14 – God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. The same God who promised to raise Jesus, has also promised to raise ***us***. If we believe He kept the promise to raise Jesus by His power, then we must believe He will keep His promise to raise us up by that same power. (2 Corinthians 4:14)

1 Corinthians 15 – Verses 12-14 explain that Jesus' resurrection proves men ***can*** be raised by God's power. Verses 20-23,25,26 – Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee (first-fruits) demonstrating that He will ***raise us*** up. The first fruit to ripen, from orchard or garden, gives hope of more to come. So Jesus' resurrection assures us there will be a harvest in which we will all be raised. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17)

Acts 17:30,31 – The assurance of the fact that God will judge us is the fact that He raised up Jesus. In order for all to be ***judged***, we must first come back from the dead. The fact God has already raised Jesus demonstrates His power to keep His promise to raise and then judge us.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 – If there is no resurrection of the dead, then our only hope for reward would be before we die. But if we believe Jesus died and rose again (verse 14), we should also believe that, when He returns, the dead will be raised and we will be with Him forever. (1 Corinthians 15:9)

1 Peter 1:3,4 – We are begotten to a living hope of an eternal inheritance by the resurrection of Jesus. If we died before Jesus comes again (as most men have), then to receive this reward, we must be raised.

Jesus' resurrection proves that God will keep His promise to raise and reward us.

The life of a Christian

Jesus' resurrection can teach us the following things about our daily life as Christians: (1) the importance of obedience to God's word, and (2) the assurance of God's power in our lives.

Acts 2:36 – Jesus' resurrection (verses 23-32) proves to us that He is ***Lord*** and Christ. Luke 6:46 – Your Lord is the one you must obey. (Romans 14:9)

2 Corinthians 5:15 – Jesus died for all so we should no longer live for self but for Him who died and ***arose*** for us. By dying and rising, Jesus purchased us. He bought us with the price of His blood, so we belong to Him and ought to let Him control our lives. (1 Corinthians 6:19,20)

Romans 6:4-13 – Baptism symbolizes, not just Jesus' death, but also His ***resurrection*** (verses 4,5). In baptism, we undergo a ***death*** (like Jesus died on the cross) because the body of sin is put to death or separated from us (verses 6,7). But we also undergo a ***resurrection*** because we should walk a ***new life*** set apart from sin.

Why should you be baptized into Jesus' death? To get rid of sins. This is necessary because the wages of sin is death (verse 23). But if we see the value of getting rid of sin, then we should see the value of staying away from sin after we are forgiven of it. This is symbolized by Jesus' resurrection. Just as He was raised never to die again, so we should be forgiven never to serve sin again (verses 8-13).

Ephesians 1:19,20 – We can have in our lives the power of God that raised up Jesus. We have considered how great the power must be to cause the resurrection. Imagine having that kind of power working in your life!

Ephesians 6:10-13 – Here is what this power can do in our lives. When Jesus was raised, He gained His greatest victory over Satan. Likewise, we can defeat Satan in his efforts to lead us into sin if we use the power God provides.

(Romans 8:33-35; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Philippians 3:10)

The resurrection was essential to our salvation from sin.

1 Corinthians 15:13-17 – If Jesus was not raised, our faith is vain and we are yet in sin. We are saved by His life because He had to be ***raised*** after He died or we could not be saved! (Romans 4:24,25; 5:10; Acts 13:38,39; Hebrews 7:25)

How can we receive this salvation by His resurrection? Note how every condition of forgiveness and eternal life is tied by Scriptures to Jesus' resurrection.

Hearing and believing – 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 – To be saved, we must hear and believe the gospel, including the message of the resurrection.

Repentance – Acts 17:30,31 – All are commanded to repent because we will be judged, and the assurance of this is the fact Jesus was raised.

Faith and confession – Romans 10:9,10 – We must believe in the resurrection and confess Christ as Lord to be saved (but His resurrection proves He is Lord – 1:4).

Baptism:

1 Peter 3:21 – In likeness to Noah's salvation, baptism saves us ***by the resurrection*** of Jesus. Jesus' resurrection is essential to our salvation, and baptism is essential for us to be saved by it.

Colossians 2:12,13 – As in Romans 6:3-5, we are buried and ***raised*** with Christ in baptism. Forgiving our sins, He gives us ***new life*** with Him. This new life refers to being "born again" to become a new creature in Christ. This occurs in baptism, not before.

Note here also the implications that baptism must be an immersion, for we are buried and ***raised*** with Him. Sprinkling and pouring do not satisfy because they do not properly symbolize what is being done spiritually.

A summary of the people to whom Jesus appeared

Why did Jesus appear to people after His resurrection? It was obviously to prove that He really had been raised. He had said He would do it. Having done it, He used this means to produce many eyewitnesses to testify that He had done it.

God is a God of evidence. He gives us proof on which to base our faith. He wanted witnesses to testify of this resurrection, so Jesus appeared to many people to qualify them to bear testimony to us and to the world that Jesus really is the Son of God as attested by the resurrection. See 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Acts 1:3, 20-26; 2:22-36; 10:36-43; 17:30,31; John 20:26-31; etc.

Here is a brief summary of the people to whom Jesus appeared after His resurrection:

1) Mary Magdalene – Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18

2) The women – Matthew 28:8-10

3) Two disciples on the road to Emmaus – Luke 24:13-35

4) The 11 apostles – Matthew 27:16-20; 1 Corinthians 15:5,7; John 20:19-21:25; Acts 1:3-11

5) Joseph and Matthias – Acts 1:20-26

6) Peter – 1 Corinthians 15:5

7) 500 brethren at once – 1 Corinthians 15:6

8) James – 1 Corinthians 15:7

9) Paul – 1 Corinthians 15:8; Acts 9:1ff; 22:1ff; 26:1ff

28:1 – After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

Various accounts say these events occurred about dawn (very early in the morning) on the first day of the week, when the Sabbath was past. Some ladies came to the tomb. Matthew mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (see notes on Matthew 27:61). The other Mary was the mother of James and Joses (Mark 16:1). Also present were Salome (Mark 16:1) and Joanna and other women (Luke 24:10). It is possible that they were in more than one group.

Their purpose was to see the tomb. Other accounts add that they wanted to anoint the body with spices they had bought (Mark 16:1). The body had been hastily prepared and buried (John 19:38-41). They may have wanted to make sure the job was well completed. Also, John 19:42 might imply that some disciples considered this tomb to be only a temporary resting place till after the Sabbath. The women might have come early so they would arrive before Joseph came to move the body to another tomb elsewhere.

Barnes observes that the fact the people came to anoint the body of Jesus demonstrates that they did not expect Him to be raised from the dead. And that in turn gives greater weight to the testimony they later gave that He in fact had been raised from the dead. The resurrection was not something they made up to please themselves. God had to convince them by overwhelming evidence so they would believe what they had not expected to happen at all.

Mark 16:3,4 adds that, as they approached, the women wondered who was going to roll the stone away from the tomb because it was "very great." But when they arrived, they found the stone already rolled away, but they did not find what they had come to find: Jesus' body.

Matthew 28:1 is translated various ways. The ASV translates "late on the Sabbath," but many others translate it "after the Sabbath" (NKJV, NASB, ESV, MLV, NRSV, HCSB) – this would imply it was the first day of the week. The apparent meaning, comparing to other accounts, must be that the women came on the morning of the first day of the week, as the sun was just appearing, but while it was still shadowy and "dark" in the garden and hilly areas, so that it was hard to see distinctly. Perhaps Mary Magdalene hastened ahead of the other women and arrived before the sun was up, whereas the main body of the group arrived later.

28:2-4 – There was a great earthquake for an angel from heaven came and rolled back the stone from the door and then sat on it. His countenance was like lightning and his clothing as white as snow. The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.

There was an earthquake and the stone was rolled away from the door by an angel from heaven, who then sat on the stone. This must

surely have happened at the very moment that the body left the tomb (through the opening left when the stone was rolled away).

It is entirely possible, maybe probable, that this happened before the women arrived, perhaps while they were on the way. There is no indication that they saw Jesus leave the tomb or saw the stone moving away from it. There is in fact no evidence that the guards were still there when they arrived.

When the women arrived, Mark's account indicates that the angel was inside (Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3,4), or at least they did not see an angel outside and there were angels inside. So the NASB translates, "behold a severe earthquake had occurred." Remember also that events are not necessarily told in chronological sequence, especially when different groups of people are involved.

The angel's appearance was extremely bright and his clothing white as snow. This would be very striking especially in the relative darkness of early morning. The effect of his appearance was such that the guards shook with fear and became immobile (either by the power of God or by fainting or sheer fear). Perhaps Jesus' body left the tomb unnoticed by the guards while their eyes were dazzled by the bright light and their hearts filled with fear so they did not react to try to stop Him, as they were put there to do.

The resurrection of course is a great event. Note that God accompanied it with other miraculous events, including the earthquake (see notes on 27:51) and the appearance of the angel.

28:5-7 – The angel told the women not to be afraid. He knew they came looking for Jesus, but He was not there because He had arisen. He told the women to come and see where the Lord had lain, then they should go tell His disciples that He was raised from the dead and would go before them to Galilee.

The appearance of the angels

The angel spoke to the women. Mark and Luke say that the women spoke to an angel inside the tomb, not outside. Mark says he was sitting, and Luke says there were two and they were standing. There are several possible explanations for these combinations of descriptions.

Perhaps the angel rolled away the rock and then sat on it as in Matthew's account at the time of the resurrection. But when the women arrived or sometime beforehand, he went inside. Matthew and Mark may have mentioned only the one that did the speaking, but two were present. They may have been sitting at first, as in Mark's account, but then arose and stood after the women had entered and when they spoke to them.

Another explanation is that the word for "standing" in Luke's account (εφιστημι) can mean simply to be present or at hand – see 2 Timothy 4:6; Acts 28:2; compare Luke 4:39; Acts 23:11; 10:17; 22:13,20.

Another possibility is that the angel was still sitting on the rock when the women came, but he was invisible (as angels usually are to us), but another one was inside. When the women went inside, the one outside also went inside and there appeared to and spoke to the women.

Note the bravery of the women in entering the tomb. This implies that they did not witness the events of verses 3,4 (compare Mark 16:8) or, like the guards, they would likely have been too frightened to enter. Perhaps on seeing that the tomb was open, they thought that Joseph or someone had already taken the body to another tomb as mentioned above.

The angels' message

As is typical, the angel tried to calm the fears of the women. Otherwise the women would naturally have been frightened both at seeing an angel and at realizing the body was gone from the tomb. Luke adds that the angels' clothing still was dazzling, so the women fell to their faces before them.

Knowing that the women would wonder where Jesus' body was, the angel assured them that Jesus was gone because He had been raised from the dead like He had predicted He would be. "Why seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!" (Luke's account). Then He showed them the place where Jesus' body had been lying.

Here is the first plain statement explaining what had happened to Jesus. And that statement came from an angel. This itself constitutes inspired testimony regarding the resurrection. If an angel said it, this is God's miraculous confirmation that it is true. Further confirmation will follow in the form of personal appearances of Jesus. But the angel's claim itself, as attested to by the women, constitutes confirmation from God that the resurrection had occurred. Men may quibble and seek alternate explanations (see verses 11ff), but God's inspired explanation was that the body was gone because Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Jesus had indeed prophesied that He would rise from the dead. The Jewish leaders knew that He had done so (27:63). It is amazing, after all the miracles they had seen Him do, that His disciples would be so slow to believe that it would happen. Examples of His predictions are mentioned in Matthew 12:40; 16:21; 17:9,22,23; 20:18,19; 26:32; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; 9:9,10; 14:28; Luke 9:23; 18:33; 24:4-7,44,45. Jesus not only arose from the dead, but He did it after He had repeatedly predicted that He would. It is a miracle in both prophecy and fulfillment. How can it possibly be explained except as miraculous demonstration that He is who He claimed to be?

The angel then gave the women a message to deliver to the disciples (the eleven). The women were to tell the disciples that Jesus had arisen

from the dead and He would meet them in Galilee as He had told them He would (see Matthew 26:32).

The significance of the empty tomb

Notice that the women entered the tomb and saw for themselves that the body was gone. The angel also testified the body was gone. The fact the tomb was empty is one of the greatest arguments for the resurrection. Where did the body go? If it had not been raised, then it must have been present somewhere still as a dead body.

If Jesus' enemies had the body, they would have produced it and disproved the disciples' claims when they began to preach the resurrection. If Jesus' friends had it, they would have known they were lying when they preached the resurrection. Yet they all suffered and most died for preaching that message. Why give their lives for what they knew was a lie? Yet none of them ever retracted their testimony.

There can be no reasonable explanation for the empty tomb except the one given in Scripture. Jesus was alive again!

28:8-10 – The women left the tomb to take the message to the disciples. As they went, Jesus met them, and they worshiped Him. He told them to tell His brethren to go to Galilee where they would meet Him.

As instructed, the women left to carry the message to the disciples. Mark adds that they said nothing to anyone on the way.

Note the emotions the women felt: fear and great joy. What a time of mixed emotions! Imagine the terrible pain and disappointment knowing that Jesus had been crucified contrary to their greatest expectations that He would become king of God's people. In their sorrow they went to his grave only to be told that He is alive again! Surely there would be fear of the angel and of the unknown (people seem always to be afraid around dead people and how much more when facing evidence that one who has been dead is now alive again!). Yet there would be great joy because there is no more reason to continue your sorrow.

It is likely that a period of an hour or more elapsed at this point in Matthew's account. The women would take some time in their travels. During this time events might occur that are omitted in Matthew's account but are mentioned in other accounts. John 20 records a number of things that happened simultaneously with these events. It is clear that the appearance of Jesus to these women is ***not*** His first appearance (compare Mark 16:9).

As the women traveled (according to the KJV), Jesus met them and repeated to them the message that they should tell His disciples to meet Him in Galilee.

The women fell and worshiped Jesus. This is appropriate only if He is Deity. Otherwise to fall and give religious honor bowing to a mere man or creature is expressly forbidden (Matthew 4:10; Acts 10:25,26;

Revelation 22:8,9). Yet Jesus gave the women no rebuke like men and angels rebuked people who bowed religiously before them. This shows clearly that Jesus Himself recognized that He deserved worship.

We note the importance of women in the resurrection narrative. The first appearance of the angel that explained the resurrection was to the women at Jesus' tomb. Likewise Jesus appeared after His resurrection to women. Although the appearance described here is not the first time Jesus appeared, nevertheless His first appearance was to Mary Magdalene.

Many people, especially those of the feminist viewpoint, accuse the Bible of demeaning women and failing to appreciate their value. In fact, society in general in the first century and earlier times often did fail to honor women. But this is not the case with the Bible, especially the New Testament. By Divine inspiration the gospel repeatedly honors women. The main reason that people today think the Bible dishonors women is that it says they should submit to the leadership of men, yet the Bible repeatedly says that leadership roles are not a matter of honor anyway (see our notes on 20:25-28).

There is some question, apparently, as to whether or not the original text includes the statement that this happened while the women were going (as in the KJV). It may be sensible that it occurred while they were going because, if they had already delivered the message, why would Jesus tell them to deliver it again? On the other hand, some argue that the women must have delivered the message as the angel said, then Jesus appeared to them elsewhere and asked them to deliver the message again, this time on His authority (not just on that of the angel).

28:11-15 - The Empty Tomb

28:11-15 – The soldiers who had guarded the tomb reported what had happened. The Jewish leaders gave them a large sum of money and told them to say that Jesus' disciples stole the body while the soldiers slept. They promised to protect the soldiers if the governor heard this. This saying was commonly reported then among the Jews.

The claim that the disciples stole the body

As the women were traveling to tell the disciples, the guards, no doubt considerably agitated by the turn of events, went to the Jewish leaders to report what had happened. They had been placed at the tomb expressly to assure that the body did not leave the tomb, yet in the end they had to tell their masters that this is the very thing that had happened.

The leaders decided to buy the soldiers off and give them a story to tell to explain what happened. They were to say that they fell asleep at night, while on guard, and the disciples stole the body while they slept.

As a result, this explanation, invented by the Jewish leaders, was accepted and reported by many.

Now the penalty for sleeping on duty was death (Acts 12:19; 16:27; 27:42). So this explanation would cause the soldiers some considerable concern. But the rulers assured them that, if the matter came to the attention of the governor, they would take care of it so the soldiers did not have to pay the penalty (how they would do this is not explained).

Note that the Jews felt a great need to explain the disappearance of the body. Why? Because they were responsible for the death of Jesus, who was condemning them of sin and taking away their followers. Now if His disciples began to teach that He was raised from the dead as He had predicted He would do, this could result in even more people becoming His followers than He had when alive. The "last error will be worse than the first" (27:64). In fact, this is exactly what happened when the disciples began to preach it.

So evil men needed an explanation for the empty tomb because it constitutes powerful evidence that Jesus had been raised and is the Son of God. Likewise, today men who deny Jesus' Deity likewise need an explanation for the empty tomb. In order to deny He is God's Son, they must deny the resurrection, since it proves His identity (Romans 1:4).

Note that once again we see the wickedness of the Jewish leaders. They knew that the message they spread was a lie. Yet they not only defended the lie but they paid the soldiers to spread it. Wicked men will often use any means, no matter how corrupt, to avoid admitting their wickedness. Wickedness tends to lead to further wickedness.

In this case, the Jewish rulers deliberately and knowingly disobeyed the command that forbade bearing false witness against a neighbor (Exodus 20:16). Yet why should we be surprised that they would be willing to tell lies when we already know that they were willing to murder an innocent man?

The explanation compared to the facts

But was their explanation a satisfactory account of the evidence we have recorded? Consider how their explanation compares to the eyewitness testimony.

(1) It is hardly probable that all the guards would have fallen asleep. A guard would have usually consisted of sixty men, and the penalty for sleeping on duty was death (as already stated).

(2) Even had the guards slept, how could the disciples have sneaked past them, rolled away the huge stone, and carried away a dead body without waking some of them?

(3) Why would the disciples do this? They had given up on Jesus. They fled from Him, denied Him, buried Him, and came prepared to anoint His dead body. They were amazed and disbelieving when they found the body gone. They had never understood or believed His claims

that He would rise again. Why would they risk stealing the body when they had no expectations of a resurrection anyway?

(4) Why were the grave clothes left behind? If Lazarus' body was decaying after four days (John 11), Jesus' would surely be close to doing the same after three days. What grave robbers would take the time, with sleeping guards outside, to remove grave clothes, carefully fold them up (see John 20:1-10), and take away a dead, decaying, naked body?

(5) Had the disciples done all this, they would have been guilty of crass lying and dishonesty. This would have been contrary to all their own teachings and all the teachings of Jesus and all the evidence of their character.

(6) Furthermore, had they stolen the body, the disciples would have been guilty of grave robbing. which was a serious offense against the law. If guilty, they should have been arrested, accused on the basis of the soldiers' evidence, and punished. Some say that the penalty should even have been death. Yet there was no apparent effort whatever to punish them in any way for this alleged crime. This in itself demonstrates that the rulers and the soldiers knew they had no real evidence against the disciples.

(7) In addition, this would mean that the disciples all gave their lives for what they knew was a lie and a fraud. Why do it? And why did not one of them ever admit to the fraud? They all faced severe persecution for preaching Jesus had been raised, and most of them gave their lives for it. Surely some of them should have eventually denied their testimony and admitted the fraud, if it was a fraud. Yet all of them went to their graves, most of them as a result of violent persecution, still claiming He was raised. None ever denied it.

(8) The guards' explanation is ridiculous on the face of it. Even if they had gone to sleep, how could they possibly know what had happened to the body while they slept? How do they know the disciples stole it? They were, according to their story, asleep! How can sensible people accept the testimony of men who testify what happened while they slept?

(9) Finally, and above all, none of this explains any of the appearances of the body, whereby people became convinced Jesus was alive again. How could a dead body be brought before skeptical friends and close companions of Jesus and convince them that He was alive again? In His appearances Jesus ate with people, talked with people, and was touched by people. How could a dead body accomplish this? And how could skeptics like Thomas and unbelieving persecutors like Saul be convinced by the appearance of a dead body that people claimed was alive?

Other explanations for the empty tomb have been attempted.

Some have claimed that Jesus never really died, but fainted or swooned on the cross, was buried, then revived in the tomb. However:

(1) We have solid testimony that Jesus really was dead: the centurion who was sent by Pilate to confirm that He was dead, the soldiers who were sent to break the legs to hasten death but did not break Jesus' because He was already dead, and the people who buried Him.

(2) If He revived but never died, He would have been in such pain and agony that He would surely have realized what had happened. He would never have claimed a resurrection for that would have made Him a fraud and deceiver. This would be completely contrary to all evidence we have of His character.

(3) Why did none of Jesus' enemies in the first century claim that He never really died but just swooned? They had all the evidence before them and the best opportunity of knowing the facts. Had there been any chance of making such a claim, they would have been the ones to make it. But they did not. If they did not make the claim, how could anyone two millennia later prove such a claim?

(4) Even if Jesus did not die, consider His condition. He had been scourged, crucified, and pierced with a spear. He had been three days in a tomb without water, food, or medication. How could He have recovered well enough to roll away the huge stone, overpower or evade the guards, walk the length of Palestine, and appear healthy enough to convince His disciples He was resurrected? That would be a miracle as great as the resurrection!

In the end, by placing guards outside that tomb, the Jews only served to defeat their own purpose. They give us still greater evidence and testimony to prove Jesus was really raised. They thereby strengthen the proof of the resurrection, where they intended to prevent it. By placing a guard outside the tomb, they have eliminated the only possible explanation anyone could have had for the disappearance of the body: i.e., that the disciples stole it. But if the disciples did not steal the body, then the enemies would still have had it and could have produced it at any time to refute the disciples' claim of a resurrection.

Any argument modern skeptics would present to disprove the resurrection must deal with the empty tomb, with the appearances of Jesus to many people, and with the reaction of Jesus' enemies. If there was conclusive evidence to disprove the resurrection, why was it not presented in the first century?

Thousands of people were converted just a few weeks after the alleged event occurred (Acts chapter 2 and following chapters). The Jews of the first century had the most to lose by allowing the resurrection to be preached and the most to gain by disproving it. The events in question happened at a Jewish feast where thousands of people were present. The

facts were well known. If there had been any way to disprove the resurrection, surely the enemies of the first century would have done it. Why didn't they do it and stop the growth of the Christian movement from the beginning?

28:16-20 - The Great Commission

Compare Mark 16:13-20; Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:3-11.

Before leaving the earth, Jesus told the apostles what work He wanted them to do after He had gone. Various accounts give different details. Perhaps these instructions were given on different occasions in which He told them different aspects of the work. Or perhaps on one occasion He discussed various aspects of their work, but each writer recorded some, but not all, of what He said.

Earlier Jesus had sent the apostles on a "limited commission" – it was not universal in its application (Matthew 10:1ff). Here He gave them the Great Commission. It was universal in its application in several ways that were not true of the limited commission. To properly carry out that commission today, we need to understand and respect the universal nature of this commission. It is a "Great" Commission because it is unlimited or universal.

28:16,17 – The eleven disciples went to Galilee where they met Jesus on the mountain which He had appointed. There they worshiped Him, but some doubted.

Jesus had promised to meet the disciples at an appointed place in Galilee (verse 7). According to other accounts, He had, however, met them at other times and places before that. But here He met them at the appointed time and place, on a mountain in Galilee. He then gave them the instructions He especially wanted to give them before He left. It is apparent that some time – perhaps even several weeks – have passed since Jesus' resurrection.

The eleven (Judas had killed himself) worshiped Him, but some doubted. It is clear from the various accounts that it took some time for the disciples to be convinced that Jesus had been raised. These were not gullible men, easily misled. Exactly when they became fully convinced probably varied from man to man.

Note also that, as Jesus had allowed the women to worship Him, so He here allowed the disciples to do the same (compare John 20:28). This is clear evidence that He considered Himself to be Deity (see notes on verse 9).

Some claim that Jesus here appeared to more than just the eleven apostles. This might help explain why there was some who still doubted, and it would make the Great Commission addressed to more than just the apostles. However, verse 16 here plainly says this appearance was to the eleven. Mark 16:14-20 says also that some among the eleven still doubted at the time Jesus gave them the Great Commission. However,

that appears to be a different occasion at a different place, so it is likely Jesus repeated this commission to the apostles on more than one occasion.

28:18 – Jesus said that all authority has been given to Him in heaven and on earth.

Jesus here claimed universal authority in heaven and on earth. This authority is the basis of the whole commission. Jesus' commands should be taught to others, who in turn should be baptized and then keep all His commands, because He has ***all authority***.

Authority is the "right to rule": the power to make rules that others must obey. A centurion in Matthew 8:5-9,13 said he understood authority because he was subject to authority and he had others under his authority. If he gave an instruction, those subject to him were expected to do what he said. He realized that, because Jesus had authority, He could simply give a command and heal the centurion's servant.

Note that, if Jesus has authority in heaven and on earth, this defeats the Catholic claim that Jesus is head of the church in heaven, but the Pope is the earthly head of the church. Jesus said He had all authority in both realms. To give earthly headship to a man is to deny Jesus' true authority.

Furthermore, if Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and on earth, who can honestly deny that He now serves as King of His kingdom? What more authority could He ever possess in the future? This totally contradicts the premillennial theory that Jesus does not reign now as King but will establish His kingdom and reign as King when He comes again. See our notes on Matthew 3:1,2; 4:17; 16:18,19,28.

Consider the Bible teaching about Jesus' authority.

Jesus rules over all nature.

He created all things, so everything in nature is subject to His rule (John 1:1-3).

Matthew 8:5-13 – He had the authority to heal diseases.

Matthew 8:23-27 – Even a storm obeyed His command to cease. The elements of nature, wind and sea, obeyed Him so that the disciples marveled.

Mark 1:23-27 – He rebuked unclean spirits and told them to come out of those whom they had possessed. When they came out, the people realized that with "authority" He rebuked the spirits and they obeyed Him.

Note this was done by His ***word***. When He spoke, obedience followed. This is authority. Jesus' authority over nature demonstrates what He meant when He said He had all power in heaven and on earth. No part of nature has the power to resist His commands.

Jesus rules over all people.

John 17:2 – Jesus has authority over all flesh. He is Lord of all (Acts 10:36; Romans 10:12), Lord of both the living and the dead (Romans 14:9).

Ephesians 1:20,21 – Jesus has been set far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. (See also Colossians 1:16; 2:10.)

We can appreciate the universal nature of His authority by comparing it to other kinds of authority. People may have limited authority over certain people in certain relationships (civil rulers, parents, supervisors at work, etc.). But Jesus has "all authority" in that His authority is "far above" that of all others. Name any authority you can name and Jesus' authority is far greater.

Revelation 19:16 – He is King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15).

John 5:27-29 – He has the authority to judge men for their lives. (2 Corinthians 10:18; Luke 12:42-46; Colossians 3:17,24)

Jesus possesses "all authority" in that all people everywhere, no matter who they are or how great their earthly authority, all people are subject to Jesus' authority. All are accountable to live their lives as He instructs, and He will judge them all for how they live.

Jesus rules over our spirits.

His authority must guide our spiritual or religious conduct in God's service.

Matthew 7:21-29 – Jesus taught as one having ***authority*** (verse 29). He said that, in order to be accepted at the judgment, people must hear His sayings and ***do*** them. People who claim to accept Him as Lord, but do not do the will of the Father, will not be accepted.

Note again that Jesus' authority is expressed in His words. He ***taught*** them with authority, and said they must ***do*** what He taught. The parallel in Luke 4:32 says His ***word*** was with power (authority).

Matthew 9:2-8 – Jesus claimed to have authority to forgive sins. When people questioned this, He proved He did have the power by doing miracles. His miracles confirmed the validity of His authority. People then marveled that God had given such authority. (John 1:12)

Romans 1:16 – The gospel is the ***power*** of God to salvation. Jesus' power is in His word.

1 Corinthians 14:37 – This power is now in the written word since the things written are the commands of the Lord.

We often teach that the ***authority*** of Jesus is the fundamental issue in religion. This is what Jesus is saying in the Great Commission. Why must people be baptized? Why must they obey all His commands? Because His ***word*** tells them to do it, and He has all authority. We must obey His word.

The Great Commission is based on Jesus' authority.

28:19 – Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit.

The Great Commission teaches the following important truths:

All nations

The Great Commission is universal in that it applies to all people everywhere.

Matthew 28:19 – Go teach ***all nations***.

Mark 16:15 – Go into ***all the world*** and preach the gospel to ***every*** creature.

Luke 24:47 – Repentance and remission of sins should be preached to ***all nations***.

This includes teaching both Jews and Gentiles. The apostles did not at this time understand that the gospel was to go to Gentiles as well as Jews. Some time passed after the gospel first began to be preached before this truth was understood, and it required special revelation from God to convince the Jewish Christians that Gentiles could also accept the gospel on the same terms as Jews (Acts 10,11).

Why do all men need to hear the gospel of salvation?

Romans 3:23 – All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). All people, at some point in their lives, commit sin and are doomed to eternal death. So forgiveness of sins is a universal need. This is the need that is met by the gospel. (1 John 1:8,10)

1 Timothy 2:4,6 – Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all. Therefore, God wants all men to come to a knowledge of the gospel so they can be saved.

Jesus can save all people. His sacrifice on the cross is the sacrifice for the whole world (John 3:16). No one else can give us the forgiveness of sins (Acts 4:12). (Matthew 11:28; Hebrews 2:9; Luke 2:10; Titus 2:11)

The early church set the example of preaching to all the world. Jesus said to preach the gospel to all the world because all people need the gospel to be saved. The early church respected Jesus' authority and kept this command.

Colossians 1:6,23 – In the first century, the gospel was preached in "all the world" to the "whole creation."

Acts 8:4 – When the Jerusalem church was scattered, they went everywhere preaching the word.

1 Thessalonians 1:7-8 – From this church the word of the Lord sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Here is an example of a first century church at work in preaching.

Colossians 1:28 – The universal authority of Jesus demands universal preaching: ***every man*** needs to hear the gospel.

Acts 20:20 – Paul taught publicly and from house to house (Acts 5:42). That's how the early church got the job done by combining diligent public preaching with diligent private teaching.

Today we have regular preaching in our assemblies and several gospel meetings every year. That is public proclamation of the word. It is good, but it is only ***part*** of what we need. We also need the ***private*** teaching by which all the members teach friends and neighbors.

Churches of the Lord today often fail to teach all the world because we do not have all the members talking to others about the gospel! We will never fulfill the Great Commission, like the early church did, until we respect the authority of the Lord like they did. We must have the burning determination to teach every soul, and we must have all members working in private teaching, in addition to the public teaching. (Matthew 22:10; 24:14; Acts 17:30; Romans 1:5; 16:26; Acts 20:31)

The conditions men must meet to become disciples

Notice the structure of the language as revealed in various translations:

NKJV – …make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them … teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you…

ASV – … make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them … teaching them …

NASB – … make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them … teaching them…

The ESV, NRSV and others follow this same pattern.

This shows that the main action of the passage is making disciples, and this is accomplished by baptizing them and teaching them. It follows that baptism is an essential condition in order to become a disciple of Jesus.

In the Great Commission Jesus stated the conditions people must meet to be saved and become His disciples (Mark 16:16; Luke 24:47). All three accounts add further information. By adding them together, we understand the fullness of what Jesus requires sinners to do to become His disciples.

Since this is based on Jesus' authority, no man on earth has the right to change these conditions. Nevertheless, many denominations teach that people can be saved without doing what Jesus here said. Such is a failure to respect the authority of Jesus, and it leaves those who preach and practice it without salvation.

Note that these same conditions apply to all people today, for they are Jesus' conditions for all people in all the world whereby they can receive the forgiveness He alone can give.

Matthew's account states that, in order for people to become disciples, they must be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Mark 16:15,16 also says the gospel must be preached to every creature in the whole world. Those who hear must then believe and be baptized to be saved. If they disbelieve, they will be condemned.

Note that here baptism is just as much a condition of forgiveness as is belief. The salvation comes as a result of believing and being baptized. It does not come before baptism any more than it comes before faith. Yet many denominations teach lost sinners can be saved before and even without baptism.

Luke 24:46,47 – Jesus died and arose to save us. When He had done this, repentance and remission of sins were to be preached to all nations. So for people to receive remission, they must repent. Repentance is a change of mind in which a person admits he is guilty of sin, recognizes this means he is eternally lost, and so makes up his mind to change his life and be forgiven by Jesus' blood (compare Matthew 21:28-32).

Summarizing these accounts we are told that, for a person who is not a disciple of Jesus to receive remission of sins and become a disciple, he must hear the gospel, believe it, repent, and be baptized (we will see that Jesus elsewhere taught that confessing Him is also necessary).

Consider other passages elsewhere that teach these same requirements are necessary to salvation:

Hearing the gospel: John 6:44,45; Acts 11:14; The gospel is the power of God to salvation (Romans 1:16). To be saved, people must hear the word of God and believe it (Romans 10:13,14,17).

Belief in Jesus and His gospel: John 8:24; Hebrews 11:16; Romans 1:16; 10:9,10; Galatians 5:6

Repentance of sin: Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 2 Peter 3:9

Confession of Christ: Matthew 10:32; Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9,10

Baptism: John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3,4; 1 Peter 3:21

Since these are the conditions ordained by Jesus for all men to obey to be saved, we must conclude that only those who obey them have received the promise of salvation that He offered.

The name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

Other passages say people were baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; compare 4:12; 2:21), so some people wonder how these verses harmonize with Matthew 28:19. Some argue that baptism must in "in the name of Jesus only," so baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is invalid. Others argue that this passage is saying that "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" refers to one person who wears all three of these titles.

Consider some Bible examples of the expression "in the name of:"

Inspired men gave commands in the name of the Lord – Acts 9:27,29; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; James 5:10.

Christians should assemble in Jesus' name – Matthew 18:20.

We can receive a child in Jesus' name – Mark 9:37.

Apostles did miracles in Jesus' name – Acts 3:6; 16:18.

The name of God would be called upon the Gentiles – Acts 15:17

Everything we do, in word or deed, should be done in Jesus' name – Colossians 3:17. (Study also John 17:11,12; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 5:4; Matthew 18:5; Revelation 3:12.)

So, when a person acts "in the name of" another person, that does not mean the first person has the same name the other does, and even less does it prove they are the same individual. In fact, the expression does not even mean we must ***say*** "in Jesus' name" every time we so act. (Note: If you baptize a person "in Jesus' name," does that make ***you*** the same individual as Jesus is?)

The expression "in the name of" actually means "by the authority of," "on behalf of," etc. (Random House College Dictionary). It is an expression showing that one individual is acting as the ***representative*** of another, acting in accordance with his will and instructions, by his authority. We have separate individuals, but one represents or acts on behalf of the other, just as in the previous expressions we have discussed.

Note carefully Acts 4:7-10. "By what ***name***" (verses 7,10) = "by what ***power***" (verse 7) = "by what ***means***" (verse 9) = "by ***Him***" (verse 10). (Compare Ephesians 1:21.)

Other examples: "Stop, in the name of the law," means the person commanding you is a representative acting by authority of the law. Likewise, an ambassador acts "in the name of" a country – by the authority of that country, empowered by its laws, as its official representative, acting on its behalf. When you sign a check, your name is the symbol of your authorization for the bank to transfer funds on your behalf, paying your money, acting in your name.

This also shows the harmony between Matthew 28:19 (in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and Acts 2:38, etc. (in the name of Jesus). The will or authority of the three individuals is exactly the same, for they are completely in harmony and united in will. What one authorizes is what the others authorize. What one says to do is what the others say to do. To act by the authority (in the name of) one, then, is to act by the authority (in the name of) all three, for it is the same authority. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate individuals. They do not all wear the name "Jesus." But they all have the same authority and will, so to baptize by the authority of Jesus is to baptized by the authority of all.

28:20 – Teach them to observe all things that Jesus commanded. He would be with them always even to the end of the age.

As discussed earlier, the language of verses 19,20 states that making people disciples is done by baptizing them and teaching them to observe all Jesus' commands. This does not mean that people must understand everything the Lord expects of them before they can become disciples.

But they must understand that being a disciple requires complete obedience.

At the point of baptism, one surely needs to understand what he is doing in receiving forgiveness by the various steps involved. He should also enter into discipleship with the commitment to learn and obey whatever the teaching of Jesus requires. He will have definite responsibilities after baptism, and this includes duties in the church (compare Acts 2:47; 8:12; 24:25). However, there will still be much to study and learn after one becomes a Christian.

The authority of Jesus requires people to obey all His commands.

Some people say we can be saved if we simply receive forgiveness of sins, but obedience afterward does not affect our salvation either way. Others want to pick certain commands as important but ignore others. But Jesus said we must be taught to obey all His commands.

Matthew 4:4 – Man shall not live by bread alone, but by ***every*** word that proceeds from the mouth of God. It is not enough to do part of what God says. Our goal must be to obey all His words.

Acts 3:22,23 – We must hearken to Jesus in ***all*** things ***whatsoever*** He says or be destroyed. Some people have a "cafeteria religion": they go through God's word like they go down a cafeteria line, taking what they want and leaving the rest. Such an approach leads to destruction.

Acts 10:33 – Cornelius set an excellent example. His desire was to hear "all things commanded by the Lord."

Acts 20:27 – "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."

People who respect the authority of Jesus must strive to learn and obey all His will. This does not mean, if we ever commit a sin we are hopelessly doomed and cannot be saved eternally. Jesus will offer forgiveness if we sin after conversion. But that forgiveness is conditioned on repentance and a real determination to do all He says. If we excuse or rationalize our disobedience, we do not respect His authority and will not have His forgiveness.

Some members of the church emphasize the need for purity in the worship of the church and the plan of salvation. But in their personal lives they are perfectly content to go year after year doing little or no work for the Lord. If we think we can be saved eternally just because we have been baptized and attend a church that worships Scripturally, without living a personal life of faithful zeal, we are no better than others who take some of God's commands and neglect others. We are seeking to be saved by partial obedience. And we are disrespecting the authority of Jesus.

For other passages about complete obedience see Acts 5:20; 20:20; John 14:26; 16:13; James 2:10; Romans 15:14; Colossians 1:9; Luke 1:6; 2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:3.

Matthew's account closes by assuring the disciples that Jesus would always be with them. He dwells in His people in the sense of fellowship and union with them (John 17:20,21; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). In this sense He is with His people throughout the age. This ought to be a source of great joy to all true Christians to know that we have fellowship with God.

Sources Frequently Cited in These Notes

Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. InterVarsity Academic, Downers Grove, IL, 2006. WORD*search* CROSS e-book

Barnes, Albert, *Barnes New Testament Notes*; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich. 1949

Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd Edition. University of Chicago Press; Chicago, IL 2001

Bromiley, Geoffrey W., trans., Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume;* William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 2003. WORD*search* CROSS e-book

ESV Archaeology Study Bible, The; Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2017

Horne, Thomas, *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, 4 volumes; T. Cadwell, Strand, London, 1828 (public domain)

Millard, Alan, *Nelson's Illustrated Wonders and Discoveries of the Bible;* Thomas Nelson Pub., Nashville, TN, 1997

McGarvey, J.W., *The New Testament Commentary: Matthew and Mark*; Chase B. Hall, 1875

Patton, William, *Bible Wines or the Laws of Fermentation*; The Challenge Press, Little Rock, AR

Pope, Kyle, *Truth Commentaries: Matthew*; Guardian of Truth Foundation, 220 S. Marion St, Athens, AL 35611

Thayer, Joseph Henry, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (original material prepared by Grimm and Wilke, translated, revised, and enlarged by Thayer); Zondervan's Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI (public domain)

Vine, W.E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*; MacDonald Publishing Co., McLean, VA

Wallace, Foy E., Jr., *God's Prophetic Word*; Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Publications, Oklahoma City, OK, 1946

Printed books, booklets, and tracts available at
www.gospelway.com/sales
Free Bible study articles online at
www.gospelway.com
Free Bible courses online at www.biblestudylessons.com
Free class books at
www.biblestudylessons.com/classbooks
Free commentaries on Bible books at
www.biblestudylessons.com/commentary
Contact the author at
www.gospelway.com/comments
Free e-mail Bible study newsletter
www.gospelway.com/update_subscribe.htm