

## Chapter Five (5:1-39)

### THE SON OF MAN CATCHING MEN

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. If the fishermen had fished all night and caught nothing, why did they try their nets where Jesus suggested (5:5)?
2. Why did Peter want Jesus to depart from him (5:8)?
3. What is leprosy (5:12)?
4. Why did Jesus send the cleansed leper to the priest (5:14)?
5. What is a "Pharisee" (5:17)?
6. Why did Jesus say first to the paralyzed man, "Your sins are forgiven (5:20)?
7. What is Jesus illustrating with the "new garment" and "new wine" (5:33-39)?

#### SECTION 1

#### Challenging Men (5:1-11)

**5** While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret. <sup>2</sup>And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup>Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup>And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup>And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." <sup>6</sup>And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, <sup>7</sup>they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup>But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." <sup>9</sup>For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; <sup>10</sup>and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus

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said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." <sup>11</sup>And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

**5:1-3 Teaching:** The great popularity of Jesus made people continually "hound" Him for healing or some other great miracle. Luke notes that crowds followed Jesus down to the shore of the lake of Gennesaret and there "pressed upon Him."

Gennesaret is a Hebrew name meaning, "princely garden." It is also the name of a very fertile plain three miles long and one-half mile wide on the northwestern shore of the lake. Luke very accurately calls it a "lake." It is also known as the "Sea of Galilee," the "Sea of Tiberias," and in the Old Testament as the "Sea of Chinnereth," (meaning, harp-shaped). It is a fresh-water lake resting 680 feet below sea level surrounded by mountains so that it resembles a huge bowl. The lake swarmed with fish of many different varieties. Barclay notes that in it were found shoals of fish covering as much as an acre. The lake is about 13 miles long and 9 miles wide at its widest point. In Christ's day nine cities of 15,000 or more stood on its shores. It was the scene of much of Jesus' Galilean ministries. It is noted for its sudden and violent storms caused by cold air sweeping down from the vast northern plateaus and converging with the tropical humidity of the lake 680 feet below sea level.

The crowds pushing and pressing made it impossible for Jesus to find a place to stand where all could see and hear Him. He saw two empty fishing boats. The fishermen were out on the shore washing their nets after a long night of fishing and catching nothing. Jesus stepped into one of the boats; it belonged to Simon Peter (the other boat probably belonged to John and James). This is not the first time Jesus met these Galilean fishermen.

He asked Peter to push the boat out into the lake a little way. Then Jesus sat down and began to teach. The Greek imperfect verb *edidasken* means Jesus kept on teaching the people. Luke does not record what Jesus said. But apparently what He taught had some connection to the great miracle which followed immediately. He must have taught things which pointed to His identity as the Messiah, for when He ceased speaking words He began teaching by sign and portent what He wanted to communicate: He is Lord! He desires that men leave all and follow Him!

**5:4-7 Testing:** Luke, the world traveler, notes that Jesus used the word *epanagage* a definite Greek nautical term meaning, "put to sea, set sail, launch forth," (cf. Lk. 8:22; Acts 13:13; 16:11; 18:21, etc.). Jesus instructed the fishermen to row out to the deep (Gr. *bathos*) part of the lake which could be as much as 150 ft. deep and let down their nets. Here is a land-lubber telling experienced fishermen how to fish!

Fishing was one of the three major industries of Galilee (along with agriculture and sheep-herding). Fishermen had an honorable place in society. They had a reputation of being seriously religious. There had been fishermen in Israel beyond the memory of man. Job, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk all speak of fishermen and their work. The tools of their trade, the back-breaking toil and the many fruitless hours, demanded strong, rough, tough, fearless, patient men. The daily experiences of fishermen taught them to be hard-headed realists. These character traits coupled with a lack of formal higher education would make them unlikely candidates for positions of leadership in the estimation of most people. Yet these are the very men Jesus chose to be apostles! The humble heart of a servant is fundamentally more significant to Jesus than all the erudition and charm in the world. The Israelites chose their first king on the basis of charm and not character (I Sam. 8-9) and the results were tragic!

It was, therefore, a real test of their character when Jesus commanded, ". . . let down your nets for a catch." Peter answered, "Master (Gr. *epistata*, meaning "one who has the right to command," or "captain") we toiled all night and took nothing!" Peter uses the Greek word *kopiasantes* which means to "labor strenuously until one is weary and sore." Peter was tired. But Peter acknowledged the authority of Jesus to demand his trust even in the face of what seemed impossible, and at the word of Jesus let down the net once more that day.

How had Peter arrived at this relationship with Jesus? Peter and Andrew, James and John had been directed to Jesus by John the Baptist a year (or more) previous to this encounter (Jn. 1:35ff). From that first encounter near the time of Jesus' baptism (December 26 A.D.), they followed Him, heard His teaching and saw many of His miracles for about a year. These fishermen saw Him make water into wine (Jn. 2) and cleanse the Temple; do many miracles in Judea (Jn. 3:2); preach to Nicodemus and the woman at the well (Jn. 3 and 4); and perhaps they witnessed the healing of the Capernaum nobleman's son (Jn. 4). After that they apparently returned to their fishing businesses on the Sea of Galilee while Jesus conducted His early Galilean ministry (Lk. 4). Peter's acknowledgement of Jesus' "captaincy" was not an emotional, spur-of-the-moment whim—it was based on solid evidence which he had witnessed with his own eyes and ears.

Obedience to the word of Jesus brought into their nets such a huge quantity of fish the nets began to tear and come apart (Gr. *dierresseto*). They had to motion (Gr. *kateneusan*, nodding the head vigorously) to their partners to come help. Galilean fishermen had to form partnerships to have the capital to buy equipment and to carry out the extremely difficult labor. In speaking of such teamwork Luke uses two words,

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*metochois* ("partners" 5:7) and *koinonoi* ("sharers" 5:10); literally the words would be "have with" and "participate with" respectively. The boats were filled so full they were sinking. In verse six the literal description of the catch is, "they enclosed a multitude of fishes, a much . . ."

**5:8-11 Turning:** Although Peter had undoubtedly witnessed miracles by Jesus before (see above), this miracle on his own home grounds, involving his own vocation, his own boat and his own close associates, had profound impact on the deepest recesses of his personality. Here was One who had demonstrated supernatural sovereignty over matters which touched the most intimate aspects of Peter's life. Surely He was *Lord!* Peter was a realist, but he was also a man of deep feeling and religious devotion. Recognizing Jesus as Lord implicated Peter as a sinful man in the presence of Deity! Peter knew what Isaiah knew (Isa. 6:1ff)—God is absolutely holy, man is unholy and in need of forgiveness. This was a turning point in Peter's life! Jesus had never before challenged anyone to leave all and follow Him, but He was about to do so.

Matthew and Mark record that Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Luke adds these words of Jesus, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." Jesus used the Greek word *zogron* which means literally, "capturing alive." The word is used in reference to the devil's capturing people (II Tim. 2:26). Apparently the emphasis is on securing and saving the lives of men for one purpose or another. Jesus wants men captured alive for Him that He may give them eternal blessedness. The devil wants to trap men alive to take them with him to eternal torment (Rev. 20:10). These fishermen added up all the evidence they had of who Jesus was and made the most momentous decision of their lives. They left everything else in second place and made Him and His will first in their lives. They went with Him to assist Him in His divine mission. They turned from being fishermen to become fishers of men.

The great Fisherman, Christ; His disciples, fishers; the world of men pictured as fish; these were favorite images of Christian artists and writers of the first centuries of the church. One of the earliest extant Christian hymns written by Clement of Alexandria (155-215 A.D.) dwells on such images:

"Fisher of men, the blest,  
Out of the world's unrest,  
Out of sin's troubled sea,  
Taking us, Lord, to thee;  
Out of the waves of strife  
With bait of blissful life;  
Drawing thy nets to shore,  
With choicest fish, good store."

The picture of the fish carved on so many tombs in the catacombs of Rome preserves this image until this very day.

## SECTION 2

**Cleansing Men (5:12-26)**

12 While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy; and when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and besought him, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean."<sup>13</sup> And he stretched out his hand, and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately the leprosy left him.<sup>14</sup> And he charged him to tell no one; but "go and show yourself to the priest, and make an offering for your cleansing, as Moses commanded, for a proof to the people."<sup>15</sup> But so much the more the report went abroad concerning him; and great multitudes gathered to hear and to be healed of their infirmities.<sup>16</sup> But he withdrew to the wilderness and prayed.

17 On one of those days, as he was teaching, there were Pharisees, and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem; and the power of the Lord was with him to heal.<sup>18</sup> And behold, men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they sought to bring him in and lay him before Jesus;<sup>19</sup> but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.<sup>20</sup> And when he saw their faith he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."<sup>21</sup> And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?"<sup>22</sup> When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts?<sup>23</sup> Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'?"<sup>24</sup> But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the man who was paralyzed—"I say to you, rise, take up your bed and go home."<sup>25</sup> And immediately he rose before them, and took up that on which he lay, and went home, glorifying God.<sup>26</sup> And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today."

**5:12-16 The Defiled:** ". . . there came to him a man full of leprosy . . ." Lepers were some of the most pathetic people of that era. It was not the physical but the social consequences of their malady that made their situation so extreme. Leviticus chapters 13 and 14 give scrupulous directions for the ostracism of lepers. They were cast out of towns and villages and had to live far away from healthy people. Often they lived in caves or tombs. They were not allowed to come within one hundred feet of a well person. When anyone approached, the leper was required

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to cry out concerning himself, "Unclean, unclean!" Often people who were well threw stones at lepers (even rabbis). No one was allowed to touch a leper. Lepers were deprived of all religious contact. They were considered outcasts from the "camp of Israel." They were forbidden access to the Temple and its services. It was the social, religious and psychological deprivation that made the lepers such pitiful cases then.

Note the desperation in the leper's plea: "he fell on his face and besought him, Lord if you will, you can make me clean." The Greek word translated "besought" might more literally be translated, "begged." It is interesting that the leper asked for cleansing (Gr. *katharisaí*) and not healing. The leper expressed humility, absolute faith in Jesus' ability, and acquiescence to whatever Jesus willed to do. This is the kind of attitude Jesus always honors (cf. I Jn. 5:14-15). With this kind of total commitment, Jesus was able to do the impossible. He could do for this defiled "untouchable" what no one else could do—He could cleanse! It is the Lord's will to cleanse the defiled. So, Luke records, He touched the leper and said, "I am willing, be cleansed (Gr. *katharistheti*)."

No one was supposed to touch a leper lest they too be defiled. Jesus' act declares: (a) I have authority to fulfill and supercede the Law—I am the Lawgiver; (b) I have power to take away the penalty that keeps man from God; (c) Love fulfills the Law! Jesus did not fulfill the Law and take away the penalty in fact, however, until He died on the cross and rose from the dead. This incident was simply a typical prediction of what He was going to do. Although Jesus fulfilled and superceded certain aspects of the Mosaic Law in order to show their true meaning, He never ignored the authority of that Law so long as it was in effect. Therefore, He ordered the leper to go to the priest, make the required sacrifices, and receive official cleansing before re-entering society.

To keep from enlarging the great throngs seeking Him merely for healing and to keep from increasing the agitation against Him already at work among the Jewish religious leaders, Jesus told the man to say nothing to anyone about his healing. Mark tells us that the man went out and began to spread the news so widely that Jesus could no longer openly enter a town because of the great multitudes which gathered to be healed of their infirmities, (Mk. 1:45), so Jesus had to stay out in the country. Luke notes that He withdrew into the "wilderness" (uninhabited areas) to pray. If these multitudes had sought Jesus to learn of the will of God for their spiritual lives and to commit themselves to Him for atonement and regeneration, He would not have withdrawn. Their primary concern, however, appears to have been physical and not spiritual.

### *A Brief Study of Biblical Leprosy:*

1. The word *lepra* in pre-biblical Greek meant "psoriasis" or "scaly." Translators of the Latin Vulgate took this Greek word and rendered

it into the Latin as *leprosus*, and it was from the Latin that our first English transliteration (not translation) *leprosy* came! Had the Greek word been *translated* it would have appeared as “scaly.” Even the Latin *leprosus* means a scaling or peeling condition and the Latin word *liber* (book or parchment or leaves) is of the same derivation as *leprosus*.

2. The Hebrew word *tzara'ath* is from a root word meaning “to cast down, to defile.” In Leviticus 13 and 14, even garments and walls of houses could have *tzara'ath*. This Hebrew word is translated in the English Bible as “leprosy.”
3. Priests of the Old Testament were given only a few days to diagnose *tzara'ath*. It is medically impossible to diagnose modern Hansen's disease (modern leprosy) in such a short time. This suggests that the “leprosy” of the Bible was not the Hansen's disease (leprosy) we know today.
4. The Hebrew *tzara'ath* and the Greek *lepra*, *lepros* apparently denoted numerous skin conditions which were pronounced “unclean” for religious and social reasons but which were curable. These skin conditions served the same purpose as other conditions which incurred defilement—to show the absoluteness of man's estrangement from God because of sin.
5. It is significant that the only leper *healed* in the New Testament was one of the 10 Samaritan lepers. All other lepers were *cleansed*. Apparently the Samaritan was simply *healed* since he could not be sent to a Jewish priest to be *cleansed*.
6. It is also significant that there is no mention of leprosy (defilement) after the death and resurrection of Christ. The Law was nailed to the cross and fulfilled; there was no more ceremonial defilement. So, while the apostles healed the sick, cast out demons, raised the dead, caused the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, *they never cleansed a leper!*
7. Modern doctors have shown that the symptoms related in Leviticus chapter 13 have no connection with the disease we call leprosy (*mycobacterium leprae*) which is really Hansen's disease. Hansen's disease is an incurable disease mainly affecting the nervous system.

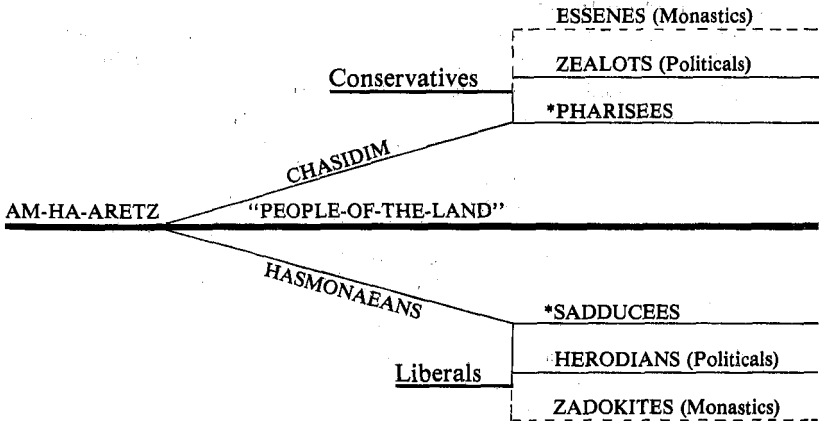
**5:16-26 The Defeated:** Luke mentions for the first time in his gospel the presence of Pharisees. The religious sect known as the Pharisees probably originated in the days of the Seleucid-Jewish struggles from a group of Jews who called themselves “the chasidim.” The Hebrew word *chasidim* means, “the pious ones” and they resisted to the death any encroachments of Hellenistic paganism upon their Jewish culture. This took place about 300-200 B.C. This group gained the favor of the

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majority of the common people and were able, by the time of Jesus, to exert tremendous influence upon society.

The Hebrew word *pharashim* (Pharisee) means, "distinctly divided or separated" and the Pharisees were extreme separatists. They were promoters of a traditional, exclusivistic Judaism. They numbered about 6000 in Jesus' time. They were contemptuous of all who did not follow their traditions. The fundamental feature of Pharisaism was extreme legalism. In their zeal for the preservation of Jewish culture they devised thousands of traditions and rules about the Scriptures in order to protect the Law from being violated. They cared more for their rules than they did either the Law or men (cf. Mt. 12:1-8; Mk. 2:23-28; Lk. 6:1-5; Mt. 15:1-20; Mk. 7:1-13, etc.). They did believe in divine providence, the free will of man, resurrection from the dead and final judgment, and a coming Messiah. They placed great store in history and the traditional culture of the Jewish race but were interested in politics only when politics interfered with their cultural and religious traditions. They were outwardly, very religious, and were the recognized (even by Jesus, Mt. 23:1) repositories of religious instruction. They were, however, for the most part hypocritical in their relationship toward God (cf. Mt. 23:1ff). See the following chart, The Religious/Political Frame of First Century Judaism, for the origins of Jewish sects.

### THE RELIGIOUS / POLITICAL FRAME OF FIRST CENTURY JUDAISM



\* Not all priests were Sadducees.

\* Not all rabbis were Pharisees.



The Pharisees, charged with the responsibility of maintaining the purity of Judaism, were here in Galilee investigating the sudden popularity of the itinerant Galilean rabbi, Jesus. Very little was officially known about Jesus. He had not gone to rabbinical schools; He apparently had little respect for Judea (had not spent much time there) which was the capital of conservative Judaism; it was being rumored that He took a very liberal view toward the traditions of the Pharisees. Jesus was teaching and preaching the word (cf. Mk. 2:1-2) and they wanted to know where He stood doctrinally. They were concerned as to whether Jesus of Nazareth based His teaching on traditional rabbinical authority or not. They soon found out!

Four friends with a frantic faith brought a man afflicted with paralysis to be healed by Jesus. The Greek word for bed is *klines* and denotes a couch for reclining at meals, in distinction from a *krabbatos* which in Greek would mean, "pallet or mattress." They could not get this couch through the door since people were jammed into the house and out around the door (cf. Mk. 2:1-2). They carried the couch to the roof-top of the house, took away some of the tiles of the roof, and let the man and his couch down through the roof into the room. The Greek word describing the man's affliction is *paralelumenos*. It is a perfect participle which means he had been paralyzed in the past and continued to be so. The word literally means, "loosed from something that is consistently fixed." Part of the man's body had been loosed from its normal consistency to the rest of the body. We know today that paralysis has something to do with the malfunction of the nerves of portions of the body in their connections to the brain. Brain damage (through stroke or accident) is usually what causes paralysis. Paralysis is almost totally incurable by medical technology.

Jesus surprised everyone with His first action toward the man. He said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you!" Matthew (9:2) notes Jesus said, "Be of good cheer . . . your sins are forgiven." Why did Jesus say this first and leave the more serious problem of the man's paralysis for later? Because the paralysis was *not* the "more serious" problem! Jesus is forcing the more serious issues first: (a) the man needs forgiveness even if he never receives healing; (b) most serious of all, the issue of His deity—His divine authority—must be declared in uncertain terms. The Pharisees recognized immediately the seriousness of Jesus' initial statement. They recognized that such a claim (to be able to forgive sins) was, if false, blasphemy. What they reasoned within themselves was true! Only God can forgive sins! The problem was the Pharisees refused to accept the idea (taught in the Old Testament, Isa. 7:14; Micah 5:2) that God could reside in a human body (become incarnate).

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Jesus, by supernatural knowledge, knew what they were reasoning within their minds. He proceeds to present incontrovertible proof of His authority. They cannot test the invisible power to forgive sins, but they can test His visible power to heal a paralytic. The healing proves the other. God would not grant such power to a liar and fraud. It is easy to say, "Your sins are forgiven you," and no external evidence will be available to verify its factuality. But to say to a paralyzed man, "Rise, take up your bed and go home" is not easy for it can be subjected to external verification! The following chart, somewhat appropriated from *The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. II*, pgs. 139-142, by Harold Fowler, pub. College Press, demonstrates the logical defense Jesus made against the charge of blasphemy.

THE REASONING OF THE PHARISEES	
False premise → really a conclusion	<p>Major Premise: "No man can forgive sins but God alone."                      Minor Premise: "But this one is not God in any sense."                      Conclusion: "Therefore, this one is blaspheming God in arrogating to himself authority to forgive sins, a prerogative which is God's alone."</p>
THE LOGIC OF JESUS' ARGUMENT	
1	<p>Major Premise: "No man but God can heal paralysis with a word of power."                      Minor Premise: "But I have power on earth to heal paralysis with a word of power (as demonstrated)."                      Conclusion: "I possess on earth the authority of God to heal paralysis." (This conclusion becomes the minor premise of further argument).</p>
2	<p>Major Premise: "None can forgive sins but one with God's authority and attributes."                      Minor Premise: "I have shown that I possess God's authority and God's attributes."                      Conclusion: "Therefore, I have power on earth to forgive sins."</p>
3	<p>Major Premise: "Only those who pretend to divine prerogative without right or authority are guilty of blasphemy."                      Minor Premise: "I have demonstrated by this miracle that I do possess the proper right or authority to exercise divine prerogatives."                      Conclusion: "Therefore, I am not guilty of blasphemy."</p>

Notice, Jesus did not say, "By the power of God, rise . . ." but, "I say to you, rise . . ." Eventually the Jews crucified Jesus on the charge of blasphemy. Jesus was not guilty of blasphemy because He proved that He possessed the absolute power of God and thus rightfully claimed the prerogatives of Almighty God.

The reactions of the multitudes are interesting: (a) they were afraid (Mt. 9:8; Lk. 5:26) (Gr. *ephobethesan* from *phobia*); (b) they were amazed (Mk. 2:12; Lk. 5:26) (Gr. *ekstasis*; they were *ecstatic*); (c) they glorified God (Mt. 9:8; Mk. 2:12; Lk. 5:26)—the word glorified in the O.T. comes from *kavod* which means *weight* and apparently derives from the idea of a person's wealth or worth; (d) they said, "We have seen strange (Gr. *paradoxa* from which we get *paradoxical*) things"—the word paradox means, "that which is contrary to the norm." They certainly did see strange and wonderful things from Jesus. No one had ever manifested such divine power—no one in their right mind had ever made such astounding claims. But perhaps the most paradoxical thing they saw that day was the refusal of the Pharisees to accept what they had seen with their own eyes verified to be true!

### SECTION 3

#### Converting Men (5:27-39)

27 After this he went out, and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." <sup>28</sup>And he left everything, and rose and followed him.

29 And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at table with them. <sup>30</sup>And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>31</sup>And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; <sup>32</sup>I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

33 And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink." <sup>34</sup>And Jesus said to them, "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? <sup>35</sup>The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days." <sup>36</sup>He told them a parable also: "No one tears a piece from an old garment; if he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. <sup>37</sup>And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. <sup>38</sup>But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. <sup>39</sup>And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, 'The old is good.'"

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**5:27-28 From Secondary Pursuits:** Mark indicates Jesus went out from the inner city to a place "beside the sea" (Mk. 2:13) and taught the people gathered about Him. As Jesus passed on along the busy boat docks of the city He saw a man called Levi (which means, "companion"). His other name was Matthew (which means, "gift"). This Levi was a tax-collector (Gr. *telones* from *telos*, meaning toll, custom or tax); tax-collectors were called "publicans" from Latin *publicanus*. We know the following things about Levi: (a) His father's name was Alphaeus; (b) he was undoubtedly skilled in writing and keeping records; (c) he was apparently well versed in the Old Testament for he quotes more from it than any other gospel writer; (d) he left a lucrative position to follow Jesus; (e) he must have been a man of deep spiritual convictions to have such concern for his former colleagues.

The typical publican of that day may be characterized as: (a) self-centered, Mt. 5:46-47; (b) heathenish, Mt. 18:17; 11:19; 21:31; (c) mercenary, Lk. 19:2, 8; (d) yet, more able to repent than the Pharisees, Lk. 7:29-30; 18:9-14; 19:8. Levi probably did not fit this picture in all its aspects. He does not seem to be self-centered or mercenary. Most publicans were hated by all the Jews because they collected taxes for the despised Roman conquerors. Furthermore, the Romans had a system of "farming-out" taxes. Rome stipulated a fixed amount of taxes they wished to receive from conquered provinces. The collectors were to insure that amount; all they could collect above that amount they could keep as salary. Many tax-collectors became adept at fraud, extortion and manipulation, and some became very rich. The Jews considered them as traitors and heathen; not fit to be included in the covenant with Jehovah, and classed with the worst of sinners.

The Lord called Levi to change his occupation to the highest of all callings—an evangelist of the gospel of Jesus Christ. While it is not stated, we may assume that Levi had prior knowledge of Jesus: (a) no one followed Jesus blindly; (b) Jesus had conducted an extensive ministry of teaching and working miracles in the city of Capernaum prior to His call to Levi; (c) Levi may have already had business contacts with the fishermen-apostles who would have told him about Jesus. The Lord had a special mission for this man who had special training. Levi, skilled and experienced at record-keeping, gave the world its most influential and enduring place of historical record—a biography of the life of the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ. Levi was converted. He immediately left all, put his trust in Jesus and followed Him. Levi committed himself to the proposition of Jesus, "Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these (necessities) things will be added to you."

**5:29-32 From Sin:** This was a turning point in Levi's life. He felt satisfied he had found Someone who could lead him to Life with a capital "L."

He believed he had found the Messiah who would fill his empty life with truth, love and holy comradeship which his forefathers and the prophets had so longed for. Now Levi wanted his associates and friends to know this Jesus also. Ultimately, this is the only real way to follow Jesus!

Levi was a man of considerable financial means, so he held a huge "reception" (*megale*, Gr. for great; *douche*—from *dechomai*, to receive) for Jesus in his own home. There was a huge crowd (Gr. *ochlos*, multitude; *polus*, much) of tax-collectors and other people at Levi's for this reception-supper. They were all reclining (Gr. *katakeimenoí*), probably on the Roman "triclinium" type couches. The triclinium was wide enough for three people. They rested their head on their left hand (the left elbow resting on the couch) and fed themselves with their right hand. Eating utensils such as we know today were possessed only by the well-to-do and rich. There were no forks; only knives, spoons, drinking goblets or cups and an individual dish for each diner. In the homes of the common people diners took a piece of flat Jewish bread and dipped it into the food in their individual dishes, or, in some cases where there were no individual dishes, the diners, one at a time, dipped a morsel of bread into the one main dish of food on the table. No one ever ate standing up. Jewish tradition says, "Eating or drinking upright upsets a man's whole body." In ordinary meals it was permissible to put one's hand into the common dish, but never to put it in at the same time as another guest—that would be extremely rude according to the apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus. An ordinary meal, in a moderately well-to-do home, would have consisted of fish or kid, vegetables (particularly onions), and cakes, with local wine to wash it all down. We do not know what Levi had served. It may have been more sumptuous than that. Whatever the meal, the real purpose of Levi was to introduce his friends to this miracle-working Teacher who spoke with the authority of God.

There were Pharisees and scribes there. We do not know they were in Levi's house when they "grumbled" at the disciples of Jesus. They could have been. It is doubtful that Levi had invited them. But in Palestine then, it was customary for spectators to gather, uninvited inside the larger homes just to watch the "goings-on" at one of the huge feasts of the well-to-do. It was a form of entertainment. More likely, however, the Pharisees heard about the feast and attacked Jesus' disciples after the feast was over somewhere other than in Levi's house. No self-respecting Pharisee would ever defile himself by entering a "publican's" house. This was the main point of their attack upon Jesus and His disciples. To the Pharisees a publican was no better than a Gentile or a Samaritan. In those days to dine indicated not simply hospitality and friendship, but brotherhood. When a person was invited to dine and did so, people

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assumed that the host and guest were in agreement religiously, politically and socially (cf. II Jn. 9-11, etc.). Pharisees considered tax-collectors and sinners anathema (cf. Lk. 18:11; Mt. 18:17). Thus the Pharisees assumed Jesus was condoning sin and had defiled Himself by such intimate association with Levi. Jesus ate with a publican—Jesus had joined in brotherhood with a publican. Rabbis only associated with righteous people: To the Pharisees it was not a question of the needs of the publican to know the truth and be brought to repentance; their highest priority was themselves—the keeping of themselves *traditionally* pure by not associating with sinners. There were no such instructions in the Law of Moses. To bring a sinner to a knowledge of God's revealed will so that sinner will repent, is the highest form of love—and love is the fulfillment of the law.

The Pharisees murmured. The Greek word is *egonguzon* which means to "grumble, mumble, or murmur indignantly in a low tone." It is onomatopoeic; i.e., when the word is pronounced it sounds like the thing it is describing. It is like the English word *gong*. Jesus' answer is a masterpiece. It is subtle enough not to enrage while at the same time it contains enough sarcasm that it cannot be shrugged off without having felt the sting of rebuke. Pharisees considered themselves learned teachers of the Law and publicans as unlearned heathen. Pharisees and rabbis looked upon the Law as medicine for the soul and themselves as blameless before the Law; therefore, in need of no repentance. Publicans were, to Pharisees, spiritually ill—in fact, terminally ill. Jesus said, Those who are well do not need a doctor; those who are ill do! Where else would you expect to find a physician than among the ill? Those who do not believe themselves to be ill will not seek a physician. Jesus came to save or "heal" those who recognize they are ill and need His healing. Publicans know they are sinners and want help (Lk. 18:13; 7:29); Pharisees do not acknowledge they are sinners (although they are) and do not want help (Lk. 18:11-12; 7:30; Jn. 9:39-41). That is why Jesus ate with publicans and sinners! If we are to bring people to Jesus for salvation, we must find those who will acknowledge they are sinners. Those who think they can be saved by themselves or someone other than Jesus are like the Pharisees. There is only one way to find sinners—befriend them, associate with them, and introduce them to Jesus. Befriending sinners does not mean we condone their sin. Eating with sinners and associating with them in certain situations does not mean we will be defiled. The apostle Paul knew Christians would be forced in certain situations of everyday life to associate with sinners (I Cor. 5:9-10), otherwise Christians would have to leave this world altogether. Thousands of sinners want to know Jesus. If Christians withdraw into little monastic clubs and mingle only with one another, how shall these thousands ever be introduced to Jesus?

**5:33-39 From Self-Righteousness:** A monastic attitude tends to produce self-righteousness. Self-righteousness feeds on legalism. This is the point of the next encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees. And it is all connected to the graciousness of Jesus toward Levi as contrasted with the self-righteous bigotry of the Pharisees toward publicans. This is not really a renunciation of the law of God; it is a disavowal of legalism and Pharisaic traditions. Jesus never renounced the Law; He came not to destroy it but to fulfill it.

Both Matthew and Mark indicate that John the Baptist's disciples joined the Pharisees in carping at Jesus in this instance. John the Baptist was probably already in prison by Herod's decree. These disciples of John were apparently part of the crowd of uninvited spectators at Levi's house or had been seduced by the Pharisees to join in attacking Jesus because of His innovative religious behavior. Had John been free he would not even have attended such an affair. He lived the life of an ascetic for the purpose of God, not to promote his own self-righteousness in the legalistic way of the Pharisees. The Pharisees, on the other hand, lived outwardly austere and ascetic to justify themselves in their legalism. The Pharisees fasted often and prayed often—publicly. They withdrew into a modified form of monasticism so they would appear to be righteous, unable to tolerate "sinners."

Where did the idea of fasting originate? Its origin is spiritual, not dietary. The commandment of the Law was that the Hebrew worshiper should *'innah* (Hebrew for "afflict") the soul (Lev. 16:29-34; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7, etc.). There was really no specific instruction concerning abstinence in the original commandment. The Hebrew word *tzum* is translated "fast," but this word is *not* used in the first 6 books of the Old Testament. Apparently the instruction in the Pentateuch "to afflict the soul" came to be *interpreted* to mean abstain from food and other things. The instructors in the Pentateuch said the Hebrew was to "afflict his soul" only on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) which occurred once a year in October. The Pharisees fasted *twice each week*, on Mondays and Thursdays, as well as on other special occasions. The Pharisees made a point to do their "fasting" publicly going to great lengths to exhibit penitence. They put dust and ashes on their heads; they wore sackcloth next to their skin; they allowed their hair and beards to go unkempt; Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 6:16) they disfigured their faces (Gr. *aphanizousin*) with gloom (Gr. *skuthropos*, "sadness, sullenness, moroseness"); and, of course, they abstained from food. Jesus' answer is not intended to preclude fasting altogether. Jesus fasted (Mt. 4:2). Jesus also said, "When you fast. . . ." (Mt. 6:17), indicating there would be times when a Christian might wish to fast. Fasting (or, afflicting the soul) might be in order in times of spiritual depression,

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penitence or mourning. But it should be a spontaneous expression, not faked or pretended. And it cannot be legalistically and arbitrarily regulated by human traditions. These are the two main points of Jesus' answer. There is a time for fasting and there is a time for feasting; a wedding is a place to feast, not fast! The Messiah had come—it was a time to rejoice and come to God's feast (as the O.T. Prophets predicted, Isa. 25:6ff; 55:1ff; 61:1ff). John the Baptist himself had confirmed that Jesus was The Bridegroom. The "children of the bridechamber" certainly should not fast or mourn while the Bridegroom was with them. When the Bridegroom was slain would be the time for mourning; and that would come soon enough. But even that mourning would last only a short time for the Bridegroom would be raised from the dead and then joy would return to the disciples.

But the Pharisees refused to acknowledge that the Messiah had come. They refused to accept the announcement that God's promises of salvation by grace were present in Jesus. They preferred to continue seeking justification through their legalistic traditions. This is the point of the parables Jesus uses here. Obviously, the new garment and the new wine is the Christian revelation of salvation by grace and the old garment and old wineskins represent the old system to which the Jews were clinging for salvation; the Law of Moses, especially as it was traditionally interpreted and practiced for the purposes of self-justification. The promise of God for salvation was never intended to be limited in its appropriation to a set of rules and traditions. God's salvation has always been by grace, through faith (Rom. 5:2). The promise, made to Abraham when he was a Gentile, was to be appropriated through faith, and the Law which came 430 years later did not annul the promise or the means of appropriation. The Law was *not* against salvation by grace through faith. In fact, the Law was given to intensify man's realization that his only hope of salvation was by grace through faith. This is more precisely taught in Romans, chapters 3 through 8, and Galatians, chapters 3 through 5. It was *not* the Law itself that condemned man. Man was condemned by his perversion of the Law. Man took God's Law and arrogantly declared that he needed no grace from God, no faith in God, for he could, by adding his own interpretations and traditions to it, keep it in such an absolute and perfect way, God would owe him salvation. Man perverted the Law into a system of self-justification. His faith was in himself and his system—not in the Lawgiver, God.

Jesus came to fulfill the old system; He did not come to patch it up. To make the "new" a patch on the "old" would never work. Cloth in Jesus' day was not "sanforized." A patch of new cloth on old, when washed, would shrink and tear itself away from the old. New, unfermented



wine put in old, brittle and dried out wineskins, would form gases as it fermented and would soon burst the old skins. The proper thing to do is put new wine in new skins; when the new wine forms gases, the new skins stretch to meet the situation.

The new era of grace ushered in by Christ and His fulfillment of the old cannot be contained in the forms of the old Law and especially in the traditions of the Pharisees. Systems of Law and Tradition must, by their very nature, be constructed to fit times and cultures. Salvation by grace through faith fits all times and cultures. The Christian dispensation of God's grace calls for new and expanding ways to express itself. It must be able to transcend human cultures. It must divorce the spirit of man from its tendency to cling to the seen and direct it to the unseen. It must be able to strip the spirit of man of its tendency to arrogance and self-justification through a system and direct it to trust the absolute faithfulness of a Person. Man must be freed from the penalty of guilt in failing to perfectly obey the Law of God and his own perversions of that Law, so he can enter a covenant relationship with the God of grace by faith. That is what Jesus accomplished for man! That is why Christianity is not simply a "patch-up-job" on legalism; that is why Christianity cannot be restricted into some humanly legalistic "wineskin." Once a man believes in Christ, accepts His new covenant terms and is immersed in water, he is justified by the grace of God and he is forgiven all penalties and is free to grow in his expression of faith and love toward God as he allows himself to be motivated and guided by the Spirit of God through the New Covenant scriptures. Such a person is born again—a citizen of the kingdom of God. Never again does he need to seek to justify himself before God; never again can anyone else bind him to a system of legalism. Only the individual through distrust in God and His word, enslaves himself again to legalism.

Now this is the point of Jesus' last illustration here (Lk. 5:39). Jesus ends this discussion of conversion on a sad note. It will be very difficult for most men to *give up* the old way of self-justification and accept the new justification by grace through faith. Pride, the mother of all sins, is not easy to surrender. Pharisees (those of Jesus' day and those of all ages) satisfy themselves with "old wine" (self-righteousness through human legalism). The old is pleasant, so why even try the new? Human legalism is a form of idolatry. The Pharisees made *void* the word of God by their traditions and legalism and thus these became their god. The man who makes his own god can manipulate it. Human legalism can be manipulated to serve man's pride and other fleshly lusts. It is not easy to surrender in faith to the Personal God who *cannot* be manipulated. Jesus found it easier to convert Levi, who had probably not been too concerned with self-justification, than to convert the Pharisees

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whose self-righteousness closed their hearts to the grace of Christ. As one man has said, "How often does the good become the enemy of the best!" The idea of self-justification is intoxicating and exhilarating to the proud heart of man.

Keeping the commandments of Christ because we believe, trust and love Him is not legalism. Legalism is an attitude, not an action. Legalism is the proud heart of man thinking he can keep the law of God perfectly and not incur guilt and so earn his salvation by self-righteousness. Legalism does not depend upon the imputed righteousness of Christ but upon self-attained merit. Trying to obey the commandments of Christ because one believes and accepts His salvation as a gift is not legalism, but love.

### STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. How would you characterize the "lake of Gennesaret"? What part did it have to play in Jesus' ministry?
2. What do you think of Jesus selecting fishermen to become apostles? How do men usually go about choosing their leaders (cf. I Sam. 8:5, 19, 20; 9:1-2)?
3. Did Jesus expect these fishermen to follow Him on some immediate, emotional whim? Does Jesus ever expect anyone to follow Him on that basis? How do you know?
4. Why was the miracle of the great catch of fish so impressive to Peter?
5. Describe the social circumstances of having "leprosy" in Jesus' day.
6. What was "leprosy"? What religious function did it have?
7. What did Jesus signify when He cleansed this leper?
8. What is a Pharisee? Where did they come from? Why were they following Jesus?
9. What was "paralysis" according to Dr. Luke? Why did they let the paralyzed man down through the roof into the house where Jesus was?
10. Why did Jesus *first* tell the paralyzed man his sins were forgiven?
11. What did the Pharisees say about Jesus forgiving the man's sins?
12. How did Jesus prove He could forgive the man's sins?
13. Who was Levi and what did he do for a living?
14. Why would Jesus call Levi to be an apostle?
15. How did Levi introduce Jesus to his friends?
16. Why did Jesus eat with "publicans and sinners"?
17. Why did the Pharisees and John's disciples attack Jesus for not fasting?
18. What is "fasting"? When should Christians fast?
19. What did Jesus mean by saying, "You cannot put new patches on old cloth . . ." and "You cannot put new wine into old wineskins"?
20. Why do men not desire the new "wine" after having drunk the "old"?
21. What is legalism? What is it *not*?