

of the four men who had brought their friend. What did Jesus actually say?

11. What was the response made by the Pharisees and theologians to Jesus' declaration? Express the principles behind their assertions about Jesus' declaration. Though you may disallow their application to Jesus, justify their conclusion when applied to anyone else who said what Jesus said. Quote Jesus' answer to their complaint.
12. Show the conclusiveness of Jesus' rebuttal of the theologians' conclusion. Explain the relationship between what Jesus said and the miracle He performed in the presence of these people.
13. What did Jesus mean by the expression: "authority on earth to forgive sins"?
14. Explain why these "reverend doctors from Jerusalem" were even present on this occasion. What was their special interest in Jesus' message and ministry?
15. What kind of roof do Mark and Luke describe the house as having, wherein Jesus sat with the crowd of people? What does this fact have to do with the event itself?

Section 19

JESUS CALLS MATTHEW LEVI

(Parallels: Mark 2:13-22; Luke 5:27-39)

TEXT: 9:9-17

9. And as Jesus passed by from thence, he saw a man, called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.
10. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples.
11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners?
12. But when he heard it, he said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.
13. But go ye and learn what *this* meaneth, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice: for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.
14. Then come to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?
15. And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bridechamber

mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then will they fast.

16. And no man putteth a piece of undressed cloth upon an old garment; for that which should fill it up taketh from the garment, and a worse rent is made.
17. Neither do *men* put new wine into old wine-skins: else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins perish: but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins, and both are preserved.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. We all know how important it is to choose our friends with care. The more important the person, the more care he must exercise in the selection of his friends. On what possible basis, then, how can Jesus be justified for being intimate with the riff-raff of Jewish society? A man is known by the company he keeps. Yet, ironically, how does this very fact identify Jesus as the finest of men ever known?
- b. Why do you think Jesus chose to call such a man as Matthew to be an Apostle? Would not He have run too great a risk to call a publican?
- c. How is it possible for Hosea to declare that God did not really care for sacrifices, since it was mercy He wanted? After all, had not God originally ordered that the sacrifices be given? What could Hosea mean that reflects not only God's original command but also the true purpose behind the law of sacrifice?
- d. Do you feel that Jesus' hobnobbing with sinners justifies a man in seeking bad company? In what way would he be right in so doing?
- e. Can you give a possible reason why the Pharisees and legal experts were on the scene when Jesus went to the dinner party with Matthew? Had they been invited too?
- f. Paul says (Romans 3:10-18, 23) that there are none who are righteous and that all are sinners. Who, then, are those whom Jesus describes as "righteous"? Are there some "righteous" persons on earth whom Jesus did not need to call to repentance?
- g. Do you think the disciples of John the Baptist were criticizing Jesus? On what basis?
- h. What effect would Jesus' cryptic declaration have on the Apostles when He said, "But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast"?

- i. Do you think that we too should fast? Why? Under what circumstances.
- j. Does it not seem to you that the call of Matthew to follow Jesus was a little abrupt? On what basis is it possible to comprehend Matthew's instant, deliberate response?
- k. Why would Matthew invite Jesus to the dinner party in his own house?
- l. Why would Matthew have invited also all his old cronies, when he knew that the pure Jesus of Nazareth would be there? What possible purpose could he have for making this social blunder? Or was it a blunder?
- m. If you decide that fasting is something a follower of Jesus can do today, do you feel that fasting is a ceremony to be observed regularly, or should the circumstances in which you find yourself determine your choice?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

As Jesus was passing on away from the seashore where He had taught the gathered crowd, He saw a man, a tax collector, named Matthew Levi, son of Alphaeus. Matthew was busy at the tax office, but Jesus invited him, "Come, be my disciple."

Matthew left the whole business, stood up and went along with Jesus.

Later, Matthew made Him a large banquet in his home. While the Lord was at his house as dinner guest, there was a large number of Matthew's old cronies, sinners and other people who came as guests. They all sat down with Jesus and His followers, for there was also a large group who came with Him.

Now when the Pharisees and their legal experts saw that Jesus sat there enjoying dinner with such notorious sinners, they murmured against Jesus' disciples, "How can you and your rabbi enjoy the fellowship of such scum?"

When Jesus heard what they were saying, He argued: "People who are well do not need a doctor, just sick folk do. You go study what this Bible text means (Hosea 6:6): "It is not just your sacrifices that I want—I want you to learn to be merciful! And besides, why should I spend my time trying to get the 'righteous' to turn from their sins? It is the SINNERS who need my help!"

Now the disciples of John the Baptist as well as the Pharisees fasted regularly each week. So the disciples of John approached Jesus with the query: "Why do we regularly go without food to spend time in

prayer? The Pharisees and their disciples do it too. But your followers, what do they do? They wine and dine!"

Then Jesus responded like this, "You cannot make the wedding guests go without food or be sad during the wedding festivities, can you? No, with the bridegroom present, it would be out of place for that. The time will arrive when the groom will be taken away from them. Then it would be appropriate for them to refuse to eat."

He illustrated His point with this parable: "Who would tear a piece from a new suit of clothes and sew it on a worn-out garment? If he does, he will tear the new material, and the new piece would not match the old anyway. In a similar way, no one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, because if he does, the new patch rips away from the old cloth and you have a bigger hole than before.

"Neither should you store freshly pressed grape juice in old goat-skin bottles. If you do, the pressure of the expanding new wine will burst the skins. The wine gets spilled and so is lost and you have destroyed the skin bottles too. No, new wine must be stored in new, flexible wineskins. That way, both are preserved.

"No one who is accustomed to drinking vintage wines calls for this year's wine. 'The old,' he claims, 'is pleasant; it suits me.'"

SUMMARY

Leaving the seashore where He had been teaching the multitudes, Jesus passed by Matthew-Levi's tax office and called him to intimate discipleship. Matthew, in turn, responded joyfully by giving a huge farewell dinner party for his former associates. Jesus' friendly fellowship with this level of society aroused the criticism of the Jewish Puritans, the Pharisees, but Jesus defended His ministry among such sinners as absolutely essential.

The disciples of John the Baptist too were scandalized that Jesus and His followers paid little of any attention to the traditional fasting practices. Again Jesus defended His practice and views as being so new and different in nature from the old system that John's disciples hoped to purify, that one would do violence to both systems to try to mix them. Jesus concluded by warning them about being prejudiced against the new ideas by thinking the old ways to be better.

NOTES

A. THE CALL OF MATTHEW

This account of the call of Matthew to close companionship with Jesus, following as it does upon the foregoing account of Jesus' divine

right on earth to forgive sins, is in its proper logical place. Jesus' call of him who, in the minds of popular Judaism, was a most flagrant sinner, is a thrilling exercise of Jesus' power to forgive sins and transform a man.

9:9 And as Jesus passed by from thence . . . Between the astounding narration of Jesus' proven ability to forgive sins on earth, demonstrated by His instantaneous cure of the paralytic lowered through the roof, and this record of Matthew's call, Mark (2:13) and Luke (5:27a) both report that Jesus left the crowded house in which that cure occurred. Perhaps it was precisely because of the pressing crowds that He went outdoors, in order to have more space. As He had done on other occasions, He led the people to the Capernaum wharf, where He could speak to them all with greater facility. Apparently, when Jesus had finished His discourse before these people, He dismissed them and walked directly toward the toll office of Matthew.

He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting at the place of toll. This could be the most beautiful sentence in the New Testament and the most incredible declaration in all of Jewish literature! Jesus, the mover of multitudes, could see the individual, Matthew. Levi was no mere number to the Lord, no "warm body" whose living personality could be ignored. How many times had thousands of other Jews passed by that same toll office without ever seeing this human being called Matthew sitting there? How often had their own awareness of his hated occupation caused them to shun him deliberately, turning their head the other way, pretending not to have seen him? But Jesus saw Matthew as he was and loved him. We too must learn to see people, not for the clothes they wear, the position they occupy, the relationships they represent to us. This latter only hides the individuality of that person. We must see the man or woman as human beings in need of God. We must see, as Jesus saw Matthew, the individual possibilities they have to grow into the image of God. Jesus was not afraid that the moral filth and contamination, of which the Pharisees were so afraid, would cause Him to lose His own purity. Nor should we withhold help for fear of contamination from those to whom Jesus felt irresistibly drawn. Jesus was not deceived by a contact with Matthew elsewhere, for He saw Matthew precisely as he was, engaged in his universally despised occupation.

Sitting at the place of toll. For detailed bibliographies on *publicans place of toll, etc.*, see encyclopedic articles and special studies, especially Edersheim, *Sketches*, 51ff.; *Life*, I, 515-517; *ISBE*, 2920a, b, 2921a,

Arndt-Gingrich, 820 on *telōnēs*. The official position of the tax official in Jewish social life, regardless of the education, wealth or power of the individual who exercised that office, was despicable beyond belief for those unaware of the peculiar religio-political situation that existed in Palestine during this period. Religiously, the Jews owned no king but God and to Him alone should they bring proper tribute. (Though for convenience' sake, they acted otherwise more often than not, as for example, Jn. 19:15; yet their religious ideal was this.) Politically, they were a small political unit of the Roman empire to which they owed tribute, custom, and duty. Although in a period previous to the Roman imperial era, the taxes were collected by wealthy men who purchased from the Greek kings the right to collect them (see, for example Josephus, *Antiquities*, XII, 4, 1-4), under the empire "the direct taxes were not farmed out, but collected by regular imperial officers in the regular routine of official duty. The customs or tolls levied upon exports and imports, and upon goods passing through the country, were sold to the highest bidders, who were called 'publicans'" (*ISBE*, 2920b). Even though the publicans themselves were apparently not Roman officials, they possessed all the authority of Rome behind their exactions. As a Jew, the publican was viewed as a traitor to his nation and to God, because of his willingness to collaborate in this way with a pagan, foreign conqueror. Worse still, the Roman system encouraged greed and graft by selling the right to collect taxes at auction, from which the publican repaid himself for his work and risk involved by collecting all he could. The tax collectors naturally enriched themselves at the expense of their own nation. The indefinite rate of taxation plus the exaggerated and arbitrary value placed upon goods by the publicans rendered their position indescribably odious to all other Jews.

Scripture notices of the publicans reveal in passing in what light they were considered in Jesus' time: they were typically selfish (Mt. 5:46, 47). They were classed on a par with heathens (Mt. 18:17), prostitutes (Mt. 21:31) and other notorious outcasts (Mt. 9:10, 11:19; Lk. 18:11). Even though Jesus Himself viewed them as people to be loved and saved, yet His use of popular language in regard to the publicans reveals profoundly in what light they were viewed by the majority of the people before whom Jesus used this language.

And He saith unto him, Follow me. Matthew knew that Jesus could have found plenty of other, respectable men who had no

embarrassing past to live down. Jesus could have eased tensions between Himself and the "orthodox" by selecting His disciples more discreetly. By Pharisaic principles, Jesus should have prudently passed right on past Matthew, but He chose not to. These two words of invitation are Jesus' deliberate demonstration of His determination to show what He could do with a man completely surrendered to Him, regardless of background or lack of previous religious virtue. Jesus intended to take this dull, rough, crude, sinful man and help him to be transformed into His own image. Jesus could see Matthew as he could become, so invited him to follow. Jesus could see in Matthew more than Matthew himself dared dream; because He was seeing "the possibilities in personality." Jesus knew the man that Levi might become, quite as well as the man Levi already was. It was Jesus' unshakeable faith in the better Matthew that became the power to make Matthew die to be that better man! He was literally calling this man to greatness. The tragic question that renders them the more guilty is how many times had Jesus offered the same invitation to the Pharisees?

And he arose and followed Him. This was the vital difference between Matthew and the Pharisees: he could properly evaluate this invitation. He responded differently from the Pharisees precisely because he was a different man. He had endured hate from his fellow Jews for years. He knew that he had sold out to the Romans for this well-paying job, but all he had earned in human relations, of which are made the real treasure of life, was the contempt and snubbing of his own people. He had felt the power of greed, cruelty, gouging and cheating in his own heart. Sick of soul, Matthew does not surprise us by responding this way. And yet, Matthew's own will could have hindered all that followed this moment, for, as Morgan (*Matthew*, 92) points out, Jesus could offer the highest invitation of heaven, but He stood limited before the surprising reality that a man can say, No.

Matthew could gratefully appreciate how much it cost Jesus to involve Himself with such as Matthew. But this publican had never witnessed a man sacrifice his reputation like this before. This customs agent could never have dared hope for such personal recognition, much less could he hope to be called to personal companionship with Jesus and Apostleship! How long had he been a secret admirer of the Prophet from Nazareth?

One interesting problem is noted and adequately handled by Bruce (*Training*, 22), i.e. why and how Matthew should respond to Jesus' invitation so promptly without any apparent or at least recorded psychological preparation. The Gospels

give the impression of abruptness surrounding Matthew's call, as if Matthew had not known Jesus quite well previously. Two factors combine to suggest very strongly that this acquaintance actually existed:

1. The call of other Apostles is surrounded by the same sort of abruptness, whereas we know that several of them had been previously acquainted with Jesus. (See on 4:18-22) As Bruce (*op cit.*) notes, "The truth is that, in regard to both calls, the evangelists concerned themselves only about the *crisis*, passing over in silence all preparatory stages, and not deeming it necessary to inform intelligent readers that, of course, neither the publican nor any other disciple blindly followed one of whom he knew nothing, merely because asked or commanded to follow."

2. Considering Jesus' close connection with the city of Capernaum, His mighty works done and repeated before a grateful and at first, responsive populace, and remembering that Matthew probably lived and worked in Capernaum, we conclude that Jesus and Matthew had been fellow-citizens of Capernaum and could well have known each other. It would have been more psychologically improbable to believe that Matthew had never heard of Him. (See on Mt. 11:23).

Had he had business relationships with the fishermen and shipowners among the Apostles? Had he been watching the growing opposition to Jesus' ministry? Or had he failed to notice the fact that Jesus seemed always to be surrounded by common sinners like himself? Could not this fact have encouraged Levi to leave his table on various occasions to slip in at the back of the crowds to hear Jesus personally? But when Jesus came right up to his table, placed before him this invitation to destiny, it took not even a moment's deliberation to make that decision that forever sealed his future and gave to the world Jesus' first publican-Apostle. As Edersheim paints him, "His soul was in the speechless surprise of unexpected love and grace; but he rose up, left the custom-house and followed Him!"

And he arose and followed, The significant omission of the word "immediately" allows us to surmise that Matthew first settled his accounts, closed out his books and turned over his responsibilities to others. His good rapport with publicans later indicates that he did not leave them embarrassed by his absence. While he may well

have concluded his work to leave all to follow Jesus, why did he rise up to readily?

1. Was it because he still retained influences of a godly upbringing? Is his deep knowledge and use of the Old Testament shown later in his Gospel, only the result of supernatural inspiration, or was it the result of a proper godly training, from which he in mid-life badly strayed in search of wealth?
2. Or was he reflecting a deep, personal dissatisfaction with a life, which from its beginning had been empty, shallow, hopeless? Had he realized the depth of his desperate condition as a sinner, depicted so well by Barker (*As Matthew Saw the Master*, 41)? "The broken intentions, the wasted dreams, the splintered personality, the poisoned mind, and the calloused heart—it added up to a loathesome, hopeless case."
3. Was Matthew simply a better man than the average publican?

Whatever his preparation to be called by Jesus, Matthew responded, leaving a comfortable job and the security of a good income for a life of destiny, adventure, peace and joy. His talent was turned to serve in composing one of the most extensive records of Jesus' teaching ministry that has ever come down to us.

B. THE CONCERN OF MATTHEW

9:10 **And it came to pass, as he sat at meat in the house . . .** Modestly, Matthew omits details that would glorify himself, reserving himself only to the barest facts. However, Mark and Luke describe the arrangements Matthew prepared in his own house:

1. Levi made "a great feast" (Lk. 5:29), such as one would expect a former publican, probably wealthy, to be able to give. Nothing is spared to make this moment a memorable occasion for all who hear of it.
2. Levi made "Him" a great feast: Luke is affirming (5:29) that Matthew arranged this banquet for Jesus Himself, in His honor.
3. All Synoptic writers agree in the large number of guests, not only Jesus and many disciples that followed Him (Mk. 2:15), but also "a large company of tax collectors and others" (Lk. 5:29).

Notice the elaborate plans carried out by this one repentant publican. His conversion must have caused quite a sensation in Capernaum! After all, here is a wealthy but notorious publican suddenly called

away from his occupation to leave everything to enter the companionship of the most truly holy Rabbi people in Capernaum had ever known. All who heard about it would wonder not only at the readiness of Levi's response and the completeness of his change, but also the purpose behind Jesus' unusual choice.

Apparently Matthew planned this feast with the specific purpose of introducing Jesus to all his former associates. He cared enough to invite all his old cronies to a feast where the issue of his own former life and present association could be faced head-on. Certainly Matthew invited his friends to the feast: who else COULD he invite? This is the reason the guest-list contained so many publicans' names. But why, in re-telling his story, does Matthew use this particular expression: **many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus?** Is this a fixed phrase in popular Jewish speech, or is he writing with tongue in cheek, preparing the mind of the reader for the hypocritical question of the Pharisees which follows? Or, by saying, **publicans and sinners**, is he revealing the purpose of his own heart? The men he invited are sinners like himself. This former lover of gain has begun to act like his Lord; he has become a lover of souls, immediately doing all he can to bring his fellow sinners under the influence of Jesus' voice.

It took great insight on Matthew's part to have been able to plan in precisely this way, knowing surely that he could bring his friends to Jesus in this way that would be perfectly in harmony with Jesus' character. C. E. B. Reed comments: (*Preacher's Homiletic Commentary*, XXII, 224)

One can see that Matthew had already studied to good purpose his Lord's character.

- I. First of all he perceived that he could best serve Him, not by eating and drinking alone in His presence, but by inviting the outcasts of society and befriending them for the sake of Him who made their cause His own.
- II. He invited to the feast his own associates. Many men would have forsworn the class from which they had been called and sought some new field of benevolence; whereas he does not disown his publican comrades, but selects them as earliest recipients of his bounty.
- III. He recognized that the best thing he could do for them was to bring them into contact with Jesus. Instead of going among them and talking about his new Master, he

wisely brought them face to face with Him whose teaching he could not match for breadth or power.

- IV. This intercourse between Christ and the publicans Matthew contrived to bring about by means of an entertainment. He knew well that most of them would never come to hear a formal discourse from the Lord, but that meat and drink would open their hearts to receive the scattered seeds of His teaching . . .

Note that Matthew's call to become Jesus' personal disciple had not turned his head. He could still see his old friends. He was still interested in them, still loved them, though he had made a definite break with his old life among them. See how he reflects that new love from Him who loved Matthew as no other! Is not this repentance at its best?

C. THE CRITICISM OF MATTHEW'S MASTER

9:11 **And when the Pharisees saw it.** What were THEY doing there? It is not too likely that they had come to the feast of publicans in order to take part! Storm clouds of opposition to Jesus' ministry had already begun to form, because Jesus had already begun to succeed at the very business He had come to earth to do. These critics would never have bothered criticizing Him, were He not making real headway. His was a movement that was going somewhere—it was alive. Nobody bothers to criticize something that is all but dead. Nor were they particularly interested in Matthew, one of the "sinners" with whom Jesus ate. What these eagle-eyed censors were after was Jesus. Matthew could have eaten with all the sinners in town and no one would have noticed. But when Jesus of Nazareth is willing to risk His reputation for Matthew by eating with him, these Pharisees attack.

It is not necessary to suppose that these Pharisees who see this spectacle of a Rabbi among publicans are theologians only, although Mark and Luke both affirm that there were theologians present. The "fraternity of the Pharisees" included people from all walks of life, (See Edersheim, *Sketches*, 226ff.) some of whom may have seen Jesus and His followers enter the publican's house. They may have then reported the incident to "their scribes" (Mk. 2:16; Lk. 5:30) who, reinforcing those first on the scene, now begin to complain.

They said unto His disciples. Notice the sheer cunning in this approach made to Jesus' disciples, although the cunning might be motivated by moral cowardice, or that fear to face Jesus directly.

These theological lawyers, instead of introducing some deep, debatable theological objection to Jesus, try to shake the disciples' confidence in Him by showing how their Master violates acknowledged Jewish propriety. If they succeed in undermining Jesus' influence by demonstrating that, while in theory He may mean well, yet in practice He fails at a critical point, then is His ministry ruined.

Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners? This question has perhaps less point for us westerners than it would for an oriental to whom a meal was a sacred matter. (Remember how Peter too violated this Jewish taboo by eating with Gentiles, Acts 11:2, 3) To break bread together pledged each to solemn friendship and mutual help. Consequently, self-respecting people eat only with other respectable people with whom they wish to associate. Thus would these accusers inculcate Jesus through guilt by association, making the false assumption: "You are known by the company you keep!" Thus they would insinuate that Jesus was of like character. It was as if they were asking, "What kind of God does He think He represents, keeping company with scum like that? He is unable to discern their character perhaps, in which case He disqualifies Himself to be a proper rabbi!" Any way the statement is phrased, their complaint shows no obvious love for these lost ones. Their merciless self-righteousness had shut their heart and frozen their concern for those who need God so desperately.

As Edersheim teaches, (*Life*, I, 507), this text highlights the fundamental distinction between Christianity and all other religions, especially Rabbinism, since all other religions must stand confessedly helpless regarding the positive forgiveness of sins and welcome for the sinner. They have nothing to say in contrast to the personal, merciful approach of God in Jesus Christ to the sinner, welcoming him back to repentance. This welcome produces repentance like no other stimulus in other religions could ever do. The burdened soul struggling toward God finds the answer of Jesus convincing and helpful like no other. Worse yet, the very title "Pharisee," or "separated one," underlined the very character of Rabbinism, even of Sadducees too in this respect, since the goal of the system was the exclusion of the unlearned, the unworthy, the sinners. So it was that this very feast of Matthew could only be looked upon by these Rabbis as a kind of reproach to the most fundamental principles they espoused. They were pledged to the maintenance of the separation of the wicked from the righteous, the Israelites from the Gentiles, the people of God from publicans and sinners. Here Jesus refused to maintain the

arbitrary lines they had drawn. This was not mere supercilious pride they felt; it was deep-running religious indignation. Jesus' goal, by striking contrast, was the INCLUSION of sinners, welcoming them to repent, assuring them of mercy and power to change their lives. The ideal of the rabbis was the welcoming of sinners *after* they had repented, with only the sterile stimulus to do so that is inherent in the repeated exhortations to repent and in the praise of repentance itself, with no definitive proof that the sins have actually been forgiven. This fact leaves the heart of the person trying to come back to God desperate and pessimistic. Instead of reinforcing the Pharisees' separatism, Jesus is seeming to sanction confusion of the traditional lines along which righteousness and holiness had been defined. It is no wonder that the Pharisees should be excited!

But Christ could not help arousing opposition. He was teaching the truth of God about sinners and about God, that would lead men to know genuine reality, as opposed to the sham or partial realities of their limited knowledge and experience. However, for doing this and for claiming to be the Son of God, He was opposed. For receiving sinners and eating with them, He was blamed. (Lk. 15:1, 2) Matthew himself was one of the chief reasons why the opposition so resented Jesus. It was but the age-old problem of the new idea presented in a context where people do not judge it on its own merits. They evaluate and its propounder only in terms of the way they are accustomed to interpreting it.

Ironically, for the very reason that they supposed themselves to be of superior righteousness and despised all others, these Pharisees thereby ceased to be righteous and manifested their own real sinfulness and need of mercy from God. The Pharisees were masters of refined sin too, and Jesus made strenuous efforts to win them to discipleship through repentance. Jesus' gentle speech here is an illustration. Usually, however, rather than repent, they got mad and tried to kill Him.

D. THE CONCEPT OF THE MASTER

9:12 But when He heard it, He said, They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. This vital question, so important because it involved the fundamental direction and purpose of Jesus' mission to earth, was asked of the disciples, but answered by Jesus. From Jesus' answer we get His own view of the work He came to accomplish. Had the disciples tried to deal with the critics, perhaps we would have something of less weight, depending upon their apprehension of His goals. Perhaps they even

tried, but the Evangelists are satisfied only to report Jesus' definitive answer, which forever settles the issue.

But observe how Jesus answered the captious question leveled at Him. As Bales (*Jesus the Ideal Teacher*, 92, 93) puts it: "Jesus appealed to a principle which they endorsed, and showed by an apt illustration which they could not dispute successfully that His conduct was endorsed by that principle . . . Jesus made another point wherein He indicated that they need to learn the meaning of certain teaching in the very scriptures which they accepted." The principle accepted by practically every Jew was that a teacher of the Law was, symbolically, a physician to the sick. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, I, 520). It would seem that Paul in Ro. 2:17-20 is listing appellatives by which the Pharisees, among whose number Paul used to count himself, loved to identify themselves!

Thus Jesus is using here no innocuous or merely interesting figure of speech: He is refuting His opponents with a reply that cuts them two ways:

1. According to the Pharisees' own view of themselves and of the publicans, Jesus, even had He been a member of the Pharisees' own party, was precisely where He should be, thus His course was justified. Jesus is saying, "I am a Physician to those whom we all describe as sick, the ignorant and sinful people of the land. As Physician, I must make contact with those whom I would help. Were I to ignore them or despise them, I would not be true to my mission as a doctor. The doctor that spends his time only with other doctors or with the well is not worth his salt as a healer of the sick. Instead of being contaminated by the disease or carrying their contagion to others, I am bringing salvation and healing. These publicans with whom I am now feasting are the very people to whom we should minister, hence I am right where I should be, making my rounds."
2. By the same principle, the Pharisees themselves and all who shared their views were unfaithful to the ideals they espoused! "If you admit that you too are teachers of the soul and physicians to the unrighteous, why are you not mercifully ministering among these publicans too? But you shun and excommunicate these people as outcasts, never offering them the mercy of a forgiving God. Thus, by your obvious failure to live by your own ideals and principles, you confess that you are unqualified for the high honors you receive or the

high pretenses you make at being righteous! You doctors, ironically, are letting the sick die!"

3. Jesus' rebuttal has a third undertone that, by the way His argument is stated, shatters the force of the Pharisees' most fundamental presupposition. When He says: **They that are whole**, He has no intention whatever of subscribing to the Pharisees' self-estimate of themselves as righteous, fit to stand proudly before God's judgment. This expression, as well as **the righteous** in the following verse, are to be taken as ironic. As Lenski (*Matthew*, 366) asks:

Could they really be righteous when they knew no mercy for the sinners, were blind to the prophet's word demanding that they have mercy, and railed at the merciful Physician who labored among those who, according to the Pharisees themselves, so sorely needed His help? . . . Thus, even their claim to be righteous, by which they attempted to justify their contempt for sinners (cf. Lk. 18:9, 10), exposed not only the hollow falseness of their religion and the emptiness of their hearts, but also disqualified them from being the great teachers of the Law they pretended to be.

The Pharisees, in short, are here exposed as common sinners, whose best attempts at separation from sin had only left them miserable and in need of repentance. There are none in so dangerous a position as those who think they are not sick and thus refuse the healing mercies of the Physician! But lest we become too smug and pray, "Thank God I am not a Pharisee, snubbing the weak and despising the sinful!", let us remember that Jesus ministered with patient mercy even to these sinners too.

9:13 **But go ye and learn what this meaneth . . .** Edersheim (*Life*, I, 520) affirms that this command is a rabbinic formula "so often used when superficial speciousness of knowledge is directed to further thought and information." If so, the Lord assumes His proper place as the Teacher of these rabbis, using a language they can understand. But this command is much more: Jesus, being the real Physician that He is, cannot send even these Pharisees away without providing them too a cure for their own soul sickness. But was the Lord requiring that these theologians spend further time in book study and not, rather, in learning the true meaning of sacrifice by actually showing mercy? Much of God's will is not to be learned by pondering and intellectual perception, but rather by obedience.

I desire mercy and not sacrifice. The parallel phrase in this citation of Hosea 6:6 completes the couplet: "And the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." This is a highly compressed saying, stating in Hebraistic style of absolute negation what we would express in relative terms. Paraphrasing this verse in a manner that would interpret the verse in its proper relative sense, we might hear God saying to Israel something like this: "When I commanded you to make sacrifices, it was not burnt offerings that I wanted; I wanted you thereby to learn mercy and the knowledge of God!" (See Notes on 5:23, volume I) The mercy of God and the mercy demanded by God of His people mean more to Him than all the perfect fulfilment of any empty ritual. Hosea does not represent God as refusing the sacrifices in themselves, but simply those sacrifices which did not represent the heart of those wicked people who supposed that thereby they could cover their sins. The mercy that God requires is that intelligent love of one's neighbor which is based upon the knowledge of God and moves one to share God's mercy with one's fellow sinners. (Cf. Mt. 18:1-35 for an even stronger polemic against that selfish mercilessness which compounds the guilt of those who sin thereby.) For similar declarations, study I Sam. 15:22; Isa. 1:11-17; Mic. 6:6-8; Psa. 40:6-8; 50:8-23; Prov. 21:3; Mk. 12:28-34; Heb. 10:5-8; 13:16.

Jesus' use of this highly revealing text, that indicated God's real purpose behind all the positive commandments of the Mosaic system, is to show that God is far more concerned to show mercy to sinners, far more anxious that sinners show mercy than He is to have heartless, punctilious performance of meaningless forms. The superior claims of mercy rise higher than strict justice, or that righteousness based upon the letter of the law. (Cf. Jas. 2:13 and notes on 5:7 and 6:12) Instead of freezing out the publicans and sinners, the truly righteous would have made every effort to show God's mercy by endeavoring, as patiently and loving as Jesus, to help them to understand the mind of God, repent of their sins and become the greatest of saints. Thus, for Jesus, merely to live a moral life that is devoid of practical expressions of merciful helpfulness to fellow sinners is not enough. Worse yet, it is plain deceiving, since it gives a false sense of accomplishment to the man who would shut his personal goodness off to himself. For Jesus, merely to live a religious life, made up of the outward functions and rites of religion without the spirit and content which the forms were intended to hold, is worse than useless. It blinds the man to that whole way of life which is God's service, permitting him to see only a few convenient commandments while ignoring "justice,

mercy and faith." (Cf. Mt. 23:23) These Pharisees, though extremely religious, had followed their limited views to the logical extremes and had become harsh critics, proud, completely inhuman to the point of hating "all lesser breeds." Thus Jesus exposes their character as, in God's sight, being far more condemnable than those they condemned.

For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Jesus is not disclaiming concern for the truly righteous or even admitting that there really are people so righteous that they do not need what He has to offer. Note that neither Mark nor Matthew specify to what Jesus had come to call sinners, even though Luke adds the words "to repentance." Jesus called men not only to repentance, but to Himself. It must be said, however, that a proper understanding of all that is involved in repentance is the secret of joy in the Kingdom of God. (See Notes on 3:15).

I came not to call the righteous. There are none who qualify for this title: we are all sinners! (Ro. 3:10-18, 23) Hence, we are to take Jesus' words in an ironical sense: "I came not to spend time with the self-righteous, whose self-satisfaction would keep them from appreciating the righteousness I offer. Only those who know how much they need me will accept my invitation." If Jesus' purpose is only with sinners, with the unrighteous, to give them the true righteousness, then for all the world, I would not be "righteous" (in my own sight)! For, in that case, Jesus could not help me! The duty of the truly righteous man, according to the Lord, is to admit his own sinfulness, believe Jesus and share the good news of God's mercy with his fellow sinners, regardless of the relative righteousness (or sinfulness) they may possess. Unfortunately, it never enters the head of most self-righteous individuals that UNBELIEF, a failure to accept Christ, is sin. (Jn. 3:36) The gospel of culture, civilization, morality and humanitarianism has not enough power in it to save one sinner. Only Jesus can save,—the cultured, the civilized, the moral humanitarians as well as the other common sinners!

I came to call to repentance. (Cf. Lk. 5:32) This should be the true mission of any man of God, who serves a holy God and dwells among a rebellious people. It is also, at the same time, Jesus' significant hint that His program would not stop short of anything but total religious revolution, bringing salvation, not to the privileged few, the righteous, the "whole", the elite, but to the despised outcasts, to the socially disgraced, to sinners, in short, to the world. As Bruce explains, with deep insight, (*Training*, 28): "It was one of the pregnant sayings by which Jesus made known to those who could

understand, that His religion was an universal one, a religion for humanity, a gospel for mankind, because a gospel for sinners."

I came to call sinners. How far do WE share the vision and purpose of Jesus? Are there people whom we ignore or for whom we do not pray? Are there certain individuals or classes for whom we dare not soil our "righteousness," because of the apparent gravity of their sin (in our sight)? Do we refuse to pray for or withhold every evangelistic effort to help the poor, the rich, the Indians, the Negroes, the whites, the city dwellers, the country folk or any other such group? To the extent that we are able to say, "Yes, Lord, but they are too wicked and unworthy", to that extent we do not share His vision. To that extent we do not have a universal gospel that is capable of saving ALL sinners, and it may well be doubted that a gospel that is incapable of saving EVERY sinner, is also incapable of saving the sinners that preach it. The seriousness of people's sin is never to be considered a barrier which we may use as a reason for not loving or helping anyone. Jesus came to overcome these barriers and save the sinner. To Him, the biggest sin in the world is that closed-hearted attitude of the self-righteous that never thinks of the desperate need of those whom we condemn, hence ignore. One might almost say, that, to Jesus, the greatest display of mercy is that shown to the person who needs mercy the most, the greatest sinner, the most despised.

I came to call, not the righteous, but sinners. The so-called "righteous" have separated themselves along lines of national pride, privileged monopolies on God's grace and sectarian exclusivism. But the sinners Jesus calls learn the truly desirable, proper separation. In contrast to the separation that the Pharisees demanded of others, Matthew's holiness, learned from fellowship with Jesus, was separation unto Christ, not merely separation from his fellows. His desires and acts became really holy, or separate, unto God, because he had learned the mind of God revealed by Jesus, something not true of those self-righteous, and, ultimately, unholy Pharisees who had despised him and criticized Jesus because of His association with Matthew and Matthew's kind. But it was this very discipleship, that made publicans and sinners truly righteous, actually holy, and not merely outwardly so. Jesus showed no mercy to the sinners' sin—to Jesus, Matthew's sins were still sins. To call those whom He had come to save "sinners", is a declaration of unvarying divine judgment. But to "come to call" just such people out of those sins, offering them the opportunity to become the greatest of saints, is a declaration of divine mercy. This

demonstrates the exceedingly practical nature of Jesus' ministry as well as its divine origin, because He proves by the purpose and direction of His own ministry that God is more interested in showing mercy than in holding people to the letter of the law.

E. THE CONSCIENTIOUS

One might almost entitle this next section "the Controversy" were it not for the very spirit with which the question contained therein was brought to Jesus. It is precisely this notable difference in attitude seen in the disciples of John, in contrast to the Pharisees, that makes the difference in the way the section is considered. Admittedly, John's disciples bring up a criticism of Jesus' program, but more in the spirit of inquiry for information, than to discredit Jesus before His followers.

As Bruce (*Training*, 67ff.) rightly judges in a masterful discussion on this section, this very portion of the Gospel is fundamentally a lesson on Christian liberty, the first of three that reveal the genius of Jesus' program in sharp contrast to every other religious system, Judaism in particular. These lessons arise out of His approved non-conformity to Judaism which He expressed by disregarding minute mechanical rules and by repeatedly placing much more emphasis upon the great principles of righteousness and morality. These three lessons, pointed out by Bruce, will be studied in their separate texts:

1. Fasting (here)
2. Ceremonial purifications prescribed by tradition (chap. 15:1-20)
3. Proper observance of the Sabbath (12:1-15)

The significance of these seemingly dusty texts for the modern Christian is, the fact that out of just these situations grew the religious revolution and spiritual freedom that characterize Christianity. That is, Jesus' revelation was originally made in these historic situations, in contrast to the views held by the people of that period. Hence, an appreciation of these situations is absolutely necessary in order to grasp the fundamental difference between Jesus' revelation and all legal religion. (i.e. religion based upon perfect fulfilment of an infinite number of regulations, but having no assured guarantee of personal mercy for all failure). Otherwise, we moderns will rewrite the once-abolished traditions, ignore the totally new spirit Jesus intends to put into us and conclude by repeating all the same mistakes made by these ancient rabbis in relation to God's Word given at that time, losing ourselves in minutiae and missing the grand moral principles of real righteousness.

From the point of view of Jesus' disciples themselves, as they developed into Apostles under Jesus' leadership, this non-conformity towards the established usages and customs of "proper Jews", is, as Bruce notes further,

a solemn crisis in any man's life when he first departs in the most minute particulars from the religious opinions and practices of his age. The first steps in the process are generally the most difficult, the most perilous, and the most decisive. . . . It is well . . . for apprentices in religious freedom when they make their first essays in the company of an experienced friend, who can rescue them should they be in danger . . . Non-conformity invariably gives offence to many, and exposes the offending party to interrogation at least, and often to something more serious. Custom is a god to the multitude, and no one can withhold homage from the ideal with impunity.

This is a particularly valid reason for letting these texts guide our reflections as we meditate upon our own discipleship as Jesus perfects us in His image. Often this loyalty to Him will bring us into conflict with the established views, customs and usages of our age, even into conflict with the Established Church. Only as we have comprehended Jesus' message well will we be able to respond to each situation in a manner that will please Him.

1. THE SITUATION

9:14 **Then come to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?** This critical question comes from an entirely different source than the usual carping complaints of the Pharisees, a source that, at first, surprises us: **the disciples of John**. This phrase suggests that those followers of John who had not left him to follow Jesus, as had many others, were maintaining their commitment to John, even though his ministry is entirely eclipsed by that of Jesus (see Jn. 3:26) and practically terminated by his imprisonment (Lk. 3:19, 20). But why did they come? Several factors may help answer:

1. All three Evangelists unite in including this section immediately after their reporting the feast of publicans, almost as if to display the two sections by contrast: "feasting versus fasting."
2. Mark's observation (2:18): "Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting" (*ēsan nēstēuontes*), suggests that Mat-

thew's feast took place on one of the traditional fast days. (Cf. Lk. 18:12) This is the more noticeable since, though this periphrastic imperfect may stand for a simple imperfect, one may well ask whether Mark intended merely to record, "as a matter of habit these fasted," and not rather to remember, "at this particular time they were even then fasting." Either way, the fact is that, though there was little or nothing in common between the religion of John the Baptist and that of the Pharisees (see, for example, Mt. 3:7ff.; 21:28-32), yet, in contrast to the acknowledged practice of Jesus, both groups fasted. So whether it was the self-imposed empty stomach that gnawed at John's disciples as they hungrily looked in on Jesus' feasting disciples, or whether they merely heard of Jesus' general reputation (cf. Mt. 11:19), their question still finds its cutting edge in their customary practice.

3. But why did John's disciples, who framed the question, put it just that way? Why mention the Pharisees at all? Why should Mark also mention the practice of these latter, whereas they do not step into the foreground? Could it be that John's followers were instigated by the Pharisees, since their last encounters with Jesus had left them silenced (Mt. 9:2-8) and rebuked (Mt. 9:9-12)? If so, they could gain much by enlisting the aid of these zealous disciples of the Baptist, since these represented a strong religious force in Judaism. In this case, this objection, lodged by John's disciples would be all the more damaging, since a contradictory diversity in practice would be exposed, placing John and Jesus in clashing opposition. The result would be disastrous for both Jesus' and John's groups, but definitely advantageous to the cause of Established Religion which had continually withstood both. Had the Pharisees not been behind the disciples of John, would it not have been more consonant with their discipleship to John to have asked, "Our master, John, has taught us to fast, but your disciples feast!"? In the absence of the guiding force of their master, were these John's disciples developing a sectarian mentality of rivalry and jealousy? Were they desiring, by their inclusion of the reference to the Pharisees, to set Jesus' disciples in the minority on a question that surely was already decided by the opposing schools of John and of the Pharisees?

Bruce suggests another motive as possibly motivating this criticism:

surprise. The disciples of John were astounded "that in respect of fasting they should approach nearer to a sect whose adherents were stigmatized by their own master as a 'generation of vipers,' than to the followers of One for whom that master cherished and expressed the deepest veneration."

Why had they come? Perhaps they had been tormented by uncertainty caused by John's imprisonment, not knowing whether to leave, to rot alone in Herod's dungeon, him who had given them the first real glimmer of messianic hope and the first real taste of genuine righteousness, in order to follow Him to whom John pointed. Any hope that they may have nurtured of John's deliverance from prison and vindication before Israel lay in Jesus' hands and He was to be found down at Matthew's house enjoying a feast with the despised scum of Jewish society! It was not the fact that Jesus received publicans and sinners that piqued them, since John himself had not rejected them. (See Lk. 3:10-14) What shattered their confidence in Him was His feasting at a time when, in their opinion, fasting and prayer would have seemed so much more appropriate. Could Jesus be the Christ if He sits down to eat and drink at a feast of publicans, while John is lying in the dungeon of Herod?

However strident the contrast might seem between Jesus' practice and their views, yet Jesus was training His disciples to act on a principle of which John's disciples neither understood the truth and validity nor the meaning. Further, until these latter asked Him, they would never grasp it. But they did come and they did ask.

2. JESUS' REPLY

Note the difference in approach used by the Lord in dealing with John's disciples and His method in dealing with the Pharisees (Mt. 15, 23, etc.) Toward these He is respectfully defensive, giving reasons for His position, whereas with the Pharisees, He denounces their marked preference for their own rules while despising God's commandments. Here, however, He is definitely on the defensive, not wounding their conscience nor attacking their practice until He could teach them. They were probably more open to learn than were the Pharisees. If it could be proved that John's disciples had not at all been motivated by the Pharisees, then their coming to Jesus reflects that attitude of anguished confidence shown later by their leader, John himself, in the hour of his great perplexity and soul anguish, when he too asked Jesus the torturing question of his heart. (Mt. 11:3)

Jesus' gentleness with John's disciples is further significant because

in no way did the Lord put in doubt the validity of John's message or practice. It is not necessary to decide whether this fasting practiced by John's disciples were actually part of his program of repentance required of Israel. Tolerant of the present state of things, which, in Jesus' view, would soon pass away, the Lord contents Himself with an appeal to His critics' sense of propriety, in order to help them see that His program and that of John were not mutually exclusive or contradictory, but represented different, progressive phases, the old and the new, of God's continuing message to Israel. In fact, Jesus' response is so very gentle that He does not actually state His conclusion directly, as though He would force them to see the truth. Rather, by means of three brilliant illustrations, He leads their minds to make His unstated conclusion.

Were we to formulate the actual conclusion to which Jesus was leading, we might state it something like this: "Real religion is that harmonious outward expression that corresponds with what the heart really feels and is. False religion involves the attempt to act without reference to that correspondence, or else to cause others to do certain acts or acquire habits without any connection to the inward condition of their heart. Fasting does not reflect the present spiritual condition of my disciples, hence should not be forced upon them artificially by some mechanical rule. While the old Judaism out of which John would preserve the finest elements and the new Christianity I represent have their respective place; it would be a catastrophe to endeavor to mix the quite different dynamics of the two."

a. FIRST ILLUSTRATION: A WEDDING IS NO PLACE TO FAST

9:15 And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? The sons of the bridechamber is a common Hebraism referring to those closely connected with the groom, i.e. the wedding guests. (cf. the use of the Hebraism elsewhere: Lk. 10:6; 16:8; 20:36; Ac. 4:36; Mt. 23:15; Jn. 12:36 and Edersheim's observation, *Sketches*, 152, 153) As used by Jesus here, the wedding guests are Jesus' disciples. Jesus thus calls attention to a very definite and accepted exception to the rule of fasting: must wedding guests fast? (See Edersheim, *Life, in loc.*, *Sketches*, 151-156; cf. Mt. 22:2; Jn. 2:1-10; 3:29; Rev. 19:7-9) This question in Greek, beginning as it does with the negative *mē*, shows that Jesus expected His hearers to answer, "No, of course not." By universal custom the marriage week was to be marked by unmingled festivity, a period when fasting or mourning would be especially inappropriate.

This illustration would perhaps appeal to the disciples of John with particular force, since John himself had called Jesus "the bridegroom," while referring to himself as "the friend of the Bridegroom." (Jn. 3:29) John's use of this figure actually proved the contrary of his disciples' present position, since rather than fast and mourn over Jesus' ministry, John "rejoiced greatly," his joy was now full. However, whether these disciples now questioning Jesus ever heard that comment from John does not matter, since Jesus' illustration stands independently as an approved exception to the fasting rules probably practiced.

But note that in making His answer Jesus changes from the word "fasting," as asked by John's disciples, to "mourning." By this change Jesus shows that fasting must be the expression of an afflicted heart. Hence, the question of fasting cannot be solved by a mechanical rule. It must be governed by the state of mind. Fasting is perfectly in order when called for by some preoccupation or great, absorbing life crisis. When the heart is deeply troubled, who cares about food then? Even though the Law had been painfully specific in regard to sabbaths and the great feasts, which the Jews were not at liberty to reject or ignore, yet the Mosaic legislation has little, if anything, to say about fasting, and then only in connection with an afflicted soul (See on 6:16, volume I.) Thus, each person was left at liberty to decide for himself when he should fast. Fasting at a wedding would be especially forced, unnatural and real. Therefore, unless there is some significant reason to fast, to do so would be unreasonable, hypocritical.

It is interesting to note that this principle Jesus states justifies both His own disciples as well as John's. The loss of their master's leadership through an imprisonment which would eventually end in his untimely death, was a momentous crisis for them, arising as it did out of the wickedness of the age against which John had preached. So for John's disciples there was a heart-felt need to fast.

But Bruce (*Training*, 73) points out the real danger to these men: after crystallizing a movement around John's revolutionary message of repentance and preparation for the Messiah, these his disciples had not totally committed themselves to the Bridegroom whom John had already announced. Thus, "their grief was willful, idle, causeless, when He had appeared who was to take away the sin of the world!"

Further, some of Jesus' closest disciples had originally been also disciples of John and had followed John's message more closely by leaving him

to follow Jesus. But then, finding themselves in Jesus' company, they found themselves required also to change their manner of life in harmony with their new, altered circumstances. How could they fast and mourn, when in His presence was to be found peace and joy?

But the days will come. Plummer (*Luke*, 162) regards this as a complete phrase, followed by a mournfully significant silence in which Jesus seemed almost unwilling to speak His mind because of the impact His words must necessarily have on His disciples. There is evidently power in these few words: they are the voice of the prophet. This early knowledge of Jesus' violently being snatched away from His people and their consequent grief, demonstrated that His grasp of His own divine mission was not forced upon Him from without by chain of circumstances that brought about His death. It proves, on the contrary, that, even from the beginning of His ministry, He not only knew toward what goals He moved, but He set about to reach them with unwavering purpose. (Cf. Mt. 26:11; Lk. 17:22; Jn. 2:19; etc.) Jesus knew what fidelity to God would cost Him, yet He did not swerve from this knowledge. But His omniscience, as God, assures us that He holds the future secure in His hands.

When the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast. The implication is clear that Jesus' disciples personally are meant. How then did they receive these ominous words? Their own ideas of the Messianic Kingdom did not differ greatly from those of the disciples of John, even of all Israel. If they viewed God's Kingdom as one continuous, external victory by which the Messiah asserted invincible Jewish power over the world, they were completely mistaken. If they assumed that Jesus' presence among them were permanent, they needed correction. (Cf. Jn. 12:32-34; 7:33; 13:36; 16:16-22) Here is one of the first intimations of approaching tragedy. In the nature of the case, this becomes a warning to the Apostles to count the cost. At the same time this reality, that there would be gloom in Jesus' absence, becomes a challenge to the Apostles: can you unite in your personal experience both the Christian joy and the Christian cross?

Then they will fast, of their own accord. No one will have to tell them to mourn or fast. Jesus does not say, "Then you can make them fast," which would be the exact opposite of Jesus' teaching earlier. Compelling Jesus' disciples to fast when Jesus would have been taken away from them would be as totally unnecessary as it would be totally incongruous now in His presence. Upon revealing the approaching death and departure, Jesus concedes that fasting would

under those circumstances be quite appropriate and voluntarily chosen. But in that case the value of fasting would consist not in its being forcibly imposed by others, but in its being spontaneously adopted because of the real sentiments of His disciples at that time under those altered circumstances.

b. SECOND ILLUSTRATION: NEW PATCHES DO NOT
REPAIR OLD GARMENTS

9:16 **And no man putteth a piece of undress cloth upon an old garment; for that which would fill it up taketh from the garment, and a worse rent is made.** It is worthy of note that Luke (5:36) calls this illustration a "parable," a fact that may not be pushed too far, since no parable can be extended to mean more than the point the author himself intended to illustrate. Nevertheless, the two following illustrations have much in common, not to mention the two additional illustrations that Luke (5:36, 39) includes. In all the illustrations, there is a particular emphasis laid upon the incongruity and impossibility of mixing something *old* with the *new* and vice versa. In all but the last there is definite loss or ruin involved in this confusion of old with new or the new with the old. The context of these parables helps to clarify their point since they were told to answer John's disciples' question that touched the radical difference between Jesus' program and that of John. (Cf. the use of *old* versus the *new*, developed by the Apostles in describing the weakness and failure of the Law versus the transforming vigor of the Gospel of Christ: (Ro. 7:6; 2 Co. 3:6; 1 Co. 11:25; Heb. 7:22; 8:6-10; 9:15-20; 12:24 in which *kainós* and *néos* are both used to describe Jesus' new program.)

Contrary to McGarvey's contention (*Matthew-Mark*, 84) that these parables "have nothing to do with the proper relation of the gospel dispensation to the Jewish law, but rather deal only with propriety of fasting on a certain occasion," an argument erroneously based upon Luke's concluding illustration (5:39), let it be urged that the whole point of Jesus' argument is to show John's disciples that His program and message, whereby His disciples are being trained, cannot be mixed with the old system with its forms and expressions of piety out of which fasting had come as a specific, representative practice.

The literal expression of Jesus' illustration is based upon the absurdity of using a patch of new cloth that is not pre-shrunk to repair an old robe. At first washing, the new patch would only rip the tear still wider, as the shrinking patch pulls against the threads

of the repaired robe. At this point Luke (5:36) sets forth the antithesis of this illustration by bringing in another illustration using exactly the same figure with another emphasis. This should be called the third illustration:

No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new and the piece from the new will not match the old.

Taken together, these two similar but antithetic parables teach that the religion of Jesus is in no sense just Judaism patched up, modified or revised for a later age. It is something entirely new, separate and distinct. Nor can Jesus' program be adjusted to fit the mentality of the old system without irreparable damage to what He is bringing into being. Old Judaism cannot bear mending by the superimposition of a totally new concept of man's relationship with God upon Judaism's forms. This would only destroy Judaism. But fasting came out of the old system under which John's disciples had been trained, precisely as feasting came out of the natural environment in which Jesus' disciples were being trained. And to deprive Jesus' followers of this freedom from fasting while He was with them would confound the message they had been taught to believe. To force the Pharisees and others to stop fasting before they had grasped the spirit of what Jesus was bringing to men, would destroy the fabric of religious consciousness they had developed under Judaism.

C. THIRD ILLUSTRATION: NEW WINE BURSTS OLD WINESKINS

9:17 Neither do men put new wine into old wineskins; else the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and skins perish: but they put new wine into fresh wine-skins, and both are preserved. Wine-skins are skin jugs made from a single goat-skin from which the flesh and bones are removed without cutting the body; only the head is removed leaving the neck of the animal to become the neck of the bottle. (For their use, see Gen. 21:14, 15, 19; Job 38:37; Psa. 119:83) When new, the flexibility of the skin permits considerable expansion due to the pressure of the carbon-dioxide present in the wine during fermentation. However, when the skins have become inflexible with age, they are not able to expand, not absorbing thus the internal pressure of the liquid that can burst a common glass bottle. This is why they explode, causing the loss of their contents. (Hear Elihu's complaint, Job 32:19)

The main point of Jesus' illustration is that the physical results produced by expanding new wine do not mix with the inelasticity of

old wine-skins. Here again, as in the former illustration, there is contrast between the old and the new. Lenski notes (*Matthew*, 370):

This illustration advances the thought. The old cannot be kept by adding a *little* of the new, nor by combining all of the new with it. In this respect there is a parallelism of thought. But again both illustrations speak of conserving: the first, the old robe; the second, the new wine . . . In this respect the illustrations are antithetic.

But there is also another current of thought in Jesus' illustration, not specifically stated but immediately below the surface: conservation, not only of the new robe from which no patches are taken and the new wine in the new wineskins, but also of the old robe with old patches and old wine in old wineskins. Jesus is not arguing that the old system was not good or that the forms which expressed it were bad, like, for example, fasting. In fact, He actually admits that honest admirers of the ancient system of Judaism would have difficulty quickly changing over to the new system of Christ. (Lk. 5:39) He does not propose the burning of the old robe or the destruction of the old wineskins, since each served its purpose in its time. Jesus did not come to destroy the Law or the prophets but to fulfill them. (See Notes on 5:17, 18, Volume I) But once the old robe or the old wineskins had served their purpose and could no longer be repaired or filled with the power and vigor of the new, they must be replaced.

Both are preserved. Jesus is interested primarily in preserving the vital spiritual force of the Gospel as well as the forms in which it would be expressed. He knows that it would be fatal to limit Christianity by trying to express it in the thought-forms and rituals of a legal system. Christianity must have modes of expression that are consonant with its nature. In the establishment of Christianity among men, the Apostles declared authoritatively what fundamental forms express Jesus' new religion. To the extent that the Lord or His Apostles have described these new forms, or their content, it is heresy to seek other forms and accept other content.

But this raises the burning question about what we should do when the new robe, the new wine of Christianity, because of the sterilizing power of tradition, becomes in our day "old wine, old cloth, old wineskins." We can but pray, "Lord, make us into new wine again; transform our tired, worn-out robe into new cloth." Then, in agreement with our prayer, we will seek in the original message of Jesus and the Apostles that transforming power which will bring us back to what the Lord wanted originally. We should remember with

Lenski (*Matthew*, 371) that the modern philosophies that reject the supernatural and the religious views that revere the traditions of the fathers, both of which reject Jesus today, are nothing but the ancient Pharisees and Sadducees with updated names. To follow them would be but to fall into the ancient but rejected errors of those who crucified the Lord. The so-called "new categories of thought, new concepts of sin and righteousness, new visions of God, new morality" are nothing but old errors, heresies and ignorance rewritten, revised and reissued. Our only hope for remaining new wine is by ever coming back to Jesus; only His message is ever new, however long ago, historically, He gave it.

Jesus says, "The content of the new relationship with God that I propose cannot be confined within the mode of expression of Judaism. There is such power and vigor in the Gospel, that, by its very nature, it bursts the constrictions of Judaism, or of any other legal system with which it is put." This is why Christianity with its modes of expression is a completely different kind of thing than Judaism, even though it is founded upon the preparations made for it in the Law and Prophets.

There is a succinct warning, however, in Jesus' admission that there would be plenty of admirers of the old wine, (Lk. 5:39) "And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says 'The old is good.'" He points out how natural it is for those, who have been accustomed to the old worn-out forms of Judaism, to be unwilling to abandon them for what they would consider to be "untried and novel." Jesus faces the reality of the old conservatives, the reactionaries in Judaism whose lives were bound up in the formalism and thought patterns of the past. Barclay (*Matthew, in loc.*) sees the problem of the new idea here:

Jesus was perfectly conscious that He came to men with new ideas and a new conception of the truth, and He was well aware how difficult it is to get a new idea into men's minds at all . . . Our minds must be elastic enough to receive and contain new ideas, since the history of progress is the history of the overcoming of the prejudices of the shut mind.

Some might take exception to Jesus' argument, saying, "But it is universally conceded among those who know good wines, that the old wine is in fact the best, the most fully matured, the richest flavored." But Plummer (*Luke*, 164) answers:

The comparative *merits* of the old and the new wine are not touched by the parable, but the *taste* for them. One who is

accustomed to old will not wish for new: it does not attract him by look or fragrance . . . The prejudiced person will not even try the new, or admit that it has *any* merits. He knows that the old is pleasant, and suits him; and that is enough; he is not going to change . . .

Compare the relative conversion of an outcast tax-collector, who had less prejudice for the old system, with the conversion of a Pharisee who had advanced in Judaism beyond many fellow countrymen and extremely zealous for the traditions of his fathers. (Gal. 1:13-17; Phil. 3:5, 6; I Tim. 1:13; Ac. 26:14).

One more note is in order regarding how Jesus dealt with His objectors. He practiced what He preached: mercy and not sacrifice. According to the letter of divine truth and justice, he could have cut down John's disciples with a withering fire of irrefutable argument. By the sheer power of His voice He could have given them no ground. But in mercy the Lord here gives us a beautiful example by which we may grasp the truth that "the Lord's servant must not strive, but be kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth"! (2 Tim. 2:24, 25) Our Master was that way. He knew how to concede a point, admitting the natural preference of some Jews for ancient Judaism. As Bruce writes (*Training*, 75)

This striking sentiment exhibits rare candour in stating the case of opponents, and not less rare modesty and tact in stating the case of friends . . . Too seldom for the church's good have lovers of the old ways understood Christ's wisdom, and lovers of new ways sympathized with His charity.

What Jesus required of the Pharisees (9:13), He Himself practiced in this critical encounter with John's disciples. He is not willing that any of these men should perish, but that they should all come to repentance by leaving the old forms of Judaism, stop trying to correct the faults of the old and just become new men in a new, totally different relation with God. This they could do in His discipleship to which, by His very gentleness in dealing with their problem, He leaves the door open. He proves in everyday practice what He will later affirm of Himself, His meekness (Mat. 11:29). This sheer gentleness with opponents, when such invincible power lay within His grasp, sets Jesus apart as the real Savior of men. (Cf. 2 Co. 13:10) This attractive gentleness of Jesus, whereby He deals effectively with

human problems, without destroying the confidence or glimmer of hope that Jesus could help, probably caused John's disciples later to return to the Master, when their great light in Israel had been extinguished. (Jn. 5:35; Mt. 14:12). Here then is the might and wisdom of meekness.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. What is a "place of toll"?
2. Who were the publicans? Describe their occupation, public notariety, religious and political character as viewed by their contemporaries.
3. Describe Matthew's response to Jesus' invitation to be His disciple.
4. Give evidence that renders psychologically sound the impression given in the text that Matthew responded immediately and decisively to Jesus' unusual invitation.
5. Tell all you know about Matthew Levi.
6. What passage of Scripture did Jesus cite (book, chapter and verse) in defense of His intimacy with such scum as the publicans, and sinners.
7. What was the probable reason for Matthew's giving this feast for Jesus as well as for his acquaintances?
8. What were the complaints offered regarding Jesus' feasting and what two separate groups made them? How did these complaints as well as the complainers differ from each other?
9. Explain the three parabolic figures used by Jesus to answer the questions raised by those who objected to His feasting instead of fasting.
10. What particular twist does Luke give to the last illustration, thus making it a fourth illustration? What does Jesus mean by this latter picture?
11. What particular facts out of oriental life and culture does one need to know in order to grasp the meaning of Jesus' last three illustrations about the present bridegroom, the torn cloth needing repair and the bursting wineskins?
12. Explain the point of view behind the question posed by the disciples of John.
13. Explain why it was so natural and right for Jesus to be found generally surrounded by sinners. Show how this fact just as deeply demonstrates His identity and true mission to earth as His stupendous miracles.