

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

Section 28

JESUS ANSWERS THE CHARGE OF BEING IN LEAGUE WITH SATAN

(Parallel: Mark 3:19-30)

TEXT: 12:22-37

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

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

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY

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

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

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

NOTES

A. SITUATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Study Jesus' procedure in making this answer:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Minor premise: Satan is divided against himself.

Conclusion: Therefore, his organization will fall.

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

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

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

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

2. WHAT ABOUT YOUR STUDENTS WHO EXORCIZE DEMONS?

(12:27)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. Bind the strong man

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

That this is truly Mark's explanation of the occasion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

distinguishing the dispensations under which each declaration was made.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FACT QUESTIONS

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

about the nature of one's heart.

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

Section 29

JESUS GIVES THE SIGN OF JONAH

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

TEXT: 12:38-45

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