



MATTHEW • DISTILLED : establish the instruction (1Co 9:1-10, 10:1-11; Rom 15:4)

CHAPTER: 9 (PART 1)

Chapter eight's theme/title/topic of **Submission To God** provided the perfect follow-up to Jesus' corrective sermons on the Law, holy habits and the gospel (in chapters 5 thru 7) since this (submission to God) is the key to applying and accomplishing those things. Submission to God is also what produces ministers and ministry appointed by God. However, the actions of such ministry can look strange (even wrong!) to the (biblically) untrained eye. This was the case with Jesus. Though clearly a minister appointed by God His actions (in this chapter) are repeatedly questioned or condemned (9:3, 11, 14, 24, 34). It is for this reason then, that Matthew records the events and teachings of chapter 9: to help us identify these rarely recognized and often questioned actions thru the ministry of Jesus.

The Rarely Recognized (And Often Questioned) Actions Of Ministers And Ministries Appointed By God

1. Claiming The Authority To Forgive Sins

As a means of demonstrating Himself to be a minister appointed by God, Jesus' claims the very unpopular position of possessing the authority to forgive sin.

(1-2a) = Leaving His former place of ministry (the Gadarenes – 8:28), Jesus returns to His house in Capernaum ("His own city"; Mar 2:1). It is in this place that "some people (4 men according to Mark's account) brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed". So great was their faith in Jesus' ability to heal, that finding no way to get an audience before Him in the conventional way (due to the number of people already in His house), they made a hole in His roof and lowered their paralyzed friend thru (Mar 2:2-5a). That being said, Matthew's recording of this event is not as much concerned w/the confidence these men placed in Jesus' ability to heal, as it is w/His authority to forgive the paralyzed man's sins. In reality, the desperate measures taken by the 4 men, and the healing of the paralyzed man all serve this greater end: to reveal that Jesus' ministry was endowed w/such authority. That this was indeed Matthew's emphasis becomes obvious when considering: 1) Jesus' first actions in relation to the paralyzed man is not to heal him but instead extend forgiveness **(2b)**¹, 2) Jesus explicitly states that His purpose in healing the paralytic was to prove His authority to forgive sin **(5-7)**, 3) Jesus' authority to forgive sins is what most impacts the crowds in attendance **(8)**. The reaction of the crowds was however, not shared by the popular religious leaders of Jesus' day **(3)** - "**blaspheming**" = To slander/speak evil of God, His gospel or sacred things. Blasphemy is a capital crime (Lev 24:16) – "Name of the Lord" = His reputation and religion (e.g. Isa 37:6²). Mark (and Luke) tell us why Jesus was being accused of such a serious crime (Mar 2:7 and Luk 5:21) - "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" = On the surface it may seem what makes the Pharisees and scribes wrong in their accusation is their ignorance (or denial) of Jesus as God. At this point in His ministry, Jesus has done very little to reveal His deity. As a result, even His disciples didn't know (8:23-27 – "what sort of man is this?"). Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees and scribes for possessing evil thoughts **(4 – "Why do you think evil in your hearts?")** would therefore be unjust if that were true. His reference to Himself as "**the Son of Man**" (versus the Son of God) along w/the claim that such authority to forgive is "**on earth**" **(6a)** instead reveal the problem to lie elsewhere: an unwillingness to recognize that God had deputized certain ministers and ministries w/this kind authority. The OC priests (for example) were able to forgive sins (Lev 6:7). Why then did these Pharisees and scribes refuse to believe that such authority had been given to certain ministers and ministry? Most likely for the same reason many w/in Evangelical Christianity refuse to recognize that Jesus has equally deputized certain ministers and ministries w/the same authority today: b/c it meant admitting that their salvation – or understanding of what is acceptable before God (including what is the right interpretation of Scripture or the right gospel message) was not something they could do on their own. Rather they needed God's established covenant community and those appointed by Him to determine those things and to hold them accountable (Joh 20:21-23 w/Act 15:22,28; e.g. re: gtr - Gal 2:2)³. That the Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders did indeed refuse to recognize the authority of God's ministers and ministry is made apparent by Jesus' later confrontations w/them (e.g. Mat 21:23-27, 33-45) = The religious leaders – most especially the Pharisees, were unwilling to recognize that God has deputized on earth w/His authority. Hence the reason Jesus accuses them of being no different than those who killed the prophets – refusing to recognize their authority as ministers appointed by God (Mat 23:28-31)⁴. Point Not To Miss = Any ministry (and its ministers) that are legitimately appointed by God will acknowledge and exercise their authority to forgive sins. They will teach what the early church fathers meant when they said, "there is no salvation outside of the church".

IOW: if a person's repentance and faith is to be accepted by God unto forgiveness and salvation, then it must go thru the church – the ministry and ministers appointed and possessing the authority of God "on earth" to grant such forgiveness and salvation – i.e. to "loose" people from their sins (Act 20:28) = Christ's blood resides in the church – which means if I want it, I must go thru the church to get it.

¹ Jesus bringing up the issue of the man's sin in conjunction w/healing his paralysis may indicate this to be the direct cause. IOW: this man's suffering is due to his own actions (versus a repayment of "the guilt of fathers to their children" – Jer 32:18; also Exo 20:5). For a similar example see (Joh 5:14).

² It is noted that not all acts of blasphemy were capital crimes – most were not (e.g. 1Sa 3:13; Neh 9:18, 26; Eze 20:27; 1Ti 1:13).

³ Examples of Evangelicalism's rejection of Jesus passing this mantle of authority to His church abound. Consider the following comments in re: to Joh 20:23: "This statement, about loosing and retaining sins, has been appealed to in terms of the authorization of a magisterial office in the church with the direct authority to forgive or retain sins. That implication appears unjustified when the context is taken seriously. The 'loosing' and 'binding' are the effect of preaching of the gospel in the world, when we go forth in the name and with the authority of the risen Lord. There is no doubt from the context that the reference is to forgiving sins, or withholding forgiveness. But though this sound stern and harsh, it is simply the result of preaching of the gospel which either brings people to repent or leaves them unresponsive to the offer of forgiveness which is the gospel, and so they are left in their sins." – Bruce Milne (*The Message Of John, The Bible Speaks Today Commentary*, p.299-300); "This verse (Joh 20:23) does not give authority to Christians to forgive sins. Jesus was saying that the believer can boldly declare the certainty of a sinner's forgiveness, if that sinner has repented and believed the gospel. The believer, with certainty, can also tell those who do not respond to the message of God's forgiveness through faith in Christ that their sins, as a result, are forgiven." – John MacArthur (MacArthur Study Bible note on verse 23 of John 20).

⁴ Pharisees (along w/synagogues) were Israel's invention to worship during the seventy years after the Babylonians destroyed the Temple, decimated her priesthood and deported the majority of her population. Their preservation after Israel's return and reconstruction of the Temple therefore required the promotion of what the people had "gained" during her seventy years in exile - a new sense of independence and considerable suspicion toward the institutional and magisterial expression of their religion. Support of the Herodian dynasty ensured such religious anarchy could continue w/o serious threat from Israel's opposing religious leaders.

Does this mean that all churches who claim such authority are therefore appointed by God? No (e.g. Roman Catholicism), but it does mean that if a church, other ministry or ministers, deny such authority exists “on earth” - or teach that people can “save themselves” by receiving such forgiveness w/o this kind of church, or by going to God on their own (thru faith), they are clearly not appointed by God. Such ministries and ministers have more in common w/the Pharisees who opposed Jesus.

What it looks like when a church (ministers and ministry) appointed by God exercises their authority to extend God’s forgiveness:

- 1.1. The practice of the sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Table – those special symbols/signs of forgiveness and salvation given to the church by Christ (Mat 28:19; Mat 26:26-28) whereby God promises to give the reality of what the sign signifies when He sees them (e.g. Exo 12:13) (As it re: to Baptism = 1Pe 3:21; Mar 16:16; As it re: to the LT = Joh 13:1-20, 21 w/Mat 26:21-28)
- 1.2. Withholding forgiveness to those deserving excommunication or apostasy and restoring forgiveness to those who fulfill what justice/repentance requires (Mat 18:15-20).

Additional point of interest = Contrary to Evangelical teaching, the Pharisees’ view that only God has the authority to forgive sins means they did not hold to a works-based salvation (i.e. they didn’t believe salvation was earned by amassing enough good deeds to cancel out - or forgive, the bad ones). This erroneous view originated w/Protestant Reformer Martin Luther who – (also) like the (real) Pharisees, promoted both anarchist and antinomian ideas – even rejecting those New Testament books that taught against such heresies (e.g. Hebrews and James)⁵.

2. Spending Large Amounts Of Time W/Those Covenant People Most In Need Of Discipline and Discipleship

Though likewise challenged/questioned by the existing religious establishment, Jesus demonstrates this to also be the actions of a minister (and ministry) appointed by God.

(9) = At this point, Matthew is merely a disciple - or one who has responded to Jesus’ invitation to, “**Follow Me**”. His appointment as an apostle comes later (Mat 10:1-3). That Jesus finds him “**sitting at the tax booth**” versus on foot may infer his role as tax collector was more related to customs work than individual taxation. Mark’s gospel infers that Matthew’s office/booth was somewhere near the sea of Galilee – possibly the docks. Boats bringing merchandise from the upper region of Phoenicia or fishing vessels transporting their catch were both subject to tolls or import tariffs making such tax booths/custom offices common in the “port city” of Capernaum. This distinction between custom-officer and traditional tax-collector is important given that the reputation of the former was not always associated w/corruption (as was true w/the latter). According to ancient historian Josephus, some customs officers were considered fair – even generous. Considering these truths along w/the fact that Jesus later chooses Matthew to be an apostle allows us to safely draw the following conclusion: Matthew was not your typical, corrupt tax-collector, but among those customs-officers who were fair or righteous in their practice⁶. Additionally worth noting, is that being tax-collector was an acceptable profession for a follower of God - if done righteously (Luk 3:12-13). This however was not the case in regard to Matthew’s friends – the focal and primary teaching point of (9-13). While Matthew’s house-party was attended by “**Jesus and His disciples**”, the majority of those on the guest list were “**tax-collectors and sinners**” (10 – or Luk 5:29 - “a large company of tax-collectors and others”).⁷ Matthew’s choice to lump his fellow tax-collectors w/those identified as sinners – along w/Jesus’ choice to refer to both as simply “**sinners**” (in verse 13b) confirms that these individuals were of a different moral stripe than Matthew. What (then) is to be understood by this term, “**sinner**” is a covenant Jew whose practice/life was pointed in the direction of unrighteousness and/or apostasy (Isa 33:14; Amo 9:10)⁸. Rabbinic sources use the term to also refer to those in the covenant community who remained ignorant in relation to the Scriptures. The Pharisees’ condemnation of Jesus is therefore due to his interaction w/Matthew’s unrighteous guests whom they viewed as - at the very least, not in the interest of God or those who were His ministers (11) = IOW: Why would any minister appointed by God give His attention to people whose practice/lives are pointed in the direction of unrighteousness (even apostasy)? Ancient Jewish documents state that Pharisees viewed such people as a waste of time (better spent in the company of scholars – e.g. Sirach 9:15). Based on Jesus’ response it is clear His view of ministry or ministers appointed by God was very different than these religious leaders (12-13) = Both Jesus’ identification of Himself as a “**physician**” healing those who are “**sick**” and His declaration, “**I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners**” are to be understood not only as the interpretation of His reference to Hosea 6:6 (“**Go and learn what this means, I desire mercy not sacrifice.**”), but also the justification of his actions as those associated w/ministers (or ministries) appointed by God. Clearly missed in the thinking/theology of the Pharisees, God’s supreme will (or desire) is to extend mercy to His people – something that only happens when they turn from their sin and practice justice/righteousness (justice is the pre-req to mercy) VERSUS constantly having to receive sacrifices (for atonement) b/c they are constantly falling into sin (see Hos 6:6 – “steadfast love” = Literally faithfulness to the covenant – see v7. The LXX renders this term, “**mercy**” - as used by Jesus yet carrying this idea: faithfulness leading to mercy - God’s greatest desire and why heaven rejoices when people turn from their sin to receive it – see Luk 15:10; As it re: to God’s disdain for sacrifice as a replacement for repentance/righteous practice see Amo 5:21-25). What then marks out legitimate ministry (and ministers) – those appointed and doing the desire of God, is spending lots of time w/those in the covenant community who tend to fall on the latter side of this equation – those who are “**sick**” w/their sin and need the help of those trained as “**spiritual doctors**” to disciple/discipline them to recovery – to becoming the kinds of consistent righteous practicing people who know the abundant blessings associated w/God mercy. Point Not To Miss: As much as this may bring consternation to those who are “**righteous**” in the covenant community (i.e. those already practicing/living righteously) – since this means more attention is (as result) given to “**sinners**” in the covenant community, it is one of the most vital missions given to God’s ministers (and a sign of ministry appointed by Him). They like Jesus, “**have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.**” What this looks like in the church and w/her ministers = Lots and lots of patient counseling (discipleship) and calling people out and away) from their sin (discipline)! This is the job of God’s pastors and where they must spend a great deal of their time (Col 1:28-29; 2Ti 2:24-26, 4:2; 1Th 5:14; Jam 5:19-20).

⁵ As an example of Luther’s antinomian spirit, he once wrote to his friend Philip Melancthon, “Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your faith in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world. This life is not a place where righteousness can exist. No sin can separate us from Him, even if we were to kill or commit adultery a thousand times each day.” (see M. Luther, *Treatise On Good Works*); As an example of his anarchist attitude toward the authority of the church Luther stated that, “The Christian is a completely free lord of all, subject to none.” (see M. Luther, *The Freedom Of The Christian*). It was this kind of thinking that ultimately led to the many wars and disagreements that still divide most of Protestant Christianity (see B.S. Gregory, *Rebel In the Ranks: Martin Luther, The Reformation, and the Conflicts That Continue To Shape Our World*).

⁶ Given the short amount of time between when Matthew became a disciple/follower of Jesus and his appointment as an apostle (less than a year) also means that Matthew’s reputation as a righteous man must have preceded him. It is unreasonable to think otherwise considering that Apostles were also elders and therefore needed to meet the requirements of righteous (“time-tested”) men (1Ti 3:1-7).

⁷ That this event was indeed a party at Matthew’s house (versus merely dinner at an undisclosed location – see again verse 10 - “the house”) is supported by: 1) Luke’s version which identifies it as “a great feast (a term used to refer to parties) in his (or Matthew’s) house” (Luk 5:29), 2) Matthew’s use of the word “recline” when referring to Jesus and the other guests (“Jesus reclined at table...tax-collectors and sinners reclined with Jesus...”). As discussed before, traditional dinners were eaten while sitting in chairs. Only during parties did guests eat while reclining on couches.

⁸ It is entirely inconceivable to view these individuals as anything other than non-apostate covenant Jews since: 1) Jesus’s earthly ministry was exclusively to the Jews – Mat 10:6, 15:24, 2) Matthew as a Jew, would not have entertained Gentiles in his home – Act 10:28, 3) A formal declaration of the apostasy by the priesthood would have rendered these individuals dead and unable to attend Matthew’s party (Deu 17:12). Ancient Jewish tractates reveal this to be the view of the Pharisees as well (e.g. Qiddushin 4:14)