

# A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us

## An Expository Study of **The Gospel According to Luke** **Chapter 5- Luke 5:33-39**

### 70- The Uniqueness of the Gospel- Part 1

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May 2, 2010

#### **Luke 5:33-39**

This is a passage of some length, at least for me, to cover, but I'm going to cover it this morning because it needs to be presented as a unit because it is a very, very important portion of Scripture- so please listen up.

Now in the reading of this passage- you obviously have some questions raised in your minds. And perhaps the singular question is- what's this passage really all about? And what it's about is essentially the title of the message today, "The uniqueness of the gospel...The uniqueness of the gospel." And I want you to try to understand this because it is critical and has far-reaching implications for all of us.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of God, as Paul calls it, the Gospel of Grace, the Message of Forgiveness through the finished Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel which we know and love and believe is unique. And I mean that in the purest sense of the word- there is no other religion and no other human philosophy in the history of the world like Biblical Christianity- nothing even comes close.

And so when I say that the Gospel is unique- I mean to say that it is incompatible with any and all other religious beliefs. It stands alone, it stands apart, it is distinct and different and unlike anything else.

So the idea that the true Christian Gospel can mix with or blend with any other religious system or human philosophy in any way is absurd on a fundamental level- it is just flat out wrong.

You cannot mix the true Biblical Gospel with Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodox Sacramentalism; You cannot mix the true Gospel with theological liberalism. You can't mix the genuine Gospel of Jesus Christ with the new psychological, or social gospel of the Hay, Wood,

and Stubble Television Network or the "feel good gospel" of Robert Schuller and Joel Osteen, or even of his father John before him. You cannot mix the true Gospel with the health, wealth and prosperity peddlers of our day, or the kingdom dominion crowd, or the name-it-and-claim-it group. You cannot mix the true Gospel with the new patriotic gospel of human morality from the Mormons, or with the pagan heresy of the Jehovah's Witness, or with Christian Science or Scientology or any other religion.

And you also cannot mix the one true Gospel even with the false religion of Judaism. The Biblical Gospel is absolutely exclusive. It mingles with no other religion. It mixes with no other religion. It accommodates no other religion. In fact, it alone actually *replaces* all other religions because Biblical Christianity is *superior* to all other religions.

Now that is not just a statement that I make to get a rise out of you. I make that statement because it is true, and it is the fundamental reason why the Christian Church has sent missionaries all throughout the world now for 2,000 years- to preach a superior religion and to encourage people- through acts of love and mercy and the preaching of the everlasting Gospel- to totally abandon their false religions and fully embrace the Lord Jesus Christ.

And all these missionaries would be wasting their time and they would be risking their lives for nothing, and their deaths would have all been in vain if all religions are the same and if we are all on our way to the same destination.

Make no mistake about friends- I seek out missionaries to support that believe exactly what I am telling you right now. I will not give a missionary one dime if I come to realize that he is in any way not preaching that Christianity is the one true religion, and that Salvation is by Grace alone through Faith alone in the finished Work of Christ alone.

The Gospel is absolutely *exclusive*. And this needs to be emphatically understood in our culture which exalts diversity of beliefs, tolerance of religions (except Biblical Christianity), pluralism, inclusivism, and even universalism which essentially says that all people who ascribe to any religion or human philosophy are all heading in the same direction- we are on different paths- but we are all heading toward the same goal. And that is just patently wrong. Another huge

misconception is that all the major religions of the world agree on the major things and only disagree on the things that are secondary. And that statement, too, is patently wrong.

All of the major religions of the world all agree with each other with the one notable exception of Biblical Christianity which is fundamentally different from every other religion on earth on a basic and fundamental level.

So we must know and understand, dear friends, that Biblical Christianity is unique in all the world- nothing is like it- nothing is even remotely like true genuine Biblical Christianity. Please turn with me to **2Kings 17:29-39:**

**29 But every nation still made gods of its own and put them in the houses of the high places which the people of Samaria had made, every nation in their cities in which they lived.**

**30 The men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima,**

**31 and the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites burned their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech the gods of Sepharvaim.**

**32 They also feared the LORD and appointed from among themselves priests of the high places, who acted for them in the houses of the high places.**

**33 They feared the LORD and served their own gods according to the custom of the nations from among whom they had been carried away into exile.**

**34 To this day they do according to the earlier customs: they do not fear the LORD, nor do they follow their statutes or their ordinances or the law, or the commandments which the LORD commanded the sons of Jacob, whom He named Israel;**

**35 with whom the LORD made a covenant and commanded them, saying, “You shall not fear other gods, nor bow down yourselves to them nor serve them nor sacrifice to them.**

**36 But the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power and with an outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, and to Him you shall bow yourselves down, and to Him you shall sacrifice.**

**37 The statutes and the ordinances and the law and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall observe to do forever; and you shall not fear other gods.**

**38 The covenant that I have made with you, you shall not forget, nor shall you fear other gods.**

**39 But the LORD your God you shall fear; and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies.**

Now the term "fear" that is used in this passage comes from the Hebrew word *yare*, which means to: *respect with reverential fear and awe*. And we are commanded here not to fear the gods of the pagans but to reserve our fear and our respect and our reverential awe for the one true living God of the Bible. So while we are to love our enemies and to respect all men as human beings and to treat all men with dignity- we are *not* to respect their false religions and we are *not* to be in awe of their pagan worship and we are *not* to have reverence to the doctrine of demons that has deceived them.

So, for example, Islam and Buddhism and Hinduism and Taoism and the many other pagan religions of the world that deceive millions and take untold billions of people to hell are not to be held in the same standing in our minds and in our hearts as Biblical Christianity. We are not to respect them.

But our fear and our respect and our reverence and our awe should be reserved solely for the one true living God that made Heaven and earth, and Who is the Father of Jesus Christ, and Who is revealed in the 66 Books of the Holy Bible- Him shall ye fear!

Now just what does it mean to fear the pagan gods of these false religions on a practical level? To not fear these false gods means that you are not to adopt the customs and the mannerisms and the practices and the terminology and the ways of those pagans religions to copy them or to play with them or to use them or to make them your own way because that is to fear them- that is showing reverence and respect and awe to them - that is how you show respect to something- you copy it.

But you are to totally *reject* their ways, and you are to put on the ways and the mannerisms and the customs and the practices and adopt the terminology that is taught to you in Holy Scripture. So I beg you to guard your hearts, dear friends, and examine how you live your daily lives and to make sure that while you may think that you are simply going about doing your own thing- that in actuality you are promoting false religions in your daily life by the way in which you use words and

the way in which you adopt the customs of pagan religions. I beg you today- do not think this to be harmless; do not say to yourself that you are excused from this or that this does not apply to you- because it does apply to you.

The false gods of these people- inspired by demonic doctrines- promoted abortions and the sacrificing of children and the abusing of women, and they promoted vile and unspeakable sexual activities that brought about unbelievable diseases that ravaged their lands and wiped out entire civilizations as God's Righteous Fury burned against them.

These are the pagan religions that promoted body piercings and various markings on the human body as a sign of spirituality and worship and adoration to the false gods, and these are the mystery religions that promoted trances and séances with esoteric and mystical components, and that promoted communication with the dead, and that read the stars and took comfort and guidance from the alignment of the planets, and these are the religions that promoted female priests, and sexual perversity such as homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, pedophilia, and incest.

And the Owner and the Creator of the Universe said do not fear them, do not respect them, do not be in awe of them, do not reverence them, do not copy them, do not mimic them, do not go after them, do not adopt their ways, do not adopt their language, do not adopt their mannerism or their customs or their thinking- but fear the Lord; be in awe of Him, respect Him, obey Him, follow Him, worship Him, obey Him, hunger and thirst after Him. Make a difference between you and the other people of the earth that do not know God.

That is what being holy means- that is why God told you and me to be holy. And what that means is that we are to be different, and unique and set aside, and set apart from the people of the world that do not love and serve God.

Now I do not apologize for anything that I just said because what I just said to you is absolutely the Truth. So if you are upset with something that I just said- take it up with God because He is the One Who said all this- I am simply a sinner who has been mercifully saved by Grace- who is simply speaking the Word of the Lord to you today. I didn't originate anything that I just said- that is what this passage means.

But, having said that- I also need to say this to you. Many, many people all throughout human history have tried to be unique, and they have tried to be separate, and to be set apart so they could be holy, and so they could worship the one true living God in Spirit and in Truth. But somewhere along the way- they crossed the line from Biblical holiness and they went into self-righteousness and arrogance, and they took pride that they were different, and they took pride that they were set apart as though that made them better than the other people.

And the net result is that they were not holy at all but they became Pharisees, and God turned against them too. So guard your hearts, dear friends, and be holy- but as you struggle to be holy- stay humble and stay sweet and be merciful to those who struggle with their flesh and who struggle with these things and give them space to repent and give them mercy so they can have hope and so they can change and leave the door open for them and leave the light on so when God brings conviction to their hearts- they can repent and come home.

No matter how far up the ladder you climb- no matter how spiritual you become-never forget that you are a wicked sinner who has been marvelously saved by God's Mercy, and that you, too, deserve eternal damnation for your many sins- just like they do- and that the only difference between you and the other people is Grace and not your own inherent goodness.

Now we are blessed by God to know there is only one God, and we are blessed by God to know that there is only one Divine Authority on earth, and it isn't the Church or the pope or the pastor or the Board of Elders or Church Tradition or Human reasoning. That one single Authority that has been made credible with signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Ghost is not your personal relationship or experience with Jesus, it isn't your dreams or visions, it isn't your angelic visitations, and it isn't your prophecies or that inner voice that you hear. No, the one single Divine Authority on earth that has been given the ability to bind the conscience of every soul under Heaven and is the final arbiter of what is holy and what is profane is the 66 Books of the Holy Bible.

And there is only one Redeemer of souls and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. And so there is only one Gospel- the Gospel of Grace and Faith. And that singularity of the Christian Gospel means that any intrusion that mixes or alters the singularity of the Gospel renders it void and nullifies it. Anything that is added to the Gospel weakens the

Gospel and anything taken away from the Gospel weakens the Gospel. The Gospel must stand alone.

Being a genuine follower of Jesus is to unashamedly and categorically reject all the other 7,900 religious systems of Man because all of those other religious systems teach Salvation by works to some degree- all of them- which by default makes all of them false and base and the product of wicked men and doctrines of devils- period- end of statement.

Most all of these false religious systems promote human goodness and nice things and some form of morality and good works and a desire to make this world a better place, and so weak and undiscerning people who do not understand Divine Truth are enamored with that aspect of these false religions and then assign them nobility.

Many people observe the dedication that people who follow these false religions have to the various rituals and the ceremonies and the various religious trinkets and activities and prayers all done in the name of some false god- who is not the God of the Bible- and they admire these people as being good and decent and nice religious people.

But the truth is that none of these people are actually worshipping the one true living God because God has already spelled out for us what true worship must include. True worship must include an acknowledgement that we are all vile and wicked sinners who deserve God's Wrath, and that God is Good and Just to judge us for our sins. Anyone who protests his own innocence or his own goodness cannot be saved.

But true worship of the one true living God must also include a total rejection of that sin and a turning away from that sin and a denouncing of that sin, and true worship must include a verbal recognition from every mouth that Jesus Christ is God, and it must include an internal trust in the heart that God has physically and literally raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and that no amount of activity or prayers or works can wash away our sins but that Salvation comes to unworthy sinners only by the majestic Grace of a kind and merciful God through the finished Work of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Power of the Holy Spirit, and that Grace is appropriated only by Savings Faith- a faith that we do not normally possess inside of us- but a faith which must be given to us again by that marvelous amazing Grace.

So I am here again this morning as I so often do in all of our studies of the Bible- to proclaim and defend the purity of the one true single Gospel of God. And the passage before us today is very, very important and very focused on this very subject- the uniqueness of the Gospel. And what this passage does for us is to demonstrate that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Gospel of Salvation is absolutely incompatible with Judaism- even though many today think that Christianity is first cousin to Judaism. But by God's Grace this morning- we're going to find out that Jesus didn't come to *add* to Judaism. He didn't come to *alter* Judaism. He didn't come to *blend* with Judaism. No, Jesus came to bring the Gospel which forever *replaced* Judaism.

And here Jesus will show us the utter bankruptcy and the abject emptiness and the total incompatibility of Judaism with the Gospel. Again I say, the Christian Gospel cannot be mixed or mingled or blended or added to any religion, any religious system- not even Judaism.

Now this becomes eminently clear in this particular passage and it points us in the direction of understanding why there was such an ongoing conflict between the religious leaders of Judaism and Jesus, which ultimately led to them getting the Romans to execute Him. The hostility continued to escalate to a fever pitch until they managed to incite an entire crowd to scream for Jesus' Blood in an irrational call for His execution. And the hostility was based upon the fact that Jesus came with the Gospel that totally replaced the religion of Judaism forever. And that must be understood by us today.

Now we've already had plenty of indication that the hostility between these Jewish leaders and Jesus has already begun. If you go back into the prior passage in chapter 5- the one we studied in our last look at Luke's Gospel- you remember that Jesus called a man named Levi, starting in verse 27. And we know this man today as Matthew because he was the writer of the first Gospel in the NT.

So Jesus called a man named Levi to Himself. And He forgave his sins. In other words- He saved him. And He made him a disciple. And then Matthew or Levi put on a feast in his large house- a celebration, a banquet, a festival, a party because he was so excited about his Salvation; he was so excited and grateful that he had been called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ he called all his friends together.



Well, all *his* friends were the worst people in town. Matthew himself was at the lowest level of society as a tax collector. And because of that- he was more hated than anybody else in Jewish society because he worked for the Roman Government, and was an extortioner and a crook who was robbing his own people to pay a foreign Gentile oppressor, and to get rich at the expense of his people. And so tax collectors were the scum.

So the only people they could associate with him were thugs and enforcers and prostitutes and other sorts of criminals. So, Matthew was so happy about his conversion and so thankful to be forgiven and to be called to be a disciple of Jesus Christ that he called a party. And he invited all his friends and verse 29 says there was a great crowd of tax gatherers and "other people" which were these horrible gangsters.

And verse 30, "The Pharisees and the scribes began grumbling at the disciples of Jesus saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with the tax gatherers and sinners?'" So here we find an indication of the terrible breach between Jesus and these Jewish religious leaders.

Now please don't make any mistake about this. The Jewish religious leaders were not interested in worshipping the one true living God out of a grateful heart for undeserved Salvation- no, they were all self-righteous hypocrites. These religious leaders all had an external show of their supposed righteousness. And one of the things they did to manifest their hypocrisy was to completely disassociate themselves from all people that they deemed to be unclean. So they were the sanctimonious and they would never soil themselves by going into a Gentile house to preach the Gospel to them or to hang around with tax gatherers, prostitutes, and other thugs and criminals, and call them to repentance- no, these self-righteous people were glad that they were completely separated from these ugly and diseased and dirty and sinful people.

But strangely- Jesus associated with those people all the time. In fact, He basically was called "the friend of sinners and tax collectors...the friend of drunkards," because those were the kind of people He went to. And when the question was asked, why He did this and why he didn't separate from these wicked sinners like they did- Jesus answered in verse 31 and said, *"It's not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick."*

And this is really sarcasm here, because He is saying here- "You who think you're well don't call for the doctor. These people are sick and they know they're sick. They're sinful and they know they're sinful, and they have called for the spiritual physician, and I have not come...verse 32...to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." And again it's sarcasm. You are the righteous, you are the self-styled righteous, your righteousness won't save you; it's your righteousness that damns you. It's the wrong righteousness, it's the righteousness of your own self-invention and I can't help you; but I have come to sinners, the poor prisoners, blind, and oppressed that He referred to from **Isaiah 61** earlier in His Message in the synagogue in Nazareth.

So we already know that there is a huge gulf between the religion of Judaism concerned with staying *away* from sinners, and the Gospel of Jesus concerned with being *with* sinners. The false religion of Judaism is concerned with *self*-righteousness or humanly developed righteousness that boasts in its own accomplishments and goodness while the Gospel of Jesus is concerned with God's Righteousness, and that this Righteousness does not and cannot come to any human because it has been earned or worked for or deserved, but simply that God *imputes* that Perfect Righteousness to unworthy sinners through the agency of Faith alone.

The false religion of Judaism is concerned about what men think while the Gospel of Jesus is concerned about what God thinks. The false religion of Judaism is concerned only with the outside while the Gospel is concerned with the inside.

So a huge gulf exists between Jesus and the followers of Judaism, and so it is very natural then to transition into the passage that I just read to you because in this passage Jesus makes it very clear that, in fact, the Gospel is completely incompatible with Judaism, and that what these Pharisees and scribes are seeing that looks to them to be a kind of religious behavior that is the very opposite of their religion is, in fact, accurate- because their religion is false.

And the behavior is different because the Gospel is different. Here we have then the uniqueness of the Gospel by demonstration of its incompatibility with Judaism. And here in this text, Jesus points out the bankruptcy, and the emptiness, and the incompatibility of the Jewish religion of His day with the Gospel.

And this is really something we need to keep in our minds, dear friends, because with this ungodly inclusive mentality that is so popular today- this pseudo-humility that says that we are much too kind and much too noble and much too spiritual and much too humble to say that anything that anybody says or does or believes is wrong. Many today want to give people credit for their religion, and maybe we will kind of introduce Jesus into it at some pint- but certainly not to the point of actually expecting them to drop what they are doing and change.

But the Truth is that if the Gospel is going to be effective- then it must replace all other religious systems and beliefs or else nobody will be saved. That is why when we preach the Gospel- we must call people to repentance- not to simply ask Jesus to make them happy or to fill the emptiness in their hearts or to heal them or to bless them or to help them through some trouble they are in.

God must save us from the Wrath of God- not low expectations; God must save us from everlasting damnation- not a bad hair day; God must rescue us from an eternal lake of fire- not so we can fulfill our own destiny. And the Wrath of God is bearing down on us precisely because we are guilty of being wicked sinners and because God is Holy, and, therefore, because we are great sinners and God is Perfect- God is correct to bring that Wrath on us.

So we call on men to repent and to confess their lostness and to confess their sin and to confess their unwillingness and their inability to love and glorify this great God. And we call on men to turn from sin and to serve the living God. And we call on men to place their full faith and trust in the finished Work of Jesus Christ and put none of their trust in what they can do for themselves to improve their own condition before God.

And that kind of preaching was not popular with Jesus back then and it is not popular with us today. But that kind of preaching is the Gospel, and so without that Gospel being preached- nobody gets saved.

So Jesus had just dealt a severe blow to Jewish Pharisaical legalism because Jesus says He's from God. Jesus says He speaks for God. Jesus proves He is God because He healed a paralytic and forgave his sin, two things that only God can do. So here is God and what is God doing? God is calling the riff-raff, the scum, the wretched, the miserable people as His disciples, and God, in human flesh, if, in fact Jesus is God, this one who supposedly comes from God, this one who represents God,

this one who claims to be God, is in direct opposition to the religion of Judaism. What they're wondering is why He doesn't pay attention to the traditions and why He's so concerned about the heart and why He doesn't associate with the scribes and Pharisees instead of the tax gatherers and prostitutes. They are shocked at His breach of religious etiquette and religious tradition. And so it's right on the heels of their shock over the whole incident with Matthew and the riff-raff in Matthew's house and Jesus' association with them, it's right on the heels of that that Luke follows up with this conversation with Jesus and these people.

And, by the way, **Matthew** and **Mark** record the same scene in the same sequence which leads me to believe that these are sequential events. If the celebration that Matthew held took place all day long, this may have happened that evening. If it took place all day long and all night long, this may have happened the next day. But I think they're very close in time that perhaps they were linked so that they occurred at the same time. Another reason I believe that is because verse 33 says, "And they said to Him..." And if you're leaping somewhere else in time, you need to identify who they are. But if you're following immediately in sequence, "they" takes you back to the Pharisees and scribes who were talking to the disciples in the prior incident. So perhaps later that very day, in the evening, or perhaps early the next day this comes in sequence. And it provides a perfect opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate the uniqueness of the gospel.

Now conflict...this is actually the third conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees in this chapter. The first conflict with them came over His healing of the paralyzed man earlier in the chapter. The second conflict comes at the house of Matthew, or outside when the disciples come out and are questioned by the Pharisees. Here is the third conflict and the stakes are raised every time...every time. In the house where the paralytic was healed, there's no real direct confrontation of the Pharisees. But there is at the time of the feast of Matthew. Now we have an even more intense confrontation as Jesus speaks directly to them about the bankruptcy, the emptiness and the incompatibility of Judaism with the gospel.

Now as we look at the passage, verses 33 to 39, I just want to flow through three very important but simple elements-

1. The question or the Inquiry- the question that's asked
2. The Interpretation- or how Jesus interprets the behavior in light of the question
3. The Illustration or the example

So, this is just three very simple points- the Question, the Interpretation, and the Example. So let's look at the question or the inquiry first of all- look again at **Luke 5:33**:

**And they said to Him, “The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the *disciples* of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink.”**

Now what these self-righteous Pharisees are doing here is pointing to a very obvious breach that Jesus and His followers are committing against the false religion of Judaism. The man-made religion of Judaism calls for prayers and fasting- and we're not talking about voluntary prayer and voluntary fasting. No, these were very prescribed prayers and very prescribed fastings that were mandatory.

You see, the Jews had a routine- a daily routine of ritual prayers that were prayed at certain hours during the day. And I'm not going to take time to go into all of this pattern of prayer, although I will comment a bit on the fasting because we've discussed their prayer patterns in other contexts. But there were certain hours of the day when these Jewish leaders stopped everything they were doing and went into a public place and very orderly went through their prayer list.

And they did that in such a way to prove their supposed spirituality before men. Now these were required, routine, and ritual prayers which were either read or recited from memorization. So in that sense- every single one of these prayers was absolutely heartless.

But, in addition to their many ritualistic prayers- the Pharisees also had fasts. In fact, it was part of the Pharisaic system to fast every Monday and every Thursday of every week. You might remember over in **Luke 18**, Jesus said the Pharisee went into the temple to pray and he was saying, *"I thank You, O God, that I'm not like this lousy tax collector, I fast twice a week..."*

So by doing that- this Pharisee was telling God how righteous he was because he fasts twice a week. So to the Jewish elite- Monday was a fast day and Thursday was, also, a fast day. And it may well have

been that Matthew's party was on a Monday, or on a Thursday, and so the Pharisees were saying, *"What in the world are You doing eating and drinking when all the rest of us are fasting? Don't You understand the tradition?"* Which they, of course, had deemed to be the true religion of God, as all false religious do.

Now I want to show you why God in His Mercy gave us four Gospel Accounts instead of just one. Look again at verse 33,

**And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the disciples of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink."**

**And they said to him...**

Well just who is "they"? We know from going back in this chapter that the "they" that Luke is referring to here are the scribes and the Pharisees. They are the group in verse 30 that had just encountered the disciples, and "they", no doubt, refers to them. So Luke poses the question as coming from the Pharisees and the scribes. But here is the problem with that. **Matthew 9:14** describes this very same event and says:

**Then the disciples of John came to Him...**

**Then came to him the disciples of John...**

So who was it? Was it the scribes and Pharisees as Luke says, or was it the disciples of John as Matthew says? Or have we uncovered a contradiction here as many unbelievers say? Or, perhaps, Matthew is talking about a completely different event?

The answer is found by looking at a third Gospel Account- **Mark** and in **Mark 2:18** the Holy Bible says:

**John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him...**

So the answer is it was both the disciples of John and the Pharisees, and this is why we must be very careful as we read and study God's Word so that we do not run off and make false judgments about who did what or who said what.

This is why **Matthew, Mark, and Luke** are called the "Synoptic Gospels" because many times in order to get the full picture of what actually happened- you need two or all three, and not just one.

In this case **Luke** emphasizes the Pharisees posing the question while Matthew emphasizes the disciples of John posing the question. Now if all we had were those two accounts- some could conclude that they were in contradiction, and, therefore, the Bible cannot be trusted. But because we also have Mark- we are able to solve the mystery.

So the answer is that the disciples of John were associated with the Pharisees and the scribes. They were hanging out together. They were committed to the same patterns of prayers and fasting. And so both groups came together that day and they both asked the same question together- perhaps as a group would do.

Now, it is very interesting that both the Pharisees and the disciples of John both observed the same fasts and prayers. **Luke 5:33** says:

**... The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the *disciples* of the Pharisees ...**

...so they both have the same pattern and the same routine, and both groups keep this, but *"Your disciples, Jesus, ignore it."*

So what they are saying here is that this is an outrage. *"Don't You understand that this is our religion? Don't you understand that we have to earn our righteousness with God, and that unless we do these things we cannot be saved, and unless we keep on doing these things we will not stay saved?"*

*"Look, Jesus- this is the true religion of God and You're in violation of it. How are we supposed to accept You as the Divine Spokesman of God and as the Messiah- Who is God incarnate- the Healer of diseases and the Forgiver of sins when You don't even observe our religion properly?"* That is what they were asking here.

Now I need to explain something about the disciples of John here because when you think of the disciples of John- most people think of them as being the good guys. And so what are the good guys doing here with these bad guys- these legalists?

Well, it's not strange to understand the mingling together and I'll tell you why. John the prophet, you remember, came in the third

chapter of **Luke**- we've already studied about him. And he came into the region around the Jordan River and he was preaching repentance. He was saying, *"The Messiah's coming! The Messiah's coming! The Kingdom of God is at hand! You better be ready when the King comes to set up His Kingdom and you better repent because if you don't repent- the Wrath of God is going to come upon you!"* That is what John was preaching and it was a very strong message.

And it tells us in **Luke 3:3-15** that everybody in the Jordan area was coming out there to hear John. One of the other writers says, *"All Judea was going to John."* Literally thousands of people, if not tens of thousands were going out there, and they were all listening to John preaching repentance, and getting ready for Messiah. *"Come, repent and be forgiven and get your heart ready for Messiah!"* And so as a result- John had many thousands and thousands of disciples.

Now there was a particular day- you remember in John's ministry- when not all of those people would have been there- and that day- Jesus showed up. And that was the day that John points to Jesus and says, **"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"**

And John wanted his disciples to then move their allegiance from himself to Jesus. And so in **John 3:30**- John said,

**He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease.**

In other words- *"I've got to fade away because what I came to do is now finished, and you need to move toward the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ."* And Jesus, you remember, was baptized by John and the Father Himself said, *"This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased"*, and the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the same way that a dove comes to the earth from flying, and it was clearly recognizable to John that this, in fact, was the long awaited Messiah. And so John wanted to transition his followers to the One Who was going to increase- Jesus Christ.

But we need to understand that not all of John's followers were there that day and all did not hear John say this and not all of John's followers were convinced Jesus was the Messiah anyway. And not all of the disciples of John actually followed Jesus.

But I'll tell you what many of them did- and we meet them in this context. They did make a very serious commitment down there at the



river. And they confessed their sin and they asked for forgiveness and they fell on God's Mercy and they wanted to be acceptable when the Messiah came and set up His Kingdom so they could get in the Kingdom.

So they cranked up their religious involvement a few notches. And how would you do that in Judaism? You would start by hanging around with whom?- the scribes and the Pharisees. And you would say, *"Hey, we had a real dedication over there, we sort of recommitted our lives to religion and to God, and where is the highest level of religion, we need to get there? So let's hang around with the scribes and the Pharisees. Let's do the fasts that they ascribe to. Let's do the alms giving that they ascribe to. Let's pray the prayers that they ascribe to. And let's really be serious because when the Messiah comes, we want Him to know that our repentance was real."* So they don't all make the transition to Jesus- but they start hanging around with the people that they perceive in their religious system are at the highest level of spirituality.

Now at this time also, interestingly enough, John the Baptist is in prison. So he's not around to help his disciples. He's not around to be preaching everywhere saying, *"Look, here is Christ, here is Christ, don't follow these hypocritical self-righteous yahoos- follow Jesus"* So John is in prison and he's going to lose his head. So for all intents and purposes, his voice is stilled.

So many of these disciples of John- wanting to be very, very faithful to their dedication that they made at their baptism with John- wind up associating with these false religionists. And they blend in to the religion of the day and they do what would be the highest level of religious devotion in their minds.

And, by the way, long after this, go all the way to **The Acts 19:1-7** you have disciples of John who have never heard of Jesus- several years after the Resurrection.

So you have to understand that back then there was no media, there was no radio or TV, no print media, no Internet, no 24 hour news channels, no cell phones, no way for most people to know.

So, if you didn't personally hear about Jesus or personally meet Jesus, or if you were off somewhere else- then you didn't know. So in **Acts 19** we find some of the disciples of John, and they were asked if they knew about Christ and they said, "We have never so much as heard that there be anything like the Work of the Holy Spirit in sending

Jesus to the earth." And they gave them the gospel and these people believed and repented and they trusted in Christ, and they were baptized and were empowered by the Holy Spirit themselves.

And so some of John's disciples- who in a desire to be earnest in their walk with God- associated themselves with the Pharisees. So now they come to Jesus as a single group- John's disciples mixed in with the Pharisees, and they ask the question:

*The disciples of John here they fast and they offer their prayers, and the disciples of John say, "Yeah." And the disciples of the Pharisees, they do the same. But Your disciples, Jesus- they eat and drink and You're having a party here- so what is this all about?*

So that is the setting here and that is why we must be careful when somebody comes to us along with other groups- to criticize us- because you never know that even though they are mingled in with a real bad crowd- there might be some of God's chosen elect in the midst of that bad group and as they hear the Gospel- they will believe and be saved.

Let's come and pray

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.