

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 45, Chapter 12 Continued 2

Of the several things Matthew continues to underscore in his Gospel, here in chapter 12 we seen this growing contrast... an unfriendly polarization, if you would... between Christ and the leaders of the Synagogue. As we read let's always remember that the Temple and the Synagogue were completely separate institutions and systems. Up until now the primary religious leadership Yeshua has been dealing with is Synagogue leadership. Only later, as He nears His mock trial and His crucifixion, does the attention turn to the Temple leadership... the Priests. So by the time of His death, Jesus will have had serious confrontations with the full spectrum of Jewish religious leadership in the Holy Land.

The primary players and leaders of the Synagogue were the Pharisees and the Scribes. Since Pharisee was, in 21st century terms, the name of a sort of religious/social movement, then we also need to understand that Scribe was a title; it represented an office, a position of authority within the Synagogue ("Pharisee" did not). While not a precise illustration, we could say that the comparison between Pharisee and Scribe is similar to how in the USA Democrats and Republicans are the names of political/social movements; but President is the name of an office of authority. In addition a President also belongs to one or the other of these two political/social movements. So just as every American President is also either a Democrat or a Republican, so was every Scribe (so far as we know) a Pharisee of one sort or another.

All Pharisees were not the same. Josephus claims that there were 7 identifiable segments of Pharisees that each held slightly different doctrines and ranged from kind and merciful to rigid and outright mean. I tell you this because when Jesus

speaks of the Scribes and the Pharisees He is speaking mostly towards one end of the spectrum of them and in no way is He condemning the Synagogue as an institution, nor is He lumping all Scribes and all Pharisees together. Just as today in every part of the world we inherently understand (without always saying it) that in every political/social movement and in every religion and branch of it, there are the extreme, there are the mainstream, and there are moderates and variations in between; so it was in Christ's day with the Pharisees. Conversation concerning them, however, necessarily speaks in generalities unless a specific segment of them is the subject. So let's not unfairly paint all Scribes and Pharisees with the same broad brush. Just because Jesus didn't agree with all of their theology and actions doesn't mean that He saw them all as bad people. But some of them He most definitely did. Clearly that is primarily those whom He confronts and denounces and calls wolves in sheep's clothing and even snakes.

Despite which of the 7 segments of Pharisees a Scribe might belong to, there was at least one thing held in common among them all: a devotion to Jewish Law... Tradition... that often outweighed the teaching and the principles of the biblical Torah. The divisions among the Pharisees had to do with who would be in control of establishing and overseeing Jewish Law. So before we move on I want to leave you with this thought about both Bible characters and modern people: one person can be kind and deceived, another can be without mercy and deceived. A person can be tolerant and believe wrong theology, and they can be unbending and believe in wrong theology; especially when the source of their beliefs is more custom and tradition than God's Word. This applies to Judaism and to Christianity, ancient and modern.

Let's re-read a short segment of Matthew 12.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 12:22 - 29

The 4 verses that come prior to verse 22 are of paramount importance to our faith and so we examined them rather thoroughly in the previous lesson. They are taken from the Book of Isaiah, and Matthew identifies Yeshua of Nazareth as God's chosen Servant that Isaiah also identifies as the Suffering Servant. In these verses it is also announced that God's Spirit will be placed upon this servant and that He is not being sent to condemn but rather to bring justice to Israel and even beyond to include individual gentiles and the many nations of the gentiles.

Such a pronouncement would have been an escalation in Yeshua's battle to restore and reform Israel's theology; especially to the more extreme Pharisees and Scribes. It made Him the fulfillment of Isaiah's Suffering Servant prophecies. We must understand how controversial and radical this would have been seen by most of the 1st century Jews that heard this, and then as the news spread. Jesus was no longer an unknown; His position as a miracle healer made Him famous far and wide in the Holy Land. And yet, it is not at all clear that Christ actually uttered those words from Isaiah nor did any of His followers. In fact, Matthew does **not** say that He or they did; rather it is Matthew editorializing what Yeshua's many miracles and His dazzling and authoritative teaching meant. Verses 18 - 21 represent Matthew's own conclusion that Yeshua was the fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1 - 4. If we are to trust Matthew's Gospel as inspired then we are compelled to trust that Matthew's conclusion and connection between Isaiah's prophecies and Christ as God's Servant is correct. At the same time intellectual honesty requires that we must not put those words in Christ's mouth as His own declaration about Himself, because Matthew makes no such claim. And, we find this statement from Isaiah 42 in none of the other Gospel accounts.

So, we also must not connect what comes next in verse 22 with the previous 4 verses. Verse 22 begins a long, and separate, story about the reaction of some Pharisees who witnessed Yeshua exorcise a demon from a man. This man was brought to Yeshua for healing by some locals; he was both deaf and mute as a consequence of this demon possession. There was nothing particularly profound or different from the countless other exorcisms Yeshua had performed; but the Pharisees had decided against Yeshua and so everything He did they spun in a negative way. The Pharisees saw themselves as the rightful controllers of the doctrines of the Hebrew faith and of Jewish Law; and so they saw Yeshua as a threat to their authority.

The crowd, of course, had an entirely different reaction. They were astounded and highly impressed by the exorcism and consequent removal of this man's disabilities, and so raised the question: "Could this be the Son of David?" What do they mean by this thought? We discussed this phrase before, but I'll just remind you that the most likely meaning to these 1st century Jews of "Son of David" is to be taken literally. The Son of David in Jewish society referred to Solomon; David's biological firstborn. Solomon was, among other things (according to Jewish Tradition) a miracle healer par excellence'. So if a person appeared who was "The Son of David", it meant that this person was either an appearance of Solomon in another form, or more likely that the "spirit" of

Solomon was present within that person. It was really not much different than the earlier statement of Yeshua that John the Baptist was Elijah; He meant it in a similar sense. The bottom line is that the crowd wondered out loud if Yeshua carried the spirit of the "Son of David" (Solomon) within Him and it was this quality that gave His miracles a cut above those of the other **Tzadikkim** (Jewish Holy Men) that had come and gone. No doubt it was the reaction of the adoring crowd that caused the Pharisees to discount Christ's actions and to claim them as evil in their source.

The Pharisees' retort reminds us of virtually the same argument they used against Him in Matthew chapter 9, when they said that Yeshua's healing power came from **Ba'al Zibbul**... The Lord of the House. This had become an informal title for Satan. The crowd is told by the Pharisees that such an exorcism could only happen if Satan himself... the author of evil... made it happen. But Yeshua quickly exposes the absurdity of their logic.

He begins by saying something that was not meant as an instruction or a law, but rather as a proverb; **"Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not survive"**. It is interesting that Matthew begins this record of Christ's proverbial statement by saying that Yeshua, "knowing what they were thinking"... The Gospel of Mark 2:28 that records the same incident has Jesus saying **"Why do you reason these things in your hearts?"** The Greek word for heart is **kardia**; so the translation is correct. Yet as this statement clearly illustrates, it was believed in that era that the heart organ is where thought and reasoning took place; they had no idea of the function of the brain. Matthew didn't bother to include the word "heart" because it was taken for granted at that time that thinking took place in the heart. So we must not interpret the term "heart" through modern Western eyes as being mostly about emotion or deep feelings of sincerity as it has evolved to mean especially in English speaking cultures. If Jesus was standing here in the 21st century and speaking to us in English, He would have said; "Why do you think these things?" And of course we would take for granted that thinking is a function of the brain and mind. So Yeshua is not questioning the Pharisees' emotions or sincerity, but rather their flawed reasoning.

Yet I don't for a second think that the Pharisees' honestly believed what they were claiming about Jesus before the crowd. Rather, just as happens among politicians, they were merely taking a position in order to discredit an opponent. So I also don't think Christ's response was meant as much as a point of

correction for the Pharisee's so that they might learn from it, as it was a way to neutralize their illogical remarks so that the crowd of ordinary folks might learn and not be deceived by the Pharisees.

So now that Yeshua has made His proverbial statement, He makes a direct application. Since the proverb is true in nearly every imaginable circumstance, it follows that it cannot be true that Satan can or would drive out Satan (from a person), thus making him divided against himself. Because if he did such a thing, Satan's kingdom wouldn't survive. Notice how Yeshua calls Satan's sphere of authority a "kingdom". It is important for us to notice that because the Kingdom of Heaven has recently arrived, the Kingdom of Satan has risen in opposition to it. Yes, Satan has his own kingdom. Right now that kingdom extends over the length and breadth of Planet Earth, and into the reaches of Hell. So the Kingdom of Heaven was birthed within Satan's Kingdom, so to speak and Satan isn't going to stand still for it. Thus the world is in for a long term battle royale. There will be no compromise. There is no middle ground; either God's Kingdom wins out and Satan's is destroyed in total, or the other way around. People of faith who read their Bibles already know the outcome, even though we look all around us today and can't help but wonder. This is why Yeshua tells us later in the Book of Matthew:

^{CJB} **Matthew 24:13** *But whoever holds out till the end will be delivered.*

Again in Revelation we read:

^{CJB} **Revelation 2:10** *Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. Look, the Adversary is going to have some of you thrown in prison, in order to put you to the test; and you will face an ordeal for ten days. Remain faithful, even to the point of death; and I will give you life as your crown.*

Thus Christ's instruction to His followers... to us... is to hang in there; trust Him no matter all the catastrophe and evil and chaos that seems to have enveloped the world. For one reason, this is not the sign of the End. Make no mistake; we are in for an all-out war to the bitter end, and we are Heaven's warriors on Earth. We can't sub this one out; we can't kick the can down the road. We'll have our glorious victories and our demoralizing defeats; such is the way of all wars. But in the end, even what seems like obvious defeat God will use for ultimate victory because the game is fixed and the outcome is predetermined. When the final buzzer sounds, we win because God wins. As Believers, if we have the attitude

that Yeshua expects us to have, then there is only victory for us... even though that may not be our experience on earth at the present. This was His attitude even in His final hours as He was headed for the cross; it is to be ours as well.

Yeshua, in verse 27, turns the tables on the Pharisees. He says, using impeccable logic, that if He is driving out demons by means of Satan's power, then by what means do they drive out demons? Wouldn't logic dictate that it has to be the same for the Pharisees? The same actions resulting in the same effects must have the same cause; and it cannot be that good comes from an evil source. Notice that Jesus more or less confirms that these Pharisees also have conducted successful exorcisms. So to apply Yeshua's logic in reverse: if the Pharisees claim that it is the spirit of God that gives them the power to remove demons from people, then it can only be that the source of Christ's power is also God.

A little puzzling is what Yeshua means at the end of verse 27 when He says: "**So they shall be your judges.**" Since all versions and translations render the Greek essentially the same, it seems that to make sense of this statement it works better to take the concept of "judges" in the context of "judgment". That is, at the End of Days when the Great Judgment happens, then those who have been released by Jesus from the power of demons (and, presumably, saved), will be the judges against the Pharisees who claim that it was done by the power of Satan. It is hard to know whether this is meant literally or rhetorically. Nonetheless the primary point is clear; obviously the claim of the Pharisees against Yeshua is not only false, it is absurd on its face and reveals a dark agenda.

Verse 28 makes yet another startling claim. Yeshua says that if He is able to drive out demons from persons, then it is proof that the Kingdom of God has arrived. I cannot say what percentage it is but it seems to be the majority of Bible commentators that have serious doubts about whether these words are actually from Jesus or not. The reason is that He has already admitted that the Pharisees have accomplished successful exorcisms; but apparently that is not necessarily a sign that the Kingdom of God has come. We must notice that it is not a general statement about exorcisms but rather Jesus is saying that when HE drives out demons by the spirit of God it means the Kingdom of Heaven has arrived. It is about a specific person doing the exorcising. This is but one of a few attributes that the people are to notice about Him. Thus the result is supposed to be that when people see all these things He does by the power of God the Father, then

the logical response from them ought to be: "so who is this guy?" Please take note: Jesus has yet to say: "I do these things because I'm your Messiah".

Yeshua concludes His debate with the Pharisees by adding:

CJB Matthew 12:29 *"Or again, how can someone break into a strong man's house and make off with his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? After that he can ransack his house.*

Clearly Yeshua makes Himself as the one who breaks into the strong man's house (Satan's kingdom), binds him (that is He thwarts his power) and begins to ransack it. It is not that later on at another time will Yeshua begin this attack on Satan; it is that upon His coming (and the Kingdom of Heaven with Him) the attack has already begun. So the exorcisms Christ performs are part of the ransacking process because Satan possessing people using his hoard of demons as minions is one of His greatest weapons against God's Kingdom. Christ demonstrates that He has power over that; He is stronger than the Satanic strong man. That is, the Father's power and will are channeled through Yeshua, as God's agent, to defeat Satan.

Verse 30 says:

CJB Matthew 12:30 *"Those who are not with me are against me, and those who do not gather with me are scattering.*

This is but another way of saying:

CJB Matthew 6:24 *No one can be slave to two masters; for he will either hate the first and love the second, or scorn the second and be loyal to the first. You can't be a slave to both God and money.*

Although this statement is self-explanatory, I think it is one of those principles that we hear so often as Believers that we can become personally immune to it... if not oblivious... as it expresses one of the most basic expectations God has placed on every Believer. Whether that Believer has become so but a day earlier, or has been in the fold for decades, our life with Jesus and His Father can never be one of neutrality, even though countless Believers unwittingly try for it. We try to find favor with God while maintaining favor with what God calls evil. Yeshua is very clear that the rules of the game didn't change just because the Church has

inserted a piece of blank white paper between the Old and New Testaments to give us the impression that it did.

We are and will be, until the Universe and the Earth are dissolved back to their elements and re-created, bound to the Law of Moses, as Yeshua so plainly tells us in Matthew 5:17 - 20. But the gentile controlled Church would have it, since about the start of the 3rd century, that since The Law was given to the "wrong" race of people, then as the "right" race we can self-determine to divest ourselves of it and its obligations. This fundamental faith issue was not left to us as a matter of opinion or biblical nuance. Obedience to God, to His Son Yeshua, and to the Law of Moses is entirely wrapped up in, and cannot be separated from, salvation in Christ.

Now it's time for what I think is an important preaching moment of application. In a podcast interview I did recently, I explained to the show's host that trusting in any god is not the same as trusting in the biblically presented and defined God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And trusting for salvation in any Jesus is not the same as trusting in the historical and biblically defined Jesus. Today, too much within the Church, Jesus is a caricature, remolded and reshaped into a form that is more comfortable for gentiles to accept. Even what Christ taught has been filtered, laundered, and spun dry to allow it to be re-interpreted and practiced in countless ways to fit mankind's' every desire. If such a thing can be right in God's eyes then there is no objective truth. And if there is no objective truth, there can be no salvation from our sins because there is no need for it since there is no standard for us to be judged sinful. The Law of Moses must continue to exist and remain in force, or we have no means by which to determine right from wrong, good from evil.

When in verse 30 Yeshua says those who aren't with Him are against Him, it needs to be understood on two levels. From the ***P'shat*** sense, it means that to be a Believer is to be with Jesus by trusting Him; and to deny Him... to not trust Him... is therefore to be against Him. But on the ***Remez*** level, simply calling on His name... and to personally identify with our own created image of Him..... is by no means proof of "being with Him." Yeshua covered this exact scenario earlier in Matthew as it regarded neither pagans nor deniers, but rather as it is for those of us who claim to be His followers and devoted Believers.

CJB **Matthew 7:21-23** ²¹ ***"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven***

wants. ²² On that Day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord! Didn't we prophesy in your name? Didn't we expel demons in your name? Didn't we perform many miracles in your name?' ²³ Then I will tell them to their faces, 'I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'

When we discussed this as we studied Matthew chapter 7, I had much to say about it that I won't echo today. But I am going to say this: verses 21 - 23 in chapter 7 are for everyone who calls themselves a Believer.... or a Christian... or a Messianic... or a member of the ecclesia. Your claim... our claim... upon Yeshua as Lord is not sufficient. It comes with a basic requirement to be accepted by the Father as sincere belief. We must do what who wants? We must do what **the Father** in Heaven wants.

For us to say, 'but in Jesus's name I prophesied (here meaning taught the Scriptures). In Yeshua's name I expelled demons from people. In Christ's name I performed actual, real miracles. What greater proof of my salvation in Messiah Jesus can there be than to do these things in His name?' Christ says the performance of such things is not the standard. The greater proof is obedience to the Father. And the Father says that the Law of Moses presents the standard of righteous behavior for humans, which is what He wants for all those who worship Him. The verse previous to what I just read to you says:

CJB Matthew 7:20 ²⁰ So you will recognize them by their fruit.

That is, the verses of Matthew 7:21 -23 explain how to sort out the true Believers from the false ones (perhaps deceived ones is the better way to think of them), and it is according to their fruit. What is fruit? Good fruit is righteous behavior that is God directed. Righteous behavior is that which meets the standard that God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai a long time ago. Believing in Jesus in once sense or another and doing things in His name may be good; but it isn't proof of one's true devotion to the true Jesus. Such declarations and claims doesn't substitute for righteous behavior nor does Christ ever give us a new and different set of standards that ends the older one.

To be with Yeshua means to be in tune with who He actually is... historically... and what He actually taught in its fullest context. Who He is historically and what He taught contextually is Jewish in manner and thought. The moment we deny that, or attempt to re-configure this Jewish man into a gentile mold, then it's no longer Him we are trusting in but rather a figment of our imaginations. And just as

we refuse to recognize Him as He truly is, He will refuse to recognize us as one of His no matter how much we might plead and bargain. Further, if we refuse to fight against Satan... against God's definition of evil... alongside Yeshua as part of His army, then as far as He is concerned we are against Him and are part of the army of the enemy. Again; no middle ground. Kind of severe, isn't it? Yes it is. But when the eternal battle of good versus evil is at stake, then no price or requirement is too high.

Verse 31 begins with: "Because of this". Other versions say "Therefore, I say to you". The point is that it is what Christ has just said in this scene that sets the stage for what He's about to say now. And what He has to say are dire warnings. The first warning is this: people can be forgiven any sin and blasphemy. Probably Christ is directly referring to what the Pharisees falsely said about Yeshua getting His power from **Ba'al Zibbul** to heal people and to expel demons. But the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not forgivable. Notice the continuing divisions of power and authority Yeshua speaks about between God, the Holy Spirit, and Himself. I am certain that you have heard any number of explanations about exactly what this means. So what, exactly, is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit? I don't know that I can necessary solve this challenging statement, but to approach it, it first helps to understand what the Law of Moses has to say about sins and their consequences.

In the Law of Moses sins are divided into two main categories: forgivable and not forgivable. Forgivable means that a properly done ritual sacrifice of atonement on the Temple altar, coupled with sincerity of regret and repentance, pays the price God demands from the sinner. Unforgivable means no sacrifice of atonement can pay the price; it is simply beyond the sacrificial system to deal with it. Only the life of the sinner will do. These unforgivable sins are also at times called high-handed. At other times the two categories of sin are called intentional and unintentional. You can go back to the TorahClass.com teachings on the Torah and get some extensive understanding of these designations, but in short it does NOT mean on purpose versus accidental. Rather intentional more means the most serious category of sins that are otherwise called "high handed" and they are, therefore, not forgivable through an animal sacrifice. These are capital crimes such as murder and adultery. Thus despite the Christian refrain that all sins are the same under God... a sin is a sin is a sin... stealing a loaf of bread is no different than killing someone because they are both sin... this is refuted time after time in the Bible. Sins are indeed structured according to their seriousness, and so, therefore, are the consequences. Thus Jesus's statement in Matthew

12:31 about blasphemy rides upon this understanding.

Just as a high handed sin is always a direct, malicious, thought-out sin against God, so is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit of God. One cannot do something against another human... no matter how terrible... even murder... that amounts to blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. So another aspect of Jesus's statement involves understanding the difference between sins and blasphemies. Generally speaking sins are acts against our fellow man, while blasphemies are acts against God. So what Yeshua is saying is that God stands ready to forgive our sins; and yet there are still limits as to what He will forgive.

Verses 31 and 32 work together in parallel.

CJB Matthew 12:31-32 ³¹ Because of this, I tell you that people will be forgiven any sin and blasphemy, but blaspheming the Ruach HaKodesh will not be forgiven. ³² One can say something against the Son of Man and be forgiven; but whoever keeps on speaking against the Ruach HaKodesh will never be forgiven, neither in the 'olam hazeh nor in the 'olam haba.

Here's the thing: despite the fact that there are sins of human against human in which an altar sacrifice will not atone for them, the coming of Yeshua and the Kingdom of God has provided for a higher and better justice. There is no sin of human versus human that sincere trust in Christ together with sincere repentance cannot be forgiven (repentance does **not** mean sorrow or regret; it means positive change by actively turning away from those sins). In fact, says Christ, one can speak against the person of Yeshua and that of itself may be a form of blasphemy, but it is not necessarily a disqualifier for eternal life. However there is a fine line in all this, and exactly where that line is between forgivable sins and unforgivable blasphemies can be difficult to find. It's one thing to say some unkind things about Yeshua; even to disagree with Him on some things (which might be rather foolish, but still doesn't condemn one to Hell). But it is quite another to slander the work of God's Spirit to save. I don't know when slander of Christ becomes slander of the Holy Spirit; but clearly it can. It is almost (and it may be exactly this) that it is not so much that one rejects the person of the Son of Man in His humanness that is blasphemy. But rather it is that since the sign of our salvation in Christ is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who stays with us until our death, then it is the result of this rejection of Yeshua in His divinity that necessarily blocks the work of the Holy Spirit to save. And so while some degree of saying words against Yeshua can be forgiven, at some point they exceed the

limits and it rises to the category of the unforgivable crime of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit from which there is but one result.

While this is probably still a somewhat hazy definition of where the line of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit falls, from a practical sense I am confident to say this: why get close to the line at all? There's no need to. Why tempt God to classify you as a blasphemer of the Holy Spirit with a consequence of eternal damnation, when it doesn't have to be that way? And really I think this is Yeshua's intent and meaning. This is not an issue of "the finer points of the Law" that He has brought up. This is not about someone sincerely wanting and valuing salvation, but just missing it by a hair's width. This is about the blatant denial of God's will and plan to redeem and save through His Son that becomes an overwhelming and unquestionable allegiance to the opposition to the Kingdom of Heaven, which is the Kingdom of Satan. Just as no one is accidentally saved, no one accidentally loses the opportunity for it, nor accidentally loses it once received. Therefore, there is not a question in my mind that, for instance, a blatant and sincere atheist is blaspheming the Holy Spirit so his or her eternal future of darkness and torment is set in stone, barring an amazing and unlikely change of heart.

Verse 33 presents another metaphor using agricultural terms. This makes sense because Jewish culture was a primarily agricultural society and so the people listening would easily grasp Yeshua's meaning. As verse 34 shows, the target of His ire continues to be these Pharisees. And equally of little doubt is that in the earlier verses about blaspheming the Holy Spirit it, too, was meant as a direct shot at the Pharisees. So using indisputable logic that most any member of Jewish society would understand, Christ says that obviously good fruit comes from a good tree; but if the tree becomes bad, then its fruit will also become bad. This is an inescapable dichotomy both of the physical and the spiritual world because the Creator of the spiritual is the same as the Creator of the physical; that is, the principles are the same for both realms. Then the meek and gentle Yeshua points to the Pharisees in the crowd and says: "You snakes!". Oh, man; that wasn't exactly charitable, kind, or subtle was it? Yeshua's pattern is that He makes many allowances for the ordinary folks; but He has no patience with the Jewish religious leadership because it is they that are supposed to know and teach the scriptural truth to the common folks. But instead it is they who lead people away from that truth by putting more stock in their long held customs and traditions, and vying for personal power, than in teaching and trusting God's Word.

Pastors, Rabbis, Ministers... lend me your ear! I hope you... we... all heard this. It is so very easy to get tied to denominational or organizational doctrines some of which that, as it turns out, don't really square with an intellectually honest and in-context reading of the Bible. We of course want to protect our jobs, so in turn we protect the doctrines. Sometimes it is that we've so wed ourselves to believing in certain interpretations, and have sold it to others for so long, that we can't bring ourselves to admit that maybe we were wrong. Perhaps it is fear that our congregation will think that if we admit we were wrong about some things, then if we change what we believe why would they believe anything we say? I can tell you from experience that an occasional admission that we don't know everything, and that over time God can teach even the oldest of dogs new tricks about His Word (if we're open to it), tends to make us more human and authentic and accessible to our congregation. They learn that we remain teachable and continue in our pursuit of truth and would rather accept the consequences for admitting previous errors than covering it up so that we don't risk our reputation as fountains of biblical knowledge.

But to those denominational Pastors who might be listening, I realize and sympathize that your situation is harder. You may be (probably are) required to faithfully adhere to a certain set of doctrines or else you could be let go and perhaps have your ordination revoked. I can only offer this comfort for you: our devotion to God and to His truth must always be higher than our devotion to customs and traditions, and to the rules of human institutions... and to our employment. When we make our devotion to God as our highest aspiration by doing what is right, and not what is safer and easier, the rewards for it... even if postponed until we enter our eternal rest... are going to far outdo anything we could receive from an earthly human religious institution. But equally I don't want any of us to stand before God on Judgment Day and hear from Him that we knew the truth but withheld it from those who need it, and trusted us to provide it for them, because we were afraid we might look bad.

We'll continue in Matthew 12 next week.