



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

### MATTHEW 12:1-8: SITUATION ETHICS?

Bryan Hodge

At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck the heads of grain and to eat. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, 'Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!' (Matt. 12:1-2)

Some misuse this context. They start with the mistaken assumption that the Pharisees were technically correct. However, Jesus went on to defend His disciples. Therefore, they conclude that in some situations one is justified in setting aside God's law.

Let us point out that Jesus earlier experienced intense hunger, yet He refused to set aside God's word in order to satisfy His hunger (cf. Matt. 4:1-4). Who can believe that He approved of His disciples setting aside God's law in order to satisfy their hunger?

The disciples had not violated the law by plucking grain. (a) This was not a violation of the Sabbath (cf. Exod. 12:16). It is true that most work was to cease on the Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11 cf. Exod. 34:21; 35:2-3; Num. 13:32-36; Neh. 13:15-22; Jer. 17:21-22). However, they did not violate the Sabbath. (b) Moreover, this was not theft, as some have thought (cf. Deut. 23:24-25; Lev. 19:9-10).

It was a violation of the Pharisees' rules and perverted interpretation of the law. They developed a long list of things that could not be done on the Sabbath. For example: one was not to look in a mirror on the Sabbath, because this might tempt one to pluck out a gray hair. Notice how Jesus deals with their objection in six points.

#### One

Have you not read what David did when he was hungry... how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat... (Matt. 12:3-4)

The Jews highly esteemed David. They did not condemn him for what He did in 1 Samuel 21:1-6 (cf. Exod. 29:33; Lev. 24:5-9). Where was the outrage? Why the inconsistency? Was this really about the law? Or, was this about their hatred of Jesus?

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# Editor

Cody Westbrook



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

## ROMANS 2:14-15

### THE LAW OF THE HEART

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another (Rom. 2:14-15).

Paul's statement in Romans 2:14-15 has been the subject of much controversy and confusion through the years. What does he mean by "the work of the law written in their hearts?" Is he saying that God has created us with a sort of innate morality—a "pre-programmed" knowledge of God's moral law? Or, is he saying something else? The answer to this question is very important because there have been any number of false doctrines that have developed through the years based upon a false understanding of this passage.

First, notice the context in which the passage is found. In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul is building his case that all people need the gospel (c.f. Rom. 1:16-17). In chapter one he describes the sins of the Gentiles, in chapter two the sins of the Jews, and in chapter three he summarizes by telling us "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). In chapter two Paul contrasts the Jews unrighteous judgment (2:1-4) with God's righteous judgment (2:5-16). The Jews prided themselves in the fact that the Law of Moses had been given to them, and not to the Gentiles. They considered themselves to be right with God simply on the basis of having the law but not actually doing what it said. Thus, they passed

condemnation on the Gentiles for the wrongs that they committed, all the while being guilty themselves of what they condemned the Gentiles for doing. But the fact of the matter is that it is not simply the possession of the Law that mattered but obeying it (Rom. 2:13). Therefore, Romans 2:13-15 is simply Paul reminding the Jews that all people are accountable to God for the law under which they lived, and that they should be completely ashamed of themselves because they had the law and yet in some cases the Gentiles were morally superior to them.

Having considered the context, we should note a few things that Romans 2:14-15 does *not* mean. First, it does not mean that the Gentiles had no law at all. Romans 4:15 says, "...for where no law is there is no transgression." Romans 5:13 says, "... sin is not imputed when there is no law." Sin is a "transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4). Therefore, if there is no law then there can be no sin, yet Paul has just described the Gentiles' sin in chapter one. Therefore, it follows that, although they were not given the Law of Moses, the Gentiles were still under law to God, and that law was the Patriarchal Law. Second, Paul did not say that the Gentiles had *a law* written in their hearts. Look closely at the passage. He said they "show the *work of the law* written in their hearts." It simply means that, though the Law of Moses had not been given to the Gentiles, still they fulfilled some of its moral work or requirements. Third, this passage is not saying that man is born with an innate sense of morality. Man is born with the *capacity* to make moral choices but not the *content*. It is impossible for man to know how to please God without God revealing that information to him. Consider Hebrews 11:4 which says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice..."

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Cody Westbrook ----- Editor

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How did Abel know what and how to sacrifice? How did he know that sacrifice was necessary in the first place without God revealing it to him (c.f. Acts 17:26ff; 1 Cor. 2:6-16)?

The meaning of Romans 2:14-15 is straightforward. Though the Law of Moses had not been revealed to the Gentiles, they were still accountable to God by the law under which they lived—the Patriarchal law. “By nature,” that is, “by learned habit,” the Gentiles fulfilled some of the moral requirements of the Law of Moses. This is because God had revealed His will to mankind, and it was subsequently passed down from generation to generation. Their conscience bore witness to their actions based upon the law that they had been given. However we must remember that conscience in and of itself is not a guide; it must be educated. Moses Lard wrote, “Conscience originates no truth. It merely approves conformity to truth, or to what is held as truth, and condemns violations of it.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it follows that the Gentiles were

...actually engaged in some reasoning process by which they examined the ‘rightness’ or the ‘wrongness’ of certain actions. And the very fact that they had a conscience that was ‘bearing witness’ with regard to the ‘rightness’ or ‘wrongness’ of their actions implies that there was some standard by which they measured that ‘rightness’ and/or ‘wrongness.’<sup>2</sup>

This passage is not teaching that the Gentiles had an innate morality “pre-programmed” within them that enabled them to be pleasing to God. Rather, the moral requirements of the law had, at some point, been provided to the Gentiles, and thus their conscience was able to be educated in regard to God’s moral requirements. God would hold them accountable under the law that they had been given just as He would hold the Jews accountable for the law that they had been given.

CW

1 Moses E. Lard, *Commentary on Romans* (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Publishing Company), p. 48-49.

2 Tom Wacaster, *Studies in Romans* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 2005), p. 112-113.

## MARK 8:22-26

### THE TWO-FOLD MIRACLE

Steve Lloyd

Among the miracles of healing, the account of the blind man receiving his sight in Mark 8:22-26 is unique. Other miracles of healing were immediate and complete, whereas this one occurred in two phases.

Jesus and His disciples were in Bethsaida. A blind man was brought to Him for healing. Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village. He spit on the blind man’s eyes, laid His hands on him, and asked if he saw anything. The man look up and said, ‘I see men; for I behold them as trees, walking.’ Jesus laid His hands on the man’s eyes again and, “he looked steadfastly, and was restored, and saw all things clearly” ( Mark 8:25).

Many commentators recognize the uniqueness of this two-phase miracle. What R. C. Sproul writes is typical. He suggests that the first phase left the man with “dim—blurred” vision, but that “Jesus was not finished. He applies a second touch. With the second touch the things that were blurred come into sharp focus. Now the man could distinguish between trees and men”<sup>1</sup> (Playing God, pp. 14-15). R. C. Foster writes, “The man could see, but not distinctly. Then with the second touch and a fixed look by the man, the sight was completely restored” (Studies in the Life of Christ, p. 691)<sup>2</sup>. But why the miracle was performed in two steps commentators, in general, do not speculate, unless they associate it with the speculative doctrine of a “second working of grace”.

We have new insights on the phenomenon. The movie *At First Sight* is based on a story told by Dr. Oliver Sacks in his book, *An Anthropologist on Mars*. One of the stories is about a man who lost his sight early in life and underwent a surgical procedure that restored his sight at age fifty. What do you suppose this newly sighted man experienced? Joy? A new lease on life? A new birth of sorts? Five weeks after surgery this man said, “he often felt more disabled than he had felt when he was blind.” Dr. Sacks explains, “Steps...

1 R.C. Sproul, *Playing God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Pub., 1988), p. 14-15

2 R.C. Foster, *Studies in the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MIL Baker Book House, 1982), p. 691

posed a special hazard, because all he could see was confusion, a flat surface of parallel and crisscrossing lines, he could not see them (although he knew them) as solid objects going up and coming down in three dimensional space.”<sup>3</sup>

This man’s sight had been restored, but he did not know what it was he saw. When people are born blind and have their sight restored later in life, there is something surgery cannot remedy. It cannot give the newly sighted person the ability to conceive that which they perceive. Mortimer J. Adler, in his book, *Intellect: Mind over Matter*, refers to a phenomenon known to neurologists as agnosia. “Agnosia...occurs in individuals whose sensory powers are in no way impaired but who have suddenly become conceptually, not perceptually, blind.”<sup>4</sup>

The title of another Oliver Sacks’ book is, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. The title tells the story. A man attempted to lift his wife’s head up to place on his head, mistaking it for a hat. Dr. Sacks quotes ophthalmologist Albert Valvo on the modern day phenomenon of a blind person receiving sight through surgery, “In fact, the number of cases of this kind over the last ten centuries known to us is not more than twenty.”<sup>5</sup>

So, what does this have to do with the miracle in Mark 8? In the first phase the blind man receives his sense of sight. In the second phase, Jesus gives the man his conceptual sense of sight. The man Jesus healed saw clearly (perceptually), but he was not quite sure what to make of what he saw (conceptually). This explains how Jesus could heal the man physically, and at the same time, the man express some confusion over what he saw.

A friend of mine taught in a community college on the East Coast. He used an earlier version of this article in a class titled, “Introduction to the Gospel.” A woman in his class, having read the article, said it paralleled her own experience, having been born blind and through corrective surgery received her sight.

Jesus, on other occasions, healed blind people immediately and completely. The account in Mark

3 Oliver Sacks, *Anthropologist on Mars* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), p. 120-121

4 Mortimer J. Adler, *Intellect: Mind over Matter* (New York, NY: Macmillan Pub. Co., 1990), p. 36-37

5 Oliver Sacks, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1998), p. 109

is the only one in which Jesus heals someone in two phases. If He was able to do it immediately and completely, why did He heal this man in two phases, and what can we learn from it?

(Author’s Note: For those interested in a more thorough treatment, please consult my manuscript in the 17th Annual Shenandoah Lectureship book on Great Questions in the Bible, pps.342-351.)

CW

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## HEBREWS 6:4-6 IMPOSSIBLE REPENTANCE?

Tom Wacaster

**T**he passage now before us describes a state of apostasy from the faith so severe that it is said to be “impossible” to bring a person again to repentance. The writer is about to enter into a description of a class of once faithful Christians who had rejected Christ as High Priest, and had instead returned to their previous state under the old Mosaic Law. In these few verses we get a glimpse of their *past*, *present*, and *future*. It is this future spiritual state wherein the author says, “it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance,” that poses the difficulty. Consider the following.

### Their Past (6:4-5)

The advocates of the false doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy would have us to believe that the author of Hebrews was presenting a mere hypothetical case that could not and would not happen to a real Christian. Listen again to the description of those of whom the inspired writer is speaking: “For as touching those who were once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted of the age to come” (Heb. 6:4-5). If the author is not describing a faithful child of God then I am at a loss as to the meaning of words. Space does not allow me to elaborate upon each of the phrases used by the author, but whether taken separately or collectively, they simply cannot be referring to anyone other than a faithful child of God. Such was their *past*.

### **Their Present**

(6:6a)

With four words the author moves from their past to their present: *“and then fell away.”* Attempts to soften the message of the inspired writer are totally inadmissible. Our English translates the Greek *‘parapipto,’* meaning “to fall beside...In the Scriptures to fall away (from the true faith)...Heb. 6:6” (Thayer). This passage is a real warning against a real danger. To deny this is to make void the purpose of this inspired letter. In short the entire book of Hebrews becomes an exercise in futility and can be likened to a man in a dark cellar with no light looking for a black cat that isn't there. Why would God spend the time in solemnly warning the people to beware lest they be lost if, in fact, it is impossible that they can be lost?

### **Their Future**

(6:6b)

Focus on the word “impossible.” In an attempt to deal with the difficulty, some have softened the language so as to make the passage mean, “it is difficult.” But the Greek word here translated “impossible” is *‘adunaton.’* It occurs ten times in the New Testament, including three other passages in Hebrews (6:18; 10:4; and 11:6). In all other places the word plainly means nothing less than “absolutely impossible,” and that must be its meaning in 6:6 also. The apostle is warning of state of apostasy so severe and so final as to make it absolutely impossible to bring that lost soul back to a saved relationship with God. In light of other passages that teach that God can, and will forgive virtually any sin we might commit so long as we have obeyed the gospel and continue to walk in the light, how might we harmonize what is said here with such promises of hope?

First, if these Christians abandoned the system of Christianity and went back under the old system of things, it would be impossible for them to be brought to repentance and salvation under that system. This interpretation is certainly in keeping with the context of this letter.

Second, there is the danger of harboring a hardened heart. The scriptures plainly teach that it is possible for one to live in sin for so long a time that he finally hardens his heart beyond the point of recovery. Consequently his heart can no longer be touched by the sweet message from God (cf. 2 Pet. 2:14; 1 Tim. 4:1-4). While it is hard to imagine such a state of

depravity and hardness of heart, it is nonetheless true that one can become so overwhelmed by sin that the gospel can no longer reach his heart. Such a state of impossibility is due to the unwillingness of men, not the inability of God!

These Hebrew brethren were in danger of placing themselves in a situation wherein it is impossible to be restored. While it is true that God will forgive any sin we confess (1 John 1:8-9), these brethren had evidently reached a spiritual state where they could no longer be stirred to repentance, *“seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh.”* So long as they remained in this state of rejection and rebellion, it was impossible to renew them to repentance.

CW

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## **REVELATION 20 AND PREMILLENNIALISM**

Don Walker

**O**ne of the most prominently believed false doctrines today is the false teaching of Premillennialism. This doctrine believes most of the prophecies made by those of old are yet to be fulfilled. It also states that the prophets of the Old Testament knew absolutely nothing about the church Christ established at His death on the cross. In explanation it is taught that Jesus came to establish the Kingdom in the first century and when the Jew rejected Him (John 1:11) He employed “plan b” and established the church. Now the world waits his return when He will accomplish what He first intended to accomplish while here on earth. Much of this fanciful theory is based on a misuse of apocalyptic sections of Scripture, including Revelation 20.

With our remaining space, we will consider first the doctrine itself, then we will consider the doctrine in light of Revelation 20, and finally we will see how it measures up to the teaching of the New Testament overall.

The events that are purported to be associated with Christ's return are interesting to say the least. In this teaching the Rapture of the righteous will begin

a period of seven years of tribulation. The first half of the seven-year period will be relatively soft while the latter half will be very intense. Just when it looks as if the “man of sin” is going to win the day in what is recognized as the “Battle of Armageddon,” Christ will return to this earth, gain the victory and begin a literal 1,000-year reign. He will sit on David’s throne, in Jerusalem for this reign. The Old Law, along with its sacrificial system will also be reestablished for this 1,000 year reign.

Now, as we turn our attention to Revelation 20, it is interesting to note how many of these dictums of Premillennialism are absent. They are simply not there. Let us first say, because we are dealing with apocalyptic literature, which is highly symbolic, it is an absurd error to literalize a solitary feature in this symbolic narrative. Also after reading this chapter we would note that it says absolutely nothing about the “second coming,” “Christ on earth,” “Jerusalem,” “David’s throne,” or even a “bodily Resurrection.” In this highly symbolic book, we need to look more for the principles and lessons that would apply to us today. To understand chapter 20, we must go back to the beginning of the second section of the book. Up until chapter 12 God is giving warning. However, John is told in Revelation 10:4 to put his pen down and not reveal what the “seven thunders” meant. Why? Because the time for warning was gone. As we open chapter 12, we see the battle begins. We are introduced to the dragon which is Satan in chapter 12, the “beast of the sea” and the beast of the land” in chapter 13, the Harlot Babylon (14:8) and the men who had the “mark of the beast (14:9-11). Then we see each one of these emissaries of hell, enemies of Christ, are dealt with in a powerful way starting with the last one introduced going back to the earlier ones. The men with the mark are dealt with in chapters 15 and 16, the Harlot Babylon in chapters 17 and 18, the Beast of the Land and the Beast of the Sea in chapter 19. Then as we come to chapter 20 there is only one last enemy to deal with and that is the one who had empowered the other enemies; the dragon himself, Satan. Brother Johnny Ramsey wrote the following words concerning this passage.

So in this book written to encourage these 7 congregations of Asia, who are being deeply persecuted John in chapter 20 sees the devil being bound

and cast into the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:3). This could not be literal. Who has ever heard of a literal bottomless pit? And how could you get a chain that would bind a spiritual being? This is **symbolic language** meaning the devil is bound, his power is gone”(Emp. Mine, DWW).<sup>1</sup>

It is a passage that would have been very encouraging to the first century brethren who were being persecuted so mercilessly, and should be an encouragement to us even today.

Now, let us consider the doctrine of Premillennialism in light of what passages outside of Revelation teach. There are a number of reasons why I cannot believe Premillennial doctrine.

1. The Premillennialist will have an inferior king who will not succeed. In Jeremiah 22:30 we learn that Coniah will have no seed prosper while sitting on the throne of David, ruling in Judah. In Matthew 1:11 we learn that Coniah is in the genealogy of Jesus. Jesus is the seed of Coniah and if Premillennialism is true, Jesus will not prosper during this 1,000-year reign. No, the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus was raised to reign at the right hand of God in heaven (Acts 2:30, 31) and is currently reigning over his kingdom today.
2. The Premillennialist will have an inferior High Priest. If the Old Law is re-established, then we go back to the Levitical system with the animal sacrifices which cannot take away our sins (Heb. 10:4) In fact the Hebrew writer’s arguments for Christ being superior as the High Priest after the order of Melchisedec are for naught. One must also consider the value of returning to the sacrifices of animals when we know that Christ was offered once for all for all sin, and it is the blood of Christ that can cleanse us from our iniquities.
3. The Premillennialist is missing out on Christ’s rule today. Jesus was raised to reign (Acts 2:30, 31). Our first century brethren were “translated into the Kingdom of

<sup>1</sup> Johnny Ramsey, *Bible Treasures*, (This book is **not** copyrighted – Use It To The Glory of God!), pg. 215

God's dear Son" (Col. 1:13). At the close of the first century, John and his brethren were fellow partakers of tribulation in the Kingdom (Rev. 1:9). Jesus began His reign in the first century nearly 2000 years ago and faithful brethren have bowed down to His rule in His Kingdom since.

We would close with this admonition to those who are wondering concerning this doctrine. If men go to a highly symbolic section of Scripture to prove their doctrine, while ignoring plain and clear teaching in the rest of the Bible, they should be avoided and recognized as false teachers. May we try the spirits (1 John 4:1) and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:11) to test all teaching as we study our Bibles more and more.

CW

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*continued from page 1*

## Two

Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? (Matt. 12:5)

Not all work stopped on the Sabbath. Burnt offerings were made (Num. 28:9-10). The showbread was prepared (1 Chron. 9:32 cf. Lev. 24:5-9). Circumcisions were performed (John. 7:22-23). These facts establish that God never intended for everything to cease on the Sabbath.

## Three

...in this place is one greater than the temple. (Matt. 12:6)

They had no idea who stood before them. "If He could instruct priests to carry on temple service on the Sabbath, He surely knew whether His disciples were authorized to eat on the Sabbath (in harmony with the law).<sup>1</sup>"

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1 Dave Miller, *Piloting the Strait* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996), p. 411

## Four

But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. (Matt. 12:7)

Jesus twice referred the Pharisees to Hosea 6:6 (cf. Matt 9:13; 12:7). God emphasized mercy over sacrifice. Ritualistic sacrifice, without love for one's fellow-man, did not impress God (cf. Prov. 15:8; 21:3; 21:27; Isa. 59:1-2; Mal. 2:11-14). The Pharisees had a heart problem. They typically had little compassion and love for others.

Consider this: While they allowed one to care for his animal on the Sabbath (cf. Luke. 13:15; 14:5-6), they objected to the disciples plucking grain to eat on the Sabbath. They cared more for their animals than they did for their fellow-man.

Let us make application to the church assembly. Think of the man who missed because he was taking someone to the emergency room. Think of the mother who stayed home to take care of an ill child. Mercy has precedence over sacrifice. This is not setting aside God's law. This is God's law.

## Five

The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. (Mark. 2:27)

One of the purposes of the Sabbath was to provide a day of rest (Deut. 5:14). It was not designed to be difficult on man. "Since it was intended for his good, therefore, the law respecting it must not be interpreted so as to oppose his real welfare"<sup>2</sup>

## Six

For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath. (Matt. 12:8)

Jesus has provided the proper understanding of the intent of the Sabbath law. He was Lord of the Sabbath (cf. Heb. 3:1-3).

May we each remember—that while there may be many different interpretations of a Bible passage or subject—there is only one which should ultimately concern us, His. May we each be about the business of discerning His will.

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2 C.E. Dorris, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Mark*, (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1977), p. 68.



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