

A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITIES  
(What Does Jesus' Call Mean for Me?)  
Mark 2:15-28

In any relationship between two people or a person and a group, there are certain expectations that each party has of the other person or group. This is true if you are talking about two friends, business partners, husbands and wives, parents and children, individuals and civic clubs, and even individuals and God.

When expectations are not properly understood, then conflict, disappointment and even estrangement can be the outcome. The Bible is a book about relationships. We find in the historical accounts and in the doctrinal teachings how relationships are to work. These accounts should help us clarify and come to a mutual understanding of the expectations we should have when we are involved with and dealing with others. The examples cover the gamut from God's relationship with people, people's relationship to God, people to people relationships, and even the relationship we have with ourselves.

Are there responsibilities that are part of God's plan of salvation? Typically, when presenting the plan of salvation, we focus on "repent and believe the good news." The emphasis in many invitations is "confess with your mouth and believe in your heart" and most people think that this is just some mental exercise and recitation of a statement of faith. Sometimes we neglect to point out that "if what you believe does not make a difference in the way you think, what you say, and what you do, then you have believed in vain." The logical next step in the "repent and believe" sequence is what we saw in the first chapter of Mark's gospel and that is to respond to the call of Jesus that says, "Come, follow Me."

As we look at what following Jesus means, we find that he reached out to sinners (Mark 2:15-17), he taught that we must have a new attitude (Mark 2:18-22) and we see that He met the needs of others (Mark 2:23-28).

### REACH OUT TO SINNERS

<sup>15</sup> And it happened that He was reclining *at the table* in his house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. <sup>16</sup> When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>17</sup> And hearing *this*, Jesus said to them, "*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*" Mark 2:15-17 (NASB95)

Jesus had just called Matthew to follow Him and Matthew left his post as tax collector and followed Jesus. Jesus had been ministering and teaching in the area for some time and knowledge of what was going on was well known. When Jesus called Levi, what had just happened? Do you remember the story of when Jesus was in a house and people were coming to be healed and a paralytic was carried to the roof and let down through the roof? There were a nearby tax-collection point and the man sitting in the tax office was Levi. Tax Collectors were Jews who worked for the Romans. They were despised by their fellow countrymen. In Jesus, Matthew found acceptance and in his joy, he immediately left everything. He also told his friends (other tax collectors) and they were also following Jesus.

Matthew hosted a party and invited his friends and Jesus and His disciples so they could get to know each other better. What a great idea! This was entertainment with a purpose. Matthew and his friends would not be likely to go to the synagogue to hear Jesus teach on the Sabbath but they had no problem coming to a party.

Some people had a problem with this gathering. The joy of Matthew and his friends is contrasted by the envy and indignation of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were so caught up in their religious activities that they had totally missed the point of what God wanted to do through the descendants of Abraham and the nation of Israel (to bless all nations by sharing God's salvation). We need to be careful that we too do not get caught up in man-made traditions or be playing church and then miss out on the Kingdom of God and what He is doing. If we major on the minors, then we will always be minor league.

One reason to be tolerant of others and to approach them in kindness rather than harshly is that at one time, before we became a Christian, we were as they are. Some people express it this way, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." It was the kindness (mercy) and love of God that drew us to Him so that we could be saved. It is His grace (in the person of Jesus Christ) that empowers us for gracious living. We need to show that same type of kindness and love toward them before they are saved.

Jesus heard the question of the Pharisees and addressed the issue they raised. He put the question of our spiritual lostness in the term of physical sickness so we can understand the dynamics of what happens in the process of coming to God through Jesus Christ for salvation. A person may be mortally ill, but unless he realizes his illness, he will not seek help from physicians. In the same way, each person is infected with a spiritually fatal disease (born of the seed of Adam) and unless we recognize our lost spiritual conditions, then we will not come to God for salvation. The Pharisee could be described as those who were sick but refused to acknowledge their illness - they already considered themselves to be righteous.

#### LIVE WITH A NEW ATTITUDE

<sup>18</sup> John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?" <sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to them, "While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast, can they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. <sup>20</sup> "But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. <sup>21</sup> "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. <sup>22</sup> "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins as well; but *one puts* new wine into fresh wineskins." Mark 2:18-22 (NASB95)

In that culture, if you were serious about your religion, then you did certain things. Fasting was a common practice for those who were committed to being faithful to accepted religious practices. Along came a group that had some appearance of being "religious" in that they talked about God and heaven and yet they did not do the expected religious things. This was the basis of the question being raised by both the Pharisees and John's disciples. It is a good question.

What are some things that we do that are part of the "church" package of expected practices today? We hear such questions being raised about other church groups and we may even tend to be critical as we raise the questions of why do "they" not do this or that! We can think of a few things that others don't do and perhaps some things that we used to do but no longer practice. Some churches do not have Sunday School. Many churches no longer meet on Sunday evenings. Others have no Wednesday evening service. Some of the so-called community or contemporary churches do not give an invitation at each service. Some do not teach tithing. We think we must have a music program. Some people put a lot of emphasis on a prescribed daily Bible reading program. Others will have a routine of a set time for prayers - first thing in the morning, before each meal, and before retiring at night. We used to monitor whether a person made a contribution each week, or whether people who attended Bible Study

were going to “stay for church.” You get the idea. We may be worse than the Pharisees when it comes to our attitudes of what is appropriate.

Why do we think Spiritual Growth and Spiritual Maturity can be accomplished or measured by Pharisaical practices? Do such practices as attendance at a Bible Study Class, attending church, reading the Bible daily, giving money once a week, reading a Bible Study lesson, saying a prayer before each meal, and/or any number of other religious things result in Spiritual Growth and Maturity? It did not work for the Pharisees . . . While such practices may be found to be taking place by those who are growing spiritually, we must not confuse cause and effect. As Billy Sunday so famously said, “going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than going into a garage makes you a car.”

*There is an issue here that goes deeper than fasting alone. If Jesus had brought fresh spiritual life, could it be contained within the old rigid forms of Judaism or would it need fresh forms? That is the problem facing the church in many parts of the world today where there is charismatic renewal or a revival movement. Some accommodation and adjustment must be made or there will be splits and divisions, as sadly there have been already, with great loss to both sides. Jesus never condemned fasting; he fasted himself. But formal and compulsory Jewish fasting would not fit with the freedom and spontaneity of the new life which he brought. Are we stifling new life by old forms, however beloved they may be to us? Some forms we must have but have we worked out new forms and are they suitable? (D.A. Carson. New Bible Commentary)*

## MEET OTHERS’ NEEDS

<sup>23</sup> And it happened that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain. <sup>24</sup> The Pharisees were saying to Him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” <sup>25</sup> And He said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he was in need and he and his companions became hungry; <sup>26</sup> how he entered the house of God in the time of Abiathar the high priest, and ate the consecrated bread, which is not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, and he also gave it to those who were with him?” <sup>27</sup> Jesus said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. <sup>28</sup> “So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.” Mark 2:23-28 (NASB95)

We sort of lose our sense of priority with regard to the needs of people. Jesus ran into that very problem in His day. Usually these problems were with the religious leaders who were more concerned about the rituals of their religion than the reality of what God cared about. As a result they missed the very things they should have been concerned about.

Is this problem of misplaced priorities a problem in today’s church? How is our “religion” or our belief expressed in our lives? Is it only in going to church twice or three times a week? What impact are we having on the world around us as a result of being a follower of Christ?

In the story related by Mark, we should not be concerned about the disciples pulling the grain from someone else’s field. The Law of Moses specifically allowed pulling the grain with the hand; however, you could not use a sickle on your neighbor’s grain. The religious leaders were questioning only the observance of the Sabbath. By their definition, the disciples were harvesting and threshing the grain. Their exaggerated interpretation of the law had many specific restrictions about what could or could not be done, how far one could walk, etc. Jesus answered their question with a question of His own regarding something that happened in the Old Testament.

By a strict interpretation of the law, what David had done broke the law of who could eat the shew bread. However, because David’s actions were motivated by mercy and caring for his men in a time of real need, the act was overlooked. Not even the Pharisees would accuse David of being a law breaker in this case. I would seem to a reasonable person that what the disciples

were doing was much less an infraction of a man-made rule than what David did to a law that came from God. If they were willing to excuse David, then why were they so unwilling to excuse the disciples of Jesus?

In verses 27 and 28, the entire question is put into perspective by the statement that Jesus made regarding the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. The Jews had enslaved themselves to the idea of the Sabbath and as such had made it a god. God, our Creator, Who instituted the Sabbath, did not intend that the Sabbath should become a tyrant that people had to serve. On the other hand, we need to be careful that we do not swing the pendulum too far in the direction of not treating it as a special day. Some tend to treat the Sabbath in a "business as usual" fashion.

God instituted the Sabbath, making provision for people's needs. We can ignore our needs to have a day of rest and we will be the one to suffer for it. Both our mental and physical health will suffer if we do not take into account the need we have to withdraw from the routineness of life and take a break. Not only can we avoid some negative consequences, we can use this special day in a positive fashion to draw closer to God and seek to know His way and will for our lives. In doing so, we will be better able to access His wisdom and power and creativity in our lives.