

Jesus' Interaction with the World

Jonathan Cheek

Ph.D. Candidate, Bob Jones Seminary

Presented at the Bible Faculty Summit, July 26–28, 2016

Maranatha Baptist University

Confusion abounds in the modern church regarding the Christian's responsibility in the world. The biblical concept of the world carries significant ramifications for the lives of believers, but many Christians today fail to understand the biblical teaching on the world and its implications for their lives. Some believers ignore biblical commands against loving the world in their stated attempt to avoid legalism. Others go beyond Scripture in their separation from the world, condemning as worldly what Scripture does not define as worldly. What it means to be “in the world but not of the world” is a concept about which Christians continue to disagree. Because Christ is the prime example for Christian behavior, examining how Christ interacted with and related to the world is crucial in understanding the believer's responsibility in the world.¹

Areas of Controversy

In an examination of Jesus' interaction with the world in the Gospels, two main areas of controversy arise: (1) The Gospels present Jesus having meals with notorious sinners. In what sense is Jesus a “friend of sinners”? (2) How did Jesus respond to false teachers? Examining Jesus' interaction with the notorious sinners and the elite religious leaders of His day will inform believers how they should respond in their world today.

Jesus, the Friend of Sinners

Scripture records that Jesus' opponents referred to him as a “friend of sinners” (Luke 7:34) because he had meals with people who were notorious sinners (Luke 15:2). Christians propose three basic viewpoints on this issue:

1. Some believe that Jesus had meals and fellowship only with those who had already chosen to follow Him—or at least were receptive to His message. Kevin DeYoung and Joe Carter espouse this view primarily as a safeguard against ethical error. DeYoung concludes that “Jesus was a friend of sinners not because he winked at sin, ignored sin, or enjoyed light-hearted revelry with those engaged in immorality. Jesus was a friend of sinners in that he came to save sinners and

¹ Scripture uses the concept of the “world” in three primary senses: (1) the physical creation (Jn. 1:29); (2) the people of the world as (a) the mass of humanity in general (Jn. 1:29) or (b) as the particularly sinful-minded people of the world who are ruled by Satan and oppose Christ and His people (Jn. 14:27); (3) a system of behaviors or thinking that is characteristically in line with the sinful-minded people and culture of the world who are ruled by Satan (1Jn. 2:15–17).

was very pleased to welcome sinners who were open to the gospel, sorry for their sins, and on their way to putting their faith in Him.”²

2. Others believe that Jesus would eat and have fellowship with “anyone and everyone” who would eat with Him in order to win them for the kingdom. Craig L. Blomberg promotes this view: “There were always kingdom purposes involved in Jesus’ presence at banquets and other special meals. Yet it remains striking how willing he was to socialize, even in the intimacy of table fellowship, with anyone and everyone for the sake of accomplishing his mission.”³ Blomberg says further, “Precisely to enhance the possibilities of genuine repentance for those alienated by standard Jewish separationism, Jesus ‘mixes it up’ with the notorious and the riff-raff of his world.”⁴
3. E. P. Sanders and others from the Jesus Seminar have proposed that Jesus would consider as disciples anyone willing to follow Him, even without repenting of their sinful lifestyle.⁵ This leads to the idea that Jesus simply enjoyed casually hanging out and partying with tax collectors, drunkards, and prostitutes.⁶

Contrasting Theologies of Church and World

Throughout the last half of the 20th century, New Evangelicalism emphasized the necessity of scholarly dialogue with theological liberals in order to gain respectability and influence for the Gospel. Robert H. Gundry argues that the New Evangelical philosophy was rooted in a Lukan theology of church and world, which is “almost the polar opposite”

² DeYoung comments, “It is all too easy, and amazingly common, for Christians (or non-Christians) to take the general truth that Jesus was a friend of sinners and twist it all out of biblical recognition. So ‘Jesus ate with sinners’ becomes ‘Jesus loved a good party,’ which becomes ‘Jesus was more interested in showing love than taking sides,’ which becomes ‘Jesus always sided with religious outsiders,’ which becomes ‘Jesus would blow bubbles for violations of the Torah.’” “Jesus, Friend of Sinners: But How?,” TGC Blog, March 4, 2014, accessed December 4, 2015, <http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2014/03/04/jesus-friend-of-sinners-but-how>. See also, Joe Carter “Since Jesus Ate with Sinners, Do I Have to Eat at the Strip Club’s Buffet?” TGC Blog, February 26, 2014, accessed July 21, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/since-jesus-ate-with-sinners-do-i-have-to-eat-at-the-strip-clubs-buffet/>.

³ Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus’ Meals with Sinners*, NSBT (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 129.

⁴ Ibid., “Jesus, Sinners, and Table Fellowship” in *BBR* 19 no. 1 (2009), 45. See also Jonathan Merritt’s response to DeYoung: “Setting the Record Straight on Jesus, the Friend of Sinners,” Religion News Service, March 20, 2014, accessed December 4, 2015, <http://jonathanmerritt.religionnews.com/2014/03/20/setting-record-straight-jesus-friend-sinners>.

⁵ E. P. Sanders says, “I propose that the novelty of Jesus’ message was that he promised inclusion in the coming kingdom to those who followed him, even if they did not make restitution and follow the normal procedures for gaining atonement.” “Jesus and the Sinners,” *JSNT* 19 (1983): 27.

⁶ In an extreme example, Craig L. Blomberg says that he has heard J. D. Crossan “provocatively describe Jesus as the consummate party animal.” Blomberg explains that Crossan has made this statement in public addresses but not in print. See Blomberg, 97n1.

of John's theology of church and world.⁷ Gundry argues that Luke's and John's opposing concepts are acceptable at different times and situations in church history. Gundry says we should "choose parts of the Bible that seem particularly relevant to a current situation and with a situational change shift to other parts so as to avoid the homogenizing of distinctive messages and a consequent loss of special applicability."⁸ Gundry argues for this since "the Bible is a collection of books (τὰ βιβλία) written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit at different times and places by different authors and for different circumstances."⁹

Gundry argues that Luke's Gospel is more "cosmopolitan" in its emphasis on Jesus' relationship to sinners and outcasts but that John, however, presents a view of the church that is sectarian, emphasizing the great distinction between those who know Christ and those who do not. John consistently positions the unbelieving "world" in opposition to Christ and believers. Gundry argues that the New Evangelical mindset of penetration was "necessary to save the gospel from irrelevance and a seclusion that threatened to keep it from being heard in the world at large."¹⁰ But Gundry says that now it is time for evangelicals to "take a sectarian turn, a *return mutatis mutandis* to the fundamentalism of *The Fundamentals*."¹¹ Gundry urges North American evangelicals to a reinstatement of John's sectarianism because the church is assimilating to the world in its behavior and doctrine instead of maintaining distinction and conflict with the world. An examination of the Gospel accounts will determine whether Luke's Gospel presents a view that contrasts with John's.

Christ and Satanic Forces

In order to understand Jesus' relationship with the world, it is necessary to understand His relationship to Satan, "the ruler of this world," and how Satan works in the world through the leaders of the world in order to oppose Christ and His people. The Gospels present a consistent picture of Satan as the ruler of this world, working against Christ and His people.

Satan's Kingdom Opposed to God's Kingdom

After Adam sinned, Satan immediately began to exercise significant influence over the world in opposition to God's redemptive plan. Cain, who was "of the evil one and murdered his brother" (1Jn. 3:12), exemplifies this influence. Because of the curse, enmity persists between the seed of the serpent (Satan and his followers) and the seed of the woman (Christ and His followers).¹² John refers to Satan as the "ruler of this world" three times

⁷ Robert H. Gundry, *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelicalism, especially Its Elites, in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 92.

⁸ Ibid., 95.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 74.

¹¹ Ibid., 93.

¹² Jesus' reference to the Jewish leaders as offspring of the devil in John 8:44 demonstrates this point. James M. Hamilton, Jr. explains: "There will be enmity between Satan and the singular Seed of the Woman, and there will also be enmity between the collective seed of the woman (the people of God) and the collective

(12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:4). After the Pharisees accuse Jesus of driving out demons “by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,” Jesus refers to Satan’s realm as a “kingdom,” which cannot stand if divided against itself (Matt. 12:25–26).¹³ Because the Holy Spirit—not Satan—empowers Jesus to cast out demons, “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28; cf. Is. 61:1–3). Loren T. Stuckenbruck notes that the Gospels indicate that “the present world order is essentially . . . an arena of conflict between Satan and his demonic forces, on the one hand, and God along with obedient followers who serve him, on the other, in anticipation of evil’s complete annihilation.”¹⁴ Satan’s kingdom stands in opposition to God’s kingdom, and Satan works against the kingdom of God by preventing men from coming to Christ and by inciting men to oppose Christ.

Satan Prevents Men from Coming to Christ

Satan works to deceive men in order to prevent them from coming to Christ. The Jewish leaders would not believe Christ because they were “of their father the devil,” who is “the father of lies” (John 8:44–45; cf. 2 Cor. 4:3–4). In the parable of the sower, the birds that take away the seed (the word of God) represent Satan, who incites people to reject the message of Christ (Matt. 13:19; Mark 4:14; Luke 8:12). In the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43), Satan sows weeds in the field of wheat, secretly working to subvert Christ by sowing his subjects among the people of God.

Satan Works in Men to Oppose Jesus

Satan also works in men to directly oppose Jesus. When Peter rebukes Jesus for speaking of His future suffering, Jesus says to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan!”¹⁵ Peter’s Satan-like activity consisted of being a hindrance to Christ’s redemptive plan and setting his mind on things of man instead of the things of God (Matt. 16:21–23). Jesus referred to Judas as “the devil” (John 6:70–71) because he was working as an agent of Satan.¹⁶ Satan “entered

seed of the serpent (those who refuse to honor God and give thanks to him).” *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 80.

¹³ Significantly, the accusation of the Pharisees is in response to “all the people” who were amazed and were wondering if Jesus might be the Son of David (Matt. 12:23). The reference to Jesus as Son of David conveys significant kingdom implications. To the idea that Jesus may be the coming divine, righteous Davidic king, the Pharisees respond that Jesus was actually working for the kingdom of “the prince of demons.”

¹⁴ “Satan and Demons,” in *Jesus Among Friends and Enemies: A Historical and Literary Introduction to Jesus in the Gospels*, ed. Chris Keith and Larry W. Hurtado (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 181–182.

¹⁵ Interestingly, Jesus uses the same imperative form of the ὑπάγω in His response to Peter that He used in His response to Satan in 4:10.

¹⁶ Although there is no definite article for “devil” here, the correct translation is “the devil.” J. Ramsey Michaels argues for this translation for several reasons: (1) “one of you is the devil” is the same grammatical construction as in John 1:1, which says that “the Word was God.” “God” is a definite predicate noun. The Word was not merely *a god*. John 6:70 says, “one is (the) devil.” (2) If διάβολος is indefinite, then it must be translated as an adjective (“One of you is slanderous”). (3) Translating this “a devil” implies “a plurality of devils, something of which the New Testament knows nothing. Demons or unclean spirits are not quite the same thing.” Jesus’ point is that “Judas is ‘the devil’ because he does the devil’s work. . . . On the traditional Jewish principle that ‘an agent is like the one who sent him,’ or ‘the agent of the ruler is like the ruler

into” Judas, who immediately begins plotting with the Jewish leaders to betray Him (Luke 22:3–6; John 13:27). Perhaps by this time, “the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas” to betray Jesus (cf. John 13:2). Jesus urges men to pray for deliverance from the evil one (Matt. 6:13).¹⁷ Paul teaches that Satan uses false teachers who disguise themselves as servants of righteousness to turn others away from Christ (2 Cor. 11:13–15). Wherever there is opposition to Jesus, Satan’s will is being accomplished.

Christ’s Conquest over Satan

Though Satan exercises authority over many men in the world, he has no authority over Jesus (John 14:30). Jesus maintains absolute authority over Satan’s kingdom and over his demons. Thus, when the seventh trumpet blows, loud voices in heaven will say, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ” (Rev. 11:15).

The Temptation of Jesus

Each Synoptic Gospel presents an account of the temptation of Christ, in which the Spirit led Jesus to the desert to be tempted (Matt. 4:1). Two of the three temptations urge Jesus to perform actions that are not inherently wrong: commanding stones to become bread and jumping from the pinnacle of the temple. The third, worshiping Satan, is inherently wrong. Anything that Satan tempted Jesus to do would have been wrong for Jesus to do because He would be obeying Satan rather than submitting to His Father. Additionally, though he offers it to Jesus, Satan does not maintain ultimate authority over the world; he is the ruler of the world only in “that human beings have made him such through their sin.”¹⁸ Jesus resists Satan and demonstrates His authority over Satan, efficaciously commanding Satan to depart, foreshadowing His impending conquest over Satan’s kingdom.

Christ’s Conquest over Demons

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus performs an exorcism on at least six different occasions, demonstrating His authority over the spirit world.¹⁹ Mark summarizes Jesus’ early ministry as consisting of “preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons” (1:39).²⁰

himself,’ someone who does the devil’s work is in that sense himself ‘the devil’ or ‘Satan’” *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 417–418.

¹⁷ Scholars debate whether this refers to “evil” (NASB, ESV, KJV, RSV) or “the evil one” (NET, NKJV, HCSB, NIV, NRSV). In support of “evil,” see John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 293; and R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 271. Sydney H. T. Page argues convincingly that the reference is to Satan. For a full discussion, see Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan & Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 112–114.

¹⁸ Ibid., 129.

¹⁹ The references are as follows: (1) Demoniac in Capernaum (Mark 1; Luke 4); (2) demoniac of Gadara (Matt. 8; Mark 5; Luke 8); (3) dumb spirit in Capernaum (Matt. 9); (4) Syrophenician daughter (Matt. 15; Mark 7); (5) epileptic boy (Matt. 17; Mark 9; Luke 9); (6) blind and dumb spirit (Matt. 12). John provides no examples of Jesus’ encounters with demons. John presents Jesus in direct opposition to Satan.

²⁰ Both Mark and Luke place Jesus’ first exorcism almost immediately after Satan’s temptation of Jesus, emphasizing Jesus’ initial victory over Satanic forces. Page notes, “By placing the stories of the

Stuckenbruck notes that Jesus “regarded his expulsions of demons from people as concrete demonstrations that God’s rule was breaking into this world. . . . Exorcisms result from a power struggle in which Satan’s power has been overcome by God.”²¹ Since the theme of Jesus’ preaching was “the kingdom of God” (1:14–15), the coming of the kingdom of God necessarily involves Christ’s conquest over the demonic realm.

Jesus’ Victory Over Satan

Scripture speaks of Jesus’ defeat of Satan as past, present, and future.²² The work of Christ accomplished salvation for men and victory over Satan, destroying “him who holds the power of death,” the devil (Heb. 2:14–15). Jesus speaks of this victory in John 12:31–33, in which He pronounces judgment on this world and that the prince of the world will be cast out, or “exorcised” (ἐκβάλλω).²³ Presently, Satan is still alive and active in the world, and his forces wage a fierce war against the church (Matt. 16:18). Christ will consign Satan and his angels to eternal fire at the final judgment (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:7–10).

Summary

Christ and Satan are irrevocably opposed to each other. Their conflict carries out the prophecy from Genesis 3 that there would be enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. Satan’s kingdom has been defeated and awaits final judgment. His kingdom, however, still works in fierce opposition to God’s kingdom in the present world through its political and religious leaders and through sinful humanity.

Christ and Political Rulers

From Jesus’ birth until His death, Jewish and Gentile political leaders plot to kill Jesus. The leaders of the nations have worked toward their prince’s (Satan’s agenda) agenda in opposing God’s people since the fall. Pharaoh arose as the chief opponent of God’s people, and leaders of nations such as Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon continue to oppose God’s kingdom in the OT. The political resistance to the authority of Christ fulfills Psalm 2:2: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed.”

temptation and exorcism in proximity to one another, both Evangelists suggest that Jesus’ power over the demonic realm is the consequence of the defeat of the evil in the desert. . . . It is in exorcism that the nature of Jesus’ ministry as the bringing of God’s rule to a world fallen under Satan’s sway comes to most explicit expression.” *Powers of Evil*, 140.

²¹ Stuckenbruck, 183.

²² Page discusses the defeat of Satan with these elements in “Satan, Sin, and Evil,” in *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 236–242.

²³ See also Colossians 2:15, where Paul teaches that Christ triumphed over “the powers and authorities” through His death. Lenski summarizes this well: “He who rules the world by using all the things of nature for his purposes which are hostile to God, inciting men against their God by all that the world contains, he is now himself dethroned, and all that is left to him is the shadow of power.” *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 874.

Political Opposition to Christ

Throughout His entire life, political leaders work in opposition to Christ. When Jesus is born, Herod the Great orders the massacre of every male child under two years old in order to ensure that the new King would die.²⁴ During Jesus' ministry, Herod Antipas ("the tetrarch" in Matt. 14:1 and whom Jesus called "that fox" in Luke 13:32), a son of Herod the Great, "wanted to see Jesus" (Luke 9:7-9) and hoped that Jesus would perform a sign (23:8). Luke notes that Antipas wanted to kill Jesus (13:31-32); Antipas participates in Jesus' trial, where Antipas and his soldiers "treated him with contempt and mocked him" (23:6-12).

The Jewish high priest was a Jew appointed to office by the Romans and performed both religious and political responsibilities for the Jews. After Jesus raises Lazarus, Caiaphas, the high priest, fears the political consequences of Jesus' growing popularity and begins plotting to kill Jesus (11:47-53). The high priests conducted the Jewish portion of Jesus' trial (John 18:12-23). When Caiaphas asks Jesus if He is the Christ, Jesus responds affirmatively, and Caiaphas leads the people in their cry for Jesus' death (Mark 14:61-62).

Pontius Pilate, Roman prefect in Judea, first encounters Jesus at His trial and questions Him about His kingship. Jesus explains that His kingdom is not of this world, and that He came "to bear witness to the truth" (John 18:33-37). Pilate scoffs at truth (18:38).²⁵ Pilate asserts that his political authority will determine whether Jesus lives or dies, but Jesus tells Pilate that his authority was given by God (John 19:10-11). Though Pilate declares Jesus innocent six times (Jn. 18:38; Luke 23:14, 15; Matt. 27:19; John 19:4, 6), he confers the death sentence by delivering Jesus to the Jews to be crucified, identifying himself as "part of the hostile world that rejects Jesus and will not be exonerated."²⁶

Jesus came proclaiming a religious message with political overtones: the kingdom of God. The political leaders felt threatened by this kingdom concept and by the following that Jesus was gathering.²⁷ Two events in the Passion week infuriate the political leaders. In the

²⁴ Helen K. Bond notes a parallelism between Herod and Pharaoh, as well as Jesus and Moses: Matthew presents Jesus as a new Moses; the parallels between Moses on Mount Sinai and Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) are quite striking, as too are the parallels here. Just as the evil pharaoh ordered the death of all newborn Israelite boys (Exod. 1:15-16), so the evil Herod orders the death of all the boys under two years of age in Matthew (2:16). And just as Moses came out of Egypt in Exodus, so does Jesus, symbolically reliving the history of his people. These echoes would have been immediately apparent to Matthew's Jewish-Christian audience (and to all other readers familiar with the Exodus narratives)." "Political Authorities: The Herods, Caiaphas, and Pontius Pilate," in *Jesus Among Friends and Enemies*, 237. For further discussion on the "typological threads" between Jesus and Moses in Matthew 2, see Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 33-41.

²⁵ Bond notes, "By his refusal to listen to Jesus, he [Pilate] will indeed align himself with 'the Jews,' who, for John, most often represent unbelief and those who reject Jesus. . . . The Roman governor has no idea that the Truth is standing before him and, by his failure to believe, shows that he really is 'a Jew' (in the Johannine use of the term)" (p. 244).

²⁶ Ibid., 245.

²⁷ Bond says, "Jesus cannot simply be assigned to the category of 'religious preacher'; his message was necessarily political too. To speak of the kingdom of God in a land ruled by Jewish client kings or Roman governors had clear political repercussions. So too did the selection of twelve men as representatives of the

triumphal entry, the crowds proclaim Jesus as the coming Davidic King (Matt. 21:7–11), constituting a perceived threat to Roman rule and the position of the chief priests. Then Jesus cleanses the temple (Matt. 21:12–16), and the chief priests seek “a way to destroy him, for they feared Him” (Mark 11:18; cf. Luke 19:47). Jesus, however, has little interest in first-century politics. Jesus emphasizes that His kingdom is “not of this world” (John 18:36).²⁸

Significance

Though political leaders are ordained by God for good (Rom. 13:1–4; 1 Pet. 2:13–14), the general mindset of political leaders in the world continues to work against God’s purposes. Jesus acknowledges that the authority of government officials comes from God (John 19:11), and He instructs people to pay taxes to Caesar (Matt. 22:17–21). During this age the focus of God’s kingdom is on the spiritual reign of Christ. Peter presents Jesus as a positive example in His willingness to endure abuse from authorities (1 Pet. 2:13–25). Thus, Christians must be faithful in spite of hostility from political leaders. Ultimately, Satan is working to oppose Christianity through political leaders, just as he worked through the political leaders to oppose Christ.

Christ and Religious Leaders

Though Christ generally avoided debate and discussion with political leaders during His ministry, a large portion of the words of Christ in the Gospels present heated arguments with the religious leaders of His day: the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes, nearly all of whom opposed the ministry of Jesus. Christ’s interaction with the false teachers of His day presents the exemplary standard for how the church should interact with false teachers. Anthony LeDonne writes of the prevalence of heated arguments in the words of Christ: “If you were to remove all of the arguments from the canonical Gospels, most of those red letters would be gone. Without the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, and others, we would know considerably less about Jesus.”²⁹

Jesus and Religious Leaders in Mark’s Gospel³⁰

In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus quickly begins doing and saying things that enrage the Pharisees. After picking grain from the fields on the Sabbath, Jesus infuriates the Pharisees

restored twelve tribes of Israel. And to perform symbolic acts, such as the entry into Jerusalem and the demonstration in the temple at the great feast of Passover, was something that clearly could not be ignored. It should come as no surprise, then, that Jesus annoyed the political leaders of the day” (p. 246).

²⁸ This means that “Jesus’ reign does not have its source or origin in this world (cf. 8:23)—this world which is . . . locked in persistent rebellion against its creator (1:10, 11). . . . The kingships of this world preserve themselves by force and violence; if Jesus’ kingship finds its origin elsewhere, it will not be defended by the world’s means. And if it resorts to no force and no fighting, it is hard to see how Rome’s interests are in jeopardy.” D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 594.

²⁹ LeDonne, “The Jewish Leaders,” in *Jesus Among Friends and Enemies*, 199.

³⁰ This arrangement of the outline does not assume the priority of Markan authorship. Mark’s material is first because nearly all of what is included in Mark is also in Matthew and Luke. The sections on Matthew and Luke will point out the material unique to each of those Gospels.

by comparing Himself with David and claiming that “the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (2:23–28), an unabashed claim to be the divine Messiah. It would be difficult to imagine any mere man claiming to be κύριος τοῦ σαββάτου. The antagonism grows in the next account, in which Jesus is “intentionally provocative” in “picking a fight” with the religious leaders: “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath?” (3:4; cf. Luke 6:6).³¹ Jesus “looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart” (3:5).³² Jesus then healed the man, and the Pharisees “immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him” (3:6; Matt. 12:14). LeDonne keenly summarizes,

The Jewish leaders are shown to be quietly observing Jesus’s behavior and wary of his sabbatical antics. In contrast, Jesus is shown to be intentionally provocative. He begins the argument and publicly heals . . . a man with a ‘withered’ hand to provoke the Jewish leaders. Notice that Mark’s portrait is *not* of a passive, live-and-let-live Jesus who was simply minding his own business. By publicly healing on the Sabbath, and starting the argument in the synagogue, Jesus is picking a fight. Indeed, we are explicitly told that he is angry. No doubt, the storyteller’s intention was to portray *righteous* anger. From this view, the Pharisees’ elevation of Sabbath regulation over physical well-being demonstrates their ‘hardness of heart.’³³

The scribes accuse Jesus of being an instrument of Satan (3:22; Matt. 9:34). Later, the Pharisees and scribes complain that Jesus’ disciples disobey “the tradition of the elders” by eating with unwashed hands. Jesus condemns the Pharisees as hypocrites who revere man’s commands as higher than God’s (7:1–23), and Jesus warns the disciples about the “leaven” of the Pharisees (8:11–21; cf. Matt. 16:1–12). Later, the Pharisees and Herodians were sent “to trap [Jesus] in what he said” (12:13), but Jesus evades their traps. In Mark, the religious leaders persistently oppose Jesus and resist His kingdom—and Jesus strongly confronts and rebukes them.³⁴

Jesus and Religious Leaders in Matthew’s Gospel

Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ interaction with the religious leaders of His day is consistent with Mark’s, and it adds further denunciations against the religious leaders and their teaching. Jesus “offends” the Pharisees with His words when He stresses the priority of a clean heart over clean dishes (15:12). Jesus instructs the disciples to “let them alone” because the Pharisees are “blind guides” (15:14). After Jesus tells the parable of the tenants

³¹ LeDonne, 210.

³² The genuine anger of Jesus is mixed with continued grief over the hardness of the Pharisees’ hearts. The participle περιβλέπω in “having looked around at them with anger” is aorist, but the present passive verb συλλυπέω (“being grieved”) emphasize “a prolonged feeling of grief or distress.” D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Gospel of Mark: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 1994), 86.

³³ LeDonne, 210.

³⁴ It is worth noting that the Synoptics do not involve the Pharisees and Sadducees in the arrest and trial of Jesus. As complicit in the arrest of Jesus, Mark lists the “chief priests, scribes, and elders” (14:43), Matthew lists “the chief priests and the whole council” (26:59), and Luke lists the “chief priests, the officers of the temple, and elders” (20:18; 22:52).

who killed the son of the vineyard owner, he quotes Psalm 118:22–23, referring to Himself as “the stone that the builders rejected.” The Pharisees understood that Jesus was referring to Himself as the one whom they themselves had rejected. They wanted Him arrested, but they feared the crowds (21:42–46). Matthew 23 recounts the woes that Jesus pronounces on the Pharisees. Jesus refers to the Pharisees as “hypocrites” (23:13, 14, 23, 25, 27, 29), “blind guides” (23:16), “blind fools” (23:17), “whitewashed tombs” (23:27), “serpents” (23:33); “brood of vipers” (23:33). Jesus accuses them of having false motives (23:5–6), and they loved places and titles of honor (23:6–7). He accuses them of having hearts of greed and self-indulgence (23:25). They are full of “dead people’s bones,” “uncleanness” (23:27), “hypocrisy” (23:28), and “lawlessness” (23:28). They adhere to ceremonial laws, but they “shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces” (Matt. 23:13). The Pharisees flog and kill prophets and wise men (23:34), and they are sentenced to Gehenna (23:33). John MacArthur comments,

That sermon [Matt. 23] was the farthest thing from a friendly dialogue. Matthew’s record of it fills an entire chapter (Matthew 23), and as noted earlier, it is entirely devoid of any positive or encouraging word for the Pharisees and their followers. . . . This is a perfect summary of Jesus’ dealings with the Pharisees. It is a blistering denunciation—a candid diatribe about the seriousness of their error. There is no conversation, no collegiality, no dialogue, and no cooperation. Only confrontation, condemnation, and (as Matthew records) curses against them.³⁵

Jesus and Religious Leaders in Luke’s Gospel

Luke’s presentation of Jesus with the religious leaders is also consistent with Matthew’s and Mark’s. Though Luke’s portrayal of Jesus’ negative response toward the religious leaders is less extensive than Matthew’s (particularly Matt. 23), its severity matches Matthew’s. In their refusal to be baptized by John, “the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves” (7:30). When a Pharisee disregarded Jesus’ prophetic gifts, Jesus compares him negatively to the sinful woman who anointed Jesus’ feet (7:36–50). Jesus favorably compares the humble prayer of a tax collector to the self-righteous prayer of a Pharisee (18:10–14). Though Luke’s “woes” are not as lengthy as Matthew’s, they are no less harsh (11:39–52). Jesus tells them that they “neglect justice and the love of God,” and they neglect other people (11:42). He questions their motives (11:43). He calls them “unmarked graves” (11:44) and murderers of the prophets (11:47–51). Rather than being the key to knowledge, they have “taken away the key of knowledge” and did not enter, though they prevent others from entering (11:52). They were insulted by what Jesus said (11:45). After this, the Pharisees “began to press him hard and to provoke him to speak about many things, lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say” (11:53–54).

³⁵ John MacArthur, *The Jesus You Can’t Ignore* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 20.

Jesus and Religious Leaders in John's Gospel

John's Gospel frequently refers to "the Jews" in general as the opponents of Jesus (John's Gospel refers to "the Jews" 64 times).³⁶ John sometimes refers to "the Jews" interchangeably with "the Pharisees" (8:12–30; 9:13–23, 40; 10:19), and the term often refers to the leaders of the people.³⁷ Nicodemus, a Pharisee, secretly approaches Jesus to discuss the signs that He is doing, but he stumbles over Jesus' statements about the new birth (3:1–15). In John 7, the Jews are seeking to kill Jesus, and the Pharisees, in particular, seek to arrest Jesus because people believe that He is the Messiah (7:1–32). After Jesus raises Lazarus, the Pharisees convene with "the council" to discuss what to do with Jesus (11:45–57).

Jewish Leaders Representing Satan in John 8

John 8 presents a debate between Jesus and the Pharisees ("the Jews" in chapter 8). Jesus speaks blunt truths to them, telling them that they will die in their sins (8:21, 24). The Jews wanted to kill Jesus (8:37, 40, 44) because they were "of their father the devil" (8:44). Jesus says, "Your will is to do your father's desires," and "Because I tell you the truth, you do not believe me" (8:45). The Jews believed Satan's lies rather than the truth because Satan is a liar and the Father of lies. Instead, they believed lies regarding Jesus' parentage and ethnicity (8:41; 48), and they accuse Him of having a demon (8:48; 52). Jesus finishes the conversation accusing the Jews of being liars, and He asserts His pre-existence (8:55–59); the Jews respond by picking up stones to throw at Him. Unbelief and opposition to Jesus and His teaching represent Satan's opposition to God's redemptive plan. Satan's work in John 8 is to deceive unbelievers, as he deceived Eve in the garden:

The Genesis account also implies that Satan is a liar, since it was through misrepresenting the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit that the Serpent convinced Eve to eat it. . . . The Serpent's *modus operandi* was to make what was detrimental appear harmless and even beneficial. In John 8, Satan's deceptiveness is seen in the way that he keeps the religious leaders from recognizing who Jesus really

³⁶ Lars Kierspel argues that "the Jews" are parallel to "the world" throughout John's gospel, rendering both Jews and Gentiles the enemies of Jesus. Both "the Jews" and "the world" represent unbelief. *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 102n67. Stanley E. Porter argues that the term "the Jews" depicts the opponents of Jesus with an emphasis on the religion of the Jews: "In their opposition to Jesus, these opponents indicate a fundamental split between Judaism and what was to become Christianity, grounded in the language of the Gospel." *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 173. For Porter's helpful full discussion, see pp. 149–173. Raymond E. Brown points out that the instances of Jews speaking of other Jews as "the Jews" are striking. "To have the Jewish parents of the blind man in Jerusalem described as being 'afraid of the Jews' (9:22) is just as awkward as having an American living in Washington, DC, described as being afraid of 'the Americans.' . . . John can refer interchangeably to 'the Jews' and to the chief priests and Pharisees (compare 18:3 and 12; 8:13 and 22), and . . . John speaks of 'the Jews' where the Synoptic Gospels speak of the Sanhedrin." *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 41.

³⁷ In John 18–20 (Jesus' trial and crucifixion), "the Jews" are mentioned 21 times, most likely referring to the contingency of the Jewish religious-political leaders surrounding the high priest.

is. Jesus says that the consequence of such unbelief is that they will die in their sins (v. 24). . . . Those Jesus saw as victims of satanic deception typically saw themselves as people who already belonged to God and were not in need of salvation. It was precisely their sense of contentment with the status quo that was the problem. Note that it was the religious leaders in Jerusalem, not the prostitutes or tax collectors, whom Jesus described as children of the Devil. Spiritual blindness is often manifest in the delusion of self-sufficiency, and it is those who do not acknowledge their need of divine grace who thereby reveal that they are the children of the Devil.”³⁸

Jewish Leaders as False Shepherds in John 10

John 10 presents a contrast between Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and the Jewish leaders, who were false shepherds. The Pharisees believed that they were the “shepherds of Israel,” who opened the door of salvation. Jesus, however, is the door (10:7), and anyone who tries to access His sheep without going through Him is a thief and a robber (10:1). The thief comes “only to steal and destroy.” Jesus lays down His life for the sheep “that they may have life and have it abundantly” (10:10–11). Jesus urges the “undershepherds” of Israel to enter through Him so they might be saved (10:9). Jesus is clearly presenting Himself as the fulfillment of the OT promise that Yahweh will be the Shepherd of His people in opposition to the false shepherds who harmed His people (Jer. 23:1–4, 30–32; Ezek. 34:1–31). Jesus, thus, unmistakably identifies the religious leaders of Israel with the false shepherds spoken of in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Because of this, the Jews began accusing Him of having a demon (10:19–21). When Jesus speaks of Himself as the Shepherd again (10:25–30), the Jews pick up stones to stone Him because He was claiming to be God (10:31–33).

The Error of the Religious Leaders

Modern interpreters emphasize that the problem of the religious leaders was legalism. Though legalism was a problem, the primary problem with the first-century perversion of the Jewish religion is basically twofold: it elevates human traditions over Scripture, and it rejects the person and work of Christ as the way of salvation. Jesus speaks of the Jewish religious leaders of His day in a similar way to how other portions of Scripture speak of false teachers. John says that the key indicator for whether a person is of God is if that person confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (1 John 4:1–3). If a person does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, a Christian should not receive that person in his house (2 John 7–11). Paul says of anyone who distorts the Gospel of Christ and preaches a false Gospel, “Let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:6–9). Believers must “watch out for” those who cause divisions and teach contrary doctrine and “avoid them” (Rom. 16:17–18). Entirely intolerant toward the false teachers of His day, Jesus responds to them not with kindness and cooperative dialogue, but with harsh rebukes and chastisement. It is the fact that they are *religious leaders* that makes them so dangerous. MacArthur notes,

³⁸ Page, “Satan, Sin, and Evil,” 224–225.

It seems almost unthinkable that the fiercest opposition to Christ would come from the most respected leaders of society's religious sector. But it's true. Look at the broad scope of Jesus' earthly ministry . . . and ask, 'Who were the chief agents of Satan who attempted to thwart His work and oppose His teaching? Where did the main resistance to Jesus come from?' The answer is obvious. It wasn't from the culture's criminal underworld or its secular underclass. It wasn't from society's outcasts—the tax collectors, lowlifes, thugs, prostitutes, and thieves. Instead, the chief emissaries and agents of Satan were the most devout, the most sanctimonious, the most respected religious leaders in all of Israel—led in that effort by the very strictest of all their major sects, the Pharisees.³⁹

Contrasting Theologies of Church and World?

Gundry's idea that Luke and John present "almost polar opposite" views of church and world struggles to account for the biblical data. First, it is difficult to defend the claim that Luke is more cosmopolitan than John. John makes clear that Jesus' mission and message are to the world (κόσμος). As Luke does, John also presents Jesus as receptive of outcasts and sinners, as demonstrated in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, His defense of the woman caught in adultery, His healing of the man born blind, His reception of foreigners (John 12:20-26), and His appearance to Mary Magdalene. Additionally, Luke's presentation of Jesus' response to false teachers is quite consistent with John's, as demonstrated in Jesus' response to the Pharisees in both Gospels. MacArthur writes of Luke's presentation of Jesus with the Pharisees:

Jesus' interaction with the religious experts of His time was rarely even cordial. From the time Luke first introduces us to the Pharisees in Luke 5:17 until his final mention of the 'chief priests and rulers' in Luke 24:20, every time the religious elite of Israel appear as a group in Luke's narrative, there is conflict. Often Jesus Himself deliberately provokes the hostilities. When He speaks to the religious leaders or about them—whether in public or in private—it is usually to condemn them as fools and hypocrites (Luke 11:40; 12:1; 13:15; 18:10-14). On one occasion, when He was expressly informed that His denunciations of the Pharisees were insulting to the lawyers (the leading Old Testament scholars and chief academicians of that time), Jesus immediately turned to the lawyers and fired off a salvo at them, too.⁴⁰

Gundry, however, calls Evangelicals back to a "paleo-fundamentalism" characterized by Johannine sectarianism. When the New Evangelical movement began growing in the 1950's, Evangelical scholars began joining theological societies filled with heretics. Gundry *nearly* admits that John *probably* would not approve of this type of Evangelical involvement with heretics, but he evades the obvious application of John's teaching:

³⁹ MacArthur, 13.

⁴⁰ Ibid., xi.

Evangelical biblical and theological scholars began holding their meetings in conjunction with . . . societies populated with heretics, non-Christians of other religious persuasions, agnostics, and outright atheists as well as with true Christian believers. And in droves evangelicals (including me) started joining these societies and participating in their activities. Would John approve? I do not know and maybe it does not matter whether or not he would; but noncanonically he is said to have fled from a public bath on perceiving that the heretic Cerinthus was there.⁴¹

Gundry believes that Johannine separation was necessary for a time (pre 1950), and Lukan penetration has been necessary (post 1950) to keep the Gospel from becoming irrelevant.⁴² The biblical evidence, though, contrary to Gundry, demonstrates that Luke and John both present Jesus as the opponent of false teachers. Jesus does not join the Pharisees to win the Pharisees, gain respectability, and gain relevance for His kingdom message. Since Jesus' denunciations of false teachers in Luke is so clear, Gundry seems to be confusing Jesus' willingness to eat with tax collectors and sinners (in Luke) with a willingness to join in non-orthodox theological societies and fellowship with false teachers.⁴³ In fact, Jesus' method for responding to false teachers is drastically different from his response to the non-religious sinners of society. Therefore, it is necessary to rejoice in Gundry's appeal to return to a Johannine paleo-fundamentalism, but to reject the basis for Gundry's argument, that Luke and John present opposing theologies of church and world.

Summary

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus confronts and rebukes the false teachers for their errors. He is angry with them, though He is grieved by their unbelief. The religious leaders' opposition to Christ identifies them with false teachers throughout the NT. Since false teaching about Christ is representative of the work of Satan (2 Cor. 11:13–15), believers must vigorously reject false teaching, as Christ did.

Christ and Sinful Humanity

Though Christ's most prominent human enemies are political and religious leaders, those leaders have significant influence on the mindset and behavior of the mass of humanity. Because of the fall, all men are opposed to God by nature. During Jesus' ministry,

⁴¹ Gundry, *Jesus the Word*, 73.

⁴² Gundry mentions a view that holds that Christians should engage with other philosophers and scholars "for a transcendent and universal center." Gundry proposes that John would respond "that Christians have already found the transcendent and universal center and therefore do not need to join others in a quest for it, but need to disengage from the quest and announce its successful conclusion." Ibid., 93n51. It is noteworthy that along with John, Luke certainly does not picture Jesus as engaged in "a quest for a transcendent and universal center."

⁴³ The Gospels do not support the idea that Luke's presentation of Jesus' social life is more culturally engaged or inclusive than any of the other Gospels. After analyzing every passage in Luke in which Jesus has meals with unbelievers, Blomberg concludes, "No *significant* difference emerges in comparing the uniquely Lukan material with passages from other Gospel strata. All the themes that we saw in the latter are reinforced and promoted in the former" (p. 163). See below for a discussion of Jesus' social interaction with unbelievers.

“He came unto His own, and His own people did not receive Him” (John 1:11). The NT presents the mass of unbelieving humanity as the opponents of Christ and Christianity.

The Mission of Jesus

Jesus came into the world to provide salvation for men. John’s concept of “the world” is thorough and prominent, and it is consistent with the OT concept of God’s people and the nations. Matthew, with his significant emphasis on Israel, presents a distinction between Israel and the nations that is parallel to John’s concept of the church and the world.

John’s Concept of “the World”

John uses κόσμος 105 times, often referring to Jesus’ relationship to the world. Though Jesus created the world, the world did not know Him (John 1:10). Because God loved the world, He sent Jesus to save the world (3:16–17). Jesus is the light of the world (3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46), but men reject that light because they love darkness (3:19). The world hates Christ because He testifies that its works are evil (7:7; 15:18, 24). Because the world rejects Christ, it will also reject believers (15:18–19). In its rejection of Christ, the world represents a class of people entirely distinct from believers (17:25). The world’s behavior is entirely different from the behavior of believers (14:27; 16:8, 20). The world cannot receive the Holy Spirit (14:17) because Jesus has revealed Himself to His people and not to the world (14:19, 22; 17:6; cf. 10:25–26). Jesus prays for His people, but He does not pray for the world (17:9). Though believers are not “of the world” (17:16), Jesus sends them into the world to proclaim the love of God shown in Christ (17:18–23).⁴⁴

Matthew’s Concept of “the Nations”

Whereas John presents the major distinction between believers and the world, Matthew uses language referring to the OT distinction between God’s people and the *nations*, referring to “the nations” as unbelievers (and, thus, as synonymous with κόσμος). Matthew uses ἔθνος 15 times, twelve of which provide close conceptual parallels to John’s use of κόσμος. This table displays the conceptual parallel demonstrating that the concept of the nations in the OT is the foundation for John’s concept of church and world in the NT:

⁴⁴ Carson helpfully summarizes: “All believers have been chosen out of the world (15:19); they are not something other than ‘world’ when the gospel first comes to them. They would not have become true disciples apart from the love of God for the world. Even after the circle of believers is formed and the resurrection has taken place, these Christians are mandated to continue their witness, aided by the Spirit, in hopes of winning others from the world (15:26–27; 20:21). In other words, God maintains the same stance toward the world after the resurrection that he had before: he pronounces terrifying condemnation on the grounds of the world’s sin, while still loving the world so much that the gift he gave to the world, the gift of his Son, remains the world’s only hope” (p. 205).

Table 1. *Kosmos* in John and *Ethnos* in Matthew

Description	Matthew - ἔθνος	John – κόσμος
Object of Christ's mission	4:15; 12:18,21	1:9; 3:17,19; 9:5; 12:46; 17:11
Rejects Christ	20:19	1:10; 7:7; 15:18, 24
Rejects believers	24:9	15:18-19
Distinct from God's people	10:5,18	14:17,19,22; 17:6,9,16,25
Distinct behavior as sinners	6:32; 20:25	14:27; 16:8,20
Object of mission of believers	24:14; 28:19	17:18-23
Object of impending judgment	25:32	9:39; 12:31; 16:8,11

Mixed Response to Jesus' Ministry

Whereas religious and political leadership persistently opposed Jesus during His ministry, the response of the common people varies. Large crowds would often accompany Jesus, seeking to hear His teaching or see a sign. Jesus does not adjust His message to gain more followers. Instead, He preached many hard words that caused disciples to stop following Him (John 6:51–71). After Jesus read the first portion of Isaiah 61 in the synagogue at Nazareth and declared Himself to be its Messianic fulfillment, the people of Nazareth were enraged and came close to killing Him (Luke 4:16–30). However, because of all of the mighty works He did and His authoritative teaching, the Pharisees and chief priests had a genuine fear that everyone would believe in Him (John 11:48). In the triumphal entry Jesus drew a large following (Matt. 21:7–11), but at least some of the common people seem to participate in the shouts to crucify Jesus (Mark 15:13–14).

Jesus' Response to Notorious Sinners

Some of Jesus' opponents labeled Him a "friend of sinners." The Gospels contain dozens of accounts of Jesus' willingness to heal and help those whom the religious elite would avoid because of their idea of ceremonial and dietary uncleanness. But scholars debate the nature of Jesus' social interaction with unbelievers. Blomberg argues that for kingdom purposes Jesus was willing to "socialize, even in the intimacy of table fellowship, with anyone and everyone for the sake of accomplishing his mission."⁴⁵ C. T. McMahan argues that "the quintessence of Jesus' redemptive mission was revealed in his eating with sinners, repentant and unrepentant alike"⁴⁶ It is necessary to examine the Gospel narratives to correctly understand the nature of Jesus' social interaction with unbelievers and notorious sinners.

⁴⁵ Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 129.

⁴⁶ McMahan, "Meals as Type-Scenes in the Gospel of Luke" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 1, quoted in Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 163.

Jesus' Table Fellowship with Notorious Sinners

The significance of Jesus' meals has become the topic of significant debate in recent years, regarding to what extent Jesus would engage in fellowship with unbelievers in order to urge them to repentance. Blomberg presents fifteen occasions in which the narrative speaks of Jesus' table fellowship, seven of which are unique to Luke. These fifteen examples may be divided into four categories: (1) Jesus eating with sinners who had repented (and opponents' statements about such meals); (2) Jesus eating with other genuine believers; (3) Jesus dining with Pharisees (probably unbelievers) and rebuking them; (4) Jesus eating with the general population. Table 2 lists each occasion discussed by Blomberg:

Table 2: Jesus' Table Fellowship in the Gospels

Reference	Event	Participants
Mark 2:13-17; Matt. 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32 (1)	Levi's banquet	Levi, tax collectors, sinners
Mark 6:30-44; Matt. 14:13-21; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15 (4)	Feeding 5,000	5,000 who wanted to listen to Jesus
Mark 8:1-10; Matt. 15:32-39 (4)	Feeding 4,000	4,000 who wanted to listen to Jesus
Matt 8:11-12; Luke 13:28-29 (2)	Reclining at table in the kingdom	Many from east and west; Abraham, Isaac, Jacob
Matt 11:19; Luke 7:34 (1)	Not an event; Jesus states claims of opponents who call him glutton, drunkard	
Matthew 21:31-32 (1)	Not an event; Jesus states that tax collectors and sinners will enter kingdom	
John 2:1-11 (4)	Wedding at Cana	Jesus and local citizens
John 21:1-14 (2)	Jesus eating with disciples on shore	Jesus and disciples
Luke 7:36-50 (3)	Jesus eating with a Pharisee (Simon)	Sinful woman appears and anoints Jesus' feet
Luke 10:38-42 (2)	At the home of Lazarus	Lazarus, Mary, Martha
Luke 11:37-54 (3)	Jesus eating with a Pharisee	Jesus and Pharisees
Luke 14:1-24 (3)	Jesus at the home of a ruler of the Pharisees	Jesus and Pharisees
Luke 15:1-32 (1)	Not an event; Pharisees complain about Jesus eating with sinners	
Luke 19:1-10 (1)	Meal at Zacchaeus's house	Zacchaeus, "a sinner"
Luke 24:13-35 (2)	Cleopas and company	two men from Emmaus

Note: The parenthetical number next to each reference refers to four categories mentioned above.

After analyzing each of these passages, Blomberg concludes, "The general pattern of Christ intimately associating with sinners in table fellowship deserves to remain at the core of what the historical Jesus represented."⁴⁷ Interestingly, though, none of these presents Jesus in "intimate table fellowship" with unrepentant sinners.

It is important to examine instances in which Jesus dined with notorious sinners. When Jesus calls Levi to follow Him, he obeys, and then "many tax collectors and sinners

⁴⁷ Ibid., "Jesus, Sinners, and Table Fellowship," 61.

were reclining with Jesus and His disciples, for there were many who followed Him” (Mark 2:15).⁴⁸ It is difficult to determine whether some or all of these tax collectors and sinners had repented and begun following Jesus.⁴⁹ Mark’s comment that many “were following” (imperfect tense) Him seems to indicate that the tax collectors and sinners had already started following Jesus.⁵⁰ The Pharisees, unaware of the grace bestowed by Christ, still viewed these followers of Christ as tax collectors and sinners. Though it is possible that some unrepentant sinners and tax collectors were present, many of them had repented of their sins and had become followers of Christ.⁵¹ The emphasis here, then, is not that Jesus was eating with unbelievers to convince them to follow Him; rather, He is accepting as followers certain men who were notorious sinners prior to encountering Jesus.

The other significant example of Jesus eating with someone who was a notorious sinner is the account of Zacchaeus, “a chief tax collector” who “was rich” (Luke 19:2). Jesus, knowing that Zacchaeus was seeking Him, invites Himself to Zacchaeus’s house. Zacchaeus immediately demonstrates signs of repentance, but Jesus’ opponents grumble because Jesus was a guest in the house of a notorious sinner. Jesus exclaims that salvation came to the house of Zacchaeus because “the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (19:9-10). Additionally, Luke includes three instances in which Jesus dines with Pharisees (7:36–50; 11:37–54; 14:1–24), likely the only biblical examples of Jesus eating with unbelievers. He does not spend time befriending these Pharisees; rather He strongly rebukes them for their obduracy in each instance.

⁴⁸ Blomberg notes that some scholars identify this type of “reclining” with a “Greco-Roman symposium,” which often “deteriorated into showcases of gluttony and drunkenness.” “Jesus, Sinners, and Table Fellowship,” 45. Blomberg correctly argues against this view and explains, “‘Reclining’ often became synonymous with ‘dining’, so that at times we may not even infer an actual posture from the use of the term. To record that a group of Jews reclined at table may therefore tell us little more than that they gathered for a meal. To conclude anything further about the nature of that meal could quickly outrun the evidence.” *Contagious Holiness*, 96.

⁴⁹ Mark alone includes the idea that many of the tax collectors “were following” Jesus. The Gospels frequently use ἀκολουθέω to refer to individuals who follow Jesus in faith or to crowds who follow Jesus, eager to hear His teaching. James R. Edwards notes, “Occurring nineteen times in Mark, ‘following’ is a load-bearing term that describes the proper response of faith (10:52!), and is indeed practically synonymous with faith.” *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 81.

⁵⁰ Blomberg notes that the imperfect “could suggest ongoing past action and some measure of commitment to Jesus over a period of time.” *Contagious Holiness*, 100. It seems best to view this use of the imperfect as an ingressive imperfect. Wallace explains that this use stresses “the beginning of an action, with the implication that it continued for some time.” The ingressive imperfect indicates “a change in activity.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 544. Blomberg notes that the literal wording, “there were many, and they were following him,” reflects “Markan paratactic style, which can be more smoothly rendered by the relative pronoun ‘who.’” *Contagious Holiness*, 100. Thus, the translation would be “for there were many who had begun following Him.”

⁵¹ Blomberg also notes that there is likely a time interval between Mark 2:14 and 2:15. This allows time for Levi and other tax collectors to establish themselves as men who were “following” Jesus (p. 100).

Jesus the Friend of Sinners?

Three passages recount the complaints of the Pharisees about Jesus' reception of sinners. Jesus addresses accusations by His opponents that He is a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt. 11:16–19; Luke 7:31–35). His opponents (Jewish religious leaders) certainly intended this to be a negative epithet (cf. Psalm 1:1–3). The necessary question is whether the statement is true. This statement is parallel to the untrue statement that John "has a demon" (Matt. 11:18). Additionally, if it is untrue that Jesus was "a glutton and a drunkard" (11:19), so it is likely that the second statement ("friend of tax collectors and sinners") is untrue as well—at least in the way they meant it.

Jesus tells the Pharisees that "the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you" because of their faith (Matt. 21:31–32). When "tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to Him," the Pharisees complained, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1–2). When unbelievers were present at meals with Jesus (meals with the Pharisees and possibly in feeding the multitudes and at Levi's banquet), Jesus' purpose was not to socialize but to urge them to repent. His mission is to the lost (15:3–32). Thus, the emphasis of Jesus as one who associates with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners, is that Jesus receives those who follow Him, regardless of their past sinfulness or social status—not that He enjoys spending time with unrepentant sinners. Blomberg, McMahan, and others fail to recognize a distinction between Jesus' interaction with repentant sinners and social outcasts and between Jesus' interaction with unrepentant sinners.

Significance

In evangelism, it is essential for believers to engage with unbelievers in order to urge them to repent. The believer, however, must take great care to ensure that he does not fall into the sinful lifestyle of the unbeliever to whom he ministers. Blomberg argues that believers should not worry about this because they should follow the example of Jesus. Since Jesus did not worry about being morally defiled by unbelievers, neither should believers today. "Scarcely fearing that he will be morally or ritually defiled by them, in many instances he winds up leading them to God and to true ceremonial and spiritual wholeness. Or to put it more succinctly, holiness, not impurity, turns out to be the most contagious."⁵² Blomberg's argument seems naïve and opposed to biblical principles (1 Cor. 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1).⁵³ Though Jesus was not morally defiled by this interaction, believers do not

⁵² "Jesus, Sinners, and Table Fellowship," 62. Blomberg also says, "Like so many in his world (and unlike so many cultures throughout the history of the world), he does not assume that he will be defiled by associating with corrupt people. Rather, his purity can rub off on them and change them for the better. Cleanliness, he believes, is even more 'catching' than uncleanness; morality more influential than immorality." *Contagious Holiness*, 163.

⁵³ For example, Haggai 2:12–13 says, "If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?" The priests answered and said, 'No.' Then Haggai said, 'If someone who is unclean by contact with a dead body touches any of these, does it become unclean?' The priests answered and said, 'It does become unclean.'"

experience the perfect reliance on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that Jesus maintained. Because of man's sinful nature, impurity becomes more contagious and appealing when the person has regular exposure to it. Additionally, the true logic of Blomberg's statement is, "Since Jesus was not morally defiled by intimate table fellowship with social outcasts, Christians today should not worry about being defiled by table fellowship with unrepentant sinners who are opposed to Christianity." In order to engage unbelievers in this world, believers must follow the example of Christ. Joe Carter helpfully summarizes the appropriate principles for believers in engaging with sinners: "Since Jesus [had dinner with] . . . sinners in the places where they congregated, we should do so too when: (1) they are not engaging in sin, (2) when we do so for the purpose of calling them to repentance, (3) when our presence does not condone sin or the mocking of God, and/or (4) when the sinners are not our fellow believers."⁵⁴ Thus, believers may have meals with unbelievers (as Jesus did with the Pharisees), so long as the conversation consists of a concerted effort to urge the unbelievers to repent and believe the gospel and the unbeliever demonstrates a genuine willingness to listen to the gospel.

Jesus and the "Things in the World"

First John 2:15–17 presents the classic description of "the world" as the "desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life." Jesus displayed a perfect resistance to these desires, choosing the Father rather than this world. He resisted the desires of His body for food when Satan tempted Him, and He submitted to the Father's will to endure great bodily pain and suffering.⁵⁵ Jesus taught that it is better for a person to pluck out his eye to resist the desires of the eyes rather than to suffer eternal punishment in hell (Matt. 5:27–30). Jesus also displayed a perfect resistance to the "pride of life," humbling Himself in obedience to the Father and giving His life for other people. He resisted the temptation of Satan to make a spectacle of Himself, and He endured intense humiliation in His Passion. Jesus points out the pride of life as a significant problem of the Jewish leaders, who performed their acts of righteousness to display them to others (Matt. 6:1–18; 23:1–35).

⁵⁴ Joe Carter, "Since Jesus Ate with Sinners."

⁵⁵ The overwhelming consensus of commentaries argues that σάρξ here refers to the NT concept of σάρξ as the sinful aspect of human nature (Rom. 7:14–18). It seems more likely, though, that John is simply referring to bodily desires for several reasons: John uses σάρξ 22 other times (total of 13x in his gospel; 2 in 1 John; 1 in 2 John; 7 in Rev.), never referring to the sinful aspect of human nature. Most often, John uses σάρξ to refer to Jesus' taking on flesh in the incarnation. (2) It is difficult to understand the distinction between "lust of the flesh" and "lust of the eyes" if "flesh" refers to the sinful aspect of human nature. Thus, "lusts of the flesh" would become the umbrella term for "lust of the eyes" and "pride of life." On the contrary, there is a clear distinction and parallelism with the subjective genitives: "the things the body desires" and "the things the eyes desire." (3) John presents a seemingly unavoidable parallel to Satan's temptation of Eve in Genesis 3:6: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food [the desire of the body], and that it was a delight to the eyes [the desire of the eyes], and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise [the pride of life]." Though not conclusive, it seems preferable to understand as a reference to "the desires of the body."

Conclusion

Jesus provides the ultimate example for how believers should relate to the enemies of God and sin in this world. Satan continues to wage war on the church through political leaders, false teachers, and the mass of humanity, and believers must respond correctly for the advancement of the kingdom of God. Believers should vigorously oppose false teachers while compassionately urging unbelievers to repent and become children of God. Though believers will not perfectly resist the lures of “the things of this world” in this life, they should seek to follow the example of Christ in resisting sinful desires.

Selected Bibliography

- Blomberg, Craig L. *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*. NSBT. Downers Grove: IVP, 2005.
- . "Jesus, Sinners, and Table Fellowship." *BBR* 19, no. 1 (2009): 35–62.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Luke 9:51–24:53*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.
- Broadus, John A. *Commentary on Matthew*. 1886. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990.
- Brown, Raymond E. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times*. New York: Paulist Press, 1979.
- Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
- Carter, Joe. "Since Jesus Ate with Sinners, Do I Have to Eat at the Strip Club's Buffet?" The Gospel Coalition Blog. February 26, 2014. Accessed July 21, 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/since-jesus-ate-with-sinners-do-i-have-to-eat-at-the-strip-clubs-buffet/>.
- DeYoung, Kevin. "Jesus, Friend of Sinners: But How?" The Gospel Coalition Blog. March 4, 2014. Accessed December 4, 2015, <http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2014/03/04/jesus-friend-of-sinners-but-how>.
- Edwards, James R. *The Gospel According to Mark*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- Geldenhuys, Norval. *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951.
- Gundry, Robert H. *Jesus the Word According to John the Sectarian: A Paleofundamentalist Manifesto for Contemporary Evangelicalism, Especially Its Elites, in North America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
- . *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Hamilton, James M., Jr. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010.
- Hiebert, D. Edmond. *The Gospel of Mark: An Expositional Commentary*. Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 1994.
- Keith, Chris and Larry W. Hurtado, eds. *Jesus Among Friends and Enemies: A Historical and Literary Introduction to Jesus in the Gospels*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

- Kierspel, Lars. *The Jews and the World in the Fourth Gospel*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2006.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J. *John*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.
- Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961.
- . *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961.
- . *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961.
- MacArthur, John. *The Jesus You Can't Ignore: What You Must Learn from the Bold Confrontations of Christ*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008.
- McKnight, Scot and Joseph B. Modica, eds. *Who Do My Opponents Say that I Am?: An Investigation of the Accusations Against the Historical Jesus*. Library of New Testament Studies. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- McMahan, C. T. "Meals as Type-Scenes in the Gospel of Luke." PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987. Quoted in Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2005.
- Merritt, Jonathan. "Setting the Record Straight on Jesus, the Friend of Sinners." Religion News Service. March 20, 2014. Accessed December 4, 2015.
<http://jonathanmerritt.religionnews.com/2014/03/20/setting-record-straight-jesus-friend-sinners>.
- Michaels, J. Ramsey. *The Gospel of John*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.
- Morgan, Christopher W. and Robert A. Peterson, eds. *Fallen: A Theology of Sin*. Theology in Community. Wheaton: Crossway, 2013.
- Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to Matthew*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.
- Page, Sydney H. T. *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan & Demons*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995.
- Porter, Stanley E. *John, His Gospel, and Jesus: In Pursuit of the Johannine Voice*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015.
- Sanders, E. P. "Jesus and the Sinners." *JSNT* 19 (1983): 5–36.
- Talbert, Layton. "Christology." Class Notes, Bob Jones Seminary, Greenville, SC, Fall 2015.