

## Lecture 14 – Conflict with the Jews

*“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”  
Matthew 10:34 (NIV)*

### Key Terms

Oral law, ‘mesith’

### Objectives

- \*To identify the place of conflict in the Gospels
- \*To articulate the character of Jesus’ conflict with contemporary Jewish groups

### Lead Questions

- \*How is the Gospel in conflict with the world today?
- \*What should be the character of our conflict with modern non-believers?

### Conflict with the Jews

#### I. Conflict as a Meta-Theme in Gospels

##### A. The Gospel story begins and ends with conflict.

1. Survey of data from Matthew and other Gospels.
2. All Gospels have long controversy sequences: Matt. 9, 12, Mark 2-3, Luke 14-16, John 7-9.
3. The Gospels reach their climax through conflict.
4. Conflict begins in first encounter between Jesus and Pharisees.
5. Jesus, the disciples, and the religious authorities all have their type of conflict.

##### B. But why so much conflict?

1. Spiritual warfare
2. Jesus upset powerful people.
3. Jesus genuinely distressed spiritual leaders of Jews, violating their rules for rabbis.
4. Why were the Jewish leaders so angry with Jesus?

*Is there conflict in your life concerning the Gospel? In what ways should conflict be a part of every Christian’s life?*

#### II. Historically: Jesus Often Violated Jews’ Standards of Holiness

##### A. Jesus’ associations

1. Women, John 4:27. Mishnah, Aboth 1:5-“He that talks much with womankind brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of the law and at the last will inherit Gehenna.”
2. Children
3. Sinners. Objection, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? (Matthew 9:10-11; Mark 2:15-17; Luke 7:39, 15:1, 19:7)” is a criticism of His standards of holiness. (Aboth 1:7) “Keep thee far from an evil neighbor and consort not with the wicked.”

##### Cultural points:

- a. Social custom said that sharing table fellowship signified intimacy, acceptance
- b. Religious custom said holy man avoided contact with defilement of ordinary people
- c. The problem of untithed food

##### B. Jesus’ treatment of OT law and institutions violated Jewish standards

1. Radicalized or apparently criticized parts of law. Matt. 5, “You have heard...I say to you.”
2. Apparently repealed parts of law. Matthew 5, divorce, oaths. Mark 7, clean and unclean foods.
3. Apparent lack of reverence for temple and officers. See cleansing of temple.

- C. Jesus' attitudes toward oral law or tradition violated Jewish standards.
  - 1. Rabbis believed oral law was given to Moses on Sinai, then handed down orally.
    - Moses received the law from Sinai and committed it...to the elders, and the elders to the prophets...They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the law. (Mishnah, Aboth 1:1)*
  - 2. Jesus rejected traditions that nullify God's law (washing hands, gifts dedicated to God).
  - 3. Example of trivia, wrongheadedness of tradition: see Bills of divorce, Gittin 2:5-6.
- D. A leading problem: Jesus behavior on Sabbath violated Pharisees' traditions
  - 1. Sample of hundreds of traditions regarding Sabbath in Mishnah: spitting, writing, walking
  - 2. Jesus traveled and healed on Sabbath.

*What are some ways that you have seen the Gospel in conflict with modern legalism?*

### III. Conflict in Matthew 12

- A. First conflict: harvesting on Sabbath in Matt. 12:1-9
  - 1. Event: not stealing, harvesting.
  - 2. Jesus replies:
    - a. David's food: Human need takes precedence over ritual.
    - b. Priests: Service to God takes priority over lesser commands.
    - c. God desires mercy, not sacrifice. "The sabbath was made (divine passive) for man."
    - d. Jesus is Lord of Sabbath.
  - 3. Note on dialogue in interpretation
- B. Second conflict: healing on the Sabbath (12:9-13)
  - 1. Both precedent and ire lead Pharisees to look for opportunity to accuse Jesus.
  - 2. Jesus asks, "Who of you will not rescue an animal that fell into a well?" The locution sets up an absurdity. Who of you... "Can add an hour of life by worrying?" (Matt. 6:27); "Will give a child a stone or a snake for food?" (Matt. 7:9, Luke 11:11). Also Luke 11:5, 14.
  - 3. Argument proceeds from greater to lesser: If you will rescue an animal, surely a man.
  - 4. While they spoke the man was healed. (note: mechanism obscured)
- C. Aftermath of double controversies 12:14-21
  - 1. Pharisees plot to destroy Jesus due to claim to be Lord of Sabbath. The issue is Jesus' authority.
  - 2. Jesus withdrew, healed many. Warning not to tell is standard in Israel. Outside is different.
  - 3. The healing ministry confirms that Jesus is God's Suffering Servant of Isaiah, 4 ways (Matthew 12:18-21).
- D. Healing of a demoniac and the escalation of hostility, 12:22-37
  - 1. Healing of demoniac produces speculation: Is He Son of David? Empowered by Satan?
  - 2. Jesus counters (12:25-30)
  - 3. Pharisees' blaspheme; their evil words spring from an evil heart.
- E. The split deepens, 12:38-45
  - 1. The absurd request for a sign - denied.
  - 2. The "sign of Jonah" (12:39). Exegetical genitive. Like Jonah, Jesus Himself is a sign.
  - 3. Unresponsive Jews are ripe for judgment.

### IV. How to Evaluate Opposition of Jewish Leaders? Three Choices

- A. Sincere but misguided? Jesus did appear to them to be breaking the law (above).
- B. Jewish leaders possibly decided that Jesus was a "mesith," a beguiler of the people
  - 1. Anyone who entices Israel away from God is a mesith. Concepts: disloyalty, seduction.
  - 2. Treatment Jesus received fits roughly with what tradition said a mesith should receive.
    - a. Leaders tried to entrap Jesus in His word, permitted only for mesith (Sanhedrin

7:10).

b. Ditto for absence of precautions to protect the innocent at Jesus' trial

c. Jesus' description of persecution of His disciples comes from the mesith passage:

Matthew 10:19, 21

When they hand you over...

brother will betray brother

and a father against his child

children will rise against parents.....

and have them put to death

Deuteronomy 13:6,9

If anyone secretly entices you...

even if it is your brother

your father's son or your mother's son

your own son or daughter

or your wife or your most intimate friend

you shall surely kill them

3. The mesith hypothesis explains puzzling behavior in Gospels: Luke 4, Last Supper

C. Culpable, willful sin among leaders?

1. They saw the Messiah, saw His deeds, knew Scripture.

2. Testimony, but did not believe.

3. They did the work of Satan: They hated, plotted, trapped, tempted and murdered the Son.

4. Jesus called them evildoers, esp. Matthew—blind guides, sons of hell (x3), hypocrites (5x), blind fools, sons of the devil. Matt. 23, Luke 11, and John 8.

D. Status of leaders seen by contrast with doubters and sincere questioners.

1. Because John asks sincere Questions, Jesus answers them and praises John (Matt. 11:1-19).

2. Thomas' and Peter's doubts also seem inexcusable. Yet Jesus answers mildly.

3. Conclusion: Jesus was gentle with genuine doubters, but harsh or cryptic with Jewish leaders. A doubter and an unbeliever may act the same way only for a time.

4. The greatest foe of Gospel may be a religious leader.