

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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HE WHO IS NOT WITH ME IS AGAINST ME

Matthew 12:30a

When it comes to deciding about Christ, there is no place for ambivalence. Jesus' expectation is very clear: He demands complete allegiance from His followers. This is how it is worded in Matthew 12:30.

Matthew 12:30. He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

There are only two sides

The general thrust of this verse is that in our relationship with Jesus, there can be no neutrality. There is no middle ground with Christ: A person is either with Him or against Him.

It is true that in our daily life, it is generally possible to remain neutral. In fact, it may even be wise to be neutral in certain situations. But in the conflict between Jesus and Satan, neutrality is impossible. There is no Switzerland in this war.

You may see yourself as a neutral person because you are not opposing any kind of religious practice, but this doesn't mean that others will consider you as being neutral. If you are perceived as a threat, your claim of neutrality may not be enough to stop someone who wants to get you out of his way. In any warfare, nobody is obliged to respect your neutrality. Remember what happened to Belgium during the Second World War. Belgium was a neutral country. They wanted to stay away from the war. And one day, without warning or ultimatum, German troops invaded Belgium. Suddenly German parachutes were coming out of the sky and their armored units rolled across the border. Belgium's neutrality has not been respected. So even if you are not engaged in any religious activity, do not think that you are spiritually neutral. Satan does not consider you neutral. And Jesus does not consider you neutral either. His statement in Matthew 12:30 forces us to make a choice: We either follow Jesus and resist the devil, or we follow the devil and oppose Jesus.

Do not stop them

Jesus' exclusivity in Matthew 12:30 has sometimes been felt to be in tension with Mark 9:40 where He says that 'whoever is not against us is for us.' 'If a man is not against us, then he is for us.' This is a certainly a less polemical statement – though it equally excludes the middle ground. But its meaning is somewhat different. Let's look at the context of Mark 9:40. We will read from v. 38.

Mark 9:38. John said to Him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to hinder him because he was not following us."

39 But Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.

40 For he who is not against us is for us.

Here we see that John was talking to Jesus about a man that they met and who was casting out demons in Jesus' name. The disciples tried to stop him because he was not one of the Twelve. But for Jesus, that was not a good reason. He told them that they shouldn't have prevented him from casting out demons. *Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.* Jesus' reply shows that His view of who could legitimately participate in His mission was not as restrictive as that of the disciples. There is a lesson here for the church of Christ. We should not limit the grace of God to a specific congregation or a specific denomination. Rather we should rejoice in all the good done by brothers and sisters of any denomination. Our allegiance must be a witness for Christ. It is not an exclusivity that requires membership in a particular branch of the church.

There are people who look with doubt and suspicion on all that is done by those who do not walk with them. They consider as 'irregularities' or even 'mistakes' the works accomplished by other believers who don't follow the ways of their church. Casting out demons, doing things in Christ's name, preaching against sin, these are all good things which should not be forbidden simply because they 'do not follow us.' We should be able to rejoice when the kingdom of God is advanced by whomsoever it may be, whether by a Presbyterian, a Lutheran, a Methodist, or a Baptist.

That was the spirit of Paul. He tells us in Philippians 1:18 that whenever Christ is preached, even though some may preach out of envy and strive, he rejoices. *Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice.* Notice. Even when the gospel is proclaimed out of selfish ambition, Paul is still able to rejoice.

For Christ and with Christ

Coming back to Mark 9, we read this expression in v. 40: *For he who is not against us is for us.* The idea is that all that are not against a man and that do not take part of his enemy are to be accounted as friends. So if a person is not against Christ or His disciples, if he is doing the same work of opposing the kingdom of Satan, then this person should be considered as being on the side of Jesus.

Now, this doesn't mean that anyone who is fighting against Satan under the banner of Christ is an honest person. Remember the words of Paul in Philippians 1. He says that there are some people in the church who preach Christ out of envy and rivalry. Some preach out of good will but others preach out of envy. *Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; the latter do it out of love ... the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition* (Philippians 1:15-17).

Here we have to notice the difference between Matthew 12 and Mark 9.

In Matthew 12:30, Jesus says, *He who is not **with Me** is against Me.*

But in Mark 9:40, we have, *For he who is not against us is **for us.***

Do you see the difference? The difference is not just in the pronouns 'Me' and 'us', but also in the prepositions 'with' and 'for'. In Matthew, Jesus speaks of being 'with Me' whereas in Mark, He talks about being 'for us.' The difference between those two expressions requires some explanations. 'For us' refers to Christ and the disciples. It is not just to Jesus. It is for the church, for the new community. It is easy to understand that anyone who is promoting the interests of the church must be for the church in some way or other. But you can be for the church in a very selfish way just as you can preach Christ out of selfish ambition. You can be a hundred percent for your church, for your

denomination, for its teaching, but at the same time, you may have a hard time respecting those who do not follow the traditions of your church. It is possible to be for Christ and His church, and not be with Christ and His church. In short, you may be doing things for Christ, but you are not necessarily with Him. Do you see the distinction?

In Matthew 7:21, we read about people who cast out demons in Jesus' name, who did mighty works in Jesus' name, who called Jesus, 'Lord, Lord.' But amazingly, Jesus said to them, 'Depart from Me you evildoers.' These people, were they not for Christ? They were certainly for Christ! Why would they be saying 'Lord, Lord?' Why would they be using the name of Jesus to perform miracles? There are people like the Pharisees and the Sadducees who were totally opposed to Jesus. They were undoubtedly against Christ. But a person who is willing to cast out demons in Jesus' name must have some sympathy with His work. In that sense, they were for Christ. The problem is that they were not with Christ. And because they were not with Christ, Jesus said to them, 'Depart from Me you evildoers. Perhaps you were for Me in some sense. But you were not with Me. Don't come here again calling Me, 'Lord.'"

I would like you to notice that nobody would be for Christ if he did not believe in Christ in some way. These people in Matthew 7:21 who said 'Lord, Lord,' surely they believed in Jesus. Otherwise they would have never cast out demons in Jesus' name, neither would they have called Him 'Lord'. But just calling Him 'Lord' is not enough. To be for Christ is not enough. A genuine Christian is someone who is also with Christ. We must not confuse the idea that if we are for Christ, we are automatically with Him.

We saw from Philippians 1 that there are people in the church who are proclaiming Christ from impure motives. Are they for Christ? Sure, they are for Christ because they preach the pure gospel of Christ. But could we say that these people who are for Christ are also against Christ in a certain sense? Yes, we can say that they are also against Christ in another sense. They are against Christ in the sense that they are not preaching the gospel as it ought to be preached, i.e., out of love. So we have this paradoxical situation in which these people, who are for Christ, are yet in another sense against Christ. With their preaching, they were for Christ. They proclaimed the name of Jesus. But their preaching of Christ was set against a background of selfish ambition. With their ill-intentioned hearts, they denied Christ.

I emphasize all this to show the difference between being 'for us' and being 'with Me,' i.e., with Christ. You can preach the word of God for selfish reasons and still be for Christ. But you cannot be with Christ and proclaim Christ in pretense. In Matthew 12:30, there is no question of being for Christ. Twice the Lord Jesus uses the expression 'with Me.'

One with God

Now, in Mark 3:14, when Jesus chose the twelve disciples, we read that He chose them to be with Him. *And He appointed twelve, that they might be **with Him**.* This doesn't mean of course that He chose them so that they can be with Him in some kind of physical sense. He is speaking about being with Him in heart. 'I chose you to be with Me in spirit.' This was in fact His prayer in Jean 17:22-23. *That they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one.* One with God. The apostle Paul says the same thing so beautifully in 1Corinthians 6:17, using different words. He wrote to the Corinthians, *But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.* He who is united to Jesus is one with Him. In Matthew 11, Jesus uses the word 'yoke'. It is when we are yoked to Him that we are really with Him. Where He goes, we go. We are identified with Him in our heart, our mind, our soul and our strength.

This question of being for or against Christ is really a question of decision. Both Matthew 12:30 and Mark 9:40 point out that neutrality toward Jesus is not possible. And because there is no neutrality with Christ, we are forced to make a decision for or against Him. We must realize that a

spiritual war is going on right now and we must choose sides. We either fight against evil or against righteousness. We either fight for the kingdom of God or for the kingdom of evil. Trying to be neutral by doing nothing for God is to be on the side of Satan because we are allowing evil to continue and to grow without opposition.

To gather and to scatter

What is more, Jesus asks us in the second part of Matthew 12:30 not only to side decisively with Him, but to gather with Him. And He warns us that not being actively engaged in gathering with Him is equivalent to being engaged in scattering from Him. *He who does not gather with Me scatters.*

What is the Lord Jesus saying in these words? This phrase tells us that the genuineness of our faith will be seen in the fact that we are active for God. *He who does not gather with Me scatters.* Now, to gather and to scatter are two kinds of activity involving work. And the action of scattering is of course the opposite of gathering. So the Lord Jesus is saying, 'He who is not working with Me is working against Me. He scatters from Me.' The evidence of our allegiance to Christ will be seen in whether we are working with Him. If we are not working with Him, we are working against Him and therefore our profession of faith cannot be true.

This gathering and scattering, what do they refer to? They are actions that are part of the shepherd's life. In the Greek language, they can refer to the gathering of sheep and the scattering of sheep. For example, the word 'scatter' is used in John 10:12 to describe the action of a wolf when it gets into a flock of sheep. *The wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.* Here also we see that there is no neutral ground. We are either a shepherd who is trying to gather the sheep or we are a wolf who scatters them.

But these words can also be used in an agricultural sense. We gather and we scatter during the harvest period. It is an allusion to the gathering of wheat and binding it in sheaves, and to the scattering of the wheat loose in the field whereby it is lost. He who does not gather in the harvest with Me scatters it. He destroys the harvest.

We can see from this that the picture of gathering and scattering has to do with bringing people into salvation or driving them away from salvation. The point of the figure used by Jesus here is very clear. Everything that we do day by day will have one of these two effects: It is either going to draw people to the Lord Jesus or it is going to drive them away from the Lord.

Using Paul's words

Now, the apostle Paul teaches the same thing in one of his letters. It is in 1Corinthians 3:9-17. We can say that this passage in 1Corinthians is simply an exposition of the Lord's teaching about gathering and scattering. Let us first read this passage and then we will see how Paul's teaching is connected to the Lord's teaching.

*1Corinthians 3:9. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.
10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it.
11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
12 Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw,
13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.
14 If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward.
15 If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.*

*16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?
17 If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.*

The connection of this passage to Matthew 12:30 is easy to understand. We saw earlier that we either gather with Christ or we scatter, and we said that it can refer to a harvest. In 1Corinthians 3:9, Paul says, *For we are God's fellow workers; **you are God's field**, God's building.* Notice. You are God's field. And God's workers are working on that field to gather the crop. When they do that, they gather with Christ. But if you are an unfaithful worker or a bad worker for some reason, rather than gathering the crop, you may damage it. You may ruin the harvest. You may scatter the harvest. In this case, you are not gathering with Christ. You are scattering. You see the connection?

When we read 1Corinthians 3, we observe that Paul does not use the same words as Jesus. Instead of speaking about gathering and scattering, he speaks about building and destroying. So from vv. 10 to 15, he speaks about building upon a solid foundation. And in v. 17, he speaks about destroying that building. *If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.* 'If any one destroys' is the same thing as 'If anyone scatters.' So the point is that we do one of these two things: We either build or we destroy. We either gather or we scatter. These links from 1Corinthians 3 to Matthew 12:30 are so clear that we can readily consider Paul's passage as an exposition of the Lord's teaching.

In our next lesson, we will see what this 'gathering' consists of by expounding on 1Corinthians 3.