

Matthew 12:30

I. Whoever is not with me is against me...

In the previous verses, Jesus has taught that there are only *two* kingdoms. There is the kingdom of God, and there is the kingdom of Satan. There is the kingdom of light and there is the kingdom of darkness. And these two kingdoms are totally and absolutely opposed to each other. Jesus has bound Satan, and is now plundering His kingdom. And yet the Pharisees are opposing Jesus by saying that when He casts out demons, He does so by the power of Satan! So Jesus says out loud what should already be completely obvious with respect to the Pharisees: “Whoever is not with me is against me”. Of course the Pharisees were not with Jesus! Of course it was obvious that the Pharisees were against Jesus! And yet it seems to me that at this point Jesus is looking more to the bystanders and giving *them* a much needed warning. You see, on the one hand, you have Jesus and the Pharisees who are polar opposites. And on the other hand, you have the bystanders, and the onlookers who stand on the outside watching the conflict. No doubt, most of these people would *not at all* want to be associated with the position of the Pharisees! The crowds were certainly not ready to say with the Pharisees that the wonderful things Jesus was doing were all inspired by Satan! Surely that was going way too far! And yet if they were not against Jesus like the Pharisees were, they wouldn’t necessarily say that they were *with* Jesus either.

What does it mean to be with Jesus? At the very least, to be *with* Jesus implies that you are *personally* and *intimately* associated with Jesus (cf. Lenski; Hendriksen). But the crowds would rather be somewhat neutral. They liked to think of themselves as somewhere in the middle – not against Jesus (*certainly not* anywhere close to the Pharisees’ camp), and yet not necessarily *with* Jesus either (depending on what we mean by “*with*”). And so my guess is that there were many people who soothed their consciences by comparing themselves with the Pharisees, and telling themselves that they were actually *much closer* to the side of Jesus. But this is a false security. It’s a lie that can only lead to destruction. And because Jesus would not have anyone believing lies that lead to destruction, He very graciously gives us this warning: “*Whoever* is not with me *is against me.*” If you’re not ***really and truly*** with me, then you’re in the ***same*** camp with the Pharisees who are attributing my works to Satan. Don’t comfort yourself with thoughts of neutral ground – or even of neutral ground that tends in My direction – because there is *no such thing*.

So what about you? Are you *with* Jesus, or *against* Jesus? These are the *only* two choices. Now before some of us answer this question too quickly and glibly, we need to reflect on what Jesus says next. We said that to be with Jesus means at the very least that we are *personally* and *intimately* associated with Jesus – but it means more than this. It means that we are actively working on His side.

II. ...and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Jesus isn’t just talking about a *static* condition of being “officially” with Him, or “officially” against Him! Jesus is talking about a very *active* condition of *working* with Him, or *working* against Him. So He says: If you’re not *gathering* with me (if you’re not actively engaged in the work and business of the kingdom), then that’s the same as scattering – and that means that

you're against Me. If you are not *gathering* with me, then you are living your life in opposition to Me and My kingdom. To gather with Jesus is to be engaged in the work and business of the kingdom. But more *specifically*, what does gathering refer to? It refers to the work of gathering sheep into the fold (Mat. 9:36; 10:6; Jn. 10:12), or gathering grain into the storehouse (Mat. 13:30). And these are pictures of the work of gathering souls into the kingdom. Jesus is not saying that if we're not full-time evangelists or street preachers, or always going door to door with the Gospel, then we are scattering, and therefore against Him. I believe that Jesus is saying that if our life is not a witness and testimony to others of the truth of Jesus Christ, *then* we need to realize that we are *against* Jesus. If our lives are not evidence of the good news of Jesus death, burial, and resurrection, then we are scattering where Jesus is gathering. We are not with Jesus, but *against* Him. Because obviously, if we are *with* Jesus, then our lives will be a testimony to Jesus!

There are many areas in life where neutrality and middle ground are very possible and perfectly acceptable. You don't have to be either a Republican or a Democrat. You may not be a big advocate of classical music, but that doesn't necessarily mean you're against it. There are many areas in life where you can be truly undecided and on the fence. But it is *impossible* for anyone to ever be on the fence with regard to Jesus – though undoubtedly many have tried and are still trying. To be undecided is to be against Jesus because it is to rebel against His command to come, and follow Him. If we are not actively working for Jesus, then we are against Jesus and in the same camp with the Pharisees – there is no middle ground. J. C. Ryle writes:

“There are many persons in every age of the Church, who need to have this lesson pressed upon them. They endeavor to steer a middle course in religion. They are not so bad as many sinners, but still they are not *saints*. They feel the truth of Christ's Gospel, when it is brought before them, but are afraid to confess what they feel. Because they have these feelings, they flatter themselves they are not so bad as others. And yet they shrink from the *standard* of faith and practice which the Lord Jesus sets up. They are not boldly on Christ's *side*, and yet they are not *openly* against Him. Our Lord warns all such that they are in a dangerous position. There are only two parties in religious matters. There are only two camps. There are only two sides. Are we *with Christ, and working in His cause*? If not, we are *against* Him. Are we doing good in the world? If not, we are doing harm.”

Conclusion

My prayer is that there would be no one who comes to this church week after week who is deceiving himself with a false sense of security. Could there be anyone here who is saying to himself:

“I go to a good church. I've always believed that what the Bible teaches about Jesus is true. I try to live a life that Jesus would approve of. And I certainly believe that what the Pharisees said about Jesus was wicked and sinful. Now I may not be with Jesus like some people are with Him. I may not be out gathering with Jesus and actively going about the work and business of the kingdom, but at least I'm not against Jesus. I wouldn't say that my life is attracting and calling people to Jesus, my life may not specifically be a witness

to Jesus, but at least I'm not trying to keep people away from Jesus. So... I should be alright."

If this is you, then please hear what Jesus said: "Whoever is not *with me* is against me, and whoever does not *gather with me* scatters." So what is the solution? The solution is *not* to work harder at *doing* and *gathering*. The solution is to *repent* of your sin and *trust* in Jesus who suffered God's wrath in the place of sinners, so that sinners might have peace with God. And just as repentance and faith are the *gifts* of God, so *also* is the ability to faithfully "gather" with Jesus and be always about the work and business of His kingdom. This is how you will know that you are truly with Jesus and not against Him. This is how you will know that you have truly repented and believed.

Now we must take this very same principle and apply it not just to those who are outside the kingdom, but also to all of us who are confessing Christians and baptized members of the church. We need to pay attention to Jesus' warning, and be careful that we aren't deceiving ourselves with the lies of neutrality. For example, it is not enough to carefully and diligently seek to avoid sin, and yet be somewhat more neutral when it comes to true *righteousness*.

- ✓ 1 Timothy 6:10-11 – The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. But as for you, O man of God, *flee* these things. **Pursue** righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.
- ✓ 2 Timothy 2:22 – So *flee* youthful passions and **pursue** righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

If we are not *pursuing* righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart, then we are *not fleeing* youthful passions. If we are not *pursuing* righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness, then we are *not fleeing* the love of money. If we are not with Jesus, then we are against Him. Let us stop lying to ourselves with thoughts of a comfortable middle ground! Calvin writes: "So strong is our propensity to evil, that 'there is no place for God's righteousness except among those who devote themselves *earnestly* to it.'" (Bruner's translation of Calvin) If it is true that those who are not with Jesus are against Him, then this should provoke *us* to be always striving more and more diligently in the work and business of the kingdom! Middle ground is never, *ever* possible, and yet let's admit it – even as Christians, we still seek it. Ryle says: "We fear extremes. We dread being righteous overmuch. We are anxious not to go too far [we don't want to be too fanatical].—Such thoughts as these are full of peril to the soul. Once allowed to get the upper hand, they may do us immense harm. [Indeed,] nothing is so offensive to Christ as lukewarmness in religion." We all know what Jesus said to the *church* in Laodicea:

- ✓ Revelation 3:15-16 – I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

It can be so easy for us to become lukewarm – to rest on past laurels – to become lazy in our Christianity and the pursuit of true *righteousness*. And it is because of *this* natural tendency that

Jesus would graciously warn *us* and exhort *us*: “Whoever is not *with me* is against me, and whoever does not *gather with me* scatters.”

Imagine an escalator going down, and you’re on that escalator wanting to go up to a higher floor. If you stand still, what will happen? Your natural “propensity to evil” will *always* and *automatically* pull you down. The only way to gain the higher floor is to *move*, and to *take active and purposeful steps* in that direction. In just the same way, in the true Christian life there is no standing still. We’re either *moving* forward or we’re sliding backward. We’re either *moving* upward, or we’re sliding downward. And so it is in *Jesus’* words that we *truly* see the absolutely “vital importance of being *earnest*”.

- ✓ Hebrews 6:9-12 – Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust so as to overlook ***your work*** and the love that you have shown for his name in ***serving the saints***, as you still do. And we desire each one of you to show the same ***earnestness*** to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may ***not be sluggish***, but imitators of those who through ***faith and patience*** inherit the promises.
- ✓ 2 Peter 1:5-8, 10 – For this very reason, ***make every effort*** to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ... Therefore, brothers, be ***all the more diligent*** to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.
- ✓ 2 Peter 3:13-14 – But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, ***be diligent*** to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.
- ✓ Hebrews 12:14 – ***Strive*** for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.
- ✓ Ephesians 4:1-3 – I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ***eager [striving, making every effort, being diligent]*** to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

This last passage from Ephesians is one that I usually quote to those who are seeking membership here at LWBC. The Bible knows nothing of simply *avoiding* strife, and being careful *not* to sow seeds of dissension in the body. Because given our natural “propensity to evil”, the only way to avoid strife, and the only way not to sow seeds of dissension in the body is to be ***eagerly and diligently striving and making every effort to maintain*** the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And so I want to exhort all of us by asking this question: “Is this church a stronger and more unified church as a direct result of your presence in the body?” If so, then this is one important way that we are “gathering” with Jesus.

- ✓ John 13:34-35 – A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

- ✓ John 17:20-21 – I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

If our presence is not strengthening the Church, then our presence is **weakening** the Church (cf. William Barclay, quoted in Morris). We're either with Jesus or against Him. We're either gathering with Jesus or scattering. There is no neutrality or middle ground in the Christian life. J. C. Ryle writes:

“Let us settle it in our minds, that we shall never have peace, [or be of any good] to others, unless we are thorough-going and decided in our Christianity... Let it be the settled determination of our minds that we will serve Christ with all our hearts, if we serve Him at all. Let there be no reserve, no compromise, no half-heartedness... in our Christianity. Let us resolve, by God's help, to be 'with Christ,' and 'gather' by Christ's side... Without decision there is no happiness in religion. He that follows Jesus most fully, will always follow Him most comfortably.—Without decision in religion, there is no usefulness to others. The half-hearted Christian attracts none by the beauty of his life.”

- ✓ Philippians 3:12-14 – Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but ***I press on*** to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and ***straining forward*** to what lies ahead, I ***press on*** toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The *true* Christian life is grace-motivated, gospel-driven, cross-centered, and Holy Spirit empowered “***pressing on***” and “***straining forward***”. And so the Apostle Paul sums up the application of this message and, I believe, of Jesus' words when he says to us:

- ✓ Romans 12:11 – Do not be slothful in ***zeal***, be ***fervent in spirit***, ***serve*** the Lord.

Teaching our Children

Q. How many kingdoms did Jesus say that there are? What are they?

A. There are only two kingdoms. There is the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

Q. Were the Pharisees with Jesus or against Jesus? Were they in the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan? How do you know?

A. The Pharisees were against Jesus. They were in the kingdom of Satan. They said that Jesus cast out demons by using Satan's power!

Q. What about the crowds? How did they like to think of themselves?

A. ~ They did not believe that Jesus did His good works by the power of Satan. They didn't want to be in the same group with the Pharisees.

~ But they didn't think of themselves as being “*with*” *Jesus* either!

~ They thought of themselves as a little more neutral – a little more toward the middle (in between).

Q. Is there a third kingdom that is in between Satan's kingdom and God's kingdom?

A. NO! There are only *two* kingdoms.

Q. What did Jesus say to those who wanted to be a little more neutral and “in the middle”?

A. “*Whoever* is not with me is *against* me.” (!!!)

Q. What does it mean to be “with” Jesus?

A. ~ To be with Jesus means that we are very clearly connected with Him as His followers.

~ To be with Jesus means that we are “gathering” with Him (our lives are a testimony and witness to others of the truth about Jesus Christ).

Q. What is the only way to be “with” Jesus?

A. See first paragraph at top of page 3

- ✓ Talk with your children about how easy it can be to be spiritually lazy. We think that we can avoid sinning without *pursuing* righteousness. We can still try to be somewhere in the middle. But we need to remember that when it comes to Jesus, there is *never* any middle ground. We are *always* either with Jesus or against Him.
- ✓ Use the illustration of what it takes to go up on an escalator going down. (See first paragraph on top of page 4)
- ✓ See Scriptures on pages 3-5 (See especially the Scriptures in the middle of pages 3 and 5)