

Author John Ortberg writes:

*Not long ago, there was a CEO of a Fortune 500 company who pulled into a service station to get gas. He went inside to pay, and when he came out he noticed his wife engaged in a deep discussion with the service station attendant. It turned out that she knew him. In fact back in high school before she met her eventual husband, she used to date this man.*

*The CEO got in the car, and the two drove in silence. He was feeling pretty good about himself when he finally spoke: "I bet I know what you were thinking. I bet you were thinking you're glad you married me, a Fortune 500 CEO, and not him, a service station attendant."*

*"No, I was thinking if I'd married him, he'd be a Fortune 500 CEO and you'd be a service station attendant."*

"Ouch! ... *that had to hurt!*" ... Some of us... who have been subjected to the rudeness of snobbery... whenever we hear a story like this... we are happy that he got what he deserved. Snobbery of any sort... is unpleasant to be around.

This morning the subject of our passage leads us to a discussion of "*Spiritual* Snobbery..." ... It is frequent in many churches... and we are not immune to it here.

We see it when a young believer approaches someone who has been a Christian for quite a while. The new Christian with their effervescent bubbly spirit approaches the more stoic believer... and they want to share something that they just learned about the Lord... or a Scripture verse that ministered deeply to them. Their truth comes gushing forth... and it is met with a rather dull... "*Yeah... I know. I learned that a long time ago...*" The older believer's lack of enthusiasm... reveals a spiritual snobbery... and it

crushes the new believer. Eventually the new believer gets the idea that spiritual snobbery and spiritual maturity are the same thing.

No... the lack of spiritual snobbery shows spiritual maturity. You know what a spiritual mature believer would do? They would consider the young believer's stage of growth... and they would do everything they could to encourage it. ... *"Wow! John 3:16 says God so love the WORLD...? Tell me more of what you saw..."* It will get excited *with* them – for their sake.

Another form that spiritual snobbery can take... is when one believer tries to tell others... that if they were really serious about following the Lord... they would seek to have the same experiences that the snob has had. "You will read this book..." ... "You would send money to this cause..." ... "You will listen to John MacArthur's sermons everyday..." ... "You will attend this conference about the end times..." ... "You would have this same study Bible..." ... And if you have been given a ministry stewardship in the church... you can expect the spiritual snob to tell you (without being invited) that the ONLY way to do your ministry... is by their standards.

Spiritual snobbery can wrap it's bony fingers around any congregation... and squeeze the life juices right out of it.

I have heard... and I have personally experienced the truth of it... that the most dangerous Christian in the world... is a believer who just completed their first class of Biblical Greek. (As you all know... the New Testament was first written in Koine Greek.) Many students who have been armed with a little bit of understanding of Koine Greek – think they know it all. (They are experts on any matter of the Bible.)

Patti and I sometimes laugh about one of the most embarrassing periods of my life... just after my first Greek class in Seminary. (Talk about spiritual snobbery!) I took my Greek Bible to church... and to Bible Studies. If the pastor said something in his sermon... that I thought I could contend with by arguing from the original Greek... I was right there to discuss it with him. ... And... perhaps like a lot of spiritual snobs... I thought that he would appreciate it... and that he was bound to think very high of me...

Whether our spiritual snobbery is based on a knowledge (or training that we have received)... or if it is based upon some kind of service in a ministry... it is more than an irritation to others. It is foolish... it is damaging... and it is what we shall see today... something that Christ confronts.

In this morning's text... Matthew gives two examples of a disdain that emerges from spiritual snobbery. The first comes from the unbelieving hearts of the Pharisees... and it is a social disdain. The second will come from a more surprising source... and it is a spiritual disdain. But in both cases... the Lord set Himself against spiritual snobbery.

In the first example... Matthew will recount the story of his own call to discipleship. It is his autobiography.

In the passage that we studied last week... Jesus declared His authority over sin. Flowing right out of that... in today's passage... Matthew uses himself to demonstrate that Jesus had authority with a sinner ... named Matthew (or Levi... as he is referred to in Mark's account of this story... and in Luke's account.)

Jesus has authority to save... even in the case of tax collectors. This was Matthew's profession before becoming one of the 12 apostles and before recording this very Gospel. Tax collectors were constantly interacting with unclean Gentiles (non-Jews), and they were known for taking advantage of Jewish people for the sake of Rome and for the sake of their own pockets. Nevertheless, Jesus goes straight to this despised man.

The kind of spiritual maturity that we all want (Christlikeness) – completely lacks spiritual snobbery.

There were two classifications of tax men: the ordinary tax collector; and the customhouse official called the *douanier*. ...The Jews especially despised the latter.

The office of *douanier* gave the appointee great power to enrich himself... vent his spite on people... play favorites... and inflict hardship. ... The customs official could force merchants to stop their journeys... unload their beasts... and open every bale and package... he could rifle through it all... read private letters... exact his dues... and generally make life miserable. Taxes and tolls were levied against rich and poor. There were bridge tolls... road taxes... harbor dues... property taxes—as many assessments as their greedy inventiveness could concoct. *“I see that you have 8 spokes on each wheel of your wagon. That will be two drachmas for every spoke...”*

Douaniers were harsh and hated people. ... But Heaven suddenly opened up before Matthew. ... Jesus approached his toll booth and said: *“Follow me!”* ... That was all.

Matthew had probably heard Jesus speak... seen His miracles... witnessed His grace and love... and Matthew probably longed to be set free from his chains so that he could follow such a Master.

But in this call... there were no preliminaries... no prolonged appeals... no invitation to think it over. ... Jesus knew His man... read his heart... understood his longings... and issued His challenge. ... Glory filled Matthew's soul "and he arose... and followed him." ... That was that. ... As a result we have in our hands today the Gospel that bears his name.

### **Matthew 9:9**

The call of Matthew is a wonderful demonstration of the fact that Jesus pursues sinners. After all... why would He choose Matthew? ... Jesus was surrounded by tons of people... and His miracles were attracting quite a crowd. ... Yet... He pursues Matthew... and calls him as a disciple. ... It is incredibly good news that Jesus summons sinners to Himself.

Out of the many... who Jesus could have called... He chose Matthew. ... But now let's consider this call from Matthew's perspective. ... Matthew was summoned to completely leave his post... his position... and his possessions. (LISTEN) Tax collectors were usually very wealthy... because there was so much room for profit in their business. ... So this was a significant financial and career sacrifice. ... And (just think) if following Jesus didn't work out for Matthew... what job could such a hated former tax collector get?

Undoubtedly... this was a decisive moment in Matthew's life. Don't miss the impact. ... Matthew dropped everything to follow Jesus.

May God help you and I... to be done with our phony ideas of being a “*casual* disciple” of Jesus. There is no such thing!

When Jesus called Matthew to be one of his disciples... Matthew got up and followed... leaving a lucrative career. ... If God has called you to follow or obey him... have you tried to do it as a casual disciple?

Matthew had a passing opportunity to be a follower of Christ... and he did not let the opportunity pass by... Procrastinators who let opportunity pass by will suffer great loss. ... This is especially true spiritually — procrastinators fill hell ... not heaven.

*"Now is the day of salvation"* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

### **Matthew 9:10-11**

Notice that Matthew didn't leave his tax booth in a spirit of grim resignation. “*Ugh! ... OK... I guess... if I have to... I will leave all this behind and follow You, Jesus.*” ... Immediately after stepping out to follow Jesus... he threw a banquet... a feast for sinners!

Matthew exhibited *his love for the Lord* and *his love for the lost*. The converted tax collector arranged a party and invited the only friends someone like him could possibly have... his fellow hated tax collectors (those classified contemptuously by the Pharisees as "publicans and sinners")... ... And I propose to you... that this was the most sensible thing to do!

Matthew was no secret disciple. ... Attempts to live your life as a “secret disciple” makes no sense. ... We see that Matthew confesses his faith openly and unashamedly before his associates... (probably his only friends.)

This (of course) upset the Pharisees... because they ignored sinners. ... They stayed away from the tax collectors and other people who weren't ceremonially and culturally clean like themselves. ... The Pharisees would never attend such a dinner as this... and they were offended that Jesus and his disciples did attend. ... Please remember that fellowship around a table was taken seriously in Jesus' time. It was an act that implies deep unity.

It is my hope that the church I am a part of will not be like the Pharisees. I want the church I pastor... to be a people who come alongside... and minister to the social outcasts of our society. (Our community is full of them.) ... Who are the notorious sinners of our day...? ... Well... This might include those with interesting hair coloring and body piercing... and those who struggle with addictions (drug... alcohol... sexual perversions... homosexual men and women.) ... This doesn't mean we join them in their sin... but we do reach out to them because we love sinners. ... We realize what these Pharisees didn't realize — that we are all sinners in need of God's grace and mercy. ... We take seriously the words of Jesus... as he answered the Pharisees in verse 12: "*Those who are well don't need a doctor, but the sick do*"

Jesus' social interaction with notorious sinners scandalized the Pharisees of his own day... and it likewise tends to embarrass the spiritual snobs of our day... whose views of separation from worldliness... stress externals... rather than personal integrity. ... Jesus and His disciples had no qualms about associating with sinners... and Christian! Don't you dare hide your light under a basket... because of your own... or other people's legalistic scruples.

Fear of such compromise... cannot become an excuse for isolation from those who most need the message of the Kingdom. ... Associating with unbelievers... is one of the reasons I am motivated to teach at the community college in Bend... and I am extremely thankful for those of you who are praying that I will be "Jesus with skin on" in that environment.

Please look at verse 11 again... By observing the Pharisees, here... we can understand some of the characteristics of spiritual snobbery... that is still seen today in our churches.

### **Matthew 9:11**

Here is one of the most common characteristics of a spiritual snob. In fact we'll see it again in the next example... as well: They assume that their own convictions... are the standards by which everyone else must perform their ministry. ... Here... the Pharisees assume that Jesus... if He was any kind of leader at all... should have known better. Everyone should be able to recognize that THIS is not the way ministry is done.

While observing the feast... they drew conclusions critical of Jesus according to their misunderstanding (that what God wants most... from all of us... is keeping ourselves pure through personal sacrifices.) ... With their

misinterpretation... the Pharisees considered themselves to be the role models for the entire nation... never even considering that their standard was not God's standard.

It was suspicious enough to the Pharisees... that this so-called Messiah's disciples were an odd assortment of fishermen and other "unlearned and ignorant men" ... but now... the choice of a tax collector... and His display of friendship with other tax-collectors... was the last straw... for these spiritual snobs.

With calculated cunning... the Pharisees approached not Jesus... but His disciples... who they thought were easy prey.

This leads to another observation... about the character of spiritual snobs. They often lack the courage to speak directly to the person they are being critical of... directing their comments... at first... to easier targets.

In a church... for example... they often do not go to the church member... or the ministry leader - with whom they have a problem... but they call someone safe... like a friend... or another leader... perhaps the pastor or a deacon. ... This is to gain support for their criticism... but they create such division in the church... It is cowardly conduct that shows the corruption in the spiritual snob's character.

Now... here is yet a third observation from these Pharisees... about the character of spiritual snobbery. They are more concerned about their own appearance of holiness... than with helping people. ... They might try to make it seem as though - they are only trying to help... but really... they are more concerned with criticism... than encouragement... (with their own sense of outward respectability... than practical help.)

Again... I go back to my days right after I finished my first Greek class. I was much more interested in projecting what I thought at the time to be my own sense of outward respectability... than being a practical help to Pastor Bill.)

### **Matthew 9:12**

In other words... the great physician demanded... "*If a doctor only had patients who enjoyed good health, what kind of doctor would he be?*" ... A doctor goes where sick people are.

In this parable... Jesus takes assumes (for sake of argument) the position of the Pharisees. ... The "healthy" are those who think they are righteous... (the Pharisees)... and the "sick" are those who realize that they need Jesus' "medicine" (the notorious sinners.) ... It is to this second group that Jesus was sent... and He called them to repentance.

Those who are sure that they are good enough... can't be saved... because the first step in following Jesus... is acknowledging our need... and admitting that we don't have all the answers. ... We must first understand our position before God... and seek repentance.

During the Great Awakening, when the Spirit of God revived much of our nation's early faith, Jonathan Edwards was presiding over a massive prayer meeting. Eight hundred men were present.

Into that meeting a woman sent a message asking the men to pray for her husband. The note described a man who had become unloving, prideful, and difficult.

Edwards read the message in private and then, thinking that perhaps the man described was at this very gathering, made a bold request. Edwards read the note to the 800 men. Then he asked if the man who had been described would raise his hand, (so that the whole assembly could pray for him.) Three hundred men raised their hands.

### **Matthew 9:13**

In verse twelve... Jesus (for the sake of argument) assumed the Pharisee position that they were healthy... and that these tax collectors and sinners were sick. But here... as Jesus pushed them to examine the Scriptures a little more carefully... He shows that the Pharisees are not so healthy. He quoted the prophet Hosea:

#### **Hosea 6:6 (ESV)**

*For I desire steadfast love (HESSED is sometimes translated as Mercy)... For I desire HESSED)... and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

The reference to Hosea was appropriate. ... The burden of the book grew out of the tragedy in Hosea's family life... and the prophet's task was to show Israel the heart of God... which was broken over Israel's hardness and sin.

God was saying to Israel, "*You bring Me sacrifices as though I had some need for them. What I want... is for you to show you mercy.*" ... Jesus was saying... "Go and learn the heart of God.. There you will find my desire for the exact opposite of spiritual snobbery... God's desire is for us to show mercy"... which is very powerful!

Jay Evensen, an editor of the *Desert Morning News* (a Long Island newspaper) wrote a story which shows that "forgiveness has power to change the future"....

He wrote about Victoria Ruvolo, a 44-year-old collection agency manager, and 19-year-old Ryan Cushing. Mr. Cushing and his friends stole a credit card and then took off on a shopping spree...for no reason.

They stole a 20-pound frozen turkey... and ended up throwing it from their speeding vehicle... just for fun... headlong into the windshield of an oncoming vehicle – which was the automobile driven by Victoria Ruvolo. Victoria underwent surgery for six hours as metal plates and other pieces of hardware were fitted together in an effort to rebuild her face....

The prosecutor told Ruvolo... that for crimes such as this one... victims... like herself... often "feel no punishment is harsh enough." ... In fact... "Death doesn't even satisfy them," the attorney stated.

This however was not the sentiment of Victoria Ruvolo. ... She was primarily concerned with "salvaging the life of her 19-year-old assailant."

By the time her case came to court... Ryan Cushing faced the very real possibility of being sent to prison for the next 25 years... and returning to society as a middle-aged man... with no skills or any job prospects.

According to editor Evensen, " The rest of it, what happened the day this all played out in court, is the truly remarkable part."

The young man walked "carefully and tentatively" to where his victim was seated in the courtroom. With tears and in a whisper he apologized, "I'm so

sorry for what I did to you." He and Victoria embraced, both weeping. She stroked his head, patted him on the back, and comforted him. "It's OK," she said. "I just want you to make your life the best it can be." ... She insisted that he be offered a plea deal. ... So what he received... was to be put in the county jail for six months and placed on one year's probation.

Evensen reported that "hardened prosecutors, and even reporters, were choking back tears."

... ..

The next confrontation Jesus made against spiritual snobbery... was to an unexpected source of pomposity - *The disciples of John the Baptist.*

#### **Matthew 9:14**

Their issue lay in the fact that John was an ascetic. He showed religious devotion by denying himself of normal pleasures. His life was almost one continual fast. He ate only locusts and wild honey.... and he wore the most uncomfortable attire – even for their day. ... Naturally then... because John was so highly regarded... John's disciples thought that asceticism was the way to a truly holy life. ... It was a rite they viewed... as a vital component of worship.

Once again Jesus needed to confront the attempt that spiritual snobs often make... They assume that their own convictions... are the standards by which everyone else must do their ministry. ... Now... it is the disciples of John who assume that Jesus... if He was any kind of leader... should have known better.

This type of spiritual snobbery is all too common in churches today... and must be stopped. (Twice now we have seen it in our passage.) ... No one should place themselves above others... to whom God has given a stewardship of ministry... and try to impose upon them what they assume to be God's Own standards for the way they are to serve Him. ... Now of course... God does put overseers and ministry leaders over others who are in ministry. And these should be able to make suggestions and seek greater ministry effectiveness. ... But what we are seeing in our passage today are not those whom God has placed in positions of oversight over the person they are criticizing. ... Spiritual snobs audaciously place themselves over another person who is trying to do the work of ministry... and insinuate that anybody with half-a-brain would see their criticism is right.

Here is why these disciples of John saw their standard was such a no-brainer. ... The law required fasting for every Jew... on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29). However many other fasts had been added by religious Jews... especially by groups like the Pharisees. ... The pious Pharisees fasted every Monday and every Thursday. ... So it became a well-recognized and prominent form of outward piety in Judaism. But in the law... God only commanded it to be done once a year. ... I am certain that Jesus and His disciples obeyed the Law... but John's disciples assumed that **the only right way** to do ministry... was to show greater piety... by fasting more often.

The answer that Jesus gave John's disciples... was that the Christian Life is more of a feast... than it is a funeral.

In summary... Jesus' three-part answer to their question says... He is not an additive to the present religious system... but is a brand-new entity. ... Jesus is not like STP that you add to your car to make it run better - Jesus is **a new car**. ... You cannot mix law and grace... for they are incompatible. Christ gave three illustrations in answering their question about fasting.

### **Matthew 9:15**

Fasting is related to sadness or mourning. Fasting is a picture of mourning... of broken-heartedness. Oftentimes... people fast when things aren't going the way they are supposed to. ... Jesus... however... made it clear that... like the festivities at a wedding feast... this was not the time for fasting. ... During the week-long celebration of a wedding... **no one** fasted. Instead... this was a time for rejoicing and celebration because the bridegroom was present. ... It is clear that Jesus was speaking of Himself as the groom.

Throughout the Old Testament, God had pictured Himself as the husband, the groom, of His bride Israel. For instance, Hosea says,

#### **Hosea 2:16, 19-20 (ESV)**

*<sup>16</sup> "And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' <sup>19</sup> And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. <sup>20</sup> I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.*

For generations God's people longed for the groom to come... (for God to come and save them.) ... They had prayed and mourned and fasted... waiting for that day. ... And now... Jesus says... the day is here. After a thousand years of waiting... the King had finally come! ... This is a time for

feasting... not fasting. ... You don't sit around at a wedding... mourning and fasting.

Along with the wedding illustration... notice please... that the Lord revealed to John's disciples - a change was coming. ... The Bridegroom would not always be present... He was to be taken away. ...The Lord foretold the removal of His visible presence... the coming change in the dispensations... and the dawning of an age during which the Lord would be absent. "*The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast...*" Jesus was predicting His Own arrest and crucifixion... and then the Church age that we live in now. ... Today... fasting is more appropriate.

Although for believers today... fasting has real value... we have been given no commandment to fast. ... If you choose to fast... do it as a means of prostrating yourself before God... because you are in need of His mercy and of His help. ... Keep in mind... however... that your sacrifice is not an attempt to obligate God. He will never be indebted to us. We are to Him.

### **Matthew 9:16**

This new cloth is unshrunk cloth and after some washings would shrink and cause the material to come apart. The illustration simply shows the incompatibility of law and grace and of the religious traditions of the day with Christ's teachings.

*The Lord had not come to patch up the old garment of Judaism.* John's disciples thought Jesus had come to reform their religion... but they were wrong. Judaism was obsolete. It was to be torn as the veil of the Temple would be torn. The new cloth of the kingdom was too strong to be patched

onto the tatters of rabbinic Judaism. The two were incompatible. It made no sense to tear the new dispensation to pieces to try to salvage the old.

### **Matthew 9:17**

In Jesus' day wine was stored in containers made of skin... usually goat skin. New containers had a measure of elasticity and could expand as the pressure of the fermenting wine within increased. ... Old containers became stiff and lost their resilience... It would be foolish to put new wine in them. This illustration was the Lord's clear declaration that the old dispensation was to be replaced by the new.

The old was right for *its* day and age. ... But now it was time for the *new* — a new *dispensation*... a new covenant... a new dynamic... new principles... new life... new methods... a new "container."

Christianity was to ***replace*** Judaism altogether. The church is *not* Israel... but something entirely new... and unique in God's dealings with men. ... Covenant theologians... I believe misunderstand or ignore what Christ says here. ... A major brand of Christianity claims that the church always existed — first in the form of Judaism... and now in our present era of the church age. No. Jesus completely distinguishes them as ***separate*** entities.

That is why we are not like those who say the church is the new Israel... with their Christianized systems of priests... sacraments... feasts... fasts... holy days... rituals... calendars... and liturgies. The Lord envisioned no such thing. ... We are *not* new wine that is poured into *old* wineskins.

But let's be careful that we don't act like spiritual snobs... looking down our noses and saying "*We got it right*". Our passage this morning condemns spiritual snobbery.

So I close today with this analogy. Each of us could be compared to a light bulb. One shines with 50 watts of holiness, another has only 25 watts. Maybe the most stellar Christians are 200 watts. But these comparisons become trite in the presence of the sun.

In the face of God... our different levels of piety are puny and meaningless. It makes no sense to think that we burn so much brighter and therefore can place ourselves above others and manifest spiritual snobbery. If God has not placed you in a position of oversight... (If you have placed yourself there)... It is foolish... it is damaging... and it is (what we have just seen)... something that Christ confronts.

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