

Text: Matthew 10 (conclusion) - 12

Section 1

I want to begin today by briefly making a better attempt to answer Corey's question than I did last week. Corey asked, "Do you believe everyone has the opportunity to be saved?" I replied, "I believe everyone has the *responsibility* to be saved," and attempted to explain Calvinism and Arminianism in four minutes or less, with no prepared notes. The main thing that I would say differently is that we as Christians are to inform everyone of their *responsibility* to confess Christ as Savior and Lord, and thus give them the *opportunity* to repent and believe. I am not convinced that everyone has the *ability* to do so, since Ephesians 2 teaches that the faith to be saved comes not from within ourselves, but is the gift of God; and John 6 teaches that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him. That's a Calvinist position, and some of you may disagree. *That's ok.*

In my opinion, this is not an issue that should divide genuine believers. In fact, most of us in this room probably fall somewhere between the two positions! I say this because full-blown Arminianism teaches that a true believer can lose his salvation, and I'm confident that no one in this room holds that position, but rather holds the Calvinist position that those that are truly saved will endure to the end. Additionally, not very many people seem to know that Jacobus Arminius, who came along a generation later than John Calvin, heaped praise upon the majority of Calvin's theological writings, and encouraged his students to study them. Finally, unless you're prepared to throw out John Bunyan, Charles Spurgeon, Francis Schaeffer, and John MacArthur (all Calvinists), or John and Charles Wesley, Billy Graham, and Norman Geisler (all at least partly Arminian), you might as well learn to get along with those that might disagree on this matter.

I do lean more to the Calvinist side of this argument than the Arminian, simply because I think the Calvinist view is more in line with the teachings of Scripture. Others disagree, and that's fine. Given more time, we'd discuss this further. However, I want to put this topic to rest for the moment by discussing items about which proponents of both systems agree.

1. Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, came into this world, lived a sinless life, died in order to atone for our sins, rose again the third day, lives and reigns today, and will come again to judge the living and the dead, and to consolidate His reign over all of creation.
2. It is the duty of Christians to share the Gospel with all people, as commanded by our Lord in Matthew 28.
3. *Everyone* that repents and believes in response to the Gospel, confessing Christ as Savior and Lord, will be saved, as taught in Romans 10.
4. Everyone that rejects the Gospel will be damned, as taught in John 3, and Revelation 20-21.

These essentials of the Gospel are clearly taught in Scripture, and are not denied by orthodox proponents of either system. All the men I mentioned a moment ago would agree that our primary responsibilities as Christians are to love the Lord Jesus Christ with all of our being and others as ourselves, and to serve Him by studying His Word, obeying His commands, and sharing the Good News with everyone we can. While Calvinists and Arminians disagree as to how exactly God works in the process of bringing a person to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, all are in agreement regarding the responsibility of Christians to share the Word and the responsibility of those we seek to convert to repent and believe.

Section 2

16"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17"But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; 18and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. 19"But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say. 20"For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. 21"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 22"You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. 23"But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes. (Matthew 10:16-23)

Jesus said that His followers will be persecuted. If we are truly following Him, we are to expect rejection by the world, and even verbal and/or physical persecution. That unrighteous governments and authorities will do this is not surprising, but this will and does occur even at the hands of "religious" people, even those who claim to serve the God whose servants they are persecuting.

2"They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. 3"These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. 4"But these things I have

spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. (John 16:2-4)

How can one that claims to serve God persecute His servants? Remember, the Gospel is not palatable to the natural man. By nature, we do not like to have our thoughts pointed out, we do not like to be told we are sinners, we do not like to be told that God is just and will send to Hell forever all people that do not repent and believe. As such, unregenerate people that want to maintain a show of religion will build churches and find teachers that will tell them what they want to hear. Ultimately, these are enemies of Christ and the Gospel, and persecutors of true believers.

3For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

When we are questioned and/or imprisoned for professing Christ, we are not to plan ahead or think about what we are to say, but are to trust in the Holy Spirit to give us the words to speak. God is not impressed with polished oration, scholarly acumen, or worldly wisdom—in fact, He explicitly chooses those things and people that the world deems base, foolish, and unworthy to be His instruments. While we must certainly be devoted students of the Word in order to know and serve Him better, ultimately He wants us to trust Him, simply, and to proclaim His Word, simply.

18For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19For it is written,

"I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE,

AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." 20Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29so that no man may boast before God. 30But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31so that, just as it is written, **"LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."** (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

Section 3

24"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25"It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! 26"Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27"What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. 28"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31"So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. 32"Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33"But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 10:24-33)

Jesus says that if we confess Him, He will confess us. What a great promise that is!

9that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

However, He also states that those who deny Him will not be saved. Does this, then, mean that one can lose his salvation? Not at all—we've already read the promise of eternal security today:

37"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. (John 6:37)

But, I would like to reiterate one verse from the previous section:

22" You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. (Matthew 10:22)

Those that are truly saved cannot become unsaved, but not every professor is a true believer. Consider once again the Parable of the Sower, in which three groups of people confessed Christ, but only one of those groups of people was ultimately saved.

14" The sower sows the word. 15" These are the ones who are beside the road where the word is sown; and when they hear, immediately Satan comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them. 16" In a similar way these are the ones on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy; 17 and they have no firm root in themselves, but are only temporary; then, when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately they fall away. 18" And others are the ones on whom seed was sown among the thorns; these are the ones who have heard the word, 19 but the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 20" And those are the ones on whom seed was sown on the good soil; and they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold." (Mark 4:14-20)

A true, saving encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ consists of a faith that will not be shaken by any amount of persecution—true believers will *never* deny Him. We are told to fear only Him that can *destroy both soul and body in Hell*. Mere men can kill the body only—why should we fear this? As believers, we have only eternity in Heaven with the Lord to expect if we are killed! Paul, in fact, noted that believers are in His presence immediately upon physical death.

6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord-- 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight-- 8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:6-8)

We are to fear God only, as He can and will punish unbelievers, body and soul, forever in the lake of fire.

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Ultimately, we must trust God's wisdom, love, and provision, knowing that everything will work out in the end for our good, and His glory.

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Section 4

34" Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35" For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; 36 and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. 37" He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38" And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39" He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it. (Matthew 10:34-39)

Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, claims to have brought not peace, but a sword to the earth. What does He mean? The sword He has brought is the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

This Sword reveals the inner nature of man, the sin and filth that so permeates each of us apart from His grace and forgiveness. People do *not* like this, and the unregenerate will turn on anyone that preaches the true Gospel.

19" This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20" For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be

exposed. 21"But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." (John 3:19-21)

If we must choose between family and Christ, we must choose Christ. If we must choose between property, career, reputation, *life*, and Christ, we must choose Christ. If we must sacrifice everything we have and are for the sake of Christ, we must do so. The reward for doing so is worth it!

28Peter began to say to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You." 29Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, 30but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. (Mark 10:28-30)

Section 5

40"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41"He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42"And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." (Matthew 10:40-42)

In even the smallest things, we are to be servants of Christ. Don't seek "greatness" as the world understands greatness—even the most mundane tasks, when undertaken seeking His will and His glory, are deemed worthy of reward.

17Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Colossians 3:17)

Section 6

1When Jesus had finished giving instructions to His twelve disciples, He departed from there to teach and preach in their cities. 2Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" 4Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: 5the BLIND RECEIVE SIGHT and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM. 6"And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me." 7As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8"But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! 9"But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. 10"This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.' 11"Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force. 13"For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14"And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come. 15"He who has ears to hear, let him hear. (Matthew 11:1-15)

We discussed this passage in part last Sunday. In a brief "crisis of faith," if you will, John the Baptist asked whether Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and Jesus referred to His works as evidence of His office. After this, He praises John and identifies John's office as the one prophesied by Malachi, that of a messenger sent to prepare the way for Messiah's immanent coming.

1"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:1)

5"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. (Malachi 4:5)

Section 7

16"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, 17and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' 18"For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' 19"The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." 20Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 21"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth

and ashes. 22"Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. 23"And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. 24"Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you." (Matthew 11:16-24)

We also discussed the latter of these verses last Sunday. It is a grievous sin for anyone to resist God and choose his own way, but how much worse is it for those that have had ample opportunity to hear the Gospel preached and even the privilege of seeing it confirmed by signs and wonders!

The first part of this passages illustrates that unrepentant sinners will always find fault with those sent to them. They were critical of John for his austere lifestyle, and then criticized Jesus for His more relaxed one. Those that are minded to reject the Gospel will always find some fault, some excuse not to believe, and fulfill Paul's words in 1 Corinthians:

14But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

Section 8

25At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. 26"Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. 27"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. 28"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30"For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:25-30)

Here Jesus praises the Father for His wisdom in bringing the lowest members of society unto Himself, and not the highest. Those that will come to Christ must humble themselves—He has no place for a prideful and self-righteous individual. He credits the Father for deliberately hiding the Truth from some, and revealing it to others, illustrating again that the power to come to Christ lies not within ourselves, but is granted to us by the Father.

44"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44)

Christ told us to enter His rest by taking His yoke. Wait, I thought a yoke was an instrument of labor and of servitude, not of rest. It is, indeed. We do not come to Christ in order to do nothing—we receive Him by confessing Him as Savior and as *Lord*, or master. We are not saved to a life of ease and comfort, but one of work and obedience, in which Christ graciously enables us to serve Him effectively. Given the choice of enslavement to Christ or enslavement to sin, serving Christ is indeed easier, more pleasant, and the only Way that ultimately leads to eternal life.

9that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. (Romans 10:9-10)

Section 9

1At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples became hungry and began to pick the heads of grain and eat. 2But when the Pharisees saw this, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples do what is not lawful to do on a Sabbath." 3But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, 4how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 5"Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? 6"But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. 7"But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8"For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." 9Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. 10And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"--so that they might accuse Him. 11And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? 12"How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." 13Then He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand!" He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like the other. 14But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him. 15But Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. Many followed Him, and He healed them all, 16and warned them not to tell who He was. 17This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

18"BEHOLD, MY SERVANT WHOM I HAVE CHOSEN;
MY BELOVED IN WHOM MY SOUL is WELL-PLEASED;
I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT UPON HIM,

*AND HE SHALL PROCLAIM JUSTICE TO THE GENTILES.
 19"HE WILL NOT QUARREL, NOR CRY OUT;
 NOR WILL ANYONE HEAR HIS VOICE IN THE STREETS.
 20"A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF,
 AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT,
 UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY.
 21"AND IN HIS NAME THE GENTILES WILL HOPE." (Matthew 12:1-21)*

Jesus castigated the Pharisees for their rigid and self-righteous interpretation of the Sabbath law. The Jews were to set aside one day in seven for rest and study of the Word, yet God never intended that this day be one in which mercy was denied or that good works for Him or others be abandoned. Jesus pointed out the Pharisees' hypocrisy, and condemned it.

Those of us in the New Covenant era do not have such a strict Sabbath restriction regarding a certain day. We are commanded to gather together for worship, study, and edification, but not to observe a strict rest as the Jews did. Paul on at least two occasions noted that such a restriction was not applicable to believers under the New Covenant.

16Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- 17things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17)

4Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. 6He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. (Romans 14:4-6)

Furthermore, the author of Hebrews identifies the believer's "Sabbath rest," as the rest one enters into when he confesses Christ (remember the final verses of Chapter 11?). When we come to Christ in faith we continue to live for Him, but we have rested from seeking salvation through our own works, instead trusting Him to impute His righteousness to us.

1Therefore, let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. 2For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. 3For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,

THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,"although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "AND GOD RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORKS"; 5and again in this passage, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST." 6Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, 7He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,

DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS." 8For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. 9So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. 11Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:1-11)

Section 10

22Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. 23All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" 24But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." 25And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26>If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? 27>If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. 28"But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29"Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. 30"He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters. 31"Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. 32"Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. (Matthew 12:22-32)

Jesus spoke of the "unforgivable sin," and Brother Skip expounded upon this topic very recently. Ultimately, he said, the "unforgivable sin" is to reject Christ. In an earlier passage Jesus stated that one's punishment will increase or decrease in intensity depending on the opportunity one had to hear and believe the Gospel. Ultimately, though, everyone that does not repent and believe will suffer eternal torment, while everyone that does repent and believe will enjoy eternal life.

16"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17"For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. 18"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18)

Section 11

33"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. 34"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35"The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. 36"But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37"For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:33-37)

Our words are an indicator of whether or not our hearts are right with Him. We must seek always to speak good words full of grace, sharing the Good News and building up our fellow believers. Jesus condemned both evil speech *and* careless, idle speech. How guilty are we of idle speech, carrying on about matters of no importance while people are dying in need of a Savior? The Bible identifies this as sin!

29Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. (Ephesians 4:29)

Section 12

38Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." 39But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; 40for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. 41"The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. 42"The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. 43"Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. 44"Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. 45"Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation." (Matthew 12:38-45)

The Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign—how many signs did they need? They had already seen Jesus heal both body and spirit in numerous individuals, yet they continued to ask for a sign. Now, asking God for confirmation of His commands and promises is not entirely bad: Gideon and Hezekiah, for example, requested and received signs to confirm God's will and to increase their faith. The Pharisees, however, had no intention of believing no matter how many signs they saw, though Jesus here predicted His death and resurrection as the ultimate sign of His power and office. In the following story, Abraham also stated that those whose hearts are hardened against the Word of God will not believe despite seeing a great sign.

19"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. 20"And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. 22"Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23"In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. 24"And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' 25"But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' 27"And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house-- 28for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29"But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30"But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' 31"But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'" (Luke 16:19-31)

Section 13

46While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. 47Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." 48But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" 49And stretching out His hand

toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! 50"For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

God graciously allows us the privilege of serving Him for all eternity if we will only repent and believe, confessing Jesus as Savior and Lord. His grace extends so far that we become not only servants, but *children* of God. Jesus identifies His followers as His family—what a privilege to be so closely identified with Him!

14For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:14-17)