

## JESUS' CRIMES ACCORDING TO MEN

### The Law and the Tradition of the Elders

As a meticulous Prosecutor, Satan would have been attentive to everything Jesus did, in hope of catching him in some infraction of the law and using that as further justification for destroying him. His sons were of the same mind. We often find Israel's leaders watching Jesus carefully in order to catch him in some error (e.g., Mk. 3:1–2; Lk. 14:1; 20:20), which was hard to do, for Jesus studiously observed the law. Jesus was an obedient servant of God who dutifully kept the commandments and taught others to do the same (Mk. 10:17–19). Moreover, whenever a tradition developed by Israel's elders did not contradict the law, Jesus observed it as well (e.g., Jn. 10:22–23), and he told his disciples to follow his example (Mt. 23:1–3).

The only thing Jesus ever rebelled against was the pressure to abandon his Father's righteousness in order to please men. Jesus was led by the Spirit in everything. But his faithful observance of the law, and the tradition of the elders when it was consistent with the law, did not prevent his enemies from accusing him of being a transgressor.

#### Crime #1, according to men: *Breaking the Sabbath*

God ordained the weekly Sabbath as a day of rest for His people (Ex. 20:8–11) but by Jesus' time, Israel's elders had changed it into a day of worship. And to assure that God's people used that day for worship, the elders devised a host of Sabbath rules which made it illegal for them to do much of anything but worship. In Acts 1:12, for example, we learn that the elders had imposed upon Israel a rule restricting the distance a Jew could walk on the Sabbath,<sup>1</sup> which means that if someone got his rest by taking a long stroll on the Sabbath, he was out of luck. He'd have to get his rest some other day.

In a religion of rites and rules, *things* always end up being elevated above people. Ministers of such religions weigh people down with traditions, rituals, and doctrines that do not minister to their spiritual needs; they serve only to perpetuate the religion. Jesus angrily condemned Satan's sons for doing that to God's people: "Woe to you experts in the law! You load people with burdens hard to bear, but you yourselves don't touch the same burdens with one of your fingers!" (Lk. 11:46). God's heart is for His people, to make them free and happy, not to laden them with rites and rules.

Tragically, Israel's leaders had also elevated their traditions to a level of authority that belonged solely to God's commandments. At times, they even honored those traditions above God's commandments (Mt. 15:1–2). That, Jesus would not tolerate, and he boldly rebuked them for "making the word of God of no effect by your tradition" (Mk. 7:13).

Once, some scribes and Pharisees who were following Jesus through a wheat field criticized him for not reproving his disciples for transgressing the tradition of the elders which forbade plucking and eating heads of grain on a Sabbath (Mt. 12:1–2). Jesus tried to explain to them that "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk. 2:27), but they did not understand. Jesus was unmoved by their grumbling because he knew that Moses' law specifically allowed hungry travelers to do what those disciples were doing, with no restrictions concerning the day:

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<sup>1</sup> This was probably based on a misapplication of Exodus 16:29b: "Let every man remain in his tent. Let no one leave his place on the seventh day."

## Deuteronomy 23

24. If you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat grapes, as much as you like, but you may not put any into your vessel.
25. If you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck ears of grain with your hand, but you may not wield a sickle on your neighbor's grain.

Jesus refused to acknowledge any tradition that encroached upon the liberty that God had granted to His people, and Satan, knowing the Scriptures, may have agreed with Jesus on that point. Using biblical examples, Jesus tried to help his upset disciples to see that God cares more about people than about ceremonial correctness:

## Matthew 12

3. He said to them, "Haven't you read what David did when he was hungry, he and those with him,
4. how he entered into the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which wasn't lawful for him to eat, nor for those with him, but only for the priests?
5. Or haven't you read in the law that on the Sabbath day, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath [by offering sacrifices, lighting candles, etc.] and are guiltless?"

Jesus went on to tell them, "If you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice', you would not have condemned the guiltless" (Mt. 12:7). But when things become more important than people, innocent people always end up being condemned.

Jesus concluded his conversation in the wheat field by telling the frustrated Pharisees, "The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Mt. 12:8). He could have said it this way: "If I say that what someone is doing is okay, then it is. You don't get to make rules for my Sabbath." But at that time, a comment like that would have challenged the faith of all his disciples, those who were eating the grain as well as those who were upset about it. Jesus had to be patient, like his Father.

Crime #2, according to men: *Healing on the Sabbath*

Jesus was frequently condemned by sons of the Accuser for healing people on the Sabbath, but he refused to stop doing it. He even dared to heal people on the Sabbath before their very eyes, not just on the Sabbath, but in their synagogue!

## Mark 3

1. He went again into the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand.
2. And they were watching him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath, that they might bring an accusation against him.
3. But he told the man who had the hand that was withered, "Get up in the midst!"
4. And then he asked them, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do harm? To save life or to kill?" But they were silent.
5. And when he had looked around on them with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their heart, he told the man, "Stretch out your hand!" And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored, as healthy as the other one.
6. And the Pharisees went out immediately and began to take counsel against him with the Herodians, how they might destroy him.

By healing on the day God set apart for rest, Jesus was breaking no commandment of God; it was Satan's sons who forbade healing on the Sabbath. That was just another of their traditions which elevated a thing, the Sabbath day, above the needs of people, for being healed is one of the best forms of rest.

They were intelligent and well-meaning men, I am sure, who devised Israel's traditions, but they entertained some wrong ideas about God, and wrong ideas about God lead otherwise sensible people into spiritual darkness. A wrong idea about God has the power to blind the mind to the simplest of truths. Gorgias of Leontini, an ancient heathen philosopher, understood this and wrote, "The power of speech over the constitution of the soul can be compared with the effect of drugs on the bodily state. . . . By means of a harmful kind of persuasion, words can drug and bewitch the soul."<sup>2</sup> Plato, another ancient philosopher, made a similar observation when he said, "Whatever deceives, bewitches."<sup>3</sup>

In Jesus' time, most of Israel had been taught wrong ideas about God, and as a result, they were blinded, not by a witch, but by God, for He had turned them over to the lies they loved:

John 12

37. Although so many miracles had been done by Jesus in their presence, they did not believe in him.

. . .

39. The reason they could not believe is that, as Isaiah said,

40. "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them."

#### Crime #3, according to men: *Claiming Equality with God*

Jesus confessed to being God's Son, but he never committed the blasphemy of claiming to be God's equal. Nevertheless, his enemies accused him of doing so:

John 5

17. Jesus answered them, "Up until now, my Father has been working, and so, I work."

18. Because of this, the Jews then wanted all the more to kill him, for not only was he breaking the Sabbath, *they said*, but he was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

How they came to the conclusion that Jesus calling God his Father meant that he was claiming to be equal with God is hard to see. When I call George Clark my father, I certainly am not claiming to be His equal. But then, spiritual blindness causes men to draw bizarre conclusions from innocuous statements. The men who made this strange accusation against Jesus made it in spite of Jesus' repeated confessions of complete dependence upon God for everything, even his life (Jn. 6:57). Jesus plainly stated that the Father was greater than he (Jn. 14:28), and he never felt or acted any other way.

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<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Freeman, translator, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 133.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, Chapter 19.

Satan knew that Jesus had not claimed to be God's equal, but men's pathological hatred of Jesus compelled them to accuse him of doing so. Satan hated Jesus, too, but in God's court, as always, he would have gone by the Book, and his charges against Jesus, which follow, would have been based on the law of Moses, not emotion.

#### JESUS' CRIMES ACCORDING TO SATAN

##### Crime #1, according to Satan: *A New Standard*

In one of Jesus' earliest sermons, he proclaimed a new standard for Israel which appeared to contradict the law which God had given them:

Matthew 5

21. You have heard that it was said to those of ancient time, "You shall not murder," and "Whoever commits murder will be liable to the judgment."

22a. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother without cause will be liable to the Judgment.

...

27. You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery."

28. But I say to you that every man who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

...

31. It has been said, "Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce,"

32. but I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except in the case of immorality, causes her to commit adultery.

...

33. You have heard that it was said to those in the past, "You shall not forswear yourself, but you shall pay your vows to the LORD."

34a. But I say to you, do not swear at all.

...

38. You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

39. But I say to you, do not resist the evildoer. On the contrary, whoever strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.

...

43. You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy."

44. But I say to you, love your enemies; bless those who curse you; do good to those who hate you; and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you.

If Satan, a strict law-and-order Prosecutor, did not view the Messiah as above God's law, then he would have considered Jesus a criminal for teaching other than what the law said. Nobody in heaven or earth knew that the Messiah was about to initiate a new covenant with Israel, the standard for which would be the Spirit, not the law. Being ignorant of that, Satan could only have concluded that Jesus was a false teacher. However, Jesus wasn't preaching *contrary* to the law; he was preaching the righteousness of God, which was *beyond* the law.

If Jesus had been trying of himself to establish a new standard in Israel different from the law, it would indeed have been a crime – but he was doing it because God wanted it done. Jesus said, “I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should speak and what I should say” (Jn. 12:49). But who could believe that?

Crime #2, according to Satan: *Drinking Blood*

As I said, human injustice against Jesus was transparent, but when Satan condemned him, his accusations were founded on Scripture; they were not irrational. God’s commandments to Israel prohibiting the consumption of blood is a case in point. Those commandments were so plain that the meaning could not be missed:

Leviticus 7

- 26. You shall not consume any blood in any of your dwellings, whether of bird or beast.
- 27. Any soul who consumes any blood, that soul shall be cut off from his people.

Leviticus 17

- 10. If any man of the house of Israel or of any stranger who dwells among them consumes any kind of blood, I will set my face against that soul who consumes the blood, and I will cut him off from among his people.

No one in Israel could have doubted the meaning of those commandments; under penalty of death, no one was to consume blood. But Jesus stood up in the synagogue at Capernaum and made this astonishing declaration:

John 6

- 53. “Truly, truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.
- 54. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I’ll raise him up on the last day.”

To many of Jesus’ disciples, and no doubt to others in the synagogue that day, it seemed that Jesus was forcing them to choose between him and God, for he was clearly contradicting God’s commandment forbidding the consumption of blood. Some of his disciples were outraged, and they “went back to former things, and walked with him no longer” (Jn. 6:66). As for Satan, this was just the sort of thing he was looking for. He was the Prosecutor of Moses’ law, and the law was clearly on the side of the offended disciples. And according to the punishment prescribed by God for drinking blood, what Jesus said was clear justification for killing him.

Before the indignant disciples stormed away, Jesus tried to explain to them that he was speaking spiritually and that he was not saying they should drink his physical blood. He told them, “It is the Spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The things that I am telling you, they are spirit, and they are life!” (Jn. 6:63). But they would not listen. They had heard all they wanted to hear from this man, for his doctrine was, to them, an obvious crime against the law of God, and Satan agreed. God had forbidden the consumption of “any blood”, so why would that not include the kind of blood this Messiah was talking about, whatever it was?

It was because those who walked away from Jesus knew and were devoted to the law that they were so offended by Jesus' teaching. "*What sane man would teach such a doctrine?*" those disciples would have thought. But the disciples who stayed did not understand Jesus any better than those who went away. Nobody understood Jesus. And we would not have understood Jesus any better than they did, had we been there with them. Paul exhorted the saints to humbly examine themselves (2Cor. 13:5a), so it may worthwhile to consider whether we would have stayed with a man we did not understand or been offended and walked away, Bible in hand.

### *Feeling the Truth*

Jesus, unmoved by the desertions, asked his twelve disciples if they wanted to go away, too (Jn. 6:67). Peter's reply to Jesus, "To whom shall we go?" reveals something important about Peter and the few others who stayed. Although Peter was as much in the dark about what Jesus meant as the ones who left, his reply reveals that he loved what he felt when he was with Jesus so much that he could not leave him. In this, Peter was doing what some Christian ministers tell their congregations not to do; he was going by his feelings. What else could Peter have done? He was certainly not "going by the Bible"; the disciples who forsook Jesus were doing that.

It is important to understand that the offended disciples were not judging God's truth; no man can do that. Rather, the truth was judging them, for every man's reaction to the truth is God's verdict on his soul. The disciples who walked away from Jesus saw evil in his words because evil was in their hearts. They did not feel the truth of Jesus' words, as Peter did, because God would not allow them to feel it. They could no longer stay with Jesus because God judged them unworthy to stay with His Son. They felt they had to leave, but that was God's decision, not theirs.

The Word of God cannot be judged by man; that Word created man, and man cannot judge his Creator. Whenever God's Word comes, it comes not to test man's head, but the heart, and Jesus' twelve disciples passed the test. And because others failed the test that day and walked away, the number of Satan's accomplices increased.

### *Crime #3, according to Satan: A Friend of Sinners*

Satan would also have seen justification for killing Jesus in the fact that wherever Jesus went, he had more in common with rank sinners than with the more respectable members of society (Mt. 11:19; Mk. 2:15–16). Those whom Jesus called Satan's sons, highly regarded men all, were also indignant at Jesus' association with sinners (e.g., Lk. 7:36–39). But Jesus saw through their appearance of righteousness and boldly assured them that God would welcome sinners into His kingdom before He would welcome them (Mt. 21:31b). Satan and his sons would have confidently condemned that as heretical nonsense, based on the law's clear judgment of harlots and drunkards, and the like, as worthy of death (e.g., Lev. 21:9; Dt. 21:18–21).

When Satan's sons complained that Jesus was not maintaining an appropriate distance between himself and sinners, he did not back down:

#### Matthew 9

10. As he was reclining for a meal in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and reclined with Jesus and his disciples.
11. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with tax collectors and sinners?"

12. But Jesus, hearing that, told them, “Those who are well don’t need a doctor, but those who are sick.
13. But go learn what it means, ‘I delight in mercy, and not sacrifice’. For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Sinners who came to Jesus found welcome and hope, but what was especially meaningful to them was that in Jesus, they found someone with the courage to love them publicly, even in the presence of men considered to be the most respectable in Israel:

#### Luke 7

36. A certain man [named Simon], one of the Pharisees, asked him to eat with him. And so, he went to the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table.
37. And behold, a woman of the city who was a sinner, having learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster flask of perfume.
38. And as she stood behind, at his feet, crying, she began to wet his feet with the tears, and she wiped them dry with the hair of her head, and then she tenderly kissed his feet and anointed *them* with the perfume.
39. Seeing this, the Pharisee who had invited him said within himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.”
40. Then Jesus answered and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he said, “Teacher, say on.”
41. “There were two men in debt to a certain lender. The one owed five hundred denarii, and the other, fifty.
42. When they had nothing to pay, he freely forgave them both. So now, tell me, which of them will love him more?”
43. Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one to whom he forgave the more.” He said to him, “You have judged rightly.”
44. And then, turning to the woman, he said to Simon, “See this woman? When I came into your home, you provided no water for my feet, but she washed my feet with tears and dried them with the hair of her head.
45. You gave me no kiss, but she, from the time I came in, has not stopped kissing my feet.
46. You didn’t anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume.
47. I tell you, it is because her sins, which are many, have been forgiven that she has loved much, but the one who is forgiven a little, loves a little.”
48. Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Finally, Jesus fearlessly provoked Satan’s sons when he declared, before the people, what their spirits were really like:

#### Matthew 23

25. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but inside, they are full of greed and injustice.
26. You blind Pharisee! Clean first what is inside the cup and dish so that the outside of them may also be clean.

27. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You're like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear to be so very lovely, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.
28. Yes, that is how you are! You outwardly appear very righteous to men, but inwardly, you're full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

The Pharisees, priests, and scribes were more useful to Satan than were harlots and drunkards because they were so much like him. They diligently maintained proper form by fastidiously following the rules, as Satan had always done, and they, like him, trusted in that kind of righteousness. The sins of harlots, drunkards, and the like, on the other hand, could not be hidden, which made them easy targets for hypocrites. But Jesus never shot at easy targets. He didn't have to because such sinners already know they are guilty, and in Jesus' presence, many of them sensed a peace they could feel nowhere else. Satan and his sons never felt that way.

#### Crime #4, according to Satan: *What Defiles a Man*

Jesus knew truth about God that was so foreign to his followers that if he had preached it before they received God's kind of life, they could not have borne it. He told them so during the Last Supper,

John 16

12. I still have many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them right now.  
13a. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he'll guide you into all truth.

It was not time for certain New Testament truths to be revealed, and it would have been sin to teach them before God's appointed time because those truths would have destroyed souls, not saved them. For example, before God revealed it to Paul, the doctrine that the rites and rules of the law were "dead works", useless for salvation, was a damnable heresy, for if Israel had believed it and ceased from the law, they would have been damned. It is sin not to do what God requires, and He required the law, until He did not. True doctrine, then, is false doctrine until God ordains it to be preached, and knowing that, Jesus kept certain truths to himself while he was here, for the good of those who believed in him.

But there was a day when it appears that Jesus did not do that. It was a day when Jesus was especially exasperated at the blindness of people's heart and weary to the bone from years of dealing with disciples who understood nothing. In that state, Jesus proclaimed a doctrine that clearly contradicted God's prohibition concerning eating unclean meats (Lev. 11). As in the case of the commandment not to consume blood, the law was perfectly clear on this point:

Leviticus 11

42. Everything that moves on its belly, and everything that moves about with four or more feet, of every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, you shall not eat, for they are an abomination.
43. You shall not make yourselves abominable with any swarming thing that swarms, and you shall not make yourselves unclean with them and defile yourselves with them.
44. I am the LORD your God and you shall sanctify yourselves, and you shall be holy, for I am holy, and you shall not make yourselves unclean with any swarming thing that creeps upon the earth.



On that day, extremely irritated, Jesus blasted the scribes and Pharisees who condemned his disciples for not washing their hands before they ate. Then, Jesus angrily summoned the people to him. This is the moment Jesus came closest to destroying people with knowledge that was ahead of its time:

Matthew 15

10. He called the multitude to him and told them, “Listen, and understand!

11. It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth! That defiles a man!”

Jesus’ disciples knew, as did the Pharisees and Satan, that the law plainly stated that people *were* defiled if they ate something unclean (Lev. 11:43–44). Satan was glad to have this ammunition against Jesus, and his sons grumbled so bitterly about it that Jesus’ disciples were troubled:

12. His disciples came to him and said, “Did you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard that?”

13. But he [still angry] answered and said, “Every plant that my heavenly Father did not plant will be uprooted.

14. Leave them! They are blind guides of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

Peter, sincere as ever, then spoke up. He assumed that Jesus must have been speaking another parable, for, surely, he did not literally mean what he said:

15. Peter answered and said to him, “Explain this parable to us.”

16. But Jesus [still angry] said, “Are you still without understanding, too?”

17. Don’t you yet see that everything that goes into the mouth passes on to the belly and then is discharged into the latrine?

18. But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart; those things defile a man!

19. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, immoral acts, thefts, false testimonies, blasphemies.

20. These are the things that defile a man. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man!”

We know that Jesus never did evil, for he was without sin (Heb. 4:15), and that is true even here, when he angrily declared New Testament truth to the helplessly ignorant multitude. I can explain what he meant by drinking his blood, that he was not contradicting the law. But I cannot explain how his teaching in this case could be taken in a spiritual sense and, so, did not actually contradict the law. The law plainly said that eating unclean things would defile a person, and Jesus’ doctrine that day plainly said otherwise. It was the truth, but it was truth that belonged on this side of Pentecost (cf. 1Cor. 6:12–13a; 8:8; 1Tim. 4:4).

### *Contrary to the Law*

In Jesus’ defense, if the worst thing he ever did was tell God’s people too much truth one day, that alone would make him the holiest person ever to walk the earth. But that defense leaves us with unanswered questions. It is better just to take into consideration the fact that God Himself once grew so frustrated with the wickedness of His people that He commanded Hosea – contrary to the law – to find a

harlot and marry her, to show them what they had done to Him (Hos. 1:2–3). And later, for the same reason, He told Hosea to take a man’s wife away from him and live with her in adultery (Hos. 3:1–5). And at about the same time, God commanded Isaiah to take a certain prophetess and, in the presence of witnesses, father a child by her (Isa. 8:1–3). All those acts were, under normal circumstances, immoral deeds which God’s law strictly forbade (Lev. 19:29; Ex. 20:14). But God commanded them to be done.

Also, and again contrary to the law but as a prophetic warning to Israel, God commanded Ezekiel to use human feces when he cooked his meals:

Ezekiel 4

10. “Your food, which you will eat, shall be by weight twenty shekels each day. From time to time, you will eat it.
11. And you will drink water by measure one-sixth of a hin each day. From time to time, you will drink.
12. And you will eat it as a cake of barley; before their eyes, you will bake it, using human dung.”
13. And the LORD said, “Thus will the children of Israel eat their polluted bread among the nations where I will banish them.”

The old saying applies: “Desperate times call for desperate measures.” That is the only way to explain God commanding Isaiah to commit fornication, Hosea to commit adultery, Ezekiel to eat unclean food, and Jesus telling people what really causes souls to be defiled.

Throughout salvation history, God made exceptions to His rules when it was needful. It is true that “the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath,” but that is not all that was made for man. The entire law, not just the Sabbath, was made for man. God demanded that His people always keep the law; however, on the rare occasions when souls were benefitted more by not keeping it, God was all for it. Merciless Satan, on the other hand, saw man as having been made for the law, and were required to adhere to every precept under all conditions. To Satan, for men to behave contrary to any of the rules was the very definition of wickedness, without exception.

### *Anger and Hatred*

A man of God who never reaches the level of frustration with Satan’s sons that Jesus reached has never seen how much harm they do to God’s people. In our time, for one example, many of Satan’s sons “quench the Spirit” within God’s children by teaching them that anger and hatred are sinful emotions. If that were true, even God would be a sinner, for He has been very angry (Jer. 7:20; 2Cor. 5:11), and He not only hates, but abhors certain people and deeds (Hos. 8:15; Zech. 8:17; Rev. 2:6, 15). Anger and hatred are holy emotions if they are God’s, and God’s children are free to feel what their Father feels when He feels it. It is the wrath of man that does not work the righteousness of God (Jas. 1:20); the wrath of God always works His righteousness. And what Jesus was feeling that day was the fury of God.

### *The Fig Tree*

Jesus seemed to buckle a little under the weight of his burden one other time before the heart-rending scene in the garden of Gethsemane. It happened the morning after Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:7–11), just days before his crucifixion. Upon entering the city, Jesus went directly to

the temple, “and when he had looked all around, it already being evening, he went out to Bethany with the twelve” to spend the night (Mk. 11:11). What Jesus saw in his Father’s temple when he looked around must have eaten at him all that night, for early the next morning, he went back to the temple in Jerusalem,

Mark 11

15b. and when Jesus had gone into the temple, he began to cast out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those selling doves,

16. and he would not let anyone carry a thing through the temple.

17. And he began teaching them, saying, “Isn’t it written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of thieves?’”

Jesus’ indignation is understandable under the circumstances. Any of God’s prophets might have done something like Jesus did if sufficiently provoked. But the particular act that suggests most that Jesus was struggling under his heavy load is what he did earlier that same morning. Mark tells us that while on his way to the temple, Jesus grew hungry,



Mark 11

13. and seeing in the distance a fig tree with leaves, he went to it, if perhaps he might find something on it. But when he had gone to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not time for figs.

14. And Jesus answered and said to it, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again!” And his disciples were listening.

The unfortunate fig tree quickly withered and died (Mt. 21:19).

Now, it was unreasonable for Jesus to become angry with a fig tree for having no figs when it wasn’t even time for fig trees to bear their fruit. But it wasn’t the tree’s fruitlessness that made Jesus angry. Throughout the night before he cursed the fig tree, his mind was haunted by the scenes which had confronted him the previous afternoon when he “looked all around” his Father’s temple. Had Jesus made it all the way to the temple the next morning with that fury still burning within him, and if he had vented that wrath on the merchants there, none of them would have survived. They would all have withered up just as the poor fig tree did. Fortunately for them, Jesus came to save, not to destroy (Lk. 9:56), and he vented the worst of his fury on a tree instead of them.

#### REMEMBER

##### The Law and the Tradition of the Elders

- Jesus was an obedient servant of God who dutifully kept the commandments and taught others to do the same (Mk. 10:17–19).
- Jesus was led by the Spirit in everything.
- In a religion of rites and rules, *things* always end up being elevated above people.
- God’s heart is for His people, to make them free and happy, not to laden them with rites and rules.

Crime #1, according to men: *Breaking the Sabbath*

- God ordained the weekly Sabbath as a day of rest for His people, but men changed it into a day of worship.
- When things become more important than people, innocent people always end up being condemned.
- Being healed is one of the best forms of rest.

Crime #2, according to men: *Healing on the Sabbath*

- Wrong ideas about God lead otherwise sensible people into spiritual darkness.
- A wrong idea about God has the power to blind the mind to the simplest of truths.
- Whatever deceives, bewitches.

Crime #3, according to men: *Claiming Equality with God*

- Spiritual blindness causes men to draw bizarre conclusions from innocuous statements.

Crime #1, according to Satan: *A New Standard*

- Nobody in heaven or earth knew that Jesus was about to initiate a new covenant with Israel, a covenant of the Spirit, not the flesh, and being ignorant of that, no one understood Jesus.

*Feeling the Truth*

- Peter loved what he felt when he was with Jesus so much that he could not leave him.
- Every man's reaction to the truth is God's verdict on their souls.
- The Word of God cannot be judged by man; that Word created man, and man cannot judge his Creator.
- Whenever God's Word comes, it comes not to test man's head, but the heart

Crime #3, according to Satan: *A Friend of Sinners*

- Sinners who came to Jesus found welcome and hope, but what was especially meaningful to them was that in Jesus, they found someone with the courage to love them publicly.
- True doctrine was false doctrine before God ordained it to be preached, and knowing that, Jesus kept certain truths to himself for the sake of his disciples while he was here with them.
- Throughout salvation history, God made exceptions to His rules when it was needful.
- A man of God who never reaches the level of frustration with Satan's sons that Jesus reached has never seen how much harm they do to God's people.
- Anger and hatred are holy emotions if they are God's, and God's children are free to feel what their Father feels when He feels it.