

Matthew 9:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples,
Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?

Analysis

The Pharisees' question to the disciples—"Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?"—reveals their theological framework. They assume holiness requires separation from sinners to avoid contamination. Their question is accusatory, seeking to discredit Jesus before His followers. The Pharisees believed righteous people shouldn't associate with sinners except to condemn them. Jesus operates on opposite principle: righteousness seeks sinners to redeem them. The Pharisees' approach creates religious pride and exclusion. Jesus' approach demonstrates mercy and mission. This fundamental difference—separation versus engagement—defines two opposing religious visions: one self-righteous and condemning, the other humble and redemptive.

Historical Context

Pharisaic interpretation of Torah emphasized purity through separation. They developed elaborate traditions (oral law) to maintain holiness by avoiding contamination. Table fellowship was particularly significant because eating together implied acceptance and fellowship. Pharisees would not eat with those who didn't observe purity laws. Their question reflects genuine theological concern: How can a holy teacher associate with unholy people without compromising holiness? Jesus' answer redefines holiness not as separation from sinners but as transformative engagement with them.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How do we balance separation from sin with engagement with sinners in Christian witness?
2. What does this passage teach about religious pride versus gospel humility?
3. How should Christians respond when criticized for associating with 'sinners'?

Interlinear Text

καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι εἶπον τοῖς μαθηταῖς
And saw when the Pharisees it they said disciples
G2532 G1492 G3588 G5330 G2036 G3101

αὐτοῦ Διατί μετὰ τῶν τελωνῶν καὶ ἀμαρτωλῶν ἐσθίει
unto his Why with publicans And sinners eateth
G846 G1302 G3326 G3588 G5057 G2532 G268 G2068

ο διδάσκαλος ὑμῶν
G3588 Master your G1320 G5216

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 11:19 (Sin): The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children.

Luke 5:30 (Resurrection): But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

Mark 2:16 (Resurrection): And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?

Hebrews 5:2 (Parallel theme): Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

Galatians 2:15 (Sin): We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

Luke 19:7 (Sin): And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.

Isaiah 65:5 (Parallel theme): Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These are a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.

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