

God Helps Those Who Help Themselves?

Big Idea: Jesus has come to save those who cannot save themselves!

Read the Bible:

Matthew 9:9-13

STUDY

*** Before interacting with this guide, all leaders should study the referenced texts using the HEAR Method. It's also important to encourage your group members to read the text using the HEAR Method. ***

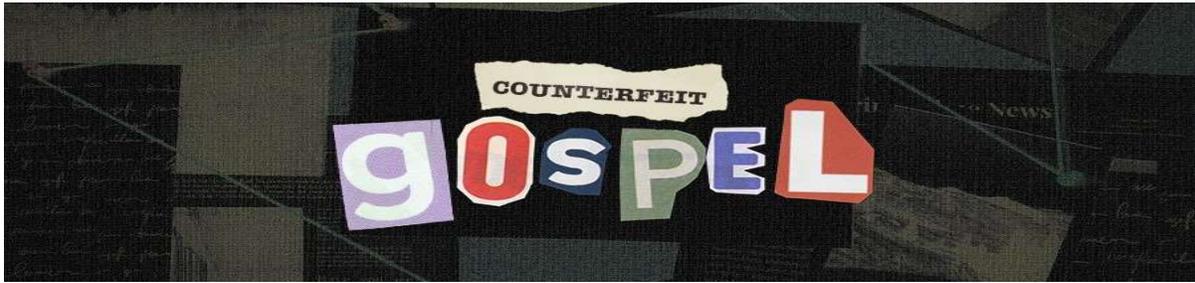
H: Highlight, or take note of, things in the passage that stick out to you as you read.

E: Explain what the passage means by asking simple questions of the text:

- **Why was this written?**
- **To whom was it originally written?**
- **How does it fit with the verses before and after it?**
- **Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?**
- **What is He intending to communicate through this text?**

A: Apply the text to your life. What does God want you to learn from this text?

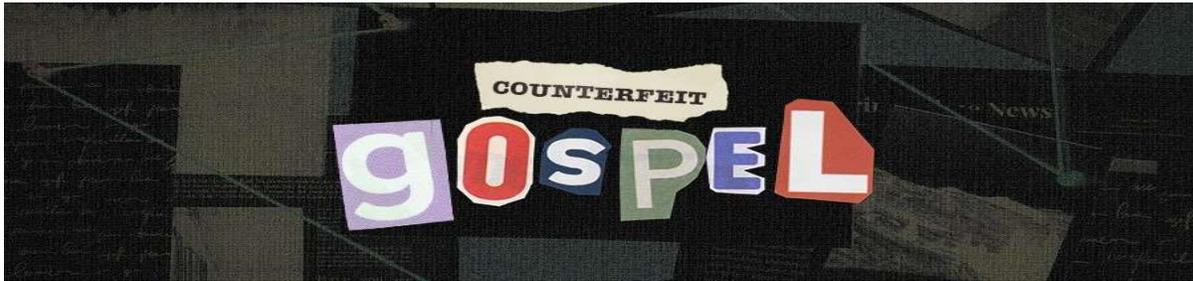
R: Respond to God in prayer.



⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.

¹⁰ And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” ¹

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 9:9–13.



Summary

One of the most common misconceptions about Christianity is the belief that it's a religion of clean people, with clean records, and clean consciences. So, when people look in from the outside, they think that Christianity is only for good people, that rare type of person who has it all figured out, doesn't struggle, and never sins. Moreover, church is where those people go on Sunday's. It's not a place for a sinner trying to figure it all out.

Try as we might, Christians have always had to overcome this stereotype. It's true that we try our hardest to kill sin and live like God told us to, but we know that we are far from the people who have it all figured out. We know that we are people who came to Jesus because we don't have it all figured out. We know that we came to Jesus not because we are sinless but because we are sinful. We know that despite the misconception Christianity is a religion for the weak, the desperate, the sinful.

That's the point behind this story in Matthew. Jesus is out to prove that he has come for the sinner. He does so from the very outset of the sermon when he approaches Matthew and invites him to "follow me." If Jesus is looking for a clean, put together, sinless type he has just chosen poorly. Matthew is a tax collector. These guys are known for being crooks and are seen as traitors in the Jewish community. It's for this type of person that Jesus came.

Matthew then does what anyone would naturally do when they have been saved by a beautiful savior. He throws a massive party. Who comes? Well, other tax collectors and sinners of course. The religious elite of the day notice who Christ is hanging out with and takes offense. It's at this point Jesus kills the misunderstanding about Christianity. Jesus makes it clear he has not come for the clean, the sinless, the put together. He is a doctor. Doctors don't come for the healthy. They come for the sick. Jesus has come to save sinners.

This is good news for you and me. We don't have to clean ourselves up to follow Jesus. Only sinners can follow Jesus. He will clean us up along the way. Moreover, we don't have to pretend that we have it all together! We don't and he knows that! Instead, we embrace the reality that we are sinners who cannot save ourselves. The good news is Jesus has come to save us.



Leading Your Group

Community Time

Start group by asking for Prayer requests and checking in on everyone.

Bible Study

***Have everyone in your group read assigned scripture before meeting. ***

Start Group by Reading Matthew 9:9-13

Major Points

These are the points for your lesson.

- 1.** Jesus identifies sin as a sickness.

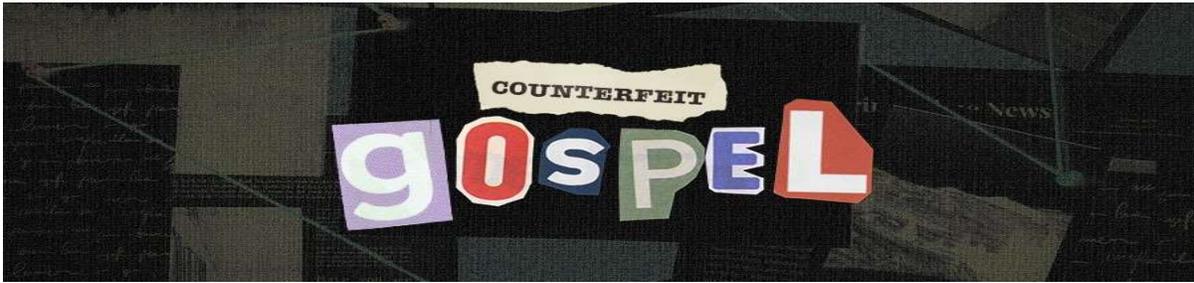
Spend some time pointing out the seriousness of sin. It's not a small thing. It is a sickness, and if it is not addressed it will leave us hurdling toward a sinner's death and judgment.

- 2.** Jesus is the Doctor we need.

Jesus is clear that sin is a sickness, but he also makes it clear that he is a Doctor who has come to heal those sick with sin. How? We know how: Jesus heals those sick with sin with the blood poured out on the cross.

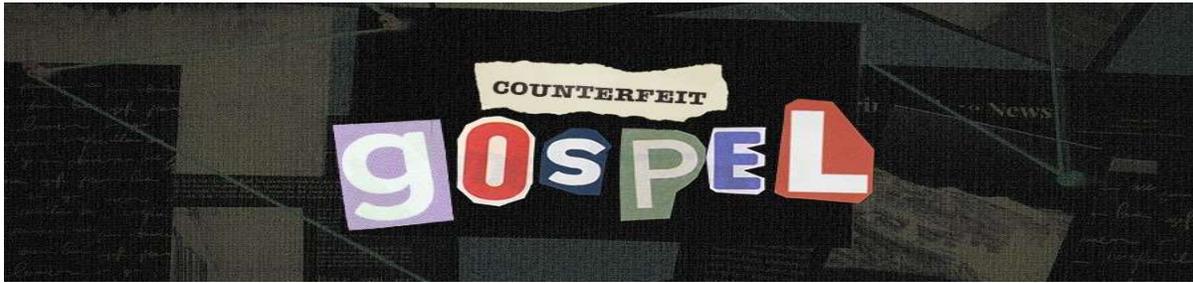
- 3.** Only those who know their sick can be saved.

The big point of consideration is how the Pharisees failed to see their own need for Jesus because they thought themselves spiritually healthy. In doing so, they missed the opportunity to have their sickness healed by Christ. A doctor is of no use to think they have no need.



Discussion Questions

- 1.** What does this passage teach us about salvation and grace?
- 2.** Why do you think so many people are confused about what Christianity is? Why do they see it as a religion for good people?
- 3.** How do you communicate to people that Christianity is for people who have great need, not for those who have no need?
- 4.** How are you tempted to look down on those more sinful than you, like the Pharisees in this passage? How do you fight against that temptation?
- 5.** What does Jesus calling Matthew teach us about how Jesus chose disciples?
- 6.** What is one thing this passage encourages you to do differently or change?



Resources

Expositor's Bible Commentary

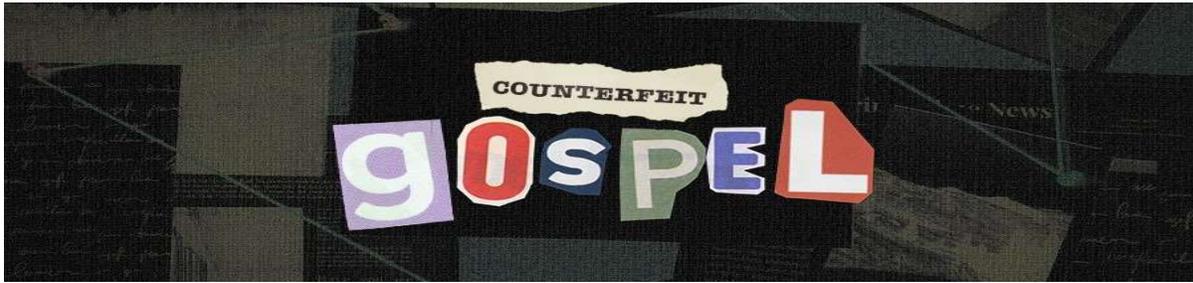
5. *Calling Matthew* (9:9)

9 The locale is probably the outskirts of Capernaum. Matthew was sitting “at the tax collector’s booth,” a customs and excise booth at the border between the territories of Philip and Herod Antipas. On attitudes toward tax collectors, see on 5:46 (cf. also SBK, 1:377–80). Having demonstrated his authority to forgive sins (9:1–8), Jesus now called to himself a man whose occupation made him a pariah—a sinner and an associate of sinners (cf. 1 Tim 1:15).

The name “Matthew” may derive from the Hebrew behind “Mattaniah” (1 Chronicles 9:15), meaning “gift of God,” or, in another etymology, from a word meaning “the faithful” (Heb. *’emet*). In Mark the name is “Levi” (though in Mark there are difficult textual variants), and the change to “Matthew” in the first Gospel has prompted much speculation. The most radical theory is that of R. Pesch (“Levi-Matthäus,” ZNW 59 [1968]: 40–56), who says that the first evangelist purposely substituted a name from the apostolic band because he habitually uses “disciple” for the Twelve and therefore could not allow an outsider to stand. The evangelist then made a “sinner” out of him to represent the “sinners” among the apostles. “Matthew” in the first Gospel is thus reduced entirely to a redactional product. But Pesch’s understanding of “disciple” is questionable (see on 5:1–2; 8:18–22), and his skepticism is vast.

Since Jews not uncommonly had two or more names, the simple equation of Levi and Matthew is the most obvious course to take. Matthew may have been a Levite. Such a heritage would have assumed intimate acquaintance with Jewish tradition. Mark and Luke have “Matthew” in their lists of apostles (Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Pesch has to say Mark 3:18 is also redactional). See for another example of a prominent NT figure with two names the apostle Paul. Acts has both “Saul” and “Paul,” but in his own writings Paul always refers to himself by the latter name. So Mark and Luke use both “Levi” and “Matthew,” but Matthew uses only the latter. (There is no evidence that either “Paul” or “Matthew” are Christian names, and the parallel is inexact because “Paul,” unlike “Matthew,” is a Gentile name.)

Gundry (*Use of OT*, pp. 181–83) suggests that Matthew’s work as a tax collector assured his fluency in Aramaic and Greek and that his accuracy in keeping records fitted him for note taking and later writing his Gospel. Hill (*Matthew*), following Stendahl (Peake, p. 673j), thinks it



unlikely that a person living on “the despised outskirts of Jewish life” could be responsible for this Gospel. But does it not also seem unlikely that “a son of thunder” should become the apostle of love, or that the arch-persecutor of the church should become its greatest missionary and theologian? If Matthew wrote 9:9 regarding his own call, it is significant that it is more self-deprecating than Luke’s account, which says that Matthew “left everything” and followed Jesus.

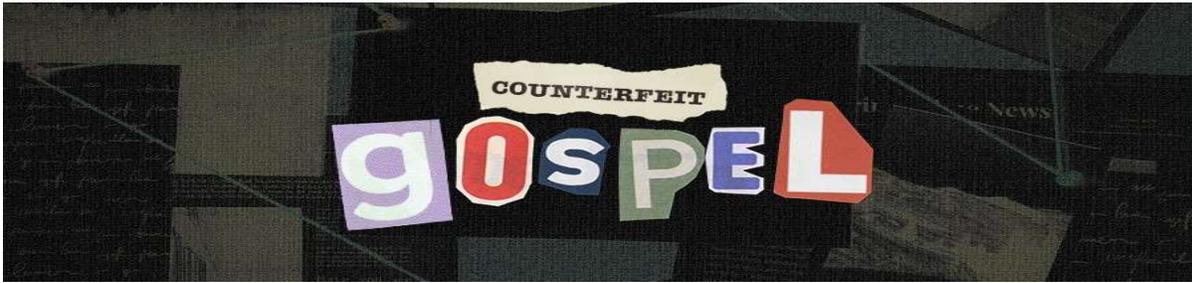
6. *Eating with sinners* (9:10–13)

On the chronological relation between v. 9 and vv. 10–13, see on 9:1. Matthew abbreviates the account of Jesus’ eating with tax collectors and sinners, excluding descriptive elements that do not contribute to the confrontation, but adding an OT quotation (v. 13).

10–11 For comment on the opening words *kai egeneto* (“and it came to pass”; NIV “while”), see on 7:28–29. The Greek text does not mention “Matthew’s” house, though 9:9 implies it is Matthew’s and both Mark and Luke specify it (so NIV). Jesus himself had said that even a tax collector has his friends (5:46), and Matthew’s dinner substantiates this. “Sinners” may include common folk who did not share all the scruples of the Pharisees (cf. TDNT, 1:324–25); hence the quotation marks in NIV. But almost certainly it groups together those who broke Pharisaic Halakoth (rules of conduct)—harlots, tax collectors, and other disreputable people (cf. Hummel, pp. 22ff.). Though eating with them entailed dangers of ceremonial defilement, Jesus and his disciples did so. The Pharisees’ question, put not to Jesus but to his disciples, was less a request for information than a charge; and contemptuously it lumped together “tax collectors and sinners” under one article (cf. 11:19; Luke 15:1–2 for the same attitude).

There can be little doubt that Jesus was known as a friend to tax collectors and sinners (Matt 11:19; cf. M. Volkel, “‘Freund der Zöllner und Sünder,’” ZNW 69 [1978]: 1–10; and see note on 5:46).

12–13 These verses again connect Jesus’ healing ministry with his “healing” of sinners (see on 8:17). The sick need a doctor (v. 12), and Jesus healed them; likewise the sinful need mercy, forgiveness, restoration, and Jesus healed them (v. 13). The Pharisees were not so healthy as they thought (cf. 7:1–5); more important they did not understand the purpose of Jesus’ mission. Expecting a Messiah who would crush the sinful and support the righteous, they had little place for one who accepted and transformed the sinner and dismissed the “righteous” as hypocrites. Jesus explained his mission in terms reminiscent of 1:21. There is no suggestion here that he went to sinners because they gladly received him; rather, he went to them because they were sinners, just as a doctor goes to the sick because they are sick.



The quotation (v. 13) is from Hosea 6:6 and is introduced by the rabbinic formula “go and learn,” used of those who needed to study the text further. Use of the formula may be slightly sardonic: those who prided themselves in their knowledge of and conformity to Scripture needed to “go and learn” what it means. The quotation, possibly translated from the Hebrew by Matthew himself, is cast in Semitic antithesis: “not A but B often means B is of more basic importance than A.”

The Hebrew word for “mercy” (*hesed*) is close in meaning to “covenant love,” which, according to Hosea, is more important than “sacrifice.” Through Hosea, God said that the apostates of Hosea’s day, though continuing the formal ritual of temple worship, had lost its center. As applied to the Pharisees by Jesus, therefore, the Hosea quotation was not simply telling them that they should be more sympathetic to outcasts and less concerned about ceremonial purity, but that they were aligned with the apostates of ancient Israel in that they too preserved the shell while losing the heart of the matter, as exemplified by their attitude to tax collectors and sinners (cf. France, *Jesus*, p. 70). Jesus’ final statement (v. 13b) therefore cannot mean that he viewed the Pharisees as righteous people who did not need him, who were already perfectly acceptable to God by virtue of their obedience to his laws so that their only fault was the exclusion of others (contra Hill, *Greek Words*, pp. 130f.). If the Pharisees were so righteous, the demand for righteousness surpassing that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law (5:20) would be incoherent.

On the other hand, it may not be exactly right to say that “righteous” is ironic here. The saying simply defines the essential nature of Jesus’ messianic mission as he himself saw it. If pushed he would doubtless have affirmed the universal sinfulness of man (cf. 7:11). Therefore he is not dividing men into two groups but disavowing one image of what Messiah should be and do, replacing it with the correct one. His mission was characterized by grace, a pursuit of the lost, of sinners. The verb *kalesai* (“to call”) means “to invite” (unlike Paul’s usage, where the call is always efficacious). By implication those who do not see themselves in the light of Jesus’ mission not only fail to grasp the purpose of his coming but exclude themselves from the kingdom’s blessings.

If Matthew does not add “to repentance” after “sinners” (as Luke 5:32), it is not because he is disinterested in repentance (cf. Mt 3:2; 4:17). Rather, the words are not in his principal source (Mark) and do not in any case contribute to his present theme.

Hosea 6:6 is also quoted in Mt 12:7, again in a context challenging the Pharisees’ legal scruples. Cope (*Matthew*, pp. 68–70) suggests that the verse reveals a contrast between the substantial demands of mercy and merely legal and ceremonial piety, a contrast traceable in the following pericopes (vv. 14–17, 18–26, 27–34, 35–38). But his evidence is slightly overdrawn. In 9:27–34, for instance, vv. 27–31 raise no overt hints of ceremonial defilement.



The Gospel According to Matthew

We now come to the second half of the discipleship frame which Matthew has placed around the second set of three miracle stories (8:18–22 and 9:9–13 frame 8:23–9:8). Like a doctor Jesus seeks out the sick.

Matthew continues the Markan sequence and uses only his Markan source (2:13–17). His main change is to add at 9:13 the reference to Hos. 6:6.

9:9 Matthew omits the lakeside teaching of the Markan parallel (2:13) in line with a consistent pattern throughout chaps. 8–9 (see at 8:4). That Matthew has moved the location of 9:2–8 away from the house of Mk. 2:1–2 is retrospectively confirmed by his use of ‘going on from there’: Matthew’s Jesus has been on the move (albeit within Capernaum). The call of Matthew is closely modelled on that of the fishermen in 4:18–22 (already so in the Markan parallels). Quite unusually Matthew retains Mark’s historic present, ‘he says’, here. That will be because Matthew introduced it to create emphasis at the corresponding point in 4:19, and wants a matching emphasis at this point. But unlike Mark, Matthew is explicitly working towards the completion of the Twelve (10:1–4); so ‘Matthew’ replaces ‘Levi’ as the name, and secures the link by adding ‘the tax collector’ at 10:3. The double role of the unique call to apostleship and the pattern for wider discipleship (cf. at 4:20) is sustained by the relationship with the ‘many’ of 9:10 and the call language of v. 13. Are we to understand that Matthew’s role is senior and supervisory? This would explain the ease with which he draws others with him into contact with Jesus (v. 10).

9:10 It is natural to think that the group has gathered as a consequence of Matthew’s following Jesus. If so, then Jesus must be the one responsible for the hospitality. This conclusion is supported by the flow of the text from following Jesus (at the end of v. 9) to the place of Jesus in the meal arrangements (at the beginning of v. 10). Matthew’s addition of ἐλθόντες (lit. ‘coming’) is naturally referred to a ‘coming’ on the part of (other) tax collectors and sinners that somewhat parallels Matthew’s own ‘following’. As elsewhere in Matthew, ‘the house’ will mean the house of which Jesus was making use (with his disciples).¹⁶¹ ἀνάκεισθαι is used of seating arrangements (reclining on couches or cushions) at festive meals. So its use here indicates a celebration of some sort (presumably of the fact that Matthew has become a follower of Jesus).

The presence of καὶ ἰδοὺ (lit. ‘and behold’) marks the presence of tax collectors and sinners with Jesus in meal fellowship as the second focal point of the episode. On the general image of tax collectors see the comments at 5:46. ‘Sinners’ here should be understood primarily ‘sociologically as identifying those publicly known to be unsavoury types who lived beyond the edge of respectable society’. But the presence of the term creates a link back to 9:2, 5, 6.



In the Matthean setting what significance are we to give to Jesus' welcome of tax collectors and sinners? The importance of repentance has already been established at Mt. 3:2; 4:17; the need for sin to be dealt with has already received significant attention; and the importance of practical righteousness has been the burden of 5:17–7:27. But the perspective that emerges here is that all this is expected to happen because of Jesus. As far as the Matthean Jesus is concerned, for these people the decisive turning point has already occurred. They do not remain guilty until they prove themselves; rather, those who will come are welcomed. No 'threshold score' is required for entry. The imagery of the doctor in v. 12 will extend this point.

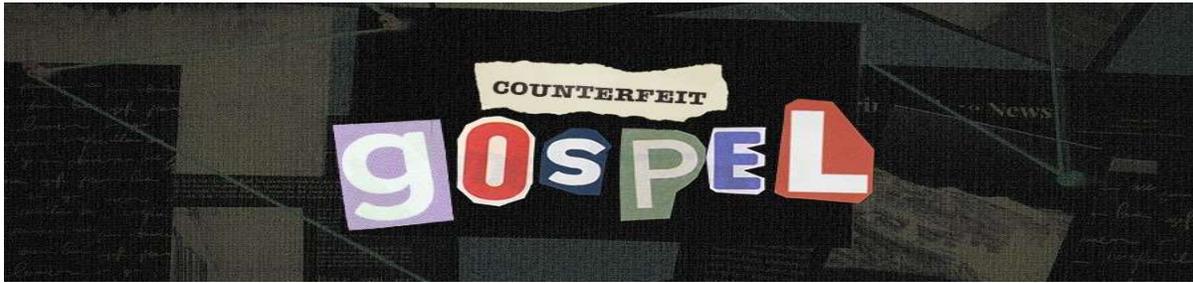
9:11 The Pharisees of the present verse belong in a natural pairing with the scribes of the previous episode. In both cases their perspective runs counter to the positive development of the episode.

Matthew does not explain the presence of the Pharisees, but we too readily impose modern Western notions of domestic privacy without realising the degree to which life in Palestine was much more public than is our experience. Given the significant numbers of people envisaged, 'in the house' might actually be out of doors in an open courtyard area belonging to the house. Or perhaps we are to think of the contact being made as the party is breaking up.

The addressing of the question to the disciples allows the image of Jesus as teacher of the disciples to emerge.

The Pharisaic approach to being pure before God involved active separation from sinners. On the analogy of communicable ritual uncleanness, one avoided contamination from contact with morally suspect elements of Jewish society as much as possible. There is a considerable cogency to such an approach, it is clearly found, in a modified form, in Paul, and it is often taken (but probably wrongly) to be part of what is operative in Mt. 18:17. But it is not at all the defining impulse of Jesus' mission.

9:12 A quite similar role for a saying about doctors and the sick is found in Philostratus. He reports, as used in defence against the accusation that the philosophers were always to be found at the doors of the rich, the saying 'One also sees the doctors at the doors of the sick'. Jesus' choice of company, by contrast, could offer him no social advantage. Jesus' image of doctor and patients allows him to begin in agreement with the Pharisaic assessment of his company as sinners, and to treat that assessment with all seriousness. But he promotes an alternative vision of 'seeing sinners as needy and able to be helped, rather than as contaminated and deserving to be spurned'. The image of God's people as ill (and therefore in need of healing) is common in the OT;¹⁶⁸ Jesus built on this background to express his concern to bring people in from the margins. We should not, however, lose sight of the implication that there is a healing process through which the ill will regain health.



9:13 Though the evidence cited is modest in scale and later, 'go and learn' is likely a piece of technical (pre-)rabbinic 'schoolroom' diction. In v. 11 the Pharisees have spoken of Jesus as teacher ('your teacher'); here they are challenged to become learners.

Given the brevity of the quotation from Ho. 6:6 and variant readings in the LXX, we cannot determine what text is reflected here.

Though the legendary care of the Pharisees for ritual matters makes for a nice fit (cf. 15:1–2; 23:23), Matthew's focus is sharply on the centrality of 'mercy'; certainly he does not disparage sacrifice (cf. 5:23–34). How does he view the call for mercy here? In Hosea the Hebrew term is likely to have meant wholehearted covenant loyalty to God, but the move to Greek here shifts the emphasis clearly to human interaction (which is also possible for the Hebrew). Covenant loyalty to God is not at all what springs to mind in the Matthean context (nor in the context of the use of the same phrase from Ho. 6:6 also in 12:7); it is the level of human interaction that needs to be addressed. As discussed at 5:7, those who are merciful manifest kindness to people who are in serious need; this is the world of thought pointed to by the image of a doctor with those who are ill. However, the second use of Ho. 6:6, at 12:7, suggests that already here we may need to link the call for such mercy back to God's own merciful ways. It is the compassion of God which comes to expression in Jesus' 'medical' work.¹⁷² Compassion and mercy are required of the one who would be the agent of God's purposes. It is from this angle that there is a smooth transition to the final statement about Jesus' call.

The language of 'call' here echoes the call of Matthew in v. 9, while 'sinners' picks up on the language of vv. 10–11. Jesus, who in 5:17 says he has come to fulfil the Law, now makes clear that he will do so not in relation to separatist isolation but in connection with a reaching out to sinners. In his concern with the restoration of Israel Jesus will focus on where there is an obvious need for restoration. Though this passage shows no interest in identifying a category of the 'righteous', we may well think of people like Joseph (1:18–2:23) who are already well attuned to the will and purpose of God and need no special call.