



# THE NONCONFORMIST

THE **PUZZLING** STORIES  
OF JESUS

# 10



## YES, NO + MAYBE

1. One of my biggest pet peeves is flaky people.
2. There have been times when I've committed to something, but had to back out.
3. We should follow the council of people in positions of authority.
4. God won't answer your questions, if you don't answer His.
5. The more religiously obedient you are, the less likely you'll go to heaven.

## DIG DEEPER

● **READ Matthew 21:23-32** (NLT)

23 When Jesus returned to the Temple and began teaching, the leading priests and elders came up to him. They demanded, "By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right?"

24 "I'll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question," Jesus replied. 25 "Did John's authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human?"

They talked it over among themselves. "If we say it was from heaven, he will ask us why we didn't believe John. 26 But if we say it was merely human, we'll be mobbed because the people believe John was a prophet." 27 So they finally replied, "We don't know." And Jesus responded, "Then I won't tell you by what authority I do these things.

28 "But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' 29 The son answered, 'No, I won't go,' but later he changed his mind and went anyway. 30 Then the father told the other son, 'You go,' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't go.

31 "Which of the two obeyed his father?"

They replied, "The first."

Then Jesus explained his meaning: "I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. 32 For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn't believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins.

✦ **23 Jesus returned-** The priests are in charge of the temple. The money changers and vendors whom Jesus chased out of their stalls (21:12-16) were there by permission of the priests. Jesus' action was offensive to the elders as well. The priests and the elders are of different parties. The priests are Sadducees, many of the elders Pharisees. The two sects agree on very few issues. As Jesus embarrassed the Sadducees by His unprecedented routing of the violators of temple sanctity, so He caused the Pharisees also to lose face, since they fancied themselves as the guardians of Jewish holiness. They of all people should have been the ones to take action against the temple authorities. They have been criticizing Jesus throughout His ministry for being too liberal with matters of the law. Now in their own backyard, so to speak, He has proved himself more conscientious than they. So together, these usually bickering groups attack Jesus.

✦ **23 The Temple** - Here again the Greek word for temple refers, not to the building proper, but to the large complex which was built around it. Jesus was probably on one of the porches that surrounded the court of the Gentiles at this time.

## DIG DEEPER...CONTINUED

✦ **23 By what authority?**- Though stated as two questions, actually are asking the same question: “Who gave you the right to do these things?” The questioners thought of themselves as taking action from a position of strength. Jesus must, they would have reasoned, cite some source of authority, and since they represented temple authority, it could not be any authority that justified him in taking action in the way he did in the temple. Any human authority he claimed must necessarily be inferior. And if he claimed to have God’s authority, they would be able to accuse him of blasphemy.

- How do authority figures help and/or hurt the growth of Christianity?

✦ **24 I’ll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question** - Jesus easily could have cited his authority, but that would have led to endless argument since his opponents would not have conceded that he had the authority he claimed. So Jesus countered with just one question of his own, and promised to answer their two questions if they would first answer his.

✦ **25 John’s authority to baptize** - Jesus raises the issue of John’s baptism, which had no Scriptural precedent and which had not been practiced (except for non-Jews who were converting to Judaism) by Jews themselves before John introduced his **baptism for repentance**. In fact, **John’s practice had also challenged the priests**, since they conducted the sacrifices ordered in the Old Testament for forgiveness of sins, the same purpose for which John baptized. They recognized the challenge (see John 1:25; Luke 3:3) and refused to acknowledge the validity of John’s baptism, but they were helpless to stop him because of John’s great popularity.

✦ **27 We don’t know.** - They can’t win, so they lie. “We don’t know.” Jesus knows they are lying. Since they will not be honest, He will not waste an answer on them. “*Then I won’t tell you by what authority I do these things*” (Matthew 22:27). They choose to pretend ignorance. He chooses not to play into their hands.

- How can you tell if God is behind new approaches in church, or if it is from mankind?

## THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS:

✦ **29 “No, I won’t go,” but later he changed his mind** - The one who actually did the will of the father is the one who repented and went. (μεταμεληθεις ἀπηλθεν [metamelētheis apēlthen]) The phrase “changed his mind” really means “repent,” to be sorry afterwards.

✦ **30 Yes, sir, I will.** - The second son tells his father yes, but he lies. He may not be intentionally lying, but the results are the same, anyway. If you don’t call him a liar, you must at least think him irresponsible. He is not a person with whom you could close a deal with a handshake. His word is no good. There is little to build a relationship on here. In a word, he is not to be trusted.

- In Matt. 5:37, Jesus says for us to let our “Yes” be a yes, and our “No” be a no. Why do you think this is so important to God?

✦ **31 Which of the two obeyed his father?** - Jesus’ question emphasized that God’s bottom-line concern was not a person’s verbal claims but what he actually did. Actions are more significant than words. This was so obvious that even Jesus’ opponents answered correctly. It was the first son—the one who initially said no but who ultimately obeyed—who did the will of the father.

- What is the “will of the father” that God wants us to say “Yes” to?

✦ **31 Corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do** - This phrase may mean either “before you go in” or “in place of you.” The use of the present tense of the verb go tends to suggest that the latter sense is intended. Tax collectors were considered traitors by the Jews because they sold out to the Roman oppressors, collecting taxes from their fellow countrymen and usually demanding extra money to line their own pockets. This often left families destitute. Prostitutes were similarly despised. For Jesus to say that the tax collectors and the prostitutes would have greater claim on the kingdom of God than the religious elite must have been a shock. Sinners were being welcomed into the kingdom, while the religious leaders only pretended to know God.

- According to this parable, what is most important to God?



## MY PRAYER...

1. How do I follow human authority more than God’s?
2. In what ways am I saying “yes” to God, but not doing it?
3. What new aspect of God’s character does He want me to know?