

## Jesus' Methods of Dealing with Accusations

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### Abstract

One aspect of communication that affects people deeply is false accusations. This study intended to discover the method of communication Jesus used in dealing with false accusations. There is very little data showing Jesus' methods of dealing with accusation. The book of Matthew was used as the source of data. The data was analysed using content analysis with intercoder reliability of 0.4 percent. It was found that Jesus primarily responded to false accusation in six ways: by asking questions; by sharing parables, analogies, or maxims; by giving strong words of condemnation or affirmation; by referring to the scriptures; by withdrawing from the accusers; and by keeping silent. All these ways of communicating with people when accused falsely, follows a progression of behaviour from active engagement to a passive one.

Keywords: *accusation, communication, conflict, Jesus, Matthew, method*

### Jesus' Methods of Dealing with Accusations

Communication touches every aspect of life. Effective communication skills can lead to success and contentment in business, at the workplace and at school. False accusations are a barrier to effective communication. Smith (2007, p. 324) suggested that threats and accusation "can have profound and far-reaching consequences," and "while rarely resulting in death, can 'kill off' something essential in the worker's motivation and commitment to the work."

False allegations can accuse innocent people of crime they never committed and cause intense suffering, pain, loss of health, loss of finances and most importantly defame a person's good name and character. *Inside Time*, (Morris, 2010, para. 6) a British national newspaper for prisoners revealed, "Prior to 2004, the Home Office stated in its own bulletin that it was aware of 3000 wrongfully convicted people being put in prison every year, while allowing the guilty to walk free (Naylor L.A 2004)." The paper further noted that many psychotherapists were found guilty of implanting "false memories" of physical and sexual abuse in their patients causing irreparable damage to families.

The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin in its article "False Allegation of Adult Crimes" indicated that in cases such as rape "these false allegations can severely affect communities and the people who live and work there" (McNamara & Lawrence, 2012, para. 12). These evidences suggest that false accusations are prevalent in the society and no one is exempt.

A survey reported a poll of 1,115 teachers where 28% of teachers were falsely accused by their students and 17% by a member of the student's family ("One in four," 2009). One can be falsely accused in the classroom, in the office, in a marriage or even in the hospital. False accusations can even become a money-making scheme by someone looking for compensation.

The Gospels give a picture of how Jesus dealt with accusations. Jesus was a Master Communicator. Jesus' methods of dealing with accusation especially as noted in the Gospel of Matthew gives valuable insight in dealing with accusations in interpersonal relationships.

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## Review of Literature

A review of the literature reveals more studies done about communication in general than on Jesus' method of communication and His method of dealing with His accusers. Stallard (2007) an experienced senior pastor and Director of Treasures of Truth Ministries, suggested responding to accusations in a godly manner. He advised that when accusations are true, confession is the correct biblical way to deal with it. He further added that even if the accusations are partly wrong or partly right "we must deal openly and honestly with anything that is wrong in our life (p. 120). Sometimes accusations may be false. What is the best way of dealing with false accusations? The life of Jesus reveals important principles.

Associate professor of New Testament studies, Bennema (2010), stated that in many instances Jesus silenced his accusers by asking them questions. Jesus used questions frequently when communicating with His accusers because it provoked an introspection and analysis of their actions and motives, often leaving them speechless.

Jesus also spoke strongly against the Pharisees and scribes who accused Him constantly, calling them hypocrites because of their lack of obedience to God's law, suggested Lee (2013), Associate Professor in Teacher Education at Kentucky Christian University. Jesus' condemnation against them resonates with what Rahim (2002), author and professor of Management, advocates as an ethical criteria to be met when managing organizational conflict. He emphasized, "Stakeholders have an ethical duty to speak out against the decisions of supervisors when consequences of these decisions are likely to be serious" (p. 209).

In an article "Out of Context—the Gospel According to Jesus," Danaher (2011), Chair of the Department of Philosophy of Nyack College, suggested that the Pharisees accused Jesus and responded violently to Him because the gospel Jesus presented to them was so out of context for them. For example, they thought they were good, but Jesus described them as white washed tombs from outside but rotting inside (Matt. 23:27-28). In another example, they could not understand how the first would be last and the last first (Matt. 19:30) as Jesus suggested.

Jesus also tried to emphasise the internal understanding of the spirit of the law rather than a strict outward observance of the law (Lee, 2013). This often led to frequent conflicts as the Pharisees accused Jesus of not keeping the Sabbath, or the disciples of not washing their hands.

"Leaders who learn to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts and through a variety of communication pathways are helping followers and their organizations navigate toward effectiveness," observed Irving, (2011, p. 126), associate professor of ministry leadership at Bethel Seminary, Minnesota.

Therefore, this study examined the Gospel of Matthew to find Jesus' method of dealing with accusations. The result of the research will be used to inform leaders, workers, or any person who wants to communicate effectively, on how to deal with accusations and how to enhance communication skills.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to look into the Book of Matthew and see the situations in which Jesus was involved with accusations. It aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How did Jesus deal with accusations?
2. How can Jesus' methods of dealing with accusation be applied in interpersonal communication today?

The knowledge gained from this study can be used to provide guidelines for communicators in any situation where there is some form of conflict or accusations. This study also aims to provide alternative ways of conflict management more than what is currently used in the field of communication studies.

## Method

The method of research used was qualitative with content analysis in the treatment of the data. The book of Matthew from the New Testament was taken as the primary source for the data. The New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible was used as it is considered a reliable translation. To maintain reliability of the research, an inter coder reliability test was used. A portion of the book of Matthew was coded by two researchers. To maintain an objective and reliable interpretation of the data, Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used. The  $r$  value determines the degree of agreement between the coders. The score for the inter coder reliability test

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using Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was 0.4 percent. This shows there is a fair reliability of data between the coders. A table was constructed to record instances when Jesus met with different kinds of accusations and the methods he followed in dealing with those accusations. The table was then analysed and categorised to find various themes and patterns showing how Jesus responded to accusations. The categories of Jesus' response to accusations were made as the data was analyzed rather than by any predetermined idea.

## Findings

A study on the book of Matthew revealed a wealth of information on communication principles especially dealing with managing conflict. These principles were recorded not only from Jesus' interactions with others in situations where accusations were made, but also from His teachings about dealing with false accusations. The content analysis of the 28 chapters in the Book of Matthew revealed the following ways Jesus responded to accusations:

- by asking questions
- by sharing analogies, maxims, and parables
- by giving strong words of condemnation or affirmation
- by referring to the scriptures as a source of authority
- by withdrawing from the place
- by keeping silent before his accusers

## Jesus Method of Dealing with Accusations

A descriptive and interpretive summary of the six methods Jesus primarily used when facing a situation of accusation is given below.

### Jesus Responds to Accusations by Asking Questions

The book of Matthew records seven times Jesus responded to accusations with a question or a series of questions. The instances happened in Matthew 9:1-8; 9:15; 12:3-5; 12:26-29; 15:1-3; 21:16; 26:10. Here are some of the accusations Jesus faced and the way he dealt with them.

In the first one, Jesus was accused of blasphemy. Jesus had just forgiven and then healed a paralytic man brought to him. The scribes present at that time "said within themselves, 'This Man blasphemes!'" (Matt. 9:1-8 New King James Version). Jesus' response was to ask two questions back to the scribes. "But Jesus, knowing their thoughts said, 'Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk?'" Matthew 9:4-5. Jesus' question was a veiled rebuke in response to their unspoken accusations of blasphemy. Jesus was showing that his authority to heal also demonstrated his authority to forgive ([www.bible gateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)).

The second recorded accusation is in Matthew 9:15. The disciples of John accused Jesus' disciples of not fasting as they and the Pharisees did. Jesus uses a question in response to their question saying, "*Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast*" (Matt. 9:15). Jesus directs their attention to himself as the "bridegroom" or the promised Messiah and therefore the need for the disciples to be joyful and not fast while he was with them. In short, by his question Jesus implies there is a time for everything and a time would come for them to fast in the future.

Next, the Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of breaking the Sabbath by plucking the grains and eating them. Jesus responded by asking two questions related to their knowledge of the scriptures :

*Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? (Matt. 12: 3-5)*

The response of Jesus to the accusation of breaking the Sabbath shows a greater understanding of the Scriptures and not blind reliance to traditions. Gempf pointed out, Jesus responded with questions to make

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the people choose either the traditions of men or the commandments of God (as cited in Bennema, 201, p. 25).

In addition to breaking the Sabbath, Jesus was also accused of using demonic power to cast out demons. The multitudes were amazed when Jesus healed the demon possessed blind and mute man. But the Pharisees attributed Jesus' power to heal from the ruler of the demons Beelzebub (Matt. 12:24). Jesus responded to this accusation by asking three questions about how the Pharisees' sons cast out demons. His rebuking questions nullified their accusations showing their reasoning was faulty and therefore their accusation was invalid. Jesus questioned:

If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. (Matt. 12:26-29)

The series of three questions were intended to emphasise the gravity of the situation and also to reason logically with them. Satan's Kingdom would be futile if it was divided and the exorcism by the Pharisees' sons would be suspect if they accused Christ of using demonic power. Sometimes the questions Jesus asked were intended as a veiled rebuke (Bennema, 2010). These questions were a rebuke to the Pharisees for rejecting the witness of the Holy Spirit's power. Jesus' power from God could bind Satan and overthrow him in the healing of the blind and mute man.

The fifth instance when Jesus responded to accusations with a question is recorded in Matthew 15:1-3. A delegation from Jerusalem comprising of the Pharisees and scribes came asking Jesus: *"Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread. He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?"* Instead of replying to them, Jesus asks a counter question. Jesus used a "counter question either to silence his audience or to redirect them to the key issues (Bennema, 2010, p. 23). Jesus wanted His accusers to be aware where their priorities lay—with traditions of men or obedience to commandments of God.

Another time Jesus faced his accusers with questions was when he cleansed the temple. The chief priests and scribes accused Jesus for accepting the praise of the children after he had done wonderful miracles of healing and shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matt. 21:15). They accosted Jesus saying "Do You hear what these are saying?" (Matt. 21:16)

Jesus turned to them and asked a question: "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?'" (Matt. 21:16) By directing the chief priests and scribes' thoughts to the Scriptures, Jesus was able to show them the fulfilment of a prophecy and the children's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah.

The final example of Jesus responding to his accusers, this time his disciples, with a question is found in Matthew 26:10. The disciples were indignant at the woman breaking a costly jar of perfumed oil over Jesus' head. They accused the woman "Why this waste?" (Matt. 26:8). They thought the perfume could have been sold and the money used for the poor. Jesus' question was a mild rebuke to them: *"Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me."* (Matt. 26:10) Jesus met the accusers and the accused with words of kindness. The question was a more acceptable method of communicating to the disciples rather than an open rebuke which may have created a negative response in them.

#### Jesus Responds to Accusations by Sharing Analogies, Maxims, and Parables

An analogy compares two things to obtain a greater understanding and clarification. Jesus skilfully used analogy in dealing with accusations. Jesus' maxims, or short statements conveying a general truth, were very effective in his communication as he dealt with opposition from the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees of his time. These men were well versed in Jewish laws and traditions and they challenge Jesus' emphasis on the sole authority of the Scriptures rather than the traditions of their fathers (Sanders, 2013). Jesus told parables, short stories to illustrate or teach the truth, when accused by the Pharisees. It was an indirect method of presenting the truth about God's kingdom, revealing their shortcomings, and warning them of the danger of rejecting him as the Son of God.

Some instances where Jesus used analogies, maxims, and parables are as follows:

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### *Analogy in Matthew 9:12*

Matthew gave a great feast at his house to “celebrate his conversion and calling” (Knight, 1994, p. 119; Luke 5:29). Many tax collectors and people of questionable reputation were invited. Looking at them the Pharisees accused Jesus of eating with “tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 9:11). Jesus responded with an analogy, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” Knight (1994), emeritus professor of church history at Andrews University, suggests Jesus’ reply showed they did not comprehend the Old Testament Scriptures nor their own lack of mercy toward sinners. Jesus made His mission very clear in Matthew 9:13: “But go and learn what *this* means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”

### *Analogy in Matthew 9:15-17*

Jesus was questioned by John’s disciples that his own disciples did not fast often like the Pharisees and themselves. They were obviously influenced to view Jesus and his disciples with a critical eye (Knight, 1994). Jesus replies, “*Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.*” (Matt. 9:15). Knight (1994) reveals that Jesus compares himself to the Bridegroom and makes allusion to Hosea 2:16:23 where God pictures Himself as a husband and not master to Israel. Knight further reveals that Jesus also alludes to his death when the disciples would mourn and fast.

Jesus also used the imagery of the old and new wineskins and old and new garments further revealing “the radical new mold into which the Jewish religious thinking and life will have to be cast” especially in regards to the new values of the sermon on the Mount (Knight, 1994, p. 119-120). By the simple analogy Jesus was able to redirect John’s disciples to the principles of God’s kingdom mercy and a true knowledge of God (Matt. 9:13; Hosea 6:6) rather than just legalism with its rituals and sacrifices done without a heart of love. The new teachings of Jesus of not judging others (Matt. 7:1) and loving your enemies (Matt. 5:44) had to be replaced with the old traditions of the Pharisees like hating their enemies (Matt. 5:43). Jesus use of analogy was a very peaceful way of dealing with accusations brought by John’s disciples as well as giving them clarity in understanding the requirements of God.

### *Maxim in Matthew 12:25*

The Pharisees’ rejection of Jesus was evident when Jesus healed a demon possessed blind and mute man. They could not attribute the healing to the power of God and were annoyed at the amazement people showed saying “Could this be the Son of David” (Matt. 12:23). They claimed Jesus was in league with the ruler of the demons” (vs. 24). But Jesus reading their hearts exclaimed, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.” Knight (1994) points out that Jesus takes an offensive position and tells the Pharisees that if he was healing by the power of the demons, then the kingdom of Satan would be divided and fall quickly. Knight (1994) further stated Jesus shows he is more powerful than Satan because he is able to bind him like a thief binds a strong man to plunder his goods. The use of the maxim effectively communicated Jesus’ divine power and the Pharisees’ stubbornness to accept it.

### *Maxim in Matthew 15:11*

The Pharisees and the scribes were relentless in their pursuit and condemnation of Jesus. They travel from Jerusalem to find fault with Jesus and his lack of regard for their traditions. Their allegation against His disciples was that they did not wash hand before eating bread (Matt.15:2). Jesus replied with this truth about his kingdom: “Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.” Jesus indicated that the defilement people should be more concerned with should be the impurity of the heart revealed in impure words and actions. The unwashed hands would not bar anyone from the kingdom of heaven, but those with impure hearts would not see God (Matt. 5:8). Jesus used maxims to engrave His eternal truths in the minds of His hearers (Lee, 2013). Even the accusers left the presence of Christ by encountering God’s truth.

In addition to analogies and maxims, Jesus used parables. Matthew 13 is a chapter concentrated on parables. It follows chapter 12 where Jesus faced severe opposition from the Pharisees accusing Jesus of breaking the Sabbath by healing the man with the withered hand (Matt.12:9-14) and asking Jesus for a sign to prove He is the Messiah (Matt. 12:38-42). The use of parables was a radical shift in Jesus' teaching method because of the rejection by the Jewish leaders (Knight, 1994). In addition, as Barclay pointed out Jesus also used parables to help individuals to find the truth or conceal truth from those blinded by prejudice or those not willing to think hard about the truth (as cited in Knight, 1994, p. 144).

For example the parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-9) revealed that in contrast to the Jewish leaders who put the traditions in the place of God's words, Jesus came "to sow the world with truth" (White, 1991, p. 22). The parable of the Wheat and Tares explored the nature of God's kingdom which gave an opportunity for both the righteous and the unrighteous to accept God's salvation until the end of time or harvest when God's people would be separated. The Pharisees could not bear the idea of the righteous mingling with the sinners and thus had accused Jesus of eating with tax collectors and sinners. In spite of the hostile attitudes of the Jewish leaders, Jesus through the parables revealed God's patience, love, and judgement for all.

Pennington, (2009) Assistant Professor of New Testament Interpretation and author of numerous articles, described a shift in Jesus communication as the religious leaders plot to destroy Jesus. He further reports that the parables of Jesus have two functions: to reveal the judgement soon to come and to proclaim the characteristics of the kingdom of God. The parables reveal and conceal at the same time the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:11). The accusers of Christ and those whose hearts are dull will close their ears and eyes to the gospel message of Christ (Matt. 13:14-15) because they do not want to accept the convictions of the Holy Spirit.

Another set of parables is found in Matthew 21 and 23. Jesus used these parables to answer the accusations about His authority. Jesus had recently made his triumphal entry to Jerusalem. He had driven out the money lenders and healed the blind and the lame in the temple. Irrked by all the attention focused on Jesus, the chief priests and elders questioned Jesus saying, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave you this authority?" (Matt. 21:23). Their lack of faith in God and the ministry of Christ led Jesus to share some parables to meet their accusations. The parables of the Two Sons (Matt. 21:28-32), the Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers (Matt. 21:33-46), and the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt. 22: 1-14) indirectly warned the Pharisees about their attitude to the invitation of God and the possible consequence of rejecting this gospel invitation by rejecting the Son of God.

The parable of the Wedding Feast is about a King who gives a feast, but the guests reject the invitation, and even humiliate and kill the servant. The King then sends out his servants to call everyone. The story ends with one of the guests found without a wedding garment and is thrust out in the darkness. This parable Jesus told was similar to the stories the Rabbis told about kings and garments but with a slight difference. Barclay (1975) suggested that the parables of Jesus revealed to the Pharisees and the audience that the door of salvation is open for all sinner to come, but not remain sinners but be changed by God's grace. He further noted we need to be clothed with spiritual garments of faith, reverence, and humility or will be thrown out of the wedding feast by the King.

White (1991) describes the wedding garment as the righteousness of Christ received by faith for those who accept Christ as their personal Saviour and who overcome sin in his name. White (1991) further stated that the parable "illustrated the gospel invitation, its rejection by the Jewish people, and the call of mercy to the Gentiles" (p. 227). She added that the gospel invitation was given by the disciples of Christ, but the rejection of the Gospel and persecution of the disciples like Stephen and James who were put to death led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the gospel going to the Gentiles. These parables revealed to the listeners that unless a transformation and a preparation was made by the people, they would find themselves outside the Kingdom of God. Through these parables, Jesus was able to communicate to the Pharisees his love and concern for their eternal welfare in spite of their denunciation of him.

#### Jesus Responds to Accusations by Giving Strong Words of Condemnation

Jesus reserved His strongest words of reproof for some of the religious leaders of His time. They were the people who taught the people to honor the traditions of men more than the traditions of God. Knight (1994) describes the conflict with the Scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23 as reaching a "verbal climax" (p. 227). He

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further added Jesus had done all he could to warn them, woo them, and win them to the kingdom of heaven. Now the time was urgent and because they still rejected him he had to make a “frontal assault” (p. 227). They were like the blind leading the blind. Jesus dealt harshly with their accusations because of the enormity of the accusations. Here are some of the examples.

When the Pharisees accused Jesus of using the power of Beelzebub, Jesus used these strong words of condemnation in Matthew 12:34: *“Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”* Clarke (1950) in his commentary describes the words as severe but “extremely proper” to the Pharisees in the context of the story (p. 139).

The request of the Pharisees for a sign in Matthew 12:38 was not a genuine request. They had seen many signs and wonders and would not have believed Christ if he had shown them a sign. That is why Jesus stated *“An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah”* (Matt. 12:39). Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days, so will Jesus be in the grave for three days and then rise after his crucifixion (Knight, 1994). Jesus’ harsh words against the Pharisees as adulterers were scriptural. Clarke (1950) observed that the Jewish nation in the Scriptures was portrayed as wedded to the Most High. However, the Pharisees were like the disloyal wife forsaking their true husband and joining with Satan and sin.

Jesus repeatedly condemned the Pharisees as *“Hypocrites!”* because the people only gave lip service to God, but did not honour God in their hearts and their worship was in vain because they were *“Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matt. 15:7-9). Clarke (1950) commented, *“By the traditions of the elders, not only the word of God was perverted, but his worship also was greatly corrupted.”*

Jesus described them as blind leaders in Matthew 15:14 He said, *“Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.”* Jesus said this when the disciples told Jesus the Pharisees were offended by what He had said.

In Matthew 23, the eight woes to scribes and Pharisees are stated. Jesus pronounced woe to the Pharisees because they barred the kingdom of heaven against men neither going in themselves nor allowing other to go in. They unjustly made profit from widows’ houses, and offered long prayers to show their piety (Matt. 23: 13-14).

In Matthew 23:27-28, Jesus likened the scribes and Pharisees to *“whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.”* In their hypocrisy, they appeared righteous outside, but inside were filled with lawlessness.

#### Jesus Responds to Accusations by Referring to the Scriptures

Ethics plays an important role in communication. What people do and say must be guided by a set or creed for communication to be ethical and not to degenerate to coercion, violence and intimidation. Jesus used the Scriptures (the Torah) to base his beliefs and values. When accused falsely, Jesus often quoted the scriptures, or he asked the people “have you not read in the Scriptures...” Some examples follow:

Jesus was accused of eating with the tax collectors. However, when Jesus heard this, he said, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”* (Matt. 9:12-13). Jesus quoted the words, *“‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’* from Hosea 6:6 in the Old Testament. By directing their minds to the scriptures, Jesus tried to shift their attention not to the traditions of men, but the commandments of God.

Jesus’ conflict with the Pharisees continued to grow. The scribes and Pharisees came all the way from Jerusalem to Jesus saying *“Why do Your disciples transgress the traditions of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”* (Matt 15:1-2). Jesus quoted a passage of scripture saying, *“Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’”* Jesus pointed out that their traditions were disregarding the commandments of God when they planned on giving any profit as a gift to God and not meeting their parents’ needs. The first quote about honouring the parents is taken from Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16; the other quote is taken from Exodus 21:17.

The conflict with Jesus reaches a high point when the chief priests and scribes ask Jesus to stop the children from shouting out their praises *“Hosanna to the Son of David!”* (Matt. 21:15). Jesus answered, “Yes. Have you never read, *‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?’*” (Matt. 21:16). Jesus quoted Psalm 8:2 to defend the children’s actions and rebuke them indirectly that the children

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had recognised what the older people had failed to understand about the role of the Messiah. Jesus used Scriptures throughout the encounters with the Jewish leaders trying to help them see their zeal in obeying God's commandments was a little misdirected. In fact, by using scriptures Jesus was trying to reason with them using the most authentic source of evidence.

#### Jesus Responds to His Accusers by Leaving the Place

Sometimes the best way to deal with accusations is to defend the case and leave. Staying and arguing can make matters worse as each side would try to prove they are right. Jesus did this in some occasions. Jesus' response by leaving showed he had done his best to convince them of who he was, and now there was not much he could say and do because they were not willing to hear him or accept his testimony.

The two opposing parties of the middle class Pharisees and the wealthy, aristocratic Sadducees from the priestly class join to test Jesus (Russell, 1986). They come to ask for a sign from heaven (Matt 16:1). Their intent was to test Jesus, not to search sincerely for the truth. Jesus correctly interprets their actions when he says they know how to discern the weather but how come they cannot discern the "signs of the times" (Matt. 16:3). Jesus leaves the place after rebuking them, "*A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*" *And He left them and departed*" (Matt. 16:4).

The chief priests and scribes heard the children praising God after Jesus cleansed the temple and healed the lame and the blind. They angrily ask Jesus, "*Do You hear what these are saying?*" (Matt. 21:16). Jesus knows that they have come to the point of no return. No matter how much he tries to reason with them through questions, words of condemnations, parables, or scriptures, they are unwilling to accept that he has come from God. Jesus then defends the children's actions saying, "*have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?'*" (Matt 21:16). Jesus then knowing he has done all he could and there is nothing more to do leaves the city and goes to Bethany (Matt. 21:17). This was the way Jesus dealt with his accusers.

#### Jesus Responds to Accusations by Keeping Silent before His Accusers

Matthew 26 "highlights the polarization that takes place as men and women are confronted by the claims of Christ" (Knight, 1994, p. 254). The Jewish leaders and Judas were on one side and the disciples on the other. Knight revealed that Jesus was "in command of the events" and had a clear understanding of what was happening. There were a few instances when Jesus kept silent before His accusers. These instances came toward the very end of His life during His trial.

The chief priests and elders brought false testimony against Jesus (Matt. 26:59). But Jesus remains silent. "*And the high priest arose and said to Him, 'Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?' But Jesus kept silent.*" (Matt. 26:62-63). Jesus was wise enough to know not to answer to the wild accusations brought against him. There was no need for him to justify himself to the people so bent on putting him to death.

Jesus responded with silence in front of Pilate, the Governor. "*And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing*" (Matt. 27:12). When Pilate questioned him, "*Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?*" Jesus did not say a word (Matt. 27:13-14).

The silence of Jesus spoke volumes. His decision not to speak did not mean He was guilty. Jesus was innocent of any crime. It meant that no matter what He said, it would not be accepted and considered, for the religious leaders were "*blinded*" by jealousy and a desire to keep on their traditions.

#### Discussion

Jesus communicated in a variety of ways when dealing with the accusations hurled at him by various people. He communicated effectively in different situations using multiple communication skills.

One of the first ways Jesus dealt with accusations was by asking questions. What was the purpose of the questions Jesus asked when facing accusations? Lee (2013, p. 5) pointed out that Jesus used questions to challenge their current views and form "*new schema.*" He added, His audience and accusers had to "*unlearn the old schemata and to explore a new way of thinking.*" For example, they had to learn not to depend so much on the traditions of men but the word of God. Asking questions in a hostile situation is an effective way to communicate. Bennema (2010, p. 25) asserted that we need to communicate by asking "pertinent and

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penetrating questions.” Rather than reacting to accusations emotionally, well-directed questions can defuse anger and force people to think about their actions and words.

Secondly, Jesus used analogies, maxims for a different purpose especially when accused about non doctrinal issues like association with sinners, not fasting, or not washing hands. These rules often were required by tradition of the fathers and not issues about salvation. To these accusations Jesus used analogy as comparison is an effective method in teaching and explaining a point. Jesus used maxims more in his teachings than in dealing with accusation. However, the maxim like “a tree is known by its fruit” (Matt 12:33) was an effective way of dealing with the accusation of the Pharisees that Jesus used Beelzebub’s power to cast out demons. Jesus through his maxim pointed out the evil in their hearts and their deliberate rejection of the Christ, the Son of God.

Jesus used parables as an important part of his teachings especially with the Pharisees (Bockmuehl, 2001). These parables illustrated Jesus ideas about the kingdom of God. The parables were also used later in Jesus’ teaching as a safe way for communicating sensitive topics, for persuading his listeners, for warning them of the judgment to come, and for dealing with false accusations. In the parables of the Two Sons, Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers, and the Parable of the Wedding Feast, Jesus was trying to persuade the Pharisees that He was the Messiah and the Kingdom of God was at hand. Jesus knew the parables would be more easily accepted by the audience rather than a direct rebuke. In some cases the parable was understood, and the chief priests and Pharisees did perceive “that He was speaking of them” (Matt. 21:45). However, in the Parable of the Two Sons Jesus made the purpose of the parable clear saying to the Pharisees, “Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.” (Matt. 21:31). Burger (2000) stated Jesus used parables to “bridge the gap between what his audience already accepted, and what he was trying to persuade them to accept” (p. 30).

Jesus used parables as a “safe” way to convey his message using figurative language (Knight, 1994, p. 143). Knight further suggested Jesus was careful not to allow his opponents to misuse his words or to unintentionally turn them away. Jesus used parables to “make truth concrete” (Knight, 1994, p. 143). By speaking of things familiar and catching their attention by an interesting story, Jesus was able to connect their earthly lives with the spiritual and heavenly realities.

The third response of Jesus to his accusers was strong words of condemnation. These words were uttered as a last resort to convince and awaken them from the deception of Satan. Jesus described them as “*Serpents, brood of vipers!*” (Matt. 23:33). Jesus’ strong words of condemnation was a result of their hypocrisy (Matt. 23: 13,15, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29) ; extortion and self indulgence” (Matt. 23:25); lawlessness (Matt. 23:28); guilt of murderers (Matt. 23:31). Yet in spite of these harsh words, Jesus lamented over them. He wanted to gather them under His wings like a *mother hen gathers her chicks, but they “were not willing,”* (Matt. 23:37).

The Pharisees it seems went “out of their way to provoke an argument” with Jesus (Knight, 1994). Knight further reveals travelling from Jerusalem to Galilee was not a “pastoral tour,” but to lay a charge why the traditions of the elders were not honored by the disciples and Jesus. To this charge, Jesus defended his case by quoting scriptures. Knight (1994) explains, Jesus showed the Pharisees and scribes that they were actually violating the fifth commandment to honor their parents by neglecting their old parents’ needs. It seems Jesus used the scriptures to open their eyes to really understand their actions. Their sin, Knight (1994) describes is “the sin of devotion” — the “*religious people trying hard to be religious*” (p. 159). Their rule about keeping the commandments of God have made them unloving and caused them to hurt people and even their parents. Jesus hoped the force of the Scriptures used to meet the accusation would hopefully open their eyes to their folly.

One of the last few measures Jesus followed in his conflict with the Jewish leaders was to withdraw. Kingsbury describes the conflict Jesus faces with the Jewish leaders as a leitmotif in the Book of Matthew (as cited in Vledder, 1997). This recurrent theme of conflict reaches a high point where Jesus withdraws from Jerusalem and goes to the city of Bethany (Matt. 21:17). Earlier in Matthew 16 when the Pharisees and Sadducees jointly work together to discredit Jesus asking for a sign, he refuses telling them no other sign will be given except the sign of prophet Jonah and “He left them and departed” (Matt. 16:4). Jesus withdrew as the hostility of the Jewish leaders increased in intensity, but he also withdrew to show he did not approve of their teachings or behaviour. Jesus’ warning to his disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees right after this incident (Matt. 16:6) was to teach them to be aware of the doctrines they taught that contradicted the Scriptures and that they should not follow their practices which was external and which could not save a person just by dealing with actions of washing, eating and doing things a proper way (Knight, 1994).

The final response of Jesus to his accusers reflected the climax of the conflict with the Jewish leaders.

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They were looking for the death penalty for Christ, and no words he would have said would have been taken seriously. In this extreme and perilous situation, Jesus kept silent, knowing the God was the supreme judge.

Jesus' purpose and the way He communicated were guided by two principles: one to do the will of the Father (John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.") and two, to do things by the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1 "*Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.*"). Jesus communicated the truth. John 14:6 says, "Jesus said to him, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* One reason why it is important to consider Jesus' method of dealing with accusations is because His methods give us important guidelines for managing conflict.

Jesus spoke with authority and left His listeners astonished. Matthew 7: 28-29 says, "*And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*" According to source credibility theory, a speaker is considered credible because of the speaker's expertise and trustworthy quality (Griffin, 2009). Jesus was the Son of God and the promised Messiah (Matthew 3:17; Matthew 16:16). Thus Jesus spoke with high credibility and therefore how He communicated is important.

Jesus' method of dealing with conflict was different to the established way of dealing with conflict as outlined by the work of M. Afzalur Rahim, author and founder of *International Journal of Conflict Management*. Rahim (as cited in Griffin 2009) identified five ways of dealing with conflict: avoiding, obliging (giving in), compromising (negotiate to find a middle way), dominating (getting the upper hand to win), and integrating (collaborate for win-win situation). In addition to this, Stella Ting-Toomey advocator of Face-Negotiation Theory identified three more conflict management styles: emotional expression (sharing and venting feelings), passive aggression (silent accusations or feelings of ill will) and third-party help (enlisting another respected person to help). Sometimes these methods of dealing with false accusations are inadequate.

Jesus' style of communication especially when dealing with false accusations was different. He did not avoid the situation and wish it away. He did not give in to the wishes of His opposers. He did not compromise His principles and the truth He stood for. He did not dominate the situation just to win the argument. He did not collaborate with the religious leaders to gain a win-win situation, so everyone would be happy. He expressed feelings of frustration, sadness, and even anger but did not vent out His feelings. He did not harbor ill will against His accusers. His response to His accusers reveals His feelings. He cried, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!*" (Matthew 23:27). He did not enlist the third person to help him solve the problem.

Jesus instead asked questions to direct the accusers thoughts to a greater principle or truth in the scriptures; he shared parables, analogies, and maxims to warn His accusers or correct or impress some important view of God; he used strong words of condemnation in love to show them their errors and bring them back to the truth; he referred to the Scriptures to guide them to a clear understanding of God's will; and on some occasions seeing that all He had said would make no difference, He chose to remain silent, letting His silence speak volumes to the guilty accusers. At other times He withdrew from the scene refusing to be drawn into controversy. His methods of communication give insight into new ways of approaching conflict management especially when dealing with accusations.

In fact the Gospel of Matthew in its structure presents a repetition of contrast between Jesus and His accusers (Bauer, 1989). The religious leaders tried to exalt themselves, but Jesus humbled Himself; they did everything to attract attention to themselves (Matthew 23:5), but Christ drew the people's attention to His Father God; they did not practice what they preached (Matthew 23:3), but Christ humbled Himself and came to serve as he taught (Matthew 20:28); Jesus was the Son of God, but they were "in league with the Devil," (Bauer, 2989). Thus the two contrasts indicate the two methods of verbal and non-verbal communication used. Jesus' method of communication and His way of dealing with His accusers seems preferable and the ideal way in dealing with accusation.

In a digitalized world today, where the media has a powerful effect on the society, we need to hear other voices, other stories that can influence and shape our values, beliefs and perceptions. "The cultural environment has been polluted as a byproduct of the cumulative effect of our immersion in commercially motivated and produced media" (Gross, 2012). The other stories and voices we need to hear come from the Bible, the Word of God, portraying the life of Christ. We can follow the methods of Christ in dealing with accusation for there was none on earth wiser, gentler, and more humble than Christ. It would do well to follow the advice of the wisest man on earth, King Solomon who said, "In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride, But the lips of the wise will preserve them." Proverbs 14:3.

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