

EXEGETICAL STUDIES IN THE

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

BY

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PREFACE

The world has never known a teacher whose wisdom and authority paralleled that of Jesus Christ. Virtually from His childhood, Jesus astonished even the wisest and most knowledgeable persons in His hearing (see Luke 2:47). At least on one occasion when Christ's enemies came to arrest him, though He had done no evil, they simply had to walk away empty handed, stating incredulously, "No man has ever spoken like this Man!" (John 7:46). And such was the reaction of the crowds who heard Jesus at the very beginning of His ministry, as the Son of Man stood on a hillside to best address the multitudes of people who followed Him to catch just a glimpse or hear just a word from the Man whom so many deemed to be the promised and heralded Messiah.

There can be no more important endeavor than studying and meditating on the words of Christ. His wisdom, tolerance, love, compassion, mercy, unparalleled righteousness and unwavering truth are desperately needed in this dark world, and especially in the church, His spiritual body (Eph. 1:22-23). For some Christians, the controversies of the day have become so prominent in their minds and efforts that focus has been lost from what we all should be dwelling on and discussing the most: the simple truths and beautiful examples left for us in the gospels. An entire lifetime could be spent cross-examining and debating people deceived by false doctrines on baptism, the work of the church, worship in spirit and in truth, and other controversial (and important) questions. But let us understand one thing: a thousand lifetimes full of such discussions will not help us save a single soul if we fail to shine forth the light of Christ in the things that we do, not just what we say. Christ demands of His disciples that we lead by example, that we love without fail, that we forgive without vindication, that we show patience and humility and mercy beyond measure – and the reason for these demands is quite simple: this is how God, in Christ, has first treated us!

It is my humble prayer that these studies in the greatest sermon ever delivered will be helpful to you as you strive to walk with Christ and shine forth His light. I claim absolutely no originality or uniqueness in the materials presented in these studies. Much to the contrary, this work is more of a compilation of some of the wonderful thoughts expressed by the teachers and authors (who spent countless hours in prayerful study of these words of Christ) who have affected my understanding of this sermon the most. This is not an academic work, and so I have refrained from extensive and cumbersome citations unless an author is directly quoted. However, the works I found most helpful, insightful and instructive are *Invitation To A Spiritual Revolution* by brother Paul Earnhart (Gary Fisher 1998), *An Expository Commentary on The Sermon On The Mount* by James Montgomery Boice (Baker Book 1972), and brother Mark Copeland's sermon outlines on Matthew Chapters 5-7 available online at www.executableoutlines.com. Looking back on this first draft, I realize that there are countless areas I would like to edit or add to. I can only hope that, if the Lord wills, there will be many more opportunities to study and add to these lessons in the future. I would be most grateful if you would bring to my attention the sections that need clarification or greater detail so that I can focus on these needed areas in future drafts. I'm thankful to the members of the Greater Buffalo Church of Christ who first gave me the opportunity to teach these lessons. And I'm grateful always to my wife Leah for her patience and assistance in the entire process of studying and compiling these pages.

May God bless us and give us wisdom as we seek His face by looking into His glorious word!

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MATTHEW 7:28-29

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.

Introduction and Survey

Introduction – Matthew 4:23-25

There are many different views held by both the religious and the irreligious concerning the meaning and significance of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew's account of its delivery includes an introduction simply stating that Christ taught the "*gospel of the kingdom*."

- Matthew 3:1-3 – John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way for Christ, and his message declared the coming of the kingdom of heaven
- Matthew 4:17 – After Jesus was baptized and then tempted in the wilderness, His message as he preached in Galilee was similar to that of John's
- This same theme, the *gospel of the kingdom of heaven*, is repeatedly emphasized within the sermon (see 5:3,10,19,20; 6:10,33; 7:21)

What should we take away from this point? The Sermon on the Mount is not a political manifesto or a blue print for social reconstruction; neither is it simply an exposition of Jesus Christ on the Old Law (though parts of it certainly work to reveal the meanings of some parts of the Mosaic Law – meanings which had been greatly lost in the shadow of Pharisaic tradition). Rather, the Sermon on the Mount is a revelation of the true nature of the kingdom of God and the righteous standards required of its citizens. It is a spiritual message directed at the spiritual transformation and salvation of those who would receive it with humble and honest hearts – and it will transform us if we'll listen!

I. Background Of The Sermon

Judging by Matthew's account, and a similar sermon found in Luke 6, Jesus preached this sermon during the second year of His earthly ministry at the very height of His popularity (Matthew 4:24-25; Luke 6:17).

- The traditions of the Pharisees had become tantamount to God's Law (Matt. 15:9)
- The people's expectations for the Christ's eternal kingdom were polluted with ideals of wealth, power and restoration of the glory of Israel (Matt. 18:1, 20:21; Luke 17:20f, 19:11; Acts 1:6)
- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus seeks to expunge these carnal misconceptions to reveal the true nature of God's kingdom and its citizens

Why are the ideals expressed in this sermon so radically and absolutely different than the world's ideas of happiness and success? Because God wants (and has always wanted) a *special* and *peculiar* people who will proclaim and perpetuate His standards of righteousness, not the world's ideals of success. Consider I Peter 2:9-10 and II Corinthians 6:16b-7:1.

II. Outline Of The Sermon – Matthew 5-7

A. The Character Of Kingdom Citizens

1. The Beatitudes – 5:2-12
2. The influence of the righteous on the world – 5:13-16
3. Their attitude towards God's word – 5:17-20

B. What Did God's Law Really Teach?

Main theme: how to love your brother and neighbor

1. Murder and the heart – 5:21-26
2. Adultery and the heart – 5:27-30
3. Marriage, back to the beginning – 5:31-32
4. Kingdom citizens and truthfulness – 5:33-37
5. Love for those who do not love in return – 5:38-48

C. Righteousness In Man's Relationship To God

1. Charity, prayer, and fasting that pleases God – 6:1-18
2. Danger inherent to the pursuit of riches – 6:19-24
3. Faith in God to provide the needs of His children – 6:25-34

D. Righteousness In Man's Relationships With Other People – 7:1-6

E. Exhortation And Invitation To Enter The Kingdom

1. Beginning of the way: ask through word and deed – 7:7-12
2. Hindrances along the way – 7:13-20
 - Broad way of rebellion
 - Danger of false prophets
3. End of the way: separating the “sayers” from the “doers” – 7:21-27

The Beatitudes, Part I

Introduction

Think about some qualities that would distinguish a prominent earthly kingdom from an obscure kingdom, or a successful man from a failure from the view point of society today. Now read Matthew 5:3-12 – are any of those attributes that the world views as so vital to success and happiness conspicuously missing from the Beatitudes? Wealth, fame, power, worldly wisdom, pleasure – these “essentials” and others like them are completely absent from Christ’s list!

Is it any shock that the priorities, characteristics and behaviors Jesus promotes in the *Sermon on the Mount* are so radically different than the historical concerns of the world? God has always sought to purify for Himself His own special people:

- Exodus 6:7, 19:5-8 – Israel vowed to sanctify themselves unto God. Unfortunately, they only succeeded in becoming just like the rest of the nations (I Sam. 8:5-7; Psalm 106:35-40; Jer. 31:32)
- John 15:18-19 – As disciples of Jesus Christ, Christians are to be radically different than the rest of the world (Titus 2:14; II Pet. 2:4-10)

I. The Kingdom Of Heaven

What exactly does it mean that Christ preached the “gospel of the kingdom” or that the poor in spirit will inherit the “kingdom of heaven”? In some sense, this phrase refers to the church: the kingdom of heaven and the church of Christ are integrally related in Scripture (as will be seen below). But to say that every occurrence of the word *kingdom* in the New Testament necessarily refers to the church is an overgeneralization. A brief study of this phrase should be helpful.

A. “*Kingdom of heaven*” and “*kingdom of God*” are used interchangeably in the Bible
Compare:

- Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:14-15
- Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20
- Matthew 13:31 and Mark 4:30-31

B. The “*kingdom of heaven*” involves several related concepts:

- God’s sovereignty and rule
 - To the Jews, the term kingdom meant dominion and rule, not necessarily a geographical area
 - e.g. Psalm 145:12f; Daniel 4:3, 34, 6:26, etc.
- The kingdom of heaven is a *spiritual* kingdom, not a world power or nation
 - Luke 17:21; John 18:36; Romans 14:17, etc.
- The kingdom of heaven is manifest in the world today as the church
 - i.e. The people in whose hearts God reigns as Sovereign
 - Consider Matt. 16:16-18; Col. 1:13; I Thes. 2:12; Rev. 1:4,6,9
- After life, the “*kingdom*” refers to the righteous souls in eternal glory with God
 - Consider Matt. 25:34; I Cor. 15:50; II Tim. 4:18; II Pet. 1:10-11

In the book of Matthew, the “*gospel of the kingdom*” is the good news of the complete revelation of God’s will in the teachings and examples of Jesus, offering salvation to all mankind. The apostle Peter tells us that the godly prophets of the Old Testament yearned to know when and how God would fulfill His promise of redemption in the Messiah, and that even angels have fervently desired to look into the revelation that we have in our very hands in the New Testament (I Peter 1:10-12, see also Luke 10:23). In writing to the Corinthians of the glory of the gospel, Paul quoted from Isaiah 64 saying:

*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man
The things which God has prepared for those who
love Him.*

– I Corinthians 2:9

These words are sometimes quoted to stir up hope and courage by turning people’s thoughts toward heaven – and surely, the glory of heaven will be more beautiful and wondrous than any finite human mind could imagine. But read I Corinthians 2 more carefully: Paul isn’t talking about heaven; he’s talking about the glorious privilege of learning the mind of God in the gospel! The blessings, comfort and glory that God has planned for His children in the gospel are too wonderful for man to even imagine, perhaps too wonderful to fully grasp. How blessed we are to live in a time when the revelation of God’s mind has been freely given to man in the gospel of the kingdom of Jesus Christ! All that is required to seize our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven is to put down our pride and pick up the words of Christ in humble obedience!

So if you’re looking for a guide to wealth and fame, or a revolutionary political document to reform a nation, or even a handbook that is sure to bring you a life of happiness devoid of conflict and sacrifice, the *Sermon On The Mount* is not the manual for you. But if you seek to approach Christ with a meek and humble heart, prepared to listen to the Master Teacher and learn from Him exactly what it means to be a citizen of the highest heavenly kingdom, to live well-pleasing to God and to reap the blessings of the gospel, then this is the place to start.

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.

– Matthew 11:28-30

II. A Blessed People

The verses at hand are referred to as the *Beatitudes* because *beatitude* is Latin for happiness, or blessedness. Already this definition presents us with a problem: does Jesus here promise that the poor in spirit, mournful, meek, etc. will truly be *happy* people in our conventional sense of gladness, joy and delight?

A. Blessed does not necessarily mean happy

Happiness and joy, as we commonly use the words, depend on external conditions and subjective feelings: you might be happy that it’s sunny and not raining, or joyful because you received a nice gift. However, *blessed*, as used in Matthew 5, depends on none of these things,

and looking at some examples of how the word is used in the rest of the New Testament will help us to see that.

- The same word is used of martyrs in Revelation 14:13 – “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”
- Also, James and Peter refer to those Christians as blessed who endure trial and temptation and suffering for righteousness’ sake as blessed (Jam. 1:12; I Pet. 3:14, 4:14)

Who would honestly say that these suffering Christians and righteous martyrs were delighted or overjoyed in their persecutions?

B. Blessed because they are received and comforted by God

The adjective *blessed* in the Beatitudes has little to do with how a person looks at himself and his own circumstances, but more to do with how God looks at him, how God receives him. Consider some examples in the New Testament of the term *blessed* used in this way:

- Matthew 13:16 – The disciples are more confused than happy after hearing the parables (vs. 36), but they were blessed because God chose to reveal the kingdom of heaven in their lifetime
- Matthew 24:46 – The faithful servant is not necessarily joyful in diligently laboring to prepare food for another, but he is blessed because the master finds him faithfully working and rewards him justly
- Romans 4:7-8 – Christians are assured that all those who seek to live in righteousness will sacrifice and suffer persecution (e.g. II Tim. 3:12), yet all Christians are blessed beyond measure because of forgiveness from God!
- Consider also Luke 11:28, 14:12-14

Now, joy, contentedness, hope and happiness can flow forth because a person is received by God – anyone who has tasted that the Lord is gracious knows this to be true (see Psalm 146; Acts 5:41; Phil. 4:10-11, etc.). But if we are going to fully understand the words of Christ in the *Beatitudes*, we must first realize that the people with the characteristics Christ describes here are blessed, not necessarily because they *feel* happy or fulfilled or delighted, but because they belong to God and have fellowship with Him.

*Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help,
Whose hope is in the LORD his God!*

– Psalm 146:5

The Beatitudes, Part II

Introduction

Whether or not it was Christ's primary intention, there is an apparent progression in the ideas conveyed by the Beatitudes, beginning with a new attitude toward self and God (vs. 3-6), then a new attitude toward and treatment of others (vs. 6-9), and finally culminating in the world's reaction to this radical change (10-12). The first four Beatitudes deal with how a person views himself and his sins. Poor in spirit, mournful, meek, and hungering for righteousness: one must learn and adopt these attributes if he or she wishes to enter the kingdom of heaven. This lesson deals with the first two Beatitudes.

I. Blessed Are The Poor In Spirit – 5:3

Jesus chose a Greek word for poor which denotes poverty of the most miserable kind. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* notes that the noun here used by Christ has root in a Greek verb, *ptochewo*, which literally means "to be poor as a beggar; to be destitute," to crouch or to cringe. This word picture helps us see that the *poor in spirit* are those who realize that before God they have nothing and they are nothing: they know all too well their own spiritual bankruptcy. The man who is poor in spirit approaches the Lord for forgiveness in penitence and humility, realizing that he has no right to what he asks for and that he has done nothing to deserve it.

A. Examples Of Arrogance In Spirit

There are many examples of characters in the New Testament who were the very opposite of poor in spirit: people so arrogant and full of themselves that there was no room in them for God's reign and will.

- John 8:33 – Proudful because of nationality, race or lineage
- Luke 12:16ff – Proudful because of possessions (cf. I Tim. 6:17)
- Luke 18:10-12 – Proudful because of good deeds done

B. Examples Of Poverty In Spirit

There are also instructive examples in the New Testament of people who were poor in spirit and whose humility was demonstrated through their disposition and actions.

- Luke 18:13-14 – A tax-collector recognizes his depravity before God
- Luke 7:1-7 – A Gentile centurion humbles himself before Christ
- Luke 7:36-50 – A sinful woman anoints the feet of Christ

C. Manifestations Of This Virtue In Our Lives

If we are people who are poor in spirit, this attribute will show itself in several areas of our lives:

- Attitude Toward Sins
 - Those outside Christ will recognize their need for a Redeemer (e.g. Acts 2:37)
 - Those saved in Christ will repent and confess their sins (I John 1:8-10), relying on God's grace and instruction (Rev. 3:14-22)
- Attitude Toward Sinners, II Timothy 2:24-26

- Attitude Toward Our Brethren, Matthew 20:25-28
- Attitude Toward God, James 4:6-10

If we wish to be part of the kingdom of God, we must be poor in spirit. We must realize that because of our sins, we are totally dependent upon God for His forgiving mercy, grace, and love to make us complete, fulfilled. And based upon this realization, we must be willing to change the way we live for the better!

"Now, therefore," says the LORD,
 "Turn to Me with all your heart,
 With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."
 So rend your heart, and not your garments;
 Return to the LORD your God,
 For He is gracious and merciful,
 Slow to anger, and of great kindness...

– Joel 2:12-13

II. Blessed Are Those Who Mourn – 5:4

As with the previous verse, this Beatitude speaks of the attitude one must have before God because of his sins. Christ must not be speaking of just any type of mourning or else this attribute could not possibly be unique to kingdom citizens – all people face sorrow and suffering (Psalm 90:10). But of all the Greek words available in His day for mourning, sadness, or grief, Jesus chose the word *pentheo*, a word for deep and violent grief, the acutest inner agony, usually associated with grieving over the dead. How can such violent sadness possibly carry with it the promise of certain comfort? The answer to this apparent conundrum lies in the spiritual truth that Jesus speaks here of *godly* sorrow: a sorrow caused, not by physical loss, but by illumination of our faults through the word of God; a sorrow that produces repentance and leads to forgiveness.

A. Various Attitudes Toward Sin

The Bible, along with our own experience, shows that different people respond to knowledge of their sins in very different ways:

- Indifference – I Tim. 4:1-2; Eph. 4:19
- Stubbornness and Denial – I John 1:8-10; e.g. King Saul in I Samuel 15
- Godly Sorrow – II Cor. 7:9-10; e.g. King David in Psalm 51
 - Consider also Psalm 34:18; Psalm 38; Isaiah 57:15, 66:1-2

B. They Shall Be Comforted

There are so many people in this life who sorrow over earthly losses with no hope (Ecclesiastes 2:20-23, 5:13-17; I Thessalonians 4:13), but those who mourn because of their sins and are willing to turn to God are assured they will find comfort and peace.

- II Corinthians 7:10 – Godly sorrow produces repentance, i.e. turning again to God, which leads to salvation through obeying His will (Heb. 5:9)
- Consider the example of Saul of Tarsus, who fasted and prayed through the depths of guilt and despair for three days, before finding God's grace in the gospel (Acts 9, I Tim. 1:12-17)
- Read Psalm 32

The Beatitudes, Part III

I. Blessed Are The Meek – 5:5

In our society, those who are weak and unable to defend or care for themselves are often looked down upon and held in contempt. Unfortunately, most people think of such weakness when they hear the word *meekness* – nothing could be farther from the truth! The Bible shows that the godly attribute of meekness, rather than weakness, is strength under disciplined control, and the very opposite of aggression and self-assertion.

A. *Meekness Defined*

- The Greek word translated meek, *praus*, describes an “inwrought grace of the soul...that temper of spirit in which we accept [God’s] dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting” (Vine)
- The Greeks used this word in reference to wild animals which were tamed and thus made useful for service
- “Now herein lies the secret of the meaning of *praus*. There is a gentleness in *praus* but behind the gentleness there is strength of steel, for the supreme characteristic of the man who is *praus* is that he is the man who is under perfect control. It is not a spineless gentleness, a sentimental fondness, a passive quietism. It is strength under control” (William Barclay, *New Testament Words*).
- Meekness differs from gentleness in that it describes the condition of the mind and heart while the latter describes the resulting actions of that attitude
- Meekness is closely related to humility, and these two words are often used in the same context in Scripture (cf. Zeph. 3:12; II Cor. 10:1; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12)
- In Galatians 5:23, the inspired writer associates this word with self-control

B. *Examples Of Meekness*

- Abraham, Genesis 13:8-9
- Esau, Genesis 33:4-9
- Joseph, Genesis 45:4-5
- Moses, Numbers 12:3 (e.g. Num. 14:4,19, 16:4,22)
- Jesus Christ, Matthew 11:29 (cf. Matt. 26:51-54; I Pet. 2:23)

C. *Do I Pass The Meekness Test?*

- Am I meek before God, humbly submitting to His will (Ps. 25:9)?
 - Do I meekly receive His word or do I “resist the Holy Spirit” (Jam. 1:21; Acts 7:51)?
 - Do I meekly/humbly do good deeds (Jam. 3:13)?
- Am I meek before my fellow men (I Tim. 6:11; Titus 3:1-2)?
 - Do I deal meekly with the unbeliever (II Tim. 2:25; I Pet. 3:15)?
 - Do I deal meekly with my erring brother or sister in Christ (Gal. 6:1)?
 - Do I deal meekly with my enemies, placing my trust in God for vengeance and deliverance (Rom. 12:14-21)?

D. *They Shall Inherit The Earth*

The characteristic of meekness is a spiritual attribute; the other blessings found in the Beatitudes are spiritual in nature also – it would be completely out of context to assume that the meek will inherit large plots of land and abundant material wealth.

- This phrase has its root in the Old Testament: Psalm 37:9,11,22,29,34; Isaiah 60:21
 - Note the alternating use of the equivalent, “shall inherit the land” – for many generations, the Jews looked forward to the fulfillment of God’s promise that Abraham’s descendents would be given a land. The wonderful blessing of Canaan became a proverbial type of any special blessing bestowed in God’s favor, especially the blessings which would come in the reign of the Messiah
 - “The phrase is a proverbial expression to denote any great blessing, perhaps as the sum of all blessings” (*Barnes’ Notes*)
- The inheritance of the land of Canaan is also used to metaphorically refer to heaven, the eternal land of God and the inheritance of the righteous (Heb. 11:13-16; Rev. 21:1-7)
- Thus, the meek will have all the blessings that God provides: blessings in this life (Matt. 6:25ff; I Tim. 4:8; Jam. 1:17); every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3), including the greatest reward:
 - “...an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*
 - I Peter 1:4-5

II. Blessed Are Those Who Hunger And Thirst For Righteousness – 5:6

This Beatitude is a culmination of the first three – Jesus teaches that the person who realizes his spiritual depravity and is thus truly humbled, filled with godly sorrow, and meek in determination to exalt the will of God, this one will have an unquenchable desire to attain righteousness in the sight of God.

A. *Righteousness*

- The character or quality of being right and just, not in the sight of man, but in the sight of God
- “Whatever conforms to the revealed will of God...appointed to be acknowledged and obeyed by man” (Vine). Compare the usage in Matt. 3:15 with Luke 7:29f.
- In Hebrews 5:13 the gospel is referred to as the “word of righteousness” because in it:
 - The righteousness of God is fully revealed – Romans 3:21-26, II Peter 1:1
 - God’s expectations for man are fully declared – II Timothy 3:16
- This righteousness is not merely an inner change, but it directly affects the way we behave and have influence in the world – see Matthew 5:10, 6:1 (NASU)
- James 2:14-24 – One cannot be righteous outside of faith in Jesus Christ (II Cor. 5:21), but faith exercised in obedience brings the soul into a living union with God, and “inevitably produces righteousness of life, i.e., conformity to the will of God” (Vine)

In Matthew 5:6, Jesus states that those who wish to be kingdom citizens must hunger and thirst for this right and just relationship with God. The Greek word here translated “hunger” is the same word used in Matthew 4:2 to describe Jesus after He fasted for forty days in the wilderness. The word is used metaphorically in the Beatitudes, alluding to an intense, voracious hunger; a hunger which must be relieved for survival. Similarly, “thirst” is the same word Paul used in II Corinthians 11:27 to describe the extreme condition of thirst which he suffered (among many other tribulations) as he strived to teach the gospel. If we want to be faithful citizens of God’s kingdom, we’re going to have to yearn for righteousness in the way that a starving person yearns for bread and water. A person who indifferently wants just a taste or an appetizer of religion is not fit to bear the name of Christ. Consider the attitude of David in Psalm 19.

B. For They Shall Be Filled

In this life, people hunger and thirst for many different things, and many strive for a lifetime without ever reaching their goals. However, there is no such uncertainty or risk of failure to those who truly yearn for righteousness: God has already graciously given us all we need to press on toward righteousness!

- Note Christ’s words in John 4:10-14 and John 6:35
 - Spiritual food for the lost: the gospel (John 4:40-42)
 - Spiritual food for those in Christ: doing the will of God (John 4:32-38)
- Let us press on toward perfection in righteousness:
 - Desiring the spiritual nourishment of God’s word (I Pet. 2:1; II Tim. 3:16f)
 - Molding ourselves into Christ’s image, doing the work of God (Phil. 3:7-15a)

The Beatitudes, Part IV

I. Blessed Are The Merciful – 5:7

In a world full of self-absorbed, self-seeking people, Jesus calls upon those who wish to gain citizenship into His spiritual kingdom to be merciful – a quality entirely concerned with the good of others. This characteristic mercy must spring from a realization of one’s own desperate need for mercy from God.

A. *Mercy Defined*

- “Compassion (human or divine, especially active)” (Strong)
- “Outward manifestation of pity; it assumes need on the part of him who receives it, and resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it” (Vine)
- Thus, mercy is compassion and pity channeled into active benevolence toward another person, for example, an enemy or a person in need

B. *Mercy is best defined by action and example*

Perhaps it is easier to recognize mercy than to accurately define this quality:

- The mercy of Abraham – Genesis 14:12-16
- The mercy of Joseph – Genesis 45:4-7
- The mercy of Moses – Numbers 12:9-13
- The mercy of David – II Samuel 19:16-23 (see II Sam. 16:5-13)
- The mercy of the Good Samaritan – Luke 10:30-37
- The mercy of Jesus Christ – Luke 23:34; Romans 5:6
- The mercy of God:
 - Mercy is an integral part of God’s nature (II Sam. 24:14; I Chron. 16:34; II Cor. 1:3)
 - His mercy is best seen in His act of offering salvation to sinful mankind (Rom. 5:8-11; Eph. 2:1-10; Tit. 3:4-7)

C. *We Must Be Merciful To Others*

Notice from the examples above that mercy is not just a feeling, but an attribute that moves a person to action! Mercy demands that Christians:

- Do more than just pray for the lost: we must take the gospel to them!
 - Ezek. 3:16-21; Matt. 9:36-38; II Cor. 5:11; II Tim. 2:24-26
- Do more than simply feel sorry for the hungry, sick, and downtrodden: we must try to meet their needs!
 - Gal. 6:10; I Tim. 6:18; Heb. 13:16; Jam. 2:14-16, 4:17; I John 3:17
- Forgive those who wrong us – Matt. 6:12, 14-15

D. *Be Merciful To Obtain Mercy*

Kingdom citizens do not earn or merit God’s mercy by showing mercy and compassion to others. However, mercy is an indication of the penitent spirit which a person must have in order to be forgiven by God. Thus it can accurately be said that a person who refuses to be merciful will never receive mercy from God:

- Proverbs 21:13; Matthew 18:21ff; Luke 1:50; James 2:13

II. Blessed Are The Pure In Heart – 5:8

“Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart...” (Psalm 24:3-4a). Even in the Old Testament, the Scriptures declare that those with pure hearts will enjoy the highest favor and blessing from God.

A. Purity

The Greek word translated *purity* (*katharos*) used in Matthew 5:8 denotes cleanness and purity (see II Tim. 1:3, 2:22; Jam. 1:27; Rev. 21:18). This word is apparently used interchangeably in the New Testament with two other Greek words (*hagnos* and *eilikrines*) which connote the meaning of “pure from defilement” and “unalloyed,” as a precious metal devoid of impurities (Vine – see Phil. 1:10, 4:8; I Tim. 5:22; Jam. 3:17; I John 3:3). Applied to a person, the New Testament writers use these words to describe purity of heart, motivations and behavior, sincere honesty, and absolute integrity. These words should describe all who seek to serve Christ in His kingdom.

- Purity in God’s sight is only attained by obeying the gospel – I Peter 1:22; Titus 1:15
 - Compare I John 1:7 with Titus 2:14
- Purity is learned and pursued by cleansing thoughts, meditations, words and deeds
 - Psalm 19:14; Philippians 4:8

B. Purity In Heart

The “heart” of which Jesus speaks is not the blood-pumping physical organ but the inner man, or man’s control center – that is, the center of man’s motivations, desires, thoughts, actions and words. The person who is striving to be pure in heart:

- *Loves God and His will above all else* – Matt. 6:24f, 22:37; Jam. 4:4; I John 2:15ff
- *Is not filled with hypocrisy and unholy motivations* – Matt. 6:1; Acts 5:1-10; compare I Pet. 2:16 with Eph. 6:6; I Tim. 1:15
- *Fills his/her mind and heart with pure things* – Phil. 4:8; see Psalm 77:12 and Psalm 119:15, 27, 48, 78, 148
 - Thus escaping the corruption of the world – Mark 7:20ff; Jam. 1:27
- *Strives to remain pure and undefiled* – I Tim. 5:22; I John 3:3

C. They Shall See God

- To see God, as it is stated in Matt. 5:8, means more than just looking upon God and being in His awesome presence
 - All people shall see God in this way – Rev. 1:7; II Cor. 5:10
- It also means more than just learning of God and who He is
 - Many learn about Jesus and thus see who God is (i.e. His power, love, will, etc. – Hebrews 1:3), yet never partake of the blessing described here
- To see God means to dwell in His presence and His highest favor – this is a blessing unique to faithful citizens of the kingdom of Heaven (cf. Revelation 22:4!)
 - To the Hebrew mind, to see the face of one was an expression of great favor
 - See Prov. 22:29; II Kin. 25:19 (footnote in NASU: the king’s close associates is literally “men of those seeing the king’s face”)

Purity of heart is meaningless to the one who has no desire to come into the presence of the mighty God with favor and blessing – but to those who desire a good standing with God (recall the first few Beatitudes), we cannot afford to shun this most important spiritual quality.

The Beatitudes: Conclusion

I. Blessed Are The Peacemakers – 5:9

“For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name shall be called...Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). God the Son came to this earth in the body of Jesus Christ that He might “redeem us from every lawless deed” (Titus 2:14) – that He might make peace between God and sinful man (Isaiah 53:5). How fitting, then, that those who walk in the footsteps of Christ should be peacemakers – people who strive to live in peace with both God and men.

A. Peacemakers

To be a peacemaker means more than just keeping to oneself in order to avoid disturbances and contentions. A peacemaker is one who actively seeks the highest good for all people whom his life touches. To make oneself a peacemaker, one must:

- *Be at peace with God in Christ* – Rom. 5:1,8-10; II Cor. 5:18f; Col. 1:19ff
- *Seek to share this peace with others* – II Cor. 5:18-19 “ministry of reconciliation”; Rom. 10:15
 - Teaching with an attitude of peace and humility – II Tim. 2:23ff
 - However, true peace never compromises truth to avoid confrontation! Note James 3:17 – heavenly wisdom is first of all pure, i.e. never compromising righteousness and truth for a false, unworthy peace!
- *Be at peace with the family of Christ* – II Cor. 13:11; I Thess. 5:22
 - Without peace amongst ourselves, how can we proclaim the gospel of peace?
 - Note that this peace sometimes comes at the cost of personal loss (see especially I Corinthians 6:7 and Romans 14:19-20 in context)
 - See also II Tim. 2:22; Jam. 3:16-18; Matt. 5:23-24; I John 4:19-21
- *Pursue peace with all people* – Gal. 5:22; I Thess. 5:15
 - Peace must be actively pursued – I Pet. 3:10-11; Rom. 14:19; Heb. 12:14
 - No matter how anyone else lives or behaves – Rom. 12:18; Ps. 109:4, 120:7
 - Consider Matt. 5:43-45a with I Cor. 13:4-8a and Rom. 13:10

Self-examination plays an important role in trying to become a peacemaker. Peace and contentment within self, a peace that does not alter with outside circumstances, is a result of walking in the hope and glory of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:6; Philipppians 4:6-7). When a Christian finds himself involved in strife in any area of life, the peacemaker first looks within and ask, “Am I to blame, in part or in whole?” (See Matthew 7:3ff).

B. Children Of God

Jesus does not here use the term *children* in the generic sense that all mankind are the offspring of God in creation (Isaiah 64:8; Acts 17:25-28) but in a special sense – a particular relationship of blessing and favor held by those adopted into the spiritual family of God through Christ (Ephesians 1:5). This relationship with God is available only because of God’s great love (I John 3:1), not our own merit (Titus 3:5) – and it is a relationship with much hope and much responsibility (I John 3:1-3).

I. Blessed Are Those Persecuted For Righteousness' Sake – 5:10-12

After speaking of the Kingdom citizen's attitude toward self, God, and others, Jesus finishes the Beatitudes with a stunning conclusion: these humble, meek, merciful, peacemakers will become the persecuted. This fundamental spiritual truth, that the darkness of the world cannot cohabitate peacefully with those shining forth the light of Christ, comes as no surprise to disciples of Jesus, for He was cruelly persecuted first and warned those who would become His disciples that the world would treat them the exact same way.

A. *Take Up Your Cross*

Jesus left no misconceptions in the minds of His listeners about the persecutions that await those who follow the path of righteousness:

- Luke 14:27-33 – Some Christians think it unwise to warn the person who wishes to become a disciple of Christ about the cost of discipleship – Christ did not think so! (See also Luke 9:57-62.)
- Part of taking up the cross of Christ is taking up the persecutions that He faced
 - John 15:18-21; Matt. 10:24-39 – A servant is not greater than his master!
 - Truly, all the godly of every age have faced these same challenges – II Tim. 3:12
 - Think of Abel (Gen. 4), Joseph (Gen. 37:2), Moses (Ex. 17:4), David (Psalm 31:13), Elijah (I Kings 19), Micah (I Kings 22), Daniel (Dan. 6), John the Baptist (Matt. 14), and indeed all the prophets (Acts 7:52)

B. *What Kind Of Persecution?*

There are many things that people mistake for persecution:

- When error is exposed by a teacher of the truth (Rom. 16:17f; I Tim. 6:3-5, 20f; II Tim. 4:ff)
- When a Christian is rebuked for living in sin (Titus 3:10f; James 5:19f)
- When a Christian is punished for doing evil (I Peter 2:20, 3:17, 4:15ff)

Though the above may cause problems for people who do not strive to live in the holiness of Christ, these are not examples of the persecutions spoken of by Christ, i.e. the unjust persecution of the righteous. However, Christians *will* face persecutions such as those that Jesus and the apostles faced:

- Physical persecution – Acts 7:54ff; Heb. 11:35ff; I Pet. 4:12ff
- Reviling (onslaught of words) – Matt. 27:39-44; Acts 17:18,32
- Slander (false accusations) – Acts 18:13; Rom. 3:8

C. *Why Are The Righteous Persecuted?*

What crime has the Kingdom citizen committed to deserve such vile treatment by those he seeks to show the way of salvation? The righteous person has done nothing more than shine forth the light of Christ in a world that does not know God and does not want its wickedness to be exposed by God's light.

- John 3:19-21 – The world despises the exposure of its evil deeds by the light of God
- John 15:19 – Because the Kingdom citizen is not only different than the world, but judges the world unworthy of God's glory simply by his obedience!

In conclusion, note two important aspects of these persecutions faced by the righteous:

- Because Christ suffered first and promised that His followers would likewise suffer, these persecutions actually work to strengthen the faith of Christ's spiritually-minded disciples, rather than destroying their hope (Acts 5:41; Phil 1:28)
- Furthermore, such suffering for righteousness' sake builds character and strengthens resolution to persevere for Christ (Rom. 5:3ff; Jam. 1:2-4; I Pet. 1:7).

The Similitudes: Salt and Light

The beatitudes of Matthew 5:2-10 are quite clear in stating the fact that citizens of the kingdom of heaven must be entirely different in character and conduct than the sinful world around them – a separation which culminates in the world’s rejection and abuse of the one who seeks to live in righteousness. Might it not be better, then, for disciples of Christ to live in righteousness alone to themselves, secluded from the world as in a commune or monastery? As if to immediately quench just such a thought, Christ teaches in Matthew 5:13-16 that Christians are not only to live in and have influence in the world, but even despite the bitter and slanderous treatment they receive from their fellow man, they are the world’s only hope.

I. In The World, But Not Of The World

Jesus never intended for His disciples to remove themselves from the world to avoid persecution or for any other reason. He taught and showed through example that the child of God must stay in the world and make their presence felt and known.

- Look at Christ’s example – Matt. 9:10-13; Luke 15:1-2, even despite persecution!
- I Corinthians 5:9-10 – For Christians not to associate with the world, they would have to go out of the world entirely!
- John 17:6-18 – Christ’s disciples are to live in the world but not *like* the world

II. You Are The Salt Of The Earth – 5:13

Salt has many important properties, even more important in 1st century Palestine than in many societies today due to advanced technologies of purification and preservation. According to William Barclay’s commentary on Matthew, the Romans had a saying: “There is nothing more useful than sun and salt.” Jesus used this common mineral to illustrate the preserving, purifying influence that Christians are to have on the world. By the greedy, egotistical standards of the world, Christians may be the unlikeliest of people to influence the people around them – power, wealth and fame probably didn’t belong to any of the audience that Christ teaches in Matthew 5 – but Christ teaches that God’s children actually have influence of the utmost importance!

A. Preservation and Purification

Because of sin, the world is a spiritually corrupt and polluted place (II Peter 1:4; 2:19f). Christians, however, having escaped this corruption by the knowledge of Jesus Christ have the ability to purify and preserve, showing the light of Christ to those who are rotting because of sin.

- *Purity In Speech* – Colossians 4:6; Ephesians 4:29
- *Purity In Dress* – The way we dress speaks to the world of our character
 - Compare Proverbs 7:10 with I Timothy 2:9-10
- *Purity In Behavior* – Titus 2:6-8; I Peter 2:12; e.g. Acts 9:36ff
 - Not to be seen by the world, but to glorify God – cf. Matthew 6
 - Taking care, even in liberty, not to offend the weak – Romans 14
- *Purity In Appearance* – Romans 14:16
 - It is not always what one does but what others *think he does* which condemns him in their sight!

B. If The Salt Loses Its Saltiness

Perhaps nothing is more sad than when a Christians becomes useless to the Lord!

- II Peter 2:20-22 – It would have been better to never have known the way of righteousness, for now they have no where else to turn!
- Christians must beware lest we become defiled and impure, ruining our influence in the world:
 - Defiled by bitterness and ungratefulness, Hebrews 12:15
 - Defiled by godlessness and lusts, Hebrews 12:16-17; Jude 23; Mark 7:14-23

III. You Are The Light Of The World – 5:14-16

A. Those That Dwell In Darkness

The Bible speaks metaphorically about darkness in several different ways:

- Distress, despair, gloom, sorrow, fear (esp. of death) – Isaiah 9:1-2; Job 10:21, 17:13
- Sin, iniquity, transgression – Jn 3:19; Rom. 13:12-13; I Cor. 4:5; Eph. 5:11
- Ignorance, not knowing God and His will – Job 5:14, 12:24-25; and:
- Ephesians 4:17-18 – a comprehensive picture of true darkness in this world

B. I Am The Light Of The World

As prophesied by Isaiah (9:1f, 49:6, 60:1-3), God brought light to the world, to those suffering in sorrow, despair, and the darkness of sin, by sending His son, Jesus Christ:

- John 1:4-5, 8:12, 9:5, 12:35-36
- Not “a light,” but “the Light” – much like John 14:6
- While on this earth, Jesus Christ was the Light of the world: His perfect example of truth, justice, righteousness, love, and good works shone bright in a world full of darkness and decay.

C. Christians Are The Light Of The World

In following His example, Christ commands His disciples to be lights of righteousness, no matter how tiny and seemingly insignificant, to lead others to salvation in Him.

- As the moon reflects light from the sun, we reflect light from God – II Cor. 4:6
- Good influence on unbelievers, I Peter 3:1-2
 - Not unseen lamps under bushels, but heralds of God’s praise – I Peter 2:9
 - Even before those who seek to harm us, I Thessalonians 5:14-15
- Good influence on our brethren, Hebrews 10:24-25 (also II Corinthians 9:12-13)
- II Corinthians 3:2 – We are Christ’s epistle to the world: mankind must see His will and His love in us!
- We must preserve our lights – Ephesians 5:8-21; Philippians 2:15-16

We **must** be seen by the world, and we **must** radiate God’s light! The world will not be changed for the better if our lives are corrupted by unholiness. The world may not even be changed by our strict adherence to worshipping in spirit and in truth. However, the world **will** be changed, and some drawn to Christ, by our examples of love and good works, self-control, godliness, joy and hope. May we strive to live in such a way that others say, “It is easier to be good when he/she is around.” May we strive to live in such a way that others see our good works and seek to glorify God by coming to Him through His word.

Jesus Christ, The Fulfillment Of The Old Law

In Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus states plainly and boldly His view of and relationship to the Scriptures. During the course of Christ's ministry on earth He had many altercations with the Pharisees over the Old Law, specifically over the Sabbath:

- Mark 2:23-28 – Sabbath was made for man, not the other way around
- Mark 3:1-6 – Not unlawful to do good on the Sabbath (reason and God's example told them this, cf. Matthew 12:11-12; John 5:17)
- John 5:1-18 – Jesus showed by His power that He had the authority of God, the Lord of the Sabbath, and thus He made the rules about the Sabbath observance!
 - The formerly lame man recognized this authority (vs. 11)
 - The Jews could see only their blind traditions, not even the great miracle!

Jesus did not break the Sabbath or any other Old Testament command (Matt. 3:15; John 8:29; Heb. 4:15; I Pet. 2:22; II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 1:18-21) – as a man, He lived perfect under the law of God, thus enabling His blood to be a righteous atonement for the sin of the world. However, because of His confrontations with the Pharisees (esteemed in that day as the greatest teachers of God's law), some would have accused Christ of seeking to destroy the Old Law and build a new one on its ruins. Jesus answers such accusations emphatically in this passage, upholding the absolute integrity and authority of God's word.

I. Christ Came To Fulfill The Old Testament – 5:17

Christ's death on the cross established a New Covenant between man and God, making the Old Law obsolete.

- Jeremiah 31:31-34 → This prophecy was fulfilled in Christ, Hebrews 8:7-13
- Colossians 2:11-17

However, in doing so Christ fulfilled the purpose/prophecies of the law and the prophets, bringing the Old Testament to glorious completion, not utterly destroying its truth and authority!

- There is a difference between destroying an agreement or covenant and fulfilling it
- *Fulfill* means to finish, to bring to an end through completion

A. *What was the purpose of the law and the prophets?*

- Galatians 3:19-25 – Added because of sin, to guide man in the paths of God
- Always pointing to and predicting the coming of the Christ, when a new covenant, kingdom, hope and new promises would be revealed unto all people
- The Old Testament was never meant to be the final covenant between God and men!
 - It had limitations, specifically that its sacrifices could not justify and take away sins (Rom.8:3; Gal. 2:16; Heb. 7:19) – why?
 - Hebrews 10:4 Its sacrifices could not bring remission
 - Psalm 40:6 Why then were they so strictly commanded? They were not ends in themselves, but commanded to teach man that sins means death, either the death of the sinner, or the death of an innocent substitute

B. How did Christ fulfill the law and the prophets?

Christ brought to completion the law and the prophets by bringing to fruition everything they had pointed to for hundreds and thousands of years:

- *Satisfied forever the demand of the law*
 - The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23; Heb. 9 22)
 - Christ became that atonement – John 1:29; Hebrews 9:23-28
- *Fulfilled the prophecies of a new covenant to all nations*, Heb. 8:7-13; Isaiah 2:1-4
- *Fulfilled the prophecies of the eternal kingdom*
 - Consider II Samuel 7:12-13 and Daniel 2:36-45
 - John 18:36; Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9
- *Fulfilled all the prophecies of the coming Messiah*, over 300 in the OT!
 - Genesis 3:15 → John 12:31; I Cor. 15:54f; Col. 2:15; Rev. 20:10
 - Genesis 22:18 → Galatians 3:13-16
 - Psalm 22, Isaiah 53 → accounts of the crucifixion
 - Psalm 16:10 → Acts 2:29ff

II. Christ's View Of The Scriptures – 5:18-19

It would be easier to destroy heaven and earth than to make a tiny mark of God's word fail to come true – Luke 16:17

- *Jot*: transliterated i or y (i.e. the smallest Hebrew letter)
- *Tittle*: a tiny, hornlike punctuation mark that differentiated between Hebrews letters [see Psalm 119 vs. 9 (*bet*) and vs. 81 (*kaf*), if your Bible includes Hebrew letters]
- God's word must come true simply because He is God – Isaiah 55:10-11

This was Jesus' attitude toward God's word always, absolute assurance of its truth and total reverence and submission in obeying it:

- When tempted by Satan, Matthew 4
- When presenting Himself to Nazareth, Luke 4:16-21
- As proof to John the Baptist, Matthew 11:4 (again from Isaiah 61)
- As evidence for His stance on divorce, Matthew 19 (citing Genesis)
- To refute the Saducees' disbelief in the resurrection, Matthew 22:32 (Exodus 3:6)
- As reason for cleansing the temple, Mark 11:15-17
- In reference to His submissive death on the cross, Matthew 26:53f
- "The Scripture cannot be broken" – John 10:35; Luke 24:44

Christ constantly upheld the inerrancy, truth, and faithfulness of God's word, not only to tell things to come, but to demand how man should live. He spoke to Jews in Matthew 5 commanding them to keep the commandments of God, not the commandments of men, and to refuse to follow those who would take a little away from or add a little to God's word. He taught that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and since man is created by God, we must listen and obey.

Note: "least in the kingdom" (vs. 19) does not mean that there is a hierarchy of kingdom citizens in terms importance or ability – all Christians, no matter the magnitude or diversity of their abilities are vital in the household of God (see Rom. 12:3-7; Eph. 4:11-16; I Pet. 4:10-11). Rather, Christ here teaches that the person who fails to keep the whole law of God and

teaches others to shun the whole law *is not fit for the kingdom of heaven* (cf. Matthew 7:21-27). Christians live under the law of Christ (I Corinthians 9:21; Galatians 6:2). All kingdom citizens are the greatest (Matthew 18:1-4, 20:26-28).

III. The Righteousness Of The Scribes And Pharisees – 5:20

At the time of Christ, all Israel viewed the scribes and Pharisees as the best examples of righteousness and truth. However, from the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus taught the surpassing righteousness of the kingdom of heaven, setting Himself firmly against the established notions of righteousness and the pompous hypocrisy of Israel's religious elite. As a consequence, the scribes and Pharisees continually resisted and plotted against Christ, having been exposed by His paramount righteousness and truth. Eventually, it was these very people who swayed the mob to demand the crucifixion of the Son of Man (see, for example, John 18:3).

A. *Who were the scribes and Pharisees?*

- *Scribes* – Experts of the law (sometimes called *lawyers*) who copied the law by hand, paying excruciating attention to detail and great ritual
 - Many loved not the law but the praise and exaltation of men (Mark 12:38ff)
 - Because Christ condemned them, they sought to kill Him (Luke 11:45-54)
- *Pharisees* – A sect of the Jews distinguished by their moral traditions which they adopted as equivalent to the law of God
 - Often their traditions negated God's purpose in the Old Law (Matt. 15:1-9)
 - Many were pretentious hypocrites (Matt. 23:2-7)
 - Cared only for outward, ritualistic religion but neglected devotion of their hearts to God (Matt. 23:23-28)
 - Because Christ condemned them, they sought to kill Him (Matt 21:33-46)

B. *What was the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees?*

From the above references (and some others), it's clear that the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees was not righteousness at all. Rather, their religion was ritualistic, external (neglecting the heart), and done only for the praise of men. Thus, the religion of these unholy people led them to:

- Hold sinners in contempt (Luke 15:2)
- Take pride in judging/condemning others (Luke 18:10-14)
- Reject the will of God (Matt 21:42; Luke 7:30)

We read in Paul's letter to the Romans (Romans 10:1-4) that these Jews, in all their zeal, tried to tip the scales toward righteousness by their own external works, wholly without faith, humility or penitence. Christ's statement in Matthew 5:20 states clearly that this type of heartless religion, placing the doctrines of men on equal footing with the commands of God, will not lead one to the kingdom of heaven! In fact, speaking of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23, Christ plainly and forcefully says that they would not go into the kingdom, calling them "sons of hell" (vs. 13,15). Why would Jesus speak so harshly? Because souls (all of which He loved) hung in the balance and would be lost due to their false doctrines. Israel was being poisoned from within by the religious elite who touted a false notion of righteousness that could lead only to hell!

C. *The surpassing righteousness of kingdom citizens*

By way of contrast, consider some passages which describe the true righteousness taught by Christ, that all who love God must strive to adopt as citizens of Christ's kingdom:

- Striving to do all of God's commands, none more important than others (Matt. 23:23)
- Striving to purify the heart (Matt. 5:8; Mark 7:20-23)
- Having love and compassion for sinners (Luke 19:10; II Cor. 5:10-11)
- Obeying the truth from the heart (Rom. 6:17-18)
- Devoid of hypocrisy in word and deed (I Pet. 2:13; Col. 3:17)
- Humble and totally dependent on God (Matt. 5:3-4; Luke 18:13; I Pet. 5:5-7)

Christ teaches us that the kingdom citizen realizes he must do his very best in serving God to the fullest with all his heart, mind, soul and strength (Matt. 22:37). But when all is said and done, he leans totally upon God to lift him up and make him whole through faith in Jesus. We see a shining example of this principle in the apostle Paul who sacrificed so much in serving the Lord and gave himself entirely to learning and teaching the word, but who still had the humility to say:

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

– Phil. 3:12-14

The True Righteousness Of The Kingdom, Part I

Anger Corrupts The Heart

In Matthew 5:20, Jesus draws a definite distinction between the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees and the true righteousness that kingdom citizens must strive to attain. Israel looked to the Pharisees and scribes as religious leaders, the most truly pious and righteous in the nation. And yet the many confrontations between Jesus and this religious aristocracy over their traditions (which they exalted to the equivalent of God's law) showed them to be full of hypocrisy, pretence, neglect of the heart, and love of praise and honor from men (see Matthew 15:1-9; Matthew 23; Mark 12:38-40). Nothing more effectively displayed the actual wickedness of the Pharisees and scribes than the fact that they set themselves against Jesus Christ, the Word of God (see Matthew 21:23-46 and Luke 11:52-53, etc.).

Christ's condemnation of the false righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes was not a denunciation of God's word in the Old Testament, but a refutation of their corrupting traditions which led those who followed them to a system of religion that barred them from entrance into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 23:13). During the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proceeds to better define what exactly true righteousness is, not just in theory, but in examples that are both abundantly clear and painfully applicable.

I. "You Have Heard It Was Said To Those Of Old"

Jesus uses this statement, or similar phrases, six times during chapter five alone. These words refer to the "tradition of the elders" (Mark 7:5), that is, the traditions of the Jewish fathers passed down orally from generation to generation. Thus, contrary to the opinion of some, Jesus is not simply clarifying the intent of the Old Law in this passage – He is marking the distinction between God's will (as perfectly anticipated in the Old Law) and the traditions of the Pharisees and scribes which nullified God's will (cf. Matthew 15:6).

- When Jesus quoted Scripture, He made statements indicating His quotation or sometimes even the author:
 - "It is written" (Matthew 4:6,7,10; 11:10; 21:13)
 - "Read in the Scriptures" (Matthew 21:42)
 - Authors, see Matthew 12:17; 13:14, 35; 15:7; 21:4; 22:43)
- In all of the statements Christ makes in Matthew 5 which appear to be quotations, sometimes direct quotations from the Old Testament, the context shows that Jesus actually contrasts the Old Law with something in Jewish thought or practice which was actually contrary to those specific commands

II. Murder And The Heart – 5:21-26

The beginning of Jesus' discourse on true righteousness begins with two statements from the Old Law (see Exodus 20:13 with Numbers 35:30-31). It appears that the tradition of the Jewish people was to put these statements together, boiling down the commandments to a mere code to escape from civil punishment. Jesus points out that this tradition ignored the Law's teachings about harboring anger and malice in the heart, totally missing God's will for the transformation of the inner man.

A. *The Old Law And The Heart*

- Deuteronomy 6:5 – The Law taught that devotion to the Lord should only be in external religious service (cf. Matthew 22:37)
 - Circumcision was only symbolic of the true setting apart that God desired for His people (cf. Jeremiah 4:4; cf. I Samuel 7:3f)
 - Worship rituals were only acts of faith meant to accompany worship in the heart and mind of the giver (I Sam. 2:1; Psalm 13:5, 19:14)
- I Samuel 15:22 – The sacrifices under the Old Law were not just external acts to make up for wicked deeds, but acts of faith which were to show the desire for clean hands and a pure heart
 - See Psalm 24:4; 66:18; Joel 2:13
- This devotion and purification of the heart was to come through hearing and meditating on God’s word!
 - Deuteronomy 32:46f; Psalm 40:8, 119:11, etc.

The Pharisees and scribes, by obeying only the external command not to murder so as to avoid punishment yet neglecting the weightier matters of the law in purifying and devoting their hearts and loving their neighbor (Leviticus 17-18, cf. Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 13:9), essentially negated the entire purpose of the Law by their traditions.

B. *What Is Murder In God’s Eyes?*

From Matthew 5:22, to the kingdom citizen, murder is not just the physical act but in harboring anger and hatred toward your brother, and speaking evil of him

- “Without a cause” is probably not authentic, but added because of verses like Psalm 109:104 and Mark 3:5 – anger toward sin is righteous anger
- But anger toward others, even if initially caused by harm done by them, is against God’s righteousness:
 - Forgiveness and mercy – Matthew 5:44
 - Love, I Corinthians 13:5 (NIV, “keeps no record of wrongs”)
 - Imitating God, Ephesians 5:1 → Romans 5:8-10; Psalm 103:10
- *Racca* was a word of contempt, literally meaning empty, used to scoff at a person as being intellectually “empty headed” or “good for nothing”
 - Murder is found in breaking a person with words, destroying their self image (James 3:8, e.g. Luke 18:11)
- *You fool* in the Greek was a phrase which spoke of a person’s lack of moral self-control – this was an attack on a person’s character and reputation
 - Murder is found in such slander (cf. Eph. 4:31; I Cor. 6:10; James 4:11, etc.)

Human courts cannot try the heart – Jesus speaks of courts and councils symbolically, showing that the real danger in such anger and hatred lies in the reality of the coming judgment before the Almighty God who tests the heart. This passage helps to define the righteousness of the kingdom by teaching that God’s commands are not to simply stop external acts of wickedness and to allow avoidance of civil punishment. Righteousness is not completely defined by what we don’t do, but also the condition of our hearts – the wellspring of our actions (Mark 7:20-22), something only God truly sees (I Samuel 16:7; Matthew 9:4)!

The True Righteousness Of The Kingdom, Part II

The Treachery Of Adultery And Divorce

In Matthew 5:21-26, Jesus began His description of kingdom righteousness by illustrating that a man sins, not just by committing some wicked action, but by harboring evil intents in his heart. For Christ's first example, the man who hates and scorns his brother is as much a murderer in God's eyes as the man who actually takes a life by violence. So, Christ calls kingdom citizens to change more than just their external actions but to bring their thoughts into captivity (II Corinthians 10:5) and to purify their hearts (James 4:8) – because out of the heart and mind spring forth all sinful actions which God abhors (Mark 7:20ff; James 1:13-14).

I. Adultery Of The Heart – 5:27-28

Jesus does not here condemn all sexual desire as base and innately sinful. God created man and woman as sexual creatures for:

- Procreation (Genesis 1:27-28)
- Companionship and enjoyment (Proverbs 5:18-19)

However, God never intended for mankind's sexuality to be unrestrained. Despite desires to the contrary, God demands that sexual fulfillment and satisfaction be found in only one human relationship: in marriage, between a husband and his wife (Gen. 2:24; Prov. 5:15-20; Heb. 13:4).

A. Fornication and Adultery

The Bible describes illicit sexual activities, while in or outside marriage, with the very general word "fornication" (John 8:41; Acts 15:20; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; etc.). In the NIV (and often in the NKJV) the term "sexual immorality" is used instead. Sexual activity between a married person and anyone other than his/her spouse is referred to as "adultery." *Adultery* is necessarily included in the term *fornication*, being a form of illicit or unlawful sexual activity, but it is also sometimes distinguished from fornication for emphasis (see Matthew 15:19, etc.). All forms of fornication, especially adultery, have been condemned by God in every age of revelation:

- In the patriarchal period – Genesis 2:24, 39:9
- In the Law of Moses – Leviticus 20:10ff; Deuteronomy 22:22ff
- In the New Testament – see above reference, also I Corinthians 6:9

Adultery is therefore described in the Bible as a sin against God and one's lawful mate, and a disregard for oneself (Proverbs 6:32-35; I Corinthians 6:15-20).

B. Looking To Lust

As with God's laws on murder, the Pharisees and scribes had reduced the laws concerning adultery down to a mere moral code – a traditional reading of the Law which only governed a person's actual actions so as to avoid civil punishment. With a narrow definition of sexual sin and a very broad definition of sexual purity, the Jews failed to recognize the importance of having a pure heart before God (cf. Psalm 19:14, 24:4). Jesus therefore teaches that sin is a matter of the heart and mind, too, not just one's actions. Jesus does not condemn a

simple look of appreciation or recognition of beauty, but looking upon another person for the purpose of lusting after them.

- *Lust* – “a strong desire...those evil desires which are ready to express themselves in bodily activity” (Vine)
 - In other words, *lust* is a description of the heart – it is deciding upon a course of action that, given the right circumstances, the body would execute (Romans 6:12)
- Such lust leads to spiritual death – Ephesians 2:3; I John 2:16
- Jesus, the Great Physician, seeks to clean out the heart, not just cease the external symptoms

As children of God, we must “make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Romans 13:14). The first provision made for sin is allowing unclean thoughts and meditations to fester within our hearts and minds. Avoiding the actual physical act of sin might prevent some consequences, but God looks at more than just our actions – He looks at our hearts.

II. Radical Surgery – 5:29-30

As a prescription for cleaning out the heart, Jesus suggests a very radical surgery. Now, it is clear that Jesus is speaking figuratively – what would physically lopping off a hand or plucking out an eye actually do to clean out the spiritual heart? The point is that no cost is too high to avoid sin and maintain purity, even if a hand or eye must be sacrificed to ensure self-control – the matter is that serious! Some guidelines for maintaining a pure heart:

- Put to death the old person of sin – Romans 6, 8:13; Colossians 3:3
- If your eye causes you to sin, don’t look – i.e. avoid the source of temptation!
 - See the grave mistake described in Proverbs 7:7-9
- Discipline the body and bring it under subjection – I Corinthians 6:12, 9:27
- Realize the awful price which Christ paid for our sins – Romans 5:8
- Focus the mind and heart on pure meditations – Colossians 3:1-4; Philippians 4:8

III. God Hates Divorce – 5:31-32

Again, Jesus did not here confront the teachings of God in the Old Law, but the misunderstanding of that law by the Pharisees which encouraged wickedness.

A. Divorce And The Old Testament

- Deuteronomy 24:1-4 – It appears that Moses found the people already practicing divorce while in the Egyptian captivity. The Old Law sought to restrain this practice, but did not remove it because of the hardness of their hearts (i.e. their stubborn rebellion, seeking to please only themselves while ignoring God’s law)
- Malachi 2:13-16 – God’s attitude toward marriage is made abundantly clear

B. The Law Of The Kingdom And Divorce

Jesus thus attacks the teaching of the Pharisees who viewed divorce as a right, and thus encouraged the practice for any reason despite the unholy consequences on the victim

- A man who divorces his faithful wife acts without love and thus shares in the guilt of her adultery (in Matt. 5:32, remarriage of the woman is assumed)

- A man who divorces his faithful wife and marries another commits adultery
- A man who marries a previously divorced woman commits adultery
- The only exception given by Jesus is in the case of fornication – but even then, the love commanded of kingdom citizens would counsel mercy and forgiveness if possible

In Matthew 5 and 19, Jesus makes it clear that the law of the kingdom seeks to restore marriage to that which it was “from the beginning.” These teachings of Jesus were not meant to be the comprehensive preventative teachings in the New Testament to dissuade married people from divorce – the commands of love, forgiveness, patience, etc. are those which husbands and wives must learn to prevent marriages from breaking down (e.g. Ephesians 5:22-25). Jesus simply spoke out against the harmful traditions of the Pharisees – the Lord’s words in Malachi 2 resound for all time: “the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence.”

The True Righteousness Of The Kingdom, Part III

The Righteous Standard Of Truthfulness And Integrity

In Matthew 5:33-37, as Christ continues His discourse concerning the righteousness of the kingdom which must surpass the supposed righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, the Savior again takes aim at the traditions of the Jews which had in essence nullified the purpose of the Old Law. In these verses, Christ teaches that kingdom citizens must shine forth as examples of truthfulness and integrity, in word and in deed.

A. The Swearing Of Oaths And The Old Law

Several passages make it abundantly clear what were God's expectations of truthfulness from His people:

- Leviticus 19:12 – It was sin to swear by the name of God falsely, i.e. with no intention of honoring the promise made
- Numbers 30:2 – It was an abomination to bind oneself to a promise, vow or oath and then break any portion of the agreement
- Deuteronomy 23:21 – It was sin to make a vow before the Lord but then fail to do it, or even fail to do it in a timely way

In each of these passages, the emphasis of God's law was on the truthfulness and integrity of His people. God's word is truth (Psalm 119:160) and every promise He makes He brings to fulfillment (Isaiah 55:10-11) – and God expected His children to be imitators of Him, impeccably honest in every word and deed. Thus, people who swore deceitfully or had hearts full of guile and craftiness were deemed unworthy to stand in the holy presence of God (Psalm 15:1-2, 23:3-4). Eventually, as the nations of Israel and Judah sunk deeper and deeper into idolatry and iniquity, God proclaimed His righteous judgment that He would raise up other nations to destroy them – and one of the charges God made against His rebellious people was that they had completely forsaken truth and justice (see Jeremiah 5:1-2):

Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel, for the LORD brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land: "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn; And everyone who dwells there will waste away..."

– Hosea 4:1-3a

B. Jesus Exposes The Perversions Of The Pharisees

It appears that by the time Jesus came to the world, the true meaning of the law (described in the verses above) had been lost and perverted to the point that many Jews viewed only certain vows as binding (those made "to the Lord") while others were inconsequential (those not made "to the Lord"). These arbitrary distinctions are more clearly seen in Matthew 23:16-22 during Jesus' lengthy condemnation of the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees. The perverted tradition of the Pharisees taught that vows sworn by the temple could be broken without consequence while those sworn by the gold sacrifices in the temple had to be performed. Similarly, one might swear by the altar and break this vow casually, but if one swears by the

sacrifice on the altar, that vow is binding. Thus, for example, a crafty and deceptive business man might swear upon the altar to repay or do a service, never intending to come through with his promise in the first place – and the Jews viewed this tradition as equivalent with the law of God! The emphasis was totally shifted from truthfulness to formulas of words that would bind a vow or render it meaningless, allowing for deceptive behavior and unjust motivations all in the name of devout religion. To combat these immoral notions, Jesus said:

Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears by it and by all things on it. He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it.

– Matthew 23:20-22

Clearly, Christ decried the unholy interpretations of the Pharisees as totally false, thereby calling them back to God’s true law: that any promise or vow is absolutely binding because God demands His children be truthful from the heart *always*. Instead of making such oaths, Jesus commanded that a child of God should mean exactly what he or she says, either “yes” meaning “yes” or “no” meaning “no,” never promising with false motivations or twisting the truth to deceive others.

C. The Christian And The Swearing Of Oaths

It is unfortunate that this passage in Jesus’ great sermon is so commonly applied only as a dogmatic condemnation of oath-taking. The simply reading of the passage shows that Jesus’ focus was not on the oaths themselves, but on the simple principle that kingdom citizens are to be absolutely and constantly honest before God and men. Still the question is raised: is it scriptural for a Christian to swear an oath of truthfulness? The question has broad application: oaths of truthfulness and intent are demanded:

- On government forms, as an affirmation of the truthfulness of the information provided
- Of some public employees before they can lawfully receive a paycheck
- Of persons practicing certain trades, that they will adhere to strict standards
- Of those who are asked to swear an oath for judicial purposes

One can only answer this questions based on faith (i.e. what is given in the word, Romans 10:17) and what does not violate personal conscience (Romans 14:23). But to answer this question honestly and objectively, one must consider a few points:

1. God and His Son and His angels have sworn oaths
 - God: Acts 2:30; Heb. 6:17, 7:20-21
 - Jesus: Matt. 26:63-64 with II Tim. 2:13 in mind
 - Angels: Rev. 10:5-6 (interesting note: most manuscripts read *right hand*)
2. Paul (and others) took vow and made statements sounding like oaths
 - Acts 18:18, 21:23-26
 - Rom. 1:9, 9:1; II Cor. 1:23; 11:31; Gal. 1:20; Phil. 1:8, etc.
3. Some commandments in the New Testament that seem absolute actually have exceptions if one considers the sum of the word, for example:
 - Divorce: Mark 10:11-12 with Matthew 19:9
 - Charitable deeds: Matthew 5:42 with II Thessalonians 3:10

- Salvation by faith: Romans 5:1 with James 2:17-20
- It could be that Matthew 5:34 and James 5:12 present such a case: their immediate application is to emphatically teach truthfulness and honesty in all situations, thus they seemingly condemn all oaths. However, looking at the whole of the New Testament, Christ may have only been condemning profane, deceptive, hypocritical oaths.

Most Christians will face situations in life when the society or culture around them demands an oath or a vow, thus this is an issue that must be thoughtfully and prayerfully considered – for “each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). However, despite the controversies that might arise over this particular issue, don’t lose sight of the meaning of this section of the *Sermon on the Mount*: Christians should be characterized by and recognized for their unwavering truthfulness. Citizens of the kingdom of heaven should live in such a way that the people who know them and are acquainted with their ways would never think to demand from them an oath of truthfulness because they are always truthful! We are not compelled by God to swear, but we are always compelled to speak truthfully.

D. *The Christian And Truthfulness*

Notice how many passages in the *Sermon on the Mount* speak of the kingdom citizen’s behavior as being a reflection of the relationship that they share with the Father – the very children of God! As children of the Most High God, our Father expects us to imitate Him and mold ourselves into His image. Paul beseeched the Christians in the city of Ephesus, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children” (Eph. 5:1). Our Father is the God of unwavering truth, so much so that it is impossible (i.e. against His very nature) to tell a lie (see Deut. 32:4 and Titus 1:2). This fact is clearly seen in the life of Jesus, who shows us the very picture of how God would live in the flesh (Heb. 1:3), “who committed no sin nor was deceit found in His mouth” (I Pet. 2:21-22). Is it any surprise then that God expects His children to be people of truth? No indeed, part of our growth as new creatures in Jesus Christ is to put off all deceit and falsehood, “renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created” us (Col. 3:8-10). In fact, our task to reform our speech is even more daunting than constant truthfulness: Christians must constantly strive to use truthful speech that never does harm but rather builds others up spiritually and emotionally (Eph. 4:29).

The main point of Matthew 5:33-37 is that Christians in all circumstances with all people no matter what are to be upstanding persons of truth and faithfulness – what we say is true, and what we promise we come through on. This should be our reputation, even with the world. How many people have lied away their integrity by making unfounded accusations and unsupported claims? How many Christians have vowed away their honor through broken promises and unmet commitments? How can we possibly expect people to trust us when share the gospel if we are not people of truth? Jesus’ commands focus on oaths, attacking a specific type of error the Jews had hypocritically molded into their culture and law, but the purpose of the teaching was to show that spiritual citizens of the kingdom are to be just like their Master, people of honor, integrity, justice and truth.

The True Righteousness Of The Kingdom, Part IV

Christ's Definition Of Loving Your Enemies

Having dealt with the struggle between the individual and evil within himself, Jesus now turns His attention to the challenge His disciples face in dealing with evil in others. Matthew 5:38-48 are verses that have been interpreted in many different and opposing ways, often with irrational arguments based upon emotion prevailing over simple exegesis of Christ's words for what they say in context. In this lesson, let us strive to humbly and honestly consider these challenging words of Christ – receiving “with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21). Perhaps no other teachings in this great sermon are more radically revolutionary, more totally against the pressures of society and even human nature, than the commands to “not resist an evil person” and to “love your enemies.”

I. Vengeance Belongs To God – 5:38-42

Fleeing from murder and adultery, both in mind and in action, and dealing honestly and fairly with all people, as previously discussed by Christ in Matthew 5, are behaviors which find their principle motivation in love (Matthew 22:39). It is evident from the previous teachings of Jesus that striving to act in love and righteousness toward others carries its challenges even when dealing with the innocent. Now Jesus addresses the even more difficult question: what does love demand of the disciple when others seek to abuse, injure, and exploit him?

A. The Old Testament Laws Of Retribution For Evil

- Deuteronomy 19:15-21 – “life for life, eye for eye, ...” was a command which defined the maximum penalty which could be given to an evil doer
 - These instructions were given, not to individuals, but to appointed judges (vs. 18)
 - One purpose of this law of retribution was to deter evil practices (vs. 20)
- Exodus 21:23-24/Leviticus 24:19-21 – The law also served to control the extent of punishment, such that the punishment exacted wouldn't exceed the injury suffered

Note that the Old Law did not authorize private administration of punishment in acts of vengeance and revenge, but gave authority only for judicial control of retribution for harm done. Contrary to this law, the Pharisees evidently used “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” as a maxim for personal vengeance – they reduced the law to a statement of their personal right to deal out punishment in violent revenge. In contrast to this false interpretation, Jesus taught:

B. Do Not Resist An Evil Person

- Luke 6:27-31 – In the “Sermon On The Plain,” Jesus places this teaching in between the exhortation to love one's enemies (Matthew 5:44) and what is often called the *Golden Rule*, “Treat others the same way you want them to treat you” (NASU).
 - Disciples of Christ must not retaliate in violence and revenge for wrongs done us
 - Disciples of Christ must not withhold good from those who have done us harm

The entire point of Christ's teaching is *selfless* love – instead of seeking harmful retribution, Christians are to always act in love for the other person, thinking of their eternal well-being and not revenge, self defense, and vindication. In short, we must not resist evil with evil (cf. Romans

12:17-21). If acting in love, this teaching does not universally prohibit all attempts to restrain evil, even by strong means – consider Matt. 18:15-17, 21:12-13; John 18:22-23; Acts 16:37.

II. Love Your Enemies – 5:43-48

The Jews understood the Old Testament commanded them to love their neighbors – they only bickered about the definition of “neighbor” (see Luke 10:25-29). Evidently, some Jews concluded that to love one’s neighbor meant to love only those of the house of Israel (e.g. John 4:9). As Jesus illustrates in Matthew 5, the scribes and Pharisees passed down through tradition the command to “love your neighbor *and hate your enemy.*” This certainly was not a valid interpretation of the Old Law:

- Leviticus 19:18, 33-34 – Love your neighbor, even the stranger in your land
- Exodus 23:4-5 – Do good if you are able, even to your enemy
- Job 31:29-30 – Job recognized the sin of rejoicing in the calamity of his enemy
- Proverbs 25:21 – In instructing Christians how they ought to treat their enemies, the apostle Paul didn’t need any new revelation, but quoted this passage (Rom. 12:20)
- Jonah 4:9-11 – What story better shows God’s love even for brutal, wicked people, and His desire that Israel have the same compassion and mercy?

Now, it is true that God commanded Israel to wage exterminatory wars on the peoples of Canaan (cf. Deuteronomy 20:16-18), and the inspired writers of many Psalms speak of hating those who hate God (cf. Psalm 139:21-22 and Psalm 109:4-20), but the commands of God to His people to love their enemies and to do good to them are abundantly clear. Therefore, Jesus rebukes this misinterpretation of the Old Law passed down through Pharisaic tradition and states unequivocally that His disciples must cast off these distorted traditions and love their enemies. The gospel makes it forever impossible to mistake the identity of our neighbors – Christ teaches that we owe our best to all people of the human race, no matter how different, distant, or even hateful and malevolent they might seem to be.

A. *Such Has God Treated Us*

The love that Jesus commands in Matthew 5:44 is not a natural, emotional reaction toward our enemies, but is a determination to act in good will toward even those who seek to harm us. This type of love must be learned from the example of God’s love toward us.

- Matthew 5:45 – God consistently loves and blesses the righteous *and* the wicked
- Ecclesiastes 7:20 – God does not love us because of our righteousness – we make ourselves morally repugnant in His sight! (read Romans 3:9-18 and Titus 3:4-5)
- Ephesians 2:1-5 – God’s love for us springs from His gracious character and will
- I John 4:8; Romans 5:7-8 – While man can only muster up occasional sacrificial love for good persons, God’s love moved Him to give His Son for our sins even when we made ourselves His enemies (John 3:16)

Only in Jesus Christ is God revealed to us in completeness (John 1:18) – in Him we see the Father (John 14:6-7, cf. Hebrews 1:3 and Colossians 1:15). Never do we see the love of our God more clearly than when we see Jesus Christ, the Son of God, hanging cruelly on a Roman cross pleading with the Father for mercy upon the men who are murdering Him (Luke 23:34). To treat our enemies as we would have them treat us; to do good to the most undeserving persons; to bless those who intensely seek our destruction – these actions are not learned from emotion or

reason, but from heaven in the glorious example of Christ who died for the ungodly. May God give us the faith and the determination to love our enemies without exception!

B. Be Perfect As Your Father Is Perfect

Such a tremendous blessing and a tremendous charge is given the adopted children of God! Not sinless perfection (I John 1:10), but a fullness and completeness of love which encompasses all people must be learned by each and every disciple of Christ (I John 4:7-12) that God might live in us!

Charitable Deeds Done In Humility

As we move into Chapter 6 of this great sermon, remember that the main theme has not changed: Jesus is expounding on the definition of true righteousness and how it differs from the righteousness of Jewish tradition and Pharisaic law. In this chapter, Christ examines righteous works (i.e. charitable deeds), prayer, fasting, godly service devoted to one master, trusting in God and putting His will first. We have already learned, especially from Matthew 5:21ff, that to live in righteousness one must first strive to purify his or her heart and then their actions. As David lamented over the sins he committed surrounding his affair with Bathsheba, he recognized that above and beyond outward signs of worship (which are very important), the sacrifices that God desires most are a broken and contrite *heart* (Psalm 51:14-17). Similarly, in Romans 6, the apostle Paul rejoiced that the Christians in Rome had not just obeyed outwardly, but “obeyed *from the heart* that form of doctrine to which [they] were committed” (Rom. 6:17).

Outward forms of worship and the patterns laid down in the New Testament are tremendously important, for all things Christians do, in word or in deed, must be done “in the name of the Lord,” that is, with the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17) – He is the author of eternal salvation only to those who obey Him (Heb. 5:9)! However, righteousness in the kingdom of heaven does not just involve mastering outward forms of religion: Christ demands that we examine and purify our hearts, our thoughts, and our motivations. Along this same theme, Christ beckons us in Chapter 6 to examine motivations for charitable deeds and other good works, for prayer and fasting, etc. Never forget that, whereas man looks only at the outward things done by other people, God looks at the heart and judges us accordingly (see I Sam. 16:7 and I Chron. 28:9)!

I. Aren't Christians Supposed To Be Lights?

There is a warning in Chapter 6 that citizens of the kingdom be careful not to do their charitable deeds, prayer and fasting “before men” (vs. 1). At first glance, this might seem contradictory to what Jesus already said in Chapter 5, that Christians are to be lights in the world, circulating among and having influence upon the people around them. Other passages, like Philippians 2:15 and I Peter 3:15-16, also necessarily imply that the humble obedience of all Christians must be *observed* by the world. However, looking carefully at Matthew 6:1 (and the rest of the chapter) we see that it is not the simple fact that Christians' works are *seen* by men that Christ condemns, but rather that some would do good works merely *to be seen* by men. Thus, Christ is talking about the motivation behind good works – are they done to draw attention to oneself or to glorify God? Even in Matthew 5:16 we see that the purpose of the Christians good influence is not to bring exaltation and honor to themselves but to inspire others to glorify God. Likewise, in I Peter 2:11-12, the apostle Peter exhorts Christians suffering persecution to live in godliness that unbelieving observers might glorify God. Through the examples of charitable deeds, prayer and fasting, Christ helps us further define righteousness as good works which flow forth from humble, unpretentious hearts.

II. The Old Law And Works Of Generosity

God was abundantly clear in the Old Testament expressing His wishes for His children to be generous people.

- Deuteronomy 15:7-11 – The children of Israel were to be generous and compassionate to the poor, even the poor from other nations who came into their lands, and they were not to be grudging in their generosity.
- Psalm 41:1-4 – The Jews were taught to remember the poor because God the Lord also remembered them in their times of need
- See also Proverbs 19:17, 21:13, and 29:7

III. The Perverted Generosity Of The Hypocrites – 6:1-2

In Matthew 6:2, 5 and 16, it is quite clear that there was a tremendously unwholesome motivation inspiring the good deeds of some of the Jews: many were doing good works only to be seen, heard and glorified by other people. This godless pattern is also mentioned in Matthew 23:5, where Jesus condemned the Pharisees and scribes because:

All their works they do to be seen by men...They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'

– Matthew 23:5

Note that these people were doing works of charity and other apparently good things, however they only performed these works in order to gain the praise of men: and they would receive just that and only that. “They have their reward” – that is, people who do righteous works just to be seen by other people will receive exactly what is due them, attention and praise of men, but no reward whatsoever from God!

IV. Why Do You Do What You Do?

The Bible shows many examples of people doing righteous works for pretentious and vain reasons:

- Vain tradition and habit (Matt. 15:7-9)
- Social recognition and prominence (Matt. 6, 23)
- Selfish pursuit of wealth and popularity (Phil. 1:16)
- To slander and demean other brethren (III John 9-10)
- To gain other unholy advantages (Jude 16-19)

Such pride and selfish ambition is a spiritual disease! To perform even good things in such hypocritical, calculating ways nullifies all possible righteousness, turning deeds that should serve others and glorify God into iniquitous displays that serve and exalt only one’s self. Before you act in the name of Christ, always ask yourself whether or not your actions proceed from pure motivations, and if not, first strive to purify your heart before looking to the needs of others.

V. The Importance Of Charitable Deeds – 6:3-4

Before we leave this passage, let’s make on final note that may be a bit tangential but is tremendously important nonetheless. Jesus states that the charitable deeds of truly godly people should be done such that the left hand doesn’t know what the right hand is doing. Another point we can take away from this phrase, besides the fact that righteous works should not be done pretentiously, is that charitable deeds should be part of our very nature as Christians: we should

not have to convince ourselves or be guilty into giving to those in need, but must be always ready and constantly prepared to extend our generosity to those less fortunate than us. In the words of Matthew 5:42, “Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away” – and this applies even to an “evil person” (Matt. 5:39)! Note the same theme in Matthew 6:19-21, 7:7-12, 19:16-22 and 25:31-46. In Galatians 6, the apostle Paul would write:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

– Galatians 6:7-10

Do you see that this passage implies that Christians must be on the lookout for opportunities to do good? Too many Christians are deceived into thinking that they have the ability or the responsibility to judge who deserves charity and who does not – this is not how Christ taught His disciples to extend their generosity! The law of the kingdom concerning charitable works is simple: when you see an opportunity to help someone in need – of money, of time, of clothes, of food, etc. – reach your hand out with all the blessings God has given you and help them! Anything less is not fitting those who have been giving so much by God!

Purifying Our Prayers, Part I

Christ's model prayer (Matthew 6:8-13, see also Luke 11:2-4) is one of the most well-known yet least understood passages in the New Testament. Many in the religious world have come to the erroneous conclusion that Christ intended for this prayer to be repeated by His disciples, line for line, as a ritual or a liturgy. However, mindless repetition of any recipe of words supposed to be a prayer to God is against the very teachings of Christ which surround this wonderful passage of Scripture (Matthew 6:5-7). Rather, Jesus states that we should pray **in this manner**, thus these phrases form a prototype for us, a prayer after which our own prayers should be modeled. As Paul Earnhart wrote in a brief article entitled *The Prayer That Teaches Us To Pray*, "there is no magic in repeating it, but there is power in understanding it."

I. Righteous Prayer Begins With Instruction

In Luke 11, Christ again taught a model prayer, almost identical to that found in the Sermon on the Mount, and yet on a totally different occasion. Christ's disciples approached the Savior with a request: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples."

- Prayer should be an important part of our everyday life as we serve God (cf. I Thessalonians 5:17), and it is something we must *learn* to do!
- Luke 11:1, along with the fact that Christ took the time on more than one occasion to teach a model prayer, implies that God *does not* accept just any prayer
- How do we learn to pray in such a way that our prayers of petition, praise, and thanksgiving are heard by God?
 - Prayers of faithful men and women in the Old Testament:
e.g. I Samuel 2:1-10; II Chronicles 6:12-42; Jeremiah 32:16-25
 - Prayers of faithful men and women in the New Testament:
e.g. John 17; Acts 4:24-31; Hebrews 13:20,21
 - Specific commands given to instruct Christians in prayer:
e.g. Colossians 4:2-6, James 1:5-8, and I Timothy 2:1-7

II. Engaging The Heart In Prayer – 6:5-7

In Matthew 6:5-7, Christ teaches about the proper attitude and motivation necessary for righteous prayer to God. Righteous prayer flows forth from honest, genuine, humble hearts.

A. Prayer Fueled By Pride – vs. 5

First of all in Christ's condemnations of unrighteous prayer is that motivated by a vain and self-seeking heart, much like His condemnation earlier in the chapter of righteous works done "to be seen by men" (vs. 1). Hypocritical prayers spoken outwardly to God but inwardly just for self-glorification are repulsive to the Father. Read **Luke 18:10-14** and notice the following about the Pharisee who went to the temple to pray:

- He went to the temple to pray "with himself," i.e. to praise himself, especially because there were onlookers to gain glory from
- As compared to the tax collector, evidently the Pharisee chose a prominent position, ideal for others to overhear his swelling words (compare Matthew 6:5)

- Rather than thanking God and beseeching Him for mercy and provisions, the Pharisee took his few moments in prayer to pat his own back and proclaim his importance

However, notice the humble, sincere attitude of the tax-collector:

- He stood “afar off,” not seeking any audience except the ear of the Almighty God
- He humbled himself prostrate before God, not even lifting up his eyes, thus exalting the position of God and bowing in his heart before the Lord’s throne
- He pleaded with the Lord for mercy, acknowledging his sins

What do we learn from the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 6:5 and Luke 18:10ff? God desires His children to pray with singleness of heart and mind. The person who prays only to exalt self, either in his/her own mind or in the mind of others, receives the full reward for such prayers here and now in fleeting self-exaltation, and should expect nothing from the hand of God.

B. *Solitude In Prayer* – vs. 6

There is a tremendous need for us to have a full awareness of the awesome presence of God when we pray. When we petition God, we call upon the all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present maker of heavens and earth (e.g. Psalm 33:6-9)! Christ teaches that it is better to pray in secret to the Lord who sees all things (e.g. Psalm 139:7ff), than to pray with pretense and side-glances toward possible spectators.

Do these instructions of intimate isolation prohibit all public prayers? Surely not, for we find examples of righteous prayers in the Bible that were offered in a public setting. One example is the tax collector in Luke 18 – he stood afar off, but not to the total seclusion of others, for the Pharisee at least saw him. We find disciples praying together in passages like Acts 4:23ff and Acts 12:5, along with commandments given for churches to pray together (e.g. Colossians 4:2-3). In fact, disciples are commanded to pray everywhere (I Timothy 4:8), meaning no matter where you might find yourself, you should take time to pray to God (compare similar phrases in I Corinthians 1:2, I Thessalonians 1:8, etc.). Even when praying together as a group, we must be certain to pray with sincere hearts and proper motivations.

C. *Mindless, Meaningless Repetitions* – vs. 7

The Gentiles, or heathens/pagans, described in this verse made two mistakes concerning prayer. First of all, based upon the reasonable conclusions that there is a God (Psalm 19:1f, Romans 1:20, etc.), they sought to pray to Him but were *ignorant* as to how to pray to Him. Clearly then, we see again that it absolutely does matter how we pray – God doesn’t accept every string of words that is muttered toward the heavens. Secondly, they made the mistake of thinking that the power of prayer is in the actual formula of words and not in the heart and attitude of the person praying (see examples in I Kings 18:26-29 and Acts 19:34). And thus, Jesus goes on to give His disciples a pattern, an example – not a ritualistic saying to substitute for our own heartfelt and meaningful supplications, but a model by which our prayers should be molded. Jesus never intended for this model to be repeated word for word – in fact, He strictly commands against using such vain and mindless repetitions in prayer!

Secondly, and probably most importantly, Christ teaches in this passage that the power of prayer lies, not in complex or elegant formulas of words, but in the attitude and disposition of the one praying. If we don’t pray from lovingly devoted and humbly submissive hearts, no amount of beautiful words, no matter how Scriptural, will ever reach God! The Lord looks at our hearts (I

Samuel 16:7). This is true for other aspects of worship as well. One might not have the loveliest voice, but if he/she sings to give thanks and praise to God while teaching others, such worship is acceptable to God (Colossians 3:16, etc.) – you can probably think of other such examples. In the same manner, God desires for His children to humbly *bow their hearts* before Him in earnest and devoted prayer, no matter how inadequate our vocabularies might seem.

Purifying Our Prayers, Part II

The model prayer taught in Matthew 6:9-13 is often referred to as “The Lord’s Prayer.” This title is not entirely accurate. Truly the Lord taught this prayer, but our Savior certainly would not have prayed this prayer in its entirety for Himself – for instance, He who was sinless (I Peter 2:22) would not have prayed for the Father to forgive His sins. Furthermore, this is not the only prayer that has the Lord’s approval, for we find many instances of righteous men and women praying during the course of the New Testament and none of their prayers take this exact form. Rather, Jesus states that we should pray *in this manner*, thus giving a prototype for us, a prayer after which our own prayers should be modeled. What a tremendous blessing we have as children of God in knowing that God cares about our needs, knowing them intimately (Matthew 6:8), and also that we have assurance that He hears those who call upon Him in truth (see Psalm 145:18, also Psalm 91:15, I Peter 5:7). In learning to call upon God in truth, according to His will, we must first learn that:

I. Righteous Prayer Is Full Of Praise – 6:8

If you take some time to find the prayers of righteous people in the Bible, you’ll note that awareness of God’s holiness, power, and majesty simply flows through them. Especially in the Psalms, those who lifted their voices to God in prayer did so in humility, reverence and awe, praising and magnifying Him as the Holy Father and Almighty Creator. Consider the following passages:

- Old Testament – I Samuel 2:1-10; Psalm 104; Daniel 9:4-19
- New Testament – John 17; Acts 4:24-30; I Timothy 1:17; Jude 24-25

Such prayers were recorded for *our* learning (Romans 15:4, Philippians 3:17) – we do not approach the Father as equals, but must bow low before him as reverent, penitent children. In our prayers, we must not forget to praise God and thank Him for who He is and what He has done for us.

This spirit of praise permeates every phrase in the model prayer, beginning with the first: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” The name of God is hallowed (i.e. holy and set apart) because of His unapproachable holiness, power, and wisdom. Our prayers should acknowledge who we’re speaking to: our Creator (Acts 17:25), the Giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17), and our spiritual Father (I John 3:1). To pray in accordance to Christ’s words in Matthew 6:9, we must enjoy a relationship with God as our Father – a relationship that only comes through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26f). But addressing God in this way is not just a term of endearment: to do so acknowledges a relationship that should dictate our entire way of life. It is contradictory to pray to God as our Father and beseech Him for blessings and yet refuse to imitate Him as dear children – this is a theme of the Sermon on the Mount (cf. 5:16, 44, etc. and Ephesians 5:1).

Praying to God as our Father has several implications for our prayers. First of all, it should help to assuage our anxiety and fears. We do not pray to an impersonal, unjustly severe deity, but a God who is caring and merciful; a Father who understands our needs, weaknesses and trials (Matthew 7:9f; Hebrews 4:14-16, 13:6). Secondly, it reassures us of the great resource we have in prayer: unlimited access to the ear of the infinitely wise Maker of the universe (Ephesians 3:20). To pray to God as our Father means to show in word and attitude our eagerness to both

devote ourselves to His will in our lives and to receive the boundless blessings He gives, both in this life and that which is to come.

II. Your Kingdom Come – 6:9

This phrase serves as yet another testimony that Christ did not intend for His disciples of all time to blindly repeat the words of the model prayer as a substitute for personal, worshipful petitions to God. This particular petition, “*Your kingdom come,*” does not hold the same meaning it did 2000 years ago when Christ walked this earth.

- God’s prophets of old foretold the coming of the eternal kingdom of heaven
 - I Samuel 7:13; Isaiah 9:1-7; Daniel 2:44-45
- John the Baptist and Jesus Christ both taught that the kingdom of heaven was so close you could figuratively reach out and touch it (Matthew 3:2, 4:17)
- In the model prayer, Jesus taught His disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom
 - A spiritual kingdom (John 18:36), thriving in the hearts of believing, obedient disciples of Christ (Luke 17:20-21)
- The apostles taught that when Christ was raised from the dead, God raised Him to sit as King of kings on the eternal throne of David (Acts 2:30-31,47; I Timothy 6:15)
 - Christians are citizens of this kingdom, the church (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9)

So, we don’t pray for the coming of the kingdom in the exact sense that the disciples during Christ’s lifetime yearned for its coming. However, the basic thrust of this petition is simply that God’s reign would fill the earth; that people would learn His truth and obey His laws; that the gospel would spread through the world, making disciples and exalting Christ in every place. These are ideas that Christians can still pray for today, just as Paul commanded Christians to pray for open doors through which the gospel might be taken to the lost (Colossians 4:3). And certainly it is scriptural to pray that Christ will soon return and deliver the kingdom to the Father, that the saved might reign with the Lord in peace forever and ever (I Corinthians 15:24; Revelation 22:5,20).

III. Your Will Be Done – 6:9

The fourth phrase of the model prayer, “*Your will be done,*” also exalts and amplifies the will of God. As God’s children, our prayers should pour forth confidence in God’s sovereign power and wisdom. Our prayers should exemplify a humble spirit which proclaims our determination to accept the decisions of the Lord, no matter what our finite mortal minds desire.

- James 4:3; I John 5:14 – Prayers which contradict or simply have no regard for the will of God are not heard by Him
- Hebrews 13:20-21 – see what prominence the inspired author gives the will of God!
In the same manner, we should pray that:
 - God will equip us to do good works according to *His will*
 - God will take our lives and mold/direct them to accomplish *His purposes*
 - Our lives might be used by the Lord to bring glory to Christ

As Christians, we are to refuse the lusts of the flesh and live for the will of God (I Peter 4:1-2); or as Paul put it, “it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). To pray that God’s will be done on earth is a prayer that must start with us individually as we submit our own wills to serve God (just as Christ did, see Luke 22:39-46 with John 8:29 and Hebrews 5:7-

9). Praying in this way, we beseech the Father for the strength, direction, courage and humility necessary to hand the reigns of our lives over to Him, to do what He says, and to trust that what best accomplishes His will is truly best for our lives.

Purifying Our Prayers, Part III

In Matthew 6:11, the fourth phrase of the model prayer marks a shift of focus from God's sovereignty to man's needs and labors. Now, "*Give us this day our daily bread*" (and the petitions that follow), still properly exalts God, for it calls upon Him as the giver of man's daily needs (cf. Psalm 136:25, James 1:17). But in this phrase, Jesus also teaches that the infinite, almighty God sees and cares about even the little things in the lives of His children, and that we should learn to be content with the blessings our Father provides.

I. Our Daily Bread – 6:11

Most probably, *bread* in this phrase represents not just food but all the daily necessities that humans must have to survive. Thus we are taught by Christ to pray to the Father for the things we need, and thank Him for His lovingkindness and grace (Colossians 4:2). However, the clear instruction of verse 8, that God knows the things we need before we even ask, hints that this phrase of the model prayer might have a somewhat deeper significance.

A. God Cares About The Little Things, Too

In Psalm 8, David declared what a marvel it is that the great God of heavens and earth is mindful of seemingly insignificant mankind. In the model prayer, Jesus teaches that truly God is not only mindful of man, but cares even about the bread that we have to eat as each day goes by. Therein lays a wonderful truth: no concern or desire of mortal man is too miniscule or insignificant to bring before God in prayer. Surely, God desires for His children to praise Him, to imitate Him, to lovingly obey Him, and yet God does not expect us to disregard the importance of our needs and cares in this life – He knows our needs, and He deems them important, too! So important, in fact, that Jesus places this petition for man's needs *before* asking for forgiveness of sins in both Matthew 6 and Luke 11.

- Philippians 4:6 – Take *everything* before God in prayer

B. A Prayer For Contentment And Faith

Notice that Jesus teaches His disciples to pray for the needs of *this* day. In the same manner, Luke 11:3 reads, "Give us *day by day* our daily bread." This phrase of the model prayer also teaches God's children to pray for and with contentment: children of God should ask for and be content with God's provisions one day at a time.

- Exodus 16:4f & Deuteronomy 8:3 – God gave the Israelites food enough for one day
 - Humbling them in their dependence on God
 - Testing their faith: God will provide for His children constantly, not occasionally
- Proverbs 30:8-9 "...give me only my daily bread" (NIV)
- Consider also Philippians 4:11; I Timothy 6:6-8; Hebrews 13:5

We cannot serve God to the best of our abilities if we're constantly worried about the needs of the future. Jesus teaches through this simple prayer that Christians should learn contentment and faith that God will provide the things we need here and now, for tomorrow is promised to no one (James 4:14) – and this contented attitude should be reflected in our prayers. Praise be to God the Father that there is no issue, no concern of man that is too little to bring before Him in prayer, and that He is profoundly concerned with all aspects of the lives of His children, thus we can be assured and content that He will provide for us every minute of every day.

II. Forgive To Gain Forgiveness – 6:12, 14-15

In Psalm 32, the psalmist exclaims, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!” Truly, forgiveness is one of the most profound blessings that God gives His penitent children. Just as daily bread plays a vital role in the life of the body, the soul cannot survive without the cleansing that God provides through Jesus Christ.

- I John 1:9 God is quick to forgive the sins His children confess
- However, we learn a vital lesson from the model prayer in Matthew 6:
 To be forgiven by God, we must be people given to forgiveness!
- In fact, the language Jesus uses in this passage indicates that we need to forgive others *first*, and then humbly ask God to forgive us our wrongs
- Consider Matthew 18:21-35
- Note that the principle of forgiveness is the only part of the model prayer that Christ returns to afterward to emphasize (vs. 14-15)!

God’s children must not only be people who forgive others freely as God also forgave us, but we must be people who are *continually* forgiving. The preliminary conversation that motivated the parable in Matthew 18 was a question raised by Peter: “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Our God and Father is quick to forgive His children no matter how many times we stumble and seek His mercy, therefore He expects us to likewise forgive and forget as often as is required of us.

The forgiveness that we seek from God is merciful, continual, and totally without merit. In the same way, Christians are to forgive others, making forgiveness an essential part of our nature as spiritual children of God. It is impossible to serve God acceptably while harboring anger, bitterness, grudging, and rivalry in our hearts. Reread Matthew 5:23-24 – refusing to forgive one another, refusing to put our wounds in the past stands against everything that Christ died to establish. As David states in Psalm 103:11-12, “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is the Lord’s mercy toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Forgive and forget, for “love keeps no record of wrongs” (I Corinthians 13:5, NIV) – this is the command we’re given by God. Let us strive to be humble and honest enough to realize our wrongs and ask forgiveness, but let us first be merciful and loving enough to forgive the wrongs of others.

III. Deliver Us From Evil – 6:13

Temptations, literally *trials*, come from many sources in this life, but in Matthew 6:13 Jesus most probably had in mind those trials propagated by Satan: trials that tempt us to sin; trials that tempt us to deny the faith.

- James 1:13-14 – Such trials do not come from God but begin with lust for evil things
- Mark 7:20-23 – A defiled heart is the source of all wickedness: these evil passions become temptations when Satan provides an enticement, an opportunity to sinfully act upon those corrupt desires
- Ephesians 6:11; I Peter 5:8 – Note the ferocity with which Satan seeks to trap up

We gain several important lessons from this petition in the model prayer. First of all, note that the plea for deliverance from evil comes after the petition for forgiveness – praying in this way reflects not only our need for forgiveness, but also a renewed determination to live a life free of

sin. Secondly, it is not sinful to pray for deliverance from temptation and suffering (consider Luke 22:42). And finally, most encouragingly, this phrase implies that God the Father has control over the extent to which Satan can buffet His children (see I Corinthians 10:13 and II Corinthians 12:7ff). Thus it is fitting to pray for wisdom to recognize the escape route from temptation, and for spiritual strength to flee from sin.

The Christian and Fasting

In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus teaches the third and final example of true piety – once again, Christ’s disciples are called on to direct their worshipful service with their hearts focused on glorifying God, not upon serving themselves.

I. Fasting and the Old Testament

By the time the first century came around, fasting already held an established position in Jewish religious culture, especially in Pharisaic tradition. The only official Jewish fast under the Old Covenant was commanded for the:

A. *Day Of Atonement* – Leviticus 16:29-31

As noted in the footnote to this passage in the NIV and ESV, the phrase “deny yourselves” (NIV) or “afflict your souls” (NKJV) or “humble your souls” (NASU) is a phrase used in the OT to denote fasting – see Psalm 35:13 (esp. ASV) and Isaiah 58:3. The word *fasting* itself is not used until the period of the Judges (see Judges 20:26; I Samuel 7:6). Note from the old phrase for fasting and the rest of this passage that the purpose for this fast was penitence and humiliation before God, the inward purpose of the outward act of fasting!

B. *Times Of Trial And Crisis*

We find many cases in the Old Testament of individuals, or even nations, fasting during times of crisis, trial, persecution, or simply tremendous emotional strain.

- Individual fasting – II Samuel 1:12, 12:16; Nehemiah 1:4; Psalm 69:10; Daniel 6:18
- National fasting – I Chronicles 10:12; II Chronicles 20:3; Ezra 8:21; Nehemiah 9:1

C. *The Purpose For These Fasts*

Several observations and conclusions can be made from the OT mentions of fasting:

- Fasting before God was never an ascetic practice nor a therapeutic practice
- Fasting was meant to humble the spirit before God (Deuteronomy 9:18; Jonah 3:5ff)
- Fasting was almost inseparably linked to prayer, often confession of sins (I Sam. 7:6)
- Fasting was most often a spontaneous act of contrition, not a planned ritual
- Fasting was sometimes associated with great sorrow, and thus accompanied by the customary signs of mourning: the wearing of sackcloth and ashes (Esther 4:1; Daniel 9:3)
- In worship, fasting was to be an outward sign of an inward piety, a time of total focus on God, His will, self-examination and repentance (Joel 2:12-13)

During the time of the captivity, several more official fasts had evidently been added to the tradition of the Jews, probably to commemorate the calamities suffered by the nation during the Babylonian siege and captivity (Zechariah 8:19). By Jesus’ day, fasting was a daily or weekly ritual for many Jews (Luke 2:37; Acts 10:30); especially those following Pharisaic tradition (Matthew 9:14; Luke 18:12). However, even before the years of captivity, God condemned some of the Jews for dishonest and vain fasting:

- Isaiah 58:3ff – God condemns their empty rituals of fasting while practicing all kinds of wickedness, such that their prayers and petitions are unheard by Him

- Zechariah 7:5 – Again, referring to the practice of fasting which was adopted during the captivity, God condemns the people for empty ritual and hardened hearts

II. Fasting and the Gospel of Christ – 6:16-18

What does the New Testament teach about fasting and the disciple of Christ? Is the Christian commanded to fast? What instructions might regulate the practice of fasting?

A. *Fasting Should Not Be Done To Be Seen By Men* – Matthew 6:16-18

As is the case with righteous works (Matthew 6:1) and prayer (Matthew 6:5), Christ teaches quite clearly that fasting should not be done simply so that we appear righteous to others.

- The sin of the hypocrite Christ describes is not in his sad countenance, nor in the fact that others observe his fasting (Matthew 5:16)
- The hypocritical sin is in performing this good work in order to find glory for oneself – if self-exaltation is what we seek, that is all we will receive!

B. *Fasting Is Inappropriate For Times Of Joy* – Matthew 9:14-17

Jesus was questioned by the disciples of John as to why His disciples did not engage in regular fasting as did they themselves and the Pharisees. Christ answered them with three small parables, teaching us several important lessons about fasting:

- Christ's disciples did not practice regular fasting in their religious devotion
- Christ indicated that His gospel was something wholly new, something that could not possibly be crammed into the confines of the Old Law or Pharisaic traditions (this evidently is the meaning of the old garment/wineskin parables)
- Christ implied that fasting is a natural expression of sorrow and deep concern
- Therefore, fasting would be appropriate for His disciples after His departure from them, not because commanded, but as a recognition of grief and anticipation

C. *Conclusions from the New Testament*

Several observations and conclusions can be made from the NT mentions of fasting:

- Jesus did not institute any official days of fasting for the church
 - This, of course, does not automatically prohibit the Christian from fasting
 - However, it is beyond our authority to institute any official period of fasting for the church (Matthew 28:18; I Corinthians 4:6)
- There is not indication that Christ intended fasting to be a regular religious devotion
 - Much as the fasting referred to in the OT was spontaneous and specific, Jesus taught that there will be certain times of deep concern when fasting will be a natural companion to our prayers
 - Thus, fasting is not a formal event that Christians do at a set, but rather is a natural outgrowth of one's activities and state of mind
- The example of the church in the 1st century accords with the above observations:
 - Acts 9:9 – Saul of Tarsus fasted and prayed for three days, no doubt in penitence for his persecution of Christ and in anticipation of future guidance
 - Acts 13:2-3 – The prophets and teachers of the church in Antioch fasted
 - vs. 2 – The reason for their fasting is not specified. It is most probably that they were so deeply involved in serving the spiritual needs of the church that they did not interrupt these efforts to eat

- vs. 3 – Barnabas and Paul were to undertake a serious task. Their companions would have held deep concerns for their safety and success. Thus, they prayed fervently, not even stopping to eat.
- Acts 14:23 – Out of deep concern for their brethren (from whom they would now be separated) and for the Lord’s work, these Christians fasted and prayed
- Consider also Acts 27:33; I Corinthians 7:5; II Corinthians 6:5, 11:27

The Christian's Ambitions And Priorities, Part I

In the first eighteen verses of Matthew chapter six, Jesus Christ teaches His disciples the danger of being absorbed with self, or having such pride and arrogance that renders vain all service to God. In Matthew 6:19-34, the Master Teacher turns the attention of His listeners to their relationship with the world – that is, worldly good, desires, ambitions and values. The words of the Christ are clear: disciples must have unreserved commitment to their heavenly Father, and without compromise!

I. Treasures In Heaven – 6:19-21

The first of Christ's illustrations of unreserved devotion to God deals with the attitude of kingdom citizens toward wealth in this world. Before going further let us note that Christ's words are not intended to prohibit His disciples from acquiring or even saving material things.

A. *Not A Prohibition Of Having Possessions And Wealth*

The focus of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21 is not on *how much* wealth a disciple possesses, but what his or her attitude is toward those treasures, i.e. where his or her *heart* is.

- Proverbs 6:6ff – The wise man points to the work ethic of the ant, who wisely prepares for the future, as a model worthy of imitation
- I Timothy 6:17 – Timothy was to teach wealthy Christians that God richly gives us all things to enjoy, including our abilities to gain wealth (I Samuel 2:7)

B. *The Danger And Futility Of Trusting In Riches*

Along with the teachings concerning God's great mercy and bountiful liberality in bestowing blessings upon His children, numerous Biblical passages speak of the correct use of such resources. We are simply stewards in God's service, and must realize that great riches come both with great responsibility and great temptation!

- Deuteronomy 8:10-20 – God warned the Israelites not to become arrogant in their abundant provisions, but to bless the Lord continually
- Proverbs 23:4-5 – Allowing the struggle for riches to consume one's life is folly
- Ecclesiastes 5:9-20 – There is no true satisfaction in gaining wealth
- I Timothy 6:9-10 – The desire to become rich is a consuming fire – it is grasping at wind, and can cause one to lose his soul!
- I Timothy 6:17 – Rich Christians are to be warned:
 - Not to be arrogant for God is the Giver of all good things (James 1:17)
 - Not to trust in riches for they are uncertain (Proverbs 11:28)

"I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:23). Wealth is a fickle beast – as Christ illustrated, moths, rust, and thieves turn earthly possessions to mere phantoms of what used to be. It is clear from the examples and warnings of the Bible that striving after riches, as uncertain as they are, can become an all-consuming endeavor, quickly crowding out our families, our responsibility to serve others, and worst of all, our God (Matthew 13:22). Furthermore, riches tempt us to trust in them, deceiving us into believing that our own abilities and strengths are able to make us stand, and destroying our humble dependence on God. Since riches are so uncertain and so undependable, what must man do to ensure purpose and productivity in life?

C. Be Rich Toward God

“Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). These words of Christ ring still clearer with His Parable of the Rich Fool, whose fate awaits all those who store up treasures on earth yet are “not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). The gospel of Christ calls upon the Christian to realize several fundamental principles regarding earthly treasures:

- *Godliness with contentment is great gain* – I Timothy 6:6-8
 - The wise man prayed for moderation and contentment in Proverbs 30:8-9
- *Riches cannot save one’s soul* – Proverbs 10:2; 11:4
 - We will answer for what we’ve *done* with God’s blessings, not how much wealth we’ve managed to acquire (II Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 25:14-30)
- *True treasure comes from righteousness* – Psalm 37:16; Proverbs 15:6, Revelation 3:18
 - The Christian must do good to and share with all people, especially with fellow brethren in need (Galatians 6:10; I John 3:17)
 - Such good works build up a firm foundation in eternity (I Timothy 6:19)

To lay up treasure only on earth is to devote oneself totally to the acquisition and accumulation of carnal goods, to commit oneself totally to storing up treasure for the temporal future. Such a future is not promised (James 4:14), and in the end all such treasures will burn and vanish away (II Peter 3:10ff). Therefore, Christ expects His disciples to lay up treasure in heaven – that is, to be totally committed to God’s rule (Matthew 6:10), and to cherish above all things those that are in heaven with God! God is concerned first and foremost with our hearts (Matthew 22:37ff) – if we lay up treasures in heaven, an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance awaits us (I Peter 1:4f), and our hearts will naturally remain focused on the love and service of God (Philippians 1:21).

II. The Lamp Of The Eye – 6:22-23

This metaphorical passage is variously translated by the popular English versions of the New Testament. The basic thrust of Matthew 6:22-23 is that disciples of Christ must serve God with singleness of mind and heart: a theme which began in vs. 19-21 and permeates the rest of the chapter.

- “The lamp of the body is the eye” – The same way that the physical eye is the window of light for the body and thus guides our physical steps, so the “mind’s eye” (i.e. the heart of man with its perspectives, ambitions, priorities) floods the inner man with either light or darkness.
- “If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light”
 - *Good* can be translated clear, healthy, sincere (all from NASU), single (KJV, ASV), and sound (RSV). Thus, if the gaze of the soul is pure and sincere, eye will be trained to fill the body with light.
 - *Light* here refers to all which is righteous, pure, and true (see Ephesians 5:8-10)
- “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness”
 - *Bad* means evil (NASU) and unsound (RSV). If one’s vision is directed and clouded by evil thoughts and desires, the body will be devoid of all that is pleasing to God and that truly stores up treasures in heaven

Physical blindness is a tragic affliction, yet how much more grievous and grave is the distorted spiritual vision which perceives darkness to be light! Many of the Jews in Christ’s day suffered this spiritual darkness and decay, such that even a blind person saw more than they (John 9:30ff).

Jesus calls on His disciples to serve Him with singleness of mind and heart, with ambition and priorities trained steadily on Him, never with an evil, wandering eye that divides loyalties, propagates confusion and extinguishes the light of the gospel. Let all who claim to love God choose the narrow way without looking back (Luke 9:62; Philippians 3:13)!

The Christian's Ambitions And Priorities, Part II

In Matthew 6:24-34, Christ continues His discourse on the disciple's need for total devotion to God and His will. To be a Christian means to put the sovereign will of God second to absolutely nothing, but to serve Him with absolute loyalty and sincerity. Seeking to compartmentalize God into only a certain portion of life while holding onto the vain ambitions and covetous pursuits of the world can lead to nothing but misery and loss. Godliness with contentment is the key to true riches and true blessings that will last through eternity.

I. You Cannot Serve God And Mammon – 6:24

The disciple's choice of treasures is indicative of his choice of masters. The word for *serve* in vs. 24 literally means "to be a slave to," as is readily seen by comparing the KJV of Romans 6:6 with any of the new translations. Furthermore, *masters* in this verse is the Greek word *kurios* which is often translated *lord* or *owner* and denotes total ownership and control, e.g. Ephesians 6:5. These words were written at a time and in a culture with legal slavery – clearly it would be impossible for one slave to have two masters. Christ draws this parallel to vividly illustrate the impossibility of simultaneously serving God and anything of this world.

- A. *Mammon* – riches, wealth, possessions entrusted to another for safe-keeping
 - Originally, this Hebrew word carried no negative connotation, and thus demanded a negative adjective if used in a negative context (see Luke 16:9,11,13)
 - However, the word eventually came to carry the meaning, "that in which someone puts his trust," meaning a possession personified as an object of worship (see NASU footnote)
 - Thus, the NIV translates this term *Money* – something that many people foolishly trust far too much (read I Tim. 6:6-10)
 - Christ's meaning is shown clearly in the context: mammon is any possession or thing that might be lifted up in our hearts as an idol that comes between us and God

B. *Israel And Idols* – In the OT, God always demanded absolute loyalty (Exodus 20:3-4; Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

- Jeremiah 10:1-11 However, Israel put their strength, trust, devotion, and worship into dumb objects that would burn up with the end of time

C. *Idols of the Heart* – Matthew 19:16-22

The problem with the rich, young ruler was not that he had possessions – God gives these blessings to be enjoyed, and while they are ours we can do with them what we like (I Timothy 6:17; Acts 5:4). His problem was that riches had become an *idol of his heart* – his wealth came in between him and his God. He couldn't obey God completely because he loved his possessions too much!

D. *Look At Yourself* – Read Christ's words in Matt. 6:33; Luke 8:14, 12:15; Mark 8:34

When Christ looks into your heart: what does he see? Is serving God your first priority? Does His will fill you up? Or is there something in your life pushing God away that will perish when this earth comes to nothing?

II. The Antidote To Anxiety – 6:25-34

“*Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her*” (Luke 10:41-42). Such were the words of Christ to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, when she rebuked her sister Mary for not serving their guests. What was this one good, ultimately necessary thing that Mary had chosen? In verse 39 of the same chapter we see that Mary had chosen to sit at Christ’s feet to hear His words, to show her devotion to Him and her need for instruction. Of all the things in life about which we worry and stress, the one truly needed ambition is to follow Christ, to listen to His words, to trust and obey His commands – this is the thrust of the powerful conclusion of Matthew 6. With such trustful obedience undivided attention, all other needs will fall into place, for they are provided by God.

A. Anxiety Tests Our Faith

In the previous verses, Jesus warns against covetousness and the unwholesome love of worldly wealth because such devotions divide and supplant one’s loyalty to God. Here in Matthew 6:25-34, Christ teaches that there is another threat to a disciple’s whole-hearted devotion which may be still more subtle – anxiety (distress or uneasiness of mind caused by fear of danger, want or misfortune). Satan, the blinder and beguiler of men, seeks to tear our minds away from God – whether we are consumed by greed or obsessed with worry, he wins! Even as the devil tempted the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden, his slippery words shook their contentment in what God had so perfectly provided until they lost sight of their loving Creator’s only command. Just so, the battle against discontentment and anxiety rages on even in our own lives as we’re tempted to devote our minds and efforts as slaves of worldly anxiety, to be preoccupied with things and how to acquire them, and to live in fear of future uncertainties. Jesus teaches that such anxiety is not only foolish but sinful, for anxious concern and worry indicate a lack of trust and confidence in the heavenly Father. Thus, the cure for anxiety is faith – faith that is full of trust and vigilant devotion to God.

B. The Logical Arguments Of Christ

In defense of teaching that His disciples should not be anxious for material things, Christ offers several logical arguments, some in the form of rhetorical questions:

- *Is not life more than food?* Here, life and body refer probably to the physical life and body. The thought is, if God created us (Acts 17:24-25, etc.) why would He starve us in need and want?
 - As an illustration, look at the birds of the air – God made these (Gen. 1:21ff), and He cares for them so richly (Psalm 104:27ff). Will he not care for man even more?
- *Which one of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?* That is, why do you fret and worry over things you cannot change? God is the giver of life, breath, and all things – including our daily needs, and even the abilities we have to acquire these things (Deut. 8:18). Why should we worry for things which are only God’s to give?

- *So why do you worry about clothing?*
 - As an example, the lilies of the field – can you imagine a flower toiling to knit itself a sweater? And these flowers will perish, but man is eternal!
 - Why then does man make the pursuit of life's possessions such an eternal struggle, and the loss of them an eternal fear?

The reason why we worry is in Christ's rebuke in vs. 30 – too *little* faith, i.e. a faith which has not matured to the point of trusting God at all times. God has given everything in Christ, and Christ gave up all that we might have in life: if these things are true and we have faith in God, what is the need for worry and anxiety? Christians must have priorities guided by faith and devotion to God – He must come first; His will must permeate and rule our lives (vs. 33). The rest of our necessities, so carnal and temporal, will be provided by His loving hand (Romans 8:31-32).

C. Seek First The Kingdom Of God And His Righteousness

There is no condemnation in this portion of the *Sermon on the Mount* for earnestly trying to earn a living. God has given mankind the ability to work and gain wealth for many reasons:

- To provide for one's family – I Tim. 5:8; II Cor. 12:14; II Thess. 3:10-12
- To share with brethren in need – Gal. 6:10; Acts 20:33-35; Eph. 4:28; Rom. 12:13
- To share with unbelievers in need – Heb. 13:16; I Tim. 6:18; Rom. 12:20
- To share in the work of the Lord – I Cor. 16:1-2; I Cor. 9; II Cor. 8-9
- To enjoy – I Tim. 6:17

But Christ's main point is seen most clearly in the contrasting statements of vs. 25 and vs. 33: "Do not worry about your life...but seek first the kingdom of God." The whole section is an elaboration upon one continuous thought: let God and His will rule your heart, not the futile struggle for more and more *stuff*.

God's blessings are rich and eternal, but the righteous demand of our loving Father is that we always place His will before our own, making Him and His work our very first priority. This command is so difficult when our lives seem to be overflowing with callings and responsibilities contending for our time and attention. But many of the activities of life, if carried out in accordance with God's will, actually help bring us closer to God rather than driving us away from Him. For example, when we work for our earthly masters/bosses "as to the Lord" our jobs bring us closer to God through doing His will rather than pushing us away from Him (Eph. 6:5-7). This is true, of course, as long as we don't allow our jobs to take up so much time that our responsibilities to our families and the church suffer! Similarly, when we take time to teach our children the ways of the Lord and love our spouses as God teaches through Christ, the time involved in responsibilities with our families work to lead us toward God rather than away from Him (Eph. 5:22ff, 6:4).

The bottom line is that seeking the kingdom first does not mean that our lives must be spent entirely in worship and prayer and Bible study (though all of these things should have a prominent position in our busy schedules). But rather, in all the multitudinous choices we face every day, we must consider God's will for our lives as expressed in His word before we act, and of all the important things battling for our time and commitment, the work of the Lord must come first. Jesus Christ died on the cross that we might be redeemed by His blood, and in return He asks only that we take on His gentle yoke, listening to Him and obeying Him above all else (Matt. 11:28ff).

Righteous Judgment and Pearls Before Swine

At first glance, the theme of Matthew 7:1-12 might seem unrelated to the thoughts expressed in Matthew 6. However, these teachings of Christ build quite continuously on the preceding ideas of the sermon. Having thoroughly discussed the true righteousness of the kingdom, as well as the true faith and right priorities of the kingdom citizen, Christ: 1) warns against hypocritical, self-righteous judging of others; 2) emphasizes the utmost importance of spreading the gospel message to willing hearers; and 3) reiterates that kingdom growth as well as all good things come forth from God's hand, not our own heroic endeavors.

I. Warning Against Hypocritical Judgment – 7:1-5

“Judge not, that you be not judged.” Looking at this verse alone, it would appear that Christ totally forbids His disciples from making judgments about others and their actions. And yet, so many of Christ's teachings necessarily imply that His disciples not only can but must make judgments concerning others: Who is my neighbor (5:43)? Who is my enemy (5:44)? Who are the hypocrites (6:2)? Who are the swine (7:6)? Who are the false teachers, and what are their unrighteous fruits (7:15-20)? No indeed, Christ's words in Matthew 7:1 cannot be an absolute prohibition of judging the character and deeds of others. However, before the disciple of Christ passes judgment on another person, regardless whether he or she is a fellow Christian or an unbeliever, several teachings of Jesus must be weighed and considered:

A. *Is my judgment self-righteous?*

Consider the immediate context of Christ's words at the beginning of Matthew 7: He uses an almost comical illustration of a man trying to painstakingly remove a speck from his brother's eye while a tremendous beam protrudes from his own. The meaning is clear, and it only rings clearer with the exclamation in vs. 5 – “Hypocrite!” With these simple words, the disciple of Christ is warned to take a long, hard look inward before rashly judging the character and deeds of others.

- God detests hypocrisy – Psalm 50:16ff; Isaiah 65:1ff; Matthew 9:10ff
- It is so easy to see the faults of others while ignoring our own – e.g. II Samuel 12:5

Much like the pompous scribes and Pharisees of Christ's day (see Matthew 23), God condemned the children of Israel in Old Testament times for thinking themselves more righteous than others while at the same time refusing to bow to His will. God did not establish His covenant with Israel because of their own righteousness (see Deuteronomy 9:4ff), and their salvation hinged upon their obedience from the heart (Deuteronomy 6:4ff). In the same manner, Christians who have heard and learned the righteousness of the kingdom in the gospel of Jesus Christ are warned not to think of themselves more highly than they ought – simply understanding the righteousness of the kingdom does not make one automatically righteous, nor does such understanding give one authority to sit as judge over the rest of the earth. The principle aim of the gospel call is for individuals to look at *themselves*, not others, and change to please God (James 1:21ff).

B. *Is my judgment merciful?*

In the Sermon on the Plain, this teaching of Jesus on the disciple and judgment comes just after His appeal, “Therefore, be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:35f). It is important to note that Christ condemns not just the judgment made in self-righteous

hypocrisy, but the attitude that follow from those attributes – an unmerciful, condemnatory spirit (see Matthew 18:21ff). The Christian does not hastily rush to judge anyone for anything, but is wise, temperate, and merciful, seeking the redemption of the other party, not his condemnation (see John 8:11)! The faithful disciple of Christ remembers that God is the ultimate Judge, and all fall short of His glory (Romans 3:23 with Romans 2:1-11)!

C. Is my judgment righteous or according to appearance?

In keeping with the last point, Christ also warns His disciples not to foolishly judge by appearances only. The Jews were quick to condemn Christ, even for performing miracles on the Sabbath day (e.g. John 5:1-18). This rash, condemnatory spirit is precisely what Christ warns against in the *Sermon on the Mount*. And to the Jews who so mercilessly and heedlessly sought to condemn Christ, He replied: “*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment*” (John 7:24).

- Such judgment was prophesied to be characteristic of the Christ – Isaiah 11:1-5
- The lack of such judgment partly condemned Israel – Zechariah 7:8ff

These verses do not condemn all judgments, or even reproofs and rebukes when necessary. In fact, the godly person has the duty of confronting the sinner with his sin (Proverbs 24:24-26; Luke 17:1-4; Ephesians 5:11). But we gain invaluable instruction from Matthew 7:1ff and other passages in which Christ teaches about our judgments of others, for we see that such judgments must be made with humility, mercy, and righteousness – and these godly attributes spring first of all from serious examination of our own failures (Galatians 6:1-3; Titus 3:2-3).

II. Pearls Before Swine – 7:6

In this verse, Jesus calls on His disciples to make a wise, discerning judgment. To balance that which was taught in vs. 1-5 on compassion toward others’ faults, Christ gives a proverbial command to be careful how we expend our efforts in preaching the gospel of Christ.

A. That which is holy

This is probably a reference to those sacrifices under the Old Law which only the priests could eat.

- See Exodus 29:33 and Leviticus 2:3
- These holy meats would be totally wasted if thrown to the dogs, as much as pearls would be waste if thrown before swine who would just trample them to get to the slop

B. How do these proverbs fit?

First of all, the dogs and swine of vs. 6 must not be interpreted to refer to specific individuals or groups, but simply to the spiritual attitude of certain people who would hear the gospel with ingratitude, indifference, or even violence.

- Matthew 10:16f – The Lord cautioned the twelve to be harmless in teaching, but that all men simply would not receive their message
- Matthew 10:11-15 – From some families and villages, they would simply have to turn and walk away, not because those souls are not important, but because the efforts in preaching the gospel are too precious to waste on those who refuse to hear!
- Some people, no matter how compassionately, persuasively, and patiently taught, will not listen to Christ (see Matthew 11:15 and 13:13-14)

C. Consider Paul's desire for the Jewish people

Paul found himself in a situation, longing for the salvation of his kinsmen, but able only to pray for those who stumbled upon the gospel of Christ and rejected their Messiah (read Romans 9:1-3 and 10:1). Thus, he had to move on and preach to those who would listen, namely the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-48; 18:6). Similarly, the wise Christian must be warned to use efforts of teaching on those who will listen, not on those who constantly choose to refuse the message.

A Challenge To Choose, Part I

With the “Golden Rule” of Matthew 7:12, the main portion of the great Sermon on the Mount is concluded. Jesus, the Master Teacher, has set forth the nature and righteousness of the eternal kingdom of heaven. Now, with verses 13-27 of chapter 7, we read the powerful conclusion of Christ’s discourse – He speaks of two gates, two types of fruit, and two foundations upon which men may build their spiritual lives. God does not force anyone to obey his will – this is clear from numerous examples and warnings in the Bible (e.g. Acts 7:51; Hebrews 10:29). Instead, God offers an invitation through Christ (see Matthew 11:28-30). These concluding words of the Sermon on the Mount are just such an invitation: they are an invitation to change and be changed: they are an appeal for commitment; they are a challenge to choose.

I. The Broad And Crooked Or The Straight And Narrow? – 7:13-14

Unlike much of the vain promises of universal acceptance that many preaches tout today, Christ makes it very clear that the way to eternal life is narrow, difficult and lonely.

- *Narrow*
 - Because there is only one way to eternal life (John 10:9, 14:6)
 - Because God demands our full allegiance (Matthew 6:24; James 4:4)
 - Because the kingdom must come first (Matthew 6:33, 19:21-22)
- *Difficult*
 - Because one must deny self (Matthew 16:24f; II Corinthians 10:4f)
 - Because one must sacrifice to put Christ first (Luke 9:57-62; Philippians 3:7-11)
 - Because God holds us to a lofty standard (Matthew 5:48; Philippians 3:12-15a)
- *Lonely*
 - Because most people will not choose the narrow path (Matthew 5:13)!
 - Because the world will reject Christ’s disciples (John 15:18ff)
 - Because old acquaintances will be lost (I Peter 4:4; Mark 10:28-29)

The narrow gate is difficult to enter in because it requires us to put away all those attitudes, philosophies and desires which contradict the righteousness of the kingdom. There is no room for arrogance, willfulness, selfishness, evil, malice and strife in the heart of him who yearns to follow the Way to the Father.

However, though the narrow way necessitates loss in the areas of our lives which are filled with self-serving and unrighteousness, it abounds in love (Ephesians 3:17-19), peace (Philippians 4:17), joy (I Peter 1:8), mercy (Ephesians 2:4ff), grace (II Corinthians 9:8); and hope (Romans 15:13). Truly, the narrow way requires only that we give up those things that destroyed us spiritually to begin with, and that would perpetually destroy us even unto eternal damnation (Romans 6:20-23). Jesus Christ came to this earth *that we might have life*, not pitiful, miserable, pointless life, but that we might have life “more abundantly” (John 10:10).

II. You Will Know Them By Their Fruits – 7:15-20

The first time in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus begins with *beware* was in Matthew 6:1 (NKJV, *take heed*), where Christ warned His aspiring disciples against hypocrisy.

Here in Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus warns of a danger which comes from the outside, namely, false teachers.

A. Warnings Of False Teachers Throughout The Bible

The warnings God has given against false prophets are numerous throughout the Bible. Just a small sampling:

- Old Testament – Deuteronomy 18:20-22; Jeremiah 23:16-32; Ezekiel 13:1-23
- New Testament – Matthew 24:4-5,11,24; Acts 20:28-32; II Corinthians 11:3f, 13-15; Galatians 1:6-9; Colossians 2:8, 16-19; I Timothy 4:1-6; II Timothy 2:14-17 (see I Timothy 2:16-17), 4:1-4; II Peter 2; I John 2:18-23, 4:1-3; II John 9-11; Jude 3f
- Notice some common themes:
 - False teachers corrupt souls by deceit, by making the false message appealing
 - The word of God was given as the standard of truth – test all things by it (see also Acts 17:11; I Thessalonians 5:19-21)

The apostle Paul said that “we must through many persecutions enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Undoubtedly, some of these tribulations come from false teachers, even among our brethren, who speak “perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30), deliberating issues of spiritual life and death, making unclear the passages which are eminently obvious, twisting difficult passages to their own destruction (II Peter 3:16). Christ presents the coming of false teachers, not as a possibility, but as an inevitability, as did the apostles and holy writers of the New Testament.

B. A Call To Righteous Judgment

Along with the fearful warning of false teachers, Jesus gives a standard by which His disciples may judge who is false and who is true. This teaching encompasses the Old Testament test of the false prophet (he would prophesy things that would not come to pass, and persuade the people to leave Jehovah for idols) and the New Testament test of a false teacher (he would deny Jesus Christ as Lord and teach things contrary to the gospel). In one simple phrase, Jesus draws upon His audience's knowledge of the physical world and states: “You will know them by their fruits.” This is not a call to judge others before there is evidence, nor a command to pry into the hearts and motivations of others – we simply wait until the tree (the teacher) bears fruit (teaches, acts, persuades) and the fruit will tell the story. As stated above, the fruit must be tested by the standard of the word of God, but since the mouth speaks “out of the abundance of the heart” (Matthew 12:34), the bad fruit will be revealed in the character of the teacher as well as his doctrine.

In Old Testament times, false prophets were men about whom all spoke well (Luke 6:26). They spoke comforting words (Jeremiah 6:14), but they prophesied lies which served not God but themselves (e.g. Jeremiah 27:9f and Micah 3:11). In this era of the New Covenant, Satan's deceitful work through false prophets has not changed – false teachers will speak lies in order to soothe the ears of the despisers of truth (I Timothy 4:2; II Timothy 4:3-4). Christians must beware then on two counts: first, that as the “pillar and ground of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15), we teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:32), leaving nothing untaught or undone (e.g. Matthew 23:23f); and second, that we test our hearts and minds to be sure that we truly love the Lord and hold precious His powerful word – that we have hearts that will endure sound doctrine, instead of yearning false words that tickle our ears but deceive our minds and condemn our souls.

A Challenge To Choose, Part II

As Jesus concludes His great Sermon on the Mount, the Master Teacher again challenges the hearer to choose. Matthew 7:13-14 challenges us to choose between the narrow way of life and the broad way of death, while Matthew 7:15-20 challenges us to distinguish between false teachers of false gospels and the true word of God. In the same manner, Matthew 7:21-27 presents yet another test of our commitment to the kingdom of heaven – will we be true disciples who do the will of the Father, or will we choose to build our life on a foundation that will not stand the test of time nor the righteous judgment of Christ?

The True Disciple: He Who Does The Will Of The Father – 7:21-23

The New Testament speaks of the second coming of Christ in no uncertain terms – the day of the Lord will come “as a thief in the night” (I Thessalonians 5:2; II Peter 3:10), at a day and time which no one can possibly know. However, the time of Christ’s coming will not be the only element of surprise on that day – Christ teaches that at judgment some will be surprised at their rejection from the presence of God. In other words, there will be some who call upon Jesus as Lord with their lips in this life and yet follow down the broad way of destruction, believing it is the way to life. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus emphasizes that the test of true discipleship is not just outward recognition of Jesus as Lord but a heart that yields totally to the will of the Father.

A. Not Everyone Who Says To Me “Lord, Lord...”

In the days of His flesh, Jesus did not often lack enthusiastic followers who had no true depth of faith (John 2:23-24). Practically from the very beginning of His ministry, multitudes of people thronged around Him to hear Him, to be fed by Him, to see the miracles that He performed. Christ strived to teach these crowds the nature of true discipleship (Luke 14:25-35), and yet few heeded His words, for these were the same people who eventually shouted, “Crucify Him, crucify Him,” and paved His way to the cross. They followed in the footsteps of the hypocritical Pharisees, and the Israelites before them who persecuted the prophets, claiming to be the children of God yet denying Him their absolute loyalty and devotion (see Isaiah 1:11-17, 29:13; Amos 5:21-25). But in the kingdom of heaven, there can be no substitute for devoted obedience to the Father’s will:

- Not religious ordinances that originate with man (Mark 7:1-8)
- Not the faithful observance of just a select few commands (Matthew 23:23)
- Not the faithful acceptance of all commands but one (James 2:8-11)

Certainly, no man will be justified by his obedience alone, but obedience is the way in which children of God express faith in and love of God (see James 2:14-26 and John 14:15,21,23, etc.). An earnest confession of Jesus as Lord and Christ is absolutely necessary to be His disciple (Matthew 10:32f; Romans 10:9f), but a declaration that begins and ends with empty words means nothing to God.

B. “Have we not prophesied, cast out demons, and done many wonders...”

Undeniably, the people whom Christ describes in these statements were caught in judgment unaware, at least to some extent, of their unfaithfulness. Christ makes no indication of

denial that these souls actually possessed and exercised miraculous powers by His authority – they were His disciples.

- In no age did miraculous gifts of God guarantee His acceptance/approval. Consider:
 - Balaam (Numbers 22:25; 23:16; II Peter 2:15)
 - Judas (Matthew 10:1; Acts 1:25)
 - Certain Christians in Corinth (I Corinthians 1:4-7, 3:1-3, etc.)
- Miraculous gifts have ceased, yet we too may teach, preach and do “many wonderful works” (KJV) yet fall short of faithfulness and be rejected ourselves!
 - See I Corinthians 9:27, 13:1-3; Philippians 1:15-17; etc.

C. “*Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness*”

In Genesis 3, when God pronounced judgment on Adam and Eve for their sin in Eden, the Scriptures tell us that He drove them out and made the way to the tree of life impassable to man. From that point forward, the story of the Bible reveals nothing less than God’s love and mercy in extending to mankind a way to restore a pure relationship with Him, making separation due to sin conditionally impermanent. The words of Matthew 7:21-23 take place in a similar scene of judgment, but this time the separation between the lawless and God is *permanent*: on the Day of Judgment, the sins of those who chose lawlessness over righteousness will separate them forever from God, never to know light, love, goodness, truth, purity, justice or peace ever again. Jesus would later describe this experience as being cast into “everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41), the “second death” (Revelation 20:14, 21:8).

D. *The Danger Of Self-Deception*

As one final warning, let us note that the rejected persons described by Christ in Matthew 7 are victims of a certain aspect of the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13). These are not people who did not know they were wrong – rather they *practiced* lawlessness; they knowingly refused to submit to the will of God. If this is true, then what explains their perplexed reaction upon hearing Christ’s condemnation? The answer is that these pitiful souls, these religious people dismayed to the point of arguing with Christ at His judgment seat, fell victim to their own self-deception: they convinced themselves, even in their unfaithfulness, that their salvation was secure.

Self-deception is described in Scripture as a particularly deadly aspect of sin caused by several mistakes of man:

- Use of the wrong standard by which to judge oneself (Luke 16:15; II Cor. 10:12)
- Thinking oneself wise and spiritually strong without God (I Cor. 3:18; Galatians 6:3)
- Expecting reward for listening to the word of God without obedience (James 1:22ff)
- Denying there is any sin in ones life at all (I John 1:8)

Thus, self-deception is caused by pride and vanity which led one to believe lies about himself which he planted in his own mind to begin with! The Bible is full of stories of men and women who were totally innocent in their own minds even despite obvious and sometimes abhorrent sins they had committed (consider David, II Samuel 11-12, I Chronicles 13:11; Saul, I Samuel 15; etc.). How can we escape falling into the same trap of self-delusion? We must examine ourselves, openly and honestly, judging by the true word of God (II Corinthians 13:5). We must look at ourselves in the perfect law of liberty and be willing to change (James 1:25), praying always that God will search us, try us and help us to see what we lack (Psalm 139:23f).

A Challenge To Choose, Part III

I. Building A Life That Will Last – 7:24-27

As we come to the end of the *Sermon on the Mount*, Christ gives us one more challenge, this time by way of a parable. Will you build your life on His teachings, or will you simply turn away from them and seek your own will? You see, it is not logical or honest to treat Christ's teachings as if they're simply the words of a very wise teacher but really nothing more than good ideas and philosophy. If His words are true, your eternal fate rests on whether or not you will not just hear but *receive* His words and be changed by them. If Christ's words are false, then He is perhaps the most arrogant and audacious teacher to have ever lived: He basically states in the passage at hand that if you don't heed His words, you are a fool whose life will end in destruction and ultimate loss! There is no middle of the road here; Christ speaks in black and white terms, just like his analogy to a straight road and a crooked one (not a *mostly straight* option), and good fruits and bad fruits (not *slightly decayed* fruits). At the end of this great journey through the gospel of the kingdom, Christ asks you to look deep into your heart and soul and decide: will you listen to Him and be changed to gain life, or will you turn away and perish with the world?

A. Two Men

Notice that both of these men feel the need to build a house, recognizing the urgency of shelter, peace and security. They both built a house with much toil, and by all appearances they both succeeded! Who could have foretold before the storm what the outcome of these structures would be? And yet, it was only when their handiwork was tested against the elements of nature that the true worth of their houses was revealed.

B. Two Foundations

The wise man dug in deep, being sure to lay a foundation on the solid rock below the superficial surface of the earth (see the parallel in Luke 6:48). This man looked into the future and knew that time would not just bring sunny, calm summer skies. Winters would come; storms were inevitable – he needed a house that would stand strong through times of joy and times of trial. However, the foolish man hastily constructed his house without wisely considering the storm clouds on the horizon. He built his house on the shifting, changing sands. Think how it must have appeared at first that this foolish man's success was sure and swift: his house probably went up faster than that of the wise man; surely his house *looked* strong and unshakeable to those who didn't examine the foundation. But, as the rest of the parable shows, this foolish man's house could only be judged a success *before* the storm.

C. Two Outcomes

As we would suspect, the wise man's house stood firm, even under stress and strain, proving itself to be as unshakeable as the rock that it was built upon. Come what may, his house would stand and bring him safety and security from the elements and all outside. On the other hand, the foolish man suffered such enormous loss: his house shifted with the sand, and that house fell flat. His loss was total: he suffered absolute defeat!

D. Application Of The Parable

Now comes the hard part: apply the analogy to yourself! You are building a life for yourself, just like every person of all the world of all time, and no one can examine your handiwork as honestly and objectively as you: will your life stand the test of time? Will your life stand the test of trial? Are you building a life that will last?

Who is the wise man? Surely not just him who *hears* Christ: the entirety of this sermon shows that God demands action, not just listening! All of those people over a century ago, standing on a hillside in modern day Palestine, heard Christ and to some extent understood Him. But everything in the sermon hinged upon one fundamental question: would they obey? The wise man of this parable is the person who hears Christ and decides that now is the time to obey; now is the time to lay down my life at the feet of Christ and allow Him to direct my steps! Look into the future (through the eyes of faith, Heb 11:1ff) and see: only a life that is built on Christ can possibly last!

Who is the foolish man? Here is the disobedient fool: the person who hears Christ but chooses to listen to false prophets, or chooses to listen only to pieces of what Christ said to the neglect of other teachings. Here is the person who chooses any other road than full, humble obedience to the gospel, laying a foundation on anything other than the teachings of Christ. (*“For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ,”* I Cor. 3:11.) Is it unfair that the consequence is the same to the half-disciple and the blatant rebel, the one who follows only *some* of what Christ commands and the one who follows none? No: we all have the same opportunity to hear and fully obey, and the half-obedient disciple will be judged as unworthy of God’s kingdom as the fool who rejects Christ completely!

What is it exactly that you are looking for in life? Happiness? Success? Peace of mind? Fulfillment? The house built in Matthew 7:24-27 represents all of these things together: you are building a life; you are engaged in a conquest to fulfill the deepest longings of your heart; you may be searching for something that lasts beyond this life that is but a vapor, often too short and full of too many trials. And you must make a choice: what foundation will you build this life upon? Christ assures us that the foundation built upon His word cannot be shaken – read John 10:27-29; Romans 8:1, 28, 31-39; and I Peter 2:6. Those who build on the rock of Christ’s words are committed to heartfelt obedience to God no matter what, and they trust in Christ’s redemptive blood to compensate for their failures: these are the blessed of God!

The only other option is to choose a foundation outside of Christ, that is, a foundation that really is no foundation at all! No substitute for obedience from the heart can possibly suffice! The audience to which Jesus preached on that day so many centuries ago faced the same choice that we face today: they stood in awe, astonished at the wisdom and authority inherent in this Man. And yet, in just three short years many of these same Jews would cry out in the streets that Jesus die the death of a criminal on a Roman cross! They heard but they didn’t *heed*. They were forgetful hearers:

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes

himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

– James 1:21-25

Are we so much unlike them? The same potential to stand in awe at Christ’s teachings today and yet turn away and refuse to change on the next lies within us, too! The choice is in no one’s hands but our own. “*And great was its fall*” – the wrong foundation can only lead to an outcome of utter ruin. However, a life built on Christ is promised to last on through eternity, through time and through trial, bringing peace and glory to all who obey the Lord by faith:

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

– Philippians 3:20-21

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!