THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

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Introduction

I. Kingdom of God

A. I wanted to preface our study of the Sermon on the Mount with some comments on the kingdom of God. That may strike you as strange, but I hope you'll see that it is important background and context for approaching this material. The kingdom of God is a large subject, but I at least want to outline it here.

B. God in the beginning miraculously created all things, including human beings (Adam and Eve), during the six days of creation. The creation was at first an ideal place in which all things were acting in the way God desired. But soon Adam and Eve, who were to be God's representatives on earth, rejected his rule by disobeying him. By bringing sin into the human world, they spoiled God's very good creation. As a result, creation is not now the way it is supposed to be. It is no longer a paradise where all things work together in peace and harmony under God's rule. Instead our world now includes things like anger, division, hatred, violence, destruction, death, decay, lying, stealing, suffering, sorrow, and pain. In that sense, it is a creation that is sick as a result of sin. It has fallen from its original state of glory, which is why Adam's sinning is known as "the Fall."

C. The story of the Bible is the story of God's work through the people of Israel to rescue his creation, which includes mankind, from its fallen state. People are the high point of God's creation, but his rescue effort includes all of creation because all of creation was harmed as a result of sin. That is why Paul in Rom. 8:19-22 says that creation itself looks forward to the day it will be freed from the consequences of human sin.

D. The scope and breadth of Christ's healing work is also seen in Col. 1:19-20 where Paul speaks of Jesus as the one through whom God the Father reconciled *all things* to himself, making peace by the blood of his cross. And it is seen in Eph. 1:9-10 where Paul says the mystery of God's will for the administration of the fullness of the times is to bring *all things* together in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things on the earth. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Cor. 1:20, ESV).

E. The Old Testament ends on a note of unfulfilled hope. It was clear that in one sense God had always ruled the world from the time of creation. He was on his heavenly throne (e.g., Ps. 11:4; Isa. 6:1) and reigned over all (e.g., 1 Chron. 16:31; Ps. 93:1, 96:10). But there was

some sense in which his kingly rule had not yet been fully exerted or expressed. He was allowing creation to go on out of step with his ultimate intention for it, to continue in a state of sin and suffering that was contrary to his ultimate purpose and vision.

F. But the prophets saw that a day was coming in which God would express his rulership of creation in such a way that all things would be brought into harmony and conformity with his ultimate will and purpose. His creation would be redeemed from the dreadful consequences of sin that had invaded it. This world of rebellion, sin, hostility, and fragmentation would be rescued by God, transformed by him into a true utopia, a perfect reality of love, joy, and fellowship with God and one another.

G. On that day God would express his authority over creation in a way he was not doing at present; he would in his sovereign power bring his creation to its ultimate fulfillment. At that time, he *will be* king over all the earth (Zech. 14:9) in a manner unlike the present.

1. Robert Saucy states in "The Eschatology of the Bible" in Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 1:105:

> According to the Scriptures, there is a sense in which God has always ruled and is even now the King over all creation (1 Chron 29:11, 12: Ps 103:19; 145:13). But there is another thread of truth that views the kingdom as yet to come (Zech. 14:9; Mat. 6:10). It is this last theme that dominates the eschatological hope of Scripture. God is king over all his creative works, but his kingdom is not established on the earth in human history. While he rules over the affairs of the earth with nothing occurring apart from his permissive will, he has allowed sin and rebellion to enter history and Satan to have a certain dominance as the "god of this age" (2 Cor 4:4). God's rule might be said therefore to be *over* the earth, but not directly *on* the earth. It is the coming of God to establish this latter condition, to bring his kingdom to earth in the vindication of his sovereign holiness, that has constituted the hope of God's people throughout all time.

2. As I. Howard Marshall expresses it in *Jesus the Savior* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 218, "[T]he [kingdom of God] is the full and powerful manifestation of the sovereignty that God already exercises over the world." Darrell Bock states in James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 257, that the kingdom of God "as Jesus used it, is not about the inherent sovereignty God has as Creator. Rather it treats the idea of his promised redeeming rule expressed afresh in the world in the arrival of a newly dawning age of shalom." In other words, the kingdom of God is in one significant sense the endgame of the Bible story; it refers to that full and ultimate expression of God's sovereignty over creation, that state of existence that is also known as the new heavens and new earth.

H. The Old Testament uses different imagery to refer to this blessed state that God is going to create. The imagery varies in how sharply it contrasts the blessed state from this present existence, in how radically it portrays the differences, but all of it says, in forms relevant to

ancient Jews, that a time of divine blessing is coming. It says that the failures and sufferings of the present age would be put to rights by the coming of the new age.

I. Sometimes the Old Testament speaks of the restoration of Israel to greatness and of the coming of a new king like the great king David; God's healing the world's sicknesses and hatreds; God's people being freed from oppression; renewed prosperity and justice for the poor; war and weapons of war being abolished; death being swallowed up and tears being wiped away; alienation between God and man being removed; God's Spirit being poured out in a new way; and a new heaven and a new earth. See, e.g., Isaiah 2, 11, 25, 51:6, 61, 65:17-25; Jeremiah 31; Daniel 7, 12; Amos. 9:13-15; Micah 4; Joel 2.

J. In the first century, Israel was weak, poor, and under the rule of pagans (the Romans). Graeme Goldsworthy writes in *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 196, "The return from exile results in only a pale shadow of the predicted glorious kingdom for the people of God." Thomas Schreiner states in *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 44-45:

> The prophets promised a new creation, a new temple, a new covenant, and a new king. The exile would be over, and the wilderness would bloom.
>
> The great promises in the prophets, however, were not fulfilled when the exile ended in 536 B.C. Israel did return from Babylon and a temple was built, yet the temple was insignificant in comparison to the Solomonic temple. Nor was the nation enjoying glorious prosperity, the kind of glory envisioned in Isa. 40-66. Israel was small, struggling, and under the oppression of former powers. Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi document the low spiritual state of the nation. Nor did matters improve in the four hundred years before the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. Israel was a pawn in the struggle between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids. A brief period of freedom dawned with the Hasmoneans in the second and first centuries BC, but the interlude was brief, and soon the Romans swept in and subjugated Israel, appointing the Herodians and procurators to rule the land.

K. The people longed and prayed for the coming of God, for his final intervention when he would set all things right and rule in the fullest sense to the blessing of his people. In Mk. 15:43 Joseph of Arimathea is described as one who was "waiting for the kingdom of God" (TNIV). It was into that religious, social, and political environment that Jesus came saying, "The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk. 1:15) and "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mat. 12:28) and "for behold, the kingdom of God is among you [in your midst]" (Lk. 17:21b).[1]

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[1] Note that the "kingdom of heaven" probably is just another way of referring to the kingdom of God. Wenham writes (p. 23):

> [T]he phrase 'kingdom of heaven' is just an alternate way of saying 'kingdom of God' . . . Matthew, writing his distinctively Jewish gospel, uses the alternative expression because it refers to God indirectly (as Jews often did) rather than directly, and perhaps because it makes it clear that the

L. Jesus made the same point in some of his parables. For example, the point of the parable of the bridegroom in their midst (Mat. 9:14-15; Mk. 2:18-20; Lk. 5:33-35) is that Jesus' disciples do not fast because the current period is like the celebration of a wedding feast when the groom is present. The joyful and significant thing that is taking place in Jesus' ministry is the ushering in of the long-awaited kingdom of God. That is why he tells the disciples in Mat. 13:17, "For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

M. Mat. 4:23 states (NIV) that Jesus "went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, *preaching the good news of the kingdom*, and healing every disease and sickness among the people." Mat. 9:35 states, "And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and *proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom* and healing every disease and every affliction." Jesus says in Lk. 4:43 (NIV), "I must preach the *good news of the kingdom of God* to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." Luke 8:1 says that Jesus went through cities and villages "proclaiming and bringing the *good news of the kingdom of God*." In Lk. 9:2 Jesus sent the twelve out "to *proclaim the kingdom of God* and to heal." In Lk. 9:60 he told a man he had called to follow him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and *proclaim the kingdom of God*."

N. The "good news of the kingdom" was that the kingdom was at long last arriving in the person and ministry of Jesus. He was the "kingdom bringer!" Jesus was announcing the arrival of God's final intervention in history, the ultimate expression of his kingly rule on the world. David Wenham writes in *The Parables of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 25: "To sum up: in proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus was announcing the coming of God's revolution and of God's new world, as promised in the Old Testament. God was at last intervening, Jesus declared, to establish his reign over everything, to bring salvation to his people and renewal and reconciliation to the world."

O. This naturally created excitement in some quarters and suspicion and opposition in others. It also led to misunderstanding because of incorrect ideas the Jews had about the coming and nature of the kingdom of God. The Lord addressed these misunderstandings in his teaching.

1. Many Jews thought the kingdom would arrive through or in conjunction with human military conquest, and more specifically, through or in conjunction with the expulsion of the Romans and their supporters from Palestine. You remember in Jn. 6:15 where it says that some were about to take Jesus by force and make him king. In their mind, it was in the role of a political king that he would be the means or catalyst of the kingdom's arrival, but as Wenham notes (p. 23):

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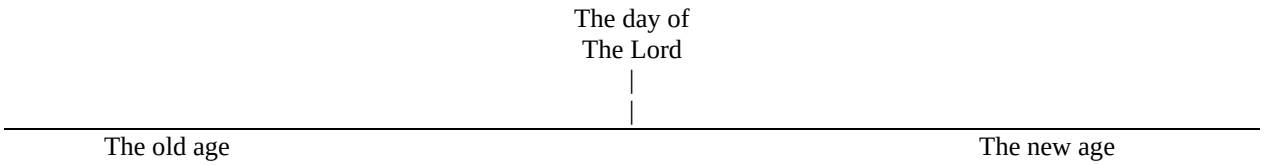
kingdom in question is not a purely this-worldly kingdom. And yet the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed was not just up in heaven; it was more like an invasion of earth by heaven!

> Jesus had in mind a bigger revolution than that: God's revolution was to be a total revolution overthrowing Satan and evil and bringing earth and heaven back in harmony, and this would not be accomplished by force of arms, but – unbelievably so far as the disciples were concerned, and who blames them? – through suffering and death.

2. They also expected the kingdom to come suddenly and decisively. They thought God's final intervention would be a one-shot deal – the Day of the Lord – where the old age would be terminated abruptly and the new, glorious age would begin. You remember in Lk. 19:11 where the people supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately upon his arrival in Jerusalem.

a. That aspect of their thinking has been diagrammed as follows:



b. This expectation caused people to wonder how Jesus could be ushering in the kingdom of God when the hallmarks of the old age – death, decay, suffering, etc. – still were present. You remember how even John the Baptist began to question as he sat in Herod's jail whether Jesus was in fact the one who would bring in the kingdom of God (Mat. 11:2-3; Lk. 7:18-19). Jesus explained in a number of parables (and elsewhere) that the kingdom comes in two stages. It is introduced or inaugurated, then there is an interval of time, and then there is a decisive intervention when the kingdom is consummated or finalized. This is clear, for example, in the parables of the seed growing secretly (Mk. 4:26-29), the mustard seed (Mat. 13:31-32), and the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Mat. 13:24-30, 36-43).

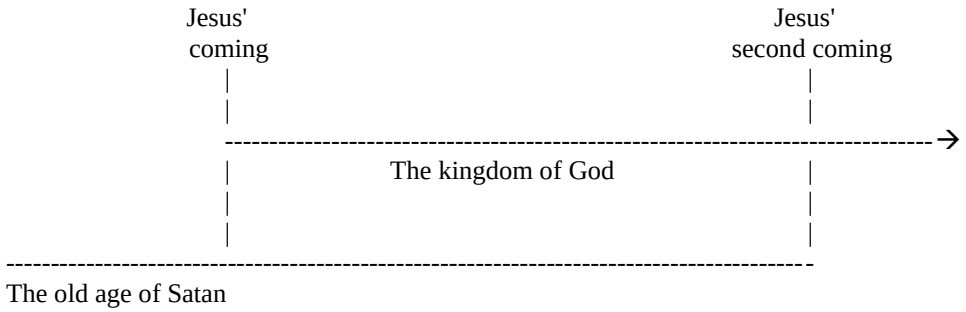
c. Samuel Mikolaski states in "The Theology of the New Testament" in Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 1:471:

> While Scripture recognizes the reign of God as being eternal, it acknowledges that his sovereignty in the evil-infected world is only partial. Scripture declares that God's universal reign will be achieved at Christ's second advent. This reign, however, has already broken into history in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

d. Preben Vang and Terry Carter state in *Telling God's Story: The Biblical Narrative from Beginning to End* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 199:

According to Jesus, the kingdom of God is already here. Jesus inaugurated it! The "age to come" has broken into the "present age." God is making his presence felt already now. Yet the kingdom of God is not here in full. Evil still exists. God does not yet fill "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). This will only happen at the time of consummation when Christ comes back. We now live between the times. The promised "age to come" has already begun but is not here in full. The "old age" is still here as well.

e. That concept has been diagrammed this way:



f. Texts in addition to the parables that indicate the kingdom of God is a present reality between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ include Lk. 17:21b; Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:20; Col. 1:13; Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9, 5:10. Texts in addition to the parables that indicate the kingdom of God is a future hope include Mat. 6:10, 7:21-23, 25:34; Mk. 14:25; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Cor. 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 1:11.

g. This same "now and not yet" aspect characterizes other kingdom-related concepts:

- Eternal life – **now** (Jn. 5:24, 6:47; 1 Jn. 5:11, 5:13); **still to come** (Mat. 19:29, 25:46; Mk. 10:30, Lk. 18:30, Rom. 6:22; Gal. 6:8; Tit. 3:7; Jude 21)
- End of the ages – **now** (1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 9:26); **still to come** (Mat. 13:39-40, 13:49-50, 28:20; Mk. 10:30; Lk. 18:30; 1 Cor. 2:6; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:21, 2:7, 5:16; Heb. 6:5)
- Redemption – **now** (Rom. 3:24; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14); **still to come** (Lk. 21:28; Rom. 8:23; Eph. 4:30)
- Salvation – **now** (Rom. 8:24; Eph. 2:5, 2:8; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:21; Jude 3); **still to come** (Acts 15:11; Rom. 5:9-10, 13:11; 1 Cor. 3:15; 1 Thess. 5:9; Heb. 1:14, 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5)
- Adoption – **now** (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 3:26, 4:6; Heb. 12:7-8); **still to come** (Lk. 20:36; Rom. 8:23)
- Death's defeat – **now** (2 Tim. 1:10); **still to come** (1 Cor. 15:26)
- New creation – **now** (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15); **still to come** (Rom. 8:19-23; Eph. 1:10; Rev. 21:1-4)

f. The inauguration of the kingdom involved a complex of events that are viewed as a single unit. The kingdom was ushered in through the life and ministry of Christ; his death,

resurrection, and ascension; and the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. That's why Jesus could say before the cross and before Pentecost that the kingdom "has come upon you" (Mat. 12:28) and "the kingdom of God is among you [in your midst]" (Lk. 17:21b). The process of inauguration was underway, a process that would run through the events of Pentecost.

P. As Robert Stein explains in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (p. 453):

> The kingdom of God is both now and not yet. Thus the kingdom of God is "realized" and present in one sense, and yet . . . future in another sense. This is not a contradiction but simply the nature of the kingdom. The kingdom has come in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. A new covenant has been established. But its final manifestation and consummation lie in the future. Until then, we are to be good and faithful servants (Luke 19:11-27).

Q. It is at Christ's return that the redemption he began nearly 2,000 years ago will come to completion. That is the time when in Rev. 11:15 the heavenly voices say, "The kingdom of the world *has become* the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And that is the time when in Rev. 11:17 the twenty-four elders say, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power *and begun* to reign." At Christ's return, the kingdom he inaugurated with his first coming will be consummated or finalized.

R. It is at Christ's return that the children of God will receive glorious resurrection *bodies*. The resurrection is not about the mere post-death survival of the spirit or soul. It is about a return to bodily life. And not only will our bodies be transformed to be suitable for eternity with God, all of creation will be transformed as well.

1. That's what Paul says in Rom. 8:18-23. Douglas Moo says of this text in "Nature in the New Creation," *JETS* 49 (3, '06) 460-463:

> . . . [C]reation has been "frustrated" and is in "bondage to decay." . . .
>
> . . . What can be affirmed on the basis of Romans 8 is that the natural world itself has been affected in some way by the human fall into sin and is therefore no longer in its pristine created state. . . . Human sin has affected the state of nature itself and will continue to do so until the end of this age. . . .
>
> . . . If creation has suffered the consequences of human sin, it will also enjoy the fruits of human deliverance. When believers are glorified, creation's "bondage to decay" will be ended, and it will participate in the "freedom that belongs to the glory" for which Christians are destined. Nature, Paul affirms, has a future within the plan of God. It is destined not simply for destruction but for transformation. . . . The reversal of the conditions of the Fall includes the created world along with the world of human beings. Indeed, the glory that humans will

> experience, involving as it does the resurrection of the body (8:9–11, 23), necessarily requires an appropriate environment for that embodiment. . . .
>
> . . . The hope for the liberation of creation that Paul expresses in Romans 8 clearly implies that the destiny of the natural world is not destruction but transformation.

2. This is the new heavens and new earth referred to in Isa. 65:17, 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13, and Rev. 21:1 (see especially Rev. 21:1-4). This reality, this creation, will be "heavenized" so to speak. Life will go on in this new heaven and earth, this transformed creation, in perfect and perpetual harmony with God's ultimate intention. N. T. Wright, a highly regarded theologian, comments in his new book, *Surprised By Hope* (p. 19): "God made heaven and earth; at the last he will remake both and join them together forever. And when we come to the picture of the actual end in Revelation 21-22, we find not ransomed souls making their way to a disembodied heaven but rather the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth, uniting the two in a lasting embrace."

3. You say, "Well, what about those passages that refer to the earth's passing or destruction?" I think Grudem has it right when he states in *Systematic Theology*, 1160-1161:

> The [radical-transformation] position seems preferable here, for it is difficult to think that God would entirely annihilate his original creation, thereby seeming to give the devil the last word and scrapping the creation that was originally "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The passages above that speak of shaking and removing the earth and of the first earth passing away may simply refer to its existence in its present form, not its very existence itself, and even 2 Peter 3:10, which speaks of the elements dissolving and the earth and the work on it being burned up, may not be speaking of the earth as a planet but rather the surface things on the earth (that is, much of the ground and the things on the ground).

4. Jn. 14:2-3 is not inconsistent with the idea that saints will spend eternity on a redeemed physical creation. Those verses state (NASU): "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, [there] you may be also." I think Jesus is saying that through his death, resurrection, and ascension (his going) he is making it possible for them to spend eternity with God the Father (preparing dwelling places in God's house). Having done that, he will **come again**, not to take them away to some nonphysical heavenly realm but to **receive them to himself** in the consummated kingdom, in the new heaven and new earth that will be created at his return. That is where he will be and thus where we will spend eternity with him.

5. The idea that Christians will spend eternity with God as spirits in some nonphysical realm has seeped into much Christian thinking, but it is wrong. Listen to how Wright states it in *Surprised By Hope* (p. 194):

> Mention salvation, and almost all Western Christians assume that you mean going to heaven when you die. But a moment's thought, in the light of all we have said so far, reveals that this simply cannot be right. Salvation means, of course, rescue. But what are we ultimately to be rescued from? The obvious answer is death. But if, when we die, all that happens is that our bodies decompose while our souls (or whatever other word we want to use for our continuing existence) go on elsewhere, this doesn't mean we've been *rescued from* death. It simply means that we've died.
>
> And if God's good creation – of the world, of life as we know it, of our glorious and remarkable bodies, brains, and bloodstreams – really *is* good, and if God wants to reaffirm that goodness in a wonderful act of new creation at the last, then to see the death of the body and the escape of the soul as salvation is not simply slightly off course, in need of a few subtle alterations and modifications. It is totally and utterly wrong. It is colluding with death. It is conniving at death's destruction of God's good, image-bearing human creatures while consoling ourselves with the (essentially non-Christian and non-Jewish) thought that the really important bit of ourselves is saved from this wicked, nasty body and this sad, dark world of space, time, and matter! As we have seen, the whole of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, speaks out against such nonsense. *It is, however, what most Western Christians, including most Bible Christians of whatever sort, actually believe*. This is a serious state of affairs, reinforced not only in popular teaching but also in liturgies, public prayers, hymns, and homilies of every kind.

S. At his first coming, Jesus not only announced the kingdom's arrival but also demonstrated its character and gave us a foretaste of it. John Piper remarks in a sermon titled "Christ and Cancer":

> The answer to why Jesus did not raise all the dead is that, contrary to the Jewish expectation, the first coming of the Messiah was *not* the consummation and full redemption of this fallen age. The first coming was rather to purchase that consummation, illustrate its character, and bring a *foretaste* of it to his people. Therefore, Jesus raised some of the dead to illustrate that he has that power and one day will come again and exercise it for all his people. And he healed the sick to illustrate that in his final kingdom this is how it will be. There will be no more crying or pain any more.

T. And just to round things out, let me say that I think we often have not been precise enough in speaking about the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. The two are closely related, but we have at times conflated them as though they are identical. They are not. The kingdom of God is God's full expression of sovereignty over his creation; the church is the community of the kingdom, the collection of kingdom participants. I think George Ladd captures the distinction well in *A Theology of the New Testament* (p. 111):

> The Kingdom is primarily the dynamic reign or kingly rule of God, and, derivatively, the sphere in which the rule is experienced. In biblical idiom, the Kingdom is not identified with its subjects. They are the people of God's rule who enter it, live under it, and are governed by it. The church is the community of the Kingdom but never the Kingdom itself. Jesus' disciples belong to the Kingdom as the Kingdom belongs to them; but they are not the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of men.

U. Now, I went through all of this not only because I think it's important generally but so you will understand what I mean when I say that my approach to the Sermon on the Mount is one of inaugurated eschatology. This is the approach of many evangelical scholars (Quarles, 10).

1. As Craig Blomberg explains, "Inaugurated eschatology recognizes an 'already/not yet' tension in which the sermon's ethic remains the ideal or goal for all Christians in every age but which will never be fully realized until the consummation of the kingdom at Christ's return."

2. In other words, the sermon shows us how, as participants in the kingdom that Christ ushered in, we are to live. It is a radical vision, which is what you'd expect from the radical nature of the kingdom of God. The fact we are "not yet" as Christlike as we will be when the kingdom is consummated at Christ's return means that we will fail to live up to this ideal fully, but the ideal remains the target of our lives. We are to strive to conform our lives to this teaching and thereby to glorify God.

3. As we do so, our failures are not a source of anxiety because we understand that our life in the consummated kingdom is not something we achieve by our performance but something given to us by God's grace and received by us through faith in Christ. It is because Christ is through faith our Savior that we strive to heed his ethical calling.

4. Beyond the general idea that the sermon presents as the ethical ideal for the "now" what will be fully realized in the "not yet," a number of verses in the sermon directly suggest this inaugurated-eschatology perspective, as I will explain as we work our way through the text. D. A. Carson says the kingdom of heaven is "the unifying theme of the sermon" (EBC Revised, 157).

II. Relation to Luke's "Sermon on the Plain" (Lk. 6:17-49)

A. Many are convinced that Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's Sermon on the Plain are two different accounts of the same occasion. They believe Jesus preached it at some level area or plateau "up in the hills." The differences in what is reported and how it is arranged are attributed to the different interests and purposes of Matthew and Luke and to possible differences in the sources on which they relied.

B. Others, however, are convinced that Matthew's and Luke's accounts are of sermons delivered by Jesus on two separate occasions. I lean in that direction. As Jack Lewis used to quip, if Jesus preached a sermon only one time he'd be the only preacher ever to do so.

III. Acknowledgement of the Sermon's Splendor

A. The Sermon on the Mount, which is reported in Matthew chapters 5-7, has been called the most superlative teaching on human ethics ever uttered by an individual. In a sermon in 1629, the English cleric John Donne said of the sermon, with some pardonable hyperbole, "All the articles of our religion, all the canons of our church, all the injunctions of our princes, all the homilies of our fathers, all the body of divinity, is in these three chapters, in this one Sermon on the Mount" (Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*).

B. There are probable allusions to the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount in Romans, James, and 1 Peter. From the close of the New Testament to the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, Matthew 5 is quoted more frequently and extensively than any other chapter of the Bible and Matthew 5-7 are quoted more frequently and extensively than another other three chapters in the Bible (Quarles, Sermon on the Mount, 2).

Exploring the Text

I. The Setting (Mat. 5:1-2)

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. [2] And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

A. Verse 1 refers to the crowds that were following Jesus. This goes back to the statements at the end of the preceding chapter. Matthew 4:24-25 state: *So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. [25] And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan*. Jesus had created a major buzz; the people were excited over his ministry.

B. In that environment, Jesus went up some distance onto a mountain and sat down, which was a common posture for a teacher in that day and culture (see, e.g., Lk. 4:20). His disciples, those who had attached themselves to him in some distinct way, came to him, and he began to teach them.

C. Some are convinced that Jesus deliberately chose the mountain setting for this profound sermon as an echo of Moses ascending Mount Sinai to receive the law of God. In that regard it is interesting that the specific phrase "he went up on the mountain" in Mat. 5:1 appears only three times on the LXX and all three occurrences describe Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai

(Ex. 19:3, 24:18, 34:4). If Jesus was suggesting such a parallel, it would be to highlight that he is the prophet like Moses referred to in Deut. 18:15-19, one who, as was true of Moses, came to deliver or save his people. Of course, any presentation of Jesus as Moses-like does not diminish the fact he is greater than Moses; he is the Lord, the Son of God.

D. Jesus is teaching his disciples in this sermon (5:1-2), but the crowds that surrounded them were also taking in his words. Indeed, when Jesus finished Mat. 7:28-29 reports that *the crowds were astonished at his teaching, [29] for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*

II. Kingdom Blessings and Norms: The Beatitudes (Mat. 5:3-10)

A. Introduction

1. Matthew 5:3-10 are, of course, commonly known as the "Beatitudes." This name comes from the Latin word for blessedness, which is *beatitudo*, which in turn came from the Latin word for blessed, which is *beatus*. "Blessed" generally describes the person who is in some special sense favored or approved by God, a privileged recipient of God's favor. It sometimes is rendered "happy," but that is not really a good translation because it has connotations of subjective feelings rather than objective blessing. The focus is on their having been favored by God, not on their subjective apprehension of that blessing. But, of course, being a privileged recipient of God's favor is a source of deep inner joy.

2. Each particular blessing is specified by the second clause of the beatitude. For example, those who are poor in spirit (v. 3) are blessed *in that* or *because* ("for") theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Note that the "kingdom of heaven" is just another way of referring to the kingdom of God. Wenham writes (p. 23):

> [T]he phrase 'kingdom of heaven' is just an alternate way of saying 'kingdom of God' . . . Matthew, writing his distinctively Jewish gospel, uses the alternative expression because it refers to God indirectly (as Jews often did) rather than directly, and perhaps because it makes it clear that the kingdom in question is not a purely this-worldly kingdom. And yet the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed was not just up in heaven; it was more like an invasion of earth by heaven!

3. The Beatitudes proper run through verse 10. Verses 11-12 are commentary or an elaboration on the eighth and final beatitude in v. 10. This break is confirmed by the fact the form of v. 11 is different. The preceding beatitudes refer to those blessed in the third person, and each is followed by "for" that specifies the blessing. Verse 11 refers to the blessed in the second person and the identification of those blessed is not followed by "for."

4. Note that verses 3 and 10 have the identical reward (for theirs is the kingdom of heaven). This structure marks the verses as a single literary unit and indicates that everything between verses 3 and 10 likewise concerns the kingdom. In other words, the blessings of the

intervening beatitudes are kingdom blessings, and the subjects of those blessings are described by kingdom norms, by attitudes and characteristics typical of disciples, kingdom participants.

5. The fact the blessings in vv. 3 and 10 are present tense, while the bracketed blessings are future tense, probably is an acknowledgement that, though the full blessedness of these beatitudes awaits the consummation of the kingdom (the eternal state at Christ's return), a foretaste presently is available in that the kingdom was inaugurated in connection with Christ's first coming.

B. **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven** (v. 3)

1. The Lord says that those who are "poor in spirit" are blessed in that they are the ones to whom entrance is provided into the kingdom of heaven. I'll say they are blessed! They enter into the glorious kingdom that Jesus is ushering in, a state of present divine blessing that will culminate in the eternal glory of the divine utopia, the new heavens and new earth. As Jesus said in Mk. 10:29-30, *"Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, [30] who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."*

2. Well, who are these "poor in spirit" who are brought by God into the kingdom? What is the connection between their description and their blessing? To be "poor in spirit" is to recognize one's spiritual bankruptcy, one's need of God. This person realizes his unworthiness before God and his utter dependence on him. New Testament scholar Robert Guelich (*The Sermon on the Mount*, 98), says the poor in spirit are those who stand "without pretense before God, stripped of all self-sufficiency, self-security, and self-righteousness."

3. One thinks of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Lk. 18:9-14.

a. You remember that Jesus tells the parable "to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt." So the target of the parable was the religiously smug, those who saw themselves as worthy before God because they obeyed so well and who treated with contempt those they perceived as not sufficiently devout.

b. The Pharisee stood and prayed *about himself*. He opens with a nod toward God but then the content of his prayer is about his superior piety in relation to others. It is self-congratulatory and shows disdain for those he judges morally defective.

c. The tax collector's sense of his sin is reflected in his standing far off. He feels unworthy to be among others who have gathered at the temple for prayer. He would not even lift his eyes to heaven, which was a common posture for prayer, because of his sense of guilt. His beating of his breast was a sign of anguish or contrition (Lk. 23:48). His prayer is simply, "God, be merciful to me, *the* sinner! He is not just "a sinner"; he feels he is a *distinctive* sinner.

d. Jesus delivers the shocking verdict in v. 14: the tax collector went home justified before God whereas the Pharisee did not. The reason is that "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." In other words, the way to justification, which is entrance into the kingdom, is only by God's mercy, and that mercy can be received only by one who recognizes his need for it. Those who seek to lay claim to God on the basis of their good works are left to stand on them, which leaves them unjustified.

4. Those who are poor in spirit come begging for mercy. They have no swagger and realize fully that they are in no position to make demands or set any conditions. They come seeking mercy without reservation. As expressed in the hymn "Rock of Ages" that we sometimes sing:

> Nothing in my hand I bring,
> Simply to thy cross I cling;
> Naked, come to thee for dress;
> Helpless, look to thee for grace;
> Foul, I to the fountain fly;
> Wash me, Savior, or I die.

5. And the Lord God responds to such a spirit with blessings and comfort. As the Spirit spoke through David in Ps. 51:16-17 (ESV): "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

6. The kingdom is not received on the basis of intelligence, social class, nationality, strength, or wealth. It is given to those who are "broken" before God, those who acknowledge their need and helplessness.

7. Luke's Sermon on the Plain mentions only the "poor" (Lk. 6:20). Matthew's "poor *in spirit*" fleshes out the sense of Luke's "poor." Already in the Old Testament "poor" had religious overtones. It occasionally stood for those who, because of sustained economic deprivation and social distress, had confidence only in God (Blomberg, 98, quoting Carson). Wealth and privilege can entail great spiritual peril, and poverty can be turned to advantage if it fosters humility before God.

8. Isaiah 61:1 indicates that the Messiah will preach good news to the poor, a text Jesus expressly applied to himself in Lk. 4:18-21 (see also Mat. 11:5). So in this first beatitude we get not only teaching about the kind of brokenness necessary to enter the kingdom but also get Messianic implications through the echo of Isaiah.

C. **Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted** (v. 4)

1. This is another allusion to Isaiah 61, specifically to v. 2 where it is said of the Messiah that he will "comfort those who mourn." The context of Isaiah 61 makes clear that the mourning spoken of is a sorrow over Israel's exile in Babylon, which was punishment for their

sinful rebellion. The mourning to which Jesus is referring is a mourning over sin, a grief that flows from the conviction that by rebelling one has done a shameful and terrible thing in dishonoring and disrespecting the Almighty God who is the giver life and every good gift.

2. Recall how Paul in 1 Cor. 5:1-2 rebuked the church for tolerating in their midst a man living in flagrant sexual immorality telling them that instead of being arrogant they should have mourned. In Jas. 4:4-10 James issues a clear call to his readers to repent of the hostility and divisiveness of the world that they had embraced. He ends that appeal with: *[8]Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. [9]Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into gloominess. [10]Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

3. Broken heartedness over sin is the prelude to repentance, to surrendering one's life to God without reservation. There are no rationalizations, no excuses; there is only confession and repentance. So those who enter the kingdom and thus receive its blessings are not only "poor in spirit," acutely aware of their spiritual bankruptcy and utter dependence on God; they also grieve over their sin and are thereby driven to turn from it. When John the Baptist came preaching as the herald of the kingdom-bringing Christ, his message was "*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mat. 3:1) and "bear fruit in keeping with *repentance*" (Mat. 3:8).

4. Those who remain casual about their sin, hardened to its true horror, will not experience the blessings of the kingdom. But those who in grief turn to God will be comforted now with the knowledge and sense of his forgiveness and reconciliation and will be comforted ultimately when they share in the blessed state of the consummated kingdom, that perfect reality in which there will be no sin, no death, no mourning, no crying, and no pain (Rev. 21:1-4). As expressed in Rev. 7:17, *"For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

D. **Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth** (v. 5)

1. This beatitude is an allusion to Ps. 37:11a which reads "But the meek will inherit the earth/land." According to F. Hauck and S. Schulz in *TDNT* (6:647), the Hebrew word in Ps. 37:11a that is translated "meek" (*ʿānāw*) "took on the predominant sense of 'one who feels that he is a servant in relation to God and who subjects himself to Him quietly and without resistance.'" You can see in Psalm 37, which we know from the Dead Sea scrolls was recognized as Messianic in Jesus' day (Carson, 133), that the meek one is a person who lives faithfully with trust in the Lord as the one who is in control and who consequently is at peace in a world that can seem upside down.

2. With the clarification provided by that background, the "meek" in this beatitude describes "those who live in complete dependence on and submission to God" (Quarles, 56). They are, in other words, those who have surrendered to God, which includes embracing his Son, and as such they will receive the blessings of the kingdom, here specified as "they will inherit the earth." In other words, their future is eternal resurrection life on a new earth, a creation that has been "heavenized" so as to be the dwelling place of God and man. As D. A. Carson notes (p.

134), "Entrance into the Promised Land ultimately became a pointer toward entrance into the new heaven and the new earth ("earth" is the same word as "land"; cf. Isa 66:22; Rev. 21:1), the consummation of the messianic kingdom."

E. **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied** (v. 6)

1. Most first-century Jews were familiar with real hunger and thirst, the overwhelming and even painful craving of the body for food or drink. So hunger and thirst were very powerful metaphors for intense longing. Jesus says that those who crave righteousness, meaning disciples because that is characteristic of them, will receive the kingdom blessing of having that craving satisfied.

2. Carson says (p. 134), "These people hunger and thirst, not only that they may be righteous (i.e., that they may wholly do God's will from the heart), but that justice may be done everywhere. All unrighteousness grieves them and makes them homesick for the new heaven and earth – the home of righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13)."

3. It is on "that Day," when the kingdom is consummated, that our sanctification, our journey to Christlikeness, will be complete and we will dwell on a redeemed earth in which all unrighteousness and injustice has been eliminated. As Jesus said in his explanation of the parable of the wheat and the weeds in Mat. 13:38-43, when he returns all *causes of sin* and all lawbreakers will be thrown into the fiery furnace. "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (v. 43).

4 But again, there is a "now and not yet" aspect of the kingdom. We here and now, in this overlap of ages, this time when the kingdom is a present reality but not yet a final manifestation, experience a foretaste of that ultimate satisfaction of our craving for righteousness. By the power of the Spirit, we now put to death the misdeeds of the body (Rom. 8:13) and we now abstain from sinful desires that war against our soul (1 Pet. 2:11). We live righteously before men, though not yet perfectly, and as a result those in contact with us glorify our Father in heaven (Mat. 5:16).

5. And in the here and now we, as those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, do what we can to influence this world for righteousness. We oppose every evil and injustice, wherever and by whomever it is committed, and promote what is good and right. And if we are fortunate enough to live in a society that grants us a political voice in its direction, we exercise our stewardship of that privilege to move the society in the direction of righteousness. We make our voice known that the slaughter of unborn babies is wickedness, we make our voice known that homosexual conduct and its glorification are sinful, we make known our voice that the oppression and exploitation of the weak and poor is immoral, and we make our voice known that all men and women should be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin.

F. **Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy** (v. 7)

1. The next kingdom norm or characteristic of disciples is being merciful. This includes forgiveness for the guilty and compassion for the suffering and needy. We are the antithesis of grudge-holding and cold-hearted people.

2. The blessing given to Christians, those described here as "the merciful," is to be shown mercy by God. This happens now in God's ongoing forgiveness of our sins (e.g., 1 Jn. 1:7), and it will happen in the future when God bestows his mercy on us at the final judgment, as is indicated in 1 Tim. 1:18 and Jude 21. Conversely, those who refuse to show mercy are not disciples of Christ and thus will not be shown mercy by God, as he makes explicit in Mat. 6:14-15 and James makes clear in Jas. 2:13. And note that the failure to "show mercy" in Jas. 2:13 refers to their dishonoring of the poor man so as to favor the rich man.

3. The story is told that John Wesley, the 18th-century founder of the Methodist Movement, was sailing to America and heard a commotion in a cabin. He went to see what was going on, and a famous man named General Oglethorpe was berating a servant who had stolen from him. He told Wesley, "The rascal should have taken care how he used me so, for I never forgive." Wesley said calmly, "Then, sir, I hope you never sin."

G. **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God** (v.8)

1. The next kingdom norm or characteristic of disciples is being pure in heart. This is probably an allusion to Ps. 24:3-6 which not only has the phrase "pure in heart" (LXX) but also speaks of receiving a blessing from God and implies that they will see him. It reads: *Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? 4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. 5 He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob*.

2. The pure in heart are those who have an undivided, heart-level commitment to God and thus to the kingdom and its righteousness (Mat. 6:33). This inner, unadulterated devotion is the fountain of their behavior. Unlike some Pharisees, their righteousness is not a put on, a mere outward show for the benefit of onlookers. It is something that comes from the inside out and is consistent even when no people are around. They are genuine, the real deal, not phony or hypocritical.

3. This is not to say that Christians are already perfect in this area, that they do not struggle with divided loyalty; it is to say they refuse to accept or to make peace with it, knowing that it undermines and corrupts righteous living. When they wander, they are responsive to the Spirit's call, as expressed in Jas. 4:8: *Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded*. They live or are centered in a genuine and pure devotion.

4. The blessing given to Christians, those described as "the pure in heart," is to see God. Now we do this figuratively with eyes of faith as we enter by the blood of Christ into the heavenly "Holy of Holies," into the presence of God as the Hebrew writer indicates in Heb. 6:19-

20. We also, as spirits in the heavenly realm between the time of our death and Christ's return, will in some way perceive or be cognizant of God's presence.

5. But the ultimate fulfillment of this blessing will be when Christ returns. We will as resurrected people see God in all his brilliance in the new heavens and new earth. As it says in Rev. 21:22-23: *And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. [23] And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb*. Rev. 22:3-4 states: *No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. [4] They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads*.

H. **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God** (v. 9)

1. Another kingdom norm or characteristic of disciples is that they are peacemakers. Rather than causing, fueling, fanning, or enjoying hostility and alienation, Christians seek to make peace wherever possible.

a. Paul writes in Col. 1:19-20: *For in him all the fullness [of God] was pleased to dwell [20]and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things in heaven or things on earth, by <u>making peace</u> through the blood of his cross*.

b. And he says in Eph. 2:13-18: *But now in Christ Jesus, you who at one time were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14]For he is our <u>peace</u>, the one who made both [groups] one and broke down the dividing wall which is the fence, having set aside in his flesh the hostility, [15]the law of commandments [expressed] in ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making <u>peace</u>, [16]and might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, having put to death in himself the hostility. [17]And having come, he proclaimed <u>peace</u> to you, those [who were] far away, and <u>peace</u> to those [who were] near, [18]for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father*.

c. As people who have experienced peace with God through his mercy given to us in Christ and peace with one another across all human divides, we reflect that character of God in our interactions in this world. We are reconcilers, healers, the very opposite of fomenters of alienation. We thus seek to reconcile lost sinners to God through sharing the gospel and to heal broken relationships in the world and in the church as we have opportunity. We seek peace here and now knowing that the true and ultimate peace awaits the consummation.

2. This does not mean, of course, appeasing or compromising with evil for the sake of peace. For example, Jesus knew that his uncompromising call to commitment, his demand that he be the highest priority in a disciple's life, would bring conflict even within families. It is in that sense that he said in Mat. 10:34 that he did not come to bring peace but a sword. He did not say allegiance to him should be abandoned for the sake of peace, but there is plenty of room for peacemaking that does not involve compromising with evil.

3. Can you imagine how this quality would revolutionize our marriages and churches? It seems to be so lacking, and yet Jesus takes it *as a given* for his followers, as he does with all these qualities.

4. Christians, those characterized by peacemaking, are blessed in that they will be called sons of God. We enjoy that special relationship with God here and now, as is clear from texts like Rom. 8:15; Gal. 3:26, 4:6; and Heb. 12:7-8. But there is a sense in which our adoption as sons awaits the consummation, our resurrection at Christ's return.

a. That is why Paul wrote in Rom. 8:22-23: *For we know that all the creation groans and experiences birth pains together until the present; [23]and not only [that], but even ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we ourselves also groan in ourselves while eagerly <u>awaiting [our] adoption as sons</u>, <u>the redemption of our bodies</u>*.

b. Jesus expressed this same idea in Lk. 20:34-36: *"The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, [35] but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the <u>resurrection from the dead</u> neither marry nor are given in marriage, [36] for they <u>cannot die anymore</u>, <u>because they</u> are equal to angels and <u>are sons of God</u>, <u>being sons of the resurrection</u>."*

I. **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven** (v. 10)

1. Jesus here describes Christians as those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Persecution comes with the territory; it is part and parcel of being a disciple of Christ, a kingdom participant, in this overlap of ages. That is why Paul wrote in 2 Tim. 3:12, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

2. The persecution is for *righteousness' sake* because the godly character and righteous living of disciples is a silent indictment against the sinful lifestyles of others. That incites resentment and inspires mistreatment (Quarles, 71). This dynamic is noted in 1 Pet. 4:3-4: *For enough time has passed to have participated [in] the desire of the Gentiles, having traveled in licentiousness, lusts, instances of drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and detestable acts of idolatry, [4]regarding which they are surprised by <u>your not running with them</u> into the same flood of debauchery, <u>vilifying [you]</u>*. Indeed, the Lord himself pointed out in Jn. 3:19-20 that evildoers hate the light and resist it because it serves to expose their works.

3. The blessing in store for Christians, those whose righteous lives stir persecution, is identical to that identified in v. 3: the kingdom of heaven. They enjoy the present blessings of life in the kingdom and will for eternity enjoy eternal glory in the new heavens and new earth.

III. The Call to Kingdom Living (5:11-20)

A. Persecution, Salt, and Light (Mat. 5:11-16)

1 Persecution (5:11-12)

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. [12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

a. Jesus now elaborates on the last beatitude (v. 10), calling his disciples to rejoice in persecution rather than be intimidated by it. He mentions three forms of hostility that his followers will experience (he says *when* not *if*). They will be reviled or insulted; they will be persecuted, which covers all kinds of assaults on one's livelihood, property, liberty, body, and life; and they will be lied about and slandered.

b. In v. 10 they are said to be persecuted "for righteousness' sake," but here the basis of hostility toward them is broadened to "because of me" or "on account of me." This includes persecution driven by hostility to Christians simply because they identify with and are loyal to Jesus; it refers to the deeper root of persecution.

(1) Jesus said in Jn. 15:18-20: *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. [20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."* He told the disciples in Mat. 10:22 that they will be hated by all for his name's sake. That is why the Apostle John said in 1 Jn. 3:13, *Do not be amazed, brothers, if the world hates you*.

(2) Hostility and persecution need not mean the church is doing something wrong, as so many seem to think. They try to lay the blame for the world's hostility at the church's feet, claiming it is a reaction to our being too narrow-minded and judgmental, but whatever ammunition we may have handed the world the fact is that this is a spiritual war. Paul reminds us in Eph. 6:12, *For our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-controlling powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*. If we were flawless, fully Christlike as we will be in the consummated kingdom, they would hate us because they hate our Lord.

c. Jesus says in 5:11-12 that in response to this type of mistreatment Christians should "Rejoice and be glad!" The reason Christians should have that response is that a great reward is in store for them, a reward that is kept in the security of heaven so that no power can deprive them of it. Just as the prophets will be rewarded for faithfulness to God despite the persecution they endured (see Heb. 11:32-38), a matter on which all agreed, so the disciples will be rewarded for faithfulness to Jesus. Between their death and Christ's return, they

will be at home with the Lord in heaven as disembodied spirits, which Paul says in Phil. 1:23 is better than this present life by far. But ultimately they will experience the glory of full-bodied resurrection life in the new heavens and new earth when Jesus returns to finish what he started.

d. Having instructed the disciples to rejoice in persecution by focusing on the great reward in store for those who endure in faith, he then warns them about two other reactions persecution might produce. These are addressed in 5:13-16.

2. Salt (5:13)

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

a. Salt had a number of uses in the ancient world, most of which were beneficial. It was then, as today, a seasoning that improved the flavor of food. It also seems to have served some kind of hygienic function in the case of newborns, whether as a cleaning solution or to retard bacteria and thus odor in the child's swaddling cloth. But salt's most critical use in the ancient world was as a preservative. It slowed the decay of meat, which in the days before refrigeration was an extremely valuable effect.

b. Whether one focuses only on salt's use as a preservative or includes in the reference its other beneficial uses, the quality of salt under consideration in the metaphor is the powerful and positive effect it has on that to which it is applied. Jesus says to his disciples in 5:13 that they are the salt of the earth because in living the way Jesus calls them to live they will have a powerful and positive effect on the world. They will benefit the world by influencing its standards and practices and by drawing people into the kingdom of God.

c. But Jesus adds the warning that if Christians abandon the faith and thus surrender their distinctive character and ethics – become tasteless or unsalty salt – if they return to being like the world in the hope of deflecting the hostility and persecution about which he has been speaking, they cease to be of any benefit to the world. If instead of rejoicing and being glad in the face of insult, persecution, and slander they jettison their distinctiveness and blend back in with the world, if they fall away, they are suitable only to be discarded, thrown out into the street.

d. The language of rejection in v. 13b seems to move beyond loss of the benefit that they as faithful disciples would have on the world to indicating that the apostates themselves, those who have abandoned the faith, will be subject to divine condemnation. The suggestion that salt that has lost its saltiness *cannot* regain it is a way of putting the danger of apostasy in its starkest terms. In other words, like the later writer of Hebrews would do in Heb. 6:4-6, I think Jesus is giving a worst-case scenario to fortify his point about the danger.

(1) We know that Christians can alienate themselves from God by sinning and yet still be able to return through repentance. For example, the disfellowshipped are not in fellowship with God, but the act of disfellowshipping is intended to move them to

repentance and thus back into fellowship with God and his people (see Mat. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; 1 Tim. 1:18-20).

(2) But there is a step beyond that, a state in which the person has deliberately chosen to end permanently their relationship with Christ. In our vernacular, they have declared "Jesus is dead to me" and meant it. At that point, we might say that one's "repenting apparatus" has been permanently disabled; they cannot be restored because they will not be restored. They have made a final, open-eyed rejection of the Lord. Jesus raises that specter by way of a rhetorical question (but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?) to raise the stakes of the apostasy against which he is warning.

3. Light (5:14-16)

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. [15] Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. [16] In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

a. Light is a symbol of righteousness and enlightenment. In Jn. 8:12 Jesus says of himself, "I am the light of the world." Christians are to be "the light of the world" in that they are to show the light of Christ in the way they live (Eph. 5:8-9; Phil. 2:15). We are a living demonstration of the arrival of the kingdom of God (Wilkins, 215).

b. A "city on a hill" and a "lighted lamp" relate to Christians being the light of the world in that, just as concealment is incompatible with the nature of a city on a hill and contrary to the purpose of a lighted lamp, concealment is incompatible with the nature of a Christian and contrary to his or her purpose.

(1) A living faith in Jesus Christ will inevitably express itself, will result in a transformed life; it cannot be concealed. A faith that does not manifest itself in works is what James in Jas. 2:14-26 calls a "dead faith," a mere intellectual assent that is insufficient to save. If it is concealed, if it makes no observable difference in a person's life, it is not a biblical, saving faith.

(2) Moreover, concealing one's Christian life is contrary to one's role as a source of light for the world. It makes no more sense to hide one's Christ-motivated righteousness from other people than to put a lamp under a basket where it cannot fulfill the purpose for which it was lit, namely, to provide light! Rather, Christians are openly to live exemplary lives, not to parade our goodness but to direct attention to God who is the source of this living and of every good gift.

c. Jesus is here warning about the temptation to go "underground" with one's faith, to be a "secret Christian," because that is a predictable response to the hostility and persecution about which he has been speaking. If instead of rejoicing and being glad in the face

of insult, persecution, and slander they seek to hide their Christian distinctiveness, they are subverting their mission.

d. If I may digress, I'm afraid some of us have gotten the idea that rather than living holy lives before the world we should live *like* the world so as to not appear self-righteous or not to scare off potential recruits by making them think they are going to have to change. Well, guess what? Christ calls us to change – in fact he calls us to come and die – and we cannot strip that out of the gospel and pretend that we still have the gospel.

(1) After all, Jesus did say (Lk. 14:26-27), "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." And he insisted on being up front about what was required. Right after declaring that he must be the supreme priority in a disciple's life, he says (Lk. 14:28-30), "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build but was not able to finish.'" He then repeats the point with the illustration of a king going to war.

(2) The truth of the matter is that many people want desperately to change. They want the power Christ gives through the Holy Spirit to live a new life, a life that is no longer enslaved to sin. When we downplay the radicalness of Christian living we muffle the truth of the new life, which I think reduces the appeal of Christianity rather than enhances it.

B. The Higher Righteousness of the Kingdom (Mat. 5:17-20)

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. [19] Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

1. In 5:17 Jesus tells them not to think he has come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. In bringing the kingdom of God he was not rejecting or setting aside God's prior revelation in Scripture. On the contrary, he came to fulfill that Scripture.

a. The word rendered "abolish" in the ESV and many other English versions frequently is used in connection with the demolishing of buildings. It is used three other times in Matthew. In Mat. 24:2 it refers to the temple complex being torn down, and in Mat. 26:61 and 27:40 it refers to the destruction of the temple. It carries the sense of scrapping or doing away with.

b. The phrase "the Law and the Prophets" was a common designation for the Hebrew Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament (see Mat. 7:12, 22:40; Lk. 16:16; Acts 13:15; and Rom. 3:21). The unusual phrase "the Law or the Prophets" may have been used because Jesus' opponents accused him most specifically of abolishing the Law. They accused him of that not because he broke the law but because he broke their erroneous interpretations of the law, such as by healing on the Sabbath. As Quarles (p. 89) paraphrases the meaning, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law, or the Prophets either for that matter." He adds, "The statement affirmed Jesus' fidelity to the entire OT."

c. Just as marriage does not abolish courtship or engagement but accomplishes its purpose, so Jesus did not reject or scrap the Old Testament but *fulfilled* it. The entire Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus and the kingdom of God he was ushering in. As Jesus said in Mat. 11:13, "all the Prophets and the Law prophesied . . ."

2. Matthew 5:18 begins with "For" showing that it explains and confirms the truth of v. 17, which is that he came to fulfill rather than to abolish the Scripture. Contrary to the notion he was abolishing God's written revelation, Jesus affirms that the Old Testament will continue to stand as God's word, continue to have relevance and significance to disciples, until heaven and earth in their present form give way to the new heavens and new earth (2 Pet. 3:10), until every promise and prediction of the Scriptures is completely fulfilled. Until that time, no part of Israel's inspired writings will be rendered useless or of no effect; they are not to be ignored or discarded but are still to be read and profited from. Quarles comments (p. 96), "The OT is of enduring significance and will not be out of date, passé, or useless so long as the universe remains in its present state."

3. *But*, as is clear from vv. 21ff., that old-covenant revelation will have a different force and application in the new setting of the Fulfiller's arrival. With the dawn of the new age, the introduction of the kingdom of God, a page has turned in salvation history. The Old Testament remains in effect as God's word, but it now is interpreted and functions in light of the Christ event. Old covenant Scripture applies differently in the new covenant era, but since that application difference was intended by God, recognizing that fact is not destroying the Scripture. It is knowing the season of God's unfolding plan of redemption and reading Scripture in the context of its fulfillment.

4. Jesus is not a Marcionite; he is not anti-Old Testament or anti-law. Rather, he is pro-Old Testament and pro-law *as properly applied*. As Douglas Moo remarks (quoted in Quarles, 97): "The OT law is not to be abandoned. Indeed, it must continue to be taught (Matt 5:19) – but interpreted and applied in light of its fulfillment by Christ. In other words, it stands no longer as the ultimate standard of conduct for God's people, but must always be viewed through the lenses of Jesus' ministry and teaching." Jesus is the prism through which the Old Testament is to be understood.

5. So when Jesus says in v. 19 that anyone who relaxes one of the least of the Old Testament commandments will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, he is referring to Old Testament commandments *as applicable to kingdom participants*, as applicable in light of his

coming and fulfillment of the Old Testament. Some commands do not apply in the new covenant era by virtue of his fulfilling work (e.g., sacrifices), but other commands have renewed applicability and indeed find their fullest expression in the Lord's teaching, as we will see in the sermon.

a. Donald Hagner states (*Matthew 1-13*, p. 108): "What is being emphasized in this way is not the minutiae of the law that tended to captivate the Pharisees but simply full faithfulness to the law *as it is expounded by Jesus*. Thus, the phrase 'the least of these commandments' refers to the final and full meaning of the law, but taken up and interpreted by Jesus, as for example in the material that begins in v. 21. "

b. Craig Blomberg (p. 104-105) comments:

> With the coming of Christ, many aspects of the law are brought to complete fruition (e.g., the need for sacrifices, on which see Hebrews). In other instances certain requirements of the law endure until Christ's coming again (e.g., classically, love of neighbor and God). In short, Christian application of the Old Testament must always take into account both the continuities and the discontinuities with the New Testament. Given this hermeneutic, correct teaching and practice of all "these commandments" (v. 19, almost certainly referring back to the Old Testament law just mentioned) are crucial. Jesus will give six illustrations of such correct interpretation shortly (vv. 21-48).

6. Given the Old Testament's ongoing relevance ("Therefore"), obedience to God's will as expressed in the Old Testament and mediated to Christians through the impact of Christ's coming remains important in the new covenant. Those who practice and teach those mediated commands, those commands as applied through the prism of Jesus, will be called great in the kingdom whereas those who do not practice them and teach others to do likewise will be called least in the kingdom.

7. This indicates there will be some type of gradations in the kingdom (see Mat. 20:23; Lk. 12:47-48), a distinction between least and greatest, but it isn't clear if this refers to ultimate rewards or the quality of one's discipleship here. Certainly it will be an eternal joy to hear the Lord say on that Day, "Well done my good and faithful servant." And it will be a matter of regret to hear that one should have been more diligent about obedience in certain areas.

8. In 5:20 Jesus says that unless their righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, they will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

a. "The term 'righteousness' and related words in Matthew consistently refer to a person's obedience to God's commands and conformity to His character expressed in personal behavior, speech, and attitudes" (Quarles, 101). In other words, it refers to how one lives, to personal rather than to imputed righteousness. Indeed, that is the context of the statement; he is talking about keeping God's commandments. His point is that the righteousness of true disciples necessarily will surpass the righteousness that is typical of too many scribes and

Pharisees. If it does not, they are not true disciples and thus will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

b. The righteousness of disciples involves a different kind of righteousness than that which characterized many scribes and Pharisees. Yes, the scribes and Pharisees put much effort into their religion and were scrupulous in their outward observance of regulations, but their religion was external and formal instead of a religion of the heart (see Lk. 16:15 and Mat. 23:27-28). They were more concerned with the ceremonial than the moral (see Mat. 23:23-25). It was a religion of man-made rules based upon concessions they granted one another in violation of the law they pretended to keep (see Mat. 15:3-9). In summary, they were interested only in specifics and not in principles, only in actions and not in motives, and only in doing and not in being.

c. That is not true of disciples, kingdom participants. We are inwardly transformed people, those to whom God has given a new heart, so our righteousness flows from inside out. It is not external or formalistic but captures the spirit as well as the letter of the law. You see this clearly in the righteousness to which Jesus calls disciples in the following verses. As R. T. France notes (p. 189), "Jesus is not talking about beating the scribes and Pharisees at their own game, but about a different level or concept of righteousness altogether." Donald Hagner (p. 109) similarly remarks that the surpassing righteousness of Christians is "a new and higher kind of righteousness that rests upon the presence of the eschatological kingdom he [Jesus] brings and finds its definition and content in his definitive and authoritative exposition of the law."

IV. Kingdom Living Illustrated (Mat. 5:21-47)

Introduction: Some particulars of the radical righteousness of kingdom participants are set out in Mat 5:21-47. There are six sections of "you've heard it said . . ., but I say." The first part, "you've heard it said" means "you've understood." Jesus is not criticizing the Old Testament but the understanding of many of his hearers. Jesus contrasts the people's incorrect, incomplete, or inadequate understanding of the law with his teaching, with his authoritative formulation as the law's Fulfiller, of the true direction in which the law points.

A. Anger and Reconciliation (Mat. 5:21-26)

You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' [22] But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. [23] So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. [25] Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and

you be put in prison. [26] Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

1. The contrast Jesus makes in vv. 21-22 between their understanding and his own teaching is that they had understood that murder was prohibited (6th commandment - Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17) and that a murderer would be liable to judgment, meaning be sentenced to death by a human court (Ex. 21:12; Lev. 24:17; Num. 35:12; Deut. 17:8-13). The law, however, points to Jesus' own, deeper teaching: the root of murder is anger, and anger is murderous in principle. One has not conformed to the better righteousness of the kingdom merely by refraining from murder. The angry person will be subject to *God's* judgment, which is presupposed since no human court is able to try a case of inward anger (Carson, EBC Revised, 181).

2. The anger of which Jesus is speaking is a vengeful or hostile attitude or emotion toward someone that arises in reaction to a perceived personal affront. It can manifest itself in various attacks on its object, including physical and verbal abuse. The attitude itself is sinful, not only its outward manifestations, and as such it subjects one to divine condemnation if it is not forgiven by God. It is so easy to ignore or rationalize this sin, but it is condemned repeatedly in the New Testament (Gal. 5:19; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; Jas. 1:19).

3. Matthew 5:22b speaks of anger expressed as insults. If one says "*raca*," an Aramaic term of abuse meaning something like "idiot," one will be liable to the council. This probably is a figurative reference to God's judgment, as the word "council" was used for God's heavenly court in a number of Jewish texts (Keener, 184). If one says "you fool," one will be subject to the fire of hell. With commentators like Carson, Blomberg, and Keener, I do not believe these involve an escalating punishment. That would require differing offenses, and these essentially are all the same. Rather, I think Jesus gives progressively more vivid descriptions of the same consequence (liable to judgment, liable to the [divine] court, liable to the hell of fire).

4. Jesus' statement is focused on anger with one's brother, almost certainly meaning a fellow disciple, because that is especially serious not because anger is appropriate toward non-Christians. Quarles comments (p. 110):

> While disciples have a responsibility to treat all people, not just spiritual brothers, kindly (vv. 43-48), Christ placed a special emphasis on treating fellow believers with grace and compassion. . . . The heavenly Father has a unique love for His own children. Because of that love, He considers abuse of a Christian brother with special seriousness. Earthly fathers do the same. A good father does not like to see any child bully other children. But is someone bullies his own son or daughter, he is especially angered. Because Jesus' disciples are children of God by faith, God views their abuse and mistreatment of one another as a more grievous offense.

5. The anger Jesus expresses in Mk. 3:1-5 and Mat. 23:17 ("blind fools") is different from what he condemns in Mat. 5:21-22. Jesus' outrage is toward sin (injustice, unbelief, misrepresentation of God, exploitation of others). Holiness cannot be indifferent toward *sin*. His reference in 5:21-22 is to personal anger (which probably explains the clarifying

addition "without cause" in v. 22 of some manuscripts). Robertson McQuilken writes in *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*:

> Righteous and unrighteous anger can be distinguished by the cause of anger. One should be angry over sin that offends God, harms others, or harms the person sinning. . . . Anger is sinful when it is for the wrong reason or results in the wrong action. . . .
>
> To keep this emotion from igniting for the wrong reason or from burning out of control, Scripture gives two ways of control: Take it easy – don't get angry suddenly (James 1:19), and don't let it keep burning – don't let it last till the next day (Eph. 4:26). Either a "low flashpoint," a quick response without reflection, or a "slow burn," continuing on with the emotion, seem to risk causing even righteous indignation to go astray.

6. The "So" or "Therefore" at the beginning of v. 23 shows that the following statement is an inference from what he has been saying about the sinfulness of anger. Specifically, Mat. 5:23-24 highlights the seriousness of the sin of anger by illustrating the urgency necessary to repair its damage.

a. Offering a sacrifice on the altar at the temple in Jerusalem was a solemn act that could be interrupted or preempted only for the most compelling reasons. Jesus says in v. 23 that the one offering a gift at the altar who remembers that his brother *has something against him*, meaning in this context that he had wronged his brother in anger (but the principle would apply to having wronged him in any way), is to stop right there and go in repentance to be reconciled with his brother. Jack Lewis comments, "God is unwilling for people to come to him unreconciled. His worship can wait" (Lewis, 90).

b. We cannot wrong someone, in anger or otherwise, and then have the attitude "Tough! He needs to get over it." Our Lord demands that we humble ourselves, go to those we have wronged, and seek forgiveness and reconciliation before we offer our worship. And yet, there are those in many congregations who week after week and year after year gather to worship God without ever having repented of the wrongs done to brothers and sisters and having sought reconciliation with them. They just ignore these festering wounds and think God is pleased with their worship. That should not be.

7. Matthew 5:25-26 is an illustration of the seriousness of anger based on the civil law. The point is that reconciliation is urgent because failure to do so will result in the full measure of justice being meted out. We must act quickly to make it right with those we have wronged, in our anger or otherwise, because if we delay too long, we may face the full measure of God's judgment.

B. Adultery (Mat. 5:27-30)

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' [28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. [29] If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30] And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

1. The 7th commandment prohibited adultery (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18), which refers to a married person having sexual relations with someone other than his or her spouse. The point of 5:27-28 is that God is concerned with both action and intent. Looking at a woman with "lustful intent" or "to lust for her" means looking with the intent of fueling your imagination of having her sexually. It does not require men to hide their faces from beautiful women or not to appreciate their beauty. It does require them not to look in furtherance of sexual fantasies; looking with that intent is to commit spiritual adultery. Jesus is not condemning the natural desire of a man for a woman (consider Song of Solomon) but the lustful desire for a woman to whom one has no right.

2. Men you know that the line between appreciating a woman's beauty and using that vision in an impure sexual sense can easily be crossed, so caution, honesty, and discipline must be employed here in abundance. This command obviously renders sinful all viewing of pornography. Do not even try to tell another man that you are viewing naked women engaging in sexual conduct for some pure and noble motivation, that you are not doing so for sexual titillation, with lustful intent. We know; we're one of you, so don't insult us. Brothers, and yes sisters, if you are viewing pornography, the Spirit of the Lord Jesus is saying to you here and now, repent. Confess your sin and find someone you can trust who will help hold you accountable in your struggle to be free of this. Please do not turn a deaf ear to this word.

3. The gravity of this sin is emphasized by Jesus' shocking prescription in vv. 29-30. Hyperbole, of course, is exaggeration for emphasis (e.g., he hit it a mile!). Matthew 5:29-30 clearly is a case of hyperbole because gouging out one's eye and cutting off one's hand would not remove lust. Lust does not reside in a part of the body. As Jesus indicated, the adultery committed by the lustful gaze occurs in the heart, meaning the inner person. The point is that Christians must be willing to deal radically with sin. It must be dealt with radically because the consequence of impenitent sin, of making an idol of that sin and putting it above the Lord, is the loss of the whole person in hell. Struggling with sin in penitence, fighting it with acknowledgment of the seriousness it has in God's eyes, is completely different from embracing and making peace with it.

4. There have been those in the history of Christianity who have taken this command literally and castrated themselves. Most notably among them was Origen, the Christian theologian who died in the middle of the third century as a result of the torture he received during the Decian persecution. He later realized he had misinterpreted the Lord's teaching and regretted his action.

C. Divorce (Mat. 5:31-32)

It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' [32] But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

1. They had heard that one divorcing his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. This is a reference to the teaching of the Jews based on Deut. 24:1-4. They inferred from Deut. 24:1 that a man could divorce his wife for "something indecent" by giving her a certificate and debated the permissible grounds for divorce. The school of Rabbi Shammai maintained that "something indecent" referred to something grossly indecent, such as unchastity or infidelity. Rabbi Hillel extended the meaning beyond sin to all kinds of offenses, including improperly cooking a meal making divorce essentially at the whim of the husband. (Jewish wives were not permitted to divorce their husbands.)

2. The point of 5:32 is that God's law is not primarily about formalities of divorce, the necessity of the certificate, but about the sanctity of marriage. Divorce is a grave matter in the eyes of God. The formality of a certificate of divorce and the prohibition against remarrying the divorced wife after she had another husband discouraged hasty divorces. The law thus points to the original purpose of marriage as a relationship of permanence, a point Jesus makes in Mat. 19:3-9. As God said through the prophet Malachi, "I hate divorce" (Mal. 2:16) (note translation issue regarding that verse).

3. As Jesus authoritatively interprets the law, the only permissible basis for divorce is sexual immorality, which of course includes adultery. Divorce always involves evil, but just as Moses permitted divorce because their hearts were hard (Mat. 19:8), so Jesus permits it among those with new but not yet fully transformed hearts, but only for sexual sin, some kind of significant sexual activity with a person other than the spouse.

4. The traditional and dominant understanding of 5:32 is that a man who divorces his wife for a reason other than sexual immorality makes her commit adultery in that he leaves her in a position where she will be driven to remarry out of economic necessity, which remarriage is in some sense an act of adultery.

a. I say it is in "some sense" an act of adultery because I do not believe it is literal adultery. I do not believe it is literal adultery because I do not believe the divorced spouses are still married, which they would have to be for literal adultery to exist. I do not believe they are still married because I am convinced from 1 Cor. 7:10-11 that a marriage is effectively dissolved even by a divorce that is contrary to the Lord's will; Paul says the parties are rendered "unmarried." Moreover, in Mat. 19:6 and Mk. 10:9 Jesus commands people *not* to separate what God has joined together, referring to a marital union. He obviously is not commanding them not to dissolve marriages in cases where God permits them to do so, so he is

implying that they have the power or ability to dissolve marriages in cases where God has not permitted them to do so. Why command someone not to do what he or she cannot do in the first place?

b. Well if even sinful divorces are effective in dissolving a marriage, in separating what God has joined together, how can Jesus say a divorced woman commits adultery by remarrying? If she is not still married to the first husband, how can she commit adultery?

c. I think it is figurative adultery committed by the act of remarriage. Jesus is referring to the violation of a right of exclusive commitment that survives dissolution of the marriage. As I piece together a host of relevant texts (including Mat. 5:31-32, 19:3-9; Mk. 10:2-12; Lk. 16:18; Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:10-16, 7:27-28, 7:39; and several texts from the Old Testament), it seems marriage creates a right to exclusive commitment that can survive dissolution of the marriage. Only a divorce for sexual immorality extinguishes the "right to exclusive commitment" prior to a remarriage and then only for the guilty party (the sexually immoral spouse). In other words, the guilty party no longer has a right of exclusive commitment from his or her former spouse. In such a case, the innocent party is free to remarry, but the guilty party commits "adultery" (violates the innocent party's continuing right to exclusive commitment) by remarriage.

d. Where there is a divorce for some reason other than sexual immorality, the right to exclusive commitment remains *mutual*, so both parties commit "adultery" by remarriage. It is not literal adultery because they are not still married, but it is still a sinful violation of a residual, maritally created right and thus is analogous to adultery. (I explain this in greater detail in "Another Look at Divorce and Remarriage.")

e. Back to 5:32, if the divorce is for a reason other than sexual immorality, the wrongfully divorcing husband is *a cause* of the wife's presumed wrongful remarriage, having wrongfully put her in a dire economic situation, and thus he bears that additional culpability. However, if the divorce is for sexual immorality, he does not share any blame for her subsequent adultery upon remarriage. That is all on her.

5. Jesus says in the last part of v. 32 that whoever marries a woman who *has been divorced* by her husband, whether for sexual immorality or some other reason, thereby commits "adultery." He violates the ongoing obligation of exclusive commitment that the woman owed the first husband who divorced her. The new husband is party to that breach.

a. Notice Jesus is not addressing the case where a woman divorced her husband as contemplated in Mk. 10:12. He is here speaking only of the case where the man divorced his wife either permissibly in the case of her having been sexually immoral or impermissibly in all other cases.

b. Whether the divorce was permissible or impermissible, the divorced wife continues to owe a duty of exclusive commitment to her ex-husband. And the divorcing husband owes that same duty to the divorced wife except in the case where she was divorced for

sexual immorality. Divorce on that ground extinguishes his residual obligation to her and thus he is free to remarry. Note that where the wife divorced her husband for sexual immorality, a situation not contemplated here, she likewise would owe no residual obligation of exclusive commitment.

6. If this interpretation is correct, which is just a variation of the traditional understanding, one that accounts for the view that even wrongful divorces are effective in dissolving marriages, it means, for example, that a faithful Christian woman whose Christian husband took her virginity and then sinfully kicked her to the curb after enjoying her for a time is barred from remarrying though she has done nothing wrong and is a victim of her husband's betrayal (but even here issues arise such as the effect of her ex-spouse's subsequent remarriage). If that is the will of the Lord, as most are convinced, then so be it, but the seeming harshness or unfairness of that result strikes some as being inconsistent with the character of God, and thus they wonder if we are missing something.

a. As N.T. scholar John Nolland states in *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 246, "The normal understanding of Mt. 5:32b runs the danger of leaving the woman involved a double victim: she has been divorced by a husband who may well have rejected her at his own whim (as per v. 31) and is now to be barred from any new relationship because she bears the stigma of the 'divorcee.'"

b. And I might add that the woman (or man for that matter) is further victimized where the church refuses to discipline the sinfully divorcing spouse. Not only does the church thereby fail to exert the divinely prescribed pressure on the divorcing spouse to repent but it also leaves the situation ambiguous in the eyes of the congregation further wounding the victim.

c. Nolland, who has written major commentaries on the Greek text of both Matthew and Luke, argues that Mat. 5:32 should be translated: "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, causes her to have adultery committed against her (rather than "causes her to commit adultery") and whoever marries a woman who has gained a divorce (rather than "has been divorced") commits adultery."

d. So, in Nolland's view, neither Mat. 5:32 nor Lk. 16:18 addresses the freedom to remarry of an innocent wife/spouse who was wrongly divorced. Jesus says only that a man who wrongly divorces his wife commits adultery against her by *his presumed remarriage* and that a man who marries a woman who *engineered or forced an impermissible divorce* likewise commits adultery (as would, of course, the woman he married). So the focus in both cases is on the improperly acting parties, those procuring the impermissible divorce. The woman who engineered an impermissible divorce from her husband and remarried would be the Jewish equivalent of a Gentile who impermissibly divorced her husband and remarried (Mk. 10:12), as a Jewish woman had no legal right to divorce her husband. See, e.g., Instone-Brewer (2002) 85-90.

e. Nolland's proposal has some advantages, but it also has its difficulties, which may explain why it has not attracted much scholarly attention. I nevertheless find it interesting and possibly correct. (William Loader acknowledges that Nolland's proposed translations are possible in *The New Testament on Sexuality* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 243, n. 9, 12 and 259; see also, Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001], 199, n. 17.)

7. There are a number of other complexities that plague the matter of divorce and remarriage and how the church is to respond to those who violate the Lord's teaching in this regard. (I again direct you to the papers on my website for further exploration of those matters.) But clearly it is the Lord's will that kingdom participants stay married. The culture breached the church's walls decades ago with its cavalier attitude about the sanctity and permanence of marriage, leading us to wink at divorce and treat it as a private, personal matter. So it is not shocking that the enemy is now trying to make acceptable in the church things like abortion and homosexual conduct. He is invigorated by our timidity and capitulation. We must labor to offer our marriages to the Lord and stop rationalizing and tolerating our sin in this area

D. Oaths (Mat. 5:33-37)

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' [34] But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, [35] or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. [36] And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. [37] Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.

1. An oath is an appeal to God to substantiate the truthfulness of a statement or the commitment to a promise. The question of what qualified as an appeal to God so as to constitute a binding oath was complicated by the fact it was considered blasphemous to speak God's name. So the Jews developed complex distinctions and regulations for when an appeal was sufficiently related to God's name to be considered a real oath and thus something that was binding. You see this in Mat. 23:16-22. For example, swearing *by* Jerusalem was not binding, but swearing *toward* Jerusalem was binding.

2. In Mat. 5:33 Jesus gives a summary statement of several Old Testament passages which prohibit false oaths and broken vows. He then highlights the absurdity of the current distinctions in oaths that were being made by listing some second-class oaths that were considered nonbinding for lack of adequate connection to the name of God and explaining that all of these things are inseparably linked with God – he even controls our heads.

3. The Old Testament requirement of keeping one's oath (not swearing falsely) points to the fundamental importance of truthfulness. That requirement finds its fulfillment in a truthfulness that is so consistent that there is no place for an oath. Since every word of theirs was to be honest and binding, there was no place for them to offer sworn speech as distinctively

trustworthy. To do so was an indictment against one's own integrity, which is why he says that buttressing one's speech with oaths comes from evil; it is a reflection of an untrustworthy character.

a. Luke Timothy Johnson puts it like this (in his commentary on James):

> If speech is meant to be a primary symbol of the self, if it is from the heart's overflow that the tongue is meant to speak, then the invocation of a special realm (whether heaven or earth) or power (the name of the Lord) to buttress one's own speech becomes, paradoxically, an admission that one's own speech is untrustworthy without such warrant. The more towering the oath, the more impressive the power invoked to support my own statement, the more suspect my innate truthfulness appears.

b. Quarles writes (p. 137-138): "Jesus' command, 'Don't take an oath at all,' serves to undermine the legal loopholes in the Jewish system of oath-taking and requires consistent truthfulness that does not require oaths at all. Jesus' disciples are to be characterized by such integrity that an oath is not necessary to make their words credible."

c. The Jewish historian Josephus reports that the sect of Jews known as Essenes shared this view. He wrote: "Every statement of theirs is surer than an oath and with them swearing is avoided, for they think it worse than perjury. For they say that he who is not trustworthy except when he appeals to God is already under condemnation" (quoted in Johnson, 327). But note that they required an oath as part of admission to their group.

4. This prohibition probably is limited to voluntary oaths. In an official oath, one that responsible authorities require, the one swearing is not offering the testimony as more reliable. He simply is complying with someone else's requirement for trustworthiness. Indeed, Jesus testified under oath in Mat. 26:63-64.

5. If Paul's "witness formula" (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20) qualifies as an oath, it may be that love requires voluntary oaths to be given when circumstances make them important for benefitting others. This appears to be behind God's swearing the oath mentioned in Heb. 6:17. There's a difference in my swearing to you that my elixir is an antidote to a snake bite so you'll buy my product and my swearing that it is an antidote so you'll take it before you die.

6. So whereas the Old Testament accepted oath taking, it pointed to the higher ethic now expressed by the Lord, the Fulfiller of the Old Testament. It pointed to an absolute and scrupulous honesty that is inconsistent with voluntary oaths. He is not discarding the Old Testament but bringing it to full flower, giving its ultimate expression.

E. Revenge (Mat. 5:38-42)

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' [39] But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. [40] And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. [41] And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. [42] Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

1. The prescription "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" occurs in several Old Testament texts (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21). It was a principle, commonly known by the Latin phrase *lex talionis* (law of retaliation), that governed Jewish courts in the administration of justice. It meant that the penalty for an offense was to be commensurate with or fit the crime; the penalty was to be neither unduly harsh nor unjustly lenient.

2. It seems, however, that in the first century this principle had been distorted into a justification for acts of personal revenge or retaliation. In other words, people were using it as a license for retribution, as divine permission to exact a "pound of flesh" from those who had wronged them. This was obviously a misapplication of the text, since Lev. 19:18 expressly prohibits taking revenge, but this may have been a popular rather than a rabbinic interpretation. Even in our culture you sometimes hear people cite "an eye for an eye" as justification for acts of personal revenge.

3. Contrary to the warped notion that the *lex talionis* justified personal revenge or retaliation for offenses, Jesus insists that his disciples, kingdom participants, not ἀντιστῆναι the evildoer (aorist active infinitive of ἀνθίστημι). I think the common translation "do not resist" is imprecise and prone to misunderstanding.

a. After all, we are called to "resist" the devil in Jas. 4:7 and 1 Pet. 5:9, and Paul "resisted" Peter's error in Gal. 2:11. It is here better translated something like "do not take a hostile stance against" or "draw up arms against" (CSB footnote – "set yourself against") an "evildoer" (NRS, NET, CSB), meaning one who *has done* evil to you. In other words, they are not to allow their mistreatment to create battlelines and an intention to seek revenge or retaliation from the wrongdoer who is now considered an enemy. They are not to go to war against the one who wronged them.

b. That "do not resist" here involves not retaliating for wrongs is suggested by the contrast of v. 39b. Instead of "resisting" the one who does evil to you, you are to react to that evil by taking it without revenge or retaliation. To retaliate would be to resist in the sense he is prohibiting.

4. This is the opposite of the world's attitude which is, "If you wrong me, it's on!" That attitude is summarized in the bumper sticker "I don't get mad – I get even" and in the statement years ago by Donald Trump: "If people screw me, I screw back in spades." The insistence on revenge for personal wrongs is rooted in an inflated ego and in a lack of faith that God ultimately will judge all things.

5. Jesus then in vv. 39b-41 gives several illustrations of his command not to assume a hostile stance against one who wrongs you, not to turn the wrongdoer into an enemy from whom you demand revenge.

a. In v. 39b he says that instead of drawing up battlelines against someone who wrongs you, "if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Since most people are right-handed, the fact the slap is on the right cheek implies it was with the back of the hand, which was a gross insult.

b. He is not talking about whether one can duck or parry such a wrongful insulting blow, and he certainly is not talking about the ethics of defending oneself against a dangerous physical assault. The teaching *assumes* the insulting blow and addresses one's response. He is saying that a disciple cannot allow such an insult to make him hostile toward the wrongdoer, to turn the wrongdoer into someone the disciple now wants to harm by way of retaliation rather than bless.

c. The command to offer the other cheek for further wrongful insult is concrete imagery that powerfully conveys the abstract notion of nonretaliation. It is hyperbole, an "over-the-top" picture designed to drive home the commanded attitude and spirit.

(1) Imagine if a business owner wanting to stress the importance of satisfying the customer said to his employees, "Clean his toilet if he asks you." Everyone would understand that it was hyperbolic, a colorful way of emphasizing the importance of being focused on customer service and satisfaction. No employee would think he was literally being asked to clean customers' toilets. That is the kind of thing Jesus is doing.

(2) Thomas Schreiner is among those who recognize that Jesus is here and in the following examples using hyperbole. He writes in *40 Questions About Christians and the Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 168:

> Believers are not to return insults with insults. Jesus gives colorful and hyperbolic examples to illustrate his teaching. He does not literally mean that one should hand another his cloak if sued, nor were believers required to volunteer to go the extra mile when Roman soldiers commandeered them to go one mile. Jesus' point was that one should not have a heart of revenge and retaliation when mistreated or abused (Matt. 5:40-41). After all, one could literally volunteer to go the extra mile and give everything one owns to a beggar (vv. 41-42) and still have a heart filled with hatred and revenge.

(3) Likewise, Davies and Allison write (p. 541):

> The import of the following sentences is lost if one attempts to take them literally. Jesus often resorted to extreme exaggeration in order to drive home his points and to get his hearers to ask questions and see their world from a new perspective. The

command to turn the other cheek cannot be understood prosaically. Rather is Jesus calling for an unselfish temperament, for naked humility and a will to suffer the loss of one's personal rights. He is declaring that two wrongs do not make a right, that revenge is poison.

e. In v. 40 Jesus repeats the point saying, "if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well."

(1) A loin cloth was something like our underwear. A "tunic" was the basic garment, a long or half-sleeved body-length inner robe similar to a night shirt that was worn in some form by everyone. The "cloak" was the outer robe that protected one from the cold and was used for carrying grain and objects. The cloak was expressly protected from confiscation (Ex. 22:25-27 – cloak taken in pledge must be returned by sunset).

(2) The call to willingly give up the cloak that one has a clear right to keep is a powerful way of making the point that even this kind of personal indignity – being sued for the very clothes on your back – is to be born without hostility, without retaliation or a spirit of revenge. No first-century Jew would understand Jesus' words literally because it would be socially unthinkable for a first-century Jew to go about only in his loin cloth, which would be the result of a literal application in the case of the poor who had only one tunic and cloak. This suggests that the commands about turning the other cheek and going the extra mile likewise are hyperbolic, understood exaggerations that drive home the intended point.

f. And Jesus again repeats the point in v. 41 where he says "if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles." The verb "forces you to go" is a specific term for the Roman soldier's practice of commandeering civilians to carry burdens for them, which was despised by the Jewish people. This was an affront, a being put upon, that invoked outrage and feelings of spite. But Christians are to bear even this offense without hostility and a desire for revenge as pictured in their willingness to go even further than required.

6. The Lord is not restricting a Christian from standing up for the truth or his legal rights or from defending other people. Paul, for example, resisted Peter to his face in Galatians 2 and stood for his rights as a Roman citizen in Acts 16:37, 22:25, 25:8-12. The point is that a disciple cannot consider someone an enemy and desire retaliation against him because that person mistreated the disciple. We must remain committed to the welfare of those who wrong us and not their harm; we must be that different. How's that for radical?

7. Having given three illustrations of his command not to turn one who wrongs you into an enemy from whom you demand revenge, Jesus in v. 42 applies the requirement of a nonretaliatory spirit to the disciples' giving to the needy.

a. In that culture, it would be assumed that the needs of those begging and seeking loans were legitimate and probably desperate. Indeed, begging was considered so shameful that some Jews preferred death (Quarles, 156), so Jesus is not addressing the case of

the slothful, lazy, or irresponsible. I think D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones is correct in saying in his book *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (p. 288-89):

> Our Lord does not encourage us here to help frauds or professional beggars or drunkards. I put it like this plainly because we all have these experiences. A man comes to you under the influence of drink and asks you to give him some money. Although he says he wants it for a night's lodging you know he will go immediately and spend it upon drink. Our Lord does not tell us to encourage or help such a man. He is not even considering that.

b. The point in context seems to be that aid to the poor must not be withheld because of personal resentment or animosity based on some kind of prior mistreatment. The fact one had treated you as an enemy does not justify kicking him when he is down by refusing to help him. As Paul said in Rom. 12:20, referring to Prov. 25:21-22, *But "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink.*

F. Hatred and Love (Mat. 5:43-47)

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

1. Love your neighbor is from Lev. 19:18, but no Old Testament passage commands hatred for enemies. Nevertheless, the Qumran community specifically commanded love for members and hatred for outsiders. There were undoubtedly other groups that arrived at that position. The popular reasoning may have been that if God commands love for "neighbor" then hatred for "enemies" is implied.

2. The true direction of the law is universal love, a love extended even to enemies. "Those who persecute you" is a reference to one important kind of enemy, but it does not exhaust the meaning. Love is a commitment to the welfare of its object, a commitment to do for another that which blesses him. It is to manifest itself in prayer for one's persecutors. As Jesus expressed the point in the Sermon on the Plain in Lk. 6:27-28, *"But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28] bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."* Paul no doubt harks back to this teaching of the Lord when he says in Rom. 12:14, *"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."*

3. This undiscriminating love marks out disciples as sons of their Father – they are reflecting his character and conduct. They are being like God who loves all people, a fact indicated by his providing natural blessings (sun, rain) on the evil and unrighteous as well as on

the good and righteous. Of course, this does not mean that all mankind will be saved. The Bible is clear that many will not be saved; many will choose to spurn God's love. But God loves them so much to have his Son die for them.

4. Loving those who love you is not morally distinct, not a higher calling; everyone does that, even the tax collectors, who were seen as corrupt traitors. Greeting was a mark of courtesy and respect and typically expressed some kind of blessing that was tantamount to "May it be well with you." If Christians greet only other disciples, they do not rise above the level of pagans. The love Christ calls us to have extends beyond *us*.

5. As John Stott sums up kingdom living: "The life of the old (fallen) humanity is based on rough justice, avenging injuries, and returning favors. The life of the new (redeemed) humanity is based on divine love, refusing to take revenge but overcoming evil with good."

V. The Kingdom Calling: Emulating God's Perfection (Mat. 5:48)

You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

A. "Greater righteousness" demanded in v. 20 and illustrated in vv. 21-47 is now summed up in one all-embracing demand: "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." This is the target for all Christians. We are to be morally and ethically perfect, completely like our sinless Lord and Master, who is the exact representation of the Father.

B. The fact we have not yet arrived at that level of sanctification, the fact our journey toward Christlikeness, our ongoing transformation by the Spirit into his image, is not complete and will not be until he returns does not mean it ceases to be our goal. We cannot be indifferent or unconcerned about our righteousness, our living as God's children, because our Lord has laid on us the call to perfection.

C. Carson writes (p. 161):

> Just as in the OT it was the distinctive mark of Israel that they were set apart for God to reflect his character (Lev 19:2; cf. 11:44-45; 20:7, 26), so the messianic community carries on this distinctiveness (cf. 1 Peter 1:16) as the true locus of the people of God (cf. France, *Jesus*, pp. 61-62). This must not encourage us to conclude that Jesus teaches that unqualified perfection is already possible for his disciples. He teaches them to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy (v. 3) and to pray "Forgive us our debts" (6:12). But the perfection of the Father, the true eschatological goal of the law, is what all disciples of Jesus pursue.

D. Quarles states (p. 169-170):

> The ethic of Jesus' kingdom is full perfection. Believers should strive for this ideal with the conviction that, as children of God, they are heirs of His character

and will resemble Him. The emphatic "you" in verse 48 reminds believers that they have a power to pursue perfection that others lack. They should strive for this perfection armed with the awareness that righteousness is a divine gift that God graciously imparts as His people crave it (v. 6). They should also remember that while Christ's kingdom has been inaugurated, its consummation awaits His glorious return. Although Jesus' disciples are progressively and increasingly characterized by righteousness here and now, their transformation will not be complete until the kingdom is consummated.

VI. Keeping the Motives for Kingdom Living Pure (Mat. 6:1-18)

A. The Controlling Principle (Mat. 6:1)

Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.

1. The motive for righteous living cannot be the praise of men. Righteous conduct is to be visible so that God may be glorified, as indicated in 5:16, but it must never be visible for the purpose of gaining personal acclaim. When I do something before men for *self*-glory, so they will applaud *me*, I am serving self rather than God. I am in fact competing with God for a share of the glory associated with the good deed. I do not want all the praise to go to God; I want at least a piece of it to fall my way. This is such a deep thing in fallen humanity (and continues to pose a struggle for those "not yet" fully transformed).

2. Mat. 23:5-7 reveals the prevalence of such self-centered piety among scribes and Pharisees, those whose righteousness the disciples must exceed: *They do all their deeds <u>to be seen by others</u>. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long, [6] and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues [7] and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi by others.*

3. Jesus states that self-centered piety will receive no blessing or benefit from God. As he makes clear in the following examples, one who does good in order to be praised by other people will receive that praise but nothing else, nothing from God. They will be left with only the reward that motivated them.

B. Examples: The Foolish Choice of a Temporal Reward (Mat. 6:2-6, 16-18)

Jesus applies this principle to the three pillars of Jewish piety (almsgiving, prayer, and fasting) as examples of how it is to be applied to all religious activity.

1. Alms (Mat. 6:2-4)

Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [3] But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

a. Warning – Do not advertise or draw attention to your giving to the needy so other people will praise you for it. That is what "the hypocrites" do. The word translated "hypocrite" (*hupocritēs*) originally referred to an actor who performed in the Greek or Roman theater. Those who advertise their giving are called "hypocrites" because they were putting on a show. As Quarles puts it, they "were spiritual play-actors who pretended to have a piety that they did not actually possess in order to inspire the applause of a human audience" (Quarles, 176).

b. Guarantee – Such people have received their reward in full. They win human praise, but that is all they get. They receive no blessing or benefit from God.

c. Instruction – Jesus instructs the disciples not to advertise their giving for the purpose of gaining human praise. He makes the point hyperbolically: the refusal to advertise your giving is put in terms of keeping it even from yourself (not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing).

d. Assurance – God-centered piety will be rewarded by God. It will lead to blessing, both now and then.

2. Prayer (Mat. 6:5-6)

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [6] But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

a. Warning – Jesus tells the disciples they must not pray for show, to impress others with their piety. That kind of playing to the crowd is what hypocrites do.

b. Guarantee – Those who do so receive human praise, but that is all the get. They get what they were after but receive no blessing or benefit from God.

c. Instruction – Jesus instructs the disciples to pray without the motivation of gaining human praise by telling them to pray in such a way that it *cannot be* their motivation. He is emphasizing the power of the temptation to pray for human praise by prescribing a

physical means of eliminating it. He is not thereby forbidding all public praying, only public praying that cannot be conducted with the same God-focus as that done in private. Indeed, Jesus prayed within the hearing of others in Jn. 11:41-42, and the early church did not understand Jesus to be forbidding all public prayer (Acts 1:24, 3:1, 4:24-30).

d. Assurance – Prayers prayed "in secret," which stands for "without a motivation to gain human praise," will be rewarded by God. Those prayers are heard, and one's faithfulness in praying genuinely will lead to blessing.

3. Fasting (Mat. 6:16-18)

And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. [17] But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, [18] that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

a. Warning – Jesus tells the disciples not advertise their fasting by putting on a haggard look or some kind of altered appearance so others will esteem them for their piety. That is what the hypocrites do.

Excursus on Fasting

One of Jesus' departures from tradition that upset some people was his breaking of the tradition of regular fasting. The Old Testament prescribed a national fast on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27, 32; Num. 29:7; Acts 27:9), and it seems from 1 Sam. 14:24 and Jer. 36:6 that a fast could be called in special times of penance, such as times of crisis or emergency. Several fasts apparently had become customary after Judah's exile to Babylon, falling on days that were significant in terms of the siege of Jerusalem (see Zech. 7:1-5, 8:19). Robert Guelich says of fasting in *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 108-109:

> Fasting was a common rite in Judaism with roots deep in the OT. At times it was an expression of mourning for the loss of someone or something (1 Sam 31:13; 2 Sam 1:12). More often it was an expression of contrition and penitence, a sign of repentance marked by the symbols of mourning (Matt 6:16). Combined with prayer, fasting was a statement of self-denial and self-humiliation depicting one as self-effacing and submissive to God's will.

In the intertestamental period, fasting in Judaism increased. Lk. 5:33 says the disciples of John fasted often, and Lk. 18:12 indicates that the Pharisees fasted twice a week. Note also Anna's fasting in Lk. 2:37. Fasting had become an expected mark of piety. But Jesus and his disciples did not engage in regular voluntary fasts. On the contrary, Jesus was more associated

with feasting, so much so that he was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard (Mat. 11:19; Lk. 7:34).

This was such an obvious difference between Jesus and his disciples on the one hand and the Pharisees and John's disciples on the other that he was asked to justify it; he was asked in Mk. 2:18 (Mat. 9:14; Lk. 5:33) to explain why John's disciples and the Pharisees fast but his disciples do not. Jesus says that his disciples do not fast because the current period, the time of his presence, is like the celebration of a wedding feast when the groom is present. Wenham notes (p. 28), "The implication is that something joyful and significant, like a wedding, is taking place in Jesus' ministry and, furthermore, that Jesus is the bridegroom at the wedding, being the reason for the joy and celebration." The joyful and significant thing that is taking place in Jesus' ministry is the ushering in of the long-awaited kingdom of God.

Jesus prophesies in Mk. 2:20 (and parallels) that the joy and celebration (and thus lack of fasting) his disciples properly exhibit in his presence will turn to fasting when he is taken from them. This seems to be a reference to the temporary mourning they will experience after his arrest and execution and prior to his resurrection (see Jn. 16:16-22). He is revealing that his coming violent death is something he knows and embraces.

So Jesus indicates that fasting is not appropriate when he is physically present with the disciples and is appropriate when he is arrested and executed, but he does not address the propriety of fasting in the period between his ascension and his return, the time when he is physically in heaven but present on earth in and through the Spirit. There is a sense in which Jesus is with us always (Mat. 28:20), but also a sense in which he is away from us, as reflected in the prayer "Come Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20) and "Our Lord come!" (1 Cor. 16:22) and in Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 5:6 that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.

We know Jesus told the disciples in Jn. 16:20-22 that their sorrow at his death will at his resurrection turn into a joy that will not be taken from them, and we also know that the church fasted on occasion after Christ's ascension (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23). So it seems that fasting is acceptable, perhaps even expected (Mat. 6:16-18),[2] as we long for the consummation and all that it will entail, including the Lord's "full presence," but that this fasting is to take place in the overarching realization of the kingdom's inauguration. Just as we still grieve in this overlap of ages but not as others who have no hope (1 Thess. 4:13), so we still fast in this overlap but with a different perspective. See Kent D. Berghuis, *Christian Fasting: A Theological Approach* (N.p.: Biblical Studies Press, 2007), 47-52 (though he believes that Mk. 2:20 and parallels speak directly of fasting during the overlap of ages).

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[2] I say *perhaps* even expected because, as I. Howard Marshall notes regarding Mat. 6:16-18 in Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Into God's Presence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 125:

> The saying is directed to those who hear the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1 – 8:1) and is cast in terms of their current religious practices – that is, the giving of alms, the saying of prayers, and fasting.
>
> Elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount the practice of offering sacrifices at the temple is taken for granted. It follows, therefore, that not all of the practices assumed by Jesus in order to communicate with his audience on its own terms necessarily carry forward as things that his followers will do.

b. Guarantee – Those who fast to win human praise for their piety receive it, but as in the other cases, that is all they receive. They receive no blessing or benefit from God.

c. Instruction – Jesus instructs the disciples that when they fast they must do so without the motivation of gaining human praise by telling them to do it in a way that negates that motivation. Their fasting is to be for God's eyes and not human accolades. I do not think Jesus is ruling out having a sad face when one is fasting from a broken heart; that would not be a hypocritical put on. On the contrary, in that case, putting on a happy face would be phony.

d. Assurance – Fasting without advertising it, fasting without a motivation to gain human praise, will be rewarded by God. Those fasts, like all acts of devotion, are seen by God and will be rewarded by him.

VII. A Digression on Kingdom Prayer (Mat. 6:7-15)

A. Empty prayer (Mat. 6:7-8)

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. [8] Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

1. While on the subject of prayer, Jesus gives an additional warning about it. It is helpful for understanding the passage to keep in mind that Jesus prayed all night (Lk. 6:12), repeated himself in prayer in Gethsemane (Mat. 26:44), and instructed his disciples that they should always pray and not give up (Lk. 18:1).

2. The point is that they should avoid "babbling" (*battalogeō*), piling up empty phrases or words that are said simply to be said rather than being expressions of the heart, because God is not some impersonal force that can be mechanically manipulated into action. As Davies and Allison state, "With regard to prayer in the Gentile world, the magical papyri put us in touch with a piety which believed in incantations and the beneficial effect of mechanical repetition." Nolland remarks, "it is likely to be a deprecatory way of speaking about the formulaic repetition of either intelligible (names of gods, petitionary formulas, etc.) or unintelligible ('words' of magical powers or the language of the gods) elements in order to multiply effectiveness with the gods."

3. The key to being heard by the true and living God is not the form or number of one's words but having a Father-son relationship with him. As sons of God (Gal. 3:26-27), there is no need to badger God to gain his attention or induce a favorable disposition from him – we already have it. Nor is there a need to fill him in or make the case for our needs. He is aware of our situation and need even before we ask!

4. Though he knows our needs already, God wants us to pray because:

a. It is an act of dependence, trust, and devotion. The very act of praying says so much. It says God is real, he hears us, he cares about us, he acts in this world, and he (and only he) is in control. The answer to prayer is confirmation of these things and an expression of his greatness.

b. It is an intimate form of communion with him. God loves us and delights in our fellowship with him.

c. It allows us to be involved with God in his work in this world. As creatures made in his image, we are allowed to be involved in the outworking of his will, to be involved in matters that are eternally important.

5. Regarding the last point, prayer can change what God does. Jas. 4:2 says, "You do not have because you do not ask." He implies that failure to ask deprives us of what God would otherwise have granted. This is all over the Bible (e.g., Mat. 7:7 -- "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you"; Jas. 5:16b -- "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.") But as with so much in theology, there is more to this than meets the eye.

a. God has a plan, and he is taking his creation to the end he determined. Nothing can stop that. In the outworking of his will, there are some things he will do and some things he will not do, no matter what. In other words, some acts of God will take place regardless of whether anyone asks that they be done or asks that they not be done.

b. But within God's will, there are many things he chooses to do or not to do on the basis of prayers, actions he chooses to condition on our requests. This is the idea behind 1 Jn. 5:14-15: *And this is the confidence which we have before him, that if we ask anything <u>according to his will</u>, he hears us.* [15]*And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from him*. It is what Jesus meant in the Garden when he prayed "if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me," and then added, "Yet not as I will, but as you will" (Mat. 26:39).

c. We do not know if many of the things we pray for are consistent with God's will, with how he is working. We know what we want and what seems like a good idea to us, but we simply are too limited to comprehend God's working or to see all the ramifications of what we are asking. Paul, for example, prayed three times for the Lord to take away his "thorn in the flesh," but the Lord's answer was "No" ("My grace is sufficient for you" - 2 Cor. 12:8). Someone wrote:

I asked for strength that I might achieve;
He made me weak that I might obey.
I asked for health that I might do great things;

He gave me grace that I might do better things.
I asked for riches that I might be happy;
He gave me poverty that I might be wise.
I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;
He gave me weakness that I might feel a need of God.
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
He gave me life that I might enjoy all things.
I received nothing I had asked for;
He gave me all that I had hoped for.

d. By saying "if it is your will" we simply are saying that we acknowledge his supremacy and the inscrutability of his plan (e.g., Rom. 11:33-36) and that we accept his answer in the matter. Such prayers are not faithless or prayers of doubt. That would be very serious because faith is a requirement of effective prayer (e.g., Mat. 21:22; Jas. 1:6). Rather, such prayers are prayers of faith because we have every confidence in God, in his wisdom, his love and his power – we just realize our own place and our limitations. If a child asks his father to go get some ice cream and adds, "but only if you think it is right," that in no way reflects poorly on the father or indicates a lack of trust in him.

6. It is an insult for a Christian to approach God with insecurity about being heard as the pagans approached their gods. That sense of alienation is the work of the Enemy. The Spirit says in Heb. 4:16 that Christians, those who come to God through Jesus' high-priestly work, are to approach the throne of grace with confidence (see also Heb. 10:19-22).

B. The Model Prayer (Mat. 6:9-13)

Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. [10] Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. [11] Give us this day our daily bread, [12] and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. [13] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from [the] evil [one].

1. In contrast to the mechanical, repetitive, and manipulative prayers of pagans, Jesus in vv. 9-13 provides an example of how to pray. It is not a script, a prescription of what to pray, but a model of the kind of attitudes and concerns that should guide the prayers of disciples.

2. "Our Father in heaven"

a. The description "Father" says a lot about God. Among other things, it says he is personal (not some force) and caring. Craig Keener states (p. 216):

> This is a relationship that denotes both respectful dependence and affectionate intimacy as well as obedience. One must understand what God's "fatherhood" would have meant to most of Jesus' hearers. In first-century Jewish Palestine, children were powerless social dependents and fathers were viewed as strong

providers and examples on whom their children could depend (in contrast to many homes in contemporary Western society; cf. 7:7-11; Heb 12:5-11). Jesus summons his disciples to pray not like the pagans (6:7), but with a dependence on God as their Father (6:8-9) who watches over them (Deut 8:3-5, in Mt 4:4).

b. "*Our* Father" rather than "*my* Father" shows Jesus is envisioning corporate prayer, prayer that is uttered by or on behalf of the community. It also speaks of the special relationship between Christians and God. God is not the Father of all people (in this sense) – see Jn. 1:12-13. Indeed, the early church forbade non-Christians from reciting this prayer just as they forbade them from taking communion.

c. The phrase "in heaven" reminds us of his transcendence and sovereignty. Though our relationship with God is one of love and intimacy, it is also one of reverence. God is too majestic to be considered our "cosmic chum."

3. "hallowed be your name"

a. God's name represents God himself; it is an expression or encapsulation of his identity and nature. The prayer is that God bring about the sanctification of his name, the honoring and revering of himself as holy. Though he is disrespected and treated as nothing special (as profane) by the world, the prayer is that he bring about the rightful acknowledgement of him by all, that he be honored and glorified as is fitting his greatness and splendor.

b. This is quite a contrast to how we pray, isn't it? We are so heavy on petition for blessings and the meeting our needs and those of others and so light on a desire for God to be revered in this world.

c. God certainly is exalted to some degree in the spread of the gospel and in the Christlike conduct of his children, but the ultimate sanctification of his name will be when Christ returns to consummate the kingdom he inaugurated with his first coming. This is the final assertion of God's kingly rule in which everything is brought into harmony with his will and all sin and its products are eliminated. It is the eternal state, the goal of God's creation. The next two requests support that this is the focus here.

4. "Your kingdom come"

a. This is how God is to sanctify his name, to show forth its ultimate glory. He is to consummate the kingdom that Christ inaugurated. It is this expectation that was behind the early church's Aramaic prayer *Marana tha* – Come Lord! – that you see in 1 Cor. 16:22. The same idea is expressed in Greek in Rev. 22:20, the next to the last verse of the book and of the entire Bible – Come, Lord Jesus!

b. As disciples of Christ, we recognize that God's kingdom already has invaded this reality through the work of the Lord Jesus. The kingdom is a present reality, and we who have embraced and entered into that work through faith in Jesus are the church. But we long

for "that Day" when the kingdom will be consummated, when heaven and earth will merge, so to speak, and God's sovereignty will be fully and finally asserted. Quarles writes (p. 200):

> Jesus' followers pray fervently and frequently for the coming of Christ's kingdom for good reason. The consummation of the kingdom will bring about the complete fulfillment of the great blessings promised in the Beatitudes. Although Jesus' disciples now enjoy a partial fulfillment of each of these promises, they will experience the complete and final fulfillment of these promises only after Jesus' return.

c. This is to be such a part of our lives that Paul describes Christians in 2 Tim. 4:8 as those "who have loved his appearing," meaning those who have "set their affection on" (NET) or "longed for" (NRS, NJB, NIV) Jesus' return. Indeed, the point of the parable of the unjust judge in Lk. 18:1-8, which is often misunderstood, is that disciples, as they long for the consummation without seeing it (17:22), must never lose the heart to keep praying, they must never lose their expectation that God will indeed answer their pleas and vindicate them at the return of Jesus. And yet, we seem to think, speak, and pray so little about our Lord's return.

5. "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"

a. This is an explanatory description of the request for God's kingdom to come. At Christ's return, when the kingdom he inaugurated is consummated, creation will be "heavenized," the picture painted in Revelation 21. It will be brought into complete harmony with God's ultimate will and purpose. The new heavens and new earth will be the divine utopia, a reality in which there will be no death, mourning, crying, or pain. Sin and all of its destructive consequences will be gone.

b. Michael Wilkins writes (p. 277), "The complete experience of God's will on earth will occur only when his kingdom comes to earth in its final form, causing an overthrow of all evil rule (Rev. 20:1-10) and completing the regeneration of this earth (cf. Rom. 8:18-25)." Robert Guelich likewise states in his exposition on the Sermon on the Mount (p. 311), "Therefore, to pray 'let your will be done' does point to the future when Satan and the forces of disobedience will be totally destroyed, the wicked and enemies judged, and God rules supreme 'on earth as in heaven.'"

6. "Give us this day our daily bread" – The prayer now turns from a primary emphasis on the future consummation to "this day," to life in the overlap of ages, life between the Lord's coming and his coming again. This is a prayer for basic physical needs, one that recognizes and reflects total dependence on God. Whatever the means of provision, *all* good things come from God (see Jas. 1:17), and disciples must remember and acknowledge that.

7. "and forgive us our debts" – This is a prayer for the forgiveness of sins, which are conceived as moral obligations owed to God that have not been paid. Luke's version (11:4) says "sins." This is recognition that we will continue to sin on the journey to the complete sanctification that will be ours at Christ's return.

8. "as we also have forgiven our debtors"

a. As indicated in 6:14-15, we cannot sincerely or properly seek forgiveness while refusing to give it. Stott writes, "Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offense against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offense of others, it proves that we have minimized our own."

b. This point is driven home powerfully in Jesus' parable of the unforgiving servant in Mat. 18:23-35. As he shows in that story, it is an outrage for a Christian, who has been forgiven a breathtakingly large sin-debt to God to turn around and refuse to forgive the relatively miniscule sin-debt of a fellow Christian who seeks forgiveness. Such a refusal to forgive establishes that the person is not a disciple, not someone who is surrendered to the Lord Jesus. That person will be condemned. He will receive what his unforgiven sin deserves.

9. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"

a. This is not a prayer for God not to tempt us, not to entice us to do evil. That would make no sense in light of the fact God does not tempt anyone, as James makes clear in Jas. 1:13-14. Rather, it is a prayer for God not to lead us into a situation in which we are tempted successfully by Satan, a trial in which we are lured away because of our weakness from the avenue of escape God has provided (1 Cor. 10:13). "Temptation" here includes the sense of failure or succumbing as it does in 1 Thess. 3:5 where Paul writes, *"For this reason, I myself, being no longer able to bear it, sent to learn about your faith, fearing that somehow <u>the tempter had tempted you</u> and that our labor had been in vain"* (see also Mat. 26:41 and Gal. 6:1).

b. The prayer is a humble recognition that though our spirit is willing our flesh is weak, as Jesus said in Mat. 26:41, and that we are vulnerable to temptation. We are not yet sufficiently like the Lord, sufficiently sanctified, to withstand all that Satan can throw at us as the Lord did when led by the Spirit into the wilderness in Matthew 4. We must pray to be delivered or rescued from Satan by God's power rather than be brought to a place of overcoming temptation. It is a confession of our weakness, an acknowledgement of our absolute dependence on God for spiritual protection. We must never forget that our "enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Why is there so little acknowledgment of this in our prayers?

C. Forgiveness and Prayer (Mat. 6:14-15)

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, [15] but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

1. This reinforces v. 12. Mercy is a kingdom norm, an assumed part of a Christian's character (Mat. 5:7), so one who refuses to extend forgiveness and mercy to others is not a disciple, has not surrendered to the Master, and thus will not be forgiven.

2. As a footnote, I think a distinction needs to be made between actual forgiveness and a *willingness and desire* to forgive. A failure to do so creates confusion.

a. God is the epitome of love, mercy, and forgiveness, and yet he does not forgive the impenitent, those who refuse to humble themselves and seek his forgiveness. It is only those who in faith repent and are baptized who receive forgiveness. (On the link between repentance and salvation, see, e.g., Lk. 5:32, 13:3, 15:10, 24:45-47; Acts 2:37-39, 3:19, 5:31, 17:30, 20:21, 26:19-20; Rom. 2:4-5; Heb. 6:1; Jas. 2:14-26; 2 Pet. 3:9.) Why is that? It certainly is not because God is reluctant to forgive. He gave his one and only Son on a cross because he so loved the world, and he wants all people to be saved. So why doesn't he forgive the impenitent?

b. I suggest to you that "forgiving the impenitent" is an inherent contradiction, a logical impossibility like making a square circle. Forgiveness by its nature is a response to a desire to be forgiven. That is its implied and understood predicate. It cannot be forced on someone who does not want it. It makes no more sense to speak of forgiving someone who does not want it than to speak of answering someone who has no questions. Whereas forgiveness brings healing and reconciliation, one-sided declarations of forgiveness of the impenitent leave the parties estranged.

c. A disciple must, like God, stand ready and eager to forgive all who have wronged him, bearing no grudge or animosity toward them, but as with God, they cannot forgive in the proper sense until the wrongdoer seeks it. That is why Jesus says in Lk. 17:3-4, "*If your brother sins, rebuke him, and <u>if he repents</u>, forgive him, [4] and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, '<u>I repent</u>,' you must forgive him."* And that is why in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Mat. 18:23-35 the refusal to forgive is in the face of one begging for it. Why do we think we can forgive the impenitent when God does not?

d. Nothing that I am saying weakens or changes our responsibility as Christians to deal with our side of forgiveness when we have been wronged. We must stand ready to forgive, having turned loose whatever anger, resentment, and desires for revenge the wrong may have engendered. Those attitudes will only consume us. We are not holding a grudge or harboring resentment while we wait for the wrongdoer to repent. Rather, our heart is ready to forgive, freed from the burden of the offense, whether the wrongdoer ever seeks our forgiveness. If he does, it is our joy to bestow it and be reconciled. If he does not, we are at peace with his being in God's hands.

e. In this regard, I recommend Chris Brauns's book *Unpacking Forgiveness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). As observed by John Piper, whom Brauns quotes in an appendix (p. 211):

But even when a person does not repent (cf. Mat. 18:17), we are commanded to love our enemy and pray for those who persecute us and do good to those who hate us (Luke 6:27).

The difference is that when a person who wronged us does not repent with contrition and confession and conversion (turning from sin to righteousness), he cuts off the full work of forgiveness. We can still lay down our ill will; we can hand over our anger to God; we can seek to do him good; but we cannot carry through reconciliation or intimacy.

VIII. The Foolish Choice Applied to Material Goods (Mat. 6:19-24)

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, [20] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. [22] The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is [good], your whole body will be full of light, [23] but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! [24] No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

A. Luke 12:13-21 is a good commentary on this passage. *[13] Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." [14] But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" [15] And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." [16] And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, [17] and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' [18] And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. [19] And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry."' [20] But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' [21] So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."*

B. This text shows how "laying up treasure for oneself" is contrasted with being "rich toward God," which is using wealth as God's steward. Jesus in Mat. 6:19-24 is forbidding the selfish accumulation or hoarding of wealth (laying it up *for yourselves*), a refusal to share with those in need.

C. This is related to Mat. 6:1-18 in that one who selfishly accumulates or hoards wealth, instead of using it as God intends, is choosing a temporary reward over an eternal one. Wealth gathered for wealth's sake gains no reward from God. The degree of the foolishness of this choice is painted graphically in Jas. 5:1-6: *Come now, you rich people, weep and wail over your coming misery. [2]Your riches have rotted, and your garments have become moth-eaten; [3]your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will serve as a testimony against you and will eat your flesh like fire. [4]Look! The wages of the workers who reaped your fields, which have been*

withheld by you, are crying out, and the cries of those who reaped have reached the ears of the Lord of armies. [5]You lived a self-indulgent life on the earth and lived luxuriously. You fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. [6]You condemned and killed the righteous man; he does not resist you.

D. Instead of selfishly and idolatrously accumulating worldly riches, disciples should seek to accumulate eternal treasure in heaven. In this context, that most centrally means doing what the rich fool in Luke 12 failed to do, which was to use his wealth as God's steward. Paul writes in 1 Tim. 6:17-19: *Command those who are rich in the present age not to be haughty or to have their hope set on the uncertainty of riches, but on God who richly provides us all things for enjoyment. [18]Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and sharing, [19]thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, that they may take hold of the real life.*

E. Verse 21 warns of the consequences of treasuring the temporal. The "heart," the center of the personality, embracing mind, emotions, and will, is pulled toward that which one treasures. If a person values the earthly over the heavenly, the temporary over the eternal, that basic valuation will inevitably control the whole person's direction and values. For example, the person who treasures or highly values the experience of pleasure soon will find his whole being involved in its pursuit, chasing drug highs or immoral sexual relationships. Conversely, those who treasure the rewards of God will find their whole being engaged in that pursuit.

F. The eye is the lamp of the body (v.22a) in that, like a lamp, it is an instrument that makes sight possible; it is the organ that permits the body to find its way, to conduct itself in the world. So the eye is associated with behavior.

1. "So, if your eye is [good], your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness" (v. 22b-23a).

a. Jesus is continuing his discussion of one's attitude toward wealth and possessions. That is clear from the fact v. 24 ends with "You cannot serve both God and money." The contrast between a "good eye" and a "bad eye" is between a generous disposition toward others and a stingy disposition toward others. The point is that a generous disposition will affect the entire person in a positive moral direction; it will fill him with righteous works. A stingy disposition, on the other hand, will affect the entire person in a negative moral direction; it will corrupt his ethics in a great and tragic way ("how great is that darkness?").

b. This point becomes clear when you understand that Jewish literature associates the "bad eye" or "evil eye" with greed and stinginess. For example, the warning in Deut. 15:9 not to let their "eye be evil" is a warning not to refuse to give to their needy brothers. The phrase in Prov. 23:6 that is commonly translated "Do not eat the bread of a stingy man" is literally "Do not eat the bread of the evil eye," and the phrase in Prov. 28:22 commonly translated "a stingy man" is literally "a man with an evil eye."

c. Since "bad eye" is contrasted with "good eye" and "bad eye" refers to a stingy disposition, one would expect "good eye" to refer to a generous disposition, and there are Jewish texts that confirm that usage. For example, the phrase in Prov. 22:9 that is commonly translated "a generous person" is literally "he who has a good eye." In fact, Louw & Nida's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (57.107) says the word translated "good" (*haplous*) pertains "to willing and generous giving" and proposes Mat. 6:22 be translated, "if you . . . are generous, then your whole body will be filled with light."

d. In addition to carrying the idiomatic sense of generosity, the word translated "good" has the basic sense of "single," "consisting of one." Now it may be that this connotation of the word is not intended here, but perhaps Jesus is employing both senses referring to a generosity that flows from a single focus on God rather than a divided focus on God and riches. That fits nicely with the insistence of v. 24 that one can serve only one master.

G. One cannot be a slave of two owners for "single ownership and full-time service are of the essence of slavery" (Tasker). Either God is served with a single-eyed devotion, or he is not served at all. Attempts at divided loyalty betray a deep-seated commitment to idolatry.

IX. Worry and Kingdom Stewardship (Mat. 6:25-34)

A. The Principle (Mat. 6:25)

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

1. The word "Therefore" shows the command follows from what precedes. Given the spiritual danger posed by an over-attachment to material things that Jesus identifies in vv. 19-24, disciples must not fret about, have intense feelings of anxiety over, securing even physical necessities like food and clothing. An attachment to material things that is powerful enough to produce anxiety is an over-attachment. They have assumed an importance and a controlling role that is reserved only for God. To be anxious about food and clothing is to be their servant; securing them becomes a priority that overrides kingdom stewardship of one's wealth.

2. This prioritizing of food and clothing is a perspective that is out of step with spiritual reality. The spiritual reality, the fact, is that life is more than food and the body is more than clothing in that life and body were created for resurrection eternity. As Paul indicated in 1 Cor. 6:13-14, contrary to what some Corinthians were claiming, God is not going to do away with the body in the end; rather, the body is destined for resurrection. So the fate of the greater thing, one's life and body, should not be jeopardized by an improper exaltation of the lesser thing.

B. Examples of God's Providence (Mat. 6:26-30)

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

1. Consider the birds. They are not anxious about food, as evidenced by the fact they do not sow, reap, or gather into barns. They make no effort to control and secure their food supply, and yet God feeds them. Since we are worth more than birds, God certainly will do no less for us, meaning he certainly will not condition his provision for us on our worrying.

2. I think the point is *not* that worry is inappropriate because God has promised always to provide food to every bird and Christian but that worry is inappropriate because God is the one who provides and his provision is unrelated to worry. This is not a guarantee that no bird or Christian will ever starve or that no Christian will go without clothes. Indeed, in 2 Cor. 11:27 Paul says that he had been cold and naked, and in Rom. 8:35-37 he says:

> [35]Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? [36]Just as it is written, "On account of you we are being put to death all the day [long]; we are considered as sheep for the slaughter." [37]But in all these things we are completely victorious through him who loved us.

3. Note that the following rhetorical question (Mat. 6:27) stresses the *uselessness* of worry: *And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?* The point is that worry does nothing to extend one's physical life, not that worry is contrary to a divine guarantee of endless life. Worrying about physical necessities will have no more effect than worrying about one's life span. No degree of obsession or level of zeal for physical necessities can guarantee their acquisition because that ultimately is not in our hands. It is a pagan perspective to think otherwise, as suggested in Mat. 6:32.

4. The flowers/grass illustrate a lack of anxiety about clothing, as evidenced by the fact they do not labor or spin (they make no effort to produce clothing), and yet God clothes them in splendor. Since we are more permanent/valuable than flowers/grass, God will not have more stringent requirements for clothing us. If he clothes them without worry, he will apply that principle all the more in our case.

5. In saying "how much more you" in v. 30, Jesus is referring to the *basis* on which God clothes the flowers (without regard to worry), not the *manner* in which he clothes them (greater splendor than Solomon). That is clear from the fact Christians typically are not

dressed more splendidly than Solomon (1 Cor. 1:26; 2 Cor. 8:2; Jas. 2:5); they are, however, provided for without regard to worry.

C. Renewed Exhortation (Mat. 6:31-34)

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. [34] "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

1. In acting as though worrying is relevant to God's provision for us, we exhibit doubt that he cares for us more than he cares for the birds and flowers, which we recognize receive food and clothing without worry. We become like the world (pagans) that is consumed with anxiety over its physical needs.

2. The right approach is to make God the focus and priority of one's energy and effort (rather than the acquisition of physical necessities), and physical necessities will be provided, *not* because one is seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness – after all, God makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Mat. 5:45) and he feeds the birds (6:26) who are oblivious to the kingdom and righteousness – but because God does not provide these things in response to worry. It is like saying, "Do not make securing air the focus of your life. Instead, make God the focus, and you also will receive air to breathe (not because you are focused on God but because God graciously provides it without regard to anxiety about it)."

X. Maintaining Balance in Kingdom Living (Mat. 7:1-6)

A. The Danger of Judging (Mat. 7:1-5)

Judge not, that you be not judged. [2] For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. [3] Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? [4] Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? [5] You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

1. Mat. 7:1 is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied verses in the Bible. It has become the anthem of our postmodern generation albeit quite inconsistently.

a. The statements Charles Barkley made some years ago in an interview with Wolf Blitzer are a good illustration of this (http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/3655):

> Every time I hear the word "conservative," it makes me sick to my stomach because they're really just fake Christians.... I think they want to be judge and jury. Like, I'm for gay marriage. It's none of my business if gay people want to get married. I'm pro-choice. And I think these Christians—first of all, they're supposed to be—they're not supposed to judge other people, but they're the most hypocritical judge of people we have in this country.... [T]hey act like they're Christians, and they're not forgiving at all (2008).

b. The writer of the article in which Barkley is quoted rightly comments: "Barkley has implied that 'fake Christians' are those who oppose homosexuality and abortion. Christians who condemn homosexuality and abortion supposedly are hypocritically judging others, and being unforgiving." And never mind the fact Barkley, who will never be accused of being a theologian or philosopher, is judging those he thinks are guilty of judging, so he is doing the very same thing he finds so offensive in others but is clueless about the inconsistency.

2. Word "judge" (*krinō*) in the NT often means "to pass judgment on" in the negative sense of condemning (NIDNTTE, 2:748). In other words, it often means to condemn someone as being guilty of a wrong. The corresponding clause (7:1b) shows that is the meaning here because that clause refers, by way of the divine passive, to our being judged, our being condemned, by God. We must not condemn others as being guilty of a wrong or God will "judge" us that way, will condemn us as guilty on the day of judgment, "judge" us in the sense of 2 Thess. 2:12 and Heb. 13:4.

3. But if that's the case:

a. Why did Stephen say to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:51, *"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit"*?

b. Why did Peter say to Simon in Acts 8:20-22, *"May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! [21] You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. [22] Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you"*?

c. And why did he say in 2 Pet. 2:12-13, *"But these men, like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct born for capture and destruction, reviling [those] about whom they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, [13]suffering harm as wages of unrighteousness"*?

d. Why did Paul, filled with the Spirit, say to Elymas in Acts 13:10, *"You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?"*?

e. Why did he say of certain people in 2 Cor. 11:13-15a, *"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. [14] And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. [15] So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness"*?

f. And why did he say in Phil. 3:18-19, *"For many, about whom I often spoke to you and now say even weeping, walk as the enemies of the cross of Christ, [19]whose end [is] destruction, whose god [is] the belly, and their glory [is] in their shame; the ones thinking the earthly things"*?

g. Why did Jude say in Jude 4, *"For certain men slipped in stealthily, the ones having been marked out long ago for this condemnation, godless men who have perverted the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."*

h. And why are Christians called to recognize and condemn sinful conduct in texts like Mat. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-12, 6:9-11; Gal. 2:11-14, 5:19-21; and Rev. 2:6 and called to recognize and condemn false teaching in texts like Mat. 7:15; Gal. 1:8-9; 1 Tim. 1:3, 18-20; Tit. 1:10-11; 2 Jn. 9-11; Rev. 2:14-16, 20-23? How is all of this "judging," this condemning as wrong, squared with the Lord's words in Mat. 7:1?

4. I suggest to you that what Jesus is prohibiting in Mat. 7:1 is judging things contrary to or inconsistently with the will of God. In other words, we are not to judge people *by our own standards*; we must let *God* be the judge. When we apply God's standard to people, conduct, and teaching we are not playing the judge, usurping God's role as the source and determiner of right and wrong. In that case, we are not the one judging. Rather, we are functioning as messengers of *God's will*, bearers of *his judgment*; we are not imposing our own notions of right and wrong on other people.

5. The sinful judging the Lord has in mind, this judging by one's own standards, is what Paul rebukes in Romans 14:1-12. He tells the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome that they have no business judging one another over eating meat and abstaining from meat; both are acceptable to God because neither is sinful (they are like circumcision in that regard). It is in that context he says in 14:4, *"Who are you who judge another's house slave? To his own lord he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."* And he says in Rom. 14:10-12, *"But you, why do you judge your brother? or you too, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God, [11]for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, to me every knee will bow, and every tongue will acknowledge God." [12]So [then], each of us will give account of himself [to God]."*

6. When the Colossian heretics tried to impose on the church their own judgments that were contrary to the will of God, Paul insisted that the church resist. He wrote in Col. 2:16-17, *"Therefore, do not let anyone pass judgment on you with regard to food and drink or concerning a festival or a new moon celebration or sabbaths, [17]which things are a shadow of the coming things, but the substance is Christ's."*

7. This concept of judging in accordance with God's will is implicit in the Lord's words in Jn. 7:24. He said there, "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

8. There are two main ways in which we play the judge, in which we condemn people by our own standards. First, we condemn sinners God has forgiven, refusing to accept God's judgment that they are forgiven. This is the spirit of the elder brother in Lk. 15:11-31. Second, we condemn those who simply have violated our personal standards and not the standards of God, as in the situation in Romans 14.

9. This command not to judge fits in the sermon in that, as we live kingdom lives, we can resent bestowal of forgiveness on those who do not match us. The tendency is to think that only those who live up to our level righteousness are worthy of forgiveness. We also can begin to think we are so holy that we begin to equate our will with God's.

10. Verse 7:2 means that if we refuse to accept God's extension of mercy to others, if we judge by our own standards in the sense of pronouncing judgment on those God has forgiven, he will treat us accordingly by pronouncing judgment on us, by refusing to extend mercy to us (see Mat. 6:14-15). And if we judge by our own standards in the sense of pronouncing judgment on those who merely violate our personal standards, God will treat us accordingly by pronouncing judgment on our violation of his standards.

11. In 7:3-5 Jesus is not defining the sin of judging. He is not saying that the judging he is condemning is noticing minor sins in other people's lives, as though it would be noble or spiritual to be oblivious to such sins. Rather, he is condemning callousness to the sin of playing the judge, judging by our own standards. The problem is not with noticing the speck in your brother's eye but with failing to turn that admirable sensitivity to sin the least bit inward and thus to remain in denial about one's own glaring sin.

a. In v. 3 he asks the one guilty of judging why he is able to notice even minor failures in the lives of his brothers and sisters but remain oblivious to his own major and glaring sin of playing the judge. It is a rhetorical question intended to highlight the inexcusability and absurdity of ignoring the sin.

b. In v. 4 he asks how the one guilty of judging can you have the audacity to seek to correct a minor failing in his brother's life while ignoring a major and glaring sin in his own life. That makes him a hypocrite because in offering to help his brother overcome a minor sin he is acting like he is zealous for righteousness, but his harboring his own major and glaring sin shows that is not the case. He is a poser, one who is pretending to be all about righteous living.

c. The point of v. 5 is that before helping a brother correct a minor failing in his life one must repent of one's major and glaring sin. That sin will impede one's ability to help, will cloud one's vision and judgment, especially in the case of the sin of judging which employs the wrong lens for viewing righteousness. We can only see clearly to help our brother

when we let God be the judge, that is, when we repent of judging. Otherwise, we may end up directing them into *our* service, making them our disciple, rather than into service of the Lord.

B. The Danger of Being Undiscerning (Mat. 7:6)

Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.

1. The verse appears to be chiastic in structure, as trampling pearls more likely refers to action of swine and turning and biting more likely refers to action of wild dogs.

> Do not give what is holy to dogs,
> and do not throw your pearls before pigs,
> lest they [the pigs] will trample them under foot,
> and after turning, they [the dogs] will tear you to pieces.

2. The "pigs" not only are unclean but wild and vicious animals; the "dogs" were also wild and associated with the unclean. Giving dogs what is "holy" refers to the holy flesh of sacrificial animals. Depending on the particular sacrifice, that portion that was not burnt was eaten by the priest or by the priest and the offeror. It had a religious value for worshippers beyond its food value. Pearls were objects of beauty and great value (e.g. Mat. 13:45-46).

3. Jesus' general point is that objects of value, special privileges and participation in sacred things, should not be offered to those who have an implacable lack of appreciation for them. A pig will despise pearls because it cannot eat them, and holy meat will mean no more to a dog than garbage. The dog will not feel grateful toward the one offering it and will even turn and attack him.

4. The point in this specific context is that, although we are to love all people and are not to judge in the sense of condemning those God does not condemn, we still must make judgments about people; we must be wise and discriminating in our dealings with the world. In the midst of wolves, we must be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Mat. 10:16). When we can recognize that our offering of the valuable and sacred, specifically the message of the kingdom, will be contemptuously and viciously rejected, we are not to plunge ahead. This is a time to "shake the dust off our feet" (e.g., Mat. 10:14; Acts 13:51), meaning to leave such people to their hardheartedness.

XI. The Power for Kingdom Living (Mat. 7:7-12)

A. The Source and Means of the Power (Mat. 7:7-11)

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. [8] For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. [9] Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? [10] Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? [11] If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

1. So far in this sermon, Jesus has called Christians to live exceedingly righteous lives, both internally and externally, and to do so with pure motives. This righteous living includes eschewing revenge, loving our enemies, having a proper attitude toward material possessions, refusing to play the judge, and being discerning in our dealings with the world. This certainly makes one feel overwhelmed, small, and incapable.

2. In that context, Jesus says "Ask and it will be given to you." He is referring to the kingdom living he has been preaching about. Prayer is the key; it is a crucial aspect of the process of spiritual transformation. In the words of D. A. Carson (EBC Revised, 222), "Far too often Christians do not have the marks of richly textured discipleship because they do not ask, or they ask with selfish motives (Jas 4:2-3). But the best gifts, those advocated in the Sermon on the Mount, are available to 'everyone' (v. 8) who persistently asks, seeks, and knocks."

3. Of course, one must truly desire the changes for which one prays, for God knows our hearts, and as indicated in the quote from Carson, we must not ask with selfish motives (Jas. 4:2-3). And, of course, we must have faith in God's ability and desire to answer our prayer (Jas. 1:5-8) and we must pray with a spirit of submission to his will recognizing that we are limited creatures and that he may answer our prayers in ways we do not anticipate.

4. Verses 9-11 are to help them see the truth of what he has just told them. If human parents, though evil, give good gifts to their children, how much more will God, who is pure goodness, do so? We can trust that God is out to bless us, not deprive us.

B. Summary Exhortation in View of That Power (Mat. 7:12)

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

1. Jesus renews his exhortation to kingdom living, this time in terms of the principle that captures the essence of the Old Testament's ethical direction. This principle, commonly called the "Golden Rule," summarizes kingdom living in our personal relationships. It is the Old Testament's ethics as mediated to us by the Fulfiller. It is another way of saying that Christians are to love all people in that we are to seek the welfare of others, seek to do the same good to them that we would want done for us. It is what Paul will call "the law of Christ" (see 1 Cor. 9:21 and Gal. 6:2 with 5:14).

2. The fact the principle is a summary of the Old Testament's ethical direction means that it cannot be interpreted to endorse actions contrary to God's revealed will. For instance, you do not ask what you would want others to do to you if you were a thief and then reason from that sinful perspective (leave the doors unlocked, honor my skill at stealing). Or as Douglas Wilson recently made the point, "How would you feel if you were a guard at Auschwitz and somebody came and took away all *your* prisoners? Hmmm?"

3. In light of the power that is available for kingdom living, the power to which Jesus referred in the preceding verses, we need to live this out. We need to be this kind of people.

XII. Conclusion (Mat. 7:13-27)

A. Call to Decision: The Two Roads (Mat. 7:13-14)

Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [14] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.

1. Having fleshed out in the sermon the nature of kingdom living, the radical righteousness to which disciples are called, a righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus tells his hearers to enter through the narrow gate. The reason is that there are only two choices, and the alternative, the broad gate, is the gateway to destruction; it is the path to hell. The narrow gate is the gateway to eternal life in the consummated kingdom.

2. The "narrow gate" is Jesus Christ. As he says in Jn. 10:9, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." He is a "narrow gate" not only because the allegiance given to him cannot be shared but also because the life that follows from faith in him, a life of discipleship, is restrictive compared to the broad way of life of those who do not call him Master. John Stott explains the two roads associated with the two gates this way (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 194):

> One way is easy. . . . There is plenty of room on it for diversity of opinions and laxity of morals. It is the road of tolerance and permissiveness. It has no curbs, no boundaries of either thought or conduct. Travelers on this road follow their own inclinations, that is, the desires of the human heart in its fallenness. Superficiality, self-love, hypocrisy, mechanical religion, false ambition, censoriousness – these things do not have to be learnt or cultivated. Effort is needed to resist them. No effort is required to practice them. That is why the broad road is easy.

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the young German (Lutheran) pastor and seminary teacher who was executed by the Nazis, wrote in *The Cost of Discipleship*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 47:

> Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves.
>
> Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.
>
> Costly grace . . . is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

4. The path of discipleship is constricted or difficult, which explains its relative paucity of travelers, but it leads to the glory of eternal life in the consummated kingdom. The way is hard in that it requires restraint, discipline, and self-denial, but those who embrace that way, who make that surrender, find that the Lord's yoke is easy and his burden is light (Mat. 11:30). The alternative is easy and superficially appealing, which explains its relative popularity, but it leads to damnation. It is a fool's choice. Note that this alone is sufficient to disprove the myth that God is not going to condemn anyone or any significant number of people.

B. Warning Against Antinomian Deceivers (Mat. 7:15-23)

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17] So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. [18] A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. [19] Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20] Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. [21] Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

1. Jesus now warns them to beware of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. In light of vv. 13-14, I believe he is specifically warning about libertines or antinomians, those who will come denying that the road to life is narrow, who claim in God's name that the path of discipleship is not morally restrictive but is a broad road that allows one to ignore Christ's high ethical call and to live like the world.

2. False prophets are those who deceive people by teaching error in the name of God. In Mat. 24:11 Jesus warns that false prophets will deceive many, and in 1 Jn. 4:1 John refers to those allegedly Christian teachers who in some sense denied the Incarnation and were morally indifferent as false prophets. Peter in 2 Pet. 2:1 speaks of false teachers as a latter-day expression of Israel's false prophets.

3. These deceivers appear to be one of the flock (they are in sheep's clothing) because they have some beliefs in common with the flock. On the surface, they appear to be "one

of us"; that is what gives them access and makes them so dangerous. Paul speaks in 2 Cor. 11:13 of deceitful workmen who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ, and Jude speaks in v. 4 of those designated for condemnation who had slipped stealthily into the community of faith. You see this battle with false teachers throughout the New Testament (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Gal. 1:6-7; Col. 2:8, 16-19; 2 Thess. 2:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 2 Pet. 2:1-3, 13-22; 1 Jn. 2:3-6, 18-19; 2 Jn. 7-9; Jude 4, 12-13; Rev. 2:20-21).

4. Though they appear to be sheep, to be one of us, they are in reality ravenous wolves. They are not merely an annoyance; they are spiritually destructive! A Christian can lose his or her soul by following a false teacher (see 1 Cor. 15:1-2; Gal. 5:2-4; 2 Tim. 2:15-18; 2 Pet. 2:17-22; 1 Jn. 2:22-26; 2 Jn. 7-9). That is why elders must be skillful in teaching (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9). They must be able to protect the flock from heresy. By analogy to Timothy, the same holds true for teachers (2 Tim. 2:15, 24). The fact elders and teachers have this responsibility does not relieve Christians of their personal responsibility.

5. This does not mean that every wrong belief or practice puts one in jeopardy. No aspect of God's will is trivial and can be willfully ignored, but not every aspect of that will is revealed clearly enough or is central enough to make a misunderstanding a matter of salvation.

a. There are difficulties in applying this of course in that it often is not clear what belongs in what category. But those difficulties are less daunting than the alternative.

b. Now I know some scoff at that idea, claiming that wrong is wrong and wrong is sin and sin separates one from God, period. But if a flawless understanding of all aspects of God's will is a requirement for salvation, I do not see how any of us can have any hope. I have labored for decades as best I know how to understand what God has revealed, but given the competing arguments and complexity of some questions and the fact I have occasionally changed my mind on theological matters, I am certain that some of what I think is true is not; I just don't know what part. And if I cannot expect to be *morally* and *ethically* perfect as I struggle on this side of the consummation, I do not see how my salvation can hang on a requirement of *theological* perfection.

6. The false prophets I think Jesus has in mind, those justifying a broad road of moral laxity, can be recognized as false, regardless of how well they try to disguise themselves as sheep, because the bad fruit of immoral living, whether taught or practiced ("fruit" can include the things people say or teach – e.g., Mat. 12:33-35), is an unequivocal sign, proof positive, that they do not share in the new life of Christ. In other words, the narrow road of kingdom living is a nonnegotiable hallmark of Christian authenticity. Whatever else some teacher may offer for his Christian bona fides, however pious he may sound and whatever great works he may claim, lawlessness is an absolutely reliable tell.

7. This is somewhat like the test of false prophets given in Deut. 13:1-3: *If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, [2] and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' [3] you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or*

that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. If the false prophet says, "Let us go after other gods," he is toast, no matter if he accurately predicts the future. In the same way, if a prophet/teacher in the New Testament promotes moral laxity, that is it for him.

8. You see this antinomian teaching crop up quite early in the church. The Letter of James was probably written around A.D. 45. In Jas. 2:14-26, James defends his call to good works against a circulating false doctrine that works are irrelevant or insignificant for those in Christ. This false doctrine probably originated in a misunderstanding of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith (e.g., Gal. 2:15-16, 21; Rom. 3:28, 4:1-8; Eph. 2:8). There are clear hints of this tendency to misunderstand in Rom. 6:1 and Gal. 5:13.

9. Jude perhaps puts it most plainly in v. 4: *For certain men slipped in stealthily, the ones having been marked out long ago for this condemnation, godless men who have perverted the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.* In 2 Pet. 2:1-2, Peter refers to false teachers who, as a corollary to denying the truth of eschatological judgment, deny that the immoral will be condemned. They actually promote immoral living and thus deny the authority of Jesus Christ, the one who bought them. He describes them in 2:13b-14: *Considering indulgence in the daytime a pleasure, [they are] blots and blemishes, indulging in their pleasures while feasting with you, [14]having eyes full of [desire for] an adulteress and that do not cease from sin, enticing unstable souls, having hearts trained in greed, [they are] accursed children!* And John writes in 1 Jn. 2:3-6: *And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. [4]The one who says, "I have come to know him" and does not keep his commandments is a liar, and in this one the truth is not. [5]But whoever keeps his word, truly in this one the love of God has reached perfection. By this we may know we are in him: [6]the one who claims to abide in him ought himself to walk just as that one walked.*

10. Jesus himself refers to such a false prophetess in Rev. 2:20 in his letter to the church in Thyatira: *But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols*.

11. Jesus makes it clear that the fate of such false prophets is condemnation at the judgment. Verse 19 refers to such bad trees being thrown into the fire, and v. 23 gives the Lord's pronouncement regarding them at the final judgment: *"I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."* They are not disciples, as evidenced by their disregard of kingdom ethics. As Quarles states (p. 333), "The true disciple expresses the sincerity of his confession of Jesus' identity as the Lord through obedient living. Jesus was not pitting obedience against faith but was insisting that obedience is the necessary expression of true faith."

12. Given that the rebel lacks saving faith and thus a relationship with the Lord, how could a rebel come to believe he had prophesied, exorcised, and worked miracles?

a. Maybe he simply had delusions of grandeur about his actions. But maybe he actually did something dramatic rather than simply imagining that he did. David Turner remarks (p. 219, n. 12): "It is clear from many biblical texts that supernatural phenomena must not be equated with genuine faith and divine endorsement. Cf. Matt: 24:23-26; Exod. 7:11, 22; 8:17, 18; Deut. 13:1-5; Acts 8:9-24; 13:6-12; 19:13-17; 2 Thess. 2:9-10; Rev. 13:13-15." As Leon Morris notes (p. 181), there can by "lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9). Acts 16:16-19 tells of a slave girl who was inhabited by a demon who gave her the ability to foretell the future.

b. Regarding exorcism, perhaps the mere name of Jesus struck such terror in some demons that they fled regardless of whether the one invoking it was a disciple. Whatever the status of the exorcists in Mk. 9:38, we know from Acts 19:13 that even some Jewish exorcists had taken to invoking Jesus' name, though in that particular case things didn't turn out too well for them.

c. Another possibility regarding exorcism by these rebels (assuming they simply were not deluded) is that the demons fled (or pretended to) to give a false impression that the non-Christian exorcist was of God. I don't think that possibility is excluded by Jesus' argument in defense of his exorcism that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. In that statement he was responding to the Pharisees' charge that he drives out demons by Beelzebub, which charge assumes an assertion of power by Beelzebub over the demons. They were not considering the possibility of a demonic/Satanic subterfuge, but if they had been, Jesus' following statement would have neutralized that charge: "And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?"

C. Kingdom Living: The Wise Man's Choice (Mat. 7:24-27)

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. [26] And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

1. Jesus concludes the sermon with a description of the wise man's choice. Those who become true disciples, who have a genuine faith in Jesus that expresses itself in obedience to his words, are like a wise man who built his house on a rock. Just as the house built on a rock can withstand the devastation of a physical storm, disciples will withstand the great storm of the final judgment.

2. Those who never come to a saving faith in Jesus, an obedience-producing faith, but continue to live without putting his words into practice, are like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. Just as the house built on sand will not withstand the devastation of a physical storm, those who are not true disciples will not withstand the great storm of the final judgment (e.g., Mat. 13:47-50).

D. Crowd Reaction (Mat. 7:28-29)

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, [29] for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

1. What amazed the crowds most was how Jesus taught. Apparently, the scribes taught by citing previous teachers as authoritative voices in establishing the steps of their argument. This is similar to the way attorneys argue by linking appeals to various authorities to construct an argument.

2. Jesus did not do that; he did not support his teaching with appeals to others. Rather, he taught based on his inherent and transcendent authority as the Messiah and Fulfiller of the Old Testament. And the people were taken aback by it. The question for them and for all who read the Lord's words today is whether they will move beyond astonishment to a genuine faith commitment; will they choose to enter through the narrow gate?