

The Sermon
on the Mount

*An introduction to the
New Covenant*

“Sermon on the Mount: An Introduction to the New Covenant”

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Forward

ome time ago I began to undertake some personal studies from the Sermon on the Mount. I thought I would outline the sermon, break it into various texts and subheadings, and maybe have a dozen pages. However, as I began to research some of the history of this sermon, I began to realize how deficient the church has been in their understanding of its true message.

I began to count all of the sayings of Christ spoken on the Mount that could be and have been misinterpreted over the centuries. I stopped counting at 40, but the list could go on. For example: “Resist not evil...” Does this mean that I should let a man break into my home? “If a man sue thee...” Does this mean that I should automatically forfeit the case? “Lay not up treasure on earth...” Does this mean that I should not have a savings account? “If a man smite thee...” Does this mean that I should allow the thug to beat me up on the street?

What has made this sermon to appear to be so unattainable, is the imbalanced interpretation and teaching of its message. The Sermon on the Mount has been a subject of much controversy over the centuries. There have been those who insisted that it is to be taken literally – to the letter. That means, if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out! That means, if you need to pray, look for a closet.

There have been others who have contested that it can only be fulfilled by clerics. Many joined the monastic societies

and orders because they felt that was the only way the sermon could be fulfilled. Still others have embraced many strange and ambiguous interpretations.

One thing is sure: God's people have suffered many needless afflictions and miseries because of an imbalanced perception of its true message. People have suffered criminal assaults, people have been victimized with unjust lawsuits and personal damages, not to mention the condemnation and feelings of guilt that have occurred. As the prophet said: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

The Sermon on the Mount is a message that never grows old. For the mature saint it grows mellower with age. We

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find a greater definition and distinction in this message as we mature in the Lord. The more that I understand the message, the more attainable (the more apprehensible) it becomes. With this thought in mind, I set forth this little commentary.

It is the Lord's desire for His people to understand His ways. We are the New Covenant people. We are the people who should have the law written upon our hearts so that we, also, can teach the nations. May the Lord give us the grace to rightly divide and balance this beautiful message into our everyday life!

***The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him;
and he will show them his covenant. (Psa 25:14)***



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Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

Although we will find parts of this sermon in various parts of Mark's and Luke's gospels, they are disconnected and they are pictured in totally different settings. Obviously, Jesus taught and preached portions of this sermon in other places as well.

Matthew's gospel records the unabridged sermon as preached on the Mount of Beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount is undoubtedly the greatest sermon of all times. This sermon, as recorded in Matthew 5-7, basically contains the seed from which all sermons are inspired. In fact, this sermon epitomizes every sermon that has ever been preached. Jesus states that "To do unto others, as you would have them do unto you" is the message of the law and the prophets (Mat. 7:12)!

The sermon introduces us to the New Covenant

The Sermon on the Mount virtually challenges every intent of the heart, every motive, every attitude and thought. The message that was preached from this mountain is actually introducing us to the "New Covenant" – the law written upon the fleshy table of the heart. (See Jer. 31:31-34.)

"After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people..."

Although we become *New Covenant* people when we are saved, the materiality of this covenant is an ongoing process. Having the law written upon our heart is an ongoing work as we yield to (or walk in) the Spirit. It requires many responses to what God is speaking into our lives. And, as we shall see, our eternal destiny and place is determined by the degree that this message gets into our hearts (See Mat. 5:19).

It takes a considerable time before the message becomes reality. The Corinthian church serves as a good illustration. They were obviously saved. They were sanctified (set apart for God's purpose), and they were filled with the Spirit. However, St. Paul labels them "carnal"! Essentially, they were breaking every precept of the teaching upon the Mount. Of course, the point is that there must be a development of this law within our hearts. It is one thing to hear a message and have it stored in our heads. It is another thing to get the truth of that message into our hearts so that it is displayed through our everyday words and actions!

It is one thing to hear a message and have it stored in our heads. It is another thing to get the truth of that message into our hearts.

The Old Covenant versus the New Covenant

The Old Covenant

Understanding the Old Covenant helps us to better understand the New Covenant. The two covenants are represented by two men. Moses was the mediator of the first covenant, and that covenant was given upon a mountain. The first covenant was represented by a law that was engraved upon

stone. Not only were there the “Ten Commandments,” but there was also a long list of rules and regulations that dictated every facet of life! The whole life of the Jew was governed by the “Law of Moses” – the Old Covenant.

The apostle Paul describes the covenant that was written upon stone as “*The ministration of condemnation!*” He even calls it “*The ministration of death*” (2 Cor. 3:7-9). It was death because the purpose of the law was to expose sin (Rom. 3:20, 7:13). Furthermore, there was no power (grace) in this covenant to triumph over the sin nature! Therefore, the law could only show you your sin. It could condemn you, but could not give you victory over the sin!

The New Covenant

Interestingly, the promise of the New Covenant was given specifically to the Jews (Jer. 31:31-34). Yet, because they rejected “*The Messenger of the Covenant*” (Mal. 3:2), The Lord Jesus Christ, they were disinherited from entering this covenant for the whole of the Church Age (2000 years). However, Paul claims this covenant for the Church Age (Heb. chapters 8 and 10). Israel does not enter into this covenant until the end of the Church Age, or the Millennium (Eze. 36:8-28).

Jesus (who is also called the “*Mediator*” of the covenant) likewise declared His law from a mountain. However, He also declares the superiority of this covenant when He quotes Moses, by saying: “*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill... **But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...***” (Mat. 5:21-22).

“But I say unto you” supercedes the authority of Moses. Christ was before Moses; indeed, Christ commissioned Moses at the burning bush. Christ is the *“I AM!”* of Exodus 3:14. Thus, Christ established a much higher mandate than Moses did.

The superiority of the covenant

So what is the advantage of this New Covenant, since it is more demanding than the previous one, and since the previous one was not kept? Actually, Paul gives us a number of advantages in the book of Hebrews, but chiefly, he emphasizes the fact that we have a greater mediator (Heb. 8:6, 12:24). We have a High Priest who ever lives. He ever intercedes for us, and He is always there to minister grace and power in our time of need!

The big difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is that we can experience the grace and power to stand in the trying hour. Indeed, the promise of the New Covenant is that Christ will enable us to perform it! *“And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes...”* (Eze. 36:27). The world will see the image of Christ in the Church. This will convince the world that Christianity is real!

Grace and truth

The apostle John said: *“For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”* (John 1:17) So often grace has been misconstrued to mean “tolerance.” Does this sound rational – that Christ would give us a higher code to live by and then excuse our inability to live

it? Grace is “Divine influence.” In other words, it is the power to do what we cannot do in our natural strength. Christ came with grace and truth (John 1:17). Truth liberates and sets free.

The New Covenant was to be a law that would be kept, and could be fully understood: *“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more”* (Heb 10:16-17).

May I say from my own personal experience that the more that I know the Lord, and the more that I understand His ways, the greater my faith becomes that He will enable me to accomplish everything that He has purposed for my life (Phil 1:6).

Does this sound rational – that Christ would give us a higher code to live by and then excuse our inability to live it?

The higher standard

Although the Sermon on the Mount represents the higher standard of the New Testament, it is a message that is within reach of the common layman. When the Law of Moses was given, 3000 perished. The Law of Moses was not attainable (in its fullest sense) because there were many debilitating conditions to it. It was an inferior covenant!

When the New Covenant was effectuated (on the day of Pentecost) there were 3000 that were made alive. The New Covenant represents grace and divine help. The New Covenant represents power to live the life! The Sermon on the

Mount introduces us to the New Covenant, which is an attainable covenant.

The New Covenant was signed at the cross. But as most testaments (wills) take a few days before they are actually put into motion – so with the New Covenant. The outpouring of the Spirit activated (as it were) the New Covenant.

A picture of what we are to become

The Sermon on the Mount gives us a picture of what the New Covenant is all about, and it gives us a picture of what Christ desires us to become. This sermon does not become a reality when we first hear it preached. Yet, it presents us with an image that we must conform to: the “attitudes of being” – “the be-attitudes” – the attitudes that shall become ours as we walk in the Spirit!

We must first see the image of Christ before we can be conformed to that image.

We must first see the image of Christ before we can be conformed to that image. Jesus was not just preaching a theory or a lot of principles, but He was preaching Himself. He was the embodiment of the message – He was the fulfillment of the message – He was the personification of the New Covenant (Psa. 40:8). He is the One that we are called to imitate (Isa. 51:7).

Let us proceed to examine this sermon with an open heart. Let us begin to respond to the Lord as He puts His finger upon certain things within our heart. This sermon is all about heart issues, and this sermon is worked out in our

lives, as we allow the Spirit of God to lead us into the circumstances that deal with those issues!

“Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words” (Deut. 33:3).



Matthew Chapter Five

The backdrop of the Sermon on the Mount – verses 1 -2.

Mat. 5:1-2 *And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: v.2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying...*

In the context of this sermon setting, great multitudes were following Jesus from every province and from beyond Jordan. Thus, Jesus situates Himself upon the mountain.

The Church must fulfill the scenario

In a sense, here is a picture that the church must imitate as it comes to completeness. The prophet Isaiah depicts the last-day church when he declares: “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains... and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD... and he will teach us of his ways... *for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem*” (Isa. 2:2-3). Zion speaks of a spiritual position or attainment.

Law from Zion

There is a distinction between Jerusalem and Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion is a mountain within Jerusalem, and it speaks of the

higher plane. There are basically three groups within the kingdom. These three groups equate with the three divisions of the (Moses') Tabernacle. These three groups are distinct throughout scripture.

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|---|
| <i>Outer court</i> | Israel | first principles |
| <i>Holy place</i> | Jerusalem | Word becomes flesh (life experience) |
| <i>Holy of Holies</i> | Mt. Zion | law upon heart (New Covenant) |

There are many churches that preach the Word but do not uphold God's standard or law. As I was working on this sermon, a minister dropped in to visit me. He told me that he only preaches the Word and that he never uses the word "law."

Yes, Isaiah 2:3 has an application to the Millennium; but in the scope of the greater things that Christ promised, the Lord will have a group of true disciples who will teach the nations the higher ways of the kingdom (Mat. 24:14).

When He was set

Observe

The mountain speaks of a position, and the fact that Jesus was "set" speaks of a position. Jesus was about to teach the message that He had become (Acts 1:1). He was the

The Lord will have a group of true disciples who will teach the nations the higher ways of the kingdom (Mat. 24:14).

messenger of the Covenant – the law was within His heart, and the message was reality (Psa. 40:8)! As it is later stated, “He spoke as one having authority.”

The ark, set upon the holy hill

The thought of “set” reminds us again of “Mt. Zion” on which the ark of the covenant sat. The ark of the covenant represented the “New Covenant.” The ark contained the law, but it was always veiled – signifying that Israel would not accept the message or the Messenger of the Covenant (2 Cor. 3:14).

Nevertheless, (to fulfill a type) the ark sat upon Mt. Zion in a veil-less tent (for a short time). It was here that the invitation went out to all who were interested in ascending the Mount – to all who were interested in fulfilling the law (Psalms 15 and 24). Christ later rent the veil, symbolizing that it was now possible (for all that received Him) to fulfill the law!

Observe

The disciples were the first to gather to Christ. The disciple must first get the message into his heart before he can preach it with authority! “To do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

He opened His mouth and taught

When Christ opened His mouth to speak, it was not just words coming from His lips, but it was like the refreshing rain that Job spoke of: “*After my words they spake not again; and my speech dropped upon them. And they waited*

for me as for the rain; and they opened their mouth wide as for the latter rain” (Job 29:22-23). The words of Christ were spirit and life!

The teaching ministry is without doubt a premier ministry of the last days. As Daniel said, “They that understand among the people shall instruct many” (Daniel 11:33).

The nine Beatitudes (blesseds) *verses 3-12*

An overview of the beatitudes:

As we begin to view these nine beatitudes from a collective view, we realize how diametrically opposed they are to the “world mentality.” As the apostle said, “*The carnal mind is enmity with God.*” The carnal mind fights God, and is in direct opposition to everything that God says. (The god of this world has undoubtedly corrupted the mind of this world.) They said of Paul and his company, “These have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Actually Paul was setting the world aright!

Blessed

Let us observe the word “blessed.” The word “blessed” has the sense of great euphoria and great happiness. It also has the sense of good fortune (success). Happy are those who allow these attitudes to be worked out in their lives—there is great eternal reward!

These attitudes simply cannot be etched upon our heart aside from agonizing experiences.

However, as we consider these nine attitudes, we realize that they don't come without a certain suffering and pain. They simply cannot be etched upon our heart aside from agonizing experiences in our lives. Single any of them out – there is a cost involved to have them developed. Joseph, who wanted to be pure, paid a great price to be pure. When you have suffered for something you hold it very dear!

Solomon was tutored by the very best. He was taught good principles but he never had to suffer for those truths. Consequently, Solomon became poor (spiritually) in the end.

Note: I am incorporating the nine beatitudes into one text. Some scholars prefer to count them as individual texts.

The first beatitude – The poor in spirit

Mat. 5:3 *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

It is said of Christ “He became poor” (2 Cor. 8:9). This was true not only in the physical sense, but he divested Himself of all of the honor and glory and majesty that He had in heaven. Though He was the Co-Creator of the world, He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant (Phi. 2:7).

Desirable poverty

The word “poor” has the sense of a cringing beggar. Christ was totally dependent upon the Father, and did nothing without Him! (See John 5:19). This is an attitude that Christ wants to develop in our lives – a healthy appraisal of who we really are. We are nothing because we are nothing. However, when we have a healthy appreciation of this – God can work through our lives – indeed, He can do all things through us.

David said, “*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars... what is man that thou art mindful of him.*” If we are willing to let the Lord work this attribute out in our lives, the Lord will bring us into

humbling circumstances that will reveal just how dependent we must be upon God, and how little confidence we can have in our own strength!

Again, David prayed: “*LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am*” (Psa. 39:4). In this particular psalm, David is at death’s door. Experiences like this help us to keep things in the right perspective.

Trying to be humble?

Some have gone overboard trying to be humble, comparing themselves to a worm, etc. During the monastic age, many a monk tried to work humility into his life by some form of self-abasement or self-affliction. That certainly does not work. In fact, it may work a certain pride or hardness into the heart. But if we walk in the Spirit, God will lead us into the conditions that will accomplish the work.

This first beatitude may be the prerequisite for having all the others worked out.

This first beatitude may be the prerequisite for having all the others worked out. If we are not poor in spirit, we certainly could not be meek and we certainly could not mourn. When the famed apostle of faith (Smith Wigglesworth) was asked to what he attributed his great power, his response was, “I am a man with a broken heart.” ...For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The second beatitude – They who mourn

Mat. 5:4 *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*

It has often been said (concerning the kingdom) that “the way up is down.” Blessed are they that mourn doesn’t seem like a rational statement. However, great blessing is reserved for those who have wept for others: for those who have wept for the kingdom purposes and for those who have wept for their own wretchedness.

They shall be comforted when they see that their tears were not in vain! Luke’s version of this sermon says, “*Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh... Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep*” (Lk. 6:21, 25). The world seems to be rejoicing, going on their merry way; but the time comes when things turn around. Isaiah said, “*Those who mourn in Zion shall be given beauty for ashes... the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*” (Isa. 61:3).

We can thank God for the spiritual parents of yesteryear who wept for the kingdom – Ezra, Nehemiah, Mordecai, and Esther... The list is endless, because there have always been those who have wept for the sins of God’s people. (See Num. 25:6.) They shall be comforted when they see the reviving of the kingdom, or the reviving of their own house!

May the Lord graciously develop this attitude within our hearts that we might intercede for our own sinful nation, and for those who have erred from the good path!

The third beatitude – The meek

Mat. 5:5 *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*

King David penned this verse in Psalm 37:11. Although meekness is generally viewed by the world to mean “weakness,” it

is the meek who shall inherit the earth. In the end, it is the meek who shall govern the nations with a rod of iron.

“Send ye the lamb to the ruler of the land...” (Isa. 16:1).

Meekness is an attitude of submission. We recognize that authority is God given. We recognize that there are circumstances that God wants us to accept, and we yield to them! Meekness is developed by accepting God’s will or by continually saying “yes” to the Lord. Jesus compares meekness to submitting to a yoke – in so doing, we find a rest! There is a rest as we surrender to God’s will.

Meekness is developed by accepting God’s will or by continually saying “yes” to the Lord.

The rest in “surrender”

A woman once shared an experience she had, while she faced a decision concerning “submission.” She struggled in her spirit for a long time – she did not want to give in. Then one day, as she was in prayer, she broke before the Lord and said, “Yes, I surrender; I will submit to this situation.” At that moment, her hands were suddenly covered with a sweet smelling ointment. In her own words, she could not explain what had happened, except that she knew that it was divine.

Compare this with the account in Song of Solomon 5:5. The seeker, who finally submits to the entreaty of her Lord, finds her hands saturated with sweet smelling myrrh. In scripture “Myrrh” speaks of meekness – death to self.

The meekest man in the Old Testament was Moses (Num. 12:3). Moses mediated the Old Testament. The

meekest man in the New Testament was Christ, and He mediated the New Testament. In truth, these two men were the most powerful men who ever walked the earth.

In true perspective, it takes tremendous strength and discipline to submit to the things that you can easily have the mastery over – for example, an unreasonable boss or a bad marriage. A woman was once mourning her marriage, wanting to escape it (not hard to do today). The man was not abusive or disloyal, just a very hard man to deal with or reason with. But after a long struggle, she meekly accepted her circumstance. Her home was changed. Today they both faithfully serve the Lord.

“Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Mat. 11:29).

The fourth beatitude – Those who hunger for righteousness

Mat. 5:6 *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*

A hungry baby is a healthy baby (1 Pet. 2:2). Here is another interesting phenomenon in the kingdom economy: The Lord never force-feeds His children. In the book of Esther, we have a picture of the kingdom. There is a table spread with delectables and with royal wine, yet none is compelled to partake except at his own pleasure (Est. 1).

Hunger and thirst are really the prerequisite for progression in the kingdom. Many years ago, the Lord spoke certain

verses into my heart from Luke's gospel. In the narrative, there was a great famine and there were many widows (during the time of Elijah). But Elijah was only sent to one – only one got fed! That birthed a cry within my heart, "Lord, let it be me!" (See Luke 4:25-26).

Sometimes dwelling with the evil works a revulsion of evil.

In Psalm 121, the psalmist finds himself dwelling in the tents of the wicked (not by choice). He then longs for the mountain of the Lord's house. Sometimes dwelling with the evil (working with or being exposed to evil men) works a revulsion of evil. We then begin to long for the ways of righteousness and truth.

David cried out, "*My soul thirsts for the living God...*" How does that spiritual hunger and thirst come? In most scriptural accounts, we see an exile, or a captive – someone that has been separated from God's house. One thing is sure, hunger and thirst come from being deprived, and from experiencing a spiritual famine or a very dry time in one's life. When a Christian is feeding on worldly delights, such as the cinema, that kills all spiritual appetite. Worldly entertainment can replace one's desire for the living God!

For many months, I found my soul hungering as I participated in a denominational church. That organization had reached their spiritual capacity (spiritual growth) and that was as far as they wanted to go!

May we always have an attitude of "I need more"! I want more of Christ! I want to become more like Him! "They shall be filled!"

The fifth beatitude – The merciful

Mat. 5:7 *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*

It has been said that the highest revelation of God is revealed through the symbolism of the mercyseat. The mercyseat was a lid that covered the Ark of the Covenant. This lid (covering) was made of beaten gold. There were two cherubims on the top facing one another (slightly bowed) with outstretched wings that touched one another. It is the supposition that these angels represented the 2/3 in heaven that found mercy during the revolt of Lucifer. (There are only three angels mentioned by name in scripture.)

The “pure gold” indicates that mercy is the divine nature. Our Heavenly Father wants to instill this attribute of mercy within us in such a way, that it becomes our disposition throughout life. Our spiritual father (my pastor) has always intimated that if we must err let us err on the side of mercy! Mercy sometimes requires action (Jas. 3:17).

Mercy is a test

The real test of mercy comes when we are directly affected by our decision “to show or not to show” mercy. This attribute of mercy, as all the beatitudes, does not come without a great personal cost. The story was told of a young man who lost his darling wife (she was pregnant). She was struck by a fellow on a motorcycle and was killed!

The Lord said, “You must have forgive this man because he is also suffering very much!” (Forgiveness is rooted in

compassion and mercy.) Needless to say, there was a tremendous cost involved to show mercy to the man that had taken away his loved one. We can keep people (spiritually) in the “debtor’s prison” when we refuse to show them mercy. And, we ourselves can be shut out from the Lord’s mercy, as king David also said in (Psa. 18:25).

It takes a real suffering to have the nature of mercy and compassion worked out in our life. We have to know what it is to fail or to hurt, in order to have compassion on others. There was a certain man who knew the humiliation of failing in business. His heart would just bleed for others who were struggling in business (See Heb. 5:2).

The reward of the merciful is mercy. When the day comes that shall burn as an oven, the Lord shall spare them as one spares his loyal son (Mal 3:17).

The sixth beatitude – The pure in heart

Mat. 5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.*

Again, we find another beatitude that was inspired to David: Who is going to ascend the holy hill where the unveiled ark sits? (Who is going to see God?) “*He that hath clean hands and a pure heart*” (Psa. 24:4).

A pure heart is not something that we are born with, or given when we are born again! David cried out, “*Create in me a clean heart, O God...*” Paul, said to the Corinthian believers, “*Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit...*” (2 Cor. 7:1).

Clearly, we play a part in the redemptive process. We must “*work out our own salvation...*” (Phi. 2:12). We must “*make our calling and election sure*” (2 Pet. 1:10). I want to emphasize this, because it takes a certain desire and a certain effort to “*cleanse ourselves.*”

Often times the biggest moral problems that God’s people have are ones that have been inherited. Genetics play a big part in the besetting sins of our lives. People often suffer with plaguing lusts and desires, though they have never committed any such sin, or done anything particular to incite such feelings.

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sins of
our lives.*

But to make matters worse, we live in a generation that floods the ears and eyes and mind with sensuality. That is why purity demands an effort on our part. The apostle Paul tells us that we must “put off” certain things and we must “put on” other things (Col. 3:5-17). He also tells us in those passages to “put to death” certain things.

That means (if we are really serious about the promise of Matthew 5:8 “*The pure in heart shall see God*”) we must close our eyes and our minds to certain things that stimulate the wrong appetites. We cannot possibly feed on soap operas, movies, and magazines that are full of sensuality and expect to be pure in heart.

There is always a choice, but when we choose to set our feet upon the path of purity, God will help us. God gives the gift of righteousness to those who are seeking righteousness. The irony of kingdom principles is that often

when we seek to walk on the right road, things seems to get worse. In fact, we may find ourselves suffering the ill-effects of the very thing we're trying to rid ourselves of. Perhaps you are suffering worse temptation or even worse failure than before. Be of good cheer – God will help you, and in the end you will have garments of white!

There are many beautiful promises to the pure. One translation says, “*They shall see as God sees.*” The pure will see clearly. Solomon said, “*He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend*” (Pro. 22:11). Pure conversation says a lot about the heart. I loathe filthy talk, but for many years I was forced to listen to it. These things cleanse you!

The reward of the pure in heart is that “they shall see God”!

The seventh beatitude – The peacemakers

Mat. 5:9 *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

In scripture, “peace” is symbolized by olive oil. Olive oil is derived by crushing the olives. Herein is a beautiful picture of the peacemaker. He is one that is willing to be the buffer zone between two opposing sides. In the process, the peacemaker gets crushed by both sides and thus lubricates the friction and brings peace!

As in all of these beatitudes, there is a certain suffering required to be a peace offering. It is only the strong who can be a peacemaker – it is only the mature saint that will be willing to be the subject of attack in order to bring peace!

The greatest example of all time was the Lord Himself, who became a peace offering on the cross – not only to reconcile us to God, but also to reconcile us with one another. “*For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.*” (Eph 2:14, and Isa. 53:5)

The eternal dividend in fulfilling this role is that “they shall be called the [Sons] of God.” It is the mature sons that shall reign with Christ (Rom. 8:20).

The eighth beatitude – Those who suffer for righteousness

Mat. 5:10 *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

The splendor of heaven is reserved for those who suffer to be right, or to do that which is right. There have always been those who have attacked the people of good character. Like instruments of cruelty, they try to malign or degrade the righteous. However, these types of implements are necessary in order to perfect the “vessels of honor.”

The wicked Haman had a personal vengeance planned against the righteous Mordecai. Why? Because Mordecai refused to bow to him! When people refuse to bow (or honor) the wicked, or when people refuse to yield to wickedness, it incites the unrighteous.

In this generation in which we live, just to be a good parent will bring persecution from the world. We will be criticized or labeled – even threatened or intimidated by authorities.

The tragedy is that often times, some of the worst persecution comes from within one's own home, with pressure from the children, or pressures from spouse or relatives. Because you don't allow your children to partake of the vanities (the delusive delights) of the world, many people would say that you are warped and need to see a psychiatrist.

Every Christian in his quest for sainthood must experience trials of persecution for standing for truth and righteousness.

Every Christian in his quest for sainthood must experience trials of persecution for standing for truth and righteousness. Sometimes churches are persecuted because they "uphold too high a standard" (e.g. on divorce/remarriage). It is imperative that we show a good spirit whilst we are being attacked or nothing is accomplished.

"But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled" (1 Pet 3:14). The kingdom of heaven awaits for you!

The ninth beatitude – persecuted for "My sake"

Mat. 5:11-12 *Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. V.12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

Being persecuted for "My sake" is distinctly different from being persecuted for righteousness sake. One could actually be persecuted by other Christians for righteousness

sake, but generally Christians come together when there is a persecution for being a Christian (for the name of Christ).

Christians in America have not had to experience any real persecution for being a Christian. However, there are nations where God's people really do suffer to bear the name of Christ, or suffer for the cause of Christ.

The book of Acts gives us a good picture of what it means to suffer for the cause of Christ: *"And when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name"* (Acts 5:40-41).

They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer. Now here is an example of real religion. The early church in Jerusalem was denied jobs, they had their goods confiscated, they were shamed, and they were excommunicated from society to the degree that they could not buy or sell! (For Jesus sake!)

The test is coming

As this age concludes, all nations will be tested on this particular beatitude. May I also say that the Lord prepares His saints for this kind of persecution. Daniel and his young friends made some resolutions. I think this is where it begins: taking a stand amongst one's peers, taking a stand at school, etc. Christ said: *"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."*

Let us observe what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:11: “*Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.*” When the people misused God’s prophets, they were actually insulting the Spirit of Christ that was in those prophets!

The walk in the Spirit prepares God’s people for their time of suffering. In fact, having the other beatitudes worked out in our lives paves the way for this final one. There was a certain Bible school where one of the students was always crying out in the prayer meetings, “Make me a martyr!” One evening, one of the fellow students graciously asked this young man if he would take the pots and pans after supper. (The other student had a special event he needed to attend.) “Not I!” protested the martyr!

There is great reward for those suffer for Jesus sake!

Review of the Beatitudes

Poor in spirit

They do not think more highly of themselves than they should. They are willing to accept any assignment that the Lord gives.

Those who mourn

They are saddened by the things that grieve their Lord. They are willing to weep for the cause of Christ.

The meek

They are willing to submit to people or circumstances in order to fulfill the Lord's purposes for their lives.

Hunger and thirst for righteousness

They always feel they need more of the Lord, more of His truth – to be more like Him.

The merciful

These are the ones who exercise compassion at every opportunity.

The pure in heart

They meditate upon the things that are pure and they grace their lips with such thoughts.

The peacemaker

They are willing to be the buffer zone between two opposing parties. They are willing to take the flak, if it might bring conciliation.

Persecuted for righteousness

They are willing to do what is right in spite of the consequences!

Persecuted for His sake

They are willing to suffer for Jesus sake – for His purposes!

As these attributes are worked out in our lives, not only are there great eternal dividends, but the Lord also gives great happiness and good success in this life!

On witnessing – verses 13-16.

Ye are the salt

Mat. 5:13 *Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

“Salt” in the Word of God speaks of sincerity and truth (Col. 4:6). Salt also speaks of preservation. For most of man’s history, salt was the only preservative. Jesus likens His people to salt. We are God’s witness upon the earth. Our presence is intended to keep the world from going corrupt. God’s people are to be “distinctively different” in order that we might convict the world of sin and righteousness.

But, when salt loses it flavor, or its pungency, it no longer serves any practical purpose – it might as well be cast into the street. When God’s people lose their witness – when our distinction is gone, when the world can’t tell us from their own – then we are no longer of any service to the kingdom!

Ye are the light

Mat. 5:14 *Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

In this passage Jesus likens his people unto light. It is interesting that the Word of God categorizes people into two groups (no middle ground). For example, St. Paul says,

“For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light...” (Eph 5:8). Again, the thought is that God’s people are to be distinctively different from the world. The world is in darkness and we are commissioned to illuminate that darkness.

In the book of Philippians we read: *“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life”* (Phil 2:15-16). The whole thought being conveyed here is that the world is twisted, but we must be the examples to the world through our life, and by holding forth the Word. God’s word is light!

If we are true witnesses then our witness should be as visible as a city that sets upon a hill!

To our house

Mat. 5:15 *Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

In the first part of this sermon, Jesus gives us a picture of what we are to be. Now the emphasis is that we maintain that witness. Men do not light a candle to hide it under a bushel, but that it might give light to all that are in the house. The first priority is to our own house – which may be the most difficult place to be a witness.

So often, Christians seem more concerned with witnessing in some other place. We must first witness to our family

and friends. In some societies that could mean total rejection! We want to see our greater family (relatives) saved. Sometimes a letter or a card helps you to share your faith.

After Jesus saved the demoniac he said: “*Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.*” (Mark 5:19) That man’s witness later had a tremendous affect around the area of Decapolis.

To the world

Mat. 5:16 *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

Lastly, our lives must be a witness to all men – through our example! The word “good” is in relation to good character and virtue. Our everyday lifestyle should speak. Our (unpremeditated) actions should speak to all!

The pilgrims from England spent a number of years in Holland before coming to the “New World.” Their actions and good character had such a positive influence in the Netherlands, that the Dutch government pleaded with the pilgrims not to leave. They even offered free tracts of land and many other benefits in hopes of retaining them in their country.

The Lord was glorified through their Christian behavior!

Fulfilling the law – verses 17-20

All to be fulfilled

Mat. 5:17-18 *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*

In Psalm 19 David likens the precision of God's law to the precision of the heavens. The heavens are so precise that our national clock (Naval Observatory, Washington D.C.) would be adjusted to a particular star in the heavens. (I'm not sure whether this is still practiced.) In short, the heavens will pass away before one jot of the law fails!

* A jot and tittle in the Greek alphabet would be equivalent to a dot or a slash of the 't'.

Fulfilling the law

The word *fulfil* (pleroo 4137) means to fill up, or to supply the deficiency. The law was deficient in the sense that it was exterior. It was a law written on stone. Jesus was transcribing the law from the exterior to the interior, from the physical to the spiritual – from the act to the thought of the act!

“The fulfilling of the law” has often been misconstrued to mean that Christ came to eliminate the law. Actually, nothing could be farther from the truth. Christ came “*to magnify the law and make it honorable.*” (See Isa. 42:21.) The

Sermon on the Mount gives us vivid illustrations of what it means to fulfill the law. The (Old Covenant) law was deficient in that it could not supply the grace/power to live up to its higher (spiritual) implications. It stopped short of heart issues!

Fulfilling the law is “doing” it. Paul explains: *“For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law”* (Rom 13:9-10). Love fulfills the law, and love is keeping the law!

Jesus said that He was come to fulfill the law and the prophets. Basically, all of the Old Testament prophets sought to bring God’s people back to the law. The law dealt with man’s relationship with men and God – to love God with all the heart and to love thy neighbor.

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>To love God</i> | Deuteronomy 10:12 |
| <i>To love thy neighbor</i> | Leviticus 19:18 |

Jesus also states (within the sermon context) that the “golden rule” fulfills the law and the prophets: *“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets”* (Mat. 7:12).

When we have the law within our hearts, we don’t have to go into great thought as to what we should do. It should be as automatic as choosing our favorite food and drink!

The three divisions of the law

Before we proceed, it may be helpful for us to understand the three divisions of the (Old Covenant) law:

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| <i>The moral law</i> | This included the Ten Commandments and all that would fall under this heading. |
| <i>The ceremonial law</i> | These were the religious ordinances, instructions about washings, touch-nots, regulations concerning Holy Days, circumcision, etc. |
| <i>The civil law</i> | This covered the laws that pertain to responsibility between neighbors, civil judgements, lawsuits etc. |

The law that was nailed to the cross was the law of ordinances – the law of ceremony: (Col. 2:14) “*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.*” Notice also verse 16: “*Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in **drink**, or in respect of an **holyday**, or of the **new moon**, or of the **sabbath** days.*”

The Gentile was never under these ordinances, but these are the very ordinances that separated the Jews from the Gentiles! Notice also what Paul says in Ephesians 2:14-15: “*For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even **the law of commandments contained in ordinances**; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace.*” Moral laws and civil laws did not separate the Jews and gentiles – ceremonial laws did!

The abolishing of the law of ceremony removed the barrier between the Jewish Christian and the Gentile Christian! The only ceremonial law imposed upon the Gentiles was relative to the paganistic worship practices of the gentiles: (Acts 15:20) *"But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood."*

The moral laws were never abolished, nor were the precepts of the civil law; they were only magnified! Those who walk in the Spirit fulfill the higher law of the New Testament!

May I further comment on the law of ceremony: It was actually the physical aspect of these ordinances that was coming to an end. There is much to be gained from the spiritual understanding and fulfillment of these ordinances – for example, the feasts. The feasts can no longer be fulfilled physically, but they are to be fulfilled spiritually!

Destiny gauged by the “higher law”

Mat. 5:19 *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

This is still in reference to the moral precepts and statutes of the Old Testament (v. 17-18). Jesus not only upheld the law, but He redefined the law to its higher implications. Jesus never advocated breaking the law, but rather gave true meaning and definition to the law.

Those who break the “Ten Commandments” (or even the least of their implications) and shall teach men to do so, shall be called “the least” in the kingdom of heaven.

His commandments are not grievous

A minister once told me that the “Ten Commandments” were not livable. He said that they were impossible to be kept! What this man was really saying was that the Lord’s commandments were grievous – that the Lord was unrealistic and that He was demanding something that we could not possibly supply. This attitude is like that of the man with the “one talent,” who said: *“I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strowed”* (Mat. 25:24).

What this man was really saying was that the Lord’s commandments were grievous – that the Lord was unrealistic and that He was demanding something that we could not possibly supply.

I once visited a country that formerly had been evangelized by the Jesuits. The Jesuits had allowed all of their converts to keep their little gods. (They themselves are idolaters.) I have found the same to be true in other segments of Christianity. The missionary must turn the people away from their old religion. And the pastor must turn his young people from their idols also! If we do not uphold the commandments we could also be dubbed: “Least in the kingdom!”

We can teach men (in effect) to break the commandments if we do not voice our disapproval when they are broken. There were many ministers in Corinth who were overlook-

ing (tolerating) the sins of the people. Thank God for ministers like Paul, who confronted his spiritual children that were flagrantly violating all of the commandments.

Old Testament analogy

A good Old Testament analogy of “lowering the standard” can be found in the study of the kings. Many of the kings compromised the temple gold. Some of them stripped the gold off the temple doors and the pillars. Some of them emptied the temple treasuries (the unsearchable riches) to appease the enemy or to save their kingdom. The law is to be greater valued than much fine gold (Psa. 19:7-10). Many a minister compromises the law to keep his people!

There are many echelons in the heavenly realm!

“*But whosoever shall do and teach them...*” This has been my desire since I have undertaken the study of this sermon – to do, (to fulfill) and to teach them. I want this message to be an extension of my life! There will be those in heaven who are called “great” because they have fulfilled this verse! (See Ezra 7:10). I believe God’s people rejoice when they understand the laws of the kingdom. Such was the case at the “Watergate” revival in Nehemiah 8:8-12.

*I believe
God’s people
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Greater righteousness demanded

Mat. 5:20 *For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus later describes the Pharisees like this: “*But do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.*” The Pharisee was a member of a religious sect that represented the straightest of the straight. They were right to the letter on every fine point, and were even fragmented among themselves upon the “finer” points of the law. Everything about the Pharisee was devoted to give the appearance of piety and sanctity. However, Jesus saw through their sham and labeled them hypocrites – play actors!

For example, the Pharisee rigidly observed the Sabbath laws to the letter. They limited their walk, food preparation, or any physical exertion. Yet at the same time, they could watch a poor cripple struggling to get on his feet, but couldn’t exert themselves to help him because they might break the Sabbath. They were (in effect) overriding the higher laws of mercy and benevolence.

The Pharisees were careful to tithe their garden herbs right to the gram, but could not reach out to the poor and needy. Even the (O.T.) prophet condemned this when he said: “*For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*” (Hosea 6:6). Also see Matthew 23:23.

The righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees was exterior – it was talk! It was all for show and for the recognition of the people. Jesus said, “*Unless your righteousness exceeds theirs, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.*” Let us cry out as king David did, for *truth in the inward parts* (Psa. 51:6). We want our actions to be an extension of the work of grace in our heart.

Higher law invoked between brethren – verses 21 -26

Anger

Mat. 5:21-22 *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: V.22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...*

Jesus begins His next text by quoting the law of Moses. He is citing the sixth commandment, which deals with murder. The reference to the judgment is from Deut. 17:6-11, and it concerns the priestly tribunal and the priest who would give the final sentence of judgment.

If a man killed another man, (under the law) the Levites and priests that were appointed to that locale judged him. But now Jesus brings a higher definition to the law – the New Covenant standard: “*But I say unto you...*” He that is *angry* with his brother without a cause is in danger of eternal judgment. St. John substantiates this: “*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*” (1 John 3:15).

Cain was angry with his brother because his brother was righteous. That is not a just cause, yet Cain murdered his brother! Jesus is bringing the law to a greater clarity and definition – heart issues. To be angry with a brother without any reason equates with having murder in your heart.

We can be innocent to the letter, but guilty in the spirit. (Anger stimulates hatred, which stimulates murder.)

Words spoken against brethren

Mat. 5:22b ...*And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (Raca is a Chaldean word.)*

Perhaps, the particular edict being referred to here was instituted during the post-Babylon era. The “council” is in reference to the Sanhedrin, which basically was founded during the post-exile era.

We can be innocent to the letter, but guilty in the spirit.

To call a brother “Raca” (a slur meaning “worthless”), was to show utter contempt for that person. That specific term was grounds for a citation to appear before the highest court in the land! But now, Jesus enlarges the category to include the word fool: “But whosoever shall say, Thou fool.... The word “fool” means, “moral reprobate.” For some reason, a man could be brought to court for using the word “Raca” and yet the society tolerated people to call others “fool” with no apparent consequence. To call a brother a fool (this particular form of the word) was an awesome indictment against a son of Israel!

We can see how this sermon was exposing some of the pharisaic influence of the times. The Pharisee could (hypocritically) say, “I have kept the law to the letter, but he still broke the spirit of the law. They could piously say, “I have never used the word Raca (I call him something

worse)” – but that is permissible? Some people look for loopholes to justify their actions. Unless every fine point of the law is spelled out and clearly defined, they will find a way to break it and then say “I have done nothing wrong.” The law is not in their hearts! The Sermon on the Mount challenges the motives of the heart!

Jesus said: “To use a term like (fool) will put you into greater jeopardy than appearing before the Sanhedrin. It could put you in Hell!” The Lord is not at all pleased to see his own redeemed maliciously attacked by “fellow” Christians. The psalmist made a similar indictment against some that were slandering their own brethren (Psa 50:21-23). Also see Proverbs 18:21.

This text not only cautions us against maligning our fellow Christians, but it also challenges the motives and intents of heart. We must give an account for our words. When we utter slurs against other people, it hardens our heart.

The word “fool” in modern English does not carry the same connotation that it did at the time that Jesus spoke this.

Reconciliation & restitution

Mat. 5:23-24 *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

This verse shows us clearly that the Lord is far more interested in reconciliation between brethren than in receiving a

gift. First be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift. Our gift to the Lord does not pacify our offense against another. As the Lord said in Isaiah 1:11-18: “Your sacrifices mean nothing to me whilst your hand are full of blood.” In essence, Israel was trying to pacify the Lord with all their observances and gifts. The Lord would not receive them.

Restitution is a part of reconciliation. That means if we owe a debt or have taken something or vandalized something (etc.), we must make things right even if it means adding interest to the principle. The law demanded adding a fifth part to the restitution – see Leviticus 6:5. Reconciliation also may require a public apology and an appeal for forgiveness. Then our gift will be acceptable to the Lord.

“And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house...” (Luke 19:8-9). Jesus commends this act of restitution as a sign of true repentance.

Mat. 5:25-26 *Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*

Under the Roman law, if one person had a case against another person that could not be settled privately, the litigant

could demand the offender to accompany him to the Roman court. Generally the infractions were between neighbors and perhaps concerned business dealings, etc.

Jesus is addressing the one who is at fault. If you are on your way to court with your accuser, the prudent course of action is to entreat your brother for a settlement out of

There are sins against people that we may seemingly get away with in this life; however, we will not escape them at the judgment.

court that he might drop the charges. If it goes to court and you are found guilty, the court will demand the weightiest sentence prescribed because you were fighting a legitimate complaint against yourself!

The point that is coming across is that when we are to blame for some sin against a neighbor, we must deal with it before it ever comes to light. There are sins against people that we may seemingly get away with in this life; however, we will not escape them at the judgment. Often Christians say to themselves, “Well, I confessed it to the Lord and that’s good enough!”

Let us be reconciled to all men that we might have the New Covenant within our heart, and that we might have God’s blessing upon our house!

Higher law of morality – verses 27-32

Sins of the spirit vs. sins of the flesh

Mat. 5:27-28 *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: V.28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

In order for us to distinguish between sins of the spirit and sins of the flesh, we must understand something about the Levitical offerings. The law of the offerings teaches us the difference between a “first degree” sin and a “second degree” sin.

There was a trespass offering, which specifically dealt with willful transgressions or trespasses. There was also a sin offering, which dealt more with the nature of sin. For example, at a baby’s dedication the mother offered a sin offering – which proves that we were born into this world with the sin nature: “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*” (Psa. 51:5).

There is a difference between the actual act and a sin in the mind (or spirit). To commit adultery is not the same as to think adultery. Yet, Jesus is showing us that the “New Covenant” demands a greater righteousness than the “Old Covenant.” In fact, the whole sermon is bringing us to grips with heart issues. Like the previous text, maybe I haven’t literally killed anyone, but unjustified anger, or hatred or envy or lusts are all sins of the spirit. They declare: it was in my heart to do so!

We have heard statements like, “Well I thought it, so I might as well have done it!” Not so! James said, “*When lust has conceived it bringeth forth death...*” (Jas. 1:15). Yes, it begins in the heart, (and it is sin) but it is not a “first-degree” sin until it takes place. Even in our penal system there are first, second and third degree crimes. It is the same idea. A first-degree crime is a willful, premeditated act. A second-degree crime may have been spontaneously provoked.

The Levitical law substantiates this point. In fact, there were greater degrees of sacrifice demanded from those who were of higher rank.

Old Testament analogy

In the Old Testament, we often find statements concerning the kings to this effect: “He did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart.” Or, we might read where one of the “revivalist” kings cleansed the land from certain idols or pagan altars etc., but the “high places” still remained!

The high places (spiritually) speak of the hidden places of the mind, heart and spirit. They represent hidden lusts, covetousness, or the sins of the spirit. The New Covenant deals with the sins of the spirit.

As we return to our text verses, (5:27-28) Jesus is bringing us to grips with (what I shall call) “second-degree” sin – sins of the spirit. “*That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*” He hasn’t physically committed the act, but this has been his meditation.

Job said that he made a covenant with his eyes, not to think (lustfully) upon a girl/woman (Job 31:1). Peter also made a statement that interprets this thought in 2 Peter 2:14: “*Having eyes full of adultery...*” It is one thing to notice an attractive looking woman. It is another thing to look contemplatively and lustfully at her. Jesus calls this adultery of heart.

May I also insert here, that it is also a sin for a woman to dress lewdly, or seductively? A woman cannot be innocent if she dresses in a fashion to provoke lust! Even nature teaches as much. The scripture teaches that a young woman should be “chaste” (Titus 2:5). The word “chaste” (hagnos) denotes modesty, innocence, and purity

We live in a lewd and adulterous society that has contaminated the world with its lewdness. Therefore, we as Christians must be distinctively different in our conduct and actions. We must pray for the grace to withstand and even shine forth in the midst of a perverse world. David prayed: “*Create in me a clean heart, O God...*” We are not born with one! The New Covenant promises the help of the Spirit to all who seek (See Heb. 4:14-16).

The seriousness of moral restraint

Mat. 5:29-30 *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. V.30* *And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

Verses 29-30 show us the seriousness of moral conduct. These passages are not advocating dismembering our bodies, but as Jesus declares, it would be better to do so if “that member” were responsible for taking us to hell. I think this also helps us to understand that we are more responsible for the physical act (1st degree) than the spiritual act. The spiritual act is a sin of the spirit – in the mind and heart. Had the Lord said: “If thine heart offend thee, cut it out,” then we would all be dead!

Please understand that we are not trying to excuse the sin nature. We are only trying to show that we are held more accountable for the physical act than the thought. The Old Covenant did not put major emphasis on the sins of the spirit because there was not a sacrifice sufficient enough to cleanse the soul and conscience. Had there been an emphasis on the sins of the spirit, that would only have brought them into greater condemnation. However, the “One Sacrifice” of the New Testament is powerful enough to purge the conscience – therefore it demands more! “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:14).

“If thy right eye offend thee...” We must let the gravity of this statement grip our hearts. Sin can be stimulated by our physical senses. Our eyes must not intentionally be searching for something that is pornographic: magazines, videos, etc. It would be better not to have eyes, than to have eyes that have been the cause of taking us to hell!

Wouldn't it be terrible for someone to dismember his body only to discover that the thought is still in his heart?

“*If thy right hand offend thee...*” That statement tells us that there is a deliberate action taken (the hand that purchases the video... that turns on the television set, etc.). It would be better not to have a hand than to have a hand that facilitates evil and cause us to perish in hell. It takes a deliberate action to buy an immoral CD or video.

The Lord is telling the church that this “New Covenant” demands a higher moral conduct. The Lord desires us to “*Be holy both in body and in spirit:*” (1 Cor. 7:34). It is really a heart issue. Wouldn’t it be terrible for someone to dismember his body only to discover that the thought is still in his heart?

*We can
never be
holy
unless
we’ve
been
tested!*

One of the early monks Simeon Stylites became famous by chaining himself to the top of a pillar for thirty years. Well, certainly that kept him from committing certain physical sins, but the Lord wants to deal with the issues in our heart. We have to have a certain exposure to the world to reveal those issues. We can never be holy unless we’ve been tested!

Let us cry out for clean hands and a pure heart that we may ascend the Holy hill. We must have clean hands to serve the Lord!

May I note that sometimes there needs to be deliverance. However, desire is still the prerequisite for deliverance. The Lord does not deliver those who are not especially interested in being delivered.

Divorce & Remarriage

Mat. 5:31-32 *It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: V.32 But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*

Again, Jesus is comparing the Old Covenant standard with the New Covenant standard. The law made various provisions for divorce, and the reason the law tolerated divorce (as Jesus later states) was for the hardness of their hearts (Mat. 19:8). But now Jesus brings our focus to the higher New Covenant standard – “*But I say unto you...*”

Actually, Jesus is bringing things back to the original plan and purpose from the beginning (See Mark 10:6-9). God’s original plan for marriage was life-long commitment. There was no provision for divorce prior to the law: “*But from the beginning it was not so*” (Mat. 19:8).

The exception clause “*saving for the cause of fornication*” has been greatly misconstrued to mean a variety of things. Fornication is an act before marriage. Adultery is an act after marriage. The word “fornication” from the Greek translation (porneia) has other ramifications. However, Jesus did not preach in Greek, He preached in Aramaic/Hebrew. The word He used relates to an act before marriage!

Case in point

We will cite the case in Matthew 1:18-25 for an example: Joseph suspects that Mary has been unfaithful (fornication)

during their (one year) espousal. He seeks to put away (divorce) his wife privately. The espousal was a binding contract, and Mary was counted as his wife, even though they had not yet come together. This is the only “exception” (other than death) that Jesus gave that would legitimize another marriage. If a man put away his wife for any other reason, and another took her to wife, both she and he would be in an adulterous relationship. This is further clarified in Mark 10:11-12. Also, the man who puts away his wife and marries another committeth adultery as well.

Sadly, the divorce/remarriage standard is no longer an issue in most of the church. The church basically accepts and condones remarriage. However, when revival comes, it will again become an issue because with revival comes conviction of the Word!

There is not another case that could be cited in the New Testament to oppose the above example! The higher law of the New Covenant is: “Till death do us part.”

Making oaths or vows – verses 33-37.

Mat. 5:33 *“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths...”*

In this next text Jesus addresses the topic of vows. The Old Testament has some very specific guidelines concerning vows. In fact, there are almost sixty references to the word “vow/vows,” not to mention other allusions to the subject. The law warns concerning swearing falsely: *“Thou shalt not forswear thyself...”*

Mat. 5:34-36 *“But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: V.35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. V.36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.”*

The warning through Moses was not to make an oath that wouldn't be kept. However, Jesus adds a greater caution to making an oath/vow: “Don't make an oath/vow that is outside the realm of possibility to keep.” It is one thing to make an oath concerning a piece of property you own. It is another thing to swear by a city – which you don't own, and in fact, belongs to the Great King.

How could we make good on a planet that we swore by? We don't even have the right to swear by our own head. We belong to our creator!

The privilege of “swearing by the heavens” is reserved exclusively for the Lord! Only the Lord can make an oath concerning Jerusalem, and only the Lord can swear by “Himself.” *“For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself,”* (Heb 6:13).

Jesus later addresses this issue to the Pharisees in Matthew 23:16-22: *“Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor...!* It seems the religious people had their own code about making vows. They were swearing by things that they had no power over! (The Jews were notorious for taking oaths.)

The point that Jesus is driving home is that we must keep our vows! We are accountable for words and promises. The next verse will bear this out.

Mat. 5:37 *But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*

The words of James re-echo this: *“But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation”* (James 5:12).

Our vows should be a simple “I do” or “I don’t!” There is nothing wrong with a marriage vow. We are promising (by God’s help) to be faithful and true to our marriage partner. There is nothing wrong with taking an oath of office. We are promising to be faithful to our post (by God’s help).

Swearing on the Bible is not an issue any more. The court has to honor your conviction not to swear on it!

The seriousness of a vow is vividly portrayed in Ecclesiastes 5:4-6: *“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. V.5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. V.6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?”*

When we take a vow before God there is an angel that records that vow. Many times we have heard people try to excuse their vow by saying something like, “We were young, and we didn’t know what we were doing.” When a person makes an oath, whether it is before a judge or a tribal chief, God hears that vow! In some counties, only the state authority can solemnize a marriage.

A marriage vow is a covenant that God takes very seriously: “The LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant” (Mal. 2:14).

May I also insert that this is one of the qualifications for ascending Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion (spiritually) speaks of the high calling to the church. Those who ascend must keep their vows: *“He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.”* That means that we keep our vows, even if we come up short on our end! (See Psa. 15:4).

Attitudes on injustice & lending – verses 38-42.

Turning the cheek

Mat. 5:38-39 *Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: V.39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.*

“*Ye have heard...*” Jesus is again referring to the law of Moses (c.f. Ex. 21:24). The law of Moses was exacting and unforgiving. That is why there were the cities of refuge – to protect certain (second/third degree) offenders from the avenger of blood.

“*But I say unto you...*” Jesus is now invoking the higher standard of relationship between brethren. “*Resist not evil...*” Paul later re-echoes this to the Corinthians who were taking each other to court. (We will further comment on this in verse 40.) The overall point that Jesus is making concerns injustice. God allows many (seeming) injustices to exist to test the mettle of his saints. “Turning the cheek” is not talking about life threatening situations that endanger yourself or your family.

“Turning the cheek” is not talking about life threatening situations that endanger yourself or your family.

Turning the cheek involves the common everyday infractions and injustices of humanity. Being spoken against, being discriminated against. It might even involve being

pushed around at school or being deprived of some right that you are entitled to. It can even happen in the church – cases in which we could legitimately protest, but we commit it to God.

Quite literal

We knew a certain woman who related an experience that happened to her when she was a teenager living in Detroit. One day she was approached by a neighborhood gang that knew she was a Christian. The (female) gang leader violently slapped her across the face. She meekly turned the cheek. Some time later, another gang confronted this girl and they would have given her a bad time, but the other gang leader happened by and said, “Let her go, she is real”!

Misapplied truth

I heard of a case in which a young girl was attacked and her virtue was taken from her. Her attitude was that she wanted to forgive and not make a case of it. That is not turning the cheek, in fact, that is an offense against society. To let a potential murderer or rapist wander around unchecked or unpunished is an offense against society!

I read of another case in which a thug attacked a preacher. The preacher was whacked in the head with a club and would not restrain the attacker. Today that preacher sits in a wheel chair because of an incorrect concept of what it means to “*resist not evil*”. (He later recanted his doctrinal error in the hopes of saving others his misfortune.) Many well meaning Christians have tried to apply these passages (to the letter) and because of improper teaching have suffered greatly because of it.

- ◆ Some have suffered criminal assaults.
- ◆ Some have thought that Christians shouldn't call the police.
- ◆ Some have refused rightful compensation.
- ◆ Some have been victimized by insurance companies.
- ◆ Some have accepted fraudulent lawsuits against themselves.
- ◆ Some have suffered needless condemnation.

Christians have suffered many needless damages by the criminal world because of a lack of understanding in the Word. Jesus was not teaching His people that they should allow themselves to be victimized by criminals. This is not the implication of “*turning the cheek*” or “*resist not evil.*”

There is absolute agreement in the Word, and in order to rightly divide the Word we must see the balance throughout. Paul later states that the purpose of government is to protect the innocent and punish the wicked:

“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: V.4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13:3-4).

Paul many times turned to the Roman authorities for protection against his own countrymen. We want to get the spirit of what our Master was saying about “*not resisting evil.*” We are looking at terms like: turning the cheek... relinquishing your coat... going to small claims court... going the extra mile, etc.

We knew a Christian lady who had a very cruel fellow-worker. This “fellow-worker” would insult her, talk against her and try to make her performance record look bad. The Christian lady kept her tongue, and tried to comply with the unreasonable demands of this woman. This is an example of “*not resisting evil.*” In the end, the Lord judged the evil woman... she declared: “The Lord hath done this to me for the way I treated you!”

Isaac dug many wells, only to have them filled in again by the adversary. Isaac refused to contend for his rights, and consequently he received the 100-fold blessing (Gen. 26). This is what is meant by “resisting not evil.” The Lord allows evil circumstances to come in order to develop His nature in our lives:

“Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. V.17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD” (Isa. 54:16-17).

This promise is for those who hold their peace and allow the Lord vindicate!

Lawsuits

Mat. 5:40 *And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also.*

We are still under the heading of “Injustices.” This verse is obviously directed to an innocent party; and this would obviously be a small claims court. The Romans allowed the Jews to operate their own penal system, especially in religious affairs. However, the Jews could not pass sentence when a capitol crime had been committed.

The attitude that Christ was seeking to impart to His people was His very own nature of meekness. Isaiah says of Christ, “*And as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth*” (Isa. 53:7). Christ was as a sheep, being stripped of His coat (unjustly) yet He did not seek to defend Himself.

The Corinthians (brethren) were taking each other to court over petty infractions. What a testimony that is to the world! Paul said (in effect), “Wouldn’t it be better to suffer the injustice than to stain the name of Christ before the ungodly?”

“But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. V.7 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?” (1 Cor. 6:6-7).

Perspective

Let us again put this into perspective: We are looking at Christian brethren and we are looking at petty court (small claims court). We must emphasize this, because we know too many sad cases where God’s people were put out of commission for the rest of their lives – needlessly; and all because of a misinterpretation of God’s Word!

If the 21st century church were functioning as it should, then there would be a judgment seat within the church. This is what Jesus taught (Mat. 18 15-17), and this is what the apostle Paul taught (1 Cor. 6:1-5). In a larger Christian community (and especially where there are new converts) there will be offenses. Paul encourages such cases to submit to a decision from the eldership of the church.

Obviously, a case between a Christian and a non-Christian falls into a different category. A non-Christian is not going to submit to a church decision. We know of cases in which even churches have had to go to court with the world. One such case was concerning a piece of land that the township was trying to deny to a church. The church won the case!

It would be absolutely ludicrous for an (innocent) Christian to go to court with an unbeliever and have an attitude of, "Well, I'll let them have my house, and if they ask for my bank account they can have that too." However, we have known well-meaning Christian who have basically done just that! They were trying to live up to the Sermon on the Mount.

There may even be a situation when a Christian is forced to go to a civil court with another Christian. There are many carnal Christians (perhaps not of your congregation or vision) who are not interested in an agreement or conciliation, or even justice. Their motive is to take everything they can get. (We are not talking about petty court, taking a garden tractor, or a few hundred dollars, etc.) They want to take your livelihood.

We must get into the spirit of what Jesus is saying here. The illustration Jesus is using is relative to infractions between brethren. We want our hearts to be right; we want to apply every measure to imitate what Christ would do. We want to take every measure to try to reconcile things even if we are not to blame.

For example, a certain brother in the church comes out after the service and discovers a scrape on the passenger door of his car. He thinks you did it, and he is very upset. Well, you did not do it, and it would be useless to tell him that you didn't do it, but you want to reconcile a bad scene. So, you say: "Brother, it's going to be okay. I will have that fixed for you... And also, I notice another little scrape over here. Why don't you have the body shop fix that one as well!"

It is one thing to suffer something for righteousness sake, or for Christ sake. But as Peter tells us: "*But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters*" (1 Pet. 4:15).

Going the extra mile

Mat. 5:41 *And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.*

Here is terminology that the Jews could readily identify with (being compelled into service). Both the Persian and the Roman governments exercised the privilege of demanding their conquered ones to assist a government courier or agent. A Roman soldier could demand a bystander to carry his pack for a mile. The Romans compelled a man to carry the cross for Christ (Mat. 27:32).

Again, Jesus is teaching His New Covenant people the way to have victory over injustices (or inconveniences). It is not usually the big violation of our rights that we deal with everyday; but rather, it is the little infractions that we have to deal with – things that annoy us, things that irritate us, etc.

Jesus later gives an illustration of what true ministry involves. A man comes in after working all day in the field. Then his master asks him to serve him at the table (Luke 17:7-8). We are asked to do things on the job – things we are not paid to do. Our husband or wife asks us to do something more to help them.

It is not usually the big violation of our rights that we deal with everyday; but rather, it is the little infractions

The way to have the victory is to go beyond the call of duty. The wife asks you to pick something up at the store and you suggest: “Why don’t I pick up the children from school too? I’ll be out that way.” You can imagine the impact this might have on a hardened Roman soldier who demanded a man to carry his pack for a mile, only to have the man say, “I will carry your pack another mile.”

This was hardly the Jewish mentality of the day!

Attitude on lending

Mat. 5:42 *"Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."*

The subject of “lending” also demands prudence and balance. If we took this verse at face value, we might well be-

come one of the street people. The Lord is not telling His people to abandon all sense of propriety, discretion and natural instinct. But again, we are considering an attitude of the heart.

As a pastor, I have had to deal with many people who stop at the church wanting assistance (generally money). I have had people become very angry with us when we did not give it: “You owe it to us – you are a church, you must give to us...” One fellow demanded a ride to Pittsburgh (a round trip of 200 miles) and he cursed us out for not bowing to his demand.

Putting things into perspective and balance, Paul tells us: *“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat”* (2 Th. 3:10). Do you think that our Lord was telling us to support sloth, and vice, and imprudence? Do you think that our Lord was suggesting that we give money to people, so that they could take it to the racetrack, etc.? The apostle Paul even laid down ground rules for the care of widows – there were qualifications.

Even “co-signing” falls into a similar category. Would you co-sign for anybody who asked? Would you co-sign for a stranger or a fellow whose character was undependable? I urged one of my congregants not to co-sign for such a fellow. He signed anyway, and he ended up making payments for the man (See Pro. 11:15).

In the perspective and context of our subject matter, we are considering the common essentials... We are looking at the every day life experiences. No, I wouldn't lend my new car

to anyone who asked. I wouldn't write a thousand-dollar check to someone on the street that asked. But as James said, if there was one naked, or hungry, or destitute – yes, I would most gladly give! (See James 2:15-16.) If we considered the times in which Jesus wrote, probably the most common item to be borrowed was a tool or some form of dry goods, or as the neighbor in Luke 11:5, three loaves.

In some places prudence is demanded even in giving a beggar a coin. Other beggars could mob you. In some cases, giving to a beggar could be giving to an evil spirit.

Lending is an attitude of heart that says: “God has blessed me, and if I can do anything to make life easier for my fellow-creatures – my hand is open!” *“Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble”* (Psa. 41:1).

There is also another aspect of lending that may apply to the wealthy – lending money (to trustworthy people) interest free. There are many promises of blessing to those who lend (interest free) to their brethren. One such promise is that they shall be candidates to ascend Mt. Zion (Psa. 15).

There are many promises of blessing to those who lend (interest free) to their brethren.

Attitudes toward our adversaries – verses 43-46

Returning good for evil

Mat. 5:43 *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.*

“*Thou shalt love thy neighbour*” is a quote from Leviticus 19:18. There is no reference to hating one’s enemy; that was an interpretation that came from the lawyer/Pharisee department.

Mat. 5:44 *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*

“*But I say unto you, Love your enemies...*” Again, Jesus clarifies the “New Covenant” standard. Actually, this was always the heart of God, but many things were misrepresented during the age of the law.

Jesus is not just telling us to love our enemies, but He is showing us how that we can love our enemies. But who is this enemy anyway? There have been many villains throughout history: Hitler, Ho Chi Minh, Ben Laden, and of course the worst villain is yet to come, the anti-christ. Is Jesus suggesting that we love all of the anti-christ villains in the world?

Perspective

Once again, we must put this into the contextual perspective. Jesus is not talking about something hypothetical (some abstract situation). Our Lord is talking about everyday life associations... everyday enemies. For example, Jesus later says this: “*And a man's foes shall be they of his own household*” (Mat. 10:36). We are considering the kinds of enemies that we have on the job, in the school, and in the home.

Note: Although this message was intended to speak into the everyday life situations, there are always exceptions or broader interpretations. For example, Elisha (by the Spirit) commanded an enemy army to be fed (2 Kings 6:21-23). The enemy came no more against them!

Jesus is showing us how to have victory over them: “*Bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.*” If we really find the grace to do this – to return good for evil, to pray for those who misuse us, etc. – we will find that the sword is taken out of our heart. That is what overcoming is all about – evil is conquered in your heart.

Life examples

Paul said, “*Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not*” (Rom. 12:14). I vividly remember a place that I worked many years ago. It was the kind of place that drove you to your knees as soon as you got home. I used to pray for the people that I was involved with, and I used to pray for my own attitude. Years later, I worked again with one

of the fellows that had been in the former shop. He was telling me how much he hated the people there. I thought he was just kidding, but he was dead serious. I didn't have the slightest ill feeling toward anyone there.

Mat. 5:45 *That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Our heavenly Father shows kindness and benevolence to all men – the good and the bad. Therefore, let us adapt this beautiful characteristic of our heavenly Father. If we don't learn to love the (familiar) enemies that face us every day, how will we be able to love the heathen on the foreign field? As the missionary song goes: "So send I you to hearts made hard by hatred..." The word "love" (vs. 44) *agapao* means to love in a moral or social sense. The story of the Good Samaritan would be a good example of this form of love.

James Elliot, the famed missionary to Ecuador, knowing the potential risk amongst the murderous jungle tribes, agreed with his comrades that if there came a choice to kill or to be killed, they would die rather than take the lives of the unsaved heathen. That is exactly what happened. The tribal people attacked them with spears and arrows, but the missionaries refused to use their guns.

If we can't love our everyday enemies in practical terms, how can we ever know the privilege of being sent to give our lives for the cause of Christ?

Not recompensed for loving your own

Mat. 5:46 *For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?*

The publicans were fellow Jews who were employed by Rome to collect taxes from Israel. The publicans were considered traitors, and were greatly despised. (Matthew – the author of this gospel was a publican.) Our Master was saying, “There is no special merit (achievement) in loving those who love you. Even the most despicable of people love their own.”

Mat. 5:47 *And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?*

To say “good morning” to your friends is not grounds to be lauded or applauded. Even the most despicable people do as much. Actually, every kind act is rewarded in heaven – but to love the lovely takes no effort. This is no grounds for a reward.

The Lord is challenging His New Covenant people to reach out to others. The Jews were very exclusive.

Perfection

We can be perfect as we walk in the light of His countenance.

Mat. 5:48 *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

In context with the previous verses, the Lord wants us to be perfect in our relationships with our fellow-beings. We can’t find any fault in our Heavenly Father’s

treatment to us. Thus, our Father wants us to be like Him! The Lord told father Abraham to walk before Him and be perfect. We can be perfect as we walk in the light of His countenance.

The word “perfect” (teleios) means perfect in relation to development. A baby can be perfect if it functions as a baby should. If a child is ten years old and still hasn’t learned to walk or use the bathroom or feed himself, he is not perfect. The perfection that our Lord demanded was in relationship to growth. In other words, we must appropriate the truths that God is presently speaking into our lives.

Love – the bond of perfection

Paul tells us that love is the bond of perfection (Col. 3:14). Love is not the beginning of our experience, but rather, the ultimate of our experience. This fruit of love is perfected through much cultivation. Love is the end product – the divine nature.

*God
demands
more from
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from
others.*

The Master demanded a (relative) perfection from His people. That means that they have appropriated the grace and truth for their level of development. God demands more from some than from others. We must continually be progressing into the things of God in order to be perfect. Paul said, “I press toward the mark...” We can’t claim completion until we get to the end of our sojourn, and we know that we have finished the course! (See Philippians 3:12-15.)



Matthew Chapter Six

Motives in giving – verses 1-4

To be seen of men

Mat. 6:1 *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. V.2* *Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

Giving alms implies giving to the poor or other beneficent acts. If the motive is to bring acclaim to ourselves, then that is our reward – the praise of men! There is no reward in heaven when the motive is to exalt ourselves.

“Sounding a trumpet” has become a proverbial expression that means, “drawing attention to ourselves.” It is said that the Pharisees actually hired a trumpeter to call attention to their “generous” gift. That was the motivation of the Pharisee, to have men proclaim their righteousness. Jesus called it sham and hypocrisy. (Jesus again is exposing the intent of the heart.) The natural tendency in man is to proclaim his own goodness – “See, I’m a pretty good guy.” *“Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness”* (Pro. 20:6).

To be seen of God

Mat. 6:3-4 *But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: V.4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.*

“*Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth*” has also come to be a proverbial expression that essentially means “tell no one.” This reveals a true motive in charitable acts. We are not looking for acclaim, but we simply are reaching out in compassion. We are not looking for acknowledgement or reward. However, the Lord sees it, and He does not let it go forgotten. The Lord often bestows wonderful benefits to His people (and they wonder, “Why am I so blessed?”), not to mention the reward that awaits in heaven.

My wife had a great aunt who was given to this kind of ministry. When she heard someone was sick, she immediately busied herself to make soup and bread etc. She would drop the basket of food off on the neighbor’s step and be gone. When the aunt died, there were lines of cars parked down this old country road to pay their respects. (This was back in the days when the wake [coffin] stayed in the home.) The undertaker was amazed at the people who came and said, “Who was this woman?”

Motives in prayer – verses 5-8

To be seen of men

Mat. 6:5 *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

Jesus once more is exposing the pharisaic influence of the day. Everything that the Pharisees did was to be seen of men. The Pharisee went through a great production to be seen of men (Mat. 23). The word “*hypocrite*” means, play actor. This was a common term of the day for people who performed on stage. The righteousness of the Pharisee was exterior. If that is our motive (to show people how spiritual we are), to have people laud our (so-called) righteousness, then we have had our reward.

It is the motive of the heart that is being revealed. Today we have other areas where men want to be acclaimed for their ministry or giftings and the motive is the same – “to be seen,” to be applauded etc. Some ministries desire to make a fair show of themselves. Obviously, most giftings and talents are displayed before people, but if the motive is to be seen, or to be acclaimed by men, they could well have their reward.

To be seen of God

Mat. 6:6 *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which*

is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

There have been those over the centuries who have interpreted this verse quite literally. In other words, when it's time to pray – look for a closet. Once more, our Lord is getting to an attitude of heart; it is not so much the idea of going down to the coal bin in order to pray. He is exposing the phony religiosity displayed by the Pharisee.

Our private prayer is not limited to a spot; it is simply the idea that we are not trying to show off our spirituality before others. There are many times when we are called upon to pray publicly and it is necessary. My mother was the type of person who was moved with compassion, she did not consider the place where she might be. She could pray for a sick person in the park, and the Lord honored her prayers.

However, it is rewarding to see God answer our private prayers. Nobody was there to watch us pray, but they are being answered before our eyes. This was the choice that Jesus was presenting: Do we want to be acknowledged of men, or do we want to be acknowledged of God? If our motive is to be seen of men, we have our reward!

This was the choice that Jesus was presenting: Do we want to be acknowledged of men, or do we want to be acknowledged of God?

Form and repetition

Mat. 6:7-8 *But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. V.8 Be not ye therefore like unto*

them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

A good example of vain repetition could be found in 1 Kings 18:26. The prophets of Baal prayed their “four word” prayer from morning till noon with no results. Elijah then prayed a little “thirty second” prayer, and the fire fell.

Even today, many religions pray repetitious prayers, thinking that their much speaking will stimulate an answer. The Catholic Church is notorious for their repetitious prayers of penance. (That is not faith – that is works!)

What the Lord is looking for is a heartfelt prayer of faith. The rabbis of Jesus day had taught the people many form (repetitious) prayers. They had fallen into the same faithless rut as the pagans. The Lord said: “The Father knows what you have need of.” In other words, we don’t have to repeat a prayer 200 times in a row to get a response. Paul said: “*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God*” (Phi. 4:6).

The Lord knows what we have need of, yet, we must pray to develop faith and dependence upon our God. “*Let your requests be made known – with thanksgiving.* We are thanking God in advance for answering our need!

Our Lord is getting to the motivation of the heart. Even His own prayer, “The Lord’s Prayer,” can be a form. The Lord wants us to get into the spirit of that prayer and not just the letter of it. (We will be considering the “Lord’s Prayer” next.)

The Lord's prayer (The acceptable prayer) verses 9-13

The Lord's prayer

Mat. 6:9-13 *After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. V.10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. V.11 Give us this day our daily bread. V.12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. V.13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

It is good to pray this prayer (or even sing this prayer) occasionally. However, in the light of what Jesus spoke on prayer – even this prayer could become form and liturgy! I think what the Lord is desiring to impart through this teaching on prayer is a concept of what prayer is about, not a ritual. In Luke's version, the disciples are asking Jesus how to pray (Luke 11:1).

Recognizing who God is

“Our Father which art in heaven...” Obviously, the Lord's prayer is not a sinner's prayer, and yet the first aspect of this prayer is faith. As the author of Hebrews tells us: *“For he that cometh to God must believe that he is...”* (Heb. 11:6).

The first approach in prayer is recognizing to whom we are coming. He is our Father, the Creator of all things. He fills all things, and His throne is in the heavens: *“The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his*

Our Heavenly Father makes no mistakes; He makes no miscalculations when He deals with us.

kingdom ruleth over all" (Psa. 103:19). Our Lord was teaching us to envision coming into the throne room of "Our Father" when we pray.

When we think of our Heavenly Father, we are thinking of One who surpasses all earthly expectation. Our Heavenly Father makes no mistakes; He makes no miscalculations when He deals with us. He loves His children, and He deals with us in mercy. As the psalmist said in Psalm 103:13, "*Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.*"

Earthly fathers give good gifts to their children – "How much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit..." (the better gifts).

Recognizing His sanctity

"*Hallowed be thy name...*" The next concept that we are to understand about coming into our Father's throne room is that our God is holy. The cherubims never cease to cry "holy:" "*And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts:*" (Isa. 6:1-3). The veil that separated man from coming into the holiest place had cherubims on it, symbolizing the holiness of God. This was to teach us about the sanctity of Father God.

The rent veil

When the Lord sits upon His throne, the atmosphere is worship – bowing and reverence! Although Christ has rent

the veil for us, we must recognize that it is a sacred thing to enter in. Let us speak the Father's name with great respect!

Thy kingdom come

“Thy kingdom come...” I think this little phrase helps us to get our perspectives right as we pray. Human nature is so caught up with its own agenda that it wants to rush in and appeal for all “my” needs and concerns. The main concern of Jesus when He was on earth was the development of His Father's kingdom. When Jesus was only 12 years old, He had the divine sense that He was on a mission that concerned His Father's kingdom (Luke 2:49).

As we mature in the Lord, this should also become our main concern: “Thy kingdom come.” May the Lord graciously increase the burden for evangelism, for missions, for the things that concern the church, for the perfecting of the saints, etc. As Jesus later states in this sermon, if we would put the kingdom of God first, all of our personal needs would be taken care of. In other words, “our kingdom” would be taken care of!

The initial fulfillment of “Thy Kingdom come” will take place at the Second Coming. The final phase will take place when the kingdom is delivered up to the Father at the end of the Millennium (1 Cor. 15:24-26).

Thy will be done

“Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” The Father has an agenda and a (fail-safe) program in heaven that is fully carried out. Not only does our Father have a program

in heaven, but He also has a plan for earth, and our lives on earth as well. He has concerned Himself with the smallest details of life on earth. He is fully cognizant of the sparrow that falls from the nest, and He knows the number of hairs on our head.

Our Lord and Master is teaching us that we must trust in our Father's plan for our lives. "Not my will but Thine" was a prayer from the Master's lips as He was in Gethsemane. There is a certain "faith mentality" that commands or demands the Lord to do our will. This is very disrespectful! The Lord knows what our real need is even more than we do. There is a rest in trusting our Father's will for our lives. This should be the over-riding factor in all of our appeals to the throne – "Thy will be done..." May this become our motive in prayer.

There is a rest in trusting our Father's will for our lives.

For our daily bread

"Give us this day our daily bread." Although our Father in heaven supplies all of His creation with their daily food, and although our Lord is teaching us to depend upon the Father's daily provision, let us also consider the spiritual implication here. During "the temptation" Christ quoted (Deut. 8:3): *"...That he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live."*

As man has a need for his daily physical bread, he also must learn to live by the daily spiritual bread that comes

down from heaven. May we hunger for the living bread – the spoken Word. In Matthew 4:4, the word “word” (rhema) is translated: “spoken word.” May that be a constituent of our prayer life – a hunger to hear what God would say to us!

Forgiveness as we forgive

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Once again, the Lord discovers the intent of the heart: “as we forgive...” If we are truly sorry for our sins, then we will be forgiving also. Our contrition does not run very deep if we are still unforgiving towards others!

Here is a point that is so significant that our Lord repeats it at the conclusion of this prayer (verses 14-15). How can we ask forgiveness if we are not sorry for our sin? David said, *“For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin”* (Psa. 38:18). When we are truly broken, our heart is soft and willing to forgive others as well!

Spare us in temptation

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...” The implication of this petition is that the Lord would spare us (in) the temptation, and from unnecessary temptation. As the apostle later writes: *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it”* (1 Cor 10:13).

Temptation and testing is part of the program, yet the Lord carefully monitors the program. The scripture is full of examples where the Lord tests His saints, and He will allow them to be tested – right to the end!

“And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am” (Gen. 22:1).

“...God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart” (2 Chr. 32:31).

“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” [The Lord will allow the anti-christ to test the saints] (Rev 14:12).

When it comes to temptation to sin, the Lord does not tempt us, but He allows the tempter to come. Satan is called “the tempter” (Mat. 4:3). Let us also consider what James said: *“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:”* (James 1:12-13).

God allows the temptation to come to reveal a condition that already exists in our heart. The lord knows it's there, but He wants us to see it and get the victory over it. This is the instruction that the Lord wants us to receive from this “pattern” prayer – that He would spare us in the temptation, and keep us from falling! “Deliver us from evil.”

Acknowledging His kingdom, power, and glory

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.” In the final sentence of this (model) prayer, we are committing our keeping unto the Almighty God. He is able to keep us from falling. He orchestrates His kingdom, and all of the kingdoms of this world. All power is at His command, and He is able to keep us! Honor and majesty and dignity are His forever. We are sealing our destiny with Him because He is faithful to His Word.

The apostle Jude ends his epistle on a very similar note: *“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen”* (Jude 1:24-25).

Summarization of the Lord’s Prayer:

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Faith | <i>Our Father in Heaven...</i> |
| 2. Worship | <i>Hallowed be Thy name.</i> |
| 3. Perspective | <i>Thy kingdom...</i> |
| 4. Motive | <i>Thy will...</i> |
| 5. Hunger | <i>Give us our daily bread.</i> |
| 6. Contrition | <i>Forgive us...</i> |
| 7. Petition | <i>Deliver us...</i> |
| 8. Committal | <i>For thine is the kingdom...</i> |

Forgiving and forgiveness – verses 14-15

Mat. 6:14-15 *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: V.15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

When the Lord repeats Himself we need to take heed to what He is saying. The Master had just taught us how that we should pray – with an emphasis on forgiveness (Verse 12). Perhaps the distinction lies between the two words: “debts” and “trespasses.” Perhaps the Lord needed to emphasize the two? Could we forgive a debt and not a trespass (or visa-versa)?

In Matthew 18, Peter asks the Lord how many time he should forgive a trespass – “up to seven times”? In the same narrative Jesus gives an illustration of a man who is forgiven an astronomical debt, and then refuses to forgive a petty debt. This man went to hell! It is just that clear – if we don’t forgive, we are not forgiven!

We might also point out that in the narrative (Mat. 18:21-35), the man who owed the (comparably) small debt wanted to pay it. He wanted to work it out. He was just asking for leniency! There is nothing wrong with receiving back money that you have lent. The point is that the creditor was not going to show a thread of mercy.

There is nothing wrong with receiving back money that you have lent.

Note: In Luke's account (17:3-4) there is another aspect to forgiveness: "If he repent forgive him." There is also an exhortation to first rebuke the offender. Sometimes this is more difficult than to just ignore what happened, and yet it is necessary for their sake! If they respond to a rebuke, by all means, forgive! We really need the mind of the Lord for different situations.

Motives in fasting – verses 16-18.

To be seen of men

Mat. 6:16 *Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

The Pharisees were great for making a fair show of the flesh. They could put on quite an act of contrition. They could appear to be mourning. They could seem so concerned.

When we consider the implications of what our Master has been saying (in respect to “being seen of men” or “being seen of God”) we realize that most 21st century Christians don’t fit the scene as it is portrayed in the sermon. We don’t see men praying on the corner, giving alms or making some scene when they fast.

One man was getting “locked up for Jesus” in a protest rally. He wanted to make sure that the TV cameras were there to film his noble stand for Jesus.

However, the “Two-edged sword” in the mouth of Christ is cutting to the intent of the heart. There are many other ways that Christians can draw attention to themselves. For example, one man was getting “locked up for Jesus” in a protest rally. He wanted to make sure that the TV cameras were there to film his noble stand for Jesus. Some ministers treat the platform like a theatrical stage, and they want applause after everything they say.

To be seen of God

Mat. 6:17-18 *But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.*

These verses give us a picture of the type of sham that the play-actors put on. They would appear as though they had spent the night on the street, all disheveled, etc. Jesus said that when you fast you should conduct yourself in such a manner that you do not appear to be fasting: “*And thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.*”

Fasting is sometimes necessary to release people from their bondages (Mat. 17:21). The Lord will not only reward us by letting us see the answer come for those things that we have fasted for, but there is also an eternal reward!

May I point out, that there are times when we designate a fast. Maybe it's a church fast or maybe it's a personal fast, and you are invited out for a meal. Sometimes we just have to tell people, "I'm sorry but I've committed myself to a fast." You loathe telling them that, but what the Lord is getting at is heart motive. You haven't done anything wrong in admitting that you are fasting!

Alotibes in saving (true investment)
verses 19-21

Treasure upon earth

Mat. 6:19 *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal*

Once again, we are getting to the motive of the heart. Is there something wrong with saving? Well, if there were Paul would not have made this statement in 2 Corinthians 12:14: “...for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.”

Of course there is nothing wrong with saving. In fact, in today’s economy it takes a bit of prudence for the normal family to save. We save for a car, or towards a house, or for the children’s education. We save a prudent amount for retirement... not all countries have social security!

But if our ambition in life is money, then we have a problem. Solomon broke the rule for kings when he made money his quest. In his own epitaph he writes, “*He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver...*” (Ecc. 5:10).

In truth, it is God who causes people to prosper and have wealth. Wealth in itself is not the sin. It is what we do with that wealth. If we just horde it up, then we are fulfilling what James said, “*Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you...*” (Jas. 5:3). It will be a witness of an empty and unfulfilled life!

Treasure in heaven

Mat. 6:20 *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal*

King David prepared abundantly before his death by accumulating material to be used in the forthcoming temple (1 Chr. 22:5). How can we fulfill this exhortation from the Master (laying treasure up in heaven)? There are many scriptural analogies that relate to this subject. The parables of the talents, and the pounds are good examples (Mat. 25:15-30, and Luke 19:12-26). The word “invest” (occupy) is used in Luke 19:13.

Invest

We must invest into the things that will render spiritual dividends. Invest into the kingdom: into missions, and missionaries that will render the fruit! We should invest our time and efforts and talents into the things that benefit the kingdom. The Lord records the smallest sacrifices for His Name’s sake – even a cup of cold water (Mat. 10:42) or a kind act (1 Tim. 6:18-19). The widow’s mite in Mark 12:42-43 was recorded as being the largest gift put into the treasury that day (in the eyes of heaven). In actuality, the “mite” was the smallest coin one could give.

The Lord records the smallest sacrifices for His Name’s sake – even a cup of cold water

God measures the intent of the heart – the widow had given her all! Our skills, our menial labors, and all of our helps are being recorded, and they shall be rewarded in time to

come. The Lord said to the Hebrews: “*For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister*” (Heb 6:10).

These are all ways that we can lay up treasure in heaven. “Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come...” (1 Tim 6:19).

Where is your heart?

Mat. 6:21 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

One more time, the intent of the heart is revealed. A man’s heart is set upon the things that mean the most to him. A story was told about a couple whom had saved and planned for buying a yacht. Shortly after their plans had become reality, they were sailing off the California coast only to run into a treacherous gale. At the first, they were praying, “Lord, save our boat.” Then the storm got worse and they began to pray for their own lives, “Lord, save us!” Then the storm increased with great intensity, so that it looked as though all was lost. At this point the man cried out, “Lord, just save my wife!”

When we are dying, things become abundantly clear as to what is really important in this life. Let us pray as David did, “*LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is...*” (Psa. 39:4). When we truly see the end of life, we will want our hearts to be upon the eternal things, and we will want to invest in the things

that are eternal! Many Christians lament leaving this life because they have made no provision for the next! (Also see Psa. 90:12.)

*When we truly see the end of life, we will want
our hearts to be upon the eternal things*

Singleness of eye – verses 22-23

Clear vision

Mat. 6:22 *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.*

In this next text, our Master directs our attention to the thought of vision. “*If thine eye be single...*” The thought of having a single eye is to have clear vision – no obstructions. Leviticus 21:20 speaks of a blemished eye. This is why people do not fulfill the course that God has for their lives. Their vision is blemished with other things (perhaps other loves, other desires or other priorities)! Spiritually, these are the people that can’t hit the mark because their focus is somewhere else! (See 2 Tim. 4:10).

Ruth and Orpah

Over the years, I have been amazed at all of the people to whom God gives opportunity. He gives them a vision (direction), and they are so excited. “We’re on a mission”! But then, where are they? They slowly begin to downplay their calling because other things have marred their vision: friends, family and the whole home scene. That was the difference between Ruth and Orpha, Ruth had clear vision and an undivided heart (Ruth 1:14-18).

***The path of the just increases in light.
The vision becomes brighter and brighter!***

Distorted vision

Mat. 6:23 *But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!*

An “evil eye” is an eye that views everything with suspicion, contempt, and unbelief.

As a classic example, we see a woman at the feet of Jesus, broken, pouring out her affection, and pouring out her most valued treasure (the box of spikenard). Judas views the scene with great contempt and says, “This was a waste!” This was how Judas viewed worshipping the Son of God – the Prince of Glory – “A waste!” This disciple that once had light within was given over to darkness – and how great was that darkness!

Judas views the scene with great contempt and says, “This was a waste!”

Sometimes the very worst reprobates are people who once had great light. We knew of such a person. He came from a family of ministers. He was a Bible school graduate and had an evangelistic call, but he became very profane, turning to the field of comedy. It was not just ordinary comedy, but blasphemous! He died from a broken neck, fulfilling Proverbs 29:1.

When a man is saved, there is a “spiritual candle” that illuminates the inner man. However, if that candle is not maintained, it can be put out. “The candle of the wicked shall be put out” (Pro. 24:20). When God gives somebody up, that (inner) light becomes gross darkness.

The ten spies in Numbers 13-14 were children of light, but their confession was slanderous. Their eyes only saw the evil, the giants, the walled cities, and obstacles. They weakened many thousands through their “evil eye.” God showed them a land flowing with milk and honey, but they only saw the obstacles and barriers. They allowed their “blemished eye” to shroud their vision. Caleb and Joshua had a single eye. They saw through the eyes of the Spirit, and their confession was, “We are well able to take the land!”

***The two masters: The things of this life,
or the One who gives life to all things –
verses 24-34***

God or things

Mat. 6:24 *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

The Christian life is about choice. Jesus makes this very clear in this sermon. Still, Many of God's people spend their lives trying to have the best of both worlds. They want the blessings of Canaan, but they want to enjoy the pleasures of Egypt as well. In the "kingdom realm" there is no middle ground. There is no special margin for people who have been sitting on the fence. Before this life is over – we have made our choice!

Jesus identifies the other god (the god of this world – 2 Cor. 4:4) as the god of things – mammon. Mammon is interpreted as the deification of material possessions (Gr. 3126). Materialism, the love of the world, and the quest for wealth and prosperity all fall into the category of mammon. The god of this world said to Jesus, "*All these **things** will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me*" (Mat. 4:9).

As a young man, Moses had to make a choice between the glitter of Egypt and the (far less apparent) kingdom of God.

Scripture says of him: “*Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward*” (Heb. 11:25-26).

The ministers of baal (lord of things) have influenced many of the kingdom people in the quest for prosperity.

Although this message certainly had relevance to the covetous Jews of the first century, there has never been a greater emphasis on materialism than there has been in our 20-21st centuries! The ministers of baal (lord of things) have influenced many of the kingdom people in the quest for prosperity. Elijah brought the people of his day to their hour of decision, “If baal is God, serve him.” If mammon is god, serve him, because no man can serve two masters!

Life is more than things

Mat. 6:25 *Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*

“*Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*” The word *life* in scripture has more than one meaning. We generally interpret the word *life* as “vitality or health or growth” – being alive! But the “abundant life” that Jesus promised relates more to the spiritual man. It speaks of life that has meaning and purpose and joy and satisfaction – something that the world does not have.

Solomon turns to “things”

Solomon proves the point very well in his quest for things. He had great wealth and great possessions. He enjoyed all of the entertainments and the delights that life could afford. He undertook great ventures and projects in his quest for meaning and purpose and satisfaction; however, he still came up empty!

But didn't Solomon know the Lord? O yes, but as life went on, he began to substitute many things for his relationship with the Lord. The sad testimony of Solomon's end is found in the book of Ecclesiastes. He labels life as being meaningless and empty, even vexing. The word “*vanity/vanities*” is used 29 times in this little book. That word means meaningless and empty.

While Solomon's life is a picture of extreme excess, much of the world is laboring just to stay alive – just for the bare essentials, just for the daily rice, etc. I have been privileged to visit different parts of this world, and to witness the agony of many that labor from the break of day just to stay alive.

But now the Lord is speaking to His people not to take thought, that is, not to be overly concerned (worried – Gr. 3309) about the common necessities. The Master is bringing our focus to the “real life” – the inner life. The spiritual life is the one that matters the most; and as our Lord is about to tell us, He will take care of the other.

May I insert the fact that the common essentials of today's modern society are a bit more complicated – a bit more costly! Still, our God is the same! He is faithful to His people! Amen!

The Lord feeds all of creation

Mat. 6:26 *Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?*

I heard an evangelist once declaring that God puts on a big breakfast every morning for the whole of creation! How true this is. Even the lions depend upon the creator. The psalmist said, “*The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God*” (Psa 104:21). Every morning the Lord provides food for the whales and the fish of the sea, and He satisfies the craving of every living thing!

“*The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing*” (Psa. 145:15-16).

The Lord wants us to take a lesson from the creation – “*Are ye not much better than they?*” The Lord devotes quite a bit of this sermon to this particular subject because human nature tends to have a “survivalist” complex.

The Lord clothes (adorns) all creation

Mat. 6:27-30 *Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? V.28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: V.29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. V.30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

Our Master now addresses the real issue: *O ye of little faith*. Paul said that we know our Creator through the things that He made (Rom. 1:20). He is also called a “*Faithful Creator*” (1 Pet. 4:19). God is faithful to His creation. He is faithful to the plant kingdom, and He is faithful to the animal kingdom. The Lord has also promised that the ordinances of heaven would remain and the seasons would not fail:

“While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.” (Gen. 8:22).

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin [as in, spin cloth]...” Let us pause a moment, and consider the lily of the field. Firstly, from the point that they are adorned without any worry or effort on their part. Perhaps while it is the natural tendency to be concerned about clothing, our Heavenly Father is encouraging us to put our minds at ease. The Lord will take care of us! When I was young, we were very poor, and I was many times ashamed that my clothes were far inferior – even ragged, in comparison to most. Still, the Lord was looking after our needs, and He was doing something in our spirit besides!

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Spiritual garments

Secondly, let us consider the greater implications of our spiritual clothing. In scripture the lily speaks of purity. In

fact, Christ is alluded to as the “Lily of the valleys” (Song 2:1). Now here is an area that we should be far more concerned with. Still, our Lord is telling us to trust Him here also. Spiritual garments can only be woven (or spun) as we walk in the Spirit. We must believe that God is developing this beautiful white garment as we continue to walk with Him by faith.

Somebody once related a story about a woman who was continually crying out to the Lord for purity. In fact, she kept dragging up the past. One day the Lord revealed Himself to her, and she began to tell Him about her sins. His response was “What sins?”

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

The Father provides our common essentials

Mat. 6:31-32 *Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? V.32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.*

“*Therefore take no thought...*” Once again, the word that is used for thought (Gr. 3309) means worry or anxiety. In other words, (as children of the Heavenly Father) do not be overly concerned about your temporal needs. Yes, the gentiles (the unsaved) nations consume their lives with “Do we have enough?” Or, “Will we have enough for tomorrow?”

In the Orient, the day starts early. The roads are covered with people carrying loads – they are working just to stay alive!

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Sometimes, I don't think that we who live in a Christianized society realize the everyday blessings that we enjoy. I think it would be good for every Christian who lives in an "affluent society" such as ours to take a trip to a third world country and observe! A missionary once told me about the youth group that visited from his home church in the States. The country where he was stationed was very poor. Their response after seeing the poverty and want was, "We'll never be the same!"

We can rest in the fact that our Heavenly Father has His eyes upon our needs, and that He never slumbers or sleeps. (That does not mean that we are not to ask Him for the things that concern us, but to worry is not faith.)

"Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psa. 121:4).

May I insert a little exhortation? The blessing that the U.S.A. has known in the past shall have an end because of apostate conditions, and because the Lord wants to bring a national repentance to this nation. We must come to appreciate this particular admonition of faith because the time will come when we must learn to live by faith!

The times of Elijah are a figure of the last day scene. Through the Word of the Lord, both the prophet and the widow were sustained during great famine (See Luke 4:25-26).

Seek ye first His kingdom

Mat. 6:33 *But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Here is a verse that could be very voluminous because this is the story of all the men and women of faith. What made them great was the fact that they put the kingdom of God first in their lives!

We have heard of the “*Sure mercies of David.*” Why did God promise such “sure” mercies to David’s house? Because, David’s heart was to build the Lord’s House (Psa. 132:1-5). David’s heart was to see “*Thy Kingdom come!*” It was on that premise that the Lord said, “I will build thy house and thy throne.”

The reason God made immutable promises to Abraham concerning his house (his offspring) was because Abraham was willing to surrender his only son to fulfill heaven’s purpose. He gave his only son – and God gave him children as innumerable as the sand and stars!

Ebedmelech

The list is endless, but let us recall a less known figure in scripture. His name was Ebedmelech. He was a black man that greatly feared the Lord. Ebedmelech lived at the time when the kingdom of Israel was coming to an end (time of

the Babylonian captivity). When he heard that the adversaries of Jeremiah had thrown him into a pit, he made intercession for Jeremiah and rescued him from the pit.

The Lord then speaks to Jeremiah: “*Go and speak to Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring my words upon this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished in that day before thee. **But I will deliver thee in that day, saith the LORD:** and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in me, saith the LORD*” (Jer. 39:16-18).

Ebedmelech risked his life to save God’s prophet. The Lord said, “When this nation falls, I will save thy life”! When people seek to save what is theirs (over what is God’s) they lose it! We know of several occasions where families were called to the mission field, but they decided that the family came first. They refused the call and stayed home to minister to their family, only to have their family rebel against them.

We know of several occasions where families were called to the mission field, but they decided that the family came first.

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Mat. 16:25).

Don't worry about the evils of tomorrow

Mat. 6:34 *Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow...” Once more, the word for *thought* translates “worry.” Our Master has just made it abundantly clear that He is very aware of our need, and that He is there to help us in the time of need. Don’t borrow trouble from tomorrow. Don’t worry about all the possible calamities that tomorrow might bring.

21st Century Pressure

There have never been the kinds of pressure that we in the 20/21-century have had to deal with. When I was a manager of a meat department, my day was consumed with problems of all sorts. However, I had a personal resolution – when I walked out that door at 4:00 PM, I left my problems there, and I refused to think about them until the next morning. I have seen too many men suffer with worry about their jobs. They would work off the clock; they would bring their worry home and stew and fret. I knew one man who went through three marriages because of his work.

There are tremendous pressures associated with management – constant threats, constant harassment and the kinds of pressure that put men in hospital beds. We need to experience the peace and rest that only Jesus can give, as we trust Him. The trouble will be there tomorrow,

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but there will be fresh grace for tomorrow also. Grace is like manna; it's only good for today!

Balanced perspective

“Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” In a sense, this verse gives us a balanced perspective on life. The Lord never promised a life exempt from trouble or a life exempt from the common maladies known to men. What our Master is saying is that we will have troubles enough. As it is stated in the book of Job: *“Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward”* (Job 5:7).

Trouble is actually part of the redemptive process.

As long as we are in this mortal state we shall have trouble. Trouble is part of the Adamic curse and that curse is not totally broken until we experience immortality. However, God uses the troubles of this present world to perfect our walk. Troubles work patience into our lives. Distress works an enlargement and a capacity within us to be merciful to others. Trouble is actually part of the redemptive process. Trouble can be the means of working character, righteousness, and faith into our lives!

Paul said, *“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Rom 8:18).

We are living in the most eventful and calamitous times that have ever been or shall be. May this Sermon on the Mount release new faith and new hope into our lives!



Matthew Chapter Seven

On Judging – verses 1-5

The standard of judgment

Mat. 7:1-2 *“Judge not, that ye be not judged. V.2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*

Let us bear in mind that this sermon applies to God’s people, and for the most part is relative to the local church body. “*Judge not...*” As in the case of all scripture, there needs to be an interpretation – “rightly dividing the Word...” (2 Tim. 2:15). Is our Lord suggesting by this statement that we are to be gullible or naïve? Are we to be undiscerning or oblivious to situations that need to be corrected? Does this apply to leadership as well as laity?

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Because this subject of “judging” has been an area of much controversy, I would like to consider this topic from several different positions. Firstly, to judge in the sense of censure or condemning or criticisms bears no justification. Even when people get off the path or don’t measure up to where we think they should be, does not justify our passing sentence on them.

Judging your brethren

In fact, Paul said, “*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted*” (Gal. 6:1). When a Christian callously judges another Christian, he is opening up himself to receive the same judgment. I once knew a man who callously derided another brother as “weak.” He was calling him weak because he had shed a few tears over a situation where most men would have restrained themselves.

Who really knows why the man wept? Maybe it was the last straw... maybe he had been under such stress that he couldn't take any more bad news? We do not generally have a clear understanding of most situations. In fact, many times we do not even know our own hearts (1 Cor. 4:3-4). The point I want to make is – I later saw the man who had scorned the other brother for tears, also break down and weep! It spoke to my own soul!

Church judgment

Secondly, this admonition (*judge not...*) is not in reference to church judgment. In fact, judgment is one of the functions of leadership. Jesus Himself endorses church judgment in Matthew 18:15-17. The church should be a place where sound doctrinal judgments are made. The church should be a place where disputes between brethren are judged. The church should be a place where judgments against sinners are executed – if the case demands it.

- ◆ Doctrinal judgment – Acts 15
- ◆ Judgment between brethren – 1 Cor. 6:5
- ◆ Judgment against the unrepentant – 1 Cor. 5:1-5

One of the crucial issues of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians was concerning a major sin that was contaminating the whole church (1 Cor. 5). Paul’s exhortation was – “Deal with it! Judge the situation!”

Hypocritical judgment

As this particular text will bear out, Jesus is undermining the pharisaic spirit of judgment. In John chapter eight, the Pharisees recommend stoning a woman taken in the act of adultery. Jesus began to write in the dirt, and as He did so He said, “*He that is without sin cast the first stone!*”

The scripture does not say what He was writing in the dirt, but may I suggest that He was writing the names of women – so that, one by one, beginning at the eldest the Pharisees faded into the crowd. They were convicted; they were guilty; and they could not stand in the judgment. The problem wasn’t the fact that there was judgment, but that it was hypocritical judgment that was being displayed. The accusers were all guilty themselves! (This thought will be enlarged upon in verses 3-5.)

“...*What measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.*” In the kingdom balances, the measure that we prescribe shall be measured to us, to our house, to our children, etc. That is why we want to be clear when we judge (1 Cor. 4:5).

Several years ago there was a television evangelist who made some serious allegations against a fellow minister. (That can be legitimate under the right auspices.) The problem was that the minister who was making the accusations was guilty of the same things – maybe worse. It all backfired on him. In fact, he was held in worse contempt than the other fellow was.

David wanted to have a man killed for taking another man's lamb (2 Sam. 12). Had he been judged accordingly, he would have died himself! As ministers, we must make judgments or we will end up being judged. The church of Thyatira was being judged for not executing judgment.

Merciful judgment

As a minister, I try to envision my own sons in the place of the offender. I want to make sure that what I am doing is in mercy, and that my prayer is in mercy, and that I have the right sentence of judgment. We cannot allow our own children to break the law either!

We must be very careful about judging, condemning, or throwing the first stone. Many times we do not see the whole situation and we must reserve judgment until we really have the mind of Christ. I have often observed that those who are quick to label people with certain things are often identifying their own problems.

I have often observed that those who are quick to label people with certain things are often identifying their own problems.

God hates tale bearing and gossip and criticism, but there are times when there are serious transgressions that take place, and they should be reported to those who are over you in the Lord. When a situation is handled like this, it then becomes the responsibility of the leadership to deal with it.

Making a clear judgment

Mat. 7:3-5 *And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? V.4) Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? V.5 Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.*

Without a doubt, Jesus is addressing the pharisaic mentality of the day. Not only were the Pharisees judgmental, but their influence had seeped into the whole society. The Pharisees were legalistic and condemning. Jesus called them “*hypocrites*” (play actors). “*They say, but do not*” (Mat. 23:3). They were judging people who were better than they were. They were saying, “You need to be repaired. Let us help you; let us show you how to live. Let us remove the speck out of your eye.” Jesus said, “*Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye...*”

We must be innocent

As we can see from this text, Jesus is not condemning the act of judgment, as much as condemning hypocritical judgment: “*Then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out*

of thy brother's eye.” Our Lord said in another place, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

The Lord desires His people to make righteous judgments – clear judgments (Psa. 37:6). Our God would desire us to be able to remove the slivers from people’s eyes. However, the only way that we can make a clear judgment is by first allowing the Spirit of God to expose our own lives. As the Lord said to Jeremiah, “If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth.” In other words, “If you want to speak a clear word from Me, separate the precious from the vile in your own life.”

May we allow the Spirit of God to first judge us that we may be clear to exercise righteous judgment.

Or, as King David says in Psalm 51:13, after he cries out for a cleansing and a renewing in his own life: “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

Paul told the Corinthians who were trying to judge him, “Examine yourselves...” May we allow the Spirit of God to first judge us that we may be clear to exercise righteous judgment. Let us consider the following criteria when a judgment needs to be made:

- ◆ We must be sure that the facts are true, that there are witnesses, etc.
- ◆ We must be sure that our own motives are right. We want to see repentance and restoration if possible.

- ◆ We want to be sure that we are not guilty of the things that we are passing sentence for. (I might point out that we may have to judge a situation that we were once guilty of. The idea of judgment is to [hopefully] save the offender, and [hopefully] save others by the example.)
- ◆ We need to receive the sentence of judgment from the Throne as David did in Psalm 17:2.
- ◆ We want to favor the most merciful course of action that is necessary!

On sharing sacred things – verse 6

Mat. 7:6 *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*

Dogs (spiritually) speak of those who are outside the kingdom (Mat. 15:21-28). Swine (spiritually) speak of the unclean or the unsanctified. This verse is exhorting us not to share our treasures with those whose lives are not separated to God, or those who continually mingle with the people of the world (like the carnal Corinthians in 1 Cor. 5:11).

I once had a dream that I was standing in a pigpen with a Bible. Suddenly the Bible slipped from my hands, and before I had a chance to pick it up, the swine pressed in on me and trampled the Bible into the muck. Having worked with swine (pigs) in my past, I am well acquainted with the nature of the beast. When you drop something in a pigpen, the pigs immediately come running because they think it is food.

The message that Jesus is conveying here is that there are certain people with whom you would never share your sacred treasures. The pearl, for example, can speak of a personal revelation that has been given to you. Maybe it was given through a dream or through a vision. That thing is sacred to you, and you can't share it with just anybody. Joseph made that mistake (Gen. 37:5).

Scripture says of Mary: “*But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart*” (Luke 2:19). How many people could she tell that an angel came to her, and she was bearing the Son of God? Even some of the saintliest people would have scolded Mary to shame!

Petition and Supplication *(Holy Spirit gifts) verses 7-11*

The seekers find

Mat. 7:7-8 *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: V.8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

In Luke's version of this text, these verses are prefaced with the illustration of a man who has an unexpected visitor at midnight. Because he is unprepared to host his visitor, he then goes to his neighbor to seek some needed provision. Although his neighbor at first tries to ignore the imposition, yet because the knocking continues, he arises and gives his neighbor the three loaves he is asking for. See Luke 11:5-8.

Jesus lauds this as the way that we should petition our Father in heaven. In fact, Jesus uses the word "importunity" in this illustration. The word *importunity* can have the sense of rudeness and impudence. The seeker is intruding. He is waking up the man's family. He is insisting that his neighbor help him out!

Our Master is teaching us how to persist in prayer until we receive the thing that we need. "*For every one that asketh receiveth...*" Although we can apply this to our temporal needs or situations, the implication (especially in Luke's

version) is more directed to Holy Spirit gifts. If we immediately receive our petition, we might not tend to value the beautiful gifts of the Spirit as much!

The disciples waited in the upper room – seeking the fulfillment of the promised Holy Spirit. Paul exhorts us (at least 3 or 4 times) in First Corinthians, to desire and to seek spiritual gifts. When people have sought for the baptism in the Holy Spirit for a long time, it is very precious when they receive it!

There is an investment when we pray and the Lord wants us to realize the value of these things. Temporal things may come a lot easier because they are of less importance!

Some years ago I had a house that I desperately needed to sell. Every night for about six months I was crying out to God for this need. The Lord indeed answered my petition, and for the price I asked. I wonder if we applied the same fervor towards spiritual things what the outcome would be?

The Father's good gifts

Mat. 7:9-11 *Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? V.10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? V.11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*

If we immediately receive our petition, we might not tend to value the beautiful gifts of the Spirit as much!

What normal father would torment his son by giving him something hurtful when he is asking for something good? Indeed, *fallen* man endeavors to give good things to his children. Even wicked people love their own! If we who are evil (by comparison to our Heavenly Father) want to give good gifts to our children, “*How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?*”

Luke’s version says, “*If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father **give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?***” (Luke 11:13).

This is an important point, because many people are afraid that when they are seeking Father God for His Spirit, they might receive an evil spirit. If we ask meat of our Father, will He give a serpent (evil spirit)? No He won’t! There was a church that was seeking God for revival. The Lord then poured His Spirit out upon them and many began to speak with other tongues. The leaders rejected the move as “evil.”

How much more shall your Heavenly Father give good things to those who ask! May I also encourage us from the “three loaves” of Luke 11:5-8. The kingdom is always represented by the three measures or by three spheres of development. Let us not be content to ask for two loaves, but let us seek for the full deposit of all that God has for us!

Let us not be content to ask for two loaves, but let us seek for the full deposit of all that God has for us!

“The Golden Rule” – verse 12

Mat. 7:12 *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*

Here is a verse that has come to be known as the “Golden Rule.” James calls it “The Royal Law” (Jas. 2:8). Even worldly people can quote this: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” And if the world practiced this precept, the world would be a utopia – Heaven on earth!

We all want people to be good to us, be kind to us, be respectful to us, and be honest and fair with us, etc. If we all treated others like that there would certainly be peace and tranquility. Jesus said, *“For this is the law and the prophets.”*

The law and the prophets

One verse basically summarizes the whole Old Testament. Jesus said, *“For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John”* (Mat. 11:13). What was the message of the law and the prophets? Let us consider several more verses that summarize the law and the prophets:

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mat. 22:37-40).

The whole of the Old Testament boils down to two commandments. To love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself. This was the message of the law and the prophets, to reconcile man with God and to reconcile men with men.

The prophet Micah also condenses the responsibility of man into a verse: *“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”* (Micah 6:8).

Communion

Even in the two communion emblems we find that the responsibility of man falls into two categories: The bread symbolizes the body of Christ – our relationship with one another. The wine (the blood) symbolizes right relationship with God. The blood covers us as we walk in the light! When we take communion we are saying that we are right with God, and we are right with men.

The “Golden Rule” is the heartbeat of this sermon. Herein is the thing that will reflect the New Covenant – loving one another: *“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”* (John 13:35). Or as it says in 1 John 4:20, *“He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”*

The famed prayer of St. Francis of Assisi (13th century) portrays the heart that wants to practice the “Golden Rule.”

(See the last page of this commentary.)

“The Narrow Way” – verses 13-14

Mat. 7:13-14 *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: V.14 Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

The word “strait” means narrow. Is this strait gate the gate of salvation? In Luke’s version, Jesus is answering a question: “Lord, are there few that be saved”? Jesus responds to that question by saying: *“Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door...”* This exhortation is telling us all that today is the day of salvation. Life is short, and when life is over the door of salvation is also shut (See Luke 13:23-25).

In one sense, the scripture pictures the door of salvation as being very wide – “Whosoever will may come!” The invitation is to all men, and the Lord desires all men to be saved, yet the terms of salvation are very exclusive. There is only one way; it is only through one man; and it is only through the recognition of one solitary act that we can be admitted. It is only through the “Crucified Shepherd” that we can enter in! Jesus is the door of the sheepfold (John 10:9).

There is only one way; it is only through one man; and it is only through the recognition of one solitary act that we can be admitted.

The sheepfolds of that day only had one door, and that door was very narrow. The sheep almost had to squeeze through the shepherd to get into the fold. There were two reasons for this narrow gate: firstly, that the shepherd might count his sheep, and secondly, so that nothing else could come into the fold.

“Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat...” There is another way that promises salvation. It is a way that seems right; it may even be under the guise of the cross. It seems reasonable to men, it is acceptable to men, and it is a less demanding – a more tolerant way. But the end of this way is death! It is the “cross-less” road. It is the road that says, “If your good works outweigh your bad you’re saved.” It is a road that says, “we’re all getting there on our own terms.” It is a road that pictures God as an old, forgiving grandfather saying, “That’s okay my children, you’re just human.” (See Pro. 14:12.)

Broad-way Christians?

Jesus was speaking to those who were supposed to be in the kingdom. There are many that have accepted Christ as their savior. They are in the kingdom, but they are not walking on the path that will bring them into the “abundant life” or to the “full reward.” In fact, many of God’s people try to live as close to the world as they can – walking in the broad way. The carnal Corinthians are an example of believers who are walking on an unacceptable path.

Someone recently told me about a “Christian” mother who would write theme papers for her “Christian” daughter at college. The papers would receive an “A plus!” These are the kinds of “Christians” that are walking in the “broad way.” If they continue to walk in this path, they will not have a very bright end; or to put it bluntly, they will not make it at all! (See Ephesians 5:13).

Unless a man run the race lawfully he is not crowned at the end – he is disqualified. The Christian race has to be run according to the rules – no shortcuts (See 2 Tim. 2:5).

My mother was a good teacher. She often took us (we three sons) on walks and drew spiritual analogies from nature. She once pointed out that the school of fish that was standing still in the fast moving stream was

The broad road is the path of least resistance.

It is the easy gospel; it is the path of ruin and shame.

exerting a lot of effort to hold their place. From that illustration, my mother would often tell me that any dead fish could float with the stream, but it took a live fish to go against the current. The broad road is the path of least resistance. It is the easy gospel; it is the path of ruin and shame.

The desire of the Lord is to bring many sons to glory. In the tabernacle scenario, the glory of God was in the holy of holies. There is a process to bring a man from the gate of salvation (outer court) into the holiest place, where His glory dwells. The way to glory becomes far more exclusive. It is a narrow path... it is the walk in the Spirit... it is the way of the cross!

Few there be that find it

The scripture is filled with illustrations and exhortations concerning the “two paths.” The book of Proverbs mentions the two paths at least eighteen times. The path of life may appear to be the more confining path, but it is the path that leads us into the abundant life! Very few seem to find this path, but may we by the grace of God seek to walk on this path!

Discerning the real prophet – verses 15-20

Beware of the false prophet

Mat. 7:15 *Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*

In many ways, our Lord was alluding to the religious leaders of the day. They appeared to be one thing outwardly, but inwardly they were ravening wolves. They had no qualms about devouring a widow's substance.

However, as the Christian era was at hand, this was a warning to the church. In the Olivet discourse (Mat. 24:11), Jesus warned that in the last days there would be many false prophets that would deceive many. This was also true of the first century church.

The apostle Paul warned the Ephesians that after his departure many “grievous wolves” would enter in among them and would delude many (Acts 20:17-30). They appear outwardly to be true. Satan's ministers appear as ministers of righteousness. St. Paul explains:

*Satan's
ministers
stand
behind
pulpits
like true
ministers.*

“And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness...” (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Satan's ministers stand behind pulpits like true ministers. But they are false prophets, and their main intent is to bring you into their own delusion.

Divorce/remarriage

We have observed certain ministers who have divorced and remarried. It is almost as though a false anointing comes upon them. Suddenly their ministry seems to be flourishing. They are testifying to the great things that God is doing in their lives. It is an unusual phenomenon, but the message being conveyed is “God is vindicating us. People have condemned our marriage, but God is showing everyone His pleasure in what we have done!” It is a hard argument to reckon with because it is a delusion.

Discerning them by their fruit

Mat. 7:16 *Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?*

“Do men gather grapes of thorns?” Our Master is now going to tell us how to discern the false. I have a grape arbor on my back deck, and every fall I expect to gather some nice clusters of grapes. If I went out to gather some clusters of grapes from my vine and I discovered clusters of thorns instead, I would be a bit dismayed... shaken! This is not what I expected. Something isn’t right here.

The fruit that the minister bears tells us the story – not his gifts. They may manifest some real gifts or ones that seem real enough, but it’s the fruit that tells the story (Holy Spirit fruit).

Telltale signs of the false prophet

He seeks to draw disciples after himself.

He speaks of himself.

He speaks with exclusivity... “We are the only ones.”

He majors on the point that he is deluded on.

He seeks to bring others into his delusion.

He redefines scripture.

He always has a message of false grace and false love.

He uses flattery. He tells people what they want to hear.
He prophesies that you have been misunderstood,
but that God will vindicate you, etc.

He seeks to control lives and especially finance.

There will always be some major sin in his life.

It is far better to be rebuked by a righteous man than to be flattered by the enemy: “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Pro. 27:6).

Mat. 7:17-18 *Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. v.18 A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*

Here is one of the first laws of creation: “*And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good*” (Gen. 1:12). Every tree must bear fruit after its kind. There are good

trees such as the plum tree. A plum tree can only bear plums. The hemlock can only produce poisonous fruit. The bittersweet can only produce poisonous fruit.

A tree cannot bring forth anything other than what it is.

A tree cannot bring forth anything other than what it is. A poisonous tree can only produce poisonous fruit. A good tree can only bring forth good fruit. (These verses are still in relation to discerning the false prophet.) In scripture, men are often times likened to trees.

When people are members of a congregation for any length of time, they get to know their pastor and his message. They know his family; they know his standing in the community; and they know his integrity and character. In short, they can observe the fruit that he manifests.

However, it is not always so easy to discern the fruit of the itinerant minister. The young Corinthian believers were impressed with anybody that made a lot of noise. They were not very fruit conscious. “He sounds good. He manifests gifts of healing and prophecy. People are saved.” That seems to justify what ever he is preaching.

My brother (who is also a minister) and I were watching an evangelist on television. He was doing a lot of miracles, but there was something that just didn’t bear witness with us. We just sat there shaking our heads in doubt. A week later we read in the newspaper that this character had been arrested for some sort of scam. It is the fruit they bear that tells the story.

Mat. 7:19-20 *Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. V.20 Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*

Here is the end of the evil tree. It is cut down and cast into the fire. The false prophet and all that are deluded by his message of false grace will perish in hell. All of those who are deluded into thinking that they cannot lose their salvation, while they continue to practice sin will perish!

Those who bear the good fruit (Holy Spirit fruit) are real. *“That they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified”* (Isa. 61:3). Paul lists the nine fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance...”*

All of those who are deluded into thinking that they cannot lose their salvation, while they continue to practice sin will perish!

Sometimes the evil fruit is easier to discern than the good fruit. By their fruits ye shall know them!

Who will enter heaven? – verses 21 -23

Those who say Lord, Lord

Mat. 7:21 *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*

Luke's version adds a little more distinction to this verse. Let us observe:

*“When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, **Lord, Lord,** open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets...”* (Luke 13:25-26).

Here is a scene where one seeks admittance into the heavenly kingdom at the end of life. He knocks at the heavenly gate saying, “Lord, Lord, open to us.” The Lord responds, “But I don’t know you!” “But Lord, I have sat on the church bench all of my life. I have said the Lord’s prayer every week, and I always say the ‘Lord, we thank thee’ when we eat Sunday dinner!” “But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.”

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

It is one thing to say, “We know the Lord.” But does He recognize us? I remember once boarding a plane for the Philippines, and at the same time, the famed evangelist “Morris Cerullo” was coming down another ramp. I then said to my friend, “Hey, there is Morris Cerrullo!” My friend said, “No!” At that, Morris Cerullo looked over and waved – to say, “Yes, I am he!” I then said to my friend (in jest) “See, I know Morris!” I knew who he was, but in reality he did not know me!

The Lord is saying, “Not everyone who claims to know Me is going to be admitted into heaven, but those who do the will of My Father.” In short, those who hear My voice and obey it – those are the ones who shall enter heaven!

Those who have had gifts

Mat. 7:22-23 *Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? V.23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

“...*In thy name done many wonderful works.*” These verses resolve many questions. Here are ministers who have thought that God’s sanction on their ministry or gift justified their lifestyle. Perhaps the life of Samson would serve as a good illustration of this. Here was a man who could spend the evening with a harlot, then come out (under the anointing) and carry off the city gates. Samson thought that his anointed ministry justified his immoral lifestyle.

Samson thought that his anointed ministry justified his immoral lifestyle.

We know that God mercifully redeemed Samson, though it was at the cost of his eyes, and finally his life. However, this is not the case with all ministers who backslide. Often, they retain their gift (for awhile), but eventually another spirit can take them over. Sometimes they can even be functioning from two different realms, as king Saul did. Saul could prophesy under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and then prophesy by an evil spirit.

We wonder, “How can this be? Here are men doing these mighty works, and yet their lifestyle doesn’t measure up.” Let us remember what Jesus said about “By their fruit...” In the last days there shall be great revival and there will be many “miracle workers.” If we qualify ministers on their giftings alone – we could well be deceived!

Someone once shared a story about a backslidden evangelist. One day as this evangelist was walking toward the tent where he was about to preach, the wind began whipping the tent; and as the tent was contorting in the breeze he saw the angry face of God. He was quite shaken for a while, but after he began to preach and people were saved, and people were healed, he sat down and was musing to himself, “Well God couldn’t be too angry...” Then God spoke to this man: “I was not honoring you – I was honoring my pulpit!”

Just remember that Judas was gifted as well as all the other disciples. He did miracles as well. “*And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*” No – having a ministry, having gifts, even seeing

people come to the Lord in salvation does not get us into heaven. Even the apostle Paul said this: “*But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway*” (1 Cor. 9:27).

I never knew you

This thought, “*I never knew you,*” can translate several ways. It can translate “I never really got to know you – you never resembled me – or you never reflected my ways or my kingdom (etc.)” As the prophet Hosea said concerning his son: “You’re not mine” (Not my people). “There is not one bit of semblance of me in you” (See Hos. 1:9).

There is also the thought of being “blotted out of the book” (Rev. 3:5). When one is blotted out of the book of life, it is as though his name was never there. “I never knew you!”

May the Lord ever spare us from the delusion of thinking that the “gift” is God’s sanction on our misconduct! Workers of iniquity go to hell – which includes ministers! Yes, we desire to see miracles, but above all, may we always desire be to be faithful and true!

The two houses – verses 24-27

The house on the Rock

Mat. 7:24 *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:*

Of course, the “Rock” is an allusion to Himself. The *Rock* that is mentioned throughout scripture is always a figure of Christ: “*And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ*” (1 Cor 10:4).

Christ is the foundation of the church – the Rock of our salvation (1 Cor. 3:11). Christ is also called “The Chief Cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20 and 1 Pet. 2:6).

The Chief Cornerstone

The chief cornerstone is the foundation stone that all the other stones in the building must square to. They must square vertically and horizontally to the chief cornerstone. The reason Jesus is called the “Chief” cornerstone is because there are other cornerstones in a building. Spiritually, the cornerstone speaks of the doctrine of Christ. All doctrine must square to the doctrine of Christ. The cornerstone also speaks of the ministry of Christ – all other ministers must take their measure from Him!

*All
doctrine
must
square
to the
doctrine
of
Christ.*

Observe the standard: “*whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them...*” It is not good enough just to hear these things. Luke’s version says, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” Many claim Christ as their Savior; they can quote the scriptures, and even preach them. But, it is only in the doing of them that fastens us to the “Rock.”

Mat. 7:25 *And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*

The house that stands the test

The last day house is the completed house. As Jesus Himself said, “I will build My church (house)...” However, before Christ comes for His Church it will be tested by great storm. The storm of tribulation shall try this house, and will shake this house so that only that which is founded upon what He hath said shall remain! The Lord will have a church that measures to the standard!

***The Lord
will have
a church
that
measures
to the
standard!***

Let us consider what Isaiah said concerning this house: “*Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place*” (Isa. 28:16-17).

Here is a prophecy of Christ “The Cornerstone” (c.f. 1 Pet. 2:6). Those who believe in this “Cornerstone” will not be forced to retreat. The prophet then proceeds to say that anything that does not measure to this stone will be swept away by the storm – namely, anything that constitutes a lie: false doctrines, false prophecies, and predictions, or anything that is not inspired by the Spirit of God! However, after the storm the true church will still be standing firm.

Let us also consider what the apostle Paul said concerning the last days:

“...Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receive a kingdom which cannot be moved...” (Heb 12:26-28). (This is a quote from Haggai 2:6-7).

Obviously, Paul is writing of something that is future – and that has still not happened yet (2002). This shaking of the heavens can also refer to spiritual things. God will shake everything that is shakable. The (false) doctrines and religious concepts of men will be shaken because God never inspired them. When it is all over, the church founded on the Rock will still be standing. Those who hear and do the sayings of Christ will still be standing!

The house on the sand

Mat. 7:26-27 *And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish*

man, which built his house upon the sand: V.27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

There shall be a great division in the last day church.

Judging from what our Master has just said concerning the two houses, it is evident that there shall be a great division in the last day church. We see one camp that remains faithful to the word of the Lord, and we see another camp that is disobedient to the Word.

A message to the Church

This is not a message that concerns the world. Jesus is addressing kingdom people – those within the kingdom. King Saul’s house had a great fall because he was disobedient to the word. The Lord said to Saul for his disobedience, “*For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft...*” It is interesting that Saul spent his last night on earth with a witch. When people continuously disregard the truth or correction then they will open themselves up for deception.

It is a fearful thing not to walk in the light of God’s word. Jesus likened this to “building upon sand.” In other words, building a house with no foundation (it’s not fastened to anything secure). When the gale comes, this house will be blown away like a cardboard shack! Sand, speaks of the precepts of men.

Be not deceived

Here is the sad truth of the sermon; too many of God's people think they can walk with the world (the broad way). They only attend church when they "feel led." They are not under any spiritual authority, they do not submit to a pastor. They are not versed in the scripture, or they just pick out the portions that they like.

The other day I was talking to a "Christian" lady about the end times. Her attitude should have been, "I want to firm up my walk with the Lord... I want to be prepared, etc." But her response was, "Well, I'll just wait and see." These are the people that are building upon sand, and there are many of them! When the final storm comes, this house will fall – and great shall be the fall of it!

Many will be disqualified from the glorious church that is going up; but worse yet the anti-christ will deceive many of them because they did not love the truth!

"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. V.11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: V.12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thes. 2:10-12).

Teaching with authority – verses 28-29

Mat. 7:28-29 *And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: V.29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

The teaching of the scribes was very ambiguous... “Well, nobody knows for sure... We have conferred with the highest authorities (meaning themselves) and we feel that this is what this means, etc.”

The Doctrine of Christ

Jesus made no apologies for what He said. Nor did He say, “Well I think...” Jesus simply spoke, “It is so!” When the Master spoke of hell, He could see it. When the Master spoke of the heavenly Father, He could see Him (John 5:19-20).

The doctrine of Christ came straight from heaven: “*And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me*” (John 7:15-16). Jesus waited upon the Father every morning for His message.

Isaiah said this concerning the Christ: “*The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear*

to hear as the learned. The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back” (Isa. 50:4-5).

“For he taught them as one having authority...” The people were astonished at the authority with which Jesus spoke. I would like to conclude this commentary on this very point, because this is one of the honors that God will give to His faithful ministers in these last days. They will speak with authority. They will say: *“This is the way, walk ye in it!”* They will teach God’s people the difference between the holy and the profane, between the clean and the unclean!

The honor that cometh from God only

During the times of apostasy, the true ministers seem to be pushed to the rear. The ones who seem to have the stage are the ministers who condone the people’s idolatries such as rock music or teen dating, or who don’t speak out against sins such as divorce/remarriage! But before this age ends there will be great revival and God will bring His faithful ministers out of the corner. These ministers will bring God’s people to their day of decision. They will speak with authority and cause the people to understand!

Before this age ends there will be great revival and God will bring His faithful ministers out of the corner.

In the Old Testament there were two line of priests that went back to Aaron. One line was full of compromise, and their motive was to have the favor of the people.

They allowed the people to keep their idolatries, etc. However, the Lord speaks concerning His faithful ministers that kept the charge:

“But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me...” (Eze. 44:15).

They have a promise of approaching unto the Lord; and they will have the privilege of teaching God’s people the difference between the acceptable and the unacceptable.

“And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean” (Eze. 44:23).

“And in controversy they shall stand in judgment; and they shall judge it according to my judgments...” (Eze. 44:24).

In the end, the Lord gives beautiful promises to the faithful sons of Zadok. They have a promise of approaching unto the Lord; and they will have the privilege of teaching God’s people the difference between the acceptable and the unacceptable. And, in all matters of controversy they shall have the say! In other words, in all controversial issues they will have the authority to say, “It is so!”

Where does the authority come from?

Authority comes from being clear in your doctrine. God gives clarity to those who do His will: *“If any man will do*

his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). In other words, God gives good doctrine to those who apply it!

Authority also comes from having the message worked out in our lives. This is what Ezekiel calls "eating the book!" Or, to put it into New Testament terms: "the Word becoming flesh." I heard a minister recently preaching from the book of Job. What an anointing was upon his message! The reason for this was because this minister had eaten some of this book; it was not theory. It had become reality.

God puts His sanction and His anointing upon those who have allowed the sword (of the Spirit) to plunge through their own lives. They have become the message. Christ was the personification of His message. He did not preach anything that was theory!

These are exciting times in which we live. God shall do great things for those who have embraced this sermon and let it become reality. This is what the New Covenant is all about – the law written upon the fleshly tables of our hearts and Christ revealed through our lives! *"The people in whose heart is My law..."*

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:" (John 1:12).



Epilogue

The promise of the New Covenant was not given to Israel during the glory days of Solomon. Rather, it was given as the remnant of Israel was being marched off to Babylon. The hope that Israel was given as they were leaving was that they might return with a new heart and a new spirit (Jer. 24:1-7).

It was during the humiliation, anguish and desperation of the captivity that this was to become a reality in some. It is an unfortunate fact that man learns more through suffering than he does through words and exhortations. As we walk in the Spirit, God will lead us into circumstances that reveal and deal with our heart. It is in these places that we cry out to know His ways!

So was the example of Ezra the priest. Here was a man subjected to the torments of the captivity, and yet through it his cry was to understand the law, and to do it, and to teach it to his confused generation (Ezra 7:10).

Thus it was that Ezra emerged from Babylon with a new heart and a new spirit. Not only did Ezra bring revival to his generation (Neh. 8-9), but he also taught God's people the difference between the holy and the profane, and the difference between the clean and the unclean. He taught them what is acceptable to God and what is not. In fact, Ezra was given great authority to teach the ungodly as well (Ezra 7:25).

We live in a generation that needs clarity – a generation that is confused on the issues. We live in a generation of Christendom that has lost its distinction from the world! Ezra serves as an example and type of those that our Lord was seeking to reproduce in Matthew 5:19: “But whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

AMEN!



Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

LORD, make me an
instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light, and

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,

Grant that I may not so much seek to be
consoled as to console;

To be understood, as to understand;

To be loved, as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive,

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

And it is in dying that
we are born to eternal life.

The Sermon on the Mount

Sermon outline of Matthew Chapter Five

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| The backdrop | verses 1-2 |
| 1. The nine Beatitudes (blesseds) | verses 3-12 |
| a. An overview | |
| b. The poor in spirit | verse 3 |
| c. They who mourn | verse 4 |
| d. The meek | verse 5 |
| e. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness | verse 6 |
| f. The merciful | verse 7 |
| g. The pure in heart | verse 8 |
| h. The peacemakers | verse 9 |
| i. Those persecuted for righteousness | verse 10 |
| j. Those persecuted for “My” sake | verses 11-12 |
| 2. On witnessing | verses 13-16 |
| a. Salt | verse 13 |
| b. Light | verse 14 |
| c. To your house | verse 15 |
| d. To the world | verse 16 |

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|---|---------------------|
| 3. Fulfilling the law | verses 17-20 |
| a. All to be fulfilled | verses 17-18 |
| b. Destiny gauged by the “higher law” | verse 19 |
| c. Greater righteousness demanded | verse 20 |
| 4. Higher law invoked between brethren | verses 21-26 |
| a. Anger | verses 21-22 |
| b. Words spoken against brethren | verse 22b |
| c. Reconciliation and restitution | verses 23-26 |
| 5. Higher law of morality | verses 27-32 |
| a. Spiritual adultery (thought life) | verses 27-28 |
| b. The seriousness of moral restraint | verses 29-30 |
| c. Divorce and remarriage | verses 31-32 |
| 6. Making oaths or vows | verses 33-37 |
| 7. Attitudes on injustice and lending | verses 38-42 |
| a. Turning the cheek | verses 38-39 |
| b. Lawsuits | verse 40 |
| c. Going the extra mile | verse 41 |
| d. Attitude on lending | verse 42 |
| 8. Attitudes toward our adversaries | verses 43-46 |
| a. Returning good for evil | verses 43-45 |
| b. Not recompensed for loving your own | verses 46-47 |
| c. Perfection | verse 48 |

Sermon outline of Matthew Chapter Six

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|--|---------------------|
| 9. Motives in giving | verses 1-4 |
| a. To be seen of men | verses 1-2 |
| b. To be seen of God | verses 3-4 |
| 10. Motives in prayer | verses 5-8 |
| a. To be seen of men | verse 5 |
| b. To be seen of God | verse 6 |
| c. Form and repetition | verses 7-8 |
| 11. The Lord's prayer (The acceptable prayer) | verses 9-13 |
| a. Recognizing who God is | verse 9a |
| b. Recognizing His sanctity | verse 9b |
| c. Thy kingdom come | verse 10a |
| d. Thy will be done | verse 10b |
| e. For our daily bread | verse 11 |
| f. Forgiveness as we forgive | verse 12 |
| g. Spare us in temptation | verse 13a |
| h. Deliverance from evil | verse 13b |
| i. Acknowledging His kingdom, power, & glory | verse 13c |
| 12. Forgiving and forgiveness | verses 14-15 |
| 13. Motives in fasting | verses 16-18 |
| a. To be seen of men | verse 16 |
| b. To be seen of God | verses 17-18 |

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|---|---------------------|
| 14. Motives in saving (true investment) | verses 19-21 |
| a. Treasure upon earth | verse 19 |
| b. Treasure in heaven | verse 20 |
| c. Where is your heart | verse 21 |
| 15. Singleness of eye | verses 22-23 |
| a. Clear vision | verse 22 |
| b. Distorted vision | verse 23 |
| 16. The two masters: The things of this life or the One who gives life to all things | verses 24-34 |
| a. God or things | verse 24 |
| b. Life is more than things | verse 25 |
| c. The Lord feeds all of creation | verse 26 |
| d. The Lord clothes (adorns) all creation | verses 27-30 |
| e. The Father provides our common essentials | verses 31-32 |
| f. Seek ye first His kingdom | verse 33 |
| g. Don't worry about the evils of tomorrow | verse 34 |

Sermon outline of Matthew Chapter Seven

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| 17. On Judging | verses 1-5 |
| a. The standard of judgment | verses 1-2 |
| b. Making a clear judgment | verses 3-5 |
| 18. On sharing sacred things | verse 6 |
| 19. Petition and supplication (Holy Spirit gifts) | verses 7-11 |
| a. The seekers find | verses 7-8 |
| b. The Father's good gifts | verses 9-11 |
| 20. "The Golden Rule" | verse 12 |
| 21. "The Narrow Way" | verses 13-14 |
| 22. Discerning the real prophet | verses 15-20 |
| a. Beware of the false prophet | verse 15 |
| b. Discerning them by their fruit | verses 16-20 |
| 23. Who will enter heaven? | verses 21-23 |
| a. Those who say Lord, Lord | verse 21 |
| b. Those who have had gifts | verses 22-23 |
| 24. The two houses | verses 24-27 |
| a. The house on the Rock | verses 24-25 |
| b. The house on the sand | verses 26-27 |
| Teaching with authority (<i>Sermon conclusions</i>) | verses 28-29 |

