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PREACHING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT FROM A
BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
AT WESTMONT BAPTIST CHURCH

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Landon Neil Byrd
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PREACHING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT FROM A
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To my wife, Lindsey, whose patient support and encouragement has made this project possible. Praise the Lord for the helpmate I have in you.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>TDNTA</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume.</i> Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated and abridged by Geoffrey William Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985. Logos.
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

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PREFACE

It is such a joy to stand at the end of this three-year effort to grow in my understanding of how the Bible fits together. It is one grand story about God and his plan to save his people. I remember saying many years ago in college that if I ever pursued seminary, I would want the cohesiveness of the Bible to be the focus of my study. Little did I know that I would stumble upon this through my DMin concentration in biblical theology. Three years ago, I felt I could not even precisely define what biblical theology is. Now I find it an indispensable tool for my own understanding of the Scriptures, as well as a tool for preaching God's Word to others. However, this pursuit would not have been possible alone.

All glory belongs to God the Father for his sustaining grace over these three years, to the Spirit for illumination to understand the inspired Word, and to Christ who is the center of this great story.

I want to thank my wife, Lindsey, for her unwavering support, even in seasons where I felt like giving up. She has, without complaint, kept the children alone during seminar weeks, gone to bed alone many nights as I stayed up late working, and most importantly, constantly encouraged me and celebrated each milestone of this project. My children, Crawford, Lorelei, and William also deserve a big thank you for all the times they have heard "Let Daddy finish writing this paragraph and then I will come play." My parents, Neil and Freda Byrd, were also among my greatest encouragers and supporters in too many ways to enumerate.

Westmont Baptist Church graciously allowed me time away from the office in order to attend seminars. My church family has given me tremendous encouragement and

I pray they have been beneficiaries of my growth in the knowledge of the Scriptures. A special thanks to Ann Jackson and Donna Poe, two church members who labored through proof reading chapters of this project.

My classmates, Nathan Cobb, Brett McDonald, Doug Ponder, and Foster Toft, have been wonderful companions through this process. We shared many long hours in the classroom, wonderful times of fellowship during each seminar, and hundreds of text messages back and forth about our projects and our respective ministries. They have become lifelong friends and partners in ministry.

Lastly, I wish to thank The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for the immense service that they give to ministers of the gospel and the church of the Lord Jesus Christ by providing such training as I have received. I want to especially thank Dr. Jonathan Pennington who has served as my supervisor for this project. I am grateful for our frequent conversations during which his knowledge of the Sermon on the Mount consistently sharpened my own thinking. I also want to thank Dr. Mitch Chase, Dr. Sam Emadi, Dr. Peter Gentry, Dr. Jim Hamilton, and Dr. Brian Vickers, who were the primary lecturers during the biblical theology seminars. Those seminars have been some of the most valuable classes I have ever had the opportunity to sit in.

It is my prayer that all the time and energy that have been invested in this project by myself and others serves the sole purpose of honoring the Lord and building up his church.

Landon Byrd

Birmingham, Alabama

December, 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount is his inaugural address of the kingdom of God. The Sermon demonstrates the fulfilment of the old covenant in Christ and announces the arrival of his kingdom, describes its character, and summons his disciples to live in accordance with the kingdom’s ethics.¹

The Sermon on the Mount contains several interpretive challenges. Rightly interpreting the overall intent of the Sermon on the Mount will depend on carefully connecting Matthew 5–7 with the remainder of the canon. Using biblical theological connections, this sermon series will demonstrate that Matthew 5–7 presents Christ as the new covenant mediator like Moses bringing God’s law to God’s people.

What Is Biblical Theology?

When the average Christian hears “biblical theology,” they think something along the lines of, “What other kind of theology is there if it’s not biblical?”² The pastor must therefore carefully articulate a definition of this phrase.

Definition of Biblical Theology

Multiple misunderstandings confront the Christian regarding the nature of the Bible. On one hand, many treat the Bible as an instruction manual. They use the

¹ Hereafter, the Sermon on the Mount will be referred to either by its full name or as “the Sermon.”

² Multiple authors acknowledge the confusion at the popular level with the phrase “Biblical Theology.” See James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 17; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 39.

concordance like an index to find a text that will relate to a pressing problem.³ Others do follow a reading plan, but make their notes on “what this passage meant to me.”⁴ Both approaches are well meaning attempts to recognize that the Bible is God’s Word and that it has something to say to us about our lives. Both approaches, however, lack a governing hermeneutic which asks, “How does God intend his Word to be understood?” Enter the task of biblical theology.

Biblical theology is the discipline that examines the Bible inductively to provide the interpretive framework for understanding the Scriptures in their canonical context.⁵ Graeme Goldsworthy states, “Biblical theology enables us to relate any Bible story to the whole message of the Bible, and *therefore* to ourselves.”⁶ This order is extremely important. Only by fitting individual stories within the overarching story can we accurately apply a particular text to ourselves.

But how do we arrive at this overarching story of the Bible? James M. Hamilton Jr. has stated, “Studying the Bible is the best way to learn biblical theology.”⁷ Therefore exegesis of the biblical texts themselves leads to the proper understanding of what unites the Bible together. D. A. Carson has stated this relationship is interconnected such that “exegesis tends to focus on analysis and [biblical theology] on synthesis. . . . Exegesis controls [biblical theology], and [biblical theology] influences exegesis.”⁸

Another essential part of the task of biblical theology is found in Hamilton’s

³ Michael Lawrence calls this an answer book approach. Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 24.

⁴ Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan: The Unfolding Revelation of God in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 19.

⁵ Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 19–20.

⁶ Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 22 (emphasis mine).

⁷ Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 20.

⁸ D. A. Carson. “The Bible and Theology,” in *Zondervan NIV Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2635.

definition of the discipline: “Understanding and embracing the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors.”⁹ Hamilton defines the authors’ interpretive perspective as “the framework of assumptions and presuppositions, associations and identifications, truths, and symbols that are taken for granted as an author or speaker describes the world and the events that take place in it.”¹⁰ In other words, we must first understand what the original authors (both human and divine) intended the text to mean.¹¹

To provide a way forward, Brian Rosner has helpfully illustrated the biblical-theological task as a construction site, shown in table 1.¹² This illustration helps us conceive a format for doing biblical theology. We analyze the text through careful exegetical study, noting not only key words, but also key concepts and symbolism. Next, we synthesize exegetical study of individual passages by noting the common imagery, types and patterns throughout the canon. We then connect them in a way that is consistent with the context of the individual passages. The goal is to put together a unifying thread that runs through the entire canon.¹³ We trace this unifying thread along the contours of the Bible’s own internal structuring—the “backbone” of the progressive revelation of the covenants God has made with his people.¹⁴ All of these aspects of biblical theology find their nexus in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God’s ultimate revelation of himself and the whole of Scripture exists that we “may believe Jesus is the Christ, the

⁹ James M. Hamilton Jr., “New Testament Use of the Old Testament” (unpublished class lecture for 80233, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, January, 2021).

¹⁰ Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 15.

¹¹ James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgement: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 45.

¹² Brian Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 5.

¹³ Hamilton has noted that much debate exists over what precisely is the one center of the Bible. He responds that belief that the Bible does in fact have a coherent story and message indicates that we are right to pursue construction of this bridge from Genesis to Revelation. See Hamilton. *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgement*, 39.

¹⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 36.

Son of God, and by believing [we] may have life in his name” (John 20:31).¹⁵

Table 1. Biblical theology as a construction site

Tools of the trade	Analysis and synthesis
Building materials	Both biblical concepts and biblical words
Bridge to be constructed	Single span across the whole Bible
Building plans	Follow blue print of the Bible’s story line
Foundation and pinnacle of the structure	Jesus Christ

Necessity of Biblical Theology

Some might question if this task could be consigned merely to academic halls or the recesses of the pastor’s study? Is it really necessary for the local church and its individual members to engage in the task of biblical theology? Cannot the faithful Christian simply pick up their Bible and understand the Scriptures without this extra step?

Certainly, the Holy Spirit helps the Christian to understand spiritual things (1 Cor 2:12). The things in Scripture “which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for Salvation” are abundantly clear in the Bible.¹⁶ But consider the two dangers mentioned earlier. What if using the “index” approach, a believer searches the concordance for “marriage” and arrives in Genesis 29? Are they to assume that this bigamous relationship where one spouse is favored over the other is to be normative for Christians? Or consider the danger of the “what the text means to me” approach in a

¹⁵ All Scripture quotations unless otherwise noted are from the English Standard Version.

¹⁶ “The Second London Confession,” Baptist Studies Online, London, 1689, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/http://baptiststudiesonline.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/the-second-london-confession.pdf.

study of Judges 3. Should the Christian follow Ehud's example in dealing with a problematic (and perhaps portly) politician? Although these are extreme examples, we see that Scripture can be easily misapplied and the significance misplaced if the text at hand is not synthesized with the rest of the canon.¹⁷

The task of biblical theology is indeed vital for the Christian to understand the meaning, significance, and application of individual texts. We should not make our first and foremost desire to know what the text means for us. Instead, we should chiefly desire that each passage "be read correctly according to God's intention."¹⁸ In order to understand God's intention for the individual text, we must first understand his intention for the whole of Scripture. This is the task of biblical theology.

Biblical Theology and Preaching

If the lay reader of the Bible needs to understand how the Bible fits together as a cohesive metanarrative, then how much greater is the need in the pulpit. Mark Dever has argued that the most fundamental thing that a church needs in order to be biblically faithful is consistent expositional preaching.¹⁹ However, careful verse-by-verse preaching alone does not equate to an expositional sermon.²⁰ Expositional preaching is accomplished when the sermon examines not only the "content" but also the "*intent* of a particular passage of Scripture."²¹ As we have previously established, the intent of a particular passage cannot be grasped apart from biblical theology. Thus, understanding

¹⁷ Goldsworthy list other problematic texts that are difficult to understand and apply if we do not engage in the task of biblical theology. Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 19–21.

¹⁸ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 46.

¹⁹ Mark Dever, *What Is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 63.

²⁰ See David Helm et al., "Episode 2: On Defining 'Expositional Preaching' (with H. B. Charles)," February 20, 2020, in *Preachers' Talk*, produced by 9Marks, podcast, 15:55, <https://www.9marks.org/interview/preachers-talk-episode-2-on-expositional-preaching/>.

²¹ Mike Bullmore, "A Biblical Case for Expositional Preaching," *9Marks Journal* 4, no. 4 (May/June 2007): 16. (emphasis mine).

the biblical–theological underpinnings of a passage is more than just a helpful aid.

Biblical theology is essential to the expositional preaching of the text at hand.

The Sermon on the Mount in Biblical Theological Context

According to Thomas R. Schreiner, “Matthew is the Gospel of fulfillment.”²² This is evident particularly in the early chapters of the Gospel. In the birth narratives, Christ explicitly fulfills Old Testament prophecy five times before the end of Matthew 2. Christ’s life also recapitulates Israel’s history in these early chapters of Matthew. Jesus is the offspring of Abraham and David in the opening genealogy. He is God’s Son being called out of Egypt (2:15), who is then tempted in the wilderness (4:1–11).²³ All of this places the Sermon on the Mount in the context of fulfilment of the Old Testament.

The Sermon on the Mount specifically shows the fulfilment of the Mosaic law. Matthew presents Christ as a new, but greater, prophet like Moses. Christ goes up on a mountain and gives a law to the people as a typological fulfilment of Moses.²⁴ Frank Thielman notes that this new law which Christ gives “demonstrat[es] how it brings the Mosaic law to its divinely appointed fulfillment (and therefore end, 5:17–18).” He further notes that, similar to the Mosaic law, the Sermon ends with a section which makes clear the choice to obey or not obey Jesus’s commands is a matter of life and death.²⁵

The Sermon on the Mount announces the arrival of a new covenant and with

²² Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 453.

²³ Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 85.

²⁴ Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 92.

²⁵ Thielman uses the language of “blessings and curses” to describe the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 90. However, Pennington suggests that “curses” is not an accurate description of what Jesus is doing in the conclusion, rather he is warning of the final consequences of rejecting Christ’s commandments. Jonathan Pennington, personal conversation, June 14, 2023. While Jesus does not use the specific language of cursing, what Jesus is warning of is the ultimate judgement that will come on the last day which will certainly be the culmination of God’s eternal cursing of the wicked (Matt 25:41).

that covenant, a new law. This law is for those whom God writes his law upon their hearts (Jer 31:33; Ezek 36:26–27) and then makes them pure in heart.²⁶

Furthermore, the Sermon on the Mount serves as an extended declaration of the “inbreaking of God’s heavenly kingdom in Jesus Christ.”²⁷ Matthew has just presented Jesus beginning a ministry of “proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23). Christ’s sermon now gives the contents of that proclamation.²⁸ Jesus shows that the kingdom has been inaugurated and then presents a new ethical constitution for life in this kingdom. The Sermon instructs believers to pray in anticipation of the consummation of the kingdom and to look forward to the last day when the kingdom will be consummated at Christ’s return.²⁹

Biblical Theology as the Support of the Sermon Rather Than the Subject

I was once called on in seminary to preach a spontaneous ten-minute sermon on Genesis 12. The first place my mind went was “God’s promises.” So, I spent my time doing a sweeping overview of the fulfilment of God’s promises to Abraham in Scripture. I distinctly remember that one critique essentially amounted to, “You did not really say anything about Genesis 12 itself.”

Once a pastor embraces the importance of biblical theology in preaching, he must avoid the temptation of using the text at hand to launch into a lecture tracing a theme across the canon. The subject must remain the text at hand and biblical theology should come in as the support that undergirds the sermon. Several methods can be

²⁶ Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 89.

²⁷ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 443.

²⁸ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 157.

²⁹ Referring to Matthew 5–7 as a “constitution” of the kingdom is not original to me and has been employed by many authors.

employed to bring biblical theology in where appropriate.

First, biblical theology helps to establish the background of a passage. Background information in a sermon is often limited to historical, geographical and biographical information. While these pieces of information are certainly helpful, explaining the situation of the text within the history of redemption is essential. This may be done extensively at the beginning of a sermon series and then inserted as a reminder at appropriate points. For instance, in preaching the Sermon on the Mount, preachers must establish that Matthew presents Jesus as the fulfilment of the old covenant and the law. As the new covenant mediator, Jesus provides a new law for those in God's kingdom. This will be an important reminder especially in making sense of Matthew 5:17–48.

Second, biblical theology provides intertextual connections in preaching that *significantly aid* in understanding the text. The preacher must especially use caution to not completely leave the text at hand in favor of preaching another text or a biblical-theological survey. However, certain intertextual connections are highly profitable if not essential for understanding the passage. For example, drawing upon Psalm 24 greatly illuminates Matthew 5:8. It is also absolutely essential to appropriately connect Matthew 5:17–20 with the Old Testament if it is to make any sense at all.

Third, biblical theology in preaching ensures that each text has a proper Christocentric focus.³⁰ The apostle Paul insisted that the final aim of preaching was to make Christ known (1 Cor 2:2; Col 1:27). As Rosner's construction metaphor shows, this is also the final aim of biblical theology. Biblical theology also ensures that the sermon points to Christ at the appropriate point and in the appropriate way. Christ and the cross are not a mere tack on to the end of the sermon.³¹ Rather, connecting lines are carefully

³⁰ Robert Smith Jr. insists that in outlining every sermon, it is necessary to identify what he calls the "Christocentric focus." Robert Smith Jr. (unpublished class lecture for "Preaching," Beeson Divinity School, Fall Semester, 2014).

³¹ This is not an observation original to me but has been called for by numerous pastors

drawn through biblical theology from the text to Christ. Biblical theology also guards against presenting a true, but less than complete connection to Christ. For example, biblical theology disallows works-based righteousness as an appropriate application of the Sermon on the Mount. Instead, with the whole New Testament in view, we see Christ as the one who perfectly keeps all these commands. He then exchanges his righteousness for our sin in his death and resurrection. The regenerating power of his Holy Spirit then gives us faith to accept this transaction and then conforms us to the image of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). It is this true righteousness and holiness which the Sermon on the Mount expounds.

Literature on the Sermon on the Mount

Jonathan Pennington's *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing* provides an extensive five-chapter introduction for understanding key elements of Matthew 5–7. Of particular help is his examination of the term *makarios*, in which he articulates why “blessed” may need more clarification when serving as a gloss. He then provides an exegetical commentary on the Sermon.³²

Charles Quarles has written a commentary for the New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology series that is quite thorough in terms of cultural and historical background, especially from the second temple era. The most helpful aspect of Quarles's work is the abundance of intertextual connections and his careful explanation of those references.³³

D. A. Carson provides two works that nicely complement one another. His

seeking to move away from only presenting the gospel during the “invitation” in a way that is disconnected from the rest of the sermon.

³² Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

³³ Charles L. Quarles, *The Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ's Message to the Modern Church*, NAC Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011).

older volume, *The Sermon on the Mount*,³⁴ is more expositional in nature but clearly states his summary conclusions. The leg work that stands behind his conclusions can be seen in the more technical (and more recent) commentary on Matthew in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.³⁵ Here Carson goes in depth with exegetical study including word studies, first century Jewish background, and interaction with other scholarship. Reading these two works side by side provides a treasure of rich exegetical study together with clear presentation of how to understand and apply Christ's teaching.³⁶

Scot McKnight's commentary in the *Story of God* series is another work that is helpful for bringing in numerous intertextual references that aid in interpreting the Sermon in its broader biblical-theological context. McKnight also has very probing application points throughout his commentary.³⁷

R. T. France's commentary is recognized as one of the best commentaries on the Gospel of Matthew. *The New International Commentary* series does an excellent job of placing the meat of the argument in the body of the text, but still provides ample footnotes to comment on Greek syntax and meaning, interaction with other scholarship, etc. Of particular note is France's extended introduction to the Beatitudes, which provides the structure of the passage, a definition of *makarios*, and Old Testament background of beatitude sayings.³⁸

Grant Osborne's volume in the Zondervan Exegetical series provides excellent

³⁴ D. A. Carson, *Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World, An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

³⁵ Carson, *Matthew*.

³⁶ Carson can clearly be identified with the "law of Christ as the fulfillment of the law of Moses" position regarding how we relate the Old Testament law to the New Testament Church. See in particular Carson, *Matthew*, 174–75. For a full treatment of this view, see Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 319–76.

³⁷ Scot McKnight, *The Sermon on the Mount, Story of God Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

³⁸ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 160.

structural diagrams for each textual unit.³⁹ The volume is based on the Greek text and interacts with the Greek appropriately without bogging the reader down with word studies of each individual word. At the end of each section, the commentary provides helpful theological summaries and applications.

Dale C. Allison Jr. has also written a stand-alone commentary on Matthew 5–7, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*.⁴⁰ This provides valuable linguistic and structural observations on the text.

One of the key interpretive issues in the Sermon on the Mount is the relationship of the Old Testament law to the New Testament people of God. *Five Views of Law and Gospel* out of the Zondervan Counterpoints series offers a spectrum of interpretation on the issue, providing both argument and counter-arguments for each view.⁴¹

Local Context

I serve as the Pastor of Westmont Baptist Church in Minor Heights, Alabama. Minor is an unincorporated community on the outskirts of Birmingham. Westmont, like the community it rests in, straddles two worlds. Minor holds onto the remnants of what was once a close nit community of stable, blue-collar homes. On the other hand, its growth is coming from younger, more transient, and, in many cases, broken households. With these two merging cultures, the church faces a challenge to preach the truth of the gospel in the face of two different worldviews.

First, the church battles a worldview in an older generation which promises

³⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

⁴⁰ Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Companions to the New Testament Series (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

⁴¹ Greg L. Bahnsen et al., *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

that pious life in the community will result in admission into heaven.⁴² The other worldview of the younger generation questions whether God has any sort of moral standard of right and wrong. Even if subscribers grant such a standard, the question remains, “Does God, or his standard, have any relevance for my life?”

Despite different cultures and different worldviews meeting in the same neighborhood, one gospel message is the solution. This gospel message points “do-gooders” to true righteousness and points skeptics to authoritative truth. It is the “gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23) proclaimed by our Lord Jesus Christ.⁴³ For this reason, I believe that Westmont Baptist Church will benefit greatly from a study of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7.

Biblical Texts

Scholars generally agree on the section divisions of the Sermon on the Mount.⁴⁴ I have kept the six dominant divisions in my outline, but added one additional division at 5:17–20. Focused attention is necessary in this section because understanding this passage affects not only the interpretation of Matthew 5:21–48, but also how Christians should read all of the Old Testament law.

Matthew 5:1–16

Jesus begins his sermon by outlining the character that his disciples will have.⁴⁵ He presents a counter-cultural ideal for the nature of citizenship in his kingdom.⁴⁶

⁴² France speaks of “False Piety” as what is addressed in Matt 6:1–18. France, *Matthew*, 155.

⁴³ Carson, *Matthew*, 77. In Carson’s outline of Matthew’s Gospel, he places the Sermon of the Mount under the larger heading of “The Gospel of the Kingdom” which encompasses 3:1–7:29.

⁴⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 93; Osborne, *Matthew*, 41–42; Carson, *Matthew*, 77.

⁴⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (1971; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 1:33.

⁴⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 101.

His followers will be marked by actions and attitudes such as poverty of spirit, meekness, mercy, and even by enduring persecution. These qualities are undesirable in the prideful and power-hungry eyes of the world, but God looks upon them with favor.⁴⁷ The repeated phrase “blessed are those” calls to mind the opening words of the Psalter. Blessings preceding the requirement for obedience calls to mind the giving of the law at Sinai.⁴⁸

Jesus explains this character is not merely a private affair but must be lived out before the world as “salt” and “light.”⁴⁹ In Matthew 4:15–16 Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy of light dawning in the midst of darkness. Christ now teaches his disciples to carry forward his mission into the world.⁵⁰

The constitution of Christ’s kingdom begins with a preamble that establishes the kingdom’s unique nature. Christ makes clear that his kingdom will not remain hidden, but will eventually grow throughout the world (Matt 13:31–33; cf. Dan 2:44–45).

Matthew 5:17–20

Before providing a sampling of the ethical demands of his kingdom, Christ clarifies that he is not doing away with the “Law or the Prophets.” Rather, he is fulfilling them. Douglas Moo argues that Christ is “proclaiming the standards of kingdom righteousness that were anticipated in the [Mosaic] law.”⁵¹ Thus Christ fulfils the law as he fulfils prophecy and Israel’s history. All of the Old Testament points forward ultimately to what Christ would do. In many of the specific instructions that Christ gives in 5:21–48, there is also a deepening, or intensifying, of the law that is taking place, not

⁴⁷ D. A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 16–17. Carson suggests that “blessing” should primarily be understood in terms of approval.

⁴⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 98.

⁴⁹ Carson, *Sermon*, 31.

⁵⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 103.

⁵¹ Douglas J. Moo, “The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 352.

in terms of changing the demand, but rather showing that this was always the true intent.⁵² This law of Christ “escalates” the purview of the Mosaic law. In this sense we might say that the law of Moses is typological of the law of Christ.⁵³

Jesus insists that only an exceedingly great righteousness will constitute entrance into the kingdom. He will shortly explain that such a righteousness is not merely an external righteousness but an internal righteousness of the heart.⁵⁴ The apostle Paul will clarify later in the canon that such a righteousness cannot be achieved by works, but must be the imputed righteousness of Christ. Yet Christ is nonetheless demanding that this standard must be lived out by his disciples.⁵⁵

Matthew 5:21–48

Matthew 5:20 and 5:48 form an *inclusio* which shows the overarching moral standard of Christ’s kingdom—exceedingly great righteousness and God’s perfection. In this section, Jesus puts forward specific instances of the Old Testament law which are now fulfilled in him. Christ cites various Old Testament laws (Exod 20:13–14; 21:24; Lev 19:12, 18; Num 30:2; Deut 24:1) half of which can be found in the Ten Commandments.⁵⁶ He then presents a more internalized and further reaching interpretation of each statute.⁵⁷ Unlike the scribes, Jesus teaches with an authority to

⁵² Willem A. VanGemeren, “The Law Is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 38; France, *Matthew*, 183; Osborne, *Matthew*, 184.

⁵³ Hamilton notes that typology can be seen in people, events and institutions. Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 77–80.

⁵⁴ Osborne, *Matthew*, 184. See also Pennington who speaks of “whole-person righteousness.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 178,

⁵⁵ Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 1:208.

⁵⁶ Osborne, *Matthew*, 184.

⁵⁷ Although Jesus is primarily showing how he fulfils these various laws, he also calls attention to misrepresentations that have been adopted that are unfaithful to the Old Testament Scriptures. See Carson, *Matthew*, 180.

rightly interpret the Old Testament Scriptures (Matt 7:28–29).⁵⁸

Matthew 6:1–18

In this text, Jesus elaborates on false and true piety.⁵⁹ He establishes that the citizens of his kingdom must not aim to please man but instead must please the Father.⁶⁰ Christ labels external religion as hypocrisy. This “play acting”⁶¹ is specifically reprimanded with regard to giving, prayer and fasting. Jesus is not simply teaching that one should give, pray, and fast. These devotional acts were clearly laid out in the Old Testament (Deut 15:11; Ezra 8:21–23; Dan 6:5–13) and were well established in Jewish life.⁶² Rather, Jesus is insisting that the heart behind the actions must be true.⁶³ These specific instances are examples of how all piety should be lived out before God rather than men and should derive from a true heart.⁶⁴

Jesus devotes an extended section of the Sermon to the subject of prayer. Christ’s model prayer demonstrates part of the nature of our relationship with God as our heavenly Father. Other New Testament authors will elaborate on this relationship in the Epistles (e.g., Eph 1:5; 1 John 3:1–3).⁶⁵ The prayer also shows the ultimate desire of kingdom citizens should be glorifying the name of God and seeking that his kingdom and will prevail.

⁵⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 106.

⁵⁹ France, *Matthew*, 155.

⁶⁰ Carson, *Sermon*, 59.

⁶¹ Carson, *Sermon*, 61.

⁶² Pennington, *Sermon*, 182.

⁶³ Pennington, *Sermon*, 182.

⁶⁴ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 207.

⁶⁵ Carson, *Sermon*, 66–67.

Matthew 6:19–34

Jesus then teaches that the citizens of his kingdom should not overly concern themselves with possessions. They should neither accumulate abundance, nor fret over lack. Christ is shifting expectations from the earthly abundance promised under the old covenant (Deut 28:1–14) to an expectation of heavenly treasure. Jesus is continuing to paint a picture of a kingdom not of this world (John 18:36).

Christ carries forward what he has already said regarding trusting the Lord for daily bread. Jesus has promised his disciples incredible spiritual blessings in the kingdom (Matt 5:3–10; cf. Luke 12:32). He now reassures them that the Father will also meet their daily needs.

This perspective on possessions clearly shapes the early church’s practices (Acts 2:44–45; 2 Cor 8:1–4) as well as the apostle’s teaching (2 Cor 9:6–12; Phil 4:14–20; 1 Tim 6:17–19; Jas 5:1–5).

Matthew 7:1–12

Many scholars acknowledge that these verses form the least cohesive unit within the Sermon.⁶⁶ Grant Osborne suggests a connection of the various elements around the subject of relationships with others.⁶⁷ Carson adds the dimension of dealing with the various “side effects” that we must avoid of judgementalism and lack of discernment.⁶⁸ Both commentators view the section on prayer as instructions to seek God’s help in order to be obedient to these commands.

The final verse, the golden rule, sums up the section on relationships as well as the entire body of the Sermon, running back to 5:17.⁶⁹ Jesus has already said that he came

⁶⁶ Carson, *Matthew*, 218; France, *Matthew*, 155; Osborne, *Matthew*, 255.

⁶⁷ Osborne, *Matthew*, 255.

⁶⁸ Carson, *Matthew*, 218.

⁶⁹ France, *Matthew*, 155.

to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. Now the authoritative teacher is able to sum up the message of the Law and the Prophets. Jesus later includes this command alongside the greatest commandment and says that these commandments together are the essence of the Law and the Prophets (Matt 22:40).

Matthew 7:13–29

The final section of Christ’s sermon depicts a sharp divide between the rewards of kingdom citizenship and the destruction of anyone who does not believe and obey the King’s Word. As previously noted, the conclusion is reminiscent of the covenant blessings and curses at the close of Deuteronomy as the law is given again on the plains of Moab. Carson notes that the distinct dichotomy between the two groups which Christ presents reflects Old Testament wisdom literature.⁷⁰ Particular traces of the wisdom psalm, Psalm 1, can be seen in that there is one way of life the Lord blesses and another way that leads to perishing/destruction.

It becomes clear that Christ’s teaching is not merely comprised of suggestions and tips for being blessed. Not hearing Christ’s words and not putting them into practice will amount to destruction. But for those who hear and believe the one whom the Father has sent, they will do the will of the Father and shall enter the kingdom (Matt 7:21; cf. John 5:24; 6:29). Christ, who is the fulfillment of the law, is setting before them death and life (Deut 30:15) and there is no other alternative, no middle ground.⁷¹ Like a good preacher at the conclusion of his sermon, Christ is calling for a verdict.⁷²

⁷⁰ Carson, *Matthew*, 224. Pennington points out that the “two-ways” theme is present throughout the Scriptures, in the Law and Prophets as well, citing Deut 30:15-20 and Jer 21:8. Pennington, *Sermon*, 270.

⁷¹ Osborne, *Matthew*, 266.

⁷² I owe the phrase “Calling for a verdict” to Steven Lawson in these lectures: Steven J. Lawson, “The Mechanics of Expository Preaching,” November 6, 2015, produced by The Master’s Seminary. YouTube video playlist, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4sbg6ng23C7CHOnSyuHsVGnko6Pyedni>.

CHAPTER 2
THE BEATITUDES, SALT, AND LIGHT
(MATTHEW 5:1–16)

As Jesus teaches his disciples what it will look like for them to be citizens in his kingdom, he begins by inviting his disciples to see the good life which he intends for them.¹ This blessedness that they have in the eyes of Jesus is meant to give them hope in the full, eschatological realization of that blessing. At the same time, this blessedness encourages them to faithfully pursue this blessed life here and now.² Jesus does this in nine statements that have come to be known as “The Beatitudes.”³ Jesus then follows these statements with two images which communicate that his disciples are not to maintain a private life of devotion but are to live out Jesus’s commands before the world. In doing so, they will fulfill the intended role of God’s people—pointing the world to his glory.⁴ *In the introduction to his sermon, Christ is appealing to his disciples for faithfulness with hopeful words of blessedness, and then commissioning them to serve as*

¹ Jonathan Pennington helped clarify my thinking greatly here in asserting that when we speak of what the Beatitudes are, it may be helpful to use care and clarification with language such as “God’s favor” which may give the unbiblical impression that by living in this way, one can earn divine favor in a covenantal sense. This insight was from a personal conversation, April 11, 2022. Carson notes that blessedness basically equates to approval. D. A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 16. Pennington further explains that macarisms are “descriptive” rather than “effectual” statements. Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 53.

² “Macarisms . . . are invitations to living based on sapiential reflections, not divine speech of reward and cursing.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 53. Pennington further explains them as “value judgements.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 49.

³ Pennington offers a summary of views on how many Beatitudes and what, if any structure is found among them. He wisely points out that there are nine “*makarios*” statements, and therefore we should accept that there are nine Beatitudes, with the final serving as a rhetorical escalation, and transition to the next section. Pennington, *Sermon*, 115–19.

⁴ Scot McKnight, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Story of God Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 55.

his witnesses to the world by their manner of life.

The Blessed Life of Discipleship (5:3–12)

In order to understand the Beatitudes, it is important for us to consider two Old Testament passages to which Jesus seems to be alluding. The first passage, Psalm 1–2, is bookended by two instances of the word “blessing.”⁵ This is the same word that we see repeatedly used in the Beatitudes.⁶ Psalm 1 bears a resemblance to the Beatitudes in their common celebration of what is enjoyed by those who are faithful to the Lord. The man who refuses to follow the wicked but instead delights in God’s Word is deemed by the Psalmist to be blessed. He enjoys this blessedness presently as he is established, nourished, bearing fruit and prospering. He also will enjoy the blessedness in the future as the Lord will not allow him to perish in the judgement. This future dimension of blessedness is furthermore seen at the end of Psalm 2. Here, those who worship the Messiah and take refuge in him will not suffer his wrath when he comes to execute judgement on the nations. This blessedness, which Psalm 2 describes as being found in obeying the law and worshipping the Messiah, will now be fulfilled in the kingdom Jesus is inaugurating.

Jesus also seems to be explicitly making reference in at least the first two beatitudes to Isaiah 61:1–3.⁷ This text was already understood in Jesus’s day to be referring to the glorious eschatological reign of the Messiah.⁸ In Isaiah 61 we see the

⁵ Pennington notes usage of blessed in both Psalm 1 and 2. Pennington, *Sermon*, 44. See Jim Hamilton on relationship between Psalm 1 and 2 as a unit. James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms*, vol. 1, *Psalms 1–72*, Evangelical Biblical Theological Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 1:89–91.

⁶ For an extended defense of *’ašrê* as the background for *makarios*, see Pennington, *Sermon*, 41–67.

⁷ Pennington, *Sermon*, 146. See also W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *Matthew 1–7*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1988), 436–39.

⁸ Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 438. See also D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 160.

Spirit resting on the Messiah as he proclaims good news, liberty, and the year of the Lord's favor. God's people are restored and no longer dishonored and shamed. Christ is filling his disciples with hope that their present humble condition will be reversed when Christ consummates his eschatological kingdom. But Jesus also intends this to serve as an encouragement now. In some sense they already presently possess this blessedness, "for theirs *is* (present tense) the kingdom of heaven." The disciples know the blessedness "so far as the [the kingdom] has been inaugurated."⁹

Drawing on the language of the Old Testament, Christ wants his disciples to understand that this is the life which King Jesus calls the blessed life. They experience this blessedness in part now, but they shall know it in full when the Messiah reigns in his kingdom. Christ intends to summon his people by this positive motivation to keep living in this way. The world would certainly not understand them as being "happy" or "flourishing."¹⁰ But Christ is redefining for his disciples what is involved in the good life.¹¹ He is showing that this is the life he deems as good. Thus, it can be enjoyed with him now.¹² This way of life then finds its full reward in the future of Christ's kingdom.

Our Lord is gently inviting us "to consider what is the best way of [living] in the world."¹³ We can chase after pride, fame, power, euphoria now. We can try to live by a code of might making right or by the ends justifying the means. That may seem in the here and now to be better than what Jesus calls blessed. But Jesus offers us the hope that

⁹ Carson, *Matthew*, 162.

¹⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC, vol. 22 (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 101. Carson, *Sermon* 16–17. See Pennington on a defense of "Flourishing" translation. Pennington, *Sermon*, 47–54. See France for a "reluctant" defense of "Happy." R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 159–61.

¹¹ France, *Matthew*, 160–61.

¹² Ironically we will find happiness now, in the midst of all this, because this is the life God has called us to live. There is joy to have *now*. We should not view Jesus as saying, "Life is hard now, but do not worry, it gets better." There is joy to have now in the suffering, because God is with us as we live this upside-down life. Jonathan Pennington, personal conversation, February 25, 2022.

¹³ Pennington, *Sermon*, 51.

if we will delight in his Word, find refuge in him as our King, and by faith live out what he summons us to in his Sermon on the Mount, then although we may be fools in the world's eyes, we will find comfort that this is the life our Savior calls blessed. And that means that in his glorious, eternal kingdom, this blessedness will one day be unmistakably realized and enjoyed.

Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit (5:3)

Isaiah 61 says the Lord's anointed would proclaim good news to the poor, whom Jesus qualifies here as the poor in spirit.¹⁴ Poverty of spirit means an acknowledgement of being "spiritually bankrupt"¹⁵ and therefore in complete dependence upon God for spiritual needs. This is very clear from Isaiah 66:2 where Isaiah uses this same root word for poverty (*'nh*) to speak of the "poor and of a contrite spirit" (KJV) whom God will look upon with acceptance.¹⁶ This is opposed to the ones who think they have something to offer God in building him a house or offering him many sacrifices. This group of the "poor" are those who understand they have nothing to offer God, but instead are broken over their sin.

The Psalms are also instructive for us in understanding what it means to be poor in spirit. The Hebrew root *'nh* is used multiple times in the Psalms for the group who cries out to the Lord for help (Ps 34:6; 40:17; 70:5; 72:12; 86:1).¹⁷ While the poverty may indeed be physical, it results in the poor crying out to God to meet their need.¹⁸

¹⁴ In Luke 6 they are simply referred to as the poor. Carson notes that even the phrase "the poor" alone "has religious overtones . . . i.e., those who because of sustained economic privation and social distress have confidence only in God." Carson, *Matthew*, 161.

¹⁵ Carson, *Sermon*, 20.

¹⁶ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (1953; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 18. See also McKnight, *Sermon*, 39.

¹⁷ France, *Matthew*, 165.

¹⁸ Interestingly, in Psalm 72 we see that the poor have the hope that when the Davidic Messiah reigns in his kingdom, they will have the hope of one who will, like the Lord himself, hear the poor when they call. It will be in this King's glorious kingdom where the poor will know deliverance and salvation.

Jesus has begun his sermon by labeling as blessed those who know they bring nothing of spiritual value to Jesus. Therefore, they are the ones who turn to him to provide for their spiritual need. Jesus makes it clear from the beginning of the Sermon that belonging to his kingdom begins with God's grace.¹⁹ This is not a work to earn God's blessing, it is a humble acknowledgement that if I am to be blessed, it will not be because of anything I have done. This is an appropriate reminder for a portion of Scripture that could very easily be misinterpreted as teaching a justification by works. However, grace is very much the fabric of the Sermon, for it is impossible to be faithful to any of Christ's teaching apart from his gracious work by his Spirit to produce these characteristics in us.²⁰

The reason these poor in spirit are blessed in Jesus's sight is because "theirs is the kingdom of heaven."²¹ Jesus will shortly tell his disciples to pray that God's kingdom would come. Here we see the tension that this kingdom is something that we in some sense have now. Yet in another sense we still long for the kingdom to come.

But what is this kingdom of heaven, or kingdom of God, to which Jesus is referring? God's people understood from the Old Testament that God had chosen a people to be a "kingdom of priests" with whom he would live in covenant relationship (Exod 19:6). God had given his people a kingship in the line of David that he promised would never end (2 Sam 7:16). They had seen a glimpse of what it was like for God's

This fits exactly with the picture we have in Matthew 5 of the poor being told that they will be blessed in the kingdom of the Messiah.

¹⁹ See Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Companions to the New Testament Series (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 44.

²⁰ Rebekah Eklund notes how with the exception of Luther's "impossible ideal" view of the Beatitudes, the history of interpretation shows a consistent thread of understanding the Beatitudes to be things that we are certainly to strive for, but that this is only possible by God's sanctifying grace. Rebekah Eklund, *The Beatitudes through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 64–67.

²¹ "'Because' shows that the apodosis provides the essential explanation or causal grounds for the radical paradox being claimed in the protasis. The unexpected claim of flourishing found in each protasis needs an explanation or else it makes no sense." Pennington, *Sermon*, 155.

anointed to reign gloriously in David's son, Solomon. But Solomon and the kings after him would show that something was lacking. The king was not who he needed to be, and the people were not who they needed to be. But the prophets gave God's people hope that there would come a king who would rule over God's people as intended (Isa 9:6–7; 11:1–16) which meant God's people would enjoy the glory of that kingdom (Isa 60–62), which would surpass the all kingdoms of the earth and would last forever (Dan 2:44; 7:14).²²

While Jesus would have to correct many misunderstandings of what his kingdom would be, people who knew the Scriptures would understand what Jesus was saying when he referred to the kingdom. It is God's glorious and eternal rule over his people.²³ This is something his people would have longed to be a part of. Jesus says those who will make up his kingdom are those spiritually destitute who realize their need to be in the kingdom and come to Jesus seeking entrance. Christ is calling his disciples to remember the wonderful inheritance they have in him. We have been welcomed into his glorious kingdom, but this is ours not because of our merits, but only given in grace to those who humbly come to him in their need for salvation.

While Jesus is primarily addressing his disciples, in the backdrop there lies a gentle invitation to the crowds who are overhearing this.²⁴ They too can be in the kingdom, if they will be poor in spirit, acknowledging that they cannot save themselves, and instead look to Christ in faith to save them.

²² Charles L. Quarles argues that Daniel plays a significant role in Matthew's presentation of the kingdom. Charles L. Quarles, *The Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ's Message to the Modern Church*, NAC Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 45–47.

²³ I have somewhat adapted this definition from Goldsworthy's "God's People in God's Place under God's Rule." Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching Christ in the Whole of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 87–88.

²⁴ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 164; France, *Matthew*, 156; Quarles, *Sermon*, 38. Carson cautions that we should note that "disciples" in Matthew are not always fully committed, and so we should be hesitant to make a sharp distinction between the crowds and the disciples at this point. Carson also notes that whoever the audience, they are still admonished to "enter the kingdom." Carson, *Sermon*, 15–16. See also Carson, *Matthew*, 157–58.

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn (5:4)

Here again there seems to be a strong allusion to Isaiah 61.²⁵ In that passage the mourning is by those who are “in Zion” as God’s people, but have gone into exile. They are mourning the ruin of Jerusalem. The background of the passage shows more than just a general mourning that is common to all people. It is a mourning specifically associated with sorrow over the consequences of sin.²⁶ In Isaiah 61, Israel is mourning over their own sin that led to the Babylonian exile. Although in that context the mourning is over their own sin, God’s people could also mourn for the consequences of sin we see throughout the world.²⁷

These mourners are blessed because “they will be comforted.” The blessing is not something chiefly experienced now, but in the future. Based on the allusion to Isaiah 61 it is natural to assume that this comfort will take place in the consummation of the messianic kingdom. The comfort that is promised is that of having “gladness instead of mourning” (Isa 61:3). This gladness comes from rejoicing at what God has done in restoring the kingdom after the Babylonian exile, making his people priests, clothing them in salvation and righteousness.²⁸

Jesus is at the same time promising that comfort is coming, but also giving comfort and hope to his disciples presently with this promise. They will be comforted, but they are blessed now, because of the promise that they will be comforted.

We see in Revelation that the mournful cry of “how long, O Lord,” is finally answered when Babylon, which symbolizes the world in its wicked rebellion against

²⁵ Quarles, *Sermon*, 53; McKnight, *Sermon*, 41; France, *Matthew*, 165.

²⁶ Davies and Allison add that the mourning in Isaiah 61 can also be understood as a mourning that God has not yet set right the wrongs that Babylon has inflicted (Ps 137) and that for Christians this mourning would be akin to mourning that Christ’s kingdom has not been consummated and we do not yet see the enemy defeated. Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1–7*, 448.

²⁷ Carson, *Sermon*, 19.

²⁸ Quarles, *Sermon*, 54.

God, finally falls under God's judgement. In the midst of this God saves his people and welcomes them to the messianic banquet (Rev 19:1–9). Those who mourn over their sin, have been zealous and repented (Rev 3:20), and have not embraced the sin of the world will at long last be comforted. They will know this comfort while the world mourns that all the pleasures of the earth are now laid waste (Rev 18:19).

Jesus is encouraging us not to continue in our own sin, embracing the sin of the world, but to in poverty of spirit, be broken over our sin. He calls us to repent with mournful, longing desire to see the kingdom in which our filthy garments will be exchanged for the joyful robes of righteousness (Isa 61:10). Blessed are God's people who mourn now over sin, for they shall be comforted when sin is no more.

Blessed Are the Meek (5:5)

Here again the Old Testament informs our understanding of Jesus's encouragement to the disciples. It is almost universally agreed that Psalm 37 stands as the background of this beatitude. Psalm 37 states, "But the meek shall inherit the land . . . those blessed by the Lord shall inherit the land, but those cursed by him shall be cut off" (Ps 37:11, 22). Psalm 37 therefore should be one of the chief places that we look to define what meekness is.²⁹ Psalm 37 teaches God's people to trust him in the face of wickedness rather than "fretting" over the wicked and seeking vengeance.³⁰ They are those who "wait for the Lord and keep his way" (Ps 37:34) believing that the day of the wicked is coming.

We can also define meekness by noticing that in the two other places Matthew uses this word it is a description of Jesus himself.³¹ Jesus is "meek and lowly in heart"

²⁹ Quarles, *Sermon*, 55.

³⁰ I owe this observation first to hearing a sermon by David Platt. David Platt, "Blessed Are the Meek" (sermon preached at the Southern Baptist Convention Pastor's Conference, Birmingham, AL, June 10, 2019).

³¹ McKnight, *Sermon*, 42.

(Matt 11:29) and comes to his people in meekness (Matt 21:5).³² Perhaps Jesus's own meekness during the week of his passion best exemplifies what Jesus views as blessed; a confident trust in the purposes of God that does not have to conquer with worldly might but can carry on in righteous suffering.³³ Jesus is calling his disciples to patient faith in eschatological justice rather than zealotry and vigilantism now.³⁴

The reason the meek are blessed likewise comes from Psalm 37, a promise that they shall inherit the earth (land). D. A. Carson points out that the verb "inherit" is often used in the Old Testament with reference to the possession of the promised land.³⁵ Psalm 37 certainly reinforces the hope that in God's kingdom, his people could "dwell upon [the land] forever" (Ps 37:29). But the hope is not to gain a territory by force now, but that in the eschatological kingdom, God's people would be given a land that is not only more glorious, as the prophets foretold,³⁶ but also that would last forever. As later Scripture makes clear, this land is none other than the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 21:1).³⁷

Jesus is encouraging his people that they are not to prize being mighty in the world's eyes and taking over by force. Rather they follow him in meekness and trust in God's final justice. They can therefore suffer here, knowing they are blessed in the eyes of the Savior. They are assured that they shall receive their great inheritance of dwelling secure in God's kingdom forever.

Christ Jesus challenges us to consider whether we will seek to set up some

³² The Greek word *praus* is used in all three texts, but translated "meek" in Matt 5:5, "gentle" in Matt 11:29, and "humble" in Matt 21:5.

³³ Allison, *Sermon*, 47; Carson, *Matthew*, 163; F. Hauck and S. Schulz, "praüs," in *TDNTA*, 930.

³⁴ McKnight, *Sermon*, 42.

³⁵ Carson, *Matthew*, 163.

³⁶ Quarles, *Sermon*, 57.

³⁷ Carson, *Matthew*, 164.

cheap imitation of God’s kingdom on earth by our own might and in our own timing;³⁸ or will we wait and trust that the judge of all the earth shall finally do what is right?

Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst For Righteousness (5:6)

The righteousness which Jesus speaks of seems to be righteous living, since this is the way the term is used by Jesus in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount (5:10, 20; 6:1).³⁹ It is also possible that a desire for God’s justice coincides with this personal righteousness.⁴⁰ It is a “long[ing] for the power of righteousness in their own hearts to prevail over sin, *and . . .* for righteousness to prevail in the world.”⁴¹ His disciples are to long in their hearts for this righteousness like the body hungers and thirsts for food. Their longing for this righteousness hints that they cannot achieve this solely by their own effort. Therefore, these spiritually impoverished people look to God as the provider of their spiritual need—to be righteous.⁴²

They are blessed for they shall be satisfied. They shall have all they want and have it abundantly.⁴³ How might such an amazing promise be fulfilled. Although righteous living is likely the chief referent of what the disciples are longing for, imputed righteousness is certainly one way in which this promise is fulfilled. A righteousness that is greater than the scribes and Pharisees will at last be counted as ours, the perfect righteousness of Christ. And in the eschatological fulfilment of this promise, this

³⁸ James M. Hamilton Jr., “New Testament Theology” (unpublished class lecture for 80231, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, January 2022).

³⁹ Quarles, *Sermon*, 59.

⁴⁰ Carson, *Matthew*, 164.

⁴¹ Eklund, *Beatitudes*, 165, citing Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints Happiness* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1988; repr., Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 89–90.

⁴² Quarles, *Sermon*, 61; Allison, *Sermon*, 49.

⁴³ Interestingly, most of the other uses of this word “satisfied” in the Gospels are in relation to Jesus feeding the crowds and the crowds being satisfied with the food he provides.

righteousness will not just be the judicious verdict, but it will be a glorious, perfected reality (Isa 60:21; Mal 3:3). There will be nothing but righteousness in God's people when Christ consummates his kingdom. His own righteousness will be counted to them, and that righteousness will be perfected in them in glory. But their longing for righteousness will also be satisfied as they live under the perfect righteousness of King Jesus as he reigns in righteousness forever (Ps 72).

Jesus is prompting us to ask what are we hungry and thirsty for? He admonishes us to be conformed to the righteousness of Christ. We should long for what is worldly in us to be put to death, and instead that we might put on the new self in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:22–24). We must long for righteousness, knowing in Christ's kingdom we will finally be satisfied, when all the ransomed church of God is finally saved to sin no more.⁴⁴

Blessed Are the Merciful (5:7)

It is tempting at first glance to read this beatitude as making God's mercy something that is earned by our mercy toward others. But Christ's latter parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21–35 reminds us that mercy is first extended by God and *then* is expected from us as a response.⁴⁵ It is only by knowing that God is a God of mercy that we can truly understand what mercy is (Exod 34:6). We must rightly understand the order in which mercy is dispensed. But we must not miss the repeated instructions of Christ that his disciples are to forgive as they have been forgiven and judge with the measure by which they would want to be judged (Matt 6:14; 7:1–2).⁴⁶ But here in Matthew 5 we have the positive encouragement to relate to the negative warning

⁴⁴ William Cowper, "There Is a Fountain," in *Baptist Hymnal*, ed. William J. Reynolds (Nashville: Convention Press 1975), 107.

⁴⁵ France, *Matthew*, 250.

⁴⁶ Quarles, *Sermon*, 63.

about not showing mercy in Matthew 18. Christ's followers are encouraged to demonstrate mercy to others by the future promise of God's mercy toward them.

We must not forget the unfathomable mercy we are promised to receive. God has promised that the guilty will by no means be cleared. But, because God's mercy appeared to us in Christ, we are spared the wrath of God. Christ calls us to respond in faith by showing this same kind of mercy to others when they wrong us.

Blessed Are the Pure in Heart (5:8)

Psalm 24:3–4 states that one of the requirements to ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in his holy place (i.e., come into his presence at the temple) was to have both clean hands and a pure heart.⁴⁷ This psalm envisions the worshiper approaching the tabernacle only to be reminded that they must be holy both inside and out. Proverbs 20:9 implies that no one can make their own heart pure and thereby be clean from sin. But God's people understood there was one way in which their sin could be atoned for and they could be made pure, through the sacrifices that God had instructed to be offered. Psalm 24 shows that it is not human merit that achieves purity of heart, but faith in God's covenant relationship with his people. In fact, Psalm 24:5 says that along with the blessing of the Lord, the pure in heart will receive "righteousness from the God of his salvation." Here again we see that God's people will ultimately receive their purity and righteousness from God.⁴⁸ This purity is given by God ultimately in the new covenant of which Ezekiel prophesied where God would cleanse his people from all their uncleanness, give them a new heart and cause them to walk in his statutes, with the Davidic king, God's servant, reigning over them (Ezek 36:24–28; 37:24–28).⁴⁹ We now

⁴⁷ Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1, (1-41), Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 1:575–76.

⁴⁸ France, *Matthew*, 168.

⁴⁹ Quarles, *Matthew*, 66.

see the Davidic king, Jesus, promising his blessing to those who are pure in heart.

But although we are right to see that this purity of heart must be given by God to those who approach the throne of grace in faith, Jesus is still calling on his disciples to seek this purity of heart.⁵⁰ Jonathan Edwards said, “Though it be God’s work to purify the heart, yet the actual or rather the active procuring of it is your act.”⁵¹ One is reminded of the book of Hebrews, where our hearts have been sprinkled clean (Heb 10:22), yet Christians are admonished to strive for “the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).⁵² The Christians is purified by God’s gracious salvation in Christ, but they are also instructed to be pure.

The pure in heart are blessed for they shall see God. In one sense, the regenerate heart that Christ makes pure will understand that seeing Jesus is seeing God.⁵³ But it is an eschatological hope that is in view here that brings them blessedness now.⁵⁴ One day the eyes of the pure in heart shall behold God. Although it may not be clear how exactly we will behold a God who is invisible and is spirit, this is the language Scripture repeatedly uses to describe the joy of being able to know God as he is in all his glory—*seeing him in all his glory* (Rev 22:3–4).⁵⁵

The hope of this indescribable reality, seeing God face to face, should cause Christ’s disciples to strive for holiness, for purity of heart. The apostle Paul reflects this

⁵⁰ Carson, *Sermon*, 26–27,

⁵¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 17, *Sermons and Discourses 1730–1733*, ed. Mark Valeri (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 85. Quoted in Rebekah Eklund, *The Beatitudes through the Ages*, 64.

⁵² Carson, *Sermon*, 26.

⁵³ Allison, *Sermon*, 52.

⁵⁴ Quarles, *Sermon*, 67.

⁵⁵ McKnight holds it will be impossible to literally see God. McKnight, *Sermon*, 46. This is contrasted with Quarles, who says, “In the new earth and the new heavens Jesus’s disciples will literally see God.” Quarles, *Sermon*, 67. For an exploration of what the Beatific vision might entail, see David Mathis, “We Will See His Face,” *Desiring God* (blog), March 11, 2021, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/we-wil-see-his-face>.

language when he summons Timothy to “pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22).

Blessed Are the Peacemakers (5:9)

The closest the Bible comes to using this word, peacemakers, is in Colossians 1:20 where Christ makes peace by the blood of his cross. Ephesians 2:14–17 shows that through the peace Christ achieved on the cross between God and man, he provides the way peace will be had between man and man. This seems to be the primary way the New Testament understands the making of peace. Thus, for his disciples to be peacemakers is to imitate this work of Christ. As Christ’s disciples make peace within the body, they are to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3) which Christ died to accomplish.⁵⁶ We see this as an emphasis later in the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus gives instructions about being reconciled to our brother before proceeding with worship.⁵⁷

Outside the body, Christ’s disciples chiefly make peace by carrying the good news of the gospel of peace to the world (Isa 52:7; Rom 10:15).⁵⁸ This is the necessary predecessor to any kind of true and lasting peacemaking.⁵⁹ This peacemaking might further be extended to the world around the disciples by turning the other cheek, loving enemies and praying for persecutors (Matt 5:38–44; cf. Rom 12:17–21).⁶⁰

These peacemakers are blessed because they shall be called sons of God. Their

⁵⁶ Quarles shows that James 3 is concerned with Christ’s disciples having peace among them and believes James is echoing Jesus’s teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Quarles, *Sermon*, 68.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Pennington, personal conversation, Feb 25, 2022. See also Carson, *Matthew*, 183.

⁵⁸ Carson, *Matthew*, 165.

⁵⁹ Eklund shows a stream of interpretation that has interpreted the phrase to refer to missionaries or the apostles as they spread the gospel. Even if not directly interpreted as missionaries, Eklund states, “Most interpreters throughout history, until recently, assumed that peace with God is prior to all forms of peacemaking. Eklund, *The Beatitudes through the Ages*, 237–38.

⁶⁰ Quarles, *Sermon*, 69.

sonship seems to have a dual significance. Sonship in one sense describes them as having attributes or the character of God (namely peace).⁶¹ But Jesus is also referring to eschatological blessing. The eschatological benefit of sonship in the New Testament seems to be more focused on our adoption and therefore redemption and salvation (Rom 8:15–25). This is consistent with the Old Testament picture that because Israel is God’s son, God rescues and redeems them from slavery and preserves them from judgement (Exod 4:22; 6:2–8; 13:1–2, 11–16).⁶²

Christ is encouraging his disciples to be those who make peace, following in the footsteps of our Savior who is our peace. We must make peace with our brothers and sisters by finding unity in the gospel of our Lord Jesus. We must then bring peace to the world through the proclamation of the gospel of peace. The encouragement to stay the course is that in the last day we will be called a son of God, adopted into his family, redeemed, spared from judgement (Mal 3:17), and made heirs to his kingdom.

Blessed Are [You], the Persecuted (5:10–12)

Although grammatically two separate Beatitudes,⁶³ the final two pronouncements of who is blessed in Jesus’s sight share the common focus on persecution. While persecution may be physical it also may include reviling and slander. The reason for the persecution is both righteousness and Christ himself. We should understand these as one in the same cause—righteousness which is rooted in obedience and allegiance to Christ. Their persecution is in keeping with the pattern of persecution of

⁶¹ McKnight, *Sermon*, 48; France, *Matthew*, 169.

⁶² Quarles, *Sermon*, 69–70.

⁶³ McKnight, although he sees these as nine Beatitudes with three sets of three, still organizes the final two together in his commentary because of their similarity. McKnight, *Sermon*, 49. Many Commentators agree that vv. 11–12 is an elaboration of the eighth beatitude. Carson, *Sermon*, 30; Allison, *Sermon*, 56. Pennington does note that vv. 11–12 serves as a transitional passage to vv. 13–16. Pennington, *Sermon*, 116–19.

the Old Testament prophets and, although not stated until later, the persecution which Jesus himself will endure (Matt 10:22–25). The righteous have been and will continue to be persecuted. Yet there is comfort and hope in knowing that if they are enduring suffering as a Christian (1 Pet 4:16) there is not shame but blessedness.

The persecuted are blessed in Jesus's eyes, and should rejoice and be glad because of the great reward they have of inheriting the kingdom. We see in the bookend statements that all of the hope offered by Christ in the Beatitudes lies in that his disciples are a part of Christ's kingdom,⁶⁴ and when his kingdom does finally come, then they shall fully enjoy these blessings.

When persecution comes upon us as believers because we are living righteously in obedience and allegiance to our Savior, will we fall away, because we have only heard the Word but have not believed it (Matt 13:18–21)? Or will we believe Christ's Word so much that, like the disciples who first heard Jesus speak these words, we go about in the midst of persecution rejoicing because we were counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ (Acts 5:41)?

Beatitudes Summary

Jesus is telling us the way life is to be lived in his kingdom, the life which he looks upon with favor.⁶⁵ He is enticing us to embrace this life by faith. With regenerate hearts, we are called to delight in his words and live by them. If we are a disciple of Christ, then we must see here the way Christ is calling us to live, and then walk by faith in trusting the promises that he gives us.

⁶⁴ Allison, *Sermon*, 56.

⁶⁵ Pennington refers to macarisms as value judgements. Pennington, *Sermon*, 49. I would nuance this by adding Christ looks upon this way of life and gives the authoritative value judgement that this life finds favor in God's eyes and is therefore blessed.

The Witness of Discipleship (5:13–16)

While Jesus has been encouraging his disciples with promises of his favor that they might persevere in their personal faithfulness, Jesus now makes it clear that he does not intend for their privileged status in the kingdom to be a benefit kept to themselves. Christ instructs his disciples that through their personal commitment to Christ they will also serve Christ by their lives being a testimony pointing the world to God.

Salt of the Earth (5:13)

Although there is no consensus as to what specific function of salt Jesus has in mind, the best conclusion seems to be that it is closely related to the function of light—pointing people to Christ.⁶⁶ In some way the righteous life of the disciples is to have an impact or influence⁶⁷ on the surrounding world in such a way that it bears witness to Christ.

With this first metaphor Jesus uses, he gives a negative caution. If salt ceases to do what it is intended to do, it is no longer any good.⁶⁸ If Jesus's disciples stop living in the way that Jesus has just described as blessed, then they cannot bear witness to Christ in the world, and thus they will be useless to Christ. One thinks of the apostle Paul disciplining himself in order that he might not be disqualified as a similar idea (1 Cor 9:27).⁶⁹

This life that Jesus calls blessed, is for the disciples' good. Yet, it is also meant to serve as a witness to the world of the transforming power of Christ's salvation. This is

⁶⁶ Pennington, *Sermon*, 163–65; Quarles, *Sermon*, 79.

⁶⁷ McKnight, *Sermon*, 57.

⁶⁸ This is another part of the metaphor for which there is little consensus, other than that is a caution against the disciples failing to be effective at their witness because of some kind of unfaithfulness. Carson describes it as being adulterated or deteriorated. Carson, *Sermon*, 52. McKnight has in mind diminishing influence of the character Jesus has described in the Beatitudes. McKnight, *Sermon*, 57. Quarles thinks the idea is becoming impure. Quarles, *Sermon*, 81–82.

⁶⁹ Quarles suggest that there may an idea of permanent harm to the Christian witness. Quarles, *Sermon*, 82.

their mission as followers of Christ. But if they cease to persevere in this life that Christ has described, Christ says they will be of no use to him. Disciples must not lose their effectiveness as a witness because they are not concerned with the character of life Christ calls them to have.

Light of the World (5:14–16)

The book of Isaiah seems to provide a great deal of background for referring to Christ's disciples as the light of the world.⁷⁰ Matthew has already shown that Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah 9:2, that in the coming of Christ, light has dawned. Isaiah also shows that the Lord's Servant will be "a light for the nations, that [God's] salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa 49:6; cf. 42:6).⁷¹ It is also God's people who will have light as God's glory rises upon them and "nations will come to [their] light" (Isa 60:1–3).⁷² The light seems to be primarily "a metaphor of the Messiah and his people fulfilling the missionary purpose of manifesting the glory of God among the nations."⁷³

In the New Testament, we see that Jesus brings light/is light (Matt 4:16; John 8:12) which brings salvation to the world. As the glory of Christ is seen in their lives, the disciples will become a light to the world as well.

Jesus next uses an illustration to reinforce the positive command he will give to "let your light shine before others." Light cannot be hidden, any more than an elevated, illumined city can be hidden on a dark night.⁷⁴ It is also absurd to hide light that is meant to give illumination to those around it. In the same way it is both impossible and inconceivable that Jesus's disciples will not fulfill God's express purpose of his people

⁷⁰ I am heavily indebted to Quarles here. Quarles, *Sermon*, 83–88.

⁷¹ Quarles, *Sermon*, 84.

⁷² Furthermore, Paul explicitly applies Isa 49:6 to Christians as well in Acts 13:47.

⁷³ Quarles, *Sermon*, 84.

⁷⁴ Quarles, *Sermon*, 86.

serving to testify to him.⁷⁵

Although the New Testament will make clear elsewhere that verbal proclamation is essential to a disciple's witness (Matt 28:20; Rom 10:14–17), Jesus teaches his disciples here that it is their “good works” that will bring others to give glory to God. This too seems to show a fulfilment of Isaiah, where God's people “shall all be righteous . . . that [God] may be glorified” (Isa 60:21).⁷⁶ As the disciples embrace the character described in the Beatitudes, and live out the true righteousness Jesus will soon describe, they will reflect the light of Christ to the world so that the world will come to Christ and also give glory to God.

The disciples' identity is light. If they would follow Christ, it is impossible to do so without being his witness. It would make no sense for them not to do this, because this was indeed part of God's purpose in saving them. Yes, he saved them so that they would know his favor, but also so that they might point the rest of the world to his saving grace as well.

Conclusion

In the introduction to his sermon, Christ is appealing to his disciples for faithfulness with hopeful words of blessedness and then commissioning them to serve as his witnesses to the world by their manner of life. He is calling us to persevere in life-long, fully-devoted following after him. He is showing us what discipleship is. But before he makes the requirements of discipleship clear in the rest of the Sermon, he wants us to understand two things about discipleship. It is for our good, and it is for God's glory. To live as Jesus's disciples, who have the character he describes, means to enjoy this life into which Christ has graciously brought us. While that blessedness is a comfort now, it will

⁷⁵ McKnight sights numerous Scripture passages to argue that this has always been God's intent for his people, ever since the garden of Eden. McKnight, *Sermon*, 55.

⁷⁶ Quarles, *Sermon*, 85.

truly be known when all of the eschatological blessedness is found in the consummated kingdom. Living for Jesus is for our good.

But living for Jesus is also for God's glory. It has always been God's creative intent that his people would bring him glory (Gen 1:26–28; Isa 43:7). This is God's intent in welcoming disciples into his kingdom, that they would live for his glory. We achieve this in part by testifying to the world around us of the good news of what Christ has done, ultimately with our words, but also by the good works that Jesus commands us to do.

CHAPTER 3

THE FULFILMENT OF THE LAW IN CHRIST (MATTHEW 5:17–20)

Rightly interpreting Matthew 5:17–20 is crucial to understanding how Christians are to relate to the Old Testament law. These verses help us thread the difficult needle of both affirming the enduring validity¹ and authority of the law, and also acknowledging that something has changed with the coming of Christ regarding how the law is to be viewed. This passage of Scripture teaches us that *Christ is the one to whom the law pointed. Thus, the law will stand forever, insofar as it points to Christ's own true righteousness that he teaches, demonstrates, and calls his people to live in.*

What Christ Has Done with the Law: Fulfilment (5:17)

In order to determine what Christ has done with the law, it is crucial to determine what is meant by *plēroō* in Matthew 5:17. D. A. Carson notes that this verb is used in Matthew more than in the rest of the New Testament combined and it almost always means “to be that to which the other party pointed.”² Jesus states that he stands as what was being pointed to by all the Old Testament, here referred to as the Law and the Prophets.

Matthew has already shown that Christ fulfilled specific statements in the Old

¹ I am slightly altering D. A. Carson's phrasing of “valid continuity.” D. A. Carson, *Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 39.

² D. A. Carson, “How Does Jesus Fulfill the Law?,” 2018 Gospel Coalition's Women's Conference, June 8, 2019, YouTube video, 2:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSWPqiUIZBo&t=859s>.

Testament, either by direct fulfilment or by typological fulfilment.³ In Matthew 5 we see that Christ stands as another typological fulfilment. Typology is the way that the biblical authors connect relationships that exist between people, events, or institutions across the canon by noticing the historical correspondences which show the “type” of thing God does in his plan of redemption. The type of thing God has done in the past gets repeated, but with an escalation in significance later in God’s plan of redemption.⁴ All the types in the Old Testament find their fulfilment in some way in Christ as the antitype.⁵ This seems to be what Christ means by saying that he has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. In the Sermon on the Mount, we see the typological fulfilment of a person (Moses), an event (the giving of the law on Mount Sinai), and an institution (the Mosaic law as a whole) all of which are fulfilled by Christ.

Matthew has already presented Christ as the typological fulfilment of Moses in the early chapters of his Gospel.⁶ Matthew calls attention to correspondences and escalation in the way Jesus, like Moses, was threatened as an infant, but was kept safe. Jesus, like Moses has been brought out of Egypt, participated in a baptism (1 Cor 10:2), and then was in the wilderness for forty periods of time.⁷ Jesus, as the prophet greater than Moses (Deut 18:15), now goes up on the mountain, which is the exact phrase used in

³ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 173.

⁴ James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology, Understanding the Bible’s Promised-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations are Fulfilled in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 4–5.

⁵ See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum on how progressive-covenantal theology must see types fulfilled in Christ, and only through him can it then be fulfilled in the church. Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical–Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 133–34.

⁶ Charles L. Quarles, *The Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ’s Message to the Modern Church*, NAC Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 91–92; Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 175.

⁷ Christ is also the antitype of the nation of Israel in that he is God’s son called out of Egypt, baptized on behalf of Israel, and tempted in the wilderness. But, unlike Israel, he overcomes temptation by keeping God’s law.

the Septuagint to describe Moses's ascent to Mount Sinai to receive the law and then bring it to the people.⁸ Now Jesus gives to his disciples the law of Christ (1 Cor 9:21).

Christ fulfills the law in that the law of Moses pointed to Jesus. Although it is not the emphasis here in this passage, Jesus did perfectly obey all of the Mosaic law on behalf of God's people.⁹ In this sense, Christ has fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law in his own life. But the primary focus of Christ's statement in Matthew 5:17 is that he fulfills the law through his teaching being the righteous standard of God to which the Mosaic law was pointing forward.¹⁰ This teaching is captured in miniature in the Sermon on the Mount.

This is crucial for how new covenant believers are to read the Old Testament law and apply it to our lives. The enduring validity of the law for us as Christians is found when we read it with our eyes toward its fulfilment in Christ's perfect righteousness and the righteous standard that he teaches his disciples to embody. We look to how Christ interpreted and applied the law of Moses, doing so on the basis of his unique authority as the Son of God (Matt 7:28–29).¹¹ This allows the Old Testament law to be read all according to the same interpretive criteria, rather than artificially dividing the law of Moses into various categories, such as moral, civil, and ceremonial.¹²

Therefore, an important application of this text is that Christ's followers need to learn how to read the Old Testament. They do not reject it as irrelevant (which is what

⁸ Quarles, *Sermon*, 22.

⁹ Christ is never in direct violation of any part of the written law. Douglas J. Moo, "Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 6, no. 20 (1984): 5.

¹⁰ Carson notes that Jesus fulfills the Old Testament law by his teaching, just as he fulfilled prophecies by his person and actions. Carson, *Matthew*, 175. See also Pennington, *Sermon*, 174–76; Quarles, *Sermon*, 91–93; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 182–83.

¹¹ Carson notes that "Jesus is showing the direction in which [the law of Moses] points on the basis of his own authority." Carson, *Matthew*, 177.

¹² Douglas J. Moo, "Response to Willem A. VanGemeren" in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 85.

Jesus will spend the rest of the passage clarifying). Rather, as they read the Old Testament, they ask “What has Christ said in this regard?” If Christ has upheld or even intensified the law’s demand, then the commandment is binding upon Christians because of its fulfillment in the law of Christ. If the command has been done away with in the law of Christ—for example, food laws (Mark 7:19) and sacrificial laws (Heb 10:12)—Christians interpret that law as having served its typological purpose in pointing forward to Christ. In the instances where the law of Christ has not specifically addressed a command from the Old Testament, that Old Testament command is to be evaluated in light of what Christ has said, particularly, what Christ declares as the two greatest commandments—to love God and love neighbor (Matt 22:34–40).¹³

So, for example, in Exodus 22:14, God’s people are commanded, “If a man borrows anything of his neighbor, and it is injured or dies, the owner not being with it, he shall make full restitution.” Nowhere in the New Testament is this law specifically affirmed, nor is it anywhere specifically abrogated. So, we must look at the way the law of Christ fulfills the righteousness of the Mosaic law and ask, “What does the law of Christ say that would help us know how we should apply this law to the life of the believer?” We can say that Christ taught, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (Matt 7:12). So, the offender should repay the loss as he would wish to be repaid. But we also are commanded to forgive one another, particularly debts that pale in comparison to the debt we have been forgiven (Matt 18:21–35). So, a Christian should also be willing to forgive a loss that he has suffered. However, Christians should certainly not let a situation like this rise to the level of a public lawsuit between brothers (1 Cor 6:1–8). So, the Christian should clearly recognize that love of neighbor is still demanded by Christ. Although they may not adhere to all the

¹³ Moo notes that the double love command shows the basic demand of God but does not replace the individual commands of God. Moo, “Jesus and the Authority of the Mosaic Law,” 11.

circumstantial instructions in Exodus 22 about repaying losses, they will strive to, in love, interact with their neighbor and offer repayment to demonstrate Christ-like love toward a neighbor.

Another application of Jesus's assertion that he came not to abolish but to fulfill the law is to realize that if a person is seeking to be obedient to God but misses Christ, they are missing the point. The law has been given ultimately so that Christ might come as the fulfillment of the law. Therefore, failure to be pointed to Christ when reading the Scriptures is a failure to understand God's revelation to his people (John 5:39).

Jesus is clearly calling his disciples to see that the law must be understood in light of his coming. However, Jesus also wants his disciples to understand that his fulfillment of the law in no way means that the Word of God is ceasing to be true, valid, and applicable to their lives. This is what Jesus is clarifying with all the remaining statements in this passage.

What Is Unchanged Regarding the Law (5:18–19)

Jesus states twice that he has not come to abolish the law. While he has explained that he has come to do something with the law, namely fulfill it, Jesus is affirming that there is some sense in which the law remains unchanged. He first affirms this by explaining that nothing will be removed from the law until the end of the age.

The Law Endures to the End (5:18)

These verses contain three statements that clarify that the law is not abolished by Christ. The central statement is that nothing will pass from the law. There will not be anything that will cease to be a part of the law,¹⁴ lose force within it¹⁵ or fall out from

¹⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), s.v. “13.93 παράγω.” Logos.

¹⁵ W. Bauer et al, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), s.v. “παρέρχομαι,” quoted in Quarles, *Sermon*, 95.

within it. Jesus emphasizes this point in that he does not simply say that no law will pass away, or even that no word would pass away. Rather, he says, “Not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen” (NIV) would pass. The *iōta* is the smallest letter in the Greek alphabet and likely corresponds to the smallest Hebrew letter, *yôd*, which is similar in size to an English apostrophe.¹⁶ The *keraiá*, “least stroke of a pen,” is the small mark that may differentiate certain letters. It might be compared in English to the difference between an “E” and an “F.”¹⁷ So Christ is leaving no room for an understanding that any part of the law will pass away. Jesus, the prophet greater than Moses, is affirming what was already commanded by Moses within the law itself: “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it” (Deut 4:2).

Jesus brackets the affirmation that nothing will pass from the law by two qualifications, both marked by “until.” These two parallel statements seem to be essentially two ways of saying the same thing, perhaps in order to reinforce the enduring nature of the law.¹⁸ Yet both statements do seem to indicate a discernable point in time when the law will be brought to its appointed end.

Nothing will pass from the law “until heaven and earth pass away” and “until all is accomplished.” Charles L. Quarles has noted the similarity, but also dissimilarity, between this statement and Jesus’s statement in Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away.” Quarles argues convincingly that Matthew 24 and Matthew 5:18 both seem to have the events leading up to the eschaton in view. He points out is similar language of heaven and earth passing away in both passages. Also, “until all these things take place” (Matt 24:34) can be compared with “until all is

¹⁶ Carson, *Matthew*, 177.

¹⁷ James Swanson, “3037 *keraiá*,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997). Logos.

¹⁸ Quarles, *Sermon*, 98. Also, Pennington notes that they are parallel statements and calls them “mutually interpretive phrases.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 176.

accomplished” (Matt 5:18). This seems to indicate that Jesus words in Matthew 5 are meant to communicate that the law will stand until the end of the age.¹⁹

We see here from the lips of Jesus the seriousness with which we should take every part of Scripture, down to the smallest detail. This statement should cause us to take great care in studying the Word of God. But we should also see that the context of this verse means that part of taking all Scripture seriously is rightly interpreting each Scripture in its context within the entire canon. Although nothing should be taken away from the law that Moses commanded, Jesus calls us to rightly interpret and understand the law by looking to its fulfillment in the law which he gives.

Pennington calls attention to the fact that this view of the place of the law in redemptive history is therefore completely consistent with what the apostle Paul will say about the law in his letters.²⁰ Paul is in agreement that the law served the purpose of pointing forward to fulfillment in Christ (Gal 3:21–25). The statement in Romans 10:4 that “Christ is the end of the law *for righteousness*” seems to be dealing with the end of righteousness based on the law (Rom 10:5), not with the end of any use of the law for the believer.²¹

So, if Christ has fulfilled the law, but it is not abolished, and it must endure to the end of the age, then what must a Christian do in response to the law?

¹⁹ Quarles, *Sermon*, 96–99. Pennington, on the other hand, suggests that, “The best explanation of the *when* of all these things being accomplished is first at Jesus’s death and resurrection and then again finally at his second coming.” He argues that Matthew’s narrative seems to focus on the death and resurrection of Christ as the fulfillment of God’s saving work and is thus described with apocalyptic language. Pennington, *Sermon*, 176–77. The view that “until all is accomplished” refers to the death and resurrection of Christ is popular among a number of commentators. (For a list of commentators with this view see Quarles, *Sermon*, 96; Carson, *Matthew*, 178). However, Carson and Quarles show that the similarity of language in 5:18 with Jesus’s statement in 24:34–35 favors understanding Jesus as speaking of the law enduring until everything that has been prophesied takes places, namely at the second coming of Christ. Carson, *Matthew*, 178; Quarles, *Sermon*, 97–99.

²⁰ Pennington, *Sermon*, 177.

²¹ “Paul does not make a global statement on the relationship between gospel and law here. . . . He responds to the specific error of the Jews articulated in verse 3: they used the law to establish their own righteousness. He observes that those who trust in Christ cease using the law to establish their own righteousness.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (1998; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 547.

The Law Must Be Obeyed (5:19)

Since the law will not pass away until all is accomplished, it must be obeyed fully and taught in its entirety to others. Although there is debate as to whether Jesus is referring to the Old Testament commandments or to the commandments he is about to give, the context, grammar, and parallel statements suggest that Jesus is most immediately referring to the Old Testament commandments.²² However, it would seem that based on Jesus's previous statement about the law being fulfilled in him, that doing and teaching "these commandments" of the Old Testament would involve doing and teaching them in light of their fulfilment in Christ.²³

Jesus warns against relaxing, or possibly better translated "loosing" or "untying," even one of the least of these commandments.²⁴ Translating *lyo* as "untying" may provide a helpful explanation for what Jesus is addressing. If we compare this with Jesus's rebuke of the Pharisees for "tying up heavy burdens" (Matt 23:4–5) we see Jesus is not wishing that his followers "untie" Old Testament laws as being no longer required. His followers should still "do and observe" (Matt 23:3) what the law instructs.

His kingdom subjects should not remove the requirement of any law, nor teach others to do so. This would make one "least in the kingdom of heaven." Although to "be called great in the kingdom of heaven" is clearly something to be desired, there is difficulty determining whether Jesus means "least in the kingdom" to be a consequence

²² Quarles notes three reasons to prefer interpreting "these" as Old Testament commands: "First, the conjunction 'therefore' links verse 19 to the immediately preceding discussion of OT authority. Second, the demonstrative pronoun 'these' that identifies the commandments always points backward to preceding material rather than forward in anticipation of later material in this Gospel. Third, the distinction between the greatest and least commandments was frequently used by the rabbis in discussion of the Law." Quarles, *Sermon*, 99–100. Quarles goes on to note "The 'least' commandments probably correspond to what the rabbis called the 'light' as opposed to the 'weightier' commandments." Quarles, *Sermon*, 100. Jesus himself makes use of these designations in Matthew 23:23–24.

²³ "But the nature of practicing [these OT commandments] has already been affected by vv. 17–18. The law pointed forward to Jesus—his activity and his teaching—so it is properly obeyed by conforming to his Word. As it points to him, so he, in fulfilling it, establishes what continuity it has, the true direction to which it points and the way it is to be obeyed. . . . His teaching toward which the OT pointed must be obeyed." Carson, *Matthew*, 179.

²⁴ For translation of "untying" see France, *Matthew*, 187.

of lesser reward or of exclusion altogether. Jesus speaks elsewhere of being least in the kingdom, and it is certainly not exclusion, nor in those other contexts is it even necessarily a bad thing (i.e., Matt 11:11). However, set next to the threat of “never enter[ing] the kingdom of heaven,” being least in the kingdom of heaven seems like a very serious matter, indeed.²⁵ Even if this is only a threat of a lower rank, it is still something the follower of Christ would not desire, and therefore should not relax or teach the relaxing of any of the law.

Here we see a point of application. Followers of Christ may not pick and choose which portions of Scripture they would like to obey.²⁶ Although there are weightier matters of the law (Matt 23:23), all the commands of Scripture are equally authoritative since they still endure as God’s Word. Even though they may be interpreted differently in light of the coming of Christ, Old Testament laws still must not be discarded. We also see that Christ’s disciples must take great care in what they teach. We will not only be responsible for how we have been obedient, but also for what we have taught others.

In contrast to “relax[ing] one of the least of these commandments”, the disciple who “does [these commandments] and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” The obedience of Christ’s disciples will be reflected in their status in the kingdom. Therefore, they must not abandon the righteousness that is called for in the law of the Old Testament. They must do the commands and teach them. However, these commands that must be done and taught, must be done and taught through the lens of their fulfilment in Christ.²⁷ As Christ fulfils these laws, he shows the righteousness which

²⁵ Pennington sees “least in the kingdom” as parallel to v. 20 and more fully explained by “never enter the kingdom.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 178. However, Carson and others view the statement as referring to “gradation within kingdom ranks.” Carson, *Matthew*, 178–79; Quarles, *Sermon*, 100; France, *Matthew*, 188.

²⁶ France, *Matthew*, 188.

²⁷ Carson, *Matthew*, 179; Quarles, *Sermon*, 100.

he demands of his kingdom subjects is the true righteousness that stood behind what the Lord commanded in the law of Moses.

What Christians Must Do Regarding the Law: Have True Righteousness (5:20)

The ability to enter the kingdom of heaven is the concern bookending the main section of the Sermon on the Mount. Only those with true righteousness (Matt 5:20) and those who do the will of the Father will enter (Matt 7:21). Those who find this narrow way will be few for it is hard to find (Matt 7:13–14, 21). Neither bookend leaves room for shoo-ins to the kingdom.

Here in Matthew 5, Jesus calls for a righteousness greater than his hearer’s highest frame of reference, the scribes and Pharisees. The scribes were likely “professional students and teachers” of the law, whereas the Pharisees held strict views on the observance of the law.²⁸ They would have been the highest standard of what it meant to “do” (Pharisees) and “teach” (scribes) the law. For Jesus to demand righteousness that exceeds theirs would be truly incomprehensible and “must have left Jesus’s hearers gasping in dismay.”²⁹ Jesus will then spend the majority of the Sermon explaining what this kind of exceeding righteousness looks like, both in terms of specific examples (5:21–48) and general principles (6:1). The kind of righteousness that Jesus demands is exceeding because it is a righteousness that is not only external, but also internal.³⁰

To fail to attain this level of exceeding righteousness will prevent one from entering the kingdom. The person who has not attained this righteousness, has not done

²⁸ France, *Matthew*, 189. See also Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 537–40; Quarles, *Sermon*, 100–101.

²⁹ Carson, *Sermon*, 41.

³⁰ The demand of Jesus will be made clear in the following verses. The “true righteousness” is greater because it is righteousness that is total and complete, not merely superficial. Jonathan Pennington, personal conversation, November 3, 2022.

the Father's will and has not entered by the narrow gate (7:13–21). This begs the question: “Is Jesus contradicting himself?” He has said that the kingdom already belongs to those who are spiritually bankrupt (Matt 5:3).³¹ But now in order to enter the kingdom one must be unimaginably righteous. What is Jesus getting at?

Christ is setting a standard that is indeed unattainable if it means “beating the scribes and Pharisees at their own game.”³² It is not physically possible, if mere physical, “outward” righteousness is the goal. If the best of the best still have to be better, then how does anyone have hope?³³

This should give us pause. *No one* is capable, in the flesh, of attaining this level of righteousness that is so complete it must be seen even on the inside. If no one is able to enter this narrow gate, the only alternative is destruction, departing from the presence of Christ, to be outside the kingdom where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Although the demand is impossibly high, Jesus has not left his disciples without a solution. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied (Matthew 5:6).³⁴ Jesus has promised that God will graciously provide this kind of righteousness to his people. In the immediate context of his call for exceeding righteousness, Jesus does not explicitly identify how God will provide this righteousness. However, the overall structure of Matthew's Gospel makes it abundantly clear that Christ himself will provide the way for his disciples to have this righteousness. Quarles has argued that the opening chapters of Matthew show that Christ is going to accomplish a

³¹ Carson, *Sermon*, 41.

³² France, *Matthew*, 189.

³³ A possible illustration of this is considering the impossibility of scoring in the 100th percentile on a standardized test. The person with the highest score still is only in the 99th percentile. They have not outscored themselves. This is impossible. Jesus is saying the scribes and Pharisees would have to outscore themselves, which would never be attainable for the Pharisees, let alone anyone else.

³⁴ Quarles, *Sermon*, 102.

new exodus, by “sav[ing] his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21).³⁵ Christ has come to bring about a new creation by the baptizing his disciples with his Spirit.³⁶ Furthermore, Jesus will specifically state that the new covenant, which promises for God’s law to be written on our hearts, is brought about by the shedding of Christ’s blood for the forgiveness of sins.³⁷ The impossibly high standard of righteous will be possible because under the new covenant, Christ will forgive his people’s sins, and put his Spirit within them so that they might do the will of his Father in obeying the fulfilment of the law of Moses—the law of Christ.

Carson observes,

By this means, the Sermon on the Mount lays the foundation for the New Testament doctrines of justification by grace through faith, and sanctification by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Small wonder Paul, that most faultless of Pharisees (Phil 3:4–6), when he came to understand the Gospel of Christ, considered his spiritual assets rubbish. His new desire was to gain Christ, not having a righteousness of his own that comes from the law, but one which is from God and by faith in Christ (Phil. 3:8f.).³⁸

We must see our great need for this righteousness which cannot be produced by our strength. We must then, as poor and needy sinners, go to Christ and be saved from our sins, so that in Christ, we might have this true righteous that will allow us to enter the kingdom of heaven. Christ himself is the one who will satisfy us with that righteousness.

However, the Christian must understand that, having been saved from their sins by Christ, Christ really does then call those he has saved and given new life by the Spirit, to now exhibit this kind of true, exceeding righteousness.³⁹ If a follower of Christ

³⁵ Quarles, *Sermon*, 21–27.

³⁶ Quarles, *Sermon*, 28–29. Quarles notes, in particular, new creation imagery and language at Christ’s baptism, as well as the similarities in Matt 1:1 and the Septuagint Greek of Gen 2:4 and 5:1.

³⁷ Quarles, *Sermon*, 31–34.

³⁸ Carson, *Sermon*, 41.

³⁹ Jonathan Pennington urged me to see that imputed righteousness is not the main focus of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. Although, it is true that a believer cannot live this life of righteousness

wishes to enter by the narrow gate into the kingdom, they must bear fruit (Matt 7:16–20) in their lives of the kind of righteousness that Jesus describes here. This kind of righteousness is the evidence that one has been born of God (1 John 2:29; 3:10). It is the necessary result that will happen in Christ’s disciples. Christ is making clear that if a person does not exhibit the righteousness he demands—internal righteousness, brought about by a new life in him—then that person will not enter the kingdom. Though they may have outwardly appeared to do righteous things, Christ did not know them. Therefore their heart was not changed and they did not live in this righteousness into which Christ summons his people.

Conclusion

Christ is the one to whom the law pointed. Thus, the law will stand forever, insofar as it points to Christ’s own true righteousness that he teaches, demonstrates, and calls his people to live in. As the Christian reads the Old Testament law, they must look down the trajectory of redemptive history and see Christ standing as the fulfilment. They must listen to the words of the Lord as he calls his people to an exceeding, true righteousness. But his people must not seek to attain this salvation on their own efforts. As the new covenant people of God, they must seek this righteousness in their new covenant mediator Christ Jesus. His disciples must trust in him for forgiveness for their unrighteousness, and seek for him to transform their hearts in order that they might live out this true righteousness of the law of Christ.

apart from the saving work of Christ, Christ still none the less makes these demands of righteousness upon his followers. Jonathan Pennington, personal conversation, November 3, 2022

CHAPTER 4

TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS (MATTHEW 5:21–48)

One of the best pedagogical tools that teachers employ is that of an illustrative example. Illustrating with examples has a way of filling in the sketch of an idea that may at first seem vague and abstract. They help solidify in the mind of the pupil the teacher's instruction. This is precisely what Jesus does in this section of the Sermon on the Mount. *Christ has come to give the true definition of righteousness to which the Law and the Prophets have always pointed, which is a reflection of the character of God himself.*

This should not be seen as a new section. The examples could easily be misunderstood, were it not for Jesus's explanation of how he is not abolishing but fulfilling the law. Likewise, how Jesus fulfills the law is difficult to comprehend without the specific examples given of how he does this. Christ offers six examples of the true righteousness that is demanded of his disciples in the law of Christ.¹

Christ is showing that true righteousness is more expansive than what can be seen in outward appearance, but is also in what the Lord alone can see—the heart (1 Sam 16:7).² This is not new information for the people of God, as the Old Testament law still

¹ I have chosen to use the phrase “true righteousness” instead of exceeding righteousness based on the fact that Jesus is not ultimately calling for a righteousness that is “upping the ante on God's righteous standards.” Jonathan T. Pennington. *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 183. Rather Jesus is calling for the righteousness that has always been what God has required, even in the Old Testament. Jesus, the prophet greater than Moses, God's own Son, is now fulfilling the law by teaching what is the true sense of the righteousness that God calls his people to live in. The specific terminology of “true righteousness” is from Eph 4:24, which states, “And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” Here we see a connection to the demand from Christ at the end of this section to be “perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The righteousness that we are to live in, that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, is a righteousness that reflects that of God himself. But from Eph 4:24 we also see that this true righteousness that we are called to live in, is only possible when we put on the new creation, which is only possible through the grace of God in Christ, through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

² Pennington, *Sermon*, 184.

showed a need for inner righteousness. The Ten Commandments themselves are expansive enough to include not just observable deeds and words, but inner thoughts as well.³ Jonathan T. Pennington notes that the prophets are constantly “calling God’s people to pursue righteousness and do it from pure, whole hearts. . . . And many times, the prophets do not reprove the people for external acts but for going through the motions with a heart not aligned with God.”⁴

Thou Shalt Not Be Angry (5:21–26)

Jesus begins each of these six examples in much the same way. He references what was commanded under the Old Testament law.⁵ His first example refers to the sixth commandment (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17). The prohibition on murder was rooted in the value given by God to every human life made in his image (Gen 9:6). Although this prohibition was given to all of creation after the flood, it was given prominence in the summary of the covenant laws in the Ten Commandments. Human life was not to be taken outside of divine approval, because life is the Lord’s to give and to take.⁶ Not only was the prohibition of murder clearly understood in Old Testament law, the punishment was clearly understood as well. Genesis 9:6 makes it clear that if someone takes another’s

³ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, The Bible Speaks Today Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 216. I owe the discovery of this to Sam Emadi on the Bible Talk Podcast. Alex Duke, Sam Emadi, and Jim Hamilton, “Exodus 19–20: On Thoughts, Words, Deeds, Deeds, Words, Thoughts (Bible Talk, Ep. 28),” May 19, 2021, in *Bible Talk*, produced by 9Marks, podcast, 29:05, <https://www.9marks.org/conversations/exodus-19-20-on-thoughts-words-deeds-deeds-words-thoughts/>.

⁴ Pennington, *Sermon*, 184. Scriptural references listed by Pennington in footnotes are: 1 Sam 15:22; 16:7; 1 Kgs 8:61; 1 Chr 28:9; Pss 26:2; 40:6–8; 51:16–17; 139:23; Prov 21:3; Eccl 5:1; Isa 1:11–13; 29:13; Jer 32:39; Ezek 11:19–20; Hos 6:6; Amos 5:21; Mic 6:6–8.

⁵ Dale C. Allison Jr. notes there are two triads of examples that Jesus gives. Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Companions to the New Testament Series (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 32. Examples one and four begin, “You have heard that it was said of those of old,” while examples two, three, five, and six begin with abbreviated versions of the introductory statement.

⁶ See Landon Byrd, “Why these Ten Commandments? A Biblical Theological Examination of Exodus 20:1–17” (unpublished research paper for Old Testament Theology, 80230, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, July 20, 2021), 13–15.

life, the consequence will be that they must pay with their own life. Jesus refers to this as being liable to judgement. This is likely a reference to the process of trying and punishing murders in the Old Testament.⁷ The community was understood to be carrying out the sentence under the direction of the Judge of all the Earth. Thus, to face earthly judgement was a reflection of God's divine judgement.

The other two indictments that Christ makes are best understood not as increasing in seriousness of offense and severity of punishment but rather as parallel statements which give a fuller picture of the heart conditions Jesus is addressing.⁸ *Rhaka* is an Aramaic term that was likely one of the most common insults of Jesus's day and means something akin to "fool" or "stupid."⁹ *Mōre* likewise means fool. It is not that one insult is worse than another, but rather that both are an expression of anger in one's heart and therefore are sinful and deserving of judgement in hell.¹⁰

Jesus is thus beginning his call to true righteousness by dealing with a command that was so fundamental, most would think they had this one covered (Matt 19:16–20). But Christ then shows the true righteousness that he demands of his followers must not just be the restraint of physically hating human life through murder. They must not hate another human life in the heart.

⁷ Charles L. Quarles, *The Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ's Message to the Modern Church*, NAC Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 108.

⁸ D. A. Carson argues that since there is no distinguishable "gradation and climax" of offenses, then there does not seem to be an escalation in punishment. D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 182. Quarles, on the other hand, argues that *mōre* has parallels in Matthew that indicate it to be a very serious insult compared to the lighter insult of *rhaka*. Quarles, *Sermon*, 110–11.

⁹ J. Jeremias, "rhaká," in *TDNTA*, 983. *TDNTA* uses "blockhead" as a definition, but as Jonathan Pennington pointed out, this is an outdated phrase. Jonathan Pennington, personal conversation, December 6, 2022. "Stupid" would serve as a modern-day equivalent. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. 11th ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 2020), continuously updated at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>, s.v. "blockhead."

¹⁰ We must clarify from other Scriptures that not all anger, nor all uses of "fool" are sinful, for Jesus himself is angry and also calls the Pharisees "fools." Carson, *Matthew*, 182. Quarles helpfully notes that *orgizō* is never used of Jesus. Quarles, *Sermon*, 109.

As we look back at the Old Testament, we realize that while Christ makes this demand explicit, the connection between anger/hatred and murder is not new information. Cain was “very angry” with his brother Abel, which was the precursor to his murder of Abel.¹¹ Also we see that while murder was liable to the judgement, under Old Testament law not all homicides were to be judged the same way. One of the things specified in Numbers 35:16–24 that could constitute the homicide being worthy of the death penalty was “if he pushed him out of hatred . . . or in enmity struck him down,” as opposed to “if he pushed him suddenly without enmity.” God’s law already had shone a light on the fact that anger and hatred lay behind the sin of murder. Jesus is now explicitly calling to account the sins of the heart that lie behind physical action.¹²

Jesus makes this true righteousness which he requires clear by assigning the same consequence to the unseen heart issues which precede murder as to the act of murder itself. Being angry with a brother is liable to the same judgement as murder. Since an earthly tribunal would be ill-equipped to judge anger in someone’s heart,¹³ it is best to see the judgement Jesus refers to as the divine judgement that the human tribunals of the old covenant were meant to reflect. It is therefore best to see the three forms of anger with their corresponding consequences not as escalating in severity but as a three-fold fuller description of the heart issue Jesus has in mind and of the consequence of judgement in hell.¹⁴

For those who might be tempted to think of themselves as “pretty good people”

¹¹ Pennington, *Sermon*, 185, n36. Allison further notes that there is also possibly a specific connection between the anger of Cain over a gift on the altar in Genesis 4, and Jesus’s command to leave a gift at the altar and go be reconciled to one’s brother. Dale C. Allison Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 73–74.

¹² Scot McKnight, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Story of God Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 77–78.

¹³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, The Bible Speaks Today Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), quoted in Carson, *Matthew*, 181.

¹⁴ Pennington, *Sermon*, 183; Carson, *Matthew*, 182.

because they have never murdered anyone, Jesus says they are deserving of the fires of hell just as much as the murderer. The Christian must examine if their standard of a life that is pleasing to the Lord is the true righteousness Christ has spoken of here. They must put to death all forms of malice and hatred in their heart that they might be conformed to the image of Christ in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24–32).

Now that Jesus has indicted the heart condition and verbal assaults that are just as sinful as murder, he then gives practical examples of how his disciples should live otherwise.¹⁵ Pennington observes that Christ follows an order with each of the six statements of true righteousness: “the Torah statement, Jesus’s explanation of the true intent, and the practical application.”¹⁶

As Jesus gives practical examples, both examples focus on an urgency that a disciple should feel for reconciliation. In the first instance Jesus shows that God prizes the true inner righteousness that seeks to put an end to anger more than he prizes simply giving outward displays of worship. This is in keeping with the oft repeated theme of the Old Testament, “To obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Sam 15:22).¹⁷ We see yet again that Jesus is not instituting a righteousness that is a new standard, but rather showing the fulfilment of the true righteousness that the law was always intended to point toward.¹⁸ We cannot express a love for God through outward worship and allow anger/hatred between us and our brother to go unaddressed (1 John 4:20–21).¹⁹ We also cannot seek

¹⁵ Quarles, *Sermon*, 112.

¹⁶ Pennington, *Sermon*, 182.

¹⁷ See also, Pss 40:6; 50:7–15; 51:16–17; Isa 1:12–17; Jer 7:22; Hos 6:6. Pennington, *Sermon*, 184n33.

¹⁸ Quarles notes that “The OT taught that before a worshiper offered sacrifice for a sin against someone else, he should first make restitution with that person (Lev 6:1–7; Num 5:5–8).” Quarles, *Sermon*, 113.

¹⁹ Carson observes, “Remarkably, neither illustration deals with ‘your’ anger but with ‘your offense’ . . . if we are truly concerned about our anger and hate, we shall be no less concerned when we engender them in others.” Carson, *Matthew*, 183.

reconciliation with the Lord through the blood of the sacrifice when we are unwilling to reconcile to our brother.²⁰

The second scenario described by Jesus bears remarkable similarity to the end of the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:21–35.²¹ Both passages speak of someone being handed over to a jailer/guard and being put in prison until all the debt/last penny should be paid. However, where as in Matthew 18 the threat is against those who are unforgiving, here in Matthew 5 it is against those who do not seek forgiveness and restoration. The courtroom scenario indicates that it is not just reconciliation between brothers that Jesus has in mind, but even reconciliation outside the context of the church with those in the world.²²

The examples that Christ has given show the positive side of what Christ is calling for in this true righteousness. He is calling for restoration and reconciliation instead of anger and hatred. True righteousness will involve not just the absence of certain sins, but for righteous pursuits to take their place.²³

Thou Shalt Not Lust (5:27–30)

Jesus moves from the sixth commandment directly to the seventh commandment to highlight the true righteousness that lies behind the commandment.²⁴ Adultery, like murder, was a capital offense under the Mosaic law (Deut 22:22), and would have been understood as a very serious sin. Jesus is addressing another issue that by external standards many, if not most, would have felt that they were “all good” with

²⁰ Matt 6:15; 18:21–35. See Quarles, *Sermon*, 113.

²¹ Pennington notes that vv. 23–24 also are connected to Matt 18. Pennington, *Sermon*, 184–85.

²² Quarles, *Sermon*, 113.

²³ See also Eph 4:26–27, 30–32.

²⁴ Jesus could possibly be intentionally moving in order from the sixth commandment to the seventh to show that this true righteousness does not apply to just a select few commands of the Lord, but to the entirety of the law.

regard to this commandment.²⁵ But Jesus shows the true intent of inner righteousness is a heart that is free from lust.

We can see that this true intent was still present even in the Old Testament when we notice that within the Ten Commandments themselves there is a prohibition on coveting your neighbor's wife.²⁶ David's sin with Bathsheba also demonstrates the close link between coveting/desiring with the eyes and the act of adultery itself (2 Sam 11:2–4). In Job 31:1 we find the well-known passage about making a covenant with the eyes not to lust. When Jesus explains the true righteousness that God demands regarding sexual purity and fidelity, he is faithfully pointing to what is within the Old Testament itself.²⁷

Jesus will further explain later in his teaching ministry that it is what comes out of the heart that defiles a person. He there begins his list of things that come out of the heart as beginning with evil thoughts, and then immediately lists “murder, adultery, sexual immorality” (Matt 15:18–19). While this text explains that those sins originate internally and not externally, Matthew 5 shows that even if the sins do not leave the heart and proceed out of the body, it is still sin even if it remains in the heart.²⁸

Jesus will also show that the commandment to love one's neighbor, along with love for God, are a summary of all the Law and the Prophets (Matt 7:12; 22:40; cf. Rom 13:9). Lust is therefore not the private sin that many think it is. It is unloving toward one's neighbor and sinning against that person by committing adultery “with her” in

²⁵ Pennington notes, “In first century Judaism, especially under the influence of the Pharisees, with their strong religious character, honor-shame cultural values, and strict laws and punishments concerning sexual immorality, actual adultery probably did not occur with great frequency, even as murder did not.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 186.

²⁶ Pennington, *Sermon*, 187.

²⁷ It has been noted that Jesus was not the first rabbi to equate lust with adultery. This was prevalent among many Jewish rabbis, thus providing support that the Old Testament law should be understood in this way. Quarles, *Sermon*, 116; Allison, *Sermon*, 72.

²⁸ Quarles, *Sermon*, 118.

one's heart.

Jesus then gives a warning coupled with an admonishment of how we must deal with internal sins such as lust. The warning makes very clear that lust will be judged in hell. Adultery, like murder, was subject to death under the old covenant, with the death penalty being carried out as God's divine judgement on the sinner. But even if adultery were not punished by the community, the Scriptures have warnings of the judgement that will come upon the adulterer. Proverbs repeatedly warns of the deadly consequences of adultery. Adultery must be fled from lest "at the end of your life you groan when your body and flesh are consumed" (Prov 5:11). Furthermore it will "[cost] him his life" and "[the adulteress'] house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death" (Prov 7:21–27). Lust itself is even seen as deserving of judgement in the Old Testament. Within this same passage where Job speaks of the covenant with his eyes, we see that Job understands that if he had lusted after a virgin, then he would have no portion/heritage with God (Job 31:2). To make the consequences more explicit Job says, "If my heart has been enticed toward a woman . . . that would be a heinous crime . . . for that would be a fire that consumes as far as Abaddon" (Job 31:9–12). Again, Jesus is not giving us new information. But as the lawgiver, he is showing us the true intention behind the law which he is now fulfilling. What God desires is a righteousness which flows from a pure heart. To conform outwardly, but still be in sin inwardly will result in judgement in hell.

Having warned his disciples of the devastating consequences of lust, Jesus therefore admonishes them to take drastic measures to avoid the things which would cause them to sin. Over literalization of Jesus's commands is eliminated when we consider the eschatological nature of the warning. The believer in his glorified body will not enter the kingdom without eye or hand. Therefore, Jesus must mean something other than literal physical harm. But at the same time, we must not "blunt its force"²⁹ by giving

²⁹ Quarles, *Sermon*, 119.

the command the death of a thousand qualifications. Jesus’s vivid and violent language in this passage is picked up by Paul in Colossians 3:5 when he speaks of putting sin to death.

In the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus will tell his disciples that at the end of the age, not only the law breakers, but the causes of sin (*skandala*) will be thrown into the fiery furnace (Matt 13:41–42). Jesus here in Matthew 5 warns that the thing which causes us to sin (*skandalizei*) must be eradicated from our lives. The implication is that even if only part of me is causing me to sin, when that cause of sin is thrown into the fire, so will the rest of me that is attached to it and was unwilling to cut it off.

D. A. Carson wisely follows up the quotation of Matthew 5:28 by saying, “I write this line with shame. Which one of us is not guilty of adultery.” For all of us who know the shame of having committed adultery in our hearts by lusting, who know that adulterers are among the unrighteous who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9–10) what are we to do? We must first look to the same Jesus that gave these demands of righteousness as the same Jesus who will save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21). Such were some of us, but we were washed, sanctified, justified in his name and by his Spirit (1 Cor 6:11). And now having been justified and being sanctified by his grace, we are to obey the commands of our Lord to violently get rid of the causes of sin in our lives.

Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery through Divorce (5:31–32)

At first it may seem as if Jesus is no longer dealing with issues of external verses internal righteousness. But the further teaching on the subject of divorce in Matthew 19:1–9 makes clear that this is indeed a matter of the heart—whether the heart is hardened or not.³⁰ Jesus refers to the certificate of divorce which Moses commanded to be given in Deuteronomy 24:1–4. It is well evidenced that many in Jesus’s day had come

³⁰ Pennington, *Sermon*, 189–90.

to hold extremely liberal views of what would constitute “some indecency” that a husband might find in his wife.³¹

But Jesus is not revealing a view of marriage inconsistent with what we find under the Old Covenant. To begin with, Jesus himself points back all the way to Genesis 1–2 to show that God’s design for marriage was that it should never be separated (Matt 19:4–6). Malachi denounces Israel for its divorces, reminding them that God had stood witness to their marriages and viewed them as covenant unions (Mal 2:13–16). In fact, Deuteronomy 24 itself is not so much about permitting divorce, but about preventing divorce, remarriage, and then return to the original spouse. Deuteronomy 24:4 actually speaks of the act of the wife being married to another man other than her original husband as “defiling” her.³² Even the text that permitted divorce because of hardness of heart did not look upon the sexual union with another in positive terms.

Jesus now comes, fulfilling the Law and the Prophets by showing that God’s intention for true righteousness in marriage is not seeking a way out of marriage, but covenant faithfulness that is not to be broken. Jesus is thereby revealing that true righteousness is conformity to God’s original design.³³ This would therefore mean that Jesus is calling for a righteousness that is not crippled by the effects of the fall and the hardness of our hearts.

The practical outworking of the true righteousness Jesus calls for is a prohibition on divorce for any reason other than sexual immorality.³⁴ Jesus asserts that to

³¹ Quarles catalogs permissions in the Mishnah and rabbinical writings to permit divorce for circumstances including failure of household duties, undesirable physical attributes, breaking the law of Moses or Jewish custom, and many more. Quarles, *Sermon*, 125–27. McKnight speaks of Jesus pushing back against *permissiveness* of divorce. McKnight, *Sermon*, 99.

³² John Piper, “Divorce and Remarriage: A Position Paper,” *Desiring God*, July 21, 1986, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/divorce-and-remarriage-a-position-paper>, section 8.1.

³³ Piper, “Divorce and Remarriage,” section 3.

³⁴ It should be acknowledged that even among Protestants, there are some who do not believe that the so called “exception clause” should mean that Jesus permits remarriage in the case of sexual immorality. See John Piper’s careful defense of this view. Piper, “Divorce and Remarriage.”

divorce on any other grounds would be sin in that a man would cause his wife to commit adultery. Presumably, this is because she would almost certainly get remarried.³⁵ Although Jesus does seem to provide one instance in which divorce and remarriage would be legitimate, Jesus's intent is not to have us focus on the one exception.³⁶ As he will later explain to the Pharisees, true righteousness means conforming to God's original intent, one man, one woman, together in covenant union for a lifetime.³⁷ Jesus's later teaching in Matthew 19 also clarifies that it is not just the remarriage after an illegitimate divorce that is a sin, but that the divorce itself violates the law of Christ by separating what God has joined together.

Thou Shalt Have Integrity in What You Promise (5:33–37)

The interpretive difficulty with this call for true righteousness is properly holding Jesus's command to take no oath at all, with the fact that God himself swears oaths (Heb 6:13; cf. Luke 1:73; Acts 2:30). Elsewhere in the New Testament, we see the apostle Paul swearing before the Lord (Gal 1:20) and placing other believers under oath (1 Thess 5:27). What kind of oaths does Jesus have in mind that we should not take?

The Old Testament law that Jesus refers to seems to be a summary of several commandments having to do with swearing by the Lord's name or swearing to the Lord that you will do something. In Leviticus 19:12 God commanded, "You shall not swear falsely, and so profane the name of your God." Here to swear falsely would also seem to violate the third commandment, to take the Lord's name in vain.

³⁵ A number of commentators point out that this is likely what Jesus has in mind, because it would be nearly impossible for a woman to survive socially and economically without being married. Pennington, *Sermon*, 191; Carson, *Sermon*, 186.

³⁶ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 70, quoted in McKnight, *Sermon*, 95–96.

³⁷ I have slightly nuanced the phrase I constantly heard from my father growing up when talking about God's intent for marriage/sexual union: "One man. One woman. Together for a lifetime. Period!"

To perform what one vowed was commanded in Numbers 20:2: “If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds from his mouth.” Deuteronomy 23:21–23 adds, “You shall not delay fulfilling it . . . you shall be careful to do what has passed your lips.”

Interestingly, in Psalm 24:3–5, not swearing deceitfully is one of the things required if one is to ascend the hill of the Lord that he might receive blessing and righteousness from “the God of his salvation.” This is tied to having a pure heart, which Jesus has earlier referenced in the Beatitudes.

God clearly has always had the expectation that his people would be truthful and have integrity with keeping their promises. Their keeping of promises is meant to be a reflection of the nature of the covenant promises which God has made to them. God swears oaths to Abraham (Gen 22:16) and to David’s son (Ps 110) to bless them, and even swears to the nation of Israel that they will not receive covenant blessings because of their failures (Ps 95:11).³⁸ The commandments regarding oaths in the Old Testament, and even God’s own swearing is intended to show that for both God and his people, truthfulness is meant to be a “solemn and sure” thing.³⁹

Why then does Christ say that oaths should not be taken? Carson suggests that in the context of Jesus’s day it is because oaths were being used in precisely the opposite way they were intended. They were being used as convenient ways to circumvent truthfulness rather than to confirm it.⁴⁰ Legal loopholes could be found to not keep one’s word if you could find the loophole to not be under oath.⁴¹ Jesus himself shows this

³⁸ All of these oaths of the Lord are reiterated in the New Testament (Hebrews 6:13; 7:21; 4:3, respectively).

³⁹ Carson, *Sermon*, 50.

⁴⁰ Carson, *Sermon*, 50.

⁴¹ Quarles, *Sermon*, 136.

perverse understanding of how the oaths functioned in his woes pronounced over the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 23:16–22, where certain oaths are seen as binding and others are not.

Jesus addresses three things that people should not swear by: (1) heaven (God’s throne), (2) earth (God’s footstool), (3) Jerusalem (God’s city). He seems to be drawing attention to the fact that to swear by these things is to swear in the name of the Lord. Jesus wants people to realize that it is no light thing they are doing. Taking the Lord’s name in vain is at stake. When Jesus addresses swearing by our own head, he draws attention to the fact that we really have no power or authority over our own head, alluding to the fact that God is the one who has this authority/power. Thus, to swear by our head is also to indirectly swear by something under the Lord’s authority and thus to swear in a way that still puts God’s name at stake.⁴²

In the place of this complicated oath code prevailing in that day, the kingdom of heaven and its citizens should be marked by unquestioned truthfulness. “Yes” and “No” should be completely sufficient. There should be no need of “committing [oneself] to a higher standard of honesty than is normal” because the standard of integrity should always be present for those that would obey Christ.⁴³ What Christ is calling his disciples to see is that true righteousness involves integrity in the heart that reflects the truthfulness of God (Num 23:19). There should be no need to invoke an elaborate system of oaths, but rather if a “yes” or a “no” passes our lips, we are under obligation to the Lord and to one another to do what we have said we would do.⁴⁴ Any such attempt to bypass truthfulness

⁴² Carson, *Sermon*, 51; Carson, *Matthew*, 187.

⁴³ Quarles, *Sermon*, 142.

⁴⁴ Carson, while commending a desire to be obedient to Scripture, gives an excellent refutation against the view that Christians may not take any oath in court or oath of allegiance. He cites (1) the different context that Christ is addressing, (2) the fact that God himself swears and that Christians in the New Testament still took oaths, and (3) the nature of Jesus antithetical teaching. Carson, *Matthew*, 187–88.

is from the evil one, the father of lies.⁴⁵

Thou Shalt Not Take Revenge (5:38–42)

Christ quotes from Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21 where we find the eye for an eye punishment principle. Many have noted that this justice principle under Old Testament law is often misunderstood as overly cruel, when in fact it has the opposite intent—to prevent excessive punishment.⁴⁶ Jesus is not doing away with cruelty in favor of leniency. Rather, the true righteousness that Jesus wishes to draw out seems to be the recognition that vengeance is not our prerogative. Judgement belongs to the Lord and to his appointed authorities. Our part is to do good, even if it means suffering while doing so.

It is important to note that the context of the “eye for an eye” principle in the Old Testament is clearly that it will be applied by the community and its judges in meting out punishment for a crime. The “avenger of blood” (Num 35:9–29) is never given this instruction. Thus, its original context was not regarding personal vengeance but judgement being rendered by God’s appointed authorities.

Jesus commands his followers that they must not resort to personal retaliation. Instead, they must be willing to suffer while doing good. Jesus not only commands this, but he calls us to follow him in the ultimate example of laying down his life:

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued

⁴⁵ Quarles notes that based on the similarity to Matthew 6:13, it is best to understand the reference as being to “the evil one” rather than simply to “evil” in general. Quarles, *Sermon*, 143.

⁴⁶ Pennington, *Sermon*, 195. See also Alex Duke, Sam Emadi, and Jim Hamilton, “Exodus 21: On Slavery, Proportional Justice, Goring Oxen, and Other Easy Topics (Bible Talk, Ep. 29),” May 26, 2021, in *Bible Talk*, produced by 9Marks, podcast, 42:45, <https://www.9marks.org/conversations/exodus-21-on-slavery-proportional-justice-goring-oxen-and-other-easy-topics-bible-talk-ep-29/>.

entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Pet 2:19–23)

In his passion, Christ Jesus did not resist the evil done to him. He entrusted himself to God, the righteous judge.⁴⁷ He endured some of the very things that he in turn commands his disciples to endure; being struck on the face (Matt 26:67; 27:30) and having his clothes stripped from him (Matt 27:28, 35).⁴⁸ Although it may not be fully seen at this point, the true righteousness that Jesus is calling us into means being conformed to his image, in part by suffering as he suffered. When we do this, we remind ourselves of the way the Savior opened the Sermon, by telling us that we are blessed when we are persecuted for righteousness' sake and on his account. We find joy in knowing that our reward is great in heaven, rather than finding our resolution through retribution on the earth.

Jesus then gives examples of non-retaliation as related to personal injury, lawsuits, authority, and generosity.⁴⁹ Two mistakes can be made in interpreting Jesus's examples. On the one hand, if not held in concert with other texts (for instance 2 Thess 3:6–10 compared with Matt 5:42) then one is likely to make very foolish applications of Jesus's examples. However, it seems the more likely danger is to be too quick to explain away the force of what Jesus is saying and think that it does not apply to our situation. Jesus is calling for a radical, counter-cultural way of thinking that finds its hope in the justice of God and our reward in heaven.

Thou Shalt Love Thy Enemy (5:43–47)

Closely related to the last example of true righteousness, Jesus's next

⁴⁷ It may be necessary at this point to offer clarification that Christ's work on the cross as an example for us to follow in suffering does not in any way take away from the atoning work Christ accomplished for our sins on the cross. (See the following verse in 1 Peter 2:24). Rather, for the one whose sins have been paid for on the cross, the cross now takes on this added dimension of showing us what our life of following Jesus must look like if we are to one day be glorified with him (Rom 8:17).

⁴⁸ Pennington, *Sermon*, 198.

⁴⁹ Quarles notes that the examples "relate to both violent actions and legal challenges." Quarles, *Sermon*, 147.

command deals with how to relate to wrong that is done to us. Jesus has already commanded that we are to not retaliate but are instead to be willing to suffer while doing good. Now Jesus makes clear that this suffering for righteousness's sake will not be a passive act void of any response. As they are suffering, the believer is to replace retaliation and hatred with love, prayer, and blessing.⁵⁰

Jesus quotes from Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” which Jesus himself will later affirm as the second greatest commandment, only following the command to love the Lord. But what Jesus's disciples had heard was apparently a combination of this statement with another command—to hate one's enemy. David writes in Psalm 139:21–22, “Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.” David, a man after God's own heart, apparently righteously hated the enemies of God who hated the Lord. It should be noted that David's hatred is not personal nor retaliatory, but is directed at those opposed to the Lord himself. Even if the saying that Jesus's disciples had heard did have its roots in the Old Testament, Jesus's response shows that the juxtaposition of loving neighbor and hating enemy was not the intention of the law.⁵¹

Jesus asserts that true righteousness involves extending love to more than just our neighbor, but to our enemies as well. This idea is not absent under the Old Testament law. God's people were commanded to return or rescue the property found belonging to an enemy (Exod 23:4–5).

Jesus would not only assert this true righteousness but live it out. Christ would give his life “while we were enemies of God” (Rom 5:10) in order to demonstrate God's

⁵⁰ Blessing those who curse us can be seen explicitly in the parallel passage in Luke 6:28.

⁵¹ Many commentators posit that “love your neighbor and hate your enemy” represents an incorrect view that was prevalent in Jesus's day. See for instance Carson, *Matthew*, 191; Quarles, *Sermon*, 159–60; Pennington, *Sermon*, 199–200.

love for us. Jesus would also demonstrate the prayer that ought to be offered over our enemies: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). The prayer for our enemies is to be one of God showing mercy and forgiveness on the sinful actions of those who are opposing God by opposing his people.

The reasoning Christ gives for exhibiting this true righteousness is that God’s children must conform to the character of our heavenly Father.⁵² The Father’s character of righteousness means that he, in his common grace, gives both sun and rain to the good and the evil, the just and the unjust. Christ’s disciples, adopted as sons of the Father must likewise show a common grace form of love even toward their enemies.⁵³ To love only those who are reciprocating love would be to love as the world loves. We would be conforming more to the world’s ideas of love, than we would be to Christ’s standard and example of love.

Conclusion: Thou Shalt Be Perfect (5:48)

This verse is not only tied to the final example of true righteousness, but to the entire section of the Sermon (Matt 5:21–48). Jesus summarizes here the true righteousness into which he is calling his disciples. They must be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect. Jesus’s concluding statement calls to mind the Lord’s repeated commands to his people to “be holy as the Lord your God is holy” (Lev 11:44; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8) along with his command to be blameless (*telios*, Septuagint) before the Lord

⁵² First John 2:29–3:10 shows us that children exhibit the character of their spiritual father, either of God, or of the Devil.

⁵³ D. A. Carson distinguishes between different kinds of love that God has in Scripture. There is a distinction between God’s love for humanity in general and God’s electing love for the church. D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 16–21, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcgclefindmkaj/https://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/carson/2000_difficult_doctrine_of_the_love-of_God.pdf. The same can be said of our love as sons of the Father. Although there is a difference between our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ and our love for others in the world, we still are commanded to love even those that do not love us in return—our enemies.

(Deut 18:13).⁵⁴ Carson explains,

In light of the preceding verses (vv. 17–47), Jesus is saying that the true direction in which the law has always pointed is . . . to all the perfection of God, exemplified by the authoritative interpretation of the Law bound up in the preceding antithesis. . . . the perfection of the Father, the true eschatological goal of the law, is what all disciples of Jesus pursue.⁵⁵

This is yet another way the sons of the Father must be conformed to his character. We must acknowledge that the context of this verse is not best suited to defend the doctrine of our need for imputed righteousness.⁵⁶ Christ is rather showing us that the standard of God’s perfection, which can be seen in the person of Jesus Christ, and heard in his law, is the true righteousness to which we as followers of Christ must seek to be conformed. *Christ has come to give the true definition of righteousness to which the Law and the Prophets have always pointed, which is a reflection of the character of God himself.*

⁵⁴ Quarles, *Sermon*, 168–69; Carson, *Matthew*, 194–95. Pennington, however, argues that “the change from the more common *hagios* (holy) to the less frequent *teleios* is very significant” and that wholeness is being held out as the alternative of whole-being, true righteousness versus merely external holiness. Pennington, *Sermon*, 78–79.

⁵⁵ Carson, *Matthew*, 194–95.

⁵⁶ Pennington notes how this verse has been interpreted “to show an impossible demand of being like God and therefore is meant only to show us our need for grace.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 204. I would affirm that this is not the *only* intent of this verse. This demand of Christ in particular can, however, *also* show us our need for grace and Christ’s righteousness and perfection in our place.

CHAPTER 5

TRUE DEVOTION (MATTHEW 6:1–18)

Martyn Lloyd-Jones has noted that in Matthew chapter 6, we find instructions on both “the directly religious part of the Christian life [Matt 6:1–18], and the mundane [Matt 6:19–34].”¹ In the first half of the chapter, Jesus continues to call his disciples to a true righteousness that comes from the heart, and is not merely external. *Jesus now calls for the right motivations to stand behind our acts of devotion as we seek to please the Lord instead of putting on a show for others.*² This is summed up in the theme verse for the section: “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 6:1).

The passage’s structure is highly repetitive and indicates that Jesus is again giving a series of examples to illustrate his main point—not practicing righteousness to be seen by others. The repetitive structure of the passage can be illustrated as shown in Table 2.

It has also been noted that this passage is the central section of a chiasmic structure within the Sermon on the Mount.³ Furthermore, even within this central section

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (1971; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 2:10.

² “Jesus did not merely command his disciples to do the right thing; He commanded them to do the right thing for the right reason. An action is not truly righteous unless it has the proper motivation. The motivation for every truly righteous act is a desire to glorify God and please Him.” Charles L. Quarles, *The Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ’s Message to the Modern Church*, NAC Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 171.

³ Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Companions to the New Testament Series (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 37.

on true devotion, we find that prayer, specifically the Lord’s prayer, is at the center.⁴

Table 2. Structure of Matthew 6:1–18

When you . . .	Give to the needy	Pray	Fast
Negative instruction	Sound no trumpet		Do not look gloomy . . . disfigure faces
As the hypocrites do/like the hypocrites	✓	✓	✓
Location: synagogues and streets/street corners	✓	✓	
That they may be praised/seen by others.	✓	✓	✓
Truly, I say to you they have received their reward.	✓	✓	✓
But when you	Give	Pray	Fast
Positive instruction concerning secrecy	Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing	Go into your room and shut the door	Anoint your head and wash your face
In secret/ Father who is in secret	✓	✓	✓
And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.	✓	✓	✓
		Additional negative instruction on prayer + Lord’s Prayer	

⁴ Jonathan T. Pennington labels this section “The Center” and notes how even within the excursus on the Lord’s Prayer, there is an introduction, body and conclusion. Jonathan T. Pennington. *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 217–18.

The bullseye that is placed on prayer highlights its importance in the life of discipleship. The text can thus be divided into five subsections: (1) heading/theme verse on right motivation for righteous living, (2) rightly motivated giving, (3) rightly motivated prayer, (4) a central focus on the Lord's Prayer, (5) and rightly motivated fasting.

Right Motivation for Righteous Living (6:1)

The disciples are to be cautious not to practice righteousness in order to be seen by others. The righteousness they practice is the true righteousness that must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, upon which Jesus has just expounded.⁵ The scribes' and Pharisees' righteousness fell short because it did not comprehend the depths of the heart into which God's law was meant to penetrate. But their righteousness also tended to be done to please others, not from a desire to please the Lord.

The opening verse seems at first glance to present a problematic contradiction with what Jesus has previously commanded in 5:16: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works." Now Jesus is cautioning that his disciples should "beware of practicing their righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them." Which is it?

The resolution to this apparent conundrum may be found when we examine the use of *doxazō* in 5:16 compared with 6:2. The issue is not primarily with people seeing our actions, but with who we intend to get the glory, ourselves or the Father? This is helpful to understand that Jesus is not calling for a completely secret Christian devotional life in contrast to the public life of discipleship he called for in 5:13–16. Nor is he prohibiting corporate acts of giving, prayer, and fasting. We see many examples of public/corporate acts of devotion in Scripture and even the praise of others and the

⁵ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 196.

encouragement to follow their example.⁶ Rather, knowing our hearts, Jesus is cautioning us against the temptation to make our own glory the end goal.

The warning that they will not receive a reward seems intended to create a question in his disciples' minds: "From whom do you wish to receive a reward?"⁷ The rewards that can be found in the praises of man may be temporarily satisfying, but they are in opposition to the heavenly reward that will be received as a result of bringing glory to the Father. The rewards Jesus wants us to have in heaven seem to come not as a result of the praise of others, but as a result of the disdain of others for his sake (Matt 5:11–12).

The reward from the Father should be understood as the blessing promised by God to his people. Abraham was told that his reward from God would be very great in Genesis 15:1. Abraham's reward is the promises that God made to him in Genesis 12 of land, seed and blessing. But later in the Prophets we see that this reward which God's people anticipate is the eschatological reward given by the Lord on the last day. Isaiah 62:11 says, "Behold your salvation comes; behold his reward is with him and his recompense before him." In Jeremiah 31:16, the reward for their work will be realized when God turns mourning into joy after he brings his people out of exile in the new exodus.

Jesus then shows that this anticipated reward will be realized in the kingdom of heaven which he is bringing about. It is a reward that awaits the faithful servant of Jesus to come and "enter into the joy of your master" (Matt 25:21).⁸

R.T. France comments,

⁶ Consider how Paul praises the giving of the Macedonians and encourages the Corinthians to follow their example in 2 Cor 8–9. The end goal, however, is still that "by their approval of this service they will glorify God." (2 Cor 9:13). See also other examples of public/corporate giving, prayer, and fasting: Num 7:1–89; Esth 2:16; Acts 2:14; 12:12.

⁷ "Thus, Jesus's disciples must decide whether they will perform acts of righteousness for the pleasure of the human or heavenly audience, whether they wish to please God or to impress others." Quarles, *Sermon*, 173.

⁸ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 235.

Matthew is not coy about the reward that awaits those who are faithful to their calling. He will use the word again in 5:46; 6:1, 2, 5, 16; 10:41, 42, and the concept of a heavenly recompense is built into several of his parables (notably 20:1–15; 24:45–47; 25:20–23) as well as more broadly into the teaching of Jesus (6:4, 4, 18; 19:27–29; 25:34–40).⁹

Jesus’s insistence that there is a reward held out to those who live faithfully in the kingdom is not inconsistent with the Scripture’s teaching elsewhere of justification by grace alone through faith alone. The heavenly reward in glory is just as much the undeserved favor of God as is our justification and our sanctification.¹⁰

Having established the principle of right motives in general, Jesus now addresses three specific areas for his audience that were viewed as the “three pillars of Judaism.” These three acts of devotion, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, had been elevated in second temple Judaism to a point that they almost seemed to replace the sacrificial system as the means of atonement.¹¹ Jesus singles out these actions which were of paramount concern to his contemporaries. Jesus affirms their legitimacy, but at the same time insists that the motive for doing them must be to please the Father, rather than man.

Rightly Motivated Giving (6:2–4)

The first example of rightly motivated devotion has to do with giving to the needy. Commentators point out that in this culture, since there was no governmental welfare system, giving directly to the poor was the primary means of providing for their care.¹² The phrase “When you give [pray, fast]” indicates Jesus is assuming that these acts of devotion will be a part of his disciples’ lives.¹³ Jesus expects this will happen, not

⁹ France, *Matthew*, 172–73.

¹⁰ For a more extended defense that reward is not incompatible with grace, see Quarles, *Sermon*, 171–72.

¹¹ Quarles, *Sermon*, 174.

¹² Pennington, *Sermon*, 213; Quarles, *Sermon*, 174.

¹³ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999),

because this is the norm in the society, but because this is what God commanded repeatedly in the Old Testament.¹⁴

Leviticus 25:35–36 commands, “If your brother becomes poor . . . you shall support him . . . take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God.” There is a connection forged between the fear of the Lord and obeying God to care for the poor. Psalm 10 makes clear that evil doers should not think that their wicked actions will escape the notice of God. Specifically mentioned is when the wicked “seizes the poor” and when “the helpless are crushed,” the wicked says in his heart, “[God] will never see it” (Ps 10:11). Jesus is affirming what Scripture has already taught—caring for the poor (or lack thereof) is something that God takes notice of. We should give to the poor, because God does see.

Now Jesus shows how his disciples must not give as if it were man, rather than God, whom they are trying to please. Therefore, Jesus first instructs them how not to give to be seen by others. Trumpet sounding could refer to the showiness of some gifts thrown into the trumpet-shaped openings of the money boxes at the temple¹⁵ or to the practice of blowing trumpets to call people together for giving.¹⁶ However, even if Jesus is not referring to a literal practice, the sounding of a trumpet is meant to serve as an image which stands in stark contrast to the image of one hand not knowing what the other is doing.¹⁷ Whether literal or metaphorical, his disciples should not “toot their own horns” when giving. The only possible reason for doing so is that someone is seeking to be

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¹⁴ I owe the following examination of texts to the list of Old Testament texts that Pennington provides concerning commands to give to and care for the poor and needy. Pennington, *Sermon*, 213n7.

¹⁵ Quarles, *Sermon*, 175.

¹⁶ D. A. Carson, *Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 60.

¹⁷ Pennington, *Sermon*, 215.

glorified by others rather than to glorify God.¹⁸

Those who do this, Jesus labels as hypocrites. The Greek word was commonly used to refer to actors in the theatre.¹⁹ Just like actors, the hypocrite puts on a mask and pretends to be different than they really are underneath. Though this is one form of hypocrisy,²⁰ it does not seem to be the chief referent for Jesus. Hypocrisy here is not primarily that someone pretends to be good as a cover-up for their immoral character, but rather that the person is doing the right thing, for the wrong motives.²¹ Charles Quarles suggests a connection with the theatrical world from which the term originated:

Many ancient play-actors aspired to be celebrities adored by the masses. They lived for the thrill of standing ovations and prizes and awards sometimes presented for excellent dramatic performances. The hypocrites to whom Jesus referred were spiritual play-actors who pretended to have a piety that they did not actually possess in order to inspire the applause of a human audience.²²

The hypocrite who seeks glory from others has received the whole of their reward.²³ The reward which they sought after is the only one which they will receive. Pennington notes the irony that this really is no reward at all since it is not a lasting reward in heaven, but a reward that will in the end perish, just like the treasure that is stored up on earth.²⁴

In contrast to attention grabbing giving, Jesus admonishes his disciples to take

¹⁸ Again, it is the same Greek verb, *doxazō*, that is used here and in Matthew 5:16. In 5:16, it is an active verb that *anthrōpos* will render to God. Here in 6:2 it is a passive verb that someone would seek to receive from *anthrōpos*. The similar language, yet distinct differences, indicate that Jesus intends to draw a direct contrast between the appropriate, God-glorifying witness of his disciples, and self-glorifying practicing of righteousness.

¹⁹ Keener, *Matthew*, 206.

²⁰ Carson, *Sermon*, 61.

²¹ Pennington, *Sermon*, 214.

²² Quarles, *Sermon*, 176.

²³ Quarles notes that “the verb was originally a technical term for providing a receipt marked ‘paid in full.’” Quarles, *Sermon*, 176.

²⁴ Pennington, *Sermon*, 215.

careful precautions to guard against the temptation to give for show.²⁵ As with many of Jesus's illustrative images in the Sermon, the command to not let the left hand know what the right hand is doing cannot be pressed too literally, as this would be physically impossible. But the image is in direct contrast to the very showy practice of the hypocrites. If one seeks to conceal their giving to such an extent that the other hand cannot even know, then they cannot congratulate themselves by patting themselves on the back or giving themselves a high five.²⁶ Then they will certainly not be aiming to give in such a way that other people will give them praise. Again, Jesus is not forbidding all public knowledge of giving, for this would contradict other Scriptures.²⁷ But as Jesus is calling his disciples to examine their motives for giving, and who they seek glory/reward/notice from, he gives them practical means of guarding against the temptation to practice their righteousness before others.²⁸

Jonathan T. Pennington draws attention to the use of the phrase *en tō kryptō* in Romans 2. “For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly (*en tō phanerō*—literally ‘in the open’), nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly (*en tō kryptō*—literally ‘in the secret’), and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God” (Rom 2:28–29).²⁹ The apostle Paul is reiterating some of the same things Jesus has taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Mere outward conformity to the law through circumcision is not the point. Rather it is total righteousness which penetrates all the way to the heart. Paul's reference to circumcision of the heart reaches back to the Old Testament and brings forward what

²⁵ Carson, *Sermon*, 61.

²⁶ Quarles, *Sermon*, 177.

²⁷ See above, page 71n6.

²⁸ Thus, Jesus is elaborating with specific examples to illustrate general principle, just as he has done in Matthew 5:21–48.

²⁹ Pennington, *Sermon*, 216.

God had desired all along—hearts that were devoted to him (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4). The law of Christ is not presenting a new requirement. Christ is again showing that true righteousness is a matter of our hearts, a righteousness that knows God the Father as its primary audience.

Thus, the reward from the Father is not something we gain because we were successful at secrecy. Rather it is given because our hearts were motivated to receive the praise of God, not of man. The parallel to Romans 2 also helps us see that the Father's reward is not in any way opposed to his grace. Romans 2, in speaking of circumcision of the heart, calls to mind the promise of Deuteronomy 30:6, which says that it will be the Lord who will do this to the hearts of his people when he brings them back from exile. The Lord, through Jesus, is bringing his people out of exile and into the kingdom. And Christ will make it clear that in order to be in the kingdom, one must be born again (John 3:3), which means they must have their heart changed, being circumcised in the heart by the Spirit of God.³⁰ God's rewards are given to those who live out the righteousness to which Jesus calls them. But that righteousness can only be present in their lives through the gracious saving work of God in Christ by the Spirit.³¹

Rightly Motivated Prayer (6:5–15)

At this point Jesus breaks the pattern, and not only confronts false piety by pressing in to the motives of prayer, but goes into a further excursus on prayer. In the excursus he confronts additional problems with prayer—wordy manipulation of God, and unforgiveness. In the center of these two cautions, is the model prayer for his disciples, the Lord's Prayer. Although the structure of the passage makes verses 8–15 its own unit,

³⁰ Jim Hamilton argues that the idea of circumcision of the heart is the old covenant language used to communicate the same idea as regeneration in the new covenant. James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 2.

³¹ See Quarles, *Sermon*, 171–72.

thematically we will consider verses 5–8 and 14–15 here and consider the Lord’s Prayer separately in the next section.³²

In verses 5–7, Jesus follows the same pattern as he did in his confrontation of the motives behind giving. His disciples must not be like the hypocrites who pray in order to be seen by others. Their recognition by others will be their only reward. Instead, they must pray in such a way that makes the Father the only audience.

The images used to contrast showy prayer and true prayer before the Father are the synagogues/street corners and the closed-door room. Each day in the synagogue prayers would be publicly led by the “messenger of the congregation,” which was a highly esteemed position.³³ The praise that would be associated with this position is the kind of thing that Jesus warns against seeking out. The prevalence of praying on the street corners is uncertain. Jesus is possibly using the street corners simply as an example of a very public place where one would be recognized by a great number of people.³⁴

Jesus offers an alternative scenario of going into a room with a closed door. This is not the only appropriate way to pray, as this command would then contradict examples from the Old and New Testament of prayer in public. Even Jesus himself prays in public (1 Kgs 8:22–53; Matt 11:25–26; John 17:1–26; Acts 1:24).³⁵ But as with the other remedies for false piety, Jesus’s solution guards against the temptation to do this in order to get praise from others. The point is that prayer should have God as its only audience. Quarles surmises, “Prayers offered to impress people are idolatry masquerading

³² Pennington notes how 6:7–15 forms its own section. Pennington, *Sermon*, 217–19. But Keener outlines the passage as I have, treating the general commands together, and then the Lord’s Prayer separately. Keener, *Matthew*, 210, 214.

³³ Quarles, *Sermon*, 181.

³⁴ Keener suggests that street corners is hyperbolic and almost meant to be an absurd picture of someone intentionally making sure they were on a street corner at the time of prayer. Keener, *Matthew*, 211. Quarles suggests something similar but that Jesus may not be speaking hyperbolically, but confronting an actual practice. Quarles, *Sermon*, 181.

³⁵ Carson, *Matthew*, 199; Allison, *Sermon*, 111–12; Pennington, *Sermon*, 217.

as piety for they address prayer to human beings instead of God.”³⁶ Offering prayers to be seen by others puts other people in an exalted place before God, violating the first commandment. If we find ourselves praying more publicly than we do in private, we need to recognize that our prayers are likely sorely misdirected toward those that cannot actually answer our prayers, nor reward our devotion in any meaningful way.³⁷

The next rebuke Jesus offers concerning prayer is for wordy manipulation.³⁸ Again, we must be careful to identify what Jesus is actually calling problematic. It is not the number of words in a prayer. There are examples in Scripture of very lengthy prayers, including from Jesus himself.³⁹ The problem is with thinking that by large amounts of words or certain specific words that God’s attention can be gained and his favor garnered.⁴⁰

Jesus says that we are not to pray like the Gentiles, because our Father knows what we need before we ask. One is reminded of the psalmist’s acclamation that “Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether” (Ps 139:4). Wordy prayers imply that God is not omniscient and therefore lacks the knowledge of our circumstances and therefore we must inform him of them.⁴¹ Thus, our wordiness in prayer might in two ways imply the same thing—a lack of trust in God. If our wordiness is meant to manipulate God, we show we do not trust his providential care. We do not trust that he not only knows what is best, but that he also works to bring it about (Matt 7:9–11; Rom 8:28). But our wordiness may also imply a lack of trust in God’s

³⁶ Quarles, *Sermon*, 183.

³⁷ Carson, *Matthew*, 199.

³⁸ Keener says seeking to manipulate God is the problem. Keener, *Matthew*, 212.

³⁹ 1 Kgs 8:22–53; John 17:1–26.

⁴⁰ For numerous prayer practices of the Gentiles that may have been in mind, and perhaps were even present in some sects of Judaism, see Keener, *Matthew*, 213; Quarles, *Sermon*, 183–85.

⁴¹ Quarles, *Sermon*, 186.

omniscience, because we view him as unaware of our circumstances and their details. Our sovereign Father does not need wordiness to manipulate or to inform him. He desires prayers offered in faith, believing in the greatness of who he is.

The final caution that Jesus gives regarding improper prayer is the way that unforgiveness in us affects our relationships with God (vv. 14–15). Scripture speaks in the Old and New Testament about how failing to love others can hinder our prayers (Mal 2:13–16; 1 Pet 3:7).⁴² The parallel passage in Matthew 18:21–35 makes clear that God’s grace in forgiveness does come first in mercifully extending forgiveness. But our forgiveness of others is an expected response to God’s forgiveness and failure to do so will result in God’s judgement.⁴³ Jesus’s warning offers commentary on why he instructed us to pray that God would “forgive . . . as we also have forgiven.”

With each of Jesus’s corrections to falsely pious prayer, he is aiming at issues of the heart. When we pray, our hearts must be aiming to be heard by the Lord, not by others. Our hearts must trust the Lord’s sovereignty. Our hearts must not remain unchanged by the gracious forgiveness we have received from Christ.

The Lord’s Prayer (6:9–13)

Jesus offers an extended positive command regarding prayer, demonstrating for us how we should pray. It is not a prayer that is only to be repeated verbatim, but is also to be imitated by the disciples.⁴⁴ Although his disciples would do well to at times

⁴² Keener brought the 1 Peter 3:7 reference to my attention. Keener, *Matthew*, 214. In both Old and New Testament, failing to show love in marital relationships will hinder prayer/worship. It is interesting that this relationship is singled out, since marriage has both the most intimacy and arguably the most daily interaction.

⁴³ See Landon Byrd, “Grace and Faith in the Sermon on the Mount” (unpublished research paper for New Testament Theology, 80231, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Jan 11, 2022), 9–10.

⁴⁴ Quarles notes that Jesus uses the adverb *houtōs*, instead of the demonstrative pronoun *touto*. Quarles, *Sermon*, 187. However, Scot McKnight notes that in Luke 11:1–2, Jesus commands them to “say” or “recite” the following words. McKnight also makes a footnote reference to *Didache* 8:2–3 as prescribing the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer (from Matthew) three times daily. Scot McKnight, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Story of God Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 174–75, 174n11. Christians would

pray the very words of Jesus, to mindlessly recite the prayer would run contrary to the inner righteousness of the heart that Jesus has been calling for.

This prayer contrasts all of the things that Jesus has just rebuked.⁴⁵ This prayer is focused on the Father in Heaven as the audience, not the audience of men. It is direct and to the point, unlike the wordiness of the Gentile prayers. The brevity of each petition also seems to assume the Father's knowledge of the daily provision we need, the sins for which we need forgiveness, and the temptations from which we need protecting. We will now briefly examine the opening address and then each of the seven petitions of the Lord's Prayer.⁴⁶

Our Father in Heaven (6:9a)

Jesus has insisted that prayers should not be offered for the hearing of others but to “your Father.” He has also reminded us of “your Father's” sovereignty and omniscience. This is the Father in heaven to whom we are to address our prayers. The Father being in in heaven reminds us not only of his exaltedness, but also of his sovereign rule.⁴⁷ Although directing prayers to God in heaven is nothing new (1 Kgs 8:22–23, 30–34), addressing God as “our Father” in prayer is a new instruction from Christ. While God speaking of Israel as his children is common enough in the Old Testament, for Israel to actually address God in this way was relatively rare (Isa 63:16; 64:8).⁴⁸ But Christ

therefore seem to be faithful to Scripture in both “saying” the Lord's Prayer and “praying like this.”

⁴⁵ Carson, *Matthew*, 203.

⁴⁶ Most commentators suggest six petitions, treating v. 13 as one petition. Pennington, *Sermon*, 218, 227; Carson, *Matthew*, 206; Quarles, *Sermon*, 212; McKnight, *Sermon*, 185. It would be entirely legitimate to notice the close connection between the two elements of v. 13, that one elaborates on the other by way of contrast. However, grammatically there are seven petitions. Six aorist imperatives, and one aorist subjunctive (possibly a subjunctive of prohibition, which can be “used to forbid in advance the initiation or occurrence of an action.”). See “More Detailed Description of the Greek Subjunctive Mood,” Learning NT Greek, accessed September 25, 2023, https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-detail-frame.htm. See also Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 204–5.

⁴⁷ (Pss. 11:4; 103:19, 108:5; 113:4–7; 115:2–3; 123:1–2).

⁴⁸ Gerald Bray, “God as Father,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed July 31, 2023.

teaches his disciples this is an appropriate way of addressing God, his Father, who is also their Father. Jesus has been shown to be God's beloved Son (Matt 2:15; 3:17). Jesus seems to be implying that it is possible for his disciples to know his Father as their Father. Later Scripture will make this explicit as the doctrine of adoption is elaborated upon (Gal 4:4–7; Eph 1:5).

Hallowed Be Your Name (6:9b)

This petition asks God to sanctify his name. The prayer is that God's name, which is representative of who he is, would be regarded by his people as holy.⁴⁹ Isaiah 29 may provide the background for this petition. There we read that God's people are under judgement "because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men" (Isa 29:13). Israel's problem was their righteousness was only external and not also internal. But the Lord speaks of a time when his people "will sanctify my name, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob" (Isa 29:23). Jesus shows us that prayer which proceeds from the heart will have as its initial desire that God be rightly regarded as holy.

Thy Kingdom Come (6:10a)

To pray to the Father in Heaven that his kingdom would come is clearly a petition that the kingdom of heaven which the Baptist and then Jesus have announced would be set up. The petition recognizes though the kingdom of heaven is at hand, it is not yet fully operative. This tension is evident since Jesus will announce that in one sense the kingdom is already present with his coming (Matt 12:28), and yet there is still more of the kingdom that will be fully seen at the end of the age (Matt 13:24–30, 47–50; 25:1–

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/god-as-father/>.

⁴⁹ R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Lord's Prayer, Session 4," Ligonier Ministries, accessed September 25, 2023, video, 10:20, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/lords-prayer>.

46). Jesus will later teach that the kingdom will start small but grow until it has become large (Matt 13:31–33). Jesus’s teaching about the kingdom shows that the kingdom has come with Christ, and it will continue to grow here on the earth, but it will not fully come until the end of the age. Thus, to pray, “your kingdom come” is to pray for Jesus’s rule over God’s kingdom to be recognized in an ever-increasing way in this age, but also to long for the eschatological consummation of the kingdom.⁵⁰

Thy Will Be Done (6:10b)

Here we see these first three petitions have been for things that are already certain realities. The Bible clearly teaches God’s will shall indeed be accomplished and none can thwart it (Dan 4:35). Psalm 103 shows the elaboration at the end of the third petition (“on earth as it is in heaven”) can appropriately be applied to all of the first three petitions.⁵¹ God’s name is hallowed in heaven (Ps 103:20), God reigns in heaven (Ps 103:19), and God’s will is done by his ministering hosts in heaven (Ps 103:21).

Jesus models for us the prayer that God’s will would prevail rather than our human wills when he prays in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:42). It seems legitimate to understand this petition as both a prayer for the revealed will of God to be obeyed, as well as for the sovereign will of God to prevail despite human plans and desires.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread (6:11)

Daily bread is the only physical/material petition in the prayer, which is a sharp contrast from the percentage of our prayers that so often focus mostly on physical/material provision. But the petition does show the appropriateness of depending

⁵⁰ Quarles, *Sermon*, 188–89. Keener, *Matthew*, 216n163.

⁵¹ Pennington refers to them as “three overlapping petitions all summed up with the catchphrase at the end . . . one threefold prayer.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 223.

upon the Lord for the necessities of our lives, such as food. The qualification that the bread is needed daily reminds us of the daily provision of “bread from heaven” in the wilderness (Exod 16). However, if we reflect on the Lord’s provision of manna, we realize the petition for daily bread is not purely physical, but also deeply spiritual. Deuteronomy 8:1–3 makes clear that the provision of manna was a test of Israel’s obedience to the Lord and thus of their faith in him. They were to desire obedience to the Lord’s Word even more than they desired food. As Christ teaches us to pray for daily bread, we are instructed to look to God for the provision that we need. But we are at the same time reminded by the example of Jesus himself that we need the Lord and his Word even more than we need this daily bread (Matt 4:4).

Forgive Us Our Debts (6:12)

The translation “debts” is to be preferred over “trespasses” not only because it is the more literal rendering,⁵² but also because it rightly brings our minds to other passages where Jesus speaks of debts being forgiven as an illustration for sin. In Matthew 18:23–35, we see that the King first mercifully forgives his debtors, and then expects them to do likewise in return. Luke 7:36–50 reminds us our sins are a great debt that has been forgiven which should move us to respond in love, service and worship to Jesus. These connecting passages make clear that we are not praying for meritorious forgiveness, but for forgiveness that originated with God.

The inclusion of a petition of forgiveness in the model prayer shows us that while disciples have indeed been once and for all saved from their sins by the blood of Christ (Matt 1:21; 26:28), repentance and seeking forgiveness is an ongoing action in the kingdom.

⁵² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), s.v. “57.221 ὀφειλή.” Logos; F. Hauck, “opheilō,” in *TDNTA*, 746.

Lead Us Not into Temptation (6:13a)

The difficulty with this petition is we know the Lord does not tempt us (Jas 1:13). But even if we acknowledge that God himself does not tempt, there is still difficulty because Christ was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for the purpose of being tempted (Matt 4:1).⁵³ So if we know God does not tempt, but that God certainly purposes to sanctify us through temptation as he did with his Son, then what precisely are we praying for God to do with regard to temptation?

D. A. Carson suggests that we might view the petition as a “*litotes*, a figure of speech which expresses something by negating the contrary. For example, ‘not a few’ means ‘many.’”⁵⁴ This makes good sense, seeing that it is closely connected with the petition to do something instead of leading into temptation—“but deliver us from the evil one.” Thus, the petition would be something like: “Do the alternative/opposite of leading us into temptation.”⁵⁵

Quarles on the other hand suggests that the petition might be understood as prayer offered in light of how Jesus did overcome the temptation we could not (Matt 4:1–11).⁵⁶ It would therefore be a recognition that we are not strong enough to face and overcome temptation as Christ did, and thus we need God to deliver us from temptation. It is a prayer of humility that prays for the Lord’s gracious provision because we know our weakness.

However, as Carson points out, it is not necessary that just because we know we will be tempted, we cannot ever pray that the Lord would protect us from temptation

⁵³ Pennington acknowledges difficulties with rightly interpreting this petition. Pennington, *Sermon*, 227.

⁵⁴ Carson, *Sermon*, 75–76.

⁵⁵ Carson says that the opposite which is being suggested by the phrase is “*not* into temptation, but into righteousness, into situations where far from being tempted we will be protected and therefore be kept righteous.” Carson, *Sermon*, 76.

⁵⁶ Quarles, *Sermon*, 217.

whenever possible.⁵⁷

Deliver Us from the Evil One (6:13b)

Based on other close parallel uses of *ponēros* plus the definite article (Matt 13:38; John 17:15; Eph 6:16; 2 Thess 3:3; 1 John 3:12), it seems best to understand the deliverance we need is from the evil one himself. However, at times the fiery darts which the evil one shoots are evil deeds (2 Tim 4:18) from evil men (2 Thess 3:2). So, praying for God's deliverance from evil more generally is also proper. The prayer for the Lord to deliver from evil echoes the repeated pleas in the Psalms for the Lord to deliver from the hands of evil men (Pss. 64:1–4; 71:4; 140:1). The Lord's is well able to deliver us from evil attacks, but we as Christians must acknowledge this deliverance may come through death, when we are brought safely to the heavenly kingdom (2 Tim 4:18).

Praying for God to deliver us from evil (the evil one) may rightly be applied to prayer for physical deliverance from evil deeds which the Devil stands behind. But the context of the preceding statement seems to indicate the primary deliverance is from the devil's attempts to lead us astray. We are praying that God would guard us from Satan ensnaring us in sin and devouring us (2 Tim 2:26; 1 Pet 5:8).

Rightly Motivated Fasting (6:16–18)

Having gone into depth on how we should and should not pray, Jesus returns to his pattern and provides a third example of how our motives for pious living must be examined. As with each of the other examples, Jesus assumes fasting will be something his disciples will engage in, once their bridegroom is no longer with them (Matt 9:14–15).

Fasting is an appropriate next example following prayer, for the two are almost always connected. It is often associated with weeping in the Old Testament (Judg 20:26;

⁵⁷ Carson, *Matthew*, 208.

2 Sam 1:12; Zech 7:5), but also with intense supplication or dire distress (Ezra 8:21, Esther 4:16). In the New Testament fasting likewise accompanied prayer prior to a major undertaking (Acts 13:1–2; 14:23).

The disciples' fasting, like their giving and prayer, must not conform to the pattern of the hypocrites. They are not to intentionally show the hardship of fasting by their appearance and facial expressions. To do so is obviously meant to garner the prying questions of others that will provide the hypocrite the opportunity to boast of their piety in fasting.

The disciple of the Lord Jesus, on the other hand, when they do fast, is to be cleaned and groomed just as they would be on any other day. Anointing the head with oil and washing seems to be the opposite of the unkept appearance that normally accompanied fasting (2 Sam 12:20). This will lend itself to few, if any, people even knowing what they are doing without for the Lord's sake. The Lord will be the only one who will be able to know what they are giving up for his sake. Their reward will be from the Lord to whom they have willingly and joyfully offered this service.

Conclusion

Jesus calls for the right motivations to stand behind our acts of devotion as we seek to please the Lord instead of putting on a show for others. The true righteousness that Jesus calls for in the kingdom is a matter of the heart. We fail at it when our hands are clean but our hearts are not. We furthermore fail at true righteousness when our hearts are seeking to win the favor of the wrong audience. The applause of men will be the only reward for those who practiced their righteousness for the praise of others. But the praise of the Father will be the reward of the disciple who lived righteously so that all glory would go to the Father.

CHAPTER 6

THE KINGDOM VIEW OF POSSESSIONS AND PROVISION (MATTHEW 6:19–34)

In this section of the Sermon, Jesus deals with how his disciples are to think about material things. *Instead of having an eye that is primarily toward material things, his disciples are rather to find their treasure, give their service, and place their trust in King Jesus.*¹ He is directing his disciples' gaze away from the material things of the earth and upward toward God's kingdom, his righteousness, and their reward with him.² God's people are to seek these things first, and trust that the Lord will provide for their material needs.

In verses 19–24 Jesus focuses more on the temptation to place too high a value on worldly possessions. Then, in verses 25–34, Jesus shifts the focus to address the temptation to think that God will not provide for the needs we have in this world.

¹ For “having an eye toward material things,” see John Piper, “God Over Money, Matthew 6:22–23,” *Desiring God*, May 4, 2017, video, 3:05, <https://www.desiringgod.org/labs/god-over-money>.

² This is one passage in which we have to wrestle with the apparent shift that has taken place with the coming of Christ on material blessings. As one reads certain passages in the Old Testament, it seems as if God intended his people to receive great material blessings on the earth from his treasury (Deut 28:12). The promises in the land include abounding in prosperity (Deut 28:11). Under the new covenant the blessings seem to be chiefly spiritual in this age (Eph 1:3–14). Even so, they are blessings still not fully enjoyed until the Christ consummates his kingdom (Matt 5:3–12). With this shift it seems that the new covenant perspective on material things becomes less about prosperity and more about provision. We should note that the focus on the provision of the Lord is not absent in the Old Testament, especially in the wilderness provision of manna. Paul Barker notes how examples from Elijah's life—receiving daily food from the ravens and the sustenance of the oil and flour for the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:1–16)—show that even under the old covenant, God's people did not always know prosperity because of their faithfulness to God, but sometimes experienced hardship. Barker gives a helpful biblical-theological perspective on this shift in understanding blessing from old covenant to new covenant and how it contradicts the prosperity gospel. See Paul Barker's four-part article series: Paul Barker, “Blessed to Be Rich? A Biblical Theology of Blessing,” *The Gospel Coalition*, May 5, 2015, <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/blessed-to-be-rich-a-biblical-theology-of-blessing/>.

Do Not Store Up or Serve Possessions (6:19–24)

Verses 19 and 20 share almost all of the same words so that there is a direct contrast drawn between two ways of thinking about treasure.³ The treasure that is stored up on earth is plain enough to understand as amassing riches for oneself. We see a condemnation in James 5:1–6 for the rich who lay up treasure connected with “liv[ing] on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence.”⁴ In Luke 12:21 the same verb *thēsaurizō* is used of the rich fool who laid up treasure for himself. He laid up ample goods for many years, only to be told by the Lord that his soul was required of him that night and his possessions would no longer be his. The repeated emphasis is that such treasure stored up on earth will be destroyed eventually and will not benefit us eternally. How apt a warning for our society today that is consumed by long term savings goals and retirement investment strategies.

In direct contrast to this pursuit of worldly gain, Jesus disciples should store up treasure in heaven. As is the case throughout the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is not bringing brand new information but fulfilling the law that God has already given to his people. It is interesting that although God does promise in the Old Testament to open his treasury to his people (Deut 28:12), one of the most frequent uses of *thēsauros* in the Septuagint is in the context of the treasury/storehouse of the Lord in the tabernacle/temple (Josh 6:19; 2 Chr 5:1; Mal 3:10).⁵ God’s people were commanded to give of their wealth to the service of the Lord, who was their greatest treasure. We also see in the Old Testament that earthly treasure was not chiefly to be prized, but rather their

³ The verses are only different in their wording in two ways: (1) they specify two alternative locations where treasure can be treasured up and (2) the placement of the negative particle. A negative particle is attached to the command in v. 19 and is reinforced by the assertion that things will be destroyed or lost. The negative particle is removed from the command in v. 20, making it a positive command. Instead, the negative particle is moved to the reinforcement section, thereby negating the previously mentioned destruction or loss.

⁴ Jas 5:1–3 uses similar destructive language of corrosion and moth-eaten to describe the agony of seeing that earthly riches did not last.

⁵ *Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Septuagint*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), s.v. “θησαυρός,” Logos.

relationship with the Lord. Proverbs 15:16 says, “Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it.” Isaiah 33:6 similarly asserts, “The fear of the Lord is Zion’s treasure.” In the Old Testament we see that although the Lord promised to give blessing from his treasury to his people, his people were still to give back to the Lord from that with which he blessed them. They would do so because they recognized that their relationship with the Lord was their greatest possession. Thus, Christ in his law is again fulfilling the law. He shows that this is the true righteousness that God always desired of his people.

Jesus affirms that true righteousness means that we are to find our treasure with the Lord himself and his reward for us.⁶ Because we desire for our reward to be found with the Lord, we must be rich toward God (Luke 12:21). Although Jesus does not specify in Matthew 6 what storing up treasures in heaven looks like, based on the context it seems to be related with how we use our earthly possessions. In the parallel passage in Luke 12:32, Jesus commands his disciples to sell their possessions and give to the needy. This is also what Jesus tells the rich young ruler to do along with following Jesus (Matt 19:21). The giving up of earthly possessions to those in need would be the opposite of treasuring up treasure on earth.

But how will giving to the poor store up treasure for us in heaven? The Scriptures make clear that the Lord has a concern for the poor. The righteousness which he expects of his people therefore means that they will care for the poor. The Lord’s care for the poor, reflected in the hearts of his people, is a demonstration of the mercy of God,

⁶ Jonathan T. Pennington sees a close connection between the reward language of 6:1–18 and storing up treasure in 6:19–21. He views 6:19–21 as the conclusion of the previous section and sees treasure here as seeking the rewards on earth versus reward from the Father. Jonathan Pennington, personal conversation, Feb 8, 2023. See also Jonathan T. Pennington. *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 237–38. However, based upon the way treasure is closely connected with possessions elsewhere in the New Testament, it seems best to see vv. 19–21 as more closely connected with 22–34. Pennington’s observation of the connection between rewards and treasures in Matt 6:1–18 is still a helpful insight.

and his desire that he would get glory through the weak things of the world (1 Sam 2:8;⁷ Luke 1:47–55; 1 Cor 1:26–27; Jas 2:5) The book of Proverbs shows us the principle that giving or failing to give to the poor brings consequences or rewards from the Lord (Prov 14:31; 19:7; 21:13; 22:9; 28:27). Although we cannot put money away for heaven, we can use our money to give toward the things for which God is concerned. In doing so we receive the approval of God in heaven.

We should not, however, limit the application of storing up treasures in heaven to only relate to how we use our finances. The apostle Paul also echoes the language of Jesus in 1 Timothy 6:17–19 when he says the rich should be charged:

Not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

While Paul does mention generosity and sharing, we see that good works are also a way to store up treasure “for the future” in heaven. We do this as a part of “fight[ing] the good fight to take hold of the eternal life to which [we] were called” (1Tim 6:12).

Multiple commentators note that while treasure in heaven does connect to the issue of money that comes directly afterwards in the text, it also connects to what lies before. Jonathan T. Pennington observes that contrasting heavenly with earthly treasure is a fitting conclusion to the section concerning earthly rewards verses rewards from the Father.⁸ Charles L. Quarles acknowledges this connection to the previous verses but also sees a connection to rewards mentioned elsewhere in the Sermon. Based on this he concludes that storing up treasures in heaven “include[s] suffering persecution for Jesus’s

⁷ I owe this reference to “The Poor,” Knowing Jesus, accessed July 31, 2023, <https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/The-Poor>.

⁸ Pennington, *Sermon*, 232.

sake (Matt 5:12), loving one's enemies (5:46), generous giving to the poor (6:2–4), fervent and sincere prayer (6:5–6), and humble fasting (6:16–18)."⁹ All of these will be rewarded by the Father with the eschatological reward of everlasting life and blessing in the kingdom of God.

Jesus adds the motivation of the enduring nature of heavenly rewards over against the destructible nature of earthly treasure.¹⁰ There may be a connection to Isaiah 51:7–8: "Listen to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear not the reproach of man, nor be dismayed at their revilings. For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool, but my righteousness will be forever, and my salvation to all generations."

Although in this passage God is not dealing with earthly reward but fear of earthly reviling, he points out that those that revile will be destroyed, but his righteousness and salvation will last forever. This fits with what Jesus is teaching his disciples about how the Lord's reward will last forever unlike the things that they can gather for themselves on earth, such as men's approval and freedom from persecution.

Verse 21 could be interpreted in two possible ways. It could be seen as a diagnostic tool, to show where we are storing up treasure as an indicator of what we love. Alternatively, it may be a warning that we must be careful where we store up treasure, because our heart will follow our treasure. In either case, the teaching is closely related to the issue of inner/heart righteousness that Jesus has been so focused upon in the Sermon. Although it has a slightly different context in Matthew 12:34–35, the connection between the heart and treasure seems to be that we bring things out of what is stored up in our heart. Therefore, it is probably best to understand Jesus's statement in 6:21 as a

⁹ Charles L. Quarles, *The Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ's Message to the Modern Church*, NAC Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 239. Quarles also notes Paul's command to the rich in 1 Tim 6:18–19 to be rich in good works. Quarles, *Sermon*, 240.

¹⁰ Quarles makes the connection to 1 Peter 1:4 where our salvation is spoken of as an inheritance, imperishable, uncorrupted, unfading. Quarles, *Sermon*, 240.

diagnostic. “Treasure stored up” is an indicator of where that action of storing up originated—the heart. Thus, what we store up for ourselves reveals what our hearts value most. For the disciple, our hearts must value Jesus and his kingdom above all. In Matthew 13:44 Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” This was not the case for the rich young ruler (Matt 19:16–30). He took a look at the kingdom and assigned a greater value in his heart to treasure on earth.

The treasure of the kingdom which the rich young ruler rejected was eternal life. After all eternal life was the reason for his question (Matt 19:16; cf. 1 Tim 6:19). But for disciples who treasure up treasure in heaven, their reward will be a hundredfold of anything they have given up for the sake of the kingdom (Matt 19:29).

The connection between these passages reminds us that there is only one possible way for us to turn from the sin of treasuring treasure on earth and embrace by faith the treasure of the kingdom. The disciples upon hearing of the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom ask Jesus, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus responds, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:25–26).

By God’s grace alone is it possible for our hearts to treasure Christ and his kingdom above all. This grace was poured out through Jesus himself when on the cross “though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9; cf. Phil 2:6–8).

We then come to interpretive difficulty found with Jesus’s teaching concerning the eye being the lamp of the body. There is debate as to whether the eye should be understood as taking in light or giving off light.¹¹ However, in either case, Jesus’s

¹¹ For an extensive discussion of intromission verses extramission, see Quarles, *Sermon*, 243–47.

illustration is simply that the eyes are “the source of light for the body.”¹² Jesus then moves to state that one type of eye will make the body full of light but another type of eye will make the body full of darkness.

The contrast between a healthy eye and a bad eye has to do with the idiom “bad eye.” This phrase is used in Deuteronomy 15:9 to forbid “your eye look[ing] grudgingly on your poor brother” regarding the sabbatical year. It is also used twice in Proverbs (23:6, 28:22) where “bad eye” is translated as “stingy man.” Finally, it is used in Matthew 20:15 where it is translated, “Do you begrudge my generosity.” “Bad eye” seems to refer to feeling a grudge about money or to being stingy about money.¹³

“Healthy” (*haplous*) could be translated as “sincere” (2 Cor 11:3; Eph 6:5; Col 3:22) or as “generous” (Rom 12:8; 2 Cor 8:2; 9:11, 13).¹⁴ Pennington suggests that both meanings are legitimate and thus adopts the translation “whole and generous.”¹⁵ The eye that will be a source of light is sincere and has a single devotion to the Lord.¹⁶ Part of that devotion to the Lord means that the disciple does not store up treasure for themselves but gives generously to the poor.¹⁷ Jesus is teaching that a bad eye toward money, means that one gets upset over money or hoards money for themselves. The good eye values the kingdom of God and his righteousness and therefore stores up treasure in heaven by being generous.

By having an eye that is singularly focused on the Lord, and thus is generous

¹² Quarles, *Sermon*, 246. See also Pennington, who says, “Either way the point is that they eye is a metaphorical window between the inside and outside of a person.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 241

¹³ Piper, “God Over Money, Matthew 6:22–23.”

¹⁴ O. Bauernfeind, “haploús,” in *TDNTA*, 65.

¹⁵ Pennington, *Sermon*, 242.

¹⁶ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 213.

¹⁷ See Quarles, *Sermon*, 249. Both Quarles and Pennington see a connection between the singleness of the eye and the need to only serve one master. Pennington, *Sermon*, 243; Quarles, *Sermon*, 243.

with possessions, the body will be full of light. Light could either be a reference to the illumination of God's revelation which shows us how we ought to walk, or it could be a reference to righteousness instead of evil.¹⁸ If the eye is greedy in the way it looks at money, then the result will be that the rest of the body is kept in the darkness. God's light will not be shining so long as our eye is not fixed upon him, but is instead fixed on money.¹⁹

Jesus then reinforces this teaching by stating that if what should be the source of light in us (our eyes) is darkness, then how great will this darkness be. If the source of light is darkened by greed, then the rest of the body will be affected by that darkness. First Timothy 6:10 further demonstrates this principle: "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." So many forms of unrighteousness in the world can be traced back to a root of greed.

The final verse demands that we must be single in our devotion to only one master, either God or money. The same root word, *doulos*, occurs in Romans 6:15–19 where believers are instructed to stop being slaves to their former master—sin. Instead, they must be slaves to another master—righteousness leading to sanctification. In Romans 6 we see that we cannot serve any sin at the same time as we are serving the Lord. In Matthew 6 Jesus narrows the focus to the subject of possessions. Jesus uses polar opposite terms of emotion (love and hate) to describe the polarization that will inevitably exist when we are serving one of these masters. James 4:4 makes the same point by teaching us that "whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

¹⁸ Quarles acknowledges that light/darkness can refer to knowledge/lack of knowledge but favors viewing light and darkness as terms relating to good and evil. Quarles, *Sermon*, 250–51. However, we might acknowledge that biblically speaking, the knowledge that comes through the light of God's revelation leads to righteousness, and the lack of that knowledge of his revelation means that we will remain in darkness and thus continue in our evil ways.

¹⁹ See also Piper, "God Over Money, Matthew 6:22–23."

Quarles makes a connection with Jesus's statement about serving two masters with Elijah's admonition to Israel on Mt Carmel: "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God follow him; but if Baal, the follow him" (1 Kgs 18:21). This is a powerful connection when we consider the way that money/mammon can very quickly become an idol. If we serve money by storing up for ourselves treasure on earth and having a "bad eye" toward possessions, then we are no less wicked than Israel as they worshiped Baal.

Throughout this section Jesus is showing us that true righteousness will involve a heart that does not treasure up and love earthly possessions. Instead, the heart of a disciple is to be filled with the light of the Lord. When they are solely focused on the Lord, their light will be full of righteousness such as giving generously in service and obedience to the Lord. Their eyes will be looking to receive the treasure of their reward in heaven.

Do Not Worry about Possessions (6:25–34)

As Jesus continues to speak about the subject of material things, he shifts focus slightly from treasuring material things to worrying about them. However, the "therefore" which begins verse 25 shows us that worrying about material things is just as much slavery to material things as is treasuring them up and being greedy/stingy (having a bad eye) toward them.²⁰ We must choose to serve God by seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, rather than being enslaved by our possessions.

The structure of these verses begins with the theme statement "Do not be anxious." Jesus gives two specific categories in which we should not be anxious: (1) life, which relates to food/drink, and (2) body, which relates to clothing. Jesus then states that

²⁰ Quarles views the "therefore" as indicating that vv. 25–34 are an application of the previous verses. He concludes that Jesus is showing us that a right view of material possessions will relate to a freedom from worry and that a wrong view of possessions will lend itself to us being anxious about possessions. Quarles, *Sermon*, 258.

our life and body consist of more than just these physical needs. He then takes each category of life and body and directs the disciples' attention to some other part of creation that does not have to be anxious because of the needs met by their (the disciples') heavenly Father. Jesus concludes each category with a rhetorical question to show that God will certainly give even more care to his children, but then follows with some form of rebuke for not placing trust in God.

This main point is repeated again in verse 31 with a condensed version of the categories of food/drink and clothing. Then what the Gentiles seek after is contrasted with what Christ disciples should seek. The passage concludes by repeating the primary command, "Do not be anxious" with an overarching summation that extends Jesus's teaching to every area of life.²¹

Jesus commands his disciples "Do not be anxious."²² Anxiety, or the cares of this world, are not a minor problem for the people of God as they seek to be faithful. Jesus uses the noun form of this same word (*merimna*) in the parable of the sower (Matt 13:1–23) to identify the thorns with the cares of this world, along with the deceitfulness of riches, which will "choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." The parable of the sower shows us what happens if Jesus's disciples do not hear and put into practice his words, concerning anxiety/cares of this world (Matt 7:24).

Being anxious about material things is not a new problem for the people of God. The mention of food, drink, and clothing recalls the children of Israel in the

²¹ Pennington observes the three-fold repetition of the "do not be anxious" command in vv. 25, 31, and 34. Pennington, *Sermon*, 245.

²² It will be helpful in preaching this text to clarify that there is a spectrum of anxiety. All anxiety is the result of the curse and our separation from the Lord. But we should acknowledge that there is one end of the spectrum where more severe cases of anxiety may rightly be considered a medical diagnosis that needs further medicinal treatment. But even in such cases, it is the responsibility of the Christian, and other believers around them, to make sure that trust in the Lord is not replaced by trust in medicine. Quarles also helpfully notes that the Greek word used here is a word for being anxious and not for "thought" about one's life, as the KJV translates it. Thus, Jesus is not forbidding thoughtful consideration of plans for the future, but rather a consuming worry about it. Quarles, *Sermon*, 258–59.

wilderness on the way to the promised land. In Nehemiah 9:20–21 we read in his prayer to the Lord, “[You] did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out . . .” And yet God’s people constantly grumbled against the Lord over food and drink (Exod 15:24; 16:2; 16:8; 17:3).

Jesus’s statement that life is more than food reminds us of the lesson that God intended Israel to learn—“Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of the God” (Deut 8:3).²³ God’s people were told that this humbling was to test them and to do them good in the end (Deut 8:17). We may conclude that Jesus intends to do the same good to us, causing us to depend on the Lord for our provision and to make our priority obedience to his Word.

Jesus then addresses the first category of anxiety over food by directing our attention to the birds of the air. Jesus shows God’s providential care over the entire created order.²⁴ Jesus is not only directing our attention to what can naturally be observed,²⁵ but he is reminding the disciples of truth God has already revealed in his Word. Psalm 145:15–16 states, “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.” Like the birds of the air, we should trust in our Father’s provision.

The language of gathering into barns calls to mind the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:13–21. We might observe that it is not only the poor who need to trust the Lord to provide. The rich also need to trust the Lord rather than thinking they can store up for themselves ample goods.

Jesus asks the rhetorical question, “Are you not of more value than they.” The

²³ Where Israel failed to recognize this, Jesus had been faithful in their stead (Matt 4:4).

²⁴ Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Companions to the New Testament Series (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 147.

²⁵ Allison sees Jesus here showing the importance of natural theology. Allison, *Sermon*, 147.

obvious answer is yes. After all, Jesus will state that two sparrows can be sold for a penny and reaffirm that we are of greater value (Matthew 10:29–31). But this should not be taken as an affirmation that human life in general, being made in the image of God, is more valuable than animal life (although that can be affirmed from elsewhere in Scripture; e.g., Gen 9:1–6). Rather, Jesus is giving this comfort of greater value to his disciples specifically. Jesus does not say that the bird’s heavenly Father feeds them, but rather that *your* (his disciples’) heavenly Father feeds the birds. The emphasis is that the freedom from worry should be there for the believer, even beyond the rest of creation because they know God as their heavenly Father.²⁶

However, this should not be taken as an absolute guarantee of our safety and physical provision. We can certainly observe this in our lives. Believers still go hungry, get sick, even die. But we still need to see where we can find this clarification in Scripture. Dale C. Allison Jr. helpfully points out how Jesus’s other illustrations involving birds shows us this truth:

In 8:20 [Jesus] says . . . that while the birds of the air have nests, the son of man has nowhere to lay his head—which tells us that even though 6:25–34 assures us that God takes care of the faithful, this assurance covers nothing more than the basic necessities. God does not give luxuries. In 10:29 Jesus speaks of sparrows being sold and falling to the ground, which entails that God’s care of them does not guarantee their physical safety.²⁷

We might further observe, that Jesus’s teaching concerning our worth being more than sparrows comes in the context of the assurance that persecution will come to his disciples (Matthew 10:16–25). God’s providential care does not mean absolute physical safety.

Verse 27 provides what might be seen as a concluding rebuke. The rebuke is

²⁶ Consider the contrast between the worth of one sparrow (half of a penny) contrasted with the cost God paid to ransom his children “not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:18–19).

²⁷ Allison, *Sermon*, 148.

not as blunt as at the end of verse 30, but it clearly condemns the foolishness of trusting in ourselves for something only God can do. None of us has the power to extend our life²⁸ through worry. If we do not have the power to extend the end of our life even by the smallest amount (Luke 12:26) then we should not worry about the everyday provision of food/drink.

The second category that Christ addresses is clothing for the body. He employs the same line of reasoning as was used when speaking about food for life. He directs his disciples' attention to some other part of creation for which God providentially cares. He then uses the argument from the lesser to the greater to show that their heavenly Father will certainly care for them in his providence.

What we will wear may not seem like something to be worried over in a world of mass-produced clothes. But for the poor of the ancient world, clothing was a precious thing that could not be parted with. In fact, the law required that if the coat of a poor man was taken in pledge that it had to be returned to him by night so that he would have a covering in which to sleep (Exod 22:26–27).²⁹ So especially for the poor, clothes were not an easily disposable possession.

To the one who is worried about this basic necessity, Jesus directs them to the flowers of the field.³⁰ The flowers of the field are not concerned with the difficult process of creating a new garment for themselves. Jesus points to the most splendidly arrayed king imaginable and says that Solomon, clothed in all his glory, held nothing compared

²⁸ Adding a cubit to our height would be a possible translation. However, given the context, worrying about the length of our life makes more sense than worrying about our height. For a more extended defense of “span of life” verses “height,” see Quarles, *Sermon*, 267–69.

²⁹ See Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 265.

³⁰ There is not a uniform consensus as to the specific type of flower. However, *krinon* is frequently used in the Septuagint as a gloss for a type of flower in the love poetry of Song of Songs and in the descriptions of decorum of the temple. This indicates that whatever the flower was, it was a flower of splendid beauty. This accords with the splendor of the flower even though only temporary. See *Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Septuagint*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), s.v. “κρίνον,” Logos.

with such flowers.³¹ France points out how within this unit where Jesus is dealing with bare necessities like food and clothing, we do not get a picture that God only provides the bare minimum. For the flowers of the field, God does not provide for their “mere survival but their magnificence.”³² Our heavenly Father is able to magnificently and wonderfully provide for our essential needs as well.

Another dimension that Jesus adds to his teaching is that the Father provides so wonderfully even for flowers that are only alive today but then are thrown into the oven. Similar to the statement about two sparrows being sold for a penny, Jesus is showing that his disciples’ worth to God far exceeds these flowers that are so easily discarded. Just as with the birds, we are then reminded again that though God provides for them, there is no absolute guarantee of their physical safety.³³

It is possible that the image of plant material being thrown into a fire is meant to remind us of the judgement that will come upon those who do not repent (Matt 3:12; cf. Joel 2:3–5; Nah 1:10; Mal 4:1). Although Jesus is not directly contrasting here God’s provision for believers verses unbelievers, Jesus is highlighting the fact that God extends this level of provision for parts of his creation that will be ultimately be destroyed. How much more care will he give to his disciples that are not destined for destruction (1 Thess 5:9).

Jesus concludes verse 30 with a rebuke of the disciples’ lack of faith. D. A.

³¹ While Solomon’s significance seems chiefly to compare his splendor with the flowers, it is worth noting that Solomon’s splendor itself is a gift from the Lord. His splendor is provided to him as a reward from the Lord when he was “seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” by asking for a heart of wisdom to rule God’s people (1 Kgs 3:3–15).

³² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 269. France goes on to clarify: “It would, of course, be pressing the rhetorical language too far to find in the saying a promise that all God’s people may expect to be more magnificent than Solomon. The point is rather that such a God, author and sustainer of a lavishly beautiful universe, can be trusted to meet his disciples’ essential needs.” France, *Matthew*, 270, emphasis mine.

³³ Allison notes, “In the Hebrew Bible, the comparison of the human being to the flower or grass often underlines the brevity and fragility of human life. Allison, *Sermon*, 149.

Carson succinctly summarizes the problem: “The root of anxiety is unbelief.”³⁴ This was the problem in the wilderness with Israel’s grumbling about lack of food and water. They demonstrated that they did not believe in who their God was, nor did they believe His promises.³⁵

Because his disciples can see their heavenly Father’s provision toward all of his creation, even the seemingly insignificant and consumable parts of creation, they must not be anxious. Jesus now repeats the command and summarizes the categories he has used above of food, drink, and clothing (Matt 6:31).

In verse 32 he gives an additional reasoning for why we must not be anxious. The language very closely parallels Christ’s instructions for why prayers should not be full of “empty phrases.” This is what the Gentiles do.³⁶ But God’s people, both in their prayers to God and in their trust in God, are to understand that God already knows what they need.

In verse 33 Jesus gives the solution that is to be pursued as an alternative to anxiety.³⁷ The disciples are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. These two themes have already been very prominent in Matthew thus far, and in particular within the Sermon on the Mount. While seeking the kingdom of God, may be related to an eschatological orientation (similar to storing up treasure in heaven), seeking the kingdom and righteousness also has a present dimension.³⁸ Righteousness is something that they have already been admonished to hunger and thirst after (Matt 5:6), and entering the kingdom is contingent upon them living out an exceeding righteousness (Matt 5:20).

³⁴ Carson, *Matthew*, 216.

³⁵ See Pennington, *Sermon*, 248n19.

³⁶ Pennington notes that “Once again Matthew’s Jesus has redefined the people of God based not on ethnicity, but on this new kind of righteousness.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 248.

³⁷ Pennington calls the solution “a reorientation to the kingdom.” Pennington, *Sermon*, 245.

³⁸ Quarles, *Sermon*, 278–79.

Jesus reiterates the focus needed on God's kingdom and his righteousness by showing how it must take priority over material things.

Christ's promise that all these things will be added to you is not a guarantee of health and wealth. It is first of all a promise concerning these particular things mentioned in verse 31—food, drink, and clothing.³⁹ Furthermore, Christ is not promising earthly abundance, but rather provision from our heavenly Father for the things we need as we seek first his kingdom and righteousness.

Jesus concludes by repeating the command to not be anxious one more time but he expands the command even beyond the necessities of food, drink, and clothing. We are to worry about nothing that tomorrow holds. This is a reminder of how the people of Israel were meant to depend upon the Lord *daily* for manna. But it also reminds us of how God's people have just been instructed to pray for our *daily* bread. However, within Jesus's summative command, we do not see Christ calling his disciples to simply be oblivious to problems that must be figured out. Jesus acknowledges that each day will still have troubles. But Jesus would have us bring today's troubles to the Lord in prayer, and trust that as the Lord provides for our needs today, he will provide again when the new day comes.

Conclusion

True righteousness of following Jesus means that our hearts fully belong to him. *Instead of having an eye that is primarily toward material things, his disciples are rather are to find their treasure, give their service, and place their trust in King Jesus.* This means that we will not create idols out of money. We will not have the idol of storing up our treasures somewhere on this earth. Nor will we bow to an idol by saying we are not sure the Lord can provide, thus placing trust in man to provide. In either of

³⁹ France, *Matthew*, 272; D. A. Carson, *Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World: An Exposition of Matthew 5–10* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 100.

these cases, Jesus wants our uncompromising allegiance to him. True righteousness will mean longing for his rewards and valuing what he values—his kingdom and righteousness.

CHAPTER 7

JUDGING, DISCERNMENT, PRAYER, AND SUMMARY (MATTHEW 7:1–12)

This is the most difficult section of the Sermon in which to identify a single theme. Dale C. Allison Jr. and Jonathan T. Pennington both connect the section with all of 6:19–7:12 under the label of “social obligations”¹ or “greater righteousness in relation to the world.”² D. A. Carson views the section as providing caveats to the Sermon’s focus on perfection and love by talking about not judging hypocritically and having discernment.³ While we must not just view the section as a redactionary collection of Jesus’s saying, it is not entirely essential to infallibly identify the interconnectedness of the section and its relation to the surrounding sections in order to interpret Jesus’s teaching. The teachings of Jesus are vital for his people to understand each in their own right. We can summarize the section in the following way: *Jesus instructs his disciples regarding judgement, discernment, and prayer. He then summarizes kingdom ethics toward others as doing to them what we wish would be done to us.*

How Not to Judge Others (7:1–5)

It is often quipped that Matthew 7:1 is the new most commonly known verse in our culture.⁴ However, the context of the verse provides a great deal of clarification that

¹ Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Companions to the New Testament Series (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 138.

² Jonathan Pennington, *Sermon Jonathan T. Pennington. The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 266.

³ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 218.

⁴ Charles L. Quarles, *The Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ’s Message to the Modern*

Jesus is instructing us to be merciful in our judgements and not hypocritical, not that we are never to render judgement on any sin. Although we can look at numerous places in Scripture that clarify this, we do not even have to leave the Sermon on the Mount to see this explained.

Twice in the Sermon, Jesus has spoken in similar ways about us receiving from the Lord what we have done to others. The fifth of Jesus's Beatitudes stated, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy" (Matt 5:7). Similarly, at the conclusion of the Lord's prayer Jesus explains the reflexive relationship between God's forgiveness and the forgiveness we must offer (Matt 6:14–15). "Judge not, that you be not judged" is a continuation of the same theme.

Hypocrisy has already been a theme which Jesus has addressed in the Sermon as it relates to false piety in giving, prayer, and fasting. Now Jesus relates this to hypocritical judgements that do not take notice of one's own sin before looking at the sin of others. Charles L. Quarles summarizes that the issue is "harsh and hypocritical judgement."⁵ He notes that Jesus will, immediately after this section, call for discernment of false prophets as his disciples examine them based upon their fruits.⁶

We can also look back into the Old Testament and see that Jesus, who has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, is clearly not telling God's people that they are to never render any type of verdict on whether something is good or bad. Leviticus 19:15 commands God's people not to do injustice, but that "in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor." Solomon prays that he may be given an understanding mind to govern (judge) God's people, which he knows will involve "discern[ing] between good and evil" (1 Kgs 3:9).

Church, NAC Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 283.

⁵ Quarles, *Sermon*, 286.

⁶ Quarles, *Sermon*, 284.

While we may in our context need to clarify that this command does not mean that Christians should never discern what is moral or immoral, we must not so over clarify that we miss what Jesus is commanding. In Jesus day, as in ours, those who view themselves as pious, face the temptation to be harsh or hypocritical in examining sin in other's lives. Jesus offers a corrective.

Jesus's command is simply "judge not." Biblically, judgement from a human perspective is meant to be a pronouncement and enacting on earth of what God has declared in his perfectly righteous judgements by his Word.⁷ We see that this is what the nation of Israel, led by its judges, and later, its kings was to do (Num 35:24; Deut 16:18; 1 Kgs 3:28). We do see a shift under the new covenant that enacting justice within the covenant community no longer takes the form of physical punishment, but rather of expulsion from the church (Matt 18:15–20; 1 Cor 5:3–5). But the biblical necessity for God's people to affirm and act upon his judgements is maintained. So, Jesus must not be overturning this idea of agreeing with and acting upon God's judgements.

Instead, the context shows that it is a specific problem with human judgement that Jesus rebukes. The very next phrase "that you be not judged" clues us in to the impossibility of thinking that Jesus is telling us not to agree with and act upon God's judgements. Scripture clearly teaches that God will judge the world in righteousness on the final day (Psalm 96:13; 2 Tim 4:8; Rev 20:12 etc.). God will with absolute certainty condemn sin and punish sin on the final day. The command cannot be taken to mean that we should ignore what God has pronounced as righteous in his judgements, and then expect that we will not be judged by God on the last day.

Jesus's next explanation then crystalizes what he has in mind when he speaks

⁷ "Yet the primary orientation of *mišpāṭ* is religious; it goes forth as light, demanding that the people do right on the basis of God's self-revelation." F. Büschel, "krínō," in *TDNTA*, 470.

of the reciprocal relationship between the judgement we pronounce and the measure we use, and what the Lord will render to us.⁸ As noted above, Jesus has already taught in the Sermon that God's mercy and forgiveness will be commensurate with the mercy and forgiveness we give to others. Our demonstrations of mercy and forgiveness do not earn God returning these to us. Rather God initiates mercy and the mercy and forgiveness we show is a necessary consequence (Matt 18:23–35).⁹ However, when it comes to God's judgement against our harsh and hypocritical judgements, the sinner will be given their deserts in the form of judgement without mercy from the Lord.

One may still wonder if verse 2 allows for the idea that if we are lenient, tolerant, and overlooking toward wrongs of others, then God will be lenient, tolerant, and overlooking toward our wrongs done toward him. The context of the Sermon makes clear that not judging is connected with being merciful and therefore forgiving sin. Forgiveness is what we need to demonstrate, not being lenient and tolerant and therefore overlooking or ignoring sin.

Jesus then gives an extended illustration by comparing specks and logs in one another's eyes. Jesus seems to be zeroing in on a particular form of harsh judgement in which the hypocrite is concerned with everyone else's sin but not his own.

One of the first things we notice about this illustration is that this is an examination of sin involving "brothers." While the principle may in some regard be extended to an unbeliever, the focus is specifically on sins in fellow Christians. This fits with how Paul instructs the church in Corinth. Paul, as a Christian, has nothing to do with judging outsiders, but that judgement belongs to the Lord (1 Cor 5:12–13). So, we see yet another reason why this verse should not be taken out of context by non-Christians to

⁸ Quarles notes that it is unlikely that us receiving back human judgement is in view. It must be God's justice. Quarles, *Sermon*, 284.

⁹ See discussion on Matt 5:7 in chapter two of this project and discussion on Matt 6:12, 13–14 in chapter five of this project.

silence us when we point out their sin in order to call them to repentance and faith.¹⁰

Jesus rhetorically asks two questions: “Why are you looking at your brother’s sin, ignoring your own,” and “Why are you trying to confront your brother’s sin, ignoring your own.” Jesus here exposes a fleshly tendency that all of us have, to point out sin in others without acknowledging our own faults. We see something similar in Romans 2:1–5, where Scripture rebukes judging others even though we practice the very things for which we would condemn them.

Here in Matthew 7, it is possible that the issue in view is not just judging and confronting others for the same sins we have. Rather the issue also seems to include the ignoring of sins that are in fact “weightier” than others.¹¹ The problem is not that a believer might have a *speck* or piece of dust in their own eye, but a *log* or beam, which is much larger. This perhaps indicates that this is a weightier sin that they are unwilling to deal with. One thinks of Jesus rebukes of the Pharisees for tithing mint and dill and cumin, and yet neglecting weightier matters of the law. There Jesus uses a similar picture of trying to confront a small issue, but missing the bigger issue. He rebukes the scribes and Pharisees for “straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel” (Matt 23:24).

Jesus had previously defined hypocrites as those who had a false, outward view of their own righteousness and who desired man’s praise rather than simply pleasing God (Matt 6:1–18). Here Jesus defines hypocrites as those who have a false view of their own sinfulness. The hypocrite is in either case someone whose outward activities do not proceed from a heart that is righteous before the Lord.

Jesus’s final statement, that we should take the speck out of our brother’s eye clarifies that it is not Christ’s intention that we should ignore or overlook sin in our

¹⁰ While Paul does say that it is not our responsibility to judge outsiders, Paul acknowledges that we do have a responsibility to expose sin for what it is (Eph 5:11) and to call unbelievers to repentance (Acts 20:21; 26:20).

¹¹ See Quarles, Sermon, 286.

brother's life. We should confront sin in a brother's life. In fact, Jesus gives us instructions for doing so in Matthew 18. However, that confrontation should only take place after we have dealt with any unrepentant sin in our own lives that is not allowing us to see the situation clearly. Once a believer has recognized their sin, and is seeking to put it to death, then by God's grace they can help their brother with putting his own sins to death.

Jesus's illustration about the log verses the speck is primarily focused on the hypocritical nature of the judgement he is forbidding. However, the illustration may also serve to remind his disciples of the danger of letting sin distort our vision. Jesus has previously warned that if our eye is bad then our whole body will be full of darkness. Although his warning there was specifically tied to greed, he has drawn attention to the way sin can cause blindness that prevents us from seeing the light of God's revelation for what is good and righteous. Being hypocritical in judgement while failing to see our own sins is another way that darkness can be in our lives where there should be light.

Having Discernment (7:6)

Jesus proverbial saying here seems to have to do with discerning who should and should not be entrusted with precious treasures of the kingdom. The previous context about not judging seems to make Jesus's proverb a guardrail on the other side to show that while hypocritical judgement is sinful, we should not fail to realize that there is some level of judgement that we need to maintain.¹² The two statements are parallel, equating dogs with swine and holy things with pearls.

Although it is clear Jesus is talking about discernment, the question remains what is the holy thing/pearl that we are to be careful with, and who are the dogs/swine that we should keep them from? The pigs (*choiros*) are only referenced in two other

¹² See Carson, *Matthew*, 218.

contexts in the New Testament, when Jesus allows the demons to depart in to the herd of pigs (Matt 8:28–34; Mark 5:1–20) and when the prodigal son is feeding and eating with the pigs (Luke 15:15–16). In both of these contexts, the presence of large numbers of pigs indicates a Gentile setting, as these animals were ceremonially unclean.¹³ Although a different word is used in Matthew 15:26–28,¹⁴ Jesus refers to the Canaanite woman as a dog, to whom it would not be right to give what was meant for the people of God. It is possible that Jesus is speaking in Matthew 7 of dogs as the Gentiles who would be ceremonially unclean. If this is correct, the fact that Jesus does indeed grant the Canaanite woman’s request after seeing her faith, clarifies that Jesus is certainly not forbidding giving holy things/treasure to any Gentiles. If Jesus is referring to Gentiles, here he would be referring to Gentiles in the way he does in Matthew 5:47 and 18:17—those who do not know God.

Second Peter 2:22 may provide clarification as it speaks of dogs and swine (although a different word) together: “The dog returns to its own vomit and the sow after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.” Peter is speaking of those influenced by false teachers turning back from righteousness to the “defilements of the world.” Peter says it would have been better if they had never known the way of righteousness. Dogs and swine in this context are those who initially seemed to repent, only to be drawn back into unrighteous living.

In Philippians 3:2, dogs are the evildoers of the circumcision party who place their confidence in the flesh and not in the gospel. Dogs are therefore not necessarily limited to ethnic Gentiles, but can include any who are not placing their faith in Christ.¹⁵

¹³ Carson, *Matthew*, 256.

¹⁴ Quarles, *Sermon*, 290.

¹⁵ Although there are different words for dogs being used, it is interesting to see the Canaanite woman who is called a dog, still receive salvation through faith in Christ, though she is a Gentile. We then see the Judaizers, who should be receiving the blessing of the Lord’s salvation, called dogs, because they are trusting in the flesh, not in Jesus, as the Canaanite woman did.

Finally in Revelation 22:15, “dogs” serves as a label leading off the list of those who will be outside the New Jerusalem and thus will have no access to the tree of life, “but rather will have their portion in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur which is the second death” (Rev 21:8).¹⁶

It seems then that Jesus’s reference in Matthew 7:6 to dogs/swine is to sinners who are far from God. But since Jesus came to save sinners, and specifically extends grace to the Gentiles, we must recognize that Jesus is calling for discernment with sinners who will not trust Christ, or who seem to trust Christ but then return to the ways of the world.

What then does Jesus not want us to give to/set before such people? Not bringing holy things into the realm of the unclean reminds us of the Levitical holiness codes. Those that were unclean were not to eat meat that was a part of a holy sacrifice (e.g., Lev 7:20–21). To eat a portion of the sacrifice, either as a priest or as a lay person, signified fellowship with God made possible through the blood of the sacrifice.

The clearest connection to pearls would be in Matthew 13:45–46 where Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a priceless pearl worth selling all we have in order obtain it. The pearl is all the benefits of belonging to the kingdom of heaven.

If we put these two ideas together the holy thing/pearls of Matthew 7:6 seems best understood as the blessings of peace with God and being brought into the kingdom. Since we cannot confer those blessings themselves, it would seem what Jesus is referring to is the offer of the kingdom blessings through the proclamation of the gospel. Although Jesus does not intend that the good news be withheld from anyone (Matt 28:19), he does tell his disciples that there must be some level of discernment involved as we proclaim the free offer of the gospel. Jesus’s instructions about shaking the dust from their feet in

¹⁶ Although “dogs” are not mentioned in Rev 21:8 as they are in 22:15, both lists include sorcerers, murderers, sexually immoral, liars/everyone who loves and practices falsehood. So, it is appropriate to assume that “dogs” serves as a label for such people.

Matthew 10:11–15 gives further clarity that although the gospel should be freely offered everywhere, we should with discernment move on to those whom God has made receptive to the gospel. We should not continue to throw this priceless treasure down before sinners who refuse to trust Christ as Savior and Lord.

Some early church interpreters have taken this verse to refer to discernment in giving the Lord's Supper.¹⁷ While this may not be the most immediately obvious application, it is not altogether off-base. "Trampling underfoot" (*katapateō*) is a word used in Hebrews 10:29 for what unrepentant sinners do to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This is also referred to as profaning the blood of the covenant, which gives this at least some connection with the Lord's Supper. Not offering the Lord's Supper, which includes the symbol of the blood of the new covenant, to an unbeliever or unrepentant sinner would seem to be an appropriate application of not giving to dogs what is holy. This would also be consistent with the Old Testament connections to partaking of part of the sacrifice, demonstrating that table fellowship with God was made possible through the sacrifice. These sacrifices were fulfilled by Christ's death on the cross, which is remembered in the Lord's Supper. Thus, in reflecting the old covenant holy food not being given to someone unclean, the Lord's Supper should not be given to those who have not been made clean through faith in the blood of Christ.

The excommunication of Matthew 18 may also be a legitimate application of this text. Dogs and swine are meant to evoke images of people who are Gentiles in the sense that they are far from God. Dogs in 2 Peter 2 are those who appeared to repent but have turned back to the world. Thus, treating someone like a Gentile and tax collector would mean treating them like a dog that has returned to its vomit. This person should not be given the holy things that belong to the church, including membership in the body

¹⁷ "Do not let anyone drink from your Eucharist, except those who were baptized in the name of the Lord, because the Lord also has spoken about this matter: 'Do not give what is holy to the dogs.'" Quarles, *Sermon*, 291n605, citing the *Didache*, (Quarles's translation). See also Allison, *Sermon*, 154.

of Christ.

The result of not heeding Jesus's caution is that the priceless treasure of the kingdom may be trampled underfoot (by pigs) and that the disciples may be attacked by those unwilling to listen (by the dogs). One way the treasure of the kingdom may be trampled underfoot is when, through the rejection of unbelievers, the gospel is not seen as a priceless treasure, but as something that may be discarded.

The language of "*your* pearls" being trampled makes it seem as if it is not just the gospel message that is at stake, but the disciples' own enjoyment of kingdom blessings. If the gospel is trampled underfoot, this only brings judgement upon the one doing it. It is possible that Jesus is suggesting that his disciples will suffer when the treasure of the kingdom is trampled underfoot by unbelievers. This could be the kingdom losing its luster when disciples watch people continually reject it. It could also be that kingdom blessings enjoyed in the kingdom embassies of the church cannot be enjoyed because, through lack of discernment, unbelievers have entered in and made a mess of the kingdom community.

The fact that believers will suffer in some way through this lack of discernment seems to be confirmed by the final warning that lack of discernment could run the risk of being attacked by dogs. Jesus certainly warns Christians that they will face persecution on his account, and this warning is repeated in the context of the disciples being sent out to share the gospel in Matthew 10:16–24. Jesus's warning regarding discernment connects with the caution that as the disciples go out "as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matt 10:16). The disciples should know persecution will come and should have no fear. However, they must not fail at having wisdom and discernment, placing themselves unnecessarily in danger of the wolves and dogs of the world who do not want to hear the exclusive claims of Christ.¹⁸

¹⁸ Quarles, *Sermon*, 294.

Although gospel proclamation is probably the most likely context for Jesus's proverb, it can rightly be applied to the danger of undiscerningly welcoming unbelievers or unrepentant false believers into the fellowship. To offer the blessings of life among the body to such people is to invite eventual attacks from within.

More Instructions on Prayer (7:7–11)

In these verses Jesus returns to the subject of prayer, which as we have seen lies at the center of the Sermon's structure.¹⁹ Although this is an amazing promise from the Lord to his people, it does seem to be an abrupt change of subject. We must ask why the subject of prayer immediately follows the section about judgement and discernment. Carson suggests that the commands to pray are inserted here because of the extraordinarily difficult (and perhaps seemingly impossible) assignments Jesus has just given—not judging hypocritically and having discernment with the gospel.²⁰ These are assignments that we cannot undertake without coming to the Lord in prayer and asking for him to grant us the ability to do these things rightly. However, though the instructions on prayer may immediately connect to the instructions about not judging and discerning, they have connections to other portions of the Sermon (Matt 6:9–13; 6:33; 7:13–14), thus indicating that they can be more broadly applied.

Before examining the details of Jesus's instructions on prayer, it is helpful to carefully note the context in which Jesus makes such a remarkable promise about God giving us what we ask. The context is the need to deal with sin before confronting our brother, and having discernment about to whom we will entrust the gospel and its benefits. The seeking that we are to do, has as its most immediate referent “seek[ing] first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Matt 6:33). Although the promise of our

¹⁹ Allison, *Sermon*, 37.

²⁰ Carson, *Matthew*, 218.

Lord can certainly extend beyond this specific context, this helps us to remember that the Lord has not only told us to ask, but also what we should ask for.²¹

Additionally, Quarles points out several things that help us to see that Jesus is primarily directing us to pray with our eyes toward the kingdom and its blessings. The parallel passage in Luke 11:13 says, “The heavenly Father [will] give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” He also notes how all other occurrences of “good” (*agathos*) in Matthew have moral connotations. He notes how “find” is used in relation to the way that leads to life in 7:14 and how knocking may be connected with entering the narrow gate in 7:13. These suggests that Jesus is most immediately referring not to tangible earthly blessings, but the good and righteous blessings of the kingdom.²²

The abuse of verses such as these should not lead us focus so much on clarification that we miss the profound blessedness they are intended to communicate—God promises to give to his children the good things for which they ask. In fact, Scripture is full of such promises that should drive us to come to our God who not only will give to those who ask, but who is able to do far more than we ask or think (Eph 3:20).

In verse 7, Jesus gives three parallel, one-word commands: ask, seek and knock.²³ Each command is accompanied by a promise that God the Father will respond accordingly. Asking is very clearly a reference to prayer and is often the terminology

²¹ We can examine other passages that contain amazing promises about God answering prayer and note the surrounding context for the types of things for which the believer should be asking: Matt 18:19 (context: binding and loosing, church discipline), John 14:13–14 (context: imitating the ministry of Jesus in greater, world-wide scope). See Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Study Notes on John,” in *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane T. Dennis (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). 2052–53.

²² Quarles gives an extended defense of why it is best not to view Matt 7:7–11 as a blanket promise about the Lord answering prayer. Quarles does suggest that the instructions on prayer should be viewed primarily as instructing disciples to ask to *enter* the kingdom. Although it may be too narrow to limit the passage’s intent to praying for *entrance* into the kingdom, Quarles is certainly right to direct the focus to asking, seeking, knocking for kingdom things rather than simply material things. Quarles, *Sermon*, 296–303.

²³ Quarles states, “‘Seek’ and ‘knock’ do not introduce distinct ideas. Instead, these verbs serve as metaphors for asking in prayer.” Quarles, *Sermon*, 296.

used of prayer in both Old and New Testaments.²⁴ Prayer is chiefly a request or petition offered to God.²⁵ That petition is offered to God in faith that he is not only able to give what we ask, but promises to do so. The caveats previously examined still remain. We must ask for what God has told us to ask. We also must ask for things according to his will (Matt 26:39; 1 John 5:14).

Seeking and finding have a background in several Old Testament passages. There are repeated admonitions to seek after the Lord with one's whole heart (Deut 4:29; Jer 29:13)²⁶ and these admonitions are often accompanied by the promise that the Lord will be found (Jer 29:13; 1 Chr 28:9). In Psalm 24:3–6 we read that those who seek the face of the God of Jacob will receive blessing and righteousness from God as they draw near to his holy place. We furthermore see in Proverbs that we should seek after understanding and wisdom knowing that the Lord gives wisdom, knowledge and understanding (Prov 2:3–6). In this passage we see that a son having heard the words and commandments of his father, should “call out” and “raise [his] voice” for understanding. This connects the seeking of these things with prayer. Knocking is more of an anomaly as a biblical image of us coming to the Lord in prayer, but it is clearly a part of the three-fold description of prayer.²⁷

²⁴ See 1 Sam 1:17, 20; 1 Kgs 3:10–11; 1 Chr 4:10; Ps 27:4 for Septuagint uses of *aiteō* regarding prayer. *Lexham Analytical Lexicon of the Septuagint*, (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), s.v. “*αἰτέω*,” Logos.

²⁵ Mark DeVine points out that for John Calvin, who devoted more space in *The Institutes of Christian Religion* to prayer than any other subject, prayer can be essentially summed up as making petition. Mark DeVine, (unpublished class lecture for “Theology of John Calvin,” Beeson Divinity School, Fall Semester, 2015).

²⁶ Note particularly Jer 29:12–13 where seeking the Lord is met with the promise that his people will find him. In the previous verse the promise is when God's people pray to him, he will hear them.

²⁷ The only other occurrence of the word *krouō* (knock) in connection with seeking something from the Lord is in Luke 13:25 when those seeking entrance to the kingdom on the final day will be told after Jesus has shut the door to depart because the Lord does not know where they come from. In the parallel in Lk 11:5–10, Jesus tells parable of friend coming late at night. The implied “knocking” in the parable seems to define “knock, and it will be opened to you” as a command to come to God in prayer with boldness or shamelessness.

Verse 8 then reinforces these promises a second time. It seems puzzling as to why Jesus would essentially repeat the same information. It may be that the primary focus of verse 8 is on “everyone.” Thus, the purpose of this verse is to provide assurance that the promise of the Lord is for all who ask, seek, knock for the blessings and benefits of the kingdom of God.²⁸ We might think of the similar comfort that is given by the word “whosoever” in John 3:16.

Verses 9–10 then pose two parallel rhetorical questions that are meant to draw the ridiculous picture of a father giving to their own child a gift that is not what they needed but is in fact a cruel gift because it is useless for their need or even possibly harmful to them.

Verse 11 then draws the argument from the lesser to the greater, that if sinful humans are capable of doing good to their children by providing them with good gifts, how much more will our heavenly Father do likewise. Carson observes that there is a contrast implied between the evil of humanity and the complete goodness of God, which reassures us further about the willingness of our completely good God to do good things.²⁹ We should note that Jesus does not simply say that the Father is *able* to provide good gifts, but that he *will* do so for those who ask him. Pennington notes that Jesus gives us an “invitation to relate to God not as a mere omnipotent deity but as a good and caring Father.”³⁰

The Summary of Kingdom Ethics (7:12)

Many commentators note that while verse 12 may appropriately be connected to the immediately preceding verses, it also serves as a summary for the entire body of

²⁸ Quarles, *Sermon*, 302–3. Although it should be noted that Quarles emphasis again is on entrance into the kingdom, which may be too narrow of an application of Matt 7:7–11.

²⁹ Carson, *Matthew*, 223.

³⁰ Pennington, *Sermon*, 264.

the Sermon, forming an *inclusio* with 5:17–20.³¹ Jesus makes a parallel summary of the Law and Prophets in Matthew 22:37–40. Love of God and love and neighbor are the two commandments upon which depend all the Law and the Prophets. Doing unto others as you would have them do to you seems to be a more concrete application of what it looks like to love your neighbor as yourself.

Looking back through the Sermon, it can be easily seen how doing to others as you would have them do to you reflects commands Christ has already given. He has commanded his disciples to give expecting nothing in return (Matt 5:42).³² Each of the other five antithesis in Matt 5:21–48 are clear examples of how true righteousness is lived out. Each is a valid application of doing unto others as you would have them do to you. The command to judge not, that you be not judged (7:1) could also be summarized by the “do unto others” command.

Reciprocity from others should sum up what true righteousness looks like toward others. But, Jesus has clearly taught his followers that there is a reciprocity that we should expect from the Father, as he responds in kind to our actions of mercy (Matt 5:7), forgiveness (Matt 6:14–15), and judgement (Matt 7:2). Receiving in kind from others is a helpful tool to understand how to put this true righteousness into practice, but it is not the motivator for our obedience. The motivator for obedience is trusting that the Lord will respond to our love and mercy toward others, by the Lord himself showing love and mercy to us.³³ In other words, this is not ultimately self-seeking, but is a way to show that we are seeking to be faithful to the Lord.

³¹ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 276; Pennington, *Sermon*, 266; Carson, *Matthew*, 224; Quarles, *Sermon*, 306.

³² Giving expecting nothing in return is the specific context in the parallel passage in Luke 6:27–31.

³³ Quarles also suggests that the close connection with the previous verses on God granting good things to his children should be seen as the most immediate context. Just as we would want God to give good things to us in prayer, so we should respond in love and goodness and kindness to others. Quarles, *Sermon*, 305–6.

Jesus himself has said that he has come to fulfill the Law and Prophets through providing authoritative interpretation of what God had always intended the Law and the Prophets to communicate (Matt 5:17–20). Jesus is here giving an authoritative summary of the Old Testament itself and of a summary of his commands, which fulfill the Old Testament.³⁴

Conclusion

In Matthew 7:1–12, *Jesus instructs his disciples regarding judgement, discernment, and prayer. He then summarizes kingdom ethics toward others as doing to them what we wish would be done to us.* While the teachings may not easily be summarized with a single theme, they are clearly consistent and fitting with other parts of the Sermon which address hypocrisy, how to relate to those outside the kingdom, and prayer. Jesus also authoritatively sums up the horizontal obligations of the Law and Prophets which he has come to fulfill.

³⁴ See chapter five of this project on Matt 5:17–20

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUDING WARNINGS (MATTHEW 7:13–27)

As Jesus began the Sermon with the promise of blessings, he concludes with warnings. As previously noted, this calls to mind when the Mosaic law was given for the second time in Deuteronomy. The law came with promises of blessings and life if the people obeyed or curses and death if they disobeyed (Deut 11:26–28; 28:1–68; 30:15–20).¹ Although there is the summons to “enter” and the exhortation to not only hear but also “do” the words Jesus has commanded, the overall tone of the conclusion is a solemn warning.

The entire passage is marked by contrast between two different responses to Jesus. The wide/easy gate/way is contrasted with that which is narrow/hard, each leading to either destruction or life, respectively. False prophets will be discerned from true prophets by whether they yield good or bad fruit. People will either enter or not enter the kingdom based on whether they did the will of the Father, or whether they were workers of lawlessness.² Finally for those who hear Jesus words, doing or not doing Jesus’s commands will determine whether they stand or fall in the judgement. *Jesus is setting before his people two options for responding to his Word—obedience which will lead to*

¹ Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 90. See also Dale C. Allison Jr., *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination*, Companions to the New Testament Series (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 162.

² Many commentators see only three sets of two, dividing the text into 7:13–14, 15–23, 24–27. Allison, *Sermon*, 162. Scot McKnight, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Story of God Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 257. Jonathan T. Pennington. *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 269. However, Carson divides the text into four sets of two: 7:13–14, 15–20, 21–23, 24–27. D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew and Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 224–31. While there are admittedly only three metaphors—gate/way, fruit tree, and house on a foundation—there does seem to be at the very least an extended explanation of the second metaphor in vv. 21–23 that deserves treatment as its own section.

life, or disobedience which will lead to death.

Narrow Gate and Hard Way (7:13–14)

The entrance that Jesus is talking about is clearly entering into the kingdom of heaven (7:21), elsewhere phrased as entering into life (Matt 18:9; 19:17).³ While there is a great deal of debate over whether the gate is conversion or salvation on the last day, and thus whether the way is proceeding up to or following from the gate, it is best not to separate the gate and way images too much from each other.⁴ In verse 13 one enters by “it” and finds “it” (*autēs*, singular). This seems to refer to both the gate and the way. There is also only one action listed in each verse for both images, entering in verse 13 and finding in verse 14. The images together should call our minds to the future entrance into the kingdom (7:21) and then cause us then think backwards to what we are doing now to obey the command.

The image of two ways is a rich Old Testament image communicating that there are two ways of living, each of which will have ultimate consequences. In Deuteronomy 11:28–29 the two options are obeying the commandments, which will bring God’s blessing, or not obeying, which will bring God’s curse.⁵ Deuteronomy 30:15–20 adds that obedience will lead to life and good, disobedience to death and evil. The Lord echoes this same choice in Jeremiah 21:8 where he offers the choice to listen to his Word and surrender to the Babylonians, or to disobey, remain in the city, and perish.⁶ Psalm 1:6 says that the “way of the righteous” is known by the Lord, “but the way of the

³ Charles L. Quarles, *The Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ’s Message to the Modern Church*, NAC Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 309.

⁴ Quarles offers an extended defense that the gate is at the end of the way, and thus is referring to entering into the kingdom at the judgement. Quarles, *Sermon*, 311–15. Carson on the other hand argues that the gate marks the beginning of the way that leads to life. Carson, *Matthew*, 225–26. Allison sees the two images as referring to one idea. Allison, *Sermon*, 165.

⁵ Allison, *Sermon*, 162.

⁶ Allison, *Sermon*, 162.

wicked will perish.” Proverbs is full of imagery of two alternative ways of righteousness or wickedness (Prov 2:13; 2:19; 3:10–27).

Psalm 1 is a particularly important parallel passage for the entire Sermon on the Mount. It begins as the Sermon does by describing the “blessed” man just as the Sermon does. It is especially helpful to consider the relation of Psalm 1 to the conclusion of the Sermon in Matthew 7:13–27. Both passages speak of two ways, the way of sinners/the wicked (Ps 1:1, 6) and the way of the righteous (Ps 1:6). Both passages speak of a tree bearing fruit (Ps 1:3).

The first gate/way, is clearly not the one we are to enter. Jesus emphasizes two things in general about this way: (1) the unrestrictive nature of the gate/way and thus the many who enter it, and (2) the end result of destruction. The unrestrictive nature of being wide and broad⁷ refers to the many other options besides obedience to Jesus. Jesus is clearly emphasizing obedience in this conclusion to the Sermon, so this alternative way/gate is clearly understood as disobeying him. There is plenty of room for a multitude of ways one could not obey Christ.⁸ As mankind continues to invent new kinds of evil (Rom 1:30) we can see just how wide this gate is.

Jesus clearly emphasizes that this gate/way is wide not only because of the comparatively large number of options for disobedience, but also because there will be many who will take this way. Charles L. Quarles points to summons of the wicked to join them in Proverbs 1:10–16 and suggests that “the number of the sinners who travel on [the way] seems to grow continually as they prod others to join with them.”⁹ McKnight while

⁷ Many note that “broad” is a better translation than easy. Carson, *Matthew*, 225. Quarles, *Sermon*, 311. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), s.v. “81.18 εὐρύχωρος,” Logos.

⁸ “The wide road offers enough moral latitude that each person can do what is right in his own eyes.” Quarles, *Sermon*, 316–17. Quarles then cites John Broadus and John Calvin who both viewed the wideness versus narrowness of the roads as descriptive of the unrestricted morality of the path of the wicked versus the narrow path of obeying the Lord. Quarles, *Sermon*, 316–317n26.

⁹ Quarles, *Sermon*, 316.

cautioning against over-speculation on how many verses how few, points out that Jesus is definitely making reference to the fact that it will be comparatively few who will be saved.¹⁰ In the parallel passage in Luke 13:23–24, Jesus’s instruction about entering the narrow door comes as the answer to the question, “Lord will those who are saved be few?”

This wide gate and easy/broad way leads to destruction.¹¹ Psalm 1:6 tells us that the way of the wicked will perish. Proverbs speaks of the paths of the adulteress going to the departed (Prov 2:18) and that “her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death” (Prov 7:27).¹² A gate that is connected with destruction brings to mind Jesus’s statement about the gates of hades (Matt 16:18) which has a background in several Old Testament passages (Job 38:17; Ps 9:13; Isa 38:10). God will ultimately bring this destruction upon the wicked in hell (Matt 10:28). Jesus is doing far more than warning about physical destruction. Eternal punishment will be the end of the gate/way that is broad enough to allow for not obeying his commands.

It is also worth noting that Jesus does not speak of one right gate/way and many wrong gates/ways, but shows us that anything other than the narrow gate/hard way are all combined together into one gate/way that leads to destruction. Disciples must recognize that *all* other alternatives besides obedience to Christ, no matter how they compare to other alternatives, are all ultimately the same rebellion and will have the same consequence. There is one way, and no one comes to the Father except through this way (John 14:6).

¹⁰ McKnight, *Sermon*, 259.

¹¹ For an interesting parallel of two ways to walk, one of which leads to destruction, see Phil 3:17–19. In this passage, “brothers” are to keep their eyes on those who walk by Paul and Timothy’s example, and to know that there are *many* who walk as enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction.

¹² Quarles also notes Prov 4:14–19; 5:3–6. Quarles, *Sermon*, 316.

The only other gate/way is the one that Jesus commands us to enter.¹³ Jesus's instructions about the narrow gate and hard way emphasize both its nature—restrictive and difficult,¹⁴ and its end result—life. The narrowness of this gate/way in its most immediate context seems to be doing the will of the Father (Matt 7:21), which is obeying Jesus commands (Matt 7:24). The Old Testament background for the two ways of living motif is confirmed by Jesus as he gives his law to his people. Just as obedience to the law was the way that would lead to blessing and life (Deut 11:28–29; 30:15–20), so now hearing and doing the words of Christ will lead to life. Quarles points out that the narrowness of the path of obedience is repeatedly emphasized in the Old Testament by the phrase “You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (Deut 5:32; 17:19–20; 28:14; Josh 1:7).¹⁵ Where the wide gate has much room for moral deviancy, the narrow gate requires careful obedience to Christ's commands. The restrictiveness and narrowness of all that Christ has commanded is easily seen as one thinks back over the radical demands of discipleship presented in the Sermon— the Beatitudes, the six examples of true righteousness, the three examples of true devotion, the instructions about not storing up material possessions nor worrying about them, and the command to do to others as you would wish them to do to you.

However, we should not miss that Jesus refers to himself as both “the way” (John 14:6) and as an opening/entry point through which his disciples are to come (“the

¹³ Pennington notes that this is not just a description of the two options but a command and exhortation for us to enter the narrow gate. Pennington, *Sermon*, 273.

¹⁴ *Thlibō* most often in the New Testament carries the idea of being afflicted (2 Cor 1:6; 4:8; 7:5; 2 Thess 1:7 etc.). However, Quarles notes that the verb can be used in relation to places to refer to being “cramped.” For instance, in Mark 3:9 Jesus gets into the boat lest the crowds crush him. Quarles suggests that this idea of tight/cramped may be the intended use of *thlibō* here since it is contrasted with a wide/broad way. The other description of this right way is that it is narrow. Quarles, *Sermon*, 311. However, affliction may still be what Jesus is speaking of, recalling the persecutions that will be faced for those in the kingdom (Matt 5:11–12).

¹⁵ Quarles, *Sermon*, 317.

door,” John 10:9).¹⁶ While obedience will be the fruit that must be borne, this obedience will result from faith in the Jesus as the Son of God who will save his people from their sins.¹⁷

The end result of narrow gate/hard way is not destruction but is life. Here lies the powerful motivation to enter the narrow gate. The Lord, through his servant Moses, set before the people life and death, admonishing them to choose life (Deut 30:19). Now the Servant of the Lord, Jesus Christ, sets before his disciples (and all others listening) life and destruction and admonishes them to enter the gate/way that leads to life. While the Sermon on the Mount certainly teaches Christians what a good/blessed/flourishing¹⁸ life of living in obedience to King Jesus looks like, the end game is of far greater consequence. Obeying Christ does not lead to the destruction of hell, it leads to eternal life.¹⁹

Jesus is reiterating the two ways that God has always set before his people—faith and obedience, or disbelief and disobedience. Christ now makes it clear that the way to be chosen requires belief in him and obedience to his commands. Entering this gate/way requires that a person repent of sin and follow Jesus in faith and obedience.²⁰

¹⁶ Although a different image is used in John 10, Allison references John 10:9 and notes, “The gate of 7:13, which is the entrance to life, must be equated with Jesus himself . . . or more precisely with his demands.” Allison, *Sermon*, 164.

¹⁷ See also McKnight: “Yet the best understanding of the gate is that it is Jesus, and that leads us to this important conclusion: union with Jesus Christ is the origin and source of all spiritual blessings and all discipleship. Jesus is not here calling someone merely to a better moral life. Rather, his own presence looms in the entire Sermon as the one through whom God speaks, through whom God redeems, and through whom God reigns. So, the ‘enter’ demand is a summons to Jesus first and foremost. In other words, discipleship begins at the personal level of a relationship to Jesus as the King and Lord who saves and rules.” McKnight, *Sermon*, 263.

¹⁸ Pennington, *Sermon*, 64.

¹⁹ See Matt 18:8–9 and the way entering life is contrasted with being thrown into the hell of fire.

²⁰ McKnight, *Sermon*, 258.

False Prophets and Bad Fruit (7:15–20)

After warning about the wrong way/gate, Jesus then warns about those that may direct the disciples down this wrong way—the false prophets. The people of God were warned twice in Deuteronomy about false prophets. God said that they could recognize false prophets if (1) the prophet attempted to lead them after other gods or (2) if the prophet’s words did not come true (Deut 13:13; 18:22). False prophets would direct people away from the Lord by deceiving them. Paul rebukes a false prophet in Acts 13:10 for making the straight path crooked.

These false prophets would make themselves look one way on the outside, but inwardly they would have a character harmful to God’s people. Inward versus outward righteousness has already been a major theme in the Sermon. Just as the disciples need to look to their own hearts to see if their righteousness is merely external, so they also must evaluate others who would claim to speak for the Lord to see if their hearts are truly devoted to the Lord. Although Jesus is specifically referring to prophets, one could see why the apostle Paul would later place such an enormous emphasis on the righteous character of those who lead the church (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:7–8).²¹

In addition to the two tests for a false prophet given in Deuteronomy, Jesus is giving another way to recognize false prophets—by their fruit. Psalm 1:3 clearly provides the background to Jesus’s statement about a tree bearing fruit. The fruit metaphor in Scripture is clear enough. The fruit is the expected result of God’s work among his people. Good fruit is the righteousness exhibited in the individual (Matt 3:8; Gal 5:22; Phil 1:11). This fits with the context of Sermon, particularly the conclusion where Jesus is calling for obedience to his commands. Good fruit also seems at times to be a reference to the results of evangelism and discipleship seen in others (Matt 13:23; Phil 1:22; Col

²¹ Although prophecy and teaching appear to be two distinct actions in Scripture, the cautions against false prophets and false teachers are clearly related in 2 Pet 2:1. It would therefore be appropriate to apply Jesus’s caution here to false teachers as well as false prophets.

1:6). Good fruit would be righteous lives and leading others to trust in and follow Jesus.

Bad fruit in the immediate context of Matthew would be deeds not in keeping with repentance (Matt 3:8), not doing the will of the Father (Matt 7:21), and evil words which proceed from an evil heart (Matt 12:33–37). Elsewhere in Scripture we see specific examples of both the words and deeds that would be bad fruit such as sensuality and greed (2 Pet 2:1–3) and not confessing that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (2 John 1:7).

Throughout Scripture we see that when there is a lack of fruit, or bad fruit, the Lord acts in judgement (Isa 5:1–4; Matt 3:7–10; 7:19; 21:33–45; Luke 13:6–9; John 15:1–9). Jesus says that those who do not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. This recalls the image of Israel, who was not bearing good fruit (Isa 5:2), being cut down and burned in judgement (Isa 6:13). Being thrown into the fire recalls when Jesus warned that if we failed to put sin to death in our lives, our whole body would be thrown into hell (Matt 5:29). Jesus makes clear that a failure to bear good fruit has eternal consequences.

The parallel passage in Luke 6:43–44 indicates that it is not just prophets who will be known by their fruit, but all of Jesus disciples (John 15:4–5). Here in Matthew 7 the immediate focus is on the recognition of those who would cause harm to the people of God by deceptively leading them. Jesus does not give an explicit command regarding these false prophets other than “beware.” The emphasis in this concluding section on hearing and doing what Jesus has just said in the Sermon shows that when we recognize these false prophets, we should reject them and instead obey and follow Christ.

Christians should remind themselves of the frequent warnings in the New Testament that false prophets/false teachers will come (Matt 7:15; 24:4; Acts 20:29; Gal 1:8; 1 Tim 4:1–2; 2 Tim 4:3–4; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 4:1–6; Jude 4). We are not given this warning without specific warning signs. Christ instructs us to test the fruit of those who claim to speak for the Lord to see if the prophets who are calling us to listen to the Lord, are themselves listening to and doing what he has commanded.

Doing the Will of God and Being Known by Christ (7:21–23)

While Jesus has just told his disciples to beware of those who would deceive them, he now cautions them against being self-deceived by a false sense of self-justification.²² The false prophets may be the most immediate referent of those who are self-deceived in Matthew 7, but the parallel passage in Luke 6:43–45 indicates that all believers need to be warned against self-deception and self-justification which leads to a false assumption that they will enter the kingdom.

Jesus initially draws a distinction between a mere confession of his lordship and actually doing the will of his Father. Quarles notes that to call Jesus “Lord” would be to acknowledge his deity and his authority, and this was the basic confession of the Christian.²³ Confessing the deity and authority of Christ is only possible by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3) given as the gracious gift of the Father (Matt 16:17). Jesus here clarifies that if confession of lordship is genuine, it will affect the whole of our life.²⁴ Those who enter the kingdom on the final day will be those who have done the Father’s will as proclaimed by the Son (Matt 7:24). Just as the narrow gate/way is chiefly Jesus himself, and entering starts with saving faith in him, so doing the will of the Father starts with believing in the one whom he has sent (John 5:24; 6:29; 6:40). Jesus warns us that what will necessarily accompany saving faith will be obedience to the will of God.

On judgement day there will be many who have not done the will of the Father and yet confess that Jesus is Lord. They have even claimed to do their deeds in the name of Christ. In the present passage, the focus is on those who would claim to speak and act

²² McKnight, *Sermon*, 265. While self-deception seems the most likely cause of the statements in v. 22, Pennington does suggest that it may not necessarily reflect surprise as much as it does an attempt at self-justification. Pennington, *Sermon*, 279.

²³ Quarles, *Sermon*, 330–32.

²⁴ Pennington, *Sermon*, 278.

with authority that came from Christ, yet who are not obedient to what Christ has actually told them to do. While there is a caution against self-deception, we are also reminded not to be deceived by the apparent mighty works of false prophets.²⁵ We should look to the fruit of their obedience to God's will.

To these that spoke and acted claiming Jesus's authority but who were not obedient to the Father's will which he had commanded, Jesus will say that he did not know them. Jesus warns that he will make this declaration to other groups of people as well. He will say the same thing to foolish ones who were not ready for the coming of the bridegroom (Matt 25:9–12). He will speak it to those who had merely been near Jesus and heard him teach but who have not entered the narrow door (Luke 13:26–27). R. T. France observes that to be known by God in the Old Testament is a reflection of God's unique relationship with his people (Amos 3:2).²⁶ To be known by Jesus is for him to be in covenant relationship with us. If we are not known by him we are excluded from this relationship, and the result is to be cut off from the King and his kingdom.²⁷ Although being known by Jesus is clearly an act of his grace, the culpability of Jesus not knowing us, is placed squarely on the workers of lawlessness who have not been obedient to him.

Jesus's rebuke, "depart from me," seems to bear a close resemblance to the Septuagint language of Psalm 6:9 (6:8 English version). It is possible to see here a typological fulfilment in Christ of the way David, as God's anointed, has been heard by the Lord and vindicated by the Lord. David says that as a result all his enemies will be put to shame in a moment.²⁸

²⁵ Pennington pointed out that the most immediate referent in this section is the false prophets. Jonathan T. Pennington, personal conversation.

²⁶ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 295. See also Pennington, *Sermon*, 277.

²⁷ Quarles, *Sermon*, 342.

²⁸ Quarles, *Sermon*, 342; Craig Blomberg, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 30.

“Depart from me” also recalls the imagery of exile as people are sent away from the presence of God. This was the curse that God said would come upon his people if they did not obey his Word (Lev 26:33; Deut 28:63). Jesus speaks of those whom he will tell to depart from him as “you cursed” (Matt 25:41). Under the old covenant God had brought the curses of the covenant upon his people, yet because of his special covenant love, he had not ultimately abandoned them. But, on the final day, for those who disobey Jesus, because they are not known by Christ, their judgement will not be a temporal discipline, but the final punishment of eternal fire (Matt 25:41).

The Wise and Foolish Builders (7:24–27)

Jesus’s final parable continues the admonition of “doing” what Jesus has commanded.²⁹ When the law was given at Sinai, it was bookended by Moses setting before the people “all these words the Lord had commanded him.” (Exod 19:7; cf. Exod 24:3). The people then respond “All *the words* that the Lord has spoken *we will do.*” (Exod 24:3; cf. Exod 19:8). Then on the plains of Moab, Moses tells of the Lord raising up a prophet like Moses, who will speak to God’s people all that God commands him. It is in this same context that God warns, “Whoever will not listen to *my words* that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him” (Deut 18:19). God has made it clear that when he speaks through his prophet, his people must listen. They must not only hear but *do* all the words the Lord has spoken. Now Jesus, the prophet greater than Moses, stands on another mountain, declaring authoritatively what is the will of God. He gives the same requirement of his law—his people must hear it and *do these words*.

James 1 is clearly drawing on Jesus’s commands to not just hear but to do the word. It is noteworthy that James says that those who only hear the word deceive themselves (Jas 1:22). They will be like the self-deceived people that Jesus has said will

²⁹ Allison notes that “does” (*poieō*) occurs nine times in v. 17–27. Allison, *Sermon*, 170.

not enter the kingdom in Matthew 7:21–23. James further adds that the one who is not a “hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed (*makarios*) in his doing” (Jas 1:25). While Jesus does not explicitly say here in the conclusion of the Sermon that the wise man who does his words will be blessed, we are reminded of Jesus’s Beatitudes in the introduction of the Sermon describing who would be blessed. As we reflect on the multiple connection points in the conclusion of the Sermon to Psalm 1, we see that the “blessed man” who the Psalmist is describing delights in the law of the Lord.³⁰

Jesus says that the wise man is the one who does what Jesus has commanded. He is compared to a man who built his house on the rock. Jesus’s parable draws upon the common knowledge about the need of solid a foundation for any structure to stand. The parable is also rich in other biblical imagery. The wise and foolish man contrast continues the two ways of living theme that Jesus has shown in the conclusion to the Sermon, which confirms the teaching of the book of Proverbs. Here the connection with Proverbs becomes even more clear through the contrast between the wise man and foolish man. Even the image of the house standing is found in Proverbs 12:7: “The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand.”³¹

The imagery of God’s judgement as a flood or storm is brought forward from the Old Testament. The most obvious example would be the flood in Genesis 6, but there are many other examples (Isa 28:2, 17; Ezek 13:10–14; 38:21–23; Nah 1:8). Isaiah 28:2–17 is of particular interest as there we see God’s judgement is compared to a destroying tempest and overflowing waters (Isa 28:2, 17). This is also the passage where we find the

³⁰ It is worth considering the further connection with Ps 2, which concludes using the same language of blessing as Ps 1. In Ps 2, blessedness is had by those who seek refuge in the Messiah from his judgement of the wicked, which is also referenced in Ps 1:4–6. See James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms, Volume I: Psalm 1-72*, Evangelical Biblical Theological Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 89–91.

³¹ Carson, *Matthew*, 230.

prophecy of a *stone* in Zion, that whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.³² We see that Jesus himself is the rock that will save us from God’s judgement. We must first believe in him as made clear from Isaiah 28:16. Having believed in him, we must then bear fruit and do these words that he has commanded us.³³

We cannot hear the language of something being built upon the rock and not see some connection to Jesus’s statement to Peter in Matthew 16 that upon this rock (Peter and his confession) Christ will build his church. Allison concludes that just as the church is founded upon the rock and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it, so the individual believer is also founded upon the rock and the storm of final judgement will not make him fall.³⁴

Based upon the context of the immediately preceding section where Jesus is referring to judgement day and his pronouncement “depart from me”, it seems best to understand the storm/flood as the final judgement. This also fits with the imagery of storm/flood as judgement from the Old Testament. Although the Bible does speak elsewhere of God giving us a rock on which to stand in the midst of the adversity of life (Pss 27:5; 40:2), this truth does not seem to be immediately drawn from Jesus’s parable in Matthew 7.³⁵

The second half of the parable simply repeats almost all of the same words. The only differences are the negation of “does them,” and replacing “wise” with

³² See also France, *Matthew*, 296–97.

³³ One of my favorite hymns is “The Solid Rock,” the chorus of which makes a clear reference to the rock versus sand metaphor of Matt 7:24–27. I love the verses of that hymn for the trust that they confess in “Jesus’s blood and righteousness” and would absolutely affirm that within an overall biblical-theological framework, it is completely appropriate to speak of standing upon the rock as saving faith in Christ. However, it does seem an oversight that there is no reference to obedience to Christ’s commands within the hymn. Edward Mote, “The Solid Rock,” in *Baptist Hymnal*, edited by William J. Reynolds (Nashville: Convention Press 1975), 337.

³⁴ Allison, *Sermon*, 171.

³⁵ See Quarles, *Sermon*, 344–45. Quarles does note that Ps 27 uses a rock as an image for “safety and security” but rightly rejects the idea that safety and security from trials is the intended purpose of the parable in Matt 7.

“foolish,” and replacing “rock” with “sand.” The similarities in the statements reveal the two men are both going to hear the words of Jesus, and they will both face the same judgement by the Lord. The contrast in the final phrase clearly demonstrates that there is been a completely opposite outcome for the fool who did not do what Jesus commanded.

This is another piercing application to be pondered by all who sit regularly under the teaching of God’s Word. We are all hearing the same message, and we all will have to reckon with the coming judgement of God. The true follower of Christ, though justified by God’s grace, will demonstrate their faith in Christ by doing what he has commanded. Those who are content to sit in the pews and listen should examine themselves to see if they might be this fool which Jesus is describing.

Based on the connection to the imagery of flood/storm as judgement and the precious cornerstone that is a sure foundation in Isaiah 28:16, it may be appropriate to make some connection with the other passages which speak of the rejection of this stone and those who stumble over it (Ps 118:22; Isa 8:14). Peter connects all three “stone” passages in 1 Peter 2:6–8 and adds, “They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do.” The foolish man’s failure to build his house upon the rock shows that he has not believed in Christ, which in turn means that he has disobeyed Christ’s words. Jesus will use one of the cornerstone passages in Matthew 21:42–44 and will speak of the one who falls on this stone being broken to pieces and it crushing them. There seems to be a connection in all of these passages that continues to make the point that Jesus and his Word are a rock/stone that will either be believed and obeyed and thus result in salvation, or Jesus and his words will be rock/stone that is rejected and thus result in judgement.

Quarles connects the fall of the house with the imagery of the fall of the temple of Dagon on the Philistines in Judges 16 or the fall of the tower of Siloam in Luke 13. He notes that when a building falls the implication is that it will fall on the heads of those

within it and destroy them.³⁶ This fits with passages in Proverbs that speak of the destruction of the wicked's house as a reference to their destruction, whereas the house/tent of the righteous will stand (Prov 12:7; 14:11).³⁷ This fall is certainly the same eschatological judgement as Jesus references in 7:23 when he tells the workers of lawlessness to depart from him. They have done lawlessness instead of doing the words of Jesus and the consequence will be eternal judgement.

Conclusion

Jesus is setting before his people two options for responding to his Word—obedience which will lead to life, or disobedience which will lead to death. One can take the wide path, that does not believe in Christ and thus does not do what he has commanded. This will result in Jesus rejecting them, the crashing down of God's judgement upon them, and their eternal destruction. Alternatively, one can enter the narrow gate of believing Jesus and thus obeying his words, thereby doing the will of the Father. Entering the narrow gate will result in salvation, entrance into the kingdom, being with Jesus, and eternal life. Only two options are presented. Jesus sets before the people life and death (Deut 30:19–20). He calls for a verdict. He bids his disciples to obey him and have life.

³⁶ Quarles, *Sermon*, 348.

³⁷ Quarles, *Sermon*, 347.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

What a privilege it has been to spend so much time studying the Sermon on the Mount. As I reflect on this process over the past three years, I can see how it has been of benefit not only to my own growth as a student and preacher of Scripture, but also has challenged me in my personal walk with Christ.

A Better Grasp of Key Biblical Concepts

When I chose the biblical-theology concentration for my DMin degree, I did so because I self-admittedly had a weak grasp on how exactly to define the discipline of biblical-theology. Much less did I feel an ability to articulate to others how to appropriately do biblical-theology. The overall course study has provided a tremendous amount of clarity to defining the discipline. This program has articulated that biblical-theology is the endeavor to examine the Bible inductively to provide the interpretive framework for understanding the Scriptures in their canonical context.¹ I have grown in my own recognition of the inter-canonical relationships across the Scriptures and ability to communicate this important concept to others. It has been particularly helpful in challenging other teachers of God's Word at our church to dig deeper in their own study of the Scriptures.

In addition to choosing biblical-theology generally as an area of growth, I felt the Sermon on the Mount in particular would help me gain clarity with several themes for

¹ James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?: A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 19–20.

which I wanted to gain a better understanding: (1) the kingdom of God, (2) the place of the law in the life of the believer, and (3) preaching salvation by grace through faith from the Gospels.

Studying the Sermon on the Mount helped me to gain clarity on how the Christian should think about the kingdom of God as it currently exists in its inaugurated, but not yet consummated state. King Jesus has gathered a people for himself through his redeeming death and resurrection. But this new covenant people of God is not merely waiting for the consummated kingdom. They are given a new law by their king and invited to enjoy a blessed life of living in obedience to the king.

Careful study of Matthew 5:17–48 was helpful in clarifying the Christian’s relationship to the law of Moses, especially the Ten Commandments. The law of Christ, which is summarized in the Sermon on the Mount, is the true righteousness to which the law of Moses pointed. Christ has fulfilled the law by authoritatively giving us an explanation of what God always intended for his people as they lived lives meant to reflect his perfect righteousness.

As for preaching salvation by grace through faith, it was particularly helpful to examine this subject in isolation in preparation for writing the project.² This preparation allowed me to see that when we read the Sermon within the overall structure of Matthew’s Gospel it becomes clear that entering the kingdom will not happen based upon something we have earned. We are brought into the kingdom by Christ saving us from sin through his death and resurrection and by his summons to repent and believe in him. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, explains to his disciples that have been granted entrance how they must now live as citizens in the kingdom.³

² See Landon Byrd, “Grace and Faith in the Sermon on the Mount” (unpublished research paper for New Testament Theology, 80231, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Jan 11, 2022).

³ Jonathan Pennington helpfully illustrated that justification by faith alone through grace alone is the ticket into the amusement park. The Sermon on the Mount is then the invitation and explanation of

Preaching These “Sermons”

In preparation for preaching through the Sermon on the Mount, I preached through Exodus in 2022. This provided an appropriate biblical-theological framework for seeing Christ as the new Moses who had come to fulfill the law. I then preached through Matthew 1–4 for several weeks leading up to our study of the Sermon. This framed the Sermon as more than a set of general ethical instructions, but as the words of the Son of God (Matt 3:17) who has come to save us from our sins (Matt 1:21). I preached the first four chapters of Matthew over the course of eight weeks, but then when I arrived at the Sermon on the Mount, slowed down significantly.

As I write this, I am 15 weeks into a 25-week series on the Sermon. The parameters of the DMin project were limited to seven chapters/sermons. However, in actually preaching these texts, I wanted to give space to pause on individual subjects such as anger, divorce, the Lord’s Prayer, etc. It has been so beneficial in my sermon preparation each week to have already completed a significant amount of study on the passage. Having a good grasp on the larger sections of the Sermon allowed me to press in on smaller sections and seek to more faithfully apply the text to the hearts of God’s people.

At times converting these chapters of an academic project into sermons has meant simply expanding on points and adding more specific application. At other times I have had to significantly revise the material from the chapter to make it “preachable.” I would often look at the careful academic study in the pages of the project and realize that the congregation only needed to know a short summary of the information gathered. This was an excellent exercise in learning to put into practice an old preaching professor’s challenge: “Leave the woodchips and sawdust in the study, just bring to the pulpit the

what to do now that we have entered in so that we might flourish in Christ’s kingdom. Jonathan Pennington, personal conversation.

finished project.”⁴

My Growth as a Disciple

Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount is meant to call his disciples to obedience. By the Lord’s grace, he has used this process of careful studying these words of Jesus to convict and challenge me in my own obedience to the law of King Jesus. As I reflect back on preaching these texts thus far, I can remember specific times the Word pierced to my own heart and laid me bare before my Lord (Heb 4:12–13). Jesus’s command to be reconciled to our brother before coming before the Lord in worship convicted me of believers with whom I needed to seek reconciliation before I stepped into the pulpit that Sunday (Matt 5:23–24). Christ’s demand for complete integrity and honesty challenged me to notice ways I had allowed other’s feelings to become valid excuses for not being straightforward in my communication (Matt 5:37). Jesus’s rebuke of praying in order to be seen by others challenged me to examine the way I prayed in corporate worship, to focus less on a prayer that was communicating something to the congregation, and to focus on bringing petition to the Father in heaven (Matt 6:5). The piercing words, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21), caused me to look at my own material resources and ask, “Where I am storing up treasure?”

For the Glory of God and the Building Up of His Church

These many hours of study and writing will have been for nothing if it is for a piece of paper to hang on a wall, which may be destroyed (Matt 6:19). If it is to gain notoriety, respect, or opportunity for personal advancement in the sight of others, then I will have already received my only reward (Matt 6:1). It is my prayer that this endeavor

⁴ Douglas Webster, (unpublished class lecture for “Preaching,” Beeson Divinity School, Spring Semester, 2015).

to grow in an understanding of biblical-theology, and specifically of the Sermon on the Mount will have a more lasting benefit. I pray that it serves to deepen my knowledge of the Word of God as I seek to faithfully follow the Lord Jesus, and that he then uses me to build up the body of Christ whom I labor among. May all this undertaking serve to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

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ABSTRACT

PREACHING THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT FROM A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE AT WESTMONT BAPTIST CHURCH

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
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This project is an examination of Matthew 5–7, chiefly aimed at using biblical theology to inform the preaching of the text. The project’s introduction defines biblical theology as the discipline that examines the Bible inductively to provide the interpretive framework for understanding the Scriptures in their canonical context. In chapters 2–8 of this project, Matthew 5–7 is divided into seven units as follows: 5:3–16, 5:17–20, 5:21–48, 6:1–18, 6:19–34, 7:1–12, and 7:13–27. Each of these chapters seeks to explore the canonical context of each passage in order to arrive at a right understanding of Jesus’s message to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount.

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