

# ***THE GREATEST SERMON***

*Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside  
and sat down. His disciples came to him, and  
he began to teach them, saying:...*

Matthew 5:1-2

## A Personal Note

Many of us have favorite passages in the Bible. The “*Sermon on the Mount*” is one of mine. Years ago, as a new follower of Jesus, I realized the need to immerse myself in what He had to say, if I wanted to understand what He planned for me to be and to do. These 3 chapters in Matthew’s Gospel seemed a good place to begin. The more I read, studied, meditated and memorized these verses, the more meaningful they became. And as the concepts became increasingly real, they began to change my life, and give me a growing desire to share the thoughts with others.

Thankfully, God gave me that opportunity during the decades that followed, through teaching, providing lyrics to go with music written by one of our daughters for a concert entitled *The Sermon on the Mount in Song*, and through a workbook, *Lessons From The Sermon on the Mount*, that was the predecessor to this book.

Now, as I move into my nineties and think back across the years, I am more than ever convinced that God has used this short, powerful monologue to influence and change my life for good. It seems timely, therefore, to combine many of the thoughts He has given me about these scriptures and place them in this book, with the prayer that they will help others as much as they have helped me.

As always, test my comments, hold onto what is good (of God)—and discard the rest.

May Our Lord richly bless you as you read, study and apply the great Truths of what may well be *The Greatest Sermon* ever spoken and lived through the life of Jesus, the Christ.

Marvin J. Martin

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## Chapter 1

### *Who Is This Man?*

*Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them*

Matthew 5:1-2

### **Introduction**

#### **The Sermon**

The Sermon on the Mount is found in three chapters of the first Gospel: Matthew 5, 6, and 7. Like any modern-day sermon, it can be read in about 20 minutes. But it is so profound that almost innumerable books, articles, and sermons have been written concerning it.

#### **The Speaker**

The Sermon is the first major discourse of Jesus recorded in Matthew's Gospel. If we want to learn the breadth and depth of a public person, it is usually helpful to read carefully their first and last major pronouncements. The first will often summarize a life message and the last will often report on the speaker's life work and the follow-up expected by followers. In the case of Jesus, Matthew 5, 6, and 7, *The Sermon on the Mount*, is His initial major statement; John 13 to 17, commonly known as *The Upper Room Discourse*, is His final major statement.

#### **The Writer**

The Gospel of Matthew was recorded by Matthew, one of the twelve apostles chosen by Jesus. He carefully drafts Chapters 1 through 4, proving Jesus was who He said He was: the Messiah, the King of all Mankind, with the right to command and to be followed. Jesus' Sermon follows in Chapters 5 through 7.

#### **The Audience**

Matthew appears to have been writing to Jews, not Gentiles. The first four chapters of his gospel not only summarize Jesus' Jewish

genealogy, but carefully document fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and give the eyewitness testimony of numerous believers. The Sermon itself draws heavily on Old Testament information and themes which were commonly understood by First Century Jews, but which need careful analysis and often special comments in order to be meaningful for us in our modern culture and time.

## **The Question**

The initial question is:

*“Who is this man?”*

Jesus proclaims a radical lifestyle in this sermon. It is a statement given to His own disciples (Matthew 5:1-2), so it is doubtful if those who do not follow Christ would understand or accept it. And Christians themselves often find Jesus’ message in the Sermon on the Mount exceedingly hard to believe and have wrestled for centuries with its symbolic or literal message. Therefore, the first question we have to answer is Jesus’ authority to make these pronouncements.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. If He is, we should follow and obey Him. If He is not God in the flesh, but simply a “good man” like Gandhi, Socrates, Confucius, and others throughout history, then we are free to discuss, question, and pick and choose those portions of His statements that we feel are helpful. Matthew makes careful and persuasive arguments to prove Jesus’ right to be heard and obeyed as the long-awaited Messiah, the Lord of Heaven and earth.

## **The Evidence**

The Historical Account

- Matthew 1—Sets forth the Jewish family tree to prove Jesus was the “Son of David” as predicted in scripture. He was born of a virgin (Mary) in Bethlehem.
- Matthew 2—Learned men from the East came to worship

Jesus. King Herod, fearing this usurper to his throne, tries to use these wise men to find the young Jesus. When the wise men evade Herod, he orders all the boys two years old and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem to be killed. Jesus' mother, Mary, and His earthly father, Joseph, flee to Egypt and only return after Herod has died. Jesus' life from this early age (probably 3 to 6), until He was about 30, is a historical blank. Nothing about these years is written in Matthew or other writings of the New Testament except one small account in Luke 2 concerning an incident when Jesus was 12.

- Matthew 3—The historical account bursts on the scene again in Chapter 3 with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist.
- Matthew 4—Jesus is led into the desert where He fasts for 40 days. Satan offers and tempts Him with the same things he uses to tempt us all: worldly pleasure, possessions, and power or position in exchange for eternal life. Jesus resists Satan and begins His ministry. He then chooses His first four apostles from Galilee. Jesus begins to attract immense crowds as shown by the concluding verses of Chapter 4, which set the stage for this greatest of all sermons.

### **Fulfilled Prophecies**

In these first four chapters, Matthew further verifies Jesus' pronouncements by showing the fulfillment of several prophecies:

- 1:23 The virgin birth as prophesied in Isaiah 7:14.
- 2:6 Birth in Bethlehem as prophesied in Micah 5:2.
- 2:15 Escape to Egypt as prophesied in Hosea 11:1.
- 2:18 The slaughter by Herod of the boys, two-year-old and under, in the vicinity of Bethlehem as prophesied in Jeremiah 31:15.
- 3:3 The preliminary ministry of John the Baptist as prophesied in Isaiah 40:3.

- 4:23 Jesus' life and work in Galilee as prophesied in Isaiah 9:1.

### **People Who Believed**

Matthew records the testimonies and actions of various credible witnesses throughout these first four chapters to further prove Jesus was who He claimed to be:

- Matthew—Who walked with Jesus for three years and wrote the Gospel of Matthew.
- Joseph—Who obeyed the angel of the Lord and took Mary home as his wife, notwithstanding her conception of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.
- Wise men—Who traveled all the way from the East to worship Jesus.
- King Herod—Who killed all the boys, two-year-old and under, in and around Bethlehem.
- John the Baptist —Who wanted Jesus to baptize him.
- Satan—Who tried to tempt Jesus and capture Him for Satan's dark kingdom.
- Peter, Andrew, James, and John—Who left their businesses to follow Jesus.
- The great crowds from the region of Galilee, the ten cities known as the Decapolis. Jerusalem, the region of Judea and the region east of the Jordan—who all followed Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

Who is Jesus?

He is Who He said He is: the Messiah, the Son of God, the "I AM" God in the flesh. If anyone reading this account does not know Jesus, the Sermon on the Mount probably will not make sense. But as we accept Him as divine and as Lord and Savior, this Sermon, together with all other scriptures, will begin to come alive. Then we can walk with God in the greatest journey anyone can undertake!

## Chapter 2

### *A Stairway Up To Heaven*

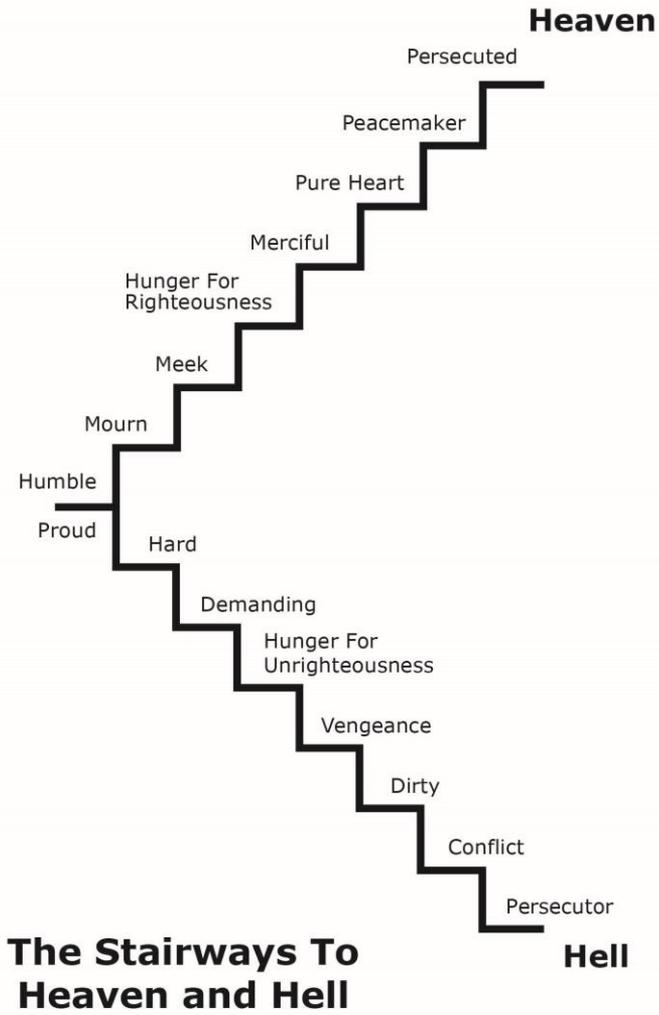
*Blessed are the poor in spirit...those who mourn...the meek...those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...the merciful...the pure in heart...the peacemakers...those who are persecuted....*

Matthew 5:3-12

The Sermon on the Mount opens with eight statements commonly known as “The Beatitudes.” It has been said these should “be the attitudes” of those who follow Christ. Each statement is contrary to the practices of self-centered, worldly success and therefore they are often dismissed as idealistic and impractical. However, each statement also reveals that those who have such character traits will receive a resultant “blessing” for each attitude in question.

The eight attitudes seem to fall in an order of progression, starting with being poor in spirit (which has sometimes been translated as “humbleness”) and concluding with persecution. While individuals are saved by God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8-9), they are, nonetheless, to expend their own energy to “*work out*” their salvation (Philippians 2:12) and to “*make every effort*” to add Godly qualities to their lives. (2 Peter 1:5-7).

Viewed in this light, the Beatitudes seem much like a hard stairway we climb on our way to heaven. While not explicitly stated in Scripture, it appears there is also a corresponding easy stairway that some individuals walk down, only to find their ultimate destination is Hell as opposed to Heaven. The steps of each road would appear to ascend and descend as set forth on the next page.



**Verse Three** *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is  
the kingdom of heaven*

**Attitude: Being poor in spirit**

**Blessing: Receiving the Kingdom of Heaven**

Those who have a personal encounter with God become deeply aware of their sinfulness as compared to His infinite power and purity. The result is a desire to discard their offensive spirit of pride. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that God would have us exalt Him and not ourselves. Peter and James both quote from Proverbs 3:34 and state:

*God opposes the proud  
but gives grace to the humble*

1 Peter 5:5; James 4:6

If we are proud and exalt ourselves, it separates us from God's presence. Separation from God is a description of Hell (Luke 16:23-26). By contrast, if we humble ourselves in obedience to Him, we begin immediately to enjoy (own) the Kingdom of Heaven. So humility and pride are the starting places for contrasting Godly and worldly paths. It is from these two starting points that we begin to walk upward toward Heaven or downward toward Hell.

**Verse Four** *Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted*

**Attitude: Mourning**

**Blessing: Receiving comfort**

Unless we see the sinfulness of our own lives, we cannot mourn (weep) over its condition. And unless we weep over our own condition, we become hard without compassion for the futility, frustration, and despair of others who are lost and separated from God. If we attempt to maintain our own righteousness, we stand cold and aloof, not allowing God to comfort us. By contrast, when we humble ourselves, acknowledge

our sins and seek God's forgiveness He does comfort us. All of us sin, but only those who acknowledge their sinfulness can experience God's forgiveness (1 John 1:8-9).

Thereafter, God can use our experience of forgiveness and comfort to comfort others who are suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

**Verse Five *Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth***

**Attitude: Being meek**

**Blessing: Inheriting the earth**

“Meekness” is not, as sometimes commonly supposed, “weakness.” Instead, it is the spirit of gentleness that claims nothing. All one has is viewed as a gift from God and held with an open hand into which God may deposit or withdraw as He wills. Like Paul, the “meek” are the “contented” ones, having learned that physical plenty or want is not as significant as the eternal presence of God (Philippians 4:12; 1 Timothy 6:6). Once we acknowledge that everything belongs to God, we see ourselves as His beloved children who inherit (rather than earn) the whole earth and we are free to enjoy its boundless beauties and gifts (Colossians 3:24). We acknowledge our roles as stewards, responsible for the care of the physical earth, but we also see ourselves as beneficiaries who are able to enjoy God's creation while we are here—not as owners, but as sons and daughters of the Owner (Genesis 2:15-16). It is not that believers in Christ do not work, but they understand that the quality and quantity of their final and ultimate reward is from God and not from their own efforts.

By contrast, each proud individual demands all the rights to which he claims to be entitled. He becomes increasingly hardened as he fights for what he claims to be his rather than relying on the unearned inheritance of the whole earth through the generosity, grace, and love of God. In the end, he realizes he must leave all he

has accumulated on earth to others whom he cannot control (Ecclesiastes 2:18-21).

**Verse Six *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled***

**Attitude: Hungering for righteousness**

**Blessing: Being filled**

Mankind was made to “hunger.” We all crave something, not just food to satisfy our physical needs, but also spiritual and emotional “food” to satisfy the deep longings of our soul. This hunger causes us to seek that which we desire. Jesus promised in this Beatitude that those who “hunger” for His righteousness will be filled. By contrast, those who hunger for and seek merely to satisfy their own personal gratification will never be satisfied. The prophet Haggai described it this way:

*You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it*  
Haggai 1:6; see also Micah 6:14-15

This step seems to be a critical one on our stairway up toward Heaven or down toward Hell. The Bible promises that we become slaves either to God or to sin (Romans 6:15-23). If we acquire and become captured by a taste for God, it will draw us ever nearer to Him and the result will be that we are filled and satisfied. But if we crave and are increasingly hungry to satisfy our longings for personal pleasure, possessions, position, and power, we are increasingly pulled downward into the pit.

We should, therefore, analyze carefully what we crave and quickly disengage ourselves from all that draws us away from God. Hunger to satisfy our own desires is like the insatiable longing of the drug addict who is temporarily lulled by immediate gratification through a “fix” only to be followed with ever-

increasing longings that can never be filled, and that end in death: physical death for the drug addict and spiritual death for those who refuse to follow Christ.

**Verse Seven *Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy***

**Attitude: Being merciful**

**Blessing: Receiving mercy**

The attitude of the Christian is to be one of “*mercy*,” kind and forgiving, rather than seeking “*vengeance*” (Romans 12:19). The Bible makes it clear that justice is important, but it needs to be balanced with mercy. (Micah 6:8)

The mercy God desires for us is unlimited (Matthew 18:21–22). The temptation is to desire mercy for ourselves, but to require justice for others. To emphasize our need to grant to others the mercy we seek for ourselves, Jesus told the parable of a servant who received mercy and forgiveness of a huge debt of 10,000 talents, but quickly forgot his good fortune and mercilessly demanded repayment from a debtor who owed the servant a much smaller sum. (Matthew 18:32-35).

The message is simple, but profound. We all fail. If we step up and confess we can receive forgiveness (1 John 1:8-9), but only if we are truly repentant (Luke 13:3). This repentance is shown by whether our hearts are softened to the point we grant to others the mercy we seek for ourselves. Thus, those who overcome the desire for revenge and grant mercy to others show they are able to receive God’s mercy and forgiveness for their failures. By contrast, the hearts of those merciless ones who step down to vengeance and demand repayment of all they claim to be owed can become so hardened they cannot receive God’s mercy and forgiveness for their own failures.

**Verse Eight *Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God***

**Attitude: Being pure in heart**

**Blessing: Seeing God**

God's invisible qualities have been evident since the beginning of the world (Romans 1:20). However, man has always wanted to see God (Exodus 33:18-23; John 14:8). In the hereafter, believers will see God and enjoy Him forever. They will be able to see Him because they have become pure through the sacrifice of Christ (Revelation 7:9-17). In the meantime, we shall only "see" Him through the "eyes of our hearts" (Ephesians 1:18).

The Bible repeatedly shows it is our hearts that reveal our true characters. For example, the merciless steward we discussed in our last section was convicted because he failed to forgive his debtor from his "heart" (Matthew 18:35). This was the downfall, also, of the Pharisees who claimed outward acts of righteousness but were described by Jesus in the words of Isaiah:

*These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me*  
Mark 7:6

By contrast, David, one of the great sinners of all time, whose acts of murder and adultery were set forth in detail in 2 Samuel 11, was nonetheless commended and honored by God throughout history because his heart continually returned to God (Acts 13:22). Notwithstanding the degradation of his sins, the attitude of David's heart, as exemplified by his "penitent psalm" (Psalm 51), revealed a heart that loved God.

Of course, believers do not gain complete purity of heart now, but the upward bound person does have an increasing awareness of God. By contrast, those whose hearts are far from God and dirtied by increasing lusts and desires for personal gratification find it increasingly difficult to see or comprehend

God or the things of God. Just as dirty water clouds our ability to see through it, so do dirty hearts prevent us from seeing God.

**Verse Nine *Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called sons of God***

**Attitude: Being a peacemaker**

**Blessing: Becoming known as a child of God**

Deep within each of us is a desire for peace. We were made in the image of God, and He is a God of peace (Hebrews 13:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:23). However, with the fall of Adam and Eve the earth quickly became a place of conflict, as evidenced by the slaying of their son, Abel, by his brother Cain, at the very beginning of recorded history (Genesis 4:8).

The Bible promises that Heaven will be perfect (Revelation 21:3-4) and, therefore, a place of peace. In the meantime, one identifying mark of those who are God's children will be their actions in helping to bring peace to a troubled, conflict filled world (Galatians 5:22). By contrast, those who demonstrate "*hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, and envy*" are easily identified with the "*sinful nature*" of mankind (Galatians 5:19-21).

This is not to say we should not be where conflict exists, for who could make peace if there were no conflict? Neither is it to say we may not cause conflict initially as we present the claims of Christ. Jesus Himself said:

*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth.  
I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come  
to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her  
mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a  
man's enemies will be the members of his own household.*

Matthew 10:34-36

But this initial, hostile response to the Gospel often fades away as

individuals' eyes and ears are opened and they, too, turn to God and are forgiven (Mark 4:12).

James shows that there are two types of wisdom—one that brings peace and one that brings conflict:

*For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness*

James 3:16-18

If we would step up toward Heaven, we need to seek and apply the wisdom of God that will help bring peace to our sphere of influence. Then we will be known as the children of God. By contrast, if we seek only our own selfish ends through unspiritual, devilish “wisdom,” we will bring conflict around us and descend one more step toward eternal separation from God.

**Verses Ten through Twelve** *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

**Attitude: Accepting persecution**

**Blessing: Receiving the “Kingdom of Heaven” and “Joy”**

This brings us to the last of the eight Beatitudes: persecution. Persecution is discussed twice, thereby indicating its importance. When it is restated, it extols the joy that will accompany this natural result of following Jesus. It seems appropriate to find persecution at the pinnacle and high point of the believer's life. It was through persecution, including taunting, flogging, crucifixion,

and death, that Jesus purchased redemption and forgiveness for the sins of all mankind (John 3:14-16). Jesus also promised persecution to all who follow Him (John 15:18-20). In 2 Corinthians 11:23-33, Paul described at length his persecution and suffering. Hebrews 11 recounts the persecution that was endured over the centuries by many of God's faithful followers (Hebrews 11:35-38).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor and theologian who ultimately died because of his opposition to Hitler during the Nazi regime that spawned World War II, repeatedly decried the tendency of mankind to want "cheap grace," i.e., the grace of God without any resulting cost. This is not to say we must seek persecution. That would be a false martyr's concept without Biblical foundation. Persecution will come naturally at the appropriate time if we follow God (Mark 10:29-30).

Also, we must be sure any persecution is "for Jesus' sake," not because of oppressive or obnoxious behavior on our part (Colossians 4:5-6; 1 Peter 3:15). When persecution comes, we can rely on God to give us the right words and response if we are faithful and trust Him as we walk upward with Him (Luke 12:11-12).

By contrast, those who are persecuting God's faithful in an effort to abolish the faith seem to take one more step down into the pit. Just as Godly martyrs have been high points in history to proclaim God's ultimate victory, so those who have persecuted and brought martyrdom to these saints have been some of the low points in history, as they reveal Satan's dramatic attempt to erase God (Matthew 23:27-38).

We must never forget that no individuals are beyond God's love and forgiveness, if they will only repent and turn to Him. Paul himself was busily persecuting followers of Jesus when God broke through into his life on the road to Damascus and changed by

grace one of the great sinners into one of God's great saints (Acts 9:1-22; 1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

### **Conclusion**

All of us are saved by grace, but we are to walk with God. The analogy of two stairways, one up to Heaven and one down to Hell, is simply a tool that hopefully will help us to see whether we are walking toward Him or away from Him. God does not want anyone to perish (2 Peter 3:9). If you are reading this and feel that you are walking through the Beatitudes on your own upward bound journey toward Heaven (Philippians 3:13-14), then praise God. If, however, you find yourself on the road down and there seems to be an ever-widening gulf between you and God, it's not too late to turn around!

## Chapter 3

### Salt and Light

*You are the salt of the earth . . .*

*You are the light of the world*

Matthew 5:3-16

As finite human beings, we can see the physical part of life, but it is difficult for us to visualize and understand the invisible, spiritual side of life. Jesus understood this spiritual blindness and often used physical examples to convey spiritual truths. For example:

*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds*

John 12:24

By using such common physical illustrations, everyone, regardless of education and background, could understand and obey if they had spiritual awareness. It is obvious from God's teachings that a relationship between the Father and His children is open to all those He calls and who receive Him (Ephesians 1:11; 2 Peter 3:9; 1Timothy 2:4; John 1:12-13).

The metaphors of salt and light that Jesus uses in this portion of His Sermon on the Mount are two of the most common of all physical ingredients. Their existence and function is experienced by virtually all humanity. And even those who cannot taste salt or are blind to light are often made acutely aware of their existence, as they hear others speak of what they themselves cannot experience.

### Salt

#### Verse 13a You are the salt of the earth

Salt has several purposes: it seasons, cleanses, and preserves. Jesus' followers are to be the salt of the earth; i.e., we are to season, cleanse, and preserve the world in which we live. That

requires that we not simply cluster together in Christian groups, but that we scatter throughout the whole earth (Matthew 28:19-20). As Rebecca Pippert has stated in her excellent book on evangelism, we should be *Out of the Saltshaker—Into the World*.

### **Seasoning**

To season our environment, we must be gracious residents in a hostile world. This requires that we carefully project Christ to those around us:

*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders;  
make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation  
be always full of grace, seasoned with salt,  
so that you may know how to answer everyone*

Colossians 4:5-6

Salt is an acid. If we over-salt the beans they become inedible. The same is true with Christians. If we are only spiritual and only with other believers, we no longer season those around us, but we become acidic: sour and spewed out. Jesus ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners and was criticized for it by the religious people of His day. One of these tax collectors and sinners was Matthew, who later recorded Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Matthew acknowledged Jesus' gracious invitation to him and others like him:

*While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' came and ate with him and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?' On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick'.*

Matthew 9:10-12

When salt is properly applied, it attracts. In answer to the maxim, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink," it

has been said, “You can if you salt the oats.” As believers, we should be salt out in the world to season and attract others to Jesus.

### **Cleansing**

Salt cleanses. So should those who follow Jesus. This requires purity and consistency of thought and action in our own lives before we can have a cleansing effect on the atmosphere around us. We must not be like the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned because “*they do not practice what they preach*” (Matthew 23:3). We must remember, however, that such cleansing may be accompanied by persecution (Mark 9:49).

### **Preserving**

The world is constantly dying. God wants His children to stop this decay. The eternal life of Christ in each of His followers is to preserve the sphere of influence around them and change it from death and decay to life and hope (2 Corinthians 4:10-12).

**Verse 13b** *But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.*

While we are to be “in” the world, we must be careful that we do not become “of” the world. We must retain the unique saltiness that can season, cleanse, and preserve the world around us rather than lose our identity and become another member of the world. Peter, in his second letter, described the horror of those who have known Christ and then fallen away to become a member of the world:

*These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error.*

2 Peter 2:17-18

This Scripture asks but does not answer the question of how salt could be made salty again after it has lost its saltiness. Theologians have debated for generations the issue of “falling” from grace, (and the corresponding need to “get right with God”) in contrast to the counterbalancing theory of “once saved, always saved,” which relies on the promise that God’s gifts and His call, once granted, are irrevocable (2 Peter 1:10; Romans 11:29). It seems that such issues are not going to be resolved in this life. While God encourages us to study and to grow, we can never totally master the mysteries He proclaims. However, one thing is certain: if we can hear what God is saying to us through the Sermon on the Mount and His other Scriptures and we are willing to turn toward Him, then we are not beyond His love and care (Romans 8:28).

## **Light**

### **Verse 14(a) *You are the light of the world***

The other metaphor Jesus uses is the universal ingredient of light. Throughout the Bible, light is associated with good while dark is associated with evil. God Himself is described as “*light*” in whom “*there is no darkness at all*” (1 John 1:5). At the beginning of the world, God infused light into His physical creation and called it “*day*” (Genesis 1:1-5). Occasionally, God has placed this physical light in those who have had extraordinary spiritual communication with the Father. For example:

- Moses—whose face shown so brightly after spending time with God on Mount Sinai that he had to veil his face (Exodus 34:29-35).
- Jesus—on the Mount of Transfiguration, was “*transfigured*” so “*His face shown like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light*” (Matthew 17:2).
- Stephen—whose countenance, immediately before his martyrdom, was “*like the face of an angel*” (Acts 6:15).

It was the practice of some earlier artists to project halos around the faces and heads of those who had been with God to denote the residual holy glow they sustained. As a battery is energized by contact with electricity, so God infuses His light into those who walk with Him. It is the privilege of those who choose to follow Jesus to “*shine like stars*” as we hold out the word of life in a dark world (Philippians 2:15-16).

We should remember, however, when we do carry this light into the world, we can expect to expose sin, which may often result in persecution. (John 15:18--16:4).

**Verse 14(b) *A city on a hill cannot be hidden.***

Light not only exposes, it also attracts. In the United States, cities were commonly built in the valleys next to navigable rivers for easy transportation. But in Israel, cities were often built on hills for protection. This also made them visible and easy to find as the cities’ lights shown forth. Likewise, God wants each of His followers to be a beacon of light who will attract others to Him.

**Verse 15 *Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house.***

Just as we are not to keep our salt in a salt shaker, neither are we to hide the light God gives us under a bowl or a basket. If we have a fortress mentality, where our light shines only within the safety of our church community, we can expect to have little effect on the outside world, except for those few whom we can convince to enter into the fortress and live under the bowl.

**Verse 16 *In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.***

Our light is to be directed outward. While it is to attract others through us to God, we must be sure that as they get closer, the

light reveals our Godly deeds. Thus, the light within us is not to blind others and to glorify ourselves; instead, our light is to help others see the works that God is doing through us so that everyone may praise Him, not us. Jesus said, “*Woe to you when all men speak well of you*” (Luke 6:26). Our goal is not to be honored or made famous, but rather that others might see God through us and then praise Him.

### **Conclusion**

Salt and light have one thing in common: they are both expendable. The world is sick and dark, but does not realize why. Those who follow Christ are the salt and light God is using to season and preserve the world and to attract others to Him. Our salt is to be scattered and our light is to be beamed into the darkness. Like seeds, we must fall into the ground and die to self if new spiritual life is to spring up around us (John 12:24).

## Chapter 4

### The Old and The New

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

Matthew 5:17-20

Jesus is the bridge between the Old and the New Testaments. In Matthew 5:17-20, He expresses this fact and sets the tone for the application of the Old Testament law to the lives of His disciples that He will discuss beginning in verse 21.

**Verse 17** *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

The term “*the law and the prophets*” refers to the scriptures of the Old Testament. It is generally believed the “*the law*” refers to the first five books written by Moses; “*the prophets*” are the other writings. Some have raised the possibility that these Old Testament scriptures were to be abolished and discarded when the Messiah came. In effect, Jesus denies this intention and says that instead of abolishing these older scriptures, He has come to fulfill them.

For centuries, Old Testament prophets had foretold the coming of Christ. The Jews of Jesus’ time were eagerly awaiting the fulfillment of the Old Testament scriptures that a new King would be born to them. The validity of His royal birth, life, and death would be proved or disproved by whether or not he fulfilled these Old Testament prophecies. From the time of His virgin birth recorded in Matthew 1:22-23 (and foretold in Isaiah 7:14) the question was constantly being asked: “Is this man fulfilling the scriptures and thus proving to be the Messiah?”

Throughout His life, Jesus did fulfill these earlier prophecies. For examples, see Matthew 1:22; 2:15, 23; 3:15; 4:14; 5:17; 8:17;

12:17; 13:14; 35; 21:4; 27:9. In addition to fulfilling scriptures and thus proving His Messiahship, Jesus also makes it clear in later sections of the Sermon (beginning with Matthew 5:21) that not only the prophecies but also the principles of the Old Testament were being fulfilled through His life and teachings.

Following Jesus' death, His life and teachings were recorded in the first four books of the New Testament commonly known as the Gospels, which means the "Good News." Paul discusses and gives a short description of the Gospel in his first letter to the Corinthians:

*Now brothers I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. ... For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...*

1 Corinthians 15:1, 3, 4

Thus Paul, like Matthew, validates Jesus' claims by the fact that he fulfilled the Old Testament scriptures.

It has been said, "The New is in the Old concealed: the Old is the New revealed." Jesus is the bridge that connects the Old Testament prophecies and physical people of God to the fulfillment of such prophecies and the spiritual believers in the New Testament. Because of His central place in history and the momentous change that occurred for all mankind through the birth, life, and death of Jesus, time itself is divided between those events occurring before Him (B.C., Before Christ) and those occurring after His death (A.D., Anon Domino).

**Verse 18** *I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.*

God has a plan for all creation. Originally, He made a perfect world for man to inhabit (Genesis 1-2). However, people (beginning with Adam and Eve) used their free will to disobey God (Genesis 3) which brought pain and death to every succeeding generation. God then spelled out in His Word (the Bible) and through Jesus (the “*Word*” made flesh [John 1]) His plan to allow His disobedient children to resubmit themselves to Him and to return, live, and enjoy once again a personal relationship with their Creator. The Old Testament spells out this plan up to the birth of Jesus. The New Testament describes the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and principles through the life and teachings of Jesus, and then reveals God’s plan for this physical world to end when Jesus comes again . . . this time to reign forever as “*King of Kings and Lord of Lords*” (Matthew 24, Revelation 19).

This eschatological (end times) view of history shows history is on a countdown toward Christ’s return and reign. It is directly opposed to the circular view of history espoused by those who believe that man, not God, is in control. Will Durant, author of a six-volume work entitled *The Story of Civilization*, concluded that all civilizations rise and fall in a never-ending series:

*In the end, a society and its religion tend to fall together like body and soul in a harmonious death. Meanwhile, among the oppressed another myth arises, gives new form to human hope, new courage to human effort, and after centuries of chaos builds another civilization. (1)*

For Durant this was apparently a perpetual process—without real beginning or end. This despairing view of history is not new. It parrots the opening chapter of Ecclesiastes that concludes:

(<sup>1</sup>) Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1935 (I: 72).

*What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, 'Look! This is something new'? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time*

Ecclesiastes 1:10

If we accept this circular view of history, life is meaningless: an inane circle which we only escape through death. But if we accept the teachings of the Bible, as even the author of Ecclesiastes did at the end of that book (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14), God is in control. All Scriptures, including the “*smallest letter*” and the “*least stroke of a pen*,” will continue to be part of His plan until “His Story” is complete and the physical heavens and earth disappear and are replaced by the new heaven and the new earth described in Revelation 21. In contrast to the despairing view of the circular historian, the Bible unfolds God’s march to a heavenly destination that will be shared and enjoyed by all those who submit to and walk with Him.

***Verse 19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.***

It is important that we live and teach others to live according to God’s commands as recorded in the scriptures if we are to be fruitful for Him and to enjoy life as He intended. His commands were not meant to prevent us from enjoying life, but rather to show us the way to gain life and avoid death. At the close of the Old Testament Law (Deuteronomy 28-30) Moses clearly described the blessings that would come from obeying God and the curses that would follow from disobeying Him. But, sadly, God then predicts that the Israelites would become stiff-necked and rebellious against Him and reap resulting difficulties and

disasters (Deuteronomy 31:16-18). The balance of the Old Testament, beginning with the book of Judges, shows the up and down course of the Jews during the next several hundred years as they prospered when they followed God and were scattered and suffered when they went their own way.

Jesus now warns the people in this New Testament verse that even the “*least*” of God’s commands is to be obeyed. Those who break even the “*least*” of His commands and teach others to do the same will themselves become “*least*,” but those who observe and teach God’s commands will become “*great*” in the kingdom of heaven, although they may or may not prosper in the present physical world.

Jesus relied heavily on Old Testament teachings to prove His own pronouncements. For example:

- His answers to the Devil at the time of His temptation after 40 days of fasting in the wilderness—Luke 4:4, 4:8, 4:12 (quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:13, 6:16).
- His announcement of His Messiahship to His hometown—Luke 4:18 (quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2).
- His description of the great commandment to love God and its corollary to love our neighbor—Matthew 22:37-39 (quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18).
- He also admonished us to obey His scriptural commands (John 14:21).

Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, similarly encourages the use of scripture in our lives to help bring us to spiritual maturity:

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful  
for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in  
righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly  
equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17

It is only when we study and use all the scriptures that we can be fully built up and enabled to do the work which God has planned for us.

***Verse 20 For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.***

(Note: To understand the Bible we always need to place the writings in context and to hear, study and choose among interpretations from others who also searched for a deeper relationship with God. I am greatly indebted to the multitude of people who have taught, written and encouraged me either personally or by their works over the years. By now, I am usually not conscious who has given me what. But I do know that almost all I have come from others, rather than from personal revelation, and I am thankful for them all. The following background information is based largely on information found in “*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*” and “*The New Bible Dictionary*” by Douglas. The reader is encouraged to use these and other sources, in order to confirm what you believe is truly of God.)

At the time of Christ, Israel was ruled by Rome. The Romans granted the Jews some self-government that was carried out by a Jewish governing body known as the Sanhedrin, that included two groups known as the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

The Sadducees followed only the written law. They did not believe in life after death nor in the resurrection. They also believed strongly in the free will of man and his ability to control his own destiny. By contrast, the Pharisees, accepted oral traditions and interpretations of the scriptures that had been made and expanded since the time of Moses. They believed in life after death and the resurrection. They also believed strongly in the sovereignty of God, some almost to the point of fatalism.

The Pharisees were closely aligned with the professional teachers

of the law known as the Scribes. Jesus often lumped the Scribes and the Pharisees together. The Scribes had great power by the time of Jesus, so much so that it was stated that, “respect for a teacher should exceed respect for a father, for both father and son owe respect to a teacher” (Kerithoth, vi, 9, fin. as quoted in *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, p. 981). These teachers of the law created interpretations of the written law and they also added additional statements where the written law was not specific. They taught this body of written and oral laws to others and acted as judges to determine if the complex and intricate oral and written laws and traditions had been violated.

In verse 19, Jesus makes it clear God in His sovereign will does have a pre-ordained plan and Old Testament Law should be followed to the smallest detail. This would have been a warning to the Sadducees and their followers, but received warmly by the Scribes and Pharisees who wanted every part of the Law to be meticulously carried out. However, in verse 20, Jesus warns the Pharisees and teachers of the Law (the Scribes) they also err. They have become so enmeshed in keeping the details and oral traditions in order to rise to positions of prominence and respect in the eyes of men they have lost their eternal way. It is concerning these same Scribes and Pharisees that Jesus concludes Isaiah was right when he warned:

*These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain;  
their teachings are but rules taught by men.*

(Matthew 15:8-9).

## **Conclusion**

The Old Testament law is not to be nullified and neither is it to be expanded. Rather, it is to be obeyed. But as Jesus will show in the forthcoming sections, it is to be an obedience of substance, through the Spirit, and not merely an obedience of form through the letter of the law.

In the final analysis, we do not win our salvation by obeying the law. Rather, God in His mercy grants us salvation if we submit to Him. We then are privileged to allow Him to work through us for His glory and for our fulfillment (Ephesians 2:8-10).

## Chapter 5

### The Spirit of the Law

*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder...’ ‘Do not commit adultery...’ ‘Do not break your oath...’*

Matthew 5:21-27

Jesus chose the sixth, seventh, and ninth commandments to make His point. These three commandments deal with God’s prohibitions against murder, adultery, and false testimony. In a sense, they all deal with life. Murder is the sinful taking of life; adultery is the sinful creation of life; and false testimony can result in an erroneous judgment against another up to and including the taking of a life by the government based on the false testimony.

In working with each of these three commandments, the Scribes (teachers of the law) and the Pharisees (legalistic companions of these teachers) looked for ways to keep the surface requirements of the law while accommodating some of man’s weaknesses. It was this same, self-protective shield that Jesus condemned in His pronouncement of the seven woes against these religious leaders in Matthew 23.

A review of Jesus’ entire discussion concerning Commandments 6, 7 and 9 reveals a pattern. First, He sets forth the prohibited act. Next, He describes the offending spirit behind each prohibited act that precedes it and causes it to happen. Jesus then provides a way for us to cleanse our spirit, realizing that it is our sinful spirit which God first finds offensive long before we commit the unlawful act the Old Testament (and often world governments) condemn.

While not set forth in Scripture, there seems to be one final part of the pattern common to each example: doctrinal disputes that have arisen over the “letter” of each of these laws. These disputes have caused the body of Christ to split, rather than causing it to unify by

understanding and then following the spirit of each of the laws. Applying these patterns and principles to the three commandments chosen as examples by Jesus reveals the following:

## **Murder**

**Verses 21-22** *You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘you fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.*

The prohibited act of the 6th Commandment is murder: the unlawful taking of human life. This rule is necessary for the peace and order of the community. After stating the prohibited act, Jesus then looks behind it for evidence of an offending spirit that may ultimately result in the act of murder. First, He lists anger, the inner burning and desire to injure which wells up in us before we act. While there may be Godly anger, e.g., as displayed by Jesus when he saw stubbornness in peoples’ hearts (Mark 3:5), we are cautioned to be

*slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.*

James 1:19b-20

As anger develops, it often causes us verbally to abuse others; in this case, calling a person *raca*, sometimes translated “empty-headed.” Then, as the anger burns hotter, so do the words: e.g., “you fool,” and our offending spirit puts us in danger of the “fire of hell.” As James says, “. . . sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:15).

**Verses 23-24** *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

Jesus is so concerned with our heart attitude and the early stages of broken relationships that He urges us to seek reconciliation before the problems fester and grow into prohibited acts such as murder. Therefore, if we remember a problem with a brother, even while we are at a worship service, we must get up and leave immediately. Don't wait! Go now while there is still time. God is glad to wait for us to return and offer our gift to Him—after we have made our peace with our brother.

**Verses 25-26** *Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison.*

*I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.*

The same is true of settling controversies with our adversaries (enemies). Litigation is costly, both in monetary expense and relationships. It is very difficult to go through a trial and retain a Godly relationship with an adversary. While there are cases that must be tried, most can be resolved by settlement. Usually this can best be done in the early stages of the controversy. To otherwise may cause the relationship to deteriorate even further. In addition, we ourselves may end up being the loser who pays the judgment or serves the sentence.

### **Doctrinal Dispute**

Some Christians, rather than emphasizing the control of ungodly anger and the elimination of an offensive spirit which may lead to the killing of another human being, have concentrated on the distinction between legal and illegal killing. As a result, the body

of Christ has often been divided over the issues of war and capital punishment, rather than united in the attitude of peace that Jesus encourages.

## **Adultery**

**Verses 27-32** *You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

*If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.*

*It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

*It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce!’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.*

The prohibited act in the 7th Commandment is adultery that, for our purposes, may be defined as willful sexual intercourse between two persons, at least one of whom is married to someone else. The rule prohibiting such acts is necessary to protect the family unit. Jesus, however, concentrates again on the offending spirit that precedes such acts: in this case, the offending spirit of lust. Just as murder can be the full-grown result of ungodly anger, so adultery can become the full-grown result of sexual lust. In His concern that we eliminate lust before it destroys us, Jesus graphically explains that it would be better for us to remove the offending members of our bodies and thus be crippled for life rather than going ahead and plunging from lust into adulterous action. Unfortunately, rather than controlling the lust Pharisees and teachers allowed individuals to divorce and then remarry those to whom they were attracted.

The answer, of course, is not to gouge out or cut off any of the parts of our bodies. Some have attempted to literalize this passage. For example, men have emasculated themselves in an effort to thwart uncontrolled sexual passion. However, it is not a physical problem, but a spiritual one. Our need is to hunger and thirst after God and His righteousness and then be filled and satisfied with goodness (Matthew 5:6), rather than being a slave to sin with its resulting eternal death (Romans 6:16).

### **Doctrinal Dispute**

Again, doctrinal disputes have arisen over the acceptable grounds for divorce and remarriage. Should divorce be allowed only for adultery (Matthew 19: 3-9), or is it allowed if one partner is not a believer and refuses to stay married (1 Corinthians 7:10-15), or are there other grounds? For our purposes, we are not attempting to reinforce one position or another in this doctrinal dispute but rather to concentrate on filling our own hearts with Jesus Christ and the good things He provides, thereby eliminating and controlling the lust which, like anger, can well up and destroy us.

### **False Testimony.**

*Verses 33-37 Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is His footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*

The prohibited act in the 9th Commandment is false testimony: perjury in a legal proceeding. This rule is necessary to protect the court system and to provide an orderly and reliable way to resolve society’s disputes. We still require testimony to be given under penalty of perjury in our modern trials.

Again, Jesus reveals an offending spirit that precedes the prohibited act. In this case, the offending spirit is a desire to have our own way. We profanely call on the name of “God” or “Jesus” or “Christ” in an effort to associate His infinite power with our selfish desires. But, admonishes Jesus, this power won’t transfer to us simply by claiming God’s name.

Jesus points out in this portion of the Sermon on the Mount that heaven is God’s throne, earth is His footstool and Jerusalem is His city. We cannot capture His essence and power by calling on them to give us the power we want to accomplish our desires. Neither should we swear by the hair on our head. That, too, is a creation of God and not of ourselves. We are simply to say “Yes” or “No.” God wants us to be truthful in our witness at all times, not only while we are on the witness stand. He wants us to tell the truth even when it hurts or works to our detriment (Psalm 15:4b).

We should live our lives and make our statements so others say about us, “If he or she said it, it’s true.” The issue is for us to be used by God, through truth, rather than trying to use His name to give us the power to get our way. We are, therefore, to humble ourselves and to have within us a spirit of truth that will not result in false testimony.

### **Doctrinal Dispute**

Again, a doctrinal dispute has arisen over the action of swearing to tell the truth—rather than concentrating on the spirit with which we speak. Some, therefore, refuse to swear to tell the truth in a judicial proceeding, relying on this verse. Again, our purpose here is not to take issue with one side or the other of this dispute, but rather to encourage us to look at the condition of our own heart whenever we speak so that we may always tell the truth and that God’s will may be accomplished—rather than attempting to use the power of the name of God to accomplish our will.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of the Old Testament law was to control our actions and to prohibit wrong acts such as murder, adultery and false testimony. Jesus fulfills and completes these Old Testament laws by showing our wrong actions originate earlier in the sinful conditions of our hearts that need to be cleansed and purified. It is not enough not to commit murder; we must control our anger and our angry verbal outbursts. It is not enough to avoid adultery; we must control our wandering eyes and hands by eliminating sinful lust. And it is not enough to swear to tell the truth in a judicial proceeding; we must humble ourselves and speak the truth simply and straightforwardly at all times so God may be glorified.

As a practicing attorney during much of the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I watched the world become increasingly legalistic and law oriented as the years rolled by. Unfortunately, some Christians moved more and more to trials and litigation to resolve disputes, even among themselves. As followers of Christ, we need to demonstrate a much better way: to fill our hearts with Jesus and the Word of God and then to act accordingly.

## Chapter 6

### Retaliate With Love”

*You have heard it said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth. . . .  
You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor  
and hate your enemy’.*

Matthew 5:38-48

Jesus uses three examples from the legal world to prove there should be no limits to our positive acts of love, just as there is no limit to His love for us. Two of these examples come from Exodus 21:1 through 23:13, which are the additional laws given by God to Moses amplifying the Ten Commandments set forth in Exodus 20. (These additional laws relate to indentured servants, personal injuries, protection of private property, social responsibility, justice, and the keeping of the Sabbath). The third example relates to obedience to Roman law which, while not in the Old Testament law of Moses, was to be obeyed by the Jews in Jesus’ time since Rome was the governing authority.

The scripture concerning these three additional legal examples reads as follows:

**Verse 38-42** *You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

A basic premise of Old Testament law was for the offender to suffer the same loss he wrongfully caused others. It was stated in Exodus 21:23-25 as follows:

*But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.*

The Old Testament punishment was not for vengeance, but for protection. It protected the public by encouraging everyone to act prudently at all times, knowing they would suffer the same injury they caused to others. It also protected the wrongdoer against excessive retribution. For example, two eyes or even a life for an eye, being exacted in the heat of anger following a serious injury.

Jesus explains there is a limit to the actions permitted or imposed by law, there are no limits to the acts of love encouraged by God. For example:

### **The Other Cheek**

If a believer is injured by someone else, e.g. his cheek is struck, he is instructed not to seek revenge, but rather, to “*turn the other cheek.*” The same admonition would appear to apply if we are struck once as a punishment for unlawfully striking another. These are truly “hard sayings.” However, those who follow them will help others understand they are relying on winning the world by love, rather than simply controlling others or protecting themselves by the law.

### **The Other Coat**

This example relates to lending and collateral, and arises from Exodus 22:25-27:

*If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest. If you take your neighbor's coat as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.*

Again, Jesus explains His followers are not to limit their actions to the narrow areas provided by the law. Lenders will be protected by the integrity of Christian borrowers who pledge property over and above the minimum collateral to make sure their loans will be repaid.

### **The Extra Mile**

It was common practice in Jesus' time for conquering armies to press civilians into service. The Romans used this right to force Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross at the time he was led outside of the city to be crucified (Matthew 27:32). However, a protection was built into the law that limited the distance a civilian could be forced to carry the burden; for example, one mile. But, Jesus points out, His disciples are not to seek the full protection of the law, but rather we are to "go the extra mile" and thereby be an example to the world of God's unlimited love.

Jesus closes this portion of Scripture with verse 42, indicating we should not be stingy and fail to lend or help others in need, simply because we realize we are not going to rely on the full extent of the law to protect our person, our property, and our time.

***Verses 43-48 You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect"***

Jesus next shows there should not only be unlimited love, but it should be directed towards all man-kind. The phrase, "love your neighbor and hate your enemy," was an example of the perversion

the Pharisees had made to Old Testament Scripture by adding to them through their oral traditions. In this case, the Old Testament law simply said, “*love your neighbor as yourself . . .*” (Leviticus 19:18). The Pharisees added the “*hate your enemy*” that apparently seemed an obvious corollary to them. Instead, Jesus points out that a Christian has no enemy. He may be seen as an enemy by others, but to Jesus’ disciple, everyone is his neighbor.

On another occasion, Jesus used this concept to show that loving one’s neighbor as ourselves is one of the two “great commandments,” by dramatically selecting one of the despised, false-worshipping Samaritans of his day (often seen as “enemies” by the Jews) as a role model to show love to others! (Luke 10: 25-37).

Ironically, it is the “good Samaritan,” not the “good Jew”, nor the “Good Christian”, who is now accepted in history as the personification of neighborly love to others. God is truly much larger than the narrow concepts and institutional dogma into which we sometimes try to compress Him.

Jesus next calls our attention, beginning in verse 45, to the “common grace” through which God grants to all mankind physical life and all its beauty and benefits. The sun and the rain fall on all of us without regard to our actions or attitudes. Therefore, as ambassadors of God, we should include everyone within our circle of love and acquaintanceship. Hated people (like tax collectors) often love those who love them and non-believers return courtesies and dinner engagements with their friends. Such actions are not unusual in the world and do not capture anyone’s attention. However, if we love those who hate us, if we pray for those who persecute us, if we invite to dinner and include in our giving those from whom we can gain nothing, we are obviously different from the world. Sometime, somewhere, someone will ask “Why?” and we can present “*the reason for the hope*” that we have (1 Peter 3:15).

## **Conclusion**

The Old Testament law (like modern secular law) was to control improper actions. Jesus accepts this fact, but asks us to go further and exchange our anger for reconciliation, our lust for Biblical marriage, and our desire for power for the plain truth, so we will control our actions inwardly, rather than having to be controlled by external laws.

The Old Testament law (like modern secular law) was also to protect. Jesus acknowledges this fact, but asks us not to make use of these legal limitations and instead to turn the other cheek, to give the extra cloak, and to walk the extra mile. (The apostle Paul understood and applied this sacrificial style of living to his life and work in 1 Corinthians 9).

The Old Testament law was to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus asks us not to limit our love to the duty owed to others under the law and not to pervert the law by excluding our adversaries or enemies from our definition of neighbor. Instead, we should reach out to everyone, including those who consider us their enemies, as neighbors whom we should love through our words and deeds. When we do these things, the love of God will extend from us out into the world. They will be blessed and so will we!

## Chapter 7

### *God Loves Good Secrets*

***Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your father in heaven.***

Matthew 6:1-8; 16-18

The discussion in Matthew 5:21-48 concerned actions that are controlled or limited by law. Jesus now sets forth in Matthew 6 a discussion of three actions that we should do voluntarily—and for the right reasons. These actions are giving, praying, and fasting.

### **Giving**

***Verse 1-4 Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in Heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, Who sees what is done in secret, will reward you***

We are to be a giving people, giving to God and to others. But why? To please others? To please ourselves? Or, to please God?

The world tells us to give and be honored. Thus, those who give money often have hospital rooms, university buildings, or church facilities named after them to proclaim the donor’s generosity as long as the monument lasts. Those who give intellectually or politically may receive honorary doctorate degrees and other rewards and citations of merit. Jesus doesn’t say such rewards are bad, but warns that seeking such earthly rewards prevents us from receiving a reward from God. Thus, we may seek and receive

something good now, but miss God's best later in Heaven.

Jesus seems principally concerned with hypocrisy: the act of giving as if selflessly when secretly it is to impress and bring us honor from others. Jesus cautions us, therefore, not to call attention to our own good deeds. As we would say today, "Don't blow your own horn." Not because He doesn't want us to be rewarded, but rather so we will not miss the better reward planned by God.

Jesus further cautions us not to give to impress ourselves. As He puts it:

***Do not let your left hand*** [normally the passive hand] ***know what your right hand*** [normally the active hand] ***is doing.***

It has truly been said, "Don't give 'til it hurts—instead give 'til it feels good." Giving can make us feel good. Jesus said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35). Leaving an anonymous tip to an unknown hotel maid who has prepared and left a clean, attractive room for a weary traveler or sending an anonymous gift to satisfy another need can leave the giver with a warm inner glow. But Jesus cautions that even anonymous giving can keep us from His reward if we perform good deeds simply to please ourselves.

The mature motivation for giving is not to receive honors from others nor congratulations from ourselves, although both are pleasant; but rather to give out of obedience and gratitude to God, trusting that in His profound mercy and compassion we will receive from Him in His perfect timing His perfect reward.

Giving for God's glory is sacrificial. God so loved us that He gave His Son (John 3:16). Moses so loved the sinful Israelites whom he led out of Egypt that he asked God to blot him out of His book unless God also granted forgiveness for the Israelites (Exodus 32:32). Jesus so loved us that He suffered and died

physically that we might have eternal life (Isaiah 53:5). The apostle Paul had such sorrow and anguish because the Israelites were separated from God that he was willing to cut himself off from Christ for their sake (Romans 9:1-3).

Our command is the same: so love God and others that we are willing to give up our lives in this world (Luke 9:23-24; 1 John 3:16; Romans 12:1-2). Such giving does not bring honor from men; neither does it bring other worldly rewards (1 Corinthians 4:8-13). But it does bring a perfect reward and inheritance from God (Philippians 3:7-21)!

### **Praying**

***Verse 5-6 And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, Who is unseen. Then your Father, Who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.***

Again, Jesus looks at the motivation that leads us to prayer. Are we praying in public so others will see us and commend us for our piety and religiosity? If so, this public recognition and praise is all the reward we will receive.

Jesus is not condemning group prayer. The famous “Lord’s Prayer” which we discuss in the next lesson, begins with the words, “*Our Father*” (Matthew 6:9). Jesus prayed with His disciples the night before He was betrayed (Matthew 26:37-39), and His disciples followed this practice by praying together after Jesus’ death and resurrection (Acts 1:14). Instead, He condemns the hypocrisy of those who act as if they are communing with God but in fact are putting on a show for those around them.

It has been said that when we pray, whether privately or publicly,

the audience should always be God. This is not difficult when we are alone with Him. That's where we can speak openly and freely. It is much more difficult when we pray out loud where others can hear. We are tempted to use such public prayers as a time to gossip under the guise of help requested for the sins and troubles of others. Finally, it can be a time for poetic phrases, pompous tones, and religious "one-upmanship."

Recognizing all these temptations, Jesus commends private prayer. There, we are not distracted. There, we needn't worry about betraying a confidence. There, we can freely confess our own guilt and fear and anger. There, we need not be careful how we phrase our petitions; in fact, at times we simply cry out to Him because we don't know what to pray and the Holy Spirit "*intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express*" (Romans 8:26). What a miracle that the Lord and Savior of the universe is available to listen to us any time of the day or night. It is so priceless we should not try to impress others or even ourselves with our marvelous prayerful attitude or moving words.

Sometimes we are privileged to speak, or hear others speak, to God in public. Just as a saint can occasionally be seen and recognized by the glow and radiance of his countenance, so can a saint often be heard and recognized by his prayers. We are blessed as we listen to an intimate communion between a person and God; hearing a believer who is unashamed and virtually unconscious of the presence of those around him.

There are, of course, times and occasions when someone prays publicly and speaks to God not only for themselves but also for others around them. These are special times. Jesus' closing prayer in John 17 is perhaps the best example ever recorded. These prayers are the exceptions. They are a rare trust to be carefully and gratefully brought before God without hypocrisy or a desire to impress others—only to express our praise and petitions to God on behalf of ourselves and those for whom we speak.

## Fasting

**Verse 16-18** *When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, Who is unseen; and your Father, Who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

The practice of fasting (abstaining from physical nourishment to bring us closer into spiritual communion with God) is not widely taught or practiced among most contemporary Christians. Yet, it is a great Biblical practice and doctrine. Moses fasted on Mount Sinai while receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28); Queen Esther fasted and asked others to fast for her before she went in to the King in an effort to save the Jews during their captivity (Esther 4:16); Ezra proclaimed a fast before leading the Jews from captivity back to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:21); Nehemiah fasted before he returned to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 1:4); Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry (Matthew 4:2); and believers fasted before sending Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey (Acts 13:2).

As we read the Scriptures, it becomes clear that such fasting has ordinarily been in conjunction with prayer to God. By temporarily withdrawing from physical food, we seem better able to clear our hearts and minds to receive spiritual food at our times of deepest spiritual need.

Unfortunately, just as we can give to impress others and we can pray to impress others, so can we also fast and deny ourselves to impress others. Here again, Satan can tempt us to use this mighty weapon which was meant for good as a devilish means of raising ourselves up before others. For that reason, Jesus commands us

not to make a public show of our fasting. Instead, we are to wash and groom ourselves so that others will not be aware that we are fasting.

Some zealous leaders of various causes have fasted, sometimes to the death, to bring attention to their cause and to pressure others to accede to their demands. While not hypocritical, it seems questionable such fasting has a spiritual purpose as described in the Bible. Others go on a partial fast (such as denying certain foods and drink during Lent) only to go to complete excess during the “Mardi Gras” that precedes the Lenten period or during the post-Lenten “let-down” that may follow. Again, such fasting, while dutiful, seems of no real lasting value. Others fast in order to lose weight. This, too, while perhaps physically desirable, would seem to have little lasting spiritual value.

Biblical fasting does not have the purpose of political control, weight control, or other worldly purposes. Instead, it is to give us an opportunity to meet and commune at the deepest possible level with God and to lay before Him our supplications (Mark 9:29).

Isaiah 58 is a full chapter of the Bible devoted to the subject of fasting. There Isaiah contrasts a normal “fast day” done out of duty and for reward with a lifestyle of fasting motivated by love for God and others. (Isaiah 58:1-52)

God wants occasional days of physical fasting to bring us closer to Him. But much more he wants a life style of doing good and avoiding evil.

## **Conclusion**

This lesson has concerned some of the religious side of life: giving, praying, and fasting. But even here Satan tempts us with our great enemy—Pride. Followers of Christ are not immune to the subtle dangers of titles, medals, and honors. Perhaps these are even more threatening to believers than money and material

wealth. There is no inherent wrong in money; neither is there an inherent wrong in an honorary doctorate, or having a building named after us. It is only when we seek to receive such honors from men that we are on the wrong track, especially when we hypocritically lead others to believe our actions were selfless. It is the subtle danger of secretly wanting and striving to be called “Reverend” or “Doctor” or to be known as a “religious and devout layman” or to have a building or a sports field or any other monument carry our name before the world that we must avoid.

We don't give or pray or fast to become praised by men, or even to praise ourselves. We do each of these to bring glory to God and help to others, with the knowledge that ultimately we will receive from Him the reward that He has planned at a time when we will not be injured but rather helped and built up by its receipt.

## Chapter 8

### *The Lord's Prayer*

*This, then, is how you should pray . . .  
Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one.*

#### **Matthew 6:7-15**

In Matthew 6:1-6 and 16-18, Jesus cautioned His followers against hypocrisy when we carry out the religious acts of giving, praying, and fasting. Now, in verses 7-15, He sets forth the most famous of all prayers: *The Lord's Prayer*. He will later conclude His teaching on prayer in this sermon at Matthew 7:7-12 we will discuss later.

**Verse 7-8** *And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

Before setting forth His proposed prayer model, Jesus cautions us not to talk to God like “babbling” non-believers. The word “babbling” is defined by *Webster* as “to utter a meaningless confusion of words or sounds.” While there may not be a link between the term “babbling” used in modern translations and the familiar story of ancient Babel described in Genesis 11, there is an intriguing corollary between them.

At the time of Genesis 11, the Bible says, “*the whole world had one language and a common speech*” (11:1). Then mankind succumbed to the three basic temptations that have plagued us all from the beginning: a desire to embezzle from God His Kingdom, His Power, and His Glory. Genesis 11:4 describes it this way:

*Then they said, ‘Come let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens [i.e., establish their own kingdom instead of promoting God’s Kingdom] so that we may make a name for ourselves [i.e., seek their own glory instead of praising and promoting the glory of God] and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth’ [asserting the power of their own will to stay in one comfortable place instead of following the will of God and spreading throughout the world as He had originally commanded]*  
(Comments in brackets added).

In order to prevent mankind from succeeding in their rebellious plan to establish their own “kingdom” for their own “glory”, by using the power of their own will, God began to act. The Biblical account describes it as follows:

*So the Lord scattered them from there all over the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them all over the face of the whole earth.*  
(Genesis 11:8-9).

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount that was spoken years after the Old Testament account of Babel, Jesus cautions his followers not to “*babble*,” i.e., not to use continuous, confusing words when we talk to God. God already knows our needs, but He wants us to acknowledge our reliance and dependence upon Him to fulfill those needs. This model prayer that Jesus sets forth in Matthew 6:9-13 also seems to speak to the content of the story

of the Tower of Babel: our attitude is to be one of accepting and helping promote the Kingdom of God, the Power of God, and the Glory of God on earth rather than attempting to set up our own kingdom for our own glory through our own power.

## **Our View Of God**

This simple but profound prayer is in two parts. The first part (verses 9 and 10) relates to our view of God as our loving, but also our all-powerful, Father.

### **Verse 9a *This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in Heaven***

God in the Old Testament was awesome and greatly feared. Jesus encouraged the dimension of God as a Father so we might understand just how deeply and completely He cares for us and how we can safely and securely rely on Him for all our needs as we ordinarily rely on our earthly fathers when we are children.

### **Verse 9b *Hallowed be your name***

Even though we may carry God's name because we are His children, we may not usurp His glory (Isaiah 48:11). Throughout the centuries many of us, like the ancient people at the Tower of Babel, have sought to "*make a name for ourselves.*" We want to see our name on a book, in a program, on a firm letterhead, in Guinness' Book of Records, in theatre lights, on a list of honorees for a job well done, or because we have given a large and significant gift or contribution to a cause or to an organization. It is this pride in establishing a name for ourselves that must yield, and we must "*hallow,*" i.e., honor and revere, the name of God. The Old Testament writers understood this concept of man's deep need to praise and exalt the name of God above all names. For example, Psalm 148:13 that reads as follows:

*Let them praise the name of the Lord, for His name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.*

It is God, and not ourselves, who must receive the glory.

**Verse 10a *Your Kingdom come***

Others of us are tempted, like the ancient inhabitants of Babel, to try to set up our own kingdom here on earth where we can comfortably live as king. I believe the Kingdom of God is wherever and whenever God is recognized and obeyed as king. Ultimately, Jesus will return in power and take back earth as a part of His kingdom. But for the present, He has allowed Satan to rule this world (John 12:31; 18:36). Our prayer is that He will return soon (Revelation 22:20). In the meantime, He wants to be invited to enter our hearts and lives and begin to bring about His heavenly Kingdom here on earth through us as believers who follow Him and spread the Good News wherever we go. If we accept His divine authority and live now in obedience to His commands, we may continue to have outward difficulties, but inwardly we can have complete peace and assurance He will enable us to carry out our assigned work while we are His representatives here on earth (John 14:21-27).

**Verse 10(b) *Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.***

At some point in life, each of us tests our will against the will of God. Every individual seems born with a desire to have his own way. That rebellion has separated Adam and everyone since Adam (including each of us) from God. It is only when we surrender our will and pray God's will be done on earth (and in our lives) just as it is in Heaven that we are reconciled back to Him. Surrendering our will is not easy. It means dying to ourselves. Even Jesus agonized over the awful trauma of following God's will through the pain and suffering of the cross. So much so that He told the disciples,

*My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*

Matthew 26:38

As He

*fell with His face to the ground and prayed,  
'My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me'*

Matthew 26:39a

But the fate of all mankind was blessed by His simple final conclusion,

*Yet not as I will but as You will*

Matthew 36:39.

The future of each of us hinges on these same words. Each of us must initially come to the point, and then day by day thereafter, where we yield up our own will and cast ourselves upon the power and mercy of God.

### **Our Dependence Upon God**

The second part of the Lord's Prayer (verses 11-13) relates to our dependence upon God and not upon ourselves.

#### **Verse 11 *Give us today our daily bread***

If we live in God's Kingdom and are under His authority, we can, like a physical child, expect our Father to provide for all of our spiritual and physical needs. In the next section (Matthew 6:19-34), Jesus discusses at length this concept of relying upon God for our needs. It does not mean we are not to work. It does mean we are not to worry. It is God's Kingdom, not our own. We can look to Him to provide for our needs as long as we faithfully claim His protection and provision. However, if we attempt to set up our own kingdom on earth, that's when we need to begin to worry.

#### **Verse 12 *Forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors"***

**Verse 14 *For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.***

It has been said that the Christian life is not so much achievement as it is forgiveness. Asking forgiveness is a humbling experience. When we confess (admit) our failures, there is no room for glory. Yet it is a constant battle not to claim for ourselves the reflective glory that can surround us when we walk closely with God. While the glory of God may be evidenced in our faces, it begins in our hearts. If we, like the merciless servant described in Matthew 18, request forgiveness for our failures, but fail to forgive others their failures, there is no repentance in our hearts, and we render ourselves unable to receive the forgiveness that we request from God. It is only when we show compassion to others as they humble themselves before us and seek forgiveness for their failures that God knows our spirits are so truly humble we can seek and receive His forgiveness for our own failures.

**Verse 13 *And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one***

Each of us wants our own way. Satan tempts us daily, just as he did Adam and Eve, to exercise our own will rather than surrendering to and following the will of God. But listen to the tragic outcome of Satan's insistence on exercising his own will as opposed to surrendering to the will of God:

*How have you fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, 'I **will** ascend to heaven; I **will** raise my throne above the stars of God; I **will** sit enthroned on the mount of the assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I **will** ascend above the tops of the clouds; I **will** make myself like the Most High.'*  
*But you are brought down to the grave,  
to the depths of the pit"*

Isaiah 14:12-15, emphasis added

If we allow Satan to deceive us and cause us to believe we can use our own will and have our own way, we, too, will be snared and ultimately destroyed (Romans 6:16). Jesus tells us to look to God to lead us away from the great temptation of attempting to have our own way and relying on our own will. It is only when we rely on the power of God and accept His will for our lives that we escape the power of Satan and his false delusion that we, and not God, are in control.

**Note:** Some of the later manuscripts add the following postscript to the Lord's Prayer which is often incorporated at the end by Protestant believers:

*For thine is the Kingdom, the power  
and the glory forever and ever, Amen.*

Whether or not these words are uttered, God wants us to pray with this humble attitude in our hearts. It is God's kingdom that is to be built on earth, as we gratefully request and receive what He provides to meet our daily needs. It is God's Will that is to be done as we surrender our wills to him and, through His power, resist the temptations of Satan. It is God's Name that is to be glorified as we humbly confess our sins and reflect His glory.

This is the attitude we all shall have in Heaven, as described by the apostle John in the book of Revelation at chapter 5:13. Until then, it is our privilege without hypocrisy, confusion or unnecessary words to speak to "*Our Father*" in the spirit as well as the form of this model Lord's Prayer.

## **Conclusion**

Most great statements are short, simple and powerful. The brief model prayer given by Jesus, contains some of the most momentous and memorable words ever uttered. Jesus warned us not to make long "*babbling*" prayers like pagans. Rather, we are to pray simply as a child to our Father. First, we acknowledge He

is supreme and in control. Next, we look forward to the day His Heavenly Kingdom and His Will are manifested here on earth. Then we conclude with our request for “*daily bread*” for our bodies; “*forgiveness*” for our souls; and guidance and “protection” from the “*evil one*” who is always seeking to capture us for his dark kingdom.

Thanks, Lord, for making it so simple and understandable.

## Chapter 9

### *Wealth and Worry*

*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth . . .*

*But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven.*

Matthew 6:19-34

Matthew 6:19-34 may be one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament to understand and apply. It deals with the practical but perplexing problem of whether to place our trust in God—or in worldly wealth obtained through our own efforts. The first section (verses 19-24) discusses the accumulation of wealth (treasure). The second portion (verses 25-34) discusses the futility of worry. Both sections deal with true security and how to obtain it.

### **Wealth**

#### *Storing up Treasure*

**Verses 6:19-24** *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

God created the world and everything in it (Genesis 1). He still owns it all. For example, when He gave the land of Israel as a home for the Hebrew nation, He made it clear that He retained ownership of the land:

*The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.*

Leviticus 25:23

The believer's view of property is not ownership, but stewardship. We are simply trustees and fiduciaries during our lives of that which God has entrusted to our temporary care and control. Whether we are young or old, we must hold everything with an

open hand into which God can deposit and from which he can withdraw at will. The rich farmer described by Jesus in Luke 12:13-21 lost everything because he couldn't let go and give back to God.

The irony of it all is that the property we sometimes seek to heap up for our own use and security is itself never really safe or secure, nor does it make us safe and secure. Jesus used examples of loss by theft, rust, and moths, but the list of destroyers of physical wealth is almost endless: war, inflation, taxes, poor business judgement, tornadoes, fires, unexpected medical expenses, and on and on.

Luke 12:33 records Jesus this way:

*Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.*

One final note: Even if the wealth we try and save doesn't leave us, we will ultimately leave our worldly wealth. God confirms in both the Old and New Testaments that we are merely life tenants and not owners as He proclaims that all of us must finally conclude:

*For we brought nothing into the world,  
and we can take nothing out of it*  
Job 1:21; 1 Timothy 6:7

The constant theme of the Old and New Testament is that we should place our trust in our Creator and not in His creation. We should store our treasures in Heaven, where we can enjoy them for eternity, not try (unsuccessfully) to hoard them up for the sole benefit of "me and mine" through the few short years we spend on this earth. Although it seems Biblical to save for our responsibilities (Proverbs 6:6-8), a critical question all of us must

ask ourselves is, “How much is enough?” When we reach that point, shouldn’t we consider giving the balance of our time and energy toward the needs of others and to the glorification of God rather than continuing to “*store up treasures*” for ourselves on earth?

### ***Our Treasure Shows the Condition of Our Hearts***

**Verse 21** *For where your treasure is,  
there your heart will be also.*

Our hearts follow our money—and our money also follows our hearts. So the condition of our hearts and where we spend and give our money is of utmost importance. We are, of course, to provide for ourselves (2 Thessalonians 3:7-10) and for our families (1 Timothy 5:8) and for those who advance the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:13-14). Jesus also urges us to give to the needy, e.g., sick, hungry, aliens, naked, and prisoners (Matthew 25:31-46) and to the “*beautiful*” things of God (Mark 14:3-9). As we invest in each of these, our hearts will follow and we will be blessed and so will those to whom we give. If, however, we spend and give to evil, such as illicit sex, pornography, drunkenness, and other forms of self-indulgence (Galatians 5:19-21), our hearts will follow these and we will suffer accordingly.

The apostle Paul makes it clear to his young follower, Timothy, that it is the *love* of money (rather than money itself) which is a “*root of all kinds of evil*” (1 Timothy 6:10). Money is neutral, like nuclear energy that can be used to light up or blow up a city. Paul, therefore, does not condemn rich men, but tells Timothy to command them to use their wealth for good:

*Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

1Timothy 6:18-19

The underlying question through all this discussion is still one of ownership. If I claim I am the owner and return nothing to God, then He probably has none of my heart. If I tithe and give Him 10 percent of what I produce but still claim I am the owner, it would seem that He might have 10 percent of my heart. But if I acknowledge that all I have belongs to God and that I am simply a steward with the responsibility to save, invest, spend, and give as He directs, then my heart will follow the wealth and the wealth will follow my heart, and we will both be with God.

### ***The Lust of the Eyes***

***Verses 22-23 The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!***

The apostle John warns us:

*Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of a sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world*

1 John 2:15-16

These are the same three temptations (pleasure, possessions and power/position) offered to Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3) and to Jesus during His 40-day fast in the wilderness just before He began His ministry (Matthew 4).

Jesus now seems to be telling us in verses 22 and 23 that we, too, need to keep our eyes on what is good in life and will flood our lives with light. However, if we succumb to the temptation of the “*lust of the eyes*” and increasingly gaze on evil and the things we want to satisfy our own selfish desires, then we will fill our souls increasingly with darkness until we are totally dark, i.e., dead.

## ***Cannot Serve Two Masters***

**Verse 24** *No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.*

***You cannot serve both God and Money.***

Joshua, at the close of his career, issued a great challenge to the people of Israel to choose whom they would follow:

*But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.*

Joshua 24:15

Jesus now makes it clear that we cannot serve two masters. Most modern management consultants would agree. So would the disciple James, who wrote that a “*double-minded*” man is “*unstable in all he does*” (James 1:8). If we live our lives for money and wealth, we gradually view God more and more as an interference with our selfish desires. If, however, we love God and live for Him, money will simply be a tool that we use to carry out the work God has given us to perform here on earth. If we try to love both God and money, we become lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, and we will be spewed out (Revelation 3:16). The result will be that we are unproductive for God and unfulfilled ourselves.

## **Worry**

The Futility of Worry

**Verses 25-30** *Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father*

*feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow? They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?*

In this section of the Sermon, Jesus condemns “worry” but not “work.” Everyone needs to work. The apostle Paul states this principle plainly in his second letter to the Thessalonians:

*For even when we were with you, we gave this rule:  
‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat’.*

1 Thessalonians 3:10

But that does not mean we are to worry. Instead, we are to learn to be content (1Timothy 6:6). Paul had learned this lesson and wrote about it to the Philippians:

*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.*

Philippians 4:12-13

It was this kind of trusting contentment Jesus was urging as He speaks of the way God feeds the birds and clothes the flowers. However, even the birds work. It has been said, “God provides the worms for the birds—but he doesn’t put them in their mouths.” And so it is with each of us. God gives and we gather. This is the unique pattern God has provided between Himself and all He has created:

*These [God's Creatures] all look to you [God] to give them their food at the proper time. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are satisfied with good things.*

Psalm 104:27-28

We count on Him to provide the raw materials and we are to give them the care and attention they need to grow and multiply. In short, we are to work but not to worry. God has always been and will always be a faithful provider. Our problem is not God's faithfulness to us but, rather, our lack of faith in Him.

However, we must not forget that faith is a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9) which we receive only because we are privileged to hear the Gospel (Romans 10:17). We should not be proud if our faith is strong nor feel guilty if it is weak. Instead, we should thank God that He has chosen us and "*make every effort*" to add to our faith by believing and acting upon the promises of God (2 Peter 1:5-8). As a farmer works to provide the right soil and environment for the seeds to grow and multiply, so should we work to provide the right environment and atmosphere around us so that our faith will grow and flourish (Romans 4:20-21; 1 Corinthians 3:7).

### ***God Knows Our Needs***

***Verses 31-32 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'what shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.***

Jesus told us, in Matthew 6:7, not to babble and use many words like the pagans do because God already knows our needs before we ask Him. Now, in Matthew 6:31-32, He tells us not to worry and run after food and clothing like the pagans do, because God knows we also need them. Pagans are expected to babble, worry, and run after their needs because they don't really expect God to provide them. As followers of Christ, we are expected to

acknowledge our needs to God and then confidently expect Him to provide for these needs while we carry out the work He has given us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

### ***Seek God First***

**Verse 33** *But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

The key to receiving our needs from God is to seek God first. In the Old Testament, God repeatedly said he was a jealous God. For example, the first of the Ten Commandments was to “*have no other gods before*” Him (Exodus 20:3). The Great Commandment, repeated in both the Old and New Testaments was to

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart  
and with all your soul and with all your mind*

Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37

and to ask for God’s name to be honored, God’s kingdom to come, and God’s will to be done (Matthew 6:9-10). When we put God first, He will faithfully provide for all our needs; not for all our wants, but for all our needs. Unfortunately, a great deal of our time, energy, and resources are often devoted to our wants, which causes us to lose many of the blessings available for us.

### ***One Day at a Time***

**Verse 34** *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

God graciously does not let us in on the future—we couldn’t handle it. Occasionally, He gives us glimpses of what to expect in both the Old Testament through His prophets, and in the New Testament through such passages as Jesus’ description of the end times (Matthew 24), and the Revelation given to John. But in general, we are called simply to live one day at a time, trusting God for our daily bread and not worrying about the future. As the

writer of Proverbs says:

*In his heart a man plans his course,  
but the Lord determines his steps.*

Proverbs 16:9

### **Conclusion**

When we accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior, we gave Him ownership of our lives. We became free from sin by becoming slaves to Him and to His righteousness (Romans 6:15-22). In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus now tells us that we need to acknowledge that God is also the owner of all we possess and produce. We are simply stewards of His treasure, which we are to save, invest, spend, and give as He directs. As we are obedient to God and live in dependence upon Him, we can work with confidence from day to day that all our needs will be met; we do not need to worry. That's security!

## Chapter 10

### *Is There Something in Your Eye?*

*Do not judge, or you too will be judged.*

Matthew 7:1-6

Matthew 7 opens with an admonition and warning about judging others. This Scripture has application to all of us when acting as individuals, but it also seems to have some application to us when we exercise legitimate authority over others.

**Verses 1-2** *Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

#### **Judgements by Those in Authority**

These verses do not outlaw all authority and judgements to be exercised on earth. The Bible refers to four earthly institutions that do have authority to govern (which would seem to include the authority to judge for earthly purposes): family, church, business (work world), and civil government.

Most civil governments have allowed the bulk of governing to take place within the family, church (or other charitable organizations), and business (or other work place organizations). The civil government then deals with overriding issues of public policy and areas not covered by the institutions of family, church, or business.

#### **Family**

In the family, children are to obey their parents and the parents are to govern the children. This would seem legitimately to include determining whether children adhere to the rules of the family and calling them back to proper conduct when they err (Ephesians 6:1-4; Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:6-7). While parents are necessarily called to judge their children and to discipline them

accordingly, the overriding purpose is not for punishment, but rather for repentance and reformation, so that they (like the prodigal son) may come to their senses, ask forgiveness for their errors, and return to fellowship with their families (Hebrews 12:5-11; Luke 15:11-24).

## **Church**

### **Judging Unrepentant Sinners**

In 1 Corinthians 5, the apostle Paul discusses the right and responsibility of those in authority in the church to judge and, if necessary, to expel from fellowship those who claim to believe in Christ but refuse to follow His commands. He concludes:

*What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you.*

1 Corinthians 5:12-13)

Sin, like yeast in dough (or cancer in our bodies), will increasingly contaminate all it touches and ultimately destroy the whole unless it is cut out and removed (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). We expect such sin from nonbelievers outside the Christian fellowship and we are to continue to be with them in an effort to save them (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). But such continuing sin cannot be tolerated inside the fellowship or it will ultimately spread and destroy the church. Again, however, the ultimate purpose of this procedure is not to punish the offenders, but rather to bring them back into fellowship with God and other Christians (1 Corinthians 5:5).

### **Judging Disputes Among Believers**

The Apostle Paul, in this same letter to the church at Corinth, also discussed the procedure to be used in resolving a dispute between believers:

*Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this*

*to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you  
wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But  
instead, one brother goes to law against another—  
and this in front of unbelievers!*

1 Corinthians 6:4--6

This procedure is set forth for believers who feel a dispute with another believer must be resolved. It avoids the necessity of suing in public courts that may submit the dispute to a nonbeliever who will base his decision on civil, rather than biblical, principles. In addition, it avoids public trial that would make the weaknesses and disagreements of the church family a public display, and thereby lessen the fellowship and the power of Christ in the eyes of non-believers. Jesus said:

*By this all men will know that you are my disciples,  
if you love one another.*

(John 13:35).

But so will all men question whether we are His disciples if we publicly dispute with one another. One of the saddest litigation is the suit in civil court by one group of church members against another over earthly title to church property. It produces internal scars and external criticisms that may take years to overcome. As Paul says:

*The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you  
have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be  
wronged? Why not rather be cheated?*

1 Corinthians 6:7

God does not leave us without a place to resolve disputes. Hopefully, controversies with other Christians can be resolved within the local church. If additional help is needed, it is increasingly available through other Christian organizations such as *Peacemakers*. Disputes with non-believers can be handled through the civil courts when it is necessary to obtain a resolution.

## **Business (Work World)**

Each business in the work world is a small governing body. Standards are set and subordinates are judged on their performance and adherence to the rules of the organization. The Apostle, Paul, emphasized our need to obey such earthly masters:

*Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.*

Ephesians 6:5-8

Here again, believers can expect some miscarriages of justice and undeserved punishment by those who use their authority for improper ends rather than as a means to serve others. When that happens believers are left to God's ultimate and perfect mercy and judgement:

*To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. 'He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.'*  
*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

1 Peter 2:18-23

## **Government**

The Bible repeatedly confirms the role of civil government in the lives of all citizens, including followers of Christ. Peter, in his first letter to the church, wrote:

*Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish*

*those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.  
For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the  
ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use  
your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.  
Show proper respect to everyone: love the brotherhood of  
believers, fear God, honor the king*

1 Peter 2:13-17 (See also Romans 13:1-7)

Both Jesus and Paul submitted to trials and judgement in Roman civil courts (John 19:10-11; Acts 25:11).

Because government decisions so vitally affect all citizens, the Bible urges us to pray for those in authority:

*I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession  
and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all  
those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives  
in all godliness and holiness*

1 Timothy 2:1-2

Unfortunately, there may come a time when those in authority abuse subordinates rather than caring for them, and there is no relief granted by earthly institutions. If that happens, believers may need simply to trust God and look to Him for their relief as many Christians have in the past. For example:

*If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any  
other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if  
you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed,  
but praise God that you bear that name.*

1 Peter 4:15-16

All these statements make it clear that institutions, through their representatives, are to judge. But those who have the responsibility to exercise judgement must do so very carefully.

### **In the family:**

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead bring them*

*up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*  
Ephesians 6:4

**In the church:**

*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.*  
Hebrews 13:17a

**In the work world:**

*And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven and there is no favoritism with him.*  
Ephesians 6:9

**And in government:**

*And I charged your judges at that time: Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly, whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an alien. Do not show partiality in judging; hear both small and great alike. Do not be afraid of any man, for judgement belongs to God. Bring me any case too hard for you, and I will hear it.*  
Deuteronomy 1:16-17

When we fail in our responsibilities of authority, those whom we serve quickly question our right to further leadership. For example, when Moses (who had been seen unlawfully killing an abusive Egyptian) later tried to separate two Jews who were fighting, one of them asked, “*Who made you ruler and judge over us?*” (Exodus 2:14a).

There may come a time when those in authority may wrongfully attempt to control a believer’s actions or words contrary to the will of God. If that happens, we must, like Peter and John, as reported in the following passage, be prepared to follow God even though it may be contrary to earthly authority:

*Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves rather it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard'.*

Acts 4:18-20

We must be very cautious in this area. Often our inclination to disobey may spring from a desire for personal pleasure, position, wealth or power, rather than to glorify and obey God. In addition, there may be a way to follow the example of Daniel and, by innovation and persuasion, find an alternative route which allows us to be obedient to earthly authority and at the same time act in conformity with the will of God as we understand it (Daniel 1:8-21).

### **Individuals Are Not to Judge**

While those in positions of authority are to engage in “judgements” within their institutions, such actions are neither our right nor our responsibility as individuals. Jesus understood this when He was asked to judge a property dispute between two heirs and He answered:

*Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?”*

Luke 12:14

While it is necessary for those acting in positions of authority to set standards and make judgements so that we may have an orderly society in our family, our churches, our work world, and our government, we as individuals should not try to pass judgement on others around us. If we do, we are being warned that we are setting for ourselves the same narrow standards that we wish to apply to others. As Jesus said to the Jews who were about to stone the woman caught in adultery:

*If any one of you is without sin,  
let him be the first to throw a stone at her.*

John 8:7

This is sobering enough when we think of judging each other in this world. But it is even more sobering when we realize that all of us will ultimately be called to account before God (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 12:19; 1 Peter 2:23; 1 Corinthians 3:12-15; Hebrews 9:27).

**Verses 3-5** *Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

What appears to you to be a speck in my eye may so blind my vision that it appears to me to be a plank (or log) that prevents me from seeing. It's only after I begin to overcome my own problems and see and repent of my own errors that I can help you. We must be careful of offering help to others in the area in which we fail ourselves. Those who have taken bankruptcy probably should be careful about giving money advice, and those who have been divorced should be careful about giving counsel on marriage. However, we can often be of some help to others where we have failed. All of us sin, and God often uses the areas where we have sinned but have been healed to comfort others through our own experiences (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

It's easy to find fault with others. We have slipped into a national trend of sometimes criticizing the products of our competitors instead of relying on the superior quality of our own products. In business, this has produced "product wars" and in politics it has resulted in "campaign wars." This trend is a serious change in our culture. It indicates an increasingly negative and faultfinding

society. The same can be true of individuals. Those who criticize others are often trying to justify their own failures by pulling others down to their level.

Every positive trait has a negative backside: a peaceful person can bring tranquility at first, but later bore and irritate us because they are so placid. A “peppy” person can stimulate but later exasperate us with constant noise. Even the best of us have traits that annoy others and tempt them to criticize. This can be disastrous to relationships within any institution: family, business, church, or government. It can also be disastrous to us individually when we judge others, for not only will we be similarly strictly judged, but also we can become negative—often about ourselves as well as others.

The key is to look for strengths and build on these (Philippians 4:8). In building up others, we will also find ourselves being encouraged and built up.

### **Discernment and Reproof**

***Verse 7:6 Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces***

This final caution is reminiscent of Proverbs 9:7 that warns us:

*Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult;  
whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse.*

There are some persons who refuse to receive the message of God. When such persons hear the message, they may react adversely and attempt to destroy the messenger. It happened repeatedly to Jesus, finally resulting in His death.

It also happened to many others. For example, it happened to John the Baptist: Herod imprisoned him and then beheaded him (Matthew 14:1-12). It happened to Stephen, one of the first deacons: the crowd listened to his testimony, then stoned him to

death (Acts 7). It happened to Paul and resulted in his imprisonment (Acts 19:23-41; Acts 21:27-22:29). It happened to other apostles who were also jailed and flogged for speaking out for Christ (Acts 4:1-3; 5:18).

There are times to speak and times to remain silent (Ecclesiastes 3:7b). When we speak, it may result in rejection, punishment, or even martyrdom. If the Holy Spirit shows us the hearer will not receive, then we should be cautious because he may simply trample what we give under foot and turn to attack us. But we should also be careful that we do not refrain from giving the Gospel at appropriate times out of unwarranted fear of rejection, for many who at first appear antagonistic (like Paul before his conversion) may stop their persecution of those who follow Christ and ultimately become His followers! Many are searching for reconciliation with God, and we don't know when or how the message God has given to us may accomplish His purpose.

Thus, while we do not judge as individuals, it appears that we must discern. The purpose of our discernment is not to render judgement and punishment, but rather to avoid errors and to help brothers in their area of weakness. Therefore, any reproof should always be done with the right motive and in the right way.

**First: We Should Reprove Gently**

We should remember that some are tempted in one way and some in another (Romans 14). We should reprove gently, but we should be careful that we do not so identify with the persons we are helping that we end up slipping into the same sin in which they are engaged. As the Galatian church was instructed:

*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted.*

Galatians 6:1

## **Second: We Should Reprove for Their Success**

Young Pastor Timothy was told:

*And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.*

2 Timothy 2:24-26

## **Third: We Should Reprove to Restore Fellowship**

*If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.*

Matthew 18:15

## **Conclusion**

Authorities have the right and responsibility to judge in order that mankind may enjoy orderly lives through the institutions of family, church, business, and government. Such authorities will be held accountable for the way in which they judge. Individuals do not have the responsibility to judge (except as they are acting within their position of authority). But we do have the responsibility to discern, act properly ourselves, and then reprove in love, gently, in an effort to help others succeed by becoming the person God designed them to be and doing the work God has planned for them. We must be careful to whom we give our message because we may be attacked in retaliation, but not so careful that we fail to speak out for God when we are called to do so.

## Chapter 11

### A.S.K.

*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find;  
knock and the door will be open to you.*

Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus again uses the unique teaching style that characterized much of His teaching in earlier portions of this Scripture and which is also shown through other parts of the Gospels—the practice of using sets of illustrations which express a single basic truth from different perspectives. For example, earlier in this Sermon, He gave believers the responsibility to be both salt and light to change the world around us; to have the proper spirit within us so we never engage in such unlawful acts as murder, adultery, or false witness; to avoid hypocrisy by giving, praying, and fasting privately rather than for public acclaim or repayment; to retaliate with love by turning the other cheek, giving our other coat, and carrying the burdens of others the extra mile; to be worry-free and dependent upon God for our physical needs in life as both the birds and the flowers; and to be careful not to place the holy and beautiful things of God before certain antagonistic non-believers who, like dogs or pigs, will reject us and trample our offerings in the mud. And in our final lesson, He will discuss the choice we are to make between two roads, two trees, and two houses.

Jesus also uses this multiple method of teaching in other passages recorded in the Gospels. For example, He used three parables in Luke 15 to illustrate the value of each person and the joy of seeing each lost sinner return and be reconciled with God. First was the story of the shepherd who had 100 sheep and who looked for the one that was lost and then called friends and neighbors to rejoice with him when it was found. Next was the story of the widow who had ten silver coins and who looked for the one that was lost and then called friends and neighbors to rejoice with her when it

was found. Finally was the parable of the father who had two sons and who patiently waited for the return of the one who was prodigal and wayward and then held a feast to celebrate his return. All were similar stories, yet all were different. All used the same principle, yet with different variations and from different viewpoints.

God used this same multiple method of letting us see Him by using different writers and illustrations in both the Old and New Testaments. He also let us see Jesus through the different experiences and pens of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Again, always the same, yet always different.

This is part of the mystery of Christ and His word (Ephesians 3:1-9; 5:32; Colossians 4:3; Romans 16:25). It fascinates us, intrigues us, frustrates us, and yet attracts us even closer to God. However, it is clear we will never fully understand God's mysteries until we are in heaven. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12:

*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall no fully, even as I am fully known.*

God will not allow us to put Him in a legalistic box in order that we may, through our intellect and logic, fully know Him. For that reason, we should listen for the balance and harmony that God has created through His scriptures and His people rather than assuming that the principle or task that is so important to us individually or to groups with whom we are closely associated represents all truth. It's as if God were sending His message through a mighty orchestra, and although each brass, string, wind, and percussion instrument is important, one individual instrument does not produce all the music that the orchestra was designed to play.

It should not surprise us, therefore, that God, Who chose to manifest His oneness in a mysterious trinity of three different

persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, should also choose repeatedly to teach and instruct us through various sets of similar but different examples. With this in mind, let's look at the three similar yet different principles of ask, seek, and knock, that Jesus discusses in this section of the Sermon.

***Verses 7-8 Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks the door will be opened.***

The acronym "A.S.K." (Ask/Seek/Knock) is a simple way to remember Jesus' admonition for us to persist in our supplications. It appears, therefore, that the first principle in this Scripture is persistence on our part.

But who do we ask, where and what do we seek, and on what door do we knock? Jesus doesn't say! Again, He leaves us with a mystery. For me, it has seemed helpful to view these three as follows:

### **Ask**

I believe this refers to prayer. Jesus said:

*You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

John 14:14

*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.*

John 15:7

We need, therefore, to be in an attitude of prayer at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This is the way God has given us to express our needs and our questions to Him. It is also a time to receive His answers through the Holy Spirit as we are still and listen for His words to us.

### **Seek**

Whether we seek strength, encouragement, or consolation; advice

on marriage, children, government, business, church affairs, or principles of finance; or help with any other subject, some answers are usually in the Bible if we search for them.

Just as we speak to God in prayer, He speaks to us through His Word. But we have to search the Scriptures to find the answers. As Paul said to young Timothy:

*All scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching,  
rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,  
so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped  
for every good work.*  
2 Timothy 3:16-17

### **Knock**

God also acts and speaks to us through other people. For example, in Exodus 4:12, the Lord spoke to the Israelites through Moses:

*Now go; I will help you speak  
and will teach you what to say.*

The writer of Proverbs urged us to be instructed. For example,

*The teaching of the wise is the fountain of life,  
turning a man from the snares of death.*  
Proverbs 13:14

It seems the admonition to knock may refer to going to other followers of Christ. Therefore, after we ask God in prayer and seek his answers in Scriptures, we should also consider requesting and listening to the counsel of Godly Christians.

That also means we may have an answer that God wants us to give to someone else. In this regard, we must act carefully and prudently since those “*who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways*” (James 3:1-2a).

Nevertheless, Scripture indicates that God’s followers are able to counsel, not of themselves but of Him. As Paul said to the

Corinthians in his second letter to them:

*Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.*

2 Corinthians 3:5

It may be we are to strengthen, encourage, and comfort others (1 Corinthians 14:3). Or perhaps we are to warn those who are idle or encourage those who are timid (1 Thessalonians 5:14). But through it all, we are to be willing to receive the message of God through His Holy Word, His Holy Spirit, and His Holy People, and give to others the message He gives to us as He directs and instructs us.

***Verses 9-11 Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!***

Bread and fish are simple but basic food staples. By using these illustrations, Jesus reaffirms the Biblical principle that God will supply our needs, not our wants (Philippians 4:19). As Paul tells young Timothy, it is with “*food and clothing*” that we are to be content (1Timothy 6:8). We cannot expect God to honor our requests for things we do not need.

Bread and fish bring life. By contrast, stones and snakes bring death. We must always remember to pray only for good: for things which will bring life and not death. When we pray for that which is good and needed, we can be confident that our heavenly Father, even more than an earthly father, will give us the good things of life which we need and not betray us and send us evil answers which would bring death.

By contrast, if we murmur and discontentedly seek from God items which we do not need—in fact, which may not be good for

us—we may prevail at getting our own way but die in the process. This is what happened to the Israelites during their 40-year journey in the wilderness. God faithfully supplied their need for bread by daily placing on the ground a substance called “*manna*” that was like “*white coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey*” (Exodus 16:31). But the Israelites grew tired of this repetitive diet and grumbled and asked for other food. God heard their murmuring and responded to their request by sending quail that brought death (Numbers 11).

Many of us, in looking back, can find items that we wanted but God graciously denied because they would have injured us. We must be careful what we request from God. We must pray for the needs of ourselves and others and for that which is good and will bring life and not give in to our cravings and pray for that which would let us have our own way but bring death in the process.

***Verse 12 So in everything, do unto others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets.***

In the story recorded in Luke 11 that we discussed above (concerning the man who consistently and repeatedly sought bread from his neighbor late at night), there is another important truth over and above the principle of persistence: he sought the bread to feed an unexpected guest. Similarly, Jesus admonishes us in this twelfth verse of Matthew 7 to do unto others as we would have them do to us. In other words, that which we pray God would give to us we must be willing to share with others. This was the standard which was originally stated in Leviticus 19:18 in the Old Testament and then confirmed by the New Testament, e.g.:

*The commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not covet, and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'.*

Romans 13:9

*The entire Law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'.*

Galatians 5:14

*If you really keep the royal law found in scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right.*

James 2:8

## **Conclusion**

God gives us various avenues to obtain answers and responses to our requests. We are to ask. We are to seek. We are to knock. When we are faithful to lay our needs before Him, He is faithful to supply them. We should be careful to seek only our needs and that which will bring life, rather than giving in to our selfish cravings which may bring us death.

When God pours out His riches and His blessings on us, we must then be careful to share them with others. God is love. In effect, God lets us be a distributor of Himself, as we love others! What a way to spend our life!

## Chapter 12

### *Two Roads, Two Trees and Two Houses*

*... small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it...*

*... every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit...*

*Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock... But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.*

Matthew 7:13-27

We come now to the climax of the Sermon on the Mount. Again, Jesus uses a set of three illustrations to make His final point: life is a series of choices that ultimately lead to eternal life or death for each of us.

### **Two Roads**

**Verses 13-14** *Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

Our first choice is the gate we are going to enter and the road we are going to take through this life and on into eternity. Jesus refers to Himself as this gate:

*‘Therefore, Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture’.*

John 10:7-10

In effect, Jesus invites us to enter the gate He provides and walk with Him on the road to Heaven. And He makes it clear that He is the only way:

*Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'*

John 14:6

He does not promise us this is easy. It is hard and costly. It requires that we die to ourselves if we are to be born again into eternal life:

*I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.*

John 12:24-26

Jesus urges us not to make this decision without first counting the cost:

*Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was unable to finish,'*

Luke 14:26-30

And He makes it clear that the cost is everything we have:

*In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.*

Luke 14:33

The three things we must relinquish are repeated over and over in the Bible. They can be summarized as pleasure, possessions, and position (power). They were offered by Satan to Eve (Genesis 3:6); they were offered to Jesus (Matthew 4:1-11); and they are offered to us (1 John 2:15-16). Jesus discusses them in a series of three teachings recorded in Mark 10 that show how hard, but necessary, it is to give these worldly desires up to God's control if we are to walk with Him:

First, He shows us the danger of seeking our own pleasure by having our own way as He explains that marriage is for life and concludes:

*Therefore what God has joined together,  
let no man separate.*

Mark 10:9

Second, He cautions against the danger of seeking position by admonishing the disciples who were rebuking the people for bringing little children to Jesus so that He might touch them as He says:

*I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom  
of God like a little child will never enter it.*

Mark 10:15

Finally, He warns of the danger to those who love their possessions more than they love Him, as He talks with the rich young man:

*The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said  
again, 'Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!  
It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than  
for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God'.*

(Mark 10:24-25)

Jesus' disciples were concerned (as we are when we hear this story) and they asked (as we do in our own minds), "Who then can

be saved?" Jesus answered them (and us):

*With man this is impossible, but not with God;  
all things are possible with God.*

Mark 10:26-27

Peter understood and told Jesus what we must tell Him if we want to follow Him through the narrow gate and along the hard road of eternal life:

*We have left everything to follow you.*

Mark 10:28

If we want to walk with God, we have to lay down the bulky baggage that would prevent us from entering the narrow gate and trust God to provide for us on the trip as we place ourselves under His protection and authority. We, like Peter, must relinquish everything we have to Jesus if we want to be with Him. But when we do we can also expect the same joy and reward as Jesus promised to Peter:

*'I tell you the truth,' Jesus replied, 'no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.'*

Mark 10:29-31

This is not a majority view. Jesus said that only a few would enter the narrow gate and walk the hard road leading to life. But remember, He also promises it is worth all the cost if we are faithful.

## Two Trees

**Verses 15-23** *Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'*

If we decide to walk with Jesus, we also need to listen carefully to what He says. This requires that we choose the right teachers to instruct us. Don't look for perfect teachers. They aren't available (James 3:2). Anyone who professes to have all the right answers is false. But do look for a heart that loves God, a humble spirit, a giving hand, and a life that leaves good, not bitter, fruit where it has been lived out.

Some teachers put on Godly, sanctimonious appearances, but inside they are evil: wolves in sheep's clothing. Jesus points out that it isn't our appearance but our fruit that reveals who we are. He also makes it clear we will reproduce what we are, not what we outwardly appear to be. Fruit trees produce fruit; thorn bushes and thistles produce thorns and thistles. We can tell both trees and teachers by their fruit. The Bible says

*A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher.*

Luke 6:40

It is imperative that we choose carefully those who will instruct us. Our choice of teachers should not be because they look “religious” but rather because we want to become like the fruit we see flowing from their lives, for that is what will happen.

Jesus also makes it clear we cannot rely on teachers’ words to prove they are Godly individuals. Some religious teachers may claim to have preached God’s word, to have driven out demons, even to have performed miracles, yet their acts and deeds (though sometimes difficult to see at first) will ultimately reveal they never belonged to Jesus. Instead they “*worked on the side of evil*”. As the Apostle John says:

*The man who says, ‘I know him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*

1 John 2:4

Peter describes these false prophets as follows:

*But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.*

2 Peter 2:1-3

Integrity in Christian leaders is one of the most disturbing issues in the world today. Because we often place such a distance between the pulpit and the pew, and particularly when we have massive congregations or TV ministries that may lend themselves more to performances than worship, we may not be aware that we are following false prophets until they fall publicly.

When that happens, Satan has a temporary victory. Those who are considering whether to enter the narrow gate and walk the hard road have an excuse to pass by; those who are attempting to follow Christ through such leaders are hurt and shaken; and Christ and those who follow Him are temporarily stigmatized and maligned.

By contrast, when we listen to and follow those who truly know God, we, too, come to know Him more fully and perfectly. It is crucial, therefore, that we learn how to separate true prophets from false prophets. The Apostle John gives us the solution:

*Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*

1 John 4:1-3

The crucial issue is whether or not teachers openly and clearly proclaim that Jesus is divine. As Paul says:

*For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form...*

Colossians 2:9

If they do, listen and watch to see if their deeds match their words: if so, follow them. If they do not proclaim Jesus as God in the flesh, or if they mouth the right words, but their actions don't match their words—find other teachers! Spend time in the word of God and listening to those who proclaim through their words and their lives that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Then we will become more like God ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:1).

## Two Houses

**Verses 7:24-27** *Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.*

If we enter the narrow gate and walk the hard road with Jesus, and choose teachers who produce good words and good fruit, we still have a third choice to make if we are to have the full life Jesus offers: we must decide whether or not to apply what we learn.

It has been said that we are often tempted to spend our thoughts and energies arguing about the 20 percent of God's word we don't understand instead of applying the 80 percent we do understand. There is much in the Bible none of us will understand until we get to heaven. Then it will be clear. But there is much we do understand now. However, our lives will only be changed by the degree to which we apply what we know. As James puts it:

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.*

*Do what it says.*

James 1:22

God and His Word must be the foundation of our lives if we are to survive all the storms we will face. Just as a house will stand or fall based upon its foundation, so do those of us who want to follow Christ stand or fall in proportion to our application of God's word to our lives. That means we must not only listen to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, but we must also study it and then, by the grace of God, apply it. Then, and only then, can we be and do what God has planned for us.

## **Conclusion**

Life is a series of choices. First we must choose whether to enter the narrow gate and walk with Jesus along the hard road that leads to life or take the wide gate and the easy road that most are taking towards death. Start hard, end easy—Start easy, end hard!

As we walk along the road, we must choose carefully those whom we allow to teach us. Because we will ultimately become like our teachers, we should look carefully at the fruit of their lives, rather than choosing them merely by their appearance and words.

If we decide to walk the road of righteousness with Jesus and carefully choose the teachers we allow to instruct and lead us, we must then choose to apply the principles God gives to us as foundations for our lives.

In essence, we are choosing between life and death. God, in His Sovereignty, calls us, but allows us to follow Him and receive life—or to reject Him and choose death. My earnest plea is that all who read this will “Choose Life!”

## Epilogue

**Verses 28-29** *When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law*

We opened our study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount by asking:

***“Who is This Man?”***

We listed the prophecies He fulfilled and discussed many of those who had believed and concluded:

**Who is Jesus? He is who He said He is: the Messiah, the Son of God, the ‘I AM’ God in the flesh.**

It is my hope and prayer that you, too, after reading and meditating on what He says in this Sermon and other related Scriptures, have reached the same conclusion. If you have already committed your life to Him as Savior and Lord, praise God. If not, I hope you will do so now. Perhaps this simple prayer will help:

*Dear God,*

*I confess that I have sinned and been disobedient to You.*

*I invite You now to enter my heart and life.*

*I accept Jesus as my Savior and my Lord.*

*I acknowledge Your control over all that I am and have.*

*I thank You for forgiving me, and giving me  
the gift of eternal life with You.*

*Now lead me, Lord, by Your Word and Your Spirit  
until I come home to be with You.*

*Amen.”*

Thanks for walking together through Jesus' great Sermon. I pray it will continue to be a guide and a comfort to us all, as we faithfully follow Him throughout our earthly lives and into eternity!

Marvin J. Martin