

A decorative horizontal border with ornate floral and scrollwork patterns at each end. Inside the border, the title is written in a serif font.

The SERMON *on the* MOUNT

R. J. RUSHDOONY



VALLECITO, CALIFORNIA

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Steve & Mary

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O N E

THE BEATITUDES

1. And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:
2. And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,
3. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
5. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
6. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.
7. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
8. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
9. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
10. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matt. 5:1-12)

Our Lord, seeing the multitudes, went up into *the* mountain; this mountain is not identified for us, but our Lord's act does give us an identification. God gave the law through Moses on Mount Sinai (Ex. 19), from Mount Ebal, the curse of God upon disobedience to His law was pronounced, and, from Mount Gerizim, His blessing upon faithfulness was declared (Deut. 27:11–28:68). All three mountains are recalled in the Sermon on the Mount, which begins with the blessings of the Beatitudes, and ends with the judgment and curse upon the house not built upon the Rock, Jesus Christ (Matt. 7:26–27). That accursed and fallen house is unbelieving Judah and Israel.

Jesus came preaching the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:15). He gathered to Himself almost at once twelve disciples; many more followed Him, but He singled out twelve for the inner company. Even as Moses delivered the law to the twelve tribes of Israel, so our Lord renews the law, and develops its inward implications (Matt. 5:21–48) in speaking to the twelve. However, while this renewed covenant, with its renewed affirmation of the law (Matt. 5:17–20) is with the twelve, the multitudes of Judea heard Him at the same time (Matt. 7:28–29). The covenant made by Jesus Christ is *new*, because it is with *a new people*, the new church or assembly of God's first-born (Heb. 12:22–24), but it is the same covenant with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Israel; *the same tree of life is the life of the covenant*, but new branches are grafted into it, and the dead branches are pruned out (Rom. 11:17–24). The tree of life, Jesus Christ, is the center and life of the New Jerusalem, God's Kingdom and city, in every age (Rev. 22:1–2).

This new covenant thus renews the law, because a covenant is a law-treaty, but, at the same time, an act of grace from the superior to the lesser. Because the triune God gives His covenant law to man, *an act of grace*, man must in gratitude and faithfulness keep that law. To depart from the covenant law and grace is to be accursed.

Our Lord in the Beatitudes therefore describes *the covenant man*, the man of grace who is therefore the man of law. These are *the blessed*.

The blessed are first of all defined as “the poor in spirit.” Edgar J. Goodspeed very ably paraphrases this as “those who feel their spiritual need.” These are they who know that they are not autonomous men, not gods (Gen. 3:5), but sinners. It is not the Kingdom of Men they want, but God’s reign and Kingdom. They reject man’s way and the tempter’s plan (Gen. 3:1–5) and want in all of their being the Lord’s reign in their lives, and the triumph of His law-word.

These too are they who *mourn* (*pentheo*) as they see their sin and the world’s apostasy. They rejoice in the Lord’s salvation, but the world’s rebellion against Christ the King is a manifest grief to them. The Kingdom of God or Heaven belongs to all such, and the Lord is their comfort. (Because of the Hebraic fearfulness of any vain use of God’s Name, Matthew substitutes “Heaven” for “God” in speaking of the Kingdom.)

Covenant men are God’s blessed *meeek* (*praos*). In origin, *meeek* referred to a gentled horse, one broken to harness or saddle and made useful. Emphatically, the word *meeek* does not mean mousy or timid before men, but useful to the Lord, and harnessed to His service and law-word. If the word and Spirit of God bind us and guide us, we are the blessed meek. It is the blessed meek who shall inherit the earth (Ps. 37:11, 22) and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. For covenant men to conquer the world for Christ (Matt. 28:18–20), it requires of them this kind of character, *meeekness*, being harnessed to the word of God and tamed and gentled by the Holy Spirit. The Greek word for meek was seen by Pindar as a royal virtue.¹ As against the servile virtues the world requires, the covenant man is marked by royal virtues. The slave has certain virtues which are a product of his servility, whereas covenant man, who is a prophet, priest, and *king*, has royal virtues.

1. M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (MacDill, FL: MacDonald Publishing Company; reprint of 1888 edition), 29.

Covenant men, as kings in Christ, are concerned with righteousness or justice; more, they hunger and thirst for it. These are the men who shall inherit the earth; their hunger and thirst after righteousness is not the desire of a slave for justice, but the active work of a king to establish it. Hence, they shall be filled or satisfied. The word translated as *filled* is *chortazo*, to feed to satiation; it comes from *chortos*, a garden or pasture. There is thus a hint here of entering a garden of satisfaction, a new Garden of Eden, the new creation.

Covenant men, the blessed, are also described as *merciful, eleos*. Mercy is God's prerogative and power, a royal and divine virtue, and we exercise it in faithfulness to His law-word as kings in Christ. Those who proclaim and manifest the grace and mercy of God also receive His mercy.

All such are *the pure in heart*. The word *pure* is *katharos*, as in the English catharsis. They are pure because they have been cleansed by the blood of the Savior, Jesus Christ. Their purity is not of themselves: it is Christ's work. By their sanctification, or growth in holiness, covenant men "put off" the old man, and "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:9–10). "They shall see God." This is the ultimate joy and privilege: it is to see and know the triune God. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," our Lord declares (John 14:9).

These are the peacemakers; they are called the children of God. To be God's children is to be princes, royalty, by the adoption of grace. Peacemaking in antiquity was a royal act of power. The peace of the land depended upon the king. So too the peace of the earth depends upon God's princes of grace. If they are faithful to their royal calling, they proclaim and bring in the King, Jesus Christ, for "this man shall be the peace" (Micah 5:5). By His atonement, He makes peace between God and man, and by His law-word, He sets forth the life of peace in Him.

Covenant man has a reward here and now in Christ, and in the inheritance of the earth, and in heaven (Matt. 5:12). He

is also a part of the wars of the Lord, not as the Lord's enemy, but as the Lord's man. As a result, he will be persecuted for righteousness' sake. He may be killed for the Lord's sake (Rom. 8:36). His enemies, however, earn Hell for their works, but covenant man gains heaven and the new creation.

He may be reviled or abused, and spoken falsely of, for Christ's sake, but he will gain from his Lord the joyful word, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant... enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matt. 25:21). Therefore, even under persecution, he must "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad" (Matt. 5:12).

Not every believer is persecuted, but every true believer is *blessed*. Our Lord does not conceal the fact of the battle, nor the cost thereof, but the overriding and dominating pronouncement is summed up in the word *blessed*.

To depart from God's covenant grace and law is to be accursed; to be faithful is to be blessed. Hence, these verses are called the beatitudes. A *beatitude* is supreme blessedness, felicity, or happiness. Failure to stress this fact is to pervert Scripture. The covenant is a blessing; the law is a blessing; grace is a blessing; the Lord's salvation is a blessing. True, in a world of sin, the bearers of God's grace will suffer from the hostilities of the world against God, but our Lord declares plainly: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

T W O

BLESSED

The Beatitudes again and again declare who are the *blessed* of the Lord. It is important, therefore, to know what this word means. The word used in the Sermon on the Mount is the Greek *makarios*; this word, however, is not used in a Greek sense, but in terms of its Old Testament and Hebrew meaning. Thus, in Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth,” our Lord echoes two verses from the Psalms:

But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. (Ps. 37:11)

For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off. (Ps. 37:22)

The Hebrew word used in Psalm 37:22 is *barak*, to kneel. To kneel is to adore and worship, so that, when man blesses God, as in Psalm 103, he is rendering to God all his life, service, and substance. He declares himself to be God’s possession. When a serf knelt before a feudal lord, he acknowledged himself to be the lord’s man. To bless God is an even more total commitment and surrender.

For God to bless man means that God bends down in His grace and mercy to aid man; it is a sovereign condescension on God’s part.

Another word in the Hebrew is *esher*, happy, as used in Psalm 1:1–2, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” The way of faithful obedience is the way of happiness. This meaning is also present in the New Testament usage.

These Old Testament meanings were carried over into the New Testament usage and added to the Greek word and its meaning. *Makarios* in its Greek meaning referred to material prosperity. This emphasis is present in the Old Testament usage: the blessed meek inherit the earth. There is, however, an important difference. The Biblical blessedness is a material prosperity, which is God’s gracious gift to the holy and righteous man or people. For the Greeks, the gods were blessed, not only because, as gods, they had everything, but also because they were above and beyond the law. Greek blessedness was thus antinomian. The gods had the powers of deity but these powers included the ability to live in “freedom” from moral law.

There was another and a pessimistic aspect to the Greek idea of blessedness. “Only the dead could be called truly blessed.”¹ This did not mean that death was to be desired, for the Greeks called the spirits of the dead “shades.” Their life was seen as pale and meaningless; they were barely existing. Death was called “blessed” only because life was seen as misery. Sophocles, in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, held that we can call no man happy until he dies.

Later, with the Greek philosophers, a moral element came into the word “blessed.” However, this moral element was not moral in the Biblical sense: it had little to do with holiness and righteousness, nor did it show an awareness of the doctrine of sin. The problem, as the Greek philosophers saw it, was not sin against God, but ignorance of ideas; hence happiness was a

1. M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. I (MacDill, Florida: MacDonald Publishing Company, 1888 edition, reprinted), 27.

consequence of knowledge. This limited true happiness to the elite, to a very few.²

The New Testament writers chose *makarios*, because God declares blessedness or material prosperity to be His grace to those who kneel before Him, i.e., surrender their lives and possessions to His service. They by-passed another Greek word for happiness, *eudaimonia*, because it meant under the protection of a good genius or demon.³ This word placed blessing outside the moral sphere and made it the protection and care of someone other than the sovereign God. The demons were not sovereign, only powerful in limited ways.

Who then are the blessed? They are the poor in spirit, those who feel their spiritual need; they that mourn, that weep over their sins, or over their persecution for the Lord's sake; the meek, or the tamed of God, those who are broken to His harness; they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, are merciful, pure in heart, and are Christ's peacemakers, and for this are reviled and persecuted. All such can "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. 5:12). Thus, *first*, the blessed receive a reward, the earth, and also a reward in heaven. This blessing is both material possessions and also great happiness. *Second*, the blessed are those who kneel before God, i.e., surrender all their possessions and lives to Him as absolute Lord. They are the meek, the tamed of God, those who respond and are governed by His word. *Third*, they are the poor in spirit, who know their spiritual need and have forsaken the fallen man's claim to be autonomous and one's own god (Gen. 3:5).

Fourth, *makarios*, the blessed, in Greek are the gods; they enjoy the highest state of happiness and freedom; this blessedness is, however, in terms of antinomianism, in the imagined fulfillment of Genesis 3:5. This exalted estate, our Lord declares, belongs, not to the mythical gods, but to all faithful covenant men. As against the antinomianism of the gods, the

2. *Ibid.*, 28.

3. *Idem.*

blessed of Christ do not set aside the law of God, because Christ comes, not as the destroyer of the law, but as the one who puts it into force (Matt. 5:17–20; Luke 16:17).

Fifth, our Lord makes very clear that happiness, blessedness, prosperity, and freedom are to be found in what to the world is the negation of blessedness. His beatitudes go contrary to the faith of fallen man. As Scott pointed out:

All men seek happiness: but none, except those who are taught by the Spirit of God according to his word, know in what it consists, or how it may be obtained and enjoyed. The beatitudes may therefore be considered as the Christian paradoxes: for they place happiness in such dispositions of mind, and in such circumstances, as men generally deem incompatible with it. All the declarations of scripture, shewing who are the blessed, or happy, have reference to our state and character as sinners: but some point out these benefits, by which we become entitled to happiness; and others those dispositions, or that conduct, which are conducive to the enjoyment of it.⁴

It should be noted that these paradoxes have reference to the Lord. It is not enough to *mourn* in a general sense; the world is full of mourning. It is mourning *before God* and in terms of our relationship to Him. Thus, as Scott pointed out, the meekness spoken of in the Beatitude is *not a constitutional* meekness but a *gracious* one.⁵ This means that our meekness comes, not because we are broken and fearful before men, but because we have been broken by God's grace to our self-will and are readily governed by His will.

Sixth, as Whedon pointed out, "This word *blessed* conveys not an opinion or a prayer, as human benedictions do, but a sentence or a decree."⁶ Precisely. This is not a pious wish or hope, nor simply an ideal. It is the authoritative decree from

4. Thomas Scott, *The Holy Bible with Explanatory Notes, etc.*, vol. V (Boston, MA: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1830 edition), 30.

5. *Ibid.*, V, 31.

6. D.D. Whedon, *A Commentary on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark* (New York, NY: Carlton and Porter, 1860), 71.

the King of creation: it is a statement of reality. When our Lord says, Blessed are all these whom I declare blessed, He is declaring also, Cursed are all others (Deut. 28). There is no other way to happiness or blessing. His word is absolute and binding.

Seventh, and finally, this blessedness is not a promise concerning the future but a *present* fact. Thomas stated it clearly:

“Blessed *are*,” says Christ; not blessed shall be. He who has these dispositions is blessed. The dispositions are blessedness, and as the dispositions increase in purity and strength, the blessedness will heighten and expand. We are not to look to any *distant* locality or onward period to get happiness, but to the state of the heart.⁷

We must not forget, as Thomas does, the Old Testament basis of the blessed. The word *barak* is used in Deuteronomy 28:3–6 for very material blessings. The Lord is God over all creation. His blessings cannot be limited to one sphere alone: they are total.

It is clear that the word *blessed* has lost much of its original force. It is important to understand the reasons for this. Two related causes can be cited as responsible for this weakening and alteration of meaning. These are, *first*, sin, and, *second*, the Hellenic or Greek influence on the church. Since the Hellenic influence was itself a form of sin, Greek thought resting on the concept of autonomous man (Gen. 3:5), the two are very clearly related.

For the Greeks, blessedness was antinomian. The gods were blessed because they were beyond the law; the law in effect knelt and made way for them to do as they pleased. To be blessed for the Greeks was thus to be *free from the law*. Now, for Paul, we are in Christ free from the law only as a death penalty against us. We are made “free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2), from the indictment and penalty which

7. David Thomas, *The Gospel of St. Matthew: An Expository and Homiletic Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1956, reprint of 1873 edition), 32.

Christ assumes in His death for us. The law could not do this; it could not produce righteousness in us: it sentenced us. The weakness of our human nature because of the fall made impossible our ability to keep the law. Now we are able in Christ to meet the law's requirements, as long as we live in the Spirit, not according to the dictates of the old man in us (Rom. 8:4).⁸ It is this faithfulness which is a basic part of our blessedness.

All too soon, the Hellenic antinomianism asserted itself. Churchmen have been ready to condemn its extreme manifestations, as in the Jesuit Order, while failing to see that the Jesuits have simply applied antinomianism more systematically than most.

A classic statement of the Jesuit development is Pascal's *The Provincial Letters*. Pascal indicted the Jesuits for their trifling with Scripture. The doctrine of equivocation and of mental reservation made lying no longer a lie, nor perjury any longer perjury.⁹ Other aspects of Scripture were disposed of as cultural conditions which no longer apply to us. Thus, the Biblical requirement of modest apparel in women (1 Timothy 2:9; 1 Peter 3:3) was set aside as no longer applicable: "These passages of Scripture were only precepts applying to women in those days, so that they should offer pagans an edifying example by their modesty."¹⁰ It is hypocrisy for Reformed and Arminian churchmen to condemn the Jesuits when they are often even more radical in setting aside the law in the name of grace as a part of Gospel blessedness.

The Jesuits, Pascal pointed out, held that the believer has a "dispensation" from law by God's grace in Christ. "The blood of Christ," they held, is the "price" of our freedom. Pascal cited Father Pintereau's antinomian doctrine:

8. See J.B. Phillips' rendering of Romans 8:2-4.

9. A. J. Krailsheimer, translator with introduction, *Pascal: The Provincial Letters* (Hammondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1967), 140 ff.

10. *Ibid.*, 143.

You will find there [in the doctrine of the blood –RJR] that this dispensation from the *tiresome* obligation of loving God is the privilege of the Evangelical over the Judaic law. “It was reasonable,” he says, “that in the law of grace of the New Testament, God should remove the tiresome and difficult obligation, which existed in the law of rigour, of performing an act of perfect contrition in order to be justified; and that he should institute the sacraments to make good the deficiency and promote an easier disposition. Otherwise, indeed, Christians, who are the children, would not find it any easier to win back the favour of their Father than the Jews, who were slaves, to obtain mercy from their Lord.”¹¹

Pascal said that all who held this doctrine became accomplices to all sin in terms of Romans 1:32, “Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.” Indeed, Pascal held, such antinomianism goes further than sinning: it *justifies* sin.

But you go even further, and the liberty you have taken to shake the most sacred rules of Christian conduct does not stop short of the total overthrow of the love of God. You break “the great commandment on which hang all the law and the prophets,” you attack piety in its heart; you take away the spirit that gives it life; you say that the love of God is not necessary to salvation; and you even go so far as to claim that “this dispensation from loving God is the advantage that Christ brought to the world.” This is the height of impiety. The price of Christ’s blood shall be to win for us the dispensation from loving him; but “since God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” the world, redeemed by him, shall be exempted from loving him! Strange theology for our times!... This is the mystery of iniquity accomplished.¹²

The Jesuits were more honest than modern “Evangelical” antinomians; they logically held that, because to love God is to

11. *Ibid.*, 160-61.

12. *Ibid.*, 161-62.

keep His commandments (John 14:15), to be freed from the law or commandments is to be freed from the need to love God. How much more flagrant the twentieth century antinomians have become, as Arend J. ten Pas has shown us.¹³

We have cited Deuteronomy 28 and Psalm 1; these texts make clear that *the blessed* delight in God's law; it is their way of life. Matthew 5:2–20 makes clear the same fact, and then our Lord goes on to set forth the fullness of the application of the law: it governs our very thoughts and feelings (Matt. 5:21ff). Let the modern Protestant Jesuits take note.

13. See Arend J. ten Pas, *The Lordship of Christ* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1978).

T H R E E

THE POOR

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:3)

The word for poor is here *ptochos*; it comes from a root, *pte*, meaning crouched together and is related to words meaning afraid and timid. As a noun, it was used in classical Greek for a beggar.

In the Septuagint, *ptochos* is used in a sense similar to another Greek word for poor, *penes*, related to *ponos*, burden, trouble. The Septuagint usage, about one hundred times, of *ptochos* carries the meaning of *penes*. The Old Testament sees the poor as the oppressed, because, when it concerns itself with the poor, it is the godly and oppressed poor of the covenant. It does not concern itself with the evil or foolish poor.

If God's covenant law is kept in faithfulness, poverty will be abolished. The Berkeley Version of Deuteronomy 15:4–5 reads:

4. However, there should be no poor among you, for the LORD your God will abundantly bless you in the land He will give you to possess as a heritage,
5. If you listen to the LORD your God and rightly observe all these commandments which today I am enjoining upon you.

However, the Lord, knowing the apostate heart of the people, declared also that “the poor shall never cease out of the land;” hence, the faithful were commanded to be ready to help their brother in his need (Deut. 15:11). While poverty exists, the bondservant was to be freed in the Sabbatical year (Ex. 21:2). The poor must not be exploited or oppressed (Ex. 22:22–27). During the Sabbatical year, the ground is to be fallowed and its produce belongs to the poor (Ex. 23:10–11). The law must not be used to oppress the covenant poor (Ex. 23:6ff). Israelites were all once poor in Egypt, and the Lord freed them; He is the protector of the covenant poor (Ex. 22:21, 27; Ex. 23:6ff., 9). Other texts command justice for all other peoples, including the poor; these texts have a covenant reference. The significant fact is that these poor are called *brothers*. From the earliest records, and from the beginnings of the synagogue, we find in Israel, except during great decadence, a remarkable care for the poor.

The poor are seen as the oppressed, burdened as Israel was in Egypt (Ex. 22:21; 23:9). In later Hebrew writings, such as the *Psalms of Solomon*, the poor are those whom God rescues and delivers; they are the oppressed righteous ones.¹

In Matthew 5:3, “‘the poor in spirit’ brings out the Old Testament and Jewish background of those who in affliction have confidence only in God.”² In Luke 6:17–49, we have much of the same material as in the Sermon on the Mount repeated, this time, we are very pointedly told, “in the plain” (Luke 6:17). The emphasis now differs. The poor, the hungry, the mourners, and the hated are so because of their discipleship. Woes are then pronounced on the rich who will sacrifice nothing for Christ’s sake (Luke 6:24ff), because they are self-sufficient and feel no need. The poor are thus contrasted with the rich as those who are not self-sufficient but are instead under Christ’s rule and grace.

1. H. H. Esser, “Poor,” in Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967, 1976), 820–24.)

2. *Ibid.*, 824.

Thus, Edgar J. Goodspeed's paraphrase of Matthew 5:3 is true to the meaning of the text: "Blessed are those who feel their spiritual need, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them!"³

3. Edgar J. Goodspeed, translator, *The New Testament: An American Translation* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1923, 1935).

F O U R

THE MOURNERS

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
(Matt. 5:4)

In a fallen world, where humanism and statism prevail, the covenant people in Christ will mourn as they see the evil wrought by sin, and its proliferating depredations. What the ungodly seek to do is to plunder the Kingdom of God, and to pillage the possessions of Christ's people. The word of our Lord and King assures us: we shall be comforted. The comfort of a king is deliverance and victory. In His sermon on the plain, our Lord is even more explicit: "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh" (Luke 6:21).

This is a promise stated repeatedly in Scripture. Some of the key texts are:

To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. (Isa. 61:2-3)

Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. (John 16:20)

And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation. (2 Cor. 1:7)

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (Rev. 21:4)

If we suffer and mourn for His sake, we shall be also blessed and joyful because of His deliverance. No victory is possible against God: those who dream of such a conclusion to their conspiracy of sin shall be confounded.

Indeed, Christ's people suffer, are oppressed, and mourn. They have the assurance, however, that "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2:4). We are summoned to join in this heavenly laughter, and our Lord assures us that we shall be comforted. Moreover, "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh" (Luke 6:21).

F I V E

THE MEEK

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
(Matt. 5:5)

The word translated as meek is *praos*. When we look at the origins of this word in classical Greek, we find it used, as in Pindar and Xenophon, in the sense of making mild, taming, bridling. It was used of gentling a horse, or breaking him to harness and bridle. If we forget this fact, we lose the meaning of the word. The meek are not the impotent, nor are they the timid and mousy ones. They are the strong ones who have been broken to harness, gentled by the Lord and His Spirit, and made fit for the Lord's use.

The word meek is the opposite of unbridled anger and passion; it refers to the bridled man.

It is the purpose of the law-word of God, *and of the Holy Spirit*, to bridle a man. The untamed and evil nature of unregenerate man leads to "the works of the flesh," i.e., of fallen human nature (Gal. 5:19–21). The fruit of the Spirit includes, among other things, meekness (*praotes*), the humbling and taming work of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).

It is the tamed of God who shall inherit the earth. They have both faith and stability. (It was Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob, who was denied the inheritance of the firstborn,

because he was as “unstable as water,” Genesis 49:4.) To “inherit the earth” must be taken seriously and literally. Only those who are harnessed by God’s Spirit to His law-word have the stable, disciplined, and Spirit-governed capacity to rule the earth. The calling of Christ’s saints is to judge or govern the earth. The word *judge* is used in the Old Testament sense of *to govern*, as in the Book of Judges.

We are made meek by the Spirit, and broken to harness, in order to be usable by Him, and to rule in Him.

S I X

THOSE HUNGRY AND THIRSTY FOR JUSTICE

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. (Matt. 5:6)

Righteousness is the same word as justice; thus, it is the desire for righteousness or *justice* which our Lord speaks of here.

Justice must be the desire of God's covenant people. *To despise God's law is to despise righteousness or justice.* Scripture speaks of God's judgment on a rebellious people, on all iniquity. Of all such, the Lord says:

12. Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not.

13. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed. (Isa. 65:12–13)

A society that moves in terms of self-interest rather than justice is under God's judgment; even more so, a society that moves in terms of deliberate injustices is certain of radical condemnation and collapse.

God summons men to His covenant justice or righteousness. Justice cannot be found, however much men may seek it, apart from the sovereign God and His law. The summons therefore declares:

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. (Isa. 55:1)

The people of salvation are also the people of justice; to separate salvation and righteousness is untenable and evil.

To be the blessed of the Lord means that we hunger and thirst after justice. The image is of intense physical craving, of a passion for righteousness or justice which consumes our being. Apart from justice, God's justice, for there is none other, we are starved and parched. Only His justice can fill and satisfy us. The promise is that we "shall be filled."

S E V E N

THE MERCIFUL

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
(Matt. 5:7)

The merciful (*eleemon*) are those who show mercy in all their being. The word comes from mercy (*eleos*), meaning compassion, or pity, and it is closely related to grace. This Greek word, however, has a very different content in the New Testament. It is a word (*eleos*) used almost 400 times in the Septuagint, almost every time to translate the Hebrew *hesed*. *Hesed* (*Kheh'sed*) means piety, beauty, favor, loving-kindness, mercy, pity, and more. H. H. Esser is to the point: "These Hebrew concepts betray a completely different background of thought from the predominantly psychological one in Greek. They are based on legal concepts."¹ It has reference to covenant behavior.

It is essentially an attribute of our covenant God; when we manifest mercy, we are manifesting an aspect of the grace and law of the covenant. "As a human quality *hesed* represents reciprocal kindness or 'loyal kindness.'"² Lester J. Kuyper has pointed out that this mercy is not an outburst of unlooked-for

1. H. H. Esser, "Mercy," in Colin Brown, ed., *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967, 1976), 448.

2. Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the New Testament* (Cincinnati, OH: The Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), 2.

mercy, nor an arbitrary exercise, as Pilate's release of Barabbas, but an act within a covenant fellowship or family circle. Covenant sanctification means separation for faithful and loyal service. It is inseparable from grace and truth.³

E. M. Good defined *hesed* as kindness, loyalty (Prov. 3:3; Prov. 19:22). The word is not humanistic; it is theological and God-centered, although it is socially manifested. It has reference to covenant relationships of man to man; friend to friend; people and leader; slaves and masters; neighbor to neighbor; of covenant man to strangers, the poor, and the unfortunate. Biblical society is a covenantal society, and men live in covenant one with another. They do not, like Pilate, wash their hands of responsibility one to another. The Biblical commandment to love one another is set in the context of a covenant relationship and mercy.⁴

The modern definition of mercy is in effect to show humanity; the merciful are humanitarians. This is in direct contradiction to the Biblical meaning. The merciful are the holy ones; a merciful man is a covenant man. At this point, E. R. Achtmeier, who at times reflects a humanistic emphasis, is correct in stating, "Mercy given to man was homage rendered to the Lord."⁵ It was and is grace shown by those who have received grace, and mercy shown by those who have received mercy. Mercy in this sense is the manifestation of covenant faith and life.

In paganism, man's relationship with the gods is transactional; man buys services, protection, and alliance in return for certain considerations. The contract is between a god and a man or a group of men for the mutual exchange of services. Because the God of Scripture enters into a covenant of total grace with man, the covenant is both grace and *mercy*. The law of the covenant is totally God's law, because all the initiative and grace in the covenant come from God. *For man to add to*

3. *Ibid.*, 29–32.

4. E. M. Good, "Love in the O.T.," in George A. Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, K-Q* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1962), 166.

5. E.R. Achtmeier, "Mercy," in *Ibid.*, 353.

the law is to insist that he can contribute in some creative sense to the covenant peace. This is blasphemy. Man is summoned to obedience, or faithfulness. As God is merciful to him, he must be merciful to others. Hence, our Lord says, it is the merciful who gain mercy (Matt. 5:7). They gain mercy in judgment; they manifest that they are truly of the covenant, not merely outwardly so. Having received grace, they live in grace and proclaim the message of sovereign grace. As Maclaren saw it,

Our exercise of mercy is the condition of our receiving it. On the whole, the world gives us back, as a mirror does, the reflection of our own faces; and merciful men generally get what they give. But that is a law with many exceptions, and Jesus means more than that. Merciful men get mercy from God—not, of course, that we deserve mercy by being merciful. That is a contradiction in terms; for mercy is precisely that which we do not deserve. The place of mercy in this series shows that Jesus regarded it as the consequence, not the cause, of our experience of God's mercy. But he teaches over and over again that a hard unmerciful heart forfeits the divine mercy.⁶

In his analysis of *hesed* as human conduct, Glueck showed its meaning to be an attitude or activity “received or shown only by those among whom a definite relationship exists.” He saw *hesed* existing between six kinds of relationships:

1. Relatives by blood or marriage, or by tribe or clan
2. Host and guest
3. Allies and their relatives
4. Friends
5. Ruler and subject
6. Those who render aid, and the persons whom the aid places under obligation.⁷

In all these situations, there is a mutuality of rights and duties and a governing concept of reciprocity. It is in this sense that

6. Alexander Maclaren, *A Garland of Gladness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1945), 20.

7. Glueck, *op.cit.*, 37.

Abraham uses *hesed* in Genesis 20:13, “This is thy kindness (*hesed*) which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He is my brother.” *Loyalty and duty* are involved in mercy. The same word appears in Ruth 3:10, when Boaz praises Ruth for her covenant loyalty in fulfilling the obligations of a Hebrew widow: “Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou has shewed more *kindness* in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.”⁸

Hesed or mercy is basic to all covenants, human and divine. Because it is covenantal, mercy is not antinomian. It is an aspect of a legal tie. To say so is to strike modern man as being cold and unloving. Such a view of law is intensely anti-Biblical and thoroughly modern. For us, *the law* means a cold, impersonal, and power-hungry state. It means taxation, oppression, and bureaucratic nightmares. In terms of Scripture, this is not so. Only for the ungodly, those in rebellion against God, and with the law setting forth a death sentence against them, is law a hostile fact. For Scripture, law is *torah*, instruction, *God’s* instruction. It is the mark of a covenant, of a relationship of love. Law has reference to God and the family, to friends, relatives, and fellow believers. It is an aspect of the tie that binds our hearts in love.

An aspect of that covenant is mercy. It is the kindness, reciprocal obligation, and love which family members show one to another. Where outsiders are concerned, it manifests our own covenant life: we witness to the covenant grace, law, and life by our mercy. Because God is merciful to His covenant people, we witness to our covenant Lord by our mercy. Because of our covenant faithfulness, we can appeal to God for His covenant mercy (Nehemiah 13:22). Mercy rests in grace. Only those who have received grace can manifest covenantal mercies to others.

8. *Ibid.*, 37–55.

E I G H T

THE VISION OF GOD

When our Lord says, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8), it is important for us to know what He means by *pure*. There are three words used in the Greek New Testament which are translated as *pure*. The first is *hagnos*, as in Paul’s words to Timothy: “Keep thyself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22). The word is related to *hagios*, holy, and it has the same connotation. To be pure in this sense is to be holy, to be set apart from sin and the contamination of sin. This is not the usage in this Beatitude, although it is an important word in the New Testament.

Second, *pure* is a translation of *heilikrines*, as in 2 Peter 3:1: “This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.” This word means an unalloyed, unmixed moral character. It has reference to integrity. This is not the word used in the Beatitude.

Third, in 1 Timothy 1:5, we read, “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.” The word is *katharos*, cleansed, and it is used in 1 Tim. 3:9; Titus 1:15; 2 Tim. 1:3, 2:22; Hebrews 10:22; James 1:27; 1 Peter 1:22; Rev. 15:6, 21:18, and 22:1. It is also the word used in Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart.”

Katharos is in the English as catharsis; it means a radical purging or cleansing. In the Greek, it means both physical and moral cleansing or purity. Both meanings were common in Greek usage. The Septuagint used *katharos* for both ritual purity and moral purity. To be *impure* in the Old Testament is to be *unclean*. Impurity is thus a matter of morality, health, and diet (unclean meats). The clean or pure are those who are cleansed in all their being. Purity and purification mean a moral and physical cleansing. Very clearly, however, the cleansing could not be merely physical. Our Lord attacks this superficial view of purity:

25. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

26. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.

27. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. (Matt. 23:25–27)

Our Lord requires a total purity; hypocrisy presents a clean exterior as a cover for an unclean interior. He therefore ate with publicans and sinners, who were regarded as unclean, because with them an inner cleansing was at work, and a true purity in view (Mark 2:13–17). The Pharisees had made ceremonial and outward cleansing more important than an inner cleansing. Paul contrasts the circumcision of the heart with the merely outer circumcision in Phil. 3:3 and Col. 2:11; Moses long before called for the circumcision of the heart in Deut. 10:16 and 30:6.

This purification or cleansing is only possible for man by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7, 9). Our Lord says that it is His sovereign word which cleanses us (John 15:3); as king and priest, He has the power to make us whole and to pronounce the word of absolution. This purification is only possible through His blood, and *forgiveness* is linked to this act of

cleansing (Heb. 9:22). In its several forms as a verb, *katharos* is very common to the New Testament.

Both the Old and New Testaments see several sins as particularly serious forms of impurity. The reason for this is that, in a radical way, sexual sins defile both the mind and the body, whereas true sexual virtue means a cleansing of both mind and body in terms of faithfulness to God and His covenant law-word.

Returning to the Beatitude, when our Lord says, “Blessed are the pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8), He is saying that all of those who, in the heart of their being, at the core and in the manifestation of their life are cleansed shall see God because they are *blessed*. Two things are important here. *First*, they are blessed. They have knelt and submitted themselves totally to God; they are faithful and obedient to Him, because they have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Purity in any other form is a myth, as far as man is concerned. The inscription on the temple of Asclepius at Epidauros read: “Let only the pure cross the threshold of the fragrant temple: and no one is pure, save he who has holy thoughts.”¹ But what fallen man can be pure in heart? Maclaren rightly called attention to the futility of all non-Christian appeals for purity: “What would be the use of saying to a man lying on a battlefield sore wounded, and with both legs shot off, ‘If you will only get up and run, you will be safe?’”²

Purity comes only when we are blessed of God, and we in turn bless Him; we bow before Him, we prostrate ourselves at His presence, in total submission.

Second, “they shall see God.” How shall a man see God? The vision of God is the vision of the Son of God. According to John 14:8–9,

1. Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971, 1979), 103.

2. Alexander Maclaren, *A Garland of Gladness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1945), 95.

8. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

9. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?

We are also told, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). The *direct* vision of God has long been a mystical quest and pretension. The idea of such a vision is a presumptuous and staggering one. God, who is greater than all creation, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal, is also declared by His own word to be *invisible*. According to Colossians 1:15, He is “the invisible God.” He is “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God” (1 Tim. 1:17). Man is a creature, and he is not able to comprehend nor to see, with his limited abilities, God in Himself.

The pure in heart, however, shall see God, in the only way possible for man the creature: they shall see and know God incarnate, Jesus Christ. Philip had not yet seen the Father because he had not yet “known” Jesus Christ. The vision of Christ is the vision of the Father.

The vision of God thus begins with knowing Jesus Christ. To know Him means *first* of all to be known by Him. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16). We know and love Him, because He first knew and loved us (1 John 4:19).

Second, to know Him is to bear fruit unto Him. Hence the very practical emphasis of the Sermon on the Mount is on results, on fruit-bearing (Matt. 7:16–23). The vision of God requires the service of God according to His law-word. We know those who belong to the Lord by their works (James 2:26), and those who manifest *faithfulness* manifest also their vision of God.

Third, those who have the vision of God talk to the Father; they “ask of the Father.” If we do not see God, we do not talk to Him; if God is only an idea to us, or some distant Being, we do not talk to Him. A true prayer life is evidence of the vision of God.

N I N E

THE PEACEMAKERS

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matt. 5:9)

Who are these blessed peacemakers? The word *peacemaker* is in the Greek *eirenopoios*, from *eirene*, peace, and *poieo*, to make. Of *eirene*, peace, we are told, “Peace is the state of law and order which gives rise to the blessings of prosperity.”¹

Eirene is used in the Septuagint to translate *salom* or *shalom*, which means peace in the sense of the well-being and order of the covenant community. God alone is the author of this peace. *Eirene* appears in John 14:27, where our Lord declares, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” In Isaiah 45:7, God declares, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.” *I make peace* in the Septuagint uses *poieo*, make, and *eirene*, peace. God identifies Himself as the author of peace, the source of all true law and order. For Jesus to declare Himself as the source of peace meant to identify Himself as God incarnate.

1. Colin Brown, ed., *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 776.

Shalom, peace in the Old Testament, means salvation and well-being in the fullest sense; it means bodily health, prosperity, salvation, redemption, mental health and contentedness, and more. This peace is the meaning of the priestly benediction:

24. The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:
25. The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:
26. The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)

This peace means much more than the absence of war. It is that state of order and law which comes from an obedience to God's covenant law. The peacemakers are those who establish the blessed state described in Deuteronomy 28:1-14:

1. And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth:
2. And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.
3. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field.
4. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep.
5. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store.
6. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.
7. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.
8. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

9. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways.

10. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee.

11. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee.

12. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow.

13. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them:

14. And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

This blessed peace is God's covenant grace to His faithful people. It is an aspect of perfection, maturity, or fullness in this world.

Peace is thus the order which God ordains and which man can only have on God's terms, faithfulness to His covenant law. By his sin and fall, man has no peace with God. Jesus Christ comes to make reconciliation with God. As Paul makes clear, Jesus Christ is our peace with God:

14. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

15. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

16. And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

17. And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

18. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. (Eph. 2:14–18)

Christ our peace, and our peacemaker with God, now sends us out to establish His peace over all the earth. This peace is wholeness for both man and the world (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15); it means a new life. The commandment is to “have peace one with another” (Mark 9:50), to live in terms of God’s law, and to establish His order among ourselves (2 Cor. 13:11). With respect to the ungodly, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom. 12:18), but not ever at the price of God’s peace. The Kingdom of God is “righteousness (or, justice) and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17). The church is called to God’s peace (1 Cor. 7:15; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 2; etc.). Peace is the gift of God, of Christ, and also of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22).²

Peace is also associated with hope, joy, and power in Romans 15:13.

The great peacemaker is Jesus Christ (Col. 1:20); He makes peace with God for us. Our duty is to make peace here on earth.

Fallen man, by seeking to establish the Kingdom of Man, Babel, Babylon the Great, seeks peace, i.e., law, order, health, and prosperity, on his own terms, in defiance of God. He is thus in reality not a peacemaker but a discord-maker, and a lover of death (Prov. 8:36). No man can be a peacemaker in Christ’s sense who is not actively engaged in working for God’s order, His righteousness or justice, and the triumph of His Kingdom. The very word *peace* prohibits us from limiting its meaning to a spiritual concern. The very fact of the atonement requires us to be the people of God’s total peace. Because God is totally God, and the Creator of all things, His holy order must be established by us over this fallen and rebellious world in every area possible. No man can be a peacemaker and be an antinomian, or a “spiritual” Christian who despises the problems of this world as irrelevant.

2. *Ibid.*, II, 781–82.

The peacemakers are those who shall be “called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9). Those who know the atonement know peace: they alone can be peacemakers, because they are by the adoption of grace the children of God. To be born again of the Father is to be His son by grace; having His Spirit, we do His will. This will of the Father requires us to be peacemakers and to establish God’s law and His order wherever we are. We bring His law-peace in our lives through Christ, in our homes, and into our callings.

The *first* aspect of this peacemaking is to reconcile men to God through Jesus Christ. The *second* aspect is to apply God’s word for the development of this peace to every area of life and thought. His law is the means to peace. To be faithful, and to avoid and eschew adultery, for example, is a step towards peace in marriage, as are other aspects of God’s word concerning sexuality and marriage.

Peacemakers are not humanistic pacifists. As Maclaren said,

And there are other people who love peace, and seek after it in the cowardly fashion of letting things alone; whose “peace-making” has no nobler source than hatred of trouble, and a wish to let sleeping dogs lie. These, instead of being peacemakers, are war-makers, for they are laying up materials for a tremendous explosion some day.

But it is a very different temper that Jesus Christ has in view here... No man can bring to others that which he does not possess.³

There is no blessing on those who call it peace and surrender to evil.

3. Alexander Maclaren, *A Garland of Gladness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1945), 110–11.

T E N

THE PERSECUTED AND THE REVILED

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

11. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matt. 5:10–12)

The persecuted are the *pursued* in the Greek, and the word revile means to reproach, upbraid. Because the world is at war with God, it seeks to pursue and hunt down all who stand for God's justice or righteousness. The law of God condemns the world; therefore, the world seeks to suppress that law, and to persecute all who uphold it.

Because they represent Christ in this world, His covenant people are reviled. They are reproached and upbraided for their faith: they are called killjoys, enemies of mankind, despisers of human rights, and more. Fallen man affirms these imagined rights against the claims of God's law.

However, such a stand against the world has its blessings. It is blessed with membership in God's Kingdom. Moreover, it gives us great reward in heaven.

We are also told to *rejoice*, and to be “exceeding glad,” because we are thereby in the company of the prophets of old. We are witnesses to God and His salvation, grace, and justice.

We have this reward if our persecution and reviling is for Christ’s sake, not because of ourselves. Our own pride, egoism, and stupidities can bring on troubles, which we are prone to say are for Christ’s sake. We must be sure that the reproach is Christ, not ourselves.

There are two reasons cited for rejoicing in this persecution which brings on blessings. *First*, it is for righteousness’ or justice’s sake. It is for the sake of justice. It is because we stand faithfully in terms of God’s entire law-word (Matt. 4:4; 5:17–20). *Second*, it is for Christ’s sake.

Then indeed we are blessed, and we can *rejoice*.

E L E V E N

SALT, LIGHT, AND LAW

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

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

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

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

17. Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

18. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

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

20. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:13–20)

Despite its professed cynicism, the world has a fondness for sweetness and light. It seeks to avoid problems, responsibilities, and conflicts. Its concept of “light” is such a trouble-free life. Our Lord gives no place to such thinking: He never tells us, Ye are the sugar or sweetness of the world. On the contrary, we are called to be the salt of the earth. Some modern churchmen, to avoid the force of this word, try to tell us that the purpose of salt is flavor. Salt is indeed primarily used for flavoring by contemporary man, but its basic use in antiquity and until the present has been as the principal agent of preserving foods. Some, like myself, can recall the rural years before electricity. Meats were kept for summer use in a large crock; fish, for example, were cleaned and packed inside and out with rock salt, and then covered with water. Beef and venison were cut into small chunks or thin sheets and similarly packed in brine. When the crock was emptied of meat (or cheese), the remaining brine was emptied on to a pathway or dirt road, “to be trodden under foot of men.”

The meaning of salt here is thus preservation. A sinful and corrupt world will rapidly decay and collapse unless the Christian element therein acts as the agent of preservation. Apart from them, society and the state are readily and quickly corrupt; only the Christians can prevent the radical deterioration of society and civil government. If they fail to work as the preserving agent, the Lord decrees that they shall “be trodden under foot of men.” Christians must either preserve their society from destruction or become themselves a particular target of destruction.

Christians, however, are more than a preserving agent: they are “the light of the world.” Proverbs 4:18 tells us that “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day,” whereas “The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble” (Prov. 4:19). But there is more. Our Lord declares Himself to be the light of the world (John 8:12; 12:35). As members of His Body, we share in that light. The light we receive we are to shine before

men. Light must not be hid: this would be a violation of the meaning of light.

“A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.” The reference is clearly to Jerusalem, and also to any other city set on a hill. It is highly visible, and the lights of that city, even its lamps and candles, reveal its presence clearly. Christ’s congregation is to be a city set on a hill.

The church is called to be salt and light, or else “to be trodden under foot of men.” Here is a warning to all antinomians.

The same point is made more emphatically and directly in verses 17–20. Biblical blessedness is inseparable from the covenant law. Lest anyone assume that Christ has come to destroy the law, He says emphatically, “I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” The law is God’s law; Christ is God’s Son; He does *not* come to destroy God’s righteousness or justice, but to destroy the power of sin and death. To make Christ the destroyer of the law is to do the work of Satan.

The word *fulfil* in Matt. 5:17 is *pleroma* (*pleroo*). This word, when used with reference to time, can mean that the time or era spoken of has come to pass, and, in this sense, is ended. In other usage, it means to fill and to keep full. To illustrate, Paul uses this word, in Philippians 1:9-11:

9. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;
10. That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;
11. Being *filled* with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

The word *pleroo* is used in v. 11, translated here as *filled*. Paul calls on the Christians of Philippi to grow in love and knowledge, and to be “*filled* with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ.” It would be nonsense to say that Paul means that, having attained salvation, they are now dead to love, knowledge, and righteousness (or, law, justice) through Christ. It is equally nonsense to say that Christ declares that He has come, not to destroy the law, but to end it and put it

aside! Indeed, our Lord goes on to warn against any lessening of the force of the law. This, however, has been no barrier to dispensationalists, beginning with the Jesuits and on through their heir, Scofield.

Our Lord goes on to say that not one jot or tittle of the law shall pass away, or *pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*” Now we have another word used for *fulfilled*, *ginomai*, related to *gennao*, beget; *ginomai* means to be begotten, to be born. When John 1:18 speaks of Jesus Christ as the “only-begotten” Son, the word is *monogenes*. Our Lord is *not* talking about the death of the law, but its true beginning in Him, and in His new humanity, His covenant people. A stronger affirmation of the validity of the law could hardly be made.

Our Lord then declares who the evil ones are: *first*, any who break even the *least* of the laws of God, and *second* and worse, any and all who teach His people, or anyone, to break these laws, even the least of them, shall be called “*least* in the kingdom of heaven.” Thus, while an antinomian may possibly be saved, he is singled out as the lowest in the category of the redeemed. Our Lord does not say anywhere that this requirement to teach His law ends with His cross. It is a fanciful re-writing of Scripture to say so. Paul cannot be cited for justification, because he rejects such a thought: “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Rom. 3:31). When Paul speaks, in Romans 8:4, of the requirements of the law being *fulfilled* in us who are saved, he uses the word *ginomai*, begotten.

Third, those who obey and teach the law, “the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Clearly, law-keeping is a sign of covenant grace. When James says that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:26), he is restating what our Lord and St. Paul both say.

Finally, our Lord makes clear that none can enter into the kingdom of heaven unless their righteousness “exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.” The false righteousness of the Pharisees replaced God’s law with man-made laws, with the traditions of men (Matt. 15:1–9). All such have

no place in God's Kingdom, whatever their church rank may be. This sentence makes clear that what our Lord means in Matthew 5:19 is not a full-blown antinomianism, but a rejection of "one of these least commandments." The teachers and followers who are *least* in the Kingdom of Heaven are people who obey most of the law but set aside some as "trifling" or relatively unimportant to obey.

Any other interpretation does violation to our Lord's words.

One final note: the word translated in Matt. 5:17 as "destroy" means literally to loosen down or dissolve. Our Lord did not come to loosen the force of the law but to create a new humanity which could live faithfully in terms of God's righteousness.

T W E L V E

HELL

Hell is not a popular subject; few people like to remember that it is mentioned even in the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 5:22, our Lord speaks of “hell fire,” or, literally, the hell of fire. What does hell mean?

There are several references to hell by our Lord in the Gospels, and one by James (3:6). The word translated as hell is *Gehenna*, the Greek form of the Hebrew Ge-Hinnom, or the Valley of Hinnom. Gehenna was notorious from Old Testament times; it was a valley where the sacrifice of children took place. King Josiah formally desecrated the place, to make it polluted for any such pagan religious practices (2 Kings 23:10). It was known also as Tophet. As a result, it became Jerusalem’s city dump; trash, dead animals, filth, and refuse were cast into the valley. The burning trash piles sent up a constant cloud of smoke, and the valley became a type of the life of the reprobate or damned.

To understand what hell is, therefore, we must see the meaning of Gehenna. A trash dump is the place of irrelevant and meaningless items. What cannot be used because it is useless is consigned to a refuse pile. Hell is thus the habitation of all who are determined to be useless to God. Whatever their opinion of themselves, if they are useless to God, they go into His cosmic trash pile. God’s righteousness or justice

is the criterion of usefulness to God, and God's righteousness is incarnate in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Things in a trash pile have no meaningful relationship one to another. In a normal house, all things have a place and a relationship in terms of the over-all life of the home. In a refuse dump, all things are meaningless; they are discarded because they are useless and meaningless. There is no common meaning, nor any meaning. There is no communication in hell, because there is no community of meaning. Every man, as his own god, lives in his own private universe; each speaks his own language of egocentricity and self-deification, and hence every man is all alone in hell. Hell is an endless monologue in an empty room by legions of empty men.

Our Lord speaks of "the hell of fire." Fire burns and consumes. The Valley of Hinnom was a place of corruption, worms, rats, and fire; each of these in its own way meant the destruction of trash.

The inhabitants of hell are in the heaven of their own choosing. Each is his own god and universe. For them, there are none now to contradict their will: they can say eternally, My will be done! No fire, however, burns more bitterly than the fires of guilt and egocentricity. Man in the isolation of hell cannot grow: he consumes himself endlessly. The redeemed, however, both in this world and in the world to come, have community and growth. Because they know themselves to be God's *creatures*, saved by *His grace*, they know the truth of Paul's words:

7. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

8. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. (Rom. 14:7-8)

We then have God's plenty to grow on, and His law-word to live by. The denizens of hell have the paltry and stinking world of their own soul.

The reprobate want themselves and their will, and hell gives it to them eternally. This is their judgment.

T H I R T E E N

THE LORD
AND THE LAW

21. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

22. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

23. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;

24. Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

25. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.

26. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

27. Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery:

28. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

29. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

30. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

31. It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

32. But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

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

34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:

35. Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

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

38. Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:

39. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right check, turn to him the other also.

40. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.

41. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

42. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

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

44. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;
45. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.
46. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?
47. And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?
48. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. (Matt. 5:21–48)

The Lord here comments on and expounds the law. There is, however, a peculiarity in His citations from the law. He does not say, “Moses said” (Matt. 19:8), nor does He say, “The law says.” Rather, He uses a more vague reference: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time...” Lenski gives us the meaning of this: “‘You heard’ means: from your teachers, the scribes and the Pharisees, on whom you were entirely dependent for your instructions.”¹ As against this *mediated* reading of the law, our Lord gives the direct, unmediated, and original meaning of the law. Six points of law are set forth in these verses:

1. The law concerning murder, Matt. 5:21–26.
2. The law forbidding adultery, Matt. 5:27–30.
3. The law of divorce, Matt. 5:31–32.
4. The law of oaths, Matt. 5:33–37.
5. The law on revenge, Matt. 5:38–42.
6. The law of love, Matt. 5:43–47.

1. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1943), 216.

Let us consider each of these six areas of law in turn, keeping in mind that our Lord makes clear that the law cannot be set aside (Matt. 5:17–20), and that blessedness is the faithful keeping of the law by covenant man.

1. The Law concerning murder — Matthew 5:21–26.

Among the texts here referred to are Ex. 20:13; 21:12; Lev. 24:17; Deut. 5:17; and, with respect to the judgment of such cases, Deut. 16:18, and 17:8–13. *The judgment* is the local court.

The law against murder forbids us to hate our brother, or to be angry with him and to call him insulting names. The term “brother” includes more than the blood family; it means our family in Christ. The anger is causeless anger, “without a cause.” We are not asked to be an unresponsive and passionless people, but rather righteous ones.

Moreover, if we have given cause for anger or displeasure to a brother, we are to make restitution or to be reconciled to him before we approach God. Our presence before God thus requires a faithfulness to every jot and tittle of the law.

If we have given offense to any enemy, we must be equally prompt to make reconciliation. Our enemy will be much more likely to institute legal action against us, and to require restitution to “the uttermost farthing.” Above all, however, our approach to God requires faithfulness to His law. “Thou shall not kill” means that we do not take a man’s life, nor seek harm to a man’s life by slandering or defrauding him. A man can be killed in more ways than by outright murder.

Not only does the law stand, but its full implications are set forth by our Lord. He spells out every jot and tittle of the law, to leave us without excuse.

2. The Law forbidding adultery — Matthew 5:27–30.

We see here, as in Matthew 19:1–12, our Lord’s revelation concerning the meaning of the law. “It was said by them of old time” and as of now that the law is merely negative. Our Lord, however, sees the law as a guide towards the fullness of health under God. We are not to commit murder, because we must

further the fullness of covenant life under God. The purpose of marriage is *from the beginning* (Matt. 19:8) the union of male and female into *one flesh*, a community of life in God's covenant service. Marriage is only abrogated when that covenant is broken. Adultery is treason to that covenant and to God's basic institution, the family. That treason, however, is more than *act*; it is also thought; "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already with her in his heart."

Hence, we are to separate from ourselves everything in our lives that causes us to offend *against God*. The reference in Matthew 5:29–30 to *hell* makes clear the theological reference. It is therefore *not* fanciful to say that, whether it be an association with a man or woman who causes us as husband or wife to have adulterous thoughts, or someone who is like a right hand or an eye to us, but separates us from God, we must separate ourselves from them. Since at times a husband or wife have been spoken of as a right hand, this can include them. The focus of marriage is the Lord and His service, not our lives, purposes, or pleasure. These verses thus lead naturally to the law concerning divorce.

3. The Law of divorce — Matthew 5:31–32

The law of divorce specifies *fornication*, a broad term inclusive of adultery, lasciviousness, perversion, rebelliousness, unbelief, and more.² Our Lord here restates what Deuteronomy 24:1 says, but He expunges from their minds the falsifications thereof. The framework of neither marriage nor divorce is man-centered. God is mindful of man's very natural needs (Gen. 2:18, 21–23), but Eve is made to be a "helpmeet" to Adam in his covenant task. Adam was not created to please himself, nor was Eve created simply to please Adam. The meaning of marriage is missed when it is made a means of self-fulfillment and self-satisfaction. Rather like every human association, it is in part a *yoke* (2 Cor. 6:14), a measure of bondage.

2. See R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Craig Press, 1973, 1981), loc. cit.

Both marriage and divorce must have a God-centered focus. The word in Matt. 5:29 translated as *offend* is *skandalizo*, meaning, causes to stumble. This stumbling is with respect to our service to the Lord.

It is noteworthy that the “law” of divorce as taught of old, and cited by our Lord (Matt. 5:31), strips from the actual law all reference to God’s purpose for marriage, and the legal ground for divorce. Rather, it reduces divorce to a masculine prerogative and power: “Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.” This is a false summation of Deuteronomy 24:1. It eliminates from the law God’s standard of holiness (“uncleanness in her”), and leaves only one determining factor: man’s will. This is evil.

4. *The Law of oaths — Matthew 5:33–37.*

We should not be surprised at the space given to a matter of language. Speech is a God-given power, and it is to be used under God. An oath was a doubly religious fact. “An oath or vow taken in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, was absolutely binding, and could not be cancelled or ‘loosed’.”³ Grant tells us further that the Hebrews were most scrupulous in their observance of oaths, and their observance was “one of the most important forward steps in the history of ethics.”⁴ Our Lord doesn’t say that these oaths were not kept; rather, He condemns them for their humanistic use of oaths.

An oath is an affirmation of the covenant. An oath of office, as required by the Constitution of the United States, means an affirmation of God’s covenant, and it invokes the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy 28 for faithfulness and for disobedience. Hence, the oath of office in the United States was originally taken on a Bible opened to Deuteronomy 28.

An oath thus, or a vow, belongs in covenant affirmation: civil courts; the church, as in ordination services, baptism, etc.; in marriage, and the like. The Jews kept their oaths and vows

3. Frederick C. Grant, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. I (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 36.

4. *Idem.*

carefully, but they trivialized their use. They feared to speak the name of the Lord, for fear of blasphemy and a violation of Ex. 20:7, but they did not hesitate to commit the same blasphemy by the ready use of vows.

Oaths are important and have their place where God ordains them. Apart from that, all speech is before the presence of God, and should be honest.

5. *The Law of revenge — Matthew 5:38–42.*

The *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, is the law of justice: the punishment or restitution must be proportionate to the crime. Matthew 5:39–41 gives us one connected thought. The premise is, Resist not the evil or wicked man. Examples of what this means are then cited: turning the other cheek; giving up our cloak when sued for our coat; and going the second mile. The premise is the wicked man; the presupposition is that he is in power. Judea was ready for rebellion against Rome, the wicked one. To expect justice, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, from Rome the wicked power, was nonsense. The word translated *compel* is *aggareuo*; it comes from the Persian and has reference to a compulsory draft.⁵ The reign of injustice is not changed by futile resistance. Bend with the situation; the Lord's way of reconstruction is not revolution. To resist a military draft when we are lone men by a roadside is absurd; going an extra mile will get us a faster release; the rebellious are treated more harshly.

In Matt. 5:42, the word *borrow* means a loan at interest. Since the next section (Matt. 5:43–48) deals with the love of enemies, and this with the law of revenge, it should be clear that these are forced loans which are required by “the wicked man.” The Old Testament law forbids interest in charitable loans (Ex. 22:25; Deut. 23:19–20; Lev. 25:35–37); very plainly, such a loan is not in mind in this verse, which is set in the context of “the wicked man” and enemies.

5. Simon was drafted to carry Christ's cross — Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21.

6. *The Law of love — Matthew 5:43–47.*

Love of our neighbor is required by the law in Leviticus 19:16-18, and the neighbor is defined to include the alien in their midst. Israel is reminded that they were once aliens in Egypt, so, by clear implication, the enemy, the Egyptians, are included in the law of love. There are statements implying love of enemies in Ex. 23:4–5; Prov. 25:21–22.; Ps. 7:4; etc. To love our enemies means to keep God’s law in relationship to them, for love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8). We are to bless them, and to pray for them. We are to hate the enemies of God (Ps. 139:21–22), but not our own enemies; we are not the center.

God causes His rain to fall on all alike, and His sun to rise on all, although, after a certain point, the curses of Deuteronomy 28:15–68 fall on the ungodly.

Our behavior as God’s covenant people must be far beyond that of “publicans.” Publicans were tax-collectors; if we follow the world in our dealings with enemies, then our morality is as low and contemptible as that of a tax-collector, such as an Internal Revenue Service agent. Our Lord cites the tax-collector as the epitome of all that is contrary to the covenant life. Because the tax-collector is the agent of the fiat taxes of the state, which are contrary to the law of God, who is alone Lord of all the earth, and the fullness thereof (Ps. 24:1), the tax-collector is used by our Lord as the epitome of the godless and contemptible way of life. The Christian cannot live on the same petty, evil level as the tax-collector. The tax-collector is mindful of *every* jot and tittle of man’s way, not of God’s law.

9. *The conclusion — Matthew 5:48.*

We are required to be *perfect*, even as God is perfect. The word *perfect* is in the Greek complete, mature, fully grown. The perfection of God is an eternal and absolute one; our maturity is our growth in His image and calling.

Because *perfect* in origin meant mature, not sinless, the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution could write describing the

document as a “more perfect union,” i.e., more mature a union than that of the Articles of Confederation.

Our Lord has just outlined the way of maturity or perfection: it is in terms of faithfulness to Him, and to His law-word.

The Greek meaning of perfect is *mature*; the Old Testament meaning is upright, undeviating, and faithful.⁶ Both meanings are implied in Matthew 5:48.

6. Grant, *op.cit.*, 38.

F O U R T E E N

“WHOSOEVER SHALL
COMPEL THEE”

The word *compel* in Matthew 5:41 brings us face to face with a very important doctrine of Scripture, as well as a very hotly disputed area. We have among the contending parties the pacifists as well as the champions of civil disobedience.

The word *compel* is *aggareuo*, from *argga*, a Persian courier. Perhaps the best brief introduction to the problem is to cite Vincent's study of the word:

This word throws the whole injunction into a picture which is entirely lost to the English reader. A man is traveling, and about to pass a post-station, where horses and messengers are kept in order to forward royal missives as quickly as possible. An official rushes out, seizes him, and forces him to go back and carry a letter to the next station, perhaps to the great detriment of his business. The word is of Persian origin, and denotes the impressments into service, which officials were empowered to make of any available persons or beasts on the great lines of road where the royal mails were carried by relays of riders.¹

This word occurs in the context of an exposition of the law, Matthew 5:38–42; the law of justice, *lex talionis*, had been used as a justification for revenge, and also for civil disobedience.

1. M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, I, 31–32.

We cannot understand the context of our Lord's ministry unless we recognize that it was in a conquered land, where the people hated and resented Rome, and, in 66–70 A.D., waged a total revolt against Roman rule. In such a situation, every statement by a public figure was read or heard esoterically; men spoke cryptically, and people listened for veiled meanings. Such a context is still with us. (Before World War I, Turkey banned chemistry text-books from Armenian schools for a time, when they found the formula H_2O therein; they read it as a code meaning Abdul Hamid II [H_2] will be assassinated, made into nothing [O]. "Modern" Turkey has not improved much since then.) Some writers have insisted on seeing Jesus as a zealot or revolutionary, who spoke in these coded terms.² This is, of course, nonsense; it requires holding in contempt the text of Scripture and re-writing history.

What does our Lord say? *First*, our Lord clearly sees the Romans as *evil*. When He says, "Resist not evil" (Matt. 5:39), He is describing very bluntly what Judaea's enemy was. The word used for *evil* is *poneros*, a word related to *ponos*, toil. The evil in mind is one which enslaves and burdens the people for its own purposes. It is a fitting word to describe the oppressive rule of an alien power. Our Lord makes no excuse for Rome, nor does He diminish at all the reality of its oppression.

Second, He says, "I say unto you, That ye resist not evil." The word *resist* means an active, aggressive stand against evil. Our Lord thus shut the door on revolution. Knowing that it would come, and knowing the futility of it, He wept over Jerusalem on His triumphal entry (Luke 19:41–44). On His way to the cross, He turned to the weeping women and said:

Daughters of Jerusalem, let not your weeping be for me, but for yourselves and for your children. For the days are coming in which they will say, "Happy are those who have had no children, whose bodies have never given birth, whose breasts have never given milk." And they will say to

2. See S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967); and Hyman Maccoby, *Revolution in Judaea, Jesus and the Jewish Resistance* (New York, NY: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1973, 1980.)

the mountains, “Come down on us,” and to the hills, “Be a covering for us.” For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will they do when it is dry? (Luke 23:28–31)

Third, it is important to recognize that what our Lord says has both a God-centered and theological import as well as a pragmatic and a practical meaning. There are some who regard any attempt to point out a useful and pragmatic aspect of Scripture as morally wrong. Such people seem to feel that it is a mark of spirituality to make the Bible and our faith as unrealistic and “unworldly” as possible. By “unworldly” they seem to mean contrary to common sense. However, God having made heaven and earth and all things therein, His word is the most practical and fitting word in that world. Not even the hostility of the ungodly can diminish the aptness and practicality of His word.

What our Lord is saying is that a lack of hostility and a readiness to go the second mile is the wisest and most practical course. The kind of forced draft described in *aggareuo* is still with us, sometimes not in evil hands. In my own experience, I have been drafted to fight on a forest fire-line. Granted, the draft was good, not evil, and the cause a worthy one. Still, some rebelled: they were assigned the hardest tasks. Because I volunteered, I found myself given a privileged task. Where our human concerns are involved, the Lord does not allow us the luxury of futile protests, gestures, or revolt. Even where His work is concerned, futile efforts are forbidden:

14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet.

15. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city. (Matt. 10:14–15)

It is obvious from this that the rejection of Christ’s messengers is a very serious matter. However, our Lord *commands* us to make our witness and go on, not to waste our time on futility.

I regularly have people ask me privately how to “reach” a “friend,” neighbor, or relative for Christ, when they have repeatedly slammed the door in their faces, insulted them, and ordered them to stay away. In such situations, there are two in rebellion against Christ, one on either side of the door. These persistent ones believe that their persistence is a mark of greater faith when it is a sign of disobedience.

Our Lord thus forbids futile gestures. Radically corrupt courts can give no justice. A tyrannical state has no regard for our wishes and delights in making that fact clear to us.

Our Lord has been speaking of the things which concern us. Where His word and work are concerned, we cannot bend, nor can we compromise. As Peter and the other apostles said, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). In such a context, we can expect, and our Lord promises, supernatural power, the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit:

18. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

19. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak.

20. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. (Matt. 10:18–20)

Fourth, Scripture is very clear that the oppression of man follows apostasy from God. It is impossible to read Scripture and come to any other conclusion; certainly, Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are emphatic on this point. The Lord therefore regards it as a further evidence of apostasy if we resist evil for personal reasons while continuing in apostasy. The route to eliminating the wicked ones who rule over us begins with ordering our lives, churches, families, communities, and civil governments in terms of God’s word. When a people are apostate, or disobedient, they will suffer, as God declared through Samuel. Oppression will come upon them. They will cry out against their oppressors, and they will pray to God, but “the LORD will not hear you in that day” (1 Sam. 8:10–18). They

were crying out against their oppressors, not against their sins and themselves. They were manifesting both sin and blindness.

For our Lord to have countenanced the cause of Jewish revolution against Rome would have been sin; it would have been a violation of 1 Samuel 8:18. In summoning them to “resist not evil,” He was ordering them out of their futility.

F I F T E E N

DEBTS

In the Lord's Prayer, we say, "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12). In Matthew 6:14–15, the word used is trespasses, *paraptoma* in the Greek, a false step, a moral deviation from righteousness and truth. Some churches use the word trespasses in the Lord's Prayer, although the literal reading is debts, *opheilema*, that which is legally due. The reference, of course, is to the forgiveness of sins, but our Lord here avoids using the word sin and adopts debts instead. Why?

Sin, of course, requires payment in the form of restitution and restoration, so that all sin places man in the position of being required to make restitution to God. Only God the Son, Jesus Christ, is capable of making that restitution for us. It must be added that the context here is not related to salvation but to sanctification. Our Lord teaches this prayer to the *disciples*; it is the common prayer, and pattern for prayer, for all Christians. It sets forth the growth of their relationship to God in terms of their faithful obedience to His requirement in relationship to one another: "forgive us our debts, *as* we forgive our debtors." In other words, let our hearts and lives witness to Thee, O Lord, of the grace we manifest one to another in Thee.

There is more to the use of the word *debts*. The great example of the forgiveness of debts in the Old Testament is the doctrine of the seventh or sabbatical year, and, chiefly, the

Jubilee. Every fiftieth year, the Jubilee brought to glorious culmination the principles of the Sabbath years: release of slaves, the restoration of lands, and the *cancellation of all debts*.

Christ Himself comes as the Jubilee man (Isa. 61:1–2). By His atonement, restitution is made for us, and our debt is cancelled out; restoration is effected. We are sent into all the world, to proclaim His Jubilee to every creature (Matt. 28:18–20). Leviticus 25:9–10 makes clear what the Jubilee does:

9. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land.

10. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.

Restitution is made by the Lord (the day of atonement); all debts are cancelled, and restoration follows.

This is what the Lord's Prayer means when it says, "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." It is Christ's salvation, followed by Christian reconstruction.

We can contrast this petition with the prayer of the pagan Apollonius of Tyana, who believed that the model prayer of all men with a "right conscience" should be, "Give me, ye Gods, what is my due!"¹ In such a view, it is God, not man, who is the debtor.

We are to pray, "forgive us our debts, *as we forgive* (or, as we have forgiven) our debtors." In other words, the Lord grants us our Jubilee only insofar as we are a Jubilee to others, i.e., insofar as we bring them atonement or salvation through Christ, the cancellation of debts, and restoration.

Jubilee is a denial of *karma*, of endless, unremitting payment by man for his sins. It celebrates the remission of sins by the Lord's atonement, and it declares that the causality which

1. G. R. S. Mead, *Apollonius of Tyana, The Philosopher-Reformer of the First Century A.D.* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1966, reprint), 133.

rules the world is not our sin but God's grace. By Christ's redemption, we are Jubilee men. To pray this petition is to declare that we believe in the Jubilee of Christ and want to be living trumpets of its liberty.

But the word is *debt*, and we must not, as we consider its theological meaning, ever forget its basic economic meaning. Ancient Babylon built its empire on debt, a policy later used by Assyria (Nahum 3:16). Before the armies marched, traders or merchants went forth, controlled by the ruler, to sell goods on credit. Very quickly, the morale of the nations was sapped and destroyed by debt-living, and the nations were easily conquered.

The Bible, however, opposes long-term debt, and the debt limit for believers is a six-year period. In the Sabbath year, debts are to be cancelled (Deut. 15:1–6). As far as possible, we are to “owe no man anything, but to love one another” (Rom. 13:8). Loans without interest are to be made to fellow-believers in need (Ex. 22:25; Deut. 15:7–11; Ps. 15:5). This did not apply to commercial loans, which could require interest.² Debt is a form of slavery (Prov. 22:7), and the believer is required to be a free man (1 Cor. 7:23), because Christ's salvation is freedom (John 8:36).

Debt living is thus a form of covetousness, and is practical atheism. Covetousness is forbidden to believers (and all men) by God's law (Ex. 20:17; Luke 12:15; Rom. 13:9; etc.). Covetousness leads to debt; its results are always evil (Prov. 15:27, 28:20; 1 Tim. 6:9; etc.). Its punishment is sure (Job. 20:15; Isa. 5:8, 57:17; Jer. 6:12, 22:17–19; Micah 2:1–2; Hab. 2:9; 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:5; etc.).

The social consequences of debt include a covetous and inflationary society. When men spend prospective and still future earnings in the present, then, as the present passes, they are chained to their past spending by debt. Debt becomes a form of *karma*, a past which governs the present and the future and produces a society with a closed future. The slavery of debt

2. See R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law* (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Craig Press, 1973, 1981), 475-481.

binds man to the worst in their past; their debt-living cripples their present and helps determine and limit their future.

Our Lord uses the word *debts*, because this is His primary meaning, but we know that the word includes *trespasses*, because He says so in Matthew 6:14–15. To harbor hatred, hostility, grudges, and vengeance is to become past-bound and to preclude ourselves from forgiveness. Here again, we create the world of karma; the past controls all things. History, however, is not controlled by the past, but by the triune God. To allow the past to govern us, either by *debt* or by *hatred*, is to insist on the world of karma for all men, including ourselves, whereas Biblical faith requires us to be governed by God's law and grace, not by our past, its debts and its hatreds.

The requirement thus is, "forgive us our debts, *as we forgive our debtors.*" The word *forgive* in the Old Testament is *kippur*, cover; *nasa'*, carry away; and *shalach*, let go. In the Lord's Prayer, it is *aphiemi*, to remit, forgive, let go. It is conditional on two things: repentance, and restitution. The sacrificial system tells us much in this respect. The believer-sinner had to confess his sins and to lay them upon the unblemished sacrifice. He came bringing a gift, the sacrifice, to make restitution for his sins. The sinner thus must repent, offer the restitution of Jesus Christ, and then live a life of faithfulness. He must live day by day in this faithfulness to Jesus Christ. His world must be governed by repentance and restitution *to* others, and an openness to repentance and restitution *from* others. Forgiveness means that charges are dropped, because satisfaction has been rendered (or, charges are dropped for the time being, pending possible satisfaction). Paul demonstrates what this can mean in the book of Philemon. Onesimus, the natural brother of Philemon, had by his prodigal ways become a slave, and his brother had bought him to protect him (Philemon 16). Onesimus had apparently rewarded him by running away with some friends (Philemon 18–19). St. Paul, meeting Onesimus in Rome, was able to convert him; he then sent him back to his brother with a letter indicating his personal readiness to make good whatever funds were required for restitution. Paul

makes clear that Philemon himself is in debt to Paul, so that their obligations cancel one another (Philemon 19–21). He was, however, confident that the once useless Onesimus will now be useful, so that Philemon will have satisfaction *in every way*. This incident illustrates the meaning of this petition of the Lord's Prayer. It tells us, among other things, that both debts and grace are to be taken seriously.

This petition is closely linked with the first petition: "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). God's Kingdom is the world's future; it must govern us, not past debts and evils, grudges and hatreds. Men who choose the past and karma choose death.

In Luke 11:4, our Lord again gives us the need for this petition concerning debts. There is a difference here, however: "And forgive us our sins; for we ourselves also forgive every one that is indebted to us." The word for *sins* is *harmartia*; *anomia*, lawlessness, the sin of the ungodly, is not used. The reference is to the sins or shortcomings of fellow-believers. The same root word as in Matthew 6:12 is used for "indebted." Clearly, debt and sin are associated by our Lord as representing a common evil. When debt and sin (our sin, or the sins of others) govern our conduct and life, we are past oriented. We then pass from the world of God and His righteousness and grace into the world of karma.

The rule of karma is the unrelenting rule of evil. God then is set aside for the priority of evil, and, since long-term debt and sin alike are evil, we submit to an essentially evil view of life. To live in terms of debt is to make a witness concerning our faith and our worldview; the same is true if we live in terms of sin, if we insist that "pragmatism," i.e., an acceptance of the necessity of evil as a tool for living, is inescapable. It is a denial of the government and providence of God in favor of an affirmation of karma. To pray this petition means that we re-order our lives in terms of the word of God. To live by faith means to live in terms of grace, not sin, and without covetousness and debt.

S I X T E E N

“DELIVER US FROM EVIL”

In the Lord’s Prayer, we are taught to pray, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13). The word translated as “temptation” is *peirasmos*. The word can have reference to a temptation to evil, but the basic meaning is a trial, a testing, an assay. Some of its Biblical usages give us indications of this broader meaning:

1. In the Septuagint of Genesis 22:1, we read, “And it came to pass after these things, that God did *tempt* Abraham.” This refers to the testing with respect to the sacrifice of Isaac.
2. In John 6:6, with reference to Philip, we read, “This he (Jesus) said to *prove* him.” Here also the reference is to testing.
3. In Acts 16:7, we read that Paul and Timothy “*assayed* to go to Bythinia: but the Spirit suffered them not.” The meaning here is *attempted*.
4. In 2 Corinthians 13:5, Paul says, “*Examine* yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.” Self-examination in terms of God’s word is here the meaning of “tempting” or testing.
5. In James 1:13, we are told, “Let no man say when he is *tempted*, I am *tempted* of God: for God cannot be *tempted* with

evil, neither *tempteth* he any man.” Here, very clearly, the temptation is to *evil*, to sin.

This last meaning is very clearly the correct one in the Lord’s Prayer. This is apparent from the rest of the sentence: “but deliver us from evil.” James makes clear that God Himself is not the tempter, but He can allow us to be tried and tempted for our testing and growth. The meaning is clear from our Lord’s words to Peter:

31. And Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

32. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.

(Luke 22:31–32)

The word translated as “converted” means in the original, turned back or around. Our Lord allowed the tempting of Peter to try, turn around, and strengthen Simon Peter.

Another word which requires some explaining is *evil*, “deliver us from evil.” Some have translated this as “the Evil One,” including Gerrit Verkuyl (*The Berkeley Version*), the English Revised Version of 1881, and others. Gordon summed up the arguments in favor of such a reading thus:

Matt. 6:13. *But deliver us from evil.* The Greek is *apo tou ponerou*. The preposition used for “from” is *apo*. In John 17:15 the preposition is *ek*, “I pray that thou shouldest keep them *out of* the evil” that is, out of evil society and the evil order of the world. The phrase in the Lord’s Prayer is presumably “deliver us from the Evil One,” protection from a person. In the High Priestly Prayer it is for protection from evil surroundings, evil *milieu*, the kingdom of evil over which the prince of this world presides.

In II Thessalonians 3:2 Paul prays to be delivered from evil persons, using the verb and preposition of the Lord’s Prayer, *rhusthomen apo*. In view of this it would seem preferable to give a personal rendering to the *apo tou ponerou* which follows directly (II Thess. 3:3): “But the Lord shall

keep you (not from abstract or impersonal evil, not primarily from disaster or misfortune) but from the Evil One.”

So in Matthew 13:25, “While men slept *his* enemy came and sowed tares” and the tares this enemy sows are the children of the wicked one, *ton ponerou*, “the Evil One” of the Lord’s Prayer (v. 38). In verse 39 “His enemy” is defined as the devil, *ho diabolos*. Why then should we not always pray, in repeating the Lord’s Prayer, “Deliver us from the Evil one” instead of using the abstract form, “from evil”?

Finally in I Corinthians 5:13 Paul writes, “Therefore put away from among yourselves *that wicked one*.” Here *ton poneron* is translated personally, though it might well be rendered “that evil” as in the case of the Lord’s Prayer.¹

Thus, the meaning is that, while God does try, test, and refine us by a variety of trials, we are to pray to be spared and delivered from any testing by Satan himself. The testings of the Lord are righteousness, and they are for our growth in holiness; the temptations of Satan are for our destruction.

This, however, raises a further problem. We are very plainly told in Hebrews 1:13–14 that God’s angels are ministering spirits to the heirs of salvation, God’s covenant people. Psalm 8:5 actually reads that God has made man a little lower than Himself, i.e., *above* the angels.

By their fall, Satan and his host gained no greater power, and, clearly, by separating themselves from God, lost power. Michael, the archangel, rebuked Satan and prevailed against him (Jude 9; Deut. 34:1–6). Satan is thus below us in power, since even Michael and all the angels are below us, and are ministering spirits to us. Then why are we to pray specifically for deliverance from one who is our lesser, is definitely below us in the scale of power, and whose power over us is broken by Christ’s redemption?

1. Ernest Gordon, *Notes From a Layman’s Greek Testament* (Boston, MA: W. A. Wilde, 1941), 19–20.

To answer this question, let us review our relationship to Satan. As children of Adam, we are, by our natural birth, all involved in the fall. The principle of the fall is Genesis 3:1–5, the tempter’s program of a declaration of independence from God. This plan, however, involves also a declaration of the rightness, justice, and priority of Satan as the great liberator. Hence, Satan’s culminating temptation to our Lord is, “All these things (‘the Kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them’) will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me” (Matt. 4:9). We worship Satan whenever and wherever we want our will to be done, our determination of right and wrong to prevail, and God to serve us.

Because we are not perfectly sanctified in this life, the readiness in our being, as a result of our remaining inheritance from Adam, is to want our way. This is the point at which Satan is able to tempt us, as he did Peter. Indeed, John Donne, in *The Litany*, XVII, prays for deliverance “from tempting Satan to tempt us.” Our Lord thus requires us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” i.e., do not subject us to such a trial, and then, “deliver us from evil,” i.e., deliver us from our own readiness to walk into the hands of our enemy.

Calvin’s comment at this point is excellent:

The sentence ought to be resolved thus, *That we may not be led into temptation, deliver us from evil*. The meaning is: “We are conscious of our own weakness, and desire to enjoy the protection of God, that we may remain impregnable against all the assaults of Satan.” We showed from the former petition, that no man can be reckoned a Christian, who does not acknowledge himself to be a sinner; and in the same manner, we conclude from this petition, that we have no strength for living a holy life except so far as we obtain it from God. Whoever implores the assistance of God to overcome temptation, acknowledges that, unless God *deliver* him, he will be constantly falling...

Deliver us from evil. The word *evil* may either be taken in the neuter gender, as signifying *the evil thing*, or in the mascu-

line gender, as signifying *the evil one*. *Chrysostom* refers it to the Devil, who is the contriver of everything evil, and, as the deadly enemy of our salvation, is continually fighting against us. But it may, with equal propriety, be explained as referring to *sin*. There is no necessity for raising a debate on this point: for the meaning remains nearly the same, that we are in danger from the Devil and from sin, if the Lord does not protect and *deliver* us.²

We can now again face the basic question: Why are we asked to pray for deliverance from one, or the power of one, Satan, who is below us in the scale of power, and whose hold over us has been broken by Christ’s redemption?

It is precisely man’s status as God’s image bearer and as His vicegerent, created to exercise dominion, that makes man vulnerable. Man’s capabilities make him overly confident in his own strength. The most swashbuckling sensualist and exploiter of women I have ever met ridiculed me once for talking about serious matters with women. Women, he said, in pornographic language, were there to be used by men, not for philosophical discussions. This same man later became the most henpecked husband in my experience; it was easily accomplished by his little wife, who exploited his sense of guilt and controlled a very big man.

Man does not normally think of Satan nor of sin as a problem, nor as a threat. His problems are usually more “practical” and mundane, and he feels competent in each situation. As a child, man is in rebellion all too often against his parents; he feels that he knows best, because his wishes have an aura of rightness and justice to his heart. As a man, he is in rebellion against God and godly authority, again with a conviction that his will and the right way coincide.

It is man in his self-sufficiency who is most susceptible to temptation, and to the evil one. Man in his self-sufficiency is most prone to show unconcern and thoughtlessness towards

2. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 327–329.

those most near and dear to him. He seeks to live “alone” in the sense of being free from responsibilities to others, in being unbothered. This *aloneness* may be a desire for physical isolation, or it can go hand in hand with a gregarious nature; in either case, there is one way and one will, *mine*.

The Lord’s Prayer, however, requires a total dependence on the Lord, and a responsibility one to another. It does not permit self-sufficiency. *First*, we acknowledge ourselves to be children, children of grace: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9). We recognize the holiness and transcendence of even the Name of God, how much more so His being. *Second*, we subordinate ourselves, our wills, and our hopes totally to Him: “Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). The goal of life and history, and our life and history, must be His Kingdom.

Third, however self-sufficient we may feel about our ability to provide for ourselves and our families, we are reminded that all this is an aspect of God’s government. The law reminds us: “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth” (Deut. 8:18). Hence, we are commanded to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11).

Fourth, we as the forgiven are to forgive, and to work for God’s great Jubilee (Matt. 6:12).

Fifth, we must pray for deliverance from the evil one. Our complacency here plays into Satan’s hands (Matt. 6:13).

Sixth, we must always acknowledge the God-centered nature of life, and we must subordinate ourselves totally to Him. “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matt. 6:13).

S E V E N T E E N

PRAYER

Matthew 6:5–15 gives us our Lord’s teaching on prayer. He begins thus: “And when thou prayest.” The Bible *assumes* prayer on the part of the believer; it records the prayers of many saints. It commands us, moreover, to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). What does that mean? Does it involve long prayers and a parade of holiness? Clearly not, because our Lord first of all ridicules hypocrites who pray by the yard, who believe quantity in prayer manifests quality and faith. A teacup full of manure does not become a ruby by being increased to a ton of manure piled high in the kitchen, and a hypocritical prayer is not increased in holiness when increased in length.

What does it mean to “pray without ceasing”? Prayer is talking with God. If occasionally I talk with a distant friend, by telephone and sometimes in person, I begin and end formally. No so with my wife; our conversation is a life-long thing of which neither of us weary. There are silences in our conversation, but we are continually “open” to one another. We want to share our thinking, our moods and reactions. The same is true in prayer. In our private and personal prayer life, we have our somewhat more formal prayers, but we also have the open and continuous conversation as well.

Few things are more productive in the life of man than continuing one sentence prayers, i.e., talking with God as we encounter problems and situations. As we face a difficult situation, we say, "Lord, give me grace to deal with this person without losing my temper," or, "Lord, I need an answer to this problem; give me grace to deal with it with light from Thy word." After a situation, we can thank God for seeing us through it, and so on. Each problem, each need, and each thought or idea we share with God; we are then in continuous conversation with Him, and never alone.

Our Lord *stresses* the need for private prayer. It is the street corner versus the closet. All too many people make a ritual of prayer: so much every morning; a weekly or daily prayer circle of men or woman, and so on. Such things *can* become an empty ritual and a substitute for our own personal dependence and conversation with God. I can have a good talk with my wife, and she with me, in a church room or a restaurant, but our happiest conversations are very private ones. On some great occasions, there have been some truly great public prayers, but the best prayers are the private conversations of the redeemed man and his Lord.

In private prayer, not all the formal elements of prayer, as evidenced in the Lord's Prayer, are *always* necessary, but the Lord's Prayer does give us the model, and it does cover the essential elements of prayer.

It begins with praise and adoration: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matt. 6:9). An aspect of praise and adoration, not specifically set forth here, is thanksgiving. When we pray, we are not talking to ourselves but to the Lord God; we are compelled to go *outside* ourselves and also *beyond* ourselves. We address "Our Father *which art in heaven*": He is transcendent. In prayer, we cannot without sin limit ourselves to our concerns and this world. While God is omnipresent, His throne is in heaven. Our lives and this world are totally subordinate to His throne and rule.

“Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). The focus is on God’s Kingdom. The public use of the Lord’s Prayer is a necessity: it compels men to focus their minds at least on God’s Kingdom, not their wishes. Our first petition in terms of priority must thus be for the triumph of our Lord’s reign and government. In terms of this, we ask for *everything*; in terms of ourselves, we ask “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11); then we ask for forgiveness, and deliverance from the evil one (Matt. 6:12–13). Our own demands are scaled down to size, whereas God’s Kingdom is given total scope. We are told to ask, Give us today our needed bread, i.e., for today. Our Lord tells us, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34); conversely, He tells us, where your personal needs are concerned, sufficient unto the day is the bread thereof. He who can give bread today can give it again tomorrow. However, where God’s Kingdom is concerned, we *must* pray, “Thy kingdom come. *Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*” When we are commanded so to pray, how dare men deny that the Kingdom will come on earth? How dare they limit it to heaven? Prayer is then limited to “saving souls,” and to personal needs.

The focus of our prayers is to be the Kingdom of God, “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matt. 6:13). Some churches, for dispensational reasons, bar the use of the Lord’s Prayer. Others use it, but deny the Kingdom and its triumph in history. Thus, not only is Matthew 5:17–20 denied, but the Lord’s Prayer also. Antinominism limits the meaning of both to accommodate the species of self-absorption known as pietism.

D. D. Whedon in 1860 called attention to the Old Testament nature of the Lord’s Prayer. His excellent summary deserves to be cited in full:

The following comparison will show that all its doctrines are contained in the Old Testament:

Our Father which art in heaven: Isa. lxiv, 8: "O Lord, thou art our Father." Ecc. v, 2: "God is in heaven."

Hallowed be thy name: Psa. xlvi, 10: "According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth."

Thy kingdom come: Psa. xxii, 28: "For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations." Dan. ii, 44: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."

Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven: Psa. xl, 8: "I delight to do thy will, O my God." Psa. ciii, 20: "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word."

Give us this day our daily bread: Prov. xxx, 8: "Feed me with food convenient for me."

And forgive us our debts: Exod. xxxiv, 9: "Pardon our iniquity and our sin."

As we forgive our debtors: Lev. xix, 18: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord."

And lead us not into temptation: Gen. xxii, 1: "And it came to pass, after these things, that God did tempt Abraham."

But deliver us from evil: Psa. l, 15: "And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen: I Chron. xxix, 11: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all."¹

1. D. D. Whedon, *A Commentary on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark* (New York, NY: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 93.

The Lord's Prayer breathes the spirit of the law and the prophets, because the same triune God is the author of both the Old and New Testaments, and the Bible is one unified revelation.

Our Lord forbids "*vain* repetitions" in prayer. Some use this as a pretext for decrying the use of the Lord's Prayer. Our Lord does *not* forbid *repetitions*, only *vain* ones. Many a man and pastor who prays "extemporaneously" uses repetitions, stereotyped phrases and expressions, and is as much given to a "set" prayer as a pastor who uses, let us say, *The Book of Common Prayer*. Both can be vain repetitions, or they can be joyful ones. I tell my wife daily that I love her, in the same words, but it is never a *vain* repetition for either of us. The repetition of the Lord's Prayer *can* be a vain one, or it can be a joyful one; if it be a vain repetition, the fault is not in the Lord's Prayer, but in us. We can, by our own emptiness, turn any other portion of Scripture into a vain repetition also.

When we pray, "Thy will be done," we pray as Whedon noted: "thy laws be obeyed; thy commandments be executed."² The Lord's Prayer gives us marching orders for dominion. As such, the early church took it seriously enough to use it daily lest any forget their priorities as Christians. Indeed, *The Didache* required the "thrice daily" use of the Lord's Prayer.³

The Lord's Prayer teaches us that "prayer is concerned with much more than our needs. Moreover, God cares for His children (Matt. 5:45; 6:33)."⁴

2. *Ibid.*, 94.

3. *The Didache*, 8:2, 3, in Robert A. Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers, A New Translation and Commentary*, Vol. 3 (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 165.

4. Frederick C. Grant, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. I (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 39.

E I G H T E E N

REWARDS

In Matthew 6:1–4, 5–15, 16–24, our Lord touches on several areas of life, but in each case from the perspective of *rewards*. Let us glance at these areas:

1. Alms, or charitable giving (Matt. 6:1–4). Men can give charitably in order to be seen of men, to make a public impression, or gain the reputation of a philanthropist. All such have their reward from men, not from God. Only those who give in secret for God’s purposes have a reward from Him.

2. Prayer can be a means of hypocritical and public self-exaltation, or a conversation in the walk of life with God. Each form of prayer has its reward. As in alms, the true prayer gives priority to God’s Kingdom and His law (Matt. 6:5–15).

3. Fasting also can be a means of self-promotion as an ostensibly godly man. If our fasting is religious, i.e., to the Lord, then it is done secretly. We do not advertise the fact. Our charity, praying, and fasting cannot be used to commend ourselves to men but only to serve God the Lord (Matt. 6:16–18).

4. What we do in these matters reveals our priorities. Is our essential faith in God, or in man? He in whom we believe is the one we look to for rewards. If our essential faith is in man, we will expect man to reward us. Only God’s reward is eternal and incorruptible. To trust in sinful man, and to expect our

reward from man, is to expect and get a specious reward (Matt. 6:19–21).

5. Our priorities reveal our vision: is it blindness or sight? Is our faith in man, or in the Lord? “No man can serve two masters.”

In each of these areas, God’s law and Person have total priority. We must give generously. Our Lord says, “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:38). Only if in our life and prayer God’s Kingdom has priority, do our needs have any priority with the Lord, and so on.

In all of these things, we are to make no public display. On the contrary, we are to go against custom. Thus, Jewish custom required mourning and fasting to go together. Only one fast was *required* by the Scriptures, on the Day of Atonement, but Israel added fast days and associated fasting and mourning. Anointing being a symbol of joy, it was forbidden on the Day of Atonement and other days of fasting by various non-Biblical regulations.¹ The service of God, even in fasting, must thus be accounted a joy, according to our Lord, and we must anoint ourselves when fasting.

“If thine eye be evil” means, if you have a grudging, selfish character; if you are not open-handed, charitable, and loving.² Having dealt with Judaism, our Lord now turns (Matt. 6:23) to Gentilism. Whedon cited the contrast ably:

Fallen Judaism is the impure service of the true God; Gentilism is the true service of a false god. That god is the world-god Mammon. Gentilism has lost its divine parent; it has become orphaned of our Father who is in heaven. In his place it has substituted the Mammon service and the earthly goods. *After all these things do the Gentiles seek.* Verse 32.

1. Sherman E. Johnson, “Matthew” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 7 (New York, NY: Abingdon, 1951), 317.

2. *Ibid.*, 319.

It is perfectly plain that with this verse 18 our Lord closes his treatment of fallen Judaism. Thereafter he takes a wider scope over the world, and treats, throughout the remainder of the chapter, upon the world-wide substitution of the earthly good for the heavenly good, (19–23), of the rivalry of Mammon before the heavenly Father, (24), and the dominion of Care in the place of the kingdom or dominion of God over us (25–30). He calls us back beneath the pater-nity of God, promising that if we will make him our sole Supreme, all earthly goods shall be subordinately added.³

It should be noted that Judaism did not countenance in theory what our Lord here condemns. Rabbi Hillel said, “Whoever tries to make a name for himself [as a pious Pharisee] loses the Name of God!”⁴ The Pharisees intended to be the most faithful, and the most separated, of the religious groups within Judaism. Their purpose was *faithfulness*. It was their intention to be the most loyal fundamentalists of their day, or the most faithful Calvinists, to use modern comparisons. In the process, they began to demonstrate their faithfulness *before men*. In trying to prove to others of their day their faithfulness, they made man their audience. They were thus proving themselves to men and before men, not before God. Their very efforts to be faithful become man-centered and oriented.

In the Gentiles, this man-centered orientation was self-centered religion. The result was total darkness. They began with an eye that was *evil* or diseased (Matt. 6:23). In the world of that day, eye diseases were commonplace, and blindness not unusual. That state of all false religion is thus *darkness*.

Mammon is an Aramaic word “meaning wealth, property, possessions.”⁵ The essence of paganism, of ungodliness, is a man-centered view. This can be personal, egocentric, or socio-centric. Personal or human values are then paramount. In the 1980 national elections, I noticed in various parts of the

3. D. D. Whedon, *A Commentary on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark* (New York, NY: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 96.

4. Cited from Pirqa Aboth 1:13, by Frederick C. Grant, *The Gospel of Matthew*, I (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 38.

5. *Ibid.*, 42.

country a variety of promotional advertisements for candidates which read: "People come first with _____." The candidate gave priority to people and their wants, not God and His law-word. Those who voted for such candidates voted for the fulfillment of their lusts, for humanism. Man cannot serve God and his own desires.

Our Lord's emphasis on rewards is a necessary one. Man is not, however much he may talk of autonomy, a self-sufficient creature. He is necessarily dependent upon others. Coupled with this necessary dependency is the fact that he is created in the image of God. Man is a purposive creature: he is goal directed. God created man to be His vicegerent over the earth, to exercise dominion and to develop the meaning and scope of God's reign and Kingdom. Man's life thus is colored in all things by a purpose, meaning, or goal.

The goal we live for establishes our rewards. If our goal is the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33), then our rewards will be in terms of it, and our joys also. If our goal is Mammon, our own goals and prosperity, our will and plan, then our rewards will be in terms of our goal. Every humanistic goal provides its own rewards in the pursuit thereof, as well as in the accomplishment.

However, because the world is God's creation, rewards (or punishments) are of God's determination and overrule and override all those of man's choosing and reaching. The great declaration of God's blessings and curses on man's obedience and disobedience is Deuteronomy 28.

Man is a purposive and goal-directed creature, but he lives in God's creation as God's creature. Man's nature determines for himself what constitutes rewards and punishments. God's law determines what in reality these shall be, "for the judgment is God's" (Deut. 1:17).

N I N E T E E N

ANXIETY

One of the problems which haunts man since the fall is his trust in his own thinking. God's word is *the creative word*. Genesis 1 tells us that God spoke the word, and creation came into being at His command. By the word of the Lord were all things made. Man in his sin dreams of having a creative word, of seeing things ordered according to his dream word. The essence of this hope is summed up in Hegel's principle that *the rational is the real*. The rational is man's word, his ideal word, and he believes it should be reality. The modern world is tormented by the applications of Hegel's dictum. Everywhere men pass laws to re-order reality, but sin and poverty are not abolished, nor does crime disappear. Man's fiat word does not bring a new creation into being despite all his hopes. We bedevil one another with words, we nag each other hopefully, trusting somehow that our word will prove to be efficacious and creative. The world is full of people who believe that they can set others straight by their words, or that they can enlighten the world if it will only hear them.

The same applies to our own lives. We tend to believe that, if we take sufficient thought, if we worry enough, we shall be able to overcome our problems and command today and tomorrow. Our Lord, in Matthew 6:25–34, speaks concerning man's trust in his own word and his self-government:

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

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

27. Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28. And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29. And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

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

31. Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32. (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

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

34. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matt. 6:25–34)

In Matthew 6:24, our Lord contrasts trust in Mammon or wealth as against trust in the Lord. Here, He probes deeper. To trust in wealth or property is to trust in what we ourselves control, and which we have ourselves amassed. The trust in Mammon is a form of self-trust; it marks all classes, rich and poor. It is a form of belief in our creative word: we have created what we have, and only we can guard, maintain, and extend it, or so we believe.

One consequence of this trust in our own word and power is *anxiety*. What our will and our predetermination brought

forth, we ourselves alone can preserve. The autonomous man carries the universe on his shoulders, and no man living can play Atlas without disaster. The autonomous man faces a hostile world. The Darwinian sees the universe as a product of chance, of struggle, and the survival of the “fittest.” The fittest are those who survive. In such a world, there is no rest, only anxiety, a lone man against the world. The result is anxiety; anxiety breeds distrust of others, suspiciousness, and hostility. Since we are the lone providers for ourselves in a hostile universe, food and clothing become potential problems even sometimes to the wealthy.

Our Lord’s answer to this anxiety is, *first* of all, that God the Father is mindful of His creation. The birds, the wild flowers of the field, and all things else are provided for by God’s total providence. If the Lord is concerned about the little things in His creation, how much more so His image-bearers?

Second, our Lord is talking to His disciples. He chides them for their “little faith” (Matt. 6:30), but they are men of some faith. He thus speaks to them of their heavenly Father, and their need to trust in Him and His all-wise and all-holy government. The examples, birds and flowers, refer to food and clothing. The Lord provides for both: “Are ye not much better than they?” (Matt. 6:26).

Our Lord says, “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” (Matt. 6:25–26). The beauty of these words must not lull us to their rebuke and meaning. As Alford notes, “The argument is, ‘shall not He who gave us the greater, also give us the less?’”¹ Moreover, we have been created in God’s image, to be His dominion men. The Lord’s purpose for us far

1. Henry Alford, *The New Testament for English Readers* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, n.d.), 43.

exceeds His purposes for the sparrows and wild flowers. The anxiety in our lives is a product of sin, our self-trust and our confidence in our own creative word and our self-government. The surrender of anxiety for trust means also to enter into the harmony of His government.

The lilies of the field are the crown imperial, *fritildaria imperialis*, according to some, the *huleh* lily according to others. In any case, it refers to a wild flower and its singular, delicate, and complex form and beauty. The God who lavishes such beauty, design, and glory in a wild flower which has a very brief life has certainly a far more glorious design and purpose for our lives. Hence the folly of anxiety. Can we do better with our lives than God can do? This, however, is precisely what anxiety means.

Third, trusting in the Lord is more than an expression of words, or an emotional state. It means this: "seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). When we trust in Mammon or ourselves, we are seeking our kingdom and rule, and the result is anxiety. When we seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness, we are seeking His justice, His law order. Righteousness and justice are the same words in the Bible. If we deny God's law, we deny God's Kingdom and His righteousness.

Such Old Testament (Hebrew) words as *tsedek*, and *tsedagh*, and such New Testament (Greek) words as *dikaios* and *dike* mean righteousness and justice; the English gives us two words, *righteousness* being a more old-fashioned term than justice. Their meaning is the same.

Our anxiety cannot add to our span of life, nor to our stature; trusting in the Lord, i.e., seeking His Kingdom and justice, can add God's peace and His providential care and blessings to our lives. Therefore, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34). Every day, in a fallen world, has its shares of evils; this surely is sufficient for us, without the additional evil of our anxiety! For anxiety is an evil. It is a distrust of God the Lord, and an insistence that we can better protect our interests than the Almighty Himself.

T W E N T Y

JUDGING

For many people, there is a contradiction between Matthew 7:1–2 and 7:6. The first ostensibly *forbids* judgment, whereas the second *requires* us to classify many people as *dogs* and *swine!*

1. Judge not, that ye be not judged.
2. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. (Matt. 7:1–2)

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

What do these verses mean, and are they in contradiction?

Clearly, our Lord does *not* forbid judgment, but rather *requires* it. The standard He sets is the only permitted one: “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). We are to judge according to the only standard of righteousness, God’s word. What our Lord condemns in Matthew 7:1–2 is pharisaic, or *self-righteous* judgment. This is made most clear in the following sentences:

3. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

4. Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

5. Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. (Matt. 7:3-5)

Mote can be read to mean a speck of dust. Perhaps it more likely means a very small piece of sawdust, whereas *beam* is an amused over-statement for a small splinter of wood. Our Lord, a carpenter's son and a carpenter, drew the image from His own trade. In the days before protective glasses, flying sawdust and small wood chips could be a hazard at times. The imagery is transferred from the trade to the moral sphere. The man with the *beam* or wood chip in his eye is clearly the one whose condition is more serious; a speck of sawdust is more easily removed and can even be washed out by tears. A man whose judgments are *self-righteous* is comparable to the man with a wood chip in his eye: his condition is the serious one, and yet he insists that the problem is elsewhere.

There are thus two kinds of judgments: *first*, those in terms of God's righteousness, and those, *second*, in terms of man's self-righteousness. The Lord will judge us by the standard of judgment we use. We shall be judged, our Lord says plainly, by the standard or measure we ourselves use. We *honor* God when we apply His righteousness, justice, or law to all things, including ourselves. We *dishonor* God when we use our own standard and insist on applying it to all things. In many areas, purely personal and humanistic standards are commonplace. We have what has been called *regional holiness*, i.e., a regional or denominational doctrine of holiness. About forty years ago, I met an able and dedicated pastor who came from an area strong in regional holiness. A dedicated and earnest pastor, he still had some strange anomalies in his view of sanctification. He was very strongly opposed, for example, to films and to dancing, but he resented criticism of tobacco chewing, something commonplace and accepted in his home area! Another man I met spoke of cigarettes as the mark of nervous

people, modernists and atheists, whereas cigars he called “a good Calvinistic smoke,” for relaxed people of faith! Such particular views are not as common now, but others have taken their place.

Our Lord, however, is concerned with more serious problems, i.e., the replacement of God’s law with man’s law and judgments. For Him, the splinter which blinds our eyes is *self-righteousness*. Our salvation is the work of God’s righteousness and grace in and through Jesus Christ; our ability then to see and to judge is in terms of God’s righteousness; His law declares this standard.

One righteous judgment we must make is not to give holy things to dogs, nor pearls to swine. The early church took this seriously. For example, while covenant children were given communion, at one time non-members were not only excluded from the table, but even that part of the service. Even in my life-time, I have known of a church, on the mission field, which had non-members leave the service before communion was administered. This is not cited either to approve or disapprove of such a practice, but as illustrative of the church’s desire, in one area, to be faithful to Matthew 7:6.

The focus of the text is on “that which is holy,” or the holy thing. The contrast is between the holy thing, something belonging to the sanctuary or to God, or of God, and two kinds of unclean animals, *dogs* and *swine*. *Swine* are in particular regarded as an abomination in the law; a common food to many, they are to God unclean. *Dog* is sometimes used as a name for homosexuals (Rev. 22:15; Deut. 23:18), and there is a general hint here that it is some such abomination in God’s sight that is meant. Whedon summed up the meaning very well:

Now we must discern these characters. We must not entrust a holy thing to a dog. Apostles and bishops must not commit the office of the ministry to a wicked man. No sacred deposit, or responsibility, or even principle (symbolized by *pearls*) must be imparted to an unfit man. No doctrines or religious experiences must be brought before an incapable

sensualist. In fine, in imparting the official trusts and the truths of the Gospel, we must *discern* men's moral qualities, and deal with them accordingly.¹

Let us examine a concrete case of such a concern. The Puritans who settled in New England were men who had been sickened by the nature of membership in the Church of England. Citizenship in the state and membership in the church were open to all Englishmen; the name *Puritan* had been given to them because they sought to purify the church of unclean men.

Coming to New England, they sought to bar the unclean from membership. There was thus a dichotomy between *faith* and *membership*. In the earliest days, members were few. Things holy could only be entrusted to the mature. Even into the early 1800s, i.e., after 200 years, full membership was restrictive in almost all churches. With revivalism, all barriers disappeared, and a long-developing trend culminated in the equation of *experience* (i.e., a conversion experience) and *membership*. The result has been the triumph of democracy in the church.

We can say with reason that the earliest New England Puritan standard, which could restrict voting membership in a sizable congregation to seven men, was unduly narrow. However, today we see men voting in churches (and voting out pastors) whose low morality and scant knowledge of doctrine makes them unfit to bear rule, and voting is a form of rule. Rome has distrusted democracy in the church, but, at the same time, trusted seasoned human authority unduly, with equally unhappy results.

In other words, the church has not given serious heed to our Lord's words. Judgment is a necessity; no ready trust in men or in democracy is a prescription for anything save disaster. The same is true of a trust in an elite or a hierarchy.

What is the answer? Our inclination today is to demand computer-like answers: push a button, and get an answer. This

1. D. D. Whedon, *A Commentary on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark* (New York, NY: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 102.

is possible with machines we program, but not with men. The factor of *sin* is present in others, and in ourselves. There is, however, a clear-cut difference between God's righteousness and self-righteousness, between God's word and man's word. The Lord has not left us without an answer. The answer, however, requires growth, sanctification. Our problem is that we want answers without growth.

T W E N T Y - O N E

THE ASSURANCE OF ANSWERS TO PRAYER

Because the Sermon on the Mount is action oriented, it is also prayer oriented. Besides giving us instructions in praying and the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:5–15), we are given assurances concerning prayer. James, our Lord's brother, gives us like assurances and commands:

5. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

6. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

7. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

8. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

17. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

(James 1:5–8, 17)

To be lazy or slow in prayer, or to be prayerless, means that we prefer to get what we want in our own way rather than from the Lord; it means that we trust, not in God, but in ourselves. For this reason, our Lord's words are very blunt, like a slap in the face to a lazy follower:

7. Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10. Or if he ask a fish, will he be give him a serpent?

11. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

(Matt. 7:7–11)

The Lord, as James makes clear, is the giver of all good gifts. We cannot dictate the answers to our prayers, but we can be assured of good answers. Our problem is that, in our sin, we are so set on our predetermined answers, that we refuse to acknowledge God's better answers.

We are, however, given three commands: *first*, (v. 7) to ask, seek, and knock, to be earnest in prayer; *second*, something is required of us (vv. 13–14), to enter into the strait or narrow gate, i.e., into the disciplined life of faith; and, *third*, to beware of false prophets and therefore of false faith.

Whedon's comment on vv. 7 and 8 is excellent:

7. *Ask, and it shall be given you*—Under the threefold symbol of *asking*, *seeking*, and *knocking*, all the expressions of our desire are included, rising in the force of climax. Our bounteous heavenly Father has a corresponding response for each. For the asking he has gifts; for the seeking, discovery; for the knocking, admissions.

8. *Asketh receiveth*—Coming into the kingdom of God, and under his paternity, we have the child's right of petition. Gifts, even the highest gift, his own Holy Spirit, and much more all lower gifts suitable for us, will he grant. And the only limitation of our asking is that we confine ourselves to the proper relation of the child; and the only limitation of the gift, and so of the promise, is that God will give only what is suitable to his character as Father to grant. The child cannot expect to *command* favours out of his proper

sphere, or at the improper time. Of these the parent is the wise judge. So the child of the heavenly Father must not interpret this promise licentiously, as if God would obey his orders at the moment he chooses. The promise only affirms that, unlike the Gentile, he enjoys the privileges of accepted prayer, and receives the returns that the infinite Father sees best.

Seeketh findeth—To *seek* is a stronger act than to *ask*. Not everything is obtained by the means and at the moment of uttered supplication. What we are to *seek first*, we are told in chap. vi. 33. It is the kingdom of God and his righteousness, in opposition to all those things which the *Gentiles seek*, verse 32. And in that kingdom, revelations of wisdom and goodness, of experience and attainment, are granted to him who earnestly employs his day and strength in *seeking*.¹

When we are commanded to *ask*, the assumption is that we will ask for *good gifts*, as Ellicott noted, “that we ask as Christ has taught us, in His name and according to His spirit.”²

What we have in the command to *ask, seek, and knock* is most emphatically not positive or possibility thinking. “To seek’ means to seek from God,”³ not from our own inner resources. To obey our Lord here means to turn from our own self-confidence to a trust in the Lord, and prayer. Our Lord here requires an activism of faith. This activism rests on a trust in God. “Nothing is better adapted to excite us to prayer than a full conviction that we shall be heard.”⁴ True prayer is not a last but a first resort, and precedes and accompanies all our faithful endeavors. It rests on the conviction and assurance that the Lord God is in every event and consequence, and that “every one that asketh receiveth: and he that seeketh findeth:

1. D. D. Whedon, *A Commentary on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark* (New York, NY: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 102.

2. Charles John Ellicott, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, VI (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, reprint), 41.

3. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1943), 293.

4. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 351.

and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (v. 8). God is never indifferent to a single moment of time, nor an atom of being, much less to us.

In vv. 9–11, our Lord refers to the “daily bread” of the Galilean peasants of his day, *fish* and *bread*. In providing these to their children, the Galileans were providing them with sustenance, with daily care. Moreover, the *son* was the cherished member of the family, the future help of his parents as well as the continuity of the family. For a Galilean to give his son a stone for bread, and a serpent for a fish, was a repulsive and unnatural thought. Hence, our Lord says, “If ye then, *being evil*, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (v. 11). Even evil men are normally given to providing for their children, although, in our degenerate age, child abuse is extensive. Given that fact, most fallen men still provide for their children. How can we doubt then that God our Father is not loving and righteous in all His dealings with us?

Like the prophets before Him, and preachers since, our Lord taught the same thing more than once, and in more places than one. Had He been followed by a tape recorder, we would find many repetitions with interesting and important variations in terms of the context. Some of these things were written down, and later used by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, with the variations preserved. At times, the variations in the text have a common meaning; at other times, there is a different or an added emphasis and sometimes a different meaning. While a “harmony” of the Gospels is a useful tool, it can be a danger if we take the variations and seek to reduce them to a single meaning or one “original” text.

Matthew 7:7–11 has a parallel in Luke 11:5–13:

5. And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves;

6. For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?
7. And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.
8. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.
9. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.
10. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.
11. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he asks a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?
12. Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?
13. If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

The Parable of the Friend at Midnight (vv. 5–8), like the Parable of the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1–8) teaches perseverance in prayer. Even more, it requires a confident boldness that God is righteous and will hear us. In addition to the stone and serpent illustrations, we have here a reference to a scorpion as well. It is insane to think that a loving father, however sinful, would give his son such evil answers. How much more insane it is to assume either indifference or evil intent on the part of our heavenly Father.

A difference exists, however, with respect to the Father's *gifts*. In Matthew, the context clearly refers to "daily bread," to the needs of our daily life. Just as a son asks his human father for bread and fish, we ask the Lord for our daily needs, and He provides them. In Luke, however, our Lord, while citing the human daily needs at their basic level, i.e., bread, fish, egg, breaks the continuity to declare, "how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" (v. 13). This is in conformity with Matthew 6:33, the priority of the Kingdom of God.

Some questions, however, come to mind. *First*, the Spirit is already given to all of us who are in Christ; it is the mark of the regenerate. True, this particular episode precedes the formal gift of the Spirit to the apostolic company (John 20:22), but the reference is too general to be limited to the time of delivery in Palestine. The charismatics speak of a special gift of the Spirit *after* regeneration, but the reference here is not to the Pentecostal type of experience and gifts but to something more general.

Second, if we assume that the contrast of gifts is basic to the text, the answer becomes clearer. In Matthew 7:7–11, the contrast is between the earthly father's gift of daily bread and the heavenly Father's gift of daily bread and providential care. In Luke 11:5–13, there is also a contrast: on the one hand, we have the father and the friend meeting their responsibilities to their children and to friends who come by with unusual requirements at odd hours. Despite our annoyance at being awakened at midnight, we provide bread and lodging for the friend as a part of our godly hospitality. When we knock on the gates of heaven at midnight or in any hour of need, the Lord not only opens to us to provide for us, but His Holy Spirit provides us with a particular consolation, blessing, and provision. He who moves us to pray becomes Himself our comforter and assurance.

The child receives his daily bread from his earthly father in the trust that his needs will be met; he does not fret about the income tax, house payments, or food costs: he knows his father will feed him. The Holy Spirit gives us a like faith and assurance of our heavenly Father's providential care.

T W E N T Y - T W O

THE GOLDEN RULE

As is well known, the Golden Rule, in some form or another, is common to many cultures. There is, however, an important difference. In the non-Biblical forms, it has a negative cast. For example, Confucius held, "What you do not like if done to yourself, do not do to others." In this negative form, the meaning varies from culture to culture. *First*, if the culture is, as Far Eastern cultures have been, one with a world and life negating faith, the Golden Rule counsels a passivity and a non-interference. If, as is true for many Eastern religions, life is a burden, then any life-giving assistance is in essence a curse, and a man will not involve himself in life-support activities to others. Where in terms of faith death is ultimate, charity means giving people "the right to die." In our own humanistic culture, man is seen as a product of chaos and an evolution out of nothingness; death and annihilation are the destiny of all men. In such a society, we see, quite logically, the development of humanitarian movements to promote abortion, euthanasia, and the right to suicide. Such demands are in conformity with a humanistic form of the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule thus gains meaning in terms of the religious faith and culture which undergird it.

Second, this means that despite the *form* of the Golden Rule, even where negative, the meaning depends upon the

religion behind it. Thus, Rabbi Hillel declared, "Whatsoever thou wouldest that man should not do to thee, do not do that to them" (Bob. Shabb. 3/a). Hillel's meaning is totally different from that of Confucius. According to Hillel, this sentence is a summary of the Law. As such, the form is negative, because the law is ("Thou shalt not..."), but the meaning is positive. Very early, the church used this same form as a summary of the law. In an early summary of the Council of Jerusalem, the statement of Acts 15:28–29 is given with such an addition:

It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: to abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from fornication, *and whatsoever ye do not wish should be done unto you not to do (or do not do) to others* from which if ye keep yourselves ye shall do well, being borne along in the Holy Spirit—Fare ye well.

This same statement, in nearly identical form, appears in the Doms (or, Judgments) of King Alfred, with this addition:

From this one doom a man may remember that he judge every man righteously; he need heed no other doom book. Let him remember that he adjudge to no man that which he would not that he adjudge to him, if he sought judgment against him.¹

Until more recent and humanistic years, the Golden Rule was seen as a summation of the way of life set forth in God's law. Its meaning thus is radically different in the Bible than it is in other religions, any equation of the various instances of the Golden Rule is a falsification.

Third, the Golden Rule in Scripture is an aspect of a dominion mandate, whereas in other faiths it can mean a way of retreat. The law and the prophets call for dominion and victory in the Lord. This too is the meaning of the Golden Rule.

1. W. A. Spooner, "The Golden Rule," in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. VI (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1913, 1937), 311.

Its place in the Sermon on the Mount is indicative of this. The law, our Lord declares, is not to pass away, but put into force (Matt. 5:17–20). *The law* is an enemy only to sinners, and to them it spells the death penalty. For us, it is the righteousness of God: *it is the Golden Rule*. Our Lord identifies “the law and the prophets” with the Golden Rule, declaring: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: *for this is the law and the prophets*” (Matt. 7:12). We have a briefer reference to the Golden Rule in Luke 6:31, and again it is followed by the requirement of productivity, and the statement that a good tree brings forth good fruit (Luke 6:43–45; Matt. 7:16–20). The law is God’s appointed means for dominion, for applying His government and righteousness to all of life. The Golden Rule is thus a declaration of the royal virtue, of the King’s way of life. To separate the Golden Rule from the law of God is to falsify its meaning and to pervert or sentimentalize it. We are summoned by our Lord to exercise the royal virtue as kings, priests, and prophets unto Christ and on earth.

Fourth, the Golden Rule, if detached from the law, can be made an invitation to sin. In recent years, the Golden Rule has had a minor underground use to justify a Sadean concept of mutuality, i.e., a pornographic caricature of its meaning. We cannot overlook this fact. Just as homosexuals use antinomianism to justify their sin, the laws against homosexuality being ostensibly dead with the law, so some have set the Golden Rule in a pornographic context. This is why the Golden Rule is incomplete if we omit the last clause: “for this is the law and the prophets.” Our Lord rivets the law to the Golden Rule. As we have seen, this was nothing new. Hillel had declared the Golden Rule to be a summary of the law. Our Lord uses both the Golden Rule and the law to sum up the meaning of love, thereby equating law and love, as in Matthew 19:17–19, and again in Matthew 22:37–40:

37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38. This is the first and great commandment.

39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

To separate love and the law is clearly not Biblical. The modern usage of the Golden Rule is humanistic and emphatically not in agreement with Scripture. It not only advocates suicide and euthanasia but manifests in all these things its inescapable will to death (Prov. 8:36). Antinomianism has contributed to the rise of humanism and its evils.

There are some, like Israel Abrahams, who have held that the negative form of the Golden Rule is more realistic; given the great amount of evil in the world, the most we can normally do is to avoid harm to others. Johnson, however, is right in stating that what Jesus taught is “that the essence of righteousness is the constructive doing of good, not the negative avoidance of evil.”² We must add that “the constructive doing of good” is to do the will of God as set forth in the law. This is the Golden Rule.

2. Sherman E. Johnson, “Matthew,” in *The Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 7 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1951), 329.

T W E N T Y - T H R E E

THE NARROW WAY

13. Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

14. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

(Matt. 7:13–14)

In these two verses, our Lord makes use of an ancient common teaching device, *the two ways*. In one culture after another, men have held, in terms of their faith, that one way constitutes life, hope, or progress, and another leads to death. Thus, Cebes, a disciples of Socrates, held, “Seest thou not a certain small door, and a pathway before the door, in no way crowded, for only a very few travel that way, since it seems to lead through a pathless, rugged, and stony tract? That is the way of true discipline.” The philosopher Maximus of Tyre (150 B.C.) said, “There are many deceitful bypaths, most of which lead to precipices and pits, and there is a single narrow straight and rugged path and few indeed are they who can travel it.”¹ Another example of such teaching is the “Choice of Hercules.” The Greco-Roman two ways stressed

1. J. R. Dummelow, ed., *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1908, 1942), 650.

the way of culture and excellence over the masses of men; discipline for Cebes was culture.

Christian literature on *the two ways* was also in evidence, most notably in the *Didache*. Jewish writings also used the concept. Of course, Jeremiah 21:8 is a central example of it: "And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death."

Our Lord thus makes use of a very familiar idea, one well known to all His hearers. He was not thereby confirming a Greek wisdom, nor merely passing on a Hebrew aphorism. Our Lord's use of *the two ways* is determined, not by past usages, but by the context of His use. As such, He gives it a very different meaning than, for example, Cebes.

First, our Lord speaks of *the two ways* immediately after declaring the Golden Rule: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). It is therefore essentially related to the Golden Rule. We can say, briefly, that *the broad way* for many is, Do in others, before they do you in; knife them, before they knife you. The world sees *conflict* as basic, because it sees chaos as basic to the universe. Such men justify their amoral policies on the ground that such is the nature of reality; they see it as a dog-eat-dog universe, not as God's creation and moral order. *The broad way* is thus a denial of the Golden Rule, and the pursuit of a contrary way. Lip service may be paid to the Golden Rule by the pilgrims of *the broad way*, but their lives are a constant denial of it.

Second, *the broad way* is commonly seen as the way of toleration and freedom. To follow Christ and Scripture strictly and faithfully is held to be the rigid and narrow way. The premise is that too strong a commitment to anything other than oneself is unwise: keep your options open, and your mind "free." *The broad way* is thus presented as the source of intelligence and rationality, and narrowness is decried. The straitness of the gate, and the narrowness of the way, that leads to life is in terms of no personal options: the way is ordered by the Lord,

not by our tastes. We cannot pick and choose what to believe, as if at a smorgasbord: the Bible is a command book from God the Lord.

In 2 Chronicles 18:9, we read that King Ahab sat “in a void place,” *void* being a threshing-floor or forum, a broad place. He sought counsel which would please him, and he called the truth Micaiah prophesied as evil (2 Chron. 18:17). Such is the spirit of *the broad way*: it wants, not truth, but self-promotion and the pleasing word.

Our Lord says of the strait way, “Few there be that find it.” As Whedon noted, “They do not look for it. They see the crowd rushing through the broad gate; they desire nothing better than so liberal a route, and they would not press through the narrow way before their eyes.”²

“Narrow is the way” means, literally, *pressed*, or hemmed in between walls or rocks, as in a mountain gorge.³

Third, the broad way is the way of parasites. Our Lord is not making an obvious statement. He is not saying that murderers and moral degenerates go to hell. Rather, He is talking about false righteousness, hypocrisy, and Phariseeism. In the Sermon on the Mount, He contrasts the (false) “righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees” (Matt. 5:20) with true righteousness. The contrast therefore between the *many* who go to hell as against the *few* who take the way of life is contemporary, applying to His day, not to the end results of history. In brief, *the broad way* refers to the ostensibly good people who are actual roadblocks and enemies to Christ’s people and realm.

We have them with us today. Niemeyer has aptly described these people in our time:

If other countries have managed to escape civil war until now, it is because of the existence of a third element, an urbanized middle class committed to neither the Christian

2. D. D. Whedon, *A Commentary on the Gospels of Matthew and Mark* (New York, NY: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 103.

3. Charles John Ellicott, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VI (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 42.

tradition nor the ideologies, and occupying most leading positions in society. One may describe them as a class of profanized people. They have rejected the Christian assumption of man's fallen nature and thus have little or no sense of the reality of evil. Conversely they feel no need for God's salvation and manage to put their whole trust in efforts of human enlightenment, which must be called their ultimate hope. For about two hundred years these people have lived on the left-overs of Christian moral capital.⁴

Niemeyer cites Walter Berns' question of the men of the Advisory Council of the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice. His question, "Why *not* commit crimes?", was not answered and created only embarrassment.⁵ Such embarrassment was understandable: the question in effect called for a religious commitment to the God of the law and to His righteousness.

But such a course of non-commitment, *the broad way*, is the way of death. *The strait way* "leadeth unto life." "Leadeth," *apago*, *apagousa*, means literally leads away, i.e., leads away unto life. It leads away from *the broad way* and from *destruction*. *The strait gate* is at the beginning of this road of life. We do not enter into life in heaven, but here and now, as we give ourselves without reservations to the Lord. The test of that commitment our Lord then sets forth: "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matt.7:20).

4. Gerhart Niemeyer, "Beyond Democratic Disorder," in *The Intercollegiate Review* 1, Spring-Summer, 1981, 68.

5. *Ibid.*, 69; cited from *Modern Age*, Vol, XXIV, no.1, Winter, 1980, 20.

T W E N T Y - F O U R

THE TEST
OF PROFESSION

15. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.
 16. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?
 17. Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.
 18. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.
 19. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.
 20. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.
- (Matt. 7:15–20)

In our Lord's day, as in our own, human motivation was seen in sophisticated and alien terms, and hence falsified. Dualistic influences in the Greco-Roman world saw the body as a separate substance of evil disposition. A man could therefore have a supposedly pure mind in an evil body. In varying forms this view governed a variety of philosophies and faiths, which held to a tripartite nature of man, or a dualistic one.

The Bible, of course, sees man in all his being as one in substance, *created*, made wholly good by God in the beginning (Gen. 1:31), and, because of the fall, become wholly bad

(Rom. 3:10–18). Christ’s redemption is the restoration of the whole man, not his “soul” only.

Our Lord thus insists here on the unity of man. A good tree means good fruit; and an evil tree, diseased, rotten, and wormy fruit. We are not allowed to excuse men, saying, “He may be good at heart, and God alone can judge the heart.” We are given the grounds for judgment: good fruit.

Having said this, we must next see that our Lord, establishing this standard *for all*, applies it specifically to leaders in the faith. The Sermon on the Mount determines the criteria for true faith, and for false faith.

First, Christians are to beware of false prophets; these come in the manner of sheep, as faithful members of Christ’s flock, but they are in reality ravening wolves (v. 15). Whatever his guise, a wolf can only be trusted to be a wolf. Earlier, our Lord distinguishes between the self-righteousness of the Pharisees and true righteousness. He is here talking about the church, i.e., Phariseeism and hypocrisy within the fold of Christ’s Kingdom. The Jewish religious leaders did not claim to be prophets. After Pentecost, many false church leaders did. Although in a garbled statement, the *Didache* echoed our Lord’s requirements, and at one point flatly stated, “From his behavior, then, will the false prophet and the true prophet be known.”¹ However, the scope of this text cannot be limited to the apostolic and post-apostolic era. It applies to all leaders in the church (and members as well) for all time.

This test of righteousness and holiness, of good fruits, is clearly full of Old Testament echoes of judgment. Our Lord also is quoting John the Baptist (Matt. 3:10) and John’s announcement of the coming judgment on the Old Israel. Our Lord stresses the same fact later, in John 15:2, 6.

The term “sheep’s clothing” makes clear the fact of deception by the wolves (c.f. Zeph. 3:3; Matt. 10:16; John 10:12; Acts 20:29), whose purpose is the destruction of the church,

1. Robert A. Kraft, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Vol. 3, *Barnabas and the Didache* (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1965), 170.

although they may pretend to be its defenders. *Deception and destruction* are basic to their purpose. They have a professional and purely external or pretended holiness; they seek to separate the sheep from their shepherds.

Second, how are the unsophisticated church members to recognize them? Our Lord says, “By their *fruits*.” The wolves seek to be impressive; if the church members are more impressed by unctuous ways and smooth words, they will be self-deceived, because they will thereby manifest a preference for a particular kind of fruit. Over the years, I have seen church members excuse financially and sexually immoral pastors and gloss over their sins, thereby revealing what they are, and what kinds of fruit they admire and desire.

Third, there is another facet of our Lord’s description of evil which must be noted. Evil disguises itself as righteousness; the wolf comes in sheep’s clothing. In the beginning, Satan presented himself to Adam and Eve as the apostle of true freedom (Gen. 3:1–5). Paul tells us of the prevalence of evil disguised as righteousness, declaring,

13. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

14. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:13–14)

This same fact is alluded to in Acts 15:24; Romans 16:18; Galatians 1:7–8, 6:12; Philippians 1:15; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 4:1; 2 Corinthians 2:17; Philippians 3:2; and Titus 1:10. Evil is generally disguised as true righteousness, and it denounces the godly as wayward and evil.

Fourth, moreover, our Lord, in describing character, does something which in almost every age goes against the grain: men, He makes clear, are either good or bad, good trees or bad trees, regenerate or unregenerate. This does not eliminate differences in the degree of evil, or of good. We are at various stages of sanctification. All the same, our lives have a basic character, good or evil, regenerate or unregenerate. All too much thinking today wars against that elemental distinction.

Both man's disguises and his nature shall be detected: "by their fruits ye shall know them" (v. 20). There is no escaping this elementary fact.

The question has been raised by some that our Lord does not identify "the fruits." Some have interpreted this to mean sound doctrine, others a life of good works. All of Scripture, however, speaks of what the "fruits" are, and we cannot abstract one facet as the sum total thereof. It is a life of faith and faithfulness in the Spirit to the every word of God. Calvin made it clear that it included sound doctrine, a godly life, the requirements Paul sets forth for bishops (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:6–9) and more. The Holy Spirit is wisdom, and He gives us knowledge of sound fruits.²

Men want to complicate moral decisions, because this lessens the moral imperative. God's law is simple and straightforward: it does not permit sophistry and evasion, and hence men prefer a man-made spirituality and law to God's. Our Lord strikes at the heart of this. The moral order is as clear-cut as the natural order. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs from thistles; the very thought is absurd. It is no less absurd to expect a good man to bring forth evil fruit, or an evil man to be righteous and holy. The consistency of the natural world is part of a broader consistency, the coherence of the moral order. It follows clearly, then, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" (v. 20).

2. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 363–65.

T W E N T Y - F I V E

FALSE FAITH

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

22. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23. And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. (Matt. 7:21–23)

As we come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, we find the people “astonished at his (Jesus’) doctrine: For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:28–29). Certainly the scribes and Pharisees, as doctors of the law, had some kind of authority, but our Lord had authority in a higher sense. Our text makes clearer what that authority was.

First, Jesus taught clearly that, on the day of judgment, He would be the Judge. “In that day,” men would stand before Him to answer to Him as their Lord. Even in their false justification, they will invoke His name: they prophesied, cast out devils, and claimed also to have done “many wonderful works” *in Christ’s name*. Thus, our Lord taught with authority, the authority of the Messiah and Judge.

Second, He spoke as God: law in Scripture is covenant law, and it comes from God alone. For Jesus Christ to speak as the lawgiver was to speak as God.

The law is confirmed, stressed, and expounded by our Lord. It is an absurd and false reading of Scripture to oppose grace and law, or to see the law as set aside. Albright and Mann observed, “Without the Law there would have been no Gospel; *ex nihilo nihil fit* is valid today as it was the Middle Ages: without the Covenant of Sinai and the election of Israel there is no understanding of the Gospel.”¹ Our Lord clearly saw His authority as ultimate and divine. At one point, He approved of an extension of the law of the tithe as acceptable, while condemning the scribes and the Pharisees (Matt. 23:23). As God the Son, He was and is the Lawgiver and therefore also the Judge.

In terms of this fact, as we look at His words, we find the following facts clearly in focus. *First*, in Grant’s words, “The duty of obedience to the will of God takes precedence over everything else.”² The will of God is made known to us in His law-word. Only those shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven who “do the will of my Father which is in heaven.” Simple assent to doctrine is not enough. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,” means profession in itself is meaningless. Our Lord’s brother, James, says the same thing:

14. What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

15. If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

17. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

1. W. T. Albright and C. S. Mann, *Matthew*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), cviii.

2. Frederick C. Grant, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. I (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1955), 45.

26. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:14–17, 26)

Of faith as mere words or empty profession, James says bluntly, “can faith save him?” Our Lord is equally blunt.

Second, this duty of obedience is to the plain law-word of God. It is not at all things which seem imposing in their holiness to men, i.e., prophesying, casting out devils, and doing many wonderful works. Today we can add being a great church-builder, a Biblical scholar or scribe, and promoting great “projects” for the faith. Lip service is condemned, as well as institutional and other activities which are not related to simple obedience to the every word of God.

Third, all such works are called *iniquity*, *anomia* or lawlessness in the Greek. This is an important point. What our Lord calls iniquity or lawlessness is highly regarded by ostensibly godly men: prophesying, casting out devils, and doing “many marvelous works.” Our Lord does not reserve the term *lawlessness* to theft, murder, adultery, false witness, and covetousness, as many do. He applies it to “good works” which are not obedience to the law-word of the Father. This clearly condemns many of the “good works” of “Christians” today, because they are antinomian works. The faith is set forth by our Lord as a *moral* matter, and that necessary morality comes only from God’s word. Just as our salvation comes only and entirely from the Lord, so too our morality is to come entirely from God and His word. There is no independent salvation nor any independent word. It was St. Anselm who rightly held, I believe in order that I may understand. We may very well add, in terms of Scripture, we obey, in order that we may grow in faith. Our Lord says, “If any man will do his (God’s) will, he shall know of the doctrine” (John 7:17). A common problem in the church is the presence of great numbers of “dead” members. They have been members most of their lives, and, apart from going to church and trying to avoid adultery and murder, they have little in the way of obedience. Is it any wonder that they show no growth? The dead cannot grow.

Fourth, our Lord says to all such, “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” Our Lord uses these words also in the Parable of the Last Judgment (Matt. 25:41). They are cited from Psalm 6:8; David spoke, looking for God’s judgment; Christ now speaks as that Judge. The smug self-righteousness of these “many” is sharply judged. They had readily assumed their salvation. They expected an affirmative answer as they *corrected* Christ the King, saying, “have we not” done these many remarkable things for you and your Kingdom? Hence, the particular sharpness of our Lord’s reply.

Fifth, it should be apparent by now that our Lord is again dealing with false followers within the Kingdom. Calvin called attention to this, saying:

Christ extends his discourse further: for he speaks not only of *false prophets*, who rush upon the flock to tear and devour, but of hirelings, who insinuate themselves, under fair appearances, as pastors, though they have no feeling of piety. This doctrine embraces all hypocrites, whatever may be their rank or station, but at present he refers particularly to pretended teachers, who seem to excel others. He not only directs his discourse to them, to rouse them from the indifference, in which they lie asleep like drunk people, but also warns believers, not to estimate such masks beyond their proper value. In a word, he declares that, so soon as the doctrine of the Gospel shall have begun to bear fruit by obtaining many disciples, there will not only be very many of the common people who falsely and hypocritically submit to it, but even in the rank of pastors there will be the same treachery, so that they will deny by their actions and life what they profess with the mouth. Whoever then desires to be reckoned among the disciples, must labour to devote himself, sincerely and honestly, to the exercises of a new life.³

3. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 367.

T W E N T Y - S I X

FOUNDATIONS TESTED

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

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

26. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. (Matt. 7:24–27)

The Biblical summations of the law, with their summons to obedience, are Leviticus 26:3–45, and Deuteronomy 28:1ff. Both instances give us blessings and curses for faithfulness and for lawlessness. The same is true of the Sermon on the Mount: our Lord begins with blessings, and cites judgment on sins throughout, concluding with the fall of every house built upon sand.

The rabbinical parallel can be found in Aboth R. Nathan:

A man who has works and has learnt much Torah, to what may he be likened? To a man who builds below with stones and above with adobe; and when much water comes and

surrounds it, the stones are not moved from their place. But a man who has no good works and learns Torah, to what may he be likened? To a man who builds first with adobe and then with stones, and when even small streams come, they are immediately toppled over.¹

The rabbinic example cites the Torah, knowing and doing what God's law requires. Our Lord's illustration is obviously the rabbinic one, but with a major difference. Our Lord has commented on the law of God, the Mosaic revelation. He now speaks of that revelation *and* of His own comments as equally the word of God. The test is "whosoever *heareth* these sayings of *mine*, and *doeth* them." The word of God is His word, and His word is the word of God. The test is *hearing and doing*. As Grant noted, "The true test of religion (*righteousness* in 5:20, the *practice of piety* in 6:1) is not a verbal profession but the actual doing of the will of God, as explained by Jesus in his gospel of the kingdom."²

Kitto indicated what foundations may have meant in this parable:

At this very day the mode of building in Christ's own town of Nazareth suggests the source of this image. Dr. Robinson was entertained in the house of a Greek Arab. The house had just been built, and was not yet finished. In order to lay the foundations he had dug down to the solid rock, as is usual throughout the country here, to the depth of thirty feet, and then built up arches.³

This account by Kitto dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century. Obviously, our view of foundations has changed. To build on the rock, in Kitto's example as well as in our Lord's parable, means to go down to the rock. To build upon sand is to be content with the surface.

1. Cited by Sherman E. Johnson, in "Matthew," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, I.c. Vol. VII (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1951), 334.

2. Frederick C. Grant, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. I (New York, NY: Harper, 1955), 45.

3. M. R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, I (MacDill, FL: MacDonald Publishing Company, 1886, reprint), 36.

The *rock* here means God, and it means Christ. When *rock* is used symbolically in Scripture, it means God, as, for example, in Deuteronomy 32:15, 18, 30, with one exception, Deuteronomy 32:31, where it means a false god.

Our Lord is thus saying that He is God incarnate, and that our lives and futures depend on hearing and doing His words. None of this was lost on the leaders of Israel. The astonishment of the people is recorded for us (Matt. 7:28–29). Jesus had equated His words with God’s word, and Himself with the Rock. At the very least, God was speaking through Him as He had through Moses and Isaiah, if not more powerfully present. Jesus was so obviously supernatural to them that they were ready to believe soon that He was John the Baptist resurrected, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, “or one of the prophets” brought back by God to reveal more to them (Matt. 16:14).

Our Lord here makes clear that every faith shall be tested, every foundation subjected to God’s testing and judgment. In Calvin’s words,

Christ therefore compares a vain and empty profession of the Gospel to a beautiful, but not solid, building, which, however elevated, is exposed every moment to downfall, because it wants a foundation. Accordingly, Paul enjoins us to be well and thoroughly founded on Christ, and to have deep roots, (Col. ii. 7), “that we may not be tossed and driven about by every wind of doctrine,” (Eph. iv. 14), that we may not give way at every attack. The general meaning of the passage is that true piety is not fully distinguished from its counterfeit till it comes to the trial. For the temptations, by which we are tried, are like billows and storms, which easily overwhelm unsteady minds, whose lightness is not perceived during the season of prosperity.⁴

Scripture often speaks of the *refining* of God’s people, e.g., in Isaiah 48:10, “Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.” When God

4. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 370.

refines us, we see that we are not silver but much dross. He purifies us in the furnace of affliction.

Thus, the images of both flood and fire are used to indicate the radical nature of our testing. This testing is a necessity if we are to be useful to God the Lord.

The testing is of *foundations*, of our basic faith. Are we established firmly on God the Lord, or is our foundation one of sand, i.e., humanism? Genesis 3:1–5 sets forth the first humanist manifesto and the essence of humanism.

Both builders build a *house*, i.e., their lives on what purports to be God's word. Both are *hearers* of Christ's word, as that both builders are outwardly in the church. The difference, as our Lord makes clear, is not in the *hearing* but in the *doing*. The second class of men hear our Lord's words but do not do them. Our Lord assumes the reprobation of the unbelievers; He is discussing the reprobation of the false believers.

Israel was a covenant nation and people, but still predominantly unbelieving. Our Lord has made clear the condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees. Here He looks at those who *hear* His words and makes clear that all who do *not* do them are no better than the Pharisees, who cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:20). God's Kingdom is closed to all hearers in the church who lack the witness of action. Again we have the same declaration as James made later: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17).

Calvin said of the words, "Who heareth these sayings," that "The relative *these* denotes not one class of sayings, but the whole amount of doctrine."⁵ Precisely. The Sermon on the Mount is our Lord's commentary on the law and the prophets: all Scripture is His word, and He sets forth the meaning thereof as its author. He declares, not, "Thus saith the Lord," but "I say unto you," for He is the Lord. We have here His seal and imprimatur on the whole of Scripture.

Our Lord gives us God's doctrine, not, as Calvin notes, "the speculative theology of Popery."⁶ More than once, He

5. *Idem*.

6. *Ibid.*, I, 247.

astonished people with His doctrine (Mark 1:22, Luke 4:32). His words were accompanied with and marked by *power* (Luke 4:32).

We cannot be partakers of His power and the power of His word apart from Him as our foundation. This means that our lives must be built on Him, and totally faithful to Him.

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The Ministry of Chalcedon

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