



The Sermon on the Mount

“Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Mt 4:17)

Contents:

1. Introduction: Background and Interpretation

Part 1: The Subjects of the Kingdom (5:3-16)

2. The Beatitudes (5:1-12)
3. Salt and Light (5:13-16)

Part 2: The Precepts of the Kingdom (5:17–5:48)

4. The Fulfillment of the Law (5:17-20)
5. Murder (5:21-26)
6. Adultery and Divorce (5:27-32)
7. Oaths (5:33-36)
8. Retribution (5:37-42)
9. Love for Enemies (5:43-48)

Part 3: The Righteousness of the Kingdom (6:1-7:12)

10. Giving to the Needy (6:1-4)
11. Prayer and Fasting (6:5-18)
12. Treasure in Heaven (6:19-24)
13. Worry (6:25-34)
14. Judging Others (7:1-6)
15. Ask, Seek, Knock (7:7-12)

Part 4: The Tests of the Kingdom (7:13-29)

16. Straight Gates and False Prophets (7:13-20)
17. A Warning about False Profession, the Blessedness of Obedience, and Epilogue (7:21-29)

Resources:

Robert Deffinbaugh, “The Sermon on the Mount,” Biblical Studies Press, 2006. www.bible.org.

William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary*, vol. 9. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973).

R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001)

Jeff Miller, “The Sermon on the Mount” sermon series. <http://www.bible.org>

Others as noted



The Sermon on the Mount

Lesson 1: Introduction

The Sermon on the Mount is recorded in Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6. It is one of the most beloved, well known, and frequently quoted portions of the Bible. It's also the longest single unit of Jesus' personal teaching recorded in Scripture, "the most concentrated yet comprehensive portion of His ethical teaching."¹ Some think of it as "the most profound section of the entire New Testament and the whole Bible, ... the most penetrating section of God's Word."² Unfortunately, it's also a very misunderstood passage. Thus, it is beneficial for believers to carefully and thoughtfully study the Sermon. Our goal should be not only to learn what Jesus said and meant, but also to apply the lessons from the Sermon on the Mount to our own lives personally.

We'll be studying the Sermon from Matthew's account (mostly). Before launching out into a detailed study of the Sermon itself, it may be beneficial to consider some introductory matters.

- I. Definition: What is the Sermon on the Mount? The Sermon as recorded likely does not contain everything that Jesus said on that occasion. It's probably a condensation or summary of a teaching session that perhaps lasted an hour or longer (as recorded in the NT, the Sermon takes only a few minutes to read). It was common at that point in history for a teacher (rabbi) to sit in a prominent place, gather his disciples around him, and teach. This is the setting of the Sermon.
- II. Literary style: The Sermon on the Mount has much in common with OT wisdom literature, reading much like the Book of Proverbs especially. This is important in that, like OT wisdom literature, the Sermon on the Mount contains poetic material that must be carefully and thoughtfully interpreted. If we seek to apply a strictly literal interpretive approach, we'll end up cutting off our hands, plucking out our eyes, and giving away all our possessions, among other things. The Sermon contains poetic imagery that the Jews of the time were familiar with, and modern interpreters should keep this in mind as they seek to interpret Jesus' words.
- III. Theme: The unifying theme of the Sermon is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew places the sermon immediately after two verses insisting that the primary content of Jesus' preaching was the gospel of the kingdom (4:17, 23). This theme brackets the Beatitudes (5:3, 10) and appears in 5:17-20, which details the relation between the OT and the kingdom. It returns at the heart of the Lord's Prayer (6:10), climaxes the section on kingdom perspectives (6:33).³ While some of his listeners recognized Jesus as the King, others must be exhorted to enter the kingdom (7:13-14) and to evaluate whether they are

¹Harry A. Sturz, "The Sermon on the Mount and Its Application to the Present Age," *Grace Journal* Volume 4 (Grace Seminary, 1963; 2002), 4:3.

²R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001), 16.

³ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

genuine citizens of Jesus' kingdom (7:21-29). As a summary, we can suggest that the Sermon describes the character, requirements, and conditions of entering and living in the kingdom.

- IV. The Audience: Whom did Jesus intend as the audience of the Sermon?
- A. The disciples. This would include the twelve as well as a good number of others.
Mt 5:1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him.
 - B. The multitude. Jesus often taught his disciples while others listened (Luk 20:45). Perhaps only a small group of disciples gathered to listen when Jesus began speaking, but by the time He finished, many people had joined them.
Mt 7:28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:
 - C. Thus we find some of the material directly applicable only to believers and some directed to unbelievers.
- V. Interpretation: One can find at least a dozen different schemes various groups have used throughout the history of the church to interpret and apply the Sermon on the Mount. This reveals that it is not an easy passage to understand. Jesus' words may seem straight-forward and clear, but thoughtful consideration of the Sermon will reveal the depths of its teaching and the difficulty of understanding some of the statements.
- A. Some have taken the Sermon in a woodenly literal way without allowing for metaphorical expression or poetic imagery. If you eye causes you to lust, you really should pluck it out. Pacifists (e.g., Amish) take Jesus' command to "resist not evil" to prohibit any form of self-defense and/or military engagement.
 - B. Roman Catholics have historically applied the Sermon as standards for the clergy (not the laity). This set up a double-standard.
 - C. Lutherans have suggested that the Sermon is Jesus' exposition of the OT law, and His intent was to drive men to repent of sin and cry for grace.⁴ While the Sermon certainly may have this impact, the overall theme of the Sermon goes beyond this.
 - D. Some have argued that the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount is a sort of moral road map toward social progress. This is the view of classic liberalism. But the Sermon is far more than a list of rules and regulations. And we cannot apply Jesus' teaching to society without the citizens of society being members of Jesus' kingdom.
 - E. Some see the Sermon as a description of how to enter the kingdom. They suggest that those who obey Jesus' teaching will be saved. Such an approach amounts to salvation by works, which obviously contradicts the rest of the NT. "It is evident from the clear teaching of the rest of the New Testament that the Lord's purpose was not to address the unbelieving world in this discourse to show them the way of life, either individual or social."⁵

⁴ MacArthur asserts that the Sermon is "a masterful exposition of the law and a potent assault on Pharisaic legalism." *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Dallas: Word Publishing), 1997.

⁵J. Dwight Pentecost, "The Purpose of the Sermon on the Mount," Dallas Theological Seminary, *Bibliotheca Sacra* Volume 115 (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1958; 2002), 115:130.

- F. Some see the Sermon as a description of how church life ought to be. However, the church is never mentioned here—no clear gospel presentation, no baptism, no indwelling or baptism of the Holy Spirit, no prayer in Christ’s name—no mention of the church at all. Further, Jesus taught these principles well before the church existed. No one in the original audience would have been thinking about life in the church while they listened to Jesus’ address.
- G. Similarly, a common approach is to think of the Sermon as a description of essential Christian discipleship. One could look at it as “the outward manifestations of character and conduct of the true believer and genuine disciple, . . . the greatest statement of true Christian living”⁶ St. Augustine, for example, described it as “a perfect standard of the Christian life.”⁷ This comes close, but seems to neglect the kingdom implications of the Sermon. Further, if the Sermon is meant to describe the normal Christian life, most Christians come far short.
- H. Dispensationalists have held various positions on the Sermon.
1. Some dispensationalists hold that the Sermon applied specifically only to the original audience when Jesus was offering the kingdom to Israel.⁸
 2. Some hold that the Sermon applies until the beginning of the millennial kingdom, during the interim period between the first and second advents.⁹
 3. Some hold that the standards of the Sermon applied only to the future millennial reign of Christ, not to the church age. Many dispensationalists today would affirm that the Sermon’s *primary* application awaits the millennial reign of Christ, but they would also assert that the Sermon applies to believers today.¹⁰
- It seems obvious that some aspects of the Sermon do not fit a millennial kingdom context. Pentecost notes that “the presence of evil and evil men, the existence of poverty, famine, hunger, and need, are all contrary to the predictions made in the Old Testament concerning the character of the kingdom. . . . We thus conclude that the Sermon on the Mount cannot be made to apply to conditions on the earth after the establishment of the [millennial] kingdom.”¹¹
- I. Perhaps the best way to approach the Sermon is to see it as Jesus’ description of life in the kingdom (see definition of this concept below). It’s not a description of

⁶ *Liberty University Bible Commentary*

⁷ Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 15. Augustine likely coined the title “Sermon on the Mount” for this passage.

⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost reflects this position. “[T]he Sermon on the Mount is to be connected with the offer of the kingdom to Israel at the first advent of Christ, so that its primary application is to that day and time, and must be so interpreted.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* Volume 115 (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1958; 2002), 115:212.

⁹ Tom Constable, *Expository Notes on the Bible*, reflects this position.

¹⁰ Ryrie asserts that the “primary fulfillment of the Sermon and the full following of its laws” relates to “either the offering or the establishment of the Millennial kingdom.” *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 100. He affirms that the Sermon is applicable and profitable for believers of this age.

¹¹ Sturz, *Grace Journal* Volume 4 (Grace Seminary, 1963; 2002), quoting Dwight Pentecost, “The Purpose of the Sermon on the Mount,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (April, 1958), p. 135. Sturz gives a long list of conditions mentioned in the Sermon that do not seem to fit with a millennial context. Both Sturz and Pentecost are dispensationalists.

how to enter into Christ's kingdom, but an invitation for unbelievers to enter (cf. Mt 7:13-14) and a guide for those who are already a part of His kingdom. Further, as noted above, the Sermon contains poetic material that must be carefully and thoughtfully interpreted. It seems unlikely that a strictly literal application of the Sermon is what Jesus had in mind. The Sermon has more in common with OT wisdom literature than with a modern newspaper report.

If we view Matthew 4:17 as an introduction to the Sermon, then perhaps the message of the Sermon on the Mount can be captured by the phrase, "What it means to repent and belong to the kingdom of heaven."¹²

Mt 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Note several reasons the Sermon applies to believers today:¹³

1. Jesus expected his listeners to obey what He's teaching (see 7:24-28).
2. Nothing in the passage or anywhere else suggests that what Jesus said was not applicable to the original audience or to succeeding generations.
3. Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel and to teach converts to observe whatever Jesus had commanded (Mt 28:18-20). Part of what Jesus commanded is found in the Sermon.
4. The rest of the NT repeats many of the themes from the Sermon, which suggests that the material applies to church-age believers.

VI. The Kingdom: In order to make sense of the Sermon, we must determine what Jesus meant by "the kingdom."

- A. As noted above, references to the kingdom abound in the Sermon: Matt 5:3, 10, 19, 20, 6:10, 13, 33, 7:21. Thus, we must seek to understand what Jesus had in mind. What is Christ's "kingdom"?
1. God is a universal king over all creation (Acts 17:24). This is not the kingdom Christ has in mind here.
 2. The kingdom Jesus has in mind is the earthly, physical, literal kingdom of God mediated by the Messiah—the Messianic kingdom, the rule of Christ on the throne of David. This is the kingdom the Jews of Jesus' day were expecting. This is the kingdom Jesus announced was "at hand" (Mt 3:2, 4:17). Jesus Himself is the king in God's kingdom, and where He reigns, there the kingdom of God is already present. So it seems that the first coming of Christ initiated the kingdom.
 3. The earthly, millennial kingdom is obviously not currently in operation, or at least not fully operational. Jesus is not reigning over the earth from the throne of David in Jerusalem. The promises from the OT have not yet been fulfilled. The Jews rejected Jesus as their king and Messiah. The kingdom, in its fullest sense, has not come yet. This facet of the kingdom is still future.

¹² Following Deffinbaugh/Ellis. www.bible.net

¹³ From Sturz, *Grace Journal* 4:3.

4. While the full expression of the kingdom awaits Jesus' return, the kingdom has been initiated or inaugurated by Jesus. There seems to be more than one phase or expression of Christ's kingdom. Between the first and second comings of Christ, the "mystery" form of the kingdom prevails (see Mt 13). This phase of the kingdom may be thought of as Jesus' spiritual reign over His people. Today, one enters the kingdom by being born again (John 3:3-7; Col 1:13). Believers are citizens of Christ's kingdom, but not in a physical, earthly sense, but in the sense of Christ's spiritual reign or rule over his people. Christ is king, and believers enter his kingdom when they get saved.¹⁴

Note on the kingdom: It's important for us to recognize that certain elements of kingdom life await the millennial reign of Christ. The physical aspects of kingdom life—reigning with power, overthrowing enemies, ruling over a land and a people, etc.—awaits a future time. Some Christians seek to apply the promises from the earthly, physical, Messianic kingdom (the millennium) to the church age. This is a mistake. The mystery form of the kingdom overlaps with the church age, but the church and the kingdom are not identical.

- B. Thus, the Sermon pertains to Christ's kingdom, whether the present mystery form of it or the future millennial form. Certain elements of the Sermon seem to apply more directly to the present and other parts to the future. In any case, Christians of any age should thoughtfully seek to apply the principles from the Sermon.

Note the Quote: [T]he Sermon on the Mount ... is intended for the guidance of regenerate persons in an unregenerate world. And because the gifts and empowerment of the Gospel are his who trusts and serves His Lord, these words of Christ stand. Their revelation has never been withdrawn: they set forth the true standard of Christian morality. They describe the conduct produced by the life of Christ in His believing people: they abide in full moral applicability to us: they are [timeless] and reveal the moral laws upon which the judgments of the Day of Christ are founded. Thus they should be studied and taken to heart by the follower of Christ who would learn of Him who is meek and lowly in heart.¹⁵

VII. Overview of the Sermon on the Mount — see the title page¹⁶

Conclusion: Jesus' Sermon on the Mount calls all His followers to a very high level of discipleship. Anyone claiming to be a follower of Christ must seriously consider how well he is obeying Jesus' words here. Living the Sermon on the Mount means, fundamentally, submitting to the authority of Jesus. It means coming to Him, taking His yoke, and learning from Him (Mt 11:28-30).¹⁷

¹⁴ The spiritual kingdom "refers to the kingdom into which all believers have been placed (Col. 1:13), and it is entered by the new birth. The Ruler is Christ; in this concept of the kingdom He rules over believers only; and the relationship exists now." Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 398.

¹⁵ C. F. Hogg and J. B. Watson, *On the Sermon on the Mount* (London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 3rd printing, 1947), pp. 18,19. Quoted in Struz.

¹⁶ This scheme follows the breakdown from the *NIV Study Bible* notes with the main sections coming from Deffinbaugh/Ellis. Some modifications by the author.

¹⁷ Deffinbaugh/Ellis.

The Sermon on the Mount is a profound and rich passage, the “greatest of all sermons having to do with human conduct.”¹⁸ In the following weeks, we’ll be looking in depth at this Sermon and seeking to understand what Jesus said, what He meant, and how we should respond. Every student would benefit from reading through the Sermon (Matthew 5-7) as we progress.

¹⁸ H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Loizeaux Bros., Inc., Bible Truth Depot, 1943), p. 44. Quoted in Sturz, *Grace Journal* 4:3.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 1: The Subjects of the Kingdom (Mt 5:3-16)

Lesson 2: The Beatitudes (Mt 5:1-12)

The Character and Blessedness of Citizens of Christ's Kingdom

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the Beatitudes, statements Jesus made regarding the blessedness of the inhabitants of the kingdom.

I. The Setting (Mt 5:1-2; Luke 6:17-19)

- A. The contents of Matthew's record of the Sermon and Luke's record of it are very similar.¹⁹ There is little doubt that the two writers are recording the same sermon. We can't totally rule out the idea that Jesus preached the same sermon twice, but it seems unlikely.
- B. One problem in reconciling the two accounts is that Matthew says the Sermon occurred when Jesus went "up into a mountain" (5:1), while Luke says Jesus "came down with them, and stood in the plain" (6:17). Possible solutions:
 - 1. Jesus went into a mountain but found a level spot to speak from. The word "plain" literally means "level place," which can be found even on mountains. And the mountains in that region are more like hills. However, this does not explain how Jesus "came down."
 - 2. Perhaps Luke does not mention that Jesus went up into a mountain before giving the Sermon. Jesus "came down" (Luke) then "went up" (Mt) sometime later. The text doesn't say that this occurred, but it could have.

II. Theme and Background

- A. The Beatitudes are the collection of blessings Jesus spoke at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. There are other Beatitudes ("blessed be ...") but this is the most elaborate list in the Bible.
- B. These statements are called Beatitudes based on the Latin translation of the word "blessed" – *beātītūdō*, meaning "perfect happiness."²⁰ However, the word "blessed" is not exactly synonymous with "happy." Happiness is a feeling that comes and goes depending on one's circumstances. The term "blessed" is a term of congratulation and recommendation. The blessing here is based on God's approval, not on a temporary happy feeling. The word "refers overwhelmingly to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to man from his share in the salvation of the kingdom of God."²¹ (Compare Ps 32:1.) MacArthur describes the blessed

¹⁹ Luke omits various matters of special interest to Matthew's Jewish readers (e.g. Matt. 5:17-42), and other matters that he himself will give elsewhere (e.g. Luke 11:1-4; 12:22-31); while Luke has a few sentences (as ver. 24-26, 38-40), which are not given by Matthew. Robertson, *Harmony of the Gospels*.

²⁰ *Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, © Random House, Inc. 2006. Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1).

²¹ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Vols. 5-9 edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 compiled by Ronald Pitkin.; ed. Gerhard Kittel et al.; electronic ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 4:367.

condition as “the divinely-bestowed well-being that belongs only to the faithful.”²²

- C. These qualities are to be envied and emulated; they make up “the good life.” Each is followed by a reason, pointing out that no one will be the loser by following this way of life, however unpromising it may appear in the short term. The rewards are at the level of spiritual experience and relationship with God rather than of material recompense. The key phrase, which opens and concludes the series, is *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. This refers to the people who acknowledge God as their King and who may, therefore, confidently look forward to the fulfillment of his purpose in their lives.²³
 - D. Note the paradoxical (seemingly illogical) nature of these statements, and how they contrast with the world’s view of happiness. In Jesus’ kingdom, it’s not the wealthy, powerful, and selfish who enjoy God’s approval, but the downcast, the meek, and the merciful. One’s inner attitude is much more important than his outer condition.
 - E. The Beatitudes are more than just descriptive. They should motivate us to pursue the blessings associated with each statement. Also, the statements are more like exclamations than simple declarations of fact. “How blessed...!” is the idea.
 - F. What kind of people enjoy God’s approval? What does God value in a person? What type of person pleases God? What characteristics describe those who inhabit Christ’s kingdom? What does God’s value in His people? The Beatitudes answer these questions.
- III. The Beatitudes—Characteristics and Blessedness of Citizens of Christ’s Kingdom (Mt 5:1-12)
- Mt 5:1-2 Jesus sat down to teach. Rabbis in that age typically sat to teach while the audience stood to listen. There is no consensus regarding where this took place. It could be a mountain or just a small hill. There is a place on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee where tradition suggests the Sermon occurred, but this is uncertain.
- The values reflected in the Beatitudes stand in stark contrast to those taught by the Jewish leaders of the day (scribes, Pharisees). They often focused on external standards and rule keeping, while Jesus here focuses on inner attitudes and commitments. The qualities that Jesus taught are not the product of external, formal religion, but of a genuine relationship with God.

²²John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible: New American Standard Bible*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), Mt 5:3.

²³D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (Rev. ed. of: *The new Bible commentary*. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970, 4th ed.; Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Mt 5:3.

- A. *Blessed are the poor²⁴ in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
1. In the OT, the “poor” or “meek” are the oppressed people of God who, nonetheless, trust in him for deliverance.²⁵ Thus, the poor in spirit are those who recognize that they have no innate ability to please God. The poor in spirit admit that they must depend fully on God, not on themselves. They see themselves as spiritually bankrupt, weak, and broken before God, having nothing to offer, claiming no merit.
 2. The poor in spirit have become convinced of their spiritual poverty. They have been made conscious of their misery and want. Their old pride has been broken. They have begun to cry out, “O God, be thou merciful to me, the sinner” (Luke 18:13). They are of a contrite spirit and tremble at God’s word (Isa. 66:2; cf. 57:15). They realize their own utter helplessness (Rom. 7:24), expect nothing from self, everything from God.²⁶
 3. Those who fit this description have (present tense) a place the kingdom of heaven. In order to be saved, one must recognize his own spiritual bankruptcy and failure.
 4. This statement prohibits that kind of self-confident pride that is so common in our culture. It runs contrary to what people today value—self-esteem, assertive self-promotion, and positive self-image.
- B. *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*
1. The context here suggests that the mourning occurs as one acknowledges his poorness of spirit, i.e., his spiritual poverty and utter dependence upon God. The mourner is broken, downcast, and burdened. Any distressing situation in life may cause mourning, but the poor in spirit recognize that sin is the cause of most grief.
 2. Although Jesus doesn’t specify who is doing the comforting, it seems reasonable that God is the one bringing comfort to the mourner. God draws nigh to those who seek Him in their times of grief (read Ps 34:18; James 4:8-10).
 3. Jesus is the great high priest who is able to sympathize with our weakness, having experienced human sorrow himself (Heb 4:14-16).
- C. *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.*
1. This is perhaps the most quoted of the Beatitudes. It’s also an ironic statement—it doesn’t seem reasonable, strikes us as odd. Jesus seems to delight in turning the tables and upsetting the conventional wisdom of the time. This is an approximate quotation of Psalm 37:11.
 2. Meekness is humility or gentleness, the opposite of self-reliant pride. It is nearly synonymous with being poor in spirit.

²⁴ The primary sense of the word “poor” (πτωχός) implies one who is completely destitute, deprived of every means of self-support, one reduced to begging; helpless and powerless.

²⁵D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary*.

²⁶William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

3. Meekness doesn't imply that one never stands up for himself or that one allows others to abuse him. Meekness is the result of placing one's confidence in God rather than in oneself.
 4. Meekness is not spinelessness, the characteristics of the person who is ready to bow before every breeze. It is submissiveness under provocation, the willingness rather to suffer than to inflict injury. The meek person leaves everything in the hand of him who loves and cares.²⁷
 5. Jesus described himself as "meek and lowly in heart" (Mt 11:29). Followers of Christ will also exhibit this characteristic.
 6. When will the meek inherit the earth? In a sense, they have it now (Mt 6:33; 1 Cor 3:21). But the full expression of this promise awaits the millennial reign of Christ and then the eternal state.
 7. Meekness is a very rare characteristic in our culture. We often value those who put themselves forward, who assert themselves. The world seems to belong to the proud, the ambitious. But in Christ's kingdom, the meek inherit the earth.
- D. *Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.*
1. God approves of those who have a deep spiritual appetite, who desire to live a righteous life. Life is full of injustice and unfairness, but God blesses those who have a strong personal desire for righteousness.
 2. The contrast with our world could hardly be more striking. Most people have little regard for personal righteousness, allowing themselves much moral flexibility. But God gives us an objective standard of righteousness—God himself and his word.
 3. Those who yearn for righteousness will be filled. That is, they will experience what they seek—true righteousness. This is the result of justification; God declares the guilty sinner to be righteous. Salvation yields full spiritual satisfaction.
 4. Righteous living is the natural and necessary result of a righteous standing before God. The two are inseparable.
- E. *Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.*
1. Mercy is withholding deserved punishment (cf. Ps 103:10). Mercy is love for those in misery and a forgiving spirit toward the sinner. It embraces both the kindly feeling and the kindly act. We see it exemplified in the parable of The Good Samaritan (Luke 10), and especially in Christ, the merciful High priest (Heb. 2:17).²⁸ Every person has experienced God's mercy.
 2. Merciful people extend mercy to others (cf. Mt 18:23-35). Anyone who has experienced God's mercy must be merciful. Merciful people sympathize with those who fail and fall.

²⁷William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

²⁸William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

3. It's interesting that Jesus places mercy next to righteousness. Those who demand adherence to a righteous standard may become hard-nosed, inflexible, and demanding. But our desire for righteousness must be combined with merciful love and understanding.

F. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

1. Read Psalm 24:3-4. Pure in heart suggests authenticity, not putting on a show, not living a lie, not hypocritical, but genuine and sincere. It also implies a single-minded devotion to God. One's motives are pure and genuine, not put-on.
2. Further, pure in heart suggests inward cleansing from sin through faith in God's provision and a continual desire to keep one's "account" clean.
3. One's heart must be clean in order to "see God." Cleansing from sin comes only through the application of the blood of Christ. Only those who experience Christ's cleansing power will be welcomed into God's presence.
4. Again we see the importance of a true, inner, personal relationship with God. We should regularly be asking God to search our hearts and cleanse us from sin (Ps 139:23-24; 1 John 1:9). Also, when the inside is clean, outer purity will not be far behind (Mt 23:26). It's a mistake to expect external purity from those whose hearts have not been cleansed from sin.

G. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

1. Peacemakers attempt to bring calm and order to a chaotic situation. Peacemakers have an inner peace with God and desire to be instruments of God's peace. Having experienced the peace of God through faith in Christ (Rom 5:1), peacemakers seek to help others know God's peace.
2. Such people reflect the characteristics of the Father. God made peace with us through Christ. God is the ultimate peace maker. In this way we resemble God, showing our relationship to him (Gal 3:26, 4:6-7).
3. Some initiate trouble and conflict—we call them troublemakers. Peacemakers do just the opposite—they initiate peace and order.
4. Jesus is not advocating a peace-at-any-price attitude. Jesus said that following him may result in conflict and persecution (Mt 10:34-36).

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

1. Jesus is the ultimate example of one who was persecuted for righteousness sake. Those who follow the core values that Jesus advocated can expect persecution.
2. People displaying these qualities will naturally stand out in a wicked culture and would become the targets of criticism and abuse.

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

1. Note the change from “they” to “you.” This becomes more personal. One is persecuted “for righteousness sake” and “for my sake,” not for political or social reasons (Mt 10:22).
2. It was a rather common idea among the Jews that all suffering, including persecution (see Luke 13:1–5), was an indication of God’s displeasure and of the special wickedness of the one thus afflicted. Christ here reverses this view, but only with respect to those who endured persecution for the sake of righteousness and for the cause of Christ.²⁹
3. The proper response to persecution—rejoice and be glad because your reward is great in heaven. You’re in good company—that’s how they treated the prophets (e.g., Jeremiah, Daniel and friends, Amos, etc.). Read Acts 5:41.
4. When you live the way Jesus describes here, the unsaved world will not appreciate it. But God does appreciate it, and those who suffer in this way can be confident of a great reward.

We must value what God values. If you want to enjoy God’s blessing, these attitudes and behaviors must exist in our lives. All citizens of Jesus’ kingdom should be striving to apply this teaching.

Note well Jesus’ emphasis on the inner qualities of the heart—dependency, meekness, yearning for righteousness, mercifulness, authenticity, and purity. These are not things that can be merely put-on. They are inner qualities, not external traditions. Jesus no doubt is taking aim at the externalism and ritualism so common among the Pharisees, which is also very common among religious people today.

²⁹William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.



The Sermon on the Mount
Part 1: The Subjects of the Kingdom (Mt 5:3-16)
Lesson 3: Salt and Light (Mt 5:13-16)
The Distinctiveness of the Disciples:
Citizens of the Kingdom Have a Positive Influence

Jesus' focus in the Beatitudes was primarily on interior, personal characteristics such as dependency, meekness, yearning for righteousness, mercifulness, authenticity, and purity. These personal traits are private, yet have public implications. Those displaying such characteristics will be noticeable. Thus, Jesus now shifts the emphasis to the external, public characteristics of citizens of His kingdom.

The poetic nature of Jesus' sermon is clearly evident here. His statements "Ye are the salt of the earth" and "Ye are the light of the world" are obviously metaphorical expressions designed to highlight a comparison. Subjects of the kingdom are in some ways like salt and like light. Those who are not "salty" and those whose lights do not shine forth in the world are failing to live up to divine expectations. Thus, the passage serves as a warning to flavorless and unnoticeable believers.

- I. "Ye are the salt of the earth."
 - A. The significance of salt:
 - 1. Preservative—salt delays decay and retards deterioration; it's an antiseptic. Without refrigeration, salting down food products was the best way to preserve them.³⁰ The preservative quality of salt is likely Jesus' primary idea here.
 - 2. Flavor enhancer—salt adds flavor.
 - 3. Other ideas associated with salt: the rabbis apparently used salt as a symbol of wisdom; whiteness; pungency; thirst-producing. OT meat offerings were always to be seasoned with the "salt of the covenant" (Lev 2:13).
 - B. The comparison: citizens of the kingdom should have an influence in their world. They should suppress or halt moral decay and they should enhance the "flavor" of the culture. The presence of believers should restrain evil in the world.
"The world tends toward decomposition and is actually rotting away. When the world is left to itself, it festers and putrefies, for the germs of evil are everywhere present and active. ... We live in a world that constantly tends toward decay. Some of the Christless structures of the world may look okay, but inside they are rotting away, and it is just a matter of time before they fall. ... This suggests to us the function of the church: The church, as salt, functions as a retardant to decay and a preservative in a disintegrating world."³¹

³⁰ Interesting note: the body of the great missionary David Livingstone was shipped from Africa back to England after his death packed in salt.

³¹R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 78.

- C. A potential condition: the salt “have lost its savor.” The Greek word literally means “to become foolish,” but in this case means “to lose taste, to become inert.” I.e., the salt loses its capacity to do its job. Jesus seems to be talking about believers who lose their influence in the world. They become inert, “tasteless,” and inoffensive. Salt-less Christians are bland and tasteless, adding nothing to the community and doing nothing to stop moral decay. They may be practically indistinguishable from the surrounding culture. The secular world has a bigger affect on Christians than Christians have on the world. Examples: how are we different from the world when it comes to materialism? morality? honesty? compassion? entertainment?
- D. What kind of a world would we live in without Christian influence? Imagine how much worse condition the world would be in without the positive contributions and the restraining influence of Christianity.
- E. Salt has little or no effect if it is not applied to some other material. Salty believers must exert their influence throughout society in order for them to do any good. They must get “out of the salt shaker.” Christian isolationism is not biblical.
- F. A potential problem: Salt generally does not lose its saltiness; it does not become inert. Chemically speaking, salt is salt. It doesn’t break down unless it is impure or chemically changed.³² So it seems that Jesus is setting forth an impossible condition. Yet this sort of language is not foreign to Jesus’ teachings (e.g., a camel cannot go through the eye of a needle [Mt 19:24]). The statement is ironic or paradoxical—it doesn’t make sense on the face of it, which makes it memorable and causes the hearer or reader to pause and consider the statement more closely. “How absurd—salt losing its saltiness!” Thus, the hearers or readers should realize that, as salt, citizens of the kingdom should not lose their “savor,” that is, their influence in the world. Like salt, they cannot become un-salty. Such a notion is absurd.
- G. A potential result:
1. Good for nothing—failing to fulfill their purpose, failing to live up to their responsibilities.
 2. To be cast out and trodden under foot—unwanted salt would commonly be thrown on to paths or roadways.
- H. The application:
1. Beware lest you lose the distinctive Christian “flavor” and become just like the unsaved crowd. Christians who are the same as everyone else are in a sense “good for nothing” and worthy of chastisement. They are not distinctive and have little positive influence. They go along with the crowd and never restrain sin.
 2. Israel was the perfect example of salt that had lost its savor and was good for nothing, being cast out and trodden under foot (cf. Mt 8:12).
 3. The Christian church today, generally speaking, has lost much of its saltiness. Many segments of Christianity, especially in free and prosperous countries, believers are so worldly that they have few distinguishing marks separating them from non-Christians. The influence of the church on the

³² Some have suggested that the salt of that time was often impure, and in certain conditions the salt itself would leach away, leaving a worthless residue. This may be true, but seems overly complicated for the analogy.

western world is slowly fading. Thankfully, in many parts of the world, Christianity is having a remarkable impact.

Rev 3:16 *So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*

- I. Jesus is not implying that an un-salty believer may lose his salvation. This is a warning, not a threat. Further, remember that in wisdom literature you can't press the literal meaning of the words too far. Focus on the main point of the comparison, not on every little detail and nuance.
 - J. The main point of the comparison: retain your gospel witness and testimony in the world; be a good example to others; have an impact on society; be different (in a good sense); seek to retard moral decay; seek to be a positive influence.
- II. "Ye are the light of the world."
- A. Significance of light: illumination, dispels the darkness, show the way, reveal the truth, etc. While salt has a negative function (preventing decay), light has a positive function (showing the way).
 - B. God is light (1 Jn 1:5) and Jesus is "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (John 1:9). Jesus called himself "the light of the world" (John 8:12, 9:5), so it's remarkable that he says of his disciples, "You are the light of the world." In contrast, the world is a dark place. The people of the world "sit in darkness" (Luke 1:79), and "men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil" (John 3:19).
Light is a common symbol in the Bible. It represents purity, truth, knowledge, divine revelation, and God's presence all in contrast to their opposites. The Israelites thought of themselves as lights in a dark world (Isa. 42:6; Rom. 2:19). However the Old Testament spoke of Messiah as the true light of the world (Isa. 42:6; 49:6). Jesus' disciples are lights in the derived sense, as the moon is a light but only because it reflects the light of the sun.³³
 - C. Point of comparison: a light is visible, obvious, and noticeable; it shines forth. Citizens of the kingdom are "the light of the world." They must be obvious, visible, and noticeable. There can be no such thing as a secret or invisible Christian.
 - D. Positive examples
 - 1. A city situated on a hilltop cannot be hid; it is visible, obvious, clearly seen from a long distance, especially at night.

³³Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), Mt 5:14.

2. A lamp³⁴ on a lampstand gives light to all in the house.
- E. A negative example: a lamp put under a “bushel” (a clay container for dry foods, usually a bowl or vase, holding about two gallons). This is patently obvious—so absurd that it never happens. A lamp is to be displayed on a lampstand³⁵ so that it may shine forth its light.
- F. The command: “let your light so shine before men.” Those who possess the light must transmit or shine the light. What a lamp is in a room, disciples of Christ are to be in the world. Followers of Christ are both visible and radiant.
- [Believers] are the light lighted. He is the sun. They resemble the moon, reflecting the sun’s light. Apart from Christ they cannot shine. The electric bulb does not emit light all by itself. It imparts light only when connected and turned on, so that the electric current generated in the power-house is transmitted to it. So also as long as Christ’s followers remain in living contact with the original light they are a light to others (cf. John 15:4, 5).³⁶
- G. The results:
1. People see your good works.
 - a) The assumption is that citizens of Jesus’ kingdom are doing good works. He doesn’t specify what kind of good works, other than the kind that others might observe.
 - b) Jesus later tells us not do religious works (charity, prayer, fasting) before men, to be seen of them (see Mt 6:1, 5, 16). One should not do good works to gain personal prestige or status but to be a good testimony. So one’s Christian testimony should be plainly visible, but one’s private religious duties should be done very quietly.
 2. People glorify God. This is no guarantee that unbelievers will turn to God based on your good works, but it does suggest that the believer’s good works may be helpful in leading others to Christ. Read Ephesians 5:8-9 and Philippians 2:15.



Tertullian (c. A.D. 200) wrote: “But it is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. ‘See,’ they say, ‘how they [the Christians] love one another,’ for they themselves [the non-Christians] are animated by mutual hatred; ‘see how they are ready even to die for one another’” (*Apology* XXXIX).³⁷ “Brighten the corner where you are.”

³⁴ The word “candle” (KJV) refers to the small, portable lamp, a clay vessel burning olive oil, not a wax candle.

³⁵ A lampstand might be a shelf extending from the pillar in the center of the room (the pillar that supported the large crossbeam of the flat roof), or a single stone projecting inward from the wall, or a piece of metal conspicuously placed and used similarly. Many houses of this time were usually rather simple, having only one or two rooms, so one lamp could illuminate the whole building. William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

³⁶ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

³⁷ Quoted in William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

Conclusion: Let's commit ourselves to being salt and light in our community. As salt, we want to be a force against moral decay and a source of "flavor" to our world. As light, we must shine forth brightly in a dark world with the gospel message and with a positive Christian testimony.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 2: The Precepts of the Kingdom (Mt 5:17-48)

Lesson 4: The Fulfillment of the Law (Mt 5:17-20)³⁸

Jesus' View of the Old Testament Law

This part of the Sermon relates Jesus' teaching on the OT Law. Perhaps some of His listeners were wondering if Jesus was planning to abolish or replace the OT. Maybe some thought that He was a revolutionary who intended to destroy all the old traditions. In this passage, Jesus states in no uncertain terms that His intent was not to annul the OT Law but to fulfill it. He also challenges his audience to seek a higher form of righteousness than achieved by the Jewish religious leaders.

I. Jesus fulfilled the OT Law.

- A. Jesus was born under the Law (Gal 4:4) and lived in obedience to the Law (John 8:46; Rom 5:19; 1 Pet 2:22).³⁹ The authority of the OT extended until the beginning of the church. More specifically, Jesus said, "All the prophets and the law prophesied until John" (Mt 11:13). We might consider John the Baptist to be the last OT prophet. There is some overlap in the transition from OT to NT, which we see reflected in the book of Acts as the church replaces Israel as the center of God's program for the world. But at the time Jesus gave this Sermon, the OT Law was still in effect.

Joh 1:17 *For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

- B. Notice that Jesus claimed not "to destroy the law, or the prophets." He's talking about the whole OT here, not just the Law of Moses (see 7:12; 11:13; 22:40).

- C. How did Jesus fulfill the Law?

1. He fulfilled OT Messianic predictions.
2. He completely and perfectly obeyed every regulation of the Law.
3. He suffered the penalties of the Law by dying on the cross.

Some of the promises from the OT are yet to be fulfilled, namely, those associated with the Second Coming of Christ and His rule over the earth (the millennium; Ezek 34:26; Amos 9:13; Isa 2:4, 11:6-8, 35:5-6).

- D. Jesus' statements communicate volumes about His own authority. He's making some amazing claims about Himself and His relationship to Scripture. Jesus very clearly positions himself as being above the Law—He will bring the Law to its intended goal.

"Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets in that they point to him, and he is their fulfillment.... [T]he OT's real and abiding authority must be understood through

³⁸ Before starting this lesson, it may be helpful to review the author's lesson "The Law: the Use of the OT Law for NT Believers."

³⁹ Jesus' perfect law-keeping obedience is an important aspect of the believer's justification. The righteousness imputed to the believer at the point of salvation is that perfect obedience that Jesus achieved.

the person and teaching of him to whom it points and who so richly fulfills it. ... Jesus presents himself as the eschatological goal of the OT, and thereby its sole authoritative interpreter, the one through whom alone the OT finds its valid continuity and significance.⁴⁰

- II. No part of the OT Law will pass away until the completion of Jesus' work.
- A. Several parts of Jesus' work remains to be fulfilled—the Second Coming, the Judgment Seat of Christ, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the millennial reign, the Great White Throne Judgment, and the re-creation of the heavens and the earth. “Heaven and earth will pass” when the new heavens and earth are created (2 Pet 3:11-13). Until everything promised in the OT occurs, no part of Scripture will be lost or annulled. Every part of every promise will come to pass.
- B. Until the eternal state commences, not “one jot or one tittle” shall pass from the law. What does this mean?
1. A “jot” is the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the *yodh* (y). The Greek literally says “not one *iota*,” the *iota* being the letter *i* in Greek, a very small letter corresponding to the *yodh*.
 2. A “tittle” is literally a “horn,” that is, a small projection or hook of a Hebrew letter, the small parts of a letter (called a “serif”). Notice the difference in the letters **h** and **x** or **r** and **d**. In each case, the difference is a “tittle,” a very small stroke of the pen, like the dot of an *i* or the tail on a *Q*.
 3. The Jews were exceedingly cautious in writing these letters, and considered the smallest change or omission a reason for destroying the whole manuscript when they were transcribing the Old Testament. The expression, “one jot or tittle,” became proverbial, and means that the smallest part of the law should not be destroyed.⁴¹
 4. Jesus obviously means that not even the slightest part of the Law would be lost or pass away⁴² until all of it is fulfilled. The word “pass” means “pass by, pass over, to neglect, to omit.” The Law will remain intact until Jesus fulfills every aspect of it—all will be fulfilled. The entire divine purpose prophesied in Scripture must take place; not one jot or tittle will fail of its fulfillment.⁴³ The OT will continue as authoritative until everything prophesied has taken place.
 5. The church stands in a sort of parenthesis in time. Before the church, the OT Law pertained. During the church age, the OT Law is not in force as a regulating principle of conduct. It has not “passed away,” that is, it is not dead or gone, but its authority over the church is different than its authority over the nation of Israel. When the church age closes, the rest of

⁴⁰ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

⁴¹ *Barnes Notes*.

⁴² In Luke 16:17, Jesus states that it's easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the Law to “fail” (literally, “to fall”).

⁴³ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

the unfulfilled OT promises will come to pass. Until the present world order ceases to exist, the OT Scriptures will remain.

6. Applications:

- a) God's promises will come true. Not one small change will take place in any of God's promises. Nothing will fall short of complete accomplishment and fulfillment. God's program will be carried out in full.
- b) The Scriptures are authoritative, right down to the small details of the words. Jesus held a high view of Scripture, and so should we.
- c) This passage is one of the strongest texts supporting the providential preservation of Scripture and its ongoing authority. Jesus himself strongly affirms ("verily I say...") that the authority of Scripture will remain because God's written revelation cannot be changed. It remains valid, with full authority over its rightful audience. Read Isa 40:8, Mt 24:35 and 1 Pet 1:25.

God has providentially preserved His word in the many manuscripts, fragments, versions, translations, and copies of the Scriptures that are available, and ... by diligent study, comparison, and correlation, the original text (words) can be ascertained.⁴⁴

"Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

III. One's position in the Kingdom is determined by his obedience to the OT Law.

- A. This statement clearly indicates Jesus' attitude to the OT Law. One should not break even a minor part of the OT Law or influence anyone else to break it. One should "do and teach" the OT Law. Jesus has no commendation for those who ignore or trespass the Law.
- B. However, remember that Jesus spoke these words while the whole OT Law was still in effect. The Temple was still operational and the Jews were capable of following all the OT regulations, even the "least" commands. The Temple was destroyed in AD 70 and never rebuilt. A Muslim mosque now occupies the site where the Temple used to stand. It is impossible to follow all the dictates of the OT Law today.
- C. In the church age, because Christ has fulfilled the Law, we no longer have to keep the least or the greatest commandments of the OT system. Christ kept those laws for us, and His perfect Law-keeping obedience is credited to believers. Paul tells us that for Christians, "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 13:10). Our responsibility is not to obey OT commands but the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).
- D. Rank in the kingdom is based on obedience.
 1. The least in the kingdom will be those who break the commands and teach others to do so. Such people will be "least," that is, small, unimportant. However, they will be included.

⁴⁴ William Combs, "The Preservation of Scripture," Detroit Baptist Seminary, *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* Volume 5 (Detroit Baptist Seminary, 2000; 2003), 5:11.

2. The great in the kingdom will be those who obey the commands and teach others to do so.
3. This text seems to imply that God imposes different degrees of reward and suffering depending on one's behavior.

Mt 11:24 *But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.*

Lu 12:47 *And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.*

Joh 19:11 *... therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.*

The law pointed forward to Jesus and his teaching; so it is properly obeyed by conforming to his word. As it points to him, so he, in fulfilling it, establishes what continuity it has, the true direction to which it points and the way it is to be obeyed. Thus ranking in the kingdom turns on the degree of conformity to Jesus' teaching as that teaching fulfills OT revelation. His teaching, toward which the OT pointed, must be obeyed.⁴⁵

IV. One must possess the proper degree of righteousness to enter the kingdom.

- A. Now Jesus shows how His teaching differs from the traditional teaching of the religious establishment. Jesus' view of righteousness is vastly different from that of the scribes and Pharisees.
- B. In the kingdom, some will be "least" and others will be "great," but some will not make it into the kingdom at all. Even the elite, religious Jewish leaders did not have the required degree of righteousness to enter (e.g., Nicodemus). This surprising statement seems to raise the bar impossibly high. If the most righteous people in the culture couldn't make it into the kingdom, who could?
- C. Who were the scribes and the Pharisees?
 1. Scribes: teachers of the Law, providing interpretations to the people (cf. Mt 7:29). They typically had great education and rhetorical skill.
 2. Pharisees: a Jewish sect that emphasized strict adherence to the OT Law. They were experts in interpretation and application of OT Scriptures and developed elaborate interpretations of the OT Law.
 3. These guardians and teachers of the Law were considered holy people. If anyone would qualify for entry into God's kingdom, one would think that it would be these people.
 4. Jesus knew that the scribes and Pharisees did not possess true righteousness; they were hypocrites (Mt 23:25). While they charged Jesus with violating the Law (Mt 15:20), the scribes and Pharisees themselves were guilty of loading the people down with man-made rules and regulations in violation of the Law (Mt 23:4; John 7:19).

The scribes and Pharisees made obedience to God's Law the master passion of their lives. They calculated that the Law contained 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions, and they tried to keep them *all*. How could anyone surpass that? And how could such righteousness be made a condition to entering the kingdom? Jesus seemed to

⁴⁵ *Expositor's Bible Commentary.*

be saying, “Don’t think I have come to make things easier by reducing the demands of the Law. Far from it! In fact, if your righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, you’ll never make it!”⁴⁶

- D. Jesus clearly stated that even their very high level of righteousness is not acceptable. One’s righteousness must surpass the high degree of holiness displayed by these elite, professional religious people.
- E. God has standards higher than what we can achieve. Jesus is laying the groundwork for salvation by grace, not works. The scribes and Pharisees had a misplaced sense of confidence—themselves (see Luke 18:9-14). Their form of righteousness was external, formal, and ritual, not personal. Jesus shows that religious self-confidence falls short of the righteousness God requires for entry into His kingdom.

Ro 10:3 *For they [the Jews] being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*

- F. What kind of righteousness does Jesus require for entry into the kingdom?

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

- G. We know that justification provides the righteousness that God requires. Only those “in Christ” have the form of righteousness that Jesus is talking about.

Ro 4:5 *But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*

2Co 5:21 *For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*

- H. Applications

1. What category are you in? In the kingdom or not? You must trust Christ to fulfill righteousness for you. You receive righteousness by faith. The NT teaches that your own human righteousness is unacceptable to merit salvation. What is the basis of your confidence? Self or God?
2. What will be your rank in the kingdom? Least or great? Obedience leads to greatness; neglect leads to loss.

⁴⁶R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 96.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 2: The Precepts of the Kingdom (Mt 5:17-48)

Lesson 5: Murder, Anger, and Reconciliation (5:21-26)

Jesus has just mentioned that He did not come to destroy the OT Law but to fulfill it (Mt 5:17).

He also stated that “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:20).

He now begins a series of statements showing how the kind of righteousness advocated by the scribes and Pharisees was inadequate. He does so by giving His interpretation and application of specific OT regulations. Six times Jesus says something like “Ye have heard...but I say.” Is Jesus overturning these commandments? Assuredly not. In these statements, Jesus is widening the application of the OT regulation and applying it to everyday situations. Jesus’ interpretations stand in stark contrast to those of the scribes and Pharisees, who demanded external conformity to the “letter of the law” but paid no attention to inner heart attitudes.

Jesus’ strategy here reflects the following pattern:

1. He states what the audience had “heard that it was said by them of old time.” Most of these statements are direct quotes from the OT Law, but some of the material probably reflects rabbinic teaching of the time or simply the common understanding of the regulation (e.g., parts of vss. 21 and 43 not from the OT).
2. When Jesus says, “but I say unto you,” He is not criticizing the OT Law but the interpretation or application that his audience had adopted. He’s challenging their pre-conceived notions on these topics.

Jesus contrasts the people’s misunderstanding of the law with the true direction in which the law points, according to his own authority as the law’s “fulfiller” (in the sense established in v. 17). He makes no attempt to fence in the law but declares unambiguously the true direction to which it points.⁴⁷

Some scholars have suggested that Jesus’ statements overturn the Law or supersede it. While Jesus is no doubt challenging the common interpretations of these regulations, he is not annulling the Law itself. If anything, Jesus seems to be intensifying the application of the Law or perhaps showing its intended meaning. In any case, as the Law’s fulfiller, Jesus has the right to provide the correct understanding of the Law. The audience found Jesus’ interpretations and applications quite remarkable (see 7:28-29).

His first topic is personal conflict. Jesus affirms the OT principle (“Thou shalt not kill”) but makes a wider application of it. Jesus condemns the kind of anger that results in murder and recommends speedy reconciliation with an adversary. This passage relates some important principles regarding maintaining and reconciling personal relationships.

- I. The statements (.21)

⁴⁷ *Expositor’s Bible Commentary.*

- A. “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time...” This may refer to Moses and the OT prophets, but more likely refers to the teaching of the rabbis. Jesus never set himself against the principles of the OT Law, but he does take issue with the common interpretations of the scribes and Pharisees.
 - B. “Thou shalt not kill.” This is one of the Ten Commandments (#6; Ex 20:13). The killing here refers to murder, the taking of innocent life.
 - C. “whoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.” This statement is found nowhere in the OT, but it was certainly true. The Law of Moses declared that the murderer should be put to death (cf. Lev 24:21; Num 35:16). It did not say, however, by whom this should be done, and it was left to the Jews to organize courts to punish such crimes (De 16:18).⁴⁸
 - D. The common Jewish interpretation was right as far as it went, but it didn’t go far enough; it was too narrow. The Pharisees focused only on the external act and failed to deal with the underlying causes of murder.
- II. Jesus’ application of the regulation (.22-26)
- A. Jesus’ authority
 - 1. Jesus, as the God-Man, has full authority to correct faulty interpretations of the Law and expound it or even change it as He pleased. When He says, “But I say unto you,” He’s making an authoritative statement regarding the proper understanding of the Law and its application.
 - 2. Jesus shows that there is more to the commandment than mere adherence to the letter of the Law. A sinful heart attitude, like anger, is responsible for breaking the Law. The cause of murder is anger and hatred, which equally break the sixth Commandment. The Pharisees and scribes paid special attention to external conformity to the OT regulations but ignored the inner, personal attitudes that influenced behavior. Jesus is demonstrating here that attitudes are just as important as actions.
 - B. Unnecessary anger: Deal properly with anger before it leads to murder. (.22)
- The root of murder is anger, and anger is murderous in principle (v. 22). One has not conformed to the better righteousness of the kingdom simply by refraining from homicide.⁴⁹
- 1. Anger without a cause
 - a) This anger is against a “brother,” that is, a fellow believer, or perhaps, just a neighbor.
 - b) “without cause” – Anger may or may not be sinful. God is “angry with the wicked every day” (Ps 7:11). Paul commands believers not to sin in their anger (Eph 4:26). So the anger Jesus condemns is not a righteous response to a violation of God’s Law, but a personal reaction to a minor slight. It is unjust, rash, unprovoked anger and is sinful.
 - 2. Anger producing inappropriate language

⁴⁸ *Barnes’ Notes.*

⁴⁹ *Expositor’s Bible Commentary.*

- a) “Raca” – an Aramaic term of utter contempt denoting intellectual emptiness, similar to the English expressions “numbskull,” “imbecile,” “idiot,” or “blockhead.” This kind of language is a violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the Sixth Commandment because it reflects a hateful attitude.
- b) “thou fool” – The word “fool” to the Jews would describe something worse than mere stupidity. Foolishness had a moral aspect. The fool denied God’s existence (Ps 14:1) and was unteachable (Pro 1:22). Calling someone a fool amounted to calling him a wicked unbeliever.
- c) Jesus warns us that “every idle word” shall come into judgment (Mt 12:36), so we must be careful about the words we use. All our language should avoid “corrupt communication” and we should use words that build up, not tear down (Eph 4:29).

Mt 12:34 *O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*

3. The potential punishments associated with expressions of anger
 - a) “the judgment” – Jesus doesn’t specify what He means by this; perhaps a lower-level court of some kind.
 - b) “the council” – literally, the Sanhedrin, the supreme council of the Jews. It was composed of seventy-two judges; the high priest was the president of this tribunal. The seventy-two members were made up of the chief priests and elders of the people, and the scribes.
 - c) Hell fire – The expression “fire of hell” (lit., “gehenna of fire”) comes from the Hebrew *gehinnom* (“Valley of Hinnom,” a ravine south of Jerusalem once associated with the pagan god Moloch and his disgusting rites prohibited by God [Lev 18:21, 20:2-5; 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31; Ezek 16:20; 23:37]). When Josiah abolished the practices, he defiled the valley by making it a dumping ground for filth and the corpses of criminals (2 Kings 23:10). Late traditions suggest that in the first century it may still have been used as a rubbish pit, complete with smoldering fires. The valley came to symbolize the place of eschatological punishment.⁵⁰
 - d) Note the ascending level of crime and punishment:
 - (1) Unjust anger leads to unspecified judgment;
 - (2) Anger with the expression of contempt leads to an appearance before the supreme court (the Sanhedrin)
 - (3) Anger combined with the charge of wickedness leads to the torments of hell.
 - (4) However, it seems unlikely that Jesus is actually recommending that the angry man faces a local court or

⁵⁰ *Expositor’s Bible Commentary.*

that a name-caller appears before the Sanhedrin or winds up in hell. A court of law or the Sanhedrin itself would probably not hear cases involving unjust anger or rash language. These are not violations that typically are brought before the civil authorities. So Jesus is simply pointing out that such violations are worthy of judgment and punishment just like murder is. Even if the courts do not punish such sins, God does. Thus, Jesus is extending and intensifying the application of the general principle, “Thou shalt not kill.”

4. Applications:

- a) The Sixth Commandment covers more than murder. It relates not only to the external act, but to the feelings and words. External obedience to the “letter of the law” is inadequate.
- b) We must rid ourselves of feelings and words of superiority. Name-calling (e.g., stupid, blockhead, nitwit, fool, etc.) is inappropriate.
- c) God views unjust anger, contempt, and hatred of one’s fellow man as violations of the Law and as attitudes worthy of punishment. Jesus is saying that we must not think we are safe just because we have not shed blood. We are guilty enough to receive punishment if we have harbored anger and contempt. He says in essence, “You may think you are removed from murder morally. But you are wrong. Have you ever wished someone were dead? Then your heart has known murder!”⁵¹

Sinful anger—the kind that leads to bitter words—is in its very nature murder. It is murder committed in the heart. Unless he repents, the person with this kind of attitude faces everlasting punishment in hell.⁵²

1 Jn 3:15 *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*

Problem: Didn’t Jesus get angry and even call people “fools”? Yes (see e.g., 21:12-19; 23:17; Mark 3:1-5). But in Jesus’ case, this was not anger “without cause,” and it was not in reaction to personal ridicule or even persecution (cf. 1 Pet 2:23). Further, since Jesus is omniscient, He knows who is a genuine fool. We might call Jesus’ type of anger “righteous indignation,” not personal animosity or hatred.

C. Unresolved conflicts:

- 1. Seek reconciliation with a brother before engaging in worship (.23-24).
 - a) In contrast to the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus focuses on the heart attitude of the worshipper. External conformity to the Law was not

⁵¹R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 101.

⁵²William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

enough. External rites and rituals are meaningless if one's heart attitude is not right.

- b) Unresolved conflict hinders worship. One must clear the offense before engaging in worship.

Jesus' point is clear: It is far more important to be reconciled to your brother than to fulfill the external duties of worship. Worship is merely a pretense if we have offended others in such a way that they are holding grudges against us.⁵³

- c) Note the cause of the offense: "thy brother has ought against thee." The worshipper is the cause of the offense, and it is his responsibility to approach his brother to clear up the problem.
- d) What kind of "ought" do we need to address? Certainly the offense cannot be of a trivial nature that friends generally overlook. The offense must be a genuine grievance, something substantial that stands between friends and damages the relationship.
- e) In any case, one should attempt to be free of personal offenses before engaging in worship. Seek reconciliation before worship.

Quote (Barnes): "He that comes to worship his Maker filled with malice, and hatred, and envy, and at war with his brethren, is a hypocritical worshipper, and must meet with God's displeasure. God is not deceived; and He will not be mocked."

Principles:

- (1) It is our duty to seek reconciliation with others when we have injured them.
 - (2) Resolve personal conflicts before attempting to worship God. Our worship will not be acceptable unless we do all we can to live peaceably with others.
 - (3) Unresolved conflict is often the reason why God does not accept our worship, and we go empty away from our devotions. If we allow unresolved conflict, cherish improper feelings, or refuse to make attempts at reconciliation, God will not accept our worship.
2. Seek reconciliation with an adversary before appearing before the authorities (.25-26).
- a) "thine adversary" – a man that is opposed to us in law. It here means a creditor; a man who has a just claim on us.
 - b) "in the way with him" – while you are going before the court, before the trial comes on, seek an agreement so you can avoid the trial.
 - c) "the officer" – the executioner or the sheriff
 - d) "cast into prison" – debtors prison

⁵³R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*

- e) “the uttermost farthing” – the last farthing, i.e., all that is due. The farthing was a small coin used in Judea, equal to two mites, a very small amount.⁵⁴

This situation serves to illustrate the principle: end personal conflicts by seeking reconciliation. The principle “do not murder” implies “do not give in to anger” and “seek reconciliation with offended brothers.”

3. Note that in both cases (worship, lawsuit), Jesus suggests that “you” are the cause of the problem; one’s own offense is the cause of the conflict with the brother or with the adversary. Jesus urges us to “agree with thine adversary.” You must admit your own failure and make amends.
4. In both cases, Jesus again urges immediate action. Settle matters with the offended adversary quickly, while still “with him on the way” to court. The time for reconciliation is always right now. Don’t wait for the other person to take the first step.
5. In both cases, the result will be bad if no action is taken.
 - a) Worship is not possible if personal conflicts are not resolved.
 - b) Punishment is possible if personal conflicts are not resolved.

⁵⁴ The original has the word κοδράντης (*kodrantēs*) a loanword from the Latin *quadrant*. A quadrant is a “quarter” of an “as” or “assarius.” The latter is worth one sixteenth of a denarius. The denarius is a laborer’s average daily wage (Matt. 18:28; 20:2, 9, 13; 22:19). Due to constantly changing monetary values it is impossible to indicate with any degree of accuracy what such coins would be worth today in American money. The point is: the person who refuses to make an earnest attempt at reconciliation will never be able to pay his debt. Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary*.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 2: The Precepts of the Kingdom (Mt 5:17-48)

Lesson 6: Adultery and Divorce (5:27-32)

Jesus has begun contrasting His interpretation of the OT Law with that which was common among the people of the time. Six times we find Jesus saying something like, “You have heard it was said,... but I say unto you....” In each case, Jesus emphasizes the underlying principle of the OT regulation and extends the application of the principle.

Jesus’ topic in this passage is adultery and divorce, two very contentious issues to this very day. All Christians need to understand and apply Jesus’ teaching on these matters.

I. Statement #1: Do not commit adultery

- A. This is a direct quote from the OT Law (Ex 20:14, commandment #7). Jesus is certainly not taking issue with this command. The Pharisees saw this command as strictly physical, but Jesus shows that the underlying principle has a broader application.
- B. Jesus’ extension of the principle
 1. Adultery is not merely physical; it’s a matter of the heart (.28). Looking at a woman “lustfully” constitutes a form of adultery. Mental infidelity is just as sinful as physical infidelity.
 2. While the word “lust” itself simply means “desire,” in this case, lust is immoral. Lusting after a woman implies a desire to possess and dominate a woman completely, to use her for one’s own pleasure.⁵⁵
 3. Is it OK to look as long as I don’t touch? Can I “window shop” as long as I don’t “purchase”? The Bible says that sin begins in the heart. Lust is sin. Job 31:1 *I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon [consider diligently] a maid?*
Mt 15:19 *For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:*
 4. Note that the look is not a casual glance but a stare with a purpose—“to lust after her.” It is possible for a man to look at a woman and acknowledge that she is beautiful, even admire her or find her attractive, without lusting. Jesus is talking about someone who looks with the purpose of lusting. That lingering stare feeds his inner sensual appetites, and he has only one thing on his mind as he continues to gaze. It’s not sinful to see or glance; it’s wrong to take that second look, to indulge in illicit desire.

⁵⁵William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*

Stier: “He who experiences at a first glance this desire, and then instead of turning away and withdrawing from sin, throws a second glance with lustful intent and in order to retain and increase that impulse, commits the sin.”

5. Today it is probably easier than ever before for a person to “look on a woman lustfully.”
- Pornography is a \$100-billion-a-year industry worldwide. Porn has now become mainstream in our society, no longer on the outer fringes of acceptability as it once was. Major American companies are involved in producing and distributing porn. Companies such as AT&T, Comcast, EchoStar Communications, News Corp. (which owns Fox networks and DirecTV)⁵⁶, Time Warner, and the Sheraton, Hilton, Marriott and Hyatt hotel chains all are major producers or providers of pornography.
 - In the US, over \$13 billion is spent on porn yearly.⁵⁷ Many people today do not see pornography as immoral. Many professing Christians admit to indulging in this form of immorality.⁵⁸
 - Americans buy or rent more than \$4 billion a year worth of graphic videos from retail outlets and spend an additional \$800 million on less explicit immoral films.
 - 25% of those viewing pornography are women.
 - It is estimated that over 20 million Americans are addicted to explicit material.
 - 12% of total websites (over 4 million) are dedicated to pornography.
 - 25% of total Internet search engine requests involve pornography
 - 43% of Internet users view porn
 - 35% of all Internet downloads involve porn
 - Monthly Internet pornography sales: \$4.9 billion
 - Teens on average see over 14,000 sexual images or messages every year through the media.

Note: In Jesus’ time, women dressed very modestly, usually wearing long, loose-fitting robes that covered nearly all their skin, and sometimes even wearing veils or turbans. This didn’t seem to stop men from lust. What does this imply about the power of lust and the need to dress modestly?

6. Drastic measures may be required to overcome certain sins.
- a) Jesus advises one given to lust to pluck out and throw away his eye if it causes him to stumble (.29).

⁵⁶ News Corp. also owns Zondervan, one of the leading publishers of Bibles and Christian materials.

⁵⁷ Some of this information gleaned from http://www.familysafemedia.com/pornography_statistics.html.

⁵⁸ According to recent surveys, about 30% of Protestant evangelical clergy members admitted viewing Internet pornography. Almost 20% admit to doing so on a regular basis. If this is true among pastors, it must be even more epidemic among congregants.

Is Jesus calling for one to literally pluck out his eye? No, His language here is figurative. Even a one-eyed man, or a blind man, for that matter, can still lust. Lust is a matter of the heart; one's eye is not really at fault. If we were to take this literally, virtually every man would be wandering around blind. Jesus expresses it this way to show the seriousness of this sin.

b) Jesus advises one to cut off his hand if it causes him to sin (.30).

As in the previous verse, we should not take Jesus to be advocating self-mutilation here. The body is not the source of sin. Jesus' point is that it would be better to lose a body part than to lose your soul, which you will do if you don't control your lust. One's eye or hand represent occasions for sin or enticements to do wrong. One must separate himself from such temptations.

c) Failure to deal with this sin will result in one's "whole body" be cast into hell (*Gehenna*). Jesus clearly believes in hell as a place of eternal torment for the wicked.

d) Jesus point: Sin begins in the heart. Sinful actions are the result of sinful attitudes. One's heart must change before one's actions will change. Cf. 2 Cor 5:17.

e) Physical immorality begins with mental immorality. If one controls his thoughts, he'll have no problem with his controlling his body.

II. Statement #2: Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement.

A. This is another quote from the OT Law (Deut 24:1). In Mt 19, Jesus gives a fuller explanation of his teaching on divorce. Read Mt 19:3-9.

B. What is "a writing of divorcement"? The husband could write out a document (called a "get") stating that he was divorcing his wife and that the woman was allowed to remarry without legal claims from her former husband. The wording of a standard rabbinic divorce certificate stated the following: "You are allowed to marry any man you wish." A woman would need such a document because it gave her certain legal rights and protections. Without it, a former husband could claim that they were still married, charge her with adultery, or prevent her from marrying someone else.

C. Jesus' comments:

1. An unbiblical divorce leads to adultery.

a) What is an unbiblical divorce? Isn't all divorce unbiblical?

(1) God hates divorce (Mal 2:16; "putting away" [KJV] is divorce). Divorce is rarely the best option, but is allowable under some conditions.

(2) Jesus gives only one condition under which a divorce may be permitted: "the cause of fornication." The word *fornication* (*porneia* in Gk) refers to any kind of sexual immorality. It's the same word as "some uncleanness" in

Deut 24:1.⁵⁹ This is the only exception to the rule that Jesus makes; marriage is to be permanent unless this occurs. Even if adultery does occur, the couple should seek reconciliation; divorce need not result. The Jews interpreted Moses' words as a command, while Jesus asserts that it was allowed but not God's original intent (Mt 19:7-8).

- (3) Paul gives one other reason that a divorce might occur: abandonment, that is, when an unbeliever is unwilling to live with a believer (1 Cor 7:15). Paul states that the believer is "not under bondage" in such cases, meaning that a divorce ends the marriage bond.
 - (4) In any case, it is obvious that a divorce may be invalid from God's perspective. The fact that the government grants or recognizes the legality of a divorce does not mean that the divorce has moral validity. A person may be divorced legally and still be married morally.
 - b) Note Jesus' words "causes her to become an adulteress." The implication seems to be that the divorced woman would normally remarry, and if she did, it would be immoral. In Jewish culture, most divorced women did remarry, if only for financial reasons.⁶⁰
 - c) A divorce certificate proved that the woman was free from the previous marriage and gave her permission to remarry. Jesus says that if the divorce was not for biblical reasons, the woman commits adultery if she remarries. If she does remarry, part of the blame rests with her former husband, who "caused" her to become an adulteress through an unbiblical divorce.⁶¹
 - d) Jesus also asserts that a man who marries an illegitimately divorced woman commits adultery (.32).
2. Jesus words here would be quite shocking to His original audience. Some of the Jews of that time allowed a divorce for "any matter," even something as trivial as serving foul-tasting food. Other Jews said that a divorce was allowable only when the marriage vows were broken, i.e., if the husband failed to provide housing, clothing, and marital love. Most Jews at the time believed that divorce was a virtual requirement if one of the spouses committed adultery.⁶² For Jesus to insist that divorce is

⁵⁹ The Hebrew literally has "nakedness of a matter," which implied some sort of sexual impropriety or indecency, not restricted to adultery.

⁶⁰ Another possibility is the interpretation that a divorce exposes the woman to adultery or to become immoral, or perhaps, to be taken advantage of. William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

⁶¹ When Jesus spoke these words, Jewish men were technically allowed to have more than one wife, although the practice was falling out of favor and not commonly practiced. Adultery was seen to be much more an offense against a husband than against the woman.

⁶² Under OT Law, adultery was punishable by death (Lev 20:10). However, the Jews rarely enforced the death penalty for adultery; divorce was the acceptable alternative in most cases.

allowable only in limited cases would have run contrary to the conventional wisdom of the time.

3. Jesus' main point: Marriage was meant to be monogamous, and both husband and wife owe exclusive faithfulness to each other.⁶³
4. Some startling statistics:⁶⁴
 - a) Among adults who have been married, one-third (33%) have experienced at least one divorce. Among all Americans 18 years of age or older, 25% have gone through a marital split.
 - b) Among the population segments with the lowest likelihood of having been divorced subsequent to marriage are Catholics (28%), evangelicals (26%), affluent adults (22%), Asians (20%) and those who deem themselves to be conservative on social and political matters (28%).
 - c) The divorce rate among those claiming to be "born again" Christians is statistically identical to that of non-born again adults: 33%.
5. Principles:
 - a) Don't commit adultery.
 - b) Don't "look on a woman to lust after her." Pornography is strictly off-limits for Christians.
 - c) Don't sacrifice eternal joy on the altar of temporary pleasure. No matter how precious or pleasant immoral activity may seem to be, it's not worth spending eternity in hell to enjoy it temporarily.
 - d) Take whatever steps are necessary to prevent yourself from indulging in immorality. Even radical actions are appropriate if they prevent you from sinning.
 - (1) "Flee fornication" (1 Cor 6:18). The flesh is weak; remove the temptation. Run away from it. "Cut off" the Internet, email, cell phone, etc. "Throw away" any sensual materials.
 - (2) Don't go to places where lust might be a problem—the beach, swimming pool, book stores, gym, etc.
 - (3) Get accountable with a person of the same sex else who will hold you to a high standard of behavior.
 - (4) Keep the home fires burning. This is a great preventative measure. Cultivate physical intimacy at home.

Pr 5:15 *Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well.*

 - (5) Recognize your vulnerability. Never think "It can't happen to me." "Take heed" lest you fall (1 Cor 10:12). Take precautions to keep it from happening to you.

⁶³ David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible* (Eerdmans, 2002), 151.

⁶⁴ The Barna Group of Ventura, California. www.barna.org.

- (6) Memorize Scripture verses dealing with the dangers of lust and adultery.
- e) Don't divorce. God's original intent in marriage is a life-long, monogamous partnership. One's commitment to his marriage should be absolute and unchangeable. Divorce should never be seen as an option if things don't "work out."
- f) If divorce occurs, it must follow the biblical guidelines to be considered legitimate. Only two conditions allow divorce:
 - (1) Unrepentant fornication (*porneia*). This category would cover a broad range of misconduct and immorality.
 - (2) Abandonment by an unbeliever.
- g) If a divorce does not follow the biblical guidelines, it has not occurred from God's perspective. The couple is still married.
- h) If a remarriage occurs after an unbiblical divorce, the new relationship is adulterous and is thus immoral.
- i) If considering remarriage after a divorce, make sure the new marriage will not be adulterous.

Conclusion: The more we study Christ's teaching as presented to us in this passage the more we begin to appreciate it. Here, by means of a few simple words, Jesus discourages divorce, refutes the rabbinical misinterpretation of the law, reaffirms the law's true meaning (cf. Matt. 5:17, 18), censures the guilty party, defends the innocent, and throughout it all upholds the sacredness and inviolability of the marriage bond as ordained by God!⁶⁵

We must not fall into the Pharisees' error of thinking that sexual misconduct is purely physical in nature. Sin begins in the heart. Drastic measures are often necessary to overcome the wicked inclinations of one's heart. We must also affirm Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce. Marriage is permanent unless specific circumstances come into play. Those violating Jesus' application of the Law will find themselves in danger of eternal punishment.

⁶⁵William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 2: The Precepts of the Kingdom (Mt 5:17-48)

Lesson 7: Oaths (5:33-37)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is contrasting His interpretation and application of the OT Law with that of the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus raises the bar impossibly high in the Sermon (see Mt 5:28), which makes us recognize our own weakness and our need for a perfect Savior. In this section, He affirms a level of honesty that far surpasses the acceptable level of truthfulness common at that time. Even in our day, truth-telling, honesty, and faithfulness to one's promises seem to be at an all-time low. Christians must insure that they follow Jesus' teaching in this text.

- I. The statement: "Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths."
 - A. The word "forswear" (KJV) means "to swear falsely." Today we would use the word "perjure." Perjury is false testimony under oath.
 - B. What is an oath? An oath is a solemn appeal to God, an authority, or even an object, to verify or witness a promise (vow) one is making.
 1. The oath may take various forms, such as "as the Lord liveth" or "the Lord judge between me and thee" or "God is my witness" or "I call upon God." The oath (the invocation of God's Name) was usually attached to a vow (the promise).
 2. Sometimes the oath was negative in tone, such as "the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me" (Ruth 1:17).
2 Sam 3:35 And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down.
 3. Because one is invoking God's name and inviting God's judgment should the promise not be kept, it was the most solemn promise one could make.
 - C. The OT teaching on oaths comes from the following passages:
Lev 19:12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.
Num 30:2 If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.
Dt 23:21, 23 When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. ... That which is gone out of thy lips thou shalt keep and perform; even a freewill offering, according as thou hast vowed unto the LORD thy God, which thou hast promised with thy mouth.

Ec 5:5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

- D. An oath was taken to affirm or verify the truth of something. The emphasis was on the binding nature of the commitment or promise. If a person made a vow, he was bound to keep it. A person making an oath really planned to make good on his commitment. One who made an oath or vow and did not do what he promised profaned the name of the Lord. What the OT discourages is making a vow, swearing to it in God's name, and then not keeping it.
- II. Jesus' interpretation and application
- A. Jesus' words are not a direct quote from the OT but a summary of the biblical teaching on the matter.
- B. The Pharisees at Jesus' time had shifted the emphasis from the truth or commitment of the oath to the name in which the oath is made. Any oaths sworn to the Lord must be kept. But an oath not made in God's name was a different matter; it did not imply the same level of truthfulness in their view. The Pharisees taught that one could get out of a promise if it was not solemnized by invoking the Lord's name. The *Mishna*⁶⁶ devotes one whole section called *Shebuoth* ("Oaths") to an elaborate discussion of when oaths are binding and when they are not.
- C. The practice of making oaths in the name of all sorts of things was popular in Jesus' day. People would swear by Jerusalem, the Temple, the altar, the gold of the altar (see Mt 23:16-17), by heaven or earth, or any number of things. But making such oaths did not necessarily bind the speaker, in the Pharisees' view. In fact, the Pharisees claimed that various levels of oaths could be used depending on the circumstances. Some oaths were binding, while others were not. As long as people didn't swear in God's name, they may be able to break their vow. Thus, dishonest people could make promises without intending to keep them and duck their responsibility by claiming that their oath was non-binding, having not been made in God's name.
- There was an ongoing epidemic of frivolous swearing [in Jesus' day], and oaths were continually mingled with everyday speech: "By your life," "by my beard," "may I never see the comfort of Israel if ..." There was an inevitable trivialization of everyday language and integrity. It became common practice to convince another that you were telling the truth (while lying) by bringing some person or eminent object into reference. The deception was very subtle.⁶⁷
- D. Jesus condemns this kind of hypocritical hair-splitting and deceitfulness. According to Jesus, one cannot get out of his vow if the oath was made "by heaven" because heaven is God's throne. Likewise, an oath made "by the earth" is binding because the earth is God's footstool (Isa 66:1 "The earth is my footstool..."). And an oath made "by Jerusalem" must be kept because "it is the city of the great King" (quoting Ps 48:2). Even an oath made by one's own head⁶⁸ must be kept because God is the one who determines the color of one's hair. Jesus shows that all oaths must be kept, even those not specifically made in God's

⁶⁶ The Mishna is a collection of Jewish traditions. It is not considered to be inspired Scripture.

⁶⁷R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 125.

⁶⁸ Such an oath may have followed the formula, "May I lose my own head if ..." One's hair being black or white (i.e., gray) may suggest God's sovereignty over one's lifetime.

name. God stands behind everything. The entire creation is God's, and you cannot refer to a part of it without referring ultimately to him.⁶⁹

- E. Rather than affirming the truthfulness of a promise by making an oath, Jesus proclaims that people should “swear not at all.” Citizens of His kingdom should be straightforward and honest in their words. For Christians, “yes” should mean “yes” and “no” should mean “no.” One should not need to invoke God's name or anything else to insure the truthfulness of what he is saying. If one affirms or denies something, his words should state the case honestly, without needing to swear to it with an oath.
- F. Anything beyond straightforward, honest communication “cometh of evil.”⁷⁰ The practice of making oaths had been so corrupted in Jesus' time that their use often led to sinful ends—outright lies, deceitfulness, and misleading communication.
- G. Is Jesus here absolutely forbidding all vows and oaths, even those made in a court of law? Is one never to invoke the name of God in making a promise or affirmation? No, it does not seem that Jesus is prohibiting all oaths whatsoever. Such a view would be contrary to Scripture. The Bible frequently describes the practice of swearing by God's name and even encourages God's people to do so.
 - 1. Abraham confirmed his promises to the king of Sodom and to Abimelech with an oath (Gen 14:22–24; 21:23, 24). Abraham also required an oath of his servant (24:3, 9).
 - 2. An oath is mentioned in connection with Isaac (26:31), Jacob (31:53; cf. 28:20–22), Joseph (47:31, 50:5), “the princes of the congregation” (Josh 9:15), and the children of Israel (Judg 21:5).
 - 3. Moses told the Israelites, “Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name” (De 6:13). God told the nation to use the oath “the LORD liveth” when they swear (Jer 4:2).
Dt 10:20 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name.
 - 4. Many other vows or oaths are uttered in the OT (see Ruth 1:16–18; 2 Sam 15:21; 1 Kings 18:10; and 2 Chron 15:14, 15). We find the oath “as the LORD liveth” twenty-seven times in the OT.
 - 5. God Himself makes oaths (Gen 22:16; 26:3; Ps 89:3, 49; 110:4; Jer 11:5; and Luke 1:73). God swore with an oath to fulfill His covenant with Israel (Deut 29:12–14) and His promise to Abraham (Heb 6:13–17).
 - 6. Jesus declared Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God, in response to the invocation of God's name (Mt 26:63–64).
 - 7. Paul used oaths to verify his statements (2 Cor 1:23; Rom 1:9; Gal 1:20; Phil 1:8). The apostle must not have thought that doing so violated Jesus' words.

Given the biblical teaching on oaths, it seems highly unlikely that Jesus was annulling the OT teaching on the subject and outlawing oath-taking absolutely.

⁶⁹ Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

⁷⁰ The Greek literally says “comes from the evil (one),” possibly referring to Satan.

Jesus is condemning the flippant, profane, uncalled for, and often hypocritical oath, used in order to make an impression and to spice-up daily conversation. Over against that evil practice, Jesus commends simple truthfulness in thought, word, and deed.⁷¹

H. In this world of dishonesty and deception, an oath invoking God's name is at times useful to add solemnity and the guarantee of reliability to an important affirmation or promise. However, oaths and vows should be rarely needed for honest people. James echoes Jesus' words and urges that we not use them at all (cf. James 5:12). Those who do use them run the risk of greater judgment.

I. Applications: How do we understand and apply Jesus' words?

1. The absolute prohibition approach: Some Anabaptist groups, Moravians, Quakers, and others, have determined never to take any kind of oaths or vows; they refuse to swear that their testimony is true or even pledge allegiance to the flag.⁷² They believe that Jesus absolutely prohibited all oaths in every case.
2. The legal oath approach: Most professing Christians today recognize that they may make oaths in some cases. They do not think that Jesus is making an absolute prohibition on the practice. Oath-taking is permitted but not encouraged. If you make an oath, be very careful about it.
 - a) In western culture today, one of the few times we take an oath, make a vow, and invoke God's name is in the marriage ceremony. The vows state "'til death do us part" and include the words "as God is my witness." The wedding rings symbolize the vows. "Forasmuch as (the man) and (the woman) have given themselves to each other by solemn vows, before God and before these witnesses, ..."
 - b) Another context in which oaths are common is the court of law. Witnesses are "sworn in" by an official of the court when they promise to "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God." This is a vow (to tell the truth) with an oath ("so help me God"). Should Christians not agree to this oath? They should not need an oath to guarantee their truthfulness, but they need not refrain from taking such an oath if serving as a witness in a court. Jesus Himself testified under oath (Mt 23:63-64).
 - c) A third context for oaths is the oath of office for political and military figures. Presidents are "sworn in" to the office by placing their hand on the Bible and stating the following oath: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

⁷¹William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

⁷² In most courts today, one can affirm, rather than swear, that his testimony is true. Pledging allegiance to the flag is optional in public schools.

Other federal employees state the following oath:

“I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same, that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.”

3. General principles

- a) Avoid swearing or taking casual oaths. Don't use the kind of language that requires something like, “I swear on a stack of Bibles that...” “I swear on my mother's grave that...” “Cross my heart, hope to die...” Affirmations or denials should stand on their own without qualifications. Your honesty and truthfulness should never be in question.

Jas 5:12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

In their daily communications, Christians should not need to make oaths. A promise or a vow need not be backed up by invoking God's name. Honesty, truthfulness, and reliability should be standard, common traits for all Christians.

- b) God will judge the truthfulness of our words. God holds us accountable for our words. Even if we don't invoke God's name, He will still bring our words into judgment. God is concerned about everything we say, not just those promises made with an oath. There is no escape clause, no excuse for bad language. There is no graduated spectrum of truthfulness.
- c) If you make a promise, follow through on it. Never shade the truth or use word games to avoid responsibility.
- d) Our words reflect our character. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Mt 12:34).
- e) How credible are your words and promises? Are you considered honest and dependable? Do people take you at your word, or do you need to convince people of your truthfulness with promises and oaths? Do you ever mislead or deceive with your words? Will you lie if you have a good enough reason? Do people doubt your word? Why?



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 2: The Precepts of the Kingdom (Mt 5:17-48)

Lesson 8: Retribution (5:37-42)

Jesus has been contrasting His understanding of the OT Law with the conventional wisdom of the time, particularly expressed by the scribes and the Pharisees. What Jesus demands from His followers in this passage is really radical, quite extreme; at least it would have been to the original audience.

How are we to respond when personally wronged or mistreated? We are to reward evil with love. Many voices would tell us to exact vengeance when wronged—do to others what they did to you, or do worse if you can. Those of high moral fiber might advocate refraining from responding in-kind. Only Jesus demands that we respond to abuse with love. A natural response to abuse is revenge; a supernatural response is love. Jesus calls citizens of His kingdom to respond in love.

I. The OT Quote: “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth”

A. This principle is expressed several times in the OT:

Ex 21:23-25 *And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.*

Le 24:19-20 *And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach⁷³, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again.*

Dt 19:21 *And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*

B. The OT principle of retribution states that one who purposefully assaults an innocent person will receive the same treatment. What one causes, or even intended to cause, he will receive. Justice demands equal retribution for crimes.

C. This OT principle represents the oldest law in the world—the law of retaliation, technically known as *Lex (Law) Talionis* (retaliation). The earliest reference to *Lex Talionis* comes from the Code of Hammurabi in the second millennium B.C.⁷⁴ Many cultures advocate this level of morality that requires exact reciprocal justice.

D. Such laws were important in that they prevented injured persons from seeking personal revenge or retribution. The typical primitive blood feud knew nothing of equity. A small infraction by one tribe against another—for instance, trespassing—was met with a beating, which was returned by homicide, which was then countered by genocide. *Lex Talionis* did away with this—on paper at least. The civil government would insure that one who maliciously caused an injury

⁷³ The word “breach” (KJV) usually refers to breaking, fracturing, crushing, or shattering.

⁷⁴R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 131.

would be suitably punished. Instead of seeking personal revenge, an individual would appeal to the civil authorities to address wrongdoing. The whole system of civil, penal, and international law is based on the idea of reparation and equity that has its roots in *Lex Talionis*. This principle brings equity and stability to human relationships.

- E. The Old Testament repeatedly forbids personal vengeance.

Le 19:18 *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.*

Pr 20:22 *Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.*

Pr 24:29 *Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work.*

- F. Two purposes of *Lex Talionis*:

1. *Lex Talionis* shifts the quest for justice from the individual to the community. The government insures that justice will prevail, and that threat of justice acts as a deterrent to criminals. The government, not individuals, seeks justice. No “vigilante” justice is allowed. Further, unlike individuals, the government is not required to show mercy on a criminal. Mercy, pity, and compassion should not prevent the government from rendering justice. Government is an agency of justice.
2. *Lex Talionis* prevents excessive retribution or vengeance. Where individuals might seek a higher level of revenge (e.g., “You hurt me; now I’m going to kill you.”), *Lex Talionis* demands equality in justice.

II. Jesus’ interpretation and application

- A. Is Jesus revoking the principle of *Lex Talionis*? No, Jesus is here addressing the individual’s role in his personal relationships; He’s not talking about civil justice. Individuals are to apply this teaching to their interpersonal relationships. Jesus is not addressing how a government might pursue justice or punish a criminal. Thus, using this passage to prohibit capital punishment is illegitimate.
- B. The general principle: “resist not evil” or “do not resist the evil-doer.”
Jesus is condemning the spirit of lovelessness, hatred, yearning for revenge. He is saying, “Do not resist the evil-doer with measures that arise from an unloving, unforgiving, unrelenting, vindictive disposition.”⁷⁵
- C. Four examples of the principle in practice:
1. Turn the other cheek.
 - a) A slap on the cheek was the highest form of insult in Jesus’ day. The assault was not physically substantial; such a slap did little harm. The significance of the slap was more psychological. A slap with the back of the hand⁷⁶ meant calculated contempt, withering

⁷⁵William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*

⁷⁶A right-handed person would have to use a backhanded slap to hit one’s right cheek.

disdain. It meant that you were scorned as inconsequential—a nothing.⁷⁷ Roman law permitted prosecution in a court for a backhanded slap on the face.

- b) Perhaps the slap that Jesus had in mind was a form of persecution the early Christians experienced. Some scholars suggest that slapping the cheek would have happened when a person converted to Christ.
- c) Instead of seeking legal redress for such an insult, Jesus exhorts citizens of His kingdom to “turn the other cheek.” Rather than getting even with those who insult you for being a Christian, you should accept such ridicule with patience and grace. Endure the insult a second time.

Personal applications: Christians are called upon to love their neighbors and even their enemies. Imagine the result of one who takes abuse without retaliating? It would be a very powerful demonstration of the difference Jesus makes in a believer’s life.

How often do you respond to mistreatment with mistreatment? Do you always insist on “getting even”? Instead of doing to others what they’ve done to you, Jesus calls you to do unto others as you would want them to do unto you (Mt 7:12).

When others mock us for our faith, how do we respond? Even when others attack us for being Christians, we should respond with patience and grace, not in-kind retaliation. Jesus calls us to swallow our pride and give up our “rights” to reparation and fairness.⁷⁸

2. Give more than what is required.

- a) The “coat” (shirt or tunic) was worn next to the body. The “cloak” was the outer robe. Poor people often owned little other clothes than their shirt and outer coat, and the Law did not allow a creditor to forcibly take a debtor’s external coat permanently; it had to be returned each night (Ex 22:26-27; Deut 24:12-13). The poor and homeless would have no other covering if their cloak was taken.
- b) Love of enemies is to extend even to the person who would attempt to take away our possession. This goes beyond what the Law requires.
- c) Just like turning the cheek for another slap would be a surprising response, so giving up one’s outer garment would be equally surprising. Those seeing such a response would no doubt be curious as to why a person would make such a sacrifice.

Personal application: In today’s lawsuit-happy society, we can easily see the problems associated with a literal application of Jesus’ words here. Should we always give up more than is called for in a lawsuit? Should we allow

⁷⁷R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

⁷⁸R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

shyster lawyers to strip us clean? Should we not mount a defense when facing a frivolous charge? Under certain conditions, we may indeed choose to give up more than is necessary if it will further Jesus' kingdom goals. Other conditions may occur when you find it helpful to give up more than is required.

Rom 12:20 *Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.*

However, it seems unlikely that Jesus is absolutely prohibiting Christians from participating in a lawsuit under appropriate conditions. Part of good stewardship is caring for and protecting the resources God has entrusted to you.

3. Go farther than what is required.

- a) In Jesus' time, the military could compel civilians to carry their equipment for a limited distance. This was a common practice. Whenever a Roman official or soldier asked anyone within the Empire to carry a burden a mile, that person had to do it regardless of who he was or what the circumstances were. Almost all Jews had been subject to this, and they hated the very mention of it.⁷⁹
- b) More generally, Jesus is referring to any time someone is compelled (forced) into some kind of service. E.g., Simon of Cyrene who was compelled to carry Christ's cross (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21).
- c) Jesus seems to be saying that rather than to reveal a spirit of bitterness or annoyance toward the one who forces a burden upon a person, the latter should take this position with a smile. Did someone ask you to go with him, carrying his load for the distance of *one* mile?⁸⁰ Then go with him *two* miles!

Personal application: Jesus is calling His followers to exceed expectations and make the most of difficult situations.

Imagine the impact it would have made on a Roman soldier when a Christian followed Jesus' advice. No doubt that soldier would wonder why the Christian was willing to "go the extra mile."

In our jobs, going the "extra mile" can be a way of testifying of Christ. Christians should do their work in a way that exceeds expectations.

4. Give to those who ask.

When someone in distress asks for assistance, one must give generously. Lend freely (i.e., without interest) to those in need.

Dt 15:7 If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:

⁷⁹R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

⁸⁰ The word is *milion*, a Latin loanword (*mille*), meaning literally a thousand paces=eight stadia, approximately .92 of a statute mile. William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*

Dt 15:8 But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth.

Ps 37:26 He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed.

Ps 112:5 A good man sheweth favour; and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion.

Pr 19:17 He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

Personal applications: People are more important than possessions, even those who might be considered as enemies. Reward evil with good. Again, some qualifications may apply to this rule. It is unwise to give financial support to those who will use your money for evil purposes.

Question: Is Jesus prohibiting all resistance to all forms of evil?

Pacifists typically say that Jesus is outlawing personal defense of any sort. Thus, no Christian should be involved in the military, the police force, or the courts of law. Christ's words here are absolute and unconditional. They do not allow resistance or defense of oneself in any case, even when criminals threaten physical harm to oneself or one's family.

It's unlikely that Jesus was absolutely prohibiting all self-defensive measures. Several reasons:

1. Jesus goes on to give four examples of what he meant by "resist not evil." In none of these examples does he mention the civil authorities. He's talking about personal relationships here, not governmental responsibilities. He's not talking about the military, the police, or civil courts.
 2. Remember the nature of Jesus' sermon here. Our record of the Sermon is in summary form and states the basic principles without giving qualifications or exceptions. These are general statements of principle, not legal definitions. In a sinful society, a strictly literal understanding and application of Jesus' words here would potentially render all Christians hospitalized, homeless, and penniless.
 3. Paul, in Romans 13, defends civil authorities and even their right to "bear the sword" (i.e., enact capital punishment). Punishing wrong-doers is impossible without the use of force. Paul would be contradicting Jesus if Jesus were advocating strict pacifism.
 4. The NT does not condemn serving in the military. Military service is an honorable profession, which seems to contradict the principle of pacifism/non-resistance.
 5. It seems unlikely that even those who claim to follow Jesus' words here literally really do. When pressed, few indeed would allow themselves (or their families) to be mistreated and abused or give everything they owned when asked. Jesus' words here should not be taken in the absolute, literal sense. E.g., a drunk or known criminal asks for money; a child asks for a loaded gun.
 6. Non-retaliation applies in particular when a Christian is persecuted for righteousness sake or for the sake of Christ. In such cases, Jesus calls believers to "turn the other cheek."
- 1Pe 2:19-20 *For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.*



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 2: The Precepts of the Kingdom (Mt 5:17-48)

Lesson 9: Love for Enemies (5:43-48)

In this section of the Sermon, Jesus has been comparing and contrasting His understanding and application of the OT Law with what the scribes and Pharisees had been teaching. We find the formula “You have heard... but I say” six times here. Jesus wraps up His discussion with an admonition to “love your enemies.”

How do we practically express our love for others, even for “enemies”? Jesus gives us the answer in this paragraph.

- I. The traditional teaching: Love those who love you, and hate your enemies
Mt 5:43 *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.*
 - A. The first part of Jesus’ statement is a direct quote from the OT. Jesus elsewhere summarized the second part of the Ten Commandments by saying “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mt 22:39).
Le 19:18 *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.*
 - B. The second part of this statement, “hate your enemies,” is nowhere found in the OT. It is likely a commonly-taught sentiment or popular saying of the time. Perhaps this is what the rabbis taught. The statement reflected an arrogant attitude that fostered hostility between Jews (one’s neighbor) and Gentiles (one’s enemy). Perhaps the Pharisees and others taught that it was acceptable to hate certain classes of people, like publicans (tax collectors) and Romans (who frequently persecuted the Jews). After all, such people were not really “neighbors.” Only fellow Jews could be considered good neighbors. The Jews enjoyed a special relationship with God; foreigners were outside the covenant. Why should the pious Jew have any special regard for the foreign, wicked Gentile “dogs”? Why should they tolerate apostates and rebels? Jonah’s feeling toward the wicked Ninevites exemplifies this sentiment (see Jon 3:10-4:2).
 - C. Whomever the statement is aimed at, it clearly contradicts the intent of the Law. God emphasized love, not vengeance, even for the foreigner or stranger (Lev 19:34; Prov 25:21). The statement reflects the “intensely narrow-minded exclusivistic and intolerant environment”⁸¹ in which Jesus carried on His ministry.
Personal application: We can fall into this same practice by thinking ourselves superior to the unsaved, or by excluding ourselves from social interaction with lost people. We love our Christian friends, but seek to isolate ourselves from

⁸¹William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

non-Christians. Jesus calls Christians to influence the world as salt and light, not isolate ourselves from it.

II. Jesus' application and expansion of "love your neighbor"

A. The commands

1. "Love your enemies."

- a) Love toward one's neighbor extends even to his enemies. This radical idea had probably never crossed the mind of most people listening to Jesus at the time. To the typical Jew, the whole idea would have been absurd and even offensive. It should not have been; the idea is fully compatible with the OT commands (see Ex 23:4-5; Deut 10:19; Prov 25:21).
- b) The main enemy of the Jews would have been the Roman occupiers. These people were idolaters and oppressors who routinely abused the Jews. Gentiles were thought of as unclean, even as "dogs" (Mt 15:26-27). A pious Jew would not even eat at the same table with a Gentile. Thus, the Jews treated Gentiles with extreme hatred and scorn.
- c) Other enemies of the Jews included Samaritans, whom the Jews considered to be half-breed apostates, and publicans (see below).
- d) Thus, the typical Jewish person loved his own kind and hated others, with few exceptions (Lk 7:1-5). Normally, Jews, Gentiles, Samaritans, and publicans formed and stayed in separate groups.
- e) One's love for enemies is of a different quality than his love for friends or family. This is not a romantic feeling or a "buddy" kind of love; it's not an emotional attraction at all. What Jesus commands is a commitment to do good for everyone, even one's enemies. This kind of behavior sets the genuine believer apart from all others.

C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*:

The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste your time bothering whether you "love" your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less.... The difference between a Christian and worldly man is not that the worldly man has only affections or "likings" and the Christian has only "charity." The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he "likes" them; the Christian, trying to treat everyone kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on—including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.⁸²

⁸²Quoted in Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

2. Bless those that curse you. To “bless” means to speak well of. Our enemies may lie about us, defame and slander us, and even swear at us, but we must not do so to them.
3. Do good to them who hate you. See Prov 25:21.
4. Pray for those who persecute you. Jesus is the primary example of this as He prayed for those who were crucifying Him (Lk 23:34). Stephen prayed for those who were stoning him (Acts 7:60). Pray positive things (not the imprecatory Psalms) for your enemies.

Personal application: We are surrounded by enemies of the faith, those who deny, criticize, and blaspheme God, the Bible, and Christianity. We are to respond to such people with love. We love the person even if their sin is very unlovely. Respond to evil with love. Don’t respond in-kind to sinful behavior.

Note: It seems obvious that citizens of Jesus’ kingdom are in for some serious opposition—hostility from enemies, cursing, hatred and persecution are to be expected. If you have enemies, it should be because of your faith, not because of personal issues. See Gal 5:11 and 2 Tim 3:12.

- B. The reason to love your enemies: To prove yourselves to be children of God (i.e., citizens of the kingdom). God extends love to His enemies and bestows blessings on all people indiscriminately. Loving your enemies makes you like God.

Note: Theologians use the phrase “common grace” to describe the benefits that God bestows on all people impartially. God’s merciful, benevolent treatment of all people, even the desperately wicked, is an expression of common grace. See Ps 145:9 and Acts 14:17. For unbelievers, this life is the closest to heaven they’ll ever get.

- C. The example of how God loves everyone

1. God makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good.
2. God sends rain on the just and the unjust
3. Notice God’s direct involvement in seeming natural, mundane events—sunshine and rain, both of which “he sends.” God gives good things to the evil and to the good, thus displaying His impartiality and grace to all. All people are the objects of His love, even vile sinners (like us).

Note: The fact of God’s impartial love for everyone should not lead us to conclude that everyone is saved or even that God’s love for the lost is of the same quality as His love for the saved. See Ps 103:17-18 and 1 Tim 4:10.

- D. The comparison with publicans (tax collectors)

The tax-buyers or “farmers” had paid a fixed sum of money to the Roman government for the privilege of levying tolls upon exports and imports as well as upon whatever merchandise passed through the region. The main tax offices were located at Caesarea, Capernaum, and Jericho. The farmers would sublet their rights to “chief publicans” (Luke 19:2) who employed “publicans” to do the collecting. These charged what the traffic would bear, huge sums. So the “publican” had the reputation of being [a crook]. If he were a Jew, he was

regarded by his fellows as being also a renegade or traitor, for he was in the service of the foreign oppressor. Publicans and sinners were mentioned in one breath, the two designations being regarded as synonyms.⁸³

1. Publicans love those who love them. Even disgusting, crooked swindlers love their own kind.
2. Publicans greet their friends and relatives. Even crooks and pagans know how to love one another.
3. Those who love only their own kind put themselves on the same level as the despised tax collectors and Gentiles. The Lord is telling his hearers therefore that by imitating the tax-collectors and the Gentiles in their exclusivism, they are simply showing that they themselves are not any better than those whom they have been regarding as being far below them in moral and spiritual worth. They are doing nothing that is exceptional, that overflows, or is extraordinary.⁸⁴
4. Those who love only their own kind lose potential spiritual rewards. Jesus is obviously not talking about earning salvation here. Rightly understood, the prospect of heavenly rewards can motivate us toward proper attitudes and behaviors (Mt 6:20; 1 Cor 3:8).
5. Those who love like God does distinguish themselves from the world. Christians should do more than what is common among unsaved people.

Personal application: Christians should treat all people with love and respect, even those seemingly cast off by society—the poor, minorities, criminals, etc. That doesn't mean that we approve of their sin, but that we show them compassion.

We tend to split people into groups—those we count as friends, and those we'd rather avoid. This contradicts Christian love. Love demands costly self-sacrifice for another's good. Jesus perfectly demonstrated this on the cross.

Note: The love that Jesus is advocating here did not prevent Him from dealing very severely with some people, like corrupt religious leaders or the Pharisees (see Mt 23:33). Love can be expressed in many ways. What is best for some people is strongly confrontational.

E. The conclusion: be perfect, as God is perfect.

1. This statement summarizes the entire paragraph. It also is consistent with OT expectations (see Deut 18:13). God is the model, the example to follow. Jesus perfectly demonstrated each of the previous commands.
Note: Does God ever ask the impossible of His children? Yes. We can never achieve this level of holiness. We can only receive it as a gift.
2. God cannot lower His requirements without compromising Himself. He who is perfect could not set an imperfect standard of righteousness.⁸⁵
3. Is Jesus teaching that His followers can somehow reach sinless perfection in life? No. He'll go on to tell His listeners to pray for forgiveness of sins

⁸³William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*

⁸⁴William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*

⁸⁵John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*.

(6:12). The Bible never suggests that believers will attain sinless perfection in this life (see 1 John 1:8-10).

4. Yet perfection is a goal Christians should seek. We are to hunger and thirst after righteousness (5:6) and strive after holiness (1 Pet 1:15-16).
5. “Perfect” in this case means “mature, complete, full-grown,” not sinlessly perfect.
 - a) Jesus is urging his audience to understand and apply the full meaning of the OT Law, not just what the scribes and Pharisees had been teaching. The conventional wisdom of the time fell far short of God’s intent.
 - b) Jesus is urging his audience to love all people like God does—impartially.
 - c) Jesus is also pointing out the impossibility of following these guidelines, and reminding us of the kind of righteousness that is necessary to enter the kingdom, namely, greater than that of the Pharisees and scribes (5:20). Full perfection is available only through faith in Christ (2 Cor 5:21).
 - d) Obviously, not even the most mature believer can ever approach the kind of love that God has for His creatures. But we can seek to love others in a similar way. Mature believers recognize their responsibility to treat everyone with dignity and respect. That doesn’t mean that we accept or even tolerate their behavior, but it does mean that we seek the best for them.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 3: The Righteousness of the Kingdom (6:1-7:12)

Lesson 10: Giving to the Needy (6:1-4)

Matthew chapter six opens a new set of topics in the Sermon, all of which deal with righteous behavior—charitable giving, prayer and fasting, storing up treasure in heaven, worry, and judging others. Once again, Jesus seems to be comparing His teaching with the teaching and practice of the religious leaders of the day. Jesus is continuing his explanation of what it means for one's righteousness to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20). Throughout the section, He warns His audience about the dangers of religious hypocrisy.

Today's passage deals with giving alms, that is, charitable giving to the needy. Jesus emphasizes here how important one's motives are for religious acts. Heart righteousness is more important than behavioral righteousness. Behavior is driven by internal attitudes. Jesus cautions us to beware of our motives for public, and especially religious, behavior. If our motivation for obedience is anything other than to please God, we are operating out of unrighteous motives. To advertise our piety for the applause of others displeases God and prevents spiritual rewards.

- I. Citizens of the kingdom do righteous acts.
 - A. Verse 1 is a heading for the rest of the chapter. It expresses Jesus' theme in a nutshell. Jesus tells us what not to do, followed by what we should do.
 - B. Jesus declares that this is an important topic—"take heed," lit., "be alert, consider carefully, watch out, beware." He's alerting the audience to a significant issue. This is a stern warning against one of the primary errors of the Pharisees—hypocrisy.
 - C. Jesus' expectation is that His people will be involved acts of devotion. He says "when thou doest," not "if." Such acts of devotion are normal for Christians.
 - D. Definition of "alms" (KJV):
 - 1. The word is literally "righteousness."⁸⁶
 - 2. The sense is "righteous acts, acts of charity, gifts of mercy." Jesus has just exhorted his audience to "be perfect" (5:48), and so now He instructs them regarding how to live that kind of righteous lifestyle.

Jesus next cites three examples of Pharisaic "righteousness" (i.e., typical acts of Jewish piety) – charitable giving (6:2-4), prayer (6:5-15), and fasting (6:16-18). In each case, Jesus exhorts his audience not to follow the hypocritical and sinful example of the Pharisees.

⁸⁶ The Greek text underlying the KJV uses the term "mercy" (alms), where older texts use a different word, "righteousness." The two words as used in this context are roughly synonymous. Most scholars follow the older text's reading.

II. Citizens of the kingdom do their charitable giving privately.

- A. The word “alms”: This word literally means “mercy” and refers especially to charitable giving to the poor. Today we might use the word “charity.”
- B. The command: do not give alms “before men, to be seen of them.” The English word “theatrical” is based on the Greek “to be seen.” Some people put on a spectacular performance when they gave alms. They didn’t really care about the poor; they just wanted human applause. Such alms-giving may benefit the needy, but was of no spiritual value for the giver. One of the primary sins of the Pharisees was their taste for showy display. They focused on external behavior with little or no consideration of heart motivation (see Mt 23:5-7).

Personal applications: 1) One’s motivation in giving is just as important as the act of giving; 2) Acts of charity are of no spiritual value if one’s heart attitude is not right; 3) Man’s heart is prone to corrupt even good things.

- C. Jesus said in 5:16 to “let your light shine” before men by doing good works. Yet here He states that some good works should be done in private, not “before men.” Good works can be done in a way that brings public glory to God, not to oneself. But a sinful human tendency is to gain glory for oneself through public displays of charity. A good summary of the general rule for how public good works ought to be done is to show publicly when tempted to hide, and hide when tempted to show publicly.⁸⁷

Righteous conduct under kingdom norms must be visible so that God may be glorified. Yet it must never be visible in order to win man’s acclaim. Better by far to hide any righteous deed that may lead to ostentation [showy display]. To trade the goal of pleasing the Father for the trivial and idolatrous goal of pleasing man will never do.⁸⁸

- D. A warning not to do the act to be praised by men: those who give alms to be seen have no reward from God. Right motive is essential for the alms to be rewardable. A life of external obedience and righteousness can amount to absolutely nothing if one’s heart attitude is wrong. All the good deeds a hypocrite does fail to merit any reward from God.
- E. Directions for alms-giving:
 - 1. Don’t be hypocritical.
 - a) Do not “sound a trumpet” before you. Is Jesus speaking literally here, or metaphorically? Did people really arrange for a trumpet blast when they gave alms? No actual instance of such conduct has been found in the Jewish writings. However, trumpets were sounded on special occasions, like a public festival or to call for prayer or fasting.⁸⁹ The Pharisees’ great weakness was that they loved men’s praise more than God’s praise (cf. John 5:44; 12:43).

⁸⁷ *Expositor’s Greek Testament.*

⁸⁸ *Expositor’s Bible Commentary.*

⁸⁹ Another possibility is that the receptacles into which people placed their gifts were shaped something like the bell of a horn and were made out of metal. Thus, when one dropped in his coins, it made noise. One “sounded the trumpet” by throwing in many coins. Making lots of noise in this way naturally drew people’s attention.

Perhaps they saw such occasions as opportunities for public admiration as they responded to the trumpet call by ostentatiously contributing to the offering. Perhaps the crowds remarked on how much they saw people giving. More likely, however, is the possibility that Jesus is speaking metaphorically here, accusing the Pharisees of “sounding the trumpet” for themselves by their pretentious self-promotion.

(1) Self-promotion is hypocritical.

- (a) A hypocrite is literally an actor, stage-player, or one who impersonates another. A hypocrite is one who pretends to be someone he is not; he wears a mask. This is the harshest word that Jesus has for any class of people and he employs it for these pious pretenders who pose as perfect.⁹⁰
- (b) The hypocrites sound the trumpet “in the synagogues and in the streets.” They wanted to draw as much attention as possible to their “righteous” acts. They want praise from men and neglect seeking praise from God. Without the recognition, hypocrites would not be so charitable.

(2) Self-promotion merits only human praise – “glory of men.” They were not giving for the glory of God or even for the benefit of the needy. They wanted to impress others with their generosity. In truth, they were buying public good will, and charitable giving was only the means of achieving what they wanted. The only reward such hypocritical giving earns is public notoriety. This is their reward in full; they will get nothing more from God. In such cases, men gain the glory that should be directed toward God. Such flattery is their only reward; all they get is human approval. Hypocritical religious practices merit no spiritual or eternal benefits.

- b) Jesus emphasizes the truth of this by prefacing his statement with a solemn promise, “verily I say unto you...”
- c) Jesus’ words imply that God knows the intent of the human heart. God’s opinion of people and their works may be vastly different than human evaluation.
- d) Hypocrites do in public what they do not do in private. Their motive for public obedience is notoriety. Without public approval, they have no reason to act. There is a disparity between private and public behavior. The action is done only to impress others.

Note: Much charitable giving in the world is done for recognition and self-promotion. People do good deeds simply for the notoriety it brings.

⁹⁰ Robertson’s *Word Pictures*.

Such good works would likely not be done at all without the recognition that goes along with it.

Personal application: The danger always exists that we do our religious duties with the underlying motivation of gaining approval from others. If public approval is the motivation, the behavior (i.e., charitable giving) will be done only in public, not in private. Sometimes hypocrites look good even though their inside is full of deceit. We must insure that our hearts are right.

Hypocrites often don't think of themselves as insincere. They take the approval of others as affirmation that they're doing the right thing. When religious people recognize your actions, it's easy to keep doing things for that reason. We often don't realize that our motivations are evil.

2. Be sincere. A sincere person (non-hypocrite) is most interested in serving and honoring God as he gives. One is not doing this for the applause of people.

Do your alms in secret, without your left hand knowing what your right hand is doing. This colorful proverbial expression signifies that the action should be done as secretly as possible. Give without self-consciousness, without a hint of self-promotion or pride. You should not make a big deal of it even within your own mind or in your family. The way to avoid hypocrisy is not to cease giving, but to give in a way that has little chance of self-promotion.

Personal application: Don't "blow your own horn," especially to mark your acts of devotion. Don't draw attention to yourself in you giving; don't advertise how much you give, or even the fact that you give.

Note: Jesus is not suggesting sloppy accountability here. We must keep records of giving and make sure financial matters are well-regulated. He's advocating anonymous giving (one reason we don't list or recognize benefactors).

Note the Quote: "The light of a Christian character will shine before men and win glory for God without the artificial aid of public advertisement."⁹¹

III. Citizens of the kingdom can expect rewards for their alms-giving.

Secret alms-giving results in reward. God sees everything, even things done "in secret" (see Ps 139:11-12; Heb 4:13). Proper behavior based on proper motivation yields eternal rewards. Are such rewards received in heaven, or on earth? Both, in time and in eternity. Heavenly rewards await those who serve God sincerely, and earthly benefits also accrue to those who give with a pure heart. If you are performing for God, then you receive a reward.

Hypocrites have no reward from God. Their only reward is human recognition.

Note: Receiving praise or applause from others does not necessarily rob us from praise from God. The two are not mutually exclusive. Motivation is key: if you do something to receive praise from men, then you will not receive a reward from God. If you do something to honor God, others might notice and appreciate it, and that's fine. We don't

⁹¹ Plumber, quoted by Jeff Miller.

have to avoid human praise; we just don't seek it, especially in our religious duties. Also, don't refrain from praising others for fear of robbing them of their rewards. Public recognition does not empty one's good works of merit or eternal reward. It's often good to recognize those who do notable acts of kindness or service as an example for others to follow.

Guiding principles:⁹²

- Heart motives are more important than external behaviors, especially when it comes to religious duties.
- The true believer gives and serves to please God—not for the fleeting approval of man.
- Our lives are to be given to uncalculating generosity.
- As we help others we must guard our eyes from wandering from those we are helping to the observers.

Questions for personal application:

- Do you advertise your religious activities?
- Who are you trying to please with your religious activities? Whom are you godly for?
- Whose opinion do you value? Whose applause do you seek?
- Do you clean up your behavior in the presence of others simply because of public pressure?

⁹²R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 3: The Righteousness of the Kingdom (6:1-7:12)

Lesson 11: Prayer and Fasting (6:5-18)

Jesus began this section of the sermon with the words “Beware of practicing your righteous deeds before men to be noticed by them” (6:1). The first category of righteous deeds He discusses is charitable giving, or “alms” (6:2-4). Such generosity ought to be done in secret, anonymously, and sincerely. Those who give merely to provoke praise from men will receive no reward from God.

Jesus goes on to discuss a couple other typical righteous deeds—prayer and fasting. In this section, Jesus again warns his audience of the dangers of public good works. Hypocrites pray and fast merely to be seen by men. Such righteous acts ought to be done privately and sincerely, not with showy display.

Within this discussion, Jesus gives “The Lord’s Prayer,” or what should more accurately be called “The Model Prayer.”

I. Lessons on Prayer

A. Don’t be hypocritical. .5, 8a

1. A hypocrite is an actor, one who puts on a front; he is not what he seems to be; he says one thing and does another.
2. Hypocrites love the notoriety gained from public prayer. In Jesus’ culture, pious people were highly regarded. The Jews observed set times for prayer, usually in the morning, the afternoon, and the evening (Ps 55:17; Dan 6:10; Acts 3:1). If a pious Jew could not get to the temple for the prayer time, he might find the nearest synagogue or even stop in the street to pray (cf. Luk 18:9-10). The hypocritical Pharisees didn’t find a quiet back alley, either. They wanted to pray on the corner of a busy street so that more people would see them. Perhaps they even secretly planned their schedules to “happen to be” at a very public crossroads at the time of prayer. Their only reward is human approval.
3. Scripture nowhere condemns public prayer. It’s no sin to pray publicly. The sin of the hypocrite was his motivation, not his behavior. He prayed publicly to be seen and honored by people. What the Lord condemns here is hypocritical, ostentatious prayer, not public prayer.

B. Pray properly. .6-15

1. Pray privately. Enter your “closet,” shut the door, and pray to God secretly. The word “closet” means “secret chamber, inner room, secluded spot.” It would be the opposite of the public street. One’s “closet” can be any private location. The point is that one should not be conspicuous in his prayer life. However, the main emphasis is on one’s attitude of mind, not his place of prayer; not secrecy, but sincerity.

2. Pray sincerely, without “vain repetition” (.7).
 - a) Vain repetition is characteristic of “the heathen” (cf. 1 Kings 18:25-29). E.g., Buddhist prayer wheels, RC rosary.
 - b) Sincere prayer doesn’t have to be wordy, flowery, or long. We find many short but effective prayers in the Bible (1 Kings 3:6-9, 18:36-37; Luke 18:13, 23:42). Even the Model Prayer (or the “Lord’s Prayer” Mt 6:9-13) is fairly short.
 - c) It was not only the heathen who babbled long prayers. Jesus also remarked that the scribes “for a pretense make long prayers” (Mk 12:40). Lengthy prayers are not the issue—the Bible contains plenty of them (cf. 2 Chron 6:14-42; Neh 9; Ps 119; Luk 6:12). The main concern is one’s heart attitude as he prays.
 - d) Vain repetition reveals a lack of understanding about prayer. Prayer is not simply repeating the same words over and over again. “Much speaking” does not increase the likelihood of being heard by God.

Oddly enough, this Model Prayer itself has become the object of “vain repetitions.” People mutter this prayer repeatedly, using these exact words, as if it had magical powers of itself. Even biblical prayers can be repeated without meaning.

Caution: Every so often someone claims to have discovered the “key” to answered prayer. They claim that if we repeat the right words or say them in a certain way, God is bound to answer us. Such ideas fit into the same category as “vain repetitions.”⁹³
3. Pray knowledgeably. Recognize that God knows what you need before you ask. .8
 - a) God’s omniscience (all-knowing) prompts and undergirds prayer. Some would observe that if God knows our needs before we ask, it makes prayer unnecessary. Why inform God of something He already knows? We should keep in mind that prayer is not for the purpose of instructing God. Prayer is for our benefit, not for God’s.
 - b) Like a child tells his loving parents what he wants and needs, so believers approach God, not to inform Him of anything he doesn’t already know, but simply out of love and obedience.
4. Pray systematically (i.e., following this model).

Note: This section of the Sermon is often entitled “the Lord’s Prayer,” but it is more properly “The Model Prayer.” Jesus prefaces his remarks with the words “after this manner therefore pray ye.” This is the correct manner; this is how to pray. We need not repeat these exact words in every prayer, but prayer should follow this model and reflect these qualities.

 - a) Pray to the right Person—“Our Father”

⁹³ Examples: Bruce Wilkinson’s *Prayer of Jabez* claims to offer a form of prayer that God is more likely to answer. Bill Gothard claims that “crying out,” i.e., loud, oral shouting is the key to answered prayer.

- (1) Many people do not have the right to call God “our father.” Such is the exclusive right of those who are “in Christ” (John 1:12; 1 Jn 3:1-2). In a sense, God is the Father of all people by virtue of creation; yet in the context of the Sermon, God is Father only of those in Jesus’ kingdom, that is, those who are saved. Jesus claimed that for some people, the devil is their father (Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:10). Thus, this model prayer is for believers alone.
 - (2) The words “our Father” imply a warm, personal relationship. This is how a child addresses his parent. Yet “our Father” is “in heaven.” We must approach God in a humble and reverent way (cf. Ex 3:5; Isa 6:1-5; Heb 12:29). God is our Father, but He’s also our sovereign King. We approach Him reverently, not casually.
- b) Pray reverently
- (1) “Hallowed” – may your name be recognized as holy.
 - (a) One’s “name” stands for one’s character or essential nature; the name is identified with the person.
 - (b) The basic meaning of holy is “set apart.” Thus, to “hallow” God’s name is to recognize Him as unique and sacred; to hold God in reverence.
 - (c) Genuine believers desire that all men would recognize God as holy.
 - (2) “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”
 - (a) The “kingdom” Jesus is talking about here is the earthly reign of the Messiah. Only during this time will God’s will be accomplished “on earth as it is in heaven.”
 - (b) God’s “will,” in this case, is clearly his moral will as expressed in the Law. Every believer wishes that God’s moral will were obeyed by every person. God’s decree (His sovereign plan) is always accomplished everywhere (Dan 4:35; Eph 1:11).
- c) Pray for daily needs. The word “daily” signifies
- (1) Something necessary for the day (emphasizing time)
 - (2) Something necessary for existence (emphasizing amount)
 - (3) Thus, “Give us today the portion needed for today” seems to be the intended sense.
- Pr 30:8-9 *Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the*

LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.

- (4) “Daily bread” represents all manner of practical needs (not luxuries). Ask God to meet your needs.
- (5) We recognize our dependence on God to provide all our needs.

d) Pray for forgiveness

- (1) Sin is like a debt.
- (2) God’s forgiveness of our sins is related to how we forgive others.
 - (a) If we forgive others, God will forgive us. .14
 - (b) If we refuse to forgive others, God will not forgive us. .15
 - (c) Although believers enjoy full cleansing from sin, they still should pray for forgiveness from the ongoing sin in our lives (1 Jn 1:9). We still need the application of the cleansing blood of Christ on a daily basis.
 - (d) Remember that this prayer was given while the OT dispensation was still in operation. OT believers did not enjoy full and final forgiveness of sins. They had to repeatedly make their sacrifices to cover their sins. Christ made the final sacrifice for sins, and NT believers enjoy full and perfect forgiveness.
 - (e) God’s forgiveness of us is ultimately not based on how well we forgive others. Forgiveness is always based on God’s grace, not our efforts. There is no merit implied here. However, a forgiving attitude is very important. The disposition to forgive others is a proof of our own forgiveness. Read Mt 18:21-35.

e) Pray for strength. .13a

- (1) “lead us not into temptation”
 - (a) God never entices people to sin (James 1:13). In that sense, God never leads people into temptation.
 - (b) The word “temptation” often refers to a trial, test, or difficult circumstance.
 - (c) It’s appropriate to pray for protection from affliction, adversity and trouble.

Ps 141:4 Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties.

Luk 22:40 [Jesus]said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

- (2) “deliver us from evil”
 - (a) Evil in general—trials and problems, the consequences of immoral behavior
 - (b) The “evil one,” i.e., Satan. The Greek has “the evil.” Satan is frequently called “the evil one” (Lu 22:40; Mt 13:19; 1 John 2:13-14, 3:12).
 - f) Pray with praise. .13b⁹⁴
 - (1) “kingdom, power and glory”: This doxology (ascription of praise to God) gives us our motivation for prayer—that the glory of God might be demonstrated in the granting of our petitions.
 - (2) “amen” – truly, so let it be
- II. Lessons on Fasting .16-18
 - A. Don’t be hypocritical.
 - 1. Hypocrites “disfigure their faces” so everyone knows they are fasting.
 - 2. Hypocrites’ only reward is human approval.
 - B. Be sincere.
 - 1. “When ye fast” – indicates that fasting is a normal practice.
 - 2. Appear normal. The Pharisees typically let themselves become disheveled during a fast so that it was obvious to onlookers that they were fasting.
 - 3. Don’t consider whether others notice that you are fasting. Don’t fast to gain human approval.
 - 4. Be assured that God knows that you are fasting and that He will reward you. .18
 - C. Notes on the practice of fasting
 - 1. Biblically speaking, fasting is a voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual reasons. One may fast from food or from any number of regular activities like watching TV, using certain products, participating in certain events, etc. A fast is any time you refrain from doing something you usually do, for spiritual reasons. The Bible refers only to fasting from food.
 - 2. The NT indicates that there will be times for fasting. Jesus stated more than once that his disciples would fast (Mt 6:16-17, 9:14-15, 17:21) and the early church participated in fasting (Acts 13:2, 14:23). However, Paul mentions it only once (1Cor 7:5) and does not suggest that fasting is a necessary part of the Christian life. Fasting is voluntary.
 - 3. Types of fasts:

⁹⁴ The Doxology in the last part of verse 13 does not appear in the earliest NT MSS or in the early commentaries on the Lord’s Prayer. Also, various forms of the statement are found in later MSS, some longer, some shorter than what is expressed in the KJV. However, the majority of Greek MS have the statement, it is in keeping with the rest of the Bible (see 1 Chron 29:11), and is a fitting conclusion to the Model Prayer.

- a) In a normal fast, one abstains from all food except water (or other liquids). The human body cannot normally function without water for more than 2-3 days.
- b) In a limited fast, one abstains from certain kinds of foods or liquids (Dan 1:12).
- c) In a congregational fast, the whole congregation agrees to abstain for a designated period in order to pursue spiritual goals (Acts 13:2).

4. Reasons to fast

Remember that biblical fasting must have spiritual reasons. There may be beneficial health reasons to fast, but that's not what we are concerned with here. If one fasts, it should be for one of the following biblical reasons.

- a) To strengthen prayer: Fasting brings a note of urgency and sincerity to our prayers. Fasting doesn't guarantee that God will answer prayer in the way that we desire, but it does show that we are serious and sincere about a matter. Fasting is often associated with prayer (Ezra 8:23; Neh 1:4; Dan 9:3; Acts 13:3). Take meal times to pray instead of eating.
 - (1) Pray and fast for wisdom in making decisions (Acts 14:23)
 - (2) Pray and fast for deliverance or protection (Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:16).
 - (3) Pray and fast to express repentance for sin (1 Sam 7:6; Joel 2:12).
 - (4) Pray and fast to express and/or renew your dedication to God and to worship Him (Luke 2:37).
- b) To humble yourself before God (1 King 21:27-29) (Note: it's possible to fast without humility [Luke 18:12]).
- c) To express grief: Especially in the OT, fasting is associated with death and grief (Judg 20:26; 1 Sam 31:13).
- d) To discipline your body and/or to overcome temptation

While fasting is not an essential, required aspect of the Christian life, it may be a common part of it, depending on one's circumstances. It should be more common than it is. Fasting is thoroughly appropriate in many situations, and participation in fasting may serve to strengthen and support your spiritual health.

Note: Always seek medical advice before fasting. Some physical conditions make fasting dangerous.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 3: The Righteousness of the Kingdom (6:1-7:12)

Lesson 12: Treasure in Heaven (6:19-24)

Jesus now moves on to a new subject—the differences between earthly and heavenly treasure.

The desire to have more seems to be a universal human trait. Our capitalistic culture is based on buying and spending, and society tells us that life at its best consists of having more and better possessions. Christians know that this is false, yet even believers may struggle to overcome a materialistic attitude. Jesus' comments here should end our desire to accumulate earthly treasures.

I. The commands

- A. Don't "treasure up"⁹⁵ treasures on earth. How shortsighted it would be to treasure up for oneself perishable, temporary riches while losing the opportunity to accumulate imperishable, eternal riches of heaven.
 1. Because earthly treasures can suffer natural decay
 - a) Moths: The larva of some moths eat woolen clothing. This was a common problem in Jesus' day. Garments were considered a part of one's wealth in the Middle East (cf. Josh 7:21-26). Expensive garments become worthless when moth-eaten.
 - b) Rust: metals corrode over time. Even gold and silver of this era contained impurities that were subject to oxidization. The word for rust is literally "eating," and may refer to the action of worms upon food in storage. Rats, mice, and other vermin consumed much of the food gathered and stored in those days.
 - c) Moth and rust merely represent the natural tendency of material objects toward decay and diminishment of value. Things wear out, grow old, break, fail, weaken, and eventually become unusable and worthless. Other natural events can ruin and destroy—insects, storms, earthquakes, disease, fire, flood, etc. The process of decay is universal and often unstoppable.
 2. Because earthly treasures can be stolen
 - a) Many homes of this era were easily broken into simply by digging through a wall, which were often made of clay bricks or even mud. Valuables were often stored in one's home, often buried in the floor. It was very difficult to secure one's valuables against thieves.
 - b) Other forces that reduce the value of one's treasures: inflation, taxation, bank failure, stock market slumps, illness.

⁹⁵ The Greek says, "Do not treasure to you treasure upon the earth." The word for treasure is *thesauros*.

3. If one's hopes and dreams are tied up with earthly treasure, he will find that such treasures tend to decline over time, and that all treasures are lost upon one's death. The old adage "You can't take it with you" is certainly true regarding earthly assets.
 4. What Jesus has in mind are people who get their entire satisfaction from things that belong to this world only. He warns us against focusing our ambitions, interests, and hopes on the things of this life.⁹⁶ Exchanging the eternal for the temporal is no bargain.
 5. Questions for personal application:
 - a) How important will the material goods that I'm so worried about now be when my life is over? What will it all be worth in 10,000 years?
 - b) What occupies your thoughts? What are you worried about? If your mind is filled with thoughts about bank accounts, stock portfolios, market shares, land values, and the like, it indicates that your heart is set on your treasures.
 - c) What do you fret about the most? What do you fear losing? How would it affect your emotional state if you lost all your worldly goods?
 - d) How do you measure the merits of other people? By their clothing labels? Their education? The size of their homes or bank accounts?
- B. Do "treasure up" treasures in heaven.
1. Believers should "lay up" heavenly treasures. Unlike earthly treasures that are subject to decay and decline, heavenly assets never depreciate.
 2. What we do in our earthly existence has eternal consequences. Some will get to heaven "so as by fire" (1 Cor 3:15), i.e., with few eternal rewards. Others will enjoy vast treasures in heaven because of their labors for Christ during their lives.
 3. What "treasures" await believers in heaven? The Bible is unclear on what rewards believers will enjoy in heaven, other than "dwelling places" (Jn 14:1-2) and "crowns" (2 Tim 4:8). What is clear is that we can earn treasure and that such rewards are eternal. Read 1 Pet 1:3-4.

Note on levels of reward in heaven: Several biblical statements seem to imply that rewards in heaven will vary according to our work for Christ on earth. Read Mt 25:21; 1 Cor 3:13-15; Eph 6:8

⁹⁶R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 207.

II. The explanations

A. What you value reflects the condition of your heart.

1. One's *heart* in biblical thinking is his control center, his whole inner man, the core of his being. Setting one's heart on something entails more than one's emotions or affections; it concerns the entire self. Thus, one who treasures his possessions dedicates himself to them—heart, mind, and soul.
2. If a person's ultimate value in life pertains to this earthly existence, then his all his activities will center on that realm. Money, fame, popularity, prestige—these will be one's goals in life. Little or no thoughts of the eternal enter into one's mind.
3. If you want to know what a person's heart is set on, just take a look at the things he treasures. Materialism and self-centeredness reveal a worldly heart.

Note: Those preachers promoting a “health-and wealth” message are really just encouraging materialism and worldliness, thus hindering storage of heavenly treasure.

B. Piling up earthly treasure blurs one's vision.

1. “The light of the body is the eye.” The eye is an organ that responds to light and is thus somewhat similar to a lamp. Like a lamp, one's eyes provide guidance for the rest of the body.
 - a) One's eye may be “single” (i.e., “sound”), resulting in the whole body being full of light. The basic meaning of the word is *simple, uncomplicated*. However, the word implies “unmixed with any defect,” and thus *clear, sound, healthy*.⁹⁷ A healthy, clear eye provides the entire body with illumination. Serving God rather than money would be the equivalent to having a “single” eye. One is focused on God and His glory rather than on earthly riches. With such a focus, one's entire life becomes simple and full of light.
 - b) One's eye may be “evil,” resulting in the whole body being full of darkness. If one's eyes are diseased or faulty, the entire body is plunged into darkness. Those whose eyes cannot perceive light are especially to be pitied. Of course, Jesus is not talking about natural blindness here, but spiritual blindness. Blindness and darkness are often associated with willful sin and spiritual ignorance in the Bible (e.g., 1 Jn 2:9-11). Sin obscures and hinders spiritual sight. Those desiring to be rich are blind to true spiritual values. Their darkness is especially deplorable because they think that their darkness is light. Jesus may be targeting those teachers whose “light” (their teaching) is really “darkness” (error).

⁹⁷William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

- C. You can't serve God and "mammon."
1. The two are contradictory. Serving God has one set of requirements; serving *mammon* has another. The two are mutually exclusive.
 2. "mammon": The word is of uncertain origin but refers to money, real estate, clothing, worldly goods, etc. Paul equates covetousness with idolatry (Col 3:5) because money can become an idol of the heart that one serves. For a greedy person, the accumulation of the things of this world becomes almost like a religion. One cannot be dedicated to wealth and at the same time be dedicated to God. Materialism promises happiness but cannot give true satisfaction.

Question: Should the Christian gather no "treasures" here on earth? Should one make no provision for future needs? No. The Bible does not condemn wealth in principle or wealthy people as a class (e.g., Job, Abraham, Solomon, Joseph of Arimathea). Ownership of private property is a basic right protected by the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:15, 17). Further, providing for future needs is biblical (Gen 41:33-36; Prov 6:6, 30:25). Paul instructs us to provide for our own households, and we should do so to the best of our abilities (1 Tim 5:8). Moreover, we are not to despise the good things of life by becoming ascetics, but rather are to enjoy food and the comforts of life as blessings from God (1 Tim 4:3-4, 6:17).⁹⁸

What the Bible condemns is the love of money (1 Tim 6:10), that is, covetousness, greediness, grasping after this world's goods. The desire to be rich is sinful and often results in "destruction and perdition" and "many sorrows" (1 Tim 6:9-10). But money itself is neither good nor evil. How one uses it determines its morality. Money can be a great blessing if one uses it properly—to provide for one's family, to finance the operation of the church and the spread of the gospel, and to provide for those in need. Money can be a help, not a hindrance, to spiritual endeavors. But if one's heart treasures earthly goods, he cannot be a follower of Christ. Read Luke 12:15 and 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

The key to a proper attitude toward money and possessions is the concept of stewardship and citizenship. A steward is a manager, not an owner. Nothing we enjoy truly belongs to us; God has loaned our worldly goods to us, and we are to administrate them wisely. Whether God gives or takes away, we can say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). Further, our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20), and we are merely visitors here (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11). The Christian does not hold tightly what he has in this world.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it this way: "I do not cling to these things. They do not become the centre of my life and existence. I do not live for them or dwell upon them constantly in my mind; they do not absorb my life. On the contrary, I hold them loosely ... I am not governed by them; rather do I govern them; and as I do this I am steadily securing, and safely laying up for myself treasures in heaven."⁹⁹

⁹⁸R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

⁹⁹Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), p. 85. Quoted in Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 3: The Righteousness of the Kingdom (6:1-7:12)

Lesson 13: Worry (6:25-34)

Jesus had just finished warning his audience about materialism and greed. He assured them that it is impossible to serve both God and “mammon.” Jesus treats a related issue in the next paragraph. For some, “treasuring up” material wealth on earth was a non-issue; they were simply trying to meet daily needs. For those with little material wealth, providing food and clothing for their family becomes the focus of anxiety and fear. But Jesus assures us that God knows our needs and will not forsake us. Instead of worrying, we should trust God.

As with the rest of the Sermon, this passage is relevant for us today. Anxiety in our culture assumes almost epidemic proportions; we are chronic worriers. We are worried about everything, and virtually every worry has a solution available for a price. Psychiatrists prescribe anti-anxiety medication and consumers medicate their worries with alcohol and sleep aids. Stress can put us at risk for obesity, heart disease, cancer, and a variety of other illnesses. Nearly every system in the body (e.g., gastro-intestinal, immune, reproductive) is negatively affected by prolonged anxiety. Chronic anxiety can lead to depression and other serious psychological conditions.

Jesus presents the solution to worry. We don’t need medication; we need biblical expectation, i.e., trust that God will take care of us. God provides for the birds of the air and even has interest in the wildflowers of the field. If that’s true, He will certainly care for His people.

Jesus uses an interesting form of argument in this part of the Sermon. He argues from the greater to the lesser and from the lesser to the greater. If the greater is true, that God has given a person life and a body, is it not also true that God will provide for what He has created? If the lesser is true, that God provides for the birds and the flowers, is not the greater also true, that He will take care of His people?

Jesus repeats the command “Don’t worry” three times in this short section of the Sermon (vss. 25, 31, 34). Citizens of Jesus’ kingdom must obey this command.

- I. The command: “take no thought for your life” .25
 - A. “take thought” – to be anxious, troubled; to care for.¹⁰⁰ Worry seems to be the basic idea (cf. Luk 10:41; Phil 4:6). This type of construction is often used to stop an action already in progress. The command is, “Stop worrying...” Worry is sin.
 - B. Jesus is not advocating a reckless, neglectful attitude about daily needs or about preparation for the future, but an attitude that trusts God to meet one’s needs. Preparation for the future is appropriate, even commanded (see Gen 41:33-36; Prov 6:6-8, 30:25).

¹⁰⁰ Back when the King James was translated (1611), the word “thought” meant “worry, anxiety.” The meaning of the word has changed considerably over time. In fact, some have objected to this part of the Sermon because they thought Jesus was advocating recklessness or neglect of future needs.

- C. “life”
1. Food (“meat” [KJV] means any kind of food) and drink
 2. Clothing (probably includes shelter)
 3. Other life issues that often are the subject of worry:
 - a) Health
 - b) Money
 - c) Failure – job, relationships, etc.
 - d) Reputation – what people think about us
 - e) Consequences – what will be the outcome of our behavior (sins)
 - f) The future
- D. Food, drink, and clothing are small matters compared to human life and one’s body. If God created one’s body and gave life to it, does it not follow that He is able to provide for the sustenance of that life?
- E. Many of Jesus’ original audience were likely very poor, and they struggled to provide for their basic needs—food and clothing. But if they were citizens of Jesus’ kingdom, they did not need to fret about whether God was going to meet their needs.

II. Explanations .25-30

- A. Life is more than food and the body is more than clothing. God, who provided both life and body, is able to provide food, drink, and clothing.
- B. The example of the “fowls of the air”: .26
1. We can learn important things from observing nature (cf. Ps 19). Learning about nature is a valuable pursuit.
 2. The birds don’t work or worry about planning, reaping and storage, yet God feeds them. Jesus is not discouraging work; He’s discouraging worry.
 3. Citizens of the kingdom are worth far more than birds. Birds are valuable, but not as valuable as humans are.
 4. Implication: God will take care of me. If God cares for the birds, He’ll certainly care for me.

Note: God “feeds” the birds, yet the birds are responsible to actively pursue each meal. They don’t sit idly by and wait for worms to crawl their way. “The early bird gets the worm” by getting up and going to work. Birds work harder to earn their living than many other animals. Many birds prepare for the future by gathering and storing food or by migrating. Likewise, God provides for His people as they earn their living through work. The birds provide an example of vigorous labor, not lazy inactivity.

Another Note: Human life is “better” than animal life. That is, it has more value, more significance. Humans, not animals, are made in the image of God, and this is the basis of their value. Many today deny this truth, asserting that humans are mere animals and thus have no more inherent value than any other animal. Jesus clearly asserts that human life is far more valuable than animal life. This, of course, does not imply that animals can be abused (Prov 12:10).

C. No one by worrying can add a cubit to his stature. .27

1. The word “cubit” literally means “forearm.” A cubit is a unit of measure spanning the distance from the point of the elbow to the end of the little finger, typically about 18 inches.¹⁰¹ Adding a cubit to one’s height would indeed be a phenomenal feat, not a small thing. This doesn’t seem to fit the context very well (see Luke 12:25-26 for the parallel).
2. The term “stature” (KJV) can mean “height” (see Luke 19:3) or “maturity, age, length of life” (see John 9:21, 23 or Heb 11:11 where the word is translated “age”). The latter option is more likely here—a short time.
3. Jesus is likely saying something like, “Who can add a single hour to his lifetime by worrying?” That is, worrying does not add any time to your allotment of life. Worry does not promote long life; you don’t gain a single hour from it. On the contrary, obsessive anxiety can lead to all sorts of medical conditions that can shorten one’s life. A person really can “worry himself to death.” Further, God has appointed the length of one’s days, and that measure cannot be changed by worrying.

Ps 39:4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

Ps 39:5 Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity.

D. Clothing and the example of the lilies of the field .28-30

1. Jesus again gives a vivid illustration from nature. Wild flowers¹⁰² grow without toiling or spinning. Spinning was the common household task of making yarn by spinning wool or flax on a spindle. Spinning was required to make clothing by hand, a job normally done by women. It’s likely that many women were listening to Jesus during the Sermon, and He speaks directly to their concerns. This was unusual for a rabbi of that era, who generally would direct his public comments only toward men.
2. Even Solomon in all his glory could not compare with the beauty of fields “arrayed” (clothed) in wild flowers. Solomon had fantastic wealth and power, but he could not attain the same level of beauty achieved by a lowly wildflower. No amount of wealth can do that.
Human beauty is like the fleeting splendor of wild flowers—here today, gone tomorrow. Citizens of Jesus’ kingdom should not be overly concerned about their external appearances. The inner beauty of godly character is of far more value than external good looks.
3. If God is able to “clothe” the fields in that manner, He is much more capable of clothing citizens of His kingdom. .30
 - a) Grass and other low-value combustible materials were gathered together to heat ovens. Typical ovens of this era were dome-shaped

¹⁰¹ There seems to be quite a bit of flexibility when it comes to the cubit measure, anywhere from 18 to 22 inches.

¹⁰² The word can refer to many different kinds of wild flowers besides lilies.

affairs made of clay or mud bricks. Grass and wild flowers would be growing one day and cut down to be burned the next.

- b) Grass and wild flowers are not high-value materials. They are perishable and common. Yet they are beautiful and God cares for them.
- c) God's interest in His own people far exceeds His concern about materials like flowers and grass.
- d) There is beauty in God's provision, and God often provides far beyond necessity. God is the author of beauty, and it's appropriate for believers to appreciate and duplicate beauty.
- e) Jesus confronts his audience here with their lack of faith. Those who worry exhibit "little faith." If the cure to worry is faith, then worry demonstrates a lack of faith. The root of anxiety is unbelief. He's not asserting that faith and worry cannot coexist, but that one hinders the other.

Note the Quote: "Worry is practical atheism and an affront to God." (Robert Mounce)

III. A repeat of the command: take no thought regarding food, drink, or clothing .31

- A. The construction of the command is a bit different here than in vs. 25. Here the grammar suggests something like "Do not grow anxious, do not become worried."
- B. The Gentiles seek such things. Jesus' audience, being composed entirely of Jews, would not want to be compared to gentile "dogs." One characteristic of the pagans was their pursuit of food and clothing to the exclusion of seeking the true God. They didn't know any better. Jews should not be like the ignorant Gentiles.
For many people today, "life" can be reduced to things like food, drink, and clothing. Without a commitment to God, human life amounts to little more than "eat, drink, and be smartly clothed." Food and fashion often become idols of the heart and take the place of God for many people.
The Gentiles, the secular world, seek material things because they overestimate their significance. The characteristic tendency of those without Christ is to be bound by the horizons of earth. Everything is crammed into the visible. This, in turn, promotes worry about secondary matters such as food and clothes.¹⁰³
- C. God knows you have need of such things. God is aware of your daily needs and he will take care of you. He's been faithful in the past and will continue to be.

¹⁰³R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the*, 223.

IV. A further command: .33

- A. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Daily needs are provided by putting God first, not by worrying or toiling. God's interests must have priority even over the daily necessities of life. Our supreme concern ought to be things above, not the things of this world (Col 3:1-3). This should be our continual pursuit.
- B. Instead of worrying about daily needs, believers should focus on God, His kingdom, and righteous living. Replace worry with positive action. Adopt God's perspective on things—eternal and spiritual, not temporary.
- C. How does one “seek” the kingdom and his righteousness?
 - 1. Seek to live as citizens of Christ's kingdom ought to live. Such a lifestyle is “righteous,” i.e., holy, upright, godly. Follow Christ's commands from the Sermon and from the rest of the NT.
 - 2. Seek to spread the Christian worldview through preaching the gospel and planting churches.
 - 3. Recognize Christ as King over all realms of your life—religious, family, social, educational, recreational, etc. It stands to reason that when God is recognized as King, righteousness will prevail.¹⁰⁴
- D. Result: God will provide “all these things,” i.e., food, drink, clothing. God has promised to provide the essentials of life, not luxuries. Our responsibility is to put God first. God's responsibility is to take care of our daily needs.
- E. Further, when our eyes are focused on the kingdom, we tend not to concern ourselves with the mundane matters of our own lives. When our attention is captured by kingdom duties, the minor inconveniences of daily life merit little thought.

V. Conclusion: Don't worry about tomorrow. .34

Note the Quote: “The ghost of tomorrow stalks out with all its hobgoblins of doubt and distrust.” (AT Robertson)

- A. For the third time, Jesus demands that we cease worrying about future events. Providing for future uncertainties is biblical; worrying about the future is not.
- B. Tomorrow will take care of itself. As long as we live, the next day will always arrive whether we worry about it or not. Live in the present. Enjoy the blessings God has given today. Don't worry about future problems; focus on today. Don't let potential problems overwhelm you.
- C. The evil of each day is sufficient for itself. Every day has a new set of problems. It's counter-productive to worry about tomorrow's problems today. Worry will not dissolve or reduce tomorrow's problems. God will give strength to bear the problems when they arrive, not before. Don't “borrow trouble” from a day that has not yet arrived—and maybe never will.

Lam 3:22-24 *It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him.*

¹⁰⁴William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

Question: Is there a proper, acceptable form of concern? Yes, as Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 11:28-29, we may well be concerned about spiritual things without descending into worry. It's proper to be concerned about our own spiritual state and that of others (Prov 4:23; 2 Tim 2:15). We naturally have cares about our families, our church, our nation, our jobs, etc. Jesus is not calling us to a life of laziness or indifference. However, in all our concerns, we must keep in mind that God is sovereign, that God is good, that God knows our needs, and that God has promised to meet our needs when we put Him first. Underlying all our concerns must remain a deep-seated trust in God's Person and providence.

At root, worry demonstrates a lack of trust in God. We may be "concerned" about things, but we should never worry like the pagans do. A steady confidence in God works against worry.

Statistically speaking, over 40% of things we worry about never occur. We have no capacity to change 30% of things we worry about. 12% of what we worry about are criticisms from others, most of which we cannot change. 10% are health related worries, which can lead to worse health. Only 8% of things we worry about pertains to things we can change.¹⁰⁵

Question #2: Have Christians ever lacked food, drink, and clothing? Has God always insured that every Christian always had the essentials of life? History has demonstrated that Christians have at times lacked the daily essentials of life, especially when suffering persecution. Jesus' words here relate a general principle, not an iron-clad guarantee without exceptions. Remember that the Sermon has much in common with wisdom literature (like Proverbs) in that these statements generally prevail but may have exceptions in rare cases. Also, Jesus is arguing that life is more than food and clothing. What happens in this life is not as important as is eternal spiritual life. An eternal perspective can help us retain our faith during the tough times of life.

*Said the robin to the sparrow: "I should really like to know
Why these anxious human beings rush about and worry so."
Said the sparrow to the robin: "Friend, I think that it must be
That they have no heavenly Father, such as cares for you and me."¹⁰⁶*

Phil 4:6-7 *Be careful (same word for "take thought" or "be anxious") for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

¹⁰⁵ Cited by Jeff Miller.

¹⁰⁶ John R. W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978). Quoted in Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 3: The Righteousness of the Kingdom (6:1-7:12)

Lesson 14: Judging Others (7:1-6)

Matthew 7:1 is likely one of the most well-known and oft-quoted portions of the NT. Everyone seems to know that Jesus said “Judge not.” Unfortunately, many do not know that Jesus also said “Judge righteous judgment” (7:24). Clearly, Jesus is not prohibiting all forms of judgment, but only hypocritical judgment, or what we might call judgmentalism. No doubt, the Pharisees were the target of this admonition because they were well-known for their hypocrisy and unjust judgment.

Those seeking to live godly, righteous lives are often accused of judgmentalism. Those who expose the unbiblical behavior and beliefs of others might also be labeled “judgmental.” We admit that there is often a fine line between exercising necessary judgment and being overly critical. And if we are not careful, we can become hyper-critical of others, even to the extent of pointing out faults in others that we are guilty of ourselves. Before we “amen” Jesus’ words here against the Pharisees (see Luke 18:9), we should make sure that we are not guilty of the same errors. This does not imply, however, that we refrain from all judgment. We must exercise a proper and biblical form of judgment and evaluation that follows Jesus’ advice here.

I. The command: Judge not.

These words have been the source of much misunderstanding and false teaching. Even good Christians have taken Jesus’ words here to mean that they should not make or express their opinions or be critical of anyone or anything. Secular people know enough about the Bible to throw the “judge not” quote at a Christian whenever morality is in question. A closer reading of the context shows that Jesus is not prohibiting judgment but is encouraging proper judgment.

II. Clarifications and conditions:

Jesus is obviously not prohibiting all forms of judgment, evaluation, or opinions. Many portions of the NT exhort believers to use good judgment (cf. 1 Cor 5:12, 6:1–5; Gal 1:8-9; Phil 3:2; 1 Thes 2:14-15; 1 Tim. 1:6-7; Titus 3:2, 10; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 10; 3 John 9). Jesus did not intend a wholesale condemnation of judgment per se. “There is nothing in the teaching either of Christ himself or of the apostles after him that relieves us of the obligation to form opinions about people and to act upon the basis of these opinions, which also implies that at times it will be our duty to express our judgments.”¹⁰⁷

A. Judgment will fall on those who judge. .1

B. Judgment will fall to the extent that you judge. .2

1. Others will judge us in the way we judge them. People often avoid those who display a critical spirit, who always point out the faults and failures of others. If we enjoy criticizing others, we may find ourselves the objects of

¹⁰⁷William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

close scrutiny. Perhaps we don't come up to the standard that we expect of others. Habitual fault-finding is very unattractive.

2. God will apply the same standard of judgment hypocrites use toward others in His evaluation of them. The standard of judgment applied to others will be applied to you. Those who judge without mercy will be judged without mercy. See 2 Sam 22:27; Mark 4:24; Jas 2:13.

Unkind judgment of others will be judicially returned upon ourselves, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁸

If we set ourselves as authorities and judges over others, we should not be surprised or complain when we are judged by our own standard.¹⁰⁹

C. Judgment must not be hypocritical or unjust. .3-4

1. One of the characteristics of a hypocritical, fault-finding person is that he looks for problems in others, finds them where they don't really exist, and then blows them all out of proportion. Ironically, he may be guilty of the same things he is so hyper-critical of in others.
2. The word for "look" in vs. 3 suggests an intent gaze. The hypocrite is very interested in how others are failing but does not consider his own weaknesses.
3. A "mote" is any small, light substance—a speck, chaff, a piece of hay or grain, a splinter, dust, etc. The object is exceedingly small. Thus, the "mote" implies a small offense, a trivial error, failure or fault.
4. A "beam" in this case signifies a large piece of wood or timber. This object is exceedingly large, much more significant than the "mote." Thus, the beam implies a major offense, failure, or fault.
5. With such a log in one's eye, it would be impossible to see anything.
6. The point: hypocrites see others' faults but "consider not" their own faults. The scribes and Pharisees were especially guilty of hypocrisy, and Jesus often called them hypocrites (5:20, cf. 6:2, 5, 16; 15:1, 7; 23:13). Everyone should evaluate himself to make sure that he is not following this bad example.
7. The kind of judgment that Jesus prohibits is unjust, unrighteous, and without love or mercy. Personal human judgments must always be somewhat tentative and flexible. Read Romans 2:1.

D. Judgment is often necessary. .5-6

1. Follow the right procedure.
 - a) First, judge yourself; "cast the beam out of your own eye" so you can see clearly. Correct your own faults before taking any action against those faults in anyone else.

"He only is fit to be a reprover of others who jealously and severely judges himself. Such persons will not only be slow to

¹⁰⁸ JFB Commentary.

¹⁰⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

undertake the office of censor on their neighbors, but, when constrained in faithfulness to deal with them, will make it evident that they do it with reluctance and not satisfaction, with moderation and not exaggeration, with love and not harshness.”¹¹⁰

- b) Consider the circumstances, limitations, and exceptions that pertain to the situation and the person/people. Try to sympathize rather than criticize. Make proper allowances for human frailty and imperfections.
- c) Make sure you are seeing “clearly.” Are you sure you have all the correct information required to make a judgment? Remember that heart motivations are often impossible to judge.
- d) Once you “see clearly,” proceed to “remove the mote” from your brother’s eye. It is appropriate to point out someone else’s failure or fault in that case. This is not being judgmental; it’s being a brother in Christ.
- e) Jesus is clearly not prohibiting mutual discipline within the church; in fact, He’s encouraging it. Believers must evaluate one another’s conduct, make judgments, and confront one another when necessary. But they must do so in a proper way.

Jesus does not encourage [an indifferent] attitude toward fellow believers. Jesus does want us to discern the sins and shortcomings in others, but he wants us to see them through clear, self-judged eyes—eyes that are tender and compassionate.¹¹¹

2. Make the right judgment calls. .6

The opposite extreme of judgmentalism is lack of discernment. If it’s wrong to be judgmental, it is also wrong to accept everyone and everything indiscriminately.

- a) Some people are like “brothers,” while others are like “hogs” or “dogs.” One must exercise discernment to tell who is who.
- b) Some things are “holy” and valuable, like pearls. “Holy” means set apart, sacred, dedicated for God’s use. Even in Jesus’ day, pearls had great value. Jesus is likely referring here to his own teaching and/or biblical doctrine in general. The Gospel message is holy and valuable and should be treated with the proper respect.
- c) Some people are unholy and as ignorant as “dogs” and “swine.” Dogs and pigs were ceremonially unclean and particularly repulsive to Jews of Jesus’ day.
 - (1) The dogs in view here are not little pet lap dogs but snarling, savage street dogs. Dogs signify anyone who spurns, opposes, and abuses biblical truth, and who does so continually and maliciously.

¹¹⁰ JFB Commentary.

¹¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

- (2) Pigs were dirty, loathsome animals to the Jews. For someone to be considered swine would be the ultimate insult. When used to describe people, swine refer to those who are impure, profane, corrupt, polluted, and wicked.
- (3) Some people are incapable of appreciating the priceless value of Christianity, the Bible, and truth. They have more in common with barnyard animals than with their Creator.
- d) Jesus is restricting His followers from offering biblical truth to those who would “drag it through the mud.” Some people find great pleasure in trampling and degrading the Gospel. Such enemies of Christ do not deserve repeated exposure to the message. See Matthew 10:14.
“Religion is brought into contempt, and its professors insulted, when it is forced upon those who cannot value it and will not have it.”¹¹²
- e) We know that no one is beyond the reach of the Gospel. God can soften the heart of even the most hardened, confirmed sinner. However, there comes a point at which we must discontinue our efforts when they prove to be counterproductive and simply trust God for the outcome.

Jesus is saying that whatever it is that stands in special relation to God and is accordingly very precious should be treated with reverence and not entrusted to those who, because of their utterly wicked, vicious, and despicable nature, can be compared to dogs (see also Phil. 3:2) and hogs. This means, for example, that Christ’s disciples must not endlessly continue to bring the gospel message to those who scorn it. To be sure, patience must be exercised, but there is a limit. A moment arrives when constant resistance to the gracious invitation must be punished by the departure of the messengers of good tidings.¹¹³

Jesus Himself was very patient and merciful with some (e.g., Peter, the woman at the well), yet had very pointed words of condemnation for those who spurned and scorned His ministry (e.g., the Jewish religious leaders).

- 3. Judgment is necessary to know when to withhold good and valuable things from wicked people who will degrade the truth and abuse Christians if given the opportunity.
 - a) How can one know what is “holy,” who are “dogs,” what are “pearls” and who are the “swine” if we make no judgment calls? Jesus does not condemn evaluating the conduct and character of others.
 - b) What Jesus condemns is hasty, harsh, or hypocritical judgment.

¹¹² *JFB Commentary*.

¹¹³ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.

There is a universe of difference between being discerningly critical and hypercritical. A discerning spirit is constructive. A hypercritical spirit is destructive. The person with a destructive, overcritical spirit revels in criticism for its own sake.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 3: The Righteousness of the Kingdom (6:1-7:12)

Lesson 15: Ask, Seek, Knock (7:7-12)

How this section of the Sermon is related to what precedes is not entirely clear. It could be an independent unit of thought standing on its own, but that would be odd for a sermon in which all the parts ought to be related. But we should recall that our record of the Sermon is composed of small sections of material, not the whole message as Jesus gave it originally.

In the preceding verses, Jesus admonished His audience to judge but not be judgmental. How can an average person have the discernment necessary to implement these commands as well as the rest of the Sermon? How can anyone live up to the high standards demanded here? He must ask, seek, and knock. Persevering prayer is required for one to understand and apply the principles Jesus has been expressing.

- I. Pray persistently—ask, seek, and knock. .7
 - A. What is Jesus talking about here? What are we to ask? What are we to seek? What door are we to knock on? Prayer seems to be what Jesus is promoting here.
 - B. The fact that Jesus repeats the idea and describes prayer with such words implies earnest, persevering prayer. The necessity of diligent prayer is found throughout the Bible (cf. Luke 11:5-8, 18:1, 7; Rom 12:12; Eph 5:20, 6:18; Col 4:2; 1 Thes 5:17).
 - C. Christians often give up too easily when it comes to prayer. Jesus reminds us “to pray and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). Prayer is a pursuit that takes effort and diligence. These are present tense commands, which means that we should keep on asking, seeking, and knocking.

However, we should not see prayer as an effort to convince God that He should yield to our requests by our “much speaking” (Mt 6:7). God knows what we need, and He’s promised to give us what we need. Repetition is not the way you get what you want.
 - D. Persistence is the key to all spiritual growth. It takes spiritual discipline to read the Bible, pray, memorize Scripture, attend church services, etc. It is by means of these disciplines that we grow spiritually. If you fail to persevere, you won’t grow.
 - E. We have an invitation to approach God in prayer, and to come persistently, even continually. God is approachable, and He invites us to come to Him in prayer, and we can present our requests boldly.
 - F. We ask, seek, and knock for ourselves (“you” .7) and for others.
 - G. Reasons God does not answer prayer (no matter how much we ask, seek, or knock):
 - 1. Lack of faith (Jam 1:6-8)
 - 2. Unconfessed sin (Isa 1:11-15, 59:1-2)
 - 3. It’s in improper request or an unrealistic expectation (Jam 4:3).

4. It's not God's will (1 Jn 5:14).
5. The time is not right. God is never late, but He's seldom early. Often we have to "walk by faith" without receiving what we are asking for. God calls us to wait and trust Him for the outcome.

II. Pray confidently. .8-11

A. The promise .8

1. Those who persevere in prayer will receive what they are looking for. God cares about us and wants to give us what we need.
2. Is this an unconditional guarantee that we get anything we ask for? Obviously not. The assumption is that the person asks rightly—in faith, according to God's will, for the right purposes, etc. James reminds us that some people have no right to expect anything from God (James 1:7).

B. The comparison .9-11

1. With man: It's natural for fathers to comply with reasonable requests from their children. A request for bread would not be met with a stone (something worthless). A request for a fish would not be met with a snake (something dangerous). Even "evil" fathers know how to give good gifts to their children.
2. With God: If the lesser is true, certainly the greater is true. If human fathers grant the requests of their children, how much more will our heavenly Father approve the requests of His children? Since God is far better than any earthly parent, it follows that He is even more interested in providing His children with what they need. See Isa 49:15.
 - a) God gives "good things to them that ask him." The Greek is even stronger: "the Father will give good [things] to those asking him."
 - b) Children are not capable of discerning what is good for them. Parents are responsible for providing good things and teaching what is good. Likewise, Christians often misjudge the value of the "good things" God provides. And just as parents do not give in to some requests from a child, so God often does not give in to some requests from His children. In such cases, not giving in is good for them. Withholding may be in the best interests of the person. See 2 Cor 12:7-9.
 - c) The obvious question is, what are the "good things" Jesus has in mind here?
 - (1) He's already mentioned bread and fish, two staples of the typical diet of that day. So at least, Jesus is assuring us that God will provide food for those who ask. This fits well with what He previously said about how God provides the necessities of life for His children (6:25-34).
 - (2) The primary emphasis in the Sermon is on the spiritual, not the physical. Thus, it seems that the asking, seeking and

knocking here is in pursuit of the spiritual goals He has already mentioned in the Sermon. Prayer is essential in living out the principles found here. We must keep on asking God to help us obey.

- (3) The word “good” is rather broad and general and may refer to any number of things—clothing, shelter, income, family, etc. God is willing to give good things of all kinds to those who ask.
 - (4) Good things, from God’s perspective, would be in keeping with His character and will. We are free to ask God for anything we need or want (Phil 4:6), but God does not promise to fulfill inappropriate requests. See James 4:3 and 1 John 5:14.
 - (5) A broader question: Does God give only good things to His people? Is everything that happens to a believer “good”? While some might assert that everything God allows or causes must be good, the Bible does not specifically make that claim. God can cause all things to work together for good (Rom 8:28), but that doesn’t mean that all things that happen are good in and of themselves. God allows plenty of bad, evil, painful things to happen to most people, even godly Christians. It seems unrealistic to claim that everything that happens is good.
- d) Note that good things come to those who ask. We need not claim that God is somehow incapable of action until we pray. God knows our needs before we ask (Mt 6:32). Our prayer, or lack thereof, cannot limit God’s purposes or decrees. However, God has commanded us to ask and has promised to respond to our supplications. God often accomplishes His will in response to our prayers.

Matthew Henry: We cannot expect to receive *good things* from God, if we do not *fair* things, and that which is *honest*, and *lovely*, and *of good report* among men. We must not only be devout, but honest, else our devotion is but hypocrisy.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996, c1991), Mt 7:12.

III. The “Golden Rule”¹¹⁶ .12

- A. This text has been described as “the underlying and governing principle of all morality.”¹¹⁷ Unfortunately, the Rule has been greatly misunderstood and misapplied. Liberals often look at it as a summary of all Christian truth or even the means of salvation, neither of which it is. Further, remember that Jesus is preaching about citizenship in His kingdom, so this ethic is primarily applicable to relationships among believers. Unsaved people may agree with the Rule in principle, but in practice rarely follow it. “Only a righteous person is able to practice this rule and thereby demonstrate the spiritual change that has come about in his life. An individual who is able to live this kind of life obviously possesses the righteousness Jesus demanded (5:20). Such a person’s righteous acts do not save him, but because he has been delivered he is able to demonstrate true righteousness toward others.”¹¹⁸
- B. This verse again seems a little out of place, not logically connected to what precedes or what follows. However, the word “therefore” suggests that this sentence is a logical conclusion of some kind. How is it related to the context?
1. As related to the previous section: Judgment becomes harsh and overly critical if we do not apply this limitation. If you don’t want to be judged harshly and critically, don’t judge others that way. And even if someone is a “hog” or a “dog,” we must treat him with respect and dignity, just as we would want him to treat us. The bad behavior of others must not result in bad behavior from us.
 2. As related to the section on prayer immediately preceding: Don’t pray only for yourself; seek God’s blessings for others.
 3. As related to the entire Sermon: The Rule sums up the entire Sermon. We apply the sermon practically by obeying the Rule. The basic rule governing interpersonal relationships for citizens of the kingdom is this—treat others as you want to be treated. Put yourself in your neighbor’s place and consider what he would want.
- C. Practical applications
1. This ethic is the practical application of the command “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18; Mt 22:39).
 2. This ethic covers “all things ... whatsoever.” In every aspect of life, we should seek the welfare of others to the same extent we would seek it for ourselves.

¹¹⁶ See Luke 6:31 for the parallel passage. Some assert that the Golden Rule is “love thy neighbor as thyself,” not this text. The two texts express virtually the same idea, just in different terms. The description “Golden Rule” for this text was first used in English in the 17th century, often as “Golden Law.”

¹¹⁷ John William McGarvey, *The Four-Fold Gospel* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999), 265.

¹¹⁸ John F. Walvoord et al., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 2:34.

3. This ethic also applies to all people, not only believers or other “good” people. Christians must treat all people this way, even those who oppose and mistreat them.¹¹⁹
 4. This ethic demands that we do to others what we ourselves would deem to be right and reasonable to be done unto us. We must put ourselves in the other persons “shoes” and consider what we would want in that case. In other words, it rules out half-hearted, hypocritical action.
- D. When we see ourselves in someone else’s place, it tends to make us much more sympathetic to the other person’s problems. What would we be like if we had to endure the same situation? What should I do for my neighbor that I would want done for myself if I were in that situation?
- E. “this is the law and the prophets” – Jesus summarizes the whole OT with these words.
1. The “law and the prophets” refers to the entire OT.
 2. By saying “this is the law and the prophets,” Jesus asserts that the entire ethical teaching of Scripture can be summed up in the Golden Rule. Those applying this Rule will always relate to others properly.
 3. This fits well with what Jesus says elsewhere (Mt 22:36-40), that the entire OT Law can be summed up with the commands “Love the Lord your God” and “love your neighbor as yourself.” Thus, we demonstrate our obedience to Christ and our love for one another by obeying the Golden Rule.

Interesting Note: Several other religious leaders who lived before Jesus stated the Golden Rule in slightly different terms, normally worded negatively: Don’t do unto others what you would not have them do unto you. For example, about A.D. 20, Rabbi Hillel, challenged by a Gentile to summarize the law in the short time the Gentile could stand on one leg, reportedly responded, “What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is commentary.”¹²⁰ Such a requirement merely demands that we “do no harm,” a relatively low standard to achieve. It calls one simply to refrain from action, to restrain oneself from bad behavior. It can be often satisfied by doing nothing. Jesus states a similar idea in more much robust, positive terms. One must do unto others (positively) what he would want done unto him. To merely refrain from doing evil unto others is not particularly virtuous. Jesus not only demands “no harm,” but also He requires “do good.”

¹¹⁹ Like the rest of the Sermon, the Golden Rule has obvious exceptions, such as in cases of war or self-defense, where one might be required to harm another person. Jesus is talking about normal human relationships here, not unique situations in which one’s life might be in danger. Pacifists use the Golden Rule to substantiate their non-violence policy. They allege that there are no exceptions to this standard, even when one’s life is in danger.

¹²⁰ *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. This negative statement is sometimes known as the “Silver Rule.”



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 4: The Tests of the Kingdom (7:13-29)

Lesson 16: Straight Gates and False Prophets (7:13-20)

Jesus is drawing His message to a conclusion. The last section of the Sermon contains an invitation to enter Christ's kingdom, a warning against false teachers, a warning against false profession, and an admonition to apply the principles of the Sermon personally.

Jesus emphasizes here the importance of a correct response to what He's said so far. The right response is to enter the kingdom (if one is not already a citizen) and walk on the narrow way of discipleship. Those who do so produce good fruit, i.e., they obey Jesus' commands and follow His example. Those who fail to bring forth good fruit prove themselves to be "evil" and face imminent destruction.

I. An Invitation to Enter the Kingdom .13-14

- A. Enter into what? Since the theme of the entire Sermon is citizenship in Christ's kingdom, the logical assumption is that Jesus is inviting His listeners to enter the kingdom. No doubt many in the audience were not yet convinced that Jesus was the promised King of the Jews. This invitation is directed toward them.
- B. Jesus uses vivid imagery to describe two paths in life—the broad way and the narrow way. Ancient cities normally had both kinds of gates and roads. Some were open and easy with many people coming and going, while others were secret, narrow, winding, and difficult, and only a few knew of these ways.
- C. Jesus' teaching here on the two ways is clearly rooted in OT doctrine (see Deut 30:19; Jer 21:8, Ps 1). Jesus' teaching divides everyone into two distinct groups: the many, who will follow the way of ease and self-indulgence; and the few, who take the "narrow" way of self-denial and sacrifice.
 - 1. The broad way:
 - a) The wide gate and the broad way suggest that this way is easy. The fact that many are on that way suggests that it is popular and comfortable, requiring no effort. There are no limits, no expectations, no rules; everything is permitted. One can be as free and independent as he wishes.
The way to death is open, broad, and thronged. The multitudes fall into it easily, and without effort, and go without thought.¹²¹
 - b) The destination of the broad way is "destruction." The word is frequently translated as "perdition" in the KJV and means ruin or perishing. Destruction in this sense refers to eternal misery in hell. Most people are indeed on the "highway to hell."
 - 2. The "straight" (narrow) way:

¹²¹ *Barnes Notes.*

- a) The straight way is the proper way, the way Jesus commands His listeners to enter and travel. The word “at” (KJV) is literally “through.” One must “strive” (seek strenuously) to enter this gate (Luk 13:24).

Being “narrow-minded” is an insult these days. We certainly don’t want to be bigoted, hypocritical, or self-righteous. However, Jesus is being very exclusive in His assertion here that there is only one correct way to find eternal life. We must affirm the exclusivity of the Gospel as the one and only means of salvation (Acts 4:12).
 - b) The grammar of the command “enter” suggests a point-in-time event, not a continual process. Salvation is a one-time event, not an extended process.
 - c) The way to “life” is straight and narrow.
 - (1) The word “straight” means “narrow” or “not crooked.” The entry to this road is small and easily overlooked.
 - (2) The correct response to the Sermon—recognizing Christ as one’s King and committing oneself to Him—is the means by which one enters this gate.
 - (3) The word “narrow” is often translated as “trouble, afflict, tribulation.” The term is used to describe the pressing of grapes or a tight spot, like a narrow place between rocks. Thus, the way to life often includes trouble, affliction, and struggle. Anyone wishing to leave the broad way and enter the road to life will find difficulty and affliction in their path.
 - d) “Life” in this context is clearly eternal spiritual life, the exact opposite of “destruction.”
 - e) “Few” find this narrow way. In comparison with the number on the broad way to destruction, the way to life is populated with only a few.
3. Interpretive note: It’s always dangerous to make an analogy “stand on all fours.” The interpreter should focus on the main points here and not press all the details. For example, the fact that one must “find” the narrow gate does not suggest that it is somehow hidden or unavailable. And the fact that the broad way has a “gate” that one must “go in” does not suggest that one must do something intentional to enter it.
4. Further Applications:
- a) Only two roads exist: the right one and the wrong one. A person cannot be neutral; he’s on one road or the other.
 - b) The popularity of a particular religion has nothing to do with its truth. Billions of people can be wrong (e.g., Islam). Most people will continue on the wrong path and end up in destruction. God has always had a faithful remnant of genuine believers, and sometimes that number has been very small.

“Truth is not left up to the tyranny of democratic consensus.”¹²²

- c) The narrow road is limited in certain ways. Our thinking about God and salvation is limited by Scripture, as is our understanding of proper behavior. We cannot simply believe or do whatever we want on the narrow way. Our primary task is to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness” (Mt 6:33) and to deny ourselves, take up the cross, and follow Christ (Mk 8:34).
- d) The way to salvation is limited and particular. One must “enter” salvation through the proper “gate.” Jesus said, “I am the door” (Jn 10:9) and “I am the way” (Jn 14:6). Many roads do not lead to heaven; only one does. Most roads lead to hell. See John 3:36; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5; 1 Jn 5:12, all of which teach the exclusive nature of Christianity.
- e) As we seek to lead others through this “gate,” we should be clear with them what the narrow way requires. We should never hide the fact that the way is difficult and has potential for persecution and abuse.
- f) Eternal destruction is a reality for those on the broad way. Everlasting, conscious misery in a state of torment is the destiny of those who refuse citizenship in Jesus’ kingdom (Rev 20:14-15).

II. An Admonition to Beware of False Prophets .15-20

Jesus describes false prophets with several analogies: sheep, wolves, trees and fruit.

A prophet in this case is simply a religious teacher, one who publicly instructs or preaches. Such preachers were common among the Jews in OT times and in Jesus’ day. Unfortunately, false prophets had an influence among the Jews throughout their history, and Jesus warns us that they will continue to be a problem.

A. False prophets present a clear and present danger. .15

- 1. False prophets were those teaching incorrect doctrine or who were making false claims.
- 2. The believer must “beware” of them. The word means to take heed, to give one’s attention to something. False prophets are a significant problem that cannot be safely ignored.
- 3. False prophets “come to you,” that is, they are actively pressing their claims and seeking to make inroads among true believers. See Mt 24:24; Acts 20:29-30; 1 Tim 4:1-2; 2 Tim 4:3-4; 2 Pet 2:1.

B. False prophets try to conceal their true nature.

- 1. They wear “sheep’s clothing.” The Bible often describes God’s people as sheep. Further, sheep depict innocence, sincerity, and harmlessness. To come in sheep’s clothing is to assume the appearance of holiness and innocence. False prophets may look like innocent, harmless, gentle sheep, but their appearance is purely external and put-on. What they teach may

¹²²R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 244.

seem plausible and attractive, even exciting and powerful. We should not be surprised when false teachers appear to be normal, even respectable, just like everyone else. Nothing seems to be wrong with them.

2. Under the sheep's clothing, they are really "ravening (ravenous, rapacious, ferocious) wolves." "Ravenous" speaks of extortion, robbery, and plunder. False prophets are greedy for power and money, bent on devouring the flock for their own selfish ends. Their subtle teaching is deceptive and dangerous, no matter how harmless it may appear. Like hungry wolves stalking unprotected sheep, false prophets leave chaos and ruin in their wake. Read Ezek 13:1-10.

"Wolves are more dangerous than dogs and hogs."¹²³

3. Given the preceding context, it may be that Jesus had in mind those false prophets who taught a broader, easier, more inclusive path than what Jesus represented. They preached a comfortable faith, one that promised all the benefits without any of the costs or sacrifices. They taught "smooth things" (Isa 30:10) and never spoke of sin, judgment, or holiness. They say "peace, peace" when there is no peace (Jer 6:14). This kind of false preacher is still very common today.

C. False prophets reveal themselves through their "fruits." .16, 20

1. Jesus now switches to another picture: trees and the fruit they produce.
2. Although false teachers attempt to conceal their true identity, we can determine who they are. We must distinguish the true from the false.
3. "Them" (.16) is the false prophets. They reveal themselves by what they produce. Their true character eventually surfaces by the "fruits" they bear. False teachers can keep up appearances for a while, but eventually their true nature comes through; time will reveal the true nature of the "tree."
4. "Fruits" in this case describe the output or production of one's life—behavior, teaching, attitude, influence, etc. Perhaps Jesus is particularly speaking about the effects of false prophets' teaching or influence.
5. "Fruits" come from different kinds of "trees."
 - a) Output is consistent with nature. One's nature (heart) determines what kind of fruit he will produce.
 - (1) It's unnatural for thorn bushes (bad) to bear grapes (good) or thistles (bad) to bear figs (good).
 - (2) Good trees bear good fruit and cannot bear bad fruit.
 - (3) Bad trees bear bad fruit and cannot bear good fruit. The word "corrupt" means "rotten, unfit, worthless." But we should not think of a corrupt tree as one which had been good and had become rotten over time. This kind of tree has always been bad; the essential character of the tree is useless and it thus produces nothing of value.

¹²³ Barnes Notes.

- b) Output will determine one's destiny. .19
 - (1) Trees failing to bear good fruit are cut down and cast into the fire. Note the language: "every tree that bringeth forth not good fruit" is destroyed. The standard is the production of good fruit. A lack of good fruit points to the fact that the tree is bad. Thus, producing no fruit is about as bad as producing "evil" fruit.
 - (2) Being "cast into the fire" speaks of God's judgment. Since those producing "evil" fruit are false prophets, the judgment is destruction (hell).
- 6. Interpretive note: Once again, we cannot press the details of this comparison too far. People are like sheep, wolves, trees, and fruit, but only in certain ways and not in other ways. Focus on the similarities and ignore the differences.
- 7. Applications:
 - a) Jesus has already told His audience to be very careful in how they judge others (7:1-6). Yet here He encourages us to be diligent fruit inspectors. Our discernment has to be keen enough to tell the true prophet from the false prophet, even when they look alike.
 - b) You can't judge a tree by its leaves. Looks can be deceiving. The output of one's life—primarily seen in his conduct—is the true measure of his character. "You walk talks louder than your talk talks."
 - c) Jesus encourages us to "know them by their fruit." That is, we can know who is true and who is false based on their output or product. We can make judgments based on evidence. Those who fail to produce good fruit must be rejected.
 - d) One's nature determines his output/fruit. For one's fruit to be good, his nature must be good. A new nature comes from being saved (2 Cor 5:17). The unsaved have no capacity for good fruit.¹²⁴
 - e) It is proper for us to have expectations from different kinds of people. A particular kind of person produces a particular kind of fruit—either good or bad. Saved people should be producing good fruit. We should expect unsaved people to produce bad fruit. We have the capacity to judge which is which, and we must make these evaluations.
 - f) When those professing to be good trees bear bad fruit, we have a problem. Jesus asserts that good trees cannot bear evil fruit. The output or product of a believer's life should be consistently, although not perfectly, good. If not, it brings his profession of faith

¹²⁴ This is not to suggest that unsaved people never do anything good. Because of common grace, God restrains sin and grants even unsaved people the capacity to do some good things. Such good works are not redemptive; they cannot save. But they are still "good" as opposed to "evil."

into question. If bad fruit is the norm, it denies one's profession of faith. See Titus 1:15-16 and 1 John 2:4.

- g) God will cut down and cast into the fires of hell those who prove themselves to be evil by their evil behavior. What is true of false prophets is true of "every tree" (.19). Without good fruit, your destiny is to be "hewn down and cast into the fire."
- h) A little self evaluation is also called for. Is your sheep's clothing real or just an external shell? What kind of fruits are your producing—good fruit (the fruit of the Spirit [Gal 5:22-23]) or "evil" fruit (the works of the flesh [Gal 5:19-21])? Your fruit shows what kind of tree you are.



The Sermon on the Mount

Part 4: The Tests of the Kingdom (7:13-29)

Lesson 17: A Warning about False Profession, the Blessedness of Obedience, and Epilogue (7:21-29)

We now come to the final words that Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount as recorded by Matthew. In this last section, Jesus issues a warning against false professions of faith and compares responses to His message to building a house on different kinds of foundations. Jesus makes a distinction throughout these verses between mere talkers and sincere doers. The last two verses record the crowd's response to the Sermon.

Sadly, Jesus felt the need to finish his discourse with a warning to those who listened but did not apply the Sermon or accept His claims. Some in the audience appeared to be genuine disciples, yet their profession of faith would prove to be empty. Even today, many who claim to be born again Christians are fooling themselves and exhibit no evidence substantiating such a claim. Jesus knew all along that false profession would be a significant problem in the church. As we finish the Sermon on the Mount, we must insure that we are not like the foolish man who heard but did not obey.

I. A Warning Against False Profession .21-23

- A. In the previous verses (15-20), Jesus had warned His audience against false prophets. Not only do these false teachers come in “sheep’s clothing,” but also they may sound and behave much like true “sheep.” Jesus here assures his listeners that even if false teachers fool others, they will be found out on Judgment Day; they cannot fool the Judge.
- B. Many false professions will occur. “Many will say...” Statistics bear this out with alarming clarity. In the USA, almost half of all adults claim to be born again Christians. Yet a small minority actually affirms the teachings of genuine Christianity and behaves in ways consistent with that profession. Multitudes of professing believers are lost without even realizing it. They sincerely profess faith in Christ but are not saved. Thinking you are saved when you are not is a great error indeed.
- C. “in that day” – the great Judgment Day
 - 1. Believers will stand before God at the Judgment Seat of Christ (Rom 14:10; 1 Cor 3:11-15; 2 Cor 5:10). This will not be a judgment for inclusion in Christ’s eternal kingdom but for rewards for service.
 - 2. Unbelievers will stand at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev 20:11). On this great day, unbelievers will be judged for their works, found wanting, and be cast into the Lake of Fire.
 - 3. The fact that unbelievers will attempt to refute their sentences suggests some sort of personal interview or audience with Jesus. They will present their case before the Judge but will be found guilty and liable to eternal punishment.

- D. Those falsely professing faith in Christ should entertain no hopes of entering Jesus' kingdom. Many claiming Jesus as Lord will be denied entry. It is possible to think you are saved and not be. This will come as a great shock to the false professors, who take issue with their exclusion from heaven.
- E. Note the distinction between saying and doing (.21 "everyone that saith" vs. "he that doeth," .22 "many will say" vs. .23 "ye that work iniquity"). A claim has little value if not backed up by obedience. Obedience always accompanies faith. In fact, sometimes faith is described in terms of obedience (e.g., John 3:36; Rom 16:26). We are not saved by works, but "every good tree bringeth forth good fruit" (Mt 7:17). We can claim to be sincere followers of Christ; but if we habitually disobey His commands, we prove ourselves to be liars and deny the faith (Titus 1:15-16; 1 John 2:3-4).
- F. Those falsely professing faith in Christ may do many good things. Note that Jesus does not deny that they did any of these good things.
 - 1. Confessing that Jesus is Lord. Note that the false professors say "Lord, Lord" to Jesus (.21-22). They are addressing the right Person but in the wrong way. They are seeking the right God but doing so contrary to His Word. Many professing Christians fit this description.
 - 2. Speaking in Jesus' name. To "prophesy" in this case is simply to speak, teach, or preach. Many biblical examples show us that wicked people can speak the truth at times (e.g., Balaam, Judas, Demas, a demon possessed girl). Even preachers and seminary professors may not be saved.
 - 3. Casting out demons in Jesus' name. Can a non-Christian really cast out a demon? Apparently so. The name of Christ itself is powerful enough to make demons run. However, the practice is dangerous (see Acts 19:13-16).
 - 4. Doing many wonderful (lit. "powerful") works in Jesus' name. Powerful works are no proof of God's approval or involvement. Satan himself empowers "power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thes 2:9).¹²⁵
 - 5. There is nothing wrong with this confession. Jesus is the Lord. It is good to speak in His name, do powerful works in His name, and even cast out demons¹²⁶ in His name. Indeed, we must affirm that all genuine believers do call upon Jesus as their "Lord" (Rom 10:9, 13) and do good works (Eph 2:10). From all outward appearances, such a confession would indicate genuine spiritual life. But appearances can be deceiving. Some who confess "Lord, Lord" will not enter Jesus' kingdom because they are not genuinely saved. One can believe many true things about Jesus and still be unconverted. A person can produce spectacular signs and give compelling speeches, all in Jesus' name, and yet be unsaved. Many who claim to speak in Jesus' name are really His enemies.

¹²⁵ See Mt 24:24, which indicates that the presence of signs and miracles do not prove God's presence. Among false prophets, illusion, trickery, deceit, and outright fraud are far more common than are miraculous powers.

¹²⁶ See Luke 10:17. It seems likely that at least some of Jesus' followers at this time were not genuinely convinced of His claims (e.g., Judas), yet they had power through His name.

- G. Is it possible to do all these good things in Jesus' name and still be unsaved? Not only is it possible, it is common. Those falsely professing faith in Christ are guilty of:
1. .21 Failing to do the will of God. The "will of God" in this context likely refers to the descriptions and commands found in the Sermon, especially the Beatitudes. External conformity without inner humility, contrition, and pureness of heart has no spiritual value. False professors say one thing and do another.
 "Jesus is referring to a profound heart obedience that is not only on the surface but permeates our inner being. 'The will of my Father' indicates the character and the conduct of the kingdom of God."¹²⁷
 2. .23 Failing to be personally related to Christ. Jesus does not "know" them.
 - a) In a sense, Jesus knows all things and even knows all people (see John 2:24-25). But there is a difference between knowing about someone and knowing him personally.
 - b) For Jesus to say "I never knew you" amounts to "You are not one of mine."
 John 10:14 *I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.*
 John 10:27 *My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me.*
 The host said the same thing to the foolish virgins (Mt 25:11-12). Read also Luke 13:23-30.
 - c) Saying "I never knew you" is far stronger than merely "I do not know you." These people were not and never were true followers of Jesus, and He was fully aware of that fact. Although they claim Jesus as their friend, He denies the relationship ever existed.
 3. .23 Failing to live a godly life. False professors "work iniquity." The word "iniquity" is literally "lawlessness." They were evil-doers, law-breakers. On the surface, they may have appeared to be followers of Christ, but that was only a front. Under the attractive exterior was a heart of deceit and rebellion against God's Law. The behavior of these people ultimately proves that they never were converted to Christ.

Personal Applications:

- Does your behavior confirm or contradict your profession of faith? Are your character, attitude, and behavior more suited for Jesus' kingdom or for the secular world?
- Do you think that good works will allow you entrance to Jesus' kingdom?
- Do you call Jesus "Lord" and not obey Him (see Luke 6:46)? Are you rendering lip service without an obedient lifestyle?
- Do moving sermons and powerful works convince you of a preacher's worth?

¹²⁷R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*.

- Is your faith genuine or just an external façade? It's easy to fool others, even yourself, into thinking that you are saved, when all you really have in your favor is a Christian vocabulary, a set of rules, and some good works.
- Examine yourself to see if you are really in the faith.

II. A Comparison of Wise and Foolish Listeners .24-27

- A. Jesus next illustrates His point by telling a story (a parable—the only one in the Sermon). The men, their houses, the storms, and the results point to a spiritual lesson. Jesus is inviting His audience to follow Him and warning them about the consequences of neglecting this message.
- B. Note the “therefore” connecting this section to the previous. This is a logical conclusion from what He has just said. A false professor is one who hears but does not do (cf. James 1:22). This parable is a warning directed toward such.
- C. The comparison in responses to the Sermon: hearing and doing vs. hearing and not doing. Obedience leads to stability and eternal life, while neglect leads to ruin.
 1. Jesus is making quite a bold, audacious claim—one's eternal destiny is based on the proper response to His words. Those who neglect Jesus' words will suffer for it. Coming from anyone else this would be ridiculous.
 2. The wise man hears and does. Wise people apply the Sermon to their lives.
 3. The foolish man hears and does not do. People may be impressed or entertained by Jesus words, yet not accept them.
 4. Note that Jesus categorizes everyone into one of two conditions: wise or foolish. We find this contrast throughout the NT—light or darkness, friend or enemy, alive or dead, new man or old man, sheep or goats, etc. Everyone exists in one of two spiritual conditions; there is no neutrality.
- D. A comparison of the two foundations
 1. The wise man built his house on “the rock” (.24-25; cf. Luke 6:48). This man is wise because he recognizes that a solid foundation is necessary for a strong and permanent dwelling that can stand up to stormy weather. What is the rock? “These words of mine” (.24). Building on the rock means not only listening to the Lord but also putting His commands into practice (James 1:22).
 2. The foolish man built his house on the sand. This man is foolish because he fails to recognize the shifting nature of sand and the poor quality foundation it makes for a building. Building on sand means ignoring Jesus' words.

3. Jesus doesn't mention any difference between the construction materials of the two houses. The foundation is the most critical element, not the "stuff" you make your house from. What appears on the surface is not important. The real question is, what is below the surface?
- E. The same trial hit both houses—rain, floods, wind. Water is one of the most destructive forces of nature.
- F. A comparison of the two outcomes
 1. The house on the rock stood firm.
 2. The house on the sand fell flat.
- G. Implications:
 1. Both kinds of listeners are building houses. The houses stand for one's life. When the weather is fair, our houses all look relatively stable. Both houses stood firm before the weather turned ugly. The foundation under the surface will determine how well your house stands under pressure.
 2. Two different kinds of foundations are available to build on: solid bedrock and shifting sand. Obedience to Jesus amounts to building on bedrock (see 1 Cor 3:11). Disobedience amounts to building on sand. The foundation chosen is the difference between life and death.
 3. Storms of trials and tribulations happen to the homes of both wise and foolish builders. Storms in the Bible often are associated with God's judgment (cf. Jonah, Ex 9:18; Job 27:21; Ps 83:15; Ezek 13:11).
 4. Those obediently following Jesus will persevere through their problems. Christ is most meaningful to us during the storms of life.
 5. Ignoring Jesus' words leads to instability and ruin.
 6. When a "house" falls, it will be a "great" fall. The house on the sand is utterly destroyed in the storm.
 - a) In practical, daily terms, lack of obedience to Jesus may be catastrophic. For instance, family break-up, financial loss, emotional instability, crime, death, etc. may all be directly linked to disobedience to Christ's commands.
 - b) In eternal terms, lack of obedience to Jesus will result in eternal punishment, a "great" fall indeed. The great trial that everyone will have to face is Judgment Day. On that great Day, even the most beautiful, well-crafted house will fall flat if it does not rest on the proper Foundation.
- H. It's interesting to note that Jesus concludes His Sermon with a warning of future judgment, a practice not common among preachers these days. The threat of future judgment surely contains an implied invitation to repent (cf. Mt 4:17) and to obtain a good foundation through accepting Jesus' words.

III. A Record of the Crowd's Response to the Sermon .28-29

- A. A large crowd must have gathered during the course of the Sermon. At the beginning, the audience was composed of "his disciples" (Mt 5:1). By the end of the message, "the people" (a crowd, a multitude) had congregated.
- B. The crowd was "astonished," i.e., struck with amazement, dumbfounded; literally "struck out of themselves." They had never heard such things before. The tense of the verb suggests that this impression lasted for a while. This does not imply that they all became disciples of Christ. Many unsaved people are impressed by Jesus and His words, yet remain unconverted. Much "God language" does not prove anything. Amazement at Jesus' words is insufficient.
- C. Jesus' speaking style contrasted markedly with the teachers of the day (the scribes).¹²⁸
 1. Jesus spoke the truth forcefully and knowledgeably from the basis of his own authority. The scribes were known for their subtle reasoning, evasive answers, and appeals to famous rabbis. Jesus didn't appeal to a single source to substantiate His claims. Even when quoting Scripture, He often disagreed with the common interpretations of the day. He repeatedly stated, "You have heard it was said...But I say to you..." If Jesus were not a true spokesman for God, He was exceedingly presumptuous and arrogant. But His authority was evident to all because it was genuine.
 2. Jesus spoke of eternally significant matters. The scribes often focused on trivialities and non-issues, boringly rambling on and on.
 3. Jesus used vivid illustrations, concrete examples, and shocking declarations. The scribes' sermons were dry as dust.
 4. Jesus spoke with authority because He knew God personally and Scripture thoroughly (cf. John 8:26; Mt 7:12). The scribes could not compete.
- D. Final Applications:
 - Would you call yourself a wise or a foolish builder? Are you merely hearing, or are you hearing and doing?
 - What is the foundation of your life? Have you trusted Christ as your Savior and following Him as Lord, or are you merely interested and impressed with Him?
 - Do you recognize the authority of Jesus' words? Do you find His teachings amazing?

¹²⁸ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary*.