

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

By Ashby L. Camp

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Introduction

I. Kingdom of God

A. I wanted to preface our study of the Sermon on the Mount with some comments on the kingdom of God. That may strike you as strange, but I hope you'll see that it is important background for approaching this material. The kingdom of God is a very large subject, and I can only outline it here.

B. The O. T. ends on a note of unfulfilled hope. It was clear that in one sense God had always ruled the world from the time of creation. He was on his heavenly throne (e.g., Ps. 11:4; Isa. 6:1) and reigned over all (e.g., 1 Chron. 16:31; Ps. 93:1, 96:10). But there was some sense in which his kingly rule had not yet been fully expressed. He was allowing creation to go on out of step with his ultimate intention for it, to continue in a state of sin and suffering that was contrary to his ultimate purpose and vision.

C. But the prophets saw that a day was coming in which God would express his rulership of creation in such a way that all things would be brought into harmony and conformity with his ultimate will and purpose.

1. His creation would be redeemed from the dreadful consequences of sin that had invaded it. This world of rebellion, sin, hostility, and fragmentation would be transformed by God into a true utopia, a perfect reality of love, joy, and fellowship with God and one another.

2. On that day God would express his rule over creation in a way he had not done before; he would in his sovereign power bring his creation to its ultimate fulfillment. At that time, he will be king over all the earth (Zech. 14:9) in a manner unlike before. As N. T. scholar I. Howard Marshall expresses it in *Jesus the Savior* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990) 218, "[T]he [kingdom of God] is the full and powerful manifestation of the sovereignty that God already exercises over the world."

D. The O. T. uses different imagery to refer to this blessed state that God is going to create. The imagery varies in how sharply it distinguishes the blessed state from this present existence, but all of it says, in forms relevant to ancient Jews, that a time of divine blessing is coming. Sometimes the O. T. speaks of (e.g., Isaiah 2, 11, 25, 51:6, 61, 65:17-25; Jeremiah 31; Daniel 7, 12; Amos. 9:13-15; Micah 4; Joel 2):

1. the restoration of Israel to greatness and of the coming of a new king like the great king David

2. God's healing the world's sicknesses and hatreds
3. God's people being freed from oppression
4. renewed prosperity and justice for the poor
5. war and weapons of war being abolished
6. death being swallowed up and tears being wiped
7. alienation between God and man being removed
8. God's Spirit being poured out in a new way
9. a new heaven and a new earth

E. In the first century, Israel was weak, poor, and under the rule of pagans (the Romans). The people longed and prayed for the coming of God, for this final intervention when he would set all things right and rule in the fullest sense to the blessing of his people. It was into that religious, social, and political environment that Jesus came saying, "The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk. 1:15) and "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Mat. 12:28).

1. New Testament scholar George Ladd wrote in 1974 in his book *A Theology of the New Testament* (p. 57): "Modern scholarship is quite unanimous in the opinion that the Kingdom of God was the central message of Jesus."

2. Fifteen years later, David Wenham wrote in *The Parables of Jesus* (p. 20): "The 'kingdom of God' was the central theme in Jesus' preaching and indeed in his whole ministry."

F. Note that the "kingdom of heaven" is just another way of referring to the kingdom of God. Wenham writes (p. 23):

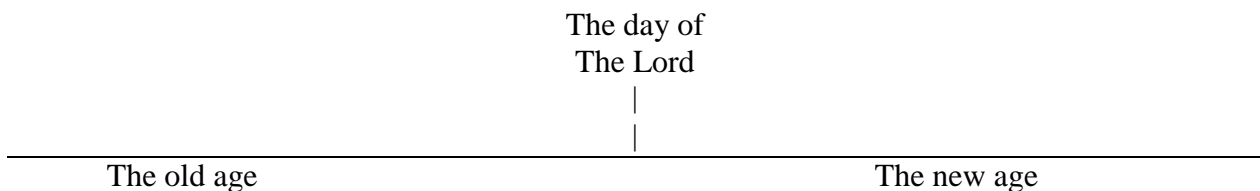
[T]he phrase 'kingdom of heaven' is just an alternate way of saying 'kingdom of God' . . . Matthew, writing his distinctively Jewish gospel, uses the alternative expression because it refers to God indirectly (as Jews often did) rather than directly, and perhaps because it makes it clear that the kingdom in question is not a purely this-worldly kingdom. And yet the kingdom which Jesus proclaimed was not just up in heaven; it was more like an invasion of earth by heaven!

G. Jesus was announcing the arrival of God's final intervention in history, the ultimate expression of his kingly rule on the world. This naturally created excitement in some quarters and suspicion and opposition in others. It also led to misunderstanding because of incorrect ideas the Jews had about the coming and nature of the kingdom of God.

1. Many of them thought the kingdom would arrive through or in conjunction with human military conquest, and more specifically, through or in conjunction with the expulsion of the Romans and their supporters from Palestine. You remember in Jn. 6:15 where it says that some were about to take Jesus by force and make him king? In their mind, it was in the role of a political king that he would be the means or catalyst of the kingdom's arrival. But, as Wenham notes (p. 23):

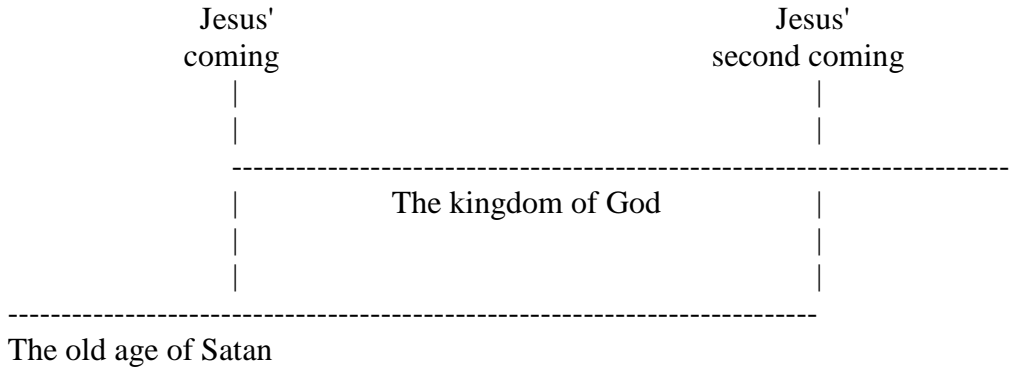
Jesus had in mind a bigger revolution than that: God's revolution was to be a total revolution overthrowing Satan and evil and bringing earth and heaven back in harmony, and this would not be accomplished by force of arms, but – unbelievably so far as the disciples were concerned, and who blames them? – through suffering and death.

2. They also expected the kingdom to come suddenly and decisively. They thought God's final intervention would be a one-shot deal – the Day of the Lord – where the old age would be terminated abruptly and the new, glorious age would begin. You remember in Lk. 19:11 where the people supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately upon his arrival in Jerusalem. That aspect of their thinking has been diagrammed as follows:



a. This caused people to wonder how Jesus could be ushering in the kingdom of God when the hallmarks of the old age – death, decay, suffering, etc. – still were present. You remember how even John the Baptist began to question whether Jesus was in fact the one who would bring in the kingdom of God as he sat in Herod's jail (Mat. 11:2-3; Lk. 7:18-19).

b. Jesus explained in a number of parables that the kingdom comes in two stages. It is introduced or inaugurated, then there is an interval of time, and then there is a decisive intervention when the kingdom is consummated or finalized. For example, you see this in the parable of the seed growing secretly (Mk. 4:26-29) and the parable of the wheat and the weeds in Mat. 13:24-30, 36-43). Jesus' teaching has been diagrammed like this:



H. Texts in addition to the parables that indicate the kingdom of God is a present reality between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ include Lk. 17:21b (if "among you" or "in your midst" is the correct translation), Rom. 14:17 (Paul no doubt considered the named aspects of the kingdom as being present), Col. 1:13 (God "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son"), and Heb. 12:28 ("let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken").

I. Texts in addition to the parables that indicate the kingdom of God is a future hope include Mat. 25:34 (Jesus says at judgment, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"), Mk. 14:25 and parallels ("I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God"), Gal. 5:21b (also 1 Cor. 6:9-10, 15:50, and Eph. 5:5 - kingdom is something to be inherited), 2 Tim. 4:1 (kingdom connected with Jesus' appearing in judgment), and 2 Pet. 1:11 (entrance into eternal kingdom is future).

J. Thus, Robert Stein writes it in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (p. 453):

The kingdom of God is both now and not yet. Thus the kingdom of God is "realized" and present in one sense, and yet . . . future in another sense. This is not a contradiction but simply the nature of the kingdom. The kingdom has come in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. A new covenant has been established. But its final manifestation and consummation lie in the future. Until then, we are to be good and faithful servants (Luke 19:11-27).

K. It is at Christ's return that the redemption he began nearly 2,000 years ago will come to completion. That is the time when in Rev. 11:15 the heavenly voices say, "The kingdom of the world *has become* the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And that is the time when in Rev. 11:17 the twenty-four elders say, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power *and begun* to reign." At Christ's return, the kingdom he inaugurated with his first coming will be consummated or finalized.

L. It is at Christ's return that the children of God will receive glorious resurrection *bodies*. The resurrection is not about the mere post-death survival of the spirit or soul. It is about a return to bodily life.

1. In Rom. 8:11, Paul says: "And if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your **mortal bodies** through his Spirit who dwells in you."

2. In Rom. 8:23, Paul says: "and not only [that], but even ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we ourselves also groan in ourselves while eagerly awaiting [our] adoption as sons, the redemption of **our bodies**."

3. In Phil. 3:20-21, Paul says: "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious **body**."

4. This is the central idea of 1 Corinthians 15 (see especially, vv. 20-23, 42-44, 49).

5. A bodily resurrection is implicit in Jesus' talk of rising from the grave (Jn. 5:28-29) and in Paul's condemnation of Hymenaeus and Philetus for claiming that the resurrection had already occurred (2 Tim. 2:18).

6. Of course, the resurrection body is not simply a resuscitated natural body. Rather, our natural body will be transformed into a supernatural body, what Paul in 1 Cor. 15:44 calls a "spiritual body." He doesn't say we will be *spirits*; he says we will have "spiritual *bodies*," in contrast to natural *bodies*. Our bodies will be "spiritual" in the sense they will be transformed so as to be suitable for the eternal age; they will be a glorious, imperishable, and immortal bodies (1 Cor. 15:42-54).

7. When Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:50 that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," he doesn't mean that no physical substance can enter the eternal state. He means that "flesh and blood" *as presently constituted*, as subject to weakness, decay, and death, cannot enter the eternal state. Our bodies must first be transformed into imperishable, glorious, powerful, and immortal bodies. As Blomberg remarks [NAC, 316], "'Flesh and blood' in verse 50 was a stock idiom in Jewish circles for 'a mere mortal' and does not contradict what Paul has already stressed, that resurrection experience is a bodily one (cf. Jesus' reference to having 'flesh and bones' in Luke 24:39)."

M. Not only will our bodies be transformed to be suitable for eternity with God, but all of creation will be transformed.

1. That's what Paul says in Rom. 8:18-23. Douglas Moo says of this text in "Nature in the New Creation," *JETS* 49 (3, '06) 460-463:

. . . [C]reation has been "frustrated" and is in "bondage to decay." . . .

. . . What can be affirmed on the basis of Romans 8 is that the natural world itself has been affected in some way by the human fall into sin and is therefore no longer in its pristine created state. . . . Human sin has affected the state of nature itself and will continue to do so until the end of this age. . . .

. . . If creation has suffered the consequences of human sin, it will also enjoy the fruits of human deliverance. When believers are glorified, creation's "bondage to decay" will be ended, and it will participate in the "freedom that belongs to the glory" for which Christians are destined. Nature, Paul affirms, has a future within the plan of God. It is destined not simply for destruction but for transformation. . . . The reversal of the conditions of the Fall includes the created world along with the world of human beings. Indeed, the glory that humans will experience, involving as it does the resurrection of the body (8:9–11, 23), necessarily requires an appropriate environment for that embodiment. . . .

. . . The hope for the liberation of creation that Paul expresses in Romans 8 clearly implies that the destiny of the natural world is not destruction but transformation.

2. This is the new heavens and new earth referred to in Isa. 65:17, 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13, and Rev. 21:1. See especially Rev. 21:1-4.

a. N. T. Wright, a highly regarded theologian, comments in his new book, *Surprised By Hope* (p. 19): "God made heaven and earth; at the last he will remake both and join them together forever. And when we come to the picture of the actual end in Revelation 21-22, we find not ransomed souls making their way to a disembodied heaven but rather the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth, uniting the two in a lasting embrace."

b. This reality, this creation, will be "heavenized," so to speak. Life will go on in this new heaven and earth, this transformed creation, in perfect and perpetual harmony with God's ultimate intention.

3. You say, "Well, what about those passages that refer to the earth's passing or destruction?" I think Grudem has it right when he states in *Systematic Theology*, 1160-1161:

The [radical-transformation] position seems preferable here, for it is difficult to think that God would entirely annihilate his original creation, thereby seeming to give the devil the last word and scrapping the creation that was originally "very good" (Gen. 1:31). The passages above that speak of shaking and removing the earth and of the first earth passing away may simply refer to its existence in its present form, not its very existence itself, and even 2 Peter 3:10, which speaks of the elements dissolving and the earth and the work on it being burned up, may not be speaking of the earth

as a planet but rather the surface things on the earth (that is, much of the ground and the things on the ground).

4. Jn. 14:2-3 is not inconsistent with the idea that saints will spend eternity on a redeemed physical creation. Those verses state (NASU): "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, [there] you may be also." I think Jesus is saying that through his death, resurrection, and ascension (his going) he is making it possible for them to spend eternity with God the Father (preparing dwelling places in God's house). Having done that, he will **come again**, not to take them away to some nonphysical heavenly realm but to **receive them to himself** in the consummated kingdom, in the new heaven and new earth that will be created at his return. That is where he will be and thus where we will spend eternity with him.

5. The idea that Christians will spend eternity with God as spirits in some nonphysical realm has seeped into much Christian thinking, but it is wrong. Listen to how Wright states it in *Surprised By Hope* (p. 194):

Mention salvation, and almost all Western Christians assume that you mean going to heaven when you die. But a moment's thought, in the light of all we have said so far, reveals that this simply cannot be right. Salvation means, of course, rescue. But what are we ultimately to be rescued from? The obvious answer is death. But if, when we die, all that happens is that our bodies decompose while our souls (or whatever other word we want to use for our continuing existence) go on elsewhere, this doesn't mean we've been *rescued from* death. It simply means that we've died.

And if God's good creation – of the world, of life as we know it, of our glorious and remarkable bodies, brains, and bloodstreams – really *is* good, and if God wants to reaffirm that goodness in a wonderful act of new creation at the last, then to see the death of the body and the escape of the soul as salvation is not simply slightly off course, in need of a few subtle alterations and modifications. It is totally and utterly wrong. It is colluding with death. It is conniving at death's destruction of God's good, image-bearing human creatures while consoling ourselves with the (essentially non-Christian and non-Jewish) thought that the really important bit of ourselves is saved from this wicked, nasty body and this sad, dark world of space, time, and matter! As we have seen, the whole of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, speaks out against such nonsense. *It is, however, what most Western Christians, including most Bible Christians of whatever sort, actually believe.* This is a serious state of affairs, reinforced not only in popular teaching but also in liturgies, public prayers, hymns, and homilies of every kind.

N. At his first coming, Jesus not only announced the kingdom's arrival but also demonstrated its character and gave us a foretaste of it. John Piper remarks in a sermon titled "Christ and Cancer":

The answer to why Jesus did not raise all the dead is that, contrary to the Jewish expectation, the first coming of the Messiah was *not* the consummation and full redemption of this fallen age. The first coming was rather to purchase that consummation, illustrate its character, and bring a *foretaste* of it to his people. Therefore, Jesus raised some of the dead to illustrate that he has that power and one day will come again and exercise it for all his people. And he healed the sick to illustrate that in his final kingdom this is how it will be. There will be no more crying or pain any more.

O. And just to round things out, let me say that I think we often have not been precise enough in speaking about the relationship between the church and the kingdom of God. The two are closely related, but we at times have conflated them. I think George Ladd captures the distinction well in *A Theology of the New Testament* (p. 111):

The Kingdom is primarily the dynamic reign or kingly rule of God, and, derivatively, the sphere in which the rule is experienced. In biblical idiom, the Kingdom is not identified with its subjects. They are the people of God's rule who enter it, live under it, and are governed by it. The church is the community of the Kingdom but never the Kingdom itself. Jesus' disciples belong to the Kingdom as the Kingdom belongs to them; but they are not the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the rule of God; the church is a society of men.

P. Now, I went through all of this not only because I think it's important generally but so you will understand what I mean when I say that my approach to the Sermon on the Mount is one of inaugurated eschatology.

1. As Craig Blomberg explains, "Inaugurated eschatology recognizes an 'already/not yet' tension in which the sermon's ethic remains the ideal or goal for all Christians in every age but which will never be fully realized until the consummation of the kingdom at Christ's return."

2. In other words, the sermon shows us how, as participants in the kingdom that Christ ushered in, we are to live. It is a radical vision, which is what you'd expect from the radical nature of the kingdom of God. The fact we are "not yet" as Christlike as we will be when the kingdom is consummated at Christ's return means that we will fail to live up to this ideal fully, but the ideal remains the target of our lives. We are to strive to conform our lives to this teaching and thereby to glorify God.

3. As we do so, our failures are not a source of anxiety because we understand that our life in the consummated kingdom is not something we achieve by our performance but

something given to us by God's grace and received by us through faith in Christ. It is because Christ is through faith our Savior that we strive to heed his ethical calling.

4. Beyond the general idea that the sermon presents as the ethical ideal for the "now" what will be fully realized in the "not yet," some verses in the sermon directly suggest this inaugurated-eschatology perspective, as I will explain as we work our way through the text.

II. Relation to Luke's "Sermon on the Plain" (Lk. 6:20-49)

A. Many are convinced that Matthew's Sermon on the Mount and Luke's Sermon on the Plain" are two different accounts of the same occasion. They believe Jesus preached it at some level area or plateau on "up in the hills." The differences in what is reported and how it is arranged are attributed to the different interests and purposes of Matthew and Luke and to possible differences in the sources on which they relied.

B. Others, however, are convinced that Matthew's and Luke's accounts are of sermons delivered by Jesus on two separate occasions. I lean in that direction. As Jack Lewis used to quip, if Jesus preached a sermon only one time he'd be the only preacher ever to do so.

Outline of the Sermon

I. Kingdom Blessings and Norms: The Beatitudes (Mat. 5:1-10)

II. The Call to Kingdom Living (Mat. 5:11-20)

A. Persecution, Salt, and Light (Mat. 5:11-16)

B. The Higher Righteousness of the Kingdom (Mat. 5:17-20)

III. Kingdom Living Illustrated (Mat. 5:21-47)

A. Anger and Reconciliation (Mat. 5:21-26)

B. Adultery (Mat. 5:27-30)

C. Divorce (Mat. 5:31-32)

D. Oaths (Mat. 5:33-37)

E. Revenge (Mat. 5:38-42)

F. Hatred and Love (Mat. 5:43-47)

IV. The Kingdom Calling: Emulating God's Perfection (Mat. 5:48)

V. Keeping the Motives for Kingdom Living Pure (Mat. 6:1-18)

A. The Controlling Principle (Mat. 6:1)

B. Examples: The Foolish Choice of the Temporal (Mat. 6:2-18)

1. Alms (Mat. 6:2-4)

2. Prayer (Mat. 6:5-6)

3. Fasting (Mat. 6:16-18)

VI. A Digression on Kingdom Prayer (Mat. 6:7-15)

- A. Empty prayer (Mat. 6:7-8)
- B. The Model Prayer (Mat. 6:9-13)
- C. Forgiveness and Prayer (Mat. 6:14-15)

VII. The Foolish Choice Applied to Material Goods (Mat. 6:19-24)

VIII. Worry and Kingdom Stewardship (Mat. 6:25-34)

- A. The Principle (Mat. 6:25)
- B. Examples of God's Providence (Mat. 6:26-30)
- C. Renewed Exhortation (Mat. 6:31-34)

IX. Maintaining Balance in Kingdom Living (Mat. 7:1-6)

- A. The Danger of Being Judgmental (Mat. 7:1-5)
- B. The Danger of Being Undiscerning (Mat. 7:6)

X. The Power for Kingdom Living (Mat. 7:7-12)

- A. The Source and Means of the Power (Mat. 7:7-11)
- B. Summary Exhortation in View of That Power (Mat. 7:12)

XI. Conclusion (Mat. 7:13-27)

- A. Call to Decision: The Two Roads (Mat. 7:13-14)
- B. Warning Against Antinomian Deceivers (Mat. 7:15-23)
- C. Kingdom Living: The Wise Man's Choice (Mat. 7:24-27)

Scratching the Surface of the Text

I. Kingdom Blessings and Norms: The Beatitudes (Mat. 5:1-10)

A. Introduction

1. The name "Beatitudes" comes from the Latin word for blessedness, which is *beatitudo*, which in turn came from the Latin word for blessed, which is *beatus*. "Blessed" generally describes the person who is in some special sense favored or approved by God. It sometimes is rendered "fortunate" or "happy," but "happy" is not really good because it has connotations of subjective feelings rather than objective blessing.

2. Each particular blessing is specified by the second clause of the beatitude. For example, those who are poor in spirit (v. 3) are blessed *in that* or *because* ("for") theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

3. The Beatitudes proper run through verse 10. Verses 11-12 are an elaboration on the eighth and final beatitude in v. 10. This break is confirmed by the fact the form of v. 11 is different. The preceding beatitudes refer to those blessed in the third person, and each is followed by "for" that specifies the blessing. Verse 11 refers to the blessed in the second person and the identification of those blessed is not followed by "for."

4. Note that verses 3 and 10 have the identical reward (for theirs is the kingdom of heaven). This literary structure indicates that everything between verses 3 and 10 also concerns the kingdom. In other words, the blessings of the intervening beatitudes are kingdom blessings and the beatitudes themselves are kingdom norms, typical attitudes and characteristics of disciples, kingdom participants.

5. The fact the rewards in vv. 3 and 10 are present tense, while the bracketed rewards are future tense, probably is an acknowledgement that, though the full blessedness of these beatitudes awaits the consummation of the kingdom (the eternal state at Christ's return), a foretaste presently is available in that the kingdom was inaugurated in connection with Christ's first coming.

6. Jesus is teaching his disciples (5:1-2), but his words also were for the crowds that surrounded them (7:28-29).

B. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (v. 3)

1. To be "poor in spirit" is to recognize one's spiritual bankruptcy. This person realizes his unworthiness before God and his utter dependence on him. As the Spirit spoke through David in Ps. 51:16-17 (ESV): "For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

2. The kingdom is not received on the basis of intelligence, social class, nationality, strength, or wealth. It is given to those who are "broken" before God, those who acknowledge their need and helplessness. They cry for mercy, and they alone are heard. See, e.g., Lk. 18:9-14.

3. Luke's Sermon on the Plain mentions only the "poor" (Lk. 6:20). Matthew's "poor in spirit" fleshes out the sense of Luke's "poor." Already in the O.T. "poor" had religious overtones. It occasionally stood for those who, because of sustained economic deprivation and social distress, had confidence only in God (Blomberg, 98, quoting Carson). Wealth and privilege can entail great spiritual peril, and poverty can be turned to advantage if it fosters humility before God.

4. This directly parallels LXX of Isa. 61:1, which Jesus applies to himself in Lk. 4:18-21.

C. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (v. 4)

1. This refers to those who mourn personal and corporate sin (see Ps. 119:136; 1 Cor. 5:1-2; 2 Cor. 12:21; Jas. 4:8-10). Their identification with God and the tenderness of their hearts toward him are reflected in the grief they experience over sin.

2. This directly parallels Isa. 61:2-3: The Messiah is anointed by the LORD "to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning." These blessings, already partially realized, will be fully experienced at the consummation (Rev. 7:17).

D. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (v. 5)

1. "Meek" refers to a gentle and reserved spirit, as opposed to an aggressive, harsh, or tyrannical spirit. See Mat. 11:29 (same word) and James 3:13 (noun form of same word).

2. Inherit the earth – The O.T. allusion here is to Ps. 37:9, 11, 29, a psalm we know from the Dead Sea scrolls was recognized as Messianic in Jesus' day (Carson, 133). As D. A. Carson notes (p. 134), "Entrance into the Promised Land ultimately became a pointer toward entrance into the new heaven *and the new earth* ("earth" is the same word as "land"; cf. Isa 66:22; Rev. 21:1), the consummation of the messianic kingdom."

E. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (v. 6)

1. Carson says (p. 134), "These people hunger and thirst, not only that they may be righteous (i.e., that they may wholly do God's will from the heart), but that justice may be done everywhere. All unrighteousness grieves them and makes them homesick for the new heaven and earth – the home of righteousness (2 Pet. 3:13)."

2. However that desire is satisfied through the power of the Spirit in this overlap of ages, it is only in the consummation that it will be satisfied fully and without qualification. As Jesus said in his explanation of the parable of the wheat and the weeds (Mat. 13:38-43), when he returns all causes of sin and all lawbreakers will be thrown into the fiery furnace. "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (v. 43).

F. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy (v. 7)

1. Being merciful includes forgiveness for the guilty and compassion for the suffering and needy.

2. The reward is mercy shown to them by God, now and ultimately in the final judgment. As Jesus says in Mat. 6:14-15, those who refuse to show mercy in the sense of forgiving others will not be forgiven by God.

3. The story is told that John Wesley, the 18th-century founder of the Methodist Movement, was sailing to America and heard a commotion in a cabin. He went to see what was going on, and a famous man named General Oglethorpe was berating a servant who had stolen from him. He told Wesley, "The rascal should have taken care how he used me so, for I never forgive." Wesley said calmly, "Then, sir, I hope you never sin."

G. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (v.8)

1. The pure in heart are those who have an undivided, heart-level commitment to the kingdom and its righteousness which manifests itself in an inner moral purity. Their righteousness is not a put on, a mere outward show for the benefit of onlookers; it's something that comes from the inside out and is consistent even when no people are around. They're genuine, the real deal.

2. They will see God, now with eyes of faith but then (on "that Day") in dazzling brilliance (Heb. 12:14; Rev. 21:22-27).

3. This parallels what David wrote in Ps. 24:3-4: "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully."

H. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (v. 9)

1. They are peacemakers in the sense of reconciling people to God through the gospel but also in seeking all kinds of reconciliation. Disciples of Jesus delight to make peace wherever possible.

2. That doesn't mean appeasing or compromising with evil for the sake of peace. For example, Jesus knew that his uncompromising call to commitment, his demand that he be the highest priority in a disciple's life, would bring conflict even within families. It's in that sense that he said in Mat. 10:34 that he didn't come to bring peace but a sword. He didn't say allegiance to him should be abandoned for the sake of peace.

3. The peacemakers are "sons" of God in that they reflect God's character – who made peace through the cross (Eph. 2:13-17; Col. 1:20) – and are heirs of the kingdom.

I. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (v. 10)

1. Opposition is a normal mark of being a Christian. See 2 Tim. 3:12 and comments on 5:11-12 below.

2. The reward for the faith-produced righteous living that engenders such opposition is the kingdom of heaven.

II. The Call to Kingdom Living (5:11-20)

A. Persecution, Salt, and Light (Mat. 5:11-16)

1 Persecution (5:11-12)

a. One reason people persecute Christians is given in 5:10 – "because of righteousness." Christians are called to live righteous lives and that upsets the unrighteous. As noted in 1 Jn. 3:11-12, Cain murdered Abel because his own deeds were evil and his brother's were righteous. See also, 1 Pet. 4:3-5.

b. Jesus says in 5:11-12 that in response to this type of treatment Christians should "Rejoice and be glad!" The reason Christians should have that response is that a great reward is in store for them when Jesus returns to finish what he started. Just as the prophets certainly will be rewarded for faithfulness to God despite persecution, so the disciples will be rewarded for faithfulness to Jesus. See Heb. 11:32-38.

c. Some other likely reactions to persecution are compromise (cease being different) and withdrawal (become a "secret Christian"). These are addressed in 5:13-16.

2. Salt (5:13)

a. In the ancient world, salt was a spice, but its most critical use was as a preservative. It had a powerful and positive effect on that to which it was applied – it kept it from spoiling. Jesus says to his disciples in 5:13 that they are the salt of the earth because if they live the way Jesus calls them to live they will have a powerful and positive effect on the world. They will influence the world's standards and practices by drawing people into the kingdom.

b. Jesus' comment about the uselessness of tasteless (unsalty) salt means that if Christians compromise with the world, if they lose their distinctive character, they lose their beneficial effect on the world. They cease to be that transforming influence that Jesus intends them to be.

3. Light (5:14-16)

a. Light is a symbol of righteousness and enlightenment. In Jn. 8:12 Jesus says of himself, "I am the light of the world." Christians are to be "the light of the world" in that they are to show the light of Christ in the way they live (Eph. 5:8-9; Phil. 2:15).

b. A "city on a hill" and a "lighted lamp" relate to Christians being the light of the world in that, just as concealment is contrary to the nature of a city on a hill and contrary to the purpose of a lighted lamp, so concealment of kingdom living is contrary to a Christian's nature and purpose. A secret Christian, one who conceals his allegiance, is of no more value to the world than one who has lost his distinctiveness. We are openly to live exemplary lives, not to parade our goodness but to direct attention to God who is the source of such living.

c. I'm afraid some of us have gotten the idea that rather than living holy before the world we should live *like* the world so as to not appear self righteous or not to scare off potential recruits by making them think they're going to have to change. Well, guess what?

Christ calls us to change – in fact he calls us to come and die – and we cannot strip that out of the gospel and pretend that we still have the gospel.

(1) I mean, Jesus did say (Lk. 14:26-27), "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

(2) And he also insisted on being up front about what was required. Right after declaring that he must be the supreme priority in a disciple's life, he says (Lk. 14:28-30), "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build but was not able to finish.'" He then repeats the point with the illustration of a king going to war.

(3) The truth of the matter is that many people want desperately to change. They want the power Christ gives through the Holy Spirit to live a new life, a life that is no longer enslaved to sin. When we downplay the radicalness of Christian living we muffle the truth of the new life, which I think reduces the appeal of Christianity rather than enhances it.

B. The Higher Righteousness of the Kingdom (Mat. 5:17-20)

1. The religion of at least some of the Pharisees and scribes was external and formal instead of a religion of the heart (see Lk. 16:15 and Mat. 23:27-28). They were more concerned with the ceremonial than the moral (see Mat. 23:23-25). It was a religion of man-made rules based upon concessions they granted one another in violation of the law they pretended to keep (see Mat. 15:3-11). In summary, they were interested in details rather than principles, in actions rather than motives, and in doing rather than being.

2. In 5:17 Jesus says that he has come to fulfill not abolish the old-covenant Scriptures (the O.T.), just as marriage does not abolish courtship but accomplishes its purpose. The entire O.T. pointed forward to what Jesus has now brought into being. As Jesus said in Mat. 11:13, "all the Prophets and the Law prophesied . . ."

3. Matthew 5:18 begins with "For" showing that it explains and confirms truth of v. 17. There is absolutely no way ("until heaven and earth disappear") that the Scriptures will be aborted. No part of the O.T. will pass away short of its fulfillment in Christ ("until everything is accomplished").

4. Verse 18 does not mean that nothing in the O.T. will become obsolete. It means only that it will not do so short of its purpose. Thus, Hebrews 8-9 speaks of the obsolescence of cultic rituals under the O.T. in light of their fulfillment in Jesus. See also Mk. 7:19. As Blomberg states:

Verse 18 reaffirms the absolute authority of all the Scriptures down to the smallest components of individual words. They will endure for all time but with

the important qualification "until everything is accomplished." With the coming of Christ, many aspects of the law are brought to complete fruition (e.g., the need for sacrifices, on which see Hebrews). In other instances certain requirements of the law endure until Christ's coming again (e.g., classically, love of neighbor and God). In short, Christian application of the Old Testament must always take into account both the continuities and the discontinuities with the New Testament.

5. The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Mat. 7:12, 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10), but some specific conduct is loving and other conduct is not. Love is the center, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself.

a. As Paul indicates in Rom. 13:9, the command to love your neighbor as yourself encompasses the commands of the law not to commit adultery, not to murder, not to steal, and not to covet (and other commands he does not specify). So the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, that set of commands that are part of Mosaic covenant, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that are included in that law (e.g., Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 10:14; Eph. 6:2). It is this ongoing moral law centered in love that is the "law of Christ." (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2 with 5:14).

b. 1 Cor. 7:19 highlights this distinction between commandments of the law that have continuing applicability and those that do not. Paul there says "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God [is everything]." Frank Thielman remarks in *Paul & the Law* (p. 101): "Although Paul offers no explanation for his startling statement, it significantly preserves the same paradox we have seen in Paul's allusive references to the law: certain commands, such as the commands not to worship idols and to preserve sexual purity, remain unchanged, but others, often those that particularly distinguished Jew from Gentile, are no longer valid."

6. Matthew 5:19 indicates some type of gradations in the kingdom of heaven (see Mat. 20:23; Lk. 12:47-48), but it isn't clear if this refers to ultimate rewards or the quality of one's discipleship here. The reference to "these commandments" is to the commands of the O.T. law. They are to be practiced *as expressed by the one who is their fulfillment*. "The law pointed forward to Jesus and his teaching; so it is properly obeyed by conforming to his word" (Carson, 146). "Thus, ranking in the kingdom turns on the degree of conformity to Jesus' teaching as that teaching fulfills O.T. revelation. His teaching, toward which the O.T. pointed, must be obeyed" (Carson, 146). Obedience is very high on the Lord's list. He is not "anti-law" (in that sense).

7. The point of 5:20 is that his teaching requires a higher righteousness than that of the Pharisees and scribes (as described above).

III. Kingdom Living Illustrated (Mat. 5:21-47)

Introduction: Some particulars of the radical righteousness of kingdom participants are set out in Mat 5:21-47. There are six sections of "you've heard it said . . ., but I say." The first part, "you've heard it said" means "you've understood." Jesus is not criticizing the O.T. but the

understanding of many of his hearers. Jesus contrasts the people's incorrect or inadequate understanding of the law with his teaching, which is the true or full understanding.

A. Anger and Reconciliation (Mat. 5:21-26)

1. The contrast Jesus makes between their understanding and his own teaching is that they had understood that murder was prohibited (6th commandment - Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17) and that a murderer would face the sentence of a human court. The law, however, points to Jesus' own, deeper teaching: the root of murder is anger, and anger is murderous in principle. One has not conformed to the better righteousness of the kingdom merely by refraining from murder. The angry person will be subject to *God's* judgment (presupposed since no human court is able to try a case of inward anger).

2. Matthew 5:22b speaks of anger expressed as insults. If one says "*raca*," an Aramaic term of abuse meaning something like "idiot," one will be liable to the council. This probably is a figurative reference to God's judgment, as the word "council" was used for God's heavenly council or court in a number of Jewish texts (Keener, 184). If one says "you fool," one will be subject to the fire of hell. I do not believe these involve an escalating punishment. That would require differing offenses, and these essentially are all the same.

3. The anger Jesus expresses in Mk. 3:1-5 and Mat. 23:17 ("blind fools") is different from what he condemns in Mat. 5:21-22. Jesus' outrage is toward sin (injustice, unbelief, exploitation of others). Holiness cannot be indifferent toward *sin*. His reference in 5:21-22 is to personal anger (which probably explains the clarifying addition "without cause" in v. 22). Robertson McQuilken writes in *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*:

Righteous and unrighteous anger can be distinguished by the cause of anger. One should be angry over sin that offends God, harms others, or harms the person sinning. The difficulty with being righteously indignant is that our motives are mixed. Am I distressed over a sin that offends God and harms people, or am I angry over the way I am affected? Since motives are mixed, the safe thing may be to eschew anger altogether when the sin of another directly affects me, as when my child does wrong but the wrong embarrasses me. Better to wait till the anger subsides to be sure the resulting action does not come from a mixture of righteous and unrighteous indignation. Anger is sinful when it is for the wrong reason or results in the wrong action.

...

To keep this emotion from igniting for the wrong reason or from burning out of control, Scripture gives two ways of control: Take it easy – don't get angry suddenly (James 1:19), and don't let it keep burning – don't let it last till the next day (Eph. 4:26). Either a "low flashpoint," a quick response without reflection, or a "slow burn," continuing on with the emotion, seem to risk causing even righteous indignation to go astray.

4. Matthew 5:23-24 is an illustration of the seriousness of anger based on a setting of temple worship. The point of 5:23-24 is that "God is unwilling for people to come to him unreconciled. His worship can wait" (Lewis, 90).

a. As Carson says (p. 150), "[I]f we truly are concerned about our anger and hate, we shall be no less concerned when we engender them in others." (Here it is the worshiper who is at fault and who therefore is in a position to fix things.)

b. We cannot wrong someone and then have the attitude "Tough! He needs to get over it." Our Lord demands that we humble ourselves, go to those we've wronged, and seek reconciliation. And let me tell you, obeying that command would go a long way maintaining the unity and harmony in the body of Christ.

5. Matthew 5:25-26 is an illustration of the seriousness of anger based on the civil law. The point is that reconciliation is urgent because failure to do so will result in the full measure of justice being meted out. We must act quickly to make it right with those we have wronged, those in whom we have engendered anger, because if we delay too long we may face the full measure of God's judgment.

B. Adultery (Mat. 5:27-30)

1. The 7th commandment prohibited adultery (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 5:18). This term generally refers to illicit sexual relations involving a married person. The point of 5:27-28 is that God is concerned with both action and intent. The intent to have, in a sexual sense, one who is not your spouse is itself sinful. The act is merely the outward expression of that intent. Several modern scholars argue that the proper translation of "looks at a woman lustfully" is "look at a woman so as to cause her to lust." This makes the intention aspect even clearer. This is a person "on the make." Jesus is not condemning the natural desire of a man for a woman (consider Song of Solomon) but the lustful desire for a woman to whom one has no right.

2. Hyperbole is exaggeration for emphasis (e.g., he hit it a mile!). Matthew 5:29-30 clearly is a case of hyperbole because these actions would not remove lust. Lust does not reside in a part of the body. The point is that Christians must be willing to deal radically with sin. It must be dealt with radically because the alternative is sin and sin's reward, the loss of the whole person in hell.

3. There have been those in the history of Christianity who have taken this command literally and castrated themselves. Most notably among them was Origen, the Christian theologian who died in the middle of the third century as a result of the torture he received during the Decian persecution.

C. Divorce (Mat. 5:31-32)

1. They had heard that one divorcing his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. This is a reference to the teaching of the Jews based on Deut. 24:1-4. They inferred from Deut. 24:1 that a man could divorce his wife for "something indecent" by giving her a certificate. The Jews debated the permissible grounds for divorce. The school of Rabbi Shammai maintained that "something indecent" referred to something grossly indecent, such as unchastity or infidelity. Rabbi Hillel extended the meaning beyond sin to all kinds of offenses, including improperly cooking a meal.

2. The point of 5:32 is that God's law is not primarily about formalities of divorce but about the sanctity of marriage. Divorce is a grave matter. The requirement of a certificate of divorce and the prohibition against remarrying the divorced wife after she had another husband in the interim discouraged hasty divorces. The law thus points to the original purpose of marriage as a relationship of permanence, a point Jesus makes in Mat. 19:3-9. As God said through the prophet Malachi, "I hate divorce" (Mal. 2:16) (note translation issue regarding that verse).

3. As Jesus authoritatively interprets the law, the only permissible basis for divorce is sexual immorality, which of course includes adultery. Divorce always involves evil, but just as Moses permitted divorce because their hearts were hard (Mat. 19:8), so Jesus permits it, but only for sexual sin.

4. The traditional and dominant understanding of 5:32 is that the remarriage of the wrongly divorced woman was presumed in that society and the man who wrongly divorced her is held responsible for the adultery that occurs upon her remarriage (he is a cause of her subsequent adultery). Matthew 19:9 makes clear that the wrongly divorcing husband also commits adultery upon his remarriage.

5. At least one N. T. scholar, John Nolland, thinks 5:32 should be translated: "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, causes her to have adultery committed against her (rather than "causes her to commit adultery") and whoever marries a woman who has gained a divorce (rather than "has been divorced") commits adultery."

a. So, in Nolland's view, neither Mat. 5:32 nor Lk. 16:18 addresses the freedom to remarry of an innocent wife who was invalidly divorced. Jesus says only that a man who wrongly divorces his wife commits adultery against her by his presumed remarriage and that a man who marries a woman who engineered an invalid divorce likewise commits adultery (as would, of course, the woman he married).

b. The woman who engineered an invalid divorce from her husband and remarried would be the Jewish equivalent of a Gentile who invalidly divorced her husband and remarried (Mk. 10:12), as a Jewish woman had no legal right to divorce her husband. See, e.g., Instone-Brewer (2002) 85-90.

6. So kingdom participants are to stay married. If they violate that standard, they are to remain unmarried. It is a separate (and complicated) issue of how the church is to respond when a Christian who has wrongly divorced also violates the obligation to remain unmarried.

D. Oaths (Mat. 5:33-37)

1. As Mat. 23:16-22 makes clear, the Jews had complex regulations on whether an oath was binding. The key was how closely it was related to Yahweh's name. For instance, swearing *by* Jerusalem was not binding, but swearing *toward* Jerusalem was binding.

2. In Mat. 5:33 Jesus gives a summary statement of several O.T. passages which prohibit false oaths and broken vows. He then highlights the absurdity of the current distinctions in oaths that were made by listing some second-class oaths that were considered nonbinding for lack of adequate connection to the name of God and explains that all of these things are inseparably linked with God – he even controls our heads.

3. The O.T. requirement of keeping one's oath (not swearing falsely) points to the fundamental importance of truthfulness. That requirement finds its fulfillment in a truthfulness that is so consistent that there is no place for an oath.

4. Since every word of theirs was to be honest and binding, there was no place for them to offer sworn speech as distinctively trustworthy. To do so was an indictment against one's own integrity.

a. Luke Timothy Johnson puts it like this (in his commentary on James):

If speech is meant to be a primary symbol of the self, if it is from the heart's overflow that the tongue is meant to speak, then the invocation of a special realm (whether heaven or earth) or power (the name of the Lord) to buttress one's own speech becomes, paradoxically, an admission that one's own speech is untrustworthy without such warrant. The more towering the oath, the more impressive the power invoked to support my own statement, the more suspect my innate truthfulness appears.

b. The Jewish historian Josephus reports that the sect of Jews known as Essenes shared this view. He wrote: "Every statement of theirs is surer than an oath and with them swearing is avoided, for they think it worse than perjury. For they say that he who is not trustworthy except when he appeals to God is already under condemnation" (quoted in Johnson, 327).

5. This prohibition probably is limited to voluntary oaths. In an official oath, one that responsible authorities require, the one swearing is not offering the testimony as more reliable. He simply is complying with someone else's requirement for trustworthiness.

6. If Paul's "witness formula" (e.g., 2 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 1:20) qualifies as swearing, it may be that love requires that voluntary oaths be given when skepticism makes them necessary to benefit others. See also, God swearing (Heb. 6:17). There's a difference in my swearing to you that my elixir is an antidote to a snake bite so you'll buy my product and my swearing that it's an antidote so you'll take it before you die.

7. Jesus formally contravenes the O.T. law here: what it permits or commands (Deut. 6:13), he forbids. But if his interpretation of the direction in which the law points is authoritative, then his teaching fulfills it.

E. Revenge (Mat. 5:38-42)

1. The principle is given in Mat. 5:38-39a. The purpose of the O.T. prescription of "an eye for an eye" (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21) was to limit retaliation and escalating conflict by prescribing a legal penalty that matched the offense. It was not to authorize personal revenge. Indeed, Lev. 19:18 specifically forbids revenge.

a. Disciples are not to resist an evil person in the sense of retaliating for personal offenses. The O.T. rule of limited retaliation points to and is fulfilled in a spirit that does not insist on "pay backs." The insistence on retaliation for personal wrongs is rooted in an inflated ego and in a lack of faith that God ultimately will judge all things.

b. This is the opposite of the world's attitude which is summarized in the statement by Donald Trump: "If people screw me, I screw back in spades."

2. Four illustrations (Mat. 5:39b-42)

a. "if someone strikes you on the right cheek" – The fact it is on the right cheek implies a slap with the back of the hand, which was a gross insult. The issue is not safety or self defense but retaliation for a wrong. Turning the other cheek is a powerful way of making the point that we are not to "get even." Rather than retaliate for an insult, rather than avenge a personal affront, we are to be willing to receive further insult.

b. "if someone sues you for your tunic" – "Tunic" was the basic inner garment that was worn in some form by everyone; "cloak" was the supplementary outer garment that protected one from the cold and was used for carrying grain and objects. The cloak was expressly protected from confiscation (Ex. 22:25-27 - cloak taken in pledge must be returned by sunset).

(1) John Nolland says it is doubtful that any creditor would sue a poor person for his tunic in payment of a debt, and if he did, it is doubtful that a court would allow such an action, it being contrary to the spirit of Ex. 22:25-27 and an affront to the poor man's dignity. In other words, this probably is a hypothetical case of an extreme assault on the poor person's dignity – seeking the very clothes on his back.

(2) The call to willingly give up the cloak that one has a clear right to keep is a powerful way of making the point that even this kind of personal indignity – being sued for the clothes on one's back – is to be born without retaliation or spirit of revenge. This would have been understood to be hyperbole because no first-century Jew would go about only in his loin cloth.

c. "forces you to go one mile" – The verb "forces you to go" is a specific term for the Roman soldier's practice of commandeering civilians to carry his luggage a prescribed distance, one Roman "mile." This was an affront, a being put upon, that invoked outrage and feelings of spite. Christians are to be so far from retaliating for such offenses that they are to be *helpful*, willing to go a second mile.

d. "give to one who asks" – This involves a request for a loan (which would be interest free - Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:37; Deut. 23:19); the repetition merely reinforces the point. The heart attitude of not exalting our personal rights extends even to our property rights. Our "rights" vanish in our concern for the welfare of others.

(1) I don't think Jesus is saying we are blindly or automatically to give to anyone who asks because the principle of love, doing what is best for others, still applies and can affect one's decision. Also, if the command were absolute you quickly would have saintly paupers and rich idlers, which is not what you see in the N.T.

(2) I think D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (p. 288-89) expresses well what Jesus is saying here:

Our Lord does not encourage us here to help frauds or professional beggars or drunkards. I put it like this plainly because we all have these experiences. A man comes to you under the influence of drink and asks you to give him some money. Although he says he wants it for a night's lodging you know he will go immediately and spend it upon drink. Our Lord does not tell us to encourage or help such a man. He is not even considering that. What He is considering is the tendency of a man because of self, and a self-centered spirit, not to help those who are in real need. It is this holding on to what is mine that He is concerned about. We can therefore put it like this. We must always be ready to listen and to give a man the benefit of the doubt. It is not something we do mechanically or thoughtlessly. We must think, and say: 'If this man is in need, it is my business to help him if I am in a position to do so. I may be taking a risk, but if he is in need I will help him.' The apostle John gives us a perfect exposition of this. 'But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth' (1 Jn. iii. 17, 18). That is the way we are to follow. 'Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need.' The man under the influence of drink who asks us for money is not in need, neither is the man who lives by this sort of thing and is

too lazy to work. Paul says of such: 'If any would not work, neither should he eat.' So your professional beggar is not in need and I do not give to him.

3. The teaching here about revenge is reflected in Rom. 12:17-21. The focus is on violation of one's personal rights, not on defense of a principle or other people. Note that Paul resisted Peter to his face in Galatians 2 and stood for his rights as a Roman citizen in Acts 16:37, 22:25, 25:8-12.

F. Hatred and Love (Mat. 5:43-47)

1. Love your neighbor is from Lev. 19:18, but no O.T. passage commands hatred for enemies. Nevertheless, the Qumran community specifically commanded love for members and hatred for outsiders. There were undoubtedly other groups that arrived at that position. The popular reasoning may have been that if God commands love for "neighbor" then hatred for "enemies" is impliedly conceded.

2. The true direction of the law is universal love, a love extended even to enemies. "Those who persecute you" is a reference to one important kind of enemy, but it does not exhaust the meaning. Love is a commitment to the welfare of its object, a commitment to do for another that which blesses him. It is to manifest itself in prayer for one's persecutors. This is reflected in Christ's prayer for those crucifying him (Lk. 23:34) and in Stephen's prayer (Acts 7:54 - 8:1).

3. Praying for and loving are mutually reinforcing – loving actions foster loving feelings, and loving feelings foster loving actions.

4. This indiscriminating love marks out disciples as sons of their Father – they are reflecting his character. They are being like God who loves all men, a fact indicated by his providing natural blessings (sun, rain) on the evil and unrighteous as well as on the good and righteous. Of course, this does not mean that all mankind will be saved. The Bible is clear that many will not be saved; many will choose to spurn God's love.

5. Loving those who love you is not morally distinct, not a higher calling; everyone does that, even the tax collectors! (They were seen as corrupt traitors.) Greeting was a mark of courtesy and respect. If Christians greet only other disciples, they do not rise above the level of pagans. The love Christ calls us to have extends beyond *us*.

6. As John Stott sums up kingdom living: "The life of the old (fallen) humanity is based on rough justice, avenging injuries, and returning favors. The life of the new (redeemed) humanity is based on divine love, refusing to take revenge but overcoming evil with good."

IV. The Kingdom Calling: Emulating God's Perfection (Mat. 5:48)

A. "Greater righteousness" demanded in v. 20 and illustrated in vv. 21-47 is now summed up in one all-embracing demand: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

B. This is the target for all Christians. The law pointed to the perfection, the completeness of God, exemplified by the authoritative interpretations given in vv. 21-47.

C. Carson writes (p. 161):

Just as in the OT it was the distinctive mark of Israel that they were set apart for God to reflect his character (Lev 19:2; cf. 11:44-45; 20:7, 26), so the messianic community carries on this distinctiveness (cf. 1 Peter 1:16) as the true locus of the people of God (cf. France, *Jesus*, pp. 61-62). This must not encourage us to conclude that Jesus teaches that unqualified perfection is already possible for his disciples. He teaches them to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy (v. 3) and to pray "Forgive us our debts" (6:12). But the perfection of the Father, the true eschatological goal of the law, is what all disciples of Jesus pursue.

V. Keeping the Motives for Kingdom Living Pure (Mat. 6:1-18)

A. The Controlling Principle (Mat. 6:1)

1. The motive for righteous living cannot be the praise of men. Righteous conduct must be visible so that God may be glorified, as indicated in 5:16, but it must never be visible for the purpose of gaining personal acclaim.

2. Mat. 23:5-7 reveals the prevalence of such self-centered piety among scribes and Pharisees. Self-centered piety will receive no blessing or benefit from God.

B. Examples: The Foolish Choice of a Temporal Reward (Mat. 6:2-6, 16-18)

1. Alms (Mat. 6:2-4)

a. warning – Do not draw attention to your giving to the needy to be honored by men.

b. guarantee – Such people have received their reward in full. They win human praise, but that is all they get.

c. instruction – Give without advertising it. The point is made hyperbolically; the refusal to advertise one's giving is put in terms of not even advertising it to yourself! (Note that Gundry suggests a more literal idea of avoiding a two-handed delivery for show.)

d. assurance – God-centered piety will be rewarded by God. This will lead to blessing, both now and then.

2. Prayer (Mat. 6:5-6)

a. warning – Do not pray for show.

b. guarantee – Those who do so receive human praise, but that is all they get.

c. instruction – Pray in private. Note that the early church did not understand Jesus to be forbidding all public prayer (Acts 1:24, 3:1, 4:24-30). Public vs. private is a good test of one's motives; it's revealing of motives if one prays more in public than in private.

d. assurance – Same

3. Fasting (Mat. 6:16-18)

a. warning – Do not parade your fasting to gain a reputation for piety.

b. guarantee – Those who do so win human praise, but that is all they get.

c. instruction – Fast without advertising it.

d. assurance – Same

VI. A Digression on Kingdom Prayer (Mat. 6:7-15)

A. Empty prayer (Mat. 6:7-8)

1. While on the subject of prayer, Jesus gives an additional warning about it. It is helpful for understanding the passage to keep in mind that Jesus prayed all night (Lk. 6:12), repeated himself in prayer in Gethsemane (Mat. 26:44), and instructed his disciples that they should always pray and not give up (Lk. 18:1).

2. The point is that they should avoid piling up empty phrases, words that are simply said to be said rather than being expressions of the heart, because God is not some impersonal force that can be mechanically manipulated into action. As Davies and Allison state, "With regard to prayer in the Gentile world, the magical papyri put us in touch with a piety which believed in incantations and the beneficial effect of mechanical repetition."

3. The key to being heard by God is not the form or number of one's words but having a Father-son relationship with him. As sons of God (Gal. 3:26-27), there is no need to labor to induce his attention – they already have it. He is aware of their situation and need even before they ask!

4. It is an insult for a Christian to approach God with insecurity about being heard. That sense of alienation has no place in the life of a child of God and is the work of the Enemy.

B. The Model Prayer (Mat. 6:9-13)

1. It is a model – v. 9 says *how* to pray, not *what* to pray

2. "Our Father in heaven"

a. The word for "father" here is *patēr* not *abba*. Jesus uses the more intimate term *abba* in his prayer in Mk. 14:36, which practice was followed by his disciples (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Jews sometimes addressed God as "father," but customarily they would address him by multiplying titles ascribing great qualities to him.

b. "Father" says a lot about God. He is personal (not some force) and caring. Craig Keener states (p. 216):

One must understand what God's "fatherhood" would have meant to most of Jesus' hearers. In first-century Jewish Palestine, children were powerless social dependents and fathers were viewed as strong providers and examples on whom their children could depend (in contrast to many homes in contemporary Western society; cf. 7:7-11; Heb 12:5-11). Jesus summons his disciples to pray not like the pagans (6:7), but with a dependence on God as their Father (6:8-9) who watches over them (Deut 8:3-5, in Mt 4:4).

c. "*Our* Father" speaks of the special relationship between Christians and God. God is not the Father of all people (in this sense) – see Jn. 1:12-13. The early church forbade non-Christians from reciting this prayer just as they forbade them from taking communion.

d. "in heaven" reminds us of his transcendence and sovereignty. Though our relationship with God is one of love and intimacy, it is also one of reverence. God is too majestic to be considered our "cosmic chum."

3. "Let your name be sanctified"

a. God's name means God himself, who he is and how he has revealed himself (e.g., Isa. 52:6 – to know God's name is to know God). The prayer is that God bring about the sanctification of his name, that he have himself receive the glory, honor, awe, and obedience which belong inherently to him as God. Though disrespected and treated as nothing special (profane) by the world, the prayer is that he be rightly acknowledged by all, that he be wholly honored and glorified as is his due.

b. God certainly is exalted to some degree in the spread of the gospel and in the Christlike conduct of his children, but the ultimate sanctification of his name will be when Christ returns to consummate the kingdom he inaugurated with his first coming. This is the final assertion of God's kingly rule in which everything is brought into harmony with his will and all

sin and its products are eliminated. It is the eternal state, the goal of God's creation. The next two requests confirm that this is the focus here.

4. "Let your kingdom come"

a. This is how God is to sanctify his name, to show forth its ultimate glory. He is to consummate the kingdom that Christ inaugurated. It is like prayer *marana tha* – Come Lord Jesus.

b. Note on the kingdom

(1) One of the questions raised by Jesus' claim to have ushered in the kingdom of God was how it could be true in light of the continuation of the old reality of sin, suffering, and death. Several parables address this issue, perhaps none more clearly than the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Mat. 13:34-30, 36-43). Among other things, this parable makes clear that the kingdom comes in two stages. The kingdom is inaugurated with Christ's first coming but will not be consummated until he returns. Good and evil coexist in the interim, in the overlap of ages, but when Christ returns he will weed out everything that is inconsistent with God's intention, and the kingdom of God will be the sole reality extending through eternity.

(2) As disciples of Christ, we recognize that God's kingdom already has invaded this reality in the person and ministry of Jesus – his reign in our lives is a present reality. Those who have entered that kingdom, who have surrendered to God and his Christ, comprise the church. As we seek to bring others into the divine revolution, we await "that Day" when heaven and earth merge, so to speak, and this reality is completely redone ("heavenized").

5. "Let your will be done"

a. I again see this as a request of God to accomplish his will in terms of the consummation of salvation history. As Robert Guelich states in his exposition on the Sermon on the Mount, "Therefore, to pray 'let your will be done' does point to the future when Satan and the forces of disobedience will be totally destroyed, the wicked and enemies judged, and God rules supreme 'on earth as in heaven.'"

b. The clause "on earth as in heaven" may modify the first three petitions. In other words, the prayer is that God sanctify his name on earth as in heaven, that he let his kingdom come on earth as in heaven, and that he let his will be done on earth as in heaven.

6. "Give us today our daily bread" – This is a request for basic physical needs. Whatever the means of provision, *all* good things come from God (see Jas. 1:17).

7. "Forgive us our debts" – This is a prayer for the forgiveness of sins, which are conceived as something owed to God. Luke's version (11:4) says "sins."

8. "as we also have forgiven our debtors" – As indicated in 6:14-15, we cannot sincerely or properly seek forgiveness while refusing to give it. "Once our eyes have been opened to see the enormity of our offense against God, the injuries which others have done to us appear by comparison extremely trifling. If, on the other hand, we have an exaggerated view of the offense of others, it proves that we have minimized our own" (Stott).

9. "And lead us not into temptation/testing"

a. James 1:13-14 makes clear that God does not "tempt" anyone, meaning entice them to evil. And 1 Cor. 10:13 makes clear that God will not allow his children to undergo a test which they *cannot* endure. So what does this request not to be led into temptation or testing mean?

b. I lean toward Robert Mounce's view that it means "do not let us fall into a trial so difficult we will fail." In other words, while God permits us to be tested for positive purposes, Satan is at work in those very trials seeking to lure us away from the avenue of escape which God has provided. Trials, especially severe ones, pose a danger that we will not take advantage of God's way out but will succumb to the Enemy. This prayer is to be kept from a test which Satan successfully will exploit to pull us away. In the words of David Turner (p. 189), "this petition is not so much for God not to lead the disciple into a moral test as it is for the disciple to be delivered from Satan so as not to yield to temptation." This understanding is aided by the fact "temptation" in Mk. 14:38 and Gal. 6:1 can be taken to mean "trial or temptation that results in a fall."

c. The ultimate source of the danger is suggested by the following clause "but deliver us from the Evil One." We must never forget that our "enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

C. Forgiveness and Prayer (Mat. 6:14-15) – This reinforces v. 12. See Mat. 18:23-35. A person who refuses to forgive others does not appreciate what he is asking of God – he is not truly penitent. See Stott quote above (B.8).

VII. The Foolish Choice Applied to Material Goods (Mat. 6:19-24)

A. Luke 12:13-21 is a good commentary on this passage. It shows how "storing up treasure for oneself" is contrasted with being "rich toward God" (i.e., using wealth as God's steward). Jesus is forbidding the selfish accumulation or hoarding of wealth ("for yourselves"), a refusal to share with those in need.

B. This is related to 6:1-18 in that one who selfishly accumulates or hoards wealth, instead of using it as God intends, is choosing a temporary reward over an eternal one. Consider the rich fool in Lk. 12:13-21. Wealth gathered for wealth's sake gains no reward from God. The degree of the foolishness of this choice is painted graphically in Jas. 5:1-6. Instead of selfishly accumulating worldly riches, disciples should seek to accumulate eternal treasure in heaven. In

this context, that probably means doing what the rich fool in Luke 12 failed to do, i.e., using their wealth as God's stewards. See 1 Tim. 6:17-19.

C. Verse 21 warns of the consequences of treasuring the temporal. The "heart," the center of the personality, embracing mind, emotions, and will, is pulled toward that which one treasures. If a person values the earthly over the heavenly, the temporary over the eternal, that basic valuation will inevitably control the whole person's direction and values. For example, the person who treasures or highly values the experience of pleasure soon will find his whole being involved in its pursuit (e.g., those chasing a drug high). Conversely, those who treasure the rewards of God will find their whole being engaged in that pursuit.

D. The eye is the lamp of the body (v.22a) in that it is the instrument that permits the body to find its way.

1. "If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light" (v. 22b) means that if the eye is functioning properly the whole body will be "enlightened" as to its place and surroundings and thus be able to find its way. The word translated "good" or "healthy" (ἀπλους) carries with it connotations of singleness, generosity, or both. To the extent the "singleness" nuance is intended, it refers to an undivided focus on God, as opposed to a divided focus on God and wealth. To the extent the "generosity" nuance is intended, it refers to a generous attitude toward one's wealth, as opposed to a stingy attitude.

2. But if the eye is "unhealthy" or "bad," the body will be full of darkness and unable to find its way (v.23). The word translated "unhealthy" or "bad" (πονηρός) in certain contexts had the connotation of stinginess. In Jewish parlance, "evil eye" often referred to stinginess. The point is that those lacking a correct view or perspective on wealth are like blind men. The inner darkness, meaning blindness, is the gravest of all darknesses because it cannot be remedied by a lamp. (He does not press this; he is simply stressing the severity of the issue.)

E. One cannot be a slave of two owners for "single ownership and full-time service are of the essence of slavery" (Tasker). Either God is served with a single-eyed devotion, or he is not served at all. Attempts at divided loyalty betray a deep-seated commitment to idolatry.

VIII. Worry and Kingdom Stewardship (Mat. 6:25-34)

A. The Principle (Mat. 6:25)

1. The word "Therefore" shows that this is deduced logically from what precedes. Jesus is forbidding his disciples from being anxious about or having an undue concern over physical necessities such as food and clothing. This prohibition is related to what precedes in that to worry or to fret over physical needs is to grant them too much influence in one's life; they have become too important vis-à-vis God. The one who frets over material things is a servant to those things (and quite likely allows his anxiety to interfere with his stewardship).

2. Because one cannot serve both God and wealth (Mat. 6:24), one must not fret about one's life, what one will eat or drink, or about one's body, what one will wear (Mat. 6:25). To worry (be anxious) about these things is to give them an undue importance. It leads one to hoard rather than to share, contrary to the command of 6:19-21, and thus makes one a servant of wealth or material things rather than a servant of God. There is more to life than preserving it physically with food and more to the body than protecting and adorning it with clothes; there is eternal life (in the body) with God, reception of which involves submission to his commands.

B. Examples of God's Providence (Mat. 6:26-30)

1. Consider the birds. They do not worry about food, as evidenced by the fact they do not sow, reap, or gather into barns. They make no effort to control their food supply, and yet God feeds them. Since we are worth more than birds, God will not have more stringent requirements for feeding us. If worry is irrelevant to the birds being fed, it is all the more so in our case (Mat. 6:26).

2. I think the point is *not* that worry is unnecessary because God has promised always to provide food to every bird and Christian but that worry is unnecessary because God is the one who provides and his provision is unrelated to worry. This is not a guarantee that no birds or Christians will ever starve or go without clothes. Indeed, in 2 Cor. 11:27 Paul says that he had been cold and naked, and in Rom. 8:35-37 he says:

³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶Just as it is written, "On account of you we are being put to death all the day [long]; we are considered as sheep for the slaughter." ³⁷But in all these things we are completely victorious through him who loved us.

3. Note that the following rhetorical question stresses the *uselessness* of worry (Mat. 6:27). The point is that worry does nothing to extend one's physical life, not that worry is contrary to a divine guarantee of endless life. Worrying about physical necessities will have no more effect than worrying about one's life span. No level of zeal for physical necessities can guarantee their acquisition because that ultimately is not in our hands. It is a pagan perspective to think otherwise (Mat. 6:32).

4. The flowers/grass illustrate a lack of anxiety about clothing, as evidenced by the fact they do not labor or spin (they make no effort to produce clothing), and yet God clothes them in splendor. Since we are more permanent/valuable than flowers/grass, God will not have more stringent requirements for clothing us. If he clothes them without worry, he will do that even more so in our case. Note that Jesus is referring to the *basis* on which God clothes the flowers (without regard to worry), not the *manner* in which he clothes them (greater splendor than Solomon). Christians typically are not dressed more splendidly than Solomon; they are, however, provided for without regard to worry.

C. Renewed Exhortation (Mat. 6:31-34)

1. In acting as though worrying is relevant to God's provision for us, we exhibit doubt that he cares for us more than the birds and flowers, which we recognize receive food and clothing without worry. We become like the world (pagans) that is consumed with anxiety over its physical needs.

2. The right approach is to make God the focus and priority of one's life (rather than the acquisition of physical necessities), and physical necessities will be provided, *not* because one is seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness¹ but because God does not provide these things in response to worry. It's like saying, "Don't make securing air the priority of your life. Instead, make God the priority, and you also will receive air to breathe (because God provides it without regard to worry)."

IX. Maintaining Balance in Kingdom Living (Mat. 7:1-6)

A. The Danger of Being Judgmental (Mat. 7:1-5)

1. Mat. 7:1 is one of the most misunderstood and misapplied verses in all the Bible. The statements Charles Barkley made in a recent interview with Wolf Blitzer are a good illustration (<http://www.apologeticspress.org/articles/3655>):

Every time I hear the word "conservative," it makes me sick to my stomach because they're really just fake Christians.... I think they want to be judge and jury. Like, I'm for gay marriage. It's none of my business if gay people want to get married. I'm pro-choice. And I think these Christians—first of all, they're supposed to be—they're not supposed to judge other people, but they're the most hypocritical judge of people we have in this country.... [T]hey act like they're Christians, and they're not forgiving at all (2008).

The writer of the article in which Barkley is quoted rightly comments: "Barkley has implied that 'fake Christians' are those who oppose homosexuality and abortion. Christians who condemn homosexuality and abortion supposedly are hypocritically judging others, and being unforgiving."

2. Matthew 7:1 does not bar Christians from making judgments about people, conduct, and teaching. Indeed, we are called to make moral judgments about people (Mat. 23:15, 23-28, 33; Acts 7:51, 8:18-23; 13:6-10; 2 Cor. 11:4-6, 13-15; Phil. 3:18-19; Col. 2:18-19; 2 Pet. 2:10b-14) and to recognize and condemn sinful conduct (Mat. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-12, 6:9-11; Gal. 2:11-14, 5:19-21; Rev. 2:6) and false teaching (Mat. 7:15; Gal. 1:8-9; 1 Tim. 1:3, 18-20; Tit. 1:10-11; 2 Jn. 9-11; Jude 3-4; Rev. 2:14-16, 20-23).

¹ God makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Mat. 5:45).

3. Matthew 7:1 means that we are not to judge people contrary to or inconsistently with the will of God. In other words, we are not to judge people *by our own standards*; we must let *God* be the judge. There are two main ways in which we play the judge, in which we condemn people by our own standards: we condemn sinners God has forgiven, refusing to accept God's judgment of forgiveness (consider the elder brother in Lk. 15:11-31), and we condemn those who simply have violated our personal standards, not the standards of God (consider Rom. 14:1-13a).

4. This relates to the sermon in that, as we live kingdom lives, we can resent bestowal of forgiveness on those who do not match us. The tendency is to think that only those who live up to our level are worthy of forgiveness. We also can begin to think we are so holy that we equate our own judgments with God's judgments.

5. Verse 7:2 means that if we refuse to accept God's extension of mercy to others, he will treat us accordingly by refusing to extend mercy to us (see, Mat. 6:14-15); and if we refuse to tolerate others' violations of our personal standards, God will treat us accordingly by refusing to tolerate (in the sense of not forgiving) our violations of his standards.

6. In 7:3-5 Jesus is not defining the sin of judging but condemning our insensitivity to it and the absurdity of our trying to help others before we repent of it.

a. Verse 3 - Why is the judgmental person so conscious of the slightest failing on his brother's part, be it real (sin) or imagined (opinion), but totally unaware of his own glaring sin of playing God?

b. Verse 4 - How can the judgmental person credibly offer to help his brother overcome some minor failing, be it real or imagined, while himself being engaged in this serious sin? To do so would be sheer hypocrisy.

c. Verse 5 - Offering such help would not only be hypocritical but also impossible. Being judgmental obscures our vision of our brother's true needs because it employs the wrong lens for viewing his conduct. We can only see clearly to help our brother when we let God be the judge, i.e., when we repent of judging.

B. The Danger of Being Undiscerning (Mat. 7:6)

1. The verse appears to be chiasmic in structure:

Do not give what is holy to dogs,
and do not throw your pearls before swine,
or they [the swine] will trample them under foot,
and having turned, they [the dogs] will maul you.

2. The "pigs" not only are unclean but wild and vicious animals; the "dogs" were also wild and associated with the unclean. Giving dogs what is "holy" refers to the holy flesh of

sacrificial animals. Depending on the particular sacrifice, that portion that was not burnt was eaten by the priest or by the priest and the offeror. It had a religious value for worshippers beyond its food value. Pearls were objects of beauty and great value (e.g. Mat. 13:45-46).

3. Jesus' general point is that objects of value, special privileges and participation in sacred things, should not be offered to those who are incapable of appreciating them. A pig will despise pearls because it cannot eat them, and holy meat will mean no more to a dog than garbage. The dog will not feel properly grateful toward the one offering it.

4. The point in this specific context is that, although we are not to be judgmental in the sense of condemning those God does not condemn, we still must be wise and discriminating in our dealings with other people. We must recognize when our offering of the valuable and sacred will only result in its desecration.

5. This relates to the sermon in that the demands for universal love (5:43-47) can breed a shortage of this type of discernment.

X. The Power for Kingdom Living (Mat. 7:7-12)

A. The Source and Means of the Power (Mat. 7:7-11)

1. So far in this sermon, Jesus has called Christians to live exceedingly righteous lives, both internally and externally, and to do so with pure motives. This righteous living includes our use of and attitude toward material possessions, and it must be balanced by our not being judgmental or undiscerning. This certainly makes one feel overwhelmed, small, and incapable.

2. In that context, when Jesus says "Ask and it will be given to you," I think he is referring to the kingdom living he has been preaching about. Prayer is the key to kingdom living; it is a crucial aspect of the transformation process. In the words of D. A. Carson, "Far too often Christians do not have the marks of richly textured discipleship because they do not ask, . . ."

3. Of course, we must truly desire the changes for which we pray, for God knows our hearts. We must not ask with selfish motives (Jas. 4:2-3); we must be persistent in our pursuit of the blessing, as the symmetric repetition of the three present tense commands suggests (see, Lk. 11:5-13); and, of course, we must have faith in God's ability and desire to answer our prayer (Jas. 1:5-8).

4. Verses 9-11 are to help them see the truth of what he has just told them. If human parents, though evil, give good gifts to their children, how much more will God, who is pure goodness, do so? We can trust that God is out to bless us, not deprive us.

B. Summary Exhortation in View of That Power (Mat. 7:12)

1. Jesus renews his exhortation to kingdom living, this time in terms of the principle that captures the essence of the O.T.'s ethical direction (see, Rom. 13:8-10). This principle summarizes kingdom living in our personal relationships.

2. Although there were other versions of this Golden Rule prior to Jesus, he appears to have been the first to state the rule positively. For instance, around A.D. 20, Rabbi Hillel is reported to have summarized the Law by saying, "What is hateful to you, do not do to anyone else. This is the whole law; all the rest is commentary." Jesus positive statement speaks against sins of omission as well as sins of commission. (The fact the principle is a summary of the O.T.'s ethical direction means that it cannot be interpreted to endorse actions contrary to God's revealed will. For instance, one does not ask how one would want to be treated if a thief.)

3. In light of the power that is available for kingdom living, the power to which he referred in the preceding verses, we need to do it.

XI. Conclusion (Mat. 7:13-27)

A. Call to Decision: The Two Roads (Mat. 7:13-14)

1. The command is to enter through the narrow gate. This is the gate to life, meaning the way of Christ. It is an appeal to accept the call of discipleship. It is called "narrow" because it excludes ways other than Christ (see Jn. 14:6). We employ this figurative sense when we call someone who is not open to alternatives a "narrow-minded" person.

2. There are only two choices: the narrow way and the broad way. The narrow way leads to life; the broad way leads to death. Relatively few travel the road of discipleship. Most are running with the crowd en route to destruction. Despite such clear statements, the myth persists that God is not going to condemn anyone (or any significant number).

B. Warning Against Antinomian Deceivers (Mat. 7:15-23)

1. False prophets are those who deceive people by teaching error in the name of God. In Mat. 24:11 Jesus warns that false prophets will deceive many, and in 1 Jn. 4:1 John refers to those allegedly Christian teachers who denied the deity of Christ as false prophets.

2. They appear to be one of the flock (sheep's clothing) because they have some beliefs in common with the flock. On the surface, they appear to be "one of us"; that is what gives them access and makes them so dangerous (see 2 Cor. 11:13-15; Gal. 1:6-7; Col. 2:8, 16-19; 2 Thess. 2:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 2 Pet. 2:1-3, 13-22; 1 Jn. 2:3-6, 18-19; 2 Jn. 7-9; Jude 4, 12-13).

3. But inwardly they are ravenous wolves. They are not merely an annoyance; they are spiritually destructive! A Christian can lose his or her soul by following a false teacher (see 1 Cor. 15:1-3; Gal. 5:2-4; 2 Tim. 2:14-18; 2 Pet. 2:17-22; 1 Jn. 2:22-26; 2 Jn. 7-9). That is why elders must be skillful in teaching (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:9). They must be able to protect the

flock from heresy. By analogy to Timothy, the same holds true for teachers (2 Tim. 2:15, 24). The fact elders and teachers have this responsibility does not relieve Christians of their personal responsibility.

4. This does not mean that every wrong belief puts one in jeopardy. Not all doctrinal issues are clear enough or central enough to be salvation issues.

5. In general, they are recognized by the fact they bear bad fruit. Though fruit can include the things people say or teach (e.g., Mat. 12:33-35), here I think the focus is on their conduct. The meaning is that their conduct is *unusually* sinful.

a. We all sin, but their sinfulness stands out. This does not apply to every type of false prophet. For instance, JW's deny the deity of Christ but do not encourage sinful living.

b. I think Jesus was speaking specifically of libertines or antinomians, those who taught that God is not concerned with one's earthly conduct. Jude 4 is a clear reference to such people: "They are godless men who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality . . ." See also, 2 Pet. 2:13-15; 1 Jn. 2:4-6. This understanding fits with vv. 21-23.

6. These false prophets claimed to be disciples and to have performed powerful deeds in Christ's name, but they ignored God's will for their lives; they were workers of lawlessness (vv. 21-23). Despite their lip service to Christ, they will face judgment for rejecting his will, for rejecting discipleship. No works, however grand, can save a rebel because one is saved by faith not by works, and the rebel by definition lacks saving faith. See Jas. 2:14-26.

7. Given that the rebel lacks saving faith and thus a relationship with the Lord, how could a rebel come to believe he had prophesied, exorcised, and worked miracles?

a. Maybe he simply had delusions of grandeur about his actions. But maybe he actually did something dramatic rather than simply imagining that he did. David Turner remarks (p. 219, n. 12): "It is clear from many biblical texts that supernatural phenomena must not be equated with genuine faith and divine endorsement. Cf. Matt: 24:23-26; Exod. 7:11, 22; 8:17, 18; Deut. 13:1-5; Acts 8:9-24; 13:6-12; 19:13-17; 2 Thess. 2:9-10; Rev. 13:13-15." As Leon Morris notes (p. 181), there can be "lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9).

b. Regarding exorcism, perhaps the mere name of Jesus struck such terror in some demons that they fled regardless of whether the one invoking it was a disciple. Whatever the status of the exorcists in Mk. 9:38, we know from Acts 19:13 that even some Jewish exorcists had taken to invoking Jesus' name, though in that particular case things didn't turn out too well for them.

c. Another possibility regarding exorcism by these rebels (assuming they simply were not deluded) is that the demons fled (or pretended to) to give a false impression that the non-Christian exorcist was of God. I don't think that possibility is excluded by Jesus'

argument in defense of his exorcism that a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. In that statement he was responding to the Pharisees' charge that he drives out demons by Beelzebub, which charge assumes an assertion of power by Beelzebub over the demons. They were not considering the possibility of a demonic/Satanic subterfuge, but if they had been, Jesus' following statement would have neutralized that charge: "And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?"

C. Kingdom Living: The Wise Man's Choice (Mat. 7:24-27)

1. Those who become disciples, who submit to the lordship of Christ, build their house on the rock. It will withstand the storm of judgment.

2. Those who choose to reject the lordship of Christ, build their house on sand. It will suffer destruction in the judgment (e.g., Mat. 13:47-50).