

A Study of

# The Sermon on the Mount

Class notes compiled by  
Jason T. Carter

**A STUDY OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT**

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**THANK YOU**

I continue to be impressed but not surprised by the spiritual maturity of the young people at Point Pleasant church of Christ. They love to study the Word and to dig deep into the Truth, just as their parents have taught them. The students are to be commended for their efforts; the parents are to be commended for their commitment to raising them in the Lord's way. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of the spiritual growth of the group on Sunday mornings.

Additional study materials are available, free of charge, at [www.ConcerningJesus.com](http://www.ConcerningJesus.com).

**FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Boles, H. Leo. (1952). *A Commentary on The Gospel According to Matthew*. Nashville, TN: The Gospel Advocate Company. [Online at [http://www.restorationlibrary.com/library/BCM/BCM\\_SIPDF.pdf](http://www.restorationlibrary.com/library/BCM/BCM_SIPDF.pdf)]

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## THE CHARACTER OF THE KINGDOM'S CITIZENS

## Matthew 5:1-12

Matthew begins his account of the gospel with the genealogy of Jesus and the birth of the Savior, followed by the ministry of John the Baptist. He tells of Jesus' baptism, His temptation, and the beginning of His ministry. After John's imprisonment, Jesus calls disciples to follow Him. Matthew then writes, "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people" (Matthew 4:23). Large crowds followed Jesus to hear what He had to say, and that is what brings us to the Sermon on the Mount.

**Read Matthew 5:1-3.** Jesus starts His Sermon on the Mount with a series of "beatitudes," related to the traits of those who are seeking God's righteousness. Each saying pairs an individual's character to a promise from the Father.

The first beatitude proclaims that the "poor in spirit" are "blessed," meaning "happy." What does "poor in spirit" mean? "By the poor in spirit are meant those who are sensible of spiritual destitution, and who long for a better spiritual state. The kingdom of heaven is theirs because they are the class who seek it, and who, when once admitted, abide in it."<sup>1</sup> Read Luke 18:9-14. Which man was "poor in spirit"? How would the religious elite of Jesus' day react to this "blessed" saying? "The Jews looked upon wealth as being one of the chief elements of prosperity which was proof that its possessor was the object of God's special favors."<sup>2</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:4.** What does "blessed" mean? What does it mean to mourn? Isn't this a paradox? Throughout the Scriptures, we see what we would consider negative events lead to positive results. Read Romans 5:3-4 (tribulation → perseverance → hope), Hebrews 12:11 (chastening → peaceable fruit of righteousness), 2 Corinthians 7:10 (godly sorrow → repentance leading to salvation), James 1:2-3 (trials/testing of faith → patience).

The mourning under consideration does not refer to everyday sorrows, as Paul tells us that "the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Rather, this is "those who mourn in reference to sin. 'They shall be comforted' because now there is an ample provision made for pardon."<sup>3</sup> Read Romans 5:8-11. We no longer have to mourn over our hopelessness, but "rejoice" that "through (Christ) we have now received the reconciliation."

**Read Matthew 5:5.** What does "meek" mean? Strong's Concordance defines it, "mild, gentle." Boles writes, "The meek are those who suffer in love, or love in patience; they are those who in the strength of love, boldly yet meekly, meekly yet boldly, bear injustice, and thereby conquer. Meekness is opposed to arrogance; meekness is a spirit the opposite of the ambitious and self-seeking ones which is characteristic of men of the world."<sup>4</sup> This was the spirit of Christ Himself (Matthew 11:29), who we would do well to emulate.

The promise that "they shall inherit the earth" could have a double meaning. "They enjoy it more fully in this life....Because, more than any others, they enjoy *whatever* God sends. The wicked, in their rush to possess, usually miss or overlook the best of this world, or else, having

<sup>1</sup> McGarvey, J.W. (1875). *The New Testament Commentary, Vol. I – Matthew and Mark*. Chase & Hall, page 49. [Online at <http://icotb.org/resources/Matt-hew-Mark-McGarvey.pdf>]

<sup>2</sup> Boles, H. Leo. (1952). *A Commentary on The Gospel According to Matthew*. Nashville, TN: The Gospel Advocate Company, pages 120-121. [Online at <http://www.restorationlibrary.c>

[om/library/BCM/BCM\\_SIPDF.pdf](http://www.restorationlibrary.com/library/BCM/BCM_SIPDF.pdf)]

<sup>3</sup> McGarvey, page 49.

<sup>4</sup> Boles, page 122.

seen it, they refuse to pay the price to gain it, or having gained it, they are miserable.”<sup>5</sup> More important than the blessings of this physical life, however, are the spiritual blessings available to the follower of Christ. “The meek will enjoy the temporal blessings more than others and finally will triumph over the earth in the kingdom of God.”<sup>6</sup> “Possibly, the Savior also alludes to the final possession by the saints of the new earth.”<sup>7</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:6.** What do you do when you are hungry or thirsty? What is more satisfying, a meal with protein or some salty snacks? When a person eats junk food, he does not receive proper nutrition for his body. Likewise, when a person feeds on spiritual junk food, such as the writings or speeches of “feel good” false teachers like Joel Osteen, they will not receive the proper spiritual nutrition.

Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” “‘Righteousness,’ in the scriptural view, means keeping God’s commandments (Luke 1:6); is revealed in the gospel (Romans 1:17); and may be obtained in only one way, namely, by obedience to God’s commandments, all of which ‘are’ righteousness (Psalms 119:172).”<sup>8</sup> Fowler notes that the verbs in this verse are “present participles” which “probably express a continuing, constantly-felt longing.”<sup>9</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:7.** It has been said that grace is getting what you do not deserve, while mercy is not getting what you do deserve. How many people can say they *deserve* salvation? Read Isaiah 59:2; Romans 3:23. Without God’s mercy, we are without hope. But God provides mercy to those who extend mercy. Read Proverbs 14:21; James 2:13; Matthew 18:21-35.

**Read Matthew 5:8.** Purity of heart is a common theme throughout the Scriptures. Can you think of anything more pure than the heart of a child? Read Matthew 18:1-4; Philippians 4:8; 2 Timothy 2:22; 1 Peter 1:22. “This is put in contrast with mere external or bodily purification, about which the Jews, and especially the Pharisees, were very scrupulous. (Matt. 23:25, 28)”<sup>10</sup>

“Jesus’ challenged [sic] to His and any age is simply: ‘How very badly do you want to see God? Are you willing, then, to open up your inmost thoughts, your best-hidden desires, your secret designs for the inspection of God? How happy is that man who so lives that at any moment he could bare his heart to the eye of God without shame. Who is willing to pay this price to enter the kingdom?’”<sup>11</sup>

“*They shall see God* ... This is true in two ways. (1) The pure in heart shall see God by faith, just as Moses endured, ‘as seeing him who is invisible’ (Heb. 11:27). (2) They shall see God and Christ Jesus in the eternal world (Rev. 22:4; 1 John 3:2).”<sup>12</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:9.** The apostle Paul frequently extended the grace and peace of God to the recipients of each of his epistles, except one, if he was the writer of Hebrews (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3). Christians are to strive for peace with others in this world (Romans 12:18), and to pray for our rulers so that we might accomplish that (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Peace is listed among the qualities of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). God is the author of peace (1 Corinthians 14:33).

<sup>5</sup> Fowler, Harold. (1968). *The Gospel of Matthew, Volume I*. Joplin, MO: College Press, page 214. [Online at <http://icotb.org/resources/Matt-hewVol1.pdf>]

<sup>6</sup> Boles, page 122.

<sup>7</sup> McGarvey, page 49.

<sup>8</sup> Coffman, James Burton. (1984) *Matthew*. Abilene, TX: ACU Press, page 53. [Online at

<http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/matthew.html>]

<sup>9</sup> Fowler, page 215.

<sup>10</sup> Boles, page 124.

<sup>11</sup> Fowler, page 219.

<sup>12</sup> Coffman, page 54.

Spiritually, the greatest peace available is that between God and man (Romans 5:1-2). How can one become a spiritual peacemaker? By fulfilling the Lord's command to make disciples, teaching the lost how they can be saved by obeying His simple commands (Matthew 28:19-20). Evangelism is the greatest form of peacemaking in which a Christian can participate.

**Read Matthew 5:10-12.** God's children face persecutions frequently, and the Lord says we should "rejoice and be exceedingly glad" when we face those difficult situations. "The blessing is pronounced upon those who are 'persecuted for righteousness' sake,' and not those who are persecuted for their opinions or their misbehavior."<sup>13</sup> What is the promise for those who overcome oppression? "Great is your reward in heaven." Where else do we read of great promises from Christ for those who persevere? Read Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-29; 3:5, 12, 21.

Paul writes, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). Are persecutions a sure sign that we are doing the Lord's will? Can we not also suffer if we are doing the wrong thing? Read 1 Peter 3:13-17; 4:15-16. How can we know if we are following God? Read 1 Peter 4:19.

"We are not to understand that a man who possesses any one of the enumerated traits of character, and is void of the others, will enjoy the corresponding blessing; that, for example, the peacemaker shall be called a child of God, though neither merciful nor pure in heart; but, rather, that the seven specifications are to be found in a single person—thus making up the perfect character who shall receive in their fullness all of the specified blessings. It is impossible to imagine a character more admirable. On the other hand, if we imagine a man the opposite of all this—proud in spirit, arrogant in demeanor, taking pleasure in sin, despising righteousness, unmerciful, foul at heart, and a disturber of the peace—we have the utmost extreme of the *cursedness* to which sin can bring down a human being."<sup>14</sup>

### Review and Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be "blessed"?
2. How would the scribes and Pharisees react to some of these beatitudes?
3. What was wrong with the Pharisees' idea of righteousness, as opposed to Jesus' meaning? Read Romans 10:1-3; 12:3.
4. How should we view our spiritual condition in light of God's righteousness?
5. What are some of the benefits of being "pure in heart"?
6. Does peacemaking forbid one from defending himself, his family, or his country?
7. Considering all the promises made by God, is it worth the effort to develop this character? Is it worth the persecutions and suffering in this life?
8. Examine yourself. Which of these qualities do you need to improve in your life? What steps can you take to make it happen, starting today?

<sup>13</sup> Boles, page 125.

<sup>14</sup> McGarvey, page 51.

## OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD

## Matthew 5:13-16

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote that Christians were “not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world” (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). He reminded the Ephesians that before their conversion, “you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:12-13).

How did those Christians become Christians? “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?...So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:14,17). It has been said that every Christian is a walking sermon, so we should carefully consider our conduct when we are in the company of those who are outside the church. Our example and influence could be what leads them to Christ, but it could also be what drives them away.

With these things in mind, let us consider the Lord’s teaching as it refers to His disciples’ relationship to the world.

**Read Matthew 5:13.** Salt serves two purposes; it is used for flavoring and for preservation. One writer paraphrased and expanded on the thought of this verse: “You are the world’s salt; you stand in the same relation to the world as does salt to meat which is decomposing. But if salt becomes insipid or tasteless, how is its saltiness to be restored or the meat to be preserved? That is, if you lose your power to preserve from moral corruption, how could you restore that lost power? And how would the world, in that case, be preserved from corruption, decay and death? Just as insipid salt is thus useless and deserved to be thrown out on the streets to be trampled by men, likewise, you too would be morally good for nothing to God, and would deserve all the contempt that men could heap upon you.”<sup>15</sup>

Salt must actually come into contact with something to affect it; sitting in a salt shaker (or in a church building) will not help the meat (or the world) that it is supposed to preserve or flavor. Jesus never intended for His people to isolate themselves from the world, but we need to be sure we are influencing it rather than being influenced by the world. Romans 12:1-2, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

“A little more salt (true followers of God) would have preserved Sodom and Gomorrah from destruction (Gen. 18:32). The world at large little realizes the debt of gratitude that is owed by the whole race to that relatively small percentage who truly walk in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord.”<sup>16</sup> What other Biblical and historical examples do we have of groups being destroyed because of a lack of faith and obedience? “There was not salt enough in the antediluvian world, nor in the city of Sodom, nor in the tribes of Canaan, to save them.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Fowler, page 231.

<sup>16</sup> Coffman, page 58.

<sup>17</sup> McGarvey, page 51.

“Jesus wants a man whose personal purity CONTROLS the moral tone of any group in which he happens to be, or by whose presence in a given situation he defeats the corruption of the morals of others.”<sup>18</sup>

In Luke 14:34-35, Christ says that salt that “has lost its flavor...is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out.” “Many things which have become corrupt or decomposed are useful for making fertilizer to throw on the land. But savorless salt is not even of this much use in that it destroys fertility wherever it be thrown.”<sup>19</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:14.** Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). The apostle John said, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:4-5). When a man becomes a disciple, he escapes the darkness of this world, leaving it behind. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord” (Ephesians 5:8).

“His disciples, according to Jesus’ metaphor here, do not merely reflect His light, but burn as lamps lit from His fire. (Jn. 12:36; Phil. 2:14-16; I Th. 5:4-8; cf. Ro. 2:19)”<sup>20</sup> “Light is not only opposed to darkness, but it overcomes it; it dispels darkness; so the truth and holiness possessed by the disciples of Jesus, who is the true light, dispel to world’s darkness, by overcoming its ignorance and sin.”<sup>21</sup> The light emanating from the Lord’s disciples will be visible to all; it cannot be hidden.

**Read Matthew 5:15.** “*On a hill...on the stand:* these phrases bespeak the most advantageous position for performing this greatly needed service....But Jesus will have nothing of covert discipleship. He knows that we are tempted to pretend not to be salt, so as not to irritate the rotting, selfish flesh around us, for such annoyance will mean persecution for us. It is a temptation to scurry about searching for anything that will hide our light, or to wish that our city were not so clearly visible.”<sup>22</sup>

The Christian is forbidden from hiding his light. His godly influence should be felt by all those who are around him, and he should not be embarrassed by his calling. “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 10:32-33).

“But why must the disciple stand out so publicly even if it means he will be an easy target for abuse? So that lost men may look up and see a Christian standing firm against the storm of life’s uncertainties, take courage and rejoice that righteousness and true life are yet to be had. Why stand? Because some might repent and be saved because of the unadulterated Christian witness of one godly man who dared to stand. Why stand? Because in the message of Christ Christians have wisdom that is indispensable for solving humanity’s greatest questions.”<sup>23</sup>

The light should be a prominent feature of the Christian’s life. It is to be placed “on a lampstand.” “And, pray tell, what can this be? It is nothing less than the church of Jesus Christ, namely, the local congregation. Revelation 1:20 identifies the lampstands as the churches.”<sup>24</sup> Every disciple should be personally and actively involved in some aspect of the work of the local church, be it evangelism, edification, or benevolence.

**Read Matthew 5:16.** Coffman quotes Marshall Keeble’s explanation here, “‘The Bible does not say to *make* your light shine, but it says to let it shine!’ This, to be sure, forbids

<sup>18</sup> Fowler, page 232.

<sup>19</sup> Fowler, page 234.

<sup>20</sup> Fowler, page 235.

<sup>21</sup> Boles, page 128.

<sup>22</sup> Fowler, page 237.

<sup>23</sup> Fowler, pages 237-238.

<sup>24</sup> Coffman, page 59.

ostentation and boasting.”<sup>25</sup> McGarvey writes, “No ostentatious display of piety or righteousness is here enjoined, but the natural and unavoidable force of a good example, and the intended influence of our actions on the world.”<sup>26</sup> The force of the statement is clear: do not seek the praise of men, but do good so that God can be glorified. Our motives must be pure.

What about the “good works”? Are these things we are required to do in order to be saved? “It is noteworthy that Jesus never gave the slightest encouragement to the delusion that people are saved by faith ‘only’! Good works, from the very beginning, were considered to be a most necessary and primary requirement on the part of all who would truly follow Christ and would through him hope to have the abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom. (Matt. 19:17).”<sup>27</sup>

Paul declares, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). James writes, “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?...You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:20-22, 24).

### **Review and Discussion Questions**

1. Can a Christian avoid all contact with the outside world?
2. In what way are Christians “the salt of the earth”?
3. Name some Biblical examples of societies that have been preserved by a small number of faithful followers?
4. In what way are Christians “the light of the world”?
5. Why is spiritual light so important in the world?
6. To whom should we direct praise?
7. Everyone exerts an influence, whether good or bad (1 Timothy 5:24). What kind of influence have you been for those at school or work? For your family? For others in the church?
8. How can you let your light shine this coming week?

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<sup>25</sup> Coffman, page 59.

<sup>26</sup> McGarvey, page 52.

<sup>27</sup> Coffman, pages 59-60.



**“BUT I SAY TO YOU” – MURDER**  
**Matthew 5:17-26**

Jesus, the Master Teacher, shows the importance of knowing one's audience in this passage. He realizes that much of the doctrine He is teaching, though it is from above, contradicts what many Jews were taught for their entire lives. He attempts to soften the soil, to prepare those whose hearts are right, those who hunger and thirst for truth. He has already taught things contrary to what they believed, and knew that many would find it difficult to discard long-held traditions that were in fact contrary to the commands of God (Matthew 15:1-20).

**Read Matthew 5:17-18.** Christ never intended to destroy the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill it. Coffman says that “the difference in ‘fulfilling’ and ‘destroying’ the Law of Moses was about the same as the difference between ‘paying off’ a promissory note and ‘repudiating’ it. In either case, it is effectively removed.”<sup>28</sup> Paul writes that Christ “wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).

“Instead of coming to destroy either the law or the prophets, Jesus came to fulfill all the types of the former and all the unfulfilled predictions of the latter. He fulfilled them partly in his own person, and partly by his administration of the affairs of his kingdom.”<sup>29</sup> “‘I am the exact meaning of all that God intended to say in the Old Testament!’ is Jesus’ bold, thrilling claim. Whoever reads the OT without seeing the mighty figure of Christ Jesus, just has not understood what he reads. (Cf. Act. 8:30-35)”<sup>30</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:19-20.** The Lord never encouraged anyone to disregard any of the Old Law while it was still in effect. There is, however, the warning that those who struggle with obedience under the Old Law will likely struggle with obedience to the commands of Christ. “The man who would break what he considered the small commandments of God, under one dispensation, would be proportionately disobedient under a better dispensation; for habits of disobedience once formed are not easily laid aside.”<sup>31</sup>

“Jesus here puts *doing* before *teaching*; this is the proper order; these are the two great things one can do; he can keep all of God’s commandments and teach others to keep them, or he can disobey them himself and encourage others to disobey them....It is bad to do wrong, but it is worse if in addition we teach others to do wrong.”<sup>32</sup>

Keep in mind again the audience that listened to Jesus’ teaching. As Jews, they would not dream of open rebellion against the edicts of God. With that in mind, consider Fowler’s observation that “Jesus refers not so much to that open disobedience or unblushing defiance of God’s government as to all the compromising and shrewd evasion of the force of God’s commands by those who profess to serve God. There are many ways to ‘loose or untie’ (*luein*) one from his obligation to the Law: through ignorant or wrong interpretations, by deliberate manipulation of the Law for selfish or ulterior motives, by cunningly devised rationalizations and justifications adopted as a means of escaping the guilt of violation. This subtle spirit of disobedience seeks to realize its desires just like the openly sinful, but it always maintains a cloak of respectability and superficial piety continually stretched to cover every act.”<sup>33</sup> Sadly, the same attitude can be seen today in many who claim to be followers of Christ.

Who were the religious elite of the day? The scribes and Pharisees saw themselves as the best of the best, but Jesus says that His followers must *exceed* the righteousness of these elites.

<sup>28</sup> Coffman, page 60.

<sup>29</sup> McGarvey, page 52.

<sup>30</sup> Fowler, page 243.

<sup>31</sup> McGarvey, page 53.

<sup>32</sup> Boles, page 132.

<sup>33</sup> Fowler, pages 249-250.

“The religion of the Pharisees, hence their righteousness, consisted of externals, ceremonials, rituals, liturgies, and formalities of many kinds, with little or no attention being paid to the condition of the heart.”<sup>34</sup> “Here again, Jesus contradicts the popular concept, not only of His day, but of every age: ‘Unless your religion excels that of the best men on earth you know, the doors of the kingdom are closed to you!’”<sup>35</sup>

What was wrong with Israel’s—and particularly the Pharisees’—righteousness? Listen to the apostle Paul, who was formerly, in his own words, “concerning the law, a Pharisee” (Philippians 3:5). “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:1-3).

**Read Matthew 5:21-22.** Jesus begins giving examples of how the righteousness of His followers can exceed that of the Jewish elite. Sure, they kept the Ten Commandments. “You shall not murder” is a clear-cut command, and there is not much gray area at all. But Jesus says there is more to it than the act of murder.

Why would someone want to murder another? When someone sins against us, there is often a feeling of resentment or even hatred. Hatred is the seed that grows into murder. The Lord says we should not even be angry with each other, or even call each other names. How difficult is this command?

The Psalmist wrote, “Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still” (Psalm 4:4). Paul quoted the first part of this, and adds, “Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:26-27). You have heard the adage, “Love the sinner, hate the sin.” Our attitude should be such that we may be disappointed and even angry with the actions of another, but don’t forget that he is still made in the image of God. We must attempt to bring the sinner to repentance so they can experience the grace and mercy of the Almighty (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20), and we must do so with a loving attitude (Ephesians 4:15).

“‘Raca’ is derived from the Hebrew ‘rak,’ which means to be empty or vain; it is an Aramæan term of contempt or reproach; it means a worthless fellow, empty-headed, and was an expression of anger; it was a step further than merely *thinking* murderous thoughts, it was *expressing in words* murderous intentions.”<sup>36</sup>

In reference to Gehenna, McGarvey explains, “The only fire certainly known to have been kindled there was the fire in which children were sacrificed to the god Moloch....It was the fire of idolatrous worship in the offering of human sacrifice which had given the valley its bad notoriety.”<sup>37</sup>

“The penalties arranged in precise order to correspond with the insults mentioned above are not to be understood as graduated penalties or punishments against crimes of more and more serious import; rather, they are to be understood as a three-fold reiteration of one overwhelming truth.”<sup>38</sup>

“The three grades of punishment are denoted by the terms ‘judgment,’ ‘council,’ and ‘hell of fire.’...The penalty of the ‘judgment’ was death for murder, which was inflicted with the sword; while the penalty of death sentenced by the Sanhedrin was inflicted by stoning; while the third grade of penalty inflicted by the civil law for the crime of murder was inflicted by exposing

<sup>34</sup> Coffman, page 61.

<sup>35</sup> Fowler, page 253.

<sup>36</sup> Boles, page 135.

<sup>37</sup> McGarvey, page 54.

<sup>38</sup> Coffman, page 63.

the dead body to the detestable valley described by ‘Gehenna’; this penalty made a death odious and revolting in the extreme.”<sup>39</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:23-24.** Trouble between brethren is so serious that it must be addressed if we are to have a proper relationship with God. In this text, the Lord says that amends must be made before one worships; “First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:24).

Elsewhere, Christ teaches, “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mark 11:25-26). Paul says that prayer must be made “without wrath” (1 Timothy 2:8). Hear the words of the apostle John, “He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:9-11). He also says, “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother....Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:10,15). Keep in mind the principle of old, “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

It is clear from these passages that “worship is not acceptable to God from any worshipper who harbors basic disobedience to any of God’s commands in his heart! (I Sam. 15:22; Psa. 40:6-8; 66:18; 51:16, 17; Prov. 15:8; 21:27; Isa. 1:11-15; 58:5, 6; 66:1-4; Jer. 6:16-20; 7:9, 10; Amos 5:21-24; Micah 6:6-8; Mk. 12:33; Rom. 15:5, 6; I Jn. 2:9; 3:17; 4:20) Reconciliation, as a supreme duty, becomes more important than all acts of worship, since continuing grudges, envy, malice and secret hatreds break that all-important relationship with God. Only the ‘pure in heart’ can truly worship God.”<sup>40</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:25-26.** “In this brief allegory one is supposed to have an adversary at law who has a just cause against him, and who will certainly gain a verdict when the case comes into court. He is advised to agree with this adversary; that is, to make reparation to him in advance of the trial and to prevent a trial. Jesus still has in his mind the preceding case of one who has given offense to his brother. Every such one is going to the final judgment, and will there be condemned unless he now becomes reconciled to his brother.”<sup>41</sup>

### Review and Discussion Questions

1. How did Christ take the Old Law out of the way?
2. How important is “doing” in relation to “teaching”?
3. Is it ever appropriate to be angry? Consider Ephesians 4:26-27, Psalm 97:10, and Romans 12:9 in your answer.
4. How does our relationship with others affect our relationship with God?
5. Do you have any reparations to make before you worship?

<sup>39</sup> Boles, page 136.

<sup>40</sup> Fowler, page 268.

<sup>41</sup> McGarvey, page 55.

**“BUT I SAY TO YOU” – ADULTERY****Matthew 5:27-32**

Jesus pronounced this beatitude at the beginning of His sermon: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). A heart that is pure is of utmost importance to the Almighty. Paul wrote by inspiration, “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). With these admonitions in mind, consider the Lord’s teaching on marriage, lust, and adultery in Matthew 5:27-32.

**Read Matthew 5:27.** Marriage is the most intimate and trusting relationship possible between two people. “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4). The act of adultery can destroy that intimacy and trust. God included a prohibition against adultery in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14), but it was recognized as a sinful act long before Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai.

Going back to the time of Joseph in Egypt, while he was overseer of Potiphar’s house, the temptation to commit adultery was presented to this young man of God. Potiphar’s wife repeatedly tried to seduce Joseph, but his response showed the sinfulness of her proposal. “But he refused and said to his master’s wife, ‘Look, my master does not know what is with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you are his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’” (Genesis 39:8-9).

The penalty for adultery under the Old Law was death. “If any man is found lying with a woman married to a husband, then both of them shall die—the man that lay with the woman, and the woman; so you shall put away the evil from Israel” (Deuteronomy 22:22).

The scribes and Pharisees tested Jesus on this point. “Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned, But what do You say?’ This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.’ And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more’” (John 8:3-11).

Why did Christ refuse to pass judgment on this woman? Why was only the woman brought to Jesus? Where was the man with whom she was caught? The Law clearly states that “both of them shall die” (Deuteronomy 22:22).

**Read Matthew 5:28.** Just as anger is the root cause of murder, lust is the root cause of adultery. Jesus warns against lust because that is the seed of the act of adultery. “The law punished the overt act of sin, and did not reach any further....Jesus goes behind the act and legislates against the thoughts which precede the act.”<sup>42</sup> “That which is condemned is not a look of admiration or of affection, but a look of lust.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Boles, page 139.

<sup>43</sup> McGarvey, page 55.

In our society, clothing is tighter and more skin is exposed than ever before. Those who struggle with lustful thoughts are at a definite disadvantage, because immodesty is embraced by the world; there seems to be no shame among those who are outside the church, and even some who are Christians. “In this commandment, just as in the case of the Fifth, Jesus was more concerned with antecedents than with overt sins. Adultery proceeds from impure thinking; and in this passage Christ’s law appears far higher and more discerning than the Decalogue.”<sup>44</sup>

Paul writes, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Corinthians 10:4-6). As Christians, we are expected to control our desires and even our thoughts. This is not something that can be accomplished overnight, but with much prayer and study.

We must also be cautious that we are not the cause of someone else’s sin. Remember that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. What type of influence are we wielding? Are we—willingly or not—causing others to stumble in their walk? Should we consider the way we dress, and talk, and act around those who are of the opposite sex? “Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother’s way” (Romans 14:13). We cannot blame another for our own sin, but we also must take care that we are not tempting someone to sin.

**Read Matthew 5:29-30.** How vital is it that we avoid sin? Knowing the result of sin (Isaiah 59:2; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10), should we not take every precaution against it? Jesus speaks hyperbolically here, telling His disciples that it is better to lose a part of your body in this life than your soul in eternity. Does Jesus actually mean that we should gouge out our eyes or chop off our hands? Of course not, but the thrust of His saying is this: avoid the temptation to sin at all costs! “Jesus’ word is to be taken figuratively but seriously.”<sup>45</sup> Be honest with yourself, identify your weaknesses, and stay away from situations that will put you in a compromising position. “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

There are certainly ways to avoid such situations. “Positive action helps to break the spell of some allurements. Sometimes flight is best. (Gen. 39; II Tim. 2:22) Plunging into the service of others does not allow time for that idleness in which the self-indulgent imagination may seek satisfaction.”<sup>46</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:31-32.** Jesus uses this opportunity to teach on the harmful effects of divorce. While God regulated divorce through Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, He also says through Malachi that He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Jesus explains, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8). The scribes and Pharisees looked to the Law of Moses, but Jesus went even further back to see what God’s intention was “from the beginning.” “Observe that the only divine law that ever spoke on the subject of divorce did not command it. Divorce was merely tolerated as representing men’s yet unconverted hearts (19:8) and was regulated to prevent grosser inhumanities.”<sup>47</sup>

“And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So then, they are no

<sup>44</sup> Coffman, page 66.

<sup>46</sup> Fowler, page 279.

<sup>45</sup> Fowler, page 276.

<sup>47</sup> Fowler, page 279.

longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6).

In both passages, Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:9, Christ authoritatively states that there is only one exception; only one acceptable reason for divorce and subsequent remarriage. This is one verse in which the New King James Version is not as accurate as it needs to be; “sexual immorality” is not a precise enough translation. There are many sins that could be classified as “sexual immorality,” but Jesus uses a very specific word here. The Greek word is *porneia*, and is defined as “fornication.” It is properly translated as such in the King James Version and the American Standard Version, while the New King James Version and New International Version dilute the meaning with the phrase, “sexual immorality.” The New American Standard Version uses the word “unchastity.”

In the case of fornication, God permits divorce. Considering that He hates divorce (Malachi 2:16), this shows how serious the sin of adultery is. As stated earlier, adultery robs the marriage relationship of the trust and intimacy that God intended for a husband and wife.

The man who divorces his wife for reasons other than fornication “causes her to commit adultery.” How does he do this? By putting in front of her the temptation to fulfill sexual desires outside the marriage relationship, or even to remarry, since a subsequent marriage would be considered adulterous in the sight of God.

### **Review and Discussion Questions**

1. How are Jesus’ teachings on hatred and murder similar to his teachings on lust and adultery?
2. What is meant by “lust”? Does this mean we cannot admire or acknowledge physical beauty in another human being?
3. What blessing is associated with a pure heart?
4. What should a Christian do when he or she is tempted, either by lust or another sin?
5. What is the effect of adultery on a marriage?
6. What is the only exception for divorce and remarriage according to Christ?
7. Be sure you understand Jesus’ doctrine on divorce before you get married! Jesus said, “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” What does that mean?

**“BUT I SAY TO YOU” – OATHS & REVENGE****Matthew 5:33-48**

**Read Matthew 5:33.** When Jesus spoke of murder and adultery, he quoted from the Ten Commandments that were handed down to Moses on Mt. Sinai: “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13), and, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). Here, the Lord moves to another part of the Old Law. Moses, relaying God’s command to the heads of the tribes, said, “If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth” (Numbers 30:2; cf. Deuteronomy 23:21). In Leviticus, 19:12, it is written, “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.”

“Under the interpretation of the Pharisees, the divine prohibition was against ‘swearing’ a lie. This, in practice, meant that as long as one had not been properly ‘sworn in,’ or as long as one refused to deliver a formal oath, the offender could tell as many lies as he would without incurring guilt under the Law! It goes without saying that that interpretation was not of God, but it was only of sinful men. The glory of Jesus Christ is that he stripped off those superficial and shallow devices for circumventing God’s Law and made the truth to shine before all men.”<sup>48</sup>

One of the problems with the Pharisaical perversion is found in Leviticus, immediately prior to the verse quoted above. “‘You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another’” (Leviticus 19:11). There is nothing whatsoever about swearing an oath in the statement, “You shall not...lie to one another.” Elsewhere, Jesus rebukes the Jewish elite for making such petty distinctions between their oaths, whether they are sworn by the temple or the gold of the temple, by the altar or the gift on the altar (cf. Matthew 23:16-22).

**Read Matthew 5:34-36.** By what, then, should we swear? You may have heard people say something to the effect of, “I swear on my mother’s grave,” or even, “Cross my heart and hope to die.” The Savior warns against making such flippant oaths. Don’t swear by heaven or anything in it; don’t swear by earth or anything on it; don’t swear by any part of yourself. You do not have any power over such things if you do not follow through with your oath. Everything in heaven and on earth belongs to God, and you have no power over yourself to “make one hair white or black.”

Are oaths taken in a court of law forbidden by Jesus in this passage? There is some disagreement on this point among brethren, and there are compelling arguments on both sides. “Many courts allow the conscientious adherent to our Saviour’s words in this place the privilege of ‘affirming under the penalties of perjury’ instead of taking the customary oath.”<sup>49</sup>

It should be noted, however, that all oaths are not forbidden in this passage. “What we style the judicial oaths of the Law of Moses, then were not included in the prohibition. This conclusion is also reached when we interpret the prohibition in the light of authoritative examples. God himself ‘because he could swear by no greater swore by himself’ in confirming the promise to Abraham (Heb VI 13) and he did the same in declaring the priesthood of Christ (Heb VII 21). Jesus answered to an oath before the Sanhedrin—Caiaphas administering the oath in the form, ‘I adjure thee by the living God’ (Matt XXVI 63). Paul also made oath to the Corinthian Church saying, ‘I call upon God as a witness on my soul that to spare you I came not as yet to Corinth’ (2 Cor I 23. See also Rom I 9, Gal I 20, Phil I 8, 1 Cor XV 31, Rev X 5,6). We conclude then that judicial oaths and oaths taken in the name of God on occasions of solemn

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<sup>48</sup> Coffman, page 67.

<sup>49</sup> Coffman, page 68.

religious importance are not included in the prohibition, but as these are the only exceptions found in the Scriptures, we conclude that all other oaths are forbidden.”<sup>50</sup>

David Lipscomb was one who disagreed with the taking of any oaths, even in a court of law. “The oaths of which Jesus spoke here seem to be made to the Lord, and to him they are to be performed. This would indicate vows made to God; yet the language, ‘swear not at all,’ seems to prohibit all oaths, either judicial or those made to God. The oath of confirmation is an appeal to God to visit wrath upon one if one does not tell the truth. This seems to violate the divine law. The courts allow an affirmation without calling on the name of God.”<sup>51</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:37.** The phrase, “I swear to God,” is so widely and frivolously used that it may be considered a form of taking the Almighty’s name in vain. When we refer to the Lord, it should always be with the utmost respect. “Careless and thoughtless use of God’s Name is all the more damnable because it implies that kind of selfishness which cares more for self than for God’s holiness. The excuse that the oath is meaningless (‘I did not mean anything by it!’) carries with it a very serious confession that the speaker holds God in such contempt that he may throw around God’s Name with impunity. Profanity is nothing but making common and vulgar (profane) what must be regarded with reverence.”<sup>52</sup> Instead of “swearing to God” over unimportant matters, follow the words of Jesus: “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’” Christians should be known as the most honest people on the planet, so much that those who know you would never dare to ask you to swear or take an oath to prove you are telling the truth. Let your word be your bond.

**Read Matthew 5:38.** This principle is found in Leviticus 24:19-20, where God says to Moses, “If a man causes disfigurement of his neighbor, as he has done, so shall it be done to him—fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; as he has caused disfigurement of a man, so shall it be done to him.” There was no misapplication or misinterpretation of God’s rule, but Christ speaks against the spirit of retaliation that was—and still is—harbored by so many.

God’s Law was better than the human principles that preceded it. “The law of the jungle was far different: (1) If you kill my child, I will kill all your children, your wife, your brothers, your whole generation! (2) If you knock out my tooth (or eye), I will knock out ALL of yours and kill you also! Thus, the ancient Law of the Hebrews was a vast improvement in that it strictly limited punitive action to the extent of the original injury or loss that precipitated it.”<sup>53</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:39-41.** Jesus compels His people to rise above revenge and retaliation. “In what sense may we not resist? In the sense of doing evil for evil; we are not to oppose violence with violence; we are not to ‘fight fire with fire’; ‘be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good,’ is the method that Christians are to use in opposing evil; our warfare is to overcome, not evil with evil, but evil with good.”<sup>54</sup>

Christ’s doctrine in this instance does not refer to self-defense, but to vengeance for wrongs committed. “The Mosaic Law limited retaliation to exact punishment measured according to the wrong done. Jesus completely abolishes that spirit of self-vindication which makes such a law necessary, giving four examples: 1. Do not retaliate against insults. 2. Surrender your right to litigate over trifles. 3. Help generously more than is asked. 4. Return good for evil by intelligent liberality.”<sup>55</sup>

It is not within an individual’s right to exact vengeance upon others when we have been personally attacked. That responsibility belongs to the governing authorities in this life (Romans 13:4), and to God in the next (Romans 12:19). We must, however, “earnestly contend for the

<sup>50</sup> McGarvey, page 57.

<sup>51</sup> Boles, page 146.

<sup>52</sup> Fowler, page 295.

<sup>53</sup> Coffman, page 69.

<sup>54</sup> Boles, page 147.

<sup>55</sup> Fowler, page 298.



faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3), following the example of the apostles in their opposition to directives that would violate our duty to evangelize as commanded by the Lord (Acts 5:29-32; Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2).

**Read Matthew 5:42.** In this, Jesus commands liberality but not recklessness. God has made us stewards of every physical blessing we have, and to squander our resources is a dangerous action. We should be liberal in helping those in need; be cautious in catering to those in greed. “Giving or lending to the encouragement of vice or indolence can not, of course, be here included.”<sup>56</sup> “Jesus’ rule must never be interpreted so as to encourage laziness, shiftlessness or greed. Note II Th. 3:6-15 where the practical expression of ‘disorderliness’ is shameless laziness and is worthy of practical excommunication. Paul soundly condemns those busybodies who try to ‘go around work,’ (*periergadzomenous*) and urges that they be not fed.”<sup>57</sup>

We must always consider the context of what we read, not only in the immediate sense, but also in the sense of the entirety of God’s Word. “Did Christ mean that a Christian by lending to all comers should suffer the plundering of all his goods? Certainly, the apostolic church did not operate on any such premise. We can only conclude that Christ was teaching a basic truth in this place, namely, that it is better to invest in people by helping and befriending them, than it is to invest in hoarding treasures for one’s self. Of that there can be no doubt.”<sup>58</sup>

“Jesus encourages this liberality to respond to genuine needs: widows and orphans (Jas. 1:27), an unfortunate (Jas. 2:14-17; I Jn. 3:17), or someone really hungry, cold, ill-clad, sick or in prison (Mt. 25:35-45). Sometimes gainful employment is the most honorable help to give; other times, food, clothing, etc. according to the need. (See Ac. 11:27-30; Ro. 15:25-28, 31; II Cor. 8, 9; Eph. 4:23; Gal. 6:10, for wider application.)”<sup>59</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:43.** Leviticus 19:18 says, “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.” Where are we told we should hate our enemies? There are several references to enemies who will hate God’s people (Leviticus 26:17; Numbers 10:35; Deuteronomy 30:7; Psalm 21:8; 83:2), and of course we should hate sinful behaviors just as God Himself does (Proverbs 6:16-19), but God never commands His people to hate others.

**Read Matthew 5:44-47.** Proverbs teaches that we are to care for our enemies. Proverbs 25:21-22 reads, “If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for so you will heap coals of fire on his head, and the Lord will reward you.” God’s people must rise above the standard of the world and live up to Christ’s standard. “Even the tax collectors” take care of their friends and brothers; we must be better than those in the world because God expects us to be better. “Implicit in these words is the proclamation that Christians are different; they love more than others, will do more than others, and are in fact better in every way than others. Their righteousness is a matter of going beyond, giving the cloak also, going the second mile, turning the other cheek, loving enemies, praying for those who persecute them, and, in short, being ‘sons of your Father who is in heaven’ (v. 45).”<sup>60</sup>

**Read Matthew 5:48.** “It is, of course, impossible for man to attain to this perfection; yet any thing short of it is short of what we ought to be.”<sup>61</sup> We must continually strive to be better, to do better, to serve better, to live better. This was the apostle Paul’s attitude, and it should be ours as well. Philippians 3:12-14, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are

<sup>56</sup> McGarvey, page 59.

<sup>57</sup> Fowler, page 304.

<sup>58</sup> Coffman, page 70.

<sup>59</sup> Fowler, page 304.

<sup>60</sup> Coffman, page 71.

<sup>61</sup> McGarvey, page 61.

behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

**Review and Discussion Questions**

1. Why should a Christian avoid insincere swearing or taking oaths flippantly?
2. How do the examples of the Father, the Son, and Paul help us understand the Lord’s teaching on swearing?
3. Who has the authority to exact vengeance in this life? In the next?
4. Does Christ teach against self-defense in this passage? If not, what is He teaching?
5. Should we show preference to Christians when helping others? Consider Galatians 6:10.
6. When should we refuse aid to another person?
7. Who should the child of God hate? What should the child of God hate?
8. What must the disciple strive to attain?

## THE MOTIVATION BEHIND OUR ACTIONS

## Matthew 6:1-18

“He has told his disciples that their ‘righteousness’ must ‘exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees’ or else they would have no place in the kingdom of heaven. In this section he presents the three great forms in which self-righteousness and hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees manifested itself; they were ‘almsgiving,’ ‘prayer,’ and ‘fasting.’ These were the three principal manifestations of practical piety among the Jews, and were abused by the Pharisees to exhibit their own superior piety. The Pharisees thought that they had attained the highest eminence in these three phases of their religious life.”<sup>62</sup>

**Read Matthew 6:1-4.** Christ’s teaching here is crystal clear, yet ignored by so many among God’s people. Our motivation in doing good for others should be to help them, not to receive praise for ourselves. The concept is so easy to grasp that worldly people often follow it, and their deeds remain unknown for years. The late George Michael, who was known as much for his sinful sexual deviancy and run-ins with the law as his musical career, was a very charitable person. Many of the good deeds that he performed were done under the condition that there would be no publicity, either ahead of or after the fact. It was not until his death that people began to come forward and speak of his many charitable contributions and private visits with fans. If only more children of God could grasp this simple concept, the kingdom would grow by leaps and bounds.

“‘Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth’ is a very striking expression. Once heard it is never forgotten; neither is it easily misunderstood, but it may be misapplied. While it very emphatically condemns all attempts to publish abroad our almsgiving, it does not condemn the publication of it for a proper purpose by others. Jesus, in order to teach a good lesson, published the liberality of the poor widow (Mark xii. 41-44); and Luke, in order to stimulate the liberality of others, made public mention of the benevolence of Barnabas. (Acts iv. 36, 37.) Even in this however, we must be on our guard, lest we tempt men to give for the sake of the notoriety with which they expect other to reward them.”<sup>63</sup>

“Take care not to perform your religious duties in public with an eye to being noticed by others.”<sup>64</sup> “If we would free ourselves from being overly conscious of men’s praise, rather than invite their attention to what we do, we must not even give our actions the whole of our own attention. Thus, the hands have absolutely nothing to do with our giving, any more than they cause us to sin....The whole matter is settled in the heart.”<sup>65</sup> When one’s motivation is proper, God will reward His faithful child; Jesus even says He “will Himself reward you openly.” “God looks at the motive and rewards according to the motive.”<sup>66</sup>

**Read Matthew 6:5-8.** Likewise, prayer must be offered with the proper motivation. Prayer is a petition to the Almighty, and is not intended to be a public spectacle. The prayers of the worship assembly are not under consideration here; we have the approved apostolic example of prayers being made by a group of Christians assembled together (Acts 4:31; 6:6; 12:12; 13:3; 20:36; etc.). Rather, Jesus is speaking of an individual’s private petitions (or, in the case of the many Pharisees, proclamations; cf. Luke 18:10-14) to the Father.

“In this passage with verses following, Christ exposes the entire area of hypocritical and ostentatious prayers. The proper exercise of the privilege of prayer is violated (1) by the choice

<sup>62</sup> Boles, page 154.

<sup>63</sup> McGarvey, pages 61-62.

<sup>64</sup> Fowler, page 324.

<sup>65</sup> Fowler, page 330.

<sup>66</sup> Boles, page 156.

of an improper place of prayer, (2) by the use of vain repetitions, and (3) by the employment of long and verbose monologue.”<sup>67</sup>

“Vain repetitions” and “many words” do not contribute anything towards a positive answer to our prayers. God already knows what we need, even before we pray it, and even if we’re not sure how to pray it (Romans 8:26-27).

Fowler suggests four reasons for praying, despite God’s knowledge of our needs:

“1. Because He wants to hear from us, because He desires our fellowship and love.

“2. Because the Father wants us to acknowledge our dependence upon Him.

“3. Prayer is also necessary because of its psychological reaction in him who prays.

“4. We need to pray to express our gratitude for the Father’s bountiful provision. (Phil. 4:6)”<sup>68</sup>

**Read Matthew 6:9-13.** “This prayer embodies the essential desires of a praying heart; it is simple in form and comprehensive in its scope.”<sup>69</sup> Jesus says, “In this manner, therefore, pray.” He does not teach here that we should recite this prayer word-for-word without considering the meaning of the words, as many today do, but use it as a model for how to pray. In fact, He had *just taught* that one should “not use vain repetitions as the heathen do.” How often do we ignore the plain teaching of Scripture in an attempt to be righteous?

In this model prayer, Jesus shows that we should ever be mindful to give glory to God first and foremost, praying for His will to be accomplished, before requesting even our daily needs. “Note that the prayer is not for cake, or wine, or luxuries, but for bread, and that for only one day at a time. Millions today do not pray this prayer meaningfully because they have a week’s supply in the refrigerator, including luxuries.”<sup>70</sup> Many have been blessed tremendously by God, and should remember to give thanks for all they have. However, even when one is impoverished, Paul teaches, “And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content” (1 Timothy 6:8).

In Luke’s gospel account, Jesus teaches us to ask for forgiveness of sins rather than debts (Luke 18:4). Certainly, Jesus was not asking for the forgiveness of His own sins, as He had none (Hebrews 4:15). Rather, He knew that His followers would succumb to temptation and sin, and taught that we should confess and pray for forgiveness (1 John 1:8-9).

**Read Matthew 6:14-15.** These are two simple “if-then” statements that affect our eternal fate. There can be no misunderstanding of the Lord’s plain teaching here, and no attempt to explain it away will stand on the Day of Judgment. If you are holding a grudge against anyone, determine right this minute that you will forgive them so that your soul is no longer in jeopardy. It does not matter if they repent; that is between them and God. You must have the spirit of forgiveness regardless of their attitude.

**Read Matthew 6:16-18.** Fasting is the act of denying one’s self food for a period of time in order to focus on spiritual matters. “The professed purposes of fasting are wrapped up in the desire to express one’s sincerity by this departure from the normal pattern of living. Devout men of all ages have fasted when they found themselves in trouble or in danger or to guarantee the sincerity of their penitence and prayers. Other times they fasted to humble the spirit and obtain the victory over selfishness, pride and desire. Again, fasting is a natural expression of mourning or an attempt to expiate some sin or an expression of penitence or even a preparation to receive revelations....Since fasting is a natural expression, it cannot be regulated arbitrarily, since it is what every person in the need or mood for it does naturally.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Coffman, pages 76-77.

<sup>68</sup> Fowler, pages 340-341.

<sup>69</sup> Boles, page 162.

<sup>70</sup> Coffman, page 82.

<sup>71</sup> Fowler, page 359.

It was practiced by the early church along with prayer at the separation of Barnabas and Saul for the work the Spirit called them (Acts 13:2-3), during their missionary journey (Acts 14:23), and for personal spiritual purposes (1 Corinthians 7:5). While we are not commanded to fast at any particular time, it is an act that is expected by the Lord. Again, the prohibition here is not against fasting, but against improper motives when fasting. “The Christian is here required to maintain the same personal appearance when fasting as on ordinary occasions, that he may not appear to men to be fasting, and may thereby avoid the temptation to hypocrisy.”<sup>72</sup>

### **Review and Discussion Questions**

1. Are the acts of giving, praying, and fasting optional matters? Why or why not?
2. Harmonize Christ’s warning against giving, praying and fasting “to be seen by men” (6:1, 5, 16) with His earlier instruction, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (5:16).
3. Does praying before a meal in a restaurant violate the Lord’s teaching in 6:5-8? Why or why not?
4. Does Jesus teach us to pray the words of 6:9-13 word-for-word? What is He teaching?
5. Must someone who has sinned against you repent before you can forgive them?
6. What is the reward of those who do acts of righteousness in order to receive praise from men?
7. What are some spiritual reasons one might fast?
8. What is the overarching lesson that Jesus is teaching in these verses?

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<sup>72</sup> McGarvey, page 65.

**MATERIALISM****Matthew 6:19-24**

“This section, if there were no other proof, would demonstrate that Jesus’ unique message is from God and could not be the product of the highest insights of rabbinical thinking. These words (6:19-34) must have sounded a wrong note in the ears of those Jews whose popular Messianic expectations required that the anticipated Son of David bring them a high degree of worldly prosperity, honors and pleasures. (Cf. Mt. 19:24, 25; 20:20-28; Lk. 22:24) Far from seeing any danger in wealth and far from believing that, as a rule, it promotes unrighteousness, the Jews tended to regard wealth as a special blessing for their carefulness in observing the Law. Characteristically, the Pharisees thought of themselves as the unchallengeable proof of the casual connection between righteousness and riches. (Cf. Lk. 16:14; 20:47) However, in terms of human motivations, it is but a hairbreadth’s difference between glorifying and seeking wealth as one’s just deserts on the one hand, and the greedily grasping after wealth as one’s universal answer to all problems. And the children of Abraham had to hear this message whether it fit their scheme of Messianic prophecy or not.”<sup>73</sup>

**Read Matthew 6:19-21.** The things that are considered “treasures” on this earth are temporary. Men who put their trust in earthly treasures will ultimately be disappointed. Jesus encourages His followers to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,” knowing that a man’s heart—his desire, his focus—will follow his treasure.

The Scriptures warn against greed in several passages. Jesus taught a parable about the foolishness of selfishness (Luke 12:13-21). He pointed to the “deceitfulness of riches” as one of the hindrances to conversion (Matthew 13:22). No discussion on this subject would be complete without reference to Paul’s inspired doctrine on the dangers of the “desire to be rich” and “the love of money” (1 Timothy 6:6-10). Such teachings were not limited to New Testament Scriptures, though. The Psalmist wrote about righteous men who laughed at “the man who did not make God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness” (Psalm 52:6-7). Proverbs 11:28 states unequivocally, “He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will flourish like foliage.”

The Greek word translated “lay up” in verses 19 and 20 is *θησαυρίζω* (*thésaurizō*). Lipscomb, quoted by Boles, writes, “The same word is here translated ‘lay by in store’ in 1 Cor. 16:2. It is used in the same way in Luke 12:21. No investment can be found on earth so safe, so permanent, or that pays so good dividends as laying up treasures in heaven. It is the only investment on earth that will pay dividends in the next world.”<sup>74</sup>

The Lord does not teach against possessing wealth, but trusting in wealth and desiring to accumulate more and more for selfish purposes. Our goal should be to serve God with whatever we have whenever it is needed. Isn’t this what He tried to teach the young man in Matthew 19:16-22? But the young man was shortsighted, unable to see the great eternal rewards available to the generous child of God, blinded by the riches he had in this life. “Possessions must be possessed; they must not possess their owners.”<sup>75</sup>

“Where the heart is, there is our source of happiness. If it is on the earth, our happiness must partake of all the uncertainty of earthly things, and it must be lost forever when we leave the world. But if it is in heaven, when we leave this world we go away to the real sources of our happiness, and we find them as durable as eternity.”<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Fowler, page 369.

<sup>75</sup> Coffman, page 86.

<sup>74</sup> Boles, page 165.

<sup>76</sup> McGarvey, page 66.

As with the acts of righteousness—charity, prayer, and fasting—in the first eighteen verses of this chapter, the focus here is on motivation. What will you do with your riches, use it all selfishly for yourself or selflessly for God?

**Read Matthew 6:22-23.** Jesus contrasts a “good” eye with an “evil” eye in these verses. The word rendered “good” by the NKJV is translated in other versions as “single” (KJV, ASV), “clear” (NASB), and “healthy” (NIV, ESV). Conversely, the “bad” eye of the NKJV appears as “evil” (KJV, ASV), “bad” (NASB, ESV), and “unhealthy” (ESV).

What does this have to do with the context? The man with a “good” eye sees righteous acts as a way to glorify God, while those with the “bad” eye are looking for ways to do good but receive praise for themselves. Specifically in the immediate context, it has to do with where one lays up his treasures.

“The subject under consideration is the propriety of laying up treasures, not on earth, but in heaven. The man whose eye is *single*—that is, it sees nothing double or with confused vision—represents him who lays up treasure in heaven. As the good eye fills the whole body with light, or supplies to the whole body the advantages of light, so does the rule of life insisted on in the context, enable the man to see in a proper light all matters of duty and of enjoyment. But he who lays up treasures on earth has the evil eye, or the eye whose vision is distorted, and which sees all things incorrectly. The light that is in him is darkness; that is, the rule by which his life is guided is false and pernicious; and this being the case, how great is the darkness in which he walks!”<sup>77</sup>

**Read Matthew 6:24.** Many try to straddle the fence, but Christ says we must decide. We cannot be a slave to God and to mammon, which “is a Syriac word which means ‘riches’; it is riches or wealth personified.”<sup>78</sup>

“The Lord does not here condemn the lawful and honest getting of money through diligent labor and wise care of funds. Careful stewardship in the gaining and handling of wealth is perfectly in harmony with Jesus’ warning here. (Cf. Lk. 16:1-13) But unless a man uses his money for God, it quickly becomes obvious which is his real god. (Cf. Heb. 13:5)”<sup>79</sup>

“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:16-18).

“God will accept none of our service unless he has it all. Satan is willing to accept a part because he knows that by securing a part he really gets all.”<sup>80</sup>

## Review and Discussion Questions

1. What are some ways people lay up treasures on earth?
2. What are some ways people lay up treasures in heaven?
3. What is the danger in trusting earthly treasures?

<sup>77</sup> McGarvey, page 66.

<sup>78</sup> Boles, page 167.

<sup>79</sup> Fowler, pages 378-379.

<sup>80</sup> McGarvey, page 67.

4. How does inspiration describe riches in Matthew 13:22 and 1 Timothy 6:17?
5. Explain Mathew 6:22-23 in the context of laying up treasures.
6. Why must we choose between God and mammon?



## THE FUTILITY OF ANXIETY

## Matthew 6:25-34

**Read Matthew 6:25-26.** Jesus has just warned against the desire to accumulate and chase after wealth. Here he continues the thought by explaining that God will take care of His faithful children, and that we should trust Him instead of worrying unnecessarily about our daily needs. Worry indicates “the state of feeling which results from a despondent view of the future.”<sup>81</sup> Does this mean that we should not make provisions for our own food and clothing? Does it mean we should not seek gainful employment?

Paul wrote to Timothy, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). He also wrote, “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). In light of these passages, it is clear that the Lord is not telling His followers to leave their jobs or to neglect their responsibilities in providing for their families. Rather, He warns against worrying about such things. Life is more than chasing after wealth. “At death none of us will have need of food and clothing. What folly to make our chief concern those things which perish with the using and over which death has dominion!”<sup>82</sup>

God provides for His lesser creation such as the birds; these creatures are not concerned with planting crops or storing food for later use, but God still cares for them and provides for them. How much more will he care for us and provide for us, who have dominion over birds and other creatures (Genesis 1:26,28)? “The weight of our Lord’s argument here is overwhelming when it is recalled that of all God’s creatures, from insects to the great animals of the forest, man alone is constantly anxious about his survival on the planet.”<sup>83</sup>

“But HOW does *the heavenly Father feed them*? Into their nature He has fused the instincts necessary for their survival, such as diet, migratory habits, etc....It does not worry for its food; it just obeys the law of its life and becomes what it is. The law of our life is that we work for our food (Gen. 1:28; 2:15; 3:17-19). We are created to work, not to worry.”<sup>84</sup>

**Read Matthew 6:27.** Jesus asks a rhetorical question, calling attention to the fact that worry will do nothing to make one live longer. The newer translations are more specific with how “stature” should be rendered in verse 27: “a single hour to his span of life” (ESV); “a single hour to his life” (NASB). The measure is not in reference to height, but to age. And Christ is correct; worry will not extend one’s life in the least. In fact, unneeded stress can have an adverse effect on a person’s longevity and quality of life.

**Read Matthew 6:28-30.** People like to dress nicely, and there is certainly nothing wrong with looking your best in most cases. Again though, Jesus warns against worrying about such things. “All should dress in as neat and attractive way as their circumstances will permit, but to give so much attention to and be anxious for clothing is a violation of the principle that Jesus has laid down.”<sup>85</sup> The Lord points to the lilies that were possibly in the sight of His audience on this occasion, and states “that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” The Scriptures tell of Solomon’s massive wealth: “So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom” (1 Kings 10:23). He wanted for nothing, but the lilies were more beautiful.

<sup>81</sup> McGarvey, page 67.

<sup>82</sup> Fowler, page 383.

<sup>83</sup> Coffman, page 88.

<sup>84</sup> Fowler, page 384.

<sup>85</sup> Boles, page 169.

Just as the Father provides for the birds of the air, he makes the flowers and other plant life beautiful to look at. “The grass, or rather the *herbage*, is spoken of as being cast into the oven, because it was used by the Jews to heat their bake-ovens.”<sup>86</sup> “Every kind of herb on earth is a product of God’s power and care; he gives to them their different shades, tints, and hues of color; these are far inferior to man; will he not care for man who is so superior to these things?”<sup>87</sup>

Christ says those who needlessly worry for such things have “little faith.” This is one of four times in the gospel of Matthew this phrase is used. He also called His followers’ faith into question when they became frightened by the storm on the sea (Matthew 8:26), when Peter attempted to walk on the water but began sinking when he took his eyes off Jesus (Matthew 14:31), and on an occasion that they had forgotten to bring bread with them (Matthew 16:8). “Jesus is proving decisively that theology and things definitely affect each other. The same faith that trusts God for grace and guidance must also trust Him for garments and groceries.”<sup>88</sup>

**Read Matthew 6:31-32.** Jesus forbids us to worry about these things! He does not forbid us to think of them or make provisions for them, as God has given us great opportunities to provide for ourselves and our families. However, we must not be overly anxious and constantly focused on trivial matters. Those who are not God’s children constantly chase after the things of this life; they have no view toward eternity. “We have a God who can supply us, and they have none....As he knows that we need them, and as he is able to supply them, we may expect to obtain them and be free from anxiety.”<sup>89</sup>

“Notice that Jesus puts the emphasis here: He does not call Him ‘God,’ in the sense of an omniscient Supreme Being who would be expected to *know* our need, but ‘Father,’ in the sense of one who both knows and *feels* our need.”<sup>90</sup>

**Read Matthew 6:33.** What should be our focus? What is our number one goal? The priority in our lives should be “the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” “The kingdom of God, which I the church of God, is of greatest importance and must be so regarded by all who would follow Jesus.”<sup>91</sup> Paul writes, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2). Seeking God is a demonstration of faith. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). “The kingdom of God should be placed first: (1) in importance, (2) in point of time, and (3) in emphasis.”<sup>92</sup>

What is included in the phrase, “all these things shall be added to you”? Is Christ promising great wealth or power to those who put God and His church first in their life? Keep in mind the context and read verse 25 again. It is not the luxuries of life that are promised, but the necessities. “The righteousness which God requires leads to that cheerful and undistracted industry which always, with the divine blessing, secures food and raiment while we are in health, and which helps to surround us with friends when we come to want.”<sup>93</sup>

**Read Matthew 6:34.** “Each day brings with it some evil of its own; if to this we add anxiety about the morrow, we but add to the unavoidable evil of to-day.”<sup>94</sup> We are not always sure what circumstances we will face from day to day. While we should be prepared, we should not be anxious.

<sup>86</sup> McGarvey, page 68.

<sup>87</sup> Boles, pages 169-170.

<sup>88</sup> Fowler, pages 387-388.

<sup>89</sup> McGarvey, page 68.

<sup>90</sup> Fowler, page 390.

<sup>91</sup> Boles, page 170.

<sup>92</sup> Coffman, page 90.

<sup>93</sup> McGarvey, pages 68-69.

<sup>94</sup> McGarvey, page 69.

**Review and Discussion Questions**

1. What are the things for which we are forbidden to worry?
2. Is it wrong to sow, reap, and gather into barns? Why or why not? If not, at what point does it become sinful?
3. How does God provide for the birds of the air?
4. Can we ever attain the glory of Solomon in the earthly sense? Yet, what did Jesus say Solomon was never able to match, despite his earthly treasures?
5. What is the kingdom, and why must we seek it above earthly concerns?
6. Why should we not worry about tomorrow?

**“JUDGE NOT, THAT YOU BE NOT JUDGED”****Matthew 7:1-6**

“The connection of chapter seven with the rest of the Sermon is also a psychologically necessary one. Those who have attained a measure of growth in the character of Christ are tempted to criticize rather harshly those who have not attained to their measure of perfection. This is especially true if one is conscientious and sincere, because, what one hates in himself as a defect in character he notices more consciously in others. Such high standards mentioned in chapters five and six might cause men harshly to judge others who have not even completely understood them, to glory in their own superior holiness (‘exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees’) and to despise all others. (Cf. Lk. 18:9; Jn. 7:45-49) This is possible in spite of the fact that Jesus has, in various ways, hinted at the merciful grace of God and openly stated some of the ethical implications that must be operative in the life of the pardoned sinner (5:7, 45; 6:8, 12, 14, 15) Now He must make those implications explicit.”<sup>95</sup>

**Read Matthew 7:1.** This verse may be as well-known as John 3:16, but it is perhaps also the most misunderstood. Many use the Lord’s words as a shield against criticism, deflecting the attempts of well-meaning individuals to bring them to repentance.

There is a stern warning against hypocritical judgment, but it is even more than that. “The word ‘judge’ in this place is translate from a Greek word, *krinó*, also found in such passages as John 12:48; Acts 17:31; and 2 Timothy 4:1, indicating that the type of judging forbidden in this place is that of presuming to determine salvation, or the lack of it, in others.”<sup>96</sup> Surely we understand the error in such a practice. Man cannot determine where another will spend eternity; only God can execute that judgment.

Yet, man must make some sorts of judgment in this life. Consider Jesus’ instruction in John 7:24, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.” While we cannot tell another what their eternal destination will be, we can use the Word to indicate which path is on. Later in this very discourse, Jesus instructs His disciples to make judgments and identify dogs, swine, and wolves (Matthew 7:6, 15-16). Context is important.

“All judging from surmise, or from insufficient premises, or from ill-will, is prohibited. It is adverse judging, of course, that is referred to.”<sup>97</sup>

**Read Matthew 7:2.** Who is making the return judgment? The assumption is often that God is the one referenced in this verse, and that’s certainly possible and plausible. James writes, “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).

In this context, however, it seems that Jesus may be referring to the one who was the victim of hypocritical judging in the previous verse. How we treat another person will typically affect how they treat us; if we are kind, they will generally return that kindness, but if we are harsh, we should expect the same in return.

Jesus expands the thought even more in Luke’s account. Luke 6:37-38, “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

**Read Matthew 7:3-4.** It is easy to find fault in others, especially when we are trying to ignore our own. And often, our faults are much bigger than those of our brothers. “The mote and

<sup>95</sup> Fowler, page 396.

<sup>96</sup> Coffman, page 91.

<sup>97</sup> McGarvey, page 69.

the beam represent the disparity between that which is tiny, insignificant, almost invisible, and that which is obvious. The mote hunter is the nitpicker, the specialist in fine, disputed points, who focuses on the most minute deviations while ignoring far more basic and important considerations.”<sup>98</sup>

What is a possible motivation of this faultfinding? As already noted, it could be to ignore our own. Or it could be to make ourselves feel better in spite of the sin in our lives. Whatever the motivation is, it is often lacking in love and sympathy.

Any judgment that is made should be done out of love. God established this principle long ago. He revealed to His people through Moses, “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor. Nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor. You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord. You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:15-18).

**Read Matthew 7:5.** How, then, should we approach a brother entangled in some sin? The first step is acknowledging sin in our own lives, and making reparations for it. In so doing, we will be more sympathetic toward our brother who has been given into temptation, and we can truly help them. “One cannot cure his neighbor’s faults except in a spirit of humility.”<sup>99</sup> Paul writes in Galatians 6:1, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” We are not to ignore or excuse sin in another person’s life, but put ourselves in a position to be able to help.

“The more critical we are of ourselves, the more merciful we will tend to be toward the failures of others, but the one who feels he is so good as to need little mercy from God, will have but meager compassion for others. As Jesus observed elsewhere (Lk. 7:36-50), the ability to love may be in direct proportion to how much we think we need forgiveness.”<sup>100</sup>

**Read Matthew 7:6.** Jesus warns against giving what is sacred or valuable to individuals that will not appreciate it properly. But if the interpretation of verse 1 is against judgment of any type, how can we determine who is a metaphorical dog or pig? Obviously, Jesus wants us to use discernment, as indicated here. “The literal meaning of this allegory is simple: ‘Do not persist in offering what is sacred or of value to those who least appreciate it, because your gift would be not only contaminated or despised, but also your generosity would be rebuffed if not openly attacked.’”<sup>101</sup>

How quickly can we determine if someone is a dog or pig? We must be patient while we teach, as Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:2, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” But there may come a point that a potential convert shows himself to be unwilling to make any sort of change, and at that point we must stop wasting time and effort. Often, in continuing to press the truth to such individuals, we invite harm upon ourselves. McGarvey warns that “some men, when you press the claims of truth on their attention, will not only despise the truth, but persecute you for annoying them with it.”<sup>102</sup>

“This careful judgment is imperative to keep us from treating men as if they were altogether beyond hope or too sinful to be saved. We must remember that God has transformed

<sup>98</sup> Coffman, page 92.

<sup>99</sup> Boles, page 174.

<sup>100</sup> Fowler, page 402.

<sup>101</sup> Fowler, page 405.

<sup>102</sup> McGarvey, page 70.

men who were often more brutal and more stubborn than we.”<sup>103</sup> Every man is hopeless and lost before belief and obedience; every man is lost without a teacher. Let us be diligent in taking the gospel to a sinful world, taking great care to present God’s grace and mercy in the most loving way possible without compromise.

### **Review and Discussion Questions**

1. How is Matthew 7:1 often misused and abused?
2. Is all judgment forbidden by this passage? Explain why or why not.
3. What is the force of the comparison between the speck/mote in your brother’s eye to the plank in your own?
4. What is the first step in bringing a brother to repentance?
5. What are we if we refuse to do this first step?
6. Explain Matthew 7:6.
7. How can we determine if someone is a metaphorical dog or swine?

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<sup>103</sup> Fowler, page 407.

## ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

### Matthew 7:7-12

**Read Matthew 7:7-8.** Prayer is one of the greatest blessings a child of God has, and Jesus promises that the Father will answer our prayers. However, Jesus shows that there is more than just asking involved in prayer. “*Ask* is the simple prayer that indicates the dependence of the petitioner upon God, and his consciousness of his need....*Seek* suggests the personal effort of the one who prays to do his part toward getting his own prayers answered....*Knock* savors of perseverant importunity despite difficulties and hindrances, a vital factor in effective prayer.”<sup>104</sup>

This does not mean that God will answer every request in the fashion we think He should answer. Nor does it mean He will answer our prayers if we have impure motives. Jesus had previously taught on the proper motivation in prayer, warning against hypocrisy and vain repetitions (Matthew 6:5-7). He then gave a model for His disciples to use in making their requests known (Matthew 6:8-13).

James also gives some guidance regarding prayer in his epistle. He writes that when we ask for wisdom, we must “ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6-8).

James also teaches that we must be unselfish with our requests. “You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:3). It is not our pleasures, but God’s will that we must seek. “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:14-15). God is not a magic genie who will grant all of our desires; rather, He gives us what we need in order to accomplish His will.

“These words are far more than a promise to answer prayer; and, depending on what men pray for, they may be even a threat....Prayers should be disciplined to request only those things which are truly desirable and should always submissively include the provision, ‘Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done’ (Matt. 26:39).”<sup>105</sup>

**Read Matthew 7:9-10.** Have you ever asked your parents for a sandwich, only to have them throw a rock at you? Of course, this is a ridiculous statement, and the Lord is proving that humans have the common sense to give that which is good to their children. Whether it be bread rather than a stone, fish rather than a serpent, or an egg rather than a scorpion (Luke 11:12), a parent who is of sound mind is naturally going to give his child that which will nourish and not harm.

**Read Matthew 7:11.** Based on the example just given, Jesus argues that *of course* the heavenly Father will give good gifts. In what sense were Jesus’ listeners “evil”? Remember that among those in the audience were some who would be persecuted for Christ’s sake (5:11), whose reward in heaven would be great (5:12), the salt of the earth (5:13), the light of the world (5:14), those who would do good works for God’s glory (5:16), who did charitable deeds (6:1), prayed (6:5), fasted (6:16), and who would seek God’s kingdom first (6:33). How were these people “evil”?

Fowler suggests that “there were undoubtedly some of the earth’s finest people present that day. But in relation to God, they were yet *wicked* by comparison. They were imperfect, sometimes, unwise, sometimes partial, sometimes fickle toward their children.”<sup>106</sup> Paul reminds

<sup>104</sup> Fowler, page 410.

<sup>105</sup> Coffman, page 94.

<sup>106</sup> Fowler, page 412.

us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). He had just quoted Old Testament Scripture in Romans 3:10, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” When we hold ourselves up to the standard of God, we are utter failures; we are, in a word, “evil.”

Despite this, humans know how to properly care for their children, giving good gifts. If we *can* do this, then of course God *will*. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

**Read Matthew 7:12.** Here is the “Golden Rule” stated in sublime simplicity. Like so many other plain statements of Christ, these words are often twisted to fit selfish desires. Jesus said, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” He did not say, “Do not do to others what you don’t want done to you,” or, “Do whatever they do back to them,” nor did He say, “Whatever you think they are going to do to you, do to them before they have the chance.”

Paul wrote, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13:8-10).

While there is harmony between Jesus’ teaching and Paul’s inspired words, there is also a significant difference. Paul emphasized the things we should not do toward one another: don’t commit adultery, don’t murder, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t covet. He says that we must avoid doing these things, because they are a sign that we do not love each other as we should. Jesus, on the other hand, encourages us to be proactive: “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them.” It is not a matter of just avoiding the bad, but initiating the good!

Lipscomb wrote, “That law does not require us to do what our fleshly impulses and passions would prompt us to desire one would do to us. It means to do to others as we, enlightened by the word of God, desirous of doing his will, would desire them to do to us. This would lead us to do what would promote the spiritual good of the other.”<sup>107</sup>

Do you want to be forgiven? Forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15). Do you want mercy? Show mercy (James 2:13). Do you want your brothers to rejoice when you receive good news? Be happy for them when they receive theirs (Romans 12:15). Do you want others to comfort you in grief? Weep with them when they grieve (Romans 12:15). Do not wait to repay their kindness; show kindness first.

“Jesus demands positive social action. He has no use for that self-complacency which is harmless, negative goodness that does nothing wrong, but never does any good either. To Jesus, omission to be helpful is sin!”<sup>108</sup>

## Review and Discussion Questions

1. What are the three words Jesus uses to teach about prayer in Matthew 7:7-8?
2. How do these words show a progression of action in the requester?

<sup>107</sup> Boles, page 178.

<sup>108</sup> Fowler, page 416.



3. What are some attributes of a prayer that is acceptable to God?
4. What point is Jesus making when he talks about the gifts earthly fathers give to their children?
5. In what sense were the men in Jesus' audience "evil"?
6. What are some examples of the "Golden Rule" in action in the New Testament?
7. Considering Jesus' command to "do" in Matthew 7:12, what can you "do" for others this week?

**CHOOSE YOUR PATH WISELY****Matthew 7:13-29**

We all must make choices in this life, and those choices affect our eternal home. The apostle Paul wrote by inspiration, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). Earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matthew 6:24). We must choose who we will serve: God or Satan. There is not a third option.

**Read Matthew 7:13-14.** God will not force us to go in one gate or the other; we all must enter a gate, but we make the choice of which one. The narrow gate takes a concerted effort and focus, while the wide gate is open to everyone who rejects the commands of God. That wide gate leads to destruction; this is the eternal state of being lost, separated from God. Jesus spoke of this as “outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). God is light; the absence of light is darkness. In this “outer darkness” will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” It is not a temporary state. It is “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46) where the lost will “be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

Those who choose the narrow gate, however, will be blessed with eternity in God’s kingdom. It “leads to life.” Again, this is not a temporary state. Christ calls it “eternal life” (Matthew 19:29; 25:46). Paul wrote, “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Timothy 2:10). Christ says the narrow gate is “difficult,” but when we see what awaits those who enter it as opposed to the wide gate, can anyone say it will not be worth the effort?

“The narrowness consists of the restrictions, disciplines, and requirements throughout the whole area of Christian living. Such things as self-denial, forgiveness of others, monogamy, meekness, renunciation of the pursuit of wealth as the chief end of life, and countless other basic scriptural principles are opposed to the natural man whose baser instincts propel him constantly in the direction of the wide gate and the broad way. Only those who are truly spiritual, who have set their minds upon the things in heaven, shall enter and negotiate the straitened way that leads to life; and yet, ‘Whosoever will may come!’”<sup>109</sup>

**Read Matthew 7:15.** Immediately after describing the way to eternal life as “narrow” and “difficult,” Christ warns against false prophets. Some make a distinction between false prophets and false teachers, but the end result of both is the same: leading people away from the narrow gate. “A *false prophet* is any teacher of false doctrine or any teacher who falsely or unjustly claims divine inspiration with a view to authenticate his pronouncements. He pretends to deliver a message from God but really says what is pleasant to his hearers and profitable to himself.”<sup>110</sup>

The sad truth is that many people want false teachers to ease their consciences and lull them into spiritual apathy. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4). There is reason men like Joel Osteen, Max Lucado, and Franklin Graham are so popular: they refuse to “convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2). They do not offend the masses, but give them a false sense of spiritual security.

<sup>109</sup> Coffman, page 97.

<sup>110</sup> Fowler, page 423.

**Read Matthew 7:16-20.** The false prophets put on a good show, acting like men of God, but the truth is beneath the surface. Since “inwardly they are ravenous wolves,” we must take note of their fruits. “*By their fruits* alone will we *know* them. Not by suspicion or hasty judgment, but by actual fruit, and this takes time to mature. Therefore, it requires patience in the fruit inspector. There is no room in the Lord’s vineyard for over-zealous heresy hunters.”<sup>111</sup>

“In judging them by their fruits we are doubtless to observe both their conduct as men and the effects of their teaching. If either is predominantly bad, the man is to be avoided. We say predominantly bad, because, as a good tree may have some specimens of bad fruit, so may a good teacher.”<sup>112</sup>

Elders have a grave responsibility to ensure sound doctrine is taught in the congregation. John warns, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds” (2 John 1:9-11). Purity of doctrine is of utmost importance.

**Read Matthew 7:21-23.** Sound doctrine leads to sound living. Words alone do not save, but submission to Christ saves. There are many religious people in the world, but their focus is not on what Jesus actually reveals in His Word. “His warning here is against formal and mere external worship, and includes not only entering the church or kingdom of God on earth, but also of gaining an entrance into the heavenly kingdom; we must do the will of God to enter the church, and we must continue to do the will of God to enter heaven.”<sup>113</sup>

Prayer is vitally important in the life of the Christian. “While it is almost impossible to overestimate the value of prayer when associated with a consistent life, it has been too common to attribute to it a virtue which it does not possess. The Pharisees were excessively devoted to prayer, and they led the people to believe that every prayerful man would be saved. The Mohammedans and the Romanists are subject to the same delusion, as may be seen in their punctilious observance of the forms of prayer while habitually neglecting many of the common rules of morality. It is here taught that prayer, unattended by *doing the will* of the Father in heaven, can not save us.”<sup>114</sup>

What word is used to describe the number of people who will enter the wide gate and broad way that leads to destruction? Likewise, “many” will point to unauthorized activities as proof they deserve eternal life. The prophecies, casting out demons, and wonders were a first century phenomenon with a specific purpose: “confirming the word” (Mark 16:20). Sadly, many are deceived into thinking that these miraculous signs continued past that clearly stated purpose, despite what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10. “Many” have been deceived, believing that they themselves are performing miracles, though none can match the wonders we read about in the Scriptures.

Such deception “leads to destruction.” Jesus will tell them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” “Many souls shall diligently serve God and do many mighty things in his name, only to discover at last that they have never really served him at all. This blessed warning from Christ should stop every man short and suddenly until he is sure beyond all possibility of deception that he is truly doing Christ’s will.”<sup>115</sup>

**Read Matthew 7:24-27.** Just as we have two masters to choose from, and two gates to choose from, we also have two foundations upon which we can build. We must choose our

<sup>111</sup> Fowler, page 424.

<sup>112</sup> McGarvey, page 72.

<sup>113</sup> Boles, page 181.

<sup>114</sup> McGarvey, pages 72-73.

<sup>115</sup> Coffman, page 99.

foundation wisely. “Throughout the New Testament, the final, ultimate and exclusive authority in true religion is the word spoken by Christ.”<sup>116</sup> If we hear *and do* the words of Christ, He says we are wise and like the man who built his house on the rock. Luke records more depth to the Lord’s words: “He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation of the rock” (Luke 6:48). Can we truly “dig deep” if Sunday is the only time we look at the Scriptures? We are so blessed with resources today, online commentaries and study guides, that we have no excuse to not “dig deep.” We should learn all we can from reliable sources, striving to not only hear but do everything we can for the Almighty.

“The storm is anything that throws the soul into a crisis. It is any temptation to do anything other than what Jesus says....The crisis may come unexpectedly, but when it does come the whole story of our life is told in a few seconds. Here there is no opportunity to pretend: either we stand or else we are morally destroyed immediately.”<sup>117</sup>

Hearing alone is not enough. Our study must be followed by action. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25).

**Read Matthew 7:28-29.** Jesus “astonished” the people of His day (Matthew 7:28; 13:54; 19:25; 22:33). They were “amazed” by His words and His deeds (Matthew 12:23; Mark 1:7; 2:12; 9:15). They “marveled” at His authority and power (Matthew 8:27; 9:8, 33; 21:20). If people of our day read His words and properly understood Him, they also would be astonished, amazed, and marveled by Him.

### Review and Discussion Questions

1. Why is the way that leads to life difficult?
2. How can we determine if a teacher speaks the truth?
3. What must one do to enter the kingdom of heaven, according to Matthew 7:21?
4. What does that include, considering what you know of the rest of the New Testament?
5. What do the rain, floods, and winds represent in Matthew 7:24-27?
6. How did the people react to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount?
7. All Christians—whether teachers or not—are judged by their fruits. We are judged by those who are outside the church, as well as by our brethren. Thus, we must look at ourselves and ask, “What kind of fruit am I bearing?”
8. Upon what type of foundation are you building your house?

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<sup>116</sup> Coffman, page 99.

<sup>117</sup> Fowler, page 438.