

DIVINE DESIGN

A Study of the Sermon on the Mount Mathew 5-7

'There is a mountain you have to scale, the heights you have to climb; and the first thing you realize, as you look at that mountain which you are told you must ascend, is that you cannot do it, that you are utterly incapable in and of yourself, and that any attempt to do it in your own strength is proof positive that you have not understood it'. It condemns at the very outset the view which regards it as a program for man to put into operation immediately, just as he is.

(Martyn Lloyd Jones, *The Sermon on the Mount*, page 43)

Chapter Five

Introductory Comments:

1. The sermon gives us an insight into the essential nature of the Kingdom of God as it deals with the Kingdom's moral demand, its penetration into the inner life, and its universality. It is universal in the sense that the sermon relates to every aspect of life and it contains an invitation for all people, both Jew and Gentile, to live in obedience to its teaching. As such, it contains the distilled essence of the Old Testament. Jesus ignores the mass of detail concerning the Law (as defined by the rabbinical tradition) in favour of stressing its moral elements. The whole of the Law is summed up in the command to love God and one's neighbour.
2. The sermon's inwardness goes to the heart of what it means to be righteous. The state of the heart is the paramount thing. Unlike the Pharisees, who attacked every moral problem from the outside, Jesus saw evil as originating within the human heart. In other words, sin is not what we do, it is who we are. (See Mark 7:14-23) **How our righteousness is to exceed that of the Pharisees is the center piece of the sermon.**
3. The sermon describes what human life looks like when it comes under the reign and rule of God. It calls the church to live as a

- counterculture in order to call all of mankind to God. This was precisely Israel's call and task. (See Leviticus 18:1-4)
4. As Jesus preached the sermon, he was announcing the arrival of the Kingdom of God which can be joined only by repentance. "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17)
 5. "What is of supreme importance is that we must always remember that the Sermon on the Mount is a description of character and not a code of ethics or morals. It is not to be regarded as a law - a new kind of "Ten Commandments" or set of rules and regulations which are to be carried out by us - but rather as a description of what we Christians are meant to be, illustrated in certain respects." (Martin Lloyd Jones, *Sermon on the Mount*, page 28)
 6. The sermon's structure: The beatitudes are the essential points of the sermon. The rest of the sermon illustrates and fills out the meaning of each of the eight statements. These encapsulate how Christian righteousness goes beyond the righteousness of the Pharisees. The first four speak of our orientation to God while the last four speak of our orientation towards our neighbour. This same pattern is found in the Decalogue.
 7. The reader must recognize Jesus' poetic way of speaking and his use of hyperbole in order to grasp the spiritual and moral teaching contained in the sermon.
 8. Jesus preached this sermon not simply to inform and give the listener a new set of concepts; he was calling for a decision. In all of Jesus' teaching there is a strong element of crisis as the reader is brought to a point where a decision is demanded. His kingdom is good news only when it elicits a 'yes' response. The end of chapter 7 contains sayings that involve opposites where Jesus spoke of a narrow and wide gate, a good and bad tree, and wise and foolish builders. The hearer of his teaching is therefore confronted by a choice of clear alternatives symbolized by the narrow gate, the good tree, and the wise builder.
 9. On first reading, the sermon seems to be a collection of unrelated fragments. The reader is therefore challenged to discover the 'big idea' that ties it all together as a coherent whole. How our righteousness is to exceed that of the Pharisees is the essential teaching that ties the sermon together in the view of this writer.

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them. (Mathew 5:1-2)

1. Jesus went up the mountain to draw a parallel between himself and Moses at Mount Sinai. He, like Moses, brought a revelation from God that had the purpose of creating a new people under God. Moses was Israel's hero but eventually Jesus presented himself as a figure greater than Moses in that he spoke from his own authority. His manner of speaking according to his own authority without reference to the 'tradition of the elders' was the central dispute between Jesus and his opponents. There is also another parallel; just as Moses' task was to lead his people to the Promise Land, so Christ's purpose is to lead his people into the kingdom of heaven. After Pentecost, the Gospel writers came to see Jesus as embodying several Old Testament themes which characterize how God intended to overturn the downward spiral initiated by Adam's fall.

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

1. The word "poor" is used metaphorically and its meaning is defined in the Old Testament. (See Zephaniah 3:12 and Psalm 34:6) These two texts do not establish poverty as a virtue in and of themselves but they do associate poverty with 'contriteness' because the material poor have no refuge but God. They are unable to save themselves and therefore must rely on God. Because they are poor they have nothing to offer in exchange for his action on their behalf. They simply cast themselves on his mercy. (See Isaiah 41: 17-18; 57:15; 66:1-2)
2. 'Blessed' is sometimes translated 'happy' but this is a poor translation because it speaks of a changing subjective state. The word actually means to 'be in favour' or 'approved' so in this sense the blessed are those whom God favours and approves of because of their contrite spirit.
3. The first Beatitude establishes the fact that entry into the kingdom of God requires a person to admit that he/she is in possession of nothing that can be offered to God in exchange membership.
4. The first Beatitude assumes the doctrine of the fall. If there was no 'fall' the first Beatitude would be unnecessary.
5. The Beatitude seems to suggest reward in exchange for being 'poor in spirit'. However, the promise grows naturally from the character

described. Each inner characteristic is approved by God because it leads naturally to the benefit at the end of the Beatitude.

6. The first and last beatitudes end with the same phrase. This is called an 'inclusion' and it means that everything in between is actually an aspect of the kingdom.

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

1. The context establishes the fact that the comfort mentioned here has nothing to do with mourning over the loss of loved ones. It is the emotional counterpart of poverty of spirit.
2. Here Jesus is speaking of mourning over one's sin because (See Romans 7:24; 1 Corinthians 5:2) confession without contrition is of no value. This beatitude relates as well to mourning over the sin and brokenness of the world.
3. The comfort derives from the assurance that God's forgiveness as eventually leading to total harmony within creation. Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates all of the above. The son effectively declares his father to be dead when he asks for his inheritance. He desires to declare independence from him. Eventually, his life falls apart due to his riotous living so he decides to return, confession in hand. The father sees him coming down the road so he rushes toward his son, accepts him back and treats him as if he had never been away. God's joy is symbolized by the celebration that the father orders as well as the contrast provided by the elder brother who feels he has been slighted and under appreciated. Were it not for the elder brother's jealous reaction, the family would have been intact.

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

1. The essence of Jesus' Messianic role was to reject power as a means of bringing about the rule of God. (See the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness) (See Paul's use of the Psalm in Ephesians 4: 13-17)
2. Biblically, meekness (praotes) is not an aspect of human temperament. It comes about from being in close proximity to Christ.
3. "Poverty of spirit" has to do with a person's assessment of himself, especially with respect to God, while "meekness" has more to do with

his relationship with God and men. (D.A. Carson, The Sermon on the Mount, page 20)

4. "Meekness" is the self control that allows a person to seek the advancement of other people's interests rather than one's own. (See Numbers 12:3)
5. The Greeks thought of "meekness" as the happy medium between too little and too much anger. 'Meekness" is the ability to be angry at the right time and for the right reason
6. This word was also used by the Greeks to describe a powerful horse that had been trained to obey a command. The trained animal has learned to accept control in order to accomplish a purpose.

"Blessed is the man who has every instinct, every impulse, every passion under control. Blessed is the man who is entirely self-controlled."
(William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, page 92)

7. This word also refers to a person's willingness to learn and their need to be forgiven.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,, for they shall be satisfied. (5:6)

1. There is a progressive logic that connects the first four beatitudes; each one leads to the next and presupposes the one before. The first beatitude is an acknowledgment of our utter dependency on God whereby we admit our need to be forgiven without possessing anything to offer in exchange. In the second, we mourn over the cause (our fallen nature) of our and mankind's bankruptcy. In other words, we wish it were not so. Thirdly, the truth of our condition is allowed to inform our self understanding and our relationships with others. The fourth beatitude pushes us further. We align ourselves with the will and purpose of God and hunger to follow our confession with a resolve to live differently.
2. The word "righteousness" (dikaiosune) has a shifting meaning in the New Testament. Its meaning can be legal, (justification) moral, (sanctification) or social. The fourth beatitude requires us to decide from the context which of these meanings Jesus intends.
3. A.M. Hunter points out that Jesus is here speaking, not of a human achievement, but of something that must be received. If Hunter is

correct then the "righteousness" should be understood in the moral and social sense. Read in this way, the beatitude calls us to identify with God's ultimate cause and purpose. This beatitude encourages longing and anticipation for the occasion when God's cause will be vindicated and triumphant,

4. D.A. Carson interprets this beatitude in terms of a personal longing to conform to the will of God. He quotes a Scottish saint. "O Lord make me as holy as a pardoned sinner can be."
5. "He wants to be righteousness, not simply because he fears God, but because righteousness has become for him the most eminently desirable thing in the world." (Carson page 22) Paul echoes this aspiration in Philippians 3:10 where he says, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his suffering, becoming like him in his death ... In short, this beatitude centers on the disciple's desire to be conformed to the will of God."
6. John Stott believes that Jesus is using the word "righteousness" in its social sense. Therefore, this beatitude calls us to desire, more than anything else, mankind's release from the power of sin, his liberation from oppression, the promotion of civil rights with justice for everyone, honesty in all our dealings, and good relations in the family.
7. We can embrace all the above interpretations as an important aspect of Jesus' teaching.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall see God. (5:7)

1. With this beatitude Jesus shifts our attention from God to our fellow man. Here Jesus follows the pattern established in the Decalogue.
2. The sentence reads as if God's mercy is obtained by offering mercy but read this way it would be a contradiction of the first Beatitude where mercy and forgiveness are given by grace not by works. Jesus described the relationship between the two in his parable of the "Unmerciful Servant". (See Matthew 18:21-35) In the parable mercy is given as a response to the greater mercy offered by God. The latter precedes the former and it is the basic dynamic that leads to the expression of mercy.
3. There is a subtle distinction between mercy and grace although each is inexorably bound to the other. Grace is a loving response when love is undeserved whereas mercy is a response prompted by the misery and helplessness of the one who is the object of mercy. "Grace answers

the undeserving; mercy answers the miserable." (D.A. Carson, The Sermon on the Mount, page 24)

4. The person who is willing to extend mercy does so because he/she comprehends that the mercy they have received exceeds exponentially the mercy they are called upon to offer.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (5:8)

1. We think of the heart in sentimental terms as the 'seat' of our emotions but in the Bible it is the center of the entire personality. In other words, the heart is used metaphorically as a reference to 'the real you'. The Bible's assessment of 'the heart' is extremely negative as in Matthew 15:19; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 1:21 and 2:5.
2. (a) Two interpretations of this text are possible. (Read William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, page 101) The first has to do with the relationship between the outer and inner person. In other words, there is no tyranny of the divided self. Jesus is concerned with the extent to which our inner life is consistent with what we do and say. In this sense, the "pure in heart" attempt no cover up for what is in their heart. Secondly, the 'pure in heart' look single mindedly forward to the culmination of God's kingdom when all things are brought into harmony. Lastly, the desire for inner and outer harmony is recognition of God's ultimate purpose and it indicates a willingness to align oneself with God's will.
(b) The second interpretation arises from the context. The last four beatitudes are devoted to the Christians orientation to his neighbour. Therefore, the phrase should be understood as a reference to an inner quality that promotes harmonious relationships within human community. According to this reading "the pure in heart" are those who are utterly sincere' (JBP) This inner quality nullifies hypocrisy and deceit in all relationships thereby eliminating the need for role playing according to the audience.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. (5:9)

1. The purpose God is accomplishing through Christ is "to bring all things in heaven and earth and on earth together under one head, even Christ". (Ephesians 1:10) Later in the letter Paul writes that Christ is the great barrier breaker in that he

brings down the wall that separated two profoundly disparate groups - Jew and Gentile - but the reconciliation of these two groups is not the whole story. Paul believed that the task God intends to accomplish through Christ is to bring total harmony to the entire cosmos. He wrote, "We know that the whole of creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." (Romans 8:22)

2. According to the seventh beatitude, the follower of Christ is expected to take up God's task by (*eirenopoioi*) pursuing human goodwill everywhere. Lessening tensions, seeking solutions, promoting communication and understanding are important priorities.
3. Those who willingly take up this task are "sons of God" in that their activities are reflective of God's nature.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (5:10)

1. The New Testament admits that persecution is the norm for Christians. (See John 15:18-20)
2. "..... for if the disciple of Christ never experiences any persecution at all, it may fairly be asked where righteousness is being displayed in his life. (D.A. Carson, The Sermon on the Mount, page 28)

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you. (5:11-12)

1. Obviously, this beatitude is an expansion of and an elaboration on the previous one. Jesus wanted to underline that persecution is the norm for his followers because of the 'fallen' world's inevitable reaction to 'righteousness'.
2. Persecution results from the collision of two dissonant 'value systems'.
3. We rejoice when our experience of persecution marks our authenticity as Christians. We rejoice because the pain of the present pales in significance to the vindication awaiting us in the future. In addition, the experience of persecution means that we are allies of the prophets.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (5:13-16)

1. Using the metaphor of salt and light, Jesus now turns to the topic of his followers' effect on the world because the kingdom norms he presented are meant for public, not private, expression.
2. The teaching also assumes that these norms, when lived out in full view of the world, will attract attention. Much of it will invite vigorous opposition because the world is opposed to the norms Jesus has enunciated as the main points of his sermon.
3. The metaphor of salt suggests two meanings, one having to do with purity. Salt, by its very nature, cannot turn into something else because it is a fundamental chemical element. It can become ineffective only as it is infiltrated by another impurity as was the case with salt from the Red Sea. Therefore, its meaning in these four verses points out the importance of 'purity' in all aspects of life. It also suggests that the 'salt' of disciple will have an effect on a world assumed to be in the process of decay. The second possible meaning related to salt's preservative qualities. By living according to kingdom values, the disciple restrains the natural decay of society.
4. The metaphor of salt also suggests Jesus' radical distinction between the 'world' and the 'church'. The church, therefore, must be fully engaged with the culture without being compromised by it.
5. Certain words used in scripture are loaded with theological meaning and we must not assume that these words always meant to the writer what they mean to us now. The Biblical meaning can differ or go beyond the contemporary meaning. 'Salt' is one of these words. The symbolic meaning of salt is usually explained by introducing chemistry into the equation. Salt, by its very nature, delays decay and adds flavour. Everyone knows this fact. But is this the sole meaning Jesus, speaking as a first century Jew, intended? Perhaps not. Salt may have an additional symbolic meaning for a Jew that is even richer and more challenging. In Ezekiel 16:4 the prophet gave a devastating criticism of Jerusalem because of its unfaithfulness. The cities wicked state is accounted for by saying it was not rubbed in salt at its

birth. Apparently, new born babies were rubbed in salt to protect them from the effects of evil and to indicate that they are born according to the Promise. Additionally, Numbers chapter 18 concerns the giving of holy offerings. Strict rules are given and in verse 19 the writer says:

Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the Lord, I give to you and your sons and your daughters as your regular share. It is the everlasting covenant of salt before the Lord for both you and your off spring.
(Numbers:18:19)

1. In this passage salt is associated with promise (covenant) and it is used in the context of a relationship where offerings are given to God with the guarantee that he will provide Israel with what it needs. We can apply this usage back to Jesus' saying. The church is called to live within a relationship where we offer to God what is his with the understanding that he will never abandon us. As well, the image is a sign that disciples, by living according to Jesus' teaching, are called all men and women to live within the relationship described by the Covenant.
2. The image of light suggests surrounding darkness. Modern city life makes it difficult for us to imagine total darkness but the ancient world would have no difficulty because light sources were much more difficult 'to come by'. The metaphor means, therefore, that the disciple is called to provide a resource that is otherwise unavailable.
3. If salt refers to knowledge of God demonstrated by the expression of kingdom norms, light is defined by "good works" and as an image it underlines God's intention to counter the world's values through us. "Flight into the invisible is a denial of the call. A community of Jesus which seeks to hide itself has ceased to follow him." (The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, page 106)

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your

righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (5:17-20)

1. With these words Jesus takes great pains to relate his teaching to the Old Testament and to demonstrate that his teaching is continuous with what Jews already knew. He was not starting a new religion.
2. These verses are amongst the most difficult because, taken at face value, they appear to butt up against the fact that Jesus was so often accused of being 'loosey-goosey' to the details of law keeping treasured by the most observant. Furthermore, what he teaches here seems to suggest a theology of works righteousness so opposed by the apostle Paul everywhere in his letters.
3. There can be no doubt that Jesus had a high view of scripture; he upholds its immutability and normative truthfulness. He does not believe that the Hebrew scripture contains only some truth.
4. The difficulty present in this text involves three questions. Why did Jesus ignore the food and Sabbath Laws as well? (See Mark 7:19) Secondly, why did the early church insist that the sacrificial system was no longer necessary and could therefore be effectively abolished? Thirdly, why did the Christians not follow the details of the Jewish Torah?
5. Various answers have been attempted. Some scholars have simply concluded that Jesus could never have said these words. They were placed in his mouth by someone zealous to maintain strict observance. However, some scholars suggest other options. Four of these interpretations center on a careful, but not obvious, exegesis of the word law. (a) Christians have divided the Mosaic Law into three distinct categories and (moral, civil, ceremonial) argued that the civil law no longer applies because Israel is no longer a nation in the Biblical sense. The ceremonial law, they say, has become irrelevant because there is no temple and because Jesus' death on the cross satisfies the sacrificial system for all time. Only the moral aspect of the law is left so it is reasoned that Jesus was referring only to this aspect because the other two are null and void. The problem with this approach is that the three distinctions are not mutually exclusive and there is no evidence in the text that Jesus was making this distinction; for him and every other Jew, the law was the entire law and every aspect of it was moral. He would have opposed the arbitrary distinction created by the three categories above.

Furthermore, if Jesus had intended this distinction why would he not make this distinction clear? (b) A second approach involves interpreting the word "fulfill" to mean "to confirm". If the law was given for the purpose of creating an obedient nation then Jesus fulfills it because he gathered a people around him and taught them how to live. Jesus fulfills the law in another way as well. The law confirms the fact that all are sinners deserving judgment. Jesus obeys the law perfectly and is therefore able to take the sinners' place and bear the judgment for all of mankind. In this sense Jesus fulfills the law. (See Romans 8:4) However, the specificity of verse 18 seems to discourage this interpretation. (c) Some commentators see an anticipation of a future intervention by God in order to bring justice to the world and they argue that Jesus' death on the cross is the fulfillment of this hope. (d) Still other commentators recognize the predictive quality of the Old Testament but not in terms of specific statements; they emphasize its prophetic voice in more general terms. The Gospels present Jesus as understanding himself in terms of several patterns and themes in the Old Testament. He sees himself as a Moses like figure, as a Davidic figure, as one doing the Work of the Son of Man in Daniel 7, and as the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. Lastly, he announced himself as the Passover Lamb during the last supper thus associating his death with the satisfaction of Israel's sacrificial system. Therefore, Jesus embodies the law in the sense that he can be understood in terms of the patterns mentioned above.

6. In verse 19 Jesus connects his disciples with all that he has said about the law to tell teach them that greatness in the kingdom has everything to do with obedience to God. Furthermore, each must teach others to do the same.
7. Jesus finished this passage by calling for a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees. On the surface, this statement seems to present an impossible standard. The Pharisees had already calculated that there were 248 commandments to be obeyed and 365 prohibitions to be avoided. (613 commandments) Each of these they aspired to obey in rigorous detail so how can their righteousness be exceeded? The meaning of Jesus teaching can be found by looking at the several confrontations he had with the Pharisees where his criticism was that their righteousness was external, legalistic, and

disconnected from their inner life. Jesus saw them as being primarily interested in drawing attention to themselves as a means of establishing their superiority. From this, they derived a sense of entitlement believing that divine favour had been showered on them. Jesus, on the other hand, accused them of being nothing more than "white washed sepulchers".

Five Incidences that Demonstrate Jesus' Dispute with the Pharisees Concerning their Literalism and Superficiality

Dispute/Issue	Text Reference
1. Jesus did not teach his disciples to fast	Mark 2:18-22
2. Jesus picks corn on the Sabbath	Mark 2:23-28
3. Dispute over food laws	Mark 7:1-21
4. Marriage and divorce	Mark 10:1-12
5. Paying taxes	Mark 12:13-17

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You should not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment'. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell fire. So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first to reconcile to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; truly, I say unto you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny. (5:21-26)

**fool was a term of extreme abuse. It suggests a lack of worth. The word in Greek is 'racca'.*

Three Introductory Comments

1. With this passage, Jesus teaches his disciples concerning how their righteousness is to exceed that of the Pharisees. He is not contradicting the law; he is disputing the interpretation of

the Pharisees and the teaching of the elders. Jesus was not in contradiction of the law; he was dealing the distortions of it that had gradually arisen within the tradition of his opponents.

2. Jesus used the word *errethe* (said) but this was not the word he used when directly quoting scripture. The implication is that he was quoting their oral tradition that was continuously taught in the synagogue. The oral (rabbinic tradition) tradition is at the center of observant Judaism today.
3. The word 'heard' is also significant because it was associated with a superficial and overly literal meaning of the text. (David Daube) It can be concluded, therefore, that Jesus' dispute with the Pharisees was not over the law per se but with their false and misleading interpretation which allowed them to obey the letter but not the spirit. Their primary interest was to reduce the demands of the law and make it less exacting. (See incident in Mark 7:1-13 where they skirt their parental obligations by declaring things corban. This practice was particularly odious because it involved the Jewish family.)
4. D.A Carson points out the underlying point being made by Jesus. "You who think yourselves from removed, morally speaking, from murderers - have you or hated? Have you never wished someone dead? Have you frequently stooped to the use of contempt, even to character assassination? All such vilifying anger lies at the root of murder, and makes a thoughtful person conscious that he differs not a wit, morally speaking, from the actual murderer." (The Sermon on the Mount, page 41)
5. Next Jesus adds weight to his teaching with two illustrations; the first relates to the Temple and the second to everyday life. The first teaches that reconciliation and forgiveness trumps religious observance and the second stresses the urgency of personal reconciliation.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a women lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart, If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than your whole body go to hell. (5:27-30)

1. The Pharisees did not understand sin as an expression of who they were. Sin, for them, was purely a matter of what a person did. Sin was an external act which consisted of the breaking of a rule. (See Jesus' teaching in Mark 7:14-23.) It must be remembered that since 5:20, Jesus has been elaborating on what he meant by righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees.
2. The lesson he taught compels every person to admit their fundamental sinfulness and cast themselves on the mercy of God.
3. Even though he taught that true righteousness was a matter of a person's inner life, he knew that the eye and the hand are portals through which our sinful nature can be aroused from the outside. What we do and what we see can be the catalyst for sin so in this teaching he points out that inner righteousness requires discipline. It is self evident that Jesus' poetic cast caused him to use non literal language.
4. These two metaphors (eye and hand) point out ways to resist temptation by exercising discipline. We can be non participants by not looking and by avoiding acts which stimulate and lead to sinful acts. This teaching calls every Christian to develop enough self understanding so as to avoid that which leads to sin.

It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. (5:31-32)

1. Mathew records a longer version in chapter 19 so we will consider this text.
2. The specific controversy percolating in the background involves the teaching of two ancient rabbis, Shammai and Hillel; one a strict 'originalist' (conservative) and the other more liberal. The origin of the dispute between them was centered on the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The passage deals with a man who gives his wife a certificate of divorce for doing something 'displeasing' and 'indecent'. The thrust of the passage is not to define what 'indecent' actually meant; the main idea is to forbid a man from remarrying his wife after she has remarried following divorce from him.

3. The Pharisees distorted the passage in Deuteronomy because they treated it as permission to divorce their wives for an undefined reason. Jesus knew this; his response changes the focus of the dispute to their displeasure.
4. The Pharisees were attracted to Hillel because he allowed for divorce for any cause including 'burning the roast'. They asked Jesus the question (19:3) seeking confirmation of their position. In a way, a direct answer would have placed Jesus in a 'no win' situation because coming down on either side could open him to criticism.
5. The question asked of Jesus centered on permission but his answer went to the nature of marriage. He asked a rhetorical question which took them back to their own primary text. They knew that the creation story established marriage as a profound 'coming together' that no person could cast 'asunder'. This clever response made their motives transparent and at odds with their own Torah.
6. They were guilty of a second convenient but incorrect reading of what Moses actually said. The Pharisees read the text concerning the certificate as a command whereas Jesus interpreted it as a concession due to "the hardness of heart". The fact that permission for divorce was a response to human sin meant that their desire for 'an easy way out' was nothing more than surrender to their own sin rather than an act informed by the revealed will of God.
7. Jesus assumed that divorce would inevitably lead to remarriage and that remarriage was the most likely reason for it in the first place. His teaching is stringent. With one exception, remarriage placed both people in a sinful relationship.
8. Like the passages before this one, Jesus teaching goes to the matter of what it means to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees.
9. **READ:** (a) The paraphrase by N.B. Stonehouse on page 97 of Stott's commentary. (b) See Stott's concluding comment on page 98. (the last paragraph)

Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath'. You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred? And you say, 'If anyone swears by the alter it is nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the alter, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the alter that makes the gift sacred? So he who swears by the alter,

swears by it and everything on it; and he who swears by the temple, swears by it and by him who dwells in it; and he who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it. (5:33-37)

1. Jesus now deals with the important issue of truthfulness. The Hebrew Bible does permit men to take oaths. "You shall fear the Lord your God. Him you will serve, to him you will cleave, and you will swear by his name." (Deuteronomy 10:20) The apostle Paul swore an oath regularly in God's name. "I call upon God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth." (11 Corinthians 1:23) If Paul knew of Jesus' teaching on this subject he did not take it literally. Passages like the one in Deuteronomy were intended to underline the importance of truth telling in every situation as a sign of Israel's covenantal relationship to God. All oaths, whatever their form, are oaths to God; no other category exists.
2. Typically, the Pharisees had built an elaborate tradition around the teaching in their Torah in order to lessen its moral imperative. This tradition is now contained in the 'Mishnah'. The subject matter concerns when oaths are binding. One rule was that a person is not bound by an oath sworn by Jerusalem but is bound when the oath is sworn when facing Jerusalem.
3. Jesus, in this passage, abolishes oath taking as a means of establishing the fact that there are no conditions that allow for the telling of non truths. All a person says must be true by virtue of the fact that God is always present; every statement must conform to the intention of passages like the one in Deuteronomy. There is, therefore, no reason to take an oath because every statement of truth is in fact an oath.
4. On another occasion Jesus said, "Let your yes be yes and you no be no."

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go a mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. (5:38-42)

1. This text reveals Jesus' poetic, non literal way of speaking. His essential principle concerns non retaliation in cases of personal wrong. He illustrates his teaching with references to personal assault, a law

- suit, an official demand, and a simple request for help. Reading these literally and applying them thoughtlessly to every situation would result in violence, robbery, and general anarchy especially if they are taken outside the sphere of personal relations and applied as rules or directives for states, nations, police work, and national defense. (See Romans 13:17)
2. Jesus began his teaching with a reference to a much misunderstood, abused, and misapplied Old Testament text found in three places; Exodus 21, Leviticus 24, and Deuteronomy 19. Today this text is often read as if it commands and gives permission to seek personal revenge. Read carefully in context, the Old Testament passages moves in exactly the opposite direction. These texts encourage restraint not violence. The original text was intended to halt the spread of blood feuds when violence escalated for the purpose of causing greater and greater suffering for one's enemies. The command established the principle that response to wrong doing must never exceed the violence done initially. In other words, a person should not be put to death for stealing an animal nor should he be imprisoned for giving a verbal insult.
 3. It is also critical to notice that the restraint, in the form of a command, was given to the nation as a whole as judicial guidance rather than to individuals bent on personal revenge. Bringing the law into the personal arena produces only vengeance, malice, bitterness, and hatred between individuals thus disturbing the harmonious relationships necessary for a nation to function successfully.
 4. It is also important to understand that Jesus was not prohibiting resistance when violence is being done to an innocent third party. (Read Carson page 49, second last paragraph)
 5. The basic principle is that righteousness in order to exceed that of the Pharisees involves non retaliation within personal affairs. Even so, his teaching must not be 'absolutized' as if it forbids a person from defending himself. To be sure, obedience to Jesus' teaching involves hard thinking; otherwise it will not be applied properly.
 6. Jesus follows the teaching of his principle of non retaliation with four illustrations drawn from everyday life. Each elaborates on the fundamental teaching.

7. First, the follower of Jesus must be committed to the idea of non retaliation so resolutely that he is prepared to take another 'slap' rather strike back.
8. Secondly, the disciple must be prepared to give up what is rightfully his rather than act in a manner that destroys harmony. (See 1 Corinthians 6:7f).
9. The third illustration establishes basic generosity as an ethic that promotes harmony. What he said was a reference to the soldier's right to commandeering civilians when they had something needed by the soldier.
10. The last illustration seems to make a similar point as the third. The disciple is commanded to be generous to people in need.

You have heard it said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say unto you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (5:43-48)

1. Jesus began this passage by correcting the distortion of the teaching they had heard. In actual fact, the Torah said nothing about hating enemies; it spoke only of loving one's neighbour. (Leviticus 19:18) However, there was a debate within Israel concerning the definition of 'neighbour'. It was common for Jews in the first century to interpret neighbour exclusively as a reference to other Jews.
2. Jesus countered this narrow definition in the parable of 'The Good Samaritan'. (Luke 10:29-37) The narrative of the story presents a despised Samaritan as falling within the definition of 'neighbour'. The parable ends by pointing out the difficulty this concept presented to Jesus' listeners.
3. Jesus supported his teaching with a reference to the nature of God; his inclusive love makes no distinction between the just and the unjust or between the good and those who are evil. This ethic is grounded in the nature of God as the beginning point. In this respect, his followers are being called to reflect God's nature rather than simply to conform to an abstract moral principle.

4. What does 'love' (agape) mean? Today this word is associated with feeling and emotion. Understood in this sense would mean that he is calling us to 'like' our enemies. Jesus did not mean that we love our enemy in the same sense that we love those who are nearest and dearest to us. For Jesus, 'love' means practical and persistent goodwill towards all people: it means caring for others by seeking their good. This pursuit may compel them to repent.
5. Loving in this manner makes the believer 'perfect'. Jesus did not have absolute perfection in mind because the prayer he taught later in the sermon, with its reference to repentance, anticipates the frequent occurrence of sin in the lives of his followers. Therefore 'perfection' in the context of his teaching means that our love must be as inclusive as God's. Loving exclusively aligns a person with the despised tax collector and with the Gentile both of who were regarded by Jews as Godless.

Chapter Six

Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (6:1-4)

1. With this teaching about the giving of alms, Jesus addresses what was at the center of religious life for a first century Jew - almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. His teaching was not new. It echoed the teaching of the ancient rabbis who taught that giving in secret made a person 'greater than Moses'. On the other hand, giving for the purpose of attracting praise is an act of self deception because it separates the giver from the greatest reward of all. The general principle embedded in Jesus' teaching is then elaborated on by two sayings that promote secrecy in giving.
2. The mention of trumpets may have been a reference to a real event. It is thought that trumpets were blown in the temple to announce a need that required giving.

3. Alms giving, when it is accompanied by the sound of a trumpet, is hypocrisy because the giver is deceiving himself and others that his giving is in the interests of the one receiving the gift when, in fact, the giver has only the satisfaction of his ego in mind.
4. The second metaphor about hands simply underlines the extent to which giving must be pure in its intention. If no one knows then a pure motive must be operating.
5. The natural and true reward for secret giving is the reward of God's favour.
6. The sermon encourages us to show when we are tempted to hide and hide when we are tempted to show. Here in lies a real reversal of the world's values.
7. The disciple of Jesus need not find the notion of reward from God a mercenary idea because "the proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation". (C.S. Lewis)

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (6:5-8)

1. During the first century it was common for a pious Jew to stop in the streets for prayer at 9:00 am, 12:00 noon, and 3:00 pm. Jesus, aware of the corrupting influence of this practice, would have none of it because it bred hypocrisy on a major scale. Secondly, prayer designed to attract public attention and praise, leads to meaningless 'babbling' or endless repetition associated with paganism,
2. It is critical to see the essential point of Jesus' teaching without absolutizing it with a rigid literalism. Clearly, his teaching presses us to examine our true motives for prayer.
3. Reading the text as if it outlaws public prayer during church gatherings is to miss the point of Jesus' teaching entirely. He was not giving his followers a new law to obey; he was simply asking them to develop enough self understanding so that honest examination of motive is possible.

This then is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name., your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (6:9-13)

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. (6:14-15)

What follows is a summary of the present Pope's writing on Jesus' prayer from his book, "Jesus of Nazareth".

Introductory Comments

Matthew places the Lord's teaching concerning prayer within the context of "The Sermon on the Mount". The sermon's subject matter concerns how mankind ought to live; the main idea is that men and women can find their true humanity only as they live in relationship with God. An essential aspect of this relationship is prayer whereby the one who prays discovers God's will and is empowered to obey it. For this reason, Jesus taught his disciples how they ought to pray. A close examination of Jesus' prayer life makes it plain that prayer involves listening as well as speaking. (See Mark 14:32-42)

The Lord's Prayer is found in Matthew's and Luke's Gospel and each provide the reader with a unique context. In Matthew, Jesus' teaching is preceded by several warnings about false prayer.

1. Jesus insisted that prayer must involve indiscriminate love whereby supplication is made on behalf of one's enemies as well as one's neighbours. The basis of this ethic is the fact that God causes rain to fall on the 'unjust' as well as the 'just'. Failure to pray with this attitude places one in close proximity to those who do not know God. (Matthew 5:43-48)
2. Authentic prayer is that which is done in secret. Public prayer, designed to gain man's approval, must be avoided. (Matthew 6:1-4) It goes without saying that Jesus was not speaking against all forms of public prayer. His warning goes to the motivation of the one praying.

3. Prayer must be thoughtful in its avoidance of idle chatter. It must be honestly connected with the reality of a person's life. (Matthew 6:7-8)

Praying as Jesus taught is a sign of spiritual maturity. "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48) With these words, Jesus was not insisting on absolute perfection. His intention was to teach that prayer must reflect God's nature and purpose in the world. Luke's version of this saying captures Jesus' intention by using the word 'mercy' instead of 'perfection',

Matthew's Gospel begins with the personal pronoun '**we**' because prayer is to be uttered within the context of a community. It is not a selfish act intended to gain access to individual benefits unrestrained by concern for others. Prayer is a shared experience not a selfish act.

Matthew's version is longer than Luke's and it is the one that has been adopted by the church. Luke records the prayer in the context of the Lord's journey to Jerusalem when the disciples observe Jesus praying and are aroused to pray in like manner. (Luke 11:1) Luke's setting allows us to see that Jesus was involving the disciples in his own prayer life and because prayer was the vital aspect of Jesus' intimacy with his Father, we see that prayer is the means by which we are configured to the image of the Son.

The Structure of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew's Gospel

Matthew's version contains seven petitions three of which are "**thou petitions**" and four are "**we petitions**". The first three are intended to align thought with the purposes of God; the last four are expressions of hope, need, and hardship. The structure of the prayer can be compared to the Decalogue which consisted of two tablets. The first tablet concerned love for God and the second love for neighbour. Similarly, Lord's Prayer begins with the primacy of God as the necessary condition for loving one's neighbour.

Our Father Who Art in Heaven

The second word of the prayer is the Aramaic word **abba**. This was the word used by infants and it connotes childlike trust. It was used to express

a child's confident love for their earthly father. By contrast, slaves in the first century were forbidden from using this title to address the head of the family with this word. Their relationship with that person was one of authority rather than intimacy whereas the Christians relationship to God is one of authority and intimacy.

Abba is suggestive of God's nature. Jesus taught that earthly fathers do not give their children stones when they ask for bread. God's love exceeds even this. "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask." (Matthew 7:9-11) Luke included words to point out that the gift God gives is himself. "... how much more will the heavenly Father give **the Holy Spirit** to those who ask him." (Luke 11:13) Addressing God as Father (abba) implies that the purpose of prayer is not primarily a request for God to give us this or that. Instead, it is an expression of the desire to receive the one thing necessary - God himself. This gift is the means by which God, by his spirit, brings us into conformity with his Son and makes us that image bearing creature he desires. Prayer is therefore the vehicle for God to restore the harmonious relationship he had with Adam before his fall from grace in the garden.

Two sides to the Fatherhood of God are apparent. First, he is our creator so our entire being is derived from this relationship. Further, it means that we are his children and have been created to experience a unique relationship the purpose of which is to bear his image.

Being his children, we are not 'ready made'; we require growth that is informed by his Fatherhood exclusively.

Why is God Referred to Using a Male image?

There are several female images of God in the Old Testament that compare God's love to that of a mother. Here are two examples.

1. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you. (Isaiah 66:13)
2. Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? (Isaiah 49:15)

The use of the word womb in the second quotation is instructive because it is an expression of maternal love. Literally, the word means womb but over time it came to be used to mean God's mercy. It expresses intimate the interrelatedness of God's life and ours and it suggests loving concern for the one who is helpless and dependant. **Rahamim** is the place where a fragile creature is protected and, as an image, it reveals God's disposition towards what he has created.

Although God's love is expressed with female images, he is never referred to as mother. Mother is an image but never a title and in the Hebrew mind there is a reason for this. Masculine titles for God were used by Israel even though they knew that God is neither male nor female; it was surrounded by pagan religions that involved 'mother-deities' which contained a concept of God completely foreign to the Biblical image. Religions in the ancient world that used female images thought of God in a pantheistic manner and thereby extinguished the difference between Creator and created. Israel's masculine titles clearly distinguished God from what he had created.

In Jesus' prayer 'Father' is preceded by the possessive pronoun '**our**'. In the Gospels Jesus is the only one to refer to the Father as **my** Father because, as his only begotten Son, he is the only one to be of one substance with the Father. The rest of us have to use the pronoun **our** not **my**. "**Our**" requires us to step outside the closed circle of "I" and avoid prayer that is entirely self concerned and divisive in its requests. The language of the prayer ever reminds us that we pray as members of a family. Lastly, the pronoun draws us together by recognizing the common source of our being.

Hallowed Be Thy Name

Here, we are reminded of the command of the Decalogue which reads, "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." (Deuteronomy 5:11)

Jews use various titles to avoid using God's name and usually they write G_d so it cannot be said. Furthermore, the Old Testament word contains no vowels and it therefore cannot be uttered. (YHWH) There is good reason for this tension and interplay between name and no-name.

1. Using a name invites image making which tends to drag down the image of God to the level of what is familiar. Naming God can become a way of domesticating him and forming him into our image. Hallowing his name therefore, is a sanction against doing this very thing.
2. A name creates the possibility of calling on God and it establishes the possibility of relationship but it also carries with it the potential to attempt control. When Adam names the animals he is bringing them into his world and placing them within reach of his call and control. "Our Father" establishes a relationship and in a sense, it draws God into our world where he becomes accessible and vulnerable. Consequently, God's name can be co-opted for our purposes thereby distorting his true image (nature) As we say the words "Hallowed be thy name" we are taking a conscious step to avoid the distortions that can result as we say his name. We are, in effect, trying to maintain his true identity.

Thy Kingdom Come

The Kingdom of God means the dominion of God so it is the sphere where his voice alone is heard and obeyed. With this petition we are acknowledging the primacy of God and confessing the fact that he alone provides the true criterion for what is truly good and beneficial for us. (See 1 Kings 3:1-15) These words counter the notion that human progress can be made by acting and thinking in a manner that establishes our independence from our Creator.

Thy Will Be Done on Earth as It Is in Heaven

The clear implication of these words is that God has a will that calls us to obey. Heaven is the sphere where God's will is unswervingly obeyed.

God's will can be obeyed only as it is known through the incarnation. Jesus' being reveals the nature of God as does his teaching. Those who ask that his

will to be done must search for it in the Biblical text which serves as the normative source.

Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread

The first three petitions are focused on *God*. The last four are concerned with mankind's needs and responsibilities. The word '**bread**' can be understood both literally and symbolically.

Modernity thinks of the creation as a self contained system. God, if he exists, may be its cause but no continuing intervention by him is required. The Hebrew mind thought differently. For them, God is the controlling spirit who energizes creation at every given moment. The fourth petition acknowledges the fact that all that is needed to sustain life is provided by God.

Recognizing dependency on God counters the human pride that thinks of life as primarily sustained by human effort and it works against our tendency to desire self-transcendence of the kind sought by Adam in the garden. Asking God for what we require is a recognition that only God can provide what we truly need. The request draws a clear line of distinction between Creator and created. Lastly, this petition affirms the fact that God will give us only what we actually need. (See Luke 11:9-13; Matthew 7:7-11)

It is critical to note that the pronoun "**our**" appears before the object "**bread**". We are, therefore, required to ask with others in mind and if we already have what we need, we are compelled to share. When the disciples noticed that the gathered crowd was without bread Jesus said to them, "Give them something to eat yourselves." (Mark 6:37)

This petition presupposes the poverty of the disciples who have renounced the world and what it offers in favour of the riches of faith. Since the request is for daily bread, the one who prays is asking only for what is absolutely needed in order to live. Absent is the desire for the security that excess provides. As this petition is made, the supplicant is reminded of Israel's sojourn in the desert when God sent manna from heaven; they are encouraged to relive the experience of a wandering people (strangers in an

alien land) with no choice but to rely on the faithfulness of God to sustain them.

It is possible that Jesus had in mind more than literal bread when he gave the disciples this prayer. "Daily bread" could be a reference to all that is needed for life. In John 6 the people have been listening to Jesus for a long time and they are hungry. The situation provided the circumstance for him to teach the crowd that there is more to life than material necessity. He said, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the true bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:32-33) When the disciples ask for some Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

The petition is a request to be united with Jesus who is the "bread of life".

And Forgive Us Our Trespasses as We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us

The fifth petition takes for granted that men sin against God and other men as well. It also assumes that sin is a serious matter and that it builds a wall between both parties that can be torn down only by forgiveness. Humankind tends to retaliate when they are sinned against and the act of retaliation results in a counter reaction thus the endless chain of evil continues. God forgives because he loves with an unconditional love. His offer to forgive, however, only penetrates those who are themselves willing to forgive. This does not mean that God's forgiveness is the reward for our willingness to forgive. Rather, we forgive others in recognition of the enormous burden of guilt that has been lifted from us.

Peter came to Jesus asking, "Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?" (Matthew 18:21) In response Jesus said, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy seven times." (Matthew 18:22) He

followed his answer to Peter with a parable. The main character is a servant who is called before the king. The servant was asked to pay back an enormous debt but he could not. The king threatened to throw him and his family in jail until the debt was paid. The servant pleaded for mercy and the king, moved with pity, forgave the debt entirely. Immediately, the servant went about collecting the small debts owed to him. He rewarded non payment with jail time. The king found out what he was doing and sent him to jail where he was tortured until he could repay what he owed previously. The last sentence of the parable summarizes its meaning. "This is how your heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from the heart." (Matthew 18:35) Refusal to forgive another person trivializes the enormous debt that God has forgiven.

Forgiveness is more than an effort to ignore and forget the offense that has been committed. The evil effect(s) of an offence is real so it has to be worked through and dealt with in some manner in order for healing to take place. What then must happen to the anger that offence arouses in the one who is offended? It cannot be simply ignored or forgotten as if the offence had never occurred in the first place. Forgiveness exacts a price in the person who forgives. Somehow the anger sin causes must be dealt with interiorly and at this point we come face to face with the reality of the cross. In the death of his son, God absorbs into himself his own wrath as he takes responsibility for human sin. We are compelled to forgive when we are offended because we realize the enormous cost of the forgiveness that God extends toward us. God's forgiving love is the essential dynamic behind the Christian's desire and capacity to forgive.

And Lead Us Not Into Temptation

Jesus faced temptation continually throughout his ministry because everywhere he went, evil was present. Temptation was a part of his life because the kingdom he brought was not yet fully realized. (A fully realized kingdom brings an end to evil.) This petition recognizes the fact the follower of Jesus is never in a 'temptation free zone'.

The sixth petition does not mean that God is the one who tempts nor is it a request to escape what is normal human experience in a fallen world. When we pray using these words we are saying to God, "I know that I need trials

so that my nature can be purified. When you decide to send me these trials, when you give evil some room to maneuver, as you did with Job, then please remember that my strength goes only so far. Don't overestimate my capacity. Don't set too wide the boundaries within which I may be tempted, and be close to me with your protecting hand when it becomes too much for me." (Jesus of Nazareth, page 163)

Finally, this petition amounts to an admission that a life not lived in close proximity to God will eventually be overcome by the dark forces that want to abscond with the creation.

But Deliver Us From Evil

The object (evil) is spoken in its singular form because Jesus has in mind that supra-natural/supra-personal force whose purpose is to blur the distinction between Creator and created. Evil attempts to fasten mankind's allegiance to his own fallen desires as a means of robbing us of our faith in God. The last petition confirms our hope that God will continue to "Rescue, redeem, and free us" from evil's influence.
(page 165)

"This, then, is why we pray from the depths of our soul not to be robbed of our faith, which enables us to see God, which binds us to Christ. This is why we pray that, in our concern for goods, we may not lose the Good itself; that even faced with the loss of goods, we may not lose **the** Good, which is God; that we ourselves may not be lost: Deliver us from evil!" (page 166)

When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (6:16-18)

1. After the digression on prayer Jesus gives a third illustration on the principle of secrecy that marks true worship. Pious Jews fasted on Mondays and Thursdays (Luke 18:12) He is repeating the teaching of Isaiah who deplored those who " bowed down their heads like a bulrush, and groveled in sackcloth and ashes". (Isaiah 58:5) Jesus did

- not object to fasting unless it was motivated by a display of outward piety designed to attract attention and impress. (See Mathew 9:14-17)
2. The edict to place oil on the head and wash is merely an appeal to appear normal particularly when fasting as a sign of true motive.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (6:19-21)

1. The theme of the first half of chapter 6 is the secrecy of his followers' inner life as an indication of pure motive but now he turns to the arena of public life. His subject matter is money, possessions, material need, and earthly ambition. At this point, Jesus' teaching breaks down any distinction between the religious and secular life. The follower of Jesus cannot have a view of life where faith is detached from practice otherwise he aligns himself with the hypocrisy as the Pharisee.
2. The teaching about treasure probably refers to three sources of wealth for the first century person. Wealth could consist of fine clothing, stored grain, and household valuables. The first was vulnerable to moths, the second to animals, (*brosis* means an eating away) and the third to thieves who could easily dig through clay walls. The obvious point is that the treasures of earth do not deserved to be our ultimate treasure because they are transitory in contrast to heaven's; these are eternal.
3. Jesus does not mention details about the treasures of heaven but they can only be "a way of life utterly sinless, integrity untarnished, work and responsibility without fatigue, deep emotions without tears, worship without restraint or disharmony or sham, and best of all the presence of God in an unqualified and unrestricted and personal way. Such treasures cannot be assailed by corrosion or theft". (D.A. Carson, page 76)

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness. (6:22-23)

1. There at least two approaches to a proper exegesis of this saying. The first focuses on the meaning of the contrasting adjectives

used to describe the eye. The word translated 'good or single' is *hapious* and the word for 'bad or evil' is *poneros*. Commonly in the first century *hapious* meant generous and *poneros* meant grudging.

Therefore, Jesus used this metaphor to contrast two radically different approaches to life. The first features generosity and the second defined by the word grudging. Acts of generosity infuse the inner life with a light that produces a clear and true vision of life whereas a grudging spirit darkens one's inner vision. Verse 22-23 follows naturally from the previous passage. It follows that the person seeking heavenly treasure will attribute to earthly treasure its proper value and since earthly treasures lack permanence they can be more easily and willingly shared.

2. A second interpretation results if the Old Testament is used to define the metaphor of the 'eye'. The Psalmist wrote:

With my whole heart I seek thee; let me not wander from my commandments. (10)

and

I have fixed my eyes on all thy commandments. (19)

The Psalmist has used both metaphors as synonyms that refer to that which a person values and seeks above all else. Therefore, the saying can be understood as meaning that a true inner vision of life results from an overwhelming desire to serve God and man. Obviously, this interpretation flows quite naturally from Jesus' teaching about treasures. Although these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, the reader is invited to decide which one flows most naturally from the previous about the two kinds of 'treasure'.

No One can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. (6:24)

1. Understanding this saying requires the reader to enter into the life of a slave in the first century. He had no personal rights and was at the complete disposal of his master who regarded him as 'a living tool' or 'possession'. There was never a moment or situation which allowed the slave to say 'my life is my own'. Therefore, Jesus' saying means that in every life there is something or someone who reigns supreme. Every person is like a slave in that either earthly possessions or God

is the supreme ruler of life; everyone has a master. In this respect, there is no neutral ground. Every human being is compelled to decide where his/her true loyalty lies; either it is God or the things of earth. Life can be informed by the will and purpose of God or alternatively life can be informed by what a person decides to value above all else. What is at stake here is our 'ultimate concern' whereby every person is pressed to decide whether he will live life as 'created' or 'creator'.

2. The contrast between 'love' and 'hate' is a semitic idiom used by Jesus on another occasion when he insisted that his followers were to 'hate' their parents in favour of loving God. (See Mark 7:9-13) Obviously, Jesus was not speaking literally; he meant that even family loyalties must become secondary to loyalty to God. These two words to point out the crisis that his announcement creates. Who the master is must be decided. This teaching echoes the Commandment: "You shall have no other Gods before me."

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds in the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? (6:25-27)

1. Taking notice of the connector (Therefore) is the key to understanding Jesus teaching about worry. Read literally, the passage denies the inevitability of worry in ordinary human experience and it would mean that a follower of Jesus is obedient only when he is inoculated against ordinary human concerns and unmoved to resolve the circumstance that caused worry in the first place. A good parent worries when their child makes foolish and immature decisions; they resolve to intervene in their child's life as a way of applying the wisdom needed to avert disastrous consequences. Another person worries that her friend is in danger of family breakdown because they have become a workaholic. She decides to make this subject a topic of conversation the next time she is with her friend. A church member worries about the plight of the homeless during the winter so she starts an 'Out of the Cold' program. These are examples of how worry (concern) energizes people to intervene appropriately when they see potential disaster looming in the lives of people they care about.

2. Jesus teaching about worry must be read within the context the sermon provides. He has taught his disciples that by centering their lives on heavenly treasure, they will become generous with their earthly treasure. Further, he has taught them that kingdom life involves devotion to the cause and will of God above all else. There is a single truth that runs through all this teaching; the kingdom consists of those who aspire to place God at the very center of life because he is their ultimate concern.
3. Jesus' teaching on worry is directed to those who so value earthly things that they fear its loss intensely because it is their ultimate concern. Worry of this sort places what is not God at the center of life and by so doing the reality of God, which even the birds in Jesus' illustration recognize, is effectively denied. Jesus is speaking in this passage about worry that deflects us from obeying God, not worry in general. Jesus experienced fear and worry himself particularly in the Garden of Gethsemane. All three Gospel writers include this scene in their narrative and each shows Jesus' agonizing fear brought on by the anticipation of his separation from God. However, his fear did not prevent him from saying "Thy will be done".
4. The apostle Paul, in the eighth chapter of Romans, writes that no earthly thing is capable of separating us from God (Romans 8:35) but then he lists several realities that inevitably lead to human anxiety. Paul does not deny worry as a normal and unavoidable human experience. He does, however, believe that a greater reality exists so he writes, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us". (Romans 8:37) The love of God, argues the apostle, makes obedience possible even when it is threatened by the most devastating anxiety imaginable. The worry Jesus was talking about is that which denies the love of God.

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the fields grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today or tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more cloth you, o ye of little faith? So do not worry saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and you heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (6:28-34)

1. Again, this passage does not promote the notion that life can be or ought to be absent of all worry since the word Jesus used is *merimnam* which in common usage, meant to worry anxiously or excessively. An extreme argument is used by Jesus, not to condemn wise planning for the future, but to condemn nervous anxiety about it. The implication of his teaching is that once we have made responsible plans that anticipate our future needs, we are to move forward by trusting God. Jesus teaching in this passage points out the basis of much of our anxiety. It results from selfish desire as well as a preoccupation with earthly treasure and as such it indicates an acute shortage of confidence in God. The person who is centered on the kingdom of God differs from the pagans; their foremost concern is defined by their earthly existence.
2. The two illustrations from nature are not intended to teach passivity whereby we put aside our normal responsibility for ourselves as an acceptable option. Secular people may believe in God but they see him as totally outside creation and uninvolved in daily life. Contrastingly, Jesus' followers live in the reality that God is active in every aspect of life therefore excessive worry is an irrational response to the challenges of everyday life. The person of faith balances the present with the future for "Each day has enough trouble of its own". (6:34b)

Chapter Seven

In the last section Jesus deals with the Christian's treatment of others which is summarized by the stating the 'Golden Rule'. This rule Jesus regards as a summary of the Law and the Prophets. (7:12) His teaching contains three fundamental ideas. Judgment must be gentle. Secondly, our judgment of others must be informed by the recognition of our own guilt before God. (7:2) Lastly, our judgment must be no more stringent than the judgment we receive from others. This teaching does not eliminate our responsibility to discern (judge) the difference between truth and falsehood since verse 15 contains the command to beware of false prophets. (7:15) Making this distinction requires judgment.

Chapter 7 consists of a series of self contained paragraphs; how they are related is not so obvious. However, the theme of 'relationships' is the unifying principle throughout the last chapter. The fact that Jesus decided to end his sermon with this theme probably means that he intended to teach his followers that the kingdom of God is a community in which harmonious relationships exist but kingdom relationships are possible only as we adopt a particular attitude towards others by countering our tendency to apply to others standards we do not apply to ourselves.

The moral concepts Jesus taught in this section were not unfamiliar to his Jewish listeners. The ancient rabbis taught that kind judgment was a sacred duty for all Jews. The disciples were familiar with what their Torah said about judgment. "He who judges his neighbour favourably will be judged favourably by God."

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, Let me take the speck out of your eye, when all the time there is a plank in your eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see more clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces. (7:1-6)

1. With this passage Jesus insists that his followers rid themselves of the spirit of fault finding driven by the desire to increase their own status at the expense of their brother's. The double standard must be eliminated but there is no suggestion in this teaching that we turn a blind eye to obvious moral failure. However, the preoccupation with the faults of others must be subsumed by an honest self judgment.
2. The brief saying about specks and planks serves to drive the point home that a person's sinfulness before God dwarfs any fault of his brother's.
3. Understanding this teaching requires a consideration of the range of meaning contained in the word used for 'judge'. It has several meanings but not all are suitable for 7:1. It can mean 'to condemn' but it can also mean 'to discern'. The second meaning is operative in 7:15 when it is applied to the discerning of prophets. The context provided by the text clearly points to the notion of discernment as the correct

exegesis. Therefore, Jesus is speaking out against a judgmental, condemning and critical spirit which inevitably is devoid of honest self judgment.

4. 7:2 requires a careful exegesis. Jesus is reminding his followers that judging others using a double standard indicates a non understanding of the mercy and generosity contained in God's judgment of them.
5. The thought contained in 7:6 is startling and it seems out of character with Jesus. Furthermore, its connection with 7:1-5 is not obvious so the reader must think hard about why Jesus said it. Without doubt, the terms 'dogs' and 'pigs' are references to people but who are they? The 'dogs' he made reference to were wild and dangerous street animals who survived by scavenging in garbage dumps. 'Pigs' were non kosher animals despised by all Jews. Given the orientation of Jews towards wild dogs and non kosher pigs, they would never have offered food, let alone pearls, to either one. On another occasion, Jesus used the metaphor of pearls to refer to the kingdom of God or, by extension, the Gospel itself. It cannot be said that Jesus was forbidding his followers to offer the kingdom to Gentiles since such an interpretation would contradict the 'Great Commission' that ends this Gospel. John Stott interprets these two terms as follows. "They must rather be those who have had ample opportunity to hear and receive the Good News, but have decisively - even defiantly - rejected it." (Christian Counter Culture, John Stott, page 182)
6. If Stott's reading is on the mark then what is the connection to the text that precedes 7:6? Jesus has insisted that his followers rid themselves of their critical and judgmental spirit because these do not belong in his kingdom. However, it does not follow that we should give up the responsibility to be a discerning when it comes to sharing the Good News. When people respond to our witness with a resounding 'No' we should honour their response by moving on and 'shaking the dust from our sandals'.

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone. Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! So in everything, do

to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (7:7-12)

1. The verbs "ask, seek and knock" grow in intensity and urgency suggesting that persistence is an important element in prayer. The requirement for persistence is not reluctance on God's part to grant requests since the 'how much more' argument suggests otherwise. Why then is persistence such a critical in prayer? John Stott's insight on the matter of persistence is helpful and most likely correct. He suggests that persistence is not necessary because God is reluctant and in need of persuasion. Neither is persistence needed 'to keep him up to date' with the state of our existence. Stott writes, "The reason has to do with us, not with him; the question is not whether he is ready to give, but whether we are ready to receive. So in prayer we do not 'prevail on' God, but rather prevail on ourselves to submit to God." (Christian Counter Culture, page 186)
2. This prayer must not be read as providing assurance that every request is answered no matter how selfish the content. Such a view ignores the context provided by the rest of the sermon. Think about what Jesus has taught. We are asked to love those who hate us and to pray earnestly for those who persecute us. (5:11-12) We are asked to live in a manner that impacts the hostile world around us. (5:13-16) We are compelled to examine our hearts as the source of evil doing. (5:21-26) We are expected to be honest and transparent in all our dealings thus making oath swearing unnecessary. (5:33-37) We must not seek revenge nor harbor resentment when we are offended. (5:38-42) Our love, like God's, must be indiscriminate. (5:43-48) God alone must be our primary focus in life. (6:19-24) Trust in God must trump our tendency to worry excessively. (6:25-34) Judgment of others as a means of elevating our self image must be abandoned. (7:1-6) These attributes and characteristics present us with heights we cannot scale. The unaided human will is categorically incapable of achieving the moral demands contained in these moral and spiritual imperatives. We are, therefore, urged by Jesus to ask, seek and knock so that his teaching will become descriptive of the inner reality that drives our outward behaviour. In short, the goal of prayer is to enable us to obey the great commandment. (7:12)

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (7:13-14)

There is a strong element of crisis in all of Jesus teaching. Unlike the earthly teacher who strives to have her students grasp concepts and master skills, Jesus taught to bring his listeners to the point of decision. Each must decide what they will do with what has been taught. Only two responses are possible - yes or no. No middle ground exists as symbolized by the two gates, the two roads, the two trees, the two categories of people, and the two builders. The narrow gate is the one which leads to life even though few chose it. The gate is narrow because it demands repentance as the only acceptable passport and because it involves submission to the will of God. The easy way involves self indulgence but the narrow way involves self denial.

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (7:15-20)

1. The previous passage establishes Jesus' message as containing an exclusive truth nevertheless the passage should not be understood as encouragement for the church to go on a 'witch hunt' nor should it be read as an excuse for constant judgmental fault finding. However, the metaphor does underline the fact that Gospel truth is constantly under threat even from those within the church. Jesus' teaching provides the norm that makes the discernment of truth possible. The normative/objective truth contained in the sermon is exclusive; prophetic words, even when made sincerely, can be false when compared to the objective norm of the Gospel.
2. There is a connection between this passage and the one that precedes it. Jesus has just finished reminding his listeners that the arrival of the kingdom creates a crisis; an easy choice must be rejected in favour of a harder one. Now Jesus warns us that choice is on going because false prophets exist and their words are often powerfully persuasive. The false prophet is one who preaches a message Jesus associates with the 'wide gate' and the 'broad road'. Secondly, the false prophet's manner of living is in obvious contradiction to the

personal characteristics that reflect kingdom values. In other words, the false prophet is more interested in self promotion than calling people to the truth.

3. The false prophet is not easily detected; they appear to be one thing but in reality they are another. Therefore, detection and discernment require us to examine the message as well as the outer expression of the prophet's life.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of the Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord", did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers! (7:21-23)

1. Jesus accepts the fact there are individuals who do remarkable deeds. Some of them even rise to the level of exorcisms and miracle working. With this teaching, he sets out to show that acts alone do not indicate membership in his kingdom.
2. This message should not be read as if Jesus is a football coach attempting to motivate his team by placing them in a position where they are constantly threatened by dismissal if their play is not entirely up to the coach's standards. This approach may work on a football turf but its effects on the spiritual life are disastrous. Martin Luther, before his great discovery of justification by faith, lived constantly in fear that he could not please God and be accepted by him. John Wesley had a similar experience until he heard the introduction to Luther's commentary read at Aldersgate. This was the occasion when Wesley's 'heart was strangely warmed'. Today's reader can be thrown into a state of constant doubt if Jesus' teaching is distorted and misapplied. He was not trying to motivate by throwing his followers into a continuous state of uncertainty. Where as James said that 'faith without works is dead', Jesus said 'works without faith are dead'.
3. Notice that the individuals who are presenting themselves to Jesus at the judgment begin by referring to their deeds and orthodox words as if these are enough gain acceptance by the father. Jesus then rejected their claim because they were mistakenly impressed by what they had done. The chief characteristic of a true follower is obedience. This essential aspect is missing in people when they are

impressed with their accomplishments as a substitute for sincere obedience to Jesus as Lord.

4. Jesus taught as he did to remind his followers of the possibility of self delusion that result when acts are substituted for faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.
5. "It is true, of course, that no man enters the kingdom because of his obedience; but it is equally true that no man enter the kingdom who is not obedient. It is true that men are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ; but it is equally true that God's grace in a man's life inevitably results in obedience. Any other view of grace cheapens grace, and turns it something unrecognizable". (Carson, page 131)

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

1. The parable has the elements of an allegory. The house on the rock stands for faith while the other house is disobedience. Jesus is not here teaching a works righteousness. If he is, then his teaching is in serious contradiction with the rest of the New Testament. Faith, he says, requires more than orthodox thought or intellectual affirmation as substitutes for authentic obedience to him. Conformity to his teaching must be grounded in obedience otherwise faith becomes legalism and as such it leads to a sense of entitlement.

First draft completed Wednesday October 7, 2008

By Peter Ferguson

For the Berean Class

.