

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

Verse By Verse Bible Studies

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**THE GREATEST SERMON
EVER PREACHED**

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew 5 - 7

by

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DEDICATION

To

Becky

Because

You live by the principles

Set Forth In the Sermon on the Mount

INTRODUCTION

I stood with contractor looking at the beautiful molding he had installed around the front of the new addition he had added on to the front of our church sanctuary. My son Mark had drawn the plans and explained them to Jim, just as he had done on a number of other projects. I was reminded of how well they worked together when I thought of a house Jim had built from blueprints Mark had redrawn for a very discriminate physician, and the cabinets they had collaborated on for a lady who hosted a very popular cooking show on a well known television station. On our church addition, Mark had sought a certain look and the molding was an important part of it.

Mark explained to Jim that instead of one piece of molding he wanted three pieces of the same wide molding joined to form one larger molding to compliment the large area it surrounded. Jim confided to me, "Mark sees things I cannot see, and he cannot understand why I can't see them. But as I begin the work, following his plans, it begin to come together and then I see what he has in mind.

God, the Master Designer, not only designed and created the universe, He also created mankind in His Own image and provided him with a plan for a fruitful and meaningful life. The Bible is that blueprint for man's life. In particular, the Mosaic Law sets down principles by which men and women should live. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus fine-tuned the Law, and in so doing He set down the highest and most noble standard of ethics the world has ever known, superceding even the Mosaic Law. And if it superceded the Mosaic Law it superceded the Code of Hammurabi and all other guides and principles ever set down as a guide for individuals, societies, and cultures. By the way, for those critics of the Bible, the Mosaic Law did not draw on the Code of Hammurabi as some claim. Instead, the Code of Hammurabi drew on the principles Noah received from the Lord and passed on to his sons, who in turn passed them on to their children, and they to their children. One of those descendants of Noah decided to set down in a codified form that which he had been taught. Since the Mosaic Law goes back to the original source, it easily supercedes all other codes of ethics the ancient world knew. It replaced the "thus reasoneth the mind of man" with the "thus saith the Word of God."

The Mosaic Law is superior to any thing else the world had ever seen before the coming of Jesus Christ. And then Jesus gave us the Sermon on the Mount, which sets before His followers the highest standard man will ever know on earth. There has never been anything else with which to compare it. It stands alone as the supreme standard by which Christians should live their lives. It is Christ's blueprint for living a life of purpose, a blueprint for building meaningful relationships, written plans which will guide nations as well as individuals. The Sermon on the Mount sets forth Gods plans for developing the individual believer from spiritual infancy to full maturity in the faith.

It is the foundation upon which God builds character and integrity into His people - it not a foundation upon which we build character or grow ourselves to maturity. You did not save yourself and you cannot nurture and grow yourself into what God wants you to be. Justification comes by grace, through faith, plus nothing - it is totally the work of God, realized when, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit one goes to the Father through His only begotten Son (John 3:16).

The nurturing and developing process is called Sanctification, and the best definition I have ever

found for Sanctification is that which is revealed in Romans 8:29-30:

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Thus, it is God's expressed purpose for everyone who is justified (by grace through faith) "to become conformed to the image of His Son" (sanctified by grace through faith), and all who are justified are so secure in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:33-39) that God can go on and pronounce them as glorified.

God has given us a blueprint for the Christian life. The lost person cannot possibly understand it or appreciate it, though he may admire the basic principles and praise many of the concepts. It is only when an individual is born from above and indwelt by the Holy Spirit that he can really begin to understand the principles set down in the Sermon on the Mount. Peter admonishes us to "...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). The more one grows in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ the more he sees how the principles set forth in this Scripture really work.

Today, two thousand years after the birth of Jesus Christ, Arabs in the Middle East hate the Jews and Jews hate Arabs. There are three "religions" in the Middle East, with Christianity making up a small percentage of the population. Only Christianity appreciates the Sermon on the Mount and the principles set down there, and there will never be peace in the Middle East as long as Muslims and Israelis reject the teachings of Christ. Islam and Judaism know little or nothing about forgiving one's enemies. They are not taught to love their enemies or pray for them, they are taught to kill them - and eye for an eye. The solution to the strife and bloodshed in Israel is found in the Sermon on the Mount. My old friend, evangelist Anis Shirosh, has testified that he blamed Jews for the death of his father, and as a child his goal was to get big enough to start killing Jews. During his youth, Anis found a job in a Baptist hospital while he was there he heard the Gospel and received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. He has said, "When I stand on a street in Jerusalem and see a Jew and love him, it's a miracle from of God."

God's miracles, however, are not reserved for such high profiled situations as this. In this study of the Sermon on the Mount I will share with the reader some insights into the life of a few remarkable believers, including a woman who was religious a long time before she became a born-again believer in Christ. She has always held a reverential belief and respect for Jesus, but when she received Him by grace, through faith, she began a new walk with Him, a walk empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit. Now in her seventies, Irene (Mickey) Steward still runs a home for Alzheimer patients. I told her that I want to tell her story - or a little of it - as I rewrite my commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. I responded to her look of confusion by pointing to her work with her patients. She has told me that when she first moved to the area she would have had "nothing to do with those people."

Dr. Steward - I call her Miss Mickey - has seven earned degrees, including degrees in psychology

and medicine. She has performed delicate and complicated surgery in the past, but her skill is totally overshadowed by the compassion she shows daily for her patients. Miss Mickey has on a number of occasions given her own bed to a new patient whose family could find no other place for their mother or father. She has often slept on a couch, or even on the floor. For years now, she has been getting up every three hours during the night to check on each of a dozen or more patients. Two heart attacks, cancer, knee replacements, broken bones, and surgery have not been enough to slow her down.

Think of a lady whose father was the first Italian immigrant to earn a degree from Harvard Law School. Picture a runaway teenager who, to avoid discipline, ran away from her strict Catholic home when she was only fourteen years old. Who could have imagined what a full life she would lead? She was picked up by a young Air Force Officer who took her to his home and turned her over to his father and their housekeeper. Before long, they were married. It gets better! He became an FBI agent. She went to school and had seven children and, in her own words, “after the first one, every time I went to the hospital and had a baby, I brought two home.” She adopted a baby to raise with the one to whom she had given birth.

Mickey has performed surgery, had private audiences with the pope, and traveled extensively in Europe, and finally made a choice between a life of luxury and a life of sacrifice, choosing between being served and serving. There is little wonder that when I look at the words, “Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy,” I think of Mickey. I believe you will too. But it is far more important to understand how you may embrace the principle set forth in that Beatitude and make an application of it in your own life.

When you read, “Blessed are they who mourn,” you may think of Mickey, who lost two sons in Viet Nam, a daughter to a drunken driver, and a husband to an airplane explosion. She has lost something like forty-five patients, whom she called “my friend” - not just a patient. Forty-four of those who have died in her home died with her holding their hand, encouraging them not to fear but trust the Lord to take care of them. When you read, “Blessed are the merciful,” you may think of Mickey. You may not, but those who know her will. Her patients receive constant care during the day and each night she gets up every three hours and checks each “friend” herself. She can give you the life history of each one. Her compassion is a disturbing challenge to those of us who tend to become apathetic at times.

When Mickey was born again, she came from a religious background, but she did not know the Scripture. Her Sunday School class was exciting to her, her Bible reading took on new meaning, and worship services were a blessing. However, Mickey showed more compassion and demonstrated more mercy than many who have been Christians for many years.

We need to approach the Sermon on the Mount with great expectation. If you are the same when you finish reading it there is something wrong - with you! You need to ask the Lord to help you understand the Sermon on the Mount and apply it in your daily life.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERMON

AUTHOR

Matthew's own experience with Christ is recorded in 9:9-17. His old name was Levi, and he was the son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14). His new name, "Matthew," means "the gift of God." Apparently, the new name was given to commemorate his conversion and his call to be a disciple [6: 14]. The Gospel According to Matthew is carefully structured to form a bridge between Malachi and the New Testament; and to introduce us to the Messiah.

BACKGROUND

In Matthew 1:1-17, we find the Genealogy of Christ. This carefully organized genealogy establishes the fact that Jesus, a descendant of Abraham and of David, meets Scriptural qualifications for the Messiah.

In 1:18-25 there is a brief account of the birth of Christ. Though brief in comparison to the account in the first two chapters of Luke, this record reveals the announcement of the birth of the Savior, Joseph's dilemma, the virgin birth, and the name JESUS, as well as Emmanuel.

Matthew 2:1-12 tells us of the men from the east who came to worship the new born king. Led by a star, they came to Jerusalem seeking information about the birthplace of Christ. Their inquiries alerted Herod, who feigned interest in worshipping the infant. They were directed to Bethlehem where they worshiped Him and presented precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

In Matthew 2:13-15 we see the flight to Egypt after the angel of the Lord warned Joseph that Herod planned to kill the child. Verses 16-18 document the slaughter of children two years old and younger in Bethlehem. Verses 19-23 record for us the death of Herod; and the return to Nazareth, and the fact that Jesus is called a Nazarene.

Matthew 3:1-12 provides a brief sketch of the ministry and preaching of John the Baptist. His message was simple: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (3:2). He fulfilled his role as the forerunner of Christ as he said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (3:11).

In 3:13-17, we find the baptism of Jesus by John. Verse 16 tells us that when Jesus came up out of the water, "the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him." Verse 17 records the response of the Heavenly Father, "And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." It is significant that at the beginning of the ministry of Christ we see work of the Trinity: The Son is baptized; the Spirit descends; and the Father speaks, expressing His pleasure with His Son.

Matthew 4:1-11 chronicles the three by the devil in the wilderness. Satan frequently comes to people immediately after baptism, or some time of renewal, when they least expect it. They are on a spiritual high and often do not realize how vulnerable they are. Jesus resisted the temptations, quoting Scripture in answer to Satan. These temptations were real! They focused on the ministry He was about to undertake. He showed Jesus how to get results; but Jesus knew he was trying to get Him to do the work of God in and ungodly manner. The fall of some popular tel-evangelists, and exposure of deceit on the part of others, should alert us to the fact that Satan is still using the same approach to try to trip up God's servants. Tragically, he has been very successful with many, and not all of them are tel-evangelists!

Matthew records (4:12-17) the beginning of the ministry of Christ, His work in and around Capernaum, and the early response of the people. His preaching followed the same theme as that of John: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (4:17).

In 4:18-22, we see Jesus calls the first disciples to follow Him. In 23-25 the writer was inspired to share with us a glorious picture of Jesus as He "went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (4:23). As His fame spread, people from far and near brought to Him the diseased, those who were possessed by demons, and the mentally ill. He had compassion on them and healed them.

Now, the stage is now almost set for the Sermon of the Mount - **THE GREATEST SERMON EVER PREACHED**. In 4:25 we read that "there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan." But, while the stage is set, there are still some unanswered questions. First, did Jesus preach this sermon to the multitude, or was He simply teaching His immediate disciples? Second, was This one sermon, or is it a collection of His teachings some of the disciples had recorded during Him ministry? The third question concerns whether this is directed at believers, or non-believers. The fourth question is, what approach do we take in studying The Sermon on the Mount?

In considering the first question, one may be inclined to ask, "What difference does it make?" It does not make me any difference at all - the content is what is important. However, I personally believe this was a sermon preached to both His disciples and to the whole multitude who gathered around Him that day. It seems that Matthew has set the stage for such a sermon.

The second question has been discussed for years. Some reject the idea that this was one complete sermon. Some say it was too long. But the late Dr. H. R. Herrington memorized the entire Sermon on the Mount and preached it from memory to his people at First Baptist Church, Rayville, Louisiana. I would like to do that, but sometimes I stumble over John 3:16. I even forgot my wife's name once. But, just once!

Others have claimed that the sermon is too deep to have been covered in one sermon. No one could retain all of it. They insist, on the basis of this argument, that this is a collections of teachings covering the entire ministry of Christ. I see this as one sermon, the greatest sermon ever preached - preached by the greatest preacher who ever lived. I would expect nothing less of the Jesus revealed

in the Bible. What about all the other references in the Gospels in which Jesus says some of the same things we find in this sermon? As noted earlier, this is a very deep sermon in which not only deep, but revolutionary new teachings are proclaimed. Repetition is to be expected, and one would expect Jesus to amplify these teachings, and painstakingly discuss their application throughout His ministry.

The third question may be the simplest for the mature, but growing Christian to answer. There is no word given in the sermon about how to be saved. There is no way a lost person can live up to the standards of this sermon. The Christian, indwelt and empowered by the Holy Spirit, may take this as a guideline for personal growth in the Lord for his/her entire life. For those who would be perfect, “even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (5:48), the Sermon on the Mount is the MAGNA CARTA of the Kingdom of God. It sets before us the ideal character of the citizen of the Kingdom of God. The standard will never be lowered.

The carnal believer may find these glorious teachings almost as difficult to procure for his life as a lost person does. He might find them almost as frustrating, because, like the lost person, he is operating in the realm of the flesh. Only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit can we comprehend the dimensions of this sermon, let alone apply them in our daily life.

The Sermon of the Mount is not just for the mature believer. It is for all believers. The babe in Christ may begin to apply these principles in his daily life and grow in his understanding of them for the rest of his life. By the same token, no one has ever mastered the principles set forth here. If you try to live up to these principles on your own you will surely fail. Our daily growth in these principles is called sanctification. Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, deals with this in his discussion of the Doctrine of Sanctification in Romans 6:1-8:39.

The fourth question, some might think, has possibly been answered in the discussion of the first three. However, many people approach the Sermon on the Mount differently. Craig L. Blomberg (*The New American Commentary*, Broadman, Nashville, 1992, Vol. 22) cites a survey that itemized thirty-six different interpretation [2: 94]. Only a few will be mentioned here. Others mention eight, or twelve.

1. Some say the Sermon on the Mount is the new Law of Jesus, abrogating the Law of Moses.
2. Some say the principles have no practical application - they are great, but cannot be practically applied.
3. It has been suggested that the Sermon on the Mount shows the futility of trying at all. Failure leads one to fall back on the mercy of God.
4. Some see it as an absolute ethic, based on the pure will of God.
5. To some it implies conversion. This standard is given to Christians, illustrating how the converted man will live. While the Christian should live by this standard, keeping this law does not produce salvation.

6. John MacArthur (*Kingdom Living Here and Now*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1980) points out that only one who is “poor in spirit” can receive God’s salvation; and that only the poor in spirit will be truly blessed [4: 14]. He is right on both counts. But this sermon, as he rightly stresses, is given to believers. One must humble himself to be saved and the believer who walks humbly before God is the believer who is blessed.

7. Blomberg lists a number of approaches:

- a. Luther believed that “God's impossible moral demands disclose the depth of our sinfulness and drive us to our knees in repentance.”
- b. Many Anabaptists applied the ethics in an extremely literal way (some to the point of pacifism).
- c. Protestant liberals have seen the sermon as a paradigm for the social gospel and a call to the church to usher in the kingdom of God on earth.
- d. Albert Schweitzer saw the sermon as an interim ethic for the disciples of Jesus who mistakenly awaited His return in their life time.
- e. Dispensationalism has limited the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount to the future millennial kingdom.
- f. Inaugurated eschatology "recognizes an 'already/not yet' tension in which the sermon's ethic remains the ideal or goal for all Christians in every age but which will never be fully realized until the consummation of the kingdom at Christ's return" [2 - 95].

My personal position is that the Sermon on the Mount sets forth the character of the citizen of the Kingdom of God. In it we see God’s absolute standard for His children. God created them, sent His only begotten Son to die for them, and then sent the Holy Spirit to convict the lost; and indwell, empower, and guide believers.

According to Paul (Romans 3:21-5:21): (1) God requires righteousness of any person who would stand before Him. (2) No one can produce righteousness. (3) The righteousness of God is imputed unto each person who accepts Jesus Christ by faith (Chapters 3-4). Man’s highest attempt at righteousness is described as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). He cannot produce righteousness; he cannot attain it through religious ceremonies; he cannot buy it; he cannot “experience” it; and he cannot discover it through mental or spiritual gymnastics. He can only receive it one way. It must be imputed unto him as it was to Abraham (James 2:23) - by faith.

In Justification the righteousness of God is imputed unto us. In Sanctification the righteousness of God is produced and nurtured within us. The Sermon on the Mount holds before us the

righteousness that the Holy Spirit produces and nurtures within the hearts and lives of believers who walk in the spirit, and not in the flesh. But, this righteousness is never produced in the hearts of those who grieve or quench the Holy Spirit. The Scribes and Pharisees believed they epitomized the righteousness of God, and set the standard in observing both the Mosaic Law and all the laws of Judaism. However, when Jesus looked at them, He saw nothing but hypocrisy and guile. He had something far better in mind for His disciples.

That brings us to the thesis of the Sermon on the Mount. A key verse in this discourse is Matthew 5:20: “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” When Jesus looks at His disciples, he wants to see inner purity and holiness, not an outward show. When Christians look at each other, they should be able to see the character set forth in this sermon in their lives. Just as the moon reflects the light of sun in the universe, the believer should reflect the life of the Son of God in his daily life. God saves us not just to get us into heaven; but to get something of heaven in us today.

Many modernists insist that Moses was influenced by, and possibly copied from the Code of Hammurabi. Let us set the record straight. There was an unwritten law long before Moses or Hammurabi. The Patriarch Noah, no doubt knew that oral law of God well and taught it to his sons, who in turn taught it to their children. After several generations languages were confused at Babel and people were dispersed. Where did Hammurabi live? Is it not reasonable to assume that much of the code of Hammurabi was based on that ancient law which had been passed down from generation to generation? Furthermore, people had been writing since Adam (Gen. 5:1), and parts of the law may have been written down before Hammurabi. The Mosaic Law was given by the same God Who had given that oral law. Hammurabi, whether he knew it or not, may well have been setting down, however imperfectly, a code based on the oral tradition God had given Adam and Noah.

Look at the religions of the world, both today and in antiquity. There is absolutely nothing to compare with the Sermon on the Mount. Judaism is so far superior to the religions of the world that a comparative study seems ludicrous. In the Sermon on the Mount we see a law far superior to anything Israel had ever seen. It sets before us, often in paradox, a revolutionary ethic which had to shock the Pharisees to the core of their being, for it left no room for their self-righteous pride and arrogance.

PRACTICAL AND REALISTIC

The Sermon of the Mount is exactly what we should expect of our Lord. It sets forth the highest standard the world has ever seen. It transcends anything this world can comprehend, without being “other-worldly.” It is the perfect law of the perfect God, so deep no one can ever completely fathom it; yet, every believer can keep going back to draw from that well which will never run dry. It is so

broad in scope that no one can completely envelop it, yet every Christian can embrace it as the standard for his life. It is so narrow that most people miss the way; yet, the way of freedom and abundant life to every child of God.

If you want to know what is expected of you, read the Sermon on the Mount. If you want assurance of salvation, study the Sermon on the Mount to see if you are bearing the fruit God expects of you. If you want others to see Jesus in you, apply the principles of this sermon daily.

Let me stress one other thing as we turn to the Scripture. There are things you will not find in the Sermon on the Mount. You will not find:

1. Support for “name it and claim it” theology.
2. Health, wealth, success gospel.
3. Self-love, self-worth, self-esteem.
4. A works righteousness.
5. Easy believism. Only the Holy Spirit can enable you to live by these principles. But something is expected of you. It does not just happen.

The story has been told of a pastor who visited a church member. As they surveyed the garden the man had planted in a newly cleared field, the pastor said, “Brother Jones, you and the Lord certainly have a beautiful garden.” Reflecting on the labor he had put into the garden, Brother Jones replied, “You should have seen it last year when the Lord had it by Himself.”

If you continue your study of the Word beyond this passage, you will find help with the ethical demands of this sermon. For example, when we read the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12), it will help to turn to Romans 13-14 and I Corinthians 8 to see how Paul helps us make a practical application of that principle.

The Lord reveals what He expects of His children. In Micah 6:8 we find, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” What a commentary the Sermon on the Mount is on that verse!

THE BEATITUDES, 5:1-12

In the Beatitudes we find one of the high-water marks of the entire Bible. What better way to begin a sermon that sets forth the sharp contrast between the faux righteousness of the Pharisees and the genuine righteousness Jesus wants to produce in every believer. The Pharisees were seen by most people as paragons of virtue and righteousness. Yet Jesus declared, “I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20). But, the Lord began His sermon on a positive note,

promising what every one wants most in this world - happiness. Genuine, lasting happiness.

In this sermon Jesus used the word “blessed” nine times. The word means happy if we think of it in the genuine sense of internal joy” [4: 23]. However, we must distinguish between the word happy as used in the vernacular, and the word joy as we find it in the New Testament. The word happy implies circumstance (happenstance). Joy overrides circumstances.

When I was a child, growing up on a Mississippi delta farm, I looked forward to my birthday as only a child will. But in time my birthday became a sort of bitter-sweet time for me each May. I overheard my parents tell neighbors that they always tried to plant cotton and have it up before my birthday. I became somewhat uncomfortable when I heard some one say, “We'll have a birthday party for Johnny on Sunday afternoon and then start chopping cotton Monday morning.”

We lived some distance from some of our relatives and some of the aunts, uncles, and cousins could visit only once or twice a year. We anticipated those visits and made plans for days to entertain our guests, with trips, fishing, hunting, or swimming. And the best meals of the year! Those were exciting times, but we knew the happiness we were experiencing would not last. They would leave, and we would go back to the cotton field, or to the new ground. So, with that in mind, we didn't wait too long before asking, “How long can you stay? When do you have to leave?” We dreaded the time when they would go so much that it always robbed us of a little of the happiness associates with their visit.

There is none of that in the Beatitudes. What we see here is a blessedness, a joy the Lord will give to those believers who are obedient to Him, and who make a commitment to apply these principles in his life every day.

There is no verb in the original, so the word “are” is supplied by translators to give us with a smoother translation. In helping us to understand how Jesus presented these wonderful Beatitudes, we might paraphrase it in one of the following ways:

1. Congratulations! The poor in spirit.
2. Blessed! The poor in spirit.
3. Oh, the blessedness of the poor in spirit!

As we begin the Beatitudes, we should be aware of different approaches taken in trying to understand how they are to be applied in the life of the believer.

1. The beginner may not see any connection between them. He may recall two or three of three of them and appreciate their beauty, but never try to relate each one to the others.
2. Some may make a serious effort to live by all of these principles daily.

3. Still others see the Beatitudes as a series of steps the citizen of the Kingdom of God must take if he is to reach the state of blessedness, or abiding joy. Some see steps as indicated below.

CHRISTIAN MATURITY

- 9--Reviled - for His Sake
- 8--Persecuted. . . Righteousness
- 7--Peacemakers
- 6--Pure in Heart
- 5--The Merciful
- 4--Hunger & Thirst after Righteousness
- 3--The Meek
- 2--They that Mourn
- 1--Poor in Spirit

SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY

Only the poor in spirit will begin this walk; only the poor in spirit will take the next step. Only the poor in spirit and those who mourn over sin will be meek. Those who have reached the first three steps, according to this approach, will hunger and thirst after righteousness. The climb continues and as one continues to grow, he will begin to think and behave more and more like Jesus. And that person will be persecuted and reviled, and he will be accused of all manner of evil for the Lord's sake. But, even the persecution will produce spiritual maturity (James 1:3-4).

4. We might try to combine numbers 2 and 3.

The step by step growth process has a lot of merit, but we must never think that the lost person who accepts Christ, or the carnal believer who repents cannot begin to hunger and thirst after righteousness until he has mastered earlier steps first.

A young Christian may be placed in a situation in which he must seek to become a peacemaker before he even understands what the Bible means by "They that mourn", or by "the meek". The Kingdom citizen must never seek to add each of these virtues to his life so that he can move on to the next one, as though he is following a formula.

There is no question that spiritual growth begins in spiritual poverty. The only person who is going to reach spiritual maturity is the one who says, "Lord, I am spiritually bankrupt. I cannot produce spiritual blessings; I cannot attain the steps which lead to spiritual maturity where Your richest blessings await me. The very best I can do is to yield my life to you and let you develop these qualities in, my life."

KEY TO THE BEATITUDES

FROM SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY TO CHRISTIAN MATURITY

BLESSED ARE YOU

<u>IF YOU ARE</u>		<u>YOU WILL RECEIVE</u>
REVILED FOR HIS SAKE	-9-	REWARD IN HEAVEN
PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS SAKE	-8-	KINGDOM OF HEAVEN
PEACEMAKERS	-7-	CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD
PURE IN HEART	-6-	SEE GOD
MERCIFUL	-5-	MERCY
HUNGER & THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS	-4-	SHALL BE FILLED
THE MEEK	-3-	THE EARTH
THEY THAT MOURN	-2-	COMFORT
POOR IN SPIRIT	-1-	KING. OF HEAVEN

~~~~~ SPIRITUAL BANKRUPTCY ~~~~~

"Except your righteousness shall exceed [the righteousness] of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" - Matthew 5:20

THE BLESSED ONES

1. THE POOR IN SPIRIT

A PARADOX. Happiness is to be poor in spirit? That's not what the world says! That's not what the gospel of high self-esteem, self-worth, self-image is teaching. Modern social thinkers tell us

criminals have low self-esteem. The child psychologist warns us of the danger of low self-esteem in children. Businesses are looking for self-assertive, aggressive young men and women who are anxious to climb the ladder of success. In school, the humble, courteous young person is not voted most popular, or class favorite. In the court room, a jury is often more impressed by an aggressive attorney with an air of arrogance than one with a quiet manner and humble spirit.

On the surface, it would seem that the Lord missed the boat here. The world simply does not appreciate the poor in spirit, and really does not understand what makes him tick. There is not much demand for this commodity in the modern world. If the guidance counselor finds a student with this attitude he might suggest some kind of behavior modification to correct it.

It is obvious that Jesus and the world are not in agreement. The world says happiness is health, wealth, and success, and of course, the ability to project this image to the world. Jesus says true happiness is reserved for the poor in spirit.

WHO ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT. In the material world, poverty means to be detached from material things. Poverty of spirit also points to a detachment from things. It also means to be detached from self. The person who is detached from material things, from the rewards of the world, and from self is in a position to attach himself to the Lord. When he does that he will find something far better than high self-esteem. He is now in a position to find high Christ-esteem [McGhee, Robert, *Search for Significance*, 5: 30].

Joining a local church does not automatically make one poor in spirit. It is disturbing to find that some church members have no conception of what it means to be poor in spirit. Or, if they do (and this is more disturbing), they have no desire for it. Is it just possible that there is a church somewhere with a member who, like Diotrephes in III John 9, “loves to have the preeminence among them, NKJV”?

One hears reports from time to time about church members who seek honor, glory, or power in the local church, often in very clever or subtle ways. It is even more disturbing when one who has been called by the Lord to be a minister of His precious Gospel seems to desire preeminence among other ministers in his denomination, convention, pastors conference, or ministerial alliance.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” If we believe Him, why are we so conscious of our clothes, cars, and homes. Young children are often as conscious of the emblem on their shirt as their father is the emblem on the hood of their car. Listen to teenagers talk about their designer jeans, or their tennis or basketball shoes. Can you tell any difference in the attitude of the youth in your church and those who are lost?

Mothers and fathers, would you like to test yourself? When your children leave for school do you really want them to manifest poverty in spirit? Or, do you want them to wear the right clothes, drive the right car, and use the speech that will help them to “fit in” with a certain group at school? Relate that to your efforts to impress your peers. How do you want your friends to see you. Be honest.

WHAT DO THEY RECEIVE? This is where it gets exciting! Play by the world's rules and you may receive a measure of wealth for a very brief period of time. Obey Jesus and receive it all - forever! What can the person who denies self and the world in order to attach himself to Christ expect? He is promised THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. See Matt. 6:33; John 10:28-30; Matt. 6:19-21.

What this all means is that in Christ you can have your cake and eat it, too! When you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord, you receive full citizenship in His Kingdom, and all the benefits intrinsic to it. Some benefits are irrevocable, some are conditional. Irrevocable benefits include security (John 10:28) and permanent access to the Father (Rom. 5:2). Conditional benefits include forgiveness (I John 1:9); prayers answered (John 15:7); and the Beatitudes. All these benefits and many more are available to us not - without diminishing in the slightest degree the blessings reserved for us in Heaven.

2. THEY THAT MOURN

ANOTHER PARADOX. If you want to be happy you have to be sad? That's not what the world tells us. Let's face it, nobody is congratulating people for being in mourning. But then, would you congratulate the person who could not mourn? Paul certainly did not congratulate those "Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4:19).

WHO ARE THEY THAT MOURN? In the first place, they are the poor in spirit. Those who are poor in spirit have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and now see both themselves and others through His eyes. Filled with Holy Spirit, they must grieve over the sin of the world as well as weep over their own sins.

Failure at this point might well explain the lack of joy in many lives and the lack of power in the average church today. I once heard Vance Havner say, "We sing, I STAND AMAZED, but we had rather sit amused." The late Leonard Ravenhill told of revivals when people would not say a word, and would not move from their seats for twenty minutes after the service. These people have seen God.

One of the problems with the church today may well be that there is too much laughing, and not enough crying. The Lord promised to bless those who mourn, not those who laugh. How often do we see tears in a worship service? How long has it been since you wept over the condition of your soul? How often do those who repent show genuine remorse?

I mourn the fact that politicians and the news media have divorced morality from politics in America. I mourn when I hear a woman say she is voting for a candidate because he will support, fund, and defend abortion. I mourn when a candidate for the most powerful office in the world openly courts homosexuals. I mourn when I see what the entertainment industry is feeding

American families every night. I mourn when I see church members swim through a mile of filth in hopes of finding a spoonful of something of value in what the music industry, film industry, and TV industry serve the people of this country. I grieve when I see companies that cannot exist without the business of Christians sponsor the most vile programs imaginable.

I grieve when I see what New Age religions are doing to our children in the name of education. I grieve when people cannot see through philosophical and political maze of certain "environmentalists." I grieve when I see the hold evolution has on America. I mourn when the religion page of a Bible-belt paper carries, under banner type headlines, major articles on Islam. I grieve when I see Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses going from door to door with their hellish lies. I grieve when I think of the breakdown of discipline in our homes and schools. I grieve over friends and relatives who are going to hell. And I mourn over the fact that I do not mourn over these things as much as I should! I do not find much comfort in the fact that you don't either.

WHAT DO THEY THAT MOURN RECEIVE? Paradoxically, they that mourn shall be comforted. They are the only ones who will be comforted. Are you beginning to see that Christianity is serious business? The understanding and application of the principles set forth here can only be realized through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and a total commitment on the part of the believer. They are beyond the carnal believer, and completely out of reach of the lost person.

Our comfort is one of the works of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16). But what does it mean to be comforted? For one thing, it means freedom from the fear, grief, and anxiety common to people in this world. They that mourn will receive daily deliverance from fear, worry, and doubt in this world, and absolute freedom from it in eternity.

3. THE MEEK

CAN HE BE SERIOUS? This is really not what the world says! The world knows a lot about the survival of the fittest. The world teaches that the strong shall inherit the earth - not the weak. Saddam Hussein subscribed to the philosophy, "To the victor goes the spoil," when he invaded Kuwait. You may remember when General Colin Powell met the press immediately after President Bush ended Desert Storm (Middle East War to drive Iraq out of Kuwait). He said, "we told him to move it or lose it. He didn't move it and he lost it!" I still get patriotic chill bumps when I think about it.

In the sports world the "winning is everything" crowd. found a champion in Leo Durocher, who proclaimed, "Nice guys finish last." A former coach at Florida A & M. gave sports writers the quote of the day when he was asked what kind of team he tried to recruit. He said he was looking for players who were "Mo-bile, ag-ile, and hos-tile!"

A generation ago a shy, timid person with a totally vanilla personality was described as "meek as a mouse." Let's face it - meekness is not a commodity in great demand in our society. Who ever heard

Jack Dempsey or Dick Butkus called meek? Coaches in all sports want players who will intimidate opponents, not build their confidence. The meek girl is not usually the homecoming queen. She is not often voted "Miss Podunk High." She is not usually viewed as "Most likely to succeed." She seems at a decided disadvantage in office politics, and a liability in real politics. Why would anyone want their children to be meek?

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek..." Either He did not understand the real world, or the real world needs a reality check. Some seem to think there is a Christian world and a real world, and never the twain shall meet. But, if Jesus, our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer, says this is a key to real happiness (joy in the N. T.) we need to try to understand what He means by meek, and ask Him to help us apply this lesson in our daily life.

WHO ARE THE MEEK? Observe that Jesus said, Blessed are the "meek" - not the weak. Synonyms in my word processor for weak include dainty, delicate, fragile, frail. This is obviously not what Jesus is has in mind.

Moses was meek above all men (Num. 12:3), yet he stood in front of Pharaoh and demanded the release of two million Israelites in the name of Jehovah [YHWH]. He was not a weak man, but a man God had molded into the instrument by which He would deliver His people from bondage. He was meek in that he submitted himself to God for the Lord to mold him into anything He wanted him to be. Jeremiah was told to go to the potter's house and observe the potter (Jer. 18). The meek person is the one who has submitted his/her life to the Divine Potter with one thought: to let God mold me into a vessel He can use for His glory.

The Greek word translated meek denotes that one is ready to be taught. A letter was discovered in which a Greek woman is writing to her soldier who was away at war. In it she wrote about the wild horse he had given his daughter. She said "the horse is now meek and she can ride him." What did she mean? Had the horse become weak? No. It had been broken so that she could ride it. It had not lost any strength, but that strength had been brought under control.

How refreshing it is to find a young Christian who is willing and eager, to learn. Mel Neuschwanger made a lot of out of town hospital calls with me during the 1980's and we had many conversations that blessed my heart. I asked about his childhood in Colorado, his naval career, his salvation and subsequent call to preach the Gospel. We often talked about seminary, churches, and ministers. More than once he mentioned Fred Hale, who is now pastor of Walnut Grove Baptist Church, Epps, Louisiana. He would say, "You know, when the Lord called Fred into the ministry, he really started studying the Word. I never went by his house that I didn't find him studying the Bible, and he always had some questions. I have never seen anyone who wanted to learn the way he did." That is called meekness, a willingness to learn, a desire to be taught. Unfortunately, many are more anxious to teach than be taught.

My grandfather talked with me about a young man who was an exceptional athlete. Most people who knew him thought he could have played professional baseball. He was given a chance, but walked away from it because he didn't like a coach. My grandfather once said, "He has a million

dollar arm, and a ten cent head." Just think how many "might have beens" there out there in the world today. One man who had blown his opportunity to get an education once asked me, "Have you ever seen anyone who is too smart to learn?" That is the opposite of meek.

William Wetzel had, reportedly, the highest IQ of anyone who ever set foot on the grounds at Parchman, the Mississippi State Penitentiary. He was convicted of murder and sentenced to life. He killed another man at Parchman, was tried and sentenced to die in the gas chamber. I preached at Parchman every Sunday morning at 8:00 when I was a student pastor. Chaplain R. B. Hicks became a very special friend and I asked him to preach in our church one Sunday.

Chaplain Hicks told us about William Wetzel. He was never open to his witness until after he received the death sentence. He accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and began an intense study of God's Word. The chaplain had never seen anyone grow so much so fast, or learn so much from the Bible in such a short time. He joined Wetzel in a request that the death sentence be commuted to life without parole so that he could spend the rest of his life teaching other prisoners. The petition was denied.

Chaplain Hicks described the execution and then talked with me personally about it. He said that for the first time he saw tears in the eyes of the executioner, and many officers and witnesses were shaken. One of those officials later said to me, "I have witnessed a number executions before, but I'll never witness another one. That man should have lived." He wanted to learn and serve, but he ran out of time. What a waste. Think what he "might have been".

Who are the meek? They are the poor in spirit who separated their heart from self and the world and humbly embraced Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. They became sensitive to the holiness of God, and conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their heart. Now, they mourn over the sinful condition of the world, personal sin, and sin in the church. These believers are the ones who will become meek. They are the ones who will be blessed.

WHAT DO THEY RECEIVE? In the first place, They shall be happy. They are blessed of the Lord. This is far more than the happiness the world offers. This refers to inner peace, the abiding joy Jesus promises to the poor in spirit who mourn over their sin and weakness to the point that they yield their hearts to the Lord for Him to teach them and mold them as He desires.

In the second place, the meek shall inherit the earth. Isn't that amazing? The meek shall inherit the earth - not the strong, not the charismatic, not the wealthy. But what does the Lord mean when he says the meek shall "inherit the earth?" Some have suggested that it means their inheritance in Millennial kingdom when the saints will reign with Jesus for a thousand years. According to this interpretation, this promises means that when one enters the Kingdom of God he comes into the original inheritance of dominion over the earth God promised Adam before the Fall.

Others may relate it to their eternal inheritance in the "new heaven and new earth" of Rev. 21. "Inherit" is in the future tense. Meekness is the present inner attitude the Lord wants to nurture in each believer. The inheritance is the future reward.

There is another possibility. Meekness is the inner attitude each believer must have before he will know true happiness (joy). Without it Christian growth stops, and the believer will never go on to realize the other Beatitudes, or the blessings available through these spiritual principles. The person who is meek will develop a different attitude toward the earth and all that is in it. When true meekness becomes a reality in one's life it will influence both his present attitude and future expectations concerning his inheritance.

MEEKNESS IS IMPORTANT. We read in Psalms 149:4 that "the LORD ... will beautify the meek with salvation." In Zephaniah 2:3, God says, "Seek meekness." James 1:21 teaches us to "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." I Peter 3:15 tells us to "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and [be] ready always to [give] an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

Someone has said, meekness means to be finished with me - forever. How do you receive criticism? How do you offer advice? This hits us where we live - every day. You will have an opportunity to test yourself - soon!

4. THOSE WHO HUNGER

HUNGER A BLESSING? World hunger is serious problem today. Various Christian and secular organizations are using television and mail-outs to keep this issue before us. We see reports of millions who will die of hunger or some illness related to malnutrition if we do not send help. We see shocking pictures of emaciated people gathered together in the desert, burying their children and waiting to die themselves.

When I was growing up in the Mississippi delta, I often listened to neighbors tell about their experiences during the Depression. In some parts of the stories were about the soup kitchens and the soup lines. In other places boys in their teens went to CC Camps to try to earn enough to keep food on the table at home, or at least, to keep the family from having another mouth to feed.

The world of the first century understood hunger. In the Model Prayer, Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." It was a challenge to provide bread for the table each day. Famine was as close as the next drought, pestilence, or war.

Starving people will go to great lengths to satisfy their hunger. We are seeing people stand at intersections with signs which read, "I will work for food." Regular news reports remind us of the street people who are going through garbage cans right now looking for food.

Physical hunger can hardly be seen as a blessing, yet Jesus used a word picture they could understand. O the blessedness of those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." How appropriate this picture is! And how appropriate that it is placed where it is in the list of Beatitudes.

The people who are really going to hunger and thirst after righteousness are the poor in spirit, the ones who mourn, the meek. As they are grow in Christ-likeness, they become more and more sensitive to the holiness of God. It is to be expected that they will begin to hunger and thirst after godly righteousness and holiness.

In Justification righteousness is imputed; in Sanctification is nurtured and developed through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. You will never get there on your own. Mark that down. The lost person, left to himself, will progressively grow more unrighteous. Satan will cooperate with him to make him harder, colder, and more blind to the holiness of God, and quench any desire for true righteousness in his own life. One can be adding good works and moral principles to his life and still be moving further and further from true righteousness at the same time.

Only the poor in spirit, who has denied self and totally surrendered his life to the Lord is going to mourn over sin in himself and others. That is the only person who will permit God to mold him and teach him (the meek). That person, and only that person, is really going to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

Jesus has real hunger and thirst in mind. He is talking to some people whose ancestors had eaten their own children. They did not know it, but a generation later those under Roman siege (Titus, A.D. 70) inside the walls of Jerusalem would again be reduced to that kind of hunger. The hunger He has in mind is more than a gnawing sensation in the stomach. It is a drive as strong as life itself; a desire as strong as life.

WHAT DO THEY RECEIVE? They shall be filled! That promise cannot be made to those who hunger and thirst for the things of the world. Thousands spend large sums to hear some financial guru tell them how to make a fortune selling a product, rendering a service, or through investments. Most of them can testify that their thirst was never really satisfied.

My son told me about a friend whose goal it was to be Miss Louisiana, and then Miss America. She finally became Miss Louisiana - on her sixth try. But she would never be Miss America. There are many politicians whose thirst for power is never satisfied. Every four years, only one person is going to be elected to the highest office in the land. That does not disturb some, but others are crushed by the defeat.

Those who are physically hungry or thirsty will go to any lengths to be filled. People have eaten cats and rats, as well as roots and bark of trees in an effort to fill their stomach. Survival techniques are taught to help people find enough food and water to survive under extreme conditions. Many survive in the woods, in caves, or at sea for a long time, but they often are found in an emaciated condition.

Jesus, however, promised, "They shall be filled." Not if, not maybe. They shall be filled! Not some of them - all of them. A high school principle used a story to challenge students to seek knowledge. He told of a young student in India who went to a wise teacher he greatly admired and asked him

the secret of his knowledge. He expressed his desire to someday be as wise as the esteemed teacher. The teacher took him by the hand and led him out into a nearby river. When the water was waist deep, the teacher suddenly placed his hand behind the student's neck and pushed his head under water. For several seconds the student waited, trying to figure out why his teacher had forced his head under water. After several more seconds, he gently tried to raise his head, only to have the teacher apply more pressure. He tried again, this time with a little more energy, but the teacher's weight simply increased on his neck. Desperately needing air by now, he tried to stand up, only to find the elderly sage springing over on his neck to hold him under. Panic set in and with all his strength he straightened up, throwing the teacher off his neck. He turned on the teacher, demanding, "What were you trying to do, drown me?!" The teacher said, "No, but when you want knowledge as much as you wanted water you will find it."

Those who have an unquenchable thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. Those who hunger for righteousness will be filled. But, only those who hunger and thirst for it will be filled. It does not just happen. It is the result of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in life of the one who is meek before the Lord.

For more help, spend time with the Lord in prayer and Bible study. Read good Christian books, like *Knowledge of the Holy*, by A. W. Tozer, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, by Andrew Murray.

5. THE MERCIFUL

A NOTE. The construction of the Beatitudes should be kept in mind as we study them. John MacArthur points out that "the first four Beatitudes were entirely inner principles, dealing with how you see yourself before God. This fifth Beatitude, while also being an inner attitude, begins to reach out and touch others" [4: 105]. He notes that the first four line up with the last four. "The first four are inner attitudes and the last four are the things the attitudes manifest" [4: 105]. The fifth Beatitude is transitional, moving from the character developed within to outward righteousness and service.

A REMINDER. Those who hold to a works theory of Justification may assume that the Beatitudes are rules you must keep to go to heaven. Those who hold a pure grace view of salvation might answer, No, these are rules on how you are supposed to live after you become a citizen of the Kingdom of God.

The truth is that these are principles by which Christians should live. No one is saved by adopting these principles as rules he must keep in order to go to heaven. But these principles do concern salvation. Only the poor in spirit will ever enter the Kingdom of God. Only one who mourns the sin in his life, and repents, will be forgiven. To be saved one must come to the Lord in meekness. At the same time, no lost person can produce the meekness the Lord can, and will produce in the life of His children. A lot of lost people are walking around with a load of guilt, and they will try anything to get rid of it. Yet they do not hunger and thirst after righteousness.

WHO ARE THE MERCIFUL? If the merciful are blessed by the Lord it is important for to know who they are, and to determine whether or not we are merciful. Did Jesus find many who were merciful in His audience?

Jesus found religious leaders to be external, ritualistic, superficial, and often hypocritical. He often found Himself in conflict with those whose religion was external. He preached, "What is really important is on the inside." At least, it begins on the inside, and finds expression in right living. "Righteousness on the inside will produce the fruit of right action. But you can falsify action without reality, and that's legalism. What Jesus wants springs from the right character" [4: 104].

What does it mean to be merciful? His listeners that day had to be wondering about that. If there is one thing the people of that day knew nothing about, it was mercy. The Romans might have taken pride in their justice, but they were without mercy. They glorified power, discipline, and courage, but held mercy in contempt. One Roman philosopher said that mercy was a "disease of the soul." If a Roman citizen did not want his slave he could kill him and nothing would be done about it. He could kill his wife, or child and never have to answer to the law.

The Jews of that day were almost as merciless as the Romans. They were long on vengeance and short on mercy, even to their own parents (Matt. 15:1-9). The average person was not interested in being merciful. At no point is the superiority of the principles set forth by Jesus seen more clearly than here. He advocated mercy, and He is our greatest example of mercy.

The Greek word (*eliamosuna*, from which we get the word eleemosynary) denotes the spirit of a benefactor. It is found only here and in Hebrews 2:17: "In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things [pertaining] to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. Mercy is genuine compassion that reaches out to others. It is not just a feeling of sympathy. Mercy is meeting the needs of another, not just feeling sorry for him.

WHAT DO THEY RECEIVE? Mercy. Every person needs mercy at one time or another. We all need the Mercy of God, and Jesus said, in essence, "You be merciful to others and God will be merciful to you." God is the subject of the second phrase [4: 108).

It is important to know what Jesus does not say. He does not say that if you show mercy to a cruel, merciless person, that he will suddenly change and show mercy to you. He might, but he might not. In fact, he might see it as a weakness and hold you in contempt. He was the most merciful person who ever lived, but two merciless systems (Romans and Jews) united to put Him to death.

If you show mercy to others, many will be influenced. Surely, others will be more inclined to be merciful to you. My bathroom is at the opposite end of the house from the hot water heater, and in the winter takes a while to get the water hot enough to shave. But after it runs for a while, I can usually turn the hot water down. Why? Because the pipes get hot. In the summer, when you have been away from home all day and come in and turn on the cold water, it may be warm at first. After

you run cold water through it, the pipes get cold and your water is more refreshing. The same principle applies to heating and air conditioning ducts.

If your life is a conduit for the mercy of God others will have their hearts warmed by it. As the mercy of God flows through your heart, your heart will also be warmed by it. When your life is a channel of blessings, you are going to be blessed. If you are a channel for the mercy of God, that which flows out to others will be the fruit of the Spirit as recorded in Galatians 5:22: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith."

However, if your life is a conduit for jealousy, envy, strife, arrogance, bitterness, harsh criticism, and cruelty, then you are going to become a cold, hard bitter person. You will not receive mercy and kindness from others, but that is not the main problem. You will not receive mercy from the Lord.

One other point must be made. It is true that if you are a conduit for love and mercy, your heart will be warmed by that love that flows through your heart, and if you are a conduit for anything other than mercy your heart will become cold. But on a higher level, what you say and what you do comes from what you are on the inside. If, in the Holy Spirit, you are a loving, merciful person, love and mercy will flow through your heart. If on the other hand you inflict pain and heartache through your words and acts, it is because you are a merciless person at the core of your being, regardless of how you may represent yourself to others, and regardless of how loudly you profess your love for the Lord.

How is mercy expressed? Forgiveness when one needs to be forgiven. Comfort when one needs comfort. Mercy is shown through the Second Commandment as you love your neighbor. Forgiveness flows out of mercy, just as mercy flows out of love. Mercy precedes forgiveness and love precedes mercy. Why is God merciful unto us? Paul says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us" (Eph. 2:4). John MacArthur asks:

Do you see the sequence? God loves and love is merciful, and mercy is forgiving, among many other things. But love is bigger than mercy. Mercy is bigger than forgiveness and love is bigger than mercy, because love can do a lot more things than just show mercy. Mercy presupposes a problem. Love can act when there isn't a problem [4: 110f].

MERCY AND GRACE. Mercy is the negative side of the coin and grace is the positive side of it. When one pleads for the mercy of the court he is saying, first of all, "I am guilty." One who is not guilty will settle for justice but the guilty desires mercy. Secondly, the guilty person who asks the court for mercy is saying, "I do not want to pay the price (or at least, the full price) for my crime."

Mercy means that the individual does not receive what he deserves (not all of it, anyway). The sinner deserves death (Rom. 3:23; 6:23a) but the one who trusts Jesus Christ does not pay that price. That is mercy. Grace means that we receive what we could never deserve - eternal life. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy." The first four Beatitudes are a reality in the believer's heart, and now he will look out to others with a spirit of love and mercy.

6. THE PURE IN HEART

THE TRANSITION. The first four Beatitudes deal with inner character. The last four deal with the outward expression of that character. The first four deal with inner reality, the last four reach out and touch others. The fifth Beatitude (Blessed are the merciful...) provides us with a transition, because it deals with both inner character and the outward manifestation of it.

A CONFESSION. I don't know where to begin! This Beatitude is so wide in scope and so deep in thought no one can fully grasp all the ramifications of it. I find myself agreeing with the writer who confesses his own dilemma in trying to write about this verse Beatitude:

This is one of the greatest utterances in all the Bible. It stretches over everything else in Scripture. The theme of purity of heart being necessary to see God is vast and infinite and draws in almost every biblical thread [4: 119].

It will help to recall spiritual conditions at the time Jesus spoke these words. Religion was a major influence on the lives of the people of Israel in the first century. The most dominant influence was that of the Pharisees, but they had moved religion a long way from the revelation God had given Israel through Moses.

Judaism by this time had become oppressive and authoritative. The Pharisees had misinterpreted the Law of Moses and substituted for it a legalistic system that no one could keep. It left people guilt-ridden and frustrated. They knew they were sinners and needed forgiveness. Their hearts cried out for a Redeemer; but instead of a Saviour who would forgive their sins and set them free from their guilt, they were given a system that burdened them with rules and laws they could never hope to keep. God had provided for their salvation through faith, but those who controlled their religious life substituted a rigid legalism which made them more aware of their shortcomings, without offering them genuine hope.

Their hearts cried out, "How can I see God?" They must have wondered, "How can I know God; how can I know that I know Him." The Pharisees had no answer for them. If the Pharisees offered them no hope, they were not going to find it from the Sadducees, who controlled the Sanhedrin, but did not believe in miracles, angels, or life after death. The office of High Priest was basically political. Judaism in that day created a lot of questions, but offered no real answers. And they were not going to find what they needed in any of the other religions of the world. Would they, then, have to continue in anxiety and frustration?

Nicodemus illustrates this anxiety in the visit with Jesus (John 3:1ff). If anyone could have found an answer in Judaism, surely Nicodemus should have. Luke (10:25) gives an account of another who visited Jesus with the same question in mind: "Behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" To paraphrase, they were asking, "How can I ever enter the Kingdom of God when I cannot keep His law?"

That was the question most in the minds of the people sitting on that Galilean hillside as our Lord

spoke that day. Jesus had an answer for them in the Beatitudes. Possibly, more than any other Beatitude, this one gives us the answer. Jesus is the answer. God is absolutely righteous and any person who has any hope of seeing God must stand before Him clothed in the righteousness imputed to him when he accepts Jesus Christ by faith. They should have known this "as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works" (Rom. 4:6).

This question still burns in the hearts of men and women today. I will never forget a young man named Timmy (not his real name). I was a student at Mississippi College, and one morning I picked up a copy of the Clarion Ledger (Jackson, MS) and saw the headlines about a carnival worker with the State Fair who had beaten and strangled his girl friend to death the night before.

The girl was about seven months pregnant. but Timmy was not the father of the baby. He had thought he could live with the fact that it was not his baby, but that night he was drinking and it started bearing on his mind. In a drunken stupor he beat her and strangled her.

I led a BSU (Baptist Student Union) trip to the Hinds County jail every week for nearly three years. When I arrived the following Thursday, the jailer told me a reporter was in maximum security trying to interview Timmy, but his time was up. I entered the outer area and heard the reporter badgering him so that he could paint a more sensational picture of this animal behind the double set of bars. I heard the reporter say, "You must think you are pretty tough, don't you; beat'n up a woman?" Timmy's response was, "You come behind these bars and I'll show you how tough I am." Not a pleasant scene.

The reporter turned on me and demanded, "Who are you?" I answered and he fired back, "Where are you from?" I said, "Home," and looked him in the eye until he walked out. I could see the negative publicity about these bleeding heart from the BSU at Mississippi College, so I decided not to give him any more information.

I introduced myself to Timmy and spoke to the man in the next cell who had received Christ as Savior on an earlier visit. I shared with Timmy God's message of salvation, but there was no response. But, the first of the next week I was surprised to find a long letter in my mail box from Timmy. In the letter he said, "Johnny, I am trying to find God." The man in the cell next to him had persuaded him to tone down his response to reporters and to listen to what I had to say. I wrote back, assuring that God was trying to find him before he ever thought of trying to find God.

On the next visit Timmy told me that he was a Catholic, and a priest had been to see him. The priest talked with him a few minutes and then said, "I will leave some pamphlets for you to read and when I come back in a week, I'll ask you some questions about them." When he left Timmy asked the jailer not to let him back in. That is when "Bob" convinced him to listen to me, and he wrote me his letter in desperation.

I thank God that I could tell Him that he could find God by trusting Jesus Christ. I had the privilege of visiting with Timmy a year later at Parchman, where he was serving a life sentence. He told me

then that if he ever got out he wanted to serve the Lord. I assured him that he didn't need to wait for years until he was paroled to serve God. Where could there have been a greater need for a witness? Now, let us look at the Beatitude that tells us how we may see God.

THE PURE IN HEART. Who are the pure in heart? The Greek word used here means pure, clear, clean. To the Christian it suggests holiness. So, what Jesus is saying, is "Happy are the holy..." This Beatitude is in the perfect place in the pattern we see in the Beatitudes.

The first seven Beatitudes are carefully arranged by the Lord. The first three lead up to the fourth, a high plateau where one thirsts for righteousness. You begin in poverty of spirit; you mourn over sin, which leads to meekness. At that point you hunger for righteousness. God supplies His righteousness, which issues forth in mercy (5th), purity of heart (6th), and the gift of peace making (7th). The first three lead to the fourth and next three flow out of it. There seems to be specific parallel between the 1st and the 5th, the 2nd and the 6th, and the 3rd and the 7th. Note that:

- # 1 - Poor in spirit reach out in mercy to others - # 5
- # 2 - If you mourn over sin, you desire a pure heart - # 6
- # 3 - They that are meek will seek to be peacemakers - # 7

While this pattern should not be pushed too far, it is obvious that God has carefully woven these together in such a way that they relate to each other. As you study them you see that they are interdependent upon each others, all in a general sense, but some in a specific sense. We must not pick and choose between the Beatitudes, but ask the Lord to make them all a reality in our heart.

It has been suggested that there are two kinds of religions in the world, the religion of human achievement and the religion of divine achievement [4: 125]. The world is full of religions, but Christianity is not one of them. Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship, based on the revelation of God's love in sending His Son to die on the Cross that we might have new life in Him. In religion man seeks to appease a god, merit the favor of a god, or attain a divine nature through works. One might make a religion of his efforts to see the true God through his own works.

In Christianity, God saves us by grace when we place our faith in His Son Who died for us on the cross. He does all the saving. Our part is to trust Him. Justification is all of God. Sanctification is also the work of God in the life of the individual. So, no one can produce a pure heart.

How do we receive it, then? The first step is poverty of spirit. The poor in spirit, mourn over their sin and in mourning, they bow before the Lord in meekness for Him to teach and to mold them. Those are the ones who hunger and thirst after righteousness; and when they were filled, then deal mercifully with others. They are the pure in heart.

The pure in heart abstain from sin and all that will impact their spirit in a negative way. Some people abstain from certain sins, but they are not pure in heart. The pure in heart add positive virtues. They not only stand against something, they stand for something. Furthermore, "Purity includes not only the capacity to abstain from evil, but also the grace to refrain from the

self-righteous, pharisaical mentality that would excommunicate or consign to perdition those who have not yet become pure" [3: 21].

THEY SHALL SEE GOD. They shall see God - not bye and bye, but here and now. "The pure in heart see God progressively on earth. They see him in others, in history, in the unfolding of his Word...To see God is the supreme good of human existence" [3: 21]. One day we will see God perfectly. We read in I John 3:2, "When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." When Christ returns, according to Rev. 1:7, "Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him." This is our blessed hope for the future, but we do not have to wait for the return of our Christ to see God.

When I became pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Nederland, Texas in 1973, people asked me if I knew Manley Beasley (now deceased), a former pastor. Unfortunately, I did not. But in the years following I heard many incredible things about this godly man who walked with the Lord in meekness and in power. The Lord had brought him back from the door of death more than once before I ever heard him preach.

Manley Beasley preached at the Nationwide Pastor's Conference at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis a few years ago. He checked himself out of a hospital in Dallas against his doctor's orders. In fact, the doctor said, "If you leave you are going to have to find another doctor." Manley said, "I can find another doctor, but I have an opportunity to preach and I am going to Memphis."

He came and preached. We were aware that he might not be with us very long. He died a few months later. But, I will never forget something he said that day. He said, "I would walk a thousand miles to see God, but I wouldn't walk across the street to hear a sermon about Him." Manley Beasley's statement took my mind back to something I heard Leonard Ravenhill say in a taped lecture. He said, "Most people do not come to church to see God. They come to hear a sermon about God. They don't come to see God." Ask yourself, "Do I have that deep a yearning to see God?"

How many church members are willing to settle for a sermon about God? Some may even take pride in the fact that they do want to hear a sermon about God; they do not go to see or be seen. But how many really expect to see God in our services? Do we have a deep yearning to see God? How do we know that we have seen Him? Do others know when we have been with God? Following Pentecost, when people "saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

When I was a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary my wife and I worshiped with First Baptist for a few months. J. D. Grey was pastor. Years later I went to hear Dr. Grey preach in revival meeting. When he stepped up to the pulpit he held up a small plaque and asked the pastor to attach it to the pulpit where every preacher who preached from that pulpit would see it while he was preaching. It read, "We would see Jesus." He took one with him to every church he visited and gave it to the pastor.

7. THE PEACEMAKERS

PEACE. Peace is a major theme of the Bible. The word "peace" is used 429 times in 400 verses in the Bible. It begins with peace in the Garden of Eden (Genesis) and close with peace in eternity (Revelation). The Fall broke the peace in the Garden. Christ came to earth and died on the Cross to bring "peace on earth" (Luke 2:14) to those who accept Him by faith. To believers He is the "Prince of Peace." He reigns with the Father in an eternal kingdom of peace. Those who accept Him as Saviour and crown Him as Lord will know "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7).

Peace is available to anyone through Jesus. Why, then, is there so little peace on earth? Two reasons come to mind. First, Satan works to destroy the peace Christ offers. In the second place, there is the disobedience of men. Lost people cannot find that peace as long as they reject the Lord. Christians can only know that peace when they walk in the Spirit. There is little peace for the carnal believer.

THE PEACEMAKERS. This should be the most popular of all the Beatitudes. These people should not even offend the world. Everyone loves a peacemaker! The supernatural work of God might be required to make one meek, or to produce purity, but anyone can get in on this one, any where, anytime. United Nations has peacemakers, or peace keepers, are at work all over the Middle East, in Africa, and Bosnia right now. What could be so special about this Beatitude?

The peace Jesus has in mind cannot be produced by man. We are grateful for peace efforts in the world. Through the efforts of peacemakers in international politics, countless lives have been saved. Because of these peacemakers we are now reducing our nuclear arsenal, and cutting back on conventional weapons. This is good. It is also good when someone persuades two parties who have had problems to "shake hands" and set aside their differences so that they can live with trouble in the community. But Jesus has something more than that in mind.

In the first place, people do not usually persecute that kind of peacemaker (See the last two Beatitudes). In the second place, being that kind of peacemaker will not cause them to be called the children of God. They may be, but they may not be. The activity of the ones Jesus refers to here will cause them to be called the children of God.

It must also be stressed that one does not become this kind of peacemaker by accident, or by his own genius or intuition. He begins in poverty of spirit, he mourns over his spiritual condition until he yields his life in meekness to the Lord. As he continues to grow he will become a peacemaker. What is the greatest work of the peacemaker?

The peacemaker who will be called the child of God is the one who has first made, or found, peace with the Lord in his own life. Then he seeks to be a peacemaker between God and his fellow man. In other words, a soul-winner. This person must also seek to be a peacemaker between man and man. "Peace is not just stopping war; peace is creating righteousness that brings enemies together in

love" [McA: 137].

As noted earlier, the peacemaker should be welcomed by everyone. But when the peacemaker begins his work it is amazing how many enemies he will make. In trying to make peace between God and man, we cannot compromise the Scripture in reference to sin and its consequences. In trying to make peace between man and man, we cannot compromise doctrine, or conviction that is Bible-based. The peacemaker is committed to truth. Satan, the father of liars, is the bitter enemy of divine truth and he will unleash all the forces of hell to hinder, or prevent the work of the peacemaker.

The Lord has promised to be with us in all things (Matt. 28:19-20). He has also promised victory over Satan (James 4:7). Paul wrote, "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom 16:20).

AN ILLUSTRATION. When I first met a Christian attorney in Monroe, Louisiana, I asked him if he knew my brother who is also an attorney in Monroe. He assured me he knows him well. He then proceeded to tell me something that illustrates how a Christian can be a peacemaker, as well as how this might lead someone to call him a child of God. He said:

The first time I ever worked with Mike Sanders, I observed that he had a way of defusing tension. When I get involved in a case I am very aggressive and that sometimes creates tension. Later I asked another lawyer if he had noticed how Mike Sanders has a way of defusing tension. I said, "I wonder if Mike is a Christian. The next time I have an opportunity I'm going to ask him." The next time I saw Mike I asked him and he told me that he is a Christian. Mike is a good lawyer and he represents his client well. I have found myself leaving him feeling especially good, and then I ask myself why I feel so good: I just left \$500.00 on his desk!

This man decided that Mike was a Christian because of the way of conducted himself in a business which frequently produces tense situations. In other words, when he observed that he was a peacemaker, he identified him with Christ, the Prince of Peace.

There are people who profess to be Christians who do not give one this impression, either in the work place, school, or the little league ball game. Even worse, they show little interest in being a peacemaker in the church. Some of them want to be seen as peacemakers, but others perceive them as insincere and hypocritical. Many have been betrayed by one they trusted as a friend and caring Christian, before they discovered their propensity for gossip.

Churches are going through some difficult times in this country today. Some churches are splitting, pastors are being terminated, church business meetings in some churches regularly turn in to what one pastor calls "a two hour ride through ulcer gorge." The church should be one place in this world where people can find peace, but too often instead of peacemakers trying to preserve and cultivate peace, trouble makers are keeping something stirred up that will destroy the fellowship.

Envy, strife, and jealousy are often expressed in harsh words, critical comments, gossip, slander, whispering, and insinuation.

We need Christians peacemakers who will go outside the church as peacemakers between God and man. In other words, soul-winners. We also need members who are dedicated to making peace within the fellowship. But before many church members serve in either capacity (and they should be doing both) they are going to have to repent, and mourn over their sin and over broken relationships in their church, family, and community.

AN ILLUSTRATION. I really don't like the Chicago Bears. I respect them in some ways; I just don't like the team. I was touched by the movie, "Bryan's Song," which featured the special friendship between Gayle Sayers and Bryan Picolo. Sayers and Walter Payton were two of the greatest running backs of all time. But when I think of the Chicago Bears I think of one position that epitomizes their brand of football. Middle linebacker. For years, that has meant Dick Butkus and Mike Singletary. Dick Butkus may have been the greatest of all time. I loved to watch him play, but now when I think of Dick Butkus I cannot help but think of all those years of beer commercials he made with Bubba Smith. By the way, when Smith was saved, he became convicted about those commercials and quit making them.

Now, for Mike Singletary. For years commentators praised him, and the more I heard, the less I wanted to hear. Then one day I watched as someone interviewed him, and I became aware of the fact that there is some substance to the man. He really has some values and a perspective on life that made me wonder if he is a Christian.

One more interview and I became a fan of Mike Singletary. In this interview he made it clear, "What is most important in my life is my relationship with Jesus Christ." He was being praised as one of the greats of the game, a can't fail for the Hall of Fame. Speaking with conviction, Singletary said, "We don't need celebrities. We need men who will stand up for what's right and what's wrong - not based on opinion, but truth, the absolute truth, the word of God. That is the only truth there is."

8. PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

WHAT'S THAT??!!! Blessed are the persecuted? You mean after seven "Blessed are they's," this is how I am to be blessed? The founding fathers had higher hopes for the citizens of America than this. They guaranteed us the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And all Jesus can promise the citizens of His Kingdom is "Happy are those who are persecuted?" That's the way it works. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness - they are going to be persecuted. Not may be persecuted - will be. But don't forget, He says He will bless you even when you are persecuted for righteousness sake.

PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. This seems at first to be out of character with the first seven Beatitudes. But after careful study it makes sense: those who live by the Beatitudes will be peacemakers and they will invite persecution. The Prince of Peace came "not to bring peace, but

a sword" (Matt. 10:34). The world harassed and persecuted Jesus, it killed ten of the twelve Apostles and Paul, and savaged the early church. The Sermon on the Mount anticipates the affliction of the saints. Jesus preached, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44).

What Jesus presents in the Beatitudes is a portrait of the true believer, the character of the citizen of the Kingdom of God. We came to the Lord with a broken spirit, mourning over our sin. We have to do this to be saved, but we continue in these attitudes in our new life in Christ. We add to that meekness, a desire for righteousness, and a commitment to be a peacemaker. When these attitude becomes a reality, be ready for this one: "Blessed are they who have been persecuted for righteousness sake."

It is critical that we understand that the first seven Beatitudes do not come by accident, nor do they come with longevity, membership in a particular church, connection with the right people in the church, or certain activity in the church. The carnal believer will only know these attitudes, and the blessings that accompany them, in a very limited way. The believer who walks with the Lord in humility, submission, and loyalty will grow in both these attitudes and blessings. These attitudes put one at odds with the world. The world will not tolerate one who is poor in spirit, because it is filled with pride, and honors those who promote themselves.

It scorns those who mourn over sinfulness. It claims, for examples, that homosexuality is simply an alternate life style. The world cannot tolerate meekness; it honors high self-esteem and self-worth. It cannot stand the peacemaker because the peace of God clashes with the peace of the world, just as the prince of this world is at war with the Prince of Peace.

BLESSED ARE THEY. Who are the blessed ones in verse 10? They are the same ones who are called blessed in verses 3-9. They are the ones who are living out the Beatitudes. "To the degree that you fulfill the first seven Beatitudes, you will experience the eighth" [4: 152]. How will they be blessed? James provides the answer: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (Lit. *trials*). Knowing [this], that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:2-3).

In I Cor. 10:13, Paul mentions a blessing which should not be over looked: "There hath no *temptation* taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the *temptation* also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (italics added). We may substitute the word "trial" for temptation. Paul also wrote: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

THE PERSECUTION. If we live by the Beatitudes, we should be outstanding citizens, the ultimate neighbors, and the best friends in any community. We should be model parents, husbands or wives, and children. Who would want to persecute or harass anyone like that? It's not fair! A motivational speaker announced to his audience, "This is not a just world, it is just a world." Sounds good, doesn't it? He was right about this not being a just world, but wrong when he said it is just a

world. It is an thoroughly unjust world.

A pastor visited a Sunday School class taught by a local attorney, a man who supported every program of the church faithfully. The pastor was surprised to hear his friend and fellow laborer say, "Christians are not persecuted in America today." The teacher was possibly thinking of the torture to which many were subjected in the first century, or in Communist countries in the twentieth century. The pastor was thinking about the burden under which he had labored for many years in that very church. He may have been thinking about his counseling ministry: the wife who was made to feel that her commitment to her Lord was the main problem in a troubled marriage. The business man whose partner derided him because he wouldn't compromise his ethics. The student whose peers harassed her because of her stand on moral issues.

It may not be fair, and it may not make sense, but those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be persecuted. Paul wrote in II Timothy 3:11 of *persecutions* and *afflictions* "which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me." More to the point, he went on to write in 3:12, "Yea, and *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" Paul wrote in Galatians 4:29, "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, *even so it is now.*"

Jesus was the most loving, gracious, peaceful Person who ever lived, yet He met with opposition and persecution everywhere He went. Living by these principles brought persecution to Jesus. From Abel to David, Paul to Martin Luther, John Bunyan to saints meeting in house churches in Communist China today, it has always been the same. Human nature has never changed; and the world is still at enmity with God and His church. The righteousness of the saints is one thing Satan can not tolerate.

If you progress to the point that you hunger and thirst for righteousness, and become a peacemaker you will be persecuted. When you are identified with Christ the world will hate you as it hates Him.

"We will find that the sons of the flesh will always persecute the ones born of the Spirit. Living in direct opposition to Satan in his world and system will inevitably bring antagonism and persecution from the people who do not respond to our message" [4: 153]. The Lord offers us encouragement: "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope (Romans 5:3-4).

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (II Cor. 4:17).

So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure (2 Thes. 1:4)

Some people seem to think that only foreign missionaries are persecuted. Some of them face numerous danger, others may have to relocate when the political climate changes, but for others the greatest burden is separation from family and home. They receive an adequate salary and benefits and look forward to a good retirement. When they are on furlough everybody wants to hear them.

They are in demand for mission banquets, conventions and conferences. When they retire from the foreign mission field many find other areas of service, and enjoy the respect of Christians wherever they go. One recently retired missionary said to a church, "Don't worry about us, worry about your pastor."

It might come as a shock to some church members, but there are hundreds of pastors who are harassed, and whose families are brutalized by the people they are called to serve. Some bring it on themselves by being insensitive, crude, and offensive to members. Through their speech and actions they invite opposition. That is unfortunate for both the pastor and the church.

Many, however, are called to a church and discover that many members simply do not respect pastors. Others watch them like a hawk, ready to pounce at the slightest provocation. Often times the biggest problems stem from trivial issues, seldom is it theology or ministry. The pastor's wife plays the piano, or teaches a particular class. She suddenly discovers there are ladies in the church who refuse to speak to her, or worse, say harsh things to her and about her.

At this time, both of my sons are active in the local church, but many PK's (Preacher's Kids) drop out of church when they finish high school and refuse to go at all. People wonder why. In some cases they cannot get over the abuse to which their parents were subjected in some church. In other cases, those sons and daughters of pastors can truthfully say that the greatest hurt, or the greatest humiliation of their life came from church members. They remember that to some people the preacher's kids were fair game. They even say cruel things about their parents where they know the children will hear it. They want to inflict pain! Thank God, they are in the minority! But it still hurts and some never get over it. My son heard a woman curse me when I refused to take Scripture out of my wedding ceremony.

The young pastor is often in for a rude awakening when he preaches on the "wrong" sin, and discovers that he does not have to worry about the world persecuting him. Some of the church members will get him first! "Our pastor" has a lot of courage when he takes a stand against the lottery, but let him mention the bingo games at the high school Halloween carnival, or the raffle tickets students are asked to sell. He is supposed to preach against adultery and homosexuality, but let him refuse to marry a member's son or daughter, no matter what the grounds are.

There are many churches with a good fellowship. Members study God's Word and make an application of it in their daily life. They are committed to prayer and soul winning. They cultivate New Testament fellowship in their church. They must never take that fellowship for granted. Satan takes it seriously! Members must come regularly to the Sermon on the Mount and drink deeply from this well which will never run dry. Continue in the Word, in prayer and soul winning.

We should not be surprised if we are harassed when we live by the Beatitudes. If we are not persecuted we know something is wrong. The answer is not that the world has suddenly become a kinder, gentler place for Christians. The world will tolerate a lot of the religion that parades itself as Christian. For years some televangelists have served up a steady diet of self-esteem and positive thinking. Others have paraded a long list of super-saints before the nation; usually famous

entertainers and athletes. Some of these have become very popular. Their records and books are best sellers.

Why are they not persecuted? Has the world changed? Was Jesus wrong? One writer reminds us:

The issue is not that the world has changed. The issue is that we have changed the standard of righteousness, and we have people who claim to be Christians who do not live enough of a righteous life to give an honest definition of Christianity--otherwise the systems they are engulfed in would spit them right out. We think the world is just more tolerant, but the fact is, we may not be living intolerant lives" [4: 155].

It is possible for one to profess to be a Christian and go through his entire life without even being harassed. All he has to do is blend in with the crowd. Adopt the world's values, its music, and movies, laugh at its jokes. In short, all he has to do is the opposite of Psalm 1:1, which says, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." Don't tell people you are a Christian; don't tell people they are lost and going to hell unless they repent. Avoid certain issues, or if you cannot avoid them, compromise. Compromise. I can almost guarantee you that you can avoid persecution.

Louisiana congressmen, Jim McCreary, and Jerry Huckaby, were forced to run for the same office after redistricting in 1992. They were invited, with other candidates, to speak at a Jewish temple in Shreveport. According to the Shreveport Times, they were all asked, "Do you believe you have to believe in Jesus to go to Heaven?" One congressmen reportedly said that he personally believed in Jesus, but did not believe everyone had to believe in Him in order to go to heaven. The other apparently said that he belonged to a particular church, but did not believe you would go to hell if you did not believe in Jesus. Jesus can make some people very uncomfortable.

True righteousness will be met with persecution. Over a century after Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount, a man was rebuked by Tertullian, one of the early church fathers, for some unchristian business practices. The man replied, "I have to live, don't I." Tertullian asked, "Do you?" [1: 106f]. Is your life worth more than obedience to the Lord?

It is persecution for Christ's sake that Paul has in mind, and that is what the Lord intends in the eighth Beatitude. "It is easy to develop a 'martyr complex' and feel that every time we fail to get our way we are being persecuted. Such whining belittles church members in the eyes of the world and of one another. This Beatitude is for stout hearts and determined spirits" [3: 23]. It must be remembered that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).

A word of caution is in order. Jesus does not say that you will be blessed when you create a bad situation and then have to suffer the consequences. The cause for which one suffers is the key. Suppose a pastor is lamenting the fact that he has just left a church under a certain amount of pressure. He says he believes in preaching the truth and they just couldn't take it. You are aware that the same thing has happened to him about six times in the past twelve years. The issue might

not be his righteousness.

The broken in spirit who mourn over sin, and bow in meekness before the Lord, will hunger and thirst for righteousness. They will seek to bring others to God for His peace. If they do not compromise, they will be persecuted. But even in their suffering they will be blessed.

9. REVILED, PERSECUTED, FALSELY ACCUSED

BLESSED ARE YOU. At first glance this might seem to be a continuation of the eighth Beatitude (vs. 10). But upon closer examination, it becomes obvious that it is a separate Beatitude. The eighth is more general - "Blessed are they which are..." The ninth is specific - "Blessed are ye when..." The late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman once wrote, "The climax of blessedness is reached in this ninth. It is more than the capacity to endure opposition to righteousness - it is the ability to rejoice even when men revile you and speak evil against you falsely for Jesus' sake" [3: 24]. It is not only specific, it is applicable to American Christian as we look contemplate life in the beginning of the third Millennium. I have to agree with John MacArthur:

We are on the threshold of some days unlike any we have seen in America. We have been lollygagging around in the aftermath of the Second Great Awakening era, living off the revivals of the past and the benefits of their heritage, but that is fast coming to an end. Not only is government acting against religion, but religion is also acting against itself by proliferating all the cults, isms, schisms, frauds, and phonies [3: 167].

REVILED. True servants of the Lord Jesus Christ must expect to be reviled. Perhaps the greatest hindrance to the spread of the Gospel in America is the fear of ridicule which paralyzes the average Christian. Simon Peter was afflicted with this fear during the early days of his ministry (Matt 26; Acts 10; Gal. 2).

Pagans have always mocked Christians. Lost people have reviled believers since Pentecost. Some of the bitterest attacks have come from religious leaders. For more than a century Christians have been mocked and reviled by a new enemy - those scientists who reject Christ. Those who believe in evolution have been especially aggressive in their mockery of Christianity. They found a ready ally in many in the news media during and following the infamous Scopes trial in 1925. That trial led to widespread acceptance of evolution in schools across America. Theologians began to adopt compromise theories and reinterpreted the Book of Genesis. This was a major factor in leading us into what Francis Shaeffer called the Post-Christian era in America.

There are new attacks today coming from a powerful enemy that is in league with the devil. For most of the twentieth century Communism has used every force at its disposal in an effort to crush all religion and establish a godless, classless state. Communism failed because it fostered a elite ruling class, and abused the masses, and because it tried to suppress one of the strongest drives in human beings - that drive was created when God wrote Himself into the consciousness of every person (Romans 1:19ff). But the danger is not over. Pagan evolutionary humanism has given way

to pagan evolutionary New Age Movements.

There are many groups and movements parading under the New Age umbrella. Each has its own agenda and some of them conflict with others. But among the things they hold in common is a pantheistic, or monistic theology, and a hatred of Christ and Christianity, and a tolerance for religions of the world.

Jimmy Furr, my brother-in-law, was a Regional Director for the Interfaith Witness Department of the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board for twelve years. He and a co-worker once rented a booth at a big New Age extravaganza in Florida. They began passing out New Testaments and witnessing to people. They were immediately reviled and bitterly condemned for daring to witness for Christ. They encourage almost every kind of religious practice, including eastern mysticism, channeling and all sorts of ungodly views and activities, but they cannot tolerate the Christian Gospel. We can anticipate a lot of opposition from these New Age movements in the future as their influence continues to spread into education, politics, environment and religion.

Television mogul, Ted Turner, called Christianity “a religion for losers.” A leading television producer has reportedly said the Christianity has failed America, and now he will give her his religion. We will do well to anticipate greater opposition and persecution in the future, especially when we take a stand against homosexuality, abortion, and other evils of our day.

PERSECUTE YOU. The ninth Beatitude makes the persecution personal. It is one thing to talk about the horrible torture and slaughter of Christian in Rome during the first century, or to read about heroes of the faith in *Foxxe's Book of Martyrs*, but quite another thing to think about our own persecution.

Paul writes in I Cor. 4:9, "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world..." Is this the way we see ourselves today? We are not to be super saints, Who's Who in America, the stars of Christian talk shows? Paul saw himself as marked for death. We must see ourselves in the same way. We read in Matthew 16:24, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

When we live by the principles set forth in the Beatitudes, we will be persecuted. That is not conjecture: it is Scripture, as already seen in II Timothy 3:12 (all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution). Those who really want to avoid persecution can always find ways to do it, and they can rationalize enough to convince themselves they are faithful to the Lord.

ILLUSTRATION. The July/August, 1992, issue of *Moody* magazine carried an article about Christian influence in Hollywood. According to the article there are a number of Christians in the film industry; they avoid controversy, seek ways to influence the industry in quiet ways, and support each other. In the October, 1992 issue, under “Letters,” there is a letter to the editor from Loren Regier of Chesterfield, Ind. responding to the article:

Yes, effective witness has always been best served in a relational style, non-abrasive in approach. . . but non-confrontational? Come on! Where in the Bible is the gospel served with a cherry on top? The gospel by its very claims is radical, direct, and brings us face-to-face with our sin.

I have great concern with our "settle-in, snuggle-down" approach to Hollywood evangelism. Christian insiders whisper terms like low-key, low-profile, and quiet influence while Satan and his special-interest groups lobby at full voice!

Why don't the Christian insiders pool their talents and start a movie company where good morals are neither whispered nor censored? [Regier, Loren, *Moody*, Chicago, Oct., 1992, p. 10].

SLANDER. "Blessed are ye, when [men] shall ... say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. No one wants to be reviled or persecuted, but it is particularly difficult when we are falsely accused. Religious leaders lied in an effort to try to persuade Pilate to have Jesus Crucified. Again, they were religious who brought false charges against Paul before Felix (Acts 24).

The more righteous a person is, the greater the dangers are that he will be falsely accused. The more courageous the stand one takes against sin, the greater the opposition will be from Satan and his forces.

BLESSED ARE YOU. What are we to do in light of all the harassment, slander and persecution? Rejoice! "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great [is] your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." We are to rejoice because (1) our reward in heaven is great, and (2) the prophets before us were persecuted. Behind us is the example of the prophets and all the martyrs. Ahead of us is the glorious promise of heaven and all its rewards. Paul wrote, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

The promise given with the first Beatitude was the Kingdom of Heaven. The last one is given with the same promise: great is your reward in heaven. For a better understanding of what that means, read John 14:1-6 and Revelation 21 and 22.

YOU ARE SALT - YOU ARE LIGHT

Matthew 5:13-16

5:13 - YE ARE. There were expressions one frequently heard a generation ago, especially in the south, that reflect a Bible consciousness people possessed in the Bible Belt. One of the expressions

was, "He is the salt of the earth." This was a high compliment for one who was both a good neighbor and "down to earth." Unfortunately, the words were usually taken out of context and reflected little understanding of what the Lord had in mind.

We must determine who Jesus has in mind first, and then what He means by the salt of the earth. In the first place, He might have addressed this to all those who heard Him that day on the mountain side in Galilee. If that is the case, He obviously means all believers, those present and those who would believe in Him after that time (John 17:20). Certainly all believers should be the salt of the earth, but many who profess to be Christians seem to have lost their saltiness.

Another possibility is that while Jesus intends all believers to be the salt of the earth, the only ones who wear the humble title, "the salt of the earth," are the ones who have applied the Beatitudes to their life in Christ. Only the poor in spirit, who mourn over sin, the meek who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are merciful and pure in heart who become peacemakers are really the salt of the earth. Paul portrays them as walking in the Spirit, rather than in the flesh; spiritual rather than carnal (Romans 8).

THE SALT OF THE EARTH. Salt was a very precious commodity in those days. It had great commercial and domestic value because of three essential properties, or uses. Salt was used to add flavor to food, to preserve food, and for healing. Those three uses made salt essential to people - and the metaphor applicable to Christians.

Christians who apply the Beatitude principles daily serve these three functions in the world. First, true believers add flavor to society, in the home, the church, on the job, and in recreation. How do they do this? By producing the fruit of the Spirit: "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law (Gal 5:22-23). I once asked the manager of a manufacturing plant if he could tell a difference between Christians and lost people on the job. He said, "Absolutely. You will have problems with Christians, but you can sit down with them and work out the problem much better than with lost people."

It was discovered that during the most oppressive days in the Soviet Union when Communism was trying to destroy Christianity, that Baptists in some places in Russia were often protected by Russian commissars. They were given a quota on the farm or in the plant. They discovered that the Baptists have a different work ethic from most workers. They were also more dependable because they would show up on Monday ready to work while many workers either did not show up because of "illness," or came to with a hangover. To fail to reach the quota meant serious consequences to the commissar so he would overlook the religious activities of these Baptists because they helped save his job and possibly his life.

The second property of salt was preservation. Without refrigeration and modern ways of preserving food, salt was essential in preservation of food. When applied to believers this points to evangelism. Beatitude type Christians are always conscious of lost people around them, as well as the lostness of the lost people. They will seek their salvation. When one hears the glowing reports from great crusades, he might feel that his humble witness is not that important. One of the greatest evangelists

of all times was Dwight L. Moody. He was not the most polished, the best educated, or the most articulate preacher. But two factors contributed to his success. First, it is said that even though thousands walked the isles during his crusades, he actually won more souls to the Lord through his daily personal witnessing than in the big crusades.

The second reason Moody was so successful is seen in the account of a ministerial meeting in which ministers tried to agree on an evangelist for a proposed revival. An elderly pastor recommended and held out for Moody. After a lengthy discussion one young pastor said, "I don't see that Dwight L. Moody has any monopoly on the Holy Spirit!" The elderly pastor responded, "The point is not that Dwight L. Moody has a monopoly on the Holy Spirit. But, you see, the Holy Spirit has a monopoly on Dwight L. Moody."

The third property of salt that parallels the work of Christians is that of healing. In our day, with antibiotics and other medications, we may not be aware of the importance of salt in healing. An allergist says that one of the best things you can do for allergy and sinus problems is to irrigate the sinuses with a mild salt water solution. A man was bitten by a cotton-mouth moccasin early in the twentieth century. Flesh decayed around the fang marks, leaving a hole that did not heal for weeks. He carried salt with him and several times each day he would take off his shoe and sprinkle salt in the wound. There were no miracle drugs at that time.

There are many wounds in the hearts of some of our fellow believers. The merciful will respond to them. Peacemakers will reach out to them in the Holy Spirit and try to be an agent of healing. We must be sensitive to those whose feelings have been bruised, those whose hearts have been crushed, and minister to them as the Good Samaritan did to the injured man on the side of the road.

IF THE SALT HAVE LOST ITS SAVOR. We do not think of salt losing its flavor, but a number of things can happen to salt to cause it to lose its flavor and its value. For example, it can become contaminated with other chemicals to the point that it not only loses its flavor, but may also become harmful. It may be diluted with water to the point that it has very little value as a preservative. The church that becomes ritualistic, lukewarm, or contaminated by the world is powerless to add flavor, to preserve, or to heal.

CAST OUT. It is said that some people baked bread in an outdoor oven which in some cases was insulated by having salt packed around it. After a period of time the heat would so effect the salt that it would have to be re- placed. The old salt would be thrown onto the road in front of one's house where it would be "trodden under foot of man."

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD - 5:14-16

5:14 - YE ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD. Light is even more essential to life on earth than salt. Light from the sun both lights and warms the solar system. In the Bible light symbolizes two things: truth and righteousness - "just as its opposite, darkness, is a figure of ignorance and sin"

[3: 31]. John says of Jesus, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). It is interesting that only Jesus can say, "I am the light of the world," yet He can also say, "Ye are the light of the world." That is because he is the source of light; we only reflect the light. If we receive the Light of the world we can no more keep from reflecting it than the moon can keep from reflecting the light of the sun.

The believer cannot produce that light, he can only receive it by grace through faith. The light he receives continues to diffuse in ever widening circles. It is reflected from the individual (vs. 16) to the house (vs. 15), and then to the city (14ff), and then to the world (14a).

The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention publishes two newsletters on a monthly basis. "Light" is a Christian ethics and religious liberty publication mailed to pastors and other leaders. "Salt" is its Washington, D.C. newsletter printed to keep pastors and denominational workers informed about political issues and social issues. The Christian Life Commission seeks to help us to more effectively be the salt of the earth, the light of the world. They also shows how Director Richard Land is trying to impact society as both salt and light for the Lord.

A CITY SET ON A HILL CANNOT BE HID. A comforting fact on a dark night to weary travelers and lonesome shepherds, from Jerusalem to Rome. But imagine what they would have thought of the lighted skyline of a modern like Atlanta or Dallas! The street lights are not turned on to keep the city a secret, but to illuminate the city, both practically and aesthetically. The Christian is given light that he might light up the world. He must not keep it a secret.

5:15 - UNDER A BUSHEL. In ancient times people used a simple lamp with a bowl they filled with olive oil. Since they did not have matches or lighters, they might shield the lamp to keep the wind from blowing it out. But when they lighted the wick they set it on a lamp-stand so that it would give light to those in the house. The Christian should let his light shine, not cover it.

Unfortunately, many Christians have become very skilled at covering the light. If you ask, they will tell you they are Christians but their actions and their speech dispute the claim. Some of these people serve very effectively in social and civic organizations, but shy away from responsibilities in the church. In 1975 someone wrote, "First-rate loyalties to second rate causes' may well be the divine Coroner's report on the death of mighty America someday" [3: 32]. If he could only see us now! Every time you turn around it seems that someone is driving another nail in the coffin of morality and decency. For the first time ever in America, in the 1992 presidential election, millions of Americans showed that moral issues did not matter to them. I am still amazed at how many Christians do not see abortion as a serious issue.

Salt must lose its identity to provide flavor or to save meat from rotting. Light, on the other hand, must be seen. Salt must touch, and become a part of, that which it is to preserve. Light, by contrast, does its work from a pedestal. The Christian must do the humble work of salt before he can be an effective light for Christ. And if there is one thing light does, it to call attention to its source. Too many are ready to be put 'up front' where they can 'shine' but are not willing to go personally to a

rescue mission, nursing home, or jail win the lost and minister to those in need.

How does one become the light of the world? He must first become the salt of the earth! He not the source of either salt or light. That which we receive from Jesus we must use for Him. Paul wrote, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17).

5:16 - LET YOUR LIGHT SO SHINE. You are not the source of the light, you cannot generate that light. You can only reflect the light you receive from the Light of the World. But that light is called "your light" and you are told to let it shine. The moon has no choice in reflecting the light of the sun, but you and I are responsible for letting our light shine. We must consciously let our light shine. In order to do that we must first know the Light of the World; we must know the Lord, we must know His Word, and we must be filled daily with the Holy Spirit.

THAT THEY MAY SEE. The world needs to see the good work of Christian people. It has been suggested that the reason many people do not go to church is that they have been to church. It is also possible that the reason many people do not want to become a Christian is that they have seen a lot of Christians. Sadly, there are times when social and civic organizations show more concern for those in need of food, shelter, clothing, and medical help than church members.

Every year we see telethons, walkathons, races, concerts and door to door solicitations for those with special needs. Certain individuals, like Jerry Lewis, are closely identified with such causes. It is now the smart thing for entertainers to have a cause. It's good for business. It is interesting that beer companies often remind us of all the good things they do for people with some of the money they make pushing the most abused drug in the country. I am not impressed by those who make billions, destroy millions, and help hundreds.

Human good is good for humanity and may be good for the person doing the good deed. But human good is the best the unsaved person can do. Jesus expects much more of those who know Him as Saviour and Lord. He may not receive any credit from human good but He is glorified by spiritual good. Every believer is either walking in the flesh or in the spirit. The Christian who is walking in the flesh is as incapable of producing spiritual good as the lost person. The believer who is filled with the Holy Spirit will bring glory to Christ through his works.

GLORIFY YOUR FATHER. In John 1:4-5, we read, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." Jesus let His light shine on in the darkness and all the darkness in the world could not put it out. He commands us to let our light shine, not so people will recognize us, but that they will glorify the Father. If you are involved in a lot of service, or charity causes, you need to pause from time to time for a reality check. Who gets the most credit for your work? It is not always easy to lose yourself in your work, but the heavenly Father will not be glorified until you do just that.

TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS - 5:17-20

5:17 - THINK NOT. What you think is important. It is essential for us to understand the point Jesus is making in this passage. Verses 17-19 provide the backdrop for the stunning fact the Lord reveals in verse 20.

TO DESTROY THE LAW OR THE PROPHETS. Jesus would be accused of breaking the law and violating the message of the prophets, but those who think He came to destroy either must stop thinking that way if they are to understand the meaning of true righteousness.

BUT TO FULFILL. In Luke 4:14-21 we find Jesus reading from the Scripture in a synagogue. It was His custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day. It was the custom in the synagogue to begin with readings from both the law and the prophets. After standing to read a messianic prophecy from Isaiah, Jesus sat down to teach the people. He shocked many in His audience when He proclaimed, "...This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21).

When Jesus changed water to wine at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee (John 2), He was not just showing off. Note that he told servants to fill six water pots with water and they filled them to the brim. These water pots were not used for drinking water, but "...after the manner of the purifying of the Jews" (John 2:6). After they were filled, Jesus ordered the servants "Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast" (John 2:8). He did not tell them dip from the six waterpots, but to draw from the well (the word means to draw from a depth).

In the Gospel According to John we see that the miracles were given as signs. In this case, the six water pots filled with water represent Judaism, which was far superior to all religions of the world until that time. Now, Judaism is filled to the brim, but it still needs to be fulfilled. Only Jesus could fulfill Judaism. The number seven stands for completion, or perfection. Jesus told them to draw out now and bear to the governor of the feast. This water was changed to wine, but not the water in the six water pots. This wine was superior to that which they had used when they began the feast, a fact which surprised the governor of the feast. Jesus fulfilled the law and the prophets and in so doing He gives us that which is perfect, or complete. No one will ever have to come along and fulfill the new covenant in Jesus.

5:18 - FOR VERILY. Twenty-five times in the Gospel of John Jesus says, "verily, verily, I say unto you..." The word means "of a truth," and when Jesus used it twice He was saying, "truly, truly, I say unto you..." When Jesus uses this term He is about to make a statement of utmost importance. Heaven and earth would pass away before God's law would.

ONE JOT OR ONE TITTLE. A jot is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet (yodh). It is like an apostrophe ('). The tittle is a very small stroke, or an extension or protrusion seen on several Hebrew letters. Not even the smallest letter, or the smallest part of a letter, will pass away. No essential part of divine law will be abolished, "till all be fulfilled."

TILL ALL BE FULFILLED. God has not changed His law, nor has He designated anyone else to change it. An article in a November 18, 1992 newspaper informs us that a major denomination has changed their catechism to bring the church more in line with society. Is that not what is wrong with

both the church and society today? They just made it official! The church (Catholic and non-Catholic) has been unofficially conforming to society for decades. What right does any individual, church, or denomination have to change the law of God.

A letter to the editor of the Monroe, Louisiana daily paper (Nov. 18, 1992) reveals the gloating of a "pro-choice" (pro-death) woman who states that with the election of a pro-abortion president the issue of abortion is settled. She is tired of reading pro-life letters on the editorial page. The woman wrote:

Since Clinton won a majority of the vote in Louisiana, I must assume that the majority of voters feel as I do. Maybe he won here because we are fed up with having your ultra-right, zealot philosophy crammed down our throats. So, if you want to continue having tantrums on the subject of abortion, go right ahead. Just know that all of us with the opposing point of views can now laugh when we see your letters.

Again, it is over! Thank God, America and the voters of Louisiana for Bill Clinton.
(Joyce Kirby, West Monroe, LA).

It is over? Four in ten voters in America elected Bill Clinton to the highest office in the land. But if he had received 100 per cent of the vote, the issue would still not be over. God has spoken. His law will not be over "till heaven and earth pass away." An atheistic evolutionary humanist, or a monistic evolutionary New Ager might laugh today at the murder of 1.5 million unborn babies each year, but that laughter will be replaced with "wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42).

Every person has a world view, and that world view is based on some authority. The Christian must base his world-view on the authority of God's Word. On what does the writer of the above letter base her view? Evolution? Humanistic philosophy? Social science? A majority vote? Or, is she her own authority? For the Christian, God's Word is his authority. His law will never be abolished, destroyed, or replaced with man's law. "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven" (Psalm 119:89). You cannot break God's law, you only break yourself on it.

Jesus did not make this statement in a vacuum. He is directing it to the very heart of the issue for the self-righteous religious leaders of the day. "It was comparatively easy for Jesus to tell the Jews he had not come to destroy the law. It was not so easy to tell them he was going to destroy their false conceptions of it" [3: 37]. To the Pharisee the law was primarily external; in reality, it is internal and spiritual. In Jeremiah 31:33b the Lord says: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

5:19 - WHOSOEVER... In this verse we have a key to true greatness. The scribes and Pharisees accused Jesus of breaking the Law. Jesus said, "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matt. 23:3). The problem is not with the Law, but with the Pharisees who "say and do not."

LEAST IN THE KINGDOM. These religious leaders made every effort to establish before the

eyes of all Israel their greatness in Judaism, and in the Kingdom of Heaven. It was beyond their comprehension that God saw them as "least" in His kingdom. Or worse - not a part of it at all. Warren Wiersby [Be Loyal, Victor Books, Wheaton, Ill, 1989] writes:

It was the Pharisees who were destroying the Law. By their traditions, they robbed the people of the Word of God; by their hypocritical lives, they disobeyed the very Law that they claimed to protect. The Pharisees thought they were *conserving* God's Word, when in reality they were *preserving* God's Word: embalming it so that it no longer had life! Their rejection of Christ when He came to earth proved that the inner truth of the Law had not penetrated their hearts [6: 39].

DO AND TEACH. Our ministry is of the New Covenant (II Cor. 3). At the same time there is a ministry of the Law (I Tim. 1:9ff) that is in no way in conflict with God's grace. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the New Testament. The exception is Sabbath observance, but Jesus did not set aside Sabbath observance as He did dietary prohibitions.

Rather than abolishing the Law as the Pharisees claimed, Jesus taught His followers to do and teach it. His view of the Law was not inferior to theirs, but vastly superior.

CALLED GREAT IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN. The Pharisees wanted to be seen as great in the Kingdom of God. They boasted of the Law, but Jesus said they "Say and do not." According to the Lord, those who will be called great in the Kingdom are the ones who "do and say." A note of warning should be sounded here. The person who has an inner desire to be greater than others in the Kingdom of God has already blown it! Jesus was very clear on this subject. In Mark 10:42, He said:

But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.

Jesus also demonstrated the attitude He expects of us when he washed the feet of the disciples. "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15).

5:20 - FOR I SAY UNTO YOU. When I was a student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, my wife, Becky, and I went to hear R. G. Lee preach at a church in the area. During my youth we worshipped in a mission church and our services were over each Sunday morning in time for us to get home and see and hear Dr. Lee on TV. I had heard him many times in person and was looking forward to the service.

While we waited for the service to begin I observed the sign above the baptistry: **GOD SAID IT, I BELIEVE IT, AND THAT SETTLES IT.** That was a popular saying with a lot of preachers at the time. I was impressed with it until I began to think about it. Then I realized that when God says it,

it is settled - for now and forever. I believe Him and rejoice in His Word, but when God speaks, truth is established. It is not enough to say, God said it because it is true. It is true because God said it.

EXCEPT YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS EXCEED THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES. To most people in His audience that day the scribes and Pharisees were the very epitome of righteousness. After all, is not that what the scribes and Pharisees taught them? But while they tithed even the herb that grew around their front door, they forgot the weightier matters of justice and compassion. Pharisee means separatist. Their exclusivism was the result of a nationalistic, unspiritual understanding and application of the Mosaic Law. For example, at the Temple they designated an outer court for Gentiles, but would not allow them to go beyond the wall of separation (under penalty of death).

The scribes were teachers who had misinterpreted the law, and then proceeded to teach others the error. They held tenaciously to its ritual, but missed its significance for humanity. One writer says:

The scribes and Pharisees kept the hull and threw the peanut away. The shell was everything to them. When Jesus tried to open the shell so they could see the real kernel, they rated him a "modernist." He and the disciple were a threat to the traditions of the fathers and must therefore be done away with [HLE, p. 41-42].

YE SHALL IN NO CASE ENTER... From the first word of Beatitudes, Jesus has been moving toward this high water mark of the Gospel. "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." To miss this point would be to miss a major theme of the Sermon on the Mount. This is a key to the interpretation of the Sermon.

These words had to be both very disturbing and very refreshing to those who listened to Jesus. It was very disturbing to those who were trying to produce the kind of righteousness produced by the scribes and Pharisees. But it brought a fresh ray of hope to those sought the righteousness of God by grace. According to the Bible, man must be clothed in righteousness to stand before God. Man is totally incapable of producing righteousness, his highest attempt seen as no more than filthy rags. But there is a way to receive this righteousness. In Romans the Lord reveals that this righteousness is imputed unto each person who receives Jesus Christ by grace through faith. Paul was inspired to write in Romans.3:21-23:

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (3:21-23).

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly,

his faith is counted for righteousness (4:3-5).

According to Paul in the Book of Romans, the righteousness of our Lord is imputed unto each person who accepts Him by grace through faith. At this point (Justification) God gives the new Christian His Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit indwells the heart of each believer. From that point the Holy Spirit seeks daily, continually, to produce righteousness in the life of the believer (Sanctification).

The outward display of religiosity could not produce righteousness in the Pharisees and scribes, or anyone else. Many who heard Jesus that day were in awe of these religious leaders. It must have been a shock to hear Him say that unless their righteousness exceeded that righteousness they would never see the Kingdom of Heaven. But those who believed Him must have been excited by the hope of the true righteousness which is imputed to each believer.

TRUE RIGHTEOUSNESS IN EVERY DAY LIFE, 5:21-48

Jesus took six Old Testament laws and interpreted them in light of the New Covenant of grace. The Law was over 1250 years old when Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. In one sense Jesus was making fundamental changes in the Law. In reality, it would be more appropriate to say that He saw in these laws what no prophet, priest, or scribe had ever seen before. These principles had always existed, but their teachers had focused on behavior up until Jesus time. He dealt with attitudes, focusing on what a person is. They focused on what he does. He enables us to see that what a person does issues from what he is.

Jesus uses these six problems of moral conduct to show how the true righteousness of God contrasts with the pseudo-righteousness of the Pharisees. They concentrated on actions or behavior; Jesus on the attitudes of the heart. True inner righteousness seeks to eradicate sin where it is conceived, in the heart.

1. MURDER, 5:21-26.

5:21 - YE HAVE HEARD. They had rightly heard the Word of God knew the law. Their teachers taught them by quoting the Law of Moses, earlier scribes, and a host of written laws of Judaism. They had heard, and knew that God forbids murder. Now Jesus will change forever the way people look at this commandment.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL. This is the sixth commandment, Exodus 20:13. The world needs to take a fresh look at this commandment. IN many places in the world, people place little value on human life. In a number of places in Africa people are starving, or dying of diseases related to malnutrition. Their neighbors are fighting to keep other countries, and concerned groups from getting food to them.

Some Middle East countries have exported murder for political, racial, and religious reasons. Saddam Hussein has slaughtered masses within his borders and exported murder, rape, and looting to Kuwait. Genocide against the Kurds has been carried out under the eyes of the world.

Israel rightly keeps the Holocaust before the world community. Unfortunately, we seem to have forgotten the slaughter of millions of non-Jews by Hitler, and the mass murder of possibly 40 - 60 million people by Joseph Stalin. Millions have been slain in Red China.

In America, gang violence has reached epidemic proportions in many cities. Drive-by shootings have millions living behind locked doors and barred windows. Criminals, young and old, kill without remorse. Circuit riding abortionists, killers for hire, rush from one abortion clinic to another to slaughter the unborn. And a woman from the Bible Belt laughs at those who would stop these barbaric acts? What is next, euthanasia? The new-born babies with birth defects? One doctor has been labeled "Dr. Death" because of his efforts to help terminally ill persons take their own life.

IN DANGER OF THE JUDGMENT. Life is our most precious possession. It is a gift from God, and it is sacred. God sought to protect the life He gives by decreeing harsh punishment for murder. He not only introduced capital punishment to Israel, He expected them to carry out the sentence. No person is permitted to commit murder in retaliation for a murder. The state, however, is authorized to execute a cold-blooded murderer to protect others from him.

The judgment is the lower court for minor offences in the days of Moses. Of course, we must never forget that the guilty person will also stand before Christ as we see in II Cor. 5:10:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

5:22 - **BUT I SAY UNTO YOU.** He said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time..." That is, the Mosaic Law given to Moses 12-14 centuries earlier. Until that day, it was the highest standard for moral conduct the world had ever seen. Throughout those centuries God had given His people glimpses of the depth of His Law through the prophets, but now Jesus is pulling back the veil to reveal the spiritual character of the Law.

"But I say unto you" has the tone of a lawgiver rather than a conveyer, or interpreter of the law. The scribes did not teach with authority, but quoted earlier teachers. Jesus shocked the crowd by speaking on His own authority. "The pronoun 'I' is given extraordinary prominence in Matthew's language, showing that Jesus boldly set his authority above that of Moses" [3: 44].

The Epistle to the Hebrews magnifies the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old, and the spiritual nature of our relationship with God over ritualism. It also proclaims the Preeminence of His High Priesthood over that of the Old Covenant. When Jesus speaks He is justified in speaking with authority. On His own authority He will bring this well known commandment under the New Covenant and expand our understanding of it.

WHOSOEVER IS ANGRY WITH HIS BROTHER. Murder begins in the heart. The word for angry here is the word from which we get the word "orgy," and points to fits of temper. Many murders are called crimes of passion, the actions of a hotheaded person. The Lord reveals three phases of inner attitude which can lead to murder. The first is anger; the second, scorn; the third, personal insult. When one's feelings toward another proceeds along these lines there is a danger that he will commit actual murder. The best place to deal with murder is in the heart, and the best time is when anger arises. It is better to arrest murder in the heart than a murderer on the street.

Earlier manuscripts do not contain the words "without a cause." Wiersbe notes that "Jesus did not say that anger leads to murder; He said that anger is murder" [6: 37]. There is a holy anger against sin (Eph. 4:26), or righteous indignation which is not sinful. But Jesus is talking about unholy anger against a person.

The word used points to a settled anger, or malice, that is nurtured in the heart. The angry person broods over some issue in order to keep his anger hot. He refuses to let it cool down. No one is justified in saying that this applies only to fellow Christians. We must see all as potential brothers and sisters in Christ.

RACA. The second phase is expressed here, an attitude of scorn. Whether one calls his brother a name to his face, or keeps the scorn festering inside, he has moved to a new phase in his inner attitude. He is now in greater danger now than before. So is his brother! Name-calling often follows close behind anger.

The attitude here is a pride perhaps akin to intellectual snobbishness resulting in calling a supposed inferior "Raca." The word in Old Testament Hebrew and Jesus' Aramaic means empty. "Raca" was probably like "empty-head," "blockhead," "stupid!" [3: 46].

When anger begins to vent itself feelings become more intensified. The danger increases correspondingly. He is now "in danger of the council." This is the Sanhedrin which dealt with more serious offenses. So, both the sin and the danger in judgment are escalating.

THOU FOOL. The New Testament word for fool is "mora," from which we get our word "Moron." In the Old Testament the word "fool" usually denotes a moral fool; a wicked person. The first was an attack on one's intelligence, the second on his character. This is the third phase in the attitude of the heart that may lead to murder. First there was anger, then scorn, and now personal insult. Anger was the first step and that placed one in danger of the judgment, or the lower court. This could lead to death by the sword. Scorn shows that the feelings have intensified, and with it the danger of the higher court, or the Sanhedrin. This could mean death by stoning.

When anger has reached the boiling point, there is a good possibility that it will break out somewhere. Personal insult may follow, and that often leads to violence. This puts one in danger of hell fire. Jesus took hell seriously enough to warn us, "And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:47-48).

"Hell fire" is from the Greek Gehenna (the Valley of Hinnon), a famous garbage dump. Dry garbage was added daily, keeping the fire burning continuously. It also contained old, or wet garbage which has been described as seething with indescribable worms. We would do well to follow Jesus in our thinking about hell. The old time evangelists were right when they said, "You miss a lot of things in going to heaven, but one of them is hell."

This may bring up another question. Does the Bible not say "Be ye angry and sin not?" (Eph. 4:26). "The 'Be ye angry' is not a command but a conditional imperative: 'If you become angry, be sure you do not sin' [3: 48].

5:23-26 - Urgency of Reconciliation Stressed With Two Illustrations.

5:23-24 - Remember that this follows closely the discussion of murder and judgment. Blomberg has written:

Jesus' listeners therefore urgently need to escape this judgment by dealing decisively with sin. Jesus drives home his point with two dramatic illustrations. First, he envisages a worshiper who is called to place interpersonal reconciliation above correct ritual [2: 107].

There is no guarantee that the other person will be open to a reconciliation, but we must do our part to bring it to pass. Romans 12:18 is helpful: "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

Maintaining a right relationship with others is essential to worship. Worship is one of the highest, and holiest functions in the life of a Christian. True worship cannot be entered into lightly and broken relationships hinder, or even prevent worship. "Has something against you" (NIV) implies that this must be a just claim.

Next Sunday when we prepare to worship, if we remember that a brother has something against us, we should leave our tithes and offerings and go out and seek a reconciliation and then come back and give our tithes and offerings. A lot of churches would be emptied for a while if all our people took this seriously. But before long they might be overflowing!

5:25-26 - The second illustration on the urgency of seeking a reconciliation with anyone who might have something against us is portrayed in an out-of-court settlement between two litigants. There are practical reasons why we should seek a reconciliation while there is an opportunity. This is especially applicable in this day when people often sue each other over frivolous issues. An early reconciliation may prevent a hardening of hearts on one side or the other by any delay. Delays may be costly, and may open the door to new problems as litigants seek an advantage over the other side.

But there is a spiritual aspect that must not be over looked. Until the believer has done everything he can to bring about a reconciliation with the other party, he will have some serious spiritual problems. His spiritual growth is arrested because the broken relationship will hinder his prayer life and prevent worship.

2. ADULTERY, 5:27-30

5:27 - YE HAVE HEARD. He will follow the same pattern in dealing with all six of the moral issues as He contrasts true righteousness with the pseudo- righteous of the religious leaders of the day. They focused on outward conduct, Jesus on the inner attitude from which the action springs.

BY THEM OF OLD. They knew the seventh commandment. Whether we think of the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) or the entire Mosaic Law, we are looking at God's law, and God's law is good. There is nothing wrong with the Law, and Jesus did not abolish it. He fulfilled it. He taught us how we should honor the law. No one had ever seen the true meaning of the Law before Jesus pulled back the veil and shed His light on it.

There was a problem, however. The scribes taught by quoting earlier teachers, and by appealing to oral traditions and written opinions on the Law, rather than going back to the original source as their authority. This is the reason the people were so astonished when Jesus did not begin each point by saying, "Rabbi Ben Ezra said thus and so..."

Visit a seminary library and spend a little time with the laws of Judaism and you will find many of them to be rigid, legalistic, and some even absurd. These religious leaders fanatically boasted, "We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man..." (John 8:33). But they made themselves slaves to the letter of the Law and shackled the people with narrow rules no one could hope to keep.

THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY. In Exodus 20 we are given ten principles that serve as a basis for morality. The first four deal with our relationship with God, the last six with our relationship with others. After giving us the Ten Commandments the Lord interpreted them for us. Moses recorded His commentary on them in what we call the Mosaic Law.

We do not have to ask if God distinguished between adultery and fornication, or if He included homosexuality in the seventh commandment. Read the Levitical Law and you will see that God forbids any behavior which violates His plan for sex between a husband and wife. He prohibits immorality in any form it may take, whether pre-marital, extra-marital, incest, or homosexuality. God is the author of sex, and He fully expects the sex drive to be fulfilled between man and woman in marriage. Any behavior which violates His purpose is sin.

Homosexuality is not an alternate life style: it is an abomination to God. When Israel was a theocratic kingdom the penalty was death. There were other forms of immorality for which God demanded the death penalty, but at this point it is sufficient to state that the Lord took moral purity

seriously and detested all forms of immorality.

It is a testimony to the moral decline of post-Christian America when that which God despises and forbids is served up nightly as entertainment. The entertainment industry (music, movies, and television) makes billions peddling filth and polluting the minds and hearts of our children. It is also a testimony to the state of Christianity when you see mothers and grandmothers who profess to be Christians sitting in the den with their children, all eyes glued to TV as soap operas excite them with the garbage of sexual indecency. Fathers are just as guilty.

5:28 - BUT I SAY. This is the shocker! Their teachers always quoted "them of old." Now Jesus boldly says, "But I say unto you..." They were astonished (7:28) because He spoke with authority (7:29). He is co-existent, co-eternal with the heavenly Father, the uncaused cause of everything. He created us, sustains us, and died on the Cross for us. He taught with authority because He is the Authority!

WHOSOEVER. What He has to say applies to everyone; the Jews, their teachers, Gentiles, rich, poor, wise and foolish. This applies to pastors, deacons, and other church leaders. It also applies to televangelists. Some who have fallen may have fallen because they were charlatans all along and they finally got caught. But others may have fallen because they thought they had reached the point, because of their position, their family, or possibly their age, that they did not have to worry about temptation.

LOOKETH ON A WOMAN TO LUST AFTER HER. Why did Jesus caution men about looking at a woman? May women not look at a man to lust after him? The answer is yes. She may. But man is far more likely to lust because of a look than a woman is. It was not necessary to address the responsibility of women at this point because what He said would apply to anyone, male or female.

Women dressed pretty much the same in those days, which is to say they dressed modestly. Young girls today grow up with commercials about sexy jeans, shorts, swim wear, and tennis shoes. They are told through music and movies that they should try for the sexy look, drive a sexy car, have sexy friends. All this seems to suggest to her that the only way she can attract the attention of the right guy is to look and act sexy. I cannot help but wonder why some Christian fathers do not put their foot down and say, "If you find a boy who can only be attracted to a girl through immodest dress and speech, you had better stay away from him. He is not normal." From the time a boy is thirteen years old he does not need to be stimulated, he needs to be encouraged to bring his sexual drive under the control of the Holy Spirit.

If Jesus preached this sermon today, He might have a lot to say about women who dress, speak, or otherwise control themselves in such a way as to invite men to lust after them. If a woman causes a man to lust after her she is as guilty as he. But he addresses men, because before the "pill" and legalized abortions they were usually the aggressors. Today, parents and teachers tell us that many girls are more aggressive than boys, and that they start at a very early age.

Jesus did not say that it is a sin to look at a woman. He said it is a sin to look on a woman to lust after her. Some old-time evangelists said, "You cannot help the first look, it is the second look that becomes lust." That may, or may not, be true. An immoral person may well lust with the second look, while another may not. When there is a temptation to lust, that is the time to ask the Lord to deliver you from temptation.

COMMITTED ADULTERY...IN THE HEART. The place to deal with adultery is in the heart. The time to deal with it is the moment of temptation. One might ask, why is it a sin to lust in the heart if the act of adultery is never carried out. Who does it hurt? It hurts the person who lusts. It has a major impact on a Christian because sin grieves the Holy Spirit and Paul tells us to "grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

No one else may be aware of the fact that a man (or youth) is lusting after a woman at school, at work, at the park, or even at church. But God knows! And the person who harbors lust in his heart may soon take some action to see if he will get a response from the woman for whom he lusts. In other words, adultery in the heart may soon become adultery in the body.

Sexual immorality is wrecking homes and destroying lives across America today as never before. The seeds of sin sown today are going to bring a harvest of grief for generations to come - if the Lord delays His return that long. Many are already reaping a harvest of syphilis, gonorrhea, herpes, HIV, and AIDS. We are paying a terrible price in broken homes, abused children, aching hearts, and a multitude of social and mental health problems.

Politicians, scientists, and social scientists are trying to find an answer to the AIDS problem. As scientists search for a solution in the lab, politicians and social activists are urging "safe sex" and pleading for sex education classes in schools. Abstinence apart from marriage is a far better solution than safe sex. Sex education courses that prohibit any reference to God, or even to morality, may do more harm than good.

A study of the doctrines of Creation, Redemption, Sanctification, and the Sovereignty of God would be invaluable in dealing with these issues. One may readily see the value of a study of Redemption, Sanctification, and Sovereignty, but not understand how the Doctrine of Creation would effect this issue. If you want to sell people on immorality, first sell them on evolution. If you want to sell them on abortion, sell them on evolution. If you want to sell them on homosexuality, sell them on evolution. If you want to sell them on euthanasia, first sell them on evolution.

Convince people that they do not owe their life to God and that they are not accountable to Him and most restraints on such behavior are removed. Atheistic evolutionary Humanism sees the universe as self-existent, and the greatest threat to the planet as overpopulation. How can you prevent overpopulation? Birth control, abortion, homosexuality, and euthanasia are a few ways. Monistic evolutionary New Age movements have practically the same agenda. They just add a religious element to it (Monism or Pantheism).

We must teach our children that God created us and claims lordship over us by right of creation. He

sent His Son to die for us and if we accept Jesus Christ by faith we accept His sovereignty over our lives.

IF THY RIGHT EYE. Since the eye is involved in looking "on a woman to lust after her," this is where the citizen of the Kingdom of God begins. The speech is figurative, but the meaning is clear. The time to deal with adultery is when the temptation arises. Do not wait for it to become lust in the heart. If the look has produced lust in the heart, then confess the sin - deal with it in the heart. That is far better than having to deal with it after lives have been crushed by an adulterous relationship.

PLUCK IT OUT. This is radical, but rather than dwell on how radical the remedy is, let us first see how serious the offense is. What Jesus is saying here is that adultery is a grave sin and when temptation comes, one must act quickly and decisively to avoid the temptation. In some cases radical treatment is the only solution. Avoiding the temptation to commit adultery may mean giving up a "good friend," changing jobs, moving from a neighborhood or city, finding new friends, or new interests. But one must act quickly and decisively, just as one would have a malignant tumor removed as quickly as possible.

PROFITABLE FOR THEE. In reality, it would be better to lose one eye than to have the whole body cast into hell. We read in Revelation 21:8, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Immorality is serious and so are the consequences. The action one must take to avoid temptation should reflect his awareness of the sin and its consequences.

CAST INTO HELL. The word for hell here is Gehenna, not Hades, the place of the departed dead or the realm of the dead. Gehenna, the valley outside Jerusalem where refuse was burned was used by Jesus to refer to the place of eternal punishment.

5:30 - IF THY RIGHT HAND OFFEND THEE. The hand may have been mentioned here because the sense of touch can easily become a source of temptation to commit adultery. The same principle applies here as in verse 29. Quick and decisive action must be taken to avoid the temptation to commit immoral acts.

3. DIVORCE, 5:31-32.

5:31 - WHOSOEVER SHALL PUT AWAY HIS WIFE. The home is the first institution the Lord gave His creation. Marriage is God's gift to men and women and the marriage vow is sacred. When Adam saw Eve he said, "This [is] now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23). A special relationship exists between a husband and wife, especially if they are children of God.

Jesus addresses the husband because the law permitted the husband to divorce his wife, but did not

permit the wife the same privilege. Also, the divorced woman might find herself at the mercy of the world. Throughout her life she was identified with three men; first, her father (or brother if her father was dead), then her husband, and if widowed, her son. A divorced woman in that day would be hard pressed to make a living. Some of them resorted to prostitution.

Before criticizing Judaism, remember that Paul often found Gentile women in synagogues outside Palestine. Some were proselytes to Judaism and others were there looking for respect and dignity they would not find in pagan religions, some of which were fertility cults that might require young women to serve as temple prostitutes. Jesus Christ brought new dignity and hope to women.

WRITING OF DIVORCEMENT. The liberal scribes interpreted law to mean that a man could divorce his wife for any reason. If she did not please him, he could give her a writ of divorcement and send her back to her father. The conservative scribes insisted that adultery was the only grounds for divorce.

Our authority on divorce is God's Word. Society may be changing, politics may change, social scientists may change, but God's world is changeless (Isaiah 40:8). The family is in serious trouble in America today. Failure in marriage is approaching fifty percent, and while most wives are better prepared for a job or career today, many are still victimized by divorce. Divorce still has a devastating effect on children. The church must teach people what God's Word has to say about marriage and divorce.

5:32 - **BUT I SAY.** Once again, we see the contrast between the true righteousness of Christ and the pseudo-righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes. Jesus continues the same formula, "You have heard...but I say..."

SAVING FOR...FORNICATION. Jesus permitted divorce for one reason - marital infidelity. He did not require divorce when one's spouse was unfaithful, but He did permit it. He did not permit it on the grounds of mental cruelty or incompatibility. The Lord places a value on marriage. People often give flimsy excuses for divorce. Up until the last generation, it was usually the husband who walked out on his family because he didn't want to be tied down. Today, many wives are walking off and leaving their husbands and children with a casual, "I just don't want to be married." Formerly, the wife sought help and the husband usually resisted. Today it is often the other way around.

In the beginning God made no provision for divorce. None was needed before the Fall, but that changed everything. His adding a provision had nothing to do with His adopting a lower standard for marriage. He gave man the right to divorce His wife because of the hardness of his heart. Jesus amplifies His teachings in Matthew 19:8:

He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth

commit adultery.

Several questions should be considered in reference to divorce. Remember that God hates divorce, but He loves divorced persons enough to give His only begotten Son to die for them. Christians must not compromise God's laws, but we must apply it with compassion. Now for some questions:

1. Should we not focus our attack on the causes of divorce, rather than the individuals involved? Name some of the causes of divorce.

2. Are all marriages that are legal in the eyes of man recognized by the Lord?

A man was elected to serve as a deacon and when he told the church he had been divorced and remarried the pastor and others told him that it did not matter because he was lost when he got his divorce. Did the pastor replace the "Thus saith the Word of God" with thus reasoneth the mind of man?

3. Does a divorced person have a right to remarry?

4. Should we make a distinction between the offender and the victim? Are there ever innocent victims?

5. What positions may the divorced person hold in the church?

6. Should a pastor perform marriage ceremonies for divorced persons?

A pastor once told a couple he did not marry anyone who had been divorced, regardless of circumstances. Two weeks later he was visiting and knocked on a door. He was surprised to see the same couple he had refused to marry. They said, "If we are not fit for you to marry us, we are not fit to go to your church." Should he change his rules?

CAUSETH HER TO COMMIT ADULTERY. Some think the reason for this is that the divorced woman may be forced into prostitution in order to provide food and shelter for herself and her family. But Christians must take God's Word very seriously. A literal interpretation is consistent with the Scriptures that deal with this issue (Mark 10:2ff).

WHOSOEVER SHALL MARRY HER. The contrast is never stronger: "But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." This answers the above question. If one who marries the divorce woman is living in adultery, then she is too.

4. SWEARING, 5:33-37

5:33 - THOU SHALT NOT FORSWEAR THYSELF. See, Lev. 19:12; Deut. 23:23. This relates to the Third Commandment: "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). The subject in the Sermon on the Mount is not profanity, but "the sin of using an oath to affirm that what is said is true" [6 - 39]. To swear here does not mean to curse, but to "affirm the truth of a statement while calling on God to judge oneself if it is in fact untrue" [2: 112]. The sin of profanity is covered in the Third Commandment and in other passages.

To some this includes swearing to tell the truth in court. A friend was called as a witness in a trial. He was asked, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" He responded, "As a Christian, I cannot swear, but I affirm that the testimony I now give is the truth." I was a witness in a trial and the clerk of court asked me, "Do you swear, or affirm, that the testimony you are about to give is the truth?"

PERFORM UNTO THE LORD. When Jesus said, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself" he does not mean that the believer should not perjure himself (the Ninth Commandment covers that). He means you are to "perform unto the Lord thine oath." "Perform" means pay, and thus an oath is as a debt or vow to God and must be paid" [3: 61].

The Pharisees took many oaths and then used all kinds of hair-splitting excuses to avoid honoring any oath they did not want to keep. They were careful not to break the law by swearing by God's name and then not keeping the oath. The scribes taught that only oaths taken in God's name or in the name of some aspect of His nature were binding.

5:34 - SWEAR NOT AT ALL. Jesus follows the same formula in dealing with a Christian's speech: "Ye have heard...but I say unto ye." Jesus speaks with the authority which is His by right of creation. The Pharisees took many oaths and then broke them at will on the grounds that since they did not swear by God's name the oath was not binding.

It has often been reported that in the old west a man traded on his word. If a man gave his word he was expected to honor it. If a man proved that his word was no good, he might as well leave the country. In the late nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, a man taught his son, "A man is as good as his word. If his word is no good, he is no good." Today people may joke about lying, but in those days if you called a man a liar you were asking for trouble.

While I am glad people do not react so violently today, I do wish we placed the same value on our word. There were attorneys around in those days but many agreements were sealed with a hand-shake. I grew up in the home of a man who placed such value on his word. My father respected the truth and hated lying with a passion. He said that he did not know which was worse, a liar or a thief. A liar will steal and a thief will lie.

When I was a student at Mississippi College, I led a group from the BSU on a mission trip to the Hinds County Jail every Thursday afternoon. I usually visited with the men in maximum security. I talked with one man about his need for Christ and when he seemed interested, I asked if he would

like to receive Jesus as his Saviour right then. He said, "I am a three-time loser and I am looking at a long sentence if I am convicted. I have a lot of lying to do when I go to court, and I cannot become a Christian and go into the court room and lie." He was so right - and he was so wrong!

I majored in Bible and Sociology at Mississippi College. I served as student pastor at Dockery Baptist Church near Cleveland. A growing interest in a prison ministry led me to visit the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. On my first visit Chaplain R. B. Hicks asked me if I would like to meet Kenny Wagner. I knew a lot about Kenny Wagner, the most notorious prisoner in the history of Parchman, so I told the chaplain I would like to meet him.

As we walked up to the hospital the chaplain told me he wanted to see someone else while I talked with Kenny Wagner. I asked how I would know him and Chaplain Hicks said, "You'll know him." As I approached the door (metal frame with bars) a very large man stood and walked over to the door, and when a guard unlocked the doors he stuck out his hand. He did not tell me his name, nor did he have to. He just started talking. I visited with him for some time and then talked with him about his need for Jesus Christ. He said, "I don't have anything against God. A preacher told me one time that if I wasn't for Him I was against Him, and I don't have anything against him." When I left the chaplain asked if I believed Kenny would ever be saved and I answered, "No, I don't think so." He had too much pride! He was both in prison and imprisoned in a diseased body, not to speak of a diseased soul. What did he have to be proud about?

Kenny Wagner had his standards. When I met him he motioned for me to sit on the empty hospital bed next to his. I cleared my throat a couple of times and he handed me a little plastic tube with lozenges in it and told me to try those. I took them and held them in my hand for a minute or two. He said, "Take one," and I said, "Yes sir." He was not only a physical giant, he had killed a lot of people and I wasn't about to argue with him, even in prison.

When I tried to lead him to receive Christ, he began to share his principles with me. He said, "I will never tell you a lie. I will respect your sister just like I respect mine." I believed him. I also remembered our conversation when he died eight days later. Kenny Wagner had more respect for the truth than many of the scribes and Pharisees.

If people are honest, they do not need to reinforce their word with an oath or with profanity. An oath may be an effort to cover up a flaw in one's character, and profanity may betray an inferiority complex. If you consistently tell the truth you do not need to swear, and you do not need to use profanity to prop up your word.

NEITHER BY HEAVEN. They must not swear by heaven because it is God's throne. It is sacred and if they swore by heaven they must "perform unto the Lord" their oath. They could not separate it from God.

5:35 - NOR BY THE EARTH. The Hebrews "swore prolifically by the altar, the vessels, the lamb, by Moses and the prophets, and regarded it as insignificant" [3: 62]. The practice must have been prevalent among early Christians, for the Holy Spirit later inspired James to write:

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

NEITHER BY JERUSALEM. The Ark of the Covenant symbolized the presence of the Lord with His people until the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C. When the remnant of the people returned from Babylonian Captivity Jerusalem became the symbol of the presence of the Lord. It was holy unto the Lord, "the city of the great King."

5:36 - BY THY HEAD. Why? "Because thou canst not make one hair white or black." People may dye, or tint their hair today, but if they do not keep it up the roots will betray them. By wishing you cannot change the color of your hair. God has programed it all for you, as we see in Psalms 139:13-16:

For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

Do you know what He means when he says "In thy book all my members were written?" We now know - DNA. This also answers the so-called "pro-choice" abortionists. God wrote in the DNA all the members of both the mother and the unborn baby.

5:37 - LET YOUR COMMUNICATION. A dishonest person will lie even under oath. A district attorney says that if he prosecuted every one who was guilty of perjury he wouldn't have time to do anything else. People do lie under oath in court. The Pharisees lied under oath and tried to rationalize away their guilt.

An honest person can simply let his communication be, "Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Oathes and profainty are unnecessary.

5. REVENGE, 5:38-42

5:38 - YE HAVE HEARD. Accentuating the contrast between the pseudo-righteousness of the Pharisees and His righteousness, Jesus continues the formula. It was not the Old Testament that was faulty, but the interpretation and application of hypocritical religionists.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE. The Levitical Law read, "Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again" (Lev. 24:20). The Law permitted limited retaliation as a restraint to violence, but prevent the proliferation of violence

which could accompany retaliation. This law has been stated in a rather trite way, "Tit for tat, butter for fat; you kill my dog, I'll kill your cat."

The Law condemned private, personal revenge. Moses wrote, "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:18). Paul wrote in Romans 12:19, "Avenge not yourselves...for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

5:39 - BUT I SAY. Now He gives them a revolutionary principle which would help end the cycle of retaliation.

RESIST NOT EVIL. The law of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" may seem fair, but let's face it, the potential for escalation of violent retaliation is ever present. If the cycle is to end someone is going to have to be willing to accept an injury or insult without striking back. Jesus will now illustrate this new principle with four applications with which His audience could readily identify.

(1) Turn the Other Cheek.

5:39b - WHOSOEVER SHALL SMITE THEE. The first application of this principle of not resisting evil is stated: "...whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

In order to strike a person on the right cheek, a right handed person would have to use the back of the hand, which was a "characteristic Jewish form of insult" [2: 113]. To take this kind of insult and not strike back would not be easy, but there was a lot to be gained by resisting the temptation to respond to violence with violence. On the basis of this principle Anabaptists of Poland and Germany practiced pure pacifism. Quakers, Amish, and other groups practice pacifism to some degree.

The last half of the twentieth century introduced us to a new twist to this principle - non-violent revolution, or non-violent demonstration. The problem with this has been that many of those who practiced this form of non-violence actually provoked others to violence. Martin Luther King has been praised above all others for his use of non-violence, and there is no doubt that he accomplished more than anyone else through this method. For one thing, it was made for a budding new industry - television.

I was surprised when a black business man told me he had been harassed and even threatened because he did not close his business in honor of King's birthday. Neighbors argued, "He was our leader." This man said, "I told them, Martin Luther King was not my leader. Jesus Christ is my leader." He added, "Have you ever noticed that every where Martin Luther King went there was violence? Have you ever watched Billy Graham. When a minister causes tht much violence there is something wrong with that minister. Violence does not follow him every where he goes." His words, not mine. I have often wondered how he came to that position. Regardless of that, it is imperative that we find a solution to the current racial strife that effects so many.

I once preached a revival at Riverside Baptist Church in Clarksdale, Mississippi. As the pastor and I drove down a street, he pointed out a young man. He explained that when the young man was in high school he had difficulty learning and was very naive, but he loved his Lord and loved his church and never hesitated to witness to others. One day a group of boys held him and one slapped him on his right cheek and then said, "If you are a Christian you will turn the other cheek." He did and was promptly hit on the left cheek. They repeated this merciless action until he was beaten severely. He offered no resistance.

A student who witnessed the incident pointed this young man out to the pastor and said, "You see that boy? I know he is a Christian." He told the pastor what he had witnessed.

I answered a knock at my door when I was a pastor in Bastrop, Louisiana and found two black men standing in my carport. One was young and the other about sixty and they were obviously Jehovah's Witnesses. The older one pointed at our church building and asked, "How can you tell your people to love one another when they go out and kill their fellow man? I asked him to repeat what he had said and when he did, I asked him what he meant. He repeated it. I asked, "What are you talking about?" He replied, "They fight in wars." My blood quickly reached the boiling point and I fired back, "Baptists have fought and bled and died to keep this country free so people like you can walk up and down the street doing what you are doing right now. And as far as I am concerned, a man who will not fight for his country is like a man who will not fight for his family. He's not much of a man!" He said, "I think we had better go" and they left.

In a way, I think they needed to hear what I said. It disturbs me that while I might have won the debate, I lost the men. But, there are some things worth fighting for, and one's country is one of them. I cannot imagine what the world would be like if Americans and their allies had not fought for our freedom during WW II. In the Old Testament there were holy wars in which God sent His people into battle to accomplish His purpose. The conquest of Canaan is just one example.

This passage does not call for unqualified pacifism. Police officers must use violence at times to control violent people. There are wars that are just and right. It has been suggested that the Scripture calls for pacifism at the personal level, and "collective protection at the national level" (Rom. 13:4) [3: 66].

(2) Unseemly Lawsuits.

5:40 - IF ANY MAN WILL SUE THEE. Lawsuits were to be avoided whenever possible. With the proliferation of lawsuits in our day, there is always the possibility that anyone could be forced to go to court. It is possible for almost anyone to be the target of a frivolous lawsuit. Paul dealt with lawsuits in which Christians were taking Christians to court before non-Christians.

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the

world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? (I Cor. 6:1-2).

In Corinth Christians were the plaintiffs. But Jesus has in mind defendants who might be sued for their robe which had been used as collateral for a loan.

TAKE AWAY THY COAT. If someone takes you to court to take away your coat, let him have your cloke also. This had to be shocking to those who heard Jesus on the mountain side that day. He was not talking about a spare coat they no longer needed, but an essential part of their dress. The coat was probably the inner garment which reached to the knees. The cloke was the long outer garment, or robe which was often used as cover at night.

One of the sins with which the men of Israel were charged by Amos was that fathers and sons were visiting pagan temples prostitutes where they "lay themselves down upon clothes laid to pledge by every altar, and they drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god" (Amos 2:8). There reference is to the cloke taken as collateral for a loan. The cloke was supposed to be returned to the owner at night so that he would have cover at night.

Jesus said if the righteous person, the true citizen of His kingdom, is sued for his coat, it would be better to give his cloak also rather than resist the evil in such a way as to increase tension, and risk a greater penalty. Each person will have to ask the Holy Spirit to guide them in making an application of this principle if the occasion arises.

(3) Public Humiliation.

5:41 - WHOEVER COMPELS THEE TO GO A MILE. A Roman soldier could legally compel a Jew to carry a burden for him for the distance of one mile. The word compel comes from the word meaning to impress or conscript temporarily for service. The soldier could force the Jew to help him with his horses or a burden up to one mile. Simon of Cyrene was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus.

This law was despised by the Israelites. It was especially humiliating to be forced to do this in front of one's friends and family. They could not resist this law, and many hated the Romans all the more because of it. The Christian could become angry, or he could bear a witness by volunteering to bear the burden another mile. If done in the right spirit, this could mean a victory for both the believer and the soldier. Such action, however, must be sincere. It has been suggested that the first mile is Law; the second mile, love.

There were three options open to them: "First, there was unlimited revenge or animal ethics; second, limited revenge or Old Testament ethics; and third, unlimited love or Christ's ethics" [3: 68]. It is obvious which is superior.

(4) Borrowing and Begging.

5:42 - GIVE TO HIM THAT ASKETH. If you follow the Lord's teachings on this, you may find that there are people who will take advantage of you. If you do not give to those who ask for help, you will deny help to some who really need it. I taught a Bible study in Pickens, Mississippi. A very gracious family invited the pastor, his family, and me to have dinner with them. The man reminded me of something I had said the previous night and gave me an illustration.

He was sitting at his desk and looked out to see two young ladies and a small child walking up to his door. He let them in and learned that the one lady was married to the brother of the other lady. Her sister-in-law was driving with her from Pennsylvania to Texas where her husband was stationed at a military base. They planned to spend the Christmas holidays with her husband, and thought they had enough money for the trip, but when they had to use gas money for a repair bill, they ran out of money. The gas gauge was on empty when they stopped in front of his house. They did not know what to do, and they were embarrassed and frightened. They assured him that if he let them borrow some money they would send it back to him as soon as possible.

This Christian farmer said, "I gave them twenty dollars and went back to work at my desk. As I sat down I looked out the window and watched them walk back to the car. It then occurred to me that I had given them just enough to get on down the road and have to stop and ask someone else for help. So, I got up and went out to the car just as they were ready to pull away from the curb. I handed the driver a one hundred dollar bill and told her it bothered me to think of them having to go through this three or four times before they reached her husband." He said, I may, or may not get my money back, but I knew that when they asked for my help I had not done all I could do to help them.

Some common sense is needed in determining what we should do in each situation. "As Augustine rightly noted, the text says 'give to everyone that asks,' not give everything to him that asks" [2: 114].

HIM THAT WOULD BORROW. Some borrowers can really take advantage of you, it is true. But there are times when people really need assistance, and to deny them will place an unusual hardship on them. A man had been forced to borrow farm implements from an established farmer when he "on the way up." He made the statement that now that he owned the equipment he needed he would not let neighbors borrow any of his equipment because he had seen how people had worn out "Mr. Miller's" equipment. He saved his equipment, but he lost something of far greater value!

6. LOVING ENEMIES, 5:43-48

5:43 - YE HAVE HEARD. They had been taught to love their neighbors and hate their enemies. Never is the contrast between the righteousness of Jesus and the spurious righteousness of the Pharisees stronger than at this point. As we reach the climax of the six moral problems Jesus uses to contrast true righteousness with the outward show of the Pharisees, we are nearing the summit. We are on higher ground.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES. Moses had taught them to love their neighbor. But, nowhere did he tell them to hate their enemies. That was a scribal addition which Jesus strongly rejects. Moses wrote: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:18).

The issue was, Who is my neighbor? The word comes from words meaning nigh and border, or in other words, one who lives near. The Jews treated all Jews as neighbors no matter where they lived, but rejected the Samaritans who lived between Judah and Galilee. When the lawyer in Luke 10:29 asked Jesus "who is my neighbor?" it was as though he was saying, "All right, I can love my neighbor, if I can determine who my neighbor is." Jesus related the story of The Good Samaritan and then asked him which of the three in the story was the neighbor to the injured person. He had to answer, "He that showed mercy on him."

5:44 - **BUT I SAY.** Once again, the teachings of Christ stand in sharp contrast to that of the scribes and Pharisees. The Old Testament standard was far superior to that of all other nations, but Jesus raises it to a new level.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES. In each of the moral problem Jesus uses to make His point He raises the principle to new heights. But no where is the righteousness of our Lord revealed in a more glorious way than in the commandment to love our enemies. We have often heard that there are two ways to get rid of an enemy: kill him, or make a friend of him. If you want an enemy to remain an enemy, treat him as an enemy. If you want to make him your friend, do not treat him as an enemy. Love him. All enemies will not become your friend because you love them, but you will give them the opportunity to become your friend. You will be obedient to the Lord, and your heart will be made soft and warm by love, rather than hard and cold by hate.

Our society is deeply divided. Some of the major divisions are racial; some are religions; some are political. There is tension between the sexes, labor and management, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. These tensions may be lead to hate. But in Christ, they are opportunities for victory through godly love. Love that can be commanded (Agape) is a mental attitude love, which is fulfilled first in the mind and will. It is not primarily emotional.

This provides a wonderful commentary on the second greatest commandment, in which Jesus taught, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Mark 12:31). Here He says that we are to love our enemies. Make a list of people it seems "natural" to hate. For example, there is the attitude many World War II veterans held toward the Japanese for years after the war. What do you remember about the way General Douglas MacArthur treated the Japanese when they surrendered and in the months that followed? He might have tried to make them pay for Pearl Harbor and for all the blood shed on countless islands in the Pacific. He might have simply tried to maintain peace and order. But it soon became obvious that he would treat them with dignity and respect and support them in their effort to rebuild their nation and provide a stable government. He took a daily tour in an open jeep through the streets of Tokyo each afternoon to reassure the people of his presence and of America's commitment to help with the reconstruction.

BLESS THEM THAT CURSE YOU. This is not idealistic love. It practical in its application. My mother had a plaque hanging on a wall which said, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Pro. 15:1). Another proverb is applicable: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Pro. 15:11). The Christian should refuse the attitude of an enemy and assume the attitude of a friend. We must not let failure with some people deter us from continuing to bless those who curse us.

DO GOOD TO THEM THAT HATE YOU. I was saved at age twelve, called to serve the Lord at age thirteen, and licensed to the Gospel Ministry while still in high school. I really tried to apply Christian principles in my daily life. One day I overheard a girl mention my name to a friend. She said, "I just can't stand him!" I began to try to figure out why; I wasn't even sure of her name, she was a few years behind me, and we had nothing in common. In other words, I had never done anything to her. But from that day forward any time I got close to her I spoke. Before long, I noticed that she always smiled and spoke as if she thought of me as a friend. I am sure I learned her name, but I do not remember it now.

The point is, this girl who really did not know me said she couldn't stand me, and I had never done anything to cause her to feel that way. It finally dawned on me that I quite possibly had never done anything to keep her from feeling that way. She was a younger girl who seemed rather shy, and her physical appearance did not attract one's attention. I had ignored her. I just didn't see her. Christians need to guard against that kind of mistake, but if we realize we have made it, then treat with kindness any one who may harbor ill will toward us. It is not enough to say, "I have never done anything to him." It is not enough to talk about how we love them, we must demonstrate it: "do good to them that hate you."

PRAY FOR THEM. It is one thing to pray for family members and friends, but another to pray for "them which despitefully use you and persecute you. Committed Christians in some parts of the world must expect to be despitefully used and persecuted. Persecution is to be expected in Muslim lands and in Communist China, but one is often surprised when they are persecuted in America. A Christian lady may be shocked when she is despitefully used by a member of her church for some political, social, or personal reason. A young person is crushed when members of his Sunday School class harass him because of his stand on dancing, gambling, or some form of entertainment.

Jesus never hid the truth from his disciples. "He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). In the Beatitudes He said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you..." (Matt. 5:11). Note that He said "when," not "if" you are persecuted. A crossless Christian may be a more comfortable Christian, but he will also be a less convincing Christian.

The question is, what do you do when you are despitefully used and persecuted? What did Jesus do? He was often the target of traps and the object of conspiracies. Finally, He was subjected to illegal trials, torture and the shame and pain of the Cross. How did He handle all of that? Before Pilate and others officials, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth"

(Isa. 53:7). From the cross Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

WHY WE SHOULD LOVE OUR ENEMIES, 5:45-48

1. It Marks Us as Children of God, 5:45.

5:45 - THE CHILDREN OF YOUR FATHER. When Jesus says, "that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven," He was not saying that you become children of God by loving your enemies. In the Bible "children of," or "son of" means "in the likeness of." You are never more like the Father than when you love your enemies.

RAIN ON THE JUST AND THE UNJUST. How does our Father treat those who oppose Him? He can deal with them any He chooses. He can bless His children and withhold His blessings from His enemies. He can crush those who rebel against Him. But instead, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and send-eth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Even the most hardened criminals and the most confirmed atheists are recipients of God's blessings. Pagans, witches, idolaters, satanists, atheistic evolutionary humanists, poly-theistic Mormons, pantheistic Hindus, and Monistic New Agers are all blessed by God's universal blessings. But, make no mistake about one thing - all of God's blessings are not universal. There are blessings the Lord saves for those who accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Lost people will never know those blessings. They have rejected God and will have their wish granted - forever.

2. The Superiority of His Righteousness, 5:46-48

5:46 - IF YE LOVE THEM WHICH LOVE YOU. What reward can you expect? "Do not even the publicans the same?" Publicans were despised above all people. They classified them with harlots and sinners. The publicans were Jews employed by Rome to collect a specific amount in taxes. Anything above that amount they could keep, and some of them had become wealthy at the expense of their fellow Jews. On one occasion when Jesus was eating with some publicans, "The Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" (Matt. 9:11).

Some people seem to bask in the glow of family love, as though it holds some great spiritual significance. This is especially true at Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter. How often I hear someone say, "We will have all the family together. After all, That's what it's all about, Isn't it?" Jesus says, Don't pat yourself on the back. Even the worst sinners love those who love them.

5:47 - IF YE SALUTE YOUR BRETHREN. True Christianity is not snobbish. Neither is it

clanish. But what does that say of some who go to church, speak only to certain individuals, and make it clear that they are holding others at arm's length? There are people who go home from Sunday School and worship services every week feeling good about the fellowship they had with their friends. Some of them are very friendly with their friends, but very unfriendly with others. Even publicans did that. Jesus expects more of His followers. Christian love is inclusive, not exclusive.

Many people are deeply hurt at church because of the attitude of people who profess to be committed to Christ. In the youth group at church every young person is conscious of the shoes each person is wearing, what emblem each person has on his shirt, and the name on the pocket of their jeans. That is a good environment in which to overlook someone who cannot afford designer jeans.

My younger brother is a Christian attorney whom the Lord has blessed. When his older son was about four years old, Mike decided it was time to encourage him to appreciate his blessings, as well as develop the right attitude toward those who are less fortunate. Recalling the farm house in which we grew up, he said, "Jim, do you realize that when I was your age I had to go to bed in a cold room in the winter, and a hot room in the summer?" He understood the puzzled look on Jim's face when he asked, "Daddy, why didn't you sleep in the cold room in the summer and the hot room in the winter?"

While Jim's response is amusing, we must do all we can to teach our children to love one another. But we must go beyond that. We must love our enemies and teach our children to love their enemies. We are never more like our Lord than when we love our enemies.

5:48 - BE YE THEREFORE PERFECT. What does God expect of Me? He answers that question in verses 20, 44, and in this verse. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." The word "perfect" is used 99 times in the King James Version of the Bible. When used of God it means absolute perfection. When used of man it may mean to be full grown in body, mature in mind. It may refer to moral or spiritual maturity. In the Epistle of James, (1:4), we find, "But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." In this verse it is obvious that perfect means "entire (complete), wanting nothing."

The Greek word for perfect is "teleios." The teleios of an infant or child is a full grown adult. The teleios of an acorn is a full grown oak tree. When applied to the Christian it means complete, mature, lacking nothing. It does not mean a state of sinless perfection, but it does mean that our goal should be God's perfect standard. We should never think we have reached sinless perfection, but we should never take our eyes off that goal.

When we love our enemies and pray for them; when we show our love for them in practical ways, we are beginning to think and act like our Lord. Maturity in the Christian life is manifested in godly conduct toward others, even our enemies.

CHAPTER SIX

TRUE VERSUS HYPOCRITICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS, 6:1-18

1. ALMSGIVING, 6:1-4.

6:1 - **TAKE HEED.** Jesus begins this new section with a **WORD OF WARNING.** He has already stated (5:20) "That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." He has supported His claim by contrasting true righteousness with the pseudo-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. "True righteousness of the kingdom must be applied in the everyday activities of life. This is the emphasis of the rest of the Sermon on the Mount [WWW: 41].

In 6:1-18, Jesus warns all believers against hypocrisy in almsgiving (1-4), prayer (5-15), and fasting (16-18). "The principle uniting all three illustrations appears first" [CLB - 116]. True piety is never done for the approval of other people. But a hypocrite deliberately uses religion to cover up sin and to promote his own temporal interests. The righteousness of the religious leaders of the day was insincere, an outward performance for the applause of men. In this section Jesus focuses on the manner in which persons should do God's will. "Correct actions with improper motives still do not please God" [2: 116].

Verse 1 does not contradict 5:16: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." The motives are entirely different.

DO NOT YOUR ALMS BEFORE MEN. There were probably many times when alms were given in the presence of other people. The qualifier is, "to be seen of them." The Pharisees had become proficient at giving alms in a way that would draw the attention and praise of men.

NO REWARD FROM YOUR FATHER. If the praise of men is your purpose in giving, you may be very successful in this world. But that is all the reward you are going to receive. There will be no reward in Heaven. This raises an often debated question. Should rewards be a consideration for the Christian? It has been suggested that we should do good for the sake of good alone; that virtue is its own reward, and that we should banish from our minds all thoughts of rewards. There might be many responses to this argument, but I will mention only two. First, it is not the view expressed by

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. In 5:12, He said, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven..." Secondly, as Barclay says, "To banish all rewards and punishments from the idea of religion is in effect to say that injustice has the last word" [1: 179].

6:2 - WHEN THOU DOEST THINE ALMS. In a society without social security, worker's compensation, or welfare, almsgiving (voluntary charity) was a way of life, especially in the Jewish community. The Jews considered almsgiving their most sacred duty. In fact, they used the same word (zedakah) for both almsgiving and righteousness. A study of Acts and the Epistles reveals the importance the early church placed on voluntary gifts, or love offerings, to help those in need. But it was easy to abuse almsgiving by making a show of it. This is what the Pharisees did, but Jesus strictly prohibits it for His followers.

DO NOT SOUND A TRUMPET. This is what the hypocrites did "in the synagogues and in the streets." It is not clear whether "trumpets" used literally or metaphorically. It is possible that the reference is to their "blowing their own horn," as we would say today. But the effect was the same. The act was the very essence of hypocrisy, and Christians must not be hypocrites.

A long standing excuse for not going to church, or for not becoming a Christian, is that there are hypocrites in the church. We see how valid their excuse is when they buy their groceries in the same super market with those hypocrites, and use the same doctors, and dentists, and send their children to the same schools. Yes, we do have hypocrites in the church. We are troubled by it, but Jesus is more disturbed than we are. The great difference is that Jesus knows exactly who they are, and He knows what to do about it.

GLORY OF MEN. This is what motivates many people. Some people will receive credit for things they do, either because of the magnitude of their action, or because of the arena in which the work is performed. Some of those who are well known for their Christian ministry remain humble and desire glory only for the Lord. They are not seeking personal glory. But human nature has not changed, and the temptation to do something for the glory of men is ever present.

THEY HAVE THEIR REWARD. Billy Graham is one of the most respected people in America. Charles Stanley is seen weekly by so many people that some are calling him America's Pastor. They are both praised by many people. Does that mean that they have their reward here and now and not in Heaven? No. These are God-fearing men who are simply taking advantage of the opportunity the Lord has given them to preach the Gospel of salvation to millions of people.

The key is found in the motive in almsgiving, or in giving our tithes and offerings. If our goal is the glory of men, we may achieve that goal. But whether we receive it or not, we will have no reward in Heaven. If a person has been saved, he will not lose his salvation, but he will arrive in the condition mentioned by Paul in I Cor. 3:13-15:

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any

man's work abide which he hath built there upon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

6:3 - LET NOT THY LEFT HAND. Rather than blowing a trumpet when giving alms (or, tithes and offerings), Jesus says, "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." Believers must live by this principle daily. Some take this to mean that they should not sign a pledge, have their contributions recorded, or even report their contributions to the IRS. Others have no problem with this. Their church asks them to subscribe to the budget and they do it without reservation, assured that all financial records are confidential. But they do not broadcast it.

6:4 - THAT THINE ALMS MAY BE IN SECRET. My mother had been treasurer of her church for some time when I made a discovery. Sometimes a check someone had given to the church would be returned to her marked "Insufficient Funds." She was aware of what most treasurers do under the circumstances, but she made an arrangement with the bank whereby she would cover the amount of the check and no one else would ever know about it.

She had a clothing store and when she was disabled by a brain tumor we went through her books and found that she was helping a number of people - in secret. Mother was making a car payment so one lady could visit her mother in a nursing home. She helped underprivileged with clothes and food. Once I found a bag with shirts and pants in it and mentioned it to my father. He told me she had put that back for their young pastor who was also a seminary student. I had been a seminary student a few years earlier and she knew he could use the help. My mother taught me to tithe and to help those who needed help, but I had no idea how fully she practiced what she taught - because she did it in secret.

THY FATHER WHICH SEETH IN SECRET. We must never lose sight of the fact that our Lord sees the most secret deeds and He knows the deep secrets of our hearts, and the innermost thoughts of our minds. How wonderful it is that One so awesome is called our "Father!"

SHALL REWARD THEE OPENLY. But when? Here in this world, or in Heaven? Both. He does not promise a public reward for private deeds. In order to appreciate His blessing in this world we must understand that His richest blessings are not material. People make a fortune and spend it in search of health, happiness, respect, and a sense of significance. God can bless His children with all these things here and now whether they have wealth or not. And whatever He provides for us in this world will not diminish our rewards in Heaven. In other words, In Jesus we can have our cake and eat it, too!

Jesus places great emphasis on this subject. He could see how easily one might slip from Christianity into pharisaism. He "foresaw that the greatest threat to his kingdom down through the centuries would not be the Neros, Hitlers, and Stalins; rather would it be the repetition of the foul Pharisaism of the first century in his little churches soon to spring up everywhere" [3: 86].

2. PRAYER, 6:5-15.

6:5 - **WHEN THOU PRAYEST.** Not "if" you pray, but "when" you pray. Jesus assumes that they will pray. The disciples asked Him to teach them to pray "as John also taught his disciples." They had all heard of pious memorized prayers associated with the rituals and ceremonies of Judaism. The prayers of Jesus and John stood in sharp contrast to those of the Pharisees. There is a lot of difference between praying and saying prayers.

NOT...AS THE HYPOCRITES. The danger of Hypocrisy is as great in prayer as in almsgiving. The word "hypocrite" denotes an actor, impersonator, one who impersonates another, possibly suggesting a stage performance. In time it came to mean to pretend, to wear a mask. There are people who pray in church with a certain quiver in the voice, or a sob, and many members will forget that they may not have been in services for weeks, and assume that they are more spiritual than more faithful members because they were stirred emotionally. Some people associate loud, rhythmic prayers with spirituality. There have always been hypocrites who take advantage of those who cannot distinguish between judging and discerning sound doctrine. John wrote, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1).

THEY LOVE TO PRAY STANDING. They used the synagogue and the street corner as a stage for a demonstration of their piety. What they actually exhibited was piosity, or religiosity. Prayers rolled from their tongue before the crowds that they might be praised by men.

THE HAVE THEIR REWARDS. They will have the same rewards as those who made a show of almsgiving. They may have the praise of men. Some can "pull it off" for a time, but most of them lose even that because the more mature Christians will eventually see them for what they are.

The first time I preached to prisoners in one particular camp at the Mississippi State Penitentiary, the chaplain told me there were two men who would lead in public prayer. Both were named "James." He said that instead of asking for a volunteer, I should call on "James Smith" rather than "James Brown" because "James Brown" was known to everyone in the camp as a hypocrite. He was always ready to lead in prayer, or singing, but he was a snitch. More than one person in jail, awaiting trial, or in prison have used religion for their own personal advantage.

6:6 - **THY CLOSET.** Rather than pray standing in the synagogue or on the street corner to attract the attention of men, go into your prayer closet (chamber, room). Jesus does not condemn public prayer. There is a place for it, but private prayer is essential. In the prayer chamber, there is no one else there to distract you, and no one to impress. If your private prayer life is everything it should be, it will help you to avoid abuse of your public prayer.

When my son, John, graduated from LSU Law School I was asked to lead in the Invocation. When we arrived I discovered that I also had the Benediction, which was no problem for me, but a young man who was helping with the exercises said, "I guess one of them will have to be impromptu." I replied, "Both of them will be."

I sat on the platform with a very impressive group of people; law professors, Chancellor of the School of Law, Chancellor of the School of Medicine, the Chief Justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court. They could not have been more gracious. While the graduates were marching in, the Chancellor came over and said, "Dr. Sanders, the Chancellor of Medical School has asked for the privilege of handing his son his diploma. Would you like to give John his?" I assured him I would appreciate the privilege. Up to this point they had shown a certain amount of respect for this north Louisiana Baptist "minister." But I had been assured that I would never pray anywhere where prayer was needed any more.

I thought about what I wanted to pray and, in essence, asked God for the prayer I would pray to Him. I could have read an appropriate prayer and if anyone remembered it, they might have been a little impressed. I could pray what the Lord placed in my heart and risk their placing restrictions on future Invocations and Benedictions. What do you do? I asked the Lord to help me and prayed about issues, but I tried to use words that would not be offensive.

The Benediction was not a benediction, as such. The Chief Justice mentioned several problems facing that graduating class. For example, he expressed his concern about the reputation of lawyers in Louisiana. In my prayer I asked the Lord to help those standing before Him that day to realize that if they concentrate on character and integrity, their reputation would take care of itself. Afterwards, it became obvious to me that there were a number of people there who apparently did not expect to hear someone pray like that and a number of people came directly to me to express their appreciation. I was somewhat ill-at-ease with some of the comments about my prayer, especially since I did not have time to tell them how much private prayer preceded the public prayer.

PRAY TO THY FATHER. It is important to glean something from what Jesus says that will make your prayer life rich and meaningful. We may see one point and infer another here. First, Jesus clearly teaches that we must meet the Father in secret, or in private. We do not have to hide the fact that we are praying, but neither do we call attention to it. We must shut out the world in order to give the Father our undivided attention. When leading in prayer in a worship service, or in a small prayer group, there is some awareness of the presence of others and that awareness might become a source of temptation.

If we are praying with another person who always prays such a "moving" prayer that others are sometimes left in awe of it, there may be a temptation to make one's prayer just a little more fervent than usual. In a "sentence" prayer in which everyone is invited to pray, everyone is conscious of it when a particular person's prayer prompts numerous and hardy "Amen's." When you pray after that are you listening for the "Amen's?" We must pray to the Father, not to, or for the benefit of others.

While the second point is not stated, we might remind ourselves that all prayer must be to the Father. The New Testament teaches that we are invited to pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

THY FATHER WHICH SEETH IN SECRET. We see the same principle here that we have

already seen in verse 4 with reference to almsgiving. If we give our gifts or pray for the glory of men, that is all the reward we will get. But if we give, or pray in secret, rather than for glory of men, our heavenly Father Who "seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

6:7 - USE NOT VAIN REPETITIONS. This is what the heathen do; "for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." One of the best examples we see of vain repetitions is that of the prophets of Baal in I Kings 18. There are many modern examples of this in our day. Several years ago I talked with a friend on several occasions about his involvement in a movement called Ekkankar. Ekkankar is consistent with Eastern Mysticism and with some of the New Age Movements that have been influenced by it.

My friend asked me if I had thought about how wonderful it is just to think about Jesus' name. I thought I was about to hear a Christian testimony, but then he added, when I am driving down the road I just like to repeat, "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus..." As he repeated Jesus' name several more times, I realized I was hearing vain repetition.

6:8 - YOUR FATHER KNOWETH. Christians should not pray long, pious prayers standing in the synagogue or on the street corner like the Pharisees. Nor, should they use the vain repetitions of the heathen. We do not have to awaken Him from a sleep (I Kings 18:27). He knows "what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him." Our Father is omniscient; He knows everything there is to know. He never comes into possession of new knoweldge, He never misses anything, and He cannot be deceived. He promises:

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear (Isiah 65:24).

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not" (Jer. 33:3).

And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me (Ps. 50:15).

THE MODEL PRAYER, 6:9-13

6:9 - AFTER THIS MANNER PRAY YE. He did not say "pray this prayer," but "after this manner pray ye." In other words, He did not give us a prayer to pray, but a model or pattern by which we should pray. That is not to say that one cannot pray this prayer. But you can quote this wonderful passage all day and never pray. This writer is not discouraging anyone who would call this The Lord's Prayer, but pointing out the true nature and purpose of our Lord's teachings on prayer. If you want to see the Lord's Prayer, read The High Priestly Prayer of our Lord in John 17.

It is also significant that the disciples asked Jesus, "teach us to pray, as John also taught his

disciples" (Luke 11:1). They had heard the stale, self-serving prayers of the Pharisees, and they had heard they moving, refreshing prayers of the Lord and of John the Baptist. They had observed His prayer life. So they asked Him to teach them to pray. They did not ask Him to teach them how to pray. Teach us to pray. Give us the earnest desire to go to the Father in prayer.

They can teach you how to preach in the seminary. They can teach you how to sing. They can teach you how to witness, how to counsel, how to be an administrator. They can teach you about many aspects of prayer. But they cannot teach you to pray. Only the Lord can do that, but you do not have to wait to be taught before you pray. You will receive in-service training, and it will just keep getting better as you grow in Him.

OUR FATHER. Two words. Both essential to prayer. "Father" settles our relationship to God. The only people who can address Almighty God as "Father" are the ones who have received Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

"Our" implies a right relationship with other believers (5:23f). It has been suggested that you can tell the story of your life in Christ by the pronouns you use. Never are we taught to pray "My" Father. If we do not love others we cannot love the Lord. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (I John 4:20).

WHICH ART IN HEAVEN. This is not our way of locating the Father in order to address Him. We must recognize Him as our heavenly Father, high and holy. He says, "I the LORD thy God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5). He also says, "For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44).

HALLOWED BE THY NAME. Praise is an essential ingredient in prayer. We may say with David, "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens" (Ps 8:1). When we think of His name it must be with a sense of "holy awe," or reverence. He is the great "I Am" God of the burning bush. When we come before Him we are on holy ground.

6:10 - THY KINGDOM COME. This is not a prayer for the Lord to take us on to heaven. The Kingdom of God is the reign of God in the hearts of believers. Jesus did not come to this world and die just to get us into heaven, but also to get something of heaven in the hearts of men and women here and now.

THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. In heaven His will is done perfectly at all times. If we are to pray as we should there must be a genuine desire for His will to be done on earth, as it is in heaven. You must desire and seek His will in your own heart first.

6:11 - GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD. There were two classes in ancient times in many countries, including Israel. The rich and the poor. There was no middle class. The masses

lived from hand to mouth, from day to day. Bread was the staple of their diet. If they could be assured of bread for each day, a great burden would be lifted from their minds. That is the reason the people were so anxious to follow Jesus after He fed the five-thousand.

6:12 - FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS. Prayer for forgiveness is an essential part of every prayer. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS. Many Christians wonder why they do not experience the blessings of our heavenly Father. This may be as big a part of the reason as anything in their life. You will be judged as you judge others (7:1f). And you will be forgiven as you forgive those who trespass against you.

6:13 - LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION. This reflects a sincere desire to walk with the Lord in holiness and purity. When Christians deliberately expose themselves to temptation and then say these words they are not praying. Repentance means a change of mind which is reflected in one's outward behavior. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful" (Psalm 1:1). God will never lead us into temptation. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man" (James 1:3).

BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. The word "deliver" is used 296 times the Bible (KJV), and the word "delivered," 291 times. In many of those references God is doing the delivering. "Deliverer" appears 10 times. David said, "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer" (II Sam. 22:2). The same Lord Who delivered Israel from Egypt, and from Babylonians, will deliver us from evil, if we trust and obey Him.

THINE IS THE KINGDOM, AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY FOREVER. The more mature a person is in Christ the deeper his thoughts of the Father will be. The Christian will recognize the sovereignty of Almighty God, acknowledge His power, and desire only His glory - forever.

AMEN. And Amen. So be it. Let it be so.

And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground (Neh. 8:6).

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen (Jude 1:25).

6:14 - FOR IF YE FORGIVE. This is the basis for praying, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (vs. 12). We must forgive those who have offended us if we ask the Lord to forgive us.

This may be the one thing standing between some Christians and spiritual blessings they seek. If we love others as the Lord commands us, we can forgive. If we forgive we will be forgiven.

6:15 - **IF YE FORGIVE NOT.** God will not forgive the unforgiving. There are people who pray, "Father, forgive us for any sins we may have committed this week..." But when they speak of other Christians they are harsh, critical, and judgmental. They will not be forgiven, no matter how fervently they pray.

3. FASTING, 6:16-18.

6:16 - **WHEN YE FAST.** "Moreover, when ye fast" shows that He expected His disciples to continue the practice of fasting, which was vital a part of Judaism at that time. Fasting continues to be an essential part of life in the Middle East. Muslims keep the fast of Ramadan in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Jesus fasted and assumed His followers would fast. He did not say "if" you fast. At the same time, He is not commanding them to fast as a Christian ordinance.

There was a place for fasting, and most of those who heard Jesus that day fasted on certain days. There was but one compulsory fast and that was the fast on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). The Jews practiced private fasting, often in connection with mourning, or repentance from sin. The Jewish days of fasting were Monday and Thursday [1: 237].

Fasting as a call for national repentance, fasting over a national disaster, or private fasting for a spiritual reasons was pleasing to God. However, fasting could be abused by hypocrites as quickly as almsgiving and prayer. Whatever a sincere believer practices for the glory of God a hypocrite will practice for the glory of men. Just as Satan counterfeits all the gifts of the Spirit, hypocrites will counterfeit the genuine acts of sincere Christians.

BE NOT AS THE HYPOCRITES. Nothing could destroy the value of fasting more quickly than hypocrisy. Christians must never call attention to themselves in fasting. Hypocrites changed their countenance and disfigured their faces to appear to men to be fasting. They might well have been the same hypocrites who prayed and gave alms to attract attention to themselves.

There is a great need for a study of fasting today. We may well be neglecting a practice which could make a rich contribution to our spiritual life. But if you decide to begin fasting, you will have to be very careful to avoid the mistakes of the Pharisees. "They have their reward," and so will you.

6:17 - **BUT THOU, WHEN THOU FASTEST.** The Christian, in fasting, as in almsgiving, should stand in sharp contrast to the hypocrites. Christians should shower, shave, and shampoo when they fast, just as they would any other day. They should not wear a "lean and hungry look" to call attention to themselves. They should not call attention to themselves in conversation, but keep the fast between themselves and the Lord. They should guard against the attitude that they think they have mastered the practice to the point that they can schedule conferences to tell everyone else

how they did it.

6:18 - **THAT THOU APPEAR NOT UNTO MEN.** It would be easy for one who is fasting to call attention to himself through his dress, speech, or his facial expression. He may succeed in leading others to believe he is much more pious than he really is. On the other hand, one who has no desire to call attention to himself may do so any way if he does not heed our Lord's warning.

BUT UNTO GOD. Fasting is a private matter between the believer and the Lord, and every effort should be made to keep it a matter of a personal commitment to God. Do not be concerned about what others think, because "thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." The same principle applies to fasting as almsgiving (vs. 4) and prayer (vs. 6).

TREASURE THE RIGHT TREASURES, 6:19-34

1. The Christian's Attitude Toward Wealth, 6:19-24.

Jesus taught that where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The Christian's heart should be in heaven; and if it is he will treasure the spiritual over the material. If that is the case, the citizen of the Kingdom will not be obsessed with material wealth. Four principles are given to illustrate this truth.

(1). Obsession With Possession, 6:19-20.

6:19 - **LAY NOT UP TREASURES...ON EARTH.** Why? For "the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I. Tim. 6:10). The Bible does not say that money is the root of all evil, but the "love of money." There are wealthy people who love money a lot less than many in the lower and middle socio-economic brackets.

In an affluent society Christians may tend to rationalize about their material blessings. A person with a "comfortable lifestyle" may soothe his conscience by saying, "I have a little money, but I am not wealthy." He may be thinking that since he is not really wealthy, this does not apply to him. But his pursuit of material possessions may have desensitized him to the plight of poor, as well as to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in forming the right attitude toward wealth. He may actually feel that his possessions make him superior to the poor around him. He may even regale them with stories that begin with, "I remember when..."

Americans in the upper-lower and lower-middle socioeconomic brackets enjoy a lifestyle that only the wealthy can hope for in most parts of the world today. The attitude that rich is relative will not excuse one who treasures treasures, or loves money. Just as there may be a temptation for the "haves" to feel superior to the "have nots," there may be a temptation for the "have nots" to envy the

"haves." Both attitudes are sinful. Where does that leave those in the middle? They are going to be tempted from both directions, so the Lord's word on wealth is particularly applicable to him.

In First Century Israel there was a small wealthy class and a very large poor class, but no middle class as we know it. The Pharisees believed that wealth was a reward for righteousness. Therefore, the poor had been deprived of wealth because of their lack of righteousness. The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16) might have been as disturbing to them as it would have been welcomed by the poor. We need to remind ourselves that the rich man in that story never enjoyed some of the material things the middle class takes for granted today. We also need to remind ourselves that Lazarus did not go to heaven because he was poor and the rich man did not go to hell because of wealth.

There have been many very wealthy people who have been poor in spirit. They possessed great wealth, but they were never possessed by it. William Colgate and J. C. Penney are said to have tithed ninety per cent of their income. Stanley Tam got in on the ground floor of the plastics business, and the first thing he did was to give God his whole business. In his book, *God Owns My Business*, he gives the details of how he had the papers drawn up to make himself a salaried employee and give God all the profit. Of course it took him some time to get a lawyer to take him seriously enough to write the contract!

There are wealthy people who get their wealth by hoarding every cent they can get. In the Mississippi delta there was a wealthy man who had started from scratch and amassed a fortune, which included a extensive farm interests. Amusing stories were told of his wealth and his attitude toward it. I can picture him now in his old felt hat, khaki pants, white oxford shirt with the tail out on one side, brogans, and three day old beard.

A new tractor salesman was left on duty at the John Deere dealership while everyone else went to lunch. A planter, "Mr. Farmer", came in and started looking at a tractor and various implements. The salesman was at first amused that a man who looked so poor would be showing such interest in a big new tractor and all the equipment. He patiently answered Mr. Farmer's questions. Finally, Mr. Farmer announced, "I think I'll take it." He asked, "Take what?" Mr. Farmer said, "All of it. I'll take all of it!" The salesman tried to stall until the owner or other salesmen returned from lunch to help him out of an awkward situation. Trying to humor the older man, he asked, "Mr. Farmer, how would you like to pay for this?" He was surprised to hear his customer say, "I pay cash. I pay cash. I'll give you a check." He looked over at several pads of counter checks from banks all over the area, and asked, "What bank would you like to write the check on?" Mr. Farmer answered, "Any of them, son! Just any of them! Yours is close, we'll use it!" He was dumbfounded when the others returned and assured him that Mr. Farmer could indeed write the check on any of those banks.

The stories abounded, but they lost some of their appeal after I talked with a former employee who lived on his farm and worked on the farm, and at his gin. He told me about the time his pay check was fifty cents short. He went in and showed Mr. Farmer that he lacked fifty cents getting all the money he had coming to him. Mr. Farmer asked, "Well, what do you want me to do about it?" He answered, "I want my money.?" Mr. Farmer fired back, "Son, I expect you'd better move!"

Jesus was conscious of all the attitudes people adopt toward wealth. He "needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John 2:25). Here He deals with a problem as old as man, and it will be a problem until His return. "We are accustomed to divide life into the "spiritual" and the "material"; but Jesus made no such division. In many of His parables, He made it clear that a right attitude toward wealth is a mark of true spirituality (see Luke 12:13ff; 16:1-31)" [6: 46].

The covetous, materialistic Pharisees even found a way to use religion for a profit. "The folly of trying to pursue two opposite goals is the theme of Matthew 6:19-34. Man desires material wealth and spiritual values. They are at opposite poles" [3: 104]. Can we correlate the two, or do we have to choose spiritual values and divest ourselves of all material possessions? As in the story of the man who sold all he had so that he could purchase the "pearl of great price," we must not cling to anything that would hinder us from undivided loyalty to Jesus Christ.

MOTH AND RUST DOTH CORRUPT. Before most fruit and vegetable were hauled in refrigerated vans or trucks, one often saw the words "Perishable Goods" printed on the side. In grocery stores (not yet supermarkets) one often saw boxes marked "Perishable." In this passages, it is as though Jesus has just stamped the material things of this world "PERISHABLE." Common things are susceptible to moths or rust, and more valuable things to thieves.

Think how foolish it is to count riches by listing things which can so easily be taken away from us. There is an old proverb, "from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in three generations." How often one generation makes it, the second to inherits it, and the third squanders it. But even if it stays in the family for many generations, it will ultimately perish.

"Corrupt" means to vanish; exactly what happens by the time moth, rust, and thieves get through with it. Moth and rust were major problems because of the climate. And in the first century there were no banks, so people buried their treasure, or hid it on their property. Thieves were always looking for one's treasures.

It is foolish to place your trust in material things. The universe is running down; the sun is being consumed; and diamonds are not forever! Radium the size of a coin and valued at, say \$100,000, is "running down" and will turn into common lead in less than 90 years. Automobiles begin to depreciate the moment they are driven from the dealership.

6:20 - LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN. How do you do that? "Spiritual treasure should be defined as broadly as possible - as everything that believers can take with them beyond the grave - e.g., holiness of character, obedience to all of God's commandments, souls won for Christ, and disciples matured in the faith" [2: 123]. Moth and rust cannot destroy these treasures, and thieves cannot steal them.

(2). Treasure Claims the Heart, 6:21.

6:21 - WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS. Since the Fall, man has been obsessed with the desire to possess. The heart is inherently drawn to one's treasures. The desire to possess is not evil within itself, but the Christian must be sure what kind of treasures he saves, and where stores them. The believer must be sure that he is never possessed by his possessions, and that he lays up his treasures in heaven rather than on earth.

There are fundamental differences between the treasures on earth and the treasures in heaven. One is earthly, the other heavenly; one is temporal, the other eternal; one is material, the other spiritual. Your heart will be on one or the other; either on earth or in heaven, but it will always be where your treasures are.

This does not mean that God wants all people to be in poverty. Neither does it mean that wealthy persons cannot be saved. But the Lord warned, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24). It is possible by the grace of God. The person who possesses great material wealth may be more tempted to focus his attention on material possession. But one does not have to possess great wealth to have his heart on material things on earth rather than in heaven.

How do we lay up treasures in heaven? And, How do we avoid laying up treasures on earth? Go back and read what Jesus had to say about giving alms, prayer, and fasting for part of the answer. Then turn to Matthew 25:34-40. In particular, observe that Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt 25:40b). Paul wrote: "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live there- therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8). He also wrote, "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3:23).

(3). Danger of Double Vision, 6:22-23.

6:22 - THE LIGHT OF THE BODY IS THE EYE. The heart (vs. 21 refers to the center of the affections. The eyes enable the whole person to see, and distinguish between good and evil. "God's Word often uses the eye to represent the attitudes of the mind" [6: 47]. If the eye is focused (single, not double vision) on the light, the whole body is able to function, or move properly. But if the eye is out of focus (double vision) the whole body will stumble as one in the dark.

6:22 - IF THINE EYE BE EVIL. Helen Keller was once asked, is not blindness the worst handicap a person can have?" Her thoughtful answer was, "No, it is far worse to have eyes and not see." The word "evil" here does not denote moral degeneracy, but a crisis or disaster. The eye presents the brain with a distorted, or blurry picture, which in turn misleads the entire body. The body is directed by the mind and the mind responds to the picture it receives from the eye. If it receives a distorted picture, the entire body will be groping in darkness.

6:23 - HOW GREAT IS THAT DARKNESS! The Greek word for darkness is "skotos," from "ischo" meaning restrain or stop, as one in that day was forced to stop when night overtook them. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness (progress is stopped). "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

(4). Impossible to Serve Two Masters, 6:24.

6:24 - NO MAN CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS. Whether they say it or not, it is obvious that many Christians have convinced themselves that they can accumulate both earthly and spiritual treasures at the same time. Jesus said that they have only two options; they must choose between competing loyalties. "Masters" implies a slave owner who demands absolute allegiance. He will not let his servant serve another.

YE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MAMMON. You cannot serve God and money. Money is a master. It totally dominates the mind and energy of multitudes of people, including many who profess to be Christians. They pay lip-service to the Lord and His church, but manifest a "heaven can wait" attitude in pursuit of material things. All our churches have members like that. They want to be seen as faithful and often rationalize to cover up their quest for more material wealth.

God is a master. Man is a threefold being (body, soul, and spirit), but "he is so constituted as to be able to give himself over to only object of affection and remain healthy indefinitely" [3: 111]. He cannot serve both God and money. Note that God did not say that you should not serve God and mammon. He said you cannot do it.

Why can you not serve both? Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." He did not say difficult; He said it is impossible. Blomberg is right:

Many perceptive observers have sensed that the greatest danger to Western Christianity is not, as is sometimes alleged, prevailing ideologies such as Marxism, Islam, the New Age Movement or humanism but rather the all-pervasive materialism of our affluent culture. We try so hard to create heaven on earth and to throw in Christianity when convenient as another small addition to the so-called good life [2: 124].

If Jesus is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all. If you do not serve Him with your whole heart you do not serve Him at all. Some who profess to have the Kingdom of God in their heart have a major problem living in the heart of the Kingdom. They may be regular in attendance for months and then something comes up: deer season, football season, camping weather, the garden, or the farm. Then these people will miss services and joke about it. Every church has members who say they are believers, but if there is a choice between worshipping the Lord and their recreation, work, family or friends, they consistently choose their own interests over the Lord's services. I am often amazed at

how little it takes to come between some church members and the Lord.

When my son was in law school, some students had been joking about things that proved one was a man. Later, a group decided to go to New Orleans to see a Saints game and they asked John to go. He told them he could not go because the game was on Sunday and he would be in church. A young lady recalling the earlier discussion, said, "A man does what he wants to." He said, "No, a man does what is right."

DON'T BE ANXIOUS FOR DAILY NEEDS, 6:25-34.

6:25 - THEREFORE I SAY. During a time of crisis, Zedekiah, king of Israel, asked Jeremiah in secret, "Is there any word from the LORD? And Jeremiah said, There is..." (Jer. 37:34). Fortunes are spent in America by people seeking a relief from anxiety. The counseling field is continuing to expand. It sometimes seems that there are as many mental health clinics now as there were psychiatrists when I began my ministry. It is about time America asks, "Is there any word from the Lord?" There is, and this is it!

TAKE NO THOUGHT FOR YOUR LIFE. In other words, "Stop being anxious for your life." The Lord is not talking about the usual things one must always think about; Hygiene, grooming, and health. He has in mind the obsession with wealth that possesses so many people. There is an old saying that "the rich get richer, and the poor get children." Today the gap between the haves and the have-nots is widening, but that does not mean that Jesus is only addressing the wealthy.

He also provides a practical commentary of the Tenth Commandment: "Thou shalt not covet..." Covetousness devalues everything; cheapens riches, and cheapens the one who covets. All people, rich and poor, must deal with the temptation to covet.

There are poor people who have a bigger hang-up about money than some wealth people. I preached against, and worked to try to defeat the legalization of a lottery in Louisiana. There are sound Scriptural grounds for opposing gambling, beginning with the fact that gambling defies every principle of New Testament stewardship. Another reason for opposing the lottery is that it preys on the poor. Those who can least afford to buy a lottery tickets keep going back and buying more in hopes of winning one big jackpot.

There are poor people who make the round of all the Halloween carnivals and spend money they cannot afford to spend on bingo games, cake walks, and raffle tickets. Some are normally quiet, people with a "vanilla" personality, but when they get close to these games of chance, they remind you of sharks in a feeding frenzy.

There are fathers who in their mad rush for "more" often neglect their wife and children. They are

constantly trying to squeeze in an extra meeting or a few more hours. Some try to compensate by buying a house or car they cannot afford. Others seem to be willing to sell their soul for a bigger house and more expensive car than their neighbor.

While in seminary and immediately after seminary, I worked on the staff of an outstanding pastor. I had a major in Sociology as well as Bible from Mississippi College and had taken counseling courses in New Orleans Seminar. I often asked the pastor questions in an effort to see if theories I had developed in school had a practical application on the church field. Once I asked, "When young adults seek counseling for marital problems, what is the number one problem you see today?" Recalling counseling classes, I would not have been surprised if he had mentioned in-law problems or sexual problems. But, without hesitation, he said, "Someone has bought something they can't pay for."

If The Sermon on the Mount is anything it is practical. The early Soviet leaders were dead wrong when they called the Gospel "Pie in the sky bye-and-bye." Jesus gave us the most profound principles the world has ever known, but rather than an opiate of the people, they have a practical application in every day life.

The word translated "take no thought" really means, "to be drawn in different directions." Worry, or anxiety, pulls people in different directions - pulls them apart. That is exactly what is happening in the heart when we worry, because worry is the opposite of faith. Worry, which might be called a practical atheism, is a sin.

WHAT YE SHALL EAT...DRINK. Jesus first focuses on food, man's most basic need. If the Lord can provide food, He can supply the rest of our needs. God created us for a purpose and He will take care of us until that purpose is realized. "Anxiety consumes; worry wears; fretting frustrates. Worry does not empty a day of its problems, only of its strength" [3: 113].

This does not address the plight of those who are starving in Somalia and other places. The Lord will provide food for His children, but we will have famines in the world until Jesus returns. How do you reconcile the promise and the reality of emaciated masses in Somalia? In the first place, blame sin, not God. Secondly, God expects us to help - as Americans have time and again. Thirdly, we must pray that our response to the suffering in places like that might be used of the Lord to defeat evil rulers who often use those helpless people like a pawn in some political game.

There are certain things we must do to provide food for ourselves and our families. We must work, plan, save, and preserve food for later use. We should pray that the Lord will bless our labor, and that He will provide for us what we cannot provide for ourselves. He has promised to take care of His children. All people are recipients of His blessings in a general way, but Christians are blessed in special ways. Paul dealt with this issue in writing to the Thessalonians:

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you

disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread (II Thes. 3:10-12).

NOR YET FOR YOUR BODY. The same principle applies. We need to clothing for the body, and the Lord has promised to provide it. He did not, however, say that He would put a certain label in your coat, or emblem on your shirt. Friends bought some shirts in Hong Kong, and when they paid for them, the clerk reached under the counter and brought out a handful of little alligator patches and gave them one to sew on each shirt when they got home.

IS NOT THE LIFE MORE THAN MEAT. Meat refers to food. Your life is more than food, and your "body than raiment." You must be industrious in providing food and clothing for yourself and your family. But you must not focus on those things to the point that you never get beyond them to the deeper meaning and purpose for your life. You can trust God to provide for you. Paul wrote, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32).

6:26 - BEHOLD THE FOWLS OF THE AIR. The birds of the air are a good example for us. They are tireless and industrious, though they are at the mercy of nature. But among the birds there is no hoarding, no anxiety, and no coveting. Why should there be any in the Kingdom of God? If God provides for them, He will surely provide for the one creature created in His image.

YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER FEEDETH THEM. Jesus appeals to the special relationship that exists between a father and his children. An earthly father cares for his children: how much more can we expect our heavenly Father to take care of us. Jesus refers to Him as "Father" seventeen times in the Sermon on the Mount. He asks the logical question, "Are ye not much better than they?" He anticipates a positive answer.

We are much better than birds and animals, and we must never let evolutionists convince us we are not. For more than a century humanists have been trying to force atheistic evolution on us. New Age scientists, recognizing problems in Darwin's theory, have reverted to pre-Darwinian pantheistic evolution. They target every public school child with their ungodly doctrines, and those who do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ and a Scriptural foundation have no defense against them.

6:27 - WHICH OF YOU...CAN ADD ONE CUBIT? Jesus' logic is irrefutable. What does worry accomplish? You cannot by thinking add one cubit, 18 inches, to your height. To argue with Him would be absurd.

6:28 - CONSIDER THE LILIES. They do less to provide for themselves than the birds of the air, yet God cares for them. The lilies grow, but what we are to consider is "how they grow." "They toil not, neither do they spin." If our Father provides for them He will provide raiments for us.

A former missionary to Israel appreciated the beauty of these lilies:

The lilies were probably of the anemone family, which cover the hillsides of Galilee prolifically for about six weeks in the spring. Of every hue imaginable, and covering the hillsides and plains like a thick Oriental carpet, when they sway in a breeze uncertain about its direction, the effect is like a kaleidoscope [3: 116].

6:29 - SOLOMON IN ALL HIS GLORY. Solomon's name is used 281 times in the Bible. That sets him apart from most men, but well behind David, whose name appears 1,085 times. Moses occurs 829 times and Abraham (Abram) 285 times. Abraham is remembered as the father of many nations and the father of the faithful. Moses will always be associated with the Exodus and the Law. David was one of the greatest military geniuses who ever lived, as well as a poet and singer, and revered king. But when you think of glory and splendor one name leaps out at you. Solomon. Yet in all his glory he was not arrayed like one of the lilies which neither toil nor spin. What they are is what God made them.

6:30 - IF GOD SO CLOTHED. God is the One Who clothes them, not Mother Nature; not a pantheistic "force." David was inspired to write, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1).

WHICH TODAY IS AND TOMORROW... The lilies are beautiful for about six weeks. Then the "first sirocco wind on a warm day in May or June that crawls out of the desert like a hot breath from a mystical dragon sears and scorches the flowers and grass" [3: 116]. Anxiety about what one will eat or wear shows a lack of faith in the God Who cares for the grass and flowers which appear for a brief time and then are gone forever.

O YE OF LITTLE FAITH. I used to talk with a scientist at a health club. He often asked questions about theology. On one visit it would seem that he was close to making a commitment, and the next time he might be moving in the opposite direction. One day he announced that he had found a word that described him. Mini-fidelis, little faith, or minimum faith. He said, "That's what I have." Unfortunately, that term might describe a lot of people who profess to believe in Christ.

Worry is a sure sign of "little faith." We are invited to trust God. To do so is to grow in the Lord, to become stronger as we walk with Him. To fail to trust Him is sin. Even those with minimum faith can pray as the father of a stricken child prayed, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

6:31 - THEREFORE TAKE NO THOUGHT. Do not be pulled in different directions. If you have faith in God you do not have to be pulled in two directions. Faith is a sure cure for spiritual schizophrenia. For years I have watched weight lifters and body builders in health clubs. Some follow strict diets and exercise fanatically. It is interesting to watch them when they get close to a mirror. I talked often with one who aspired to be a professional body builder. I asked him if he paid as much attention to the spirit as he did his body. I tried to talk with him about the importance of the right spiritual diet and proper spiritual exercise. He said, "Oh, sure, you gotta do that." But then

when he started talking he was focused on his attitude toward exercise (psych himself up), and not the Spirit.

6:32 - AFTER THESE...THE GENTILES SEEK. "Anxiety characterized pagan religions, which were dominated by fears of capricious and despotic deity who constantly had to be appeased" [2: 126]. The word "Gentiles" is not used to denote non-Jews, but those who worshipped pagan gods. Francis Shaeffer taught that the smallest word in the English language is the word god with a small "g;" and the biggest word in the English is the word God with a big "G."

6:33 - BUT SEEK YE FIRST. The attitude of the Christian stands in sharp contrast to the attitude of the heathen Gentiles. Our priorities today must contrast as sharply with those of lost persons. There are two kinds of people in the world, lost and saved. And there are two kinds of saved people, spiritual and carnal; those who are walking in the Spirit and those who are walking in the flesh. The strong contrast will be seen between spiritually minded Christians and lost people. Unfortunately, the attitudes and priorities of the carnal believers may seem more like those of lost people than committed believers.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Lost people may be in a frenzy over food, clothing, and shelter, but Jesus promises that if the Christian will seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, all those things will be added unto him. Jesus minced no words in promising to provide for those who walk with Him in faith. Sadly, many church members are seeking everything in the world except His righteousness. They have no fresh testimony about answered prayers or other spiritual victories. Their great pleasure is in material possessions, pleasure, and personal honors.

"Seek ye first" holds that the Christian's highest priorities are the glory of God, the welfare of His Kingdom, and "His righteousness." His righteousness is imputed unto us when we accept Christ by faith. It is then produced in us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

6:33 - TAKE...NO THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW. The believer does not have to spend his life worrying about where the next meal is coming from, or what to do to keep the wolf away from the door. But this is not a call to be irresponsible. The Lord never said that we are not to plan at all for tomorrow, save for a rainy day, or participate in a retirement program. The Scripture is clear about this: "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (I Tim. 5:8). New Testament stewardship requires that we do all those things. But faith means that we will not be so preoccupied with these things that we do not keep the Kingdom of God and His righteousness in first place.

Again, "take no thought" means to be drawn in different directions. Faith will prevent spiritual Schizophrenia. We do not have to have our lives torn apart by anxiety over what tomorrow holds. Faith says, "I do not know what tomorrow holds, but I know Who holds tomorrow."

As a pastor, I have lived in homes provided by churches I have served. I thank the Lord that there have been but a few. Many churches now provide a housing allowance so that the pastor can build

up some equity in a house and be better prepared for retirement. They are both wise and considerate to do this. This will prove to be a blessing to those pastors. The rest of us will have to buy or rent a house when we retire. At this time I really do not know how I will be able to buy a house, but I am convinced that the God who called me will provide for me. I do not know where, I do not know how, but I do know what He promised. For Him to fail is for my Lord to lose more than I will. I would lose my comfort, He would lose His character.

Unfortunately, many pastors and their wives have not been able to retire with dignity; some because they failed to prepare, but most because the people they served lacked vision. That is better than saying they did not care, but let's face it, many of them simply do not care. Some seek a young pastor so they will not have to be concerned with a pastor's needs as he approaches retirement. Not only should a church be willing to contribute to a retirement program for their pastor, they should insist on it.

SUFFICIENT UNTO THE DAY IS THE EVIL THEREOF. As we have seen already, "evil" as used here does not denote sin, but problems, disaster, or some crisis. Each day is going to have a sufficient number of problems and challenges without our having to borrow from those of tomorrow.

Alcoholics Anonymous reminds its members to set a goal of sobriety "one day at a time." Some things must be planned in advanced, but the ideal philosophy for the Christians is reflected in the familiar words of an old Gospel song:

One day at a time, Sweet Jesus;
That's all I'm asking from you.
Just give me the strength
To do everyday what I have to do.

Yesterday's gone, sweet Jesus,
And tomorrow may never be mine.
Lord help me today, show me the way
One day at a time.

CHAPTER 7

I. DEALING WITH OTHERS - HIS WAY, 7:1-12

1. Critical Spirit Condemned, 7:1-5.

Chapter seven, at first glance, seems to be a collection of proverbs added to an otherwise well structured sermon. No doubt that is the reason some people think the whole Sermon on the Mount is a collection of the teachings of Jesus during His public ministry. But upon closer examination we see that in chapter five Jesus deals with the matter of human relationships and the law. He moves on in chapter six to show how true righteousness is expressed in almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (1-18); and the difference between making a living and a sinful pursuit of wealth. In chapter seven he returns to the theme of our relationship with others. Our citizenship in His Kingdom demands that we maintain a Christ-like attitude toward others.

7:1 - JUDGE NOT. "Judge" (krino) may mean to analyze or evaluate; or it may mean to condemn or judge harshly. The first use is good and every Christian is expected to discern between good and evil. John wrote, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). What Jesus is saying here is that Christians should not be characterized by a critical or judgemental attitude.

Discrimination is essential. We do not go blind when we become a Christian (Phil. 1:9f). A Christian who believes everything he hears and accepts everyone who claims to be a prophet may end up bidding God speed to the a false prophet. "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (II John 1:10f).

In this chapter Jesus discusses three different judgments: our judging ourselves, 7:1-5; our judgment of others, 7:6-20; and God's judgment of us, 7:21-29. In 7:1-5 we are taught that before we judge others we must first judge ourselves. Wiersbe points out reasons for this: we shall be judged, 7:1; we are being judged, 7:2; and we must see clearly to help others, 7:3-5 [6: 49f].

The scribes and Pharisees were guilty of judging others in the worst sense of the word. Their pseudo-righteousness led to false judgement of themselves and others. Their false righteousness resulted in false judgment. Condemnation of others became a part of their righteousness. We face the same temptation today. One of the great dangers in liberalism is that one might not take a stand on certain moral issues. In fact a part of his religion might well be judging the motives of those who take a strong stand on those issues. During the Reagan administration Americans heard a lot about the Moral Majority. I heard a preacher refer cynically to "the Moral Majority, which is neither moral, nor a majority." While I disagreed with Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority at points, there is no way I considered the movement immoral; and they elected President Reagan by a landslide.

A great danger in conservatism is that we might become so intense in our fight against abortion, pornography, and others evils that we may lose sight of positive things we should stand for. Righteousness must never be reduced to condemning liberals. There is grave danger in extremism on either side. That danger is that we might end up confusing true righteousness with attacking the other side and cease to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22f).

YE SHALL BE JUDGED. The tense denotes final, once-for-all judgment. The Pharisees played God, and condemning others without considering the fact that they would one day stand before the

judgment bar of God. There is nothing that will prevent our condemnation of others more than remembering that we, too, will be judged, and we will be judged by God, according to the way we have judged others.

7:2 - WITH WHAT MEASURE. If taken seriously, it will go a long way toward eliminating one of the most pharisaic attitudes in the Christian church. Jesus stated a profound principle: "For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged." If we judge harshly, we shall be judged harshly. An old saying holds that "There is so much good in the worst of us, and so much bad in the best of us, that it hardly behooves any of us to talk about the rest of us." The unity of the Sermon on the Mount is obvious when we relate this principle to the Beatitudes (5:8): "Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."

Judgment here may refer to intermittent judgments, as well as the final judgment over which Jesus Christ will preside. Leave the condemnation of others to the One Who has both the qualification and authority to judge.

Jesus Christ is the only One Who has the right to judge us. We are often very sensitive to what others think about us. Perhaps the most quoted line from a Clint Eastwood movie is "Go ahead; make my day." When it comes to criticism most people, if they told the truth, could say, "Go ahead; break my day." Robert McGhee, founder and President of Rapha, says that we can hear many complimentary things during the day. Then someone can say one negative thing about us, and when we go to bed at night, what do we think about; all the good things, or the one negative thing? We must remember that only Christ has a right to judge us, and only He has a right to judge others.

7:3 - MOTE...IN THY BROTHER'S EYE. Jesus shows the absurdity of man judging man. Only God has authority and qualifications to judge. This does not mean that we are never to form an opinion about others. We must do this every time we vote on public officials. Church nominating committees must evaluate both the character and qualifications of prospective teachers and officers. Jesus said, "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:16). But we had better be very careful when we judge another person. The critical, censorious person is in danger of severe judgment. Some people condemn others because of jealousy or envy. They have no positive, or constructive purpose in judging; they just want to hurt others. This is what the Lord prohibits.

There are people who mercilessly criticize others over some small character flaw, and all the while they have much greater flaws in their own character. They see the mote (speck, splinter) in their brother's eye, but are totally oblivious to the beam (2x4, or large timber) in their own eye.

7:4 - WILT THOU SAY. Jesus continues to develop the preposterous picture of one with a huge beam in his eye focusing his attention on the speck in his brother's eye. "How wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?" Picture the person with a 2x4 or 6x6 hanging several feet out of his eye trying to get close enough to his brother to locate and remove a speck from his eye.

Don't laugh! It happens in every church. Some gossip addict sees a teenager make a mistake and

coldly condemns him for years. Some pious member whose heart is filled with hate for another race, or nationality, jumps on every sin, real or imagined, he can find. A man whose heart is filled with lust accuses the girl next door of being immoral because of her music. One man announced to me that a girl in her mid-teens might be immoral. And how did he know? She was biting her nails!

7:5 - THOU HYPOCRITE. When a person with a beam in his eye becomes hung-up on the speck in his brother's eye he deserves to be called a hypocrite. Jesus says, "first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." We can almost see a smile on the face of His disciples as Jesus painted this word picture. Unfortunately, however, a hypocrite does not believe he has a beam in his eye. Of course, if he pulls the beam out of his eye he will see something else more clearly: only God is qualified to remove the speck from his brother's eye.

The word hypocrite denotes an actor, one wearing a mask, a sham. A hypocrite pretended to be something, or someone, other than himself. He disguises his motives, pretending to be more committed to the Lord, and His church than he really is. He may deceive a lot of people, but is often unaware of how many people see through his disguise. This person might make a motion in a business meeting that implies a deep concern for his church, when in fact, he has an ulterior motive. He may seek to pass a resolution at state convention for the same reason.

A deacon fought a building program behind the scenes, but when it was obvious that he was on the losing side, he gave every indication of supporting the program. He was elected to the building committee and made a contribution, but created fear about the cost of the building. When they realized they needed another five thousand dollars for furnishings, he made a motion at the next business meeting that the committee be authorized to borrow up to fifty thousand dollars more to complete the building and furnish it. Some people were shocked, and at least one was impressed with the man's leadership and faith. Then he learned that he knew exactly how much money was needed and made the motion for the effect it had on some members.

Another deacon opposed a motion to build a gym because he and a number of leaders were convinced that they should build a new auditorium. They were having two morning services and the auditorium was packed for the second service. Hundreds of homes were being built near the church. They questioned the wisdom of building a gym first when worship space was needed. When the vote was announced, this man stood immediately and said, "All of you know I voted against the motion and you know my reasons. But my church has voted to build a Christian Life Center and I want you to know that I am one hundred per cent behind my church, and I will do everything I can to support it." Those who knew this deacon were not at all surprised by what he said. There was no hypocrisy in him.

BROTHER. There is no justification for claiming that this prohibits us from judging a brother in Christ, but not lost people. Jesus was speaking to Hebrews who used the term in speaking of another Hebrew, thus, their neighbor.

2. Wisdom in Judging Others, 7:6.

7:6 - GIVE NOT THAT WHICH IS HOLY TO DOGS. This verse seems out of place in this section. It seems unrelated to the context, but it may further qualify the command against judging [2: 128]. If that is the case, it gives a sense of balance to what Jesus has just said. "Without making it a topic of conversation, we can evaluate men realistically. If we are not to judge others carelessly, neither are we to set sacred things carelessly before those who would be sure to defile them with their reaction" [3: 126].

Dogs were scavengers, not domesticated pets. Swine were unclean to the Jews. Both were opposed to that which is holy (of great value). Pearls probably refers to thoughts. It is possible that "that which is holy" refers to carcasses of animals from the altar which were **supposed** to be burned outside the camp. "For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp" (Heb. 13:11). These carcasses should not be thrown to dogs or hogs "lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."

I have had drunks to tell me they wanted to be saved. They would agree to anything I suggested, confess sins, and ask to be baptized. In some cases I knew they would not remember the conversation the next day. To continue to witness to them in that condition would be like casting pearls before swine. The Lord is not saying that we should not preach to a certain class of people, but that we should be discerning enough to know when to we are wasting our time and move on to someone else.

Peter, in II Peter 2:22, may help us understand this verse. He wrote, "But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." He amplifies this in the third chapter.

3. God's Generosity, 7:7-11.

7:7 - ASK...SEEK...KNOCK. Our relationship our fellow man is dependent on our relationship with God. Persistent, fervent prayer is the best way of discerning God's will in judging or evaluating others. "Ask" implies dependence. We must ask God as His dependent children. "Ask, and ye shall receive." We need wisdom in all our relationships. Just as Solomon asked for wisdom to judge Israel, we must ask God for direction. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5).

"Seek" suggests increased concern, and determination to know His will. Jesus promised, "Seek, and ye shall find." "Knock" shows an intensified effort to go along with a sense of dependence on God, and an attitude of persistence. Liter- ally, we are to "keep on asking," "keep on seeking," and "keep

on knocking." We may ask, seek, and knock with confidence because of this promise. The Lord assures us, "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24).

7:8 - EVERY ONE THAT ASKETH RECEIVETH. The Lord, knowing our need for assurance, followed the promises of verse 7 with a specific promise to answer our prayers. "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." God has set conditions for answering prayer: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). But we are warned, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3).

7:9 - WHAT MAN IS THERE. The question can only be answered one way. One proof that God will answer our prayer is in the response of an earthly father to the needs of his children.

IF HIS SON ASKS BREAD. If the earthly son needs bread his father will do any thing within his ability to provide it. But even if he cannot give him bread, he would never give him a stone when he asks for bread. We are reminded that the round flat discs of bread in Palestine were not unlike flat stones or pieces of shale in appearance. They might be similar in looks, but a father would never give a stone for bread.

7:10 - OR IF HE ASKS A FISH. The same principle applies here as in the previous verse. The question invites a negative response. If an earthly son asks for fish, his father would never give him a serpent. The question invites a negative answer. If this applies to an earthly father, it most certainly applies to our heavenly Father.

7:11 - IF YOU THEN, BEING EVIL. "Evil" includes all manner of imperfection, frailty, or limitation, as well as sin. Man, though imperfect, knows how to give good gifts. He may make mistakes, but he knows how to give good gifts and will try to give them to his children. If we can expect imperfect man to give good gifts, we can be sure that our heavenly Father will give us good gifts. Human parents might at times make mistakes, or fail us, but God will never fail His children. "Give" is the key word throughout vv. 7-11, appearing five times as well as linking back with v. 6. "The 'good gifts' God gives include everything that pertains to seeking first his kingdom and His righteousness, 6:33" [2: 130].

4. The Golden Rule, 7:12.

7:12 - THEREFORE. With this word the Lord links this verse to verses 1-11. Holding those verses in mind, He takes the next logical step in showing how He would have us to treat others.

WHATSOEVER YE WOULD THAT MEN SHOULD DO TO YOU. We call this "The Golden Rule." And golden it is! But we need to avoid thinking of it as the sum total of the

Christian ethic. We should not build our whole system of theology around it. It is a principle which should govern our attitudes toward others. It is a principle for all Christians and it should be applied in every area of life, in all relationships. "Practicing the Golden Rule releases the love of God in our lives and enables us to help others, even those who want to hurt us" [6: 52].

DO YE EVEN SO TO THEM. If after praying about some issue, you still are unsure about how you should treat someone, then apply this principle. Ask, "How would I want to him to treat me if I were in his place and he in mine?" The Bible is our authority and we must be sure that our answer to the question is consistent with Scripture, but when we do not receive an immediate answer to prayer, we should apply this principle. We must never use prayer as an excuse to postpone, or avoid, what the Bible and common sense tell us we should do.

There are many parallels to the Golden Rule, but most of them are stated negatively: "Don't do to others what you do not want them to do to you." There is a difference. You can keep the negative principle by doing absolutely nothing. But the Golden Rule requires positive action from us.

II. A SPECIAL INVITATION, 7:13-27.

In 7:13-27, Jesus used three illustrations to show that there are only two categories of people in the world, the lost and the saved. These three illustrations contrast those who (1) choose the straight gate and narrow way rather than the wide gate and broad way (13-14); (2) those who bear good fruit instead of bad fruit (15-23); (3) and those who build their house on the rock rather than the sand (24-27). "In each case the first category refers to those who hear, obey, and are saved; the second, to those who only hear and are destroyed. In either case eternal life and judgment are at stake" [2: 131].

1. Two Roads, 7:13-14.

7:13 - ENTER YE IN AT THE STRAIGHT GATE. Robert Frost wrote one of my favorite poems, "The Road Not Taken." I have often quoted it, even while driving down the highway. He understood something of the cross roads of life. William Barclay wrote:

There is always a certain dramatic quality about life, for, as it has been said, 'all life concentrates on man at the cross-roads.' In every action of life man is confronted with a choice, because he can never stand still. He must always take one way or the other [1: 282].

With these two verses we come to a new and fresh emphasis in the Sermon on the Mount. Some see 7:13-27 as the conclusion to the sermon. In a sense verses 13 and 14 demand that the hearer draw a conclusion, or make a decision, based on all that Jesus has said up to this point. It is

as though He is saying, "I have set before you My Manifesto. Now that you understand what your citizenship in My Kingdom involves, and you understand how you must live if you become a member of it; will you enter it? But let me warn you - if you enter, you must enter My way; that is, you must enter in at the straight gate."

The Lord's invitation is often repeated in the Bible. The Scripture makes an urgent appeal to lost people to enter by grace, through faith into His Kingdom.

Behold, now is the day of salvation (II Cor. 6:2). Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision (Joel 3:14).

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isaiah 1:18).

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17).

To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts (Heb 3:15).

Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (II Cor. 6:2).

FOR WIDE IS THE GATE. The gate that leads to heaven is narrow but the gate to hell is wide and easy to find. This is the gate most people find. I read once that in the New Testament there are 237 warnings of eternal punishment for those who reject Christ.

BROAD IS THE WAY. Not only is the gate to destruction wide; once through the gate the lost person will find that the road is broad. Broad enough to accommodate the whole spectrum of individuals, philosophies, and movements that set themselves against God. There is room for both those who do human good and those who do evil; room for so-called Christian cults as well as Satanists. Room for the religions of the world and room for secularists who reject the supernatural. Room for the gutter bum and room for the lost church member. Room for the New Agers and room for the Humanists. Room for atheists and room for those who called Jesus "Lord, Lord," but never knew Him. Room for the proud and arrogant, room for agnostics. Room for profane, vulgar tongues, room for those who call themselves "good people."

There will never be one Christian on this road. But there will never be a lost person who will miss it. Many walk this highway because it is broad and the billboards along the way promise anything your heart desires. But what a toll one pays who travels that road!

THAT LEADETH TO DESTRUCTION. Dr. Harold Bryson, a friend from Mississippi College,

taught at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary for a number of years before returning to teach at our Almer Mater. He is the author of a book entitled, *Yes, Virginia, There Is a Hell*. At the time he wrote the book very few books were being published on the eternal destruction of the unredeemed, so his book was timely. Paul wrote of conditions in his day, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18). That describes America today. That which God loathes, Americans have adopted as entertainment. Comedians have made a mockery of that which is holy. Homosexuality is defended by singers and actors who entertain our children; by educators who teach them, and by politicians who govern them. Pro-death, anti-life abortionists are slaughtering 1.6 million unborn babies each year in America. Violence and corruption are wide spread. During the 1992 presidential race the national news media which sees censorship as the worst of evils, decided that moral issues should not concern us.

Let us face one fact: There is no place in heaven for evil people who refuse to repent. "The fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). This verse describes both those who enter the wide gate and travel the broad way, and their eternal destiny.

Jesus gave us the Revelation, which was recorded by John on the isle of Patmos, more than one-half century after He preached this sermon. In chapter 20, He describes the lake of fire that is prepared for the devil and all those who enter at the wide gate and travel the broad way. Those who go to hell will wish that "destruction" here meant swift annihilation, but it does not. It means conscious, eternal torment. It is incredible, but even with all the warnings we have about the gate that leads to destruction, "Many there be which go in thereat."

7:14 - STRAIGHT IS THE GATE. There are two gates, two roads, and two destinations. They are so clearly identified in the Scripture that anyone who dies and goes to hell can only blame himself. Years ago a man was driving down a familiar highway in a severe thunder storm. When he came to the Homochita River in south Mississippi, he could not see that the violent currents had washed out the bridge, so he drove off into the raging river. Somehow, he managed to escape from the car as it was being swept along by the force of the river. He rushed back to the highway to try to stop other drivers from driving off into the river. He had no light, so he stood in the middle of the highway and frantically waved both hands over his head and shouted as eleven drivers swerved to avoid hitting him and drove off into the river. He finally got someone to stop and block the road to save other drivers.

Jesus has set up warning signs and barriers to keep people away from the wide gate and the broad road that leads to destruction. He has sent His Spirit and given His word. He has done more; He has called and sent out preachers to stand in the road and warn people about the destruction that awaits all who travel the wrong road. Some are even waving their arms and shouting the warning, but most people are going around them as though they were some kind of nuisance.

Our Lord has also sent His Spirit, given His Word, and sent preachers to point people to the straight gate and the narrow way that leads to eternal life. The few who enter that straight gate do so by

faith, and by faith they travel the narrow way. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The way is narrow, but the Lord's promise to those who choose this way is life. He said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

2. Two Kinds of Religious Leaders, 7:15-23.

(1) False Prophets, 7:15.

7:15 - BEWARE OF FALSE PROPHETS. Literally, pseudo-prophets. The primary object of this warning was probably the false prophets among the Jews, particularly the scribes and Pharisees. But there can be little doubt that He anticipated the pseudo-prophets who would seek to pervert the Gospel. Paul dealt with false prophets in Galatia (Gal. 2:4). Peter warned "that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts" (II Peter 3:3). John was inspired to write, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (I John 2:18).

IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING. False prophets disguise themselves in order to hide their true purpose. They deny that they are false prophets, often misleading people by quoting Scripture. The late Dr. Walter Martin, known as "the Answer Man," warned us about the false prophets who are sent out by various cults. These false prophets visit church members and try to reach them on what appears to be Christian grounds. Those who are deceived are then cunningly backed away from true Christianity. But all false prophets are not in a cult; some serve in local churches and mainline denominations. These are just as dangerous; because while they have not "fallen," they spread false doctrines and subtly lead sheep astray.

These False prophets are not extinct. They are not even on an endangered species list. The Kingdom of God has been held up to ridicule by certain false prophets who first gained a lot of notoriety through their television ministries, and then lost everything when their greed or immorality was exposed. But they were not the only losers. The fall of certain televangelists has done serious damage to the image of faithful evangelists, and to some extent, other ministers of the Gospel. All false prophets have not been exposed. They continue to do their evil work while pretending to be true prophets. Two major cults send them out in pairs from door to door spreading false doctrines and stealing sheep.

INWARDLY THEY ARE RAVENING WOLVES. "Ravering wolves" are never more dangerous than when they come to us in "sheep's clothing." They appear to be harmless when in fact, they are ravering wolves.

(2) We Can Tell Them By Their Fruit, 7:16-20.

7:16 - YE SHALL KNOW THEM BY THEIR FRUIT. You can identify the false prophets by their fruit, even if they come to us wearing the clothing of a true shepherd. We know them, not by their mail-outs, advanced publicity, and boasting, but by their fruit. Listen to what they say and prove it by God's Word, as the believers did in Berea. They "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11).

DO MEN GATHER GRAPES OF THORNS. The question demands a negative answer. "No. We do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles." Even a child knows that. But, the more mature a Christian is, the more likely he is to know the false prophet, because he is more able to discern the spirit, and inspect the fruit. We read in I John 4:1:

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

I Corinthians 12:10 teaches us that among the gifts of the Spirit is the gift of the discerning of spirits. The Lord has given this special gift to some believers and they can help expose the more difficult cases. But can a child identify a false prophet? Once while on vacation, I took my family to a worship service in a growing church. The pastor was gone and the pulpit guest was a very young evangelist. He really put on a show for the people and many of them were excited. They were generous with their praise. As I pulled out of the parking lot, my twelve year old son leaned over the back of the front seat and said exactly what I was thinking - and feeling a little guilty for thinking it. He said, "Daddy, I got the feeling that what that man was saying was, 'Here I am, look at me.'"

It is not always that simple, but the Christian who is grounded in the Word of God will be prepared to judge them by their fruit. This kind of judgment is not only permissible, it is essential.

7:17 - GOOD TREE...GOOD FRUIT. "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit." It stands to reason that a bad tree cannot bring forth good fruit. I watched a friend graft some pecan trees. He had a lot of native trees growing near a river. Some produced excellent, but small pecans, while others produced bitter pecans. The good native trees always produced good pecans, never bitter ones. The bitter pecans never produced good pecans. The trees looked identical, but when you tasted the fruit you knew what kind of tree produced it. Furthermore, the grafts produced bigger pecans and you could always tell the grafted trees from the native trees by the pecans they produced.

When we consider leaders we must determine what kind of fruit they produce. On more than one occasion I have told a Pastor Search Committee how important integrity is in the ministry. I have added, "If you are not interested in investigating me, I am not interested in being considered by your church." A frustrated deacon had seen three pastors come to his church and leave in a short period of time. They had made the church a joke in the community. He asked me, "Will you tell me why you preachers won't tell us about preachers like that?" I answered, "I will if you will tell me why it is that you don't listen to us when we tell you."

There is a desperate need for some fruit inspection at this time. Part of the problem is that many of the Pastor Search Committees and Personnel Committees have a list which reflects their priorities. He must be young, experienced, with several degrees. And his score board must have the right numbers on it.

Jesus tells us that we shall know them by their fruit. He has the fruit of the Spirit in mind. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22). We need to ask, "Does this person's ministry produce the fruit of compassion, righteousness, faith, joy, and peace?" If we ask that of a pastor or staff member, should we not also ask that of the teachers and officers we elect?

7:18 - GOOD TREE CANNOT BRING FORTH EVIL FRUIT. The same point as in verse 17, but stated negatively. The teaching is simple, and easy to follow, and consistent with the rabbinical method of teaching.

7:19 - EVERY TREE THAT BRINGETH NOT GOOD FRUIT. Once again, Jesus does not hesitate to warn of the destruction that will come to those who hear Him but refuse to obey Him. "Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." He gives a similar warning in John 15:6: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

7:20 - BY THEIR FRUIT YOU SHALL KNOW THEM. When Jesus uses such repetition (see v. 16) we know He had a reason for it. The point is made clearly enough, but He knew that the emphasis was needed because Christians who know and understand this often overlook some bad fruit "to keep from hurting someone's feelings." The chairman of the Nominating Committee states that he is determined to see unfaithful workers replaced. But later when he is reminded that a personal friend has been neglecting his responsibilities, does he agree to replace him? He might think, "If we replace him he'll be mad at me, his wife will be mad at my wife, and his children will be upset with my children."

(3). Final Fate of All Fakes, 7:21-23.

7:21 - NOT EVERYONE THAT SAITH...LORD, LORD. "Verses 21-22 enumerate some of the ways in which individuals can masquerade as Christians. They may verbally affirm that Jesus is their Master, perhaps even with great joy and enthusiasm, but such claims must issue in lives of obedience" [2: 132f]. Not everyone who belongs to a church is a member of the Kingdom of God. False prophets will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It is possible that a significant number of church members will go to hell, not because they belong to the wrong church, but because they belong to the wrong master.

True believers do more than pay lip service. One can preach a sermon, teach a class, or sing a song without being saved. A person may drop religious clichés and shout "Amen" all day and die and go

to hell. We must believe in our heart before we can call Him "Lord, Lord."

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).

BUT HE THAT DOETH THE WILL OF MY FATHER. We must hear and obey. A saving faith is a working faith. Dr. E. R. Pinson, former Bible professor at Mississippi College, used to say to his classes, "Wind is not wind unless it is blowing; and faith is not faith unless it is working."

It is unfortunate that some have seen a conflict between Paul and James on this subject. Paul wrote, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). James says, "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works" (James 2:18). James did not say he was saved by works, but that faith is manifested in works. Paul agrees: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

7:22 - MANY WILL SAY IN THAT DAY. There is coming a day when every person is going to be judged according to his works (Rev. 20:13). According to Jesus, there are going to be a lot of people who think they are saved who are going to be cast out. This is a very disturbing thought. Those who masquerade as Christians might perform exorcisms, supernatural healing, or major on signs and wonders. Blomberg quotes Allison and Davies: "The call to righteousness encompasses personal virtue, private devotion, and unselfish social behavior; and to these things seemingly supernatural powers are incidental" [2: 133]. He then observes that It is also interesting that prophecy, exorcisms, and miracle workings all characterize "charismatic" activity, which has a tendency, by no means universal, to substitute enthusiasm and the spectacular for more inglorious obedience in the midst of suffering [2: 133].

HAVE WE NOT PROPHESIED IN THY NAME? "Prophesied" here refers to the forthtelling of news rather than foretelling future events. These false prophets who presumed to speak for the Lord, will stand before Him and say, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" Those who preach in His name, perform exorcisms, and do supernatural works have often been held up as "Super Saints" on the religious talk shows.

There are many people who are obsessed with the idea of finding something beyond the Scripture, beyond salvation, beyond the preaching and teaching of the Word. Once some of them get caught up in these ecstatic experiences, "second blessings," and special extra-biblical revelations, they never seem to be satisfied with anything else. Jesus says here that there will be many of these people who will never see the Kingdom of Heaven.

Television reporters have exposed numerous false prophets for the frauds they are. Some deny it

when the fraud is being acted out on tape for the whole nation to see. How do they think they are going to get by the all-seeing eyes of the Lord when they cannot convince a television crew?

7:23 - THEN WILL I PROFESS. Jesus was well aware of the fact that before too long He would be betrayed, persecuted, subjected to illegal trials, and crucified. Witnesses would be called in to give perjured testimony against Him. But in the final judgment Jesus will be doing the talking. There will be no lies, no deception, no miscarriage of justice. His word will be final.

I NEVER KNEW YOU. He will not say, "I once knew you, but I forgot you." He will say, "I never knew you." There will never be an erasure in the Book of life. If He ever knows us redemptively, He will always know us. If He does not know one in that day, He never knew him. "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (I John 2:19).

This verse affirms the doctrine of security of believers. He stated it clearly in John:

And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand (John 10:28).

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled (John 17:12).

YE THAT WORK INIQUITY. There are false leaders who profess Christ, prophesy, teach, and sing in His name, but they are evil. These people do not simply miss the mark (sin), they are actually evil. They may be church members, even leaders, but they are evil. Iniquity denotes that which is warped, twisted, perverted. It is especially disturbing to discover that a church leader is seen as evil by lost people in the community.

Pastors and denominational workers should be careful when they begin to praise people. A business man was sickened by a local pastor who constantly boasted about how godly a well known public figure was, when he knew for a fact that he was vulgar, profane, and possibly corrupt.

This passage reveals some sobering facts:

1. Not all people will be saved (vs. 23).
2. More seemingly good people will go to hell than to heaven (vs. 13 - many; vs. 14 - few).
3. "Many" who expect to be saved will discover that they are lost on Judgment Day (vs 22).
4. There are no second chances after death (23-27).

3. Two Houses, 7:24-27.

7:24 - THEREFORE WHOSOEVER HEARETH...DOETH. "Therefore" ties this section to the previous section. On the basis of what has just been said, it can be stated that "whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock."

Jesus will bring the Sermon on the Mount to a close with a final illustration. This is an urgent call for faith and commitment. "There is destiny in the decision. And this decision will determine the direction of all future decisions. It is doing, not hearing only, that makes the difference" [3: 142].

A WISE MAN. Jesus concludes this great sermon with a simple illustration about two men; one wise and the other foolish. To illustrate the wisdom of hearing the words of Christ and obeying them, he points to the wise man who builds his house on a rock. Jesus was a carpenter and He knew about building houses. He understood the importance of a good foundation.

In Palestine there were many wadis. A wadi was a stream bed which was dry in the summer, but during the rainy season it would become filled as water. Following heavy rains the current would become strong enough to destroy anything in its path. When the wadi was dry there would be sandy places that would seem like an ideal place to build a house. But no wise man would risk it. He would look for a large flat ledge rock and build his house on it.

Just as the wise man builds his house on a rock foundation, the wise hearer builds his life of the solid foundation of obedience to the Lord. The wise man would not just hear, he would obey the Lord.

7:25 - THE RAIN DESCENDED. The rain was sure to fall during the rainy seasons. "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock." The wise man also anticipates some storms in his life. But if he has built his life on Christ, "the Solid Rock," he will withstand those storms and be stronger because of them. See James 1:1ff.

7:26 - HEARETH AND DOETH THEM NOT. Jesus continues His simple illustration: "Every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand." Only a foolish person would build his house on the sand. This is especially true in Palestine, where the sand one found to build on would be in the path of a raging flood when the heavy rains came.

The spiritually foolish man tries to build his life on the foundation of hearing and not doing, and when the storms of life come he will be destroyed. He cannot withstand the storms of life now, and he cannot stand in the judgment to come.

7:27 - THE RAINS CAME. Jesus continued the story: "And the rain descended, and the floods

came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." The listeners might well have been nodding in agreement. They could picture the rains falling in the mountains and running down into ditches and gullies, emptying into the wadi, filling it with water which would tumble down from the hills in a raging torrent, sweeping away everything in its path. The house the foolish man had built would be flattened and swept away.

Only a foolish man would build a house on the sand, and only a foolish person would try to build his spiritual life on the quicksand of hearing with no commitment to obey the Lord. Unfortunately, most people are building their lives on such a foundation. When the storms of judgment come they will be destroyed.

GREAT WAS THE FALL OF IT. There is a note of finality in these last six words. Jesus has just preached the greatest sermon ever preached, set forth the highest standard of ethics the world has ever known, and revealed the richest, fullest life possible. But He did not conclude this sermon on a positive note. He finishes with a solemn warning people must not only hear "these words of mine;" we must obey them.

These closing words are in order because Judgment day is going to come like a storm. The life that is not built on the Rock of Ages is will fall - great will be the fall of it!

III. THE RESPONSE, 7:28-29.

7:28 - THE PEOPLE WERE ASTONISHED. They were astonished at His doctrine. When we look at the Sermon of the Mount, we would be surprised if they had not been astonished. The Beatitudes. The Golden Rule. But they were not just astonished at His doctrine.

7:29 - HE TAUGHT THEM AS ONE HAVING AUTHORITY. The scribes did not teach like this. They taught by quoting from the Law, and from earlier scribes. Jesus taught as One having authority. He did not explain His teaching or defend His authority. He simply assumed the authority on the basis of His Person and His nature, and by right of creation.

In the 16th century Martin Baal concluded from his Bible study that justification is by faith. He wrote his conclusion on paper, then folded it and hid it behind stones in the wall of his monastery room. Martin Luther reached the same conclusion, but he tacked his 95 theses on the door of the cathedral. The first Martin reached a conclusion but did not act on it, and nothing happened. The second Martin had the courage to do something. The world was change because he was a doer of the Word, and not a hearer only.

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